SUMMING UP AND CONCLUSIONS

The subject of this study has been the vast scheme of agricultural colonisation launched by the British in Western Punjab in the late nineteenth century. The construction of several hundred miles of canals which brought perennial irrigation to the vast arid wastes in this region changed the face of the country. It was not as if prior to Colonisation these lands were totally unpopulated and uncultivated. On the contrary these lands had been home of numerous tribes and people who subsisted on grazing as well as cultivation. In fact even in pre-British days irrigation by means of natural inundation or wells had formed an important feature of the regional economy in this largely rainless tract. The rivers and riverain lands occupied a prominent place in such an economic set-up, a fact that was recognised by the rulers since the days of the Mughals who initiated the earliest scheme for canal irrigation, which was later continued by the Sikh rulers and other chieftains. The nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled cultivators continued a somewhat placid life, with possibility of any grave, long-lasting conflict being ruled out by the fact of availability of vast grazing lands. The construction of canals by the British let loose
a whole chain of processes, reactions, institutions, rules
all of which had a defined purpose and which were largely
alien to the rhythm of life in this region prior to the
advent of perennial irrigation.

Above all else, Colonisation made the presence of the
State and State machinery an all-pervasive factor in the
life of the peasant. This was reflected in various forms
in a very physical sense—starting from the advent of
state-built and controlled canals, to the allotments, often
on condition, to peasants for cultivation; the application
of new laws and law courts exercised a kind of authority
and struck awe which customary processes neither did nor
could. Various processes, discussed in previous chapters,
came to exercise an influence on the life of the peasant,
and changed his life in a very real sense, both at the
level of economic status as reflected in the statistics
government published annually, and in his day-to-day
dealings with those he interacted with. This involved a
question of 'perceived' status as well, since existing
social relationships underwent a vast change as Colonisation
proceeded. While on the one hand at the economic level
far-reaching changes were coming about, at the social level
all established norms of behaviour, self-perception of
status, values and of relations with others faced a challenge
with the advent of immigrants who came to occupy a pre-
dominant position both in terms of their numerical
presence, as well as the economic resources at their
disposal.

The influx of a mass of immigrants from central and
eastern Punjab added a whole new dimension. Matters were
further complicated by the fact that these changes, aimed
at development, often adversely affected the fortunes of
the old settlers. Many found that traditional sources of
water and irrigation supply had dried up. The river no
longer flowed as of old, spreading its bounty with the
flotsam. First the rivers and the numerous streams and
channels dried up, prompting tenants to leave; very soon
the subsoil water level started to rise at an alarming rate —
rendering wells useless and resulting in efflorescence in the
soil — making cultivation well nigh impossible and even
compelling proprietors to move out of their lands. Even
as these and several other negative aspects began to
surface, official effort concentrated on publicising the
grand irrigation schemes and their gains. The achievements
of Colonisation were sung all over the land, how water had
been reached to the rainless tracts, how the wastes were
populated, and how the 'criminal' had been replaced by the
superior agriculturists of central Punjab. (Chapter I)
While the old settlers drew attention to problems stemming from Colonisation, the Punjab government began to gloat over its swelling coffers. For, canal irrigation and Colonisation of West Punjab was proving to be a paying proposition. The initial, faltering steps in canal construction taken after several years of policy debate regarding the feasibility of canal irrigation — where was the money to come from, whether canals were to be built under the heads of protective or productive works, what was to be the nature of returns that could be expected, if at all, were all forgotten, once the initial outlay brought in handsome returns. The focus of debate shifted at once from who was going to foot the bill for canal construction, to who was going to pocket the financial receipts, the Provincial government or the Imperial exchequer? The matter was finally settled in the form of a multiplicity of charges on the cultivator which were diverted to different departments.

Once quibbling over the money was over, there was a scramble for land and allotments. The initial objective of canal irrigation was improvement of agriculture which was to be combined with relieving pressure on the congested districts of Central Punjab: hence the three categories of grantees, capitalist, yeoman and peasant. Judging by
initial professed objectives, Colonisation was hardly a success but the fact is that soon after allotments began various other interests and objectives came to the fore. Thus the army staked its claims to a large part of the land to breed camels, horses and mules to meet pressing needs of the imperial army. The Manchester-Lancashire lobby pressed for 'Cotton' grants to meet the shortfall of raw cotton after the American civil war. Political interests had to be considered. Thus large landowning families who had in the past stood by government in its hour of need and who pledged to do so in future, had to be rewarded; the sagging fortunes of the landed gentry had to be lent support and above all, those who had and were likely to make a contribution through military service had to be rewarded for Punjab had to continue its glorious 'martial' traditions. World War I drove the point home more sharply. Allotments, initially conceived of within the confines of the schedule of agricultural and non-agricultural classes of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill, soon overstepped the limits in accommodation of various interests. The desire to also attract capital and capitalists from non-agricultural classes extended this further.

The outcome of allotment policy was revealing in terms of the categories, classes and castes which gained.
While the Sikh Jat peasantry of Central Punjab came out strong, the worst sufferers, were the Janglis, Hithāris and other old settlers especially the poor peasantry amongst the Muslims. The prevalence of a caste-based occupational or status division and its preservation as well as reinforcement by the British contained within it the seeds of future conflict. The old settlers, cultivators and graziers, being divested of their customary and traditional rights in the lands initially appropriated as crown wastes and subsequently sold as Colony land to grantees, added to the grievances of the old settlers. Once again, they were directly hit by state action and the suffering was compounded by the denial to all peasant grantees of proprietary rights on Colony lands. (Chapter II)

While tightening its grip over Colony lands government also sought to increase the financial returns. Reassessment of land at higher revenue rates, increase in the heads of charges collected, and higher estimates of yield and net produce so as to arrive at a much higher proportion of net assets which formed the basis of calculation of net revenue were an exercise repeated at each settlement. The government claimed its rightful share in the increased prosperity of the region making it clear that this prosperity was directly a result of state action. Security of irrigation supply
and rising prices formed its justification for higher demand. The peasantry pointed to the continued uncertainty of canal supply, especially in the tail chaks mostly belonging to Janglis. The more well-placed cultivators cajoled the subordinate canal bureaucracy to give them more than their due of canal water while charging less. Kharābā remissions, like fluctuating assessment, remained a bone of contention. For government it was clearly a case of not just maintaining revenue returns, but of maintaining a continuously rising rate of return whereas in the case of the richer peasants it was a struggle for retaining for itself a share of the surplus. The poor peasant, discriminated against in allotments, then in assessment and canal supply, and generally denied his due share of Kharābā, struggled for survival.(Chapter III).

While the first part of this study examines the Colonisation process in the context of administrative measures directly undertaken by the state, in the second part we explore the impact and outcome of Colonisation in terms of the economic processes that were set off. While on the one hand cropping patterns, rotation and agricultural methods were affected by the introduction of canal irrigation; the timing and cycle of water supply, the revenue and irrigation charges levied as well as the
conditional grants made, all favoured a specific pattern with Rabi predominating over Kharif and secondly, the predominance of wheat and cotton cultivation. Both these crops were grown primarily for the market and these years saw a rapid spread of the market and commercial enterprise in the region. The upper strata of the peasantry found itself more advantageously placed vis-a-vis the market. Having more to sell in the first place, they could bide their time to command a better price, were better off in terms of means of transport and generally more well-informed regarding market trends and fluctuations. The poorer strata of the peasantry, as inescapably caught in the market network, was integrated at a different level altogether. Few could directly sell their produce in the market or expect to get a high price for their produce. Hardly any possessed the means to transport the crop to the market, while the cart-owners who transported it were usually in league with the arhtīās, dalāls and other intermediaries in the commercial network who combined to cut into the price due to the peasant. At the level of market structure and organisation too the small cultivator found a whole series of factors weighing against him. If he was in debt then the village shopkeeper, the local sāhukār, or the landlord could gain control of the produce
cutting off all possibilities of him getting a fair price for the produce. Even when not in debt, prevalent market practices acted against him. The nature of communication services available in the region while greatly facilitating commercial development and encouraging a high level of commercial enterprise and organisation in the region did not necessarily work to the advantage of the small landholder. These years saw an increase in commercial enterprise-forming a link between the village shopkeeper and big export firms in Karachi but with sub-stations, advancing agents, out stations, joint stock banks, and a whole chain of small and big time dalâls and other intermediaries in the mandis etc. These in fact seem to have made the most of the price boom from the 1900's onwards, especially the second and third decade of the century, upto the depression. However, in these very years when there were possibilities of greater benefit from rising prices to the actual cultivator, as in the years of the first world war, the colonial state directly intervened to act against it. The wheat scheme implemented primarily in the years 1915 to 1919 was a classic example of government acting so as to regulate prices when imperial interests were involved; thus it resiled from the late-nineteenth century principled 'non-interventionist' stance
which had been maintained in the face of even the severest drought and scarcity price situation.

While the period under study saw a rapid and close integration with the international market, a sort of regional economic pattern could be traced. It is clear that the Canal Colony tracts were more directly linked by the market to international trends and network than to an internal market. Production in the region was also consequently geared to export. The years saw a rapid rise in the importance of Karachi as an export centre for wheat primarily and also cotton. The level of price linkage between international markets and Lyallpur was fairly high. However, this very pattern of economic development contained within it serious hazards. These soon came to surface when the impact of the Depression came to be felt. The price slump had a deep, wide-ranging impact on the Colonies and its cultivators since the uneven and imbalanced regional development within Punjab and the low integration of the Colony tracts with the internal market exposed them with full force to the devastation of Depression years. While the small and poor peasants of the region had not been in a position to reap the advantages of the 'boom' years, they were exposed with greater vulnerability to the slump. (Chapter IV)
The impact of Colonisation in its socio-economic aspect of tenancy and indebtedness was equally complex. Tenancy was not unknown in this region prior to Colonisation. But the first decades of this century saw a sizeable portion of colony lands passing into the hands of tenant cultivators on cash and kind rents. This pattern emerged with variation in extent in almost all the districts. While the preDepression years also saw a slight increase in land leased on cash rents, this was not a continuous trend, and was certainly reversed during the Depression years which also saw a reversal to Khudkasht in some of the Colony districts. Apart from the trends relating to cultivating occupancy, these years marked an increased intensity in struggle over the rent between tenants and owners. While these years saw the rise of owner tenants who leased in land in order to increase area under cultivation, it also saw a rise in the number of poor peasant - tenant holdings. Undoubtedly the latter were at this time engaged in a struggle for control over the produce with landlords. This struggle was enacted in different stages and at different levels, beginning with the form of rent itself. Thus at a time when prices were rising and rent rates prevailing were still comparatively low, tenants favoured
low cash rents. This was generally resisted by landlords who all through this period were pushing for kind rents on halfbatai terms, an advance on earlier, lower produce rents. Along with struggle over form and rate of the 'formal' rent component, the struggle over share in produce was fought out in parts spreading over the entire process of harvesting, division of the crop, division of fodder, deductions for menials and other sharing of expenses. The years saw a steady rise in rent appropriated by the landlords by means of pushing on to the tenant charges which were either their responsibility or shared by both. Whatever laxity may have prevailed in earlier years was dealt a blow by the Depression when landlords adopted more rigid postures, even when forced by circumstances to postpone actual appropriation of rent. (Chapter V)

The decline in the status of tenants and other poor and small peasants was even more clearly reflected in the increasing debt burden of agriculturists. As the commercial network widened and deepened, cash needs of peasants increased, driving them deeper into the clutches of money-lenders. While an increasing debt burden was interpreted as a sign of prosperity by official commentators, the fact was that for the small and poor peasants whose vulnerability
increased with greater penetration of the money economy, debt was a further and often the last step towards landlessness. While agriculturist moneylenders saw in advancing loans against landmortgage a convenient means of acquiring land cheap for cultivation, for the professional moneylenders the compounding of interest itself ensured that the cultivator was not likely to escape from his clutches. The pre-Depression years saw an expansion in debt owed to agriculturist moneylenders; this did not necessarily imply a decline in the prosperity of professional moneylenders. They in fact took the opportunity to branch out into other forms of commercial activity extending into towns. Attempts to promote co-operatives in the region could register only partial success and met with active resistance from moneylenders in combination with arhtias. The Depression intervened to rehabilitate the moneylender since they were more willing to advance loans on seemingly 'lenient' terms which, though disastrous in the long-run, seemed lax in such stringent circumstances. (Chapter VI)

Thus the Colonies, projected as the model for agrarian development, and constantly referred to as revealing the positive side of imperialism, in fact saw development of some trends which were essentially not
very different from other parts of the country. Despite favourable indices for crop acreages, value of output, exports, financial returns to government etc., the social fabric being woven through the web of colonial policy combined with class differentiation was not very different. The state was no neutral bystander in these series of developmental changes. In fact as pointed out earlier, nowhere was the all-pervasive hand of colonial intervention more visible than in the Canal Colonies. It was therefore not surprising that these years saw a steady building up of a movement directed against state policy. This is not to argue that class-based tensions did not exist. Far from it. But the overbearing presence of the state and the impact of its policies definitely caused widespread resentment to build up.

From the early 1890's itself, resentment against government policies found political expression. The years 1905 to 1907 saw a massive agitation in the Colonies, directed against government. The immediate occasion for this was provided by the Colonies' Bill adopted by the Punjab Legislative Council in 1906. The provisions of the Bill, kept secret and colonists receiving no official communication, gave rise to further suspicion and speculation about it. The main issues of concern to the Colonists were (a) the
denial of proprietary rights to peasant grantees and
(b) the proposed imposition of the condition of primo-genture on all horse-breeding and similar conditional
grants. The passage of the bill caused further resentment
since it coincided with the announcement of a rise in
water-rates for canal-irrigation.¹ There developed a
basic distrust in government and all things connected
with government in various social classes and communities
including those who had benefitted from its policies except the
large landowners. This distrust was reflected in various
actions by the people, as well as in their perception.
An intelligence report in 1907 noted that:

the mood of the people is apparently
such that they distort the most innocent
act of the government into a deliberate
design to cause them injury.²

People were urged to dissociate themselves from all
government actions and functioning, in a spirit, par-
tially reminiscent of the Swadeshi movement, though on
a miniscule level and of the non-cooperation movement
later. This included boycotting officials on tour, not
seeking government office or favour and so on. A seemingly
innocent act such as a Deputy Commissioner's refusal of

² Home Pol., Aug. 1907, Pro 141, B, W.R.
permission to hold wrestling matches was interpreted as reflective of government's intention to "effeminate the people so that they may not be in a position to rise against it". 3

The report of the Colonies' Committee, the scrapping of the 1906 Canal Colonies' Bill and the grant of major concessions in the final Bill passed in 1912—grant of proprietary rights to all except grants on horse-breeding concession being the most important—gave a temporary reprieve to government. But this was not to last for long. The banking crisis of 1913 caused the first rumbles. The years 1913-20 saw resentment and widespread discontent against the burden of land revenue and water-rates, more so in the face of frequent crop failures in these years as also waterlogging, price-rise, increase in incidence of death and disease. 4

These were closely followed by the outbreak of the War and its concomitants - the hateful war loans and the recruitment drive. In one district, Lyallpur, - alone, over Rs 66 lakhs were collected on account of war loans and other war-related funds, while over 6,500 men were

3. Home Pol., Feb. 1909, Pro 2-11, B. W.R.
recruited for the army and 2,000 Bilocches drafted as Sarwans. 5 The Central Recruiting Board fixed the Punjab quota of combatants at 190,000 but the Punjab Provincial Conference resolved to exceed this by providing 20,000 non-combatants as well. The loyalists did not lag behind:

"£s 33 per square were forcibly levied en masse".6 No square holder was either consulted or spared; the proposal having come from title-hunters. The evidence collected by the Sub-Committee set up by the Indian National Congress to enquire into the 1919 disturbances, collected massive evidence to show forced recruitment, collection of war loans, and instances of high-handedness on the part of lambardārs, zaildārs, tahsildārs, nāib-tahsildārs, patwāris, Honorary Magisterates and Extra Assistant Commissioners. The resentment against these often led to murders of officials on recruitment tours in villages. 7

The 1919 anti-recruitment agitation shook the very foundations of the government, more so because of its likely impact and implication for the army. The importance

5. de'Montmorency, D.C., Lyallpur: The History of the War
6. Punjab Disturbances, British Perspective, op.cit,p.57
7. Ibid., Indian Perspective, vol. I, p. 22
of the Army question in Funjab is by now well-known.\footnote{Josh, 1979, passim.} Once again government and government institutions as seen in the form of railways, communications, etc. came under attack, often even violent attacks.\footnote{\textit{Punjab Disturbances}, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 90}

The popular response to this 'political instability' was reflected in various ways, including non-payment as well as non-investment in co-operative societies pending clearance of the 'political horizon'. But official response to these developments was typical. On the one hand any link between the discontent building up and government policy was totally denied; on the other, the agitations were attributed to the conspiratorial, seditious designs of nationalists.\footnote{\textit{Punjab Disturbances}, 1919-20, Vol. 2, British perspective, Deep Publications, 1976 Ed. p. 90.} In the same way in 1919 it was concluded that "there is even less ground for attributing unrest in the province to any action taken by government in connection with the war loan".\footnote{cf. Home Pol, W.R., for 1918-19, Rev. Agri. Rev. March 1911-A, P. 36, F 17.}

The Depression saw a fresh wave of discontent spreading across the Punjab countryside, with peasants demanding large-scale reduction in land revenue and water-rates, if
not total remissions. In 1931, Punjab government announced a total of remissions worth ₹ 108.25 lakhs in land revenue and water-rate combined which worked out to only 5 annas in the rupee for rabi crop and 3 annas in the rupee on water-rates on wheat. 12

Upto the Depression years, political expression of any sort of discontent amongst the rural population was directed not on religious or community based lines, but specifically against government. In fact even religion-centered agitations had a strong anti-imperialist content. The two major agitations that erupted in the Colony districts were in 1905-1907 around the proposed Colonies' Bill and the anti-recruitment agitation which came to a head in 1919. Apart from these there were a series of localised stirs in districts, by different rural segments, around very specific grievances with concrete demands. These included the horse-breeding grantees agitation in Shahpur, the Nili Bar Colonists' agitation and so on. Clearly through all this political upsurge, the occasion was provided by official measure and the anger of the peasantry was also, consequently, directed against government. Notably, on all these occasions it was found that the peasantry showed a remarkable unity in the course of

these agitations. Smith, Colonisation Officer, Jhelum Canal, commented on the fact that during the 1905 agitation:

men of various castes and tribes in the Canal Colony sank their mutual differences and dissensions and united in a common cause. 13

This is not to deny that tensions existed between social groups in the countryside. We have in chapters IV, V and VI outlined some of the processes which lay at the root of tension between social classes. The rapid pace at which peasants were integrated into the market, the remarkable increase in tenancy and decline in the rights and status of poor peasant-tenants, as well as the viciousness of the debt transaction, were all sources of deep social conflict. This in fact provided the base for a radical peasant movement which was building up at this time. 14 While social disparities were not unknown before British rule there is no doubt that Colonisation hastened the pace and scale of differentiation. The social and political changes ushered in by Colonisation also gave rise to various social

parties which sought to represent the political aspirations of diverse groups and interests. These have not formed part of this study but we refer to them here since they point to tensions and political developments, the roots of which lay in the changes discussed here. These trends and movements reflect general trends that tie up with some of the issues discussed here.

Needless to say, the Colonial government was not a mere catalyst of change. Rather this very 'change' and development served a role and purpose within the grand imperial design. As social groups began to assert themselves and their aspirations manifested themselves in political alignments, the British government stepped in to manage and manipulate these to its own advantage. The form of this intervention followed a curious yet familiar pattern. At the risk of sounding banal we will distinguish between the government's ideological and political stance.

Ideologically, the British government sided with the sturdy Sikh peasantry of Central Punjab. The preference for the Sikh Jat, 'agriculturists of the best type', influenced allotment policy in the Colonies in a big measure. This was in sharp contrast with the Janglis who combined in themselves absence of agricultural skill,
general slackness, and economic thriftlessness. These were followed up with other, similar insulting and disdainful observations about Janglis and other communities or castes. While mass political activity pointed to united action around common issues, government's attitude and policy stood out in sharp contrast. Particularly notable was the element of patronage combined with an arrogant tolerance towards certain communities, revealing under cover of paternalism, an inherent streak of the 'white Man's Burden'. Thus, references are replete with the humanising, civilising influence of immigrant settlers on the Janglis, and success in the Jangli ilaga being attributed to their having imbibed much from their colonist neighbours. 15

What merits attention at this point is that while political events gave proof of the unity being forged around basic issues, official policy and official writing increasingly highlighted underlying differences between social groups, religions and communities. Special effort was made to keep traditional bonds alive, and to create hostility where none existed. This was combined with a search for local support agents, classes and social groups who could help stem the tide of anti-British sentiment.

15. Cf. A.R.s, for Lyallpur district in the 1930s, passim.
In this search for political strategies, the Punjab government mastered well the tactic of giving a religious colour to existing or latent social tensions. In the Canal Colonies, the allotment policy and its outcome facilitated this task.

Way back in 1886 Thorburn had drawn official attention to the fact that:

without some radical changes in the substantive civil law and its mode of administration and for certain tracts in the revenue system, the impatience which now finds expression in the occasional murder, maltreatment or plundering of an obnoxious moneylender or other necessities of life will soon grown into widespread disaffection... 16

In 1912, Financial Commissioner, Fagan, expressed fear that co-operative societies, which were to an extent in competition with Hindus moneylenders, could become anti-Hindu organisations in regions where Muslim debtors joined them in larger numbers. 17

Allotment policy in the Canal Colonies was, nevertheless, directed at maintaining the differences and identity based on caste or religious differences. The justification for such a policy was found precisely in

16. Thorburn, 1886, op. cit. p.40
17. PCSR, 1912-13, Note by F.C.
those social disparities to which it had contributed. Thus it was felt that:

the mingling in the Colonies of tribes drawn from the extreme of the Punjab has accentuated the differences which must arise when the most frugal and acquisitive are brought into juxtaposition with the most reckless and improvident. 13

From this the conclusion was logically drawn that:

it would be impolitic in the extreme to allow Hindu Jats to become co-sharers in Jangli Villages. 19

Even though the Colonies' Committee found no instance of expression of political hostility along caste or religious lines, it recommended that "for the Colony districts re-grouping of tribes be undertaken," for, "the Muhammadans of the West Punjab, should at least be protected from the Hindu and Sikh Jats of the Central Punjab districts". 20 While the Committee had a point in so far as the Hindu and Sikh Jats, Khatris etc. represented affluent landowning and commercial classes which controlled land, capital and trade in the region — there can be no difference of opinion regarding the protection the smaller

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
land holders and tenants required. But what is notable is that this situation was a direct result of official policy; that the basis of conflict was an economic one; and lastly, while talking of giving protection to the smaller peasants, government itself was, in fact, doing all within its means to prop up the prosperous Sikh peasantry. Further, the Committee's recommendations were paradoxical in that they came in the wake of its own observation that all through the 1905-7 agitation the rural classes had shown remarkable solidarity.

Notwithstanding the Canal Colonies' Committee recommending steps to protect the less prosperous peasants, the administration's preference for the immigrant Colonists remained a fact; when the allotments for the Lower Bari Doab Canal area were being made, it was apprehended that residents of Multan and Montgomery, who had hitherto led almost pastoral lives, "will make life intolerable to the new settlers, whose immigration they will naturally resent unless some measure is adopted to keep their criminal tendencies in check...." 21 It was also recalled that early settlers in the Chenab and Jhelum Colonies, "suffered a good deal and even now suffer

from the depredation of their Jangli neighbours". 22
At such times government chose to forget that in fact
extension of canal irrigation and Colonisation had
adversely affected the rights and, the way of life it­
self, of the old inhabitants. Further, amongst the
original settlers also, government made distinctions
amongst the tribes, and selectively granted them
favours or treated them otherwise. Differences within
them were later utilized for political purposes.

Government's contribution to reinforcing prejudices
and caste and religious tensions were noted by its own
officers. Middleton, Census Officer, expressed his
resentment in the 1921 Census Report:

"these castes have been largely manufactured
and almost entirely preserved as separate
castes by the British Government. Our land
records and official documents have added
iron bonds to the old rigidity of caste..." 23

Referring to the Census data where even the lower
castes, not too rigid on their own, were pigeon-holed
under hereditary occupational names if castes could not
be found; Middleton believed that left to themselves,
many of these castes would rapidly disappear. The 1931

22. Ibid.
23. Census, Punjab, Report, 1921, op.cit., p. 343
census went further with the Census Officer, pointing out that since the census was being conducted in a period of political upheaval with the people knowing fully well that the future constitution was being moulded there was a rush to swell numbers so as to ensure greater representation. This was a direct response to the tactics the British government had used all this while and 'community leaders' were out to take advantage of this stance now. The Census gave descriptions of how the tug-o-war was fought rather fiercely with menial castes forming the main target. Since these were drawn from all the three major religious groups, leaders of all three were eager to enrol them as followers of their respective religions. 24

In another comment on the importance of religion as a category in the Census, it was pointed out that:

questions related to religions expanded steadily and cut across much of the older subjects discussed in the Census reports, so that initial concern for religion and religious groups expanded with time. 25

The Census in fact provided a new conceptualization of religion — as a community, an aggregate of individuals mapped, counted and above all, compared with other


25. K.W. Jones, 1981; p. 84
religious communities. Once the Census reports and their findings filtered down to literate Indians it ceased to be a neutral instrument which merely described but did not influence, and by 1890s the census itself was drawn into the world it described, becoming "one more arena for conflict and manipulation". 26

The policy pursued by government bore fruit in the meantime. The latent tensions amongst rural classes influenced and came to be reflected in a miniscule way in the political alignments that emerged at the Provincial level. In the course of these years the Muslim League and the Unionist Party, began their politics of wooing mass support — both pursued the line of appealing on sectarian platforms. Both combined genuine economic demands and grievances, of different social groups they represented, with rhetoric which even when adopting a seemingly secular stance promoted communal hatred. The political aspirations of 'leaders' of various communities and the manoeuvres of an imperial government, fed on each other, and played on communal passions. Thus these years saw the rise of the Unionist Party's loyalist politics which promoted tension between agriculturists and non-agriculturists, between Jats and other castes, and master-

26. Ibid.
minded an electoral strategy of caste and religion-based politics which amply suited the colonial state. As opposed to the pre-eminent position of the Congress in most other Provinces, Punjab witnessed the growing strength of groups, associations and parties which strengthened mutually antagonistic groups while giving the British ample scope to play on the aspirations of each to drive a further wedge into the unity that anti-imperialist forces sought to build. 27

Government played no small role in channelising social discontent into a communal stream of thought. If official reports and documents are to be believed, the economic basis for discontent did not exist at all. For, the official explanation for all social problems lay in the habits and lifestyle of the people affected. Early in the history of Punjab, 'stereotypes' were evolved and these served to explain all official action. Thus debt was increasing due to cultivators 'living extravagantly', and the tendency on the part of zamindars to leave work to other people 'once they made a fortune'. It was always ignorance, thriftlessness, and irrational expenditure on non-productive heads that contributed to debt, in so far as it was an indicator of poverty. Thorburn, himself one of the first to draw attention to this problem, subscribed

to this opinion. On the other hand, when reports showed that supposedly more industrious and 'better' cultivators were also deeply in debt, Darling's thesis of debt amongst the Punjab peasantry being a result of prosperity proved timely and useful in rebutting any criticism of Punjab's agricultural progress. All through this, official writing on the subject studiously avoided being drawn into a critical evaluation of the impact of its own agrarian policies. The fact that in the projected 'model' of the Canal Colonies, the main scourges of colonial agriculture — tenancy and rent, debt and land transfer — could be well identified by the early part of the twentieth century and that the Colonies in this respect showed no different trends from the rest of the country, were facts consciously and conveniently pushed aside. Instead, astronomical figures for exports, for production and the rising value of agricultural produce were cited to ward off criticism.

Refusal to accept any link between the social-agrarian problems and governmental policy led to and stemmed from a search for solutions which fell in line with the false ideological premises officialdom chose to propagate. Communities, in official propaganda, were attributed traits

29. Darling, 1925, op. cit., passim
and assigned roles. Hence the labels — the "martial races", the "thriftless Mohammedens," the "indolent Janglis", the "sturdy Jats", the "shrewd Sikhs" or the "rapacious Hindu moneylender, or kirār".... The list was endless. Along with such typecasting, officials projected models of ideal peasant behaviour with immigrant groups, 'the best Punjabi type', designed to serve as the role-model for diffusion of good agricultural practices as well as positive values such as hardwork, thrift, self-cultivation etc. The Janglis, original inhabitants, and Muslim cultivators, identified with bad agriculture and negative values, represented the other extreme. 30

The all-pervasive hand of Imperial Policy created conditions where assimilation of the various streams became difficult giving rise to new tensions and offering greater scope for political manouvrings to the Colonial State. Such characterisation was mischievous and dangerous. But then imperial governments have always been known to play games which are dangerous. The remarkable thing was that the Colonial government lined up such a magnificent array of Punjab officials — Rose, Ibbetson, Darling, Calvert, Cunningham — who are today known more

for their historical and sociological contribution than their administrative assignments. Clearly these were not merely objective students of social anthropology. Nor was the typecasting of different communities into different values a harmless exercise. Subsequent political events in British Punjab were ample proof of an imperial purpose they served.