Introduction

Before embarking onto a study of the State of Punjab in its contemporary economic form, a review of its historical evolutionary process is imperative. A transparent perception would be possible only after examining the currents of history, as they flowed for this particular segment of the subcontinent and the emergent peculiarities marking its identity. The annals of Punjab’s history present interesting phenomena, when juxtaposed they may appear contradictory, though a reality. As a British colony, the focus on agricultural development led the area to witness a boom, prima facie yet agricultural indebtedness was not far too seek, recently, the Green Revolution made the economic statistics soar yet industrially it staggerred, such perplexities can be clarified only when the pages of history are surveyed, of course, with the focus on its economy.

Punjab, etymologically the land of the five rivers, is a vital segment in the history and culture of South Asia, located on the entrance of the Indian sub-continent and an essential channel to the rest of the world. In the historic continuity of this region, over thousands of years, it has been variously referred to as ‘Sapta Sindhu’ (Rigveda), the land watered by the seven fold Indus, ‘Pancananda’ (Mahabharta) and ‘Uttarapatha’ as the north western division of ‘Bhartavarsha’.1 Implements have been found, which reflect its’ historical moorings, as early as the first Inter-glacial period and

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the beginning of the second age that is between six and five lakh years. Punjab, was also the cradle of the chalcolithic cultures of India. Several sites in Sindh and Baluchistan, have revealed the existence of the Bronze Age culture, amidst small townships and village settlements dating back to the pre-Harrapan period.\(^2\)

However, the apex of archaeological finds was the Indus Valley Civilization, which put Punjab on the map of the ancient civilized world.\(^3\) The antiquities found here are unique, among other contemporary civilizations of West Asia. Similar antiquities were found in various parts of North India, testifying a well developed urban culture and civilization. Later Aryan settlements in Punjab, reflected a reversal to village culture. It is in these village settlements, that the priests developed the socio-religious ideology, which is called ‘Vedism’ or ‘Brahmanism’. “The Punjab was thus the earliest part of India to be Aryanized or Brahminized, never completely though.”\(^4\) The Aryans established small republics and monarchies all over the Punjab.\(^5\) After Alexander’s invasion, a virtually non-effectual Greek influence, the Punjab became an integral part of the Great Mauryan Empire.\(^6\) After its’ downfall, the historical pageantry unravelled, the Kushans and Hunas period followed by a Hindu revival under Harshawardhana.\(^7\)

\(^4\) Ibid, p.2
\(^7\) Ibid, Romilla Thapar, op.cit, p. 136
With the rise of Islam and the Muslim incursions towards India, Punjab was annexed to the Ghaznavid empire. The successors ruled over this area, for over 150 years and the last of them was ousted from Lahore by the new rulers of Afghanistan, the Ghurids before the end of the Twelfth Century. Under Muslim rule, Punjab received a cultural fillip since the Caliphs and other Islamic sovereigns of the time encouraged literature and arts. The Art industries from foreign countries attracted by the accumulated wealth of the capitals of the Muslim sovereigns, soon found their way to Punjab and merged with the Hindu manufacturers or established themselves as independent industries. Afterwards, it was conquered by Mohammad Ghori and became the stepping stone, for the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. During the Sultanate period, the Punjab was industrially well organized. There were guilds and crafts in villages and towns which carried on widespread commerce, silk weaving was carried on at Samana, Sunam, Ghurham, Sirhind, Dipalpur, Jallandhar, Lahore and Multan. The Mughals under Babur occupied Punjab in the 1520s and for over two centuries, it remained a part of the Mughal Empire. During the reign of Akbar, in the late sixteenth century, Punjab was synonymous with the Province of Lahore and actually smaller than the area lying between the rivers Indus and Sutlej.

One of the most momentous occurrences in the annals of Punjab’s

history, was the evolution of the new sect of Sikhism, which emanated as a reform movement of Hinduism and its' adjunct. The history of the Sikhs can be traced to the late fifteenth century, the founder was Guru Nanak, who was born in the Rachna Doab in April 1469, when Bahlol Lodhi was ruling at Delhi. The ‘Janamsakhis’ are replete with the trade contacts of Punjab Khatri Merchants with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Guru Ram Das founded a new centre for Sikhism in 1577 called Ramdaspur. The City which eventually became Amritsar, gradually developed as an important cultural and commercial nucleus of North India. He invited traders, artisans and craftsmen to settle in the town.  

Sikhism, later branched out into its’ distinctive ethos, as the Khalsa was created by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa transformed the dramatis personae in the forefront of Punjab, as it fought with newly infused enthusiasm against the Mughal oppression, which failed to suppress them. Mughal tyranny eased out, as their empire began to disintegrate only to be replaced by Afghan repression. The Sikhs moved onto the central stream of Punjab history, as the plains of Punjab during the eighteenth century remained a battle ground since Afghans, Marathas and Sikhs marauded the region. The Sikhs consolidated their power in Punjab, during the

12(a) J.D.Cunningham - A History of the Sikhs, reprinted by S.Chand & Co. New Delhi, 1972, p.66
12(b) A.C. Banerjee - 'An Aspect of Guru Gobind Singh's Career,' Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol.I, 1945
13. Indu Bhushan Bannerjee - Evolution of the Khalsa, Calcutta, 1962, p.115
prevailing confusion and anarchy, which followed the invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. The resuscitated Sikhs, organized themselves into small groups under a chief. The small fiefdoms called ‘Misl’ were frequently at war with each other. During this period, owing to political instability, trade and manufacturing suffered. As Hamilton commented “An open regular trade with Punjab from other parts of Hindustan has in a great measure ceased.” The City of Lahore temporarily looked dissipated. It is also significant that at this juncture, a large number of Khatris migrated to Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Bengal and Gujarat by the end of the seventeenth and through the eighteenth century. During the Mughal period, there are numerous references to trade links that existed between the Punjab, Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Major towns like Lahore and Multan functioned both as centres for the products of the hinterland, as well as bases for traffic with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Lahore was a major centre for inter and intra regional trade. Lahore was well connected by land as well as the River Ravi, which by its navigable course had communications with the Indus and all its branches. The exports from Lahore were sugar, rice, indigo,

wheat and white cotton cloths.

Multan was known as a mart for imported Arabian horses, its hinterland produced woollen and cotton carpets, chess pieces, chintz, calico and bows. Multan was also a market for sugar, gallnuts, opium, sulphur, camels and white cotton goods. The political turbulence of the eighteenth century saw the relative decline of some of the north Indian towns but it also witnessed the growth of new trading centres like Amritsar. Amritsar carried on an extensive trade with Bombay as well as Calcutta.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh carved out the kingdom of Punjab, out of war ravaged fiefdoms 'misls' which would unite, whenever there was an emergent and common foe. He wove together, the strands of a well orchestrated administration and a secular polity, amidst a region torn asunder by marauders and foreign incursions. The rule of Ranjit Singh gave the region, a scope for rejuvenation, since, inspite of intermittent aggression, an administrative infrastructure had been laid. Other spheres, like cultivation, trade and revenue collection, which had begun in the late eighteenth century reached a high watermark in his reign.

Ranjit Singh realized that he could not build a formidable state without giving it a strong economic base, so he recognized the importance of industries. Primarily, he was interested in industries like arms, ammunitions

for the requirement of his court, administration and his forces. The
government of the Maharaja took great care to manufacture weapons and
other military material and defence industries were a state enterprise.
Workshops manufacturing arms were set up at Nakodar, Shahdara and
Peshawar. These workshops manufactured cannons, matchlocks, caribles,
guns, pistols, small fire arms, steel caps, helmets, spears and all types of
ammunition powder required for arms. The chief manufacturing towns were
Amritsar, Shujabad and Multan. 22  Boats were also manufactured at Pind
Dadan Khar and Attock. Iron and Salt mines were owned by the State. The
Maharaja also encouraged private entrepreneurs. Prominent private
industries produced cotton, silver, woollen goods, utensils, ornaments and
paper manufacturing. Amritsar, Lahore, Multan and Srinagar were the
major industrial centres and so were Jullundur, Batala, Hoshiarpur,
Wazirabad, Dera Ghazi Khan and Peshawar known for industries.
Considerable assistance was given to the private industries, taxes were
levied at moderate rates and the small craftsmen paid nominal taxes.
Trade within Punjab and outside was encouraged by the peace and stability
during the Maharajas’ reign.

The Maharaja gave an impetus to the urban development by
encouraging trade and industry, several towns grew into cities because of

23. Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s First Death Centenary Memorial Volume, Ganda Singh (Ed.), Khalsa
College, Amritsar 1930 (reprint), pp.128-137.
24. Nayyar, Gurcharan Singh, “The Dynamics of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s policies,” The Panjab Past
and Present, Edited Ganda Singh, Serial No. 43, Vol.XXII-I April 1988, Punjabi University,
Patiala, p.45.
trade and manufacturing. Wazirabad became an important town of the Lahore Kingdom known for boat manufacturing, hosiery and chenille. It was also one of the important centres for trade on the River Chenab. Another important town which owes its flourishing position to the Maharaja was Gujranwala, which later became a leading industrial town. After Amritsar was made the summer capital, it began to flourish, under the Maharaja it transformed into the biggest commercial city. Amritsar was known for textile manufacturing and shawls, trade was carried on of saffron. Shawls, carpets, silk and cotton fabrics began to be exported from Amritsar to other parts of India. Walter Hamilton regarded Amritsar as a “Grand Emporium of trade”.

Multan was another important town in importance Steinbach wrote,

its modern consequences arise from the great extent of commerce of which it is the seat, the banking transactions particularly, giving it a prominence over all other towns in Western India.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh took special interest in encouraging the silk trade in Multan, as has been testified by Alexander Burnes who writes,

Ranjit Singh has with much propriety encouraged this manufacture since he captured the city and by giving no other cloth at his court has greatly

greatly increased their consumption, they are worn as sashes and searves by all Seik Sardars. They are exported to Khorasan and Indian and duties levied are moderate.

So the Maharajas’ impetus to industry led to the growth of towns. Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign reflects that how political stability in the strife ridden state led to infrastructural growth, which encouraged trade and industry. The Maharaja’s death in 1839, was followed by a period of turbulence and internecine struggles among the Maharajas’ sons and the emergence of the Khalsa army as an indomitable force.

The British who were always game to fish in troubled waters decided to step in. Moreover, the Sikh aristocracy invited them to settle their personal scores and they intervened. Consequently, two Anglo-Sikh wars were fought and the Sikhs were routed. After which, Lord Dalhousie annexed the State in 1849 and Maharaja Dalip Singh became a British pensioner. Soon after, the British colours were hoisted on the citadel of Lahore and “the Punjab every inch of it, was proclaimed to be a portion of the British Empire in India”. 29 Punjab was the last state to lapse into the British colonial mosaic, yet they were not unaware of its’ strategic topography, its’ volatile human resource material, since they had subtly scrutinized Ranjit Singh’s domain from across the Cis-Sutlej, while they had

During this period, some occurrences took place in India which influenced their policies in India perhaps indirectly, their Punjab policies and the subsequent focus on enhancing agricultural production. In England, the Corn Laws ceased to exist, indicating the growing political power of the industrial class. Under the doctrines of free trade and laissez faire it demanded a larger share in the exploitation of colonial India, which meant on the one hand, an increasing import of cheap raw material (cotton standing first) and on the other hand an enhanced export of manufactured goods (specially cotton textiles). The British manufacturers had succeeded in abolishing all duties on cotton exported from India into England between 1836 and 1844. However, in order to:

have both the raw material and the manufacture in her own hands, and be thus independent of America and thus cotton cultivation should be increased in India by reducing the revenue in cotton growing lands.31

In 1850, the short cotton crop in the United States caused a loss of 11 millions for the industrial class, which gave a fresh impetus to the struggle for a more satisfactory supply from India. At this time, the condition of the East India Company was also financially precarious.32

Lord Dalhousie remarked on Punjab,
The incorporation of Punjab will add considerably to the available revenue. The soil generally fertile, requires only moisture to bring it into rich cultivation; while as appears from reports already received, the character of the rivers which divides the country affords singular facilities for supplying readily the means of developing resources of the soil.  

Punjab at the time of annexation was regarded as a promising province, they produced a good quality of cotton, after annexation great sums were devoted to the improvement of cotton cultivation. 

The political strategy of pacification and generating support to British rule was interlinked with the preparation of the Punjab for colonial exploitation with the adoption of various projects. The Government surveyed the resources of the Punjab. This process of collecting information started with the establishment of British rule. It was observed by the Government that by judicious measures, the agricultural produce of the Punjab may be increased in quantity and improved in quality to the immediate benefit of the people and the ultimate advantage of the Government. The expansion of canal irrigation was considered most important among the works for the development of the resources of the Punjab. Through out the period, the Government constructed large irrigation canals in the Punjab which were interpreted as blessings of

benevolent government. State income from canal irrigation multiplied with the passage of time and came to be counted as a major resource of revenue.  

Annexation, of course, brought inevitably the benificence of Pax Britannica - the administrative framework with its' mechanical procedures, missionary activity, a railway network, a postal system and exclusively for Punjab - a well laid out canal system. Trade was not their primary purpose here, as these motives were now being eclipsed by the rapacious and imperialistic desires of the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie. Punjab had so far been significant, as a buffer state because of its' frontier position to counter the Russophobia, which would erupt occasionally in Afghanistan, so it was imperative, to keep both these areas under their control, by keeping puppet monarchs with the strings in own hands. Once the Union Jack was planted on Punjab's soil, the child heir Dalip Singh was ousted to Christiandom overseas.

As the British troops had marched into Punjab with their army of occupation of 6,000 soldiers, they found the immediate tasks to be-taming a belligerent army trained on western lines, wooing a hostile, landed aristocracy and a traumatized population seething with discontent. The

37. Ibid, Foreign Consultations 29 December 1849, Numbers 78-79.
Sikh soldiery, - whom the British dreaded, - 50,000 were paid and disbanded immediately after annexation. With the passage of time, British political sagacity enabled them to rule two years short of a century and transform Punjab from a pastoral savannah to a major centre of commercialized agriculture in South Asia. The British engineered many social and economic changes in the Punjab, the most notable being the development of agricultural colonization by introducing a remarkable system of irrigation.

The British tried to overcome their initial problems by developing a semi-military despotic system of government. They built upon the indigenous administrational infrastructure by systematizing it and thus steered it out of its' medieval moorings. “The paternal rule of the early decades was eventually replaced by the machine rule of laws, codes and procedures”. The region was placed under the control of a three men Board of Administration, which was dominated by the towering personalities of John Lawrence and Henry Lawrence. The most experienced civilian and military officers were despatched to assist them. All officials were given both administrative and judicial powers. A well organised judicial system had been evolved in Punjab. After 1897, changes and reforms were brought about in the judicial system but the basic structure remained the same. As regards civil courts, there were five grades of courts - the Chief Court, the Divisional Court, the Court of the District judge, the Court of the

Subordinate judge and the Court of the Munsif. The Chief Court at Lahore was the highest Court of Appeal in Civil and Criminal Cases. In the army, the Punjab regiments were raised to assist the 8,000 strong military police force for the maintenance of law and order.

The Punjab system of governance became proverbial, as it drew some of the best talent among British officialdom. The Board of Administration, initiated a large number of economic reforms. It abolished internal customs’ duties and improved the roads, thus removing barriers to the development of trade and commerce. In local administration, the British incorporated certain elements of customary flair, they adopted the Mughal pattern of subdividing the districts into tehsils and sub-tehsils and the major administrative divisions were under Commissioners. However, to keep in direct touch with the grassroot level, they used the services of the Zaildar for liason. The latter was at the bottom of the administrative pyramid, a unit of ten or twenty villages, he supervised the village headmen and acted as an honorary police officer, in charge of the village police. Eventually, his position emerged as a vital mediator between government and society. The British ensured that it was held by local landowners, who had demonstrated unquestionable loyalty. The institution of the Zaildar was in fact, unique to the Punjab’s local administration, it reflected the importance, which the

British attached to securing the support of the rural notables.\textsuperscript{46} Punjab gradually began to experience a rapid and extensive economic growth from the late nineteenth century onwards. Canal irrigation was developed in western parts, in areas, that eventually came to be known as ‘canal colonies’. Cultivated lands, were confined to areas accessible to irrigation, which was derived either from ground water sources, through wells or from seasonal canals utilizing river water.\textsuperscript{47}

The British laid out an extensive network of canals by drawing waters from the major rivers. They built headworks on river beds and then diverted the water through these canals to such areas which otherwise were dependent on rain. With the passage of time, the canal-network transformed this dry, arid region into one of the most fertile agriculture belts in the world.

The sizeable immigration from other parts of the Punjab, that followed upon canal construction and the ensuing extension in agricultural activity has made the canal colonies, a phenomenon of major importance in the recent history of the world.\textsuperscript{48}

For the British, the canal colonies were the most spectacular benefit of their rule to the people of this province, this was their prime focus thus commerce and industry were sidelined.

They had annexed Punjab as a logical corollary to their moves towards the completion of their dominion, so they used all possible

strategies to good governance. In fact, so as to win over the Sikhs, they even begun a perusal of their scriptures, compiled, translated them and wrote their history. British rule also brought stability to Punjab, which had been constantly on the warpath, even in Ranjit Singh’s period. The agricultural wand turned a belligerent peoples into a contented yet dynamic workforce. During the events of 1857, this partnership was augmented, when the Sikhs sided with the British. The British attributed the Provinces’ loyalty to the ideals imbued by the Punjab School of Administration. It was the Sikh army that was mainly responsible for the reoccupation of Delhi by the British. The Punjab troops saved India for the British, for whom they “bore the privations, the fatigues, the perils of the ridge before Delhi and shared in the final conflict within the City Walls.”

The years 1857-59, were a turning point for the British Empire in India, since, practically the whole country was seething with rebellion. In certain regions, the tremors of the uprising were felt rather severly, while in others, their intensity was comparatively lesser. It is believed that at this hour of grave crisis of the Empire, the Punjab stood aloof and helped the British to re-establish their rule. Sir John Lawrence was hailed as a saviour of the state. In fact, the loyalty of the Panjabis was often quoted to disprove the view, that the uprising was a show of popular disaffection against the Colonial Government.

52. Ibid, p.386.
The people of Punjab contributed manpower to help satiate the British imperialistic appetite for conquering, as well, as policing far flung areas, Punjab was an important recruiting ground for the British, in fact, by the First World War, three fifths of the Indian army's troops came from the state. The recruits had been primarily from the martial castes of Muslims, Rajputs, Hindu Dogras and Jat Sikhs. Almost half the British army came to be recruited from this province, and in the course of time, the British pandered to them, calling them the “martial races of India and the sword arm of their empire”. Though the pages of Punjab’s historiography, reflect, that it was the British who labelled the people of the region as being “martial”, which is true however, this epithet emerged from the region’s turbulent history. The people instinctively, developed military prowess and martial values to meet the challenges their chequered region threw up. Thus, there existed a strong military tradition, on which the British could build. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the region had replaced the Presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal, as major centres of recruitment to the Indian army.

The British tackled the different sects among Punjab’s population deftly. The loyalty of the peasantry was crucial because of their willingness to pay land revenue, since they drew the bulk of their recruits from here to ensure the solvency and military security of the Raj. It was equally necessary

55. Ibid, p.41.
to win the support of the Muslim clan leaders and large landowners of West Punjab, who acted as the Raj’s military contractors in the post mutiny period, the regions’ aristocracy was to be used as “the great bulwark for the state”.

After the British had established their administrative infrastructure, they undertook revenue settlements in each district, which became the most important source of income. Surveys were carried out to assess the revenue paying capacity of each area and then the British eventually began to collect revenue. From 1885 onwards, the economy of Punjab began to be reshaped by the unprecedented extension in agricultural production brought about by canal colonization. By 1895-96, in British India, the total capital outlay on irrigation works amounted to Rs. 38.3 million, Punjab had emerged on top and the North Western Provinces had been relegated to third place.

Agricultural development brought along with it, its’ own share of problems. The land tenure arrangements introduced by successive rulers of the Punjab were probably determinative of the rural class structure. Initial British policy for example, aimed at levelling the agrarian class structure by eliminating large landlords and equalizing the rights of tenants and proprietors. The British began settling the land revenue, by determining,

56. Ibid.
who should pay government charges on the land and thereby holding proprietary rights on peasant cultivation rather than rural magnates, who also claimed proprietary rights. The British purpose was to maximize government revenues by removing all intermediaries between the peasant proprietors, since this would enhance revenue collections.

One of the greatest problems of rural Punjab had been rural indebtedness. It was not abating with military remittances nor protective irrigation works and the control over agrarian production by merchants and moneylenders was also increasing. The commercial forces unleashed by the British themselves namely the merchant class, originally fostered by them threatened those very colonial interests. After the Mutiny, the British had realized that the continuance of their rule depended upon the support of the war like people of the province. The object could be attained only if the rural people, the landed class and the peasantry which formed 90% of the population would remain loyal to the Raj. So the Government wished to introduce remedies for the welfare of peasantry.

Fearing a loss of army recruits, rural unrest and disaffection of indigenous troops from the 1870’s onwards, the colonial administration passed legislation, the Land Alienation Act of 1900, that prevented cultivators from alienating their lands or mortgaging them for extended

periods except to other cultivators. The Act took away the zamindars’ right to sell or mortgage his land, without prior approval of the district officer. These officers generally gave permission only when the recipient of the land could prove that he belonged to a tribe designated in the Government Gazette as agriculture. The Government of India, hoped that restrictions on land transfer would improve the peasants’ plight, but its’ primary purpose was political. The political support of the large body of the people was considered essential for the stability of the British Empire in India. The Act divided the Punjab population, between the so called traditional agricultural and non-agricultural castes. The British bureaucracy used the provisions of this Act, to create a new class of agricultural usurers and middlemen to act as a bulwark of British rule in India by facilitating in certain respects, the means of expropriation of the cultivator. Eventually, “the British purpose of cheap military recruits, legal landlords, contented soldiers and inexpensive rural policing could be maintained”.

If the British at all, self consciously divided and ruled in the Punjab, it was not along the lines of religious community, but in terms of rural-urban divisions. The agriculturist communities were to be safeguarded from economic and political domination by the urban elite. David Gilmartin has adduced convincing evidence of British efforts to protect tribal’ identities.

63. Barrier, N.G. The Punjab Alienation of Land Act 1900, Duke University, Carolina 1966, p.34.
The British wanted to benefit the middle class zamindar at the cost of the cultivator, the Government was nervous by this time, about the rising tide of nationalism in the rest of the country. The measure was calculated in creating a class of people loyal to them. That the British ultimately succeeded in their objective is proved by the subsequent historical events, where the agricultural community, i.e. the Jat Sikh became richer and steadfast loyalists of the British. As a matter of fact, the shadow of this Act, was manifest on almost the entire political life of the province, upto the partition of the Province in 1947. The powerful Unionist Ministry of the Punjab, which was so loyal to the British may be regarded as a creation of this Act.

The year 1907, saw the emergence of a new political consciousness and witnessed a stir, never seen before in the annals of Punjab, since British occupation. Though the causes of the movement stemmed from agrarian discontent, it widened into a political movement. The disturbances began at Rawalpindi, on April 21, 1907 with the poem “Pagri Sambhal Jatta”. Ajit Singh made an attack upon the increase in land assessment rates. Despite the fact, that the Punjab Government had passed several paternal measures, which were calculated to improve the economic position and the standard of living among Punjabi agriculturists. In 1907, its’ further attempts to help the agriculturists unexpectedly resulted in the alienation of the political support of the agrarian population in Central Punjab. This area was the

recruiting ground, for more than a third of the Indian army. There were indications in May 1907, that the Punjabi agriculturists, as individuals and as soldiers, had moved towards rebellion. They were reactions to the Punjab Colonization of Land Bill and the Bari Doab Canal rates. The Chenab colony, had been mostly inhabited by ex-soldiers, most of whom were Sikhs. They had been given lands, in this area, as a compensation for their services to the British. As the size of each holding was being reduced by partition among heirs, the Government proposed to check further division by passing an Act providing for inheritance by primogeniture. This and other regulations in this connection were resented by the people, as an unjustified interference in their time honoured practices and traditions. Meanwhile, Punjab had been ravaged by famine and plague, the Government remained insensitive to these calamities but the land revenue grew by 30%, land became a valuable commodity and the small farmers could not resist the temptation of selling land to the moneylenders. Though the Land Alienation Act saved the agricultural land from passing into the hands of money lenders, yet it failed to solve the problem of rural indebtedness, it also opened the controversy of agriculturist.

The social impact of British rule in Punjab was the emergence of the educated middle class, which included government servants, teachers, doctors, an offshoot of the formal education introduced by them. As a

consequence of the Educational Despatch of 1854, there was to be a Department of Education in each province, this gave a fillip to education in Punjab, the Department was instituted in 1857. A cess amounting to one percent of the land was attached to education and within two years, 456 village schools were established. The Panjab University had been instituted in 1872. English education was considered useful and expedient, as well as consistent with the political requirements of British rule in India. Although, the basic policy of the Government was to widen its’ scope, but practical considerations demanded that it should be limited to the upper and middle classes of society.

The growing middle class wanted to maximize their share in political and economic power, hence communal sentiments began to be institutionalized. The emergence of reformist movements accentuated this divide. The Hindu reformers initial communal sentiment were directed against Muslims and Christians but gradually it grew against Sikhism as well. Further, the British writers added fuel to fire by consistently projecting the Sikhs, as a separate entity, even in the annals of later history they endeavoured to retain a distinct identity.

The advent of western education and the printing press had ideological implications as well. The educated people were now exposed to

western religious and secular values, which resultantly triggered off, reform movements like the Arya Samaj among Hindus, the Singh Sabha among the Sikhs and the Ahmediyah movement among the Muslims. These movements tried to modernise their religions, so they struck a conciliatory path between modern western culture and their traditional customs.

In India, during the early twentieth century, the freedom movement was picking up and Punjab could not remain unaffected. The rise of communalism in Punjab, was a major tragedy in the way of the rapid development of national and militant forces working for independence and social transformation of society. The Unionist Party maintained a pro British, pro agriculturist stand, which actually nourished the interest of the landlords. On account of the peculiar geographical distribution of the population, the Unionist Party could build a stronghold in the Western and Eastern Punjab, while Central Punjab remained the nerve centre of nationalist, militant and Akali politics. The communal leadership of all the three existing religious groups tried to use every forum, including the floor of local bodies and the legislative, to advance their own interests. Taking advantage of the communal dissension and class differences, the British bureaucracy tried to manipulate them for their own imperialist designs.

However, the year 1919, brought the focus of the Freedom Movement

onto Punjab and in fact, the Jallianwala Bagh episode, where 379 were killed and 1200 wounded, boosted the anti British tirade and made it take an irretrievable turn. It all had begun as an agitation, against the Rowlatt Act spearheaded by Congress leaders like Dr. Kitchlew and Satyapal. Hartals had taken place, which had demonstrated complete communal amity and coordination. This had struck Michael O’ Dwyer, the Governor and he had shuddered. So the crowds which assembled to agitate against the Rowlatt Act, were fired at and it snowballed into a gruesome episode with national repercussions.

The Congress Enquiry Committee reported, that even the figure of 1000 persons killed would not be an exaggeration. Meanwhile, the agrarian unrest blended with revivalist aspirations, and found expression in regional parties like the Akalis, majority of whom were from among the Jat Sikh agriculturists. The Akalis, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, fervently participated in various anti-British tirades, particularly, the Gurdwara Reform Movement, in which they were strongly backed by the Congress.

The Akali agitation culminated in the passing of the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925 and the creation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandak Committee, which was to play a pivotal role in Sikh politics. Religious reform in Punjab, eventually, took the shape of an anticolonial crusade in


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Punjab. Meanwhile, the landlords protested against their oppression by organizing the Unionist Party to represent their interests. The State of Punjab had played its’ role in the wider national context of the freedom struggle, however with the later course of events, the Sikh homeland issue began to take precedence over others.

As efforts for liberating the country began to fructify, the clouds of partition were looming on Punjab’s horizon. The communal tension, which had engulfed the whole of north India, affected Punjab the most, on account of the vital importance of the province to all three communities. As partition became inevitable, the leaders of political parties and the officials were preoccupied with working out details of the division of assets and liabilities of the country, paying scarce attention to a planned exchange of population. A planned inter-migration between the two newly formed countries had not been envisaged by either government.

The Muslim League leader, Mohammad Ali Jinnah had suggested an exchange of population on the 10th Dec. 1945 and again on the 15th Nov. 1946, it was not seriously considered by the Congress leaders. The election results of 1946 had clearly indicated that the Muslims of the Punjab were solidly behind the Muslim League and were aspiring to form Pakistan with Punjab as one of its provinces. In order to avoid this, the Sikhs and the Hindus insisted on the creation of a Sikh-Hindu Province.

On the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi felt

Every province is Indian, be he Hindu or Muslim, it is his. It won’t be otherwise, even if Pakistan came in full. For me any such thing will spell the bankruptcy of Indian wisdom or statesmanship, or both.  

There were a variety of opinions on the subject, the crux being, that the leaders, decided against a planned exchange of population, thinking that it would bring in its’ wake a number of problems. However, the unprecedented orgy of violence that erupted brought tremendous destruction, death and uprooted thousands of people.

The Governments and the leaders could not arrest the spread of communalism and with the establishment of the two dominions, communal frenzy occurred in its’ most brutal form.

Nearly a million persons perished, and over 13 million crossed the borders, over 4 million refugees from West Pakistan crossed into the Punjab and a large number of Muslims from the Indian side, crossed into Pakistan. In 1951, when the total population of the Indian Punjab was over 12 1/2 millions, there were nearly 2 1/2 million refugees, forming a fifth of its’ population.

The partition of Punjab brought about the most radical change in the

life of this region since the fall of the Sikh Empire and the British annexation. The division of the state on communal lines, which affected every sphere of life - political, economic, social, linguistic, administrative and cultural influenced the population pattern. The Hindus who were a minority of 30%, now became a majority with 70% of the population, the Sikhs a small, though sizeable minority with 30% of the population in East Punjab, Muslims, a majority in United Punjab became a microscopic minority. It was within the strands of Punjab’s history, that it was to be divided into two, this was only a beginning in its’ vivisection, which was to subsequently, to take place once again, each partitioning had repercussions which reverberated within its’ body politic.