Chapter Six
SOCIO-ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS

The century long colonial rule over the Punjab ushered in numerous changes in the social, economic and cultural spheres. At annexation, production for the market came from a very small portion of the cultivated area. Access to the market was restricted by the Zamindar’s rents or the money-lender acquiring the grain at low prices. With the development of transport, agricultural produce could find its way to the market for sale. Commercialization of agriculture catapulted the people of the Punjab to the global market without their having developed the corresponding attitudes and practices. The bullock cart existed side by side with the global trade, underlining the gap between the modern means of transportation and the traditional technology of production. Nevertheless, the trade in wheat, the main commodity of export, came to have a bearing not only on the systems of production but also on landed rights, village organization, urbanization, regional disparities, standards of living, social tensions and other related aspects.

The impact of the opening up of the Punjab to the world market may be seen first on the base of operations, that is the village where the life of the people was dictated by custom handed down from generation to generation. The inherited traditions ensured broad continuities but change, varying in nature and extent, also became visible. Three broad categories of farmers produced for the market: first, the bigger landlords who employed tenants to cultivate their holdings and did not take active part in the cultivation; second, the landholders who did not cultivate the land but organized cultivation; and third, the peasant proprietor who had enough land for surplus production.
for the market. The owners of twenty-five to fifty acres of land and the peasant grantees holding fifteen to twenty-five acres in the canal colonies cultivated more for the market than subsistence. The cultivators of less than fifteen acres produced mainly for subsistence.

Most of the peasant proprietors came under the middle and rich categories at the beginning of British rule. In 1924, when the first detailed survey was made on the size of holdings, the smaller peasants holding less than five acres accounted for fifty-nine per cent of the owners though they were holding only twelve per cent of the land. By 1939 they still controlled twelve per cent of the land but their percentage among landowners increased to sixty-four per cent. On the other hand, the percentage of land under the control of landlords rose from forty-six in 1924 to fifty-three in 1939 even though their percentage among owners fell from eight to six. The area controlled by those who owned more than fifty acres increased from twenty-six per cent in 1924 to thirty-eight in 1939. The middle peasants were being squeezed out. The area held by them fell from twenty-seven per cent in 1924 to twenty-two per cent in 1939.¹ This was largely an outcome of the wheat trade which brought in more money for the landlord who in turn invested it in the purchase of land. As a consequence of the Land Alienation Act of 1901, the small holders tended to borrow money from the bigger landowners and when the former was unable to repay the debt the latter acquired his property.

Orientation towards the market was evident in the change in the cropping pattern. The cultivation for subsistence was replaced by cultivation for the market with greater emphasis on the cultivation of cash crops—primarily wheat, cotton, and oilseeds. The area under individual crops varied with the market demand. Although a rise in both the rabi and kharif harvests was evident, the acreage under rabi was thirty per cent more. There was also an increasing tendency to grow fewer and more valuable kharif crops so that larger area could be left for the cultivation of wheat. The enhanced wheat trade also encouraged an unhealthy rotation of crops. To derive additional benefits the cultivators increasingly resorted to the cultivation of wheat and cotton thereby robbing the soil of its fertility that used to be earlier restored by the leguminous plants. This increase in the cultivation of cash crops adversely affected the cultivation of fodder crops and other inferior grains. In 1925 income from the improved varieties of wheat amounted to eighty-four lakh rupees. The cultivator wanted to maximize his profits by using new techniques and implements. Various new kinds of ploughs, reapers and other implements were used mainly by the market oriented cultivators.

The commercialization of agriculture induced even the small peasant proprietor to observe market prices and demand. He tried to follow market patterns. However, as the

2 For greater detail on the various crops see Chapter Three.
5 A detail of the new implements used in the production of wheat is given in Chapter Three.
The cultivator did not adequately develop the conditioning for the market, let alone for the export market, he often lost heavily. For example, in the canal colony in 1921, the banias hoarded the wheat crop till the autumn season. The prices doubled and they made huge profits. In the following year the cultivator hoarded his wheat in anticipation of rise in prices, but by autumn the prices receded by thirty per cent and he lost heavily. A change in the marketing of agricultural produce was also evident. The cultivator now realized that he stood to benefit by bringing his produce directly to the market instead of giving it to the village trader. This change was more evident in the canal colonies and the central Punjab. In such situations the hold of the money-lender was relatively weakened. From these markets the cultivator also bought seeds and implements thereby adversely affecting the village artisans. The artisans had to look for employment elsewhere. As the new implements and techniques curtailed the demand of the traditional services, some of the artisans took to agricultural labour, while others took to cultivation as tenants.

The majority of the proprietors had small holdings. They either gave their land to someone else for cultivation or took land from others. All cultivation was thus carried on either by peasant proprietors or tenants. Throughout the period under review, more than

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8 Tom G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848-1968, Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*, University of California, Berkeley, 1974 (cited hereafter as *Vilyatpur*), 181.
fifty per cent of the cultivated land was under tenants. The payment of rents in kind remains much in evidence in the province. The share of the owner varied from one-half to one-third of the produce. Generally, the former rate prevailed if the owner paid the occupier’s rate and the latter, if the tenant paid the occupier’s rate.

When the British enforced cash rents and revenues it was expected that payment of rent in cash would increase. But the landlord’s tendency was in favour of the grain rents as he could hoard the produce for a subsequent increase in the price of foodgrains. The prices of wheat were generally lower at the harvest time and rose during the winter season. As the landlord was the deciding party, rents in kind continued to prevail. Indeed, cash rents were an exception rather than the rule even in the canal colonies. In the Lyallpur district, which had the greatest development in agriculture, rents in kind

### Table 6.1: Area under tenancy (in acres)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Area Cultivated</th>
<th>Area under tenancy</th>
<th>Percentage of area under tenancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1897-1902</td>
<td>25,727,726</td>
<td>13,920,478</td>
<td>54.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-1907</td>
<td>27,231,427</td>
<td>14,334,479</td>
<td>52.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907-1912</td>
<td>27,922,277</td>
<td>15,092,286</td>
<td>54.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1917</td>
<td>28,034,136</td>
<td>15,144,854</td>
<td>54.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917-1922</td>
<td>28,820,019</td>
<td>15,989,768</td>
<td>55.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-1927</td>
<td>29,787,535</td>
<td>16,885,439</td>
<td>56.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-1932</td>
<td>29,913,112</td>
<td>17,094,825</td>
<td>57.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-1937</td>
<td>31,041,660</td>
<td>18,131,656</td>
<td>58.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1947</td>
<td>13,851,764</td>
<td>6,736,289</td>
<td>48.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: LRA 1902, 1907, 1912, 1917, 1922, 1927, 1932, 1947. For further detail see Appendix L.

10 DG Shahpur 1917, 204; DG Gurgaon 1910, 136.
11 DG Muzaffargarh 1908, 137.
12 Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony 1904, 101.
prevailed even in 1932-33 in thirty-three per cent of the total cultivated area.\textsuperscript{14} The tenants too preferred the payment of rent in kind so that they did not have to sell at the low price of the harvest time to pay the necessary dues. The persistence of kind rents resulted in a lower standard of cultivation: the tenants preferred to sow crops of a relatively lower value.\textsuperscript{15} The inputs involved in these crops were smaller. The cultivation of wheat and cotton involved greater investment and the tenants did not have the necessary surplus. Moreover, there was no security of tenure. The landlord had no interest in investing his money. Cash rents did not become widespread.

The effect of the market on the village economy led to change in the wages of agricultural labour and their occupations. Though most of the artisans continued staying in the rural society, all of them did not depend only on traditional occupations. They had to supplement their earnings through agricultural labour. They engaged as harvesters when the wheat ripened. The traditional system of paying wages in kind was replaced by cash wages. The tendency to pay wages in cash became popular as the landowners benefited by hoarding the wheat crop in anticipation of a rise in prices. Though this practice was not unknown before our period, an acceleration of cash wages was much in evidence now.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} H.R. Stewart & Kartar Singh, \textit{Accounts of Different Systems of Farming in the Canal Colonies of the Punjab, 1927}, BOEI, Lahore, 1927,1. Also PLCD 1934, Volume XXV, Lahore, 1934, 121.

\end{flushright}
For fifty per cent of the 4,728 villages surveyed in 1900 wages were paid in cash. Wages in both cash and kind were paid in forty-two per cent of these villages. Wages in kind were paid only in eight per cent of them. The percentage of wages in cash rose to fifty-eight in 1912 and that of wages in kind fell to two. That the rates of wages varied in the different regions is evident from the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1943</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Punjab</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-montane region</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Punjab</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canal Colonies</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Punjab</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Punjab</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Report on the Third Regular Wages Survey of the Punjab taken in December 1922, Table B ii; Ibid 1927, Table B ii; Ibid 1929 Table B vi; Ibid 1932, Table B vi; Punjab Wages Survey 1943, Table xii. (For greater detail see Appendix M).

It is also evident that wages in the canal colonies were relatively more than the wages in other regions. This was because holdings in the canal colonies were bigger and it was not possible for the owners themselves to do all the work. Moreover, it was easier for the cultivators in these colonies to pay wages as they earned more through greater wheat trade. The wages in the canal colonies were eighty-two per cent more than the eastern Punjab in 1917. The central Punjab had a lower wage than the canal colonies except in


1917 and 1943. In 1917 it was five per cent higher while in 1932 it was nine per cent lower. This could have been due to the Depression which depressed the price of wheat and weakened the financial position of the landlords. They could not pay as much now as they did when the prices were high. The canal colonies were the worst hit and the labourers in these colonies suffered more. Most of them had migrated from their homes and this fall in wages reduced their earnings. However, the labourers managed better during the recession despite a fall in wages, because the foodgrains and other items became cheaper. By 1937 the wage had recovered partially though when we compare it with the increase in the price of wheat it was decidedly lower. From 1937 to 1943 the wages increased by more than one hundred per cent while the price of wheat registered an increase of three hundred per cent.

Besides these regional variations, there were seasonal variations. During the season of wheat harvesting the wages went up to twelve annas or one rupee a day. It was observed that when the wheat ripened there was a considerable rise in the number of agricultural labourers. On the whole, the system continued to work in favour of those who produced and sold wheat rather than those who sold their labour. The difference in the rates of wages accounted for the migration of labourers.

Significantly, we see in the Punjab a trend of migration from the densely populated sub-montane and central areas towards the canal colonies and not to urban centres. Of the total immigrants to the Lower Chenab Colony in 1901, forty-eight per cent were from

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18 DG Shahpur 1917, 204; DG Gujrat 1921, 94.
19 DG Gurdaspur 1914, 88.
the central Punjab, forty-three per cent from the sub-montane region and nine per cent from other areas. In the following decade, the number of immigrants into this colony increased by twenty-eight per cent. The Lower Jhelum Canal Colony and the Upper Jhelum Canal Colony too attracted colonists from the sub-montane and central tracts. There was a considerable degree of mobility among colonists who apparently were not willing to become long time settlers. For example, the number of immigrants from Sialkot registered a decline over the decade. This would mean that a number of colonists failed to remain on their allotment of land long enough to obtain proprietary rights. If we compare the two Tables given below we see that the Lower Chenab Colony area had greater immigration. This can be attributed to the fact that the Lyallpur Colony, which was also

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District of Origin</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>District of Origin</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sialkot</td>
<td>103,390</td>
<td>96,984</td>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>8,614</td>
<td>17,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>67,963</td>
<td>81,144</td>
<td>Multan</td>
<td>7,777</td>
<td>12,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jullundur</td>
<td>56,983</td>
<td>70,847</td>
<td>Patiala</td>
<td>4,281</td>
<td>8,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>43,593</td>
<td>52,701</td>
<td>Jhelum</td>
<td>4,224</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>35,099</td>
<td>44,234</td>
<td>Kapurthala</td>
<td>3,968</td>
<td>8,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahore</td>
<td>28,620</td>
<td>28,176</td>
<td>Hisar</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujrat</td>
<td>25,352</td>
<td>25,174</td>
<td>Rawalpindi</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>17,807</td>
<td>28,306</td>
<td>Mianwali</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahpur</td>
<td>16,156</td>
<td>12,367</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferozepur</td>
<td>15,048</td>
<td>10,813</td>
<td>Other Districts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>409,621</td>
<td>455,621</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32,434</td>
<td>111,316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District of Origin</th>
<th>Upper Chenab Canal Colony</th>
<th>Lower Bari Doab Canal Colony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jullundur</td>
<td>7,455</td>
<td>18,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sialkot</td>
<td>30,175</td>
<td>8,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>4,401</td>
<td>10,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>12,124</td>
<td>3,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>7,521</td>
<td>7,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahore</td>
<td>5,196</td>
<td>13,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferozepur</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>4,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67,908</td>
<td>65,4532</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paul W. Paustin, *Canal Irrigation*, 86.
the leading colony in terms of the production and export of wheat, was situated in this area. This colony registered a phenomenal increase of 2,408 per cent in population from 1881 to 1921 while Montgomery and Shahpur witnessed an increase of ninety-nine and eighty-seven per cent respectively. It can be safely deduced that the great wheat producing tract attracted more immigrants. By contrast, the size of immigration into other parts of the Punjab countryside was considerably smaller. Here we are not taking into account migration from rural to urban areas, though the production and marketing of wheat influenced urbanization in its own way.

The urban population in the Punjab increased from 2.5 million in 1881 to 5.5 million in 1941, registering an increase of 120 per cent. During 1921-31 the natural increase of population was twelve per cent, but the corresponding increase in urban population was thirty-four per cent. The migration of population was a deciding factor in this increase. The agricultural trade also led to the emergence of commercial centres or mandi towns. The improved means of transport made the trade of wheat and other items easier. The trading population did not have to go to the bigger towns to open shops. Trade was carried on from shops in the mandis in towns like Rohtak, Kaithal, Bathinda,

22 Paul W. Paustin, *Canal Irrigation*, 86.


Abohar and Kasur in the east and Gojra, Chhichawatni, Okara, Sangla and Lyallpur in the west.\textsuperscript{25}

The mandi towns attracted industries based on processing of agricultural produce, creating new employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{26} The largest number of towns developed in the canal colonies.\textsuperscript{27} These colony towns registered a substantial increase in population.\textsuperscript{28} As these towns became centres for collection, the vertical linkages of the pre-British times were re-oriented and broken, leading to decay or even deurbanization in those cases which lost their markets. These were mostly the towns away from the railways which altered the inter-regional balance between different urban centres. The small towns away from the railway lost their markets and virtually became villages.\textsuperscript{29}

\footnotesize{25 Census of India, 1911, Volume I, Calcutta, 1913, 36.}
\footnotesize{28 For example, between 1901 and 1921 the population in Lyallpur increased by 206 per cent, in Montgomery by 121 per cent and in Sargodha by 100 per cent. Paul W. Paustin, Canal Irrigation, 90.}
\footnotesize{29 Indu Banga, ‘Rural Urban Interaction: The Upper Bari Doab (c.1550-c.1900)’, forthcoming in special number of the Indian Historical Review.}
A direct outcome of the wheat trade was the emergence of Karachi as a major port. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, it had become the Indian port closest to the European countries which brought the wheat fields of the Punjab within thirty days of Europe. This port accounted for more than forty per cent of the wheat exported from the Punjab. In 1938-39 the port of Karachi accounted for fifty-seven per cent of the wheat exports from the region. Even in the inter-provincial wheat trade of the Punjab from 1936 to 1944 Karachi ranked first with sixty-seven per cent of the total wheat going from this port to other parts of India. This heavy wheat trading attracted people from

30 In 1901-02 it absorbed 39 per cent of the wheat trade. By 1915-16 it absorbed 61 per cent of the total wheat trade of the province. PAR 1901-02, 121; Ibid., 1902-03, 58; Ibid., 1904-05, 35; Ibid., 1906-07, 36; Ibid., 1912-13, 51; Ibid., 1920-21, 87.

31

Table 6.5: Wheat exports from the Punjab (in maunds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>1938-39</th>
<th>1939-40</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Export from this port</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachi</td>
<td>16,086,440</td>
<td>9,227,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>16,086,440</td>
<td>2,332,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>16,086,440</td>
<td>738,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajputana</td>
<td>16,086,440</td>
<td>2,155,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>16,086,440</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


32 The average inter-provincial trade from 1936-37 to 1943-44 from the Punjab was 515,010 thousand maunds. Out of this 349,110 thousand maunds were routed through Karachi; 53,970 thousand maunds were routed through Calcutta and 34,670 thousand maunds were routed through Rajputana. Supplement to the Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India, 1946, 40.
the neighbouring and distant areas to make Karachi a leading urban centre and the fourth largest port city of India during the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{33}

The growing export of wheat and its rising prices brought more money into the hands of the people engaged in its production and its marketing. This surplus money was channeled into the purchase of land, which remained the best form of investment in view of slow development of industry and joint stock banking. The demand for land and its price increased with the expansion of the market for wheat (Table 6.6). In 1900-01 when the area sold was 323 thousand acres, the price of cultivated land was eighty per cent more than the other land. On the eve of World War I (1913-14), 209 thousand acres were sold, with the price of cultivated land being seventy-three per cent more. At the beginning of World War II (1938-39), the transferred area rose to 257 thousand acres with the price of cultivated land being seventy-five per cent more. Obviously, the cultivated land was substantially costlier than the other types of land. This could possibly be an outcome of increase in earnings brought about by the wheat trade, which boosted the best investment recognized by the cultivator. Remittances from the canal colonies, the army personnel and from those who had gone overseas also increased the influx of money, which meant greater capital for investment and purchase of land. Besides, land was an investment that yielded a return of thirteen per cent per year without any further investment thereby inducing landlords to invest in the purchase of land.\textsuperscript{34} At the same

\textsuperscript{33} Indu Banga, ‘Karachi and its Hinterland’, 337.

\textsuperscript{34} The Tribune, Volume L, 10\textsuperscript{th} December, 1930; Lahore, 5; Ibid., 17\textsuperscript{th} December, 1930, 5.
time, increase in the land mortgaged shows that there was a disinclination to sell lan
This would result in a relative shortfall in its supply and hence an increased value.
Increased land mortgages also reflects the lenders desire to obtain the produce as most of
the mortgages were usufructuary. This enabled the lenders to enhance earnings as the
peasant after mortgaging usually cultivated the same land as a tenant, but was forced to
alienate a larger part of his produce in the form of rent. 35

If we compare the price of land with the price of wheat we do see a certain
degree of correspondence between the two, though the violent fluctuations in the wheat
prices were not reflected in the land prices. From 1907-08 to 1920-21 the price of
cultivated land increased by 156 per cent while that of wheat by seventy-one per cent.
During the Depression the price of wheat receded by fifty per cent while that of
cultivated land only by twenty per cent. By 1945-46 the price of wheat had risen by
more than 380 per cent while that of cultivated land by one hundred and forty per cent.
The amount of land sold was somewhat proportional to the price of wheat. During the
phase of lower wheat prices there was a decrease in the land sold. Similarly, when wheat
prices were high during the Wars the amount of land sold registered an increase. From
1942-43 the price of wheat registered a sharp increase and so did land sales. This means
that when the price of wheat was high the cultivators earned more and invested in land,

35 Land was handed over to the mortgages and not simply pledged as a security.
Mridula Mukherjee, ‘Commercialization and Agrarian Change in Pre-Independence
Oxford, Delhi, 1985, 56-57.
while on the other hand, when wheat prices were low their earnings were adversely
effected and this lowered their investment capacity.36

The trade in wheat also brought with it regional disparities. Prior to the
introduction of canals the central Punjab was the major producer of wheat (Graph 7). After the construction of the canal network the canal colonies started producing greater
quantity of wheat, and subsequently cotton crops, while gram cultivation became
important in the central Punjab. The relatively arid south-eastern region also grew gram
and millets. The canal colonies also had relatively greater out-turn. For example, in 1942-
43 the out-turn of wheat on the irrigated lands was almost 110 per cent more in the canal
colonies than the central Punjab.37 This disparity in the cultivation and out-turn of crops
clearly underlines the dominant place of the canal colonies in export earnings. The
enhanced income from the export of wheat had a direct bearing on the income of the
producer. An average peasant of the canal colony profited more by selling wheat as he
earned more than what he spent. He thereby had surplus cash as well as incentive to try
new techniques. Further, in terms of hoarding the wheat crop in anticipation of a rise in

36 It must be stated here that besides wheat trade and prices there were other
factors also that influenced land prices. Some of these are the monetization of the rural
economy, political security, private property, rent and settlement operations to fix land
revenues. Bachan Singh Hira, Social Change in the Upper Bari Doab (1849-1947), 147;
K. Mukherji, ‘Land Prices in the Punjab’, Trends of Socio Economic Change in India

37 The out-turn on irrigated area was 424 maunds and 884 maunds in the central
Punjab and the canal colonies respectively. Labh Singh and Ajaib Singh, Farm Accounts
prices, the large size of the colony holdings was a great help. In this respect, the peasants of the sub-montane districts were even worse off than those in the central Punjab. Their earnings were neutralized by the higher costs of cultivation and other expenses. These circumstances forced them to resort to increased labour on their holdings. The people in the central Punjab began to cultivate their lands themselves and did the work that was earlier done by the labourers. They even hired out their labour becoming mere 'commodity producers'. The competition from the canal colonies obliged some of them to migrate to South-East Asia and North America.\(^{38}\)

In the semi-arid south-eastern region, scanty rainfall, sandy soil, recurring famines and the absence of perennial canals prevented agriculture from displacing the co-existing pastoralism. In the central Punjab, with its fertile soil, adequate rainfall and a good water table providing for intensive cultivation, pastoralism was replaced by agriculture. These developments led to a difference in the means of livelihood in the two regions. The people of the central Punjab took to wheat cultivation whereas the people of the south-eastern region took to cattle rearing.\(^{39}\) This divergence in occupations paved the way for a skewed interdependence between the two regions. A bad year in the pastoral lands

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invariably meant a good year in the agricultural region.\textsuperscript{40} The failure of crops forced the pastoral people to depend on grain and fodder from the central Punjab and the canal colonies. This enhanced demand raised the prices and, as a result, the agriculturists enhanced their earnings. On the other hand, the occurrence of drought forced the pastoralists to sell their livestock. This increased supply in the market was followed by a fall in the price of livestock. This indicates the advantage of the agriculturists as opposed to the pastoralists.

The increase in earnings was reflected in change in the of standard of living.\textsuperscript{41} There were regional disparities and obvious disparities among the rich and the poor in rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, for the richer people, three meals now became common where two meals had been the rule earlier. Though the staple food consisted of the grain grown in the locality, wheat was now widely consumed and replaced \textit{bajra} in


\textsuperscript{41} The term standard of living has now acquired a wider usage but the economic phrase for the idea conveyed is ‘real income’ or ‘real wage’. However, as just income does not tell us much we must know the purchasing power of that income. For the social scientists it relates to the conditions considered essential by a person or a group and includes working conditions and the like. The yardsticks to measure the standard of living are housing, clothes, food, education and so on. But as economists agree, the yardstick remains relative to a given space and time. Our understanding is based on: \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}, Volume 21, Encyclopedia Britannica Limited, Chicago, 1959, 308-9; \textit{Chamber’s Encyclopedia}, Volume XIII, Oxford, London, 1967, 122; P.A.S. Taylor, \textit{A Dictionary of Economic Terms}, Oxford, Bangladesh, 1974, 102.
the diet of the well to do in almost all parts of the province, except the western Punjab where even the rich ate wheat only in summer. The poorer people ate gram, peas, turnips, onions and dates, and in the years of scarcity they ate the flour of date stones. In the eastern Punjab too bajra, jowar and pulses were widely consumed in winter while wheat, gram and barley constituted the staple food in summer. In the central Punjab and the canal colonies wheat was widely eaten. However, a difference in the food of the rich and the poor was evident even in the canal colonies. The rich ate wheat throughout the year whereas the poor had to resort to mixing parched seeds of watermelon with other grains in winter. In summer they generally ate wheat, bajra and jowar. It is interesting to note that the increase in the price of wheat was accompanied by an increased consumption of mixtures. To gain more profits, most of the poorer people ate mixed wheat and kept the unmixed wheat for sale. Though wheat was more widely consumed it could not replace bajra completely. This is evident from the increased area under bajra. The food in the cities was also different as people here ate more green vegetables and wheat than in the villages. It is also interesting that an increased consumption of wheat was accompanied

42 DG Muzaffargarh 1908, 80.
43 DG Gurgaon 1910, 80; DG Rohtak 1908, 80.
44 DG Shahpur 1917, 134; DG Gujrat 1921, 57.
45 DG Kangra 1904, 105; DG Kangra 1917, 76.
46 This comes out clearly in the pie chart in Chapter Three.
47 DG Lahore 1916, 78.
by a decrease in the consumption of milk and ghee. It is evident from village surveys that increase in the area under wheat lead to a contraction of the area under fodder crops.48

In respect of clothing, a change was evident though the dresses for different tracts were different. They used to be made of home spun cloth. With the increased earnings ushered in by the wheat trade, the people began to wear mill made cloth, more so in the canal colonies and the central Punjab. The less developed eastern Punjab still persisted in home spun cloth.49 The difference in clothes was more pronounced in towns than in the villages. The towns in general were more receptive to change in fashions while the villages remained more conservative. In the towns where traders benefited more by wheat trade it was common to see men wearing clothes of the European fashion. Shoes too became a common feature.50

Another important measure of the standard of living was the houses. The flat roofed mud plastered single storeyed kacha houses remained the most common kind of houses throughout the period under review. These houses did not have proper ventilation.51 The roofs were often thatched with rafters of timber.52 Prior to the opening

49 DG Gurgaon 1910, 73; DG Kangra 1904, 106; DG Kangra 1917, 71; DG Lahore 1916, 145.
50 DG Gujrat 1921, 59.
of the Punjab to the global market, the existence of pacca houses was relatively unknown. Even where these houses existed, they were owned by money-lenders. The export trade and remittances from abroad made pacca houses a relatively common feature of the central Punjab and the canal colonies. The bigger landlords, who now had surplus, built pacca houses with more doors and windows. Some of them even built bungalows with gardens, like the Europeans. It was also noticed that the houses of tenants were generally kacha and poorly ventilated. Though some land owners also had kacha houses, their houses were distinctively better. It was a popular saying that the ‘owner had a residence while tenant the shelter’. Moreover, the owners were better able to employ servants. The richer peasants increasingly used deodar wood while the poorer had to use...

An Economic Survey of Gaggar Bhana, 2. See also Paul W. Paustin, Canal Irrigation, 96.

DG Muzaffargarh 1908, 82; DG Shahpur 1917, 138; DG Gurdaspur 1914, 68.

M.L. Darling, Punjab Peasant Life, Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1984, 46, 141, 164.


DG Lahore 1916, 80-81.


Anchal Das, An Economic Survey of Tehong, 93; F.L. Brayne An Economic
The use of metal utensils became fairly widespread during our period. In addition to these, a few of the landowners and traders had chairs, crockery and lamps.

On the whole, it can be said that the western Punjab was poorly fed and poorly housed; the eastern Punjab was well fed but poorly housed, while the canal colonies and the central Punjab were well fed and well housed. The material condition of the ordinary cultivator remained relatively poor. His only source of livelihood was agriculture and this limited his means. In times of scarcity he had to limit his consumption which kept his standard of living low. It must be mentioned here that the labourers of the canal colonies were better off than those in other regions because they got higher wages. Though these labourers earned more there was no corresponding improvement in their houses, dress or food. It was the better off landlords and tenants who consumed more wheat, wore better clothes, had better furniture and possessed better houses. The increase in brick houses had a direct bearing on artisans who now found work in brick kilns. However, to maintain this standard of living the cultivators of the central Punjab had to work harder than before. In order to save money they began to perform those tasks that were earlier performed by

Survey of Bhadas, 61.

58 G Shahpur 1917, 139.
59 G Muzafargarh 1908, 138; DG Shahpur 1917, 130; DG Gurgaon 1910, 75.
61 DG Gurdaspur 1914, 133.
labourers. The cultivators soon realized that they could derive additional gain in the form of saving if they used his family labour.\textsuperscript{62}

The change in the standard of living ushered in by enhanced wheat exports affected the life of the women of the province. In the earlier days they did the household work, spun cloth, cut the fodder besides helping in the fields. Hard work was a general feature of all parts of rural parts of the province. Yet, relatively speaking, the geo-economic conditions of the eastern and northern Punjab made it mandatory for the women to work harder than those in the central Punjab and the canal colonies. Besides these regional variations the castes also dictated the amount of work done by the women.\textsuperscript{63} For example, the Rajput women did not do work within the house leave alone fields. The Jats on the other hand were assisted in almost all work by the women of the house.\textsuperscript{64} Women from other agricultural castes were also reported as having worked hard. It was also observed that the women of the trading castes too did not assist in the work.\textsuperscript{65} This exclusion of the women from all other work except domestic manifested itself in lower economic returns from agriculture. Where the women assisted in the production of wheat and other crops, they earned more and even saved all that they would have paid to the labourer. These

\textsuperscript{62} M.L. Darling, \textit{Punjab Peasant}, 141-42.


\textsuperscript{64} M.L. Darling, \textit{Punjab Peasant Life}, 35-36.

\textsuperscript{65} Census of India, 1931, Volume XVII, Delhi, 1933 (cited hereafter as Census of 1931 Punjab), 217.
savings added to their standard of living. The increased earnings aided by wheat market enabled the peasants to buy new machines for grinding flour, thus reducing the work of the women.\textsuperscript{66} The availability of machine-made cloth and the ability to buy it saw the gradual disappearance of the spinning of cloth.\textsuperscript{67} The women who wore better clothes became disinclined to do the menial tasks and devoted more time to embroidery.\textsuperscript{68} The richer ladies took to wearing \textit{dupattas} of English cloth and silk with \textit{phulkaris}.\textsuperscript{69} The traditional silver ornaments suffered a setback as with enhanced earnings there was an increased purchase of gold ornaments.\textsuperscript{70} However, gold ornaments were confined to the richer classes, whereas silver was the material of almost all ornaments of the lower agricultural classes.\textsuperscript{71} Like all other aspects the standard of living of the women was different in the different regions, The women in the canal colonies and the central Punjab lived better lives than in the southern Punjab where they continued to work harder than the menfolk.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{66} DG Shahpur 1917, 134.
\textsuperscript{67} M.L.Darling, \textit{Punjab Peasant}, 141.
\textsuperscript{69} DG Shahpur 1917, 136; DG Muzaffargarh 1908, 81.
\textsuperscript{70} DG Shahpur 1917, 134; DG Lahore 1916, 145.
\textsuperscript{72} Census of 1931 Punjab, 217.
The overall prosperity of the Punjab helped to change the outlook of the people. The attitude of the agriculturist became more practical. The kismet of earlier days lost its significance and the peasants realized that good seeds and hard work gave better results.\(^\text{73}\)

Zamindari scholarships were founded to foster education among agriculturists. In 1901 there were 187 Zamindari schools with four thousand pupils.\(^\text{74}\) The enterprising cultivators increasingly sought to send their children to the Agricultural College to learn more about mechanized agriculture. In 1906 the Agricultural College at Lyallpur had over four hundred pupils.\(^\text{75}\) From 1917 to 1926 out of the total number of students admitted to the agricultural college, sixty-three per cent were from the agriculturist background.\(^\text{76}\) By 1946 the number of students at the Agricultural College was 679.\(^\text{77}\) This drive for greater education was also stimulated by the benefits derived by farmers who used new technology on their estates. It was the desire of all cultivators to develop their holdings on these lines and gain benefits.\(^\text{78}\) The spread of education remained limited and this can be attributed to the popular belief in villages that once a lad attended school, he became


\(^{74}\) Imperial Gazetteer Punjab, 368.

\(^{75}\) M.L. Darling, *Punjab Peasant*, 149.


\(^{77}\) M.L. Darling, *Punjab Peasant*, 149.

\(^{78}\) *Royal Commission on Agriculture Punjab 1927*, 157.
unfit for cultivation. The bigger landlords were able to afford education which the other sections could not.\textsuperscript{80}

The enhanced wheat production and trade accentuated differentiation and stratification within the rural society, with the rich landlords at the apex and the growing mass of landless labourers at the bottom. The landlords were in a better position to benefit from enhanced wheat production and the new techniques. It was these bigger landlords who were able to use improved seeds, and to get additional benefits from the sale of seeds.\textsuperscript{81} Commercialization benefited the richer section of landowners as they were better able to take advantage of a rise in price by resorting to hoarding. The poorer peasant who barely had enough to feed himself could not gain by any such practice. This amassing of wealth led to the purchase and concentration subsequently of land in a fewer hands. This phenomenon was backed by the Land Alienation Act of 1901. The enhanced wheat trade also forced the smaller peasants to rely on their richer counterparts for credit and employment. This made them mortgage their holdings or even to become landless labourers.\textsuperscript{82}

The extension of cultivated area, wheat production and marketing and other related aspects affected the social framework of agriculture and brought about tensions.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} M.L. Darling, \textit{At Freedoms Door}, Oxford, Bombay, 1949, 194.
\item \textsuperscript{80} This insight is from Indu Banga ed., \textit{Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, Society and Culture c. 1500-1990}, Manohar, Delhi, 1997, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Tom G. Kessinger, \textit{Vilyatpur}, 123.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Richard Fox, \textit{Lions of the Punjab}, 39.
\end{itemize}
The landlord-tenant relations underwent a change. As already pointed out, the mechanization and commercialization of the agriculture, along with the development of irrigation and transport resulted in the rise in the value of land. With this increase in the value of land the landlord did not want to give occupancy rights to the tenants. For this, proprietors deliberately made efforts to prove that the tenants had no occupancy right and tried to get rid of them by issuing notices of ejectment and enhancing the rent. Quite often the liability of the tenants to meet the increasing demands of the landlord resulted in the filing of regular suits under the Tenancy Act. This led to an increase in disputes which strained the relations between the two. The rapid development in the canal colonies created an increased demand for tenants. These tenants indulged in careless cultivation. The landlord preferred that the tenant should sow marketable crops but the tenant benefited more by sowing fodder crops. This clash of wills strained the relations.

The relations between the landlord and the artisans were also considerably altered. In the earlier days the landlord was the master and there was his complete subjugation. The commercialization of agriculture brought about a change in this position. The village artisans moved towards the canal colonies and thus they were no longer bound to the landlords. They now refused to render any service free of charge for the landlord and often asserted that when the government did not expect free services then why should the landlords. These artisans now did not pay the same regard to the landlords. In

84 *DG Shahpur 1917*, 214.
the cases where the artisans were still in the traditional houses, they dictated their terms. The landlords who could not do without them felt obliged to agree as the artisans could threaten to go away.  

When the prices of wheat rose the small peasants and labourers were only half-fed. This resulted in discontent and frustration which resulted in burglaries and dacoities. The life and property became insecure. On the other hand a fall in price ruined the cultivator and he was not even able to recover his costs of cultivation. The growing discontent was evident in the relation between the debtor and the money-lender as well. The peasant had to resort to borrowing money often from the money-lender to meet his expenses. The money-lender often cheated the debtor. This involved litigation. The debtor when unduly harassed by the money-lender could murder him. In 1930-31 alone, thirty-five money-lenders were murdered in the province.

The extension of area under the wheat crop was made possible by the colonization of wastelands and grazing grounds. This displaced the pastoralists. They had to give up their traditional occupations and the nomadic way of life. They resorted to wage labour or part-time cultivation. They resented particularly the development of canal colonies and looked upon the colonizers as intruders. They often set fire to forests and defied

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87 The Tribune, Volume XLVII, 17th June, 1922,5.
88 Ibid., Volume L, 6th November, 1930,11.
89 PLCD 1931, Volume XX, 341-44.
restrictions on grazing rights. They created chaos by raiding peasant communities, destroying crops and stealing cattle.90

The attempts at enhancement of wheat production had several unintended ecological consequences. Irrigation was not an unmixed blessing as it led to water-logging, salinity and malaria. The predominant cause of water-logging was the percolation of water from canals and distributaries. The water level was raised by the large volume, high elevation and continuity of flow.91 The increase in sub-soil water level lead to accumulation of thur, kallar and sem on the land which rendered it unfit for cultivation.92 The opening of successive canals increased sub-soil water level which came upto seven feet of the surface. The central Punjab and the canal colonies were more prone to water-logging than the other regions of the province. In the Punjab, about eight per cent of the area receiving irrigation was water-logged and the yields on these were down by seventy-five per cent.93 Also, the extraction of water from rivers downstream reduced the level of


92 *Thur* is a white ash-coloured substance. *Kallar* is the same as *thur*. *Sem* is when the sub-soil moisture renders cultivation impossible. *Collection of the Proceeding of the Water-Logging Conference (1934-1936 Meetings) Held Between 4-1-35 and 21-12-36*, Volume III, Lahore, xlii.

93 By 1926 out of 117,058 acres cultivated land in the Sheikhupura district, 33,089 acres was water-logged. This means that 28 per cent of the land was water-logged. *Water-Logging Notes, Punjab, Part III, Correspondence*, Volume I, Lahore, 1928, 54. Also *Proceedings of the Water-Logging Conference 1928-30* 53; *Ibid.*, 1931-33, 48;
water upstream because of which the sailaab cultivation in Gujranwala, Jhang and Montgomery districts was adversely affected.94

Water-logging caused several wells to go out of use. The government undertook varied remedial measures and succeeded partially in bringing the wells back into use again.95 The remedial measures taken to curb the problem of water-logging were lift irrigation, soil evaporation, treatment of soil with gypsum and leaching and the construction of drains to the nearest river to drain out water.96 The arid lands that had once become fertile with the development of canals once again reverted to their old position: not even a blade of grass grew there to provide fodder. The houses crumbled and the dwellers had to leave or perish.97

Coupled with high temperatures and maximum precipitation, water-logging increased the level of humidity and helped to prolong the life of the anopheles mosquito, thereby leading to the widespread occurrence of malaria. The death rate by malaria was

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Ibid., 1934-36, xxxvii-xxxviii; Proceeding of Water-Logging Board, Punjab, 1st to 8th Meetings (December 1928-June 1931), Volume I, 153.


95 For example in, 1904 Gujranwala had 13,410 wells out of which 11,961 were in use. By 1924 the total number of wells had risen to 13,671 while those in use were only 10,575. Similarly, the number of wells in Shahpur were 338 and 16 were out of use. By 1927 remedial measures carried out helped to reduce the number of wells out of use to 12. Water-Logging Notes, Punjab, Part I, 232.

96 Water-Logging Notes, Punjab, Part I, 15; Proceedings of Water-Logging Conference 1928-1930, 75. See also PLCD 1932, Volume 21, 915;

97 M.L. Darling, At Freedoms Door, 50.
thirty-three per thousand persons in 1900. The endemic malaria of 1908 adversely affected the irrigated tracts in the Bari Doab area, especially the Amritsar district where there were twelve thousand malaria deaths. By 1922 an increasing occurrence was reported from the canal colonies. The incidence of malaria gathered momentum and by 1941, the Amritsar District alone reported 528,635 deaths. In fact, nearly one third of the deaths in the province were caused by malaria alone.

The wheat crop in the canal colonies required special attention as the canal waters operated as carriers of weed seeds like leh and introduced weeds that did not formerly exist. This reduced the yield. Inter-culture by manual labour was not possible as the holdings were large and the close spacing in sowing hindered the inter-culture by bullocks. The extension of cultivation also reduced the area of pastures.

Wheat production and its marketing had a direct bearing on the people of the province. Production for subsistence was no longer the mainstay of agriculture. The enhanced yields and fluctuating prices brought in phases of prosperity and hardships.

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98 Census of India, 1911, 382.


100 Seasonal Notes October 1924, Punjab Agricultural Department, 3; Ibid., 1927, 39.
These inter-related aspects altered the life and attitudes of the people of the Punjab. Several of the socio-economic ramifications of the wheat production and its export under colonialism have continued to persist even after Independence.