Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The British province of the Punjab lay between 27° 39' and 34° 2' N and 63° 23' and 74° 2'E. Geologically, the Punjab had three natural divisions: the plains, the Salt Range and the Himalayas. The Plains consisted almost entirely of the Indo-Gangetic alluvium. In the north of the province the Salt Range stretched from the Jhelum valley in the east to the Indus in the west. The Himalayas fell into three broad zones: the northern, southern and central. In the north the Himalayan range separated the Punjab from Kashmir and the North Western Frontier Provinces, while in the west the Indus formed the boundary. The Punjab was enclosed and watered by the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and the Sutlej. Apart from the main rivers, innumerable intermittent streams traversed the plains of the sub-montane area of the Punjab. Its five interfluvial regions called doabs were known as the Sind Sagar, Chaj, Rachna, Bari and the Bist Jalandhar, hence it got its name 'Punjab', meaning 'land of five waters'. The Punjab may thus be roughly described as a triangular plain bounded by mountains on the west.


2 Doab is a land between two confluent rivers called after the respective rivers which bound them. The names of the doabs of the Punjab are said to have been given for the first time by Akbar who formed them by combining the first letters of the names of the rivers between which they lay. David Ross, *The Land of Five Rivers and Sindh*, 1
and north-east and a desert on the south. The name the ‘Punjab’ proper was used for the plain areas of the five rivers flowing into the Indus and lying between the Jhelum and the Sutlej.³

The province had four natural divisions with varied characteristics, namely the Himalayan region, the sub-Himalayan region, the Indo-Gangetic plain west, and the north-west dry area (Map 2).

The Himalayan region in the north-east had a temperate climate. This tract extended to both sides of the outer ranges of the Himalayas and covered roughly an area of 22 thousand square miles. The average rainfall was sixty-one inches. The surface of the area was broken and only the lower slopes, valleys and foothills were under cultivation, hindering extensive cultivation. This region had numerous mountain streams which were converted into small water courses by the cultivators and utilized in irrigating the valley and lower slopes. Only one-fifth of the total area was fit for cultivation whereas only one-tenth of it was actually cultivated.⁴ This region comprised of the districts of Simla.

Languages Department Punjab, Delhi, 1970 (Reprint, first published, 1883), 9.

³ This understanding is based on the following sources: Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume XX: Punjab, Calcutta, 1908 (cited hereafter as Imperial Gazetteer Punjab), 4-6; H.K Trevaskis, An Economic History of Punjab From Earliest Times to 1890, Vintage, Gurgaon, 1989 (Reprint, originally published 1928, cited hereafter as Economic History), 5-8; James Douie, Punjab NWFP and Kashmir, 32.

and Kangra along with other native states. The irrigation in this region was by streams.\(^5\) Cultivation was carried on in all the lower valleys of the hills but less extensively and more widely than beyond the Sutlej in Kangra.\(^6\)

The sub-Himalayan region comprised of the Ambala, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Gujrat, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Attock districts of the Punjab. In this area the surface was levelled and two-thirds of the area was cultivable whereas only half was actually cultivated. The average rainfall was thirty-three inches and it was supplemented by irrigation from perennial canals and hill streams. This region was traversed by numerous hill torrents which deposited silt and increased the fertility of the soil.

The north-west dry area comprised of the Shahpur, Mianwali, Montgomery, Lyallpur, Jhang, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Dera Ghazi Khan districts.\(^7\) This region was a continuous plain interspersed with low hills. The average rainfall was low and measured only thirteen inches. Prior to the introduction of canals the area of the Lyallpur district consisted of scattered pastoral nomads but when the canal revolution took place it became a flourishing wheat growing region.\(^8\)

The Indo-Gangetic plain west comprised of Hisar, Gurgaon, Rohtak, Karnal, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Lahore, Amritsar, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura districts.

\(^5\) Census of India, 1931, Punjab, Vol. XVII, Lahore, 1933 (cited hereafter as Census of 1931, Punjab), 4-5.

\(^6\) Punjab District Gazetteers, Simla District 1904, Volume VIII-A, Lahore, 1908 (all subsequent references to District Gazetteers are prefixed by DG), 58.

\(^7\) Census of 1931, Punjab, 4.

\(^8\) Census of India, 1911, 9.
The rainfall averaged to about twenty-seven inches. This region was the level alluvial plain of the Punjab facilitating irrigation by perennial canals. 9

The Punjab plains had a rich alluvial soil interspersed with patches of clay and tracts of pure sand. An alluvial soil possessed great natural fertility and was easily ploughed and it required little artificial drainage. It had a temperature that was eminently suited to the working of those organisms which were so essential for the preservation of healthy fertility in the soil. The soil of the Punjab required very little expenditure to bring it under cultivation and to maintain its crop bearing capacity. 10

As pointed out above, in the monsoon, the rainfall was fairly sufficient for agricultural purposes in the hills but it diminished rapidly as the distance from the hills increased. 11 During the rainy season there were floods. Beyond the flooded area the land was low in level and was moistened by percolation so that the wells could be easily dug and water found at the depth of seven to twenty feet. 12 At the outset of the British rule the well-irrigated areas of the upper doabs, which also received ample rainfall

9 Census of India, 1911, 21; Census of 1931, Punjab, 4-5.
11 Imperial Gazetteer Punjab, 296.
and inundation from the rivers, were the best cultivated.

II

Bulk of the Punjab population depended on agriculture. In 1901 fifty-six per cent of the Punjab population was dependent on agriculture.\textsuperscript{13} The Census of 1911 shows that 1.53 crores were dependent on agriculture as against five lakhs on industry.\textsuperscript{14} At the time of annexation there were mainly three broad sections in the agrarian society of the region: peasant proprietors, tenants and artisans. The peasant proprietorship was the most important characteristic of the agrarian structure of the Punjab.\textsuperscript{15} The peasant proprietor tilled his own land, paid his revenue and pocketed the profits.\textsuperscript{16} About four-fifths of the total cultivated area belonged to those proprietors who cultivated a portion of their land by their own ploughs and got the remainder cultivated by tenants-at-will and tenants with a right of hereditary occupancy. From 1872-73 to 1902-03 the number of tenants-at-will increased by 360 per cent and of those with occupancy rights by 143 per cent whereas the increase in population from 1881 to 1911 was only by nine per cent. The hereditary

\textsuperscript{13} Imperial Gazetteer Punjab, 297.

\textsuperscript{14} Census of India, 1921, Punjab and Delhi, Volume XV, Part I, Lahore, 1923, 381-85.

\textsuperscript{15} A peasant proprietor may be defined as the owner cultivator who conducted agricultural operations on his holdings primarily with his family labour, supplemented by hired labour, if required. Sukhwant Singh, ‘The Peasant-Proprietor in the Punjab 1849-1901’, Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference, Patiala, 14th session, 1981, 191.

cultivators were paid according to the prevailing village rate and no malikana was claimed, whereas the tenants-at-will were on a yearly contract and the batai system was prevalent with proportions which varied from one-third to one-fourth of the gross produce.

Under British rule the position of the hereditary tenants was strengthened, and the total area under tenant cultivation increased. In 1901 the area cultivated by tenants was forty-four per cent and by 1918-19 it rose to fifty-one per cent. However, for purposes of production for the market the peasant proprietors continued to constitute the single most important agrarian class. They were the nucleus of a larger agricultural community as they often received rent from small holdings they rented out or paid rent as they undertook cultivation on other holdings which had become uneconomical with the

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17 Throughout the period under review the area under tenant cultivation increased whether it was with occupancy rights or without it. The increased tenant cultivation in the Punjab was an outcome of several factors, particularly the increase in population which led to sub-division and fragmentation of holdings rendering them uneconomic. In the sub-montane central districts like Ambala, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Lahore it was the small size of holdings whereas in Montgomery and Multan, it was the large size of holdings which placed more land under tenant cultivation. In other districts various factors such as migration and the plague led to greater tenant cultivation. H. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, 197. See also, Sukhwant Singh, ‘Technology in the Punjab Under British Rule 1849-1947’, Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference, 29th Session, 1969,100. Also see Appendix L.

increase in population leading to sub-division and fragmentation.\textsuperscript{19}

The organization of agricultural production was based on the integration of agriculture with artisanal production not within individual households but within the village as a whole as a socio-economic unit. The village community included a nearly complete establishment of occupations and trades which by and large enabled it to lead collective life without crucial assistance from any external person or body. There was always a village \textit{bania} who maintained a shop for the sale of odds and ends and supplemented his income by money-lending.\textsuperscript{20} For assisting in agricultural operations with their skills and labour, each village had its own artisans and menials who rendered services to the agriculturists and received remuneration in kind in the early decades of British rule.\textsuperscript{21} The payments were generally made out of a heap called \textit{tala} and were paid partly by the tenant and partly by the landlord. On land irrigated by wells the payment was made at so many \textit{maunds} per well, so many \textit{maunds} per plough, or a certain portion of the produce.\textsuperscript{22} The remuneration of artisans for these services rendered was determined by local customs. The dues of the artisans under the \textit{sep} system signifying reciprocal obligations based on custom were deducted from the total produce of the village before

\textsuperscript{19} 18 Months of Provincial Autonomy in the Punjab, A Review of the Administration of the Punjab from April 1937 to September 30 1938, Director Information Bureau, Punjab, n.d., 2.

\textsuperscript{20} M.S. Randhawa, A History of Agriculture in India, 204.


\textsuperscript{22} Final Report of the Revised Settlement of the Montgomery District, 1892-99, Lahore, 1900 (all subsequent references to Settlement Reports are prefixed by \textit{SR}), 29-30.
making any other payment. The deduction allowed was generally ten to sixteen per cent of the total produce.\textsuperscript{23}

To enable the produce to reach the market there were the traders. These traders engaged in activities ranging from trade and money-lending to owning shops. The whole trade of the Punjab was concentrated in the hands of a few mercantile groups, namely: i) Banias, Dhursans, Bohras and Pahari Mahajans in the eastern region; ii) Khatris, Kakhas, and Bhatias in the central and north-western Punjab; iii) Aroras in the western and central Punjab; iv) Khojas and Parachas in the northern Punjab.\textsuperscript{24}

\section*{III}

The process of marketing encompassed the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers. The marketing of agricultural produce did not merely mean buying and selling of farm produce, but a vast multitude of economic and commercial phenomena that lay in the realm of concentration, equalization and distribution. It embodied the various functions such as assembling, grading, standardization, packing, storing, processing, financing, transport and communications. Large scale production, specialized farming, localization of industries and economic inter-dependence spring from an efficient marketing system.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{23} Harish Sharma, ‘Artisans in the Punjab (1849-1947)’, 110-111.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Census of India, 1901, 302; Imperial Gazetteer Punjab, 87. See also J.S.Grewal, ‘Business Communities in the Punjab’, JRH, Volume III, 1982, 60-62.
\item\textsuperscript{25} R.S.Srivastava, Agricultural Marketing in India and Abroad, Vora and Co., Bombay, 1960, 27.
\end{itemize}
The geographical location of the Punjab across the land route linking India with western and central Asia, had been of great importance for trade. Trade from the north-west was funnelled through the Khyber Pass which was a route leading into the Punjab. Similarly, trade from West Asia passing through Qandahar was through the Bolan Pass which was in southern Punjab. Both Lahore and Multan were trading centres as they were of strategic importance on the northern and southern routes. Gradually, under Sikh rule, the centrally located Amritsar developed as an important centre of trade in all kinds of commodities, including wheat. In fact, given the technology and limited means of communication at annexation urban centres of all sizes were serving as the centres for collection and distribution of produce.

The commercialization of agriculture in the Punjab was made possible by the development of the means of transport and by the enhanced yield of crops that was an outcome of the construction of canals by the British during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth. Extension of cultivation raised the ground rents and both intensive and extensive cultivation helped increase the average output per acre. This led to an increase in total production thereby leading to a sizable export surplus which was mobilized by merchants and middlemen whose activities were steadily assisted by the gradual improvement of communications.  

The Punjab started exporting wheat to the European markets particularly after the

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opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the building of the rail link with ports of Calcutta and Bombay via Delhi in 1870. As a result, the largely subsistence cultivation was replaced by production mainly for the market. The cultivation of more remunerative crops like cotton, sugarcane and wheat gained currency. The agriculturists began to produce not only for the domestic market but also for the world market. By the turn of the twentieth century the market purposes dominated the area under various crops as well as the cropping pattern and other aspects of agricultural production. This supply for export and need for cash prompted the peasant proprietors of the Punjab to produce wheat, which was a cash crop, on their small holdings using family labour and domestic capital. Thus the pre-capitalist system of labour and production was harnessed to the world economy.

Among the British Indian provinces the Punjab came to have the largest area under wheat with the cultivation of about thirty per cent of the total wheat in India in 1935. The following Table shows the figures regarding average area under wheat in different provinces for the period 1926-27 to 1935-36:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British Provinces</th>
<th>Area (million acres)</th>
<th>Percentage of all India acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>28.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>22.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Provinces and Berar</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>10.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay and Sind</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>7.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar and Orissa</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Frontier Province</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>75.70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Due largely to the contribution of the Punjab, India came to acquire a distinctive position among the great wheat growing lands of the world. As evident from Graph 1 compounded from the *Agricultural Statistics of India*, the Punjab province of British
India had on an average thirty-five per cent of the area under wheat. The detailed statistics underline the relative importance of the Punjab in wheat production (Appendix A).

This acreage in the Punjab helped India attain a position as one of the world’s big four both as regards the area sown with wheat and its total production, as is evident from the following Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average Area (Thousand Hectares)</th>
<th>Average Production (Thousand Quintals)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>1926-30 30,380</td>
<td>1926-30 227,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1931-34 34,965</td>
<td>1931-34 247,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1926-30 24,415</td>
<td>1931-34 235,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1931-34 12,775</td>
<td>1931-34 90,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1926-30 9,862</td>
<td>1931-34 118,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1931-34 10,472</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


IV

The peculiarities and economic significance of the Punjab have been studied by several scholars — historians, economists, anthropologists and administrators. The groundwork for post-colonial studies was prepared before 1947 by the writings of the British administrators and the government publications.

Various studies brought out by the Board of Economic Inquiry, Punjab give relevant information on the cultivation, production and marketing of wheat and other crops. Some publications deal exhaustively with prices while others with implements.

systems of irrigation, and even with the marketing of wheat in the Punjab. The works of I.D. Mahendru, L.R. Dawar and F.A. Shah deal with the cultivation and marketing of wheat. I.D. Mahendru throws light on wheat types, cultivation and marketing; the other two dwell on marketing, their functionaries and other relevant detail. L.R. Dawar and Gurcharan Singh Dhaliwal in their works have given vital information on the implements of the Punjab. Dawar’s study relates to Batala as it was the place where the agricultural implements industry came to be centralized in the 1920s and 1930s. Brij Narain traces the prices of various food grains from 1841 to 1920. He gives an account of the prices of wheat and their increase and fluctuations over the period. He ascribes the increase to the development of communications and response to the world market.

H. Calvert (1922) shows how the construction of canals, communications and irrigation stimulated production, increased trade and brought into existence a wealthy professional class. The opening of the Punjab to the global market also altered the outlook of the people towards production and distribution. Though covering aspects of wheat trade and prices, this work does not dwell on wheat production or the processes involved in preparing the wheat for the market.\(^{28}\) In his major work M.L. Darling (1925) studies the nature, extent and causes of agricultural debt in the specific conditions of different sub-

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regions. He highlights agricultural development, underlining what he calls ‘close connexion between prosperity and debt’ in situations where ‘peasants live in primitive or backward conditions’. He regards indebtedness for unproductive purposes as evil, and in some other situations holds prosperity as the cause of debt. While laying stress on the ‘increasing expropriation of the peasant proprietor by the money-lender’, he tends to overlook the exploitative nature of British rule.\(^{29}\) H.K. Trevaskis (1928), writing a little later provides an account of the Punjab under the British in terms of administration, revenue, irrigation and agriculture.\(^{30}\) While giving an overview of agriculture and crops of the Punjab, he takes up wheat, the major commercial crop, briefly without dealing with its marketing. He also shares the ideology of colonialism with his compatriots. Together, the works of these three British administrators can be treated as providing raw materials to be critically processed and sifted.

Among the recent studies with a wider scope maybe mentioned George Blyn’s (1966), analysis of agricultural trends in India for the period 1891-1947.\(^{31}\) He takes up eighteen major crops and shows how increased agricultural production, especially in the Punjab, was an outcome of extensive cultivation and how the development of irrigation and introduction of new varieties resulted in an increased yield. However, Blyn includes


the whole of British India and does not throw light either specifically on wheat or its market in the Punjab.

On the basis of extant village records and by using sociological and anthropological concepts and techniques Tom G. Kessinger (1974) makes a micro-study of the socio-economic transformation of Vilyatpur, a village in the Jullundur Doab, from 1848 to 1968.\(^{32}\) He shows how the opening of markets affected the village economy and how new techniques of cultivation, cropping and land utilization became current, and how the coming of the British affected the social and political structure of the village. Even when Kessinger places his study in the context of the global economy, his work remains limited to a part of the Punjab, and does not focus on regional variations within the province.

In his study of the society and economy of the Punjab B.S. Saini (1975) begins his work with an account of the natural resources and then moves onto give information on the social institutions, religious movements, society, education, agriculture, industry, trade, communications and finance.\(^{33}\) By and large uncritically reproducing the government sources he only gives a general view of the social and economic condition of the Punjab. However, he does not analyse the impact of the various developments on the people of the Punjab. His discussion of agriculture barely touches upon wheat production and altogether leaves out marketing.

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\(^{32}\) Tom G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848-1968, Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*, University of California, Berkeley, 1974.

Himadri Banerjee (1982) gives an account of agrarian trends and changes in the social framework of agriculture. He gives an account of colonization as well as commercialization of agriculture. He also deals with the cultivation of wheat but gives no account of its marketing processes. Besides, his study period ends where the present study begins. In a subsequent article, he has talked about the significant changes that occurred in the Punjab with respect to distribution of water supply, techniques of cultivation, growing popularity of commercial crops, movement of population, predominance of money-lenders and a new relationship between landlords and kamins. He gives the impression that there was no fundamental structural change particularly from the point of view of the organization of the peasant economy which is not borne out by the present study. The aspects of wheat production and marketing too have not been taken into consideration.

Richard Fox (1985), primarily a social anthropologist, shows how the capitalist world system penetrated the economy of the Punjab and how it led to the emergence of a class of petty commodity producers. He traces the different systems of agricultural production and rural labour that evolved under British colonialism. He discusses colonization and its socio-economic results, namely migration and the emergence of wage labour. Fox’s attempt, however, is to understand the anti-colonial protests in the Punjab in a specific cultural context. Though, Fox does refer to the wheat trade, he does not focus

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35 Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of
on the production or marketing of wheat in the British Punjab.

Imran Ali (1989) analyses the significant aspects of economy and society with special emphasis on the canal colonies. He focuses on the colonization and the political benefits that accrued to the state from distribution of land in the canal irrigated tracts, particularly how the government tried to channel colony lands towards fulfillment of military demands. While taking up aspects of cultivation in the canal colonies, he underlines the coexistence of significant growth and continued backwardness in the Punjab. Imran Ali’s primary concern is to understand why the Pakistani Punjab remained underdeveloped in contrast to other regions of the erstwhile British India. In his conclusion, he shows how the present Pakistan experienced major continuities from the colonial period. He has highlighted the relationship between the strengthening of the landed peasantry and the political economy in the western Punjab. The wheat production and trade however have not been covered in this work.

Harish C. Sharma (1996) in his book and subsequent article on the artisans has analysed the social and economic conditions which altered the traditional sepidari (jajmani) relationship between the artisans and the agriculturists under British rule. He


shows how the changing situation, including commercialization and colonization, obliged the artisans to move out of the villages in search of new occupations. This occupational mobility brought them face to face with new situations in their relationship with other castes as well as their parent groups. They broke away from their parent exogamous groups and utilized census operations and the religious and secular ideas then prevalent to get a higher social status. This mobility led to new patterns of social relationships with political implications. However, not much emphasis has been laid in this work on the majority of artisans who remained within their traditional occupations or who came to be more directly associated with wheat production and trade.

In a recent work on irrigation and agriculture in the Punjab, Mufakharul Islam (1997), a Bangla Deshi scholar, has made a detailed study of the irrigation system in the province. He has given an account of the irrigation by canals and the other sources, including their financial aspects. The relationship between irrigation and sharecropping tenancy and land transfers and mortgages has also been studied. He has also taken note of the rate of change in the cropping pattern and the profitability of crops with respect to the enhanced irrigated area under particular crops. However, under cash crops, he refers only to cotton, sugarcane and oilseeds. He has not included the wheat crop, which was the chief crop of exports, among the cash crops. Furthermore, his work is limited to irrigation and cropping pattern, with no account of the markets.

Among the short studies, the most relevant are the articles by Sukhwant Singh on ed. Indu Banga, Manohar, Delhi, 1997, 496-508.

agricultural development and the factors that generated greater and more effective exploitation of the vast agricultural potential of the Punjab under the British, including the contribution of its peasant proprietors. The article on capitalistic tendencies dwells on how with the emergence of a new market the focus of cultivation shifted to the commercial crops and how land became a valuable commodity. Sukhwant Singh however does not specifically study the wheat crop and its marketing.

Though important and useful in their respective spheres, and for providing the base for this study, the works reviewed above leave sufficient scope for an integrated study of the agrarian economy of the Punjab in the second half of the colonial rule in terms of continuities and changes in ecological, technological, social and economic factors having a bearing on wheat production. There is scope also for studying how the production and trade in wheat were linked with politics, legal system and the lives of different sections of the Punjabi society. As a matter of fact, the production of wheat directly or indirectly comprehended a substantial majority of population in this region. It had a direct bearing also on the politico-administrative policies and measures of the colonial rulers and the Unionist Government. The researcher intends to focus on the framework within which wheat was marketed and exported and its ramifications for the socio-economic life in the region covered by the British province of the Punjab.