Collaboration, Political Control and the British Strategic Imperatives in Colonial Punjab

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Abstract

The article problematises the colonial view of contented and loyal peasantry and argues that the British system of political control, based on collaboration and patron-client ties, had historical and cultural antecedents. Punjabi peasantry and soldiers were loyal and trustworthy but they could not be left on the mercy of fate to face the brunt of economic vicissitudes, and seditious and subversive influences. Collaborating elite assisted the British in maintaining stability and peace yet the British had to continuously address the grievances of the peasantry whether it was the case of land alienation or the colony disturbances of 1907. Moreover, western ideology of Social Darwinism provided intellectual underpinnings to the martial race theory. This was imbibed by the collaborating elite because it provided them with the opportunity to maintain their lifestyle encoded by the traditional notions of *izzat*. Collaborators helped the British in recruitment. Troops raised from Punjab were always more loyal and effective as compared to other parts of India. Yet the British had to safeguard Punjabi loyalism through various measures.

Introduction

Punjab was the last province of India to be annexed by the British. After defeating Sikhs in two bloody wars the British annexed the Province in 1849. Right from the beginning the British decided not to administer the province according to the statute book rather they preferred to carry out its administration in a paternalistic way. This came to be popularly known as Punjab school of administration. This had a number of reasons. Primarily Punjab was of crucial strategic importance for the Raj. It guarded possible Russian invasion from the north-west. Moreover, towards the end of nineteenth century it became home of

the colonial Indian Army and thus provided bulk of its troops. In the 1880s the economic significance of the province increased many fold when the province witnessed major projects of canal colonisation. With the development of rail and road network provincial economy was integrated with the world economy. Because of agricultural surplus produce the province became the breadbasket of India. Strategic imperatives such as fear of Russian threat and loyalty of the elite were the determining factors in the Punjabisation of the Colonial Indian Army. The Punjabisation of the army was contemporaneous with the Canal Colony development. The two processes strengthened each other. Loyalism was secured in the colony areas by land grants to martial castes and military contractors, while areas were set aside for providing mules and remounts for the army. It was this significance of the province that it attracted the ablest and most competent administrators and civil servants.[1] Ian Talbot maintains that 'the province's loyalty in 1857 enhanced the ideals of the Punjab School of Administration'... He further writes that 'the paternalistic ethos of British rule thus remained unaltered when the personal rule of Lawrence era was replaced by the more formalised bureaucracy which grew up after the Punjab Code of Civil Procedure and the Punjab Laws Act of 1862 and 1872.'[2]

Collaboration, Political Control and Loyalism

After the war of independence the British authorities began to look at the rural elite more favourably and decided to utilise their services in the interest of the colonial state. Ian Talbot maintains that it became a state policy to look for rural allies. It found the local elite willing to cooperate with the colonial regime, which reciprocated them with patronage that enhanced its social standing. Families demonstrating loyalty to the British at the time of various crises won the patronage and were made part of the alliance system. These families remained loyal to the British through successive generations because firstly of their share in the prosperity assured by British rule and secondly due to the patronage of the British government. With the introduction of new crops, improved system of irrigation, and better means of transportation for the agricultural surplus they became affluent. Further, the benevolent policies of the government, like low revenue demand, Court of Wards Administration and Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900 strengthened this class and increased its loyalty to the British. Besides the general protection of their interests they were bestowed with honorary ranks and titles, posts in local government and land grants in the Canal Colonies. *Pirs* were also given patronage and incorporated in the system of alliances. Like other landed families they were also given land in the canal colonies.[3] Collaborators helped the British in maintaining political control, army recruitment and assisted them at their time of crisis. Michael O'Dwyer who served in the Shahpur district

during his early Punjab administrative career writes about the Tiwana collaborators:

'Hence in every subsequent campaign, the Tiwana Chiefs were the first to come forward. In the Great War Lt. Col. Sir Umar Hayat Khan was perhaps the most distinguished Indian soldier – one who served on every front from Flanders to Mesopotamia, and by his influence and example raised thousands of fighting men in the North Punjab. Nawab Mubaiz Khan, a fine soldier himself and the son of veteran Jahan Khan (for the many years the chief Indian officer of the Tiwana Lancers), was also a tower of strength. Nawab Sir Khuda Bakhsh Khan, then a Minister in the Bahawalpur state, was recalled by me to the Punjab in 1916, to help in a great emergency, and raised, in and around his native district, six thousand mule and camel-drivers for Mesopotamia in a few weeks. All these were young men when I was in Shahpur (1887-89), and we became fast friends, hunting, shooting, and hawking together when one could get away from the strain of work'.[4]

Collaboration was a system of indirect rule through intermediaries. Collaborators were mainly the tribal chiefs, clan leaders, landed elite and wielded tremendous influence in their neighbourhoods. Some of them were appointed as honorary magistrates and played key role in maintaining law and order situation in the countryside. At times of crisis they also provided watch and ward services and assisted the British with their administration. Canal colonization toward the end of the nineteenth-century put tremendous amount of patronage in the hands of the British. Loyalism of the collaborating elite was secured by allotting them colony lands. Huge areas were set aside for providing mules and remounts for the army which again were allotted to the elite. Punjabisation of the Colonial Indian Army and canal colonization schemes were contemporaneous and both process strengthened each other. Martial races were allotted colony lands thus cementing their ties with the army and making them more loyal to the British.

There is a vast literature on the impact of the British rule on Punjab. The ameliorist approach was the hallmark of the colonialist writings represented by the work of H. K. Trevaskis[5] and H. Calvert.[6] On the whole these writings conveyed the argument that the colonial regime poured more money into Punjab than anywhere else in India and brought prosperity to the province by bringing huge amounts of land under cultivation which was hitherto lying as waste. British rule also brought peace to this historically disturbed region, and by conferring proprietary rights to the people, boosted their status as being not more than a tenant under previous governments, either Mughal or Sikh. Through canal colonisation schemes, provision of perennial irrigation and development of rail and road networks, along with the establishment of new market towns,

commercialisation of agriculture was made possible. New urban towns not only became the hub of the new market economy but also provided modern civic amenities. Moreover, military employment was a great source of remittances going into the villages. Thus the Punjab experience is portrayed as benefiting from colonial rule and by implication is a justification for it.

However, since independence a critical view of the colonial impact on the Punjab has emerged. The contrasting picture is presented in the works of Imran Ali[7] and Mridula Mukherjee.[8] Imran Ali's argument hinges on the premise that despite economic growth, Punjab largely remained underdeveloped. The lack of industrial growth and land reform rested on the British need to bolster the power of their rural allies. The predominance of the rural elites, especially in the West Punjab was strengthened, while the middle class grew very slowly. He considers this as 'malign growth' which had inherent retarding elements for economic and political development. Utilisation of sources primarily for political and military objectives arrested economic progress. Similarly, Mridula Mukherjee in her book *Colonializing Agriculuture: The Myth of Punjab Exceptionalism* argues that there was nothing exceptional to the economic growth of Punjab and it had the same causes of underdevelopment as lying elsewhere in India. The peasantry's agricultural prosperity was a misconstrued and simplistic assertion because taxation and debt burden had in fact broken the spine of the peasant. Given the impediments they faced a vast majority of them had never been able to produce surplus capital for investment. The tensions between development and security needs addressed by Imran Ali relating to West Punjab are also revealed with respect to the central Punjab districts by Richard Fox in his book *Lions of the Punjab.*[9] He discusses the factors behind the commercialization of the Punjab economy and its integration into the world economy under British auspices. His focus is mainly on the Sikh dominated central Punjab districts, Sikh identity formation and its value for the colonial regime and army.

Punjabi loyalism has also been debated by the scholars. Sahdev Vohar, for example, has invoked the isolated cases of unrest and revolt to prove that Punjabi loyalty was a myth.[10] On the other hand David Omissi and Tan Tai Yong are of the opinion that generally the Punjabi troops were 'loyal and obedient' but they needed to be protected by the British from subversive influences. This article asks the question whether colonial views of a contented and loyal Punjabi peasantry can be taken at face value and whether troops from Punjab were always more loyal and effective than troops from elsewhere in India.

Historical and Cultural antecedents of Collaboration

Historically system of alliances was culturally entrenched in Punjabi society. The patron-client relationship had been an integral part of the agricultural society

of India and the Punjab was not an exception to it, where such a relationship was functioning in a horizontal plane and the British while co-opting its elite added a vertical dimension to it. It was the latter dimension through which the rural society of the Punjab was culturally tied to British imperialism. This resulted in the cultural entrenchment of the collaborative system. The landed elite of the Punjab which was hitherto functioning as patron only now also started functioning as a go-between for the British hierarchy at the upper-end and the peasant subjects at the lowest-rung. The role boosted its status and enhanced its value for its clientele with whom its traditional cultural bond was further strengthened. The elites were already performing a historical role of rendering a number of services which ranged from disseminating justice and brokering peace to the solution of a number of social and economic problems and 'Muslim rulers in India resolved problems of stability by drawing on the support of local notables.'[11]

Behind the evolution of this role there were both social and cultural necessities of the society and some political causes. Under the Mughals the system of indirect rule was maintained through their nobles and *mansabdars* (rank holders). The sheer size and expanse of their domains made it a mammoth task for them to reach out to all of their subjects. Moreover, Nadir Shah Durani and Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded through Punjab, which led to the weakening of central and provincial administration in Punjab. Under the Mughals and similarly under the Sikhs the government remained inaccessible to the common man due to which this role was bestowed on this class (agricultural elite) as a dictate of history. The British system of indirect rule through these intermediaries was, therefore, consonant with the socio-cultural and historical traditions of its Punjabi subjects who could now be effectively controlled by the collaboration of the elite.

Strategic Imperatives

Colonial control was necessary to deal with both the internal and external threat as well as to preserve prosperity. In turn economic prosperity which ensued from the irrigation projects in the late nineteenth century facilitated the British to not only strengthen its control but also to defend India from the external threats of Russian invasion in the late nineteenth century from its own budget. With the socio-economic transformation of Punjab and its contribution in Indian colonial army, stability and control in Punjab acquired added significance. With establishment of canal colonies and Punjabisation of the Colnial Indian Army its contribution in revenue and defence increased many fold. The British colonial policy was based on the principle of running the empire without letting it become a burden on the home economy. If it were to become

so then it was not worth having it at all. So 'empire on the cheap' was the main precedent acting underneath the colonial economic superstructure. All the expenditure incurred on military was to be borne by the Indian economy. C.A. Bayly writes that 'most pleasing of all to the new Indian Office in London and to the British Treasury, Indian taxation, which had been reorganised after 1857, continued to bear the cost of this expensively re-equipped force.'[12] Its growing agriculture not only had to sustain the pressure of fast growing population of India but also had to meet the consumption demands of the expanding military. Besides maintaining domestic control, the Indian army had to safeguard imperial interests abroad. Recruits drawn from Punjab served overseas and during the First World War they took part in battles waged in the Middle East and mainland Europe.

There were some other strategic considerations regarding the defence of the Indian Empire against the Russian threat from the North-West. The Russian Empire in Central Asia had always been a matter of concern for the British authorities in India. This concern became a priority for the military authorities in India due to its rapid Southward encroachment after 1850. By the 1870s this threat was looming large over the horizons of India, which was now only at a distance of 400 miles away from Punjab.[13] In the Berlin Congress 1878, Afghanistan was declared to be the British sphere of influence. However, the same year the Second Afghanistan war took place. In 1884 Russians occupied Merve (Turkmenistan). It was feared that they would attack from the historic Khyber Pass but after annexing Tajikistan and Pameer (area between the Hindukush and Himalayas) it was feared that they would encroach into Punjab from there. In 1893 a boundary between Afghanistan and Central Asia was agreed between both powers but the threat persisted. In the wake of such external danger, it was of the utmost importance for the colonial authorities in India to have peace and sustainability of control in the Punjab, which was not only shouldering the economic burden but also contributing to the defence needs of the Empire.

Social Darwinism and justification of Martial Race Theory

Changed strategic considerations contributed to heavy reliance on the martial race theory and the ensuing enlistment of warrior races of the Punjab. In fact the martial race concept gained wider currency in the British Empire when the British appreciated the fact that the Scottish Highlanders possessed more martial attributes than anybody else in Britain.[14] They extended this concept to India where it initially rested on pseudo-scientific notions of climate and its impact on bodily strength, but gained greatest intellectual justification in the fashionable and 'scientific' ideology of 'Social Darwinism'. Herbert Spencer was its chief

proponent and he applied Darwin's ideas of natural selection and evolution to human society by stating that rich and powerful were better tailored to social and economic requirement of the society and it was quite natural that they flourish at the expense of the weaker sections. Later Sir Arthur Keith applied Darwinian ideas to explain social relations through his idea of 'social prejudice'. He argued that 'nature had arranged national and tribal organisations on a competitive basis; each tribe was a team engaged in the eternal struggle to obtain promotion and avoid relegation.'[15] Social Darwinism both supported British Imperialism and was justified by its existence which seemed to 'prove' its arguments as handfuls of British officials ruled huge tracts of territory in Asia and Africa. Most importantly, British notions of the innate ability to rule 'lesser peoples' for their own benefit were given an apparent scientific justification.

'Social Darwinism' supported not only imperialism but capitalism and political conservatism by justifying the element of competition among groups of people for political power and economic gain. More generally it stipulated that some ethnic groups equipped with better mental and physical qualities have greater prospects of success and domination over other groups. In this way it had a direct bearing on the emergence of martial race theory.[16] Just like the Scottish Highlanders the British found Nepalese Gurkhas, Sikhs and certain Muslim tribes more warlike than other communities. Common to such communities was the prowess they had displayed before succumbing to British 'superior' military force and the fact that the British recognised similarities between their value systems and that of themselves with notions of 'courage', manliness' and independence of spirit. These communities' needed to maintain a 'traditional' life style and cultural value system which was validated by the colonial power often in economically barren environments, or in the case of the Sikhs in changed political circumstances made them prepared to take up military service with their vanquishers. Heather Street argues that the 'martial race discourse must not be viewed simply as a replication of a time in which scientific theories of race and gender held sway. While such theories were clearly important to the development of the discourse, the language of martial race was also a discursive too – a strategy of domination and rule that used the power and appeal of racial and gendered language for political purposes.'[17]

Defining Martial Race and its application

'Martial race' in India according to colonial manuals and recruitment handbooks can be defined as referring to certain ethnic and social groups which had 'inherent qualities such as masculinity, fidelity, bravery and loyalty'.[18] In this light Noons, Tiwanas, Jats, Pathans, Sikhs and certian other tribes of Punjab were designated as martial castes for whom the military way of life was a matter of

honour. Therefore, British and the collaborating elite invoked the notion of *izzat* to secure the enlistment of martial races in the Indian Army. The rural collaborating elite not only imbibed the theory but also took exceptional pride in their martial attributes. Umar Hayat, a chief collaborator from the Shahpur district, while making speech in the Council of State in March 1922 declared, 'If a person is weak he is unable to stand the cold and dies; the theory of the 'survival' of the fittest is correct. There are some places where there are people with limbs like our fingers. How on earth can they fight?'[19] According to this theory all natives did not possess the same soldierly qualities. Martial race theory thus gave Punjabis 'the military birthright hitherto accorded to the Hindustani.'[20]

Frontier conditions also lent credence to the martial race theory as they necessitated the deployment of forces who could combat guerrilla tactics used by the hill men. Therefore, Pathans and the Rajput martial races of the Salt Range such as Tiwanas, Noons and Awans were considered ideal to cope with any threat in the frontier environs. Moreover, soldiers from the Bengal army were to be paid extra allowances for their service in the Punjab. It was therefore, considered more economical to deploy the martial races for the garrisoning of the frontier.[21]

Martial races had become a concern of the British immediately after the revolt of 1857 when the Peel Commission in its report regarding the causes of mutiny concluded that 'the British had been unaware of the true martial attributes possessed by various Indian ethnic groups.'[22] How much the military echelons had put their faith in this theory is evident from the words of Frederick Roberts, Commander-in-Chief between 1885 and 1893; he wrote that 'it is not a question of efficiency but of courage and physique; in these two essentials the sepoys of Lower India are wanting.'[23] He wanted to 'substitute the men of the more warlike and hardy races for the Hindustani sepoys of Bengal, the Tamils and Telagus of Madras, and the so-called Mahrattas of Bombay…'[24] In favour of the martial races he said 'I have a thorough belief in, and admiration for, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Dogras, Rajputs, Jats and selected Muhammadens; I thoroughly appreciate their soldierly qualities…'[25] As a result of this policy 'the proportion of the martial races went up from about a quarter of the entire Indian infantry in 1881 to half in 1893.'[26]

The Punjabi soldiers proved their mettle on every front whether it was the rough and mountainous terrain of frontier with Afghanistan or the trench warfare in the mainland Europe. Omissi maintains that the 'Indian soldiers clearly did not fight just for pay. Most had a strong sense of honour, which induced some to enlist and ecouraged others to act bravely in the field, usually with the aim of winning renown.'[27] Their bravery and gallantry in the First Word War proved that Punjabis were better soldiers as compared to troops recruited from other parts of India. The British officers were so much convinced by the fighting

prowess of these soldiers that evern during the war, as early as 1915, they considered Commission for the Indians. A British officer stated that 'I am so impressed with the importance and urgency of the question of Commissions for the Indians that I feel that I am but fulfilling my duty in urging the case…India has come forward whole-heartedly in the war, that Indians have been fighting in France, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Egypt and East Africa alongside of their British comrades and have suffered equally with them, that the Indian soldier should have an equal opportunity with the Britsh soldier of official recognition of his services, and that this opportunity is withheld so long as the bar to commissioned rank is maintained.'[28] A similar proposal was also considered to acknowledge the services of landed military elite. The scheme devised by Sir O'Moore Creagh outlined 'to give commissions in a specially organised Indian regiment to men drawn from the landowning classes of the fighting races.'[29] Even the Mazhbi Sikh soldiers, who did not come from martial races, demonstrated tremendous gallantry in the action at Jebel Hamrin and in the battle of 'Black Hill', and their names will remain forever in the annals of military history.[30] This certainly suggests that the Punjabis troops recruited from martial tribes were more loyal and better soldiers than troops from elsewhere in India.

Issues of order and stability and Mechanism of Control

From within Punjab order and stability could have been jeopardised by a number of factors. Firstly, Punjabi society was not a monolithic whole. Western Punjab had a Muslim majority and the Eastern and central Punjab was a Sikh and Hindu dominated area, so a considerable number of minorities adhering to different religions were living side by side with the majorities professing different faiths. These cleavages and fault lines were a potential cause of communal conflict and a source of threat to British rule. Secondly, the tensions arising out of the agrarian transformation could disturb the communal harmony. Rural indebtedness, decreasing wages of agriculture labour, salinity and water logging, fluctuation in the prices of agricultural produce might erode the prosperity generated by this transformation. Last but not least, a threat from the nationalist politics began to emerge in the closing quarter of the nineteenth century. This development was directly the outcome of changing policies in the Britain. In fact the period of entrepreneurial mercantilism was now over. As David Washbrook points out 'the transfer of governing authority from the Company to the Crown in 1858 symbolised the final part of the transition from mercantilist monopoly to free market competitive economy.'[31] In 1885, the Indian National Congress was established, which claimed to represent all the people of the subcontinent. The sense of its marginalisation of Muslim interests, however, culminated in the establishment in 1906 of the All-India Muslim League to represent this

community's interests. It was the Congress however which posed the greatest threat to the military connection of the Punjabi rural elite. In its wake there was a need to institutionalise the informal alliances with the agricultural elite of the Punjab. The rural elite saw the establishment of a formal party as the best means of securing their power and for protecting the safeguards to their economic interests provided by the Land Alienation Act of 1900. This prevented land being permanently acquired by the moneylenders. The Punjab Congress was by this time closely identified with moneylenders' interests.[32]

In 1923, therefore, the Punjab Unionist Party was established around the ideology of safeguarding the interests of the cultivators. The party provided a rallying platform to the Punjabi landlords to augment Punjabi loyalties and to direct provincial politics within the structure of colonial political control. Its agricultural ideology broadened its political appeal to all agricultural communities. Under the able leadership of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and Chottu Ram the Unionist Party developed. After the 1937 elections it formed a coalition government with the Khalsa Party and National Progressive Party, and Sikandar gave representation to both in his cabinet. Under the prudent leadership of Sir Sikandar Hayat the party reached its zenith. The Muslim League increasingly challenged its power from 1944 onwards. But even after the 1946 polls in which the Muslim League had secured a breakthrough in support amongst the rural Muslim populace, the Unionist Party remained in office in a coalition government with Congress and the Akalis headed by Khizar Hayat Tiwana the last premier of the United Punjab.[33]

Besides patronage, the colonial system of mediatory politics in the Punjab depended on the institutionalisation of the civil-military cooperation as was manifested in various bodies like District Soldiers Boards (henceforth DSBs) and Recruitment Boards. DSBs were extensively used to control the disgruntled elements of society, mainly the demobilised soldiers after the First World War. Similarly during the war this civil military cooperation was evident from the Recruitment Boards which not only stepped up the recruitment efforts of the government but also help arrest the recruitment related tensions. In this way colonial control facilitated the war effort. DSBs which always had a district recruitment officer as a member played a vital role in the pacification of disgruntled Sikh soldiers. These boards carried out a number of welfare activities. They served as a link between the civil hierarchy and the rural peasantry. *Zaildars* (a *zail* was a circle of villages in which the *zaildar* was in charge) were the civil representatives on these boards. All the deputy commissioners were presidents of their respective DSBs. In this way as Tan Tai Yong has shown that the civil and military departments acted in cooperation to alleviate the sufferings and address the problems of the soldiers.[34] Their

administration was deeply penetrated to the *zails* and villages through the person of *zaildar* who also normally happened to be the village headman, the government kept an eagle eye on the conditions prevailing in the countryside. In this way these boards served the dual purpose of control to pacify the soldiers in particular and to suppress the recalcitrant elements in general.

The rationale behind the establishment of the DSBs was that it was the home town or village where the loyalty of the serving and ex-soldiers was impaired when they were approached by seditionists and came in touch with seditious propaganda.[35] In fact after the First World War the provincial economy had deteriorated and commodity prices had shot up. Moreover, the war time promises of the government to allot colony land to the soldiers for their services were not being fulfilled due to the paucity of such lands. These boards were used to launch counter propaganda campaigns against the malicious tactics of the seditionists and rumormongers. In this regard retired soldiers rendered their valuable services from the platform of these boards. During the *Ghadarite* conspiracy and after the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre these boards helped maintain control in the military districts.[36] These boards were an important example of the benevolent government as they not only took care of the interest of the retired soldiers, but also provided relief and comfort to the families of the serving soldiers. Moreover they served as a link between them and their families. Special attention was given to the distribution of pensions and Major General F. J. Aylmer, the Adjutant General, instructed that such cases should be 'considered as matters of extreme importance and even more especially the cases of the relatives and next-of-kin of soldiers killed in action or died of wounds'.[37] This was further facilitated by establishing Patriotic and Heroes Fund.[38]

Sahdev Vohra has pointed out that *Ghadarite* conspiracy succeeded in instigating some units in various Punjab regiments to revolt in India as well as Far East. On 21 Feburary 1915 Punjabi troops revolted at Ferozpur, Rawalpindi and Lahore. Their leaders wer punished and regiments were disbanded. Some Punjabi troops statationed at Singapore also revolted and were meted out with execution and transportation for life. Vohra thus questions the loyalty of the Punjabi soldiers by maintaing 'that the revolt was a serious affair, and expression of resentment against the British.'[39] However, this reafirms the necessity of safeguarding the loyalty of the troops and the British measure to establish the DSBs. David Omissi maintains that the scale of dissent in the Colonial Indian Army was limited. Amongst the fourteen mutinies between 1886 and 1930 the most serious was that of 5th Light Infantry in Singapor. Otherwise these were localised in nature and were mostly related to service conditions.[40] Omissi maintains that 'the roops were usually loyal and obedient, the authorities did not tempt fate by leaving the army open to potentially subversive influences.'[41] Just

as 'White Mutinies'[42] cannot be interpreted to call in question the loyalty of the white troops similarly it would be erroneous to doubt the loyalty of Punjabi soldiers on the basis of limited and localised revolts of native troops.

The government also controlled disruptions and any possibilities of unrests through the enactment and enunciation of laws and legislation. Increasingly agrarian problems were viewed in a political light. Washbrook writes that 'the Raj saw the agrarian problem much more in political than in immediately economic terms'. Therefore, 'its policies of social conservatism and peasant protection flowed from the fear that if competitive capitalist relations were allowed freedom to take over the countryside, the resulting conflict would destroy the Raj's own institution of government and political security.'[43] To tackle the agrarian debt and increasing alienation of land the British gave rural stability precedence over free market economic principles and hence it acted in the interest of agricultural castes. The government in this light passed the Land Alienation Act of 1900.[44] Debt had become a serious issue in the rural economy. Between 1891 and 1921 'mortgage debt apparently increased by over 25 *crores*'.[45] Agricultural lands which were mortgaged were ultimately being acquired by the moneylenders. Using their capital they were also purchasing more lands and thus evicting the rural peasantry from their lands. Prosperous peasants were considered the backbone of the colonial regime and their eviction 'was a potential political time-bomb'[46] for the British authorities. 'Two pieces of legislation', therefore, 'the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900) and the Punjab Pre-Emption Act (1913) were passed, which restricted the transfer of land from the agricultural to the non-agricultural classes.'[47]

Contrary to the above mentioned practices the government repealed and rescinded those measures which were causing unrest and disorder. In this regard the example of the 1907 disturbances can be cited. The Punjab Colonization of Land Act (1893) had imposed conditions on the grantees relating to residence, succession, alienation of land and sanitation so that they do not become renters and the land should not become unviable through numerous subdivisions. These measures proved inadequate. The Punjab government, therefore, introduced the Colonization Bill of 1906, which was passed by the Council but vetoed by the Governor General owing to mass agitation in the colonies. In this regard the Colonies Committee was appointed, which recommended several concessions to the colonists and the same were incorporated in the Colonization of Government Lands (Punjab) Act, 1912.[48]

Another mechanism of control on which the government relied was the establishment of cantonments at strategic locations. Bayly writes, that 'during the rebellion, it was apparent that British power could only be eliminated in an area if the authorities simultaneously lost control in the countryside and in the

outskirts of towns.'[49] The government was not oblivious in this regard. Clive Dewey has shown that unprecedented investment was made in the Punjab for the construction of roads, railway and cantonment towns. Rawalpindi was a small village which emerged as the 'biggest cantonment in India.'[50]

As political control helped the government to maintain order and stability, the prosperity of the province facilitated the government in its war effort. In the words of Tan Tai Yong, 'the material and monetary contributions from the province were no less significant: the total amount of money raised through war investment and donations aggregated 92,118,664 rupees, roughly equivalent to pound 700,000 in 1918'. Moreover, 'out of a total of 683,149 combatant troops recruited in India between August 1914 and November 1918, 349,688 - about sixty per cent - came from the Punjab.'[51]

Conclusion

The article demonstrates that the system of British political control in Punjab was predicated upon collaboration and patron-client ties. This was in tune with historical and cultural realities and was bound to yield loyal peasantry and soldiery. Mutual beneficience and reciprocity was the essence and spirit of the system. Any altration in the relationship would upset the equation of mutual beneficience thus jeopardising the political system. There is no doubt that the colonial notions of loyal and contented Punjabi peasantry can be taken on the face-value as the peasantry was loyal to the cores of their hearts. They considered the British rule as benevolent. But this loyalism was to be safeguarded by the British not only from extraneous influences but also by preserving the terms of relationship on which the system of politcal control was based.

The article demonstrates that the system got severe jolts by the problem of land alienation and at the time of colony disturbances of 1907. At times the British got apprehensive and restless about the Punjabi loyalism. However, when they restored the confidence of the peasantry by enacting Land Alienation Act of 1900 and Colonisation of Government Land Act 1912 all disturbances subsided and the British could, once more, count on Punjabi loyalism. Punjab's unprecedented contribution to war effort during the First World War was a proof of this. Moreover, the troops from Punjab were more loyal and effective as compared to troops recruited from elsewhere in India. Bulks of these troops were recruited by the leading collaborators of the province. They mostly came from their tenents and lesser kinsfolk. Their alleginece and loyalty was unquestionable. Dissent was limited and localised. The isolated cases of minor revolts cannot be invoked to call in question the loyalty of Punjabi soldiery.

While thinking along with the existing scholarship, the article maintains that maintaining order and stability in Punjab was of crucial strategic importance for

the Raj. The system of collaboration played a key role in maintaining political control and recruiting martial races into the colonial Indian Army. Political stability was essential to deal with internal and external threats and preserve the prosperity of the province. The British province of Punjab acquired new significance when it became a home for the Indian army in the 1880s. Collaboration provided this needed stability and facilitated the British in army recruitment. Moreover, the government exercised its control through laws and legislation, which were hitherto alien to Punjabi society. The 'Punjabisation' of the Indian Army from the 1880s onwards resulted from the fear of Russian expansion and the 'loyalism' of the Punjab elites during 1857 mutiny. The emerging western ideology of 'social darwinism' provided an intellectual underpinning for the martial races theory. This was internalised by sections of Punjabi society as it helped them maintain 'traditional' lifestyles encoded by notions of *izzat*.

The Punjabisation of the army was contemporaneous with Canal Colony development. The two processes strengthened each other. Loyalism was secured in the colony areas by land grants to martial castes and military contractors, while areas were set aside for providing mules and remounts for the army. Despite the disturbances in 1907 and in the wake of the First World War, the loyalism of the key elites remained intact. Their material self interests coincided with those of the colonial administration. Both Congress and later the Muslim League were as a result sidelined. The Congress had the further handicap of being associated with the money lending class. This sought to make inroads into land ownership once there was a private property in land. Increasing peasant indebtedness also assisted this process. The colonial state had to abandon *laissez faire* economic principles to limit this potentially politically damaging process by means of the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The measure institutionalised the differences between the so-called agricultural and non-agricultural castes and structured Punjab politics until almost the eve of the British departure.

Notes and References

1 See Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon, 1996). David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the making of Pakistan* (London: I. B.Tauris, 1988).

2 Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, pp. 34-35.

3 For more details see Ibid.

4 Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I knew It, 1885 – 1925* (London: Constable & Co., 1925), pp. 40-41.

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35 Ibid. pp.164 -170.

36 The *Ghadarites* were revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow the British Government in India through violent means. Their leader, Har Dayal, was a Punjabi Sikh who tried to spread revolutionary ideas through his American-based newspaper, the *Ghadar,* amongst the Punjabi Sikhs. Ibid., p.112.

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