



CANAL COLONIES AND THE MAKING OF MODERN PUNJAB: THE CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT SETTLERS

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<p>ARTICLE INFO</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Migrants, Lyallpur, Settlers, Colonization, Punjab</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Dr. Mansoor Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government College University, Faisalabad</p> <p>Email: mansoorahmed@gcuf.edu.pk</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>This paper explores the transformative role of migrant settlers in the canal colonies of British Punjab between 1876 and 1930, focusing on how state-directed migration and irrigation schemes reshaped the agrarian landscape. Drawing on archival records, settlement reports, and demographic data, it analyzes the socio-economic impact of settlers brought from across the province to cultivate newly irrigated tracts of land. These settlers—comprising various caste, tribal, and regional backgrounds—played a pivotal role in converting arid wastelands into some of the most fertile and productive agricultural zones in colonial India. The study highlights how the canal settlement policy not only boosted agricultural output and revenue for the colonial state but also fostered new patterns of land ownership, social mobility, and rural hierarchy. By centering the experiences and contributions of these migrants, this paper underscores their agency in the making of modern Punjab and provides a critical perspective on colonial development strategies.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Migration is a word not new to the world people migrate to one place to another place from centuries and as a Muslim we come to know that many prophets migrated from one place to another place by the order of ALLAH almighty, our prophet MUHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) migrated from Makkah to Madina after that many renown migration took place i.e. first world war people migrated to safe places from Germany and Austria ,second world war people migrated to safe places from Germany ,USSR and UK , at the time of partition 1947 million of people migrated to both sides Muslims from India to Pakistan and Hindus from Pakistan to India at the time of Pakistan India war 1971 about 2 million peoples migrated from east Bengal to west Bengal and at the time of Russia Afghan war 1979 approximately 3 million people cross Torkham border and

entered into Pakistan and majority of them start permanently living in Pakistan there are two types of migrations, first is internal migration and other is external migration.ⁱ Internal migration refers to the people who migrated from one part of the same country to another part by any reason is called Internal migration while the external migration refers to the people who migrated from one part of the country to another country is called External migration. But later if we talk about 20th centuries large no of people migrated from one place to another but also causing many problems i.e. land disputes, hunger, poverty, feudal loads after Mughals during British Raj first large migration took place between (1885-1940) during British policy of colonization which actually their policy to produce raw material for their factories in Great Britain or to feeds their large military power which is necessary for their survival in subcontinent. This project includes a setup of complete canal system to irrigate barren lands of the area although this project mostly includes the area of west Punjab thought this project 4.5 million hectares of barren and desert land was coveted into fertile plain, after the successful lunched of canal system now British government planned to bring agriculture rich families.ⁱⁱ British government allotted large number of lands in three categories and select productive peasant from central Punjab their migrants was called *Abadkals* (settlers) and the peasant or families already present in that area are called *Maqami* (locals) their migration from central Punjab and eastern Punjab changed census of Chenab colony district and balance of local population. These farmers were tagged to settled in west Punjab, their peasant was compelling by the British government to cultivate allotted land as a share cropper, commonly known as (*BATAI*). Moreover, the British government also highlighted one factor in connection with allotment of land was REVENUE, they select the peasant of central and western Punjab with high land revenue (*lagan*). As earlier mentioned that the new colony include the area of Jhang district , Montgomery district, Gujranwala district and some area of Lahore district British made new colonies in order to reduce the population density on the other existing district and to promote agriculture production in order to feeds their huge military need and to provide horses and mules for their transportation needs , so as per their objects they selected people from around district which are expert agriculturist and made a formula for their allotments.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are three types of settlers in Chenab colony

- 1) Settlers from East Punjab
- 2) Settlers from West Punjab
- 3) Indigenous group

Government has two objectives towards the settlers as selected the caste who are skilled in agriculture and the people from the district which are heavily populated to reduce the burden of population on that district, and the such settlers were selected from seven district namely Sialkot, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Ambala, Jullundur. Their settlers were granted over sixty percent (60 %) of land which was mostly *Jat, Arain, Kamboh*. the above settlers were mostly belonged to the East Punjab district so criticism start on the government to neglect the west Punjab so as a result of criticism government allotted one lakh thirty-five thousand (1,35,000) acres of land to the district of west Punjab that includes Shahpur, Ferozpur, Gujrat, Jhelum, Lahore, Banu, Rawalpindi, which are thirty one percent (31 %) of the entire colony. Majority of the settlers from the above district are *JAT* both from Hindu and Muslims 36% and the second main caste was *Rajputs*. A British officer Thornburg wrote as follows:

"The Muslims of Punjab were very unhappy, that they are not in safe state and thinks they are neglected and they have valid reason.^{iv} They gathered fighters and produced good fighter for British army all. It was good policy of the British to divide and rule. *AWAN* caste was made first class.^v The native grantees did not qualify either of the two main objectives for the settlement of the Chenab colony. Neither they from the connected district to the colonies, nor they are skilled agriculturist. The allotments to that group were the result of agitation and lack of balance caused by improvement by irrigation in the life style of people of Jhang, Gujranwala and Montgomery district.^{vi} The natives consist of two elements, the semi drifter pastoralist of the Bar, who were locally called (*Janglis*) and the settled skilled agriculturists riverain, who were called *Hitharis*. their native locals finally got sizeable area of six lacs sixty-three thousand (663,000) acres which constitute thirty-five (35 %) of land initially. however, the British government had no plan to allot the lands to their native, but in compensation to their loses that their lively wood had been destroy had been destructive effect of canal irrigation and some of *Hitharis* last their homes because of the construction of canals. These local people allotted vary small no of agriculture land that was 35% of the total land. Initially, the British government was not agreed to allot such land. But somehow latter the government agreed to compensate: the *Janglis* for their lose in the colony and the *Hitharis* for the environmental impact of canal irrigation on the riverain tracts in which their homes were situated. Their allotments were also the result of the geographical changes that occurs during the construction of canals their homes were vanished and their lands were allotted other strangers which they called (*Usurpers*) and then increase crime rate sudden of all specially (theft of cattle)

to which they are vary used of, as well as loss of their lively wood and made difficult for them to survive which forced the British government to allot land to these native locals called *Janglis* British government made compulsory for them to pay a tax to become eligible for land allotment. In the end their indigenious group allotted 448,000 acres, or about 24 % of allotted area. This was a huge amount of land that the British government allotted to their *Janglis* but they still had a sense of affliction because they had a sense of disrespect as they had received half no of acres as compare to the settlers of east Punjab agriculturist families, but they had no previous experience of agriculture but they still had fulfilled the market demand after the following years many of they become successful agriculturist.^{vii} The Chenab colony was given the status of a separate district Lyallpur after the named of. Late Lieutenant Governor Sir James Lyall, K.C.S.A of for the aim of periodic count of population in 1901. Excluding Jhang, which was the formal district, and the Lyallpur was its tehsil of which the colony was once part. it then was 13th in the order of area (3,706 square miles) and 12th in the order of population (782,690) amongst the 32 districts of Punjab as then constituted. It was very obvious and natural that the earlier migrants faced many financially and administrative difficulties and hardships. The journalist sketches the circumstances of those settlers in the following words. The agriculture condition and arrangement were not up to the mark as expected by the settlers of east Punjab. An initial step that was taken by different departments was not enough to satisfy the settlers of the Chenab colony.^{viii} Many sketches of canals were built and constructed settlement of migration and they had to construct small channel by them self to irrigate their squares. This was very heart breaking for them when they saw that some of their equitable were left uncultivated. Moreover, the rainfall received by the bar was considerably low as compare to the previous years. That's why many settlers refuse to believe that the land is worth cultivating as the was expert agriculturist. In this situation many of the settlers were returned to their home districts without cultivating land allotted to them by government. Those settlers who bare all the above hardships and not flew back and the survivals of epidemic were earned excellent crops. There were new settlers ready to replace for those who flew back, but the balloon of the early settlers was not come to end and they face another problem in the shape of lack of human labor to harvest mature crop and that is why large no of cotton was left unpicked. That is why large no of larger assignee still think that the land is not worth cultivating due to the shortage of human labor because the Chenab colony was not fully popularized until and unless the construction of railway in 1896. Meanwhile many improvements were made by the

British government, like better water provision, network of channels to their squares, construction of railway the above mention factors encourage more and more settlers to settle in the colony and their pace increased. And from year 1892 to year 1903. about one lac eighty-one thousand five hundred and one acres of land was allotted to news settlers .and in this phase of settlement was so vigorous and people was happy for this migration as they are now much more financially strong than any other time.

As we notice from the fact and figure that most of the irrigated area was given to the settlers from other districts.

<u>Religious Composition By District Of Origin & Caste (1901)</u>											
District	Muslamans						Hindus				Total
	Arai ns	Jat	Rajp ut	Kamb oh	Guj ar	Mis c.	Jat	Kamb oh	Sain i	Mis c.	
Amritsa r	3,677	21,328	507	826	0	512	105,103	39,224	0	764	172,001
Gurdasp ur	30,671	43,315	1,880	875	14,115	59	40,807	978	0	1,109	138,809
Sialkot	18,02	69,78	1,24	309	0	5,73	30,23	0	0	993	126,3

The advanced scheme was recognized by numerical number given to them. Theirs numerical number were given by logic of their arrangement in ascending order and the canal that irrigating that area. So Chaks comes under the areas irrigated by Rakh Branch were named as Chak No. 1 RB, Chaks occurring on the area of along Jhang Branch were named 1 JB and similarly, Chaks occurring in the area along Gugera Branch had been named GB fixed with their numbers.^{ix}

<u>Literacy Rate In Chenab Colony</u>									
Religion	Population			Literate			%		
	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Muslims	484,657	272,174	212,483	4,972	4,775	197	1.02	1.08	.09
Hindus	210,459	123,518	86,941	11,180	11,023	107	5.2	8.9	.12
Sikhs	88,049	53,404	34,645	4,335	4,245	90	4.9	7.9	.25
Christians	8,672	4,747	3,925	312	233	79	8.5	4.9	2.01
Jains/Zoaroastrians	24	18	6	8	8	0	34.7	47.6	0
All	791,861	453,861	338,000	20,757	20,284	498	2.6	4.4	.14

The settlement of migrants in British Punjab's canal colonies marked one of the most significant agrarian transformations of the colonial era. Through a combination of state engineering, irrigation infrastructure, and strategic migration, previously barren lands were converted into thriving

agricultural zones that reshaped the economic and social fabric of the region. The settlers—selected not only for their farming skills but also for their perceived loyalty and caste backgrounds—emerged as key agents of this transformation. Their labor, adaptability, and agricultural knowledge laid the foundation for the long-term prosperity of the canal colony areas. Beyond the immediate economic gains for the colonial state, the canal settlement project catalyzed lasting demographic, social, and cultural changes in Punjab. New villages were established, kinship networks expanded across districts, and a distinct rural hierarchy began to emerge, influenced by land allotments, irrigation access, and colonial administrative policies. While the British envisioned the canal colonies as a model of controlled development, it was ultimately the settlers who brought these landscapes to life—turning engineered plans into lived realities. By centering the role of migrants in this historical process, this study reaffirms the importance of local agency in colonial development narratives. The story of British Punjab's transformation is not merely one of state planning and imperial ambition, but also one of the resilience, adaptation, and ambition of the people who settled, cultivated, and sustained its newly irrigated lands.

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ⁱⁱ *Ibid*,329.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*,367.

^{iv} *Ibid*,45.

^v Note by S.S. Thorburn, PC, 22 January 1898; in PRAP(I), April 1898, No.7.

^{vi} *Ibid*,61.

^{vii} Ahmad Ali s/o Sarishta Khan Kamoka, Dhudi wala 214 R.B(Lyallpur: November 25, 2016)

^{viii} *Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony 1904* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1905), 99.

^{ix} *Ibid*,202.