



RESEARCH PAPER

Peasant Revolts against Colonial Forces: A Case Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Punjab Province in 1907

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ABSTRACT

The Indian independence movement owes a great deal to the peasant uprisings that served as a symbol of the people of India's awareness of the colonial force and their desire for self-government. This research study is to trace out the major developments of peasants' struggle in the Punjab province with focusing on the agrarian revolts of 1907. The revolt of 1907 was a game changing event for the peasants and the agrarian classes in the Punjab province to resist the colonial force along with the political forces which were working for the separate and self-government in India. For this research study the historical analytical method is adopted to trace out the research gap of the study. The results of this study shows that the revolt was one of the factors for the self-consciousness of the agrarian and lower classes of Punjab and make them more strengthen against the colonial forces.

KEYWORDS Agrarians, Colonialism, Peasants, Punjab, Revolts

Introduction

Throughout the course of recorded history, peasants have played an important role in the development of society as well as the identities of individual nations. Because the forms of historiography that were adopted by the experts mostly referred to positivist and elitist approaches, the role of peasants has not been mentioned in a proper way by the authors, historians, and scholars. This is due to the fact that the peasantry played no significant role in the development of the country. Mainstream historical texts from the second half of the 20th century were not available to the public until the events and actions of peasant life, which were a feature of many societies throughout the world, were brought into the domain. Even the British rulers, who claim to be the petitioners and promoters of civilization around the world, neglected the historical significance of India's peasantry and its subaltern strata (Pal, 2009). The fact that agrarian classes and peasants made up the bulk of the population in every region of the subcontinent ensured that they would continue to play an important role there. This is not just due to the size of the people but also to the fact that peasants have had a difficult time establishing themselves as important figures in the history of the subcontinent and other regions of the world. Why did people put up such a fight and rise up against the government? This is the fundamental question that the vast majority of historians ponder and attempt to investigate. Given that a third of the world is socialist and guerrilla organizations are active in more than a dozen countries, it should come as no surprise that some Western social scientists are interested in the role of peasants in revolution. Because for historians, what was important was only the ruling classes, and the peasantry was considered something extra in their own domain, historians had no interest in the lives of the peasants (Barrier, 1967).

Urban moneylenders in Punjab took advantage of destitute farmers and foreclosed on their farms. The Punjab Land Alienation Act was enacted in the year 1900 by the government of India in response to concerns regarding the possibility of a peasant insurrection in Punjab. This province provided the British Indian Army with a significant number of soldiers throughout the war. Because of this, the Act divided everyone living in Punjab into one of three categories: farmers, statutory farmers, and everyone else. Farmers were given priority over statutory farmers. There were significant impediments placed on the capacity of those in the first class to sell or mortgage their land to those in the second and third classes. In the province of Punjab, the degree of management of the peasant class was comparable to that in other areas of India; nevertheless, in Punjab, the peasant identity and separate spaces were preserved with the assistance of riots and revolts with the local administration and with the British authority. This was accomplished with the help of the British (Oommen,1971).

Peasants as a social group had their own distinctive way of life as well as a culture that was distinct from that of the ruling and corporate classes. This strategy results in a differentiation between these classes, which ensures that the political power and the system continue to be held by the same class. As a result, the peasantry is forced to participate in uprisings and agitations directed against the ruling and the middle classes. These were the route cases for the revolts, but the main cases for the revolt were the bills that were passed by the British Government of India and the Government of the Punjab, and this is the main argument for this research study, which is that the major unrest in the Punjab province was initiated both due to the class differences and with the legislation (Sarwar,1994).

Literature Review

Beginning in the early 20th century, the history and historiography of the world formally acknowledged peasants as a distinct group. Since then, other publications on the peasants have been made, all of which contribute to our knowledge of the peasant revolts in the Punjab region. The question of peasants and class system is taken up by Fareeha Zafar in her book "*Canals, Colonies and Class: British Policy in the Punjab 1880-1940*" in the goal of the author is to look for proof in the ways in which the colonial government's shifting policies toward colonization affected the environment, production methods, tenancy dynamics, and social stratification. While previous research has examined some of the questions this work raises, very few attempts have been made to synthesize these issues. Where such a synthesis does exist, the historical evidence behind it is shallow. Based on an exhaustive examination of the archival material, this study establishes a connection between the transformation of rural structures (and, more specifically, the emergence of social stratification) and the introduction of modern irrigation techniques. The impact of natural factors in determining property ownership has diminished as a result of technological advancements (Zafar 2017). Another book discusses the peasants is the first in-depth look at how colonialism affected agriculture in the strategically vital region that spans modern-day Pakistan, India, and the Indian provinces of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Evidence from village surveys, farm accounts, and family budgets supplements information from official archives and private files in India and Britain to support the author's claim that Punjab was not a utopian region of affluent peasant proprietors. She argues that in addition to wealthy feudal landowners, rack-renting tenants, and poor small-holders, these people also called the region home before being conscripted or forced to emigrate in order to pay taxes and settle debts. By drawing parallels between the eastern region of Bengal and Bihar and the western region of Punjab, Mridula Mukherjee demonstrates that Punjab, like the eastern region, was beginning to exhibit features typical of colonial under-development, such as the stagnation of

productive forces, the intensification of semi-feudal relations, the forced commercialization of agriculture, and the lack of capital investment in the sector. Thus, the green revolution did not arise from a continuation but rather from a break with the colonial past (Padhi, 2012).

Similarly, another approach is about the anticolonial idea of peasants' movement and role of peasants in the freedom movement of India. A radical anticolonial practice was first introduced to Punjab, British India, by the Ghadar Party in the early 1910s. According to many sources, the Ghadar Party was founded by Punjabi peasants from the West Coast of North America who went back to their motherland with the intention of starting an anticolonial rebellion. One line of thought holds that the Ghadar Party fell short because its members' political consciousnesses couldn't adjust to the realities of their fellow Punjabis. This idea is also taken up by Sukhdev Singh Sohal that the colonial administrator rationalized this as an inevitable consequence of the success of landowners and surplus-generating peasants. The colonial administrator under-estimated the number of tenant and subsistence farmers who made up a disproportionate share of the financially struggling households. Land revenue was also cited by the Punjab Committee on Indebtedness (1934) as a major contributor to the province's financial woes. Despite having only 7% of India's population, British Punjab was considered "a heavily indebted" province because her share of debt exceeded 16% of the total. Punjabi farmers' struggles with access to affordable loans, rural debt, costly legal disputes, and the sale or lease of farmland to those who aren't farmers. Maintaining imperial control and advancing the extraction and exploitation processes were the primary goals of the colonial state (Sood, 1995).

Material and Methods

For this research study the historical analysis method with qualitative research technique is applied. Studying past research practices can shed light on the most effective strategies for engaging with data and testing hypotheses in internationalization studies. Research procedures are proven to benefit from critical study of all "texts" (sources), time series analyses, comparison methodologies across time and place, counterfactual analysis, and the examination of outliers. With a focus on internationalization processes, examples and applications are provided in three major areas of study. By looking at these approaches, we may understand internationalization as a series of choices made over time and space, which is path dependent but ultimately up to managerial discretion. Source analysis, timeline creation, cross-cultural evidence comparison, and realistic options analysis are all areas where historical research methodologies can aid internationalization process studies.

Results and Discussion

The Agrarian revolt of 1907 in Punjab

The agrarian revolts had their own history, which is now incorporated into the canon of published works on the subject of the history of Punjab. The history of the uprising can be understood relatively easily if it is studied in conjunction with the political history of India; however, it is essential to conduct independent study on the events connected to the insurrection. At the turn of the twentieth century, the political climate in the Punjab was one that encouraged agrarian unrest. This was the case in the region. Because of improvements in communication and the following alterations in agrarian organization and agricultural economics, peasants had a greater understanding of the predicament in which they found themselves as a direct result of these developments. The development of this substance was additionally impacted by a variety of different factors

at various stages. To begin, by the 1860s, the problem of agricultural indebtedness had already reached a critical stage in the Punjab (Sood, 1995).

The vast majority of Punjabi farmers, as stated by M.L. Darling, "were born in debt, lived in debt, and died in debt." This was owing, in part, to the consistent tradition of farming families passing down their land to their children and grandchildren (Islam, 1985). This practice continued for generations. Multiple famines that swept through various regions of the Punjab at the same time. The death of cattle in the years 1860–1861, 1876–1878, 1896–1897, and 1900–1901 as a result of famine and drought contributed to the peasantry's already precarious economic situation and made it significantly worse. The surge in population resulted in a decline in the overall quality of the farming population as well as an increase in the number of people competing for available land. Weddings and other significant social gatherings often need a significant financial investment from the typical Punjabi, who will typically allocate a large portion of this sum. Both the economic status of farmers and the pressure that is being placed on the world's available arable land have worsened as a direct result of the rise in the global population. In particular, the ever-increasing requirements for state revenue frequently forced them to seek assistance from moneylenders. This transpired on a rather regular basis. The costs that were associated with defending oneself in judicial proceedings added significantly to the huge debt that they already owed. In the cities of Ludhiana, Jullandar, and Amritsar, it was a significant element that led to an increase in the total amount of debt that was owing.

According to D.R. Gadgil, another reason for this phenomenon was the sudden surge in demand for Indian cotton in England that was brought on by the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States in 1861. However, this explanation was only temporary. The fact that the Civil War in the United States had just begun was the impetus behind this demand. Between the years 1900 and 1905, the British government passed a number of laws that were applicable to the Punjab. These laws included the Land Alienation Act, the Punjab Limitation Act, the Transfer of Property Act, and the Punjab Pre-Emption Act (Gadgil, 1965). These laws were enforced in the Punjab. The Alienation Act of 1900 was passed into law in order to stop the non-agricultural sectors of the region from purchasing land from the agricultural classes of the Punjab, the majority of whom were Hindu. It did help reduce some of the nation's debt, but at the same time, it drove a rift between different groups of people by designating the Jats, Rajputs, and members of the scheduled castes as farmers and the Khatri, Aroras, etc. as industrialists. While this did help reduce some of the nation's debt, it also drove a split between different groups of people. The zamindars, who formed up the communal part that was loyal to the British administration, were the intended beneficiaries of this rule, which was created to protect them from Hindu moneylenders. The law was enacted to defend the communal segment. The government drafted this law with the promise that its provisions would benefit impoverished farmers in their struggles against economic exploitation, hunger, and disease (Chatterjee, 1995). In the hope of preventing rural unrest, the government drafted this law with the promise that its provisions would help impoverished farmers.

The Punjab Pre-Emption Act of 1907 gave local government aristocracy houses the right to make a first claim on the Wards Act of 1905. This right was granted by the family's permission. It wasn't until the Pun Bill was enacted in 1906 that the primary goals and functions of the District Officer job were defined and articulated. The legislation forbade statutory farmers from obtaining them if there was even the slightest possibility that they were going to be utilized for religious purposes. Another factor that led to the rural uprising in Punjab in 1907 was the Colonization Bill. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a significant expansion in the amount of land used for agriculture across the Central Punjab districts. With the completion of various irrigation projects in the 1880s and

1890s, large swaths of land that had not been used for farming before were put to use. In order to colonize wide swaths of the dry area of western Punjab, the British built canal irrigation systems.

These locations had been deserted for generations since they did not have access to any form of irrigation. However, as time passed, these colonies evolved into India's primary source of food supply. The colonies started shipping massive amounts of wheat, cotton, and oil seeds to England as well as to other countries. On October 25, 1906, the Canal Colonies Bill was brought before the Legislative Council, where it was debated and finally approved. The Act was composed of a total of 37 sections. It was intended to change the fundamental basis for realizing land in Punjab and to enable impoverished farmers who had been relocated from Central Punjab areas to irrigate the large but barren crown waste lands in the Western Punjab by digging canals (Talbot, 2011). There was a massive backlash against the Punjab Colonization Act and the increased land revenue and water-tax from the local populace. The Government received numerous signed memorials and resolutions made at large meetings that voiced opposition to the Punjab Colonization Bill. As an "act of great injustice and hardship" and a "breach of faith," the Bill was widely criticized (Ali, 2014).

At Lyallpur on the 21st and 22nd of March in 1907, colonists organized the first major protest assembly in the area. There were thousands of people there, and they came from all walks of life. Additionally, there were a great deal of journalists present in order to cover the event. It is not uncommon for people to read poems at the beginning of meetings, and this particular gathering was no exception. A prayer called "Pagri Sambhai O Jattat pagri sambhal O" (which translates to "mind thy turban, honor thy self, O. Jat") was recited in order to establish the mood. The bill was opposed by the feisty Jat zamindars, who wore their turbans as a symbol of their autonomy and pride in their culture. He gave the impression that the new law that the government had passed had not only made their life more difficult but had also been an affront to their sense of dignity. On March 24, 1907, the second assembly in Lahore was held, and there were 2,000 individuals who showed up. The topic of conversation was "Hindustan Hamara Hai," and Ajit Singh stated that if Indians were unable to accept India for its own reasons, then they should respect it for the sake of the great "rishies." He stated that the Native Americans had no authority to assert ownership over their land. It was Morley's, but, as he repeated multiple times, it wouldn't be in his ownership for very much longer. The audience mimicked his sentiments and applauded enthusiastically after each repetition of the statement. On April 1st, Lahore played host to the mi Watan ceremony. The citizens of the municipality made the decision to withhold the required money without being given any prior notice or having it made public. In addition to that, he argued his case in front of the entire audience. Because he said that, despite the fact that he would know who to kill in the commission of murder (Pal, 2009).

The following day, on April 2, the subcommittee convened and decided to bring the zamindars to Lahore to express their grievances in front of the public at a Singh of Kasur, Labh Singh. They also planned to recruit locals to attend along with the about 500 Sikhs who were already there. Ajit Singh, the individual assigned with their care, communicated with them in Hindi and endeavored to motivate them. On account of the Singh Sabha anniversary celebration taking place on the same day as the meeting on April 7, a significant number of attendees presented themselves. The tournament started at ten o'clock in the morning. There were at least 3,000 individuals there, with 1,000 Sikhs constituting the majority. All of the other gatherings had involved some level of danger, but this one was on a whole other level. The government came under fire, and some people started calling for a revolution. Residents were required to place their thumbprints on

printed forms in order to demonstrate that they were committed to avoiding paying the higher water prices. According to reports, the Anjuman received donations totaling seven thousand rupees to fund the organization's political activities (Barrier, 1967).

Talks being given by authoritative persons like Ajit Singh. A directive prohibiting the meetings was issued by the Deputy Commissioner, who also issued a warrant for Ajit Singh's arrest. I Ram got in touch with the people who were organizing the meeting and invited them to a demonstration in front of the courthouse at 8:00 in the morning. As soon as the Deputy Commissioner learned the news, he refrained from commenting negatively on the furniture in either Mission House or the European apartments. The issue with the general population and Europeans in particular. The administration has been accused of detaining a number of protest leaders. The arrests that took place in Rawalpindi quickly became known over the entirety of the province like wildfire. A rally against the government was held in Lahore at the office of the Bharat Mata Society. Due to the fact that the authorities were aware of the destructive potential of the disorderly crowds, they barred the precisionists from entering Upper Mall out of concern for the residents of the European communities that were located there. After the crowd refused to disperse, the police ultimately used excessive force and began torturing everyone present, without making any exceptions. As a direct consequence of this, a great number of uninvolved bystanders were brutally assaulted by the police using lathis and musket butts (Condos, 2017).

According to the records kept by the provincial government between the first of March and the first of May in 1907, a total of 28 public meetings were held across the territory. In a typical year, attendance at these events ranges from four thousand to five thousand people. A number of Pakistan's most important cities, including Lahore, Lyallpur, Amritsar, Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Multan, Gurdaspur, and Datala, were among those that were explored. In addition, there were a number of get-togethers in the more remote areas. According to a story that appeared in the Tribune on June 1, 1907, just five of the complaints had anything to do with agriculture, while the remaining 23 were entirely political in origin. During the fight for independence that took place in the Punjab in 1907, the British administration was concerned not so much about the gatherings and demonstrations as they were about the growing discontent among army formations that were comprised of Punjabis. Because it was one of the primary centers for recruiting Indian soldiers for the British army, the turmoil in the Punjab caused damage to the armed forces, the most significant weapon of imperialist power. This is because the Punjab was one of the primary locations. Both civilian and military officers in India immediately developed a sense of empathy for the protesting citizens of the country. Their fears were validated when they heard reports of growing dissatisfaction among Indian leaders and soldiers in the army. A government agent in Amritsar stated that certain Sikh sepoy of the 29th Punjab Infantry were sympathetic to the seditionists and were well prepared to mutiny when the riots broke out in Lahore and Rawalpindi. These individuals served in the 29th Punjab Infantry. One clerk from the 37th Dogra regiment expressed his disgust with the way the Indian armed forces were treated by stating that "their regiment would not have fired upon their countrymen when the unrest was at its peak, and it is doubtful whether they would do so even now if disturbance were to erupt again" (Barrier, 1967).

The revolutionary group that was led by Ajit Singh and Sufi Amba Prasad began a campaign in which they distributed revolutionary literature that they had written and that was published by the prestigious Book Agency Bharat (Pal, 2009). They came to the realization that the only way their militant movement would be successful was if the people were politically educated. Some of the slogans that were highly popular during that period included the following: "European Thazib Ki Bezabtagian, Inquilab, Desi Fauj

Zaffar Mauj, Hindustan Ko Angrezon ne kis tarah Fateh kia our us par kis tarah se hukumat karte hain, European Tahzib ka Namuna, Ungali Pakarte Paucha Pakr, Hindustan mein Angrezon ki hukumat, Bandar Bant, Divide and Conquer, Ilhaq Punjab (or the Annexation of the Punjab), Kaumen kis tarah zinda rahti hain, Kaumi Islah (in two parts), Amant mein Khianat. It was imperative that quick action be taken since the political situation in the province was described as "extremely serious" and "dangerous." On May 3, 1907, he gave a presentation in which the topic of discussion was the political climate in the Punjab. He requested that prompt action be taken and under Regulation III of 1818, he filed for arrest and deportation orders for Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh.

In this very solemn minute, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab discusses the roots of the instability that has taken place in that region. His statements provided irrefutable evidence that the general populace harbored revolutionary sentiments directed towards the British administration. He stressed the point that the leaders had tried to rouse the villages on the pretense of the Colonization Bill, and that the propaganda had an unmistakable anti-British tone to it. He said this several times throughout his speech. Individual Sikhs were singled out and given preferential treatment. Invitees to the protest meeting included active-duty military troops as well as retired military personnel. The prosecution of the Punjabi newspaper prompted considerable agitation, which resulted in the revenue tax and water rates being outlawed. Additionally, police and soldiers were requested to retire. He sought the right to censor any publication using press legislation after being given a warning, and he wanted the ability to censor assemblies without having to provide an explanation. Fear could be instilled in the minds of individuals whose lives are directly affected by these measures by the government.⁶³ Since the beginning of the movement two months ago, Ajit Singh has been recognized by the Government of the Punjab as having played a pivotal role (Yong, 2005).

On the basis of the minute that was taken by the Lieutenant-Governor, the Viceroy, Lord Minto, provided the Secretary of State with an update of the situation in the Punjab. Due to the precarious situation in the Punjab, Lord Minto was compelled to give his consent to the expulsion of Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai as well as the prohibition of public gatherings. However, he exercised his authority to veto the Punjab Colonization Bill on the grounds that "it was a very faulty piece of legislation."

Conclusion

Peasants and the agrarian classes of the Punjab province were very important during colonial as the majority population in Punjab were the peasants and the agrarian classes. The event of 1907 was very important for the Indian freedom movement. It changed the life of the peasant classes to and made them involve in the politics and get a chance to put their opinion in front of the higher class and government for managing their affairs. Farmers and ranchers have been pivotal figures in shaping society and national identities since the beginning of time. The role of peasants has not been adequately recognized by authors, historians, and researchers due to the prevalence of positivist and elitist views in the forms of history embraced by the specialists. This is because the peasants had no meaningful impact on the nation's progress. It wasn't until the middle of the 20th century that the events and acts of peasant life, a staple of many societies around the world, were included in mainstream historical literature. This event of 1907 also compelled the British authorities to bring into consideration the peasants and the agriculture class before any legislative reforms.

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