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*Malcolm Darling and Developmentalism in Colonial Punjab**

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Abstract

This article studies the career and writings of Sir Malcolm Darling to make three main claims. First, an intellectual genealogy of development studies is presented through the examination of close parallels between colonial efforts at rural welfare and post-colonial prescriptions for the same. Darling was central in the British efforts in Punjab to formulate ideas of reform from below or thrift among the peasantry, both of which remain popular in contemporary theories of community development and microfinance respectively. The similarities between colonial and post-colonial reforms are striking because the colonial experience remains largely forgotten. This intellectual amnesia serves a political end by blaming the peasant for his poverty and redemption from the same. Simultaneously, any structural or revolutionary social change is avoided. Secondly, the article probes the exaggerated focus on indebtedness and the political interests this served. Indebtedness gave the Unionists in Punjab political legitimacy, and the colonial state formulated solutions for the problem that did not tax its resources, for example the cooperative movement was designed to be self-financing. Finally, the article speaks to the themes of this issue by challenging the assumption that 'institutions' alone are a legacy of colonial rule and developmentalist reform is a post-colonial preoccupation of independent states. By presenting a case study of attempted economic and institutional reform during colonial rule, it allows one to appreciate the close, contemporaneous connections between colonial modes of governance and current modes of development.

Introduction

In February 1940, Sir Malcolm Darling, former financial commissioner of Punjab and an expert on rural indebtedness in the

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province, delivered the presidential address at the first conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics. Instead of a self-congratulatory speech on the many macro-level achievements of the imperial state in Punjab (including the establishment of canal colonies, the construction of a vast railway network, and a phenomenal increase in agricultural output), Darling discussed the Punjabi peasant and the primacy that must be accorded to the *individual* in any sustained strategy of development:

> I have always been more interested in men than in things, in values than in value, in welfare than in wealth. Nor have I so much concerned myself with the way men should live as with the way they do live. Life is infinitely complex and even for oneself it is not always easy to say what is good and what is bad. I therefore feel a certain diffidence in prescribing for others, and in dealing with the peasant, my chief study, my object has been less to apply a spur than to hold up a mirror in which he might perhaps see his life as it is and judge for himself how far it should be changed. Finally I have always sought contact with the individual rather than with the mass; the individual is more human and understandable, and ultimately the problem of human life is the problem of the individual.[1]

Darling's views on the Punjab peasant emerged from over 40 years of close study of rural life in the province, including numerous tours on horseback during which he had interlocutors from all walks of life. His book, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, first published in 1925, remains a seminal account of indebtedness, replete with statistical data and ethnography of village life. He also wrote several other books and published numerous papers while being a career civil servant, and he continued to tour Punjab even after his retirement. What emerged was a body of scholarship rich in insights even as it retains a crucial academic blindspot: an inability to critique the colonial state or policies systematically. Instead, Darling developed an understanding of rural poverty by focusing on the peasant and the improvement of his habits, thereby placing the blame of poverty and the burden of redemption on the peasant himself. Little wonder, then, that Darling was one of the foremost proponents of the cooperative movement in Punjab, as it promoted an official agenda to cure rural impoverishment through self-help on the part of the peasant. This article examines the life and works of Malcolm Darling to demonstrate how he embodied a

[1] Text of speech, February 1940, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Malcolm Darling Papers (hereafter Malcolm Darling Papers), Box 1.

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particular colonial outlook on rural welfare that enjoys post-colonial popularity in theories and schemes of community development.

The colonial origins of development studies have been discussed as intellectual theories, but the experiences of Darling and like-minded officers in Punjab provide a practical instance of attempted economic reform framed in a certain conception of the peasant and rural relations. This interpretation of colonial economic experiments in the province allow one to transcend the current discourse on the region. Existing scholarship on Punjab views it as a beneficiary of empire or as a site of extractive institutions. The cooperative movement and attendant rural uplift programmes remain under-studied for their capacity to illuminate a history of microeconomic reform, predicated on certain assumptions and limited by colonial ideological commitments, which is inextricably linked with post-colonial economic development in the region and elsewhere. This article fleshes out these connections by drawing on materials from Darling's private papers and related archival sources on Punjab. The implications are both global, in their links with the evolution of theories of economic development, and historical, in unveiling an alternate understanding of the colonial impact on Punjab.

Peasant indebtedness in Punjab was the key rural economic issue that preoccupied not only the political leadership, for example the Unionist Party, but also the colonial administration in the early twentieth century. A small but significant group of officers sought to provide the peasant relief from financial hardship as part of a larger effort to 'reform' his habits, customs, and world view. A key part of these efforts was the introduction of a system of credit cooperatives in Punjab, which were initially used to provide an alternative means of borrowing for the peasant and to allow him to escape the clutches of usurious moneylenders. Later, these credit cooperative societies became focal points of community reform in terms of education, hygiene, and 'better living' in general. Within this group of officers approaches differed, with some—for example Frank Brayne, who was fired with a missionary zeal—being more prescriptive about the kind of changes the peasant needed to incorporate, while Malcolm Darling remained a more earnest observer and less interventionist in his ideas. A key ideological commitment shared by the varying strains, however, was the belief that the onus of both poverty and remedial measures lay with the peasant; the state or local power structures never became the object of critique in any substantive way.

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Darling was a central figure in both the diagnosis of rural poverty in Punjab and the extensive system of credit cooperatives established to combat it. Retrospectively, this historical experience in rural development may be dismissed as an ultimately ineffectual ripple in the general tide of regressive development in Punjab. The attempted amelioration of the peasant through setting up alternative sources of finance, like cooperative banks, and devoting manpower and resources towards the collection of extensive statistical data on his finances, had negligible lasting impact. However, it is significant in its ability to illuminate the connections between colonial attempts at economic development and post-colonial efforts that mirror the same world view, for example contemporary community development programmes and microfinance initiatives. It is also important because it questions a reductive view of the economic legacy of colonial rule in Punjab encapsulated in the inheritance of extractive institutions. The attempts at rural uplift are an instance of another kind of state intervention, but these have disappeared from historical memory, with the result that contemporary efforts at rural development are seen as an imaginative, post-colonial cure that will undo the wrongs of colonial systems of governance. The Darling papers expose the thinking underlying these initiatives, and an understanding of the failure of the cooperative movement in colonial times can help shed light on why post-colonial efforts in the same vein remain ineffectual.

Darling continued to be associated with the subcontinent in the post-colonial era, consulting for various governments in South Asia as well as international organizations. Close perusal of Darling's papers reveals the making of a 'technocrat', an expert on poverty who gathers 'data', diagnoses poverty, and prescribes authoritatively. While Darling may have been spurred by personal intellectual interests, he was a harbinger of a post-colonial ethos of dispatching 'experts' to developing countries and commissioning wide-ranging 'studies' that constructed the intellectual problem of underdevelopment and its modern, usually Western, solution. This represented the academization of social issues, creating a culture of information gathering and scholarly publication. By locating Darling in a larger intellectual context, we observe how the omnipotent colonial officer transitions into the globetrotting expert, much as the examination of his earlier career in the Indian Civil Service provides lived expression of colonial economic reform in Punjab from the perspective of the executor.

This article is divided into three sections: the first provides a brief biographical sketch of Darling and contrasts his views on economic

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development with those of his contemporaries. The next section focuses on the issue of peasant indebtedness in Punjab and the cooperative movement, with a discussion of Darling's role. The third section analyses the implications of this debate and the reforms for development theory and practice in the post-colonial context.

Malcolm Darling and developmentalist thought in Punjab

> We have not yet come across any European gentleman of your parts—the model of plain living and high thinking—who unmindful of his high erudition and official position could condescend (so) freely, in sweet social intercourse, with those not quite of his own rank and station in life—a thorough-going Indian among the Indians. Such men carry about them an atmosphere of peace and goodwill which always tells. By sheer force of their angelic nature, they help bridge the gap between East and West.[2]

Malcolm Lyall Darling was born in 1880 to an affluent family; he was schooled at Eton and later King's College, University of Cambridge. He was well-connected (his guardian was Sir Alfred Lyall, the former lieutenant governor of Punjab) and well read (he grew up in Bloomsbury, was intimate friends with E. M. Forster, and was a cultured humanist). In 1903, he took the civil service exam and was offered places in the civil service, both in England and in India. He later wrote that this presented the most perplexing decision of his life, but eventually he made up his mind to go to India because he thought he would despise himself if he feared to take the plunge and felt he was guided by instinct.[3] This led to a career spanning over 30 years in active service in Punjab from his initial posting in 1904. Among the various appointments he held were the chair of the Punjab Banking Enquiry in 1930, the vice chancellorship of Punjab University (in 1931 and 1937), chair of the Punjab Land Revenue Committee (in 1938), and the financial commissioner of Punjab (1936–39). He was awarded the Companion of the Indian Empire (CIE) in 1934 and Knight Commander of the Indian Empire (KCIE) in 1939. He published numerous books on the Punjabi peasant, including *Some Aspects of Cooperation* (1922), *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (first published in 1925), *Rusticus Loquitur* (1930), *Wisdom and Waste*

[2] Farewell address to M. L. Darling, The Tukojirao Club, 14 May 1908, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 1.

[3] Papers relating to Darling's obituary, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 12.

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(1934), *At Freedom's Door* (1949), and the autobiographical *Apprentice to Power* (1966).[4] He remained active even after his retirement and became the Indian editor of the BBC in England from 1940–44. In 1946–47 he undertook a tour of India on horseback to examine rural conditions in the lead-up to the British exit, the findings of which were recorded in his book *At Freedom's Door*. In the 1950s and 1960s he consulted for governments in Greece, Egypt, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, and India, and he remained involved in various committees in England. He died in London on 1 January 1969 at the age of 88.

In his private papers and diaries, Darling refers to the intellectual figures he looked up to and the influence they had on his conduct and career. Alfred Lyall greatly influenced Darling with his free-thinking ideas, and the intellectual context of Bloomsbury ensured that he was no closeted conservative. Darling had all the advantages of an affluent background, privileged schooling, and influential family connections that may have led to the expectation that he would be a conservative, establishment man. Indeed, at the start of his career, he was predicted to be as successful as his guardian and was also appointed in 1907 as tutor to an Indian maharaja, the Raja of Dewas, a small Maratha state, no mean feat for a junior officer. However, Darling

[4] The complete titles are: *Some aspects of co-operation in Germany, Italy and Ireland* (Lahore: Government of Punjab, 1922), *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1925), *Rusticus Loquitur or The old light and the new in the Punjab village* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), *At freedom's door* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), and *Apprentice to power* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966). Some other speeches, articles and publications by Darling include 'The Zeiss works, or what a factory should be', *The Irish Economist Quarterly Journal of Cooperative Thought and Progress*, 8, 3 (1923); 'Luigi Luzzatti', *The Bombay Cooperative Quarterly*, 5, 3 (1921); 'The *Cattedre Ambulanti* of Italy and the training of the peasant', *The Agricultural Journal of India*, 22, 4 (1927); 'The economic holding or the family farm', *The Agricultural Journal on India*, 22, 6 (1927); 'Presidential address', *Indian Journal of Economics*, 8, 30 (1928) pp. 477–96; 'Planner and peasant in India', *Yearbook of Agricultural Cooperation* (1958); 'Cooperation and India's second five year plan', *Review of International Cooperation*, 52, 1 (1959); *Report on certain aspects of the cooperative movement in India*, Government of India Planning Commission (New Delhi, 1957); 'Cooperation and the village community', *Review of International Cooperation*, 8, 9 (1952); 'The Indian peasant in the modern world', *The Asiatic Review*, 38, 133 (1942); 'All India rural credit survey', *International Cooperative Alliance Review*, June (1955); Presidential address of Mr M. L. Darling, Financial Commissioner Punjab, delivered at the 21st Session of the UP Cooperative Conference held at Lucknow on 30–31 January 1937; 'The Indian village and democracy', *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts*, 91, 4645 (1943); 'Cooperative farming in Italy', *Yearbook of Agricultural Cooperation* (1953); Presidential address by Sir Malcolm Darling: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, Delhi, Feb. 24th and 25th 1940.

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was viewed with suspicion by his colleagues for his congenial attitude and deep friendships with Indians. These suspicions intensified in 1919 when, after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Malcolm Darling was one of the few serving colonial officers to criticize the killing of Indians. It is probable that the ill-will thus generated among the imperial administration unwittingly derailed what may have been as illustrious a career as that of his guardian. This also marked the point where Darling became passionately interested in collecting statistical evidence on peasant indebtedness and publishing his findings in various books, becoming the most prolific colonial officer writing on these issues.

Even after his retirement, Darling remained actively involved in various committees and commissions. He was invited to join a committee set up by the Colonial Office, Downing Street, on cooperation in the colonies in 1946, and he served successive three-year terms until 1959. In 1952–54, he was invited to join a mission of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to Pakistan, to study agricultural conditions. He remained convinced that cooperation could play a vital and transformative role in rural uplift. In 1956, he was sought by B. H. Farmer of the Ceylon Commission on matters relating to proprietary rights in Punjab. In 1960, he consulted for the Pakistan government. The Indian Planning Commission also sought his expertise for the technical cooperation scheme part of the Colombo Plan of 1956.[5]

Malcolm Darling's lasting contribution remains his lifelike studies of the Punjabi peasant, and his notes, diaries, and publications reveal the underlying attitude towards the peasant's predicament. Cooperation was the preferred official response to peasant indebtedness in early twentieth-century Punjab, as it was a convenient solution that did not demand resources from official coffers or blame the state for oppressive rural conditions. It also accommodated differing reactions within the colonial bureaucracy to rural uplift: some viewed it as a vessel for imposing their vision of the 'good life' on the peasant, for example Frank Brayne approached the problem of rural backwardness with a missionary impulse to civilize the peasant. Darling treated it as an intellectual problem, admitting no simple solution, even as he promoted the cause of cooperation. In this Darling foreshadowed

[5] See relevant paperwork for these assignments in Malcolm Darling Papers, Boxes 3:6, 6:1 and 6:2.

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development thought later in the twentieth century that continues to be in a state of 'learning' and still devising the solution to poverty.

Darling's approach differed from the dogmatic or paternalist policy of officers like Brayne, and even as he advocated the adoption of cooperation on a wide scale, he remained cautious and willing to reconsider his opinions. At a speech delivered at the 21st session of the UP Cooperative Conference in 1937, he said: 'we must feel for the peasant, for without feeling there can be no understanding, and if we do not understand him, we shall certainly mislead him, and also ourselves'.[6] He was also aware of the slow pace and rigidity of rural life in India, and fully conscious of the long period of sustained effort needed to dismantle some of the entrenched exploitative relationships in the countryside. In the same speech, he said:

> Great patience is needed and patience is at present an unfashionable virtue. Five year plans are popular enough but who is prepared to support a 25-year plan? Yet this is the very least that is needed to build up the habits of mind and character which are the only sure foundation for a system of cheap and abundant credit.[7]

Statements such as these indicated not only that the root cause, according to Darling, was the peasant's own faulty habits but also that no structural or bureaucratic change was deemed necessary to improve rural conditions.

In a later article on the Indian peasant, Darling discussed the essentials of village life in India:

> the motto of the modern world might be—God proposes, man disposes. With the Indian peasant man hardly even proposes ... All this illustrates some of the most characteristic traits of village life in India: its essential kindness, its great hospitality, its quarrels, its absence of privacy, its interest in religion, its superstitions, its readiness to follow good examples, its naivety and finally—what trick must I play? So many tricks have been played upon the peasant since Joseph made the Egyptian peasant give up his land and cattle for bread that no wonder the peasant has been forced to resort to tricks in return. But the chief moral is his response to selfless devotion.[8]

[6] Presidential Address of Mr M.L. Darling Financial Commissioner Punjab, delivered at the 21st session of the UP Cooperative Conference held at Lucknow, 30–31 January 1937, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 1, p. 23.

[7] Ibid., p. 19.

[8] Malcolm Darling, 'The Indian peasant and the modern world', *The Asiatic Review*, XXXVIII, 133 (1942), p. 48.

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So, while retaining a friendly and sympathetic attitude towards the peasantry, the official position also remained one of calculated observation: to ensure that matters did not worsen to the point of rebellion or unrest, while at the same time peddling the dogma of cooperation and self-help as the solutions to poverty.

Darling felt that the Indian peasant was essentially apolitical and strongly influenced by his religious world view. In an article titled 'The Peasant Strength of India', he wrote:

> Man, said Aristotle, is a political animal. This may be true of urban man, perhaps even of western man, but it certainly is not true of the Indian peasant. On the contrary, he is essentially a non-political animal. He has always 'let the legions thunder past' and plunged into work again – the work of wrestling for daily bread with a despotic and capricious nature. But great changes are taking place. His life is no longer bounded by the distance that a horse or a bullock-cart or a small donkey will take him in a day.[9]

During his presidential address at a conference of agricultural economics in 1940, he echoed these sentiments and further let slip a sense of superiority expected from a colonial officer, however sympathetic: 'If however the Indian peasant is illiterate he is certainly not deaf and not always dumb.'[10]

In a letter written to a relative, in 1933, Darling mentioned his conversations with junior officers as well as some observations on the peasant. He wrote:

> When we approach the village, if we have been brought up in the town or in the school of commercial and industrial economics, we must divest ourselves of our urban notions and realise that, in India at least, the village is of greater importance than the town and far more acceptable to the bulk of its people. As a Punjabi put it: 'In the village there is simplicity and good fellowship, and one lives with one's brotherhood. In the town only the police and the fire brigade look after you, neighbours do not come to your marriages, and when you die only the doctor knows'. ... let no one therefore approach the village in a spirit of superiority as so many do. Let us rather approach it in the spirit of those who feel that they have at least as much to learn as to teach, and for my part I believe that the town had more to learn from the village than the village from the town.[11]

[9] Malcolm Darling, 'The peasant strength of India', *Asia* (March 1941), p. 119.

[10] Presidential Address Sir Malcolm Darling: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics held at Delhi, Feb. 24th and 25th 1940, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 1, p. 8.

[11] Malcolm Darling to Alice Darling, 22 February 1933, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 1:16.

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While colonial officers varied in their views on how the peasant's lifestyle could be changed, most of them shared the idea that such change was necessary. Henry Calvert, another officer at the forefront of the cooperative movement, wrote:

> no substantial improvement in agriculture can be effected unless the cultivator has the will to achieve a better standard of living and the capacity in terms of mental equipment and of physical health, to take advantage of the opportunities which science, wise laws and good administration may place at his disposal. Of all the factors making for prosperous agriculture, by far the most important is the outlook of the peasant himself.[12]

He goes on to describe various aspects of the peasant's life that need reform, including religion: 'the Punjab is poor because it is not organised on the lines that lead to wealth. Such organization as has existed has been more or less military, designed to preserve in power the dynasty of the day or religious.'[13]

In one of his books, *Rusticus Loquitur*, Darling discusses the necessity of reforming the habits of the peasant, while framing it in the colonial belief that some castes were superior to others:

> The very word credit implies character and where it does not exist, it is as demoralizing to borrow as it is dangerous to lend. This is the difficulty in depressed districts like Muzaffargarh and Gurgaon. On the one hand, the peasant cannot shake off the yoke of the moneylender without money; on the other, he cannot be trusted voluntarily to repay the smallest sums. Even small sums, therefore, can only be advanced when close supervision is possible. It is safe to say that had the Punjab peasant everywhere the character and intelligence of the peasant in Jullundur, he could be advanced twice as much as can safely be given at present. The money is there, or could probably be found, but character and intelligence in sufficient degree are lacking ... To build up the character of the peasant and develop his intelligence is therefore indispensable to the cure of his financial ills, and once this is done money will flow freely enough into the village.[14]

These examples indicate the firm belief of the officers engaged in rural reconstruction that it was the peasant's world view and habits that were the root causes of his financial ills. Such an approach automatically dropped the state and political elites from the equation, which fulfilled the overarching imperial need to maintain stability in the province.

[12] H. Calvert, *The wealth and welfare of the Punjab: Being some studies in Punjab rural economics* (Lahore, 1936), p. 55.
[13] Ibid., pp. 368–70.
[14] Darling, *Rusticus Loquitur*, p. 4.

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Possibly due to his scholarly disposition, Darling never became a passionate social reformer like some other British officials of the time, including F. L. Brayne. Fired by a religious Evangelical streak, Brayne was the architect of the Gurgaon Experiment in Punjab, which was intended to reform the 700,000 residents of the Gurgaon district near Delhi into industrious and frugal workers. Brayne designed pamphlets for sanitation and hygiene, devoted himself to long hours and ambitious projects and single-mindedly blamed the poor for their condition: 'Mr Brayne told the agriculturists in the plainest of language, without any beating about the bush, where their defects lay. He told them they were poor because they were extravagant and wasteful'.[15] F. L. Brayne was a front runner in the cooperative movement in Punjab as well as a pioneer of what became generally known as 'rural reconstruction'. The term Brayne preferred to use was 'village uplift'. Like Darling, Brayne wrote a series of books and pamphlets popularizing his ideas, though his work was more missionary in approach and less intellectual in its treatment of rural problems.[16] Towards the end of his 40 years' service, he joined the Indian Army and attempted to implement his ideas among the sepoys on how to improve their homes and villages. In a note on the development of Gurgaon, Brayne summarized his thoughts as follows:

> Development therefore means first and foremost uplift. Teaching the people how to spend their money, how to clean their homes and villages, how to make their homes healthy and comfortable, how to avoid ill health and epidemics, how to bring up their girls and boys in health and cleanliness, how to educate them and how to lead happy, healthy and rational lives.[17]

Brayne focused more on popularizing his remedy for rural reconstruction and had no ambiguity about what needed to be done: his approach was motivated by a religious zeal and a sense of authority which focused less on producing academic monographs and more on practical actions and endeavours to improve rural conditions. Brayne would emerge as a pioneer of community development, and in a

[15] Punjab Information Bureau, *Rural Uplift in Gurgaon* (Lahore: Government of Punjab, 1928).

[16] On missionary activity in colonial India related to economic development see Gary R. Hess, 'American agricultural missionaries and efforts at economic improvement in India', *Agricultural History*, 42, 1 (1968), 23–34.

[17] Note on Gurgaon development, London, British Library, Brayne Papers, MSS Eur F152/29.

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discussion in *Vilayatpur*, a book focusing on a Punjabi village by Tom Kessinger, the author writes:

> A deputy commissioner in several districts in Punjab, Brayne used the power of his office to implement schemes for rural uplift including the construction of manure pits, latrines, chimneys on fireplaces, and the like. Brayne considered villagers lazy and unenlightened and sought to motivate them to self-improvement through propaganda and strict supervision. Malcolm Darling another British civil servant familiar with rural conditions was critical of Brayne's characterization of villagers and his methods because he did not involve local residents in his schemes.[18]

Referring to Brayne, Gandhi wrote to Mahadev Desai, in November 1929, 'That man's zeal amazes me', and in Brayne's own writings, the solutions were clear: 'What has uplifted rural England? The lamp of culture was kept alight, the example set to others, and the work started by the selfless work of the country parson'.[19]

However, even an individual like Brayne, who was self-motivated and energetic and enjoyed a moderate degree of influence, felt the implacable character of the imperial state. Even in the short run, Brayne's efforts proved worthless and were criticized generally. Gandhi described the programme in Gurgaon as follows: 'The Gurgaon Experiment must be pronounced virtually a failure. The reform was superimposed from without. Mr Brayne put as much pressure as he could upon his subordinates and upon the people themselves, but the conviction so essential to success was lacking'.[20] Brayne also met with a high degree of bureaucratic opposition, which is discussed later in the article.

Malcolm Darling's approach to the problem of rural poverty was quite different from Brayne's. Driven by an academic interest in the problem and a natural reticence to prescribe and impose, he encouraged the growth of the cooperative movement in the province as the way to provide peasants with cheap credit and provide an alternate source of finance to them, freeing them from oppressive contracts with local moneylenders. Like Brayne, Darling was convinced that it was not merely an economic problem that had to be solved but a moral or spiritual one—one which necessitated sustained,

[18] Tom Kessinger, *Vilayatpur* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 133.
[19] F. L. Brayne, *The Remaking of Village India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).
[20] Mahatma Gandhi, 'Village Improvement', *Young India*, 14 November 1929.

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long-term commitment from the state. And so, the cooperatives set up in Punjab were more than economic entities. C. F. Strickland referred to the peculiar nature of these cooperatives as follows: 'Cooperative societies for economical purposes are familiar throughout the world; the peculiarity of Punjab movement is the formation of moral societies'.[21] However, this reticence on the part of Darling also meant that there was inadequate official interest to eradicate indebtedness. Instead Darling was content to make it the subject of scholarship and academic discourse. Both the cooperative movement and the community development schemes championed by Brayne and Darling were precursors to similar initiatives in the post-colonial context. However, the links of these programmes with colonialism have not been studied closely. The following section discusses the colonial interventions in detail and the reasons for their failure, some of which can be extrapolated to the post-colonial context as well.

Indebtedness and cooperation in Punjab

> If history shows anything, it is that there's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt—above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who's doing something wrong.[22]

No rural problem in colonial Punjab preoccupied the official imagination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries like peasant indebtedness. Whether it was the high priests of officialdom in the nineteenth century, who viewed it as an inevitable phase in the monetization and liberalization of the Punjabi economy, or the passionate junior officials who were moved by the plight of the landless peasantry to petition for remedial legislation, peasant indebtedness remained a burning policy issue throughout colonial rule in the province. Despite this, there was little success in combating the scourge of indebtedness. Even after the passage of the landmark Punjab Alienation of Land Act in 1900, senior officials remained reluctant to endorse an active role for the state in alleviating indebtedness. Indeed, the Act itself can be considered less as an instrument benefiting the peasantry and more in line

[21] C. F. Strickland, 'The spread of cooperation in the Punjab', *Agricultural Journal of India* (1918).

[22] David Graeber, *Debt: The first 5,000 years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), p. 5.

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with the interests of large landlords in the province. However, the early twentieth century witnessed an outpouring of reforms championed by junior officials. At the same time local politicians, particularly those belonging to the Unionist Party, introduced a series of laws aimed at curbing indebtedness. Both types of reform, the legal institutional changes ushered in by the politicians and the microeconomic community-based movement favoured by the state, were predicated on varying conceptions of what caused indebtedness and what could be done to alleviate it.

Carrying out a detailed statistical survey of thousands of proprietors, Darling discovered that only a mere 17 per cent of peasant proprietors were free from debt in 1918–19, a figure that had reduced to 13 per cent by 1930. Average debt per proprietor in the first survey was Rs 463 in 1919 and Rs 600 in 1930. In 1921, the total agricultural debt was Rs 90 crores (£60 million), which was 15.5 times the amount collected in land revenue. The figure increased to Rs 120 crores by 1930 and total agricultural debt stood at Rs 140 crores (£105 million) which was 22.5 times the land revenue.[23] The system of land revenue, so painstakingly grafted by the British, continued to be beset with inefficiencies and widespread corruption, well in to the twentieth century. Simultaneously, the issue of peasant indebtedness and landlessness aggravated over time. Punjab was also more indebted than other parts of India. The surveys of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee in 1929–30 found that 87 per cent of proprietors in Punjab were indebted compared to 54 per cent in UP, 50–65 per cent in Bihar and Orissa and 59 per cent in the Central Provinces.[24]

Darling was one of the strongest proponents of the cooperative movement in Punjab as a means of social and economic uplift, and he made a thorough study of cooperation in other parts of the world to devise mechanisms most suited to the local context. He was closely associated with the cooperative movement in the province, which started in 1905 with the setting up of the first cooperative credit society. In 1947, when the British exited India, there were 170,000 societies with 9 million members. However, this amounted to less than 15 per cent of the population of the country. The movement was most entrenched in Bombay, Madras, and Punjab. Darling's private papers contain a wealth of information on the movement in the province

[23] Darling, *The Punjab peasant*, p. 5.

[24] *The Punjab Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee report, 1929–30*, Chapter IV, Cambridge, Cambridge University Library.

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and all over the world. His own interest in the subject started at Cambridge, under the influence of Alfred Marshall, the economist, who viewed cooperation as the only means of reducing inequality. Darling was well acquainted with Marshall's pupils as well, including Pigou, Keynes, and Fay;[25] the latter also visited him in Punjab to examine cooperation there. Over the years, Darling became a global authority on cooperation, touring and consulting in various countries in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia. He met other experts and intellectuals, including the Italian prime minister Luigi Luzzatti, who had started the first cooperative bank in Italy, the Banca Popolare or People's Bank of Milan.[26]

The cooperative movement in Punjab started with the village Thrift and Credit society based on the German Raiffesian model that Darling championed—there was unlimited liability, no immediate disbursement of profits, and operations were restricted to one village. His connection with the movement in Punjab began in 1915, when he started a central cooperative bank in a district. Darling believed the Raiffesian model was essential to break the power of the moneylender:

> our first object was to free the peasant from the stranglehold of the moneylender—to give him economic freedom rather than raise his standard of living. The moneylender had existed in India from time immemorial, *but until the British came he had been the servant, and not the master of the village*. With the introduction of the rule of law, the positions were reversed and bonds signed in their ignorance by an illiterate peasantry became a millstone round their necks. By 1900 it could be truly said that the vast majority of peasants were born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt. An enquiry made 18 years later showed that nearly 80 per cent of the peasant proprietors of the Punjab were in debt ... Compound interest was particularly insidious in its effects. At 25 per cent, a very general rate, a debt will double in less than 3.5 years and at 60 per cent, a not impossible rate, a debt of £1, as Professor Marshall once pointed out, will become £100 in 8 years.[27]

Initially the cooperative societies were viewed with suspicion by the villagers, and Darling recounted that they felt this was a device by the government to take away their money. He mentioned a particular instance of this in a 'remote upland village':

[25] All three succeeded Marshall in teaching Economics or Economic History at Cambridge. See a discussion in Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian attitudes: The mind of the Indian civil service* (London: Hambledon, 1993), p. 140.

[26] See details in Darling, 'Luigi Luzzatti'.

[27] Notes written by Darling, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 1.

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There was no hospital, school or post office within ten miles, but many moneylenders. No one had the least idea what was meant by a village bank – some dodge they thought of governments to take hold of their land and cash. What would government's share of the profits be? I was asked. They looked at me incredulously when I said – none.[28]

Darling also discussed the difficulty in spreading cooperation among an illiterate peasantry. But he chose to take an optimistic view of the situation, considering that cooperation would lead to better financial management and later autonomy:

it was not the least advantage of a thrift and credit society, or village bank as we called it, that it did something to educate its members in the use of money and in the management of their own affairs. In this way it was capable of becoming the foundation of self government in the country as a whole.[29]

It seemed the entire brunt of welfare policy in Punjab would be soaked by the idea of cooperation. Yet it can be wondered why an experienced officer like Darling felt it would be so transformative without any structural change in the truly exploitative relationships otherwise continuing in the villages for example between landlord and serf, *patwari* and cultivator, judge and petitioner, etc. And not all cooperative societies were performing well, as Darling acknowledged:

There were bad societies as well as good. Take for instance this society formed of only 10 members, some rich, some poor. On paper everything smiled: in 10 years a capital of over £2000 has been accumulated. The rich president and his family had invested £900 in shares. But they had borrowed £1350, what was worse they had encouraged the poorer members to borrow too, and when they didn't repay, they bought in their lands.[30]

The failure of the movement, however, was in part blamed on nature and the temperament of the peasant, in a manner characteristic of the colonial officer using caste stereotypes to understand the locals. Darling wrote:

For the peasant it must be admitted that his difficulties were often overwhelming. A hot climate does not make for energy, and generations of despotic government do not make for self-reliance. These two factors alone are sufficient to account for the fatalism of the East; but there is a third which makes fatalism almost inevitable – a devastating nature, very different from the capricious goddess who rules over us here, destroying crops wholesale by

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

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drought or flood and man and beast by disease. In addition there is caste with all its restrictive taboos. Let me take the 10 defaulters in a society I saw many years ago. The first had lost all its cattle and was working as a coolie, the second had taken a lease at too high a rent, the third had repaid his moneylender and had nothing left for the bank; the fourth was a minor, the fifth had too large a family; the sixth was down with fever; the seventh was the victim of a cheating contractor, the 8th went mad and was in an asylum; the 9th lost half a dozen members of his family from plague and cheered himself by spending £75 on marrying two of the survivors. Finally the 10th admittedly frankly that he had been idle for two years.[31]

But somewhere in between the misplaced enthusiasm and glorified hopes associated with cooperation were buried stories of individual endeavour, and it is to Darling's credit that he sought to engage with many different peasants, society managers, inspectors, and landlords to gain a real sense of the impact of the movement. He mentioned the difficulties of finding worthy leadership among the peasants and then wrote:

It is rare to find a good society in the Indian village without a good leader. The example I gave was a case in point, and in the case of the upland village nothing would have resulted had not an intelligent and public-spirited Brahmin been present at the meeting. What good leadership can do is shown by another Punjabi. Allah Rakha as he was called, inherited only 3.5 acres from his father but by dint of hard work and thrift, he was able in time to buy another 12 acres. He then became headman of his village and it was at the very moment when the cooperative movement started and he became interested in it. He got together 9 of his neighbours who all agreed to form a society but when the time came to pay their shares, they all ratted. Undeterred, he got together nine more on a promise that he would pay up their shares for them; he also offered to deposit with the society a mortgage loan of £23 which he had just been repaid. And so the bank was launched. But this was only the beginning. The mornings he spent on his land, but after the midday meal when others took their rest, he went about preaching the gospel of cooperation. 'cooperation has cast a spell on him' was his neighbours' comment. The result was the birth of societies grouped together in a banking union, with deposits when I saw it, of over £7000, and within a 5 mile radius of his village, 85 per cent of the householders had become cooperators. But, alas, such men are rare anywhere.[32]

Such descriptions and details are reminiscent of accounts of projects of community development in South Asia in the 1950s and 60s, where the struggles of individuals and households were deified as success

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

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stories. Just as community development projects transitioned into a nationwide movement in the 1960s, the cooperative movement also spread to urban areas with the establishment of urban credit societies. There was tremendous opportunity for this as rapid urbanization had meant many towns did not have any banks at all. Darling mentioned that, in India by the 1930s, such urban societies numbered 650 with nearly 2 million members

> and a working capital of £30 million as against £18 million in agricultural credit societies. There were over 4,000 industrial societies for weavers, carpenters, potters tanners and suchlike. All these societies deal primarily in short term credit. For long-term credit there are 260 cooperative land mortgage banks.[33]

Perhaps most interesting are the notes from his tours around various villages and his conversations with peasants. Often these presented a different picture than the official account and statistic; for example, in 1930–31, while touring the Shahpur district, Darling had the following exchange:

> The president of the thrift society thought that the Rural Community council was doing some good, and said that the number of improved implements in the village had increased owing to its propaganda; but when I asked one of the best type of zamindars who had attended a meeting at Bhalwal what he had heard at it, he said he remembered nothing.[34]

Darling continued to support the cooperative movement in his retirement, and in his account of a conference on agricultural cooperation he remarked 'what was most impressive was the conviction of all present, repeatedly expressed, that for the farmer, whether in Europe, Asia, Africa or America there could be no improvement in welfare without cooperation'.[35]

Darling charted the evolution of cooperative credit societies from financial entities designed to 'free the peasant from the stranglehold of the moneylender' to Better Living societies to free him from the stranglehold of custom. He wrote:

> We began to realise this when we saw how often loans were being made in our societies for marriage and other social ceremonies, loans that could

[33] Ibid.
[34] Darling's Diary 1930–31, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 2:1, p. 31.
[35] Malcolm Darling, 'Report on the Commonwealth conference on agricultural cooperation at Oxford—July 23 to 28, 1951', *The Asiatic Review*, XXXVIII, 133 (1942), p. 2.

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only be classed as unproductive. Enquiry showed that few spent less than a whole year's income on the marriage of a son or daughter, often much more, and a great part of it had generally to be borrowed. Custom made the expenditure inescapable and such is its force in the East that no one can afford to break with it unless his neighbours agree to do the same too. Societies had therefore to be formed for the purpose ... By 1947 over 2000 Better Living societies had been formed in the Punjab, primarily to reduce expenditure on social ceremonial to reasonable limits but ultimately to provide villages with better conditions of life. Extremely varied were their activities, touching education, sanitation, ventilation, the improvement of drinking wells, the deepening of village tanks, and the repair of temple and mosque, occasionally even the provision of a small library. One society, which consisted solely of untouchables, had only two rules – one that members should brush their teeth once a day, and the other that they should wash themselves once a week. Before they formed their society they were unapproachable to anyone with a nose, but when I inspected them we sat almost cheek by jowl without the slightest inconvenience on my side.[36]

Interestingly, despite his close observance of rural conditions, Darling bought into the prevalent colonial discourse of the peasant suffering from debt due to his indebtedness. An obsession with cooperation as the tool to reform the peasant's habits and financial dealings aided this perception. Nowhere does Darling question the land revenue demand or taxation, or the role of privileging the military, the landlords, and the bureaucracy in Punjab. The monetization of the economy and the sudden vulnerability of the peasant to international grain prices also do not figure into his analyses, and he is instead content with an increasingly specialized treatment of cooperation as it sprouted into many societies with multifarious aims. The only real anxiety that keeps surfacing is the thought that increased cooperation may fan communist sentiment in the province, and Darling is noticeably perturbed by the thought. In an account of the development of cooperation in his notes, he writes: 'One must remember too that without cooperation all along the line the Indian peasant cannot hope to obtain any large measure of economic freedom. The only alternative is Communism, but at what a price!'.[37]

It is important to note that Darling's faith in cooperation was shared not only among others in the civil service but also by local activists and thinkers. Darling's ideas were not dissimilar to initiatives promoted later by the Gokhale Institute for instance, or Rabindranath Tagore in

[36] Notes by Darling, Box 1.
[37] Ibid.

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the Bengal.[38] The micro approach, focusing on individual households and villages, would also later become the hallmark of the community development movement.

Both Darling and Brayne faced official opposition to their schemes for rural improvement, in part responsible for the overall failure of the cooperative movement. The Brayne papers catalogue some of the bureaucratic obstacles and steady official opposition to his schemes of rural uplift. While giving evidence before the Royal Commission of Agriculture in 1927, Brayne said:

> First I would insist with all my power that no improvement of agriculture is of any use whatever without uplift ... Government is so entangled and obsessed with paper work that the percentage of gazette officers able to visit the villages themselves and gain any first hand knowledge and experience of actual rural conditions is infinitesimally small. To show the immense difficulties in the way of rural uplift and development I may give the case of Gurgaon district. For six years I have been struggling by every means in my power, by official, demi-official and private correspondence, by interviews, with officials and ministers, by the front door and by the back door, by the good officers of members of council and with the help of the press, and I may say that as far as getting official recognition of the necessity for developing the district and for getting Government help for uplifting the people I have cut extremely little ice in return for many years of overwork. I sent up a development scheme in 1922 and again in 1926 and yet again in 1926 I asked for instruction to submit a scheme for a party of the district rapidly becoming depopulated from continued neglect. The first and the last Government refused to contemplate and the second has, I believe, been pigeonholed. Six years is an exceptional period for any official to stay in a district and if so little can be done with Government in six years you can imagine how little those with local knowledge can ever hope to effect'.[39]

He further said:

> The attitude of Government towards the proposals of local officers is not always that of sympathy and support. The work is all centralized, the central offices are overworked, local schemes increase work and are, therefore, likely to be unpopular ... A great obstacle to progress is the rapid transfers of the Deputy Commissioner's assistants, often with complete disregard of the Deputy Commissioner's wishes and the work in hand. As soon as the Deputy Commissioner has trained an assistant for his uplift campaign he may be

[38] See Prem Chand Lal, *Reconstruction and education in rural India in the light of the programme carried on at Sriniketan, the Institute of rural reconstruction, founded by Rabindranath Tagore* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1932) for a discussion.

[39] Evidence of Mr F. L. Brayne, Deputy Commissioner Gurgaon before the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 22 February 1927, London, British Library, Brayne Papers, MSS Eur F152/29.

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immediately moved elsewhere and the result is the Deputy Commissioner's work is continually being spoilt in a most disheartening manner.[40]

A most graphic illustration of the opposition from fellow officers can be seen in Brayne's correspondence with F. Wace, registrar of cooperative societies in Punjab in 1935. On a note from Brayne on hygienic defecation as part of a village uplift scheme, Wace pencilled in the comment 'Need one have so much on defecation?'. Brayne wrote a passionate three-page letter in response describing why he considered the matter important from the point of view of hygiene and self-dignity. He concluded the letter by saying: 'I have answered your question. In return will you now have the gist of it tactfully put into Urdu and published in your cooperation magazine?' Wace replied: 'My dear Brayne, I call this too sweet. But if you want to exhibit the national bottom to cooperators I don't see why I should have the task of wiping it first. Personally I should send it to the poetry review and call it "A Rhapsody on Shit"'.[41] The difficulties were financial as well as attitudinal. In December 1939, Brayne's request for a development loan was turned down with the comment that 'a development loan during the war is an impossibility'.[42]

Darling faced similar difficulties while conducting his tours through rural Punjab. When he wanted to tour India in 1946–47 on horseback to study conditions before the British left, the government of India refused to give him two horses to conduct the village tour, despite his repeated pleas even to the viceroy's office.[43] Some of his policy recommendations were also ignored. In 1942, towards the end of the Second World War, Darling suggested Britain repay its debt to India, a suggestion unlikely to appeal to the government:

> I have one more suggestion to make. During the last war India offered Britain a gift of £100 millions towards the cost of the war and I understand that £70 millions were actually paid. It would be a graceful gesture if at the end of this war Britain were to give India 100 crores – that is £75 millions – as a thank you offering for her assistance to us during the war ... I suggest further that the gift should be separately funded, perhaps on the lines of the Indian Famine Fund, and that the annual interest, which be in the neighbourhood

[40] Ibid.

[41] 'Difficulties', London, British Library, Brayne Papers, MSS Eur F152/41.

[42] Punjab Civil Secretariat to Mohd Afzal Khan, PCS, Publicity Officer, Rural Reconstruction dept. Lahore, 29 December 1939, London, British Library, Brayne Papers, MSS Eur F152/41.

[43] Darling to Viceroy's office, 1946–47, Cambridge, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 2:8.

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of three crores, should be handed over to the Provincial Governments in proportion to population for expenditure on schemes for improving the lot of the Indian peasant.[44]

Post-colonial connections

Ideas of rural reconstruction or cooperation did not pass away with colonial rule but endured in South Asia under new nomenclature and frameworks. While programmes of community development funded by the Americans took root in both India and Pakistan from the 1950s onwards, there was little recognition of the earlier colonial flirtation with similar ideas. Instead, community development was presented as a novel way of eradicating 'third world poverty', and it continues to be recast in various deifications of the local as an 'innovative' cure for underdevelopment. This ahistorical persistence of ideas of community is neither accidental nor benign: at the heart of all valorization of 'grassroots' development is an abdication of responsibility at the structural level and a transfer of blame to the poor. Much like the colonial schemes of rural uplift, the community development programmes are also premised on self-help and a fundamental criticism of the outlook and habits of the peasant or citizen as the root cause of indebtedness or poverty.

Both India and Pakistan embarked on large-scale community development programmes in the 1950s and 1960s, with the financial support of the United States. By 1954, the United States had established a community development division within its foreign aid agency and by 1956, this department was providing financial and personnel help to 47 community development programmes in 23 countries.[45] In some ways, these programmes built on the earlier colonial experiments in rural reconstruction, though without acknowledging this historical precedent. In both countries, the programmes met with ultimate failure, rather like the colonial case. Furthermore, just like the forgotten colonial experiments, the community development movements of the 1950s and 1960s remain largely forgotten as, for India and Pakistan, the period is remembered as the era of Nehruvian planning and dam-building and Ayub's rapid

[44] Darling, 'The Indian peasant in the modern world', pp. 49–65.

[45] Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking small: The United States and the lure of community development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 3.

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industrialization and the green revolution respectively. This amnesia regarding the failure of community development programmes or the earlier colonial version, allows the approaches to retain a tenacity and legitimacy as an answer to underdevelopment that they ill-deserve.

However, even the failed programmes of the 1950s and 1960s do not represent the finale. Ideas of community-based development including microfinance continue to remain popular to this day as antidotes to poverty. Between 2004 and 2014, the World Bank spent around $85 billion dollars on community-based or community-driven development.[46] With its faith in local cultures and a suspicion of the regulatory state, such ideas appeal to both the right and the left. The lack of historical memory of previous attempts at community development and their failure is a major reason why there remains a therapeutic aura around such programmes.[47] Brayne and Darling were emphasizing rural uplift or rural reconstruction in the 1930s, and at the time 'their activity was regarded by higher authority as a heresy practiced by crazy district officers'.[48] In other quarters, the efforts were seen as revolutionary and inspirational.[49] Brayne's Gurgaon experiment was highly localized and intensive, and also ultimately unsuccessful. It was based fundamentally on the idea that the peasant's world view and habits needed to be reformed.[50]

In India, the community development programme began on 2 October 1952: Gandhi's birthday. The programme started as a pilot in Etawah, Uttar Pradesh in 1947 and, after its perceived success, was scaled to the national level.[51] It was funded by the United States and initially covered 16,500 villages. Within a decade it expanded to 446,000 villages (253.2 million inhabitants) all over India under what came known as *panchayat raj*. By 1965, it covered every village in

[46] Ibid., p. 13.

[47] For a critical appraisal of rural development approaches in general, see S. H. Deshpande, 'All-Sided Approach to rural development: How valid is it?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3, 16 (1968), pp. 638–43 and John Harriss (ed.) *Rural development, Theories of peasant economy and agrarian change* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

[48] Hugh Tinker, 'Authority and community in village India', *Pacific Affairs*, 32, 4 (1959), pp. 354–75.

[49] See the review of Brayne's books by H. R. C. Hailey, 'Review', *The Economic Journal*, 40, 157 (1930), pp. 136–7.

[50] B. B. Mukherjee, 'Brayne's Gurgaon experiment: Rural welfare in India', *Social Forces*, 8, 2 (1929), pp. 253–4.

[51] Walter C. Neale, 'Indian community development, local government, local planning, and rural policy since 1950', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 33, 4 (1985), p. 677.

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India (in terms of population this equalled over ten per cent of the world's population).[52] In Pakistan, the movement started a bit later, in 1953, under the Village-AID programme, again through funding from American foreign aid agencies.[53]

Even as Nehru emerged as the champion of dams and large-scale planning, he placed community development at the centre of a campaign called 'democratic decentralization' to counter the centralizing process. *Panchayat raj*, which was the nationwide successor of the Etawah project, was thus based on village councils, local elections, and devolution. Nehru termed community development as by 'far the most revolutionary thing we have undertaken',[54] and the 'the dynamo providing the motive force'[55] of the first five-year plan.

In Pakistan, the Village-AID (Village Agricultural and Industrial Programme) was launched also with American financial support in 1953, and later followed by the West Pakistan Rural Works Programme under the Ayub regime in the 1960s.[56] The Village-AID programme was described in the first five-year plan (1955–60) as follows: 'The Village-AID programme is of crucial importance as the means for bringing better living standards and a new spirit of hope (and) confidence to the villagers where, according to the 1951 census, 90 per cent of the people of the country live'.[57]

Meanwhile the cooperative movement in Punjab also persisted in the post-colonial era. In March 1948, the Government of Pakistan decided to launch a scheme to popularize agriculture on cooperative lines, starting with the most favourable areas. For this purpose the Thal colony, a new canal colony in Punjab where ex-service men and refugees from India were resettled, was selected. Cooperative societies were established in the Multan district, as well, and in all over 200 cooperative farming societies were formed, with members totalling 11,765 families.[58]

Despite the rhetoric and patronage of the programmes at the highest levels, community development programmes in both India and

[52] Immerwahr, *Thinking small*, p. 78.
[53] Shoaib Sultan Khan, *Rural Development in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980), p. 2.
[54] Immerwahr, *Thinking small*, p. 10.
[55] Ibid., p. 82.
[56] See a summary of rural development in Pakistan in Khwaja Amjad Saeed, *The Economy of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 48–51.
[57] Government of Pakistan, *First Five Year Plan, National Planning Board* (Karachi, 1957), p. 16.
[58] A. K. Khalid, *The agrarian history of Pakistan* (Lahore: Allied Press, 1998), p. 283.

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Pakistan failed to achieve much. In India, they became a bureaucratic leviathan lacking genuine grassroots participation.[59] The final straw was Nehru's death in 1964. Nehru had been the foremost champion of community development, but his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri directed the community developers to focus exclusively on increasing agricultural production and, after him, Indira Gandhi brought the ministry of community development under the ministry of agriculture in 1966, further decreasing its importance and power. She slashed funding for the programme and the balance between centralization and decentralization that Nehru had tried to maintain instead gave way to authoritarianism under Indira Gandhi.

In Pakistan, as well, both the Village-AID and the Rural Works Programme ultimately failed to achieve much. Critics of the programme pointed out that

> It is one of the inner contradictions of the Community Development Programme that the people directing the programme represent the interests and classes which stand to lose their status, privilege and power if the programme succeeds. Today political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of the westernized elite and specially the government servants. Democratisation of society is bound to reduce this power and the advantages that accrue from it.[60]

The Village-AID programme had close similarities with Brayne's work in Gurgaon, in that the village worker was the outside agent acting as 'educator-organiser-planner-friend-philosopher-guide'.[61] Both the Village-AID and Rural Works programme were shelved due to a lack of results.

Aside from the immediate factors leading to the collapse of the community development programmes in India and Pakistan, several more general trends can be observed about the approach in general. Ideologically, community development programmes mirrored the colonial attempts at rural reconstruction, in that a foreign vision of improvement was implemented in the rural areas at an intimate level.

Another reason behind the failure of the community development programmes was the lack of political backing. In the Indian case, while the first five-year plan had openly advocated for the approach, the

[59] Immerwahr, *Thinking small*, p. 93.

[60] Masih-uz-Zaman, quoted in Jack D. Mezirow, *Dynamics of community development* (New York: Scarecrow, 1963), p. 149.

[61] Shahid Javed Burki, 'West Pakistan's rural works programme: A study in political and administrative Response', *Middle East Journal*, 23, 3 (1969), pp. 321–42.

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vision of the second plan was provided by P. C. Mahlanobis, a physicist and passionate modernizer. He believed that the development of heavy industry must be given paramount importance and wanted to emulate Soviet and Chinese styles of economic planning. In such a schema, community development automatically fell to the sidelines.

In Pakistan, the various tiers of bureaucratic machinery clashed over the implementation of the Village-AID and later the Rural Works programme. Post-1947, the Civil Service of Pakistan (the descendants of the ICS) was supplemented by various technical departments for agriculture, irrigation, power, etc., and the two strands of bureaucracy could not work amicably to implement the programme.[62] Rural development in the colonial case had been allowed to continue as long as it did not antagonize the local political elite—the main concern of the colonial bureaucracy was the maintenance of law and order. With independence, however, economic development itself became a primary aim of the government and the same complacency was no longer possible. Ayub Khan's regime openly sought to change the rural structure by introducing land reforms, but these were not well-implemented, and on the ground, with an ineffective bureaucratic machinery, the programme did not manage to effect real change. On the contrary, rural elites managed to enrich themselves through community development; for example, roads built under the programme benefited the wealthy.[63] In both India and Pakistan, none of the structural inequalities stemming from debt, patriarchy, and caste were challenged. In India, community councils were captured by village headmen, caste leaders, and landlords, and the *panchayat* councils had little say in the agenda to be implemented,[64] so much so that an in-depth study of the Indian community development programme by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal concluded that its net effect had been to 'create more, not less, inequality'.[65]

Post-colonial attempts at community development and cooperation inherited this fundamental assumption about the ultimate responsibility for poverty resting with the peasant. At the same time, community developers valorized the villager, instead of the

[62] For a detailed discussion, see ibid., pp. 321–42.

[63] This links back to scholarship on rural elites dominating the economy during the colonial period; see, for instance, D. A. Washbrook, 'Progress and problems: South Asian economic and social history c. 1720–1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 1 (1988), pp. 57–96.

[64] Neale, 'Indian community development', p. 680.

[65] Immerwahr, *Thinking small*, p. 11.

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modernist vision that saw large-scale planning as the panacea for underdevelopment. With ultimate blame for poverty also came the absolute faith that the peasant was the agent of sustained progress. Despite the rhetoric and heavy investment in nationwide community development programmes in India and Pakistan in the 1950s and 60s, the programme achieved little and had to be abandoned. What is curious, however, is the persistence in development studies of ideas of 'grassroots development', which are repeatedly seen as something new and innovative with no history. The latest among these cures, microfinance, is hailed as a revolutionary idea, and yet substantially it does not differ much from the state-sponsored cooperatives in Punjab in the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

On first arrival, if a (Civilian) is a man of generous disposition he feels indignant at the manner in which he finds the people of the country spoken of by some Europeans of longer standing in the country than himself. After a little, when he himself comes in close contact with the people, he is shocked by much of what he sees that he undergoes a revulsion of feeling, and if you meet him at that stage, you will probably find that he displays the very prejudices that so shocked him on his arrival. Meet him again a few years further on, and you will find that he has come at last to understand the actual position, to see that he is dealing with people of wholly different type from himself, who are better than him in some ways, worse than him in other ways, and (not) to be judged by the same standards.[66]

The official approach to indebtedness in Punjab remained one which held the peasant primarily responsible for his situation. In his diary for 1945, Malcolm Darling noted:

Cheap credit is a blessing to a rural population only where the average cultivator is possessed of the knowledge and strength of character required, to induce him on the one hand to limit his borrowing within the range of his capacity to repay, and on the other to apply the greater part of the borrowed money to sound productive purpose ... the solution of the problem of indebtedness is only to be found in the cumulative effect of the spread of literacy and in the cooperative movement ... Any permanent cure must touch the 'root problem' which is that the peasant doesn't understand the use of credit.[67]

[66] Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick, governor of Punjab, note dated 23 September 1893, quoted in Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes*, p. 199.

[67] Diary for November–December 1945, Malcolm Darling Papers, Box 2:7.

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Such a diagnosis is a convenient one for the colonial officer, as it absolves the state or government of any responsibility for the situation. In part, Darling shared the disappointment that F. L. Brayne had faced in his dealings with the resistant nature of the state. Whereas for Brayne it was official opposition that frustrated him the most, for Darling it was the peasant's own habits and decisions that continued to thwart attempts at sustained economic development. Writing to a fellow officer in the Punjab administration, Brayne wrote that

> Whatever ambition I ever had, has long evaporated. My wife and I have some reason to be bitter. We both want to do what we can to help the Punjabi make his villages brighter, but we both feel that we are up against such a solid block of official opposition that we are only busting ourselves in going on trying. What guarantees have I that my schemes will be received with less contempt than those I have been sending up for the last ten years? I worked to the bone in Gurgaon, but that did not help.[68]

Darling instead stressed the need for a long-term and consistent attention to the problem of rural poverty in a letter to Brayne in 1941: 'Twenty years ago, I believed in five year plans, ten years ago in twenty-five year plans; now I have sorrowfully come to the conclusion that what we need is a fifty year plan'.[69] The efforts were not completely futile retrospectively speaking, as the detailed statistical information and interviews collected during these years of reform in Punjabi villages are an invaluable resource for contemporary discussions on rural development in the wake of their continued popularity. Darling's intellectual journey also captures the freedom possessed by colonial officers in shaping policies and initiating projects in Punjab, while also showing the limited agency officers had due both to their own intellectual commitments and stonewalling by superior officers. In some ways, he is a precursor to the consultant or technocrat called in to advise on socioeconomic problems, preferably not by recommending any fundamental reordering of state or social structures but by presenting a magic pill such as cooperation. The strategy protects all existing entrenched interests while blaming the poor for their own lack of industry and discipline. It is interesting to find this parallel in a time of colonial rule and to observe its striking similarity to piecemeal recommendations for problems of underdevelopment. By

[68] Brayne to Hubert Calvert, 3 January 1933, quoted in Dewey, *Anglo-Indian attitudes*, p. 53.
[69] Darling to Brayne 3 September 1941, quoted in ibid., p. 80.

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making development a problem of the poor, in its causes and solutions, the elite and the state are absolved of any responsibility or action.

In the 1990s, Amitai Etizioni popularized ideas of communitarianism,[70] and later Hillary Clinton published *It Takes a Village* in 1996,[71] both espousing the virtues of developing local communities. Meanwhile the World Bank maintained an active interest in programmes of community development despite its own reports finding no evidence of success. After reviewing nearly 500 studies of participatory development and decentralization, Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, two leading economists at the World Bank, concluded that community-directed development had 'modest results, benefits that skewed significantly toward local elites and greater difficulty in encouraging the durable formation of egalitarian communities'.[72] The continued popularity of the community development approach is only possible within an ahistorical framework and a preference for maintaining structural continuity. By placing the blame on the poor, the rich are dropped from the equation and their role in creating or engendering poverty is ignored.

The same can be said of institutionalist approaches to development that also remain in vogue. By blaming an inherited colonial system and an impassive structure, the failure of development interventions is accepted and rationalized. And so both forms of discourse and prescription go hand in hand: community development or localized approaches blame the individual, institutionalist approaches blame the past. In neither case is a more nuanced understanding of the close connections and overlaps examined: development programmes and projects are incubated within the institutional and bureaucratic structure and implemented through it. The failure of cooperation and rural uplift programmes in colonial Punjab, in a period in which institutional structure was also being shaped, shows that instead of an opaque 'system', concrete causes such as paucity of funds, individual opposition, lack of political will, a flawed and limited ideological conception of reform can be identified. The failure of similar post-colonial initiatives may have more to do with the ideological assumptions and interests of the implementers in maintaining the status quo in power structures than in attributing the failure to a

[70] See for instance Amitai Etzioni, *The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities and the communitarian agenda* (New York: Crown, 1993).

[71] Hillary Clinton, *It takes a village* (New York, 1996).

[72] Immerwahr, *Thinking small*, p. 176.

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colonial past. The existence of community development during a period of colonial rule therefore challenges this bifurcation of blaming either history (in the case of institutionalist approaches) or individuals (in the case of community development.)

Furthermore, Punjab can be viewed as a site for microeconomic interventions in poverty reduction that catalysed a global movement towards community—one that ill-acknowledges its colonial roots and is instead generally seen as a postcolonial, US-sponsored drive. Additionally, with the emergence of colonial officials like Brayne and Darling, who sought to implement personalized visions of economic reform without any official directive to do so, a new class of technocrats or foreign experts was born: this also germinated in the interwar period and the incubating structures were well in place by then. Post-colonial states were thus birthed into a world thick with technocracy, and expert handmaidens ushered them into an era of technical assistance, foreign aid, community development, and the science of development economics. In the twenty-first century, the missionary faith of Brayne and the circumspect intellectualism of Darling may have been commercialized into theories and models applied to poor countries universally, but a backward glance at the trajectory of the ideas reveals little evolution. Current-day prescriptions of community building and microfinance as silver bullets for eradicating underdevelopment are not substantially different from the schemes of economic reform introduced in Punjab. Anchoring the ideas in space and time allows one to appreciate the colonial impact in development studies.

Finally, this account illustrates the limits to which colonial officers were willing to go in their reformist zeal. Darling, for instance, never attached any blame to extractive policies imposed by the government, including high revenue demands and the subjugation of rural interests to those of the military. His political convictions ensured that he remained opposed to communism, even as he admitted that cooperative efforts would have to be more large-scale to be effective. In this vein, the careers and memoirs of officers like Darling enable us to appreciate the limits of knowledge and power in the governance of colonial territories. In the first instance, the ideological convictions of officers constrain the diagnosis and interpretation of socio-economic problems, and even with the commissioning of more information or knowledge the impact of the most well-intentioned and well-planned reforms are limited by the degree of power vested in the bureaucrats implementing them. Often the very officers seeking

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to expand their understanding of the society were those divested of accomplishing any real change in the prevailing institutional arrangements – including Darling, who never became lieutenant governor and whose alma mater King's College, Cambridge, refused to host his funeral saying he was not important enough to merit the consideration.

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