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RESEARCH ARTICLE

British Punjab and the Dialectics of Primitive Accumulation

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Abstract

The article begins by understanding Karl Marx's theory of primitive accumulation (PA) as a historical process integrated by both internal and external components. Situating itself within the Marxist tradition that views PA as an originating, historical process that experienced closure by the end of the colonial period, it draws on history and theory to delineate how the external dimension of PA, British colonialism, unfolded in Punjab. Operating in cahoots with local actors, this colonial form of the "original sin" succeeded in subordinating the pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalism and established a new private property order as well as permanent agricultural settlements, using political, legal, ideological, and coercive means. It makes a distinctive contribution to the debates around PA by arguing that the external of PA (in British Punjab) differed radically from its internal (in England): the accumulation project involved mass sedentarization as opposed to mass expropriation. The article concludes by examining how the dialectics between dissolution and conservation form the dominant feature of colonialist PA in Punjab and how that can help us redefine PA in colonies.

The "So-called Primitive Accumulation", the last section of Karl Marx's *Capital I*, has been the subject of rich intellectual contention and continues to generate debate even today. On the one hand, there is a genealogy of thinkers including Rosa Luxemburg,[1] Peter Kropotkin,[2] David Harvey,[3] Silvia Federici,[4] and Ian Angus,[5] who assert the ongoingness of capitalism's extra-economic means of accumulation and, therefore,

[1]Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (Oxford, 2003).

[2]Peter Kropotkin, "Western Europe", in Marshall S. Shatz (ed.), *Kropotkin: "The Conquest of Bread" and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 203–232.

[3]David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford, 2005).

[4]Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York, 2004).

[5]Ian Angus even argues that primitive accumulation is Marx's least understood irony, although palpable from the prefix "so-called". See Ian Angus, "The Meaning of 'So-Called Primitive Accumulation'", *Monthly Review*, 1 April 2023, https://monthlyreview.org/2023/04/01/the-meaning-of-so-called-primitive-accumulation.

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challenge the notion of primitive accumulation (PA) as a one-off historical event bringing about the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe. Harvey's characterization of the perpetuation of PA – accumulation by dispossession – has been so influential that it not only saw its application in a number of global[6] and local phenomena[7] in various parts of the world, but also highlighted multiple contemporary forms of dispossession.[8] On the other hand, there is a relatively less influential but vibrant Marxist tradition of reading PA as an originating, historical process that offered global capital the essential surplus base at its nascent stage. Thinkers from this tradition, including the likes of Aaron Jaffe,[9] Raju Das,[10] and Cinzia Arruzza,[11] emphasize the transitional structure of PA without discounting the social reproduction of oppression in capitalist societies. Along a third dimension, there are thinkers from the World-systems tradition, particularly Giovanni Arrighi, whose legacy situates PA within the hegemonic landscape of overlapping systemic cycles of accumulation,[12] although he has taken distinguishably different positions on the subject in different contexts. For instance, while in *Adam Smith in Beijing* Arrighi emphasizes processes of "accumulation without dispossession" in China, his earlier works – particularly his study of capitalist development in southern Italy with Fortunatta Piselli – attend to distinct forms of PA within Italy. As we will see below, both of these positions are relevant to the present article.[13]

The debates around PA, whether in terms of its perpetuation, its afterlife, or its ability to feature in the successive overlapping cycles, are particularly consequential for the Global South, both at theoretical and political levels. Take, for instance, the example of South Asia, where the question of pre-colonial India has opened up a pandora's box of historiographies. On the one hand, we have scholars such as Hassan Gardezi evaluating the literature around the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) to construe that the closest India comes to this kind of Marxian understanding of Indian society

[6]See, for instance, Natacha Bruna, *The Rise of Green Extractivism: Extractivism, Rural Livelihoods and Accumulation in a Climate-Smart World* (Oxford, 2023).

[7]Among a range of works, see, for instance, Jasper Ayelazuno, "Continuous Primitive Accumulation in Ghana: The Real-Life Stories of Dispossessed Peasants in Three Mining Communities", *Review of African Political Economy*, 38:130 (2011), pp. 537–550.

[8]Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, for instance, used the term "militarized dispossession" in Pakistan's context. See Aasim Sajjad Akhtar and Ammar Rashid, "Dispossession and the Militarised Developer State: Financialisation and Class Power on the Agrarian–Urban Frontier of Islamabad, Pakistan", *Third World Quarterly*, 42:8 (2021), pp. 1866–1884.

[9]Aaron Jaffe, "The History and Afterlife of Marx's 'Primitive Accumulation'", *Historical Materialism*, 32:3 (2024), pp. 188–215.

[10]Raju Das, "David Harvey's Theory of Accumulation by Dispossession: A Marxist Critique", *World Review of Political Economy*, 8:4 (2017), pp. 590–616.

[11]Cinzia Arruzza, "Readings and Mis-readings of Primitive Accumulation", YouTube, 9 December 2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pTmpnf6PZY; last accessed 15 June 2025.

[12]See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York, 1994).

[13]See *idem, Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2007); Giovanni Arrighi and Fortunata Piselli, "Capitalist Development in Hostile Environments: Feuds, Class Struggles, and Migrations in a Peripheral Region of Southern Italy", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 10:4 (1987), pp. 649–751.

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was during the Mauryan Empire (400–180 BC). Post-Mauryan India broke down into regional empires, where, starting from the Gupta period (fourth to sixth centuries CE), we see a "proliferation of royal grants of land, *agrahara*, free from taxation", facilitating a system of caste-based (Brahmanical) feudal structures.[14] For much of pre-British India, the patterns of landownership and the relations of production have been feudal, albeit with elements of AMP persisting.[15] On the other hand, historians like Jairus Banaji, Harbans Mukhia, and Irfan Habib tend to diverge from the feudalistic characterization of India. Banaji elegantly argues that capital's trajectory in places like India has been deceptive: the practice of subsistence production need not be interpreted as a parallel mode of production, for the small producer is situated very much within the coordinates of capitalism.[16] Mukhia and Habib outrightly dismiss any references to pre-colonial India as feudal: the former calls it "free peasant production"[17] strikingly different from feudal Europe; the latter refers to it as the "Indian medieval economy".[18] Yet, along a third dimension, the likes of Utsa Patnaik regard the Indian agricultural relations of production as semi-feudal, involving four classes: landlords (capitalists and feudal), rich peasants (proto-bourgeois and proto-feudal), poor peasants, and full-time labourers.[19]

While each of these positions has somewhat distinct political implications and it is imperative to delineate the characterization of relations of production and exchange in South Asia (both historically and contemporarily), it is equally important to understand South Asia as a diverse socio-geographical space marked by significant unevenness. For instance, while individual property (in varying forms) entered the Indian social milieu long before the British period,[20] large parts of western Punjab, today's Pakistani Punjab, have historically been an agro-pastoral region largely devoid of fixed agricultural settlements.

Focusing on British Punjab and situating itself within the Marxist tradition that understands PA as an originating, historical process, this article will first briefly examine the economic history of pre-British Punjab (and North India at large). Secondly, following Marx (including the late Marx) and a particular current of the World-systems tradition, it acknowledges and builds upon the argument that PA unfolded differently not only *in* different spatio-temporal contexts but even *within* such contexts. Moreover, although the article breaks down the PA process into its internal (England) and external

[14]Hassan N. Gardezi, "South Asia and the Asiatic Mode of Production: Some Conceptual and Empirical Problems", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 11:4 (1979), pp. 40–44, 43.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 44.

[16]Jairus Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", *Capital & Class*, 1:3 (1977), pp. 1–44, 34–36.

[17]Harbans Mukhia, "Was there Feudalism in Indian History?", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 8:3 (1981), pp. 273–310.

[18]See Irfan Habib, *Economic History of Medieval India, 1200–1500* (Delhi, 2011).

[19]Utsa Patnaik, "Class Differentiation within the Peasantry: An Approach to Analysis of Indian Agriculture", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11:39 (1976), pp. A82–A101. Also see Alice Thorner, "Semi-feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17:51 (1982), pp. 2061–2066.

[20]Mukhia, "Was there Feudalism in Indian History?", p. 293.

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(colonies) dimensions, it does not consider the two independent of each other; indeed, the former both shapes up and is shaped up by the latter. With this unity between the two dimensions in mind, this article focuses on the latter, the colonialist PA in Punjab, and draws upon a range of entailing processes. Here, unlike accounts that either singularly focus on the internal trajectory of a colony toward capitalist modernization or take account of only the extractive nature of the imposed PA, the case of Punjab offers fertile ground to bring the two debates together. That is, how exactly the colonialist PA in Punjab was carried out; how markedly it differed from the British PA; how consequential it was in subordinating the pre-capitalist modes of being; what exactly it offered to the British PA; and how best it can be defined. In many ways, the paper is a historical account. Yet, because it repeatedly circles back to Marxist theoretical debates around PA, it is also a theoretical interpretation of colonialist PA. Following Dale Tomich, such an approach, which enables a synergetic interaction between history and theory, can better be understood as "historical theory" rather than "theoretical history",[21] i.e. it is possible and fruitful to develop theory through history rather than mobilizing history to "validate" theoretical frameworks. The fact that an approach like this is forced to confront a range of differences and contradictions must not deter the pursuit.

Pre-British Punjab and Land Rights

It is beyond the scope of this article to run a detailed account of the economic history of pre-British Punjab (and North India at large), but a glance at the sources investigating the agrarian system and land rights in Mughal India reveals that the situation was far more complex than the simplified accounts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European observers. Instead of the state claiming the "absolute and exclusive ownership of agrarian land", the vast archival data of revenue records across Mughal India indicates that the ownership of private land was vested in the following: the *riaya* (a class of peasant proprietors further divided into multiple classes but each having the right to transfer, mortgage, and sell their property); the *zamindars* (a class of landowners who also acted as intermediaries for land-revenue collection); and the tenants (a class of cultivators working on the land of *riaya* or *zamindars* but still having possession of land consistent with *Patta* – a state document detailing the terms of ownership and revenue obligations for the tenants).[22] Chetan Singh's account of seventeenth-century Punjab, backed with a wealth of data, also validates the existence of private property and the practice of buying and selling it in urban centres such as Lahore.[23]

[21] Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World-Economy, 1830–1848* (2nd edn, Albany, NY, 2016), pp. 32, 34, 36.

[22] B.R. Grover, "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1:1 (1963), pp. 1–23, 15.

[23] Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), p. 176.

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Yet, what kind of a practice of private property was it? Following Habib,[24] Macpherson,[25] Grover,[26] and others, we can conclude that, despite the existence of private property and the entailing transactional rights, neither the king nor the peasant-proprietor had absolute ownership over land, as was the case in Europe. Unlike in Europe, where private property was becoming an unconditional individual right, landownership in Punjab and Mughal India at large was tied to socio-economic functions such as land cultivation, surplus production, and revenue payments.[27] The self-cultivating peasant-proprietors – locally called *ryots* or *Khudkashta* – were never expropriated from the land as long as they paid the fixed land tax, and even then they had "at least thirty years" to reclaim their land on paying the outstanding dues to the government.[28] Moreover, land revenue was not paid because the landholder "was using royal property" but rather "in return for the protection and justice provided by the king".[29] Such a concept of land and property existed probably because the Mughals were primarily interested in control, not ownership – "specifically control over extraction of the surplus product from the land".[30] Faced with such a non-European dynamic of property, the "frequent transfers of *jagirs* (assigned land)", and the complete absence of serfdom in Mughal India, European observers of the period could not grasp the complexity of the subcontinent and instead understood it as autocratic and in desperate need of capitalist modernization.[31]

Yet, under these conditions of means of production, which prevailed across much of Mughal India and even across the subsequent Punjab of Ranjit Singh (with the difference that the *jagirdari* system became much more institutionalized[32]), the pre-British Indian economy thrived, especially during the seventeenth century,[33] depending largely on the export of primary agricultural commodities and the internal consumption of artefacts and other locally manufactured products. In light of such a background, this article looks at British Punjab, the regime of European-style private property, and the agricultural settlements to decipher major economic-political and ideological events producing large-scale transformations. Here, our inquiry specifically deals with how the colonial state viewed Punjab and deployed multiple means geared toward the larger, primary PA in England.

[24]Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (Mumbai, 1963), pp. 111–112.

[25]C.B. Macpherson, "Capitalism and the Changing Concept of Property", in E. Kamenka and R.S. Neale (eds), *Feudalism, Capitalism and Beyond* (Canberra, 1975), pp. 104–125, 109.

[26]Grover, "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India", pp. 1–23.

[27]M.N. Pearson, "Land, Noble and Ruler in Mughal India", *Sydney Studies in Society and Culture*, 2 (1985), pp. 175–196, 177–178.

[28]Grover, "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India", pp. 4–5, 19.

[29]Pearson, "Land, Noble and Ruler in Mughal India", p. 178.

[30]*Ibid*.

[31]*Ibid*.

[32]Indu Banga, "Formation of a Regional State in Medieval India: A Study of the Punjab under Sikh Rule", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 43 (1982), pp. 823–831, 828–829; *idem*, "Agrarian System of Ranjit Singh", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 36 (1975), pp. 321–325, 323–324.

[33]See David Clingingsmith and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Deindustrialization in 18th- and 19th-Century India: Mughal Decline, Climate Shocks and British Industrial Ascent", *Explorations in Economic History*, 45:3 (2008), pp. 209–234.

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Circling back to Marx's notion of colonialism as a major component of the process of PA, we examine how the process unfolded in Punjab after Britain consolidated its control over the region in the 1840s. Marx makes it clear in *Capital I* that, as a historical transitionary process, PA had both inward and outward orientations. With a focus on England, he recalls how, starting from the sixteenth-century Reformation, the process involved the theft of state lands, usurpation of Church estates, confiscation of communal and clan property, enclosure of commons, and, lastly, "the so-called 'clearing of estate,' i.e. the sweeping of human beings off them".[34] Likewise, Marx reflects on how the brutal colonial enterprise operating in the Americas, India, and Africa has been the central force for primitive accumulation in England. Elegantly, he makes a connection between the internal and external components of PA, but he says little about the latter. *Capital I* offers an elaborate account of the internal of PA (in England and in Western Europe at large), but we are interested in how the external of PA unfolded itself in British Punjab.

On the Timeline of British PA

Before we dive into Punjab, it is imperative to clarify whether the period of British rule in the region, which I will divide below into two sub-periods (the pre-Canal Colonies period of the 1840s–1880s and the Canal Colonies period of the 1880s onward), can be regarded as one integral to the originating stage of capital accumulation. The conflation stems from Marx's statement that the PA in Western Europe was accomplished by the time he was writing *Capital I*, that is, the 1860s.[35] But in the same section, Marx refers to the 1866 famine in Orissa, India (that killed a million people) as part of the British PA process.[36] Clearly, the section is open to interpretation in terms of the timeline of British PA. The openness of interpretation is reinforced by Marx's ambiguous and generic allusion to slavery as constitutive of PA, even though the period of slavery between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth century, led by the Portuguese and Spanish empires, fed only into feudal relations of production, not capitalist relations.[37] It is only the capitalist slave trade and plantations across the West Indies[38] and beyond, from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, that contributed to PA in England (and France).[39]

Instead of narrowly defining PA as the period in which British corporations had attained the capital impetus necessary to carry out industrialization, the idea here is to view colonialism and capitalism together, i.e. colonial capitalism – the external of Western Europe's PA – was not merely a mechanism for the transfer of wealth from the

[34]Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I* (Dublin, 1976), p. 889.

[35]*Ibid*., p. 931.

[36]*Ibid*., p. 917.

[37]See Henry Bernstein, "Colonialism, Capitalism, Development", in Tim Allen and Alan Thomas (eds), *Poverty & Development into the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 245–248; Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber, "Prelude to a New Imperial Order?", *Spectre: A Marxist Journal* (26 April 2024), https://spectrejournal.com/prelude-to-a-new-imperial-order/, last accessed 15 June 2025.

[38]Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "Colonialist Primitive Accumulation", *Journal of Labor and Society*, 22:4 (2019), pp. 717–732, 719.

[39]Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, pp. 2–3.

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colony to the metropole but as a project primarily aimed at encapsulating pre-capitalist formations and expanding and imposing capitalist relations, even if the resulting subordination was less than absolute as in England. In Banaji's words, it was "a worldwide process of subordination of pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalism […] but where subordination itself *least assumed the simple aspect of a destruction* [of traditional modes of production]".[40] The process of PA in England, in which colonies were forcibly integrated, therefore lasted until subordination was achieved. Echoing Banaji, Henry Bernstein sums it up brilliantly:

> primitive accumulation marked a period, or era, of world capitalism, that came to an end when the generalization of commodity relations was completed. That is to say, when the reproduction of any class, social category or formation, became impossible outside capitalist commodity relations, even if reproduction is not constituted exclusively by them. I have proposed that this era was broadly completed by the end of the colonial period in Asia and Africa.[41]

Unlike propositions that treat PA as an ongoing process, this article not only views PA as a historical process but posits that the process of subordinating pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalism was accomplished by the end of the colonial period, even if subordination resulted in formations containing elements of pre-capitalist modes of production. In the case of Punjab and North India at large, these elements included not only the self-cultivating peasant-proprietors but also creditors, wholesale markets (*mandi*), bustling North Indian bazaars and mercantile institutions. Due in part to Late Mughal India's developed trading ties with the Middle East,[42] Turkey,[43] and Europe,[44] and in part to "cumulative indigenous changes reflecting commercialisation, the formation of social groups and political transformation within the subcontinent itself",[45] conditions or elements existed that facilitated India's transition to the capitalist mode of production and exchange. Local North Indian gentry in cities and towns (the Muslim "service people"[46] and "Hindu and Jain moneylenders and merchants"[47]), which consolidated its power first due to and later "at the expense of the centre", "provided capital, knowledge and support for the East India Company, thus becoming its uneasy collaborators in the creation of colonial India".[48]

[40] Jairus Banaji, *A Marxist Mosaic: Selected Writings 1968–2022* (Leiden, 2024), p. 61. Italics in the original.

[41] Henry Bernstein, "Where is Population in 'Surplus Population'?", *Focaal*, 97 (2023), pp. 79–88, 85. Such a view of the timeline of PA is also somewhat supported by Christopher Alan Bayly's reference to North Indian society as pre-capitalist, at least till 1925. See Christopher Alan Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (Oxford, 2012), p. 262.

[42] Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 108–109, 218.

[43] *Ibid*., pp. 216, 229.

[44] *Ibid*., pp. 218, 232.

[45] Christopher Alan Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* [Part 2, Vol. 1, The New Cambridge History of India] (Cambridge, 1988), p. 3.

[46] *Idem, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 166, 189.

[47] *Idem, Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, p. 3.

[48] *Ibid*., p. 4.

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British Punjab in Two Epochs

Let us now look at colonial Punjab. Here, we set out to track PA in the region, bearing in mind the elements characteristic of the British PA, as revealed by Marx in *Capital I*: expropriation of the means of production, especially land; enclosure of the commons and the establishment of capitalist property relations; rise of commodity production; and the accomplishment of these goals through coercion. Yet, taking account of Marx's other writings on the subject, especially those of the late Marx, and the historical evidence for divergent trajectories of PA in and outside Europe,[49] the article is open to elements not characteristic of the British PA. Considering the Canal Colonies project in Punjab as the decisive moment that brought about expansive economic, socio-political, and territorial transformations, the century-long colonial period has been divided into pre- and post-Canal Colonies periods. The division is crucial in terms of understanding both the continuity and the rupture between the two periods: while the former saw the establishment of private property in cahoots with the ascendant *zamindar* class and offered a model of continuity for the latter, the latter experienced the entire range of PA elements, some of which were common to the British PA. For instance, the element of commodity expansion in Punjab received the most extraordinary impetus only after the Canal Colonies project when, by 1910, western Punjab became the greatest wheat-exporting region (to Britain, Western Europe, and Japan) of all the colonies of the British Empire.[50] Similarly, the element of coercion, characteristic of British PA, was prevalent in colonial Punjab, especially during the post-Canal Colonies period. Yet, there were remarkable differences between the internal (British PA) and external (colonial Punjab) of "the original sin",[51] as the subsequent pages manifest. Lastly, despite the analytical advantage of dividing the history of colonial Punjab into two epochs, the division is of little significance in relation to PA, as the gradual nature of the process must be understood as a union between the two periods.

The pre-canal colonies Punjab: 1840s–1880s

Although the state-run Canal Colonies project in western Punjab, initiated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, is regarded as the most profound historical event in instituting the private property regime in Punjab, the groundwork was laid during the initial years of British rule in central Punjab. Central Punjab, with its fertile plains as opposed to the semi-arid western Punjab, offered perhaps the most favourable conditions for a prototype revenue-settlement system to emerge. The process began by

[49]For Southeast Asia, see John T. Sidel, "Primitive Accumulation and 'Progress' in Southeast Asia: The Diverse Legacies of a Common(s) Tragedy", *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and-National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 3:1 (2015), pp. 5–23; for China, see Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*; for Italy, see Arrighi and Piselli, "Capitalist Development in Hostile Environments"; for Russia, see Wendy Z. Goldman, "Blood on the Red Banner: Primitive Accumulation in the World's First Socialist State", *International Review of Social History*, 67:2 (2022), pp. 211–229.

[50]The minor port city of Karachi became a "wheat city", handling the largest export of wheat of all the British colonies. See Harvard Mellon Urban Initiative, "Wheat City: Karachi in the Commodity Revolution, 1880s–1920s", available at https://mellonurbanism.harvard.edu/wheat-city-karachi-commodity-revolution-1880s-1920s, last accessed 15 June 2025.

[51]Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, p. 873.

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identifying the "village" as the fundamental unit. Inspired by the liberal consolidation of private property debates in Europe during this time, the property laws in Punjab saw the village not only as an administrative unit, but also as the site most receptive to the state-imposed property order. Yet, "the village" was not devoid of contradictions either. Who owns the land in the village was the key question. Here, the regime, unlike its experience in England, was confronted with the question of landownership as opposed to land dispossession. David Gilmartin offers some insight into the situation:

> Issues of property were at the center of the great nineteenth-century debates in Britain about social order … But property also provided a frame within which indigenous, "natural" forms of Punjabi community, based in particular on "tribe" and genealogy, were increasingly encompassed within a larger, rationalized – and spatialized – structure of Indus basin order. Property law in Punjab provided the critical framework within which the colonial state brought together competing visions of community whose juxtaposition defined a main current of late nineteenth-century thinking: one defined by man's productive action upon nature, the other by nature's action upon man.[52]

Diverging from its strategy in other parts of India (such as in Dera Ghazi Khan, where the intensity of pastoral culture ruled out the "village" model to an extent), Britain mobilized central Punjab's deeper roots of the well-based agricultural institution of the village[53] to create a juxtaposition of private property with genealogy. Here, "both the individual property-owning producer and the genealogical community" appear "as the twin foundations for modern Indus basin governance".[54] But how did genealogy come to play such a central role? The question of *biradari* (which literally means brotherhood but commonly means kinship networks)[55] or *qaum* becomes central in this context. As Brian Caton notes in his pioneering work on settlements in Punjab, "the British officials misread these lineages as permanent social structures founded on tangible blood relations".[56] "Village by village", Clive Dewey writes (as cited by Gilmartin), "the Settlement Officers and their assistants traced the descent of rights and the descent of right-holders

[52] David Gilmartin, *Blood and Water: The Indus River Basin in Modern History* (Oakland, 2015), p. 70.

[53] Although there is a long-standing debate between the likes of Habib and Chetan Singh around the pervasiveness of the Persian wheel versus the *charas* (a rope and leather bucket system), both acknowledge the ubiquity of the well-based agricultural system. See Irfan Habib, "Jatts in Medieval Punjab", in Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (eds), *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics, and Culture: Essays for Indu Banga* (New Delhi, 2005), pp. 63–74; Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 93–98.

[54] *Ibid*., p. 71.

[55] For instance, I come from the Gujjar *biradari*. Gujjars have, historically, been agro-pastoral people in Punjab and the mountainous regions of Northern India (today's Northern Pakistan). They, like other *biradaris* (such as Jats, Rajpoots, and Arains), have largely married within their *biradari* for hundreds of years. My parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are all Gujjars. As a result, I am linked by blood to many of my immediate and remote cousins. But there are millions of Gujjars in Pakistan (mostly in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit Baltistan) and perhaps more in India (both among Hindus and Muslims). I cannot seem to be related by blood to all of them. This was the genealogy fiasco committed by the British, confusing *biradari* with bloodline.

[56] Brian Caton, "Settling for the State: Pastoralists and Colonial Rule in Southwestern Panjab, 1840–1900" (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), p. 214.

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back to some mythical founder".[57] Almost unanimously, these mythical founders came from the higher classes, cementing the colonial regime's imperial and political position. The result was the ascent of a class of "hereditary" agriculturalists against a class of non-agriculturalist landless labourers, but this was due not to the generally perceived "totalizing binary" between the colonizer and the colonized, but rather to the sustained complicity of the local peasant actors, who emerged at the top of the new agrarian hierarchy.[58]

It is interesting to note that Britain used genealogy as "a critical stabilizing counterpoint to *individual* rights".[59] The key to Punjab's property order, as Gilmartin argues,

> lay in the colonial state's ability to bring these two conceptually distinct (indeed, even conceptually antithetical) visions of the Punjab "peasant" together: to define him, in other words, simultaneously as a property-owning subject (defined by action upon nature) and as a "communal" man (defined by the action of nature, through "blood," upon him).[60]

The process was not simply about imposing the private property order but placing the property-rights-bearing individual in a dialectical relation with the man "honouring" the community identity. Unlike in England, where PA showed no pretence for the peasant community institutions, the process in Punjab had to place the individual in both individual and communal registers, thus making private property rights appear even more "natural".

At the same time, while the village was a site holding the dialectics between an individual property owner and a communal man together, it also came to be posited against a non-village called "waste" (waste, generally, a larger area than the village). The British property order in Punjab created a binary between productive land, the village, and the non-productive land, the waste. Where the former included individual property (agricultural and residential), the latter were composed of arid areas of pastoral wandering. These were state-controlled areas, commonly owned by the villagers, called village commons or *shamilat deh*. Interestingly, "commons was thus determined not by any history of common *use* at all but simply by its definition as 'wasteland' – that is, land on which the claims to productive use necessary for revenue assessment (and thus for individual proprietorship) could not be, or had not been, readily made".[61] To the British, "commons" were "waste" as they were perceived as unproductive, unmanageable, and undesirable – a perspective that, as we will see below, experienced a radical shift in western Punjab where the uncultivated "wastelands" were turned into settled, capitalist farming as part of a grand agrarian conquest.

[57] Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, p. 73.

[58] Navyug Gill, *Labors of Division: Global Capitalism and the Emergence of the Peasant in Colonial Panjab* (Stanford, 2024), pp. 5–7.

[59] *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, p. 82.

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The canal colonies: 1880s onward

The village–waste model was subsequently exported to the western Punjab, but the challenges were enormous. The semi-arid terrain of the region and the agro-pastoral ways of being were captured interestingly by a court text of the later years of the Mughal Empire (as cited by Caton):

> The Wattu, Dogar, Gujar, and other tribes live here, and are notorious for their refractory and rebellious character. In the rainy season, the rivers Biah and Sutlej reach the *mahals* of this *Sarkar* and extend broad and deep for leagues together over the surface of the land, and all the parts of this territory are submerged; the deluge of Noah seems to be acted again here every year. When the water subsides, so many jungles spring up all over this land, owing to the great moisture and dampness, that a pedestrian has great difficulty in travelling. How then can a rider? For this reason, this country is called the *Lakhi-jungle*. The wicked men of this plain, owing to the assistance of the river (which flows in many streams by the dwellings of the inhabitants of these tracts) and the shelter afforded by the impassable jungle (which is leagues in length and breadth), become ambuscaders, highwaymen, and thieves. The hand of the Imperial commanders cannot reach the chastisement and destruction of these people.[62]

Against this challenging backdrop, insufficient rainfall, and traditional irrigation systems relying on wells, the British understood the western Punjab (today's Pakistani Punjab) not as an extension of the central Punjab. Therefore, the revenue-settlements project in this region had to go beyond the village–waste insertion, hence the initiation of state-run Canal Colonies from the 1880s onward. Lasting till the 1940s, the project, comprising nine colonies, involved a large-scale construction of a canal network from the Indus River to transform the semi-arid region into a "hydraulic society", increasing the area of cultivation (and, therefore, of taxation) in the region from three million to fourteen million acres.[63]

But long before the Canal Colonies, the British had deployed a heavy *tirni* (grazing tax) system on the nomads of western Punjab for about three decades. These nomads of the *bãrs* – the interfluves of the Sutlej, Ravi, and Chenab rivers – had already been, since the dawn of the nineteenth century, subject to the control of dominant clans and their pastoral chiefs, who would defend the nomads' cattle and negotiate their movement rights with other clans in exchange for tribute and loyalty.[64] Even before that, the Afghans and the Sikhs also levied *tirni* in much of western Punjab and collected it through *sadar tirni guzars*, the intermediary clan chiefs. [65]

Yet, the imposition of *tirni* by the British was not just an assertion of power over wilderness; *tirni* became, as Neeladri Bhattacharya notes, a means of "transforming nomads into settled pastoralists".[66] Bhattacharya goes on:

[62]Caton, "Settling for the State", p. 10.

[63]Imran Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885–1947* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), pp. viii, 5, 9–10.

[64]Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest: The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World* (Albany, NY, 2019), pp. 342–346.

[65]Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, p. 96.

[66]Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, pp. 348–349.

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> The project [before the British] was not […] to impose tirni to settle pastoralists, fix them to a location, bound their landscape of mobility. It was to collect revenue and assert the power to do so. Things changed under colonialism. Tirni became an instrument of settling the bār nomads, confining them within demarcated spaces, and colonising the commons.[67]

By progressively employing *sadar-tirni-guzars, chakdars, lambardars*, and *zaildars*, the British unleashed a chronology of intermediaries (clan chiefs) over three decades in western Punjab to pursue "the colonial project of the sedentarisation of nomads and the reterritorialisation of pastoral spaces – one of the great projects of the agrarian conquest".[68] Despite the "288 per cent" increase in *tirni* "in the thirteen years between 1857 and 1870",[69] the coercive sedentarization project did not bring about sufficient results. Exhausted by these challenges, the British saw a state-run canal irrigation system, the Canal Colonies, as a much more promising instrument for sedentarization, settled farming, and the linked revenue structure – one that, let us not forget, rested not only on *tirni* but primarily on the export of monoculture cash crops (wheat and cotton) to Europe and elsewhere.

In the Canal Colonies again, genealogy was used "as an ordering principle of community and life".[70] This is not to say that *biradari* structures did not exist before the British but that they now took on a new role within the imperial structure. As fixed private property was juxtaposed with genealogy, *biradari* came to be associated with the juridical-ideological structure of the state only during the British period. It was a situation where landowners were bound to the colonial state but still rooted in local cultural calculation. The genius of instrumentalizing the concept of *biradari* helped conjure a genealogy posing as indigenous and even pre-colonial.

In the Canal Colonies, however, the genealogy matrix had to be fused with class. Driven by the logic of conquering new frontiers for nascent capitalist accumulation, transforming idle landscapes into productive settled farming, and annihilating or restructuring resistant ways of being, the British lured the *zamindar* class (landowners) from central Punjab to migrate to western Punjab and portrayed the latter as a land promised to be "overflowing with milk and honey" (see Figure 1 for a fuller view of the districts incorporated into the Canal Colonies project and the Doabs of Punjab within which the *bārs* lie).[71] At the other end of the spectrum were, largely, local pastoral nomads viewed as backward, primitive and uncivilized *janglis* resistant to fixed private property and settled agriculture.[72] In the Canal Colonies, therefore, the British had to import the "industrious", land-cultivating, land-owning *zamindar* class from central

[67] *Ibid*., p. 355.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 350.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 354.
[70] David Gilmartin, "Environmental History, Biradari, and the Making of Pakistani Punjab", in Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (eds), *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 289–319, 295.
[71] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 422.
[72] The nomadic Manes Jats, a community in Lyallpur, refused to sedentarize even after they were given the canal land, perceiving "agriculture as a subsidiary occupation". See Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 405.

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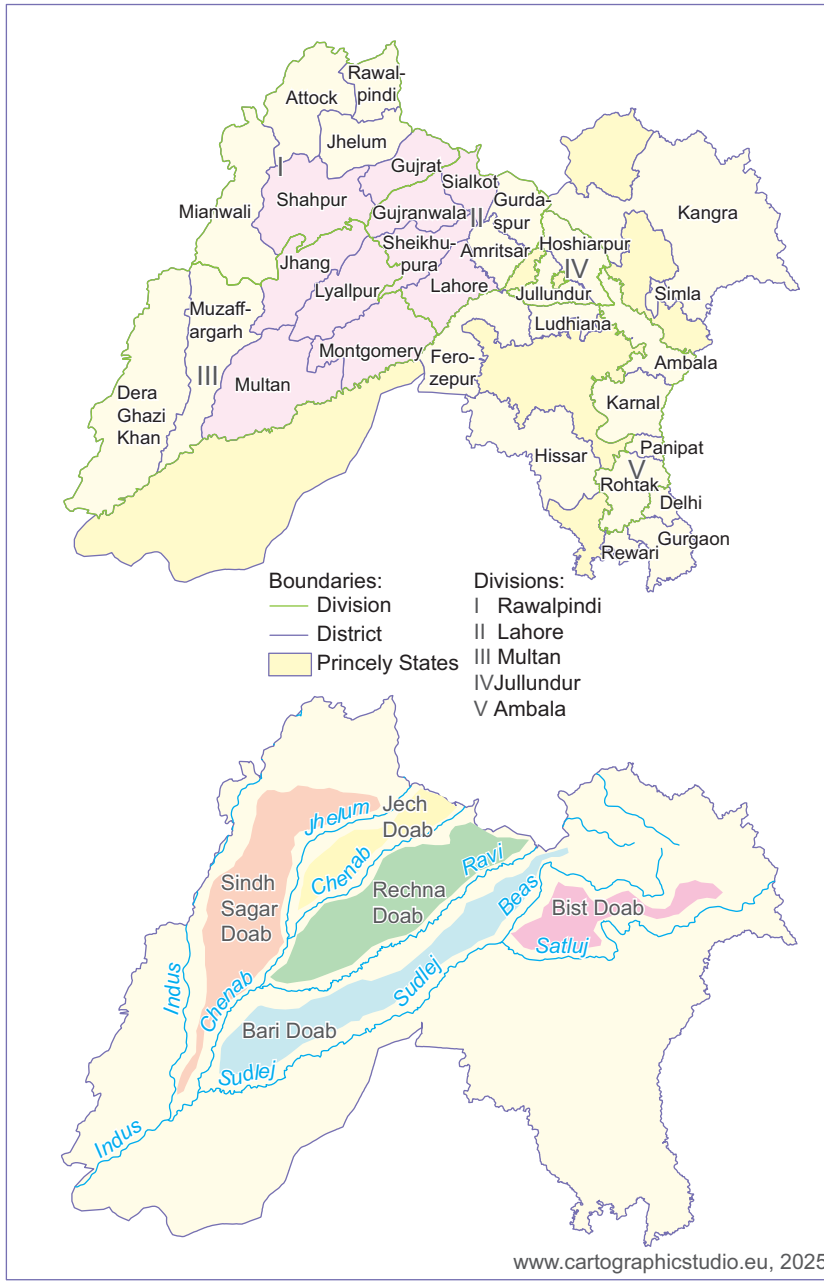


Figure 1. Top: Districts of Punjab around Canal Colonies, 1880–1947 (highlighted in pink). Bottom: The Doabs of Punjab. The Persian word doab means a tract of land lying between two converging rivers. All the land colonized and cultivated as part of the Canal Colonies project – the bārs – lie within these doabs.

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Punjab (districts such as Ludhiana, Jalandhar, and Gurdaspur) to carry out the task of transforming pastoral landscapes into productive agricultural landscapes, dispossessing the local nomads of their grazing land, freedom of movement, and pre-colonial lifeworlds.

The Ideological Dimension of PA

So far, we have looked at the British private property order in Punjab in relation to genealogy (and class) on the one hand and the village–waste binary on the other. Connecting it back to our discussion on PA, we have explored the economic–political dimensions of the colonial order forming the major component of PA for capital in England, that is, how the private property order was instituted in Punjab using political, cultural, environmental, juridical, and bureaucratic means. In other words, the discussion, so far, has focused on the revenue-generation and trade aspect of PA.

No inquiry into PA, however, can produce meaningful results without dissecting the ideological dimension of the process. Punjab is a classic case of how ideology was at the centre of instituting private property order in the region. Although Gilmartin's work revolves largely around the revenue-generation aspect of the order, he too, albeit intermittingly, offers a powerful account of the ideological process. In his chapter in the edited volume *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, Gilmartin argues that the British "colonial principles of rule operated as a universalizing moral discourse defined not just by the immediate authority of the colonial state but by its claims to be the bearer of a moral universalism that transcended all specific cultures".[73] So much so that there were systematic, concerted attacks on pre-colonial, pastoral ways of being.

> What is noteworthy is that this attack was explicitly constructed by the British as inextricably linked to a vision of private property as a universal moral good. Though British records are not without romantic statements of sympathy for the Indus Basin's pastoral peoples, the overwhelmingly dominant colonial view, shaped by nineteenth century liberal thinking, was that pastoralism was both an economically and morally backward system. By failing to allow for the accumulation of landed, private property, pastoralism stunted the growth of individual moral responsibility that was, in the eyes of most British administrators, the hallmark of the modern era – and an element in the hegemony of the new colonial state.[74]

Settlements were systematic, with a heavy undertone of liberal moral universalism inseparable from private property. Those who resisted were marginalized, stigmatized, and even reduced to "socially inferior and morally bankrupt 'criminal tribes', both in the eyes of the British and, increasingly, in the eyes of many settled Punjabi agriculturists themselves".[75] In fact, settled, fixed property became the yardstick for civilization. In a very Gramscian sense, the condescension toward pastoralism was part of instilling

[73] Gilmartin, "Environmental History", p. 294.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 295.

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a new cultural hegemony centred on private property. The fundamental figure representing this hegemony was the new rights-bearing legal individual (intertwined with the local *biradari* matrix and the class dynamics stemming from landownership and the cultivation skills of colonists migrating to the Canal Colonies) perceived and projected as superior to the non-rights-bearing pastoral folk.

Yet, scholars such as Vinay Krishin Gidwani go on to develop an overwhelming ideological–cultural reading of the private property order. To Gidwani, "waste" was not only an unproductive terrain posited against the productive village, but also "a representation of the cultural inferiority and physical infirmity of Indians (the colonised people) vis-à-vis the English (the colonisers)".[76] Although Gidwani's essay concerns Bengal under the Permanent Settlement of 1793, there are uncanny similarities between how the concept of "waste" was represented and applied by the English in Bengal and Punjab. Both regions saw the unfolding of the trio of "waste", "value", and "property". And both peoples were seen as culturally and ontologically inferior to the English: western Punjabis' "inferiority" lay in their pastoral ways of being as opposed to settled agriculture; Bengalis' "idleness and extravagance" was contrasted with English "industry and economy".[77]

The Question of Violence

Amidst accounts of sedentarization in British Punjab, the question of violence often remains underlying or at the margins, perhaps partly because the spectacular violence characterizing events such as the Anglo-Sikh wars and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre acquired a much more dominant stature in the history of Punjab than the systematic, gradual violence entailing sedentarization. Unlike the imperial discourse of colonial benevolence,[78] the history of the external of PA (specifically in British Punjab here) is a history of state violence and coercion – not only symbolic, ideological, and cultural but also physical, juridical, and systematic.

Take the example of *tirni*. As noted above, at a macroscopic level, *tirni* was not only a means for revenue collection, but also a mechanism for transforming pre-colonial, pre-capitalist pastoral-nomadic ways of being into settled agriculture, particularly in western Punjab. Such a top-down, violent imposition of capitalist-agricultural relations needed operational force such as the "placement of police and army corps at regular posts throughout the southwest".[79] But how did the pastoral nomads come into the fold of such state-imposed operations, given their long-standing history of defying state regulation and disciplining? As soon as the British annexed the *bārs* in western Punjab, they took control over the nomadic groups controlling different areas – the Sials in Chenab *bār*, the Kharrals in the central *bār*, the Bhattis in the

[76]Vinay Krishin Gidwani, "'Waste' and the Permanent Settlement in Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27:4 (1992), pp. PE39–PE46, PE40.

[77]*Ibid*., p. 41.

[78]See Navyug Gill, "Accumulation by Attachment: Colonial Benevolence and the Rule of Capital in Nineteenth-Century Panjab", *Past & Present*, 256:1 (2022), pp. 203–238; Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, pp. 26, 58–59, 242.

[79]Caton, "Settling for the State", p. 118.

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Gujranwala *bār*, and the Baloches in the south.[80] Their nomadic chiefs were turned into *tirni guzars*, tax collectors for the state,[81] though they accepted the new position reluctantly. Frustrated with "the loss of their power, their territory, their sovereignty, and their grazing lands",[82] nomadic groups in the central *bār* led by Ahmad Khan Kharral rebelled against the new order in 1857. The rebellion, the Gogira revolt,[83] was brutally crushed by the state: "the rebels were cut to pieces, their villages burnt, their cattle tracked down in the jungles and slaughtered".[84]

In 1869, the British government introduced the *chak* system in western Punjab – blocks or villages between Jhelum and Chenab, which were to be irrigated by the new canal irrigation system. By 1874, the *bār* wastelands, earlier owned by the government, were also turned into *chaks* by the fiscal regime.[85] The circle around pastoralist spaces grew tighter over the years: their mobility was restricted; their grazing lands were turned into government-owned wastelands (*rakhs*); the *tirni* was multiplied (as they now had to pay taxes in multiple places); and their cattle stock was now enumerated. Toward the end of the century,

> they saw their land being sliced up, reshaped into squares, and given over to people who descended in hordes from the world outside. These outsiders cut down the scrub, grubbed up the roots, and cleared the land; they ploughed the fields and planted crops. Then fences appeared, marking one field from another and barring entry to "outsiders". The pastoralists were told to stop their cattle straying into cultivated fields, trampling crops, and destroying harvests. Suddenly they were outsiders on land they had for long seen as their own. The immigrants swarmed all over, outnumbered the locals, and asserted their monopoly over what till some years earlier had been the land of the nomads.[86]

Faced with the might of the British state, the nomadic anger channelled itself toward the colonists from central Punjab. Cattle trespass into colonist fields became "a deliberate and performative act, flamboyantly executed, in defiance of the new territorialisation".[87] The Cattle Trespass Act of 1871 had already laid out the legal consequences of trespassing, but the nomads continued to trespass as an act of resistance against the new socio-legal agrarian and private property order and the colonization of *bārs*.[88] On the other hand, the relentless "bloody legislation" of the state – to use Marx's expression – continued, and, by 1918, almost all of the nomadic groups – the Dhers, Kharrals, and Valana Jats in the central *bār*; the Manes Jats and Vasirs in Lyallpur; and the Baloches in the south – had been declared criminal tribes.[89]

[80] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 408.
[81] Caton, "Settling for the State", p. 118.
[82] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 408.
[83] See Salahuddin Malik, "1857 Gogira Rebellion in Southeastern Panjab: A Forgotten Chapter of Muslim Response to British Rule in India", *Islamic Studies*, 16:2 (1977), pp. 65–95.
[84] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, pp. 408–409.
[85] *Ibid*., p. 350.
[86] *Ibid*., p. 403.
[87] *Ibid*., p. 408.
[88] *Ibid*., p. 410.
[89] *Ibid*., p. 405.

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Even the immigrant peasants, the colonists from central Punjab, were not spared state violence. For instance, according to the Punjab Colonisation of Land Act 1893, they were supposed to live in the *abadi* (not on their farms), cultivate ceaselessly without absenteeism, and abstain from small plotting and a range of other practices as part of the British pursuit of creating an ideal agrarian landscape in western Punjab.[90] They were granted large landholdings but were denied proprietary rights as a measure of control over them. The Act was stifling in many ways, but the colonists were still migrating in droves to chase the dream carefully constructed and clothed in the language of patriarchal benevolence by the British.

This changed dramatically in December 1906 when a new Colonization Bill was passed to impose stricter measures against non-compliance while also introducing new terms to the 1893 Act: "The colonists were now required to practice primogeniture, plant trees on their farms, and maintain a broodmare for supply of horses to the government",[91] while also bearing an enormous increase in land revenue and water tax.[92] Already perplexed by the Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900, the plague epidemics,[93] and the routine confrontations with trespassing nomadic groups, the colonists were angered by the new Bill to the point that they mobilized thousands of peasants across the Canal Colonies, led large protests against the state, filed legal complaints, and even allied with nationalist, anti-imperialist political groups. The police and military responded with brute force, unleashing torture and large-scale arrests,[94] leaving no remnants of the pretence of "colonial benevolence".

Long before western Punjab's dry tracts became new frontiers to colonize, in the 1830s, the British state initiated sedentarization in the shrublands between the Ghaggar River and Sutlej, a region locally called *rohi* (desert). Again, using the colonial classist logic, the settlement officials classified peasant colonists into landlords and tenants. Bhattacharya tells a tragic tale of the village of Dabwali Dhab (part of today's Sri Muktsar Sahib district in Indian Punjab) whose earliest peasant settlers were dispossessed of the land they had cleared and cultivated – seventy per cent of the cultivated land in the district.[95] The 1868 Tenancy Act denied tenants the right to utilize or develop the "wastes" as the proprietorship of the latter now belonged to *lambardars*, the state intermediaries. Faced with large-scale displacement, the peasants lodged ejectment suits, only to face defeat and "the violence of the courts".[96]

From these peasant colonists of *rohi* to the indigenous pastoral nomads of western Punjab to the colonists from central Punjab, groups across Punjab experienced ruthless state violence of different varieties in different epochs. While the *rohi* peasants' encounter with the state was one of experiencing exile and dispossession, colonists

[90] *Ibid*., p. 418.

[91] *Ibid*.

[92] Savinder Pal, "Agrarian Unrest in Punjab and Sardar Ajit Singh", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 70 (2009), pp. 451–464, 454.

[93] Between 1903 and 1907, plague epidemics killed two million people in Punjab, accounting for thirty per cent of total plague deaths in India. See Sasha Tandon, "Epidemics in Colonial Punjab", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 20 (2013), pp. 217–242.

[94] Pal, "Agrarian Unrest in Punjab and Sardar Ajit Singh", p. 459.

[95] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, pp. 222–228.

[96] *Ibid*., p. 228.

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from central Punjab experienced the shift between patriarchal "benevolence" and sheer brute force. Indigenous pastoralists and peasants in western Punjab, on the other hand, experienced dispossession of their common land, pastures, fields, and ways of being.

Dialectics of the External of PA (British Punjab)

Our inquiry into the English private property order in Punjab might reveal some similarities with how PA took place within England, as documented by Marx, but we encountered striking dissimilarities. Marx defines PA as a violent, repressive process involving the perpetual divorce of producers from the means of production. Indeed, "the [violent] expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process".[97] This is echoed in the final sentence of *Capital I,* where Marx, concluding his thoughts on the modern theory of colonization, reiterates that expropriation of the worker from the property earned with labour forms the fundamental condition of the capitalist mode of production and accumulation. In a way, the expropriation of the peasant or worker from the soil and the conditions of labour – and her/his transformation into a wage labourer for capitalist farming initially and subsequently into a proletarian for industrial capital – are what defined PA in England.

At first glance, this may appear similar to the situation in Punjab. Some of the peasant groups experienced violent dispossession of the lands they cleared and cultivated, as the *rohi* example demonstrated above, as part of the colonialist PA process that classified the agents of agrarian conquest (along class lines) into proprietors and tenants. Secondly, very much like the initial period of British PA engendering capitalist farming, the PA in Punjab sowed the seeds of capitalist relations in the agrarian realm, although it was not followed by proletarianization in the industrial sphere. Lastly, almost all groups, irrespective of their relationship to the colonial-capitalist state, experienced violence, including even the colonists from central Punjab, the so-called recipients of colonial "benevolence".

As much as disciplining and violence have been the common nodal points among groups experiencing the colonialist PA, very much like the peasants in England, the complexity lies in the fact that there were radical dissimilarities between England and Punjab. This can be inferred from our three examples quoted above. First, the peasants from central Punjab were not coerced into migrating to western Punjab, but rather were incentivized into the project. They were offered large landholdings, "28 to 56 acres" each,[98] as part of being agents of PA. They were not expropriated from the means of production, as the definition of PA in England suggests, but instead were annexed to these means, primarily land – and much more land compared with what they had in central Punjab, even if the new land and its socio-spatial circumstances offered numerous challenges. Secondly, even though the *rohi* colonists were dispossessed of their cultivated land, they were first instrumentalized as agents of sedentarization. Still, even though dispossession came after the initial-most sedentarization, the fact that immigrated peasants were dispossessed and many of them turned into sharecroppers and agricultural wage labourers makes the *rohi* case most

[97] Marx, *Capital I*, p. 876.
[98] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 418.

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closely resemble PA in England, where a section of expropriated peasants was reduced to wage labourers for capitalist farming (at least in the initial phase).[99] Thirdly, far from being the agents of capitalist-agricultural expansion, the indigenous pastoralists in western Punjab offered the fiercest opposition to PA and were, unsurprisingly, the greatest recipients of British violence and repression: "The severest action had to be taken against those who impeded the progress of colonisation and subverted the foundations of settled agrarian life in the bãrs".[100] But, by the end of the colonial period, they too had been incorporated into the PA project in Punjab, albeit with great difficulty. Eventually, they had to sedentarize under the might of the coercive state and the existentialist threat.

Working through these contradictions, without tending to resolve them superficially, one can argue that, whereas in England the expropriation process involved mass evictions, turning the independent peasants largely into the urban proletariat, in Punjab the process involved large-scale sedentarization. It is within the dominant rhythm of sedentarization that sections of peasant groups were turned into agricultural wage labourers. Instead of proletarianizing the peasant, the colonial state had to cultivate an attachment, incentivized or forced, to fixed private property using ideological, juridical, economic, and political means – a phenomenon that Navyug Gill has interestingly called "accumulation by attachment".[101] In other words, while the internal of British PA involved expropriation, its external entailed attachment.

Such accumulation by sedentarization and its radically divergent course and form from the internal of British PA may not come as a surprise if we read *Capital I* along with Marx's other writings on the subject, especially the late Marx. The late Marx, particularly on the question of the Russian path to communism, puts an end to the mechanistic teleology haunting those yearning to interpret the particular trajectory of Western Europe's PA and the subsequent capitalist development as universal. In response to the February 1881 letter from the Russian exiled revolutionary Vera Zasulich in which she provoked Marx to respond to the question of the socialist trajectory of Russian rural communes, Marx responded against the notion of PA as a universal condition for arriving at communist social relations: "The 'historical inevitability' of this [proletarianization] course is therefore expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe".[102] And that "the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia".[103] Fully supporting "the efforts by the Russian people to find for their motherland a road of development different from the one along which Western Europe has proceeded and still proceeds",[104] Marx, in his letter to the literary magazine *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, states that he has "come to the conclusion that if Russia continues along the path it has followed since 1861 [that of bourgeois capitalist revolution], it

[99] Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, pp. 907–909.

[100] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, p. 405.

[101] Gill, "Accumulation by Attachment", pp. 203–238.

[102] Karl Marx, "Marx–Zasulich Correspondence: Letters and Drafts", in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York, 1983), pp. 117, 124.

[103] *Ibid*., p. 124.

[104] Karl Marx, "Karl Marx: A Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*", in Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, p. 134.

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will lose the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fateful vicissitudes of the capitalist regime".[105]

These excerpts (and others characterizing the work of late Marx) denounce not only the historical inevitability of PA in non-Western-European societies but also propose an alternative path to socialism, one grounded in local historical, material, collectivist, and cultural tendencies and processes. Consistent with our analysis of Punjab, these excerpts may also be read in relation to *Capital I*, especially the part where Marx argues that the "history of this [primitive] expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form".[106] The first draft of Marx's reply to Zasulich strengthens this understanding further by establishing that it is enough to restructure the pre-capitalist mode of production within the logic of capitalism by expropriating peasants from one or a few conditions of their mode of subsistence.

> In order to expropriate the agricultural producers, it is not necessary to drive them from the land, as happened in England and elsewhere; nor to abolish communal property by some ukase. If you go and take from the peasants more than a certain proportion of the product of their agricultural labour, then not even your gendarmes and your army will enable you to tie them to their fields.[107]

The process of PA could assume different paths and forms, depending upon the society's conditions of production and exchange, and it did not necessarily entail expropriation from land. Moreover, not only could the process of PA assume different paths and forms in non-Western-European societies, there could also be significant differences between the non-colonized (such as Russia) and colonized (such as India) parts of such societies, and even between regions within these social formations, as argued by Giovanni in the case of Italy and Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Kumar Dhar in the case of India.[108] Instead of transforming Marx's "historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples",[109] or instead of assuming the "death of the peasantry" as "the precondition for the birth of capitalist modernity",[110] the key lies in understanding and studying various historical courses of PA on their own terms.

[105] *Ibid*., p. 135.

[106] Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, p. 876. In the French edition, Marx made the following addition: "but all the other countries of Western Europe are going through the same course". See Karl Marx, *Le Capital* (Paris, 1872–1875), p. 315.

[107] Marx, "Marx–Zasulich Correspondence", p. 114.

[108] Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Kumar Dhar argue that there could be differences even within India: "Not only is there no single route of primitive accumulation between countries, it is very likely that, especially in countries such as India with diverse types of world of the third societies, the forms of primitive accumulation could vary within a country as well". Although this article differs from their argument that there *still* exists an outside of capitalism and that PA is an ongoing process, their stance on why PA would take different forms and paths in the Global South is helpful. See Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Dhar, *Dislocation and Resettlement in Development: From Third World to the World of the Third* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 152–177, 161.

[109] Marx, "Karl Marx: A Letter", p. 136.

[110] Gill, *Labors of Division*, p. 10.

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The unfolding of PA in Punjab – the external of British PA – reveals the perpetuity of dialectics. The colonial state "as a self-imagined agent of reason"[111] had to retain the unreason of kinship structures. The individual private property order had to sit next to the communal identity (*biradari*). The productive village had to be juxtaposed with the unproductive waste (although this changed increasingly in western Punjab and elsewhere where the wastelands had to be colonized). At the heart of the process, lies the dialectics between dissolution and conservation: the dissolution of the pastoral ways of being and knowing alongside the imposition of settled, fixed private property, on the one hand, and the conservation (and imperial reorienting) of kinship relations on the other; the dissolution of pre-colonial farming practices by modern, rational farming, on the one hand, and the conservation of large landholdings on the other; the dissolution of the "lazy", "inefficient" western Punjabi peasant and nomad, on the one hand, and the conservation of the laziness of landlords on the other; and the dissolution of the means of subsistence (common land and cattle) of the masses of pastoralists, on the one hand, and the conservation (and growth) of the assets (land, cattle, and beyond) of *lambardars*, pastoral chiefs, and other intermediaries on the other.

The coordinates of British PA's external contradict increasingly with its internal. The PA in British Punjab – part of England's own PA – was, let us not forget, a colonialist PA geared toward the economic, imperialist, and ideological interests of the colonizer. The process was, understandably, instrumental and extractive. The larger objective was to transform the mode of production and exchange enough to engender capitalist social relations at large, even if the process did not result in proletarianization and the complete annihilation of the pre-capitalist mode of production. Because the process was oriented externally, PA in Punjab had to tailor itself to what Punjab could offer to PA in England, which, as we noted above, was the colonization of uncultivated wastelands to set in motion the lucrative export of primary commodities such as wheat, cotton, and rice. As each colony offered different sources to the PA in Western Europe, each experienced a different kind of tailoring. The greatest feature of the PA process led by Western Europe was the absorption of pre-capitalist modes of production in colonies into the fold of global, hegemonic, capitalist relations of production, distribution, and exchange, to the point that there was no outside of capital left by the time the PA had been accomplished by the end of the colonial period – only new frontiers and markets.

[111] Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, p. 71.

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