

- The British were in favour of promoting irrigation by means of canals and embankments because it would increase the land revenue and provide proof of the benign nature of British rule.
- In many areas the British improved the existing canals as in the case of the Ganges and Yamuna canals in the United Provinces.
- In Bengal the Eden canal was not very successful partly because the demand for water was not as acute as in the dry regions
- Unlike the railways, for which the British govt guaranteed a five percent rate of return to investors regardless of actual performance, the irrigation projects were expected to give a minimum rate of return before they could be undertaken.
- Therefore, the pace of irrigation development in India was slower than what it might have been if the social rate of return on investment had also been taken into account.
- The central dry region of the Punjab needed water and the snow fed rivers which traversed through the Punjab could be harnessed by irrigation projects
- Punjab became the main recruiting ground for the Indian army in the post-1857 period so British were keen to promote irrigation & the allocation of land in Canal Colonies of the Punjab.
- Lyallpur became an important town of these colonies.
- Imran Ali has highlighted the connection between military recruitment, settlement of colonists in these lands brought under irrigation & attempts to promote loyalism in the Punjab.
- The settlement of the "surplus population" in the newly settled areas, used by pastoralists earlier, was an important factor in providing stability to the Raj.
- Some of these colonies had allotments made to soldiers & some areas were devoted to providing fodder to the army.
- A colonial observer, C.H. Buck noted in 1906 the elements of colonisation thus: – the colonization officer has to arrange for the sites of the towns & villages; for those of buildings, such as hospitals, schools, police-stations, and other public offices; space has to be reserved for factories along the railway; and plots have to be kept for arboricultural plantations and nurseries, and for an experimental farm.
- The power of the merchants & moneylenders in the Punjab, & the canal towns was less pervasive than in the Bombay Deccan or Bengal, since they were unable to exercise their influence over the rural

population through debt & loan advances that they did in other parts of India.

- Colonial legislation to protect the interests of the agricultural castes was also responsible for limiting the power of urban merchants & professional classes
- Canal colonies were better linked to the world market than the local market.
- The rise of agricultural output & productivity led to the growth of market towns and urban centers which catered to the needs of the more prosperous sections of the region as in the western districts of the United Provinces
- The irrigation policy of the British was not very effective in areas, where the geophysical conditions were not conducive for state intervention.

PUNJAB DISTURBANCES OF 1907

- The process of canal colonisation in western Punjab was rooted in the rule of British paternalism.
- Large tracts of land were colonised by carefully selecting different caste & status groups
- The crown tenants were granted the right to purchase land after completing an initial period of probation.
- Emergence of many big landlords in this region
- The existing laws were manipulated.
- The local lower level bureaucracy extorted money to prevent punishment to the potential defaulters.
- Subjected to everyday administrative interference, resentment grew in several canal areas.
- It exploded in the form of the agrarian agitation of 1907.
- The Punjab land colonisation bill was introduced in the Punjab council on October 25, 1906.

REASONS FOR RESENTMENT

- The 1906 Bill revised the conditions on which land allotments had been made to settle peasants from Central Punjab
- Since the 1890s, after the spread of perennial irrigation in vast, previously dry & scantily populated tracts of the Province.
- The introduction of a clause of primogeniture in succession, by which land could firstly be transferred to the elder son, or a widow & was likely to be resumed by the govt in the absence of a legal heir, was an unacceptable proposition to those who had spent a lifetime making the land both cultivable & habitable.
- The Bill, restricted the jurisdiction of the Courts with regard to the Colony lands & barred them from stalling executive orders.

- Conditions with regard to tree planting, sanitation & residence were to be strictly implemented, with violations being punishable.
- This included the possibility of the revocation of grants.
- The oppressive system of fines imposed by an obnoxious canal bureaucracy, put in place since the setting up of the Colonies, including a system of bribes for petty offences, was thus legalised.
- This, coincided with distress due to the plague & disaffection due to specific factors affecting recent harvests.
- N.G. Barrier, who researched the 1907 disturbances, spoke of the protests being led by former govt servants & educated Punjabis living in rural Punjab.
- Barrier also highlighted the spread of the protests among the Indian army & also illiterate peasants, of all religious groups.
- The peasantry in Punjab was a highly differentiated class, with increasing integration with international markets for agricultural commodities and prices having turned the fortunes of many.
- The discontent of peasants resulted from a series of govt measures.
- The Punjab land colonisation bill sought to alter the conditions on which land was granted to colonists in the canal colonies.
- Colonisation Bill in 1906, amended the 1893 Punjab Colonisation of Land Act.
- In November 1906, the govt ordered enhancement in the canal water rates on the Bari Doab canal.
- It provided water for irrigation in the district of Amritsar, Gurdaspur & Lahore.
- The increased rate of water was up to 50 percent.
- The land revenue in the Rawalpindi district was also enhanced.
- These were to remain outside the purview of courts.
- There was even bar on the purchasing of the land by the colonists.
- Farmers felt threatened by the Colonisation Act that they said would reduce owners to contract workers on their own land.
- While Punjab & Haryana have emerged as the nerve centre of these protests, the epicenter of the 1907 agitation was Lyallpur.

THE PATTERN OF AGITATION

- Not only there was breakdown in rural & urban divide but also peasants cutting across religious differences joined the struggle.
- The big Zamindars Association took the lead.
- With the coming of Ajit Singh & Lala Lajpat Rai, agitation became wide spread.
- Numerous public meetings were held to criticise government's measures.
- The viceroy vetoed the colonization Bill.

- The peasant agitation in colonial Punjab had challenged the claim that paternalistic rule had succeeded in keeping the peasantry of the Province happy and contented.
- At the back of the veto was the realisation that the colonial regime alienating the Punjab peasantry – the primary recruiting ground for the British Indian Army .
- The agitation saw a flood of pamphlets, news reports, cartoons, petitions to the govt with vast publicity through the local press.
- Large public protests were held in Sangla, Gojra, Amritsar and several other towns.
- Bar associations organised meetings with mobilisations of several thousands and a spate of memorials were submitted. Amritsar, Lahore and Rawalpindi saw riots.
- Amid resentment against the laws, Bhagat Singh's father Kishan Singh and uncle Ajit Singh, with their revolutionary friend Ghasita Ram, formed Bharat Mata Society, aiming to mobilise this unrest into a revolt against the British government.
- While Punjab & Haryana have emerged as the nerve centre of these protests, the epicentre of the 1907 agitation was Lyallpur.

COLONIAL REACTION

- The entry of Lajpat Rai & Ajit Singh gave the govt a chance to assert that it was a handful of educated politicians engineering the agitation, which was politically motivated.
- Govt used temporary measures such as the postponement of enhanced rates
- Govt used its key weapon of charges of treason & sedition, on the basis of which Ajit Singh & Lajpat Rai were deported.
- Disregarding the grounds for widespread rural discontent in Punjab, an ordinance placing restrictions on meetings was promulgated.
- The signal sent out was that the colonial administration would brook no opposition.
- Despite this assertion of power, in May 1907, Minto vetoed the Bill passed more than six months prior to these developments in 1906, admitting that it was a 'faulty' legislation.
- Minto stated that , " Appearing to 'surrender' to the agitation was less dangerous, than 'insisting upon enforcing the unfortunate legislation."
- The GOI announced the setting up of a Committee to enquire into the administration of the Canal Colonies in the Punjab, to examine the issues that had been raised in the course of the agitation and to consider the basis of a new legislation.
- A smaller committee was constituted to examine the issue of water rates to be charged.
- The Canal Colonies Committee in its report acknowledged that the colony regime in the Western districts had 'meant a good deal of interference.'

- On the issue of succession it recommended that proprietary rights should be granted to all 'good' colonists & that the ordinary law of succession should apply.
- It observed that, the feeling against primogeniture was so strong that it would be 'unwise to maintain the condition of primogeniture for any grantee against his will'.
- The Canal colony Committee held that the allottees should have the right to alienate as per the Land Alienation Act, which included a provision on permission required from the Govt.
- The Committee, pushed for 'perfection' in the system of providing water for irrigation & doing away with remissions for failed crops due to faulty distribution.
- Committee asserted that the they will have to pay whether they get their share of water or not is akin to the courage which necessity gives to the most helpless.'
- Committee admitted that the fines were imposed 'too freely,' that these were 'unduly heavy' & collected with 'too great rigidity.'
- Committee chose to recommend retaining the provision that 'pecuniary penalties may be imposed.'
- A reading of the Committee's Report points to two different standpoints & schools of thought in dealing with the issues thrown up by the agitation.
- One asking that no laxity be shown to those for whom 'almost everything has been done.'
- The other wanting to address the image of the government as a rapacious landlord, 'modifying laws and regulations to suit his own pocket and his own fancies.'
- The colonial establishment, based on intelligence reports, admitted that 'the mood of the people is apparently such that they distort the most innocent act of the government into a deliberate design to cause them injury,' which had led to a situation where, '... men of various castes & tribes in the Canal colony sank their mutual differences & dissensions and united in a common cause...
- The imperial establishment was, undoubtedly, forced to bend in the face of the massive peasant uprising.
- It also set about reconstituting the terms of negotiation with the Punjab peasantry, by a marked shift in allotment policy for land in the newly colonised tracts
- Imperial govt tried factoring in religious alignments & specific concern for a condition of loyalty with respect to those seeking grants, including as reward for services rendered.
- Pagri Sambhal Jatta', a song by by Banke Dayal, the editor of Jhang Sayal, was introduced at a peasants rally in Lyallpur that year.
- It soon became an anthem that defined the farmers' agitation against three British laws – the Doab Bari Act, Punjab Land Colonisation Act and the Punjab Land Alienation Act.
- There were riots in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore etc. British personnel were manhandled, mud was flung at them, offices and churches were burnt, telegraph poles and wires cut.
- According to Ajit Singh, In Multan Division, railway workers went on strike and the strike was called off only when the acts had been cancelled.
- The Superintendent of Police, Phillips, in Lahore was beaten by rioters.
- British civil servants sent their families to Bombay and ships were chartered to take them to England if the situation got worse.
- Some families were transferred to forts.