

Book Review

Fareeha Zafar. *Canals, Colonies and Class: British Policy in the Punjab 1880-1940.* Lahore, Pakistan: Lahore School of Economics. 2017. xxii + 317 pages. Price not given.

Fareeha Zafar's book *Canals, Colonies and Class: British Policy in the Punjab 1880-1940* is essentially an edited reproduction of her PhD thesis, *The Impact of Canal Construction on the Rural Structures of the Punjab: The Canal Colony Districts, 1880 To 1940*. The thesis was completed about 35 years ago at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London (now SOAS, the University of London). She studies the British colonisation process in the Punjab and its effect on the local environment, the production patterns, and social relations, understanding that despite several similar studies on the region, no serious effort had been made to synthesise these issues the way she does in this book. However, in the form of a new book, the synthesis does not add much value as it reiterates the British colonisers' well-known strategies, namely irrigation development as a tool to settle disarmed forces and nomads and, thereby, strengthening a class of local landed elite to maintain their power in the colonies, their revenue-seeking policies, indebtedness of the landed class and alike. Nevertheless, considering the timing of the original contribution, the book, if read together with the contributions such as Khuhro (1978/1999) and Cheesman (1997), provides a relatively rich description of geographers' analyses of the British policies, their intentions, and their effects.

Organised into nine chapters, the book starts with a brief introduction, followed by three chapters highlighting the changes in the physical landscape in the form of ecology, human settlements and the population patterns, changes in the cropping patterns, production levels, and other agricultural developments. The subsequent three chapters deal with the emergence of a new land market, the class structure, and the changes in the land-tenure systems. Chapter eight puts these pieces together to highlight the social change triggered by the coloniser's irrigation and allied policies and their effect on the rural society, the land ownership patterns, and the class structure of the society. The conclusion basically provides a chapter-wise summary, but it also goes on to show the way differential access to the irrigation technology led to specific production relations in the twentieth-century Punjab and helped the colonisers in class formation to enhance and prolong their rule in South Asia.

At least four comments can be made on the book. Firstly, it is unclear why Zafar published a three-decade old work as a new book without any value addition, such as a reanalysis of the issues and thoughts expressed in the original contribution. Secondly, the book—as also noted by Savage (2001) about similar works produced by the history scholars of the era—also fails to appreciate the role of local cultural and religious elites and the institutions, and implicitly portrays locals as passive recipients of the change

initiated by the colonisers. Thirdly, a reader already informed on the subject may feel disappointed as the promise to provide a rich synthesis, which Zafar claims to be missing from earlier contributions, still remains largely unfulfilled. In fact, compared with the contributions of Cheesman (1997) and Khuhro (1978/99), her contribution is more descriptive and less analytical. Finally, the book remains largely disconnected from the changing international political landscape during the 1930s and the 1940s, which later determined the fate of many colonies and colonisers. It is largely unknown how it affected the British policies during those years.

Having said that, Zafar's thesis is now more accessible and may amuse new readers who want to know this historical account of the British rule in India. Various historical events mentioned in the main text, footnotes, and annexes were unreported in the past. The book and resource materials it mentions are indeed a valuable contribution that may guide future researchers towards grey literature available on the subject.

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REFERENCES

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- Khuhro, H. (1978/1999) *The Making of Modern Sindh: British Policy and Social Change in The Nineteenth Century*. Karachi: Indus Publications and Karachi: Oxford University Press.
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