

EMERGENCE OF CLASSES AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: AN ANALYSIS OF PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at studying the emergence of classes and social stratification of pre-colonial and colonial South Asia through the case study of Lahore, the capital city of the Pakistani Punjab. Through employing the theoretical model of Wright (2003) about class categorization, based on Marxist and Weberian notions of class, this research postulates that South Asian society have evolved through pre-colonial subjective position to colonial objective and relational positions, leading to historical foundation. The central argument maintains that before colonial intervention the daily life and society of Lahore was not divided into economic sections and classes and was collectivist in nature. With the advent of British rulers the society was starkly divided into categories and sections, making them exclusive from inclusive. This compartmentalization of the society was primarily based on economy, resulting in the emergence of classes, i.e. elite, middle, lower, upper and lower middle, and under the poverty line. This research is a qualitative analysis built upon archival materials and secondary sources.

Key Words: Class, Colonial modernism, Social stratification, Pre-colonial Lahore, Middle class.

INTRODUCTION

While the class structure in Punjab is easily identifiable in the modern era, it is far more difficult to identify in pre-colonial or colonial Punjabi society (Daechsel 2012). Class division based on economic inequality is one of the challenges, that is becoming more and more dangerous in Pakistan, these days. Nearly 40% of Pakistanis, according to a World Bank report from 2023, are below the poverty level. Even though Punjab is thought to be the wealthiest province in the country and Lahore, its capital and the most developed city, poverty and socioeconomic divide still exist there. Since independence, Lahore has unquestionably been the hub of Punjab's politics and economics. This city has been blessed with the majority of development projects, infrastructure, health and educational facilities, etc. However, because it is the capital of Punjab, it is overpopulated, with 30% of its area made up of slums that were built by the underprivileged.

The question rises here whether this region was always divided into the economically deprived and privileged classes? And if not when, how and why

this economic disparity emerged? This research is an effort to study the process that led to the widening schism between economically diverse classes. For this purpose the city of Lahore has been chosen as the case study because of its centrality in the Punjab's, and ultimately in the country's politics and economy. It is interesting to study the emergence and increase of the class difference in one of the most developed city of the country.

The renowned English poet John Milton in his timeless poem *Paradise Lost*, excellently described Lahore and Agra, as the locations that God showed Adam after "the Fall" as the marvels of his creation. Lahore was greater than Constantinople, Paris, and London combined when the poem was composed in 1080/1670, and the Mughals dominated most of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh from Lahore fort (Shaykh 2017). Since the Middle Ages, or perhaps before, the city of Lahore has continued to serve as the hub of all regional political, economic, and social activity. Due to the city's continued exposure to the socio-cultural, political, economic,

and religious influences of the Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Greek, Turk, Mughal, Afghan, Sikh, and British empires, it has gained even more historical significance. The ancient Hindu literature known as the *Rig Veda* attributes the city's origins approximately 3700 years ago to Loh, the son of the Hindu god Rama and his wife Sita (Latif 1892). In honor of the city's founder, the Hindu temple of Loh is still standing in the Lahore fort.

Early in the eleventh century, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni took control of Lahore, and in 411/1021, Malik Ayaz was named governor of the city (Kabir, Abbas, Hayat 2017). Under Khusrau Shah's leadership, the city was made the capital of the Ghaznavid Empire in the east in 546/1152. When Ghazni fell in 563/1163, the city was left as the only capital of the empire (Lal 1884). Following the Ghaurid invasion of Lahore in 582/1187, Qutbuddin Aibak established the Mamluk dynasty as the Delhi Sultanate's capital in 597/1206. Lahore was crucial to the beginning of the Mughal dynasty in India because its governor, Daulat Khan Lodhi, persuaded Babur to invade the country. Later, when Sher Shah Suri gained power, Humayun and his cousin Kamran Mirza sought refuge in Lahore. Sher Shah Suri took control of the city in 946/1540, but Humayun captured it in February 962/1555, ushering in a new period of prosperity and greatness in the city's history (Latif 1892).

Akbar established Lahore as his capital in 992/1584, rebuilding the crumbling citadel on the ruins of the old Lahore fort and elevating the city to the rank of province. Delhi's influence on Lahore weakened with the Mughals' fall in 1118/1707 following the death of Aurangzeb Alamgir. Following raids by the Maratha, Sikh, and Nadir Shah, the city was governed by a number of governors and became increasingly independent of Delhi. When the city was taken over by the Bhangi Misl in 1180/1767, it became the part of the Sikh kingdom (Kabir, Abbas, Hayat 2017). During the reign of Ranjit Singh (1213/1799–1254/1839), Lahore regained its splendor and emerged as the hub of the region's economic activity. However, the Mughal monuments were mercilessly destroyed and looted by the Sikhs at this time (Lal 1884). Following Ranjit Singh's demise, Lahore experienced political unrest once more before the British took control of the city in 1262/1846. When Punjab was absorbed into the British Empire in 1265/1849, Lahore had about 120,000 residents. Lahore was designated as the capital of Punjab

province upon independence in 1947 and has since been the focal point of all government development and urbanization initiatives.

With the help of some archival materials and secondary sources, the central argument of this research claims that before colonial intervention in Lahore in 1849, there were economic classes in the society but with less social stratification. The society was coherent and collectivist in nature. The process of this economy based social stratification started during colonial period, under European influence, and has grown into acutely stratified society, in the post-colonial period. One small portion of the society is living highly privileged life, with less or non-existent interaction with the other major part of the society, hardly meeting the both ends. And in between there's a middle class with limited resources, trying to mimic the life style of upper class and hardly maintaining the difference from the lower class. This class difference has resulted in a shallow social structure.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx's classification of classes according to how the means of production relate to each other and Max Weber's classification of classes according to their wealth, status, and power are the origins of the classical perspective on the concept of class (Wright 2003). Both Weberian and Marxist traditions reject a gradational, oversimplified concept of class because they associate different types of economic resources with people's social relationships. According to these schools, social relationships influence people's material interests and serve as the basis for both conflict and cohesiveness. But the fundamental difference between Marx and Weber is their theoretical approach, which is seen in Weberian "life chances" and Marxian "exploitation."

Wright (2003) offers a helpful synopsis of the various underlying elements that give rise to the diversity of class ideas. He categorizes these classes into the following five groups.

1. Subjective position refers to the ways in which individuals within a social organization and others are defined by disparities.
2. The objective distribution of individuals on a gradational scale of economic inequality, primarily as shown by wealth or income, is known as the objective position. Classifications like upper class, middle class, higher middle class, lower class, and underclass are the outcome of this.

3. The relational explanation of economic life chances, which also characterizes the schools of thought held by Marx and Weber, explains why there are differences in living standards and other aspects of economic life chances. Class ceases to be a gradational term and becomes relational, based on how individuals relate to resources or assets that generate income.

4. Historical variation in systems of inequality: This theory explains how social organizations of inequality have changed throughout time by concentrating on the macro level rather than the micro level.

5. The foundation of economic oppression and exploitation examines the kinds of adjustments that must be made in order to eradicate economic exploitation in communities.

All these five thematic categories of class help us to understand the historical evolution of the present extremely stratified class based Pakistani society. The first category of subjective position defines the pre-colonial social construction, with social inequalities primarily based on religion, race or gender, etc. but not necessarily economic. From colonial period onwards we see the emergence of salaried class, employed by the British rulers, thus founding the first ever middle class in Indian society. Families with jobs with the British colonial government made up the majority of the Muslim middle class in colonial India (Phedra and Ranjan 2022). In colonial India, these individuals served as the intermediary between the common Indians and the English colonial rulers. This development caused objective positioning of various social classes based on economic status, relational to financial resources and assets. From colonial to post-colonial period it developed historical variation in systems of inequality, laying the foundation of economic oppression and exploitation. Based on these above mentioned categories, this research studies the evolution of economy based class difference in Pakistani society through the pre-colonial and colonial Lahore.

Literature Review

A substantial amount of literature has been written regarding the idea of class, with roots in both Weberian and Marxian schools of thought. These schools disagree about which characteristics should be included when defining classes. There are a few theorists that have theorized classes as following;

place and function (Mosca 1939; Pareto 1963); relations of power (Dahrendorf 1959); status position (Warner 1960; Lenski 1966); inter-marriage (Schumpeter 1951); cross-categorization of wealth and power (Ossowski 1963; Wright 1979); degree of structuralism (Giddens 1973); and wealth, employment, and political relations (Goldthrope 1987; Erikson and Glodthorpe 1992), etc . It would be accurate to say that all of these theories of class, in general, pursue the ideas of exploitation and opportunities in life that Marxian and Weberian thought about class.

Following colonial interference, Indian society saw a significant shift in economic norms that gave rise to distinct strata. 100 million Indians were killed by British colonialism in 40 years, between 1880 and 1920. Robert Allen, an economic historian, found that under British control, extreme poverty in India rose from 23% in 1810 to over 50% in the middle of the 20th century (Allen 2020). Living conditions in India may have been similar to the developing parts of Western Europe before colonization, according to Allen and other academics (Sullivan 2022). The exploitation of India's riches and resources was made easier by British colonial policies, which led to a rise in socioeconomic inequality.

Economic inequality in South Asia now has its roots in the colonial era, hindering the implementation of economic and social rights and reducing access to healthcare, education, and basic services (Oxfam 2022). With British India's institutional and economic policies making the rich Indians richer and the poor Indians poorer, gaps between the propertied and the property-less have expanded and continue to do so. Peasants were frequently subjected to oppressive practices and increased poverty as a result of the introduction of the Zamindari system, which required them to pay zamindars exorbitant rents and taxes (Balaji 2023). The system's emphasis on cash crops and commercial agriculture made the population more vulnerable to current cycles of poverty and debt and made them more vulnerable to rural shocks.

Based on the macro-analysis in the above mentioned studies, this research is aimed at micro-analysis of the development of classes in Lahore, resulting in economy based acute social stratification. No prior research has distinctively discussed the emergence of classes and social stratification while focusing pre-colonial and colonial Lahore.

Findings and Discussion

Pre-colonial Lahore

Seven major Imperial dynasties ruled over India during the six centuries of Muslim rule: the Lodhi dynasty (855/1451-932/1526); Muslim Bahmani Sultanate (747/1347-933/1527); Saiyyid dynasty (816/1414-855/1451); Mughal dynasty (932/1526-1273/1857); and the Slave dynasty (1206/602-1290/689). By conquest, each overthrew the other, only to be overrun by fresh central Asian invaders. Lahore was the primary target for the invaders because it was the main city on the route from the northwest to Delhi. Its fortunes therefore fluctuated along with these dynastic shifts. Every conqueror brought death and destruction to the city at first, but as his reign spread, Lahore's riches and status returned. The Mughals (932/1526–1141/1729) were the kings who had the biggest impact on Lahore's growth out of all of them. They practically turned Lahore into India's second capital. It developed into a royal home where Mughal emperors annually resided for a period of time. They hosted courts, created gardens, palaces, and mosques. Emperor Akbar constructed the city walls between 992/1584 and 1006/1598 (Lal 1884).

The Mughal social structure was founded on a military-administrative system in which nobles were designated as regional vassals tasked with managing a territory, raising taxes, and supplying the imperial army with a set number of soldiers. European feudalism was similar to this social structure (Qadeer 1983). Similarly, territorial-communal concepts formed the foundation of the Mughal urban social order. Under the protection of a noble family, cities were split into quarters or districts, each inhabited by a tribe, clan, or guild fraternity. These neighborhoods resembled towns in which the wealthy and the poor were bound together by traditional duties and benefits. Additionally, there were marketplaces and commercial areas with a focus on goods like spices and diamonds. This was also the structure of Lahore. For instance, Rarra was the neighborhood for oil producers and blacksmiths resided near Mochi Gate (Qadeer 1983). Lahore therefore lacked a distinct division between the usage of residential land and that of business or industry.

The Greek system of medicine, often known as the herbal system, reached its pinnacle during Mughal reign (Musa 1962). The Mughal rulers encouraged and employed doctors in their courts, to treat the general public. A neighborhood inside the walled

city known as Physicians' Bazaar got its name from the decades of medical families who practiced there (Goulding 1924). In a similar vein, there existed an Islamic educational system built around mosques and cemeteries. Persian was the medium of instruction, and the main subjects covered in the curriculum were logic, history, Arabic, etc. A dramatic departure with the established medical and educational systems happened with the arrival of British control.

Colonial Lahore

The partition of Lahore by the British into sectors within the walled and gated city allowed authorities to gather information about the city and isolate it from its surrounding suburbs and districts. The word "suburban" evokes comparisons between urban and colonial settings. However, the urbanization of Lahore and its "suburban areas" did not result from the spatiality of class distinctions that are prevalent in large cities like Manchester (Suvorva 2011). According to William Glover, such a translation process "does violence" to the social relations and sensory reality of Lahore (Glover 2008). Although the suburban Lahore cliché upsets the city's natural equilibrium with its surroundings, it also makes it possible for both areas to be reclaimed and developed. These areas are now recast as agents of colonial improvement by creating urban order, enabling progressive assertions to be made by colonial urban practitioners. Representing the area around Lahore as ruins before the British occupation initially enabled colonial rulers to assert—and rather understandably—that they were the only ones capable of bringing Lahore back to life. To quote an official Indian source:

The dull, lifeless stretches of crumbling ruins, tottering walls, and ancient mounds, the desolate and barren tracts scattered with debris for miles around, where not a single tree stood to shelter a weary traveler, have been charmed into a scene of life again through the magic wand of British civilization. (Latif, 1892).

In the old city and its surroundings, medical ideas about germs, illnesses, and health provided an excuse for intervention (Glover 2008). Its supporters contended that British spatial patterns were created with the benefit of both people and place in mind. Either ignored or downplayed were concerns about the structural relationships and accompanying violence inherent in colonial interactions. In addition to creating a fresh and unique style that was brought

together by the Mall, a great thoroughfare that connected all of official Lahore's districts, these colonial structures also created a stark contrast to the walled city's congested areas and winding lanes. As Glover puts it, architecture helped to modernize Lahore. The old city's narrow streets and the Mall's boulevard make for an unmistakable contrast.

The practice of dividing residential neighborhoods from commercial areas was brought by the British; it was a manifestation of their rigid, formal, and highly differentiated lifestyle patterns, which divided work, play, home, and shopping. It was also a transplantation of a European town planning concept. Civil Lines is the new town the British created for themselves. It was constructed to serve as the headquarters for British civil servants. These were the residences, shops, clubs, and offices that made up the British officers' whole living quarters. The Governor's House (1265/1849), University Hall (1293/1876), Central Telegraph Office (1297/1880), High Court (1306/1889), and General Post Office (1330/1912) were among the new British administration buildings constructed concurrently with this (Rudduck 1965). A military cantonment was constructed in 1276/1860 five miles from the Civil Lines. Punjab's industrialization was not systematically promoted by the British (Qadeer 1983).

However, the construction of roads, railroads, and other public works encouraged the development of small-scale molding, lathing, and milling workshops close to the train station on the boundaries of the walled city. The Delhi to Karachi line was finished in 1878, connecting Lahore with the developing sea port in Western India (Talbot and Kamran 2016). The significant commercialization of agriculture and wheat exports coincided with the building of the railway connection between Karachi and Lahore. Whether it was manufactured goods and food items or imported cotton piece goods from Lancashire, long-distance traffic heading for Lahore required to be loaded onto boats or camels for the 590-mile upriver trip from Kotri to Multan. From there, it was transported by train for the final 220 miles to Lahore (Talbot and Kamran 2016).

During the 1800s, products made in Lahore, including as oil lamps, candles, soaps, textiles, glass, copper, and iron, were in high demand in distant regions (Latif 1892). The contemporary industrial era was brought about by British administration, and the city grew to become the home of a military

garrison as well as a hub for railway carriage and locomotive maintenance factories. The majority of the metal fabricating, molding, and lathing industries were born out of these public projects, which upgraded traditional smithies. In tandem with the growth of its manufacturing sector, Lahore emerged as the hub for healthcare, education, and government services. By serving the entire province through its hospitals, institutions, and High Court, it was able to diversify its economic basis.

During the Mughal era, the fields of health and education underwent significant change as well. The Department of Education was founded by the British in 1272/1856, and Punjab University was founded in 1285/1869 in Lahore (King 1976). Within three years of the advent of British administration in 1268/1852, an American Missionary school was established in the historic edifice known as *Rang Mahal* (palace of colors) (Goulding 1924). A hospital and medical college were established in Lahore around 1276/1860 (Ansari 1962). By establishing these organizations, the British demonstrated how quickly and deliberately they changed the social structure of Lahore and all of colonial India. The ancient curricula, traditional remedies, and *maktabs* were swiftly superseded. They withdrew into the shadow economy. Traditional facilities and services were forced into the private and voluntary sectors by modern institutions and practices. Since the start of British administration in 1265/1849, as the population has grown, so too have the number of schools, institutions, and hospitals. The educational administration of the province founded both colleges and schools. The Lahore municipality was in charge of public health, elementary schools, and epidemic management. All around the city, maternity and child health facilities, epidemic disease centers, and outpatient dispensaries were set up.

In Lahore, a new definition of the good life was coined. The club, the cricket ground, the broad roads, the bungalow, and the flush toilets became requirements of life. Obviously, only the wealthy and powerful could afford this kind of life, especially in the civil lines. There were not many changes in the villages that surrounded the old city where most people lived. The process of dualization of the economy and way of life that separates the native town of the masses from the city of the elite started at that point (Qadeer 1983). In Indian history, the British conquest marked a turning point. It allowed western influences to enter the Indian subcontinent.

Several useful contemporary institutions and practices, such as roads, trains, public health and sanitation, were brought to colonial India by the British Raj. These developments quickened the rate of social change and significantly changed Indian society. However, these establishments and amenities continued to be the exclusive domain of the gentry, who actively collaborated with the British. The changes were so gradual for most Indians that they were barely perceptible. The small governing elite's existence was altered by the British, who made them an island of modernity in a sea of poverty and tradition. Social processes of dualization and fragmentation were initiated, at least in the case of Lahore, when contemporary methods were imposed on top of a traditional economy and society.

Conclusion

The pre-colonial Lahore had a society where the classes were subjective and relational in nature instead of gradational. The professions like cobblers, goldsmiths, carpenters, oil-sellers etc. whether earning well or hardly meeting their both ends, were considered the respectable members of their relevant communities. Also the cultural or religious celebrations were not distinctive to classes; everyone celebrated them together, without considering the class difference. British viewed walled city of Lahore as haven for potential social discontent and disease epidemics so they left the inner city alone and focused the suburban areas for development projects. They laid the foundation of 'civil station' outside the walled city, towards south. Lahore Railway Station was also constructed outside the walled city after the mutiny of 1857, castle shaped in case to avoid any political uprising.

The local Indian employees of British rulers lived in the newly introduced life structure and slightly adapted the British mannerism, indulging into an inferiority complex about their native traditions and culture. This developed a new class which was British in life style and local in origin, entitled as the middle class. The economic deprivations caused by the British colonial rule made major portion of the society to live under the poverty line, causing the emergence of another class. All these newly emerged classes were economically distinct, and were exclusive in their socio-religious celebrations. The colonial period laid the foundation of social stratification and economy based classes in Lahore specifically, and South Asia generally.

Since then our society is divided into classes which are rigid in nature. It is the result of this social stratification that health and education, the two basic parameters of social development, are divided into private and public. Lahore district has only 1300 public schools and 6000 private schools (Planning and Development Board 2011). Lahore has 18 male colleges, 6 commerce colleges and 36 female colleges, total 60 colleges in public sector, while 233 colleges in private sector (PHEC). Lahore has 15 public sector universities and 22 private sector universities (PHEC). There are 84 private hospitals while 23 public hospitals. Hence, within one city of Lahore, there are two separate worlds of health and education, divided into public and private; it is the continuity of the colonial division of *anderoon* (main or inner) and *bairoon* (peripheral) Lahore, stratifying the society economically.

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