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### An Attempt to Explore How Colonialism Has Influenced Peripheral Space: Rejuvenating the Paraphernalia of Western Punjab's Districts in Pakistan

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**Original Article**

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#### Keywords

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Districts, Urban  
centres, Judicial,  
Administration, District  
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#### Abstract

*During the last decades of the 1800s, British rulers colonized the western doabs (interfluvial lands) of Punjab with agricultural colonization through a network of canals, restructuring space (physical and social) to serve their imperial purposes of power and economy. The agricultural colonization, not only impacted the economy of this region through increased agricultural productivity and international trade but also the land grants favored certain classes, influencing the social and political basis of the Punjabi society[1]. The landscape of West Punjab was transformed forever by rapid urbanization,[2] as new districts and headquarters towns were established. This process of socio-economic development has been studied only partially, and never previously from the perspective of architectural, urban, and landscape history. The paper will address the reshaping of (physical) space at the district scale during British rule in Punjab (1849-1947), wherein new districts were created, and will discuss the changing role of the district headquarters towns. It will argue that the re-appropriation of space in the British Punjab should be understood by contemplating the imperial structure's political and economic requirements. While some old towns (including Sialkot, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sheikhpura, and Jhang) were expanded in West Punjab, a few new towns (for instance, Lyallpur/Faisalabad, Montgomery/Sahiwal, Sargodha) was also laid out, to act as intermediate centres between the big cities and small towns. Focusing on selected examples, the paper will analyze primary resources including district maps, and architectural and urban documentation assembled through investigative information gathering*

## **Introduction**

The Punjab, annexed by the British in 1849, witnessed considerable transformation in its urbanization, landscape, and economy throughout British rule till its end in 1947, the year of independence. Serving as a test bed, the Punjab's territory was constantly rearranged for imperial ends at the whim of its rulers. This article will focus on the West Punjab region of Pakistan and discuss how the area was reorganized during the British administration by creating new cities and districts. Furthermore, the requirement for the imperial system to solidify its political and economic control throughout the region will be taken into consideration while discussing the changing function of the towns with the establishment of specific towns as district headquarters. Numerous historical materials, such as district gazetteers and old maps of cities and districts have been consulted and analyzed alongside field surveys in selected Punjabi towns.

### **1. Discretionary Spatial System of Imperial Rulers**

The Sikhs subjugated Punjab in the latter years of the Mughal dynasty in this area in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, until the British appropriated the territory in 1849. In 1799, under the reign of Ranjit Singh, Lahore was assigned as the capital of the Sikh Kingdom. During Singh's reign, the Punjab embraced a substantial area that stretched from the Khyber Pass in the west to the northern frontiers of Kashmir, and down to the southern borders of Sindh. The Mughal administrative system was expended to decree the nation, with the capital serving as the center of power. Punjab was fragmented into several sarkars, which were administrative units coarsely tantamount to districts, and two subas, or larger administrative units, of Lahore and Multan. (see Figure 1) [3].

Due to the Sikhs' tenacious resistance, the Punjab was only eventually included in the British Empire's invasion of the Indian Subcontinent. In March 1849, the Punjab was effectively conquered following protracted conflicts with the Sikh Khalsa [4]. This came about as a result of the Punjab's strategic significance as a border territory between the British Army in India and the Russian Army in Central Asia, as well as the area's economic potential (see Figure 2). These elements strongly influenced British policies aimed at upholding law and order while boosting Punjab's agricultural output and ability to generate income through the expansion of the area's infrastructure and economy [5]. The extensive territorial periphery of Punjab, which protracted from the imperial capital of Delhi in the east to Peshawar in the west, was governed by the Board of Administration from the provincial capital of Lahore, with somewhat exclusive statute by the sequestered district officers, from the time of annexation in 1849 until the establishment of direct crown rule in 1858. Even after the Pathan districts that encompassed the Northwestern Frontier Region to the west of the River Indus were divided into a separate province in 1901 and given Peshawar as its capital, the Punjab supplied all the needs of the military commissariat, which resulted in the growth of the province's transportation and communication networks (see Figure 3) [6].

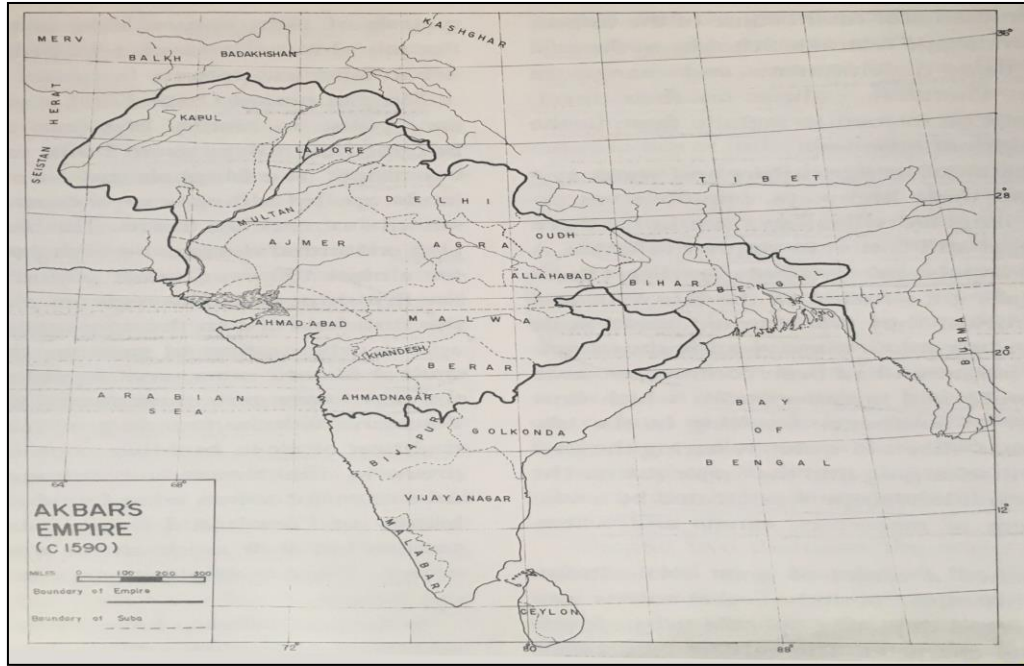


Figure 1: Map of India during the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar (c.1590), when the region of Punjab was divided into two subas; Lahore and Multan[3].



Figure 2: Map of Russian Frontiers in Central Asia, showing the Punjab as a Frontier Region of British India, and Afghanistan as a Buffer Zone between the Russian and British Empires.[7].

The region's administration was augmented by partitioning the region into five key capitals: Ambala, Jullundur, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi (see Figure 4). This was done in addition to enhancing the region's connectivity and interaction through the development of railways, roads, ports, and telegraph systems. However, a petite controllable unit was essential to spreading imperial power and control. The divisional units were divided into districts, each of which had its headquarters town created. These districts were split into rings of villages and tahsils, or subdivisions. With the progressive establishment of a new bureaucratic system, the province to tahsil level administrators of the judiciary, executive branch, and revenue department reported to the Lieutenant Governor. The urban center, a town of judicious extent and amenities served as the imperial authority's nucleus for all legislative levels and urban dimensions over Punjab's populace and fiscal productivity. Roads, post offices, telegraph networks, and train lines were associated with the larger towns. Once agricultural colonization restructured the region's western *doabs*, these freshly built governmental establishments and infrastructure lattices had a major influence on the region's frugality and urbanization.

### 1.1 Agricultural Colonization as a Trigger of Urbanization in the Punjab

The Punjab's western region was split between mountainous regions in the northwest and river valleys in the southwest. Major cities and urban villages existed in river valleys prior to colonization. The semi-nomadic tribes living in isolated and tiny communities clustered around water sources were sporadically distributed over the mountainous regions, known as the bars of the western doabs (interfluvial lands). However, during British administration, these western Punjabi tracts experienced a massive urbanization and alteration in their terrain.

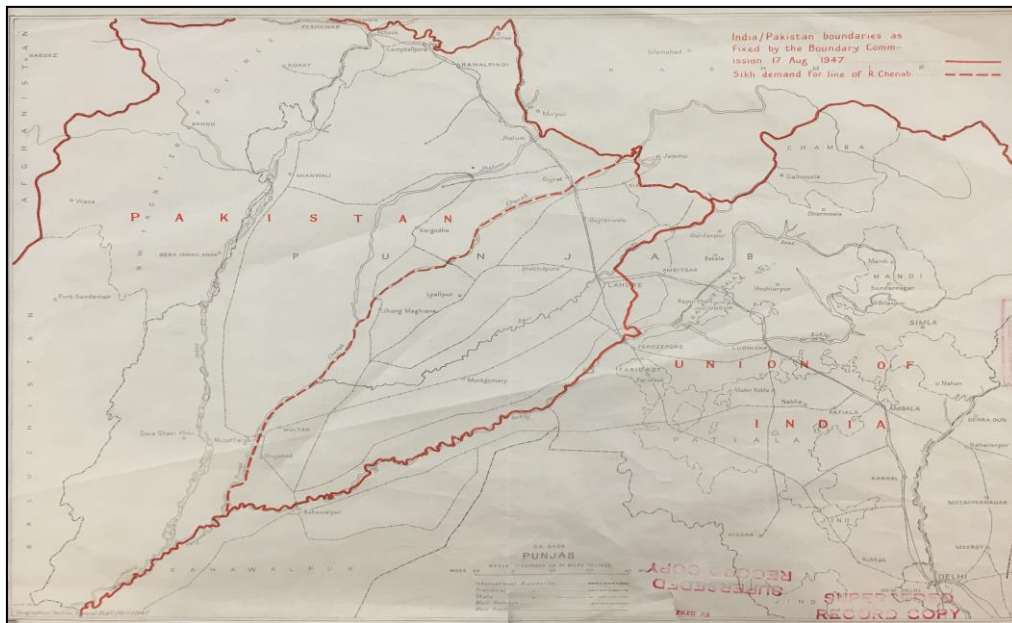


Figure 3: Punjab map with the main railway lines linking the province's largest cities, from Peshawar to Delhi. Also displayed is the borderline that the Border Commission established on August 17, 1947, dividing Punjab into West Punjab (in Pakistan) and East Punjab (in India) [8]

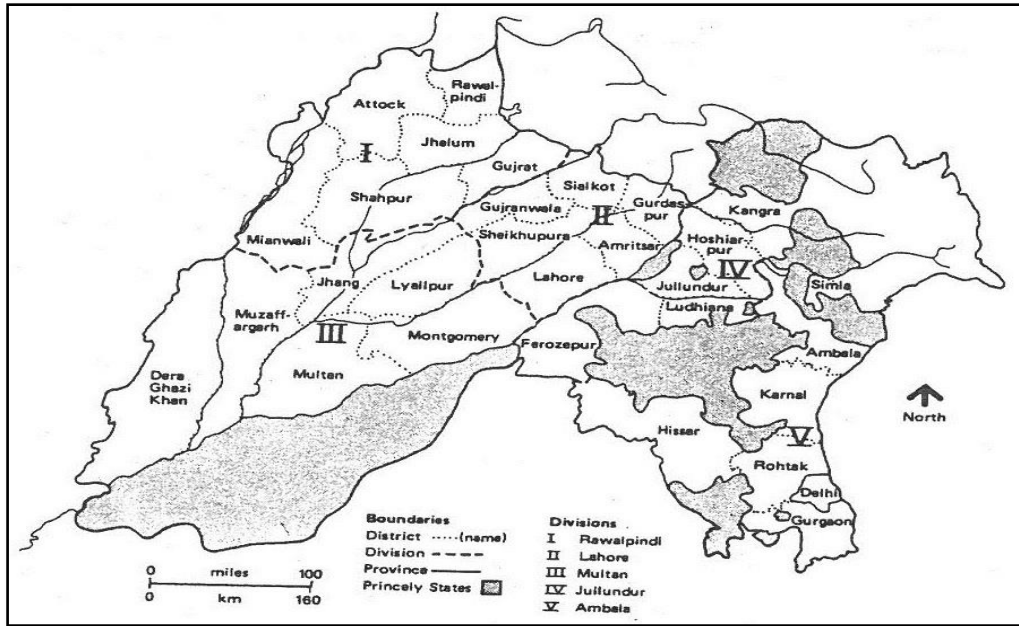


Figure 4: Map of Punjab, 1947, showing the main divisions and districts of Punjab[9]

From the earliest days of colonial control in the Punjab, the province's economic potential was acknowledged, and its western rivers were thought to be suitable for the construction of canals. But after the financial viability of building canals was guaranteed, the agricultural colonization through canal networks in the western doabs of the Bari, Rechna, and Jech began in the later decades of the nineteenth century. The Punjab was established as a model agricultural province of British India with nine canal projects, comprising colonies of Sidhnai, Sohag Para, Chunian, (Lower) Chenab, (Lower) Jhelum, Lower Bari Doab, higher Chenab, higher Jhelum, and Nili Bar [10]. Urbanization was sparked by the massive rise in agricultural output and population, which changed and modified the land [11]. These canal colonies were included in the districts in which they were situated as soon as the land concessions were distributed, and after Pakistan was divided in 1947, they were included in that region.

In the western *doabs*, the agricultural colonization set off a broad process of rearranging the Punjabi terrain. In the process, the land was turned into a commodity and a representation of political and socioeconomic power. This was accomplished in two ways: first, by declaring it as Crown Wastelands in 1885; second, by dividing the wastelands into squares that the imperial rulers could lend, sell, or give to anybody through land grants of canal colonies. The Punjabi landscape was reorganized to attain the objectives of improved governmental control and economic efficiency to handle the rising revenue, agricultural production, and population. Beginning with the survey-based revenue assessment,

Canal colony and settlement reports, as well as district gazetteers, served as official records of the land settlements (both regular and modified) and the changes brought about by canal irrigation. District borders were constantly being changed, tahsils and estates were being transferred within and between districts, and new administrative entities consisting of tahsils and districts were being created. The upper part of the Rechna Doab was ruled as a single district with its seat at Wazirabad at the time of annexation in 1849. However, following the revenue survey, this one large district was divided into the districts of Gujranwala and Sialkot within a year (Figure 5). Over the course of the following several decades, there were more modifications to the districts of Gujranwala and Sialkot.

The *tahsils* in the Sialkot District were transferred and re-transferred, and by 1881, the district had been divided into five *tahsils*: Daska, Pasrur, Raya, and Zafarwal (see Figure 6). But to condense the district's size when the Upper Chenab Canal was built in 1912, the District of Sialkot was left with its last four *tahsils*: Daska, Pasrur, Zafarwal, and Sialkot [10]. To improve income administration, the Sheikhpura area was established in 1919. Later, land acquisitions from Sialkot, Gujranwala, Lahore, and Lyallpur districts expanded the area (see Figure 7) [12]. When the new town of Sargodha was laid out in the Rawalpindi Division's Shahpur District, the four *tahsils* of Sargodha were added to the already-existing *tahsils* of Shahpur, Bhera, and Khushab (see Figure 8) [13] in the Gujrat District, there were three *tahsils*: Gujrat, Kharian, and Phalia (see Figure 9) [14].

Dera Ghazi Khan, Jhang, Montgomery, and Multan were the four districts that made up the early Multan Division. Before the current town's layout, Montgomery District was known as Gugera District. Following that, the district headquarters was moved to Montgomery, and Gugera, Dipalpur, and Pak Pattan were joined by a new *tahsil* (see Figure 10) [15]. Three *tahsils*, Jhang, Chiniot, and Shorkot, comprised the Jhang District (see Figure 11) [16]. When agricultural colonization began, Chenab Colony was divided into new districts, each with its capital town, Lyallpur. This colony was founded between 1892 and 1806, with its primary branches located in the lower Rechna Doab valley at the old Sandal Bar, Jhang, Rakh, and Gugera, mostly populated by tribes of semi-nomadic livestock and camel owners [17]. The area in the two former districts of Jhang and Montgomery in Multan Division, as well as the two former districts of Lahore and Gujranwala in Lahore Division, underwent extensive reorganization during the Chenab Colony settlement process. There was constant estate transfer and retransfer within the *tahsils* of these districts [18]. In the end, it produced the new district of Lyallpur, which was named after Sir James Lyall, a previous Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and was established on December 1st, 1904. The newly constituted district was first divided into three *tahsils*: Lyallpur, Toba Tek Singh, and Samundri. Later, the fourth *tahsil*, Jaranwala, was added (see Figure 12) [13].

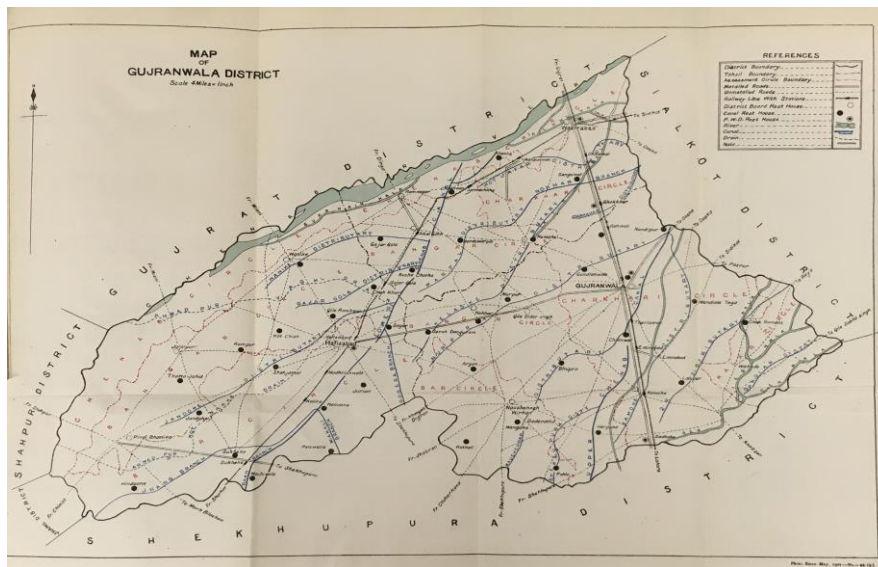


Figure 5:Map of Gujranwala District, showing main *tahsils* of Gujranwala, Hafizabad, and Wazirabad[19].

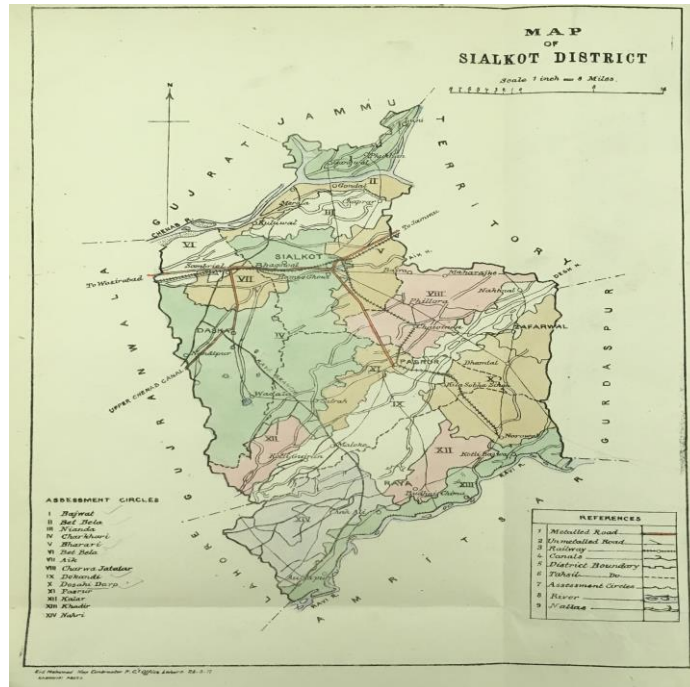


Figure 6:Map of Sialkot District, showing five tahsils of Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur, Zafarwal, and Raya[20]

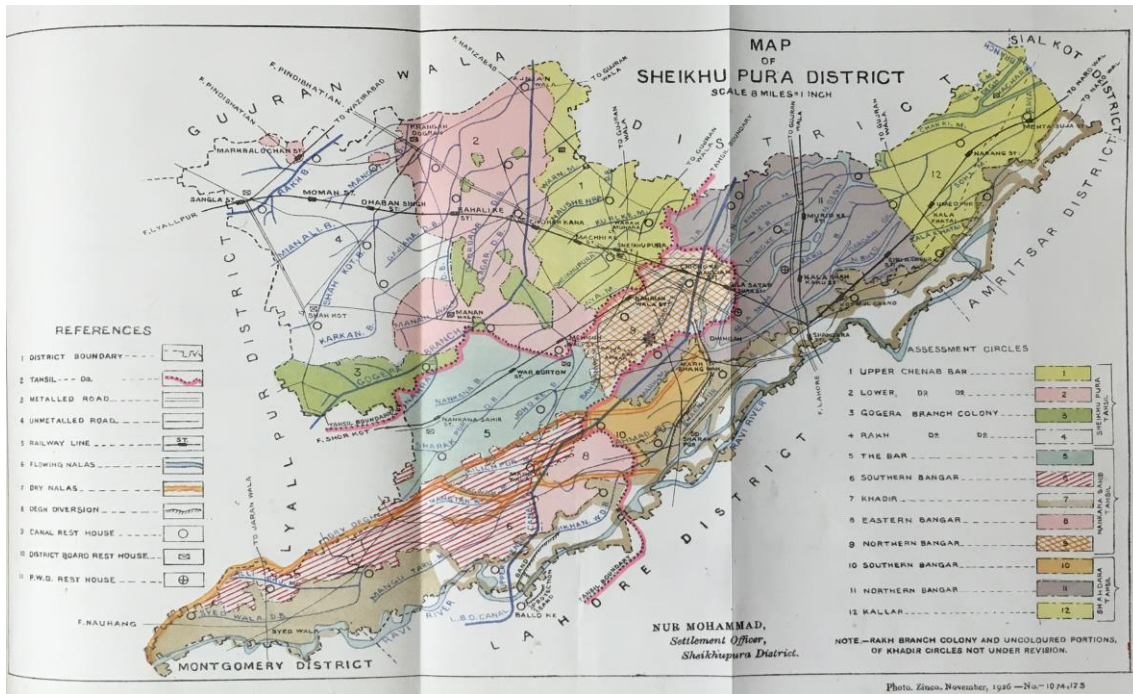


Figure 7:Map of Sheikhupura District, showing main tahsils of Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib & Muridke[21].

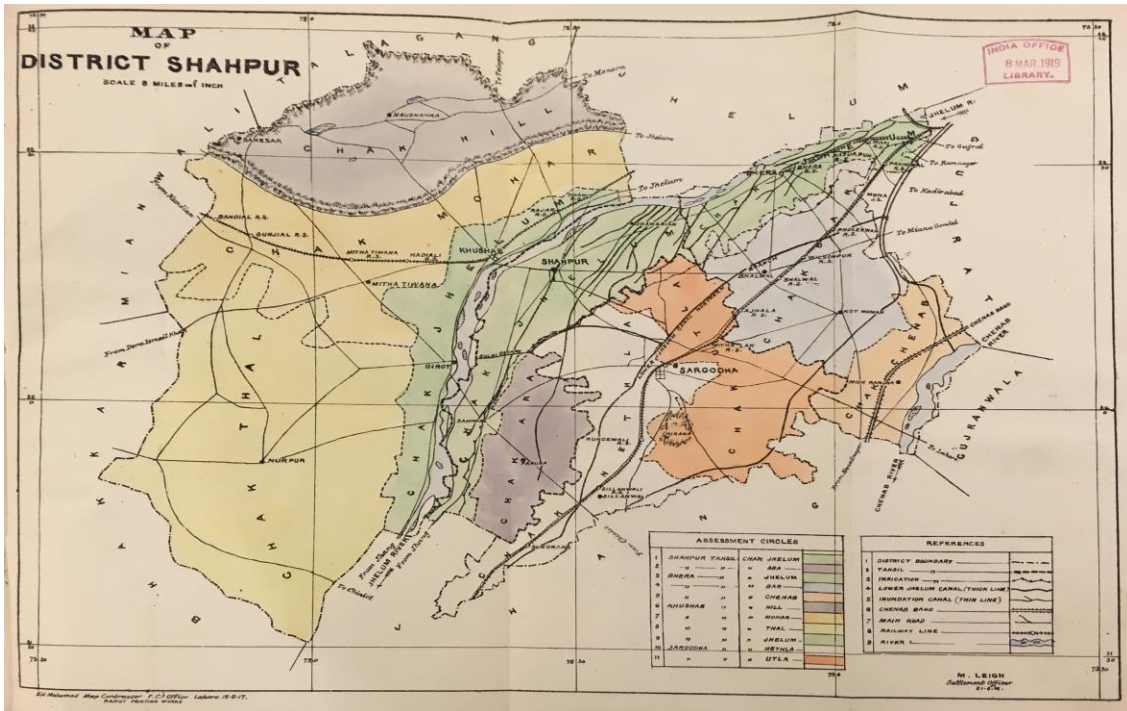


Figure 8: Map of Shahpur District, showing four tahsils of Sargodha, Shahpur, Bhera, and Khushab

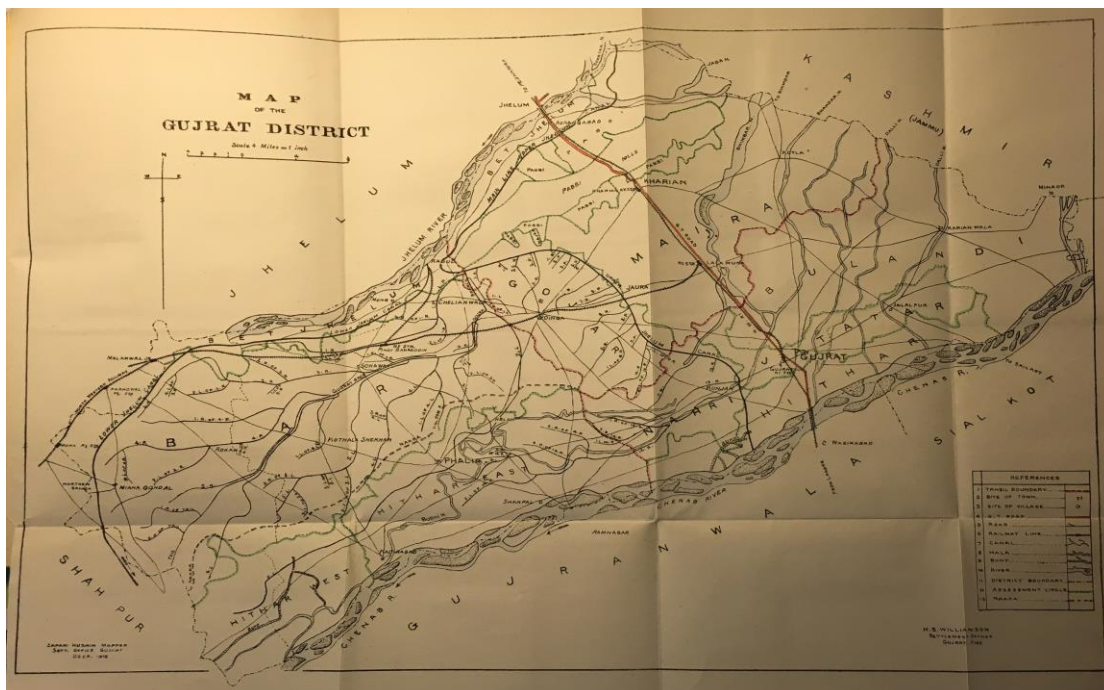


Figure 9: Map of Gujrat District, showing three tahsils of Gujrat, Kharian, and Phalia.



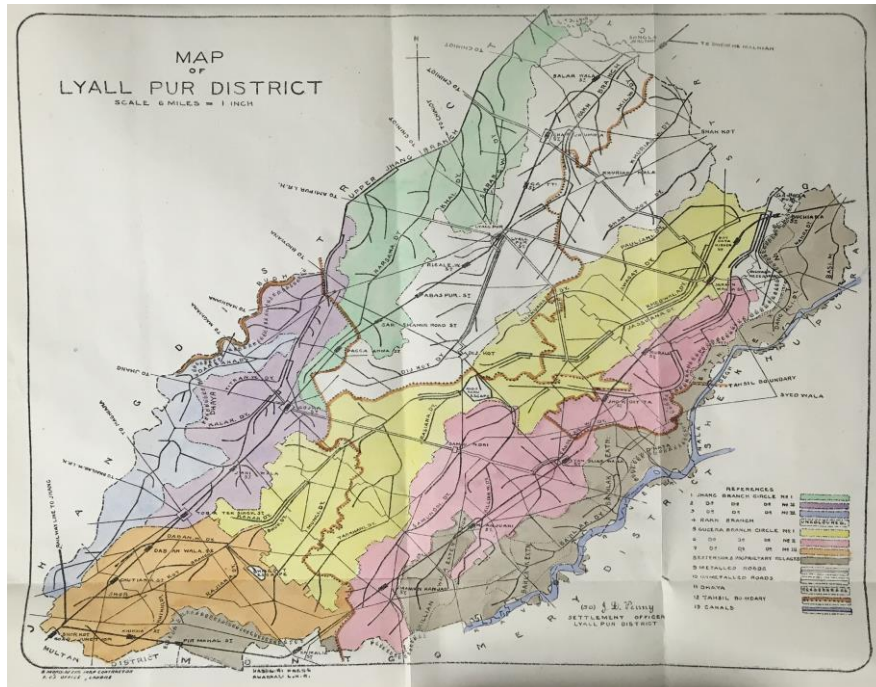


Figure 12: Map of Lyallpur District, showing four tahsils of Lyallpur, Toba Tek Singh, Samundri, Jaranwala.

### 1.2 District Headquarters Towns as Foci of Imperial Supremacy and Economy

The towns' functions as district headquarters changed within the district. While some towns declined to the tahsil level or became minor towns, others flourished and took on new responsibilities. The district office for Montgomery District was moved from the town of Gugera to the newly established town of Montgomery. In the Shahpur District, a new town called Sargodha was established next to the former Shahpur hamlet to serve as the district's new administrative center. The district office in Jhang District was relocated from Shorkot to Jhang-Maghiana. Initially, a cantonment was established at Wazirabad, Lahore Division; however, the district headquarters was relocated to Gujranwala. For political considerations, the Wazirabad garrison was abandoned and moved to the recently constructed Sialkot cantonment as a defense against the Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir. Wazirabad was relegated to the position of a tiny tahsil headquarters town, which has continued to impede its progress even in the present. In contrast, Sialkot and Gujranwala saw prosperity and attained the status of district headquarters towns in their respective districts. Sheikhpura, which had previously been a hamlet settlement, was elevated to the status of a town and developed as the district headquarters in the recently established Sheikhpura District.

The spread of imperial authority throughout the region was further ensured by the development of transportation networks, which included major roads and rails. Montgomery, for example, was developed along the main rail line, midway between the two divisional headquarters of Lahore and Multan (see Figure 10)[15]. Lyallpur, the new town, was situated along the main Wazirabad-Khanewal Branch of the North-Western Railway, along Chiniot Road (see Figure 12)[10] Gujranwala, on the main Grand Trunk Road, which connected it to the divisional capitals of Lahore and Rawalpindi (see Figure 5). The Sheikhpura, district headquarters, was built along the route that connects Sargodha, the district headquarters town, with Lahore, the divisional capital.

Also, by connecting these towns to the seaports of Karachi and Bombay and guaranteeing the flow of people and products between other metropolitan centers, these infrastructure advancements connected these Punjabi towns to the global economy and had an impact on the region's commerce activities. As a result, the British Punjab developed into Asia's most commercially focused province. These towns' roles as the district's principal market towns and administrative hubs were facilitated by these infrastructure improvements. However, some historic towns that had significant religious and commercial significance before colonization were downgraded to ordinary towns and declined under British rule. For example, Gugera and Wazirabad were downsized to small tahsil towns when Montgomery and Gujranwala, in their respective districts, became the district headquarters. Similar to this, Eminabad, which is close to Gujranwala, was formerly a well-known commerce hub east of Lahore. But during the British administration, Eminabad was relegated to a tiny town while Gujranwala emerged as the district center.

In addition to the reorganization of district-level space, the urban forms of the towns that became district headquarters transformed. The majority of these district headquarters were established in old historic towns, such as Gujranwala, Gujrat, Jhang, Sheikhpura, and Sialkot. These five towns have varying pre-colonial settlement histories, with their status as towns or villages. During British rule, however, these towns were expanded with new spaces to support their functioning as district headquarters. These new extensions took the form of kutchery (civil station) and/or cantonment. In colonial towns, kutchery (civil station) houses public administrative buildings, while cantonment is a self-sufficient military settlement where army personnel are stationed.

The medieval walled city at Sialkot was very different from the 1852-built cantonment because to its size, layout, amenities, and political motivations. The town gained a new urban form and way of life as a result of the cantonment, along with a new function as the imperial hub for military district administration. Please refer to Figures 13, 14, and 15.

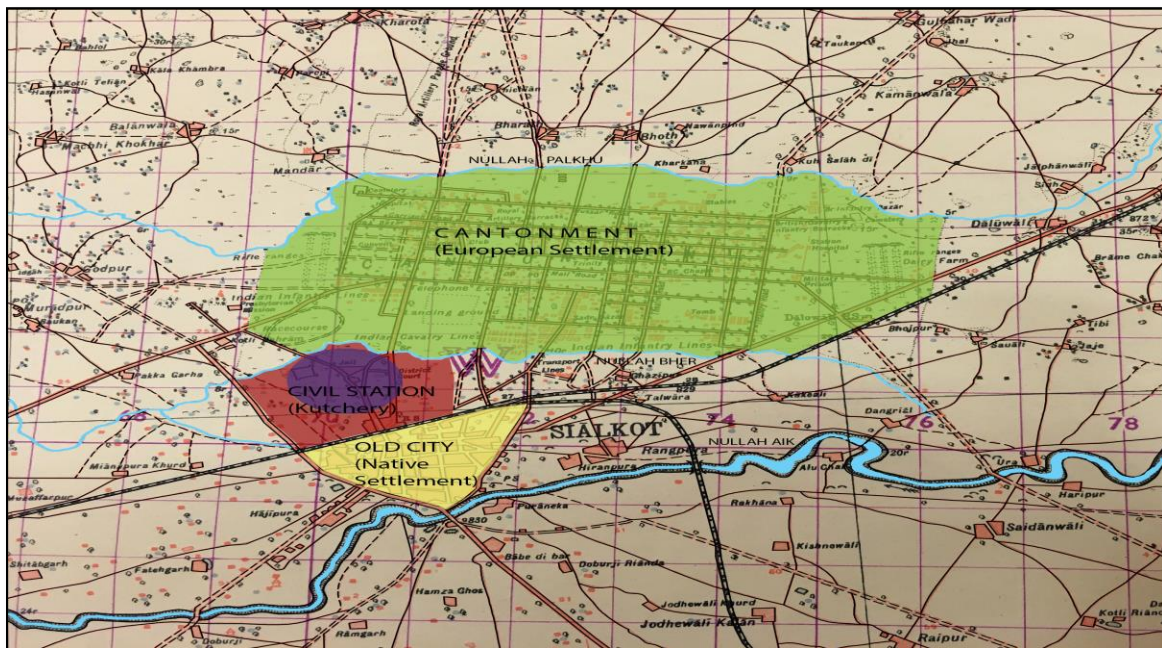


Figure 13: Map of Sialkot, showing the old town and new extensions of the cantonment and civil station



Figure 14: streets of the Sadar Bazar of Sialkot Cantonment (Photo credit Principal Author)



Figure 15: Narrow streets of the old walled city of Gujrat (Photograph by the Principal Author).

On the other hand, a district headquarters cannot operate in a town without the civil station, which has grown to be a vital component. These Western-styled civil stations, which housed the district courts and revenue offices and other public buildings of civil administration, came to represent

imperial power and the local economy. In the case of Sheikhpura, for example, these civil stations were mostly located outside the ancient walled town but close to and beside the transportation and communication facilities, such as railway stations, post and telegraph offices, jails, and police lines. Figures 16, 17, and 18 are shown. The town's function as the district's center of civil administration is carried out by these civil stations.

These headquarters cities served as hubs for the imperial economy in addition to serving as civil and military administrative centers. The new towns of Montgomery and Lyallpur more clearly and immediately illustrated the impact of this position on the urban layout of these new towns, even if the old towns that served as district headquarters also saw the expansion of their existing bazaars and newly created grain markets. The first attempt was in the Montgomery District when the district office was moved from Gugera to the recently established town of Montgomery, which was given its name in honor of Sir Robert Montgomery, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab at the time.

The town was established in 1865 by Mr. Blyth, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Gugera District at the time. It had two major bazaars, Blyth-Ganj and Ford-Ganj, as well as the administrative center of the civil station, together with its associated housing and facilities [18]. A look at (Figures 19, 20, and 21).

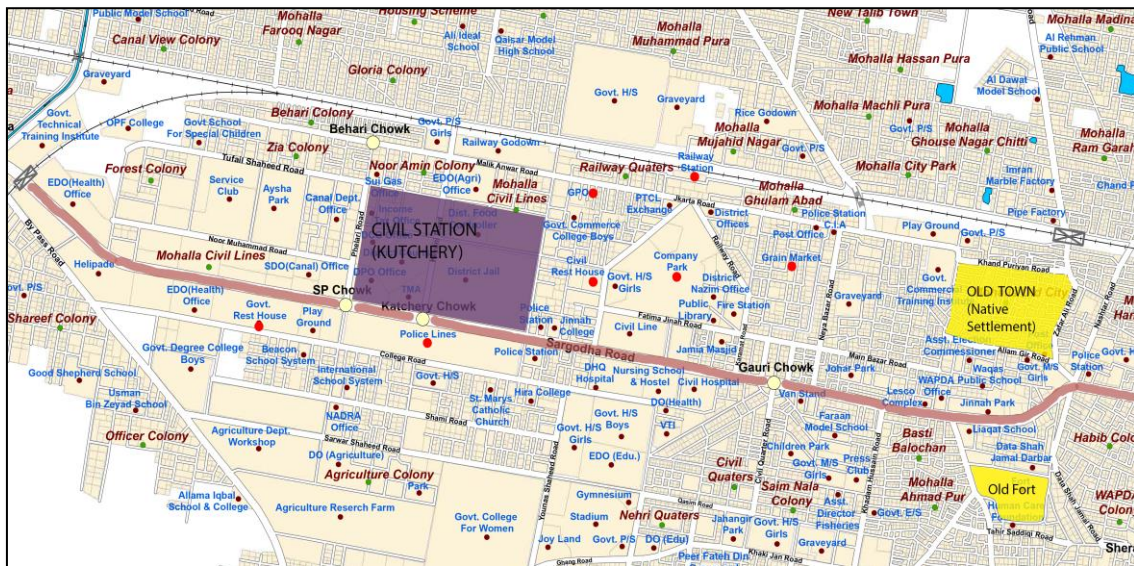


Figure 16: Map of Sheikhpura, showing the location of the old town, Fort, new civil station and its allied facilities of the police line, railway station, post office, rest house, company park, and grain market[22]



Figure 17: Civil Court in Kutchery premises of Jhang ((Photograph by the Principal Author)



Figure 18: Railway Station, Sheikhupura (Photograph by the Principal Author).

A new town was then built for a new district of Lyallpur, substantially elevating the bazaars and their significance in the imperial Punjab. Known primarily as a market town, Lyallpur was established in 1896 and was planned by Captain Popham Young around the clock tower. It served as a hub for the procurement, distribution, and export of the region's agricultural products [14]. Wide streets, bungalow-style homes arranged in rectangular blocks, a civil core housing the judicial, revenue, and executive branches of government, police stations and a jail, transportation and communication infrastructure, and the Chenab Club all contributed to Lyallpur's portrayal of an orderly world built by the British. The town also served as the home of the agricultural college established for the region's agricultural education and research. Figures 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 are shown.

## 2.0 Conclusion

Agricultural colonization was a major factor in the urbanization of West Punjab. At the whim of the imperial rulers, space was reorganized at both the district and urban levels through the division of land into lendable squares, ongoing redrawing of district borders, creation of new districts, relocation of district headquarters towns, expansion of existing towns, and design of new towns. By rearranging space and creating urban centers of different urban sizes, imperial control over the region was imposed. The town's shifting function as the district headquarters helped the imperial rulers maintain control over the population and economy of the area. These towns served as intermediate centers for military and civil administration as well as hubs for trade and commerce between the region's larger cities and smaller towns and villages. This study has sought to highlight the extensive network of imperial power and authority, as well as the economics and trade, throughout West Punjab by discussing these spatial modifications throughout the British imperative.



Figure 19: View of the Bazar, Montgomery (Photograph by the Principal Author)

Figure 20:

Central Jail, Montgomery, built in 1873

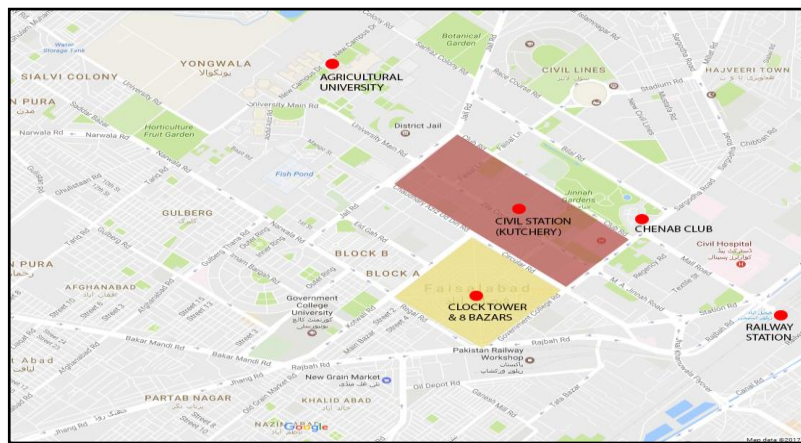


Figure 21: Railway Station, Montgomery (Photo credit Principal Author) Figure 22: Map of Lyallpur town, showing its eight bazaars and civil station[22]



Figure 23: Clock Tower, located at the centre of eight bazaars, built-in 1903-1905 (Photo Principal Author)



Figure 24: View of one of the eight bazaars around the clock tower (Photo credit Principal Author)



Figure 25: Chenab Club, Lyallpur, built in 1910 (Photograph by the Principal Author)



Figure 26: View of the old block of Agricultural University, Lyallpur (Photo Credit Principal Author).

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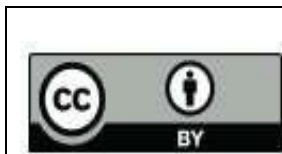
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