
Agrarian Transformation under Colonialism in India: Case of United Provinces

Sandipan Bakshi*¹

¹Foundation for Agrarian Studies – Inde

Résumé

Maximization of land revenue was the fulcrum of the agricultural policy framework throughout the British colonial rule in India. Some of the early measures shaped certainly by this framework led to a series of experiments with regard to land revenue settlements. At the same time, however, there was a severe lack in official effort towards the application of modern science to the practice of cultivation, in the first hundred years of colonial rule. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant shift in the colonial understanding of agricultural modernization, especially in the aftermath of a series of recurring famines followed by scathing observations in the reports of various Famine Commissions. The last few decades of the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of an active involvement by the colonial administration towards advancement of productive forces in agriculture. The notion of agricultural improvement, through the application of modern science and technology, had by now become a part of the colonial conception of agrarian transformation.

This was also the period which witnessed the emergence of a class of Indian intelligentsia. This class played a significant role in the rise and growth of economic nationalism and was the first to articulate a response to colonial policy with regard to economy and society. The attitudes and perceptions of this class shaped the discourse of the Indian response to modernization, including agrarian modernization, and played an instrumental role in the evolution of the idea.

The paper is an attempt to inquire into the evolving meaning of agricultural modernization in India during the late colonial period, with a particular focus on the United Provinces. It is a study of the

*Intervenant

colonial attitude as well as the perceptions of different sections of Indians towards agrarian change, especially with respect to the interrelationship between the techniques and methods of agricultural production on the one hand, and the socio-economic aspects of agricultural production on the other. While reflecting on this, it will also throw some light on the evolution of a particular viewpoint on agrarian issues that has become a part of received wisdom in post-independent India. The paper will thus trace the historical trajectory of the contemporary understanding of agrarian transformation in India. The study will analyze various official and non-official writings on agriculture. It will also investigate sources like Reports of the Native Press and Legislative Council Debates that give a reflection of the attitude of different sections of Indians towards agricultural modernization. Vernacular sources, especially contemporary Hindi periodicals, would constitute an important and unique source for this study, as they tend to provide an interesting view of the evolutionary character of the Indian response to the introduction of modern agricultural knowledge.

Mots-Clés: Colonialism, History of Agricultural Sciences, Productive Forces, Colonial Rule in India