



Class, caste and housing in rural Punjab – the untold story of the Marla schemes

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Contents

Abstract	02
1 Marginalisation and social policy	03
1.1 Framing Social Policy	03
1.2 Class and Caste in Punjab	03
1.3 Punjab Marla Scheme	05
2 Findings of a field survey	07
2.1 Methodology and Approach	07
2.2 A brief description of Chak 003	07
2.3 Traditional arrangements for homesteads	08
2.4 Beyond the original settlement	09
2.5 Bonded labour on farmhouses	11
2.6 Marla Scheme and change	13
3 Conclusion	15
References	16



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Abstract

National policy discussion of poverty and social policy in Pakistan has largely overlooked the conjunction of class and caste as a dimension of social marginalisation. While agrarian class relations are frequently debated with respect to some of the less developed parts of the country, it is widely presumed that the prosperous and politically significant region of central Punjab is relatively free of traditional feudal encumbrances. Historical records, the rare village study, and current practices with respect to political mobilisation suggest, however, that the class-caste conjunction might be a significant feature of social structure. A homestead land intervention called the Punjab Marla Scheme which was first launched in the early 1970s remains one of the few, perhaps the only, government programme which was self-consciously targeted at the conditions of the most marginalised segments in the class-caste hierarchy of the Punjab village. This paper presents primary evidence from qualitative research in a number of villages in central Punjab to illustrate the continuing salience of the class-caste conjunction in rural housing and the impact of the Marla Scheme.

Keywords

social protection, housing, marginalisation, bonded labour.

1 Marginalisation and social policy

1.1 Framing social policy

Social protection policies arise within the broader framework and language of social policy. Historical and political processes will highlight some aspects of social exclusion and vulnerability while at the same time relegating others into the shadows. The national discourse on poverty and social protection in Pakistan admits a number of empirically significant dimensions of marginalisation such as gender, asset poverty, disability, old age, unemployment, food insecurity, loss of a breadwinner, and natural disaster, without necessarily reflecting these concerns in fiscal or social policy priorities (Government of Pakistan 2007). Other dimensions of exclusion such as regional backwardness, ethnic disparity and the rural-urban disparity too attract some public attention as well as resources. A conspicuous gap, however, is the absence of any serious public acknowledgement or discussion of the conjunction between class and caste in production and reproduction of social inequality, marginalisation, poverty and vulnerability.

The contrast with post-independence India, where the class-caste conjunction is foundational to the design and architecture of virtually all social policy and social protection interventions, could not be more vivid. The divergent ideological trajectories of the movements, political parties and elites which dominated the moment of decolonisation might be responsible for this difference. Pakistan's origin myth makes much of an assertion of a uniform and egalitarian Muslim identity united in opposition to a caste-ridden Hindu society (Jalal 1995). It might be true, though surprising, that social structures in Pakistan are, indeed, so different from India that any comparison is rendered irrelevant.

This paper argues that even if the class-caste conjunction is not as important a determinant of marginalisation in Pakistan as it was in pre-independence India, there are large regions of the country where it is almost a defining characteristic of social structure. The virtual absence of the issue from academic discussion, let alone policy debate, contributes to the perpetuation of extreme inequalities and violations such as bonded labour, vulnerability and social exclusion. The Punjab Marla Scheme, which was a homestead land programme which was introduced into the rural parts of the province in the 1970s, is the only significant government intervention specifically directed at the most marginalised segments in the class-caste hierarchy. The examination of the context and impact of the scheme in selected

villages in central Punjab reveals the nature of the class-caste hierarchy in that region, and the implications of ignoring this hierarchy for social protection in particular and social policy in general.

1.2 Class and caste in Punjab

In 1931, which is the last year for which detailed and reliable population census data on the class-caste conjunction are available, around half of the individuals who relied on agricultural livelihoods owned some land. In the regions that comprise the present-day Punjab province of Pakistan, two-fifths of the agriculturalists were owner-cultivators (Table 1.1). Another thirty per cent were tenant cultivators, and nearly a quarter were classified as agricultural labourers. In the Montgomery district of central Punjab, which includes present-day Okara where much of the fieldwork for this study was conducted, the picture was somewhat different. Here over two-thirds of the agriculturalists were tenant cultivators, and one-tenth were agricultural labourers. Montgomery is located in the irrigated region of central Punjab where much of the land was brought under cultivation through the expansion of an extensive canal system. Land allotments were made to cultivators from outside the district who were awarded tenancy leases which were later converted into ownership rights.

Table 1.1 Per cent of agricultural earners by class

	Rent earners	Owner cultivators	Tenant cultivators	Agricultural labourers
Present-day Pakistani Punjab	7	41	30	23
Montgomery (including present-day Okara)	9	13	68	10

Source: Authors' calculations based on Census of Punjab 1931 (Khan 1992).

The 1931 census provides a breakdown of the population by caste. The castes and religious groups that are known to have remained in Pakistani Punjab are identified in Table 1.2. Chuhras and Mussallis whose traditional caste occupation was described as 'sweeping' consisted of under five per cent of the population of Punjab and over seven per cent of Montgomery's population. Muslim *kammi*, or non-agricultural service castes such as barbers, potters, blacksmiths, washers, water-carriers, weavers and beggars, made up around a fifth of the population in Punjab and in Montgomery. The largest group consisted of Muslim cultivator castes including Jat,

Rajput, and Arain. The others include non-Muslim cultivators and *kammi* who are thought to have migrated to India at the time of independence, as well as small numbers of urban Muslim non-cultivators.

Table 1.2 Population distribution by castes, per cent

	Present-day Pakistani Punjab	Montgomery including present-day Okara
Chuhra - all religions	1.3	1.6
Mussalli	3.3	5.5
Muslim <i>kammi</i>	20.6	21.3
Muslim cultivator castes	42.8	41
Others	32	30.5

Source: Authors' calculations based on Census of Punjab 1931 (Khan 1992).

The census classification of society into castes of different types, particularly cultivator and non-cultivator, was buttressed by legal provisions instituted in the early part of the twentieth century. The Punjab Land Alienation Act, which remains in place, divided rural society into 'cultivating' and 'non-cultivating' tribes for the purposes of restricting property transactions which might lead to the 'alienation' of land to non-cultivators. The institutional basis for operating this division was the 'village record' which was then and remains today the authentic record of property rights in rural Punjab. The *mauza*, or the land revenue village, is the lowest unit of land title. Its record, which is maintained by a *patwari*, or lowest land revenue official, lists the names of individuals and their respective shares in the cultivated and uncultivated land of the village.

The traditional village record requires the identification of individuals by paternity and caste, and through a genealogical tree traced through the male line. The most privileged form of property right in the village is the ownership of cultivated land and corresponding shares in the uncultivated area including the inhabited part of the village. These are often referred to as the 'original owners'. Below this, there are those who may own cultivated land but do not enjoy rights in the uncultivated area. Then there are non-owner tenants who are officially recognised as cultivators. Agricultural labourers and people belonging to various service castes may be recorded as residents but not as cultivators or as having property entitlements in the village.

The 'original owners' are recognised in law as direct lineage descendents of individuals with whom the first colonial land settlement was made in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the more modern villages which were inhabited as a result of canal irrigation the record

there is a similar hierarchy of rights and entitlements with the state's lessees enjoying a privileged status. In these villages it was the state rather than the 'original owners' that held non-cultivated land, but the lessees eventually came to acquire ownership rights and rights of pre-emption that were analogous to the traditional village. The common feature across these villages is the maintenance of a hierarchy in which genealogical lineage with the additional filter of 'cultivator' caste is invoked on a regular basis for all transactions. The social classifications defined in the village record continue to find their way in other interactions of citizens with the state. The enrolment forms for government schools in Punjab demand to know a child's caste as well as her father's 'cultivator' status.

The debate on land reforms in Pakistani Punjab addressed some issues in the colonial agrarian structure. There were a number of initiatives in the immediate aftermath of independence in 1947. The ruling Muslim League appointed an agrarian committee to review the agrarian situation and to make recommendations for reforms. The main focus of its deliberations was on the conditions of tenant cultivators, or the class of farmers who mostly belonged to traditional cultivating castes but did not have outright property rights in land. The committee also recognised, however, the oppression of non-cultivator service castes and agricultural labourers. It recommended legislation for the extension of residential security, and regulation of wages, working conditions and other forms of protection. The provincial legislature of Punjab accepted the Muslim League committee's recommendations with respect to tenant cultivators when it passed a tenancy law in 1950. All of the recommendations relating to the agricultural labourers and the non-cultivator service castes were ignored.

Some elements within the Muslim League continued to press unsuccessfully for reforms aimed at these castes and classes in the first five-year plan of the country. The experts who formulated the first major redistributive land reform in 1959 restricted their mandate to self-cultivating agriculturalists alone. As such they said nothing at all about the non-cultivator service castes which made up the poorer fifth of the population of Punjab. About agricultural labourers who were even further below in the class-caste hierarchy the Land Reform Commission of West Pakistan said:

We have not dealt with agricultural labour and the steps that should be taken for the amelioration of its condition. We do realise that this class of workers is almost entirely at the mercy of its employer [...] this,

however, is a problem which, to our mind, is more akin to the conditions of labour generally. Sooner or later it will be necessary to provide the agricultural labour some measure of security and protection, but the problems involved in devising such measures are so intricate that it would need far more time than we had at our disposal.

Land Reform Commission of West Pakistan: 215 (Naqvi, Khan and Chaudhry 1987)

There was no basis for comparing agricultural labourers, many of whom still subsist in conditions of bonded labour, with the position of labourers in general. It took another 15 years before there was any specific provision for either the service caste non-cultivators or the agricultural labourers in the shape of the Punjab Marla Scheme. A further 18 years were to lapse for the first piece of legislation to deal explicitly with bonded labour. The legislation as well as the mobilisation leading to it entirely ignored the caste dimension.

What was required was a thorough overhaul of land administration, since these organisations and institutions were built upon a hierarchy of claims and privileges which happened to exist at the time of the first regular land settlement. In fact, the system of land administration further entrenched some aspects of this hierarchy. Information obtained from the Federal Land Commission on the Punjab provincial rules for allotting state land to the landless stipulates that to be eligible an applicant must be a 'landless resident [...] as self-cultivating tenant [...] and recorded as such in the revenue record.' In other words, service caste non-cultivators and agricultural labourers who may find themselves in the village revenue record are explicitly ruled out as beneficiaries.

The silence on the class-caste conjunction in Punjab has been broken by a handful of village studies over the decades. The word Chuhra used in the 1931 census is now a pejorative term for Punjabi Christian who prefer to refer to themselves as Maseehi. Although many of them live as free citizens in cities such as Faisalabad, they find it hard to shed the association with sanitary work and thus pollution (Beall 2002). The Mussalis, likewise, are known as Muslim Shaikh and work as bonded labourers on brick kilns and farmhouses. Ethnographic studies of traditional proprietary villages in Sargodha in central Punjab document the salience of the class-caste hierarchy in relation to the Muslim Shaikh who are passed on from one generation of landlords to another in servitude (Martin 2009; Naqvi 2007; Rouse 1983; Ahmad 1972; Alavi 1972). A village census in a well-connected canal colony village

in Toba Tek Singh, also in central Punjab, found that among the dominant Arain caste which constituted around half the population 85 per cent of the households owned agricultural land, there were no illiterates, and three per cent of the households were below the poverty line. Among the Muslim Shaikh in the same village, there were no land owners, many were bonded workers of Arain landowners, forty per cent had no schooling, and the headcount ratio of poverty was 64 per cent (Gazdar 2007).

1.3 Punjab Marla Scheme

The Punjab Housing Facilities for Non-Proprietors in Rural Areas Act, popularly known as the Marla Scheme, was passed by the Punjab provincial assembly in 1975 (Provincial Assembly of Punjab 1975). The passage of this law endorsed an identical presidential decree of the previous year. The law initiated a programme for the allotment of property rights to homesteads measuring five marla, or just over 150 square yards, to 'non-proprietors' in Punjab villages. The land to be used for this purpose was either going to be state-owned land or land acquired from existing landowners on payment of compensation. The definition of 'non-proprietors' referred to those individuals or families who did not own any type of land anywhere in the country. In effect, this was meant to specifically target people belonging to the non-cultivator service castes and agricultural labourers.

Unlike the land reform laws which were administered exclusively by the land administration machinery of the provincial government the Punjab Marla Scheme was to be implemented in partnership with newly-formed Peoples' Village Committees (PVC) set up specifically for this purpose at the *mauza* level. It will be recalled from above that the land administration system relies on the village record to identify individuals and families, and this record and land allotment rules favour existing cultivator castes. The Marla Scheme called upon the PVCs to identify potential beneficiaries. The term 'non-proprietors' could, in principle, cover those tenant cultivators who did not have ownership interests in a village. Although the Marla Scheme law did not explicitly highlight caste or non-cultivator status as a test of eligibility, in actual fact the scheme was widely interpreted as being targeted at agricultural labourers and non-cultivator service castes.

Beneficiaries were awarded lease titles to their plots of land, and in many villages in Punjab the settlements thus created became known as Bhutto colonies after the name of the prime minister whose government was credited with launching the scheme. While Bhutto colonies remain facts on the ground, there is little documentation available

at the national or provincial levels of government about the programme. Within a few years of the scheme launch the government was overthrown in a military coup, and the Marla Scheme fell into dormancy. In 1985 the military regime decided to initiate a transfer of power to a civilian administration. At this moment the transitional government repealed the original Marla Scheme law and launched a new scheme called the Jinnah Abadis for Non-Proprietors in Rural Areas Act of 1986 (Government of Punjab 1986). The main difference between the 1986 law and its earlier counterpart was the abolition of the PVC in favour of implementation through the land administration machinery.

Like most interventions involving the transfer of state land in rural areas, the implementation mechanism for the original Marla Scheme was institutionally linked to the district level land administration or land revenue department. The Marla Scheme has much political support in the provincial government but there was no trace of an institutional presence at that level. The ruling party's local activists ran the PVCs and they may have been supported by sympathetic ministers at the provincial level. There is little evidence of any active involvement of the provincial government in the scheme. The law allowed for the identification or acquisition of land at the district level, and local party activists were empowered through the PVCs to select beneficiaries.

The removal of the PVC from implementation implied the reversion of scheme implementation to the land administration machinery alone. The impact of this change was observed in practice in some fieldwork sites where there were Jinnah Abadis. These were no longer exclusively targeted at traditional agricultural labours or non-cultivator service castes. In fact, in all of the latter-day Marla Scheme settlements a substantial part of the land was allotted to people belonging to cultivator castes. In some cases the scheme had been used for the *post hoc* regularisation of illegal possession of state-owned land by dominant cultivator caste families.

Since the revised Marla Scheme under the 1986 law remains on the books at least nominally it was reasonable to expect its presence somewhere in the provincial government. It was found that the office for land colonisation within the provincial land revenue department was responsible for the scheme. The role of this office with respect to the Marla Scheme was to maintain records and to act as intermediaries between the provincial government and the district level land administration officials who were regarded as the primary implementation agency.

No records were held on scheme operation under the earlier 1970s law. Even on the post-1986 revived scheme the records were irregular and dated. An *ad hoc* demand from the Chief Minister's office or some other higher authority triggered requests to the districts for data on plot availability or allotment. Returns were then compiled and forwarded on a one-off basis. One set of records obtained indicated the availability of nearly 200,000 plots across the province in the late 1990s. Another suggested that between 1999 and 2002 some 100,000 had been allotted and another 85,000 were still available for allotment. There are discrepancies between these various records at the district level which cannot be reconciled. It is safe to conclude that the record held at the provincial level is not only sketchy but also unreliable. The fact that the Jinnah Abadis implementation annually received under \$50,000, in the provincial budget in the last three years confirms that its role in government is not much more than that of an occasional forwarding agency (Government of Punjab 2009).

On the basis of key informant interviews at the provincial capital, and scoping fieldwork in several districts of central Punjab it was decided to focus on Okara district. The land revenue officials in this district were able to supply a list of villages where Marla Scheme allotments were made in Okara *tehsil*, or the administrative unit below the district. The list included the area of land acquired and number of plots allotted in the period up to 1980, or the earlier phase of the Marla Scheme. A total of 28 villages out of 371 in this *tehsil* had some Marla Scheme intervention, and around 1,800 plots were allotted in all. A number of these villages were visited to verify the record and two were selected for more detailed fieldwork. Scoping fieldwork also revealed a number of villages in the *tehsil* where the Marla Scheme had been implemented before 1980, but which were not in the list supplied by the land revenue officials. At the time of implementation the beneficiaries in the listed villages would have constituted only five per cent of all landless households in the *tehsil*. Within the villages where the scheme was present, however, over 15 per cent of all households, and over a quarter of the landless had benefited. In some cases beneficiaries were estimated to be as high as two-thirds of all households.

2 Findings of a field survey

2.1 Methodology and approach

Interviews with provincial government officials and other key informants suggested that the Marla Scheme had been particularly active in the Okara, Kasur, Faisalabad and Jhang districts of central Punjab. Visits to these districts revealed that scheme records are not maintained systematically even at the district level. Community level informants did lead to the identification of a number of villages in all of these districts where the scheme had been active. Seven distinct settlements were visited for qualitative fieldwork on residential security and the Marla Scheme. Land administration officials in Okara were forthcoming with a list of villages with information on scheme implementation. Some of these villages were then selected for more in-depth fieldwork.

The choice of qualitative methodology was partly governed by the absence of reliable secondary data as a basis for sampling. In part it was due to the fact that there was need for a better understanding of the processes relating to residential insecurity, and scheme implementation and impact before committing significant resources to a large-scale survey. Research teams comprising women and men, therefore, constructed village profiles, community histories, and detailed interviews of specific individuals in order to better understand the experience of residential insecurity and scheme impact on communities and individuals. It was necessary to select locations where it was possible to observe the conditions of the target population without scheme benefit.

Findings were comparable across fieldwork sites. The villages in Okara, Jhang and Faisalabad were modern canal colony villages with diverse histories of migration and settlement over the last seven decades. In Kasur and Lahore districts there were traditional proprietary villages and one large stand-alone Marla Scheme settlement which had evolved into a township. All fieldwork sites were relatively large settlements with good physical and social infrastructure. They were all located in regions with highly productive agriculture including high value market-oriented vegetable farming and orchards. These residents of these settlements also took part in non-agricultural economic activities in their villages or in neighbouring towns and cities.

Another aspect which was common across the fieldwork sites was the presence of substantial populations of historically marginalised service caste non-cultivators, agricultural labourers, Muslim Shaikh and Maseehis. There were, of course, many from these target groups who lived in Marla Scheme settlements, but also significant numbers in most cases with other forms of

residential tenure. In some of the fieldwork sites bonded labour was still common with workers and their families residing in the homes and *dera*, or farmhouses, of their employers. One of the larger villages in Okara, Chak 003, with a population of over a thousand households, and comprising several individual settlements, is used here to illustrate the main findings from across fieldwork sites.

2.2 A brief description of Chak 003

Chak 003 is a canal colony village located 17 km away from the Okara district headquarters. It was developed between 1920 and 1928 during the British period at the time of excavation of the Lower Bari Doab Canal. The total land area covered by the *mauza* is around 1,800 acres of which 1,575 acres were allocated for cultivation. There were 125 acres of common land which was vested with the state in the shape of the land colonisation department. Another 100 acres were kept for inhabitation. The 1998 population enumerated over 700 households and over 5,000 individuals. The village was among the largest in the district where the average population in 1998 was under 1,900. Chak 003 could be counted among the top six per cent of Okara villages in terms of population.

The farm economy was highly productive and well-connected with the urban market, particularly for the supply of fresh vegetables and dairy products. There were other cash crops too such as tobacco and cotton, as well as staple food crops such as wheat. The cash crop economy had developed into vegetable processing and marketing. Much of the farm economy in Chak 003 relied on labour intensive activities. In comparison with grain farming, vegetable cultivation required the continuous presence of farm labour for planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, cleaning and packing. The highly successful dairy sector in the village also demanded a great amount of labour as farm animals needed to be tended on virtually a constant basis. Chak 003 was well-endowed with physical and social infrastructure. There were several government and private schools and health clinics. The road link with the district headquarters and transport connections were excellent, and the village had an urban level of public utility provision including electricity, water supply and gas. Much of the infrastructure could be credited to the size of the locality, though the fact that the village had produced more than one federal minister and several legislators over the last four decades was also relevant.

The history of settlement in Chak 003 was not dissimilar from that of other canal colony villages in central Punjab. Previously semi-arid lands opened up for irrigated

cultivation were allotted to recognised cultivator or agriculturist caste families from high population density districts of Punjab. These groups of families migrated en masse along with their 'dependent' service castes to cultivate new land. They also engaged large numbers of indigenous people as farm labourers and servants. In Chak 003 the two major clans who were allotted canal colony lands were the Rajput and the Jat. The former came from Gurdaspur in eastern Punjab, and the latter from various districts of western Punjab. Other landowners including Arain, Bhatti and a number of different Jat clans also came and settled in the village over time. Most of these who belong to recognised cultivator castes or tribes purchased land from the Rajput and Jat landowners.

The Rajput and Jat still own more land than the others, and also enjoy greater entitlements by virtue of their status as original owners. Their nominees act as *lambardars* or village level revenue officials who interact with the state land administration machinery for the maintenance of village records and the collection of land dues. One key role of the *lambardar* is to manage access to residential land within the inhabited area of the village collectively on behalf of the village owners. He also has influence over the use of commonly-held state or village-owned land.

At present it is estimated that Chak 003 has over 1,300 households. This is a considerable increase over the 700 households enumerated in the 1998 population census (Government of Pakistan 1999). The natural rate of population growth as well as migration into the village will have accounted for some of the difference. It is also believed that some parts of the village population may have been under-enumerated in the population census, and this is discussed further below. Out of the present residents the cultivator castes, including the original owners, the newcomer landowners as well as tenant cultivators, account for only a fifth of the population. The remainder include service caste non-cultivators such as barbers, weavers and potters, of whom only six households are still engaged in their caste occupation under traditional village arrangements. These arrangements require the provision of service throughout the year to landowners who then compensate the service provider with grain or produce at harvest time. While some of the service castes such as barbers currently work in their traditional occupation on a cash basis, many others such as weavers and potters simply do casual wage labour of any type. The most numerous groups among the non-cultivator castes consist of Maseehis and Muslim Shaikh who do not even qualify as service castes in the traditional village hierarchy. Nearly all Maseehis and

Muslim Shaikh work as casual labourers, farm labourers, or domestic servants.

2.3 Traditional arrangements for homesteads

Canal colony settlement followed a prescribed pattern for the establishment of village inhabitations. In Chak 003 as in other such villages the primary residential quarter was a square-shaped village with broad dividing streets lined with individual plots. These were originally allotted to settlers roughly in proportion to their holdings of agricultural land. The management of the inhabited area was counted among the tasks of the *lambardar*. Non-owning tenant cultivators were also accommodated in the main village settlement. Some of the fringes of the main inhabited area was set aside as *kammi ahata*, or the quarter of the service caste non-cultivators. Here smaller individual plots were provided to the various service providers who were considered joint servants of the proprietary body of the village. The service castes were allowed to stay in the village at the convenience of the landowners who paid for their services in kind at harvest time. The landowners could collectively decide, through the *lambardar* to evict a service provider or to engage a new one. The service caste non-cultivators were also entitled to two acres of agricultural land while they remained in village service. The management of this land too was in the hands of the *lambardar*. There was no specific provision for homesteads for agricultural labourers and servants. It was presumed that they would reside with their employers, most likely near livestock sheds to look after the farm animals.

The original canal colony village is currently only one of six distinct settlements within Chak 003, accounting for around a quarter of the total population of the *mauza*. It was still the central location in terms of economic activity and infrastructure. Most of the powerful village owners as well the latter-day landowners reside in the original settlement. Even so, the cultivator castes make up barely half the population of this settlement. The bulk of the population belongs to the service castes, many of whom live in congested conditions in the traditional *kammi ahata*. Some of the service castes have now acquired agricultural land as well as better homes in the village, though their rights in the village like those of other latter-day landowners are limited.

Most of the service caste families no longer work as village servants. While they remain in the village they do face threats of eviction from the village owners. One barber's family was evicted from the *kammi ahata* around five years ago due to complaints on the part of the village owners that he

was no longer providing satisfactory service. The barber moved home to Okara city where he set up his own shop and also changed his surname to get away from direct association with the service caste. This was a common practice also among traditional weaver households who had migrated out of the village.

Other former service providers also come under pressure to give up their entitlement to cultivated land. Sajan Maseeh's family are from a sweeper caste and he had a residential plot as well as two acres of cultivated land from the village. He had fallen ill and in 2002 leased out his two acre plot to the *lambardar*. After a few years the *lambardar* stopped paying rent and used his influence with land revenue officials to get the land title transferred to himself. In 2005 a government school was sanctioned for the village and the *lambardar* forcibly utilised four out of the 14 *marlas* of Sajan's residential plot for the school. Later the school became dysfunctional and the school land including Sajan's four *marlas* was occupied by the *lambardar*. Sajan died of his illness in 2009 and the *lambardar*'s pressure on the family to give up their possession of their residential plot. Sajan's son Yasin no longer worked as a sweeper and had refused at one instance to remove the body of a dead dog from a village street. The *lambardar* used this refusal as a pretext to press for eviction. In the meantime, another landowner who was a political rival of the *lambardar* had begun to support Yasin and helped him to get a stay order from court against eviction.

It is not only in relation to the traditional service castes that the original owners assert their power through their leverage on residential land in the main settlement. The incoming landowners such as Arain and Bhatti, and the few service caste families that have bought agricultural land are in a much stronger position than the landless service castes. Even so, there are instances where the power of the original owners becomes obvious. Five families of the religious minority Ahmadi sect were evicted from the village in the early 1980s simply on the basis of their faith. The fact they were not among the original owners doubtless made the eviction possible. Another Ahmadi family decided to remain in the village and converted to mainstream Sunni Islam. Differences in relative power even among the original owner castes can be seen to be played out in terms of residential insecurity. A Rajput widow's family that had fallen on hard times was unable to secure her statutory share in her father's estate. They were provided temporary accommodation by their wealthier cousins, but faced the threat of eviction if they pressed for their claim in the inheritance.

2.4 Beyond the original settlement

Nearly three-quarters of the population of the Chak 003 resided in settlements outside the original settlement. Five new settlements had emerged since the first settlement, and there were over eighty farmhouses around the *mauza* with a combined population of around 400 households. All of the farmhouses were on privately owned agricultural land. Of the new settlements two were on privately owned agricultural land, two were Marla Scheme allotments on state-acquired land, and one settlement was partly on private land and partly on illegally occupied state land (Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Table 2.1 Settlements in Chak 003

Name of settlement	Approximate date of establishment	Type of property right
Chak 003	1920s	Original canal colony allotment
New 003	1960s	Privately owned agricultural land; occupation of government land
Tilla Bhutto Scheme (TBS)	1972	Marla Scheme allotment
Mian Basti	Early 1980s	Privately owned agricultural land
School Basti	Early 1990s	Occupation of government land
Pullwali Bhutto Basti (NBS)	Early 1990s	Marla Scheme allotment
Jat Basti	Early 1990s	Privately owned
Farmhouses	Various	Privately owned agricultural land

Source: Based on authors' fieldwork findings.

Table 2.2 Number of households, traditional non-cultivators and bonded labourers

Name of settlement	Number of households	Traditional non-cultivator %	Bonded labour households %
Chak 003	315	52.4	0.0
New 003	64	93.8	15.6
Mian Basti	61	9.8	9.8
TBS	320	93.8	0.0
School Basti	64	93.8	0.0
NBB	76	92.1	0.0
Jat Basti	62	80.6	0.0
Farmhouses	400	100.0	100.0
	1,362	81.6	30.5

Source: Based on authors' fieldwork findings.

New 003 was established on privately owned agricultural land by a Rajput family that had migrated from India at the time of the partition. Although they were kinsfolk of the Rajputs who were already present in the village, and were included among village owners, they developed religious sectarian differences with their incumbent relatives and decided to shift their homes away from the main village. They name their settlement after the village they had left behind in India. This family was initially accompanied by non-cultivator service castes and agricultural labourers in their employ. Because New 003 was closer to the main road compared to the original settlement it attracted more families, mostly belonging to non-cultivator service or labourer castes. As the settlement expanded it encroached upon nearby state-owned land on the roadside.

The most dramatic change in terms of housing in Chak 003 occurred in the early 1970s with the introduction of the Marla Scheme. Known locally as the Tilla Bhutto Scheme (TBS) this settlement is located one and a half km away from the original settlement. The word Tilla literally means an uncultivated dune in revenue administrative vocabulary. Approximately 250 families of Muslim Shaikh and Maseehis were allotted five *marla* plots of land with title of ownership. A majority among those targeted beneficiaries was Muslim Shaikh and Christians who lived with their landlord employers, for whom they worked as farm and domestic labourers. The allottees of TBS as well as their former employers recall the disruption caused to the landlords' economy by the sudden departure of the labourers. It was as though the village had been abandoned en masse.

The labourers recall their excitement at being able to own property for the first time. Landlords say that there was a wave at the time when slogans such as 'bread, cloth and home for all' caught the imagination of political activists and the poor workers alike. This was given a boost by the overwhelming electoral victory of the populist Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the region. Some of the local landlords had themselves joined the party and then found it difficult to resist the Marla Scheme even if they wanted to do so. The political momentum was too strong and attempts at stopping the labourers from leaving will have caused violence. Some of the key individuals from the landlord families claim that they actually played a role in ensuring scheme implementation in the village due to their political commitment.

Out of eight and a half acres of land ten *marlas* of the land was allocated for public infrastructure for a mosque and

school. At the beginning people constructed their houses with mud, sticks and thatch material on allotted plots. At the present time almost all houses are made of cement mortar and bricks. The metalled road was sanctioned in 1988, and other infrastructure such as electricity, and the sanction of a primary school was made by a subsequent PPP government. The sanctioned school building was shifted from TBS to New 003 after a change of government. A politically influential Rajput landowner had used his powers to shift that school to facilitate his relatives. Some children walk to attend the schools inside the main settlement and a few were attending private schools in Okara city.

Besides the Maseehis and Muslim Shaikhs, there were a few households of the weaver caste who were allotted plots in TBS. Subsequently some poor Arain families had also moved here by purchasing plots from the original allottees.

A second Marla Scheme settlement known as the Pullwali Bhutto Scheme was also initiated in the 1970s. This was located along a canal bank on land that was thought to belong to the irrigation department. Approximately 100 plots of five *marla* each were allotted to farm and domestic labourer Muslim Shaikh families. Because this land was far from the main settlement and was thought to be vulnerable to physical insecurity the lessees did not establish possession of their plots. After a few years when the area had become more accessible, a number of original beneficiaries as well as some landowning families attempted to take possession of plots. Since the original sanction had lapsed with the repeal of the 1975 law, new allotments had to be made. This happened in 1990 and was accredited by the Muslim Shaikh PPP supporters to their party which was then in office.

Two further settlements emerged in Chak 003 on a commercial basis. The Jat Basti was developed in the early 1990s by a Jat *lambardar* who was a politically influential landlord. He partitioned two and a half acres of his privately owned agricultural land adjacent to the original settlement, and began selling possession of these plots to poor landless families. Muslim Shaikhs constituted a majority of the inhabitants. Another significant group was a number of traditional beggar families who had changed their caste name to Jat Gill and now worked as casual labourers. The plots in Jat Basti were not officially leased and the *lambardar* had consistently refused demands from the residents to register sale deeds in the land record. The School Basti was developed by Rajput families during the same period

and plots were sold to landless labourer households belonging to marginalised castes. It was suspected that both commercially-developed settlements have been established on state-owned village common land which had been illicitly acquired by powerful local landlords through their influence with the land administration machinery. There were similar stories of commercially developed settlements in other fieldwork villages in Okara and elsewhere. In most of these cases too, the settlement had been developed by the original owners with privileged access to the land bureaucracy. The residents were mostly from marginalised castes who faced contractual insecurity and did not receive legal cover for their purchases. It was also common in these settlements for the developer to sell the same plot of land several times over.

2.5 Bonded labour on farmhouses

The last 20 years had seen an increasing trend on the part of local landowners to establish farmhouses, on their agricultural holdings. There were over eighty farmhouses scattered across the 1,800 acres of Chak 003. Part of the reason for setting up farmhouses was the lack of space inside the original settlement. It may be recalled that the traditional landlord house in the village was supposed to accommodate livestock as well as farm and domestic servants who were mostly from Maseehi and Muslim Shaikh families. After the loss of a majority of these families to TBS in the early 1970s the landowners were able to acquire new farm and domestic servants from other villages. The farmhouses allowed the landowners to maintain large numbers of livestock, mostly for dairy purposes, as well as to keep captive workers for the highly labour-intensive cash crop economy which had developed in the region. Far from breaking down, therefore, the bonded labour system continued to thrive in this village. While Chak 003 might represent a particularly well-organised and integrated economic system around large numbers of bonded labour, other fieldwork villages in Okara and elsewhere in central Punjab had qualitatively comparable arrangements in place.

It is estimated that there were over four hundred families working as bonded labourers for landowners and living at farmhouses. Nearly all of them are Muslim Shaikh, and the remainder are Maseehi. Men, women and children of these families are always at the beck and call of the employers. Most of the landowners of Chak 003 who maintain farmhouses themselves reside in the main settlement. Women and children from the bonded labourer families often work as domestic servants in the

landowners' homes. The salaries for male servants range from three to four thousand rupees monthly. This works out to around half the amount that an employer would have to pay if he were to hire from the casual labour market.

Women who are hired for specific jobs, such as domestic work, get paid at a lower rate. In addition to specific duties, it is expected that many unspecified tasks will be performed by family members without additional pay. Family members are not allowed to take up work with other employers. They can work for extra pay with the employer well below the going rate of pay in the casual labour market. While the daily wage rate ranges between 250 to 300 rupees, family members of servants can expect to get only around 100 to 120 rupees a day from the landowner. Although contracts are nominally for a year, corresponding with the annual agricultural cycle, most farm servants and their dependents have been with the same employer for many years.

A loan or an advance is an essential part of this arrangement. The amount of the loan ranges from thirty to seventy thousand rupees. In many cases parents of present-day workers were also indebted servants of the same landowner. The annual cycle of the employment contract simply means that a servant is free to negotiate with a new employer at the end of a crop cycle and not in the middle of it. When landowners hire new servants they must compensate the previous employer for any outstanding debt, which then gets transferred to the new employer. For newly hired workers, employers demand a personal guarantee from a trusted individual who can ensure that the servant will not abscond without repaying the debt. Landowners have strong networks across the district and province, and even beyond, and are able to eventually track down absconding servants. They are also careful to hire servants who have families, so that it is difficult for the entire family to abscond together. Quite often close relatives of servants either work for the same landowner or live nearby. If a servant absconds, the landowner can and does use other family members as hostages.

Besides economic exploitation the farm, servants and their families are often mistreated verbally and physically. Their children are not able to go to school, and it is extremely difficult for them to break out of the debt cycle. Employers make deductions from the already low wages for any losses, the use of electricity at the farmhouse, as well as on any number of pretexts. There are stories of individuals in the fieldwork villages who have made the

transition out of bonded labour through a variety of strategies. In some cases where a number of brothers have inherited their father's debt, some of them agreed to remain with the employer while other brothers left to work elsewhere, saved up and repaid the debt for the entire family. There are also cases of servants who were able to save enough, mostly in the form of livestock, and repay the debt. After securing freedom from debt the conspicuous problem is to find a place to live.

Most of the farm servant families living on the farmhouses in Chak 003 had always been servants of landowners for as long as they could recall. Many of them were 'acquired' by Chak 003 landowners from other masters and the neighbouring village of Chak 004 was frequently mentioned as the place of origin. It was reported that the owners of this village had obstructed the establishment of a Marla Scheme settlement.

The labour arrangements found to be prevalent in the farmhouses of Chak 003 and in other fieldwork villages in central Punjab are clearly outside the law. Since the enactment of legislation for the eradication of bonded labour, but also prior to it, it has been illegal for a private person to extract forced labour or to restrict a person's individual autonomy on any pretext. In Chak 003 and other mainstream, even urbanised villages, these labour arrangements are openly acknowledged and without any apprehension on the part of the employers that they might invite legal sanction, political cost, or moral opprobrium.

It is no coincidence that at the receiving end are people who are almost universally regarded as social outsiders by virtue of their caste. The Muslim Shaikhs and the Maseehis carry the burden of having been held as fit for contempt and exploitation because of the uncleanness of their supposed traditional occupation. The Maseehis are additionally vulnerable due to their minority Christian faith in a Muslim majority country where religion is important in politics. Association with the church and its organisations does provide them with an alternative form of identity and a support system. As it has been shown here Muslim Shaikhs who are faith-fellows of the majority fare no better than the Maseehis. That they are often taunted as not being proper Muslims, implies that deeper societal processes of marginalisation are at work. The early colonial record which first officially classified Punjab society into castes and tribes observed that the groups that made up the lowest classes and castes were racially distinct from cultivators, professionals and urban mercantile groups (Ibbetson 1883). The language used by the upper classes and castes in Chak 003 and elsewhere

to maintain their social distance from the Maseehis, Muslim Shaikhs and others, is replete with racial references.

The fact that the formal institutional props of discrimination, such as the village record, the land alienation law, and the school enrolment register remain intact implies that the state system has been unwilling to acknowledge and counter discriminatory social attitudes and practices. Human rights interventions on bonded labour in Punjab have focused on a particular sector and a specific form of contract, and not the social structural dimension (State of Human Rights 2006, 2005, 2003, 2002, and 2001). As a result much of the activism has centred on indebted labourers working at brick kilns and employers in this sector have become less open in discussing labour arrangements compared with their counterparts on farmhouses. Brick kiln workers who are vulnerable to extreme forms of exploitation, also happen to be Maseehi and Muslim Shaikh, and are often former farm servants or descendants of farm servants. This is noted in passing but not taken up systematically to deepen the understanding of inequality and vulnerability in Punjab.

While indebtedness, economic dependence, and caste are significant dimensions of bonded labour in Chak 003, the focus on housing offers important new insights into the process of marginalisation and change. In the administrative culture prevailing in the districts of central Punjab, farmhouses of the type found in Chak 003 are regarded as landowners' work premises but not also as the homes of the farm servants, which they certainly are. When asked if census enumerators list the people living on farmhouses the *lambardar* in Chak 003 responded 'landowners get the people who live in their homes enumerated in the census'. Since landowners actually reside in the main settlement this reply suggests that farmhouse servants and their families are not enumerated. This question gets similar responses in other fieldwork villages: 'landowners get those servants enumerated who are loyal to them'; 'owners get some farmhouses listed and not others'.

Even if many farmhouse servants are actually enumerated, the common theme running through these responses is that it is the landowner's prerogative as to who gets recorded. Census enumerators obviously do not consult urban property owners before they list and enumerate tenants living in rented accommodation in towns and cities. The fact that they do so in Chak 003 and other such villages in central Punjab reflects an implied continuity with the old village record in which certain

classes and castes were officially counted as dependents who had no claim to an independent homestead. This continuity is apparent in the life histories of farm servants in Chak 003 and in other villages. There are only exceptional instances of individuals or families that had their own autonomous dwellings before they became bonded labourers. In most cases present-day farmhouse servants are children or grandchildren of servants who lived on the residential premises of their employers, next to the farm animals.

Farmhouse servants depended on their employers not only for shelter but for an address. Their period of residence at the farmhouse was at least a year by the very nature of their contract, and considerably longer, in actual fact, in most cases. In effect, one of the many rights that farmhouse servants did not enjoy was the right to an address. There were multiple implications for any number of citizenship-based entitlements. Servants needed the consent of their employers to register for national identity cards. Voter registration also was linked to the address. In contrast to other Muslim Shaikh and Maseehi residents of Chak 003, farmhouse servants and their families were less likely to possess identity cards or to have voted. New social protection measures such as the targeted cash transfer under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) had large numbers of beneficiaries among the labour and non-cultivator service castes in other parts of Chak 003, but none in the farmhouses.

2.6 Marla Scheme and change

Nearly all the inhabitants of the two Marla Scheme settlements in Chak 003 are either Maseehi or Muslim Shaikh. None of them own any agricultural land, and most work as casual labourers on local farms. None work as farm servants or bonded labourers anywhere. Although many of the original allottees had sold their plots and moved elsewhere, most of the transactions were among close relatives, and very few were with people outside the original target population. The main reason cited for Marla Scheme plots remaining in the possession of families from marginalised castes despite much turnover, was that people from the dominant cultivator castes did not want to live among the marginalised castes as equals.

Individual stories support the generally held perception that TBS beneficiaries are all former servants of landowners who lived as dependents of their employers. Aslam Maseeh's father was a farm servant who was allotted a five *marla* plot in the early 1970s. He stopped being a farm servant when he got the allotment. Aslam

went to school and then became an electrician. He is currently employed as an electrician in a government department. There are a number of stories like that of Aslam's, but many more of people who continue to rely on casual daily wage labour for sustenance.

Chann was a Muslim Shaikh, whose father was a bonded servant on an Arian landlord's farmhouse. After his father died Chann moved to the farmhouse of a Rajput landowner. The new employer repaid his father's debt to the Arain landlord, which was then transferred onto Chann. He worked for the new employer alongside his family for several years until his leg was injured in an accident in 1988. Despite the injury the landlord insisted on getting work out of him. Chann had two buffaloes which he then sold in order to repay the debt and to stop being a servant. In 1990 he managed to get a plot allotted in the new Marla Scheme. He believes that this was possible only because the PPP, which was credited with initiating the Marla Scheme in the first place, was back in power. Chann had not been to school but had learnt about homeopathy even when he was a farm servant. When he was freed from debt and had moved to his own plot, he started practicing homeopathy. His older son had never been to school, but a younger son had done primary schooling and helped Chann with his homeopathic practice. Other family members worked as casual labourers.

Shahnawaz was a Muslim Shaikh whose grandparents used to work as attached farm and domestic servants in a nearby village. During the early 1970s his grandfather was allotted a five *marlas* plot in TBS. This was a turning point. Shahnawaz's father was able to get educated and was recruited into the military. He took earlier retirement and got a clerical job in a bank branch in Okara. He also purchase more land and expanded his home. Shahnawaz's father ensured that all his sons were educated, and Shahnawaz himself had done middle school. He had leased a 17 acre plot of land from a local Arain landowner and started farming. There is a family dispute among the owners on that piece of land, but Shahnawaz feels secure enough to cultivate it. Part of his confidence comes from his own strong network of support amongst friends and relatives who helped him and beat up the rival Arain claimant to the land when he came to dispute Shahnawaz's tenancy. According to Shahnawaz, the rival group has implicated him in a false charge of motorcycle theft. Shahnawaz absconded when the police raided his home, and then got support from a local politician who helped with his bail. When he took up

the farm there were three Muslim Shaikh families working there as farm servants. Shahnawaz regards it as a major achievement of his family that 'those who were like we were before, now work for us'.

Although TBS did not have any functional government schools or any private schools, there were a number of individuals who had progressed in education. Within the last year two young men became the first ever graduates among the Muslim Shaikh families of the *mauza*. Although many children were still not in school or dropped out early, there were at least 50 girls and boys belonging to Maseehi and Muslim Shaikh families who had completed high school. Over 30 individuals from these groups were in formal sector jobs of various types.

Public life in the Marla Schemes was marked by cooperation as well as segmentation. Although there is no traditional hierarchy that separates the two main groups who reside there, there is a level of segmentation. The Maseehi and the Muslim Shaikh inhabit different segments of TBS. The Maseehi Christians have organised their religious activities around a small house which serves as a chapel as well as a community centre, which was constructed in the early 1990s. Although the Christians belong to different denominations, their respective churches have agreed to joint prayer arrangements. An international Christian non-governmental organisation helps the community in various ways including microfinance.

There is strong electoral support for the PPP across TBS, regardless of caste or religion. In this, TBS mirrored fieldwork findings from other Marla Scheme settlements which had been initiated in the 1970s. The situation was different in some post-1986 Jinnah Abadi Marla Schemes where political affiliations were more heterogeneous. TBS voters, despite their strong party affiliation with the PPP, could not be taken for granted. It was well known that they voted for the PPP in national and provincial elections, but bargained with candidates over infrastructure and public services in local elections. Since TBS was seen as an important vote bloc by local PPP politicians, the residents were able to access them for specific purposes.

The social and economic conditions of the Maseehi, Muslim Shaikh and non-cultivator service caste inhabitants of the commercially developed settlement in Chak 003 were comparable to those of the Marla Scheme residents. They were casual labourers and accessed public services and citizenship-based entitlements to the extent that these were available. Their ownership rights over their homesteads were less secure than those of the

Marla Schemes, but these were likely to get strengthened over time. Land suppliers in the form of existing original owners of the village had emerged to cater for a market niche first created by the Marla Scheme. An important difference with the residents of the Marla Schemes was that the marginalised classes and castes living in the commercially developed settlements had not been able to develop a collective political identity.

6 Conclusion

This paper has shown that the class-caste conjunction remains active at least in some parts of contemporary rural Punjab. A region with a strong resource base, good connections with markets, and well-developed infrastructure also retains a traditional hierarchy in social and economic relations, which has survived significant political and economic changes. The ordering of rural society between owners and non-owners and cultivator and non-cultivator castes which was institutionalised in the land administration system in the nineteenth century continues to reproduce social marginalisation along class-caste lines. Successive reforms failed to address the resulting exclusions because they retained and even endorsed the key institutions such as the village record, genealogy, and a hierarchy of privileges.

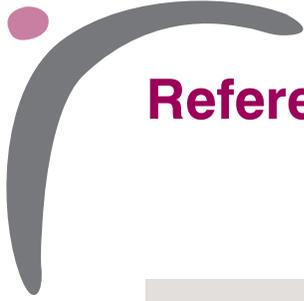
The class-caste conjunction and the resulting social hierarchy become visible through an analysis of formal and actual, traditional and contemporary arrangements for access to homestead land in particular villages in the region. Some of the villages are now large and developed enough in terms of infrastructure and economic integration to be considered as towns. At the bottom end of the class-caste hierarchy are labourer castes whose traditional occupations are considered unclean and who suffer racial discrimination. Many of them subsist as bonded labourers on farmhouses which have emerged as efficient suppliers of fresh vegetables and dairy products to urban markets. These farmhouse servants perpetually remain in debt, suffer economic exploitation, and are unable to access basic citizenship-based entitlements. They are dependent on their employers not only for shelter but for an address. While the farm servants from marginalised castes represent one extreme form of exclusion, institutionalised hierarchy in rights over land and housing affects a broader group of people who may not be in conditions of personal servitude.

A number of dimensions of vulnerability and social exclusion such as asset ownership, gender, unemployment, illness, disability, region and ethnicity find explicit expression in public discourse, even if acknowledgement is not always backed up with action. The non-acknowledgement of the class-caste conjunction in public discourse, however, is a major blind spot in the very framing of the debate on poverty, social protection and social policy in general.

The Punjab Marla Scheme was a short-lived initiative aimed at providing homestead land to the landless poor. It is perhaps the only state or non-state intervention which was purposively, though not explicitly, targeted at socially

marginalised people at the bottom of the class-caste hierarchy in rural Punjab. There is now considerable evidence from qualitative fieldwork in central Punjab that while it was active in the 1970s the scheme led to the emancipation of significant numbers of the marginalised in particular regions and villages. The scheme was initiated through legislation by a populist government and implemented with the involvement of local committees made up of political activists. The overthrow of the populist government in a military coup in the late 1970s led to an amendment of the law, and then eventually to the effective winding up of the scheme. No records of scheme implementation were maintained by the provincial government, and the Punjab Marla Scheme must be one of the rare social policy interventions in Pakistan which has left a bigger impact on the ground than on paper.

Even though its activity lasted for a limited period, the Marla Scheme contributed to important changes in the rural social and economic hierarchies in Punjab. Scheme beneficiaries remain poor, continue to suffer caste-based discrimination in the labour market, and have uneven access to low quality public services, much as anyone else in Pakistan. Their conditions need to be contrasted with those of people of similar class-caste groups who were not scheme beneficiaries, because the scheme never got off the ground in their villages. Many of the latter subsist as bonded labourers, or once emancipated from bondage live on commercially developed settlements which are comparable to the Marla Scheme settlements but with some continued dependence on dominant caste landowners.



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