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IS MODERNITY DEPLETING BHERA

Abstract

This paper analyses and condenses numerous individual and focus group interviews about life and social trends in Bhera. Our findings paint a declensionist¹ picture of Bhera. Food has deteriorated; there is no industry but industrial food produced with agrochemicals a la Green Revolution abound. Women are getting higher education in much larger numbers, but in Bhera it has only brought their wages down; private college female teachers work for Rs.3600 per month. Cell phones and increasing internet connectivity are draining precious family resources. Flush based modern sanitation is a convenience but there is no proper integrated disposal and the effluent permeates through the soil to the aquifer. Sanitation, therefore, has become the main cause of groundwater pollution; the other is the liberal use of agrochemicals in the surrounding agricultural land which too permeate to the groundwater. The new nearby motorway is a big convenience, but has also started to drain away local milk, vegetables and fruit to larger and more affluent markets. Emigration of the able bodied and the educated is celebrated by both family and state for its remittance but like osteoporosis it is hollowing out the social skeleton. While Bhera is experiencing modern gadgets and products, the effect is depleting not adding value that was once offered by the project of modernization. The indigenous batteries of agricultural surplus and craftsmanship have dried up and while the state has rolled back, the small town Bhera is not attractive for large scale investment from without. The current remittance economy is at best covering up the process of depletion.

Introduction

Bhera is a small city of north central Punjab, Pakistan. The past of many small towns in Punjab has similarities, including, a long history, riverside location on a trade route, well-developed crafts², an urban island surrounded by a vast hinterland, a mixed Hindu- Muslim population characterized by harmony, and last but not least a strong sense of belonging and security³. As for the scale of a city there are many ways of looking at it (Bhagat 2011). It could be relative, what is small for Pakistan may be big for Europe. It could be officially classified on the basis of census population but such official classification is not available for Pakistan where the last census was held about two decades ago. It could be administratively defined in the line of metropolitan corporation, municipal committee, town committee etc or it could be defined in a social context, a place where many people know many people. We favour this last definition; it incorporates historicity. Bhera is a small town from this point of view as well.

Bhera was there when Alexander invaded India in 326 BC (Cunningham 1871). Some mounds in Bhera's vicinity and on Bhera's old site (Burarian mounds, Elliot and Dowson 1869) contain archaeological remains but have not been properly investigated. Cunningham has identified the ancient site of Bhera with the unnamed capital of Sophytes – the King of Salt Range at the time of Alexander's invasion of Punjab (Gardezi 1993). Old Bhera located on the right bank of River Jhelum was destroyed and the present city was founded by Sher Shah Suri in 1540 on the left bank (Imperial Gazetteer 1908). Its location at the intersection of two major trade routes, one north-south from Kashmir via River Jhelum and the other east-west to Kabul and further onwards to Central Asia was a major advantage for Bhera and it flourished as a trade centre (Rehman 1997).

The colonial District Gazetteer of 1897 describes the riches of the city and its sumptuous architecture built by the trading community. However, like many small cities of colonial times Bhera's fortunes altered with the introduction of new communication infrastructure of railways and roads which disrupted trade by river or by camels (Grewal 2013). Perhaps the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 played an even more important role in ending trade with Central Asia and many local traders suffered huge losses (Rehman 1997).

Contemporary Bhera is largely confined to the footprint of the ancient walled city. However, today a circular road instead of the wall marks the city limit. Eight of the ancient gates are extant, however they are colonial period reconstructions, few have been recently rebuilt. The total area of the walled city is some 400 acres and the current population is variously estimated between 80,000 and 100,000 including some settlements outside the old city limits. Upto the time of partition in 1947 the city had a mixed religious population who lived in harmony with each other (Ahmad 2012). The Hindus were fewer but carried a bigger weight by way of business and wealth.

The people of Bhera somehow, have a deep attachment to the soil, a euphemism for community. The abandoned and deserted *mohalla* Khwajgan, a posh residential neighbourhood of pre-partition days, is a sad commentary on the decline of Bhera. The Khwajgan residents of those homes left Bhera many decades ago but they could not find the heart to sell off those grand properties lest their connections with Bhera breaks for good. Likewise the departing Hindus continued to have a strong nostalgia and deep longing to revisit the place. One Hindu even sent his ashes for burial in Bhera. While in India they set up an affluent neighbourhood in Delhi called Bhera Bhawan. Many have written articles and memoirs and some had the opportunity to revisit their beloved city.

According to these memoirs post-partition Bhera did not live up to their nostalgia and later visitors from India reported on the poor condition of Bhera. *"In the 1950s and 1960s visitors reported a depressing picture of Bhera as a declining town ... The impression I got from Balraj Sabni's brother Bhisam Sabni a senior colleague of mine at Delhi College, was that Balraj ji had found large parts of the town in a state of utter desolation and ruins"* (reminiscence, Gian Sarup). In fact Bhera flourished to whatever degree only upto the time of partition. Today one can see a palpable attachment and pride of the

people of Bhera to their past. This pride in Bhera's history has also been kept alive by religious institutions like the Bugvi caretakers of the Shahi mosque, which was built in 1540, as tradition has it, by Sher Shah Suri, the short-lived emperor of India.

This is a study of the social impact of modernity as looked through Bhera's lens. In order to appreciate social change. We looked into people's life, routines, institutions, education, health, perceptions and visions. During our visits to Bhera and partly to its twin city, Namak Miani during 2013-15 we had meetings with teachers and the Principal of the Government Degree College, a private girls college, some Bhera students of Sargodha University, teachers and the principal of Government High School, the Head Teacher of a school for special children, a few teachers and students of the two major madrassas, a group of businessmen in Miani, an agricultural family on the outskirts of Bhera, a focus group of small farmers in village Rakh Charagah and visited some working class and middle class households, meeting housewives and other female members of the family. We also interviewed two surviving craftsmen, a weaver and a potter and saw their working arrangements. We visited government offices and had a long meeting with the *naib-tehsildar* (revenue officer) and the local *patwari* (the local land and revenue record keeper). We visited the city dispensary, the new Tehsil Head Quarter Hospital and a private charity hospital and discussed staff, facilities and patients. We also visited an outreach milk collection centre of Nestle Corporation in Miani. All interviews were transcribed. We visited the small Bhera Information and Research Centre set up at Shahi Masjid by the Bugvi caretakers and met Mr. Abrar Ahmad Bugvi, the current chief imam. The Bugvi family have looked after the mosque now for over 150 years. We met the Assistant Commissioner who regretted that some of the Municipal records were at the old Tehsil Head Quarter Bhalwal and some had been destroyed alongwith the library during the great flood of 1992 but allowed access to the births and deaths registers of 1881 and later. At the Municipal Committee the Water and Sanitation staff briefed us about the unfortunate history of water supply and sanitation. A brief visit was made to the migratory *Pakbimas*⁴ community on the outskirts of Bhera. We have also gone through any available literature, memoirs, blogs etc. on Bhera.

Meetings with college teachers were useful in giving us a perspective especially on education but they lacked depth in other fields like agriculture, healthcare and the working class. They were proud of Bhera's long history but their narration lacked detail and critical perspective. Not all doctors or government officials are equally erudite but we found one Naib Tehsildar and one particular government doctor very involved and informed. Interviews with working class families, with peasants in a suburban village, and with two master craftsmen were rich with empirical experience.

There is an acute paucity of published surveys and documentation with the government agencies about Bhera. The colonial period Gazetteers have been the most widely used source of information about late 19th and early 20th century picture of the city. One available post-partition account of the city is a baseline study for development planning carried out in 1993. It is useful in providing a mapping of the

city landuse and demographics but is generally of poor quality. It carries erroneous information about neighborhoods and limited information on economic activity. Another government document, the Punjab Small Industries Corporation Survey of Crafts, on the other hand, is a well researched publication. It proved useful in corroborating the narrative of the local surviving craftsmen regarding the presence of extensive craft based local production such as *khais* and *lungis*, earthenware and *Mehndi*, etc. It also shows that there used to be a vast local craft based production of items of daily use.

Col. Zahid Mumtaz a retired army officer is an active and enthusiastic amateur local archivist. He has collected hundreds of photographs, more than a dozen video recordings, letters, memoirs by old residents and miscellaneous newspaper articles on Bhera. This archive was a useful pictorial record of social life and built heritage. Most of his material was part of a website³ on Bhera now defunct. This website was created by late Dr. Gian Sarup a pre-partition Bhera resident who had migrated to United States and retired as a sociology professor at North Illinois University. Information about residents of Bhera enclave in Dehli and other information about the migrants were also gathered from this archive.

We have not defined the period for which we studied social change which after all is in one big continuity. However, the past for the people is the period of their recall. It starts in the 70's which is as far as their recall goes and may be termed the period of globalization or the New World Order. Globalization we note has been no abstract idea for the people. Through the agency of technology, consumerism and diaspora it has transformed their lives in the last 40 to 50 years.

Education: A mirage

According to college and school teachers public sector education continues to be popular at least for now, in Bhera. One reason is affordability. Another is that, it is reasonably good. Education fever as seen in big cities, is not yet atop the imagination of the business and agricultural classes of Bhera but is picking up. Many businessmen want their children to enter business after matriculation. Government schools in Bhera are producing fairly good results. Old students feel teachers work hard, not for any incentive but as part of tradition. At least for Bhera, it appears, the NGO and media propaganda about the unacceptable standards of public school education and quality of its techers is baseless, it is just creating a market for private schools. Young Muhammad Arshad is a welder now. He said, *"I studied at a government school. Our teachers were regular, worked hard and taught us well, repeat, taught us well. Private schools are now a fad (bberchaal)."* Tariq the affable dispenser at the city dispensary had a similar view, *"I studied at Government High School Bhera, the education was good and well grounded; students at private schools have weak handwriting. One reason why private schools are successful is their readiness to take children at very early age. Mothers like it. Govt schools, on the other hand, do not admit below 5 years of age."* However, education is changing. It is more and more competitive now, cheating has become more acceptable and teacher-student relations have degraded.

More and more girls have access to higher education. Modern education is geared towards jobs but there are no jobs, except teaching at exploitative wages (between Rs.3600 to 7000 per month for private school and college female teachers). According to the UN Status Report 2016 “The percentage of women with BA and MA/MSc who earn below minimum wage of PKR 10,000 is unacceptably high” (Zaidi and Farooq 2016). Induction of females into productive labour has definitely lowered the wage. *“Yes they pay very little. Some pay only Rs.2000 a month but when there is no alternative, you accept. When my sister did her MA in 1997 she started in a private school at Rs.300/-, said a middle class woman from mohalla Shah Naseeb Daryai. “I teach in a school, my mother died, my father is ill. They give me Rs.1500 a month”, another told us. Interestingly, lack of jobs, pushes students to do a higher qualification like Masters or MPhil which then tends to become a minimum condition for worthwhile jobs or even matrimony, “with a master’s you may hit a job or a good match”. The boys however have lagged behind creating a new type of imbalance. A doctor at the hospital said, “when you ask a girl her education she might say she is an MA and when you ask what does her husband do, in some cases the reply might be, he is a street vendor”. In a class conscious society that would be truly shocking.*

The College Principal gave us a long diatribe on the state’s education policy from Zia’s time, 1979. He said, *“privatization has been a death-knell for education. Education was now restricted, socially segmented and quality education kept only for the rich... the rich tradition of public education was deliberately destroyed to promote the business of education in the private sector. Public sector these days has no guidance, hardly any budget and not even bare essential teachers to teach core subjects. We have not had anyone to teach biology and chemistry for two years. The state does not care. The policy makers know our plight but they don’t care. Their own children don’t study here and they are in collusion with private colleges. Even the present day examination policies like the ratio between objective and subjective questions are horrendous and destructive.”*

He said, *“I know you come from a private school but candidly I am all praise for Bhutto’s nationalization of private education. The grand narrative of public education was great. It brought equality, security, and respect to teachers and it provided a much better education to the majority children.”*

“Above all”, he pointed out, “it provided vertical social capital to the poor children and helped them integrate in the social set up. I have a number of class-fellows in important official and non-official positions. They come handy in all difficulties. Today’s segregated educational set-up has deprived rural students of this network advantage.”

There is a trend and a pressure among the college teachers for higher degrees, a number of college teachers were currently registered for MPhil or PhD programmes. However, the objective, it appeared, was not to create scholars but to add degrees and meet career requirements.

Use and Role of Media and Internet

Children’s upbringing and discipline is a good indicator of the social difference between small and big cities. In Lahore, people complain they have lost control over

their children's access to the internet. In small cities there is less atomization and social hierarchy still exercises some control. Parents, teachers and society together are able to prevent children from excessive screen time and restrict access to the internet. All the complaints that you hear in the big cities, where media and the internet have already broken parental control are also mentioned by parents and teachers in Bhera but on a lower note. They said it had affected children's study, discouraged socialization, decreasing physical play and led to bad behavior. Outdoor physical play had definitely declined and the one major reason was screen time.

Parents and teachers in multiple interviews complained that media and internet especially mobiles are having a strong negative impact on children's education and upbringing. Their interests have changed. *"A large number of students perform very poorly, why? Because students these days are attracted to cell phone and internet, listening to music, downloading films, engaged with facebook"*, (a college teacher). Some teachers, however, continue to believe it was for the individual to safeguard himself, *"We are not using these facilities wisely. It is up to us, the fault lies with ourselves, not technology, which is our need."*

Use of internet has greatly increased but it is not as much accessed through laptops as through smart phones. Now many middle class children have smart phones worth Rs.8000 to 10000 (\$80 to 100) which can access internet and 'Google'. Use of 'facebook' etc has negatively impacted children's education and grades. Use of radio tape-recorders in the past was still tolerable. *"We use to listen to radio songs and still learn our lessons or do maths but you can't study while watching, children, adults, all sleep late now. Even more important, technology has atomized us, now everyone wants privacy. Watching TV while washing clothes might be interesting but even that replaces socialization in the home or neighbourhoods."* said one school teacher.

TV dramas, films, events, and social media have replaced traditional stories and narrations by grandma, affecting morality, imagination, and relationship with grandparents. *"Grandmas' stories of princesses and fairies are considered frivolous these days"*.

Mainstream visions of development

Interestingly incomes, roads, cars, private schools, hospitals, glamorous hotels and restaurants have come to define the mainstream vision of development and good life while breakdown of relationship, family, inequality, disease, pollution, degradation of water and soil do not seem to matter. Contrary to small peasants, craftsmen and working class persons the middle classes including school and college teachers were oblivious to the declensionist change and uncritically proffered the mainstream visions of development wherein means become the end. They were asked how did they perceive Bhera 20 years from now; some said, surely there would be more recreation spots, good restaurants, quality schools, universities, and quality hospitals. Already they said, *"there is more fashion, modern beds have replaced charpayees and people have moved from eating two meals to three meals a day. Bhera is advancing in every way. Motorway has increased rents. Some shops fetch a hundred thousand a month"*.

Where do college teachers place themselves in social hierarchy? Seventy years since partition feudal political pressure still haunts the teachers. There was a clear resentment about the still persisting feudal hold, *‘you cannot cross the path of an MPA. They cannot tolerate a common man wearing clean white clothes. They consider them their servants.... They don’t come to the hospital, the doctor must attend them at home’*.

Even when the weaver *baradari* (tribe, kinship based community) united and got a *julaha* (weaver) elected as Chairman of local Union Council in the last election, the feudals were so furious they punished the *baradari* by withdrawing the local cleaning staff from their area.

When shopkeepers close down at Isha prayer time some go to the motorway to eat at KFC etc and to see the Lahore – Islamabad passenger crowds. It was recreation. The college teachers lamented there were no recreation spots in Bhera, not even parks, yes, there is the riverside. The one cinema house had closed down in the 1980’s.

Bhera has few manifest developments associated with the lifestyle aspirations of the middle class. A gated housing development was introduced outside the old city, it has been very slow in developing but recently the construction has picked pace. As Bhera has not sprawled through modern housing colonies the price of urban land has gone up three to four fold in the last two decades. Another prominent marker is an elite private school, the Hafsa National School, which opened in 2015, on the same Jhawarian Malakwal main road. The school has a well developed facebook page and is trying to acquire the characterization of a modern elite school. Interestingly both the colony and the school are the initiative of the local spiritual, feudal and political family of Pir Karam Shah (deceased) owner of the Saudi funded Islamic madrassah and would be University, Darul uloom Ghausia Muhammadia.

Glimpses into the life of working class

Working class faces different realities. A maid with a local feudal family talks about her own household, *‘We live in chaos and crisis, but hunger must be satisfied. If there are no men to work it is difficult to survive. While trying to organize other’s household our own household is totally deranged, ‘Bahar di wasson, tey ghar di ujaar’*. Hunger makes us leave our home. Our own household chores are left unattended, clothes are not washed, floor is not swept, dishes are left dirty...”

Pre-partition locals still consider themselves the real owners of land and language. Their women generally do not engage in domestic or agricultural labour. Mohajir [1947 migrants from India] women engage in labour, they carry a lesser burden of feudal oppression *‘and those muhajar working women who engage in agricultural labour in the field might pick peas and with a day’s hard labour might be able to fill one small sack and earn a wage of Rs.150 [\$1.5].’*

She tells about her own family, *‘I had four daughters and four sons. The eldest has lost his mind, the second has died, a third one is addicted to drugs and the fourth works as domestic servant for the feudal household to which we are attached. All four of my daughters were married, two of them have lost their husbands, one leaving behind 7 children and the other five. They were all*

brought up in this household. Of these children of my daughters two daughters are yet to be married. Now my working son also has four daughters and one son and there is a son and a daughter from my son who has died."

"I am ill, have respiratory problem. When I am out of breath I pump a dose from the inhaler into my mouth and start working again".

To a question whether *lassi*, a milk drink, is available she said *"yes, lassi was freely available in the past. Now people sell all their milk and there is no lassi to be had or shared with others"*.

Another interview was conducted in the shack like home of the low-caste Muslim Sheikh family in the outskirts of Miani. *"My husband died 2 ½ years back. This land on which this house is built we got in Bhuttos time when he granted 5 marlas (1250 sq ft) land to each homeless poor [in 1975]. Most of the allottees now [after 40 years] have moved but we are too poor to move. We have lived here for generations". To a question about livelihoods she said, "labour, manual labour. But our men are not ready to undertake what they consider dirty work. No wonder we are hungry. The cost of living has greatly increased, in the past we had lassi, milk and even butter. We had two buffaloes. There was plenty to eat we churned milk in earthenware.*

We drink our water from the handpump which is polluted now because the toilet is just besides. This village is like a city now, the markets are open till late at night. We ourselves sleep late 12 a.m or sometimes even 2 a.m then get up early. There is so much tension in us we cannot sleep for long.

"What are you photographing. It's a poor household. Had there been pretty rooms you could have made some nice photos and would have been pleased to see them."

In the empty part of a graveyard on the outskirts of Bhera the migratory 'Pakhival' community had camped. A few claimed they had been there for over 10 years, others had arrived from Multan only a year ago. They said the state land was decreasing and it was difficult for them finding places to set up camp. Their children collected mainly paper from waste dumps in the city and a child could make Rs100 to 250 a day. Some assisted on vegetable and fruit vending carts and some added by begging. The household we visited was remarkable in the sense it had nothing except two charpayees with two small tied up bundles of clothes placed on them and a wood fire with a pot of daal cooking. There was no other furniture, no crockery, no stores of food and no electro – mechanical items. They offered to entertain us with coke and when we refused they offered to bring tea from a nearby shop which we again gratefully refused. It was an experience showing life was possible at that minimal level. We asked them why didn't they try for maids' jobs at middle class homes, *"we do if offered, but the wage is low, the treatment harsh and allegations of theft too easy"*. It is easy to be suspicious of those who have no permanent address. Most of those who gathered looked emaciated and weak, not strong. We didn't see many old people around.

For the poor apart from wage labour and domestic help job prospects are very limited. There is hardly any industry except brick kilns, kinnoo polishing and

packing while mechanization and agrochemicals continue to cut jobs and self employment in agriculture.

Healthcare, sanitation and water pollution

In stark contrast to the days when Bhera was known for its hakeems and Ayurvedic treatment, modern health facilities in Bhera are poor. There is a city dispensary and a relatively recent Tehsil Head Quarter hospital. The city dispensary is the remains of an old hospital with dysfunctional indoor facilities and a rusting, small operation theatre, more akin to a museum piece. Today it is manned by an affable paramedic who was disappointed at the lack of response and support from the government for the appointment of a qualified medical officer and other facilities. Between 50 and 100 patients visit the rundown facility every day. The Tehsil Head Quarter hospital is much larger with facilities for indoor patients. It has medical, surgical and gynaecological wards, laboratories, an operation theater and budgeted positions for 9 doctors. However, some positions remain vacant, *"There should be 4 doctors for the morning and 4 for the evening.... But there are only three altogether, one of whom is on leave. So there is only one for the day and one for the night, for outdoor, indoor, and for the emergency"*. A lady doctor who chose to commute from Sargodha found that very expensive and quit. There are no proper systems to service and maintain the expensive equipment and once out of order it may remain out of service for a long time. The local feudals find it below their status to visit the local hospital and get free treatment at par with the ordinary people. They call the doctor at home or go to private hospitals in Sargodha. There are a few private doctors but people mostly go to Sargodha for any major ailment. Although there is a public sector District Headquarter Hospital in Sargodha but only the poor go there who cannot afford private treatment, the rest consult public sector doctors and professors in their private clinics in the evening. Sargodha, people say, has become a city of private hospitals and consultants.

Hypertension and diabetes and gastrointestinal diseases including stomach problems, ulcers and liver problems are ubiquitous. Hepatitis-C is on the increase and is locally ascribed to water pollution⁵. TB is not so common probably because people still manage to get some adequate nourishment being relatively closely connected to the relatively less monetised moral economy of the rural hinterland but it is coming back and is becoming resistant. We managed to get some records for the Tehsil Head Quarter Hospital from the Punjab Health Department. The OPD forms show the number of reported cases against selected diseases. The THQ hospital data however, must be read with many qualifications. Many who are ill do not report at the THQ hospital. They could go to private facilities and doctors, they could go to hakeems and homeopaths or not go anywhere. There could be other statistical errors, too, like same patient counted more than once. The records might give us a general idea only. Although accidents requiring immediate attention like burns, dog bites, snake bites fractures and road accidents are at least partially or mainly reported some like depression may not be reported for social reasons. Ischemic heart disease patients are probably taken directly to or referred to the

District Headquarter Hospital at Sargodha through emergency and do not show up in the THQ OPD register.

Gastronomical diseases, diabetes, hypertension, acute respiratory infection, asthma, tuberculosis, urinary tract infections and malaria are the main reported diseases at the OPD. In general the diseases show an increase between 2010 and 2015. Some like gastrointestinal, UTI, dermatitis increased many times. Of course the population also increased during this period but the increase in disease is disproportionate. Data before 2009 – 2010 is not available and for that people's recall is the only source.

Local people report one or two generations back people in Bhera had a much healthier and longer life. They quote many instances of their fathers and grandfathers. To a question about changes in life expectancy Muneer Ahmad, a peasant of Rakh Charagah said, *"my grandfather lived to be 130, my father died 4 years back at 115. He could recognize people upto his last moment I am 70 now but I don't think I would live beyond 80. Average age has decreased"*. The connection between modern (industrial) agriculture and disease is now firmly entrenched in peasants mind, Munir Ahmad continued, *"We use chemical fertilizers to grow wheat the old ata was nutritious not the present one, the agrochemicals are one hundred percent disease. And how much cancer and heart disease we had before? Thirty, forty years back we had hardly heard of these, now every other person reports either high blood pressure or low, heart disease or cancer. I matriculated in 1957. We didn't have that type of incidence then. Why? It is all because of our contaminated food and polluted water. We grow our vegetables on gutter water, that produces disease, there are chemicals in tea, chemicals in ghee highly injurious to human health. In the past I took half a bread and a glass of lassi. I could live on it till evening. Now I take two breads at breakfast, three at twelve noon, 2-3 in the evening but remain hungry. There is no nutrition. True, productivity has increased but these chemicals have destroyed us"*.

However, one college teacher had an opposite outlook on food and lifestyle. *"In the past we had Katcha houses, you will hardly see any today. We had (woven net) charpayees at home, people had little sense of (proper) dress no desire to visit places. Some people would eat their one meal with home made chatni (sauce) now they take breakfast in the morning and two meals, lunch and dinner. What if we don't have desi ghee now, our standard of living is definitely better today. Like Lahore many women don't cook at home. We have Sheeda's naan chana here and McDonald, too."*

Another teacher said lifestyle had changed, *"Physical exercise has finished Only those take a walk who have some constraint"*.

Flush based sewerage system has gradually become the norm since the 1980s, because it is a great convenience. Although there is a lot of propaganda against the unhealthy effects of open defecation people in Bhera do not recall dry **latrines** or open defecation to whatever extent it was there, caused any disease or epidemic when Bhera had more open spaces and had closer access to the countryside. In fact, they think it was healthier because it involved walking to the outskirts or the fields and for the crops it was natural source of fertilizer. Cities do need sewage disposal but the modern water based flush system without sealed sewers or with leaking household sewers have contributed to the pollution of underground water. In the

words of a doctor at the hospital, *“Let me talk of the hospital. Sewerage is a big issue. There is no drainage. We have a drain at the back but it remains permanently blocked.... Our water is not potable. It has a strange colour, you can't drink it.”* So with modern sanitation and flush systems, disease has actually increased.

Modern sanitation and sewerage system have been promoted for convenience and safety from disease but because there is no functional integrated sewerage local effluent drains into ponds and ditches or flows out of broken drain pipes and eventually seeps into the groundwater below becoming the main cause of water pollution and water borne disease⁶. The other main source of groundwater pollution is the liberal use of agrochemicals in the hinterland. Use of bottled water is increasing but the majority of low-income population use water from handpumps or motorized pumps besides the canal on the outskirts or delivered home by local vendors @ Rs one/l in large cans. A few use deep bore handpumps (>240 ft) within the city.

Changes in the hinterland and depeasantisation

Now a Lahore based party has set up a big milk farm comprising some two thousand imported cows in Bhera where compared to 12 to 14 litre per day yield of a good local buffalo the imported Friesian cows are said to produce 20 to 25 litres of milk per day. A heifer starts milching at two years age, a buffalo may take more than twice as long. Again a buffalo offspring of one year sold for Rs 20000 (2015) while that of cow sold for Rs.40000. The Tehsildar thought buffalos were on their way out and will gradually be replaced by imported breeds of cows. The common peasants in village Rakh Charagah thought otherwise. They said some people in the village had already experimented with the new high yield breeds but found them uneconomical and a failure.

Wheat, rice and sugar cane are the three main crops. Potato is grown mainly on the river floodplain. Then there is corn. The Tehsildar said in the revenue subdivision mozea Bhera had 2600 acres of agricultural land and except for one holder with 25 acres most were small peasants. But agriculture and dairy farming today both needed capital input if returns were to be had. Tractor is for Rs.7 to 8 lakhs, ploughs another 1 ½ lakhs. This was bad news for the small farmer who stood to be eventually depeasantised and replaced both in farming and in milk production. Agriculture according to the Tehsildar needed yet another input today, education. You have to be educated and internet savvy to reap the gains of modern agriculture. Both education and capital input go hand in hand. In future the skill of the peasant gained over countless generations was to be discounted and ISO led farm management would count more. This was a slippery road to corporatization of agriculture which requires large scale depeasantisation to meet the demands of technology and capital.

What about productivity and return on agriculture? Wheat crop costs in 2015 were about Rs 20000 per acre while a good crop yielded Rs.45000 per acre in sales leaving some 25000 per acre as profit. The land rent was about 25000 to 30000 per acre for a year which meant one crop was sufficient to completely pay off rent and input

costs while the second crop of the year produced some Rs 25000 in profit. According to this calculation a ten acre farm would leave some 250,000 per year in income for the tenant/contractor or Rs 20000 per month.

In a focus group in Rakh Charagah a peasant commented on increased productivity under industrial agriculture, *“yes, productivity has increased but disease [in crops, humans and even animals] has also increased while the [net] income has declined. Whatever we produced in the past belonged to us, no other person had a share in it; now one part goes to medicine [pesticides], one part to fertilizer, one for seed and so on. [In the end] when we take our crop to the market we are spurned, we beseech them, sometimes offer to leave it on credit or on any price. That is the change. Fifty years ago in a family of 10 one earned, nine lived on that; now nine have to earn to sustain the same family. The past was better.”*

Crafts: a stifled industry

Bhera was an agrarian city with craftsmanship and trade. As trade flourished crafts followed providing the needs of the city and of the surrounding countryside. Over time Bhera engaged in a large variety of local produce (Gardezi 1993) which included woodwork especially wood carving, weaving, namdas (unwoven woolen rugs), carpets, metalcraft, shoe making and last but not least mehndi. Many of these crafts showed great promise and growth at one time, yet failed in the end.

Mehndi, a cosmetic dye, became a particular specialty of Bhera and a large number of people were engaged with its growing, picking, grinding and packing. Mehndi production was a labour intensive agroindustrial craft and its productivity was considered higher than that of wheat. However, since about three decades mehndi production has been declining, first because mehndi production in Sindh is cheaper because of cheaper labour cost and second and perhaps more important, because of the introduction of chemical dyes which colour the skin faster and deeper. The industry has collapsed yet a few factories are still engaged with its production. Mehndi was one of the area's most important crops and its sturdy seed could be cultivated on a poor sandy soil. However, official agencies played no role in the development or improvement of the crop.

In the groundfloor living room of a small two storied house sits 85 years old master craftsman Bashir Ahmad a majestic old man cross-legged on his charpayee with a pillow against the wall. He is the head of the only surviving weaver family in Bhera. Two of his 3 married sons live with him along with their families. His 3 sons and one daughter-in-law sit with us. She is hardly 40 but has lost her 3 upper front teeth already. They offered to make tea more than once though a bit hesitantly every time, and we declined with thanks. Bashir Ahmad tells us the story of his apprenticeship with Amrit Laal a Hindu master craftsman in Jhang. It was 1945 two years before partition. Amrit Laal hated to use cotton thread imported from Britain. He would rather dye local cotton thread himself. After moving back to Bhera Bashir taught the art to scores of other people. According to Bashir Ahmad as recently as 1993 some 200 weavers worked in Bhera. Gardezi, (1993) on the other hand, puts the figure at 50 (and quotes the craftsmen's own estimate of 1000 units 40 years earlier in 1953)

but in 2010 there were just 5 to 7 and today Bashir Ahmad's was the only surviving family. His grandchildren were now studying at school. They didn't want to take up weaving. For one thing weaving was a craft which was considered low and menial, *julahas* being the caste name for the trade; for another on the handloom you could hardly make one *khaïs* (heavy woven cotton bedspread) in a day while the machine made 15. One was sold for Rs.1000 to 1200 in which they hardly made a profit of Rs.400 to 500, the rest was cost. So they did not make even a day's minimum wage (Rs.500) through weaving. They were merely going through the motions because they loved the work and were used to, but it was now, in the days of large scale industry, clearly unsustainable and everyone else had left already. The family took us around their handloom and related implements to prepare the thread for weaving on the loom. They had set up two other small machines one for shelling rice the other for grinding wheat on which they worked in the evening to make up their daily living expense.

Bashir's reflections on the craft and society showed great insight. Such wisdom could only come from the holistic nature of his work.

Just outside Bhera, closer to River Jhelum is the workshop of potter Ehsan Ilahi. He was of senior years and had two younger persons working with him, one of whom was his son. It was a brick built enclosure with covered work place and two pits for storing raw clay in the courtyard. On one side of the courtyard was a *bathbi* wood fired furnace. At the moment he made only *kunalis* (shallow flat clay trays) for kneading flour or making yogurt. A number of processes were involved. He brought raw clay from the river bank and stored it in the pits in the courtyard, one for raw, the other for semi-processed. In the covered workshop on a turn-table deft hands moulded the clay lump into any desired shape. The *kunalis* were glazed on the inside, sun dried and put into the *bathbi* for firing. Earlier it was fired with freely available dung but now with glazing it needs a higher temperature for which wood is used. Wood is more expensive, raising costs. His vocation, *kumbar*, too was considered lowly. At one time family labour was freely available, now hired labour makes it more expensive. He, too said, on average he could hardly make a labourer's wage in a day. It was not sustainable. According to Ehsan Ilahi of the 150 families in this field some 25 years back (Gardezi 1993 reported 42) all but two had left the trade. His grandchildren, now in school, did not want to do it. The little ones called him '*baba ganda*' (the dirty old man). He was a serene person and again his broad understanding came not from education but the holistic craftsmanship he was engaged in.

Its location on the bank of river Jhelum gave Bhera the special advantage of availing cheap timber from Kashmir. Over time Bhera became Punjab's most important wood craft centre especially known for its wood carving which had a unique style. According to Gardezi (1993) there was hardly a mohalla or street which did not have rows of multistoried houses with carved wooden façades. The most used wood was *deodar* brought from Kashmir in the north and *sheesham*, a hard wood, from the plains of Punjab, in the south. Carved doors, balconies and wooden facades have disappeared today, the affluent trading communities have left and antique dealers

have since bought massive carved doors and woodwork in the deserted homes at Rs.50000 to Rs.150000 a piece. Cheaper substitutes have replaced expensive wood as building material and intricate carving has become unaffordable. In the 1993 survey of crafts in Bhera, one master engraver was still living. Today there is none (Dar and Ali 2010).

A major wood craft was combs, an item of daily use needed by everyone. Bhera was one of the three centres in the Punjab, the other two were Dera Ghazi Khan and Lahore. It was first hit by the departure of Hindu capitalists who provided the raw material, then by the arrival of plastic combs. Today the master craftsmen have all died, no one wanting to learn the craft anymore.

In its heyday Bhera was quite famous for its metalcraft which included swords, knives and cutlery. Latif in 1911 recorded 20 cutlery workshops in Bhera whose product was sent to markets in Peshawar, Multan and other areas. The metalcraft was mainly engaged in by Ahmadis, a sect declared non-Muslim in 1977. Since then most of the community have left Bhera and with their departure the craft has largely died.

Shoes are a basic need. Traditionally they were made of pure leather and were of a type called '*desi jutti*' worn by both men and women. Those engaged in this craft are called *mochis*, who like other skilled workers were considered low caste in the feudal society. Gardezi (1993) recorded 30 *mochis* in Bhera who reported that a few decades back 150 households were engaged in this trade. Because of the low prestige and better jobs for the educated, the younger generations have gradually moved out of this vocation.

Hand-woven carpet-making, at one time widespread, has also died except in mohalla Saithian when women work for measly wages of just over Rs.100 or one dollar a day. Here a Lahori financier who has moved to Bhera taps the still existing art by providing looms, raw materials and design.

The nearby Sheikhpur Kohna in pre-partition Bhera had developed a reputation as a healing centre because of its hakeems. When we went to see hakeem Ataullah Shah Hashmi he said "*these days only discerning people believe in Hikmat, the common folk want quick relief. They don't care for long-term damages to the body so hikmat for all practical purposes has died*".

Analysis and discussion

Bhera does not have the glamorous trappings of a modern city, yet it is here that the impact of modernity can be studied as the old has not yet been eroded beyond recognition. It still exists in peoples' lives and imaginations.

Since around 1980 an increasing use of modern technology have invaded the traditional society of Bhera. The demand for cash has increased and young men are increasingly leaving Bhera to earn cash in big cities and preferably abroad.

Imperceptibly the families and the society have both been disintegrating on a permanent basis.

Modern education has not uplifted Bhera. Only few go for higher education and those few are misfits for the economy of Bhera. Education has hardly created any jobs but it is considered a conduit for moving people to jobs, which are hard to find, at least in Bhera. The modern 'quality' education not only does not teach any practical skills, it does not even leave time for the children to learn any skill on their own. Modern education is universal in character not related to local needs or resources. Moreover it deprives children of their language, culture and history. It is urban in nature and makes them contemptuous of both craftsmanship and agriculture. Most of those who acquire higher education leave Bhera never to return. After all modern education is about producing people for the market. If Bhera is now connected through roads and internet why should the educated stay back in Bhera. They move in search of greener pastures. This is, however, not the story of Bhera alone. The best educational institutions in the country aim to assume the role of export processing zones.

While middle class intellectuals keenly support internet technology; madrassah teachers not to be left behind are even keener. Madrassa teachers too now look at development as a technical issue not a political issue. Schools, colleges, madrassahs all proudly display their computer labs and try to excel at it. In the words of a professor at the Jamia, *"we do believe in technology. How can we isolate ourselves while the world goes global. We must join in and benefit"*.

Bilal Ahsan Malik a student of Graduate School of Education at Harvard University while doing his PhD on Islamic revivalism and modernity based his research in Jamia Ghausia, Muhammadia of Bhera. The experiences and narratives of his interlocutors at the Jamia showed a struggling engagement with globalization and accommodative stance towards secularization. The economic and political power of its backers and the magic of technology is too much to resist and determines which will be the subset: globalization or an alternative value-based world view held by the madrassah students. Keenness on technology is meant to win recognition as a place for advanced learning not to develop a deeper understanding of the issues at stake (Malik 2008).

A college teacher said access to education has increased. Has it? In some ways, yes, because education has become a commodity and is being advertised. *"There used to be just a government intermediate college here. Only around 2003 these private colleges and Universities started to arrive in the region. Now two bus-fuls of students go to the [nearby] Bhawal every morning"*. Sargodha University is 70 km away and Gujrat University has opened its Campus at Mandi Bahauddin only 40 km away. Set up by the government both these Universities offer paid education. Two generations back Feroze Khan Noon (later Prime minister of Pakistan) did his schooling from Bhera Government High School (Noon 1966) where rich and poor all studied together. In Noon's words it *"was a public school like the grammar schools of England."* Today only the

rich can afford quality education, others have to sell their assets. Education was one way of bridging inequalities. Now it is increasing inequalities.

What is new about Bhera's education. The present centralized western education was introduced after the fall of Punjab in 1849. It changed the ownership of the programme from community to state and objective from literacy, language and grooming to preparing to undertake jobs. More recently the state has become disinterested in its constitutional obligation of providing school education to all and is shifting the ownership of state schools to private businesses. The content has shifted to the technical and the medium of instruction encouraged to shift to English⁷.

Under capitalism in the west women labour participation has been used to keep a downward pressure on wages (Bruegel 1979, Humphries 1990). We now see the same phenomenon in Bhera where rather established schools were paying a salary of Rs.3500 to 7000 to Masters degree holder teachers. But this is the norm for other small cities and for many private schools even in Lahore. For example we found in 2014 that the wage being paid to MA qualified female teachers at a government primary school by an NGO in Sooter Mandi, Walled City Lahore was 3600 per month. When we asked the teachers why they didn't move to other private schools they replied many actually paid Rs.1500 to 2000 per month. A study conducted by Dr. Baloch at the Lahore School of Economics (talk on 2016) also found the government itself was paying the same wage to qualified teachers employed to teach children of bonded labour working at *bathbas* or brick kilns. Another study found the wages of the private schools were found to be one fifth the wage of the public school teachers (Andrabi et al 2013). Men are obviously not ready to work at this low wage so there are hardly any men teaching at the primary level in private schools. Men teach at the secondary level and above especially in government schools where they are paid more.

In India, Deuchar (2014) noted that the youth in a small city are not finding employment that can sustain their class position and there was widespread disillusionment with higher education, they also lose the capacity to do manual work. There is also relentless fetishisation of the large city through advertising and media. These finding could easily be applied to the youth in Bhera.

The small city of Bhera is surrounded by an agricultural hinterland where subsistence farming has been abandoned in favour of market, production is mechanized and chemical inputs have replaced the home grown inputs of organic subsistence farming. Demand has become tied to global market speculation and prices highly volatile. This year (2015-16) the paddy price fell to one third, the contract tenants have all been devastated. Such price volatility is the result of making rice heavily dependent on international market. In this profit and loss equation small scale agriculture is no longer viable, on many occasions the revenue does not meet the input cost. Some members or whole of the small peasants families have to sell their labour in cities or sell whole or part of their holding to emigrate from the country. The tehsildar said, *"I know from my personal experience poor peasants sell their one or two acre holdings in village Moria Pul to go to Saudi Arabia or Europe"*. The observations

from our interviews are supported by the more extensive research of Shah and Harris White in India (2011) where unviable small farms are leading to semiproletarianisation. With jobless growth in the formal sector those dispossessed from the agricultural sector find it hard to get alternative forms of gainful employment in the formal industrial sector So the “reserve army of the dispossessed” increasingly find refuge in the growing informal sector where the possibility of getting a decent job is highly impossible (Yadu and Satheesha 2016). Our limited work points to the build up of an explosive situation in the rural economy as in India.

The Lahore Islamabad motorway passes pretty close to Bhera. People have welcomed the access provided by the Bhera interchange. It has decreased time to Lahore and Islamabad; even time distance to Sargodha has decreased where majority of higher education and healthcare facilities used by many people in Bhera is located, and it is now possible to commute to and from Sargodha on a daily basis. The same, however can also be looked at from a different angle if we look at the relationship between Bhera and big cities. The latter stand to benefit more. There is a core-periphery relationship and it is the periphery that is feeding the core; like other small cities Bhera is providing human resource, vegetables, fruit, agricultural produce and milk and in the process is being depleted. The motorway is helping do this more quickly. Everything has started to gradually move out to the big cities or abroad, even *lassi*, the traditional drink, is hard to find; one who produces does not enjoy the fruit of his labour.

Pollution of underground water in Bhera is a major calamity. For sometime people thought it was a temporary problem and would soon be fixed. While it has only increased over the past 25 years. People have gradually moved to alternative sources. As mentioned earlier water pollution is intimately linked to the seepage of sewage from the sanitation system and the use of agrochemicals both modern technological developments. Having tried many sewage drainage solutions the state has abandoned the possibility of a sealed integrated drainage system. The latest solution in Bhera is the setting up of two filtration plants maintained for the Municipal Committee by private contractors who filter as well as add chemicals to purify the water. This is supplied to public at two outlets for a limited 2 hours morning and evening. The next step is bottled water which is already expanding fast in Bhera.

Ideally a sealed underground drainage of sewage should be possible but experience has shown that considering the local levels of technology and management it is nearly impossible. In fact, one discovers, the problem is not confined to Bhera almost all cities are now affected by it. One thing is clear, drinking water has now become a highly profitable business and growth of water pollution is adding to the GDP of the countries.

Cash, gadgets, modern education, sanitation, modern agriculture all are supposed to bring a better life but a brief look at social change in Bhera brings up an ironic situation. Instead of cash and gadgets bringing a better life people are selling better

life to buy cash and gadgets. The medium has become the message. The process has become the end. Cell phones and internet are robbing people of their children, modern education has started to rob children of their culture and industrially produced food has robbed people of good health. Modernity is understood as the forward march of society but we see in Bhera it is not producing exactly the expected results. There is, therefore, a need to go deeper into the issue of modernity and its paradoxical role.

There is a whole set of debates about what constitutes modernity. Modernity may be defined by the period of the Industrial Revolution and the ideas of so called rationality related to that, or it may be defined by the progress of technology. Whichever way we look at it, modernity as ideas or as machines, it has been a fairly continuous process primarily determined by man's struggle for production. The society has been modernizing through the ages and in that sense every age has been modern compared to the past. Colonialism in India, however, perverted the process of indigenous modernization. It started to import modern consumer goods, stifled the emerging local industry and imposed foreign institutions of learning. So India started to become modern without passing through the process of modernizing and without passing through the struggle for production and innovation. This phenomenon was the gift of colonialism and neoliberal times that have followed it. In our society today we have all modern goods, machines, services and education without having a corresponding productive capacity or passing through the process of modernizing. Let us also look at the issue from the people's viewpoint. Modernity is better understood viewed against its opposite. For example allopathic medicine vs Hikmat, western education vs madrassa education, industrial agriculture vs subsistence and the modern information and communication technology vs books or the still earlier oral tradition and English vs local or mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Even diaspora has emerged as modern means of livelihood in a globalised world, as against local jobs.

It is this malignant growth of consumption-based modernity that is producing paradoxical results in education, agriculture, industrial production, health and even governance. Our present day modernity of consumption goods, services and processes is ahistorical, out of context and totally out of synch with the old receding traditional set-up. It is, in fact, helping to destroy the very tradition and specificity which is the soil that should have produced it.

Today modernity in Bhera has the shape of ecological destruction. For example in Bhera, water, a primary resource, is being irreversibly polluted, soil is being destroyed, agricultural self-employment is being reduced, jobs are being lost, communities are disintegrating and food and crops are being poisoned in the name of technology and productivity.

In a presentation at the Lahore School of Economics in 2016 Harris-White highlighted the gross issue of waste and pollution in India through the lens of Bellamy Foster's concept of 'metabolic rift'. In Bhera we do not observe it in a big

way but the direction the present state policy of liberalization will take informal waste, supply of drinking water, etc is worth further study.

Modernity is also a new more liberating social and productive structure born out of the old traditional, the moribund and decadent social order. Such a new social structure was born in Europe with the advent of industrialization. In Pakistan a different type of modernity has born out of the old moribund semi-feudal traditional social structure. It looks modern because it uses all modern products of industrialization even of post- industrialization but it has brought in a new equally moribund and decadent social order without industrialization. It is more decadent because it is more dependent compared to the previous.

In Bhera we discovered the use of new products and technology has not been liberating as the social structure emerging with industrialization in Europe was. The new products and processes including healthcare and education have not emancipated peoples minds they have instead enslaved them. It is a new type of modernity, very different from Europe's. it is gagging (in loss of language), it is blinding (loss of critical ability), it is weakening (osteoporosis of society through diaspora) and it is eroding capacity (loss of local manufacturing base and its replacement with trade). No wonder the past appears better than the present.

Structural adjustment

Electric powered gadgets TV, fridges, washing machines, clothes iron, water motors, cell-phones and the motorcycles are now part of a large number of households. One needs cash to buy these, to access education, healthcare, as well as for the agricultural inputs in the hinterland. Over time people's lives have structurally adjusted to generate that cash, so the quest for jobs.

In Bhera we can see how market dependency has replaced the food autonomy of the farmer households and how large scale industry has replaced the local autonomy of small scale production. We can also see how closed cycle autonomous farming has changed into open-cycle total dependency for both inputs and outputs. Structural adjustment is a process whereby self-reliant production and consumption in Bhera has changed to a dependent mode in which market cash transactions have become the need.

Globalization has played a major role in this structural adjustment of societies making new needs the anchors of new life, for example, urbanization, bigger cities, inequality, demand for specialised quality education, industrial agriculture and a breakdown of security are making people run for destinations, for status, for competition for healthcare and what not with cash in hands. Its not a matter of choice, life has been made impossible without these. Few years back society was functioning fine without cell-phones, today it is hard to imagine life even without internet. Breakdown of security, job market and even interaction with the government all demand mediation by the new technology. Creation of need is the structural adjustment. Need is not autonomous, it is policy. Again people of Bhera

have been satisfied so far with public education but increasing inequality in education is going to increase the demand for private education. Through inequality, loss of jobs, increased competition and free trade in agriculture, globalization is generating a structural adjustment which creates new needs, - ever exacerbating the dance of life. Harris-White (2016) showed consumption choices in India do not prioritise basic necessities such as food or sanitation durables. According to her it is the social pressures that mediate consumption and these are extensively networked through TV, telecommunications and internet.

Like milk and vegetables, human resource too is now eagerly being exported abroad where it earns a much higher return. Many people from Bhera are working abroad, others are in the queue. 100% households of village 'moṛea' Boola have scions working abroad. The nearby city of Mandi Bahauddin which is bigger than Bhera has hardly a household who is not represented abroad. There is a trend among small peasants to sell land to buy a visa for the Middle East or Europe.

Diaspora is the scourge of globalization. It is the osteoporosis of the society. Like human bones the social structure weakens through depletion and in the long term the society moves towards a collapse. People can already feel this progressive collapse but they feel helpless. In the words of a peasant in Rakh Charagah, *"If our family had sustenance here, I ask you, would you or I send our children even to Lahore. Today some are working in Saudia, some in Dubai or in other foreign countries Parents die in the meanwhile, they cannot come even to their funeral, they are abroad just to earn a sustenance. I have two sons in Saudi Arabia, they hardly send anything."* A social revolution or confrontation is no longer in people's imagination. They think in terms of escaping and continuing to make a living for their immediate family. Migration is an obvious choice. There is no other alternative. So the family celebrates the remittance and the state celebrates an export. Both are celebrating the depletion of society as growth. In the name of an arguable individual benefit the social is destroyed.

Hikmat, the practice of traditional medicine, is generally not included among crafts. But hakeems fulfilled a basic non-agricultural need of the society and it wasn't just service, as the present day practice of modern medicine is. Hakeems engaged in the production of medicine, getting and choosing their ingredients direct from nature, then selecting, curing, preparing and combining them in suitable proportions to create medicines; many of them were great innovators, studying the effects then changing and improving them. Hikmat was practiced as an art. It wasn't a monoculture of commercial mass production. This art was not allowed to flourish and develop into its modern version but was declared unscientific, superimposed and stifled by another system.

Like so many other cities of Punjab Bhera showed seeds of indigenous industrialization especially in pre-partition days when Bhera was relatively isolated, big industry was minimal anywhere around and not linked to Bhera's market and hinterland. With increasing linkages to big cities Bhera lost its manufacturing capacity and small scale indigenous production started to be replaced by large scale production from outside and more recently by liberalized imports from China and

elsewhere. Crafts had generated a huge employment in the urban areas as subsistence farming did in rural areas. According to the report titled, “Future of Charkha in the Punjab” by the Board of Economic Inquiry, Punjab, there were 138000 handlooms in the Punjab in 1951 which were supplying two-third of the total cloth requirement of the province and providing employment to 350,000 persons (Yasin 1951). Services are now replacing manufacturing crafts. Now one finds instead beauty parlours, motorcycle and cell phone repair shops and potable or filtered water delivery services.

The widespread nature of industrial crafts even in pre-British India has been recorded by many (Roy 1999, Haynes 2012) in small towns especially those located by a river on a trade route. One of the Soviet Union’s leading historian Vladimir Pavlov (1958, 1973, 1978) noted that by the end of the 18th century trade capitalism had emerged in feudal India in the form of small industries set up by artisans, but a developed form of capitalism had not emerged. At the developed state of crafts a large and growing technical population was engaged in innovation. Development of crafts and the availability of a market had been the route to industrializations in Europe. The social development of parts of India had at least reached a level where they were ready for a take off into industry while India had a huge local market. However, colonial occupation derailed the process of industrialization by taking over both the local market as well as the raw materials of India. Thus in Bhera crafts did not give birth to industry and jobs, rather large scale industry elsewhere or abroad destroyed crafts the buds of future home grown manufacturing.

Role of state

Modernity, including its thought and culture was the result of industrialization in the West. The industrialization took place in a capitalist paradigm based on exploitation of the working class. As the number of working class grew and political consciousness developed class contradictions sharpened and the state helped develop alternative institutions to temper the negative social fall out from the breakdown of traditional institutions. The state could not ignore the interests of a growing and politically restless working class. However, now especially in the Third World Countries, the restraining role of the state has been thrown overboard and in the name of growth and technology capitalism is developing explosive contradictions with nature on the one and with the people on the other.

In the past the state had safeguarded though in a limited way the interest of the community against the interests of capital. That type of state has rolled back while a new type of state has emerged. The old state had protected the private but also promoted the commons. The new type of state has disowned commons, it is selling these to private capital, which is segmenting markets according to purchasing power.

The Tehsildar tells us the role of the state at the local Tehsil level. Policy and planning at local Tehsil level has suffered. Even the routine functions of administration and adjudication suffer because of frequent crisis management like dealing with floods, with dengue, vaccination campaigns, elections etc. Even the

maintenance of security has suffered. *"I have a small administrative unit but I have too many multifarious assignments. I and my patwari issue land ownership certificates, appear in the court, make domicile certificates for children, deal with all petitions regarding land, disaster, amount of compensations, extent of property damage, conduct surveys, investigate, keep records, settle disputes. It all involves fieldwork but I have been given no transport"*. Where is the time for reflection and policy it is non-stop routine and crisis management.

Reminiscences

It is remarkable to note how people loved the soil, a euphemism for community. Some of their oral and written memoirs eventually found their way on to the internet. Some have even documented Bhera's history episodes in fiction (Sahni, 1988).

Most of these reminiscences talk of a period between 1930 and 1960 and express nostalgia, a longing for the good old times. Writers have taken note of the importance of river transport for Bhera, which gave it a uniqueness and centrality lost with roads and railways in colonial times.

The majority population was Hindus who dominated trade and business yet there was great diversity marked by a commendable religious harmony with the inhabitants participating in each other's religious festivals.

One issue is how reliable are these reminiscences as record of the time. Nearly all are nostalgic, expressing a longing for the past and do not record problems, difficulties or misery. However, we should take them as personal impressions of Bhera's society as it was in the decades before partition.

The memoirs give us a healthy and prosperous picture of pre-partition Bhera which contrasts with the conflict, ill-health and poverty of today. However, even the memoirs talk of a decline in the fortunes of Bhera in the 20th century. Many reasons have been speculated upon for this decline. These include first the end to trade with Central Asia consequent upon the socialist revolution in Soviet Union, second the arrival of railway and roads which replaced river transport, making transportation costly, third, the withdrawal of its Tehsil position by the British and finally the Partition in 1947 which removed the long accumulated social, cultural and business capital breaking community and damaging culture.

We cannot be dismissive of the nostalgia in people's lives. Work in Bhera helps us understand the apparent paradox in peoples lives. They are trying to reach out for the modern but are nostalgic about the past. It is because the modern promises a better life but has delivered worse. People are now running after an illusion but it has become a struggle for existence, a struggle for survival; the process has become the end.

Endnote

We have investigated the life and people of small town Bhera and discovered it all adds up to a declensionist picture. But is Bhera alone?

Notes

¹ William Cronon (1992) used the term 'declensionist' to describe the settlement of the West (US) and presents it as a picture of decline and loss versus another 'progressive' narrative in which historians celebrate it as a story of heroic effort and progress. He considers all narratives to be constructs based on the historians' attitudes and values with respect to past events, people and episodes. The declensionist view of the settlement of West counts the human contribution in the destruction of the soil and water (the creation of a dust bowl) that aggravated material conditions through industrial farming and dams. The story, in his opinion, was not of heroic effort and progress but man-made decline which was the result of greed and violence towards the natives who lived and occupied the land prior to the white settlers.

² Hassan (2011) writing about small cities of Pakistan identified their ancient past as a product of geographical location near rivers and/or additionally on intersection of major trade routes.

³ Ahmed (2012) documents narratives of inter-communal harmony in Bhera and other towns of Punjab. The various memoirs available about Bhera found on late Dr. Gian Saroop's website (www.bhera.com disabled in 2014) also testify to the absence of any communal conflict.

⁴ *Pakhiyas* are local nomadic tribes who take their name from the temporary fabric and stick shelters or *Pakhis* they set up as homes on available open land.

⁵ There is no scientific link established between groundwater pollution and Hepatitis C. World Health Organization (WHO) lists Hepatitis A and E as waterborne diseases. (http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/hepatitis/en/). It is a popular misconception and even some doctors in Bhera ascribed to this view.

⁶ The development of water supply systems without disposals increases sanitation-related problems (Hassan 2006, Water Aid/BPD 2010). The water policy document of PHED (www.punjab.gov) envisions a reform programme which will be based on rationalization of tariff, reduction of inefficiency, cost and improvement of service delivery encouraging private sector and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement service delivery models.

⁷ With privatization the burden of education has increased on the people. It is becoming increasingly competitive and is now considered a family investment rather than a community or social investment. Throughout the country the media, the NGOs and even the state itself have been pointing out deficiencies of public education and people have been consequently shifting to private schools. In Bhera most people have been satisfied with the quality of public education so far. Only recently private schools are stepping up their presence and the trend is changing with all its implications in terms of exclusion, inequality, segregation and loss of social capital.

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Memoirs

Allama Nazir Ahmed, Mohallah Fazil Imam – Bhera

Dr Rashid Nisar

Headmaster (Retired) Manzoor Piracha, Mohallah Pirachgan – Bhera

Headmaster (Retired) Ali Hassan

Iven Anwar (2013, January 1)

Khawaja Bashir Ahmed, Mohallah Sheikhanwala- Bhera

Malik Sher Muhammad Awan, Mohallah Hidayat Shah- Bhera

Malik Muhammad Nawaz Awan, Chak wala darwaza

Riaz Fatima, Zianpur (Miani) – Bhera.

Syed Iftikhar Hussain, Mohallah Sahiniawala- Bhera

Tufail Piracha, Mohallah Pirachgan-Bhera

Dr Gian Sarup