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Colonialism and the Construction of Religious Identities in Punjab: The Case of Muslims

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Abstract

The colonial state of India referred to as the Raj introduced multiple changes and sought modifications in the socio-cultural, political and economic spheres in the province of Punjab. Being the last province annexed and rendered the part of the British Indian Empire, forming North Western area with a proximity to the Russian Empire and contributing heavily, never lower than fifty percent of the total British Indian Army, Punjab attained a special significance for the Raj. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the extensive network of canals turned this area into a 'basket of bread.' Similar to the unprecedented physical infrastructure feats, the British carried out social-engineering as well to attain calculated goals. In addition, the colonialism was conjoined by colonial modernity which included, inter alia, decennial census and its concomitant process of enumeration, massive use of printing press and burgeoning press and publications market, electoral arenas of politics, and formation of a large number of social organizations. It provided impetus to the redefinition of socio-religious and political identities and an assertive quest for social mobility. This redefinition of increasingly religiously informed social and cultural identities among Muslims of Punjab in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is the focus of this paper.

Keywords: Muslim Identity, Colonial Punjab, Colonial India, Religious Identities, Social Organizations, Punjab.

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Introduction

Islam embraces a large measure of diversity which makes it, to some theorists, a universal ideology and it was through this adaptability that it influenced the lives of people throughout the world wherever it reached. Some variegated socio-cultural variants of Islam discernable on a regional basis are inter alia: South Asian Islam, Central Asian Islam, European Islam, African Islam, and Middle Eastern Islam (Yilmaz, 2014: 1-22). The Punjabi society is such an example of a sub-variant of Muslim identity with its distinct socio-cultural and linguistic heritage. The highest conversion to Islam took place during the medieval period which was characterized by syncretic mutualities and shared inclusive identities. However, with the advent of the British state and coming of social and political institutions of modernization, a sense of increasing communitarian consciousness was witnessed which had to be accommodated in formal political arenas yielding yet further augmenting communal chasm among religiously defined communities.

This Punjabi Muslim identity can be understood in terms of some continuity and some changes throughout the colonial period. Using the Marxist terminology, Punjab under the colonial period witnessed many changes which were the result of changing the structure and superstructure of the Punjabi society. Although Indian society had traditionally been of multiple identities yet the question of primary identity was a subjective issue depending upon the socio-cultural baggage of that particular individual or collectivity or it depended on the salience of certain identity in a particular situation. The factors which influenced and marked identity were socio-political, cultural, linguistic, and economic. As an official record of the colonial period suggests efforts were made, in some instances, to create a particular identity at the expense of the other: though some policymakers admitted that introducing religious distinctions could only be counter-productive.

The deputy commissioner of Ambala, for instance, wrote in 1900 that “religion, in the rural parts of this district, is by no means a potent divider of hearts” (Gilmartin, 1988: 30). Likewise, the Deputy Commissioner of Gurdaspur observed in 1901 that “the *jat* peasant here is still a farmer first, and a Sikh or Muslim, as the case may be, in the second place only” (Gilmartin, 1988: 30). In 1871, when the British government introduced census, some people mentioned themselves both as Hindus and Muslims simultaneously. They were not conscious about their religious identity that either one has to be a Muslim or a Hindu and that they cannot retain or claim to have both identities at the same time. An example in point is the response of the Meherat community of North India in the 1871 and 1881 censuses “when the Meherat were queried on their religion, their answer was rarely ‘Islam,’ but mostly ‘Meherat’” (Oberoi, 1994: 11). Ruchi Ram Sahni, an important public figure of colonial Lahore, while describing the faith of his father writes in his memoirs,

I cannot say how exactly to describe my father’s faith. He had his daily role of idol worship with all the warmth of a sincere believer, so much that when he was ill, he would ask me to go through the forms and formalities of washing the idols in the morning... I have every reason to conclude that my father was an idol worshipper. The only thing that now raises doubts in my mind is the fact that both in the morning and at night, he recited, with equal warmth and regularity, the Sikh scriptures Rohoras and Sukhmani. How he could reconcile these recitations with idol worship I do not know (Burra, 2017: 214-15).

In the initial censuses in colonial Punjab, the Sikhs were lumped together with the category of Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists eliciting a response of reaction from Sikhs such as Bhai Kahn Singh’s best-known work titled *Hum Hindu Nahin Hain* (tr. We are not Hindus) (Qasmi, 2011: 154). Thus, all the decennial censuses conducted by the British gave a repeated chance to those Indians who were

not identity-conscious before to align themselves with one religion or the other. In other words, these 'fuzzy' community identities were to be replaced by clearly defined boundaries in the colonial period (Kaviraj, 2010: 1-8).

Census was one factor of the formation of identity out of a large number of socio-political, cultural, and economic factors that contributed in this regard during the period under study i.e., Colonial Punjab. Since religious identity implies the nature of relationship between different religious communities, particularly, after the experiences of partition of 1947, the scholars who have written on this subject tend to either over-emphasize the harmony and they even see massacre of 1947 as mere accidental; there are others whose writings present as if inter-religious congenial relationships have never been the case in Indian context. Thus in the context of the rising tendency of the religious nationalism in South Asia, historians and social scientists, have long ignored the 'legacy of cleaving in India.' This phenomenon of Muslim identity formation in the colonial Punjab needs to be investigated and this paper is an effort in this regards. It carries two parts: part one is about the territorial, demographic, political, and administrative account of Punjab in historical perspective so that the reader may get tuned to the historical context and be receptive of those influences which impinged upon the formation of Muslim identity. This part also provides a political and administrative framework of the colonial period during which time some developments—partly intentional and calculated and partly unintentional and miscalculated— took place which fostered the process of construction of religious identities; part second focuses upon the subject and explores some major factors which contributed to the formation of Muslim identity in colonial Punjab

Contextualizing the Area and Demography of Colonial Punjab

The word '*Punj-ab*' literally means 'five rivers' or the land of five rivers which are namely the Ravi, the Chenab, the Jhelum, the Sutlej, and the Beas (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 2013: 31). The water-flow of these five rivers combines at '*Panjnad*' located in the South-West of Multan district. These rivers not only used to provide agricultural potential for the sustenance of the people of Punjab but also supported large boat traffic as a means of communication and transportation. The irrigation potential of the rivers of Punjab was attempted to be tapped by successive ruling dynasties in accordance with their will and the level of their technological advancement of these rulers including Ghaznavids, Ghauris, the Turk and Afghan Sultans of Delhi, Lodhis, Mughals, Sikhs, and the British. However, it was the British who comprehensively engineered the landscape of the colonial Punjab along with "social engineering" making it the 'basket of bread' feeding not only the British India but also British Empire the world over (Gilmartin, 2004: 6). Huge state-constructed irrigation works transformed the whole landscape of this area. Large-scale migration provided a window of opening to engineer a state-attempted significant social change. The migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were also critical in establishing connections between village organization and state power that lay at the heart of colonial rule (Gilmartin, 2004: 3).

Like rivers, the Punjab was a land of many religions; Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity flourished here at various points in time. Christianity spread particularly during the colonial period due to the space provided to the missionaries by the colonial state. The British military presence in the Punjab, which was meant to counter possible Russian advancement from the North-Western side, provided the missionaries an opportunity to focus their activities for conversion under this military cover. Moreover, the leading early administrators of Punjab—Henry

Lawrence, John Lawrence, Robert Montgomery, and Donald Mcleod—saw hardly any differences between the goals of British rule and evangelism (Oberoi, 1994: 219). The missionaries established a large number of educational institutions and each school preached the Gospel. They established modern educational institutions like schools and colleges and opened other philanthropic organizations as well. According to the Census of 1921, the province had a total population of 20.5 million (*Census of the Punjab, 1921*). The population was predominantly rural with almost 90 percent living in villages. There were only two cities (Lahore and Amritsar) with a population of more than 100,000 and only five inhabiting more than 50,000 persons. The distribution of the population by religion was: Muslims 11.5 million (55 percent), Hindus 6.5 million (31 percent), Sikhs 2.5 million (11 percent) and Christians ¼ million (1.5 percent) (*Census of the Punjab, 1921*). The Punjabis were predominantly agriculturalists with almost 60 percent of total population attached to the agriculture sector.

The British assumed full control of the Punjab from the Sikhs and the annexation was proclaimed on 29th March, 1849. Lord Dalhousie (Viceroy of India at the time of annexation of Punjab) appointed a Board of Administration consisting of three members—the two Lawrence brothers, Sir Henry Lawrence and John Lawrence, and Charles Mansel. In 1853, the board was abolished and the administration was entrusted to a chief commissioner; John Lawrence being the first one (Zahoor, 2018: 1-14). He was empowered to be the chief executive of the province as well as commander of the Punjab frontier force which was established during the time of the Board's administration. It was in 1859 that the Punjab was given the status of an Indian Province; John Lawrence was made its first Lieutenant Governor. In the first quarter of the twentieth century the Punjab underwent two territorial changes; 1) in October, 1901, under the Curzon government, the territory to the west of Indus was cut off from the Punjab and constituted North-West Frontier Province (present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), to be administered by a chief commissioner; and 2) Delhi was separated from the Punjab and made the Imperial Capital in 1911. (*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Punjab vol. I and II, 2013: 31*).

Punjab was divided, after British annexation, into seven divisions and twenty-four districts: each division was given in the control of a commissioner and each district was given in the control of a deputy commissioner. The divisional headquarters were located at Ambala, Jullundur, Amritsar, Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi, and Leiah. The province, after the aforementioned territorial changes, retained five divisions, twenty-nine districts and forty-three native states (*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Punjab vol. 1 and II, 2013: 98*). The district was comparable to the size of a large English county. (*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Punjab vol. 1 and II, 2013: 98*). The deputy commissioner who was in charge of the district had enormous executive, judicial, and discretionary powers. He was the collector of the district and was assisted by many assistants and extra assistant commissioners with criminal, civil, and judicial powers. Each district was divided into 3-7 sub-collectorates called Tehsils; each Tehsil was under a Tehsildar and his staff. The Lieutenant-Governor was the chief civilian officer in charge of the Punjab administration. He was supported by a secretariat consisting of a chief secretary and several secretaries and under-secretaries. The Punjab, being politically less advanced than other provinces, was not given a legislative council until 1897 when Punjab Legislative Council was established. As opposed to Bengal, it was being treated as a military province being part of "the British security state" in the North-West of the British India (Talbot, 1999: 64).

Muslim Identity Construction in Colonial Punjab

To understand the formation of Muslim identity in colonial Punjab, it is a prerequisite to have theoretical knowledge of the concept of identity, its types and the factors which help construct or sharpen the identity of a person or community. Although “identity is a highly elusive category,” according to Tariq Rahman, yet it can possibly be grasped through the socio-cultural and political expressions of an individual or community (Rahman, 1998: 16). First, it is based on self-perception. A person simultaneously identifies himself or herself in terms of gender (son, daughter, wife, mother, etc.), occupation (*julaha* i.e., weaver, doctor, colonel, professor, etc.), tribe or class (Mughal, Pathan, or Shaikh), or some other self-defining category tags (South Asian or Pakistani, etc.). In the Punjab, for example, people define themselves as Arains, Mirasis, Jats, Quraishis, Rajputs, Bhattis, Dogars and while living in an area predominantly of the same tribe or *zaat* identity is further reduced to sub-categories like among Bhattis there are Manika, Jalloka, Bangsinka, Piranika, Ilyaska, Gajeeka, etc. Thus, identity is largely a self-perceived and expressed subjectivity and its expressions are “situation and context-bound” (Rahman, 1998: 16).

There is no denying the fact, however, that modernization has led to the sharper articulation of identities encompassing broad communities; such “identities have been ‘imagined’ and ‘invented’ to a large extent” (Anderson, 1983: 1-8). This proposition has been substantiated by Tariq Rahman, a social linguist, who elucidates that “studies of pre-modern communities suggest that language was not the major symbol of identity” and that “many pre-modern rural persons, far from being emotionally attached to their mother tongue, do not even know its proper name” (Rahman, 1998: 16). He further illustrates “even when identity labels were local, tribal, and kinship-oriented, they were changed when possible for instrumental reasons, i.e., prestige” and “periods of transition and accelerated social change gave new impetus to this phenomenon” (Rahman, 1998: 18). Thus in the words of Rahman, “Social change was most accelerated with the advent of the British rule which brought modern education, printing, modern methods of communication—in a word, modernization—to India” (Rahman, 1998: 16). Cynthia Talbot has sought to explore the issues of identity formation in Indian context,

No one would deny that modernization has led to the sharper articulation of identities encompassing broad communities.... Nor can we uncritically accept the primordialist view that postulates the inherent and natural roots of national and ethnic identity. However, modern identities do not spring fully fashioned out of anywhere. They commonly employ the myths and symbols of earlier forms of identity, which may be less clearly formulated and more restricted in circulation but are nonetheless incipient cores of ethnicity (Talbot, 2003: 84-85).

Indian plural society while having lived for centuries in communal harmony was shaken up by the period of British colonialism (in some areas it makes up to two centuries like Bengal, while in the case of Punjab it formally makes near about one century) and the modernization it brought forth. Some symbols of identity yet dormant were enlivened while some existing identity markers were sharpened, which, resultantly, found expression in sometimes violent and unconstitutional actions and in other times in constitutional struggle to achieve their targeted goals. Moreover, social, cultural, and political identities carry certain in-built assumptions; for instance, social identity is taken as class-based while political identity (in the sense of nationality) is contextual and cultural identity is traced in history and environment.

Identity is primarily instrumental because it is directly associated with the question of power. The process of modernization, with particular emphasis on its economic and social development, works as an integrative force as well as a factor to sharpen the identity and ethnicity of other groups (Rais, 2017: 1-2). Moreover, identities are layered and contextualized (Rais, 2017: 3). Personal names are, according to Rahman, are used as identity markers or as religious boundary markers. Giving of Islamic names was considered so much important as boundary marker that Maulana Ilyas, the founder of Tablighi Jamat considered the Meos of Mewat (Alwar, Bharatpur, and Gurgaon) in colonial Punjab with their Hindu appearance and names in the 1920s as affront to Muslim sensibilities despite the fact that they had converted to Islam (Rahman, 2015: 37). The importance of attaching religious significance to names is evident from the fact that,

In the early fifteenth century 10 percent of the recorded Sial males had Muslim names; for the mid-seventeenth century, 56 percent; for the mid-eighteenth century, 75 percent; and for the early nineteenth century, 100 percent (quoted in Rahman, 2011: 37).

The difference of religious characteristics of names served as an important cause of communal animosity in colonial Punjab along with conversion from Hinduism to Islam and vice versa.

Some scholarly writings have “emphasized colonialism’s impact on identity formation” and this has been argued that since the British had a different worldview so they were unable to understand the social dynamics of Indian society (Talbot, 2003: 84). There is no denying the fact that large scale conflicts between Hindus and Muslims began under colonial rule. The emergence of broadly-based community identities during the nineteenth century has been closely investigated by some researchers (Freitag, 1989: 30). Communal violence was itself a British construct and many other kinds of social strife in Indian settings used to be labeled as religious by the British. It was owing to the Orientalists' assumption that the fundamental source of division in Indian society was religion. However, there is a general consensus among the scholars that it is questionable whether a Hindu or Muslim identities existed in all classes prior to the nineteenth century in any meaningful way and whether it was discernible if it was existent to some degree. The elite were consciousness about religious identities but they were a tiny fraction of the overall population of India.

As to Punjab, according to Hussain, the Sikhs played an important role in sharpening Muslim identity before the colonial period. The Sikhs were a community who had fought many bloody wars against the Mughals in Delhi and suffered a lot by this protracted struggle against a powerful adversary. However, they benefitted equally in the form of developing a sense of unity and identity in them. Resultantly, the Sikhs became a formidable force in Punjab due mainly to the strength of their unity and community feeling. They had a special relationship to the land and customs of Punjab being an indigenous Punjabis and sons of the soil (Hussain, 2011: 1). According to Hussain,

...the Punjab was everything to the Sikhs. It was a birthplace of their Gurus and religiously historical place where their religious heroes lived, smiled, passed through an ordeal, ruled, and had *samadh*s. The roots of the Muslim-Sikh antagonism were the assassination of the Gurus, further atrocities by Banda Singh Bahadur Bairagi and Mir Mannu, and the Muslim invasions by Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali, his son Timur Shah and grandson Shah Zaman in which the Muslim support was unleashed in favor of the Muslim invaders (Hussain, 2011: 1).

Resultantly, when the Sikhs became powerful and they succeeded in establishing their rule over the Punjab, they also committed many atrocities on the Muslims and their *misls* which were contingents

organized on military lines unleashed all over the Punjab. This was a challenge for the Muslim community because they were numerically in majority but politically subjugated community, Sikhs being in power. This atmosphere provided a background to the emergence and eventual assertion of Muslim political identity during the British colonial period. However, this opinion has been contested on the grounds that the British period historiography of Punjab encouraged a particular interpretation of Punjab which presented a contrast between the “violent and unstable” Sikh period with that of “stable and progressive” British period. An example in point is the famous *History of the Punjab* (1891) written by Syed Muhammad Latif in which he propounds in its very start that,

On the page of History, there is probably no story at once so good, so romantic, and so pregnant with instruction as that of the British Conquest of India and the progress of the British Nation in the East. What deeds of noble daring, what examples of calm resolution and untiring devotion, does it not unfold (Latif, 1891: iii).

Latif’s interpretation sounds in line with a typical Orientalist understanding of India and the benefits brought about by the British in India. It was on the basis of Orientalist assumptions that India’s history was periodized on the basis of religion and not the ruling dynasties. James Mill’s *The History of British India* (1817) was a classic example of this genre of history which encouraged the use of the Hindu period, Muslim period, and Modern period. The colonial history painted the pre-colonial history of Punjab with a darker brush. By drawing a contrast, they wanted to justify their annexation of Punjab and wanted Punjabis to realize how beneficial for them the advent of British rule in Punjab was.

The formation of Muslim identity in the colonial period owes much to the social classification and distributional mechanisms developed by the British in Punjab. They created a symbiotic relationship between imperial administrators and the notable intermediaries and between the British and the commoners. For example, the government’s motive in passing the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901 was the maintenance of a contented peasantry—which was required for the continuance of the Punjab’s role as the principal recruiting ground for the Indian army—rather than to protect Muslims as such (Yong, 2005: 275-76). Indeed Muslim and Hindu cultivators were suffered alike by the moneylenders but since Muslim cultivators were more in number than Hindus, this Act was taken as more in Muslim interests. Therefore, Hindu moneylenders who were mostly urban dwellers took to the streets and struggled to undo this act.

Thus identity was being sharpened on transactional terms also: the favors given by the British for their own interest—felt after the lapse of some time to be benefitting—elicited a response of more demands from the community. In this way, Punjabis, by the turn of the nineteenth century, started identifying themselves with the Muslims of the center so that they could secure more by modern style of politics. Meanwhile, the British encouraged a large number of divisions and divided society into innumerable categories which in the later period of the raj resulted in communal violence between different communities. Secondly, with the rising tide of communalism and identity politics around the imperial capital and all over India, the Punjab could not remain isolated and immune from the influences coming from abroad. As a result, many movements and organizations developed on communal lines (and others which were social reform movements ostensibly but doing the same job covertly or covertly) which had agenda of sharpening identities and thereby achieving political objectives. Such organizations include inter alia: Anjuman-i-Punjab Lahore, 1865 (Salamat, 1977: 11), Delhi Literary Society Delhi, 1865, Anjuman-i-Farzandaan-i- Gujranwala, 1866, Anjuman-i-Islamia Punjab Lahore, 1869, Anjuman-i-Mufid-i-Am Kasur, 1873, Anjuman Mawahidin

Amritsar, 1873, Anjuman Athna Ashar Ambala, 1876, Anjuman-i-Numania Lahore, 1888, Anjuman Taeed-i-Islam Amritsar, 1884, Anjuman Madrassa Islamia Gujrat, 1883, Anjuman Miran Jullundhur, 1880, Anjuman-i- Himayat-i-Islam, 1884, Anjuman Ghamkhawar-i-Islam Jullundhar, 1885, Anjuman Ahsaan ul Akhlaq Lahore, 1886, Anjuman Hamdard-i-Islamia Amritsar, Anjuman Hazara, 1883, Anjuman Urdu Amritsar, 1882, Majlis-i- Ahrar-i-Islam and the Khaksar Movement (Ahmad, 2003: 34-38). All these organizations were pronouncedly revivalist in nature and their aims and objectives carried some clauses aimed at sensitizing Muslim identity so that the people could be prepared for mobilization for achieving some targeted objectives.

In the electoral arenas of politics, “separate electorates not only survived the constitutional reforms of 1919 but were also actually extended, despite the expressed reservations of its authors (Bose and Jalal, 2011: 141).” This concession, once granted to the Ashraf Muslims, was deemed as birth right and became difficult to be withdrawn by the state. While pitting the Muslim communitarian identity against Indian composite nationalism had the potential to aggravate the political tensions and misfire, using provincial and local political arenas against the center could effectively be used by the British. Resultantly, reforms in the provinces were, time and again, used to perpetuate effective control on center which was the exclusive domain of the British. Thus, “politics in provincial and local arenas meshed awkwardly” and it increased polarization in electorates on communal lines.

It was the Khilafat movement that stirred the heart of Muslims through length and breadth of India. Since the institution of Khilafat was in danger after the fateful end of World War I and the British had decided to balkanize the Muslim areas of the Middle East, the Indian Muslims took it upon themselves the challenge to save the Khilafat. The Khilafat, as a symbol of Muslim unity and the supremacy of *Shari'a*, had a special significance in the history of Muslim rule in India. The Caliph was particularly important in times of “political confusion and strife as a source of legitimacy based on *Sharia*, and as a source of solidarity among the ruler, the ulama and the nobility” (Minault, 1999: 7). The Punjab during the Khilafat Movement remained a center of Muslim politics and all its smaller and larger organizations played an important role in asserting their identity and thus the Khilafat question through mass movement contributed towards the formation of Muslim identity in colonial Punjab.

The Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam (MAI) and the Khaksar Movement played an important role in sharpening Muslim identity. According to Samina Awan, “the MAI embodied the quest for identity among the traditional and new elite groups of Indian Muslims” and “given the apparent invincibility of the colonial state following the uprising of 1857, this quest for revitalized identities was to reshape the political and cultural definition across the communities” (Awan, 2010: 70-71). Besides, Muslim small social and communal organizations were the forerunners of the future Punjab Muslim League, the MAI, and Khaksars. All these *Tanzims*, *Anjumans*, and parties used Islamic imagery, symbols, and clichés for the construction of Muslim nationalism and built their respective cases by promising sovereignty and economic empowerment. Before the working of these organizations Punjabi identity, despite its Sufi, caste-based and predominantly rural ethos, was not cohesive, and being Punjabi meant different things to different sections (Awan, 2010: 161) and this identity was not only sharpened by these organizations but also by prominent demagogue leaders who engaged their audience in their long discourses and stirred a sentiment of loyalty and attachment in the hearts of millions of people. The leaders of MAI were such as Afzal Haq, Attaullah Shah Bukhari, Mazhar Ali Azhar, Habibur Rahman, Shorish Kashmiri, and Janbaz Mirza all were raised from

emerging Muslim middle class and they sought sustenance from Islamic traditions yet also benefited from modern Western ideas of nationalism and socialism.

The Muslims from the Punjab actively participated in all the activities and movements that the MAI organized for the rights of the Muslims of India. Awan opines that,

Other than espousing a unitary nationalism, the MAI identified itself with several Islamic symbols, which strengthened its position and following among the Punjabi Muslims. Although the political impact of these efforts was limited, yet it reaffirmed the power of Islamic symbols in political mobilization and also enhanced public perception of a Muslim political organization independent of the structure of the colonial state (Awan, 2010: 163-4).

Although the MAI had sympathizers all over India yet Punjab was their main center of activities. The party headquarters were located in Lahore, Sialkot, Amritsar, and Jalandhar while its regional branches existed in almost all the major towns of Punjab. Besides its registered members, the MAI had a volunteer cadre known as the Jayush-i-Ahrar-i-Islam and its members wore Khaki *shalwar*, red shirt, Peshawari chapel and covered their heads with the Bukhari cap. Their flag was red with white crescent and star inscribed in it. The dress of MAI members and workers itself signified the use of Islamic symbolism stressing upon the expression of Muslim identity. The use of crescent was extensively used as an Islamic symbol during the Khilafat movement to save the institution of Khilafat as well.

Jalal notes with reference to Punjab that “it was a dismal manifestation of inverted pride on both sides of the religious divide” and situation was that “conducted in the name of Hindus and Muslims, the bigotry was no less individual for being cast in communitarian idioms (Jalal, 2001: 249).” The Muslim League began to secure mass base although its political organization had been weak since its inception. On the one hand it was the result of League’s reorganization by Muhammad Ali Jinnah while, on the other, Muslim religious symbolism got increasing currency in political arenas (Hayat, 2008: 225-267). Started initially in urban areas, the use of this symbolism permeated in rural areas as well to the close of closing days of the Raj. The wave was so strong that it persuaded even the erstwhile pro-Raj collaborators of Muslim elite such as *Pirs* and *Sajjada nashins* and landlords to join Muslim League in masse (Gilmartin, 2014: 177-210). This emerging trend reversed inter-religious influence of *Pirs*, on the one hand, and support for inter-communal Unionist Party in Punjab, on the other. So much so that the players of alternative politics to the idea of separation became villains, in the eyes of many sections of Muslim society, and their support and following increasingly diminished (Qasmi and Robb, 2017: 1-34). The “spirals of contention” which had plagued the community fabric and created communal animosities on religious lines caused unprecedented massacre and displacement of population across newly drawn borders in South Asia (Saberwal, 2008:172-73).

Conclusion

It is argued that since Islam has got many facet and variations in cultural terms all over the world, it is generally categorized as Indian Islam, Middle Eastern Islam, Central Asian Islam, South East Asian Islam, and the Central Asian Islam. Such categorization can also be applied to many sub-variants of Islam within India because India has been a land of geographical, religious, and cultural diversity and the Indian Muslim community is far from a monolithic identity. It was owing to this fact that the term of “Islamicate” was coined by Martial Hodgson to explain the phenomenon of expansion of

Islam in various areas and its variegated social and cultural expressions. In the introduction to his study of Indian Muslims, Muhammad Mujeeb perceptively asked, “who are the Indian Muslims?” and then answered the question by citing innumerable variations based on historic, geographic, tribal, and sectarian differences (Mujeeb, 1967: 9-25). Punjab is, thus, an area which exhibits a distinct variant of Islam with its peculiar socio-cultural and linguistic baggage. Punjab, right up to its colonial annexation in 1949, was a land of assimilative spirit and Punjabis had imbibed qualities of assimilative spirit. Many historical factors like the Bhakti Movement and popularization of Sufism and syncretic tradition had contributed to creating such a congenial and accommodative environment. However, the period of a century of colonial rule witnessed and contributed to the formation and sharpening of Muslim identity in Punjab which not only resulted in communalism for some time but also Punjab played a significant role in developing Muslim nationalism aimed at separation from United India. The processes of modernization starting by the colonial state transformed the Punjabi society. Continuous practice of conducting decennial censuses, the spread of print capitalism and the formation of socio-religious reform movements played an important role in sharpening religious identities. Contesting religious identities were formed and accentuated in the early decades of the twentieth-century by the politico-administrative and documentary practices of the colonial state. It was provided further impetus by the socio-religious organizations of Muslims. This process was helped by novel institutional models, new technologies of communication, the pervasive use of printing press and propaganda techniques. As a result, religious symbolism was used by even the Marxist and the liberals to mobilize people. This tendency had far-reaching consequences for Punjab during the Pakistan movement and beyond.

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