



Original Article

Punjab under the British: A Study of Political Development

JHSS

55-74

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Vol. 33 (1), 2025

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the political evolution of Punjab, focusing on the period before and after British occupation. Before British rule, Punjab was a vibrant region governed by a series of local kingdoms, empires, and dynasties, most notably the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The pre-colonial political landscape was characterized by a combination of religious, feudal, and tribal structures that fostered a diverse and often turbulent political environment. The British annexation of Punjab in 1849 marked a turning point, as the colonial administration introduced new political, economic, and social policies that radically changed the governance of the region. The period witnessed new land reforms, the introduction of modern bureaucracy, and legal restructuring that reshaped traditional power structures. A new class emerged under the banner of the British that replaced the feudal class. They were loyal to their masters and remained loyal to Jinnah at the time of the partition of Punjab and India. As a result of this political engineering, the newly emerged class was in the driving seat in Punjab. By illuminating the political environment of Punjab, this research adds to a greater understanding of colonialism, regional identity, and political transformation in South Asia.

Keywords: Sikh Empire, colonial Punjab, bureaucracy, feudalism

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Introduction

In British India, the Punjab was a large territorial unit with a significant population. Its mores, customs, traditions, and strategic location contributed to the survival of British rule. The political and administrative characteristics further elevated the Punjab within the overall context of British India (Gilbert, 1994). With its fertile lands, which attracted many foreign invaders, the Punjab was often under foreign rule (Tinker, 1961). The British annexation of the Punjab on March 29, 1849, effectively concluded colonial expansion in India. The occupation of the Punjab marked the beginning of a new era of historical developments associated with colonial rule. In turn, colonial rule also brought benefits, including improved connectivity through enhanced road and railway networks, along with a canal system that reshaped society (Frykenberg & Viswanathan, 1992). Before 1901, five districts of the North Western Frontier Province (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)—namely Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Hazara—were also part of the Punjab. Notably, Punjab was the last major area to fall under British rule, and it expanded to Delhi (Grare, 2005). By 1849, the boundaries of Punjab stretched from the Afghan frontier to Delhi and encompassed the colonial aim of controlling the tribal belt of the frontier regions adjacent to Afghanistan (Dalton & Edwardes, 1969).

The frequent struggles for supremacy in the Indian subcontinent encouraged numerous intruders to compete for control of the prosperous territories. The Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud was the first Turkish ruler of Punjab, and in 1186, his descendants were defeated by Shuhab-uddin Ghauri. By 1206, Punjab became part of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, lasting until the mid-18th century. As chaotic conditions arose from the decline of Mughal rule, Punjab found itself caught in the competition among Afghans, Persians, Marathas, and Sikhs (Grewal, 2008). Throughout the 1700s, the Mughal Empire leaned toward decline and an anarchic scenario. The rise of the Marathas, the expansion of British rule, and the ascent of the Sikhs were all consequences of the weakening Mughal authority in the Indian subcontinent. Sikh power contributed to both the material and spiritual growth of the Sikhs under their respective Gurus. The Marathas, who controlled territories in the Deccan, participated in the power struggle during this tumultuous era and were defeated by the Afghan King Ahmed Shah Abdali at the third battle of Panipat in 1761 (Sarma, 2017).

The rapid shift of power to Abdali in Punjab and then to the Sikhs created a scenario of rampant disarray and anarchy, destabilizing the prevailing social peace and harmony in the region. Specifically, the aftermath of Abdali's rule set the stage for the new political ascendancy of the Sikhs. In 1772, Ahmad

Shah Abdali died, and Punjab experienced weak Afghan rule, which allowed the Sikhs to dominate the province. Ranjit Singh established his rule in Lahore in 1799, transforming Punjab into a dominant state marked by complete Sikh political supremacy, and occupied Multan, Peshawar, and Kashmir. The death of Ahmad Shah Abdali proved to be a formative phase for Sikh power in Punjab, which subsequently began expanding as many other states fell under the sway of the Sikh Kingdom. The Sikh rule flourished, bringing Kashmir, Multan, and Peshawar under its influence. During the peak of Sikh rule, Ranjit Singh's approach focused on establishing a trustworthy environment by gaining the support of the feudal nobility of Punjab; in return, he elevated them to exceptionally powerful and high-status positions within the province. Both Hindus and Muslims were given substantial roles in the affairs of the new empire (Talbot, 1991).

Ranjit Singh established an efficient and highly trained army, similar to that of the East India Company. His prudent policies regarding state affairs for revenue collection, various administrations, and increasing trade brought stability to the Punjab (Malhotra, 2013). He sought to unite the Sikhs and aimed to further strengthen his rule while securing the loyalties of the key chieftains of the Punjab in exchange for benefits from Sikh governance. However, following Ranjit Singh's death, the Punjab descended into chaos, disorder, and anarchy, which ultimately attracted foreign rulers and led to two wars between the weakened Sikhs and the British (Ahmed, 2011). The defeat of the Sikhs ultimately paved the way for the domination and annexation of Punjab into the British Empire in 1849, marking the beginning of a new era of governance, administration, politics, education, and socio-economic development in the region. The consequences and impacts of British colonial rule remain evident in the system of governance, politics, and the approaches of the bureaucracy in both India and Pakistan.

Punjab in the 20th Century

Extending its territorial boundaries from Delhi to the Indus River, Punjab, along with Bengal, was one of the largest provinces, boasting a 56 percent Muslim population according to the general census of 1931. The Sikh population was an important minority located in the parts of the Hindu and Muslim-dominated divisions of Jullundur and Lahore, respectively. The eastern part of Punjab primarily had a Hindu majority, whereas Western Punjab was mostly Muslim (Gilmartin, 1989). From its inception, the British administration implemented measures to strengthen its rule in the Indian subcontinent. The annexation of Punjab marked one of the largest territorial and political gains. General infrastructural development and sound administrative measures were top priorities of the British Raj (Gondhalekar &

Bhattacharya, 2017). Initiatives such as constructing railway tracks, roads, and canals, along with significantly expanding agricultural frontiers, facilitated the masses and helped them maintain strict control over and better access to the region. Furthermore, the collection of land revenues was rigorous, and the environment of peaceful progress under the British Empire (1849-1947) fostered agricultural growth (Ferris, 2011). The enhancement of outdated means of communication, along with the arrival of real-time and improved services of the Imperial Postal Department, bridged distances between remote provinces and the center. For social advancement and the enforcement of law and order, the British modernized the policing system (Griffiths, 1964). To manage the affairs of the newly annexed Punjab, the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, established a three-member Board of Administration in 1849 (Noon, 1966). Under the leadership of Henry Lawrence, responsible for the matters of the Defence and the association with the local chieftain and *Sardars*, John Lawrence worked as his aide entrusted with the responsibility of land settlement, agriculture, and monetary issues while, Charles Grenville Mansell was in charge of the general administration, police, law and justice. Having full-fledged powers and the final authority to respond to any appeal for life and death sentences, the Board of Administration was further assisted by officers of the British Empire in India (Lovett, 1969). The Board prioritized law and order, the prevalence of peace, and ensuring a strong defensive posture by disarming the rebels with local loyal support. The Board was allowed to directly communicate with the Governor General about the matters of the newly annexed province. Later, in 1911, with the shift of India's capital from Calcutta to New Delhi, the Delhi district was also parted from the Punjab (Dutton, 1981).

The Sikhs harbored resentment towards the British because they had lost their power and empire to them, and they sought to regain their influence. These continual attempts further deepened the divide between the Sikhs and the British administration. In the early 1850s, the former ruling elites of the Sikh Empire appeared hostile to the British administrators who aimed to diminish their authority. The lavish entourages of the previous Jagirdars gradually disappeared, and the British administrators anticipated weakening them by providing pensions (Wagner, 2011). However, the treatment was not uniform, as the British administration's attitude towards the rebels remained severe. Notable fighters like Jawahar Singh, the son of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, who had courageously fought against the British at the Chillianwala and Gujrat campaigns, were stripped of all his jagirs and other privileges. Similarly, notorious rebels like Sardar Chattar Singh Atariwala and his son Raja Sher Singh were expelled from Punjab (Telford, 1992). Influential political figures such as Raja Tej Singh and Sardar Shamsheer Singh Sandhanwalia, among

others, were granted lands, leading the British administration to expect their loyalty. Following 1857, the British administration in Punjab supported the livelihoods of Sikh noble families, ensuring their elevated status in society. The British patronage of this elite class aimed to engage them in social reforms and constitutional politics in Punjab (Fenech and Smith, 1999). This patronage of the landed elite represented a strategy of political consolidation for the British, allowing them to influence the social, economic, and political structures of Punjab down to the grassroots levels.

Colonization and Administration

Before British rule, Indian states lacked proper institutionalization, and society was caste-based. The British rulers emphasized the goals of management and administration in India, which later established a systematic vision of governance. The Punjab under the British Empire was much larger than the Kingdom of Ranjit Singh and was positioned within the context of global politics and the economy. Under British rule, innovative measures were implemented to ensure the rule of law and public administration through functional bureaucracy, initiating a phase of association between the state and the individual. The personalized rule of the early decades was eventually replaced by rational rules, laws, codes, and procedures (Kerr, Roseberry, & Ali, 1989).

Power was delegated, and the executive was separated from the judiciary and finance. New reforms and technological advancements, such as telegraph offices, railroads, and the press, were introduced. Communication and transportation were priorities for the British. The Punjab, being an agricultural economy, saw the British invest in the agrarian system with periodic settlements aimed at generating new sources of revenue (Zafar, 1985). Over 10,000,000 acres of uncultivated land began agricultural production between 1860 and 1920, which in turn created a layer of progress, prosperity, and economic development in the province that ultimately reshaped the agrarian economy and demographic dynamics. This new development increased the volume and value of trade and commercial activities. Economic exploitation was prevalent across India under colonial rule. The high demand for the export of agricultural products was under the control of British export-import firms, exchange banks, and shipping corporations. The British administration collected revenues and converted rupees into sterling at lower rates and maintained strict control over the monetary matters of the Punjab so that, after all exchanges, the net financial balance remained in favor of colonial interests.

Education was considered an objective of the British Raj. Therefore, from the beginning, the British administration in Punjab introduced a system of education in Western sciences, English literature, and social studies. The

efforts of Dr. G.W. Leitner over 20 years aimed to revive Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic learning and teaching Western sciences in the vernacular and enhancing the quality and standards of contemporary Indian literature. His concept of a university was distinct from the traditional higher education system and the established universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. However, in 1882, when the Punjab University was established, its characteristics were similar to those of other universities in India, and it marked a setback in native education in Punjab. Although Punjabi was the dominant language of the population in the province, it was replaced by Urdu as the medium of education up to the matriculation level (McGowan, 2009). The Christian missionaries became allies of the government in promoting English as a medium of education. The classification of grant-in-aid primarily served the school system. They used the press as an effective means of communication in indigenous languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Urdu for evangelization. They criticized native religious beliefs, customs, practices, social trends, and the morals of Punjabi society due to their theological orientation and their view of colonial rule as providential. The British administration and the education system were closely aligned with the ruling class. The local population of Punjab reacted against the presence of Christian missionaries, especially because of their surprising success; in 1881, the total number of Christians was roughly 4,000, which rose to 300,000 within 40 years (Subrahmanyam, 1999).

The colonial administration also shaped social conversion in Punjab, and the emergence of prosperous farmers by the early 1880s was principally attributed by the British to improvements in permanent assessments, choice of contracts, personal possessions of land ownership, and the adoption of practices favored by agriculturists. After the British took over in India, new large irrigation units were constructed, which in turn enhanced agricultural production and greatly contributed to the revenue collection and generation of revenue for the colonial power. This innovative irrigation system proved to be a game changer for both poor peasants and landlords, bringing a variety of opportunities to the agricultural economy in British Punjab. Through a highly personalized administrative structure of bureaucratic rules and effective management of the canals, an assured supply of water for cultivation was established. The British bureaucratic system was so effective that it realized the long-cherished dream of canal management and land distribution projects. Even after the independence of the Indian subcontinent, there was no such example; however, the newly formed states of India and Pakistan aimed to manage the canals and the land (Cullet, 2010). The agriculture of Punjab during British colonial rule relied on the canal irrigation system, which contributed to socio-

economic development, and even after the end of colonial rule, the canal structure effectively sustained the agricultural system.

Aside from the improved agricultural production and water management system, the plight of small farmers was reflected in the growing number of tenants-at-will, while an extraordinary level of agricultural commercialization contributed to this phenomenon in the main districts of the province and in the canal colonies. The socio-economic division among landholders, emphasized by the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, aimed to mitigate some of the adverse effects of commercialization (Saraswati, Kumar, & Corbridge, 2006). Traditional commercial communities such as the Banias, Khatris, Aroras, Shaikhs, Khojas, and Pakhtuns benefited from the expansion of settlements. In pursuit of better opportunities, various castes heavily invested in local industries and enterprises. In 1895, purely indigenous entities were established, leading to the creation of the Punjab National Bank and later numerous other commercial ventures, including the Bharat Insurance Company and the People's Banking and Commercial Association. By 1901, moneylenders profited from interest charges and the forced sale of land at minimal market value following loan defaults, facilitated by *Munsifs* and the legal system imposed by colonial rulers (Kessinger, 1977).

Certainly, the agrarian and business-oriented middle classes evolved into the professional middle class. With the aid of English education, a new era of opportunities and employment opened up for them in the mid-levels of the bureaucratic apparatus and in other professions such as law, teaching, and medicine. In the late 19th century, Punjabi Hindus dominated the middle tiers of administration. Castes like Khatris led employment among Hindus, while Muslim Pashtuns, Shaikhs, and Syeds were at the forefront. The educated youth of Punjab were competing for secure government jobs and aimed to catch up to or surpass the others. Furthermore, these middle-class individuals aspired to embrace the egalitarian principles of English education and reform their traditional societies (Bagchi, 1978). Compared to Christians and Sikhs, both Muslims and Hindus were significantly weaker in government positions, which concerned them. The Indian Councils Act of 1861, implemented in Punjab in the late 1800s, established nine members of the provincial council, all appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. The Act of 1909 expanded the legislative council to 30 members, with only one-fifth being elected representatives (Roy, 1987). The British rule in Punjab aimed to establish an indigenous hierarchical structure that supported state authority by enticing local notables with political prominence within society. This indicates that the role of political Islam in British Punjab remained potentially strong.

Geo-Economic Importance of Punjab

Based on the five administrative divisions of Delhi, Lahore, Jullundur, Multan, and the princely states, Punjab was an exceptionally important province that significantly enhanced the power and economic leverage of the colonial rulers. The proximity of Punjab to the North-Western regions and Afghanistan created a sense of insecurity, and the British had to maintain forts and forces to deter foreign invasions or rebellious misadventures (Panayi & Virdee, 2011). The geographical position of Punjab enabled the British to project power along the Afghan frontier to secure the rest of India. Increased resource exploitation and revenue generation from the colonized land ensured a return on their investments in resources, supporting the objectives of maintaining British rule. The fertile lands of Punjab, along with their role as the primary recruitment ground for the Indian army, made it central to the stability of British rule. The gallantry and loyalty of Punjab's soldiers were regarded as significant assets for the British Empire.

The fertile plains of Punjab were an outstanding source of revenue generation for the colonial rulers, who effectively managed water resources that led to the initiation of the canal system for irrigation and increased output. Another major issue was the unequal distribution of land, as some landlords had exceptionally large holdings that often went uncultivated, while the peasantry, eager to cultivate the less fertile land, struggled to secure even a small plot. Likewise, poor peasants lacked land to grow their own crops and sustain their minimal needs. Most of Punjab, particularly in the Eastern region, was under the control of moneylenders who acquired vast areas by deceiving ignorant and uneducated rural people. The British rulers recognized Punjab's distinct identity as an established society with unique features. Its geographical position was tied to a tumultuous history in colonial times, necessitating plans to develop Punjab's characteristics as a model of prosperity and agricultural strength (Carter & Harlow, 2003). With such aims, the canal colonization process began in 1885, paving the way for a vast network of canals that extended from rivers and spread across most uncultivated plains in Western Punjab. Consequently, the canal colony became a catalyst for the cultivation of over fourteen million acres over time (Kapur and Kim, 2006).

Apart from agriculture, the politics of Punjab were significantly influenced by the broader politics of the subcontinent. For instance, the role of the Punjab Unionist Party, of the landed aristocracy, protected domestic politics from religion or race and encouraged inter-communal participation. It was regarded as the third major political force in Indian politics, alongside the Indian National Congress (INC) and the All India Muslim League (AIML) (Perrill, 1975). Recognizing the importance of Punjab, at a pivotal moment in the Pakistan movement, Jinnah stated (Civil & Military Gazette, 1946),

Punjab has been the sword arm of India, and you have played your part heroically on different battlefields that have been reorganized by the world. Now, your sword arm plays a more magnificent part in the achievement of Pakistan. You can do it; we shall do it if Muslims stand united. Your triumph in the Punjab is all the greater, for you had to face the most unscrupulous methods that were resorted to by your opponents. The power and authority of the government were abused flagrantly, officers were let loose to hinder, coerce, and threaten the Muslim League candidates and those who were supporting them. It was almost a criminal conspiracy that you had to face. You have toiled and sweated after fighting against all odds, you have secured a wonderful victory, thereby you have rendered a service not only to the Punjab but to the hundred million Muslims in India and posterity. Punjab is the cornerstone of Pakistan, and such a clear, thumping majority of Pakistan has given me one of the most pleasant shocks I have ever received in my life, and it has stunned our enemies. If you continue this remarkable unity, this discipline by the Muslims of the Punjab of all classes, and maintain your discipline and organize your people for all future contingencies. Pakistan is in the hollows of your hands.

Even after 1947, Punjab has been the political heart of the nation and remains at the center of all political, social, and economic progress. It has significantly contributed to the national resources, industrial development, and agricultural production of Pakistan and continues to be the focus of its military-political economy.

Impact of Political Consciousness on Punjab

The political movements and the rise of anti-colonial sentiment gradually became key factors in the political awareness of the Indian people in general and the people of Punjab in particular. For instance, in the aftermath of the announcement of the partition of Bengal by the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, in July 1905, tremendous polarization occurred both for and against this decision (Barman, 2009). Hindus viewed the move as detrimental to their interests, believing the partition of Bengal would deprive them of their dominance over the Muslim-majority areas. Conversely, the Muslims of East Bengal perceived the partition as a beneficial opportunity, as it promised improved chances of education and employment; therefore, they opposed the (Swadeshi) movement. This local movement of the locals and the Indian

National Congress initiated a process of boycotting British goods and institutions through propaganda, which was carried out via the press and diplomatic means to persuade the British and to reverse their decision to partition Bengal. However, opposition to Bengal's division also received support from the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Henry John Stedman (Neale, 2012).

The success of the movement served as a lesson for all communities in India. The larger segments of Hindu society participated in the movement and in general political consciousness. Ultimately, due to widespread political crises and protests, East Bengal was merged with West Bengal on December 12, 1911. This reunification, however, did not halt division along linguistic lines, and the Oriya, Hindi, and Assamese regions were separated administratively. The Indian capital was moved from Calcutta to Delhi, and new provinces of Bihar and Orissa in the West, along with Assam in the East, were established. Like the rest of India, political consciousness in Punjab evolved gradually, with circumstances paving the way for greater public involvement in political affairs. With Lord Minto's appointment as Viceroy of India in 1905, new reforms were introduced, including extended electoral principles. Following the anti-separation agitation, Muslims grew cautious of the Congress and the Hindu majority, demanding separate electorates from Minto in Simla on October 1, 1906. The Viceroy responded to this Deputation with assurances that Muslim political rights and community safeguards would be maintained under his administrative reorganization. The efforts of the Simla Deputation yielded positive results, establishing a distinct Hindu-Muslim distinction at constitutional and electoral levels (Beverley, 2015). This moment marked a turning point, forming the basis for the understanding that there was no homogeneous Indian nation, as Muslims represented a separate community with their own unique identity.

During the first decade of the 20th century, the Indian masses developed a significant level of political consciousness that ultimately enhanced the roles of political parties such as the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. The previous reforms and acts were subsequently void and null to the politically aware citizens with growing political aspirations, thus presenting a need for innovative reforms that were needed of the hour. The colonial rulers recognized this importance of the fact and prepared options to accommodate the will of the two leading parties. The populace also understood the role of politics in their daily lives. It became clear that collective bargaining could multiply the options for success (Reinsch, 1910).

The Indian Councils Act, also known as the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909, was a political development that reflected popular awareness in favor of

political rights and participation in public affairs. The British Parliament, recognizing the demands of the Indian people, increased local representation in British India (Wolpert, 1965). In England, the Liberal Party had come into power, and the political discourse of authoritarianism had begun to shift away from authoritarianism. The British rulers pragmatically chose to accommodate certain groups and extend consultation and representation to landed elites. To increase the number of legislative council members, the sizes of the Governor General's Council and the Governors' Councils in many provinces were expanded (Israel, Zinkin, & Zinkin, 1965). With these reforms, elected council members of the councils could obstruct or at least critique Raj policies that did not serve the public interest. The councils played a larger role in policy formulation, and the participation of Indian political leaders in these councils significantly influenced the decision-making processes of the colonial state. Following the introduction of the Minto-Morley Reforms, demands for separate electorates arose from and within the masses, thus allowing the Muslim minority to have their representatives as members of the Legislative Council.

Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms

The self-governing institutional reforms were outlined in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918, which became the basis for the Government of India Act of 1919. Indian nationalist leaders felt that the reforms did not go far enough, while traditionalists criticized the changes. This was the first instance where a mass popular elective procedure was introduced. Meanwhile, Indian Muslims successfully persuaded Governor General Lord Minto about the unique aspects of their minority status, securing separate representation and weightage in the provinces where they were in the minority compared to Hindus. Following the example of Indian Muslims, the Chief Khalsa Diwan became representative of the Sikhs and lobbied the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, emphasizing the crucial role of the Sikh community in provincial life and demanding consideration for measures to ensure their representation in elections. However, there was no response to this request from the Governor General's side, and neither the Sikhs nor the Hindus were granted separate electorates (Report, 1918). While unwilling to concede separate electorates to the Sikhs, the British did allocate 18 out of 93 members in the Punjab Assembly, along with three additional members. This was significantly greater than the 1206 members of the population that was Sikh (Elangovan, 2016).

Nationalist Leaders and Political Awareness

The role of nationalist leaders was a driving force behind the political and social awareness of the masses in the Punjab. The formation of the Akali Dal in 1920 resulted from the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee's

ambitions of creating a task force mainly representing the political interests of the Sikh community in the Punjab. Initially led by Sardar Sarmukh Singh Chubbal, the Akali Dal advocated for the demands of a separate state for Punjabi-speaking people under unified West Punjab (Prakash, 2004). After 1937, Congress held predominant representation in eight out of eleven provinces, creating a sense of danger for the Muslim political leaders and encouraging them to struggle for Pakistan. Unfortunately for the Muslim League, the rural Muslim population aligned with the Unionist Party, which solidly supported and safeguarded their interests. Conversely, circumstances eventually shifted with the escalating conflicts within the structures of imperial power. In response to the crises of imperial strategy, the demand for Pakistan represented the essentiality of Islamic ideology as a solution for the Muslims of India (Zachariah, 2009).

The first to establish a press for the propagation of their ideas in Punjab, alongside Christian missionaries and the government, were the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, who began publishing their version of social restructuring. In 1877, magazines such as the monthly Hari Hakikat, influenced by the Brahmo Samaj in Punjab, were inspired by the movement initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Bengal. This idea was grounded in Upanishadic influence, while also admiring Western developments and Christian principles. This faction advocated for press freedom and education in the English language, and it also championed the rights of lower castes and Hindu women. Although willing to utilize Urdu and Punjabi for spreading ideas, the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj had a strong preference for the Hindi language in the Devanagari script. The Brahmo Samaj served as an incubator for Hindu nationalism (Tunick, 2006).

In the late 1890s, a system of Aryan education was established from primary to college level, broadly inspired by the needs of the Western-influenced Hindu middle class. Western science, English literature, and social studies were combined with Sanskrit and Hindi to forge an Anglo-Vedic system of education. The social restructuring extended further through the observance of societal customs of the society, such as during marriage, birth and death, remarriage, and the creation of orphanages and the education of girls (Zinkin, 1965). Following a schism in 1893-1894, the radical Aryas initiated a print propaganda campaign against Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and traditionalist Hindus. The Arya leaders were generally supported by and associated with the Indian National Congress to promote and safeguard the interests of Punjabi Hindus. In the aftermath of the 1907 agitation, when the colonial administration took a harsh stance on such movements, the Aryas revised their position and labeled their movement as non-political. Meanwhile, the Hindu Sabhas emerged in the province of Punjab, and the Hindu Conference was

consecutively held from 1909 to 1914, and helped transform Arya Samaj perceptions into Hindu nationalism and consciousness.

Since the British policy of neutrality towards the belief and indigenous religious communities promoted shared achievements, leaders from various political segments viewed themselves as the sole representatives of their entire community. The British strategy of maintaining equilibrium among diverse groups further fueled competition between them. Consequently, communal consciousness was not limited to the Aryas or Hindus. Muslim associations, such as Anjuman-i-Islamia and Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, also operated across Punjab and chose to adopt modern education and social reform. Schools were established based on Western-style education. The middle class gained access to these educational institutions and subsequently began to demand their share of jobs and government services. Previously, only the landed elite and wealthy could send their children abroad, a practice that guaranteed increased prestige and a greater role in local socio-political matters.

Fazl-i-Husain and Inter-Communal Politics

Sir Mian Fazl-i-Husain was one of the most influential political figures in Punjab during colonial rule. Along with Chhotu Ram (Chawla, 2018), he founded the Punjab Unionist Party in 1923, which primarily focused on defending the interests of landlords. The Unionist group consisted of 24 Muslim landlords and 6 Hindu Jats, with its agenda centered on inter-communal politics. Punjab's status was largely that of an agricultural province, significantly influenced by the politics of the landed elite, while the majority of the Muslim population felt marginalized (Robinson, 1979). Forming any government in Punjab required at least 54% of the seats, and no single political entity could establish a stable government on a communal basis. Fazl-i-Husain's foresight in this scenario aimed at creating a coalition of members from various communities to work towards forming a government. Based on the idea of cooperation among the Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh landed elite of Punjab, the Party was open to all communities without any discrimination of caste and creed (Talbot, 1998). Fazl-i-Husain advocated for a united Punjab and opposed Muslim separatism. He fought for communal harmony as a champion of shared interests (Khilnani, Raghavan, and Thiruvengadam, 2013). Fazl-i-Husain also contributed to the cause of Muslim landlords and sought to establish an employment quota for educated Muslims in civil service. As a significant historical milestone, his efforts successfully raised the quota for Muslims in civil service from 40% to 50%. In local politics, the Unionists also expanded separate electorates to municipal bodies and nearly all educational institutions. The Muslim representation in governmental services was very low, leading to a general perception of deprivation.

However, by 1932, the Unionist Party's skilled approach notably improved the ratio of Muslims in governmental services.

Meanwhile, the operation of the transferred departments under the Unionists primarily influenced the stance of the Sikhs in Punjab towards constitutional reforms. The Central Sikh League demanded the elimination of communal representation or criteria for Sikhs. Subsequently, the Akalis and leaders of the Central Sikh League adopted a hardline position to boycott the Simon Commission and engage in demonstrations alongside the Congress (Griffiths, 1965). The Chief Khalsa Diwan also made reservations and called for the Commission to protect the constitutional rights of Sikhs. Additionally, Sikh leaders formed the Central Sikh Association to advocate for the Sikh case to the Commission, demanding a 30 percent share for Sikhs and Hindus. The Unionists supported the majority view, calling for the maintenance of communal electorates and greater power and autonomy for Punjab. As an alternative to the Simon Commission's proceedings, Akali and Central Sikh League leaders participated in the All-Parties Conference in February 1928 in Delhi. Mangal Singh Gill was appointed as a member of the Moti Lal Nehru Committee to develop a constitution for India. During the All-Parties meeting in August 1928, Sikh leaders expressed concerns about their status in Punjab. However, the popularity of the Unionist Party declined during the 1936 elections, securing over 98 seats out of 175, while the Muslim League barely obtained 2 seats. This achievement represented a victory for inter-communal politics in Punjab. Furthermore, the Unionist Party's successful initiatives included agricultural legislation in Punjab, popularly known as the 'Golden Bills,' which protected the interests of peasants, farmers, and landlords from the influence of moneylenders.

Establishment of the Unionist Party

From 1920 to 1937, the Punjab Legislative Council was predominantly controlled by the Punjab Unionist Party. The Unionist Party was initially established by Fazl-i-Husain as a coalition of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh politicians from the Rural Party who were elected to the Council in 1920. Subsequently, during the second elections, it significantly influenced constitutional politics and gained popularity as the Unionist Party. For a quarter-century, the Unionist Party enjoyed widespread popularity in Punjab's local politics until its defeat in the 1946 elections. Additionally, the circumstances that facilitated the consolidation and popularity of the Unionist Party resulted of the boycott of the 1930 elections by the Indian National Congress, the Central Sikh League, and the Akali Dal, which left the field open for Fazl-i-Husain. During the elections, a few independent Sikh legislators and leaders from the Chief Khalsa Movement also collaborated

with the Unionist Party. This uncontested success consequently secured ministries without regard to the political parties (Dutton, 1981).

The Unionist Party promoted itself as the sole representative of the rural class, striving to safeguard the interests of all landowners regardless of their religious beliefs and faith. Furthermore, the specific functions and priorities of the Muslim leaders of the Unionist Party kept Muslim interests at the forefront of their agenda. Following the observations of the Reform Enquiry Committee in 1924, the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Fazl-i-Husain, actively aligned its departments with the communal interests of Muslims (Ramey, 2014). The Unionist Party's notable popularity contributed to its unwavering stance on the agrarian agenda, which emphasized the rights and welfare of the rural class while opposing the dominance of communalists and the hegemony of the urban mercantile elite. The Unionist leaders worked to promote awareness among agriculturalists regarding their rights in the political arena, seeking greater representation in the bureaucracy (Chowdhury, 1991). The Indian National Congress viewed the Unionist Party as having a soft spot for the colonial rulers and considered itself the true representative of India's masses. The Unionist Party of Punjab, which discouraged communal politics and protected landowner interests without regard to caste and creed, could have repressed Congress (Baxter and Rashid, 1990). However, Congress's downfall regarding partition, its alliance with wealthy interests, and its Hindu Gandhian symbolism did not sit well with the Unionists. The striking success of the Unionist Party in the 1936 election for the Punjab Legislative Assembly, where it contested against over 12 political and communal parties but secured 95 out of 175 seats, marked a turning point in the politics of India in general and in Punjab in particular (Singh, 2014 and Chawla, 2018).

Conclusion

The story of political development in Colonial Punjab is a unique and captivating episode in the political history of united India. Punjab was not oblivious to the political and geographical changes occurring under Company Raj. The British initiated their occupation of India from the eastern side, culminating with the annexation of Punjab, the western region of India. They lacked the courage to assert their dominance over Punjab during the rule of Raja Ranjit Singh, from 1801 to 1939. The weak and politically shortsighted successors of Ranjit Singh could not resist the British and ultimately fell into their grasp. Sikhs lost the chance to reclaim Punjab from their oppressors in 1857 because they fought against Muslims instead of uniting against the British during the War of Independence. The British developed infrastructure according to their interests and to maintain law and order in the region. They

exploited Punjab's resources to support efforts in World War I and II. The grain basket of Hindustan provided them food and supplied their resources to make Britain 'great.' In the early 20th century, Punjab was also influenced by the political changes in Indian society, particularly with the introduction of the Minto-Morley Reform of 1901 and the Montague-Chelmsford Reform of 1919. These reforms effectively raised awareness among Indians and Muslims as they gained the right to vote and separate electorates. Sir Fazl-i-Hussain played a significant role in uniting nationalists under the banner of the Unionist Party, established in 1923. This led to a transformation of consciousness and awareness among all communities. Non-communal politics was embraced, and even Sir Fazl's successor, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, continued his non-communal policy to unite the communities of Punjab. However, the Sikhs again erred by demanding a separate state in Punjab. The Muslim League took advantage of the political platform in Punjab after the Jinnah-Sikandar Pact of 1938 and made Pakistan a reality. The division of Punjab held great significance in the context of the division of the Indian subcontinent. H. V. Hudson said, 'If Punjab remained united, India would be united, and if Punjab were divided, then there is no force to make the partition of India impossible.' This proved to be true, and India was divided with the partition of Punjab. Although Punjab could have spared millions of people from killings and displacements, this did not happen with its division, resulting in the establishment of a liberal and secular Pakistan.

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