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Role of Punjab in Determining the Idea of Pakistan: A Study of Muslim Social Organizations of the Colonial Punjab¹

Abstract

Introduction

The crushing defeat in the War of Independence seemed to restrict the Indians to the status of virtually the Red Indians. A richer America might arise lest the Indian did not have the passion to resist their annihilation with strong nerves. Especially the Muslims were main target as a community. But the Muslims were wise enough to carve out a space to evade their extinction as a community under the British by developing social organizations. This resulted in a mushroom of social organizations and the Punjab took lead in it. First social organization in India was established in 1817 while first Muslim organization was setup in Bengal in 1855.²

The only affair; the Muslims could think for as a community was religion in the post-1857 era. The loss of the political power coupled with new rulers' wrath further aggravated the situation and the Muslims started reforming and organizing their religious trends so as to survive as a religious community without any transcending agenda in new setup.

This paper seeks to analyze the nature and character of social organizations of the Punjab with a view to locate their part in determining the ideals for the Punjabi Muslims regarding their setup vis-à-vis other communities of India especially the Hindus particularly under any type of self rule. Though, not directly related to the idea of Pakistan, ideals set by these organizations later determined the nature of the very idea.

Social Organizations of the Indian Muslim: Religious setup under the British

The key feature common in these organizations was stress on practicing Islamic values. It is usually included in the objectives of organizations. In certain instances

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a full body was formed for pursuing a single trait of Islam. For example an organization was formed in Rawalpindi in 1905 having the sole objective of burial of heirless dead bodies of the Muslims.³ Call to adopt five times prayer was customary from almost all platforms. In an annual session of one of the organizations⁴ school students staged a drama in which message was floated how young men fled from saying prayers in order to invoke regularity of prayers in the audience.

From Religious Awakening to Religious Reformation

It is important to note that call to religious practicing was not an isolated phenomenon. It would definitely arouse a reformed version of Muslim Civilization in the British India. As Islam did not have any church, the process of jurisprudence was entrusted to *jamhoor* Ulema who represented the collective conscience of the Muslims; a phenomenon of pure qualitative approach. But with the banishment of Shariah Law under the British the authority of traditional Ulema was also sidelined. In this situation sensitive Muslims, with a reasonable background of traditional outlook, filled the gap and started devising a code of conduct for new setup. But due to the demoralization of Muslim Civilization a reference to traditional traits was to pose assertive stand under the British. The only option was to pivot to the Islamic Scripture directly, rendering it a religious process. Referring to early Islamic experiences, which are frequently alluded in the Scripture, proved helpful to carve out a space for this outlook. Though the practice did not banish Ulema from the scene, it deprived them of a leading role for the affairs of the community as a whole. Since that time, Ulema have been striving to be in power in order to impose traditional Islamic injunctions.

In the process of 'Indian Muslims Reformation' the first target was those rituals which were adopted by the Muslims in the course of time under the influence of non-Muslim communities especially the Hindus. Condemnation was launched through platform of different organizations as the Muslims were being labeled as a backward community for adopting these rituals. These rituals are mainly related to wedding and death. Warding off social woes through religious reformation was also common in the objectives of most of the organizations. One of the organizations was formed for the betterment of Kakke Zai Clan of Lahore in 1899.⁵ The basic objective behind the formation of this organization was to purge the clan of bad rituals. Another organization established for Sadat Clan of a small village of Jalundhar portrayed these rituals as 'dreadful' and considered them the sole cause of the decline of the clan.⁶

Safeguarding the Faith

The above mentioned sense of religiosity became intense with the activities of Christian missionaries. Indians; both the Hindu and the Muslims, were not familiarize this kind of proselytizing the people by hooks and crooks. The major attack of Christian missionaries was to adopt the orphans of different communities of India. Actually this step sparked apprehensions in the minds of the Muslims and they readily responded to this by establishing different organizations. Like other common objectives the look after of the orphans was also included in the programs of almost all organizations of the Muslims.

It is noteworthy that the First tussle of the Muslims with respect to religion was against Christian Missionaries and they stemmed a tide against them successfully. However, with the start of revival movements in the Hindus Arya Samaj (established in 1875 in Bombay) became operative in the Punjab with full zeal. Arya Samaj also setup their schools and colleges in the Punjab to impart their ideals in the Hindus.⁷ Arya Samajists claimed India as the sole territory of the Hindus. Especially they had the agenda to convert all Indian Muslims to Hinduism as their ancestors were converted to Islam in the Muslim period. Arya Samajists were also active in waging polemics with the Muslims. Thus the Muslims had to face two fronts in safeguarding their faith through polemics and rejoinders. A third challenge came from a group of the Muslims who were alleged to be deviated from the basic principles of Islam regarding the prophet hood. They were the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani from Qadian, a town in the Punjab. Major Muslim sects were against them and polemic with them was often underway. Formerly a pure religious issue the campaign against Qadiani entered the political realm with the political dynamism of the Muslims in the Punjab in 1930s.⁸ Though the practice was also common among other sects of the Muslims and they used to issue *fatwas* against each other to oust others from Islam, but branding others non-Muslim was restricted to religious circles and common Muslims attached to social organizations did not show the extent. Social organizations also took notice of sectarianism among the Muslims and devised steps to eradicate the dissensions of different sects of the Muslims. Actually this feature of social organizations dissuaded common Muslims, to a considerable extent, to indulge in the tussle of clerics for the cause of the community in the overall situation.⁹

Paradigm Shift: Politics, Education, Society

The Muslims succeeded to create a space for their religion in new setup in isolation. However, they could not assert their identity until they practiced their religion in relation with other spheres of civilization i.e. politics, education and culture. For this they shifted their paradigm by opening the gate of ijtehad for those Muslims who had contemporary knowledge apart from a base of traditional sciences in the realm of politics, education and society.

Politics: Recognizing the British Rule

The easiest change which the Muslims of India embraced was in the realm of politics. The community readily accepted the British as their rulers and the plight of Mughals did not bother them, though, their Hindu counterpart continued to revere Mughal Kingship. The likely explanation of this Muslim behavior is evident from Sir Syed's approach that is to avoid the wrath of the British in order to survive as a community. However, those who did not surrender even after the 'mutiny' was crushed never thought of revival of Muslim traditional rule.¹⁰ Famous Silk Letters Movement launched by Deoband activists also did not allude to the revival of Muslim political past. Muslim political theory can help us in understanding the Muslim psyche under the British setup. Actually traditional Muslim past experienced different kind of government, Caliphate, Sultanate and Kingship and jurists justified all these on different bases. It implies that Islam does

not sacralize any form of government. This metamorphosis of Muslim polity could be a rationale to explain the Indian Muslims' behavior towards the British rule. Similarly, after the independence no one talked about the revival of Traditional Muslim Rule. If seen in world scenario all efforts of Political Islam have been failed so far because the Muslim conscience had shred the option of Traditional Muslim Polity.

Education: Taking Science and Religion Along

Pre-British Punjab had amazing facts regarding the education. Dr Leitner, who was first principal of Government College Lahore and Oriental College Lahore, discussed these facts of indigenous education of the Punjab at length.¹¹ As Europeans influence grew gradually, so was their education system. Early European schools in India were ministered by the missionaries, therefore, were totally religious. With the usher of the British annexation secular education started in European schools. In lieu of quality education local population also joined these schools. The Muslims also showed inclination towards West's experiences of education. Anglo-Arabic College Delhi was a prototype in this regard.¹² However, with the annexation of major Indian provinces coercively towards mid of the nineteenth century, a relation of hatred developed between the British and the local population, especially the Muslims. Change of medium from Persian to English and Lord Macaulay's Minutes in 1835 developed a sort of rivalry between European and traditional education system which corresponded to the start of the Muslim plight under the British.

By embracing religious education of seminaries only they did not remain in the mainstream. Moreover, the concept of mass education introduced by the British did not match their concept of education. It was for this reason that the Muslims did not attend government schools established by the British as they declined the concept of learning for earning.¹³ On the other hand having basic religious education they did not consider themselves illiterate. Thus the Muslims were not eligible to fill any vacancy in the public offices as they did not have the requisite qualification of government schools. On the other hand the positions they held in the indigenous education of the Punjab prior to 1849 were also lost to them by the year of 1882.¹⁴ It can be noticed that the time of the emergence of social organizations among the Muslims of the Punjab was around 1882. The founders and members of these organizations were not illiterate but in a relative sense discussed above. What they were advocating was the stimulus for the education of government schools so that the Muslims could be able to have their part in the services, snatched by their Hindu brethren by attending these schools.

On the other hand, advisers of social organizations adopted another pattern to justify the modern school education. They hailed the scientific progress of the West not out of any inferiority complex but as the fulfillment of an Islamic ideal, remained practically underway in the Muslim Spain. They considered modern education as a continuation of Islamic practice of learning. The Muslims always hailed the British for introduction of technology to India. They advocated the education of science not only as an urgent need for progress but to conform to the teachings of Quran. In this way the educated circles of the Muslims made the

community construct a belief of taking science and Islam mutually inclusive. Moved by this construction people wrote verbose treatise to correlate the Quran with scientific knowledge and reasoning.¹⁵

However, hailing science and technology did not mean to ignore religious education. Starting from MAO College Aligarh, all Muslim institutions lent special importance to religious education. Muslim organizations were active enough to chalk out their own syllabus and books. Text books prepared by Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam Lahore were of such quality that schools in Calcutta recommended these books.¹⁶ Syllabus for religious education was not taken casually. Muslim High School Hoshiarpur, run by Anjuman Islamia Dosohta Wakaithan, properly prepared and recommended the syllabus of *Diniyat* (Islamic studies) for class one to ten.¹⁷

It is evident from above mentioned facts and figures that the Muslims were canny in adopting modern education by keeping in view their religion and traditions. First of all they coined their own terms for their institutions. MAO (Mohammadan Anglo Oriental) was symbolizes the Muslim identity under the British. But afterwards the Muslims adopted the term 'Islamia' for their institutions. After the establishment of Islamia College Lahore in 1892, the term became so popular that a barrister from Rawalpindi suggested for the establishment of Islamia schools in every district of Rawalpindi division as an objective of his organization. He also recommended to administe a permanent aid for Islamia College Lahore.¹⁸

The Society: Familiarizing with Modernism

Indian society is deep rooted in tradition even in the twenty first century. Both the Hindus and the Muslims were more conservative than religious. Religion, though, has a vital role in developing traditions; traditional setup constitutes its own circle as well. Therefore, Indian Muslims having a strong connection with the Muslim world, behave a bit differently. It is mentioned earlier that social organizations had a common objective of warding off the social woes of the Muslims which they had developed with the course of time; they were not pursued successfully and the Muslims spent large amount on marriages and other occasions. Similarly, Arya Samaj could not move the Hindus to give up the practices not verified by the Vedas. Sticking to the tradition was a unique feature of Indian society. However, modern education did not let the situation unchanged as the Indian Muslims were greatly impressed by the modern setup. But the change made its way through same process of traditional setup and despite the paradigm shift the Muslim society remained traditional overall. Actually the Muslims cherished the modern civilization but could not adopt it due to unique mode of the society which was inclined to religion. Moreover, the Muslims were more concerned with the improvement of the community; therefore, they focused those traits of the society which were considered to be the factors behind the progress of European Nations.

In advocating the modern manners the Muslims did not pretend to draw on European Civilization but took it as recommended by Islamic teachings. Even concepts like socialism and communism were thought to be originated from Islamic teachings.¹⁹ Thus modernizing society was analogous to modernizing politics and education. However, only those aspects of modern society were

encouraged which were thought to be beneficial for the community and religion was not totally relegated to background as happened in Europe. Even educated Muslims continued endorsing religious traits with vigor. Those who were educated abroad were practicing Muslims. A. K. Ghaznavi of Bengal, who was studied at abroad, advised the Muslim to concentrate on religion and education. In a visit to Lahore at the invitation of Punjab Muslim Club he said in a meeting: “I find myself better Muslim than those who studied in India as I follow prayers and other pillars of Islam strictly in Europe. The study of other religions convinced me of the truthfulness of Islam. Islam is a light and the Quran is a source of all facts and truths. The Muslims should at least abide by Friday Prayer.”²⁰ He believed that Islam can transcend in the modern world. He envisioned the future of Islam brighter. For this he advised the Muslims to revert to early days of Islam, to arouse the spirit of Islam and to ponder over the Quran.²¹

Post Partition Inclinations

After the partition the Muslims of Pakistan upheld all these convictions made under the British rule. That was why immediately after the independence minds were bent upon the religious nature of the constitution. Though the constitution took nine years to be passed, the Objective resolution passed in 1949 set the ideals of the state at once. As the Indian Muslims accepted modern system of the British the liberal inclination were likely to appear afterwards. In this connection Progressive Writers Movement along with Communist Party of Indian tried to convert Pakistan into a communist state. The movement was backed by the revolutionary poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and liberal literature of Manto with his famous anti-partition character Toba Tek Singh. Sajjad Zaheer from India came to Pakistan on the special mission. However, the Islamic character of Pakistani society infused under the British did not let the communist stance play their cards and the state did not yield to the communist appeal. Receiving setback the communist move even tried to take over the hold by conspiracy known as Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. The conspiracy failed and the communist party's fate sealed forever in Pakistan. It should be noted that the cabinet and the legislature which passed the Objective Resolution were modernly educated and Islamist elements were adequately represented. The reason was the very inertia of religion oriented struggle for Pakistan.

In the successive years all governments managed to care for Islamic injunctions in the constitution and the governance. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who came to power by promising a socialist setup in the country, furthered the Islamization process and made Islam the state religion of Pakistan. Zia-ul-Haq religious program was just an extension of Bhutto's policies. Pervez Musharrat, though tried to reverse the process but could not get recognition despite launching unprecedented public works in the country.

Conclusion

After losing the political power in India the Muslims had to face the cultural hegemony of the West as well. To survive as a nation and to keep their religion intact the Muslims started social activities of various kind and Punjab was a centre for it. In all such activities the religion of Islam was placed in focus. These social

activities aroused the religious aspirations of Indian Muslims and towards the status of self rule the Muslims conscious thought of a separate country which would envisage an Islamic constitution. After the partition secular circles tried to relegate the Islamic character to the background but the collective conscience was powerful enough to retain religious identity of the country and it has become the *raison detre* of our national existence. With the dawn of twenty first century and so called debacle of 9/11 the modernism has been cherished both in the state and the society of Pakistan and a reinterpretation of country's religious character is stressed. A logical effort in this connection is to detach the country from its historical religious contours. The effort becomes problematic due to the ample evidence of religious bases of the Pakistan Movement. In the nutshell the strategy adopted by the social organizations of the Punjab served as a trajectory to the fabric of religion, politics and society in Pakistan.

Notes & References

¹ Article is a part of dissertation submitted for the partial fulfillment of PhD Degree by Muhammad Raza Taimoor, Associate Professor of History, Govt. Islamia College Lahore

² See Ahmad Saeed, *Anjuman Islamia Amratsar: 1873-1947* [Urdu], (Lahore: Punjab University, 1986), 2.

³ It was Anjuman Sheda-i-Islam Rawalpindi [devotee of Islam]. For details see Ahmed Saeed, (2004), 49

⁴ Second annual session of Anjuman Islah-i-Tamuddan Amratsar [Organization for reforming Civilization] which held on June 2, 1912. See Saeed (2004), 168

⁵ Proper name was All India Kakke Zai Association Lahore, see Saeed (2004), 34

⁶ Organization's name was Anjuman-i-Falah-i-Quresh wa Sadat Rahun [Organization for the reforming Quresh and Sadat of Rahun]. See Saeed (2004), 92

⁷ Present day Islamia College Civil Lines Lahore was formerly DAV College before the Partition. DAV stood for Dyanand Anglo Vedic College. The college was an institution of Arya Samaj in Lahore and was active in spreading its ideals among the students.

⁸ See Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, *Iqbal Ke Akhri do sal* [Last Two Years of Iqbal], (Lahore: Iqbal Akadmi, 1978), 322-26

⁹ Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam Amritsar took the unity of the Muslims as an objective and struggled for it. The Anjuman made an appeal to the Muslims to offer Eid prayer together regardless of their sect. The community of Amritsar responded the appeal positively. Saeed (2004), 25-26

¹⁰ In NWFP and Baluchistan different veterans constantly fought against the British in the name of self rule.

¹¹ G. W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab: Since Annexation and in 1882*, Calcutta: 1882

¹² Formerly a school opened in February 1872 for the purpose of promoting the study of the English language among the Mohammadans of Delhi. The school was entirely maintained by the endowments of Nawab I'tmad al-Daula. See Leitner, 5 (Part II).

¹³ Leitner, 56

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ghulam Ahmad Pervez was first in line who based his reasoning upon linguistics of Arabic; thereby devising alternative meanings to terms of the Quran and deriving interpretation which conforms to the scientific theory. Professor Rafiq Akhtar with a view to retain the traditional creed tries to explain the Quranic episodes in term of scientific theory of human origins.

¹⁶ The fact was revealed by Syed Hassan Imam at a tea party arranged by Punjab Muslim Club, *Paisa Akhbar*, October 18, 1914, 8

¹⁷ The syllabus included part of the Quran, Islamic History and Sirah books wrote by notable authors. For example *Rahmatul li' alamin* written by Suleman Mansoorpuri – which is still a book of reference – was included in the syllabus. *Annual Report* of the organization, Appendix II, 38

¹⁸ Qazi Siraj al-Din established an organization named Muslim Educational Society Rawalpindi in 1913. *Paisa Akhbar*, June 24, 1913, 3

¹⁹ Saeed (2004), 169

²⁰ *Paisa Akhbar*, October 10, 1912, 8

²¹ *Ibid*, October 11, 1912, 8