

# ***The Collective Self and the Collective Other: Construction of Communal Identities in Colonial Punjab***

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<i>Kisey ne panjaanpaaniyanwich</i>	Someone has poured in the five rivers
<i>Ditizaharrala,</i>	venom very potent
<i>Teunhanpaniyaandhartoun</i>	And with that deadly concoct
<i>Dittapaanilaa</i>	Has watered our fields (Amrita Pritam)

## **Abstract**

*The end of the British colonial rule in India culminated into the partition of subcontinent and the genesis of two successor nation states of Pakistan and India in 1947. The Punjab (a province of British India) was also parted into two halves. Eventually, it experienced communal massacre at an unprecedented scale. Millions of people were displaced and migrated from one to the other state. This massive exodus on communal basis was not anticipated either by hitherto rulers of India or the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. Various explanations have been offered for the tragedy of partition and concomitant communal violence but one that endures and is popular in Pakistan is the idea that Hindus and Muslims constituted two identifiable and separate nations, which could not live in one 'nation state' further. This argument augments the trauma of communal carnage happened due to violent assertion of*

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*'essentialist' and 'primordial' Hindu-Muslim-Sikh identities. There is a need to explore the process and bring out factors of mutually exclusive communal "instrumental" identities due to which the strict boundaries were drawn up between religious communities. It is equally important to consider evidence that suggests the socio-cultural and political variables which transcend the communal boundaries and testify existence of composite cultural milieu in pre-colonial and colonial Punjab side by side the markers of communal identities. This paper is an attempt to trace out the process and comprehend the contributing factors of demarcation of religious boundaries and construction of communal identities in the colonial Punjab.*

### **Introduction**

There were two major explanations of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India during the last few decades of the British colonial rule. One argues that it was intrinsic to the peculiar situation of India, being home of diametrically opposed communities. Hindus and Muslims were different and this 'difference' turned into hostility. The British controlled and limited this hostility during the heyday of colonial rule through their efficient administrative machinery. However, the prospect of independence brought this hostility to the surface.<sup>1</sup> The other view argued that there is nothing intrinsic about Hindu-Muslim conflict. The British faced a rising anti-colonial movement so they wished to keep hold on to their colony thus deliberately converted minor differences into major conflicts. This argument stressed the importance of famous maxim of divide and rule; *divide et impera*. The British government in India succeeded in this by appealing to a sizeable and powerful segment of the Muslim community.

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1 History produced by the colonial administrators held this point of view. Later, Pakistani text book writers and champions of Hindutva ideology in India have advanced this version. Pakistani text book writers go to such a length that they claim, "Pakistan was established for the first time when the Arabs under Muhammad Bin Qasim occupied Sindh and Multan in the early years of the eighth century." See for example, M. D. Zafar, *Pakistan Studies* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1986), 4.

However, the British were forced by the consistent struggle and the force of argument of impending Congress Raj that the colonial masters had to accept partition of India on the basis of two-nation theory.

These explanations simplify what really happened during the colonial period as they reach to conclusions without considering the long and protracted process which culminated in the construction of sharp religious boundaries and the contribution of socio-religious reform movements in this process. Without distorting the thrust of the previous arguments, one can argue that we need to understand the process, over a reasonable period of time, which produced, fashioned and accentuated Muslim identity in colonial India. Documentary evidences suggest that neither were Hindus and Muslims intrinsically different and opposed to each other nor could the British foresee their withdrawal from India so earlier. It was only after the prolonged war struggle in Europe and the necessities of re-building their home country that the British colonial government had to withdraw. It was the process of identity construction—religious, political and national—that resulted in widening chasm between various religious communities and increasing communalism.<sup>2</sup> The minor issues turned out to be major causes of riots and disturbances. The political solution of this problem was sought in the shape of partition of India which yielded unprecedented massacre yet further increasing the problem of communalism in the independent nation states.

Punjab was influenced by Islam earlier and became a majority Muslim area. It experienced the British colonial rule very late in 1849 as compared to other regions of India which

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2 Communalism has been defined, in the Indian context, by Ian Talbot as “the situation in which religious community rather than caste or class becomes a major determinant of political loyalties...it is based on two premises, first that because a group of people follow a particular religion they automatically possess common social, economic and political interests, second that religious identity is the sole determinant of political loyalty.” See Ian Talbot, “State, Society and Identity: The British Punjab 1875-1937”, in Gurharpal Singh and Ian Talbot (eds.), *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), 28.

were already under the British rule. This period witnessed an unprecedented array of changes in administrative structure as well as social sphere. Colonial rule happened to coincide with an era of modernization which brought about socio-economic and political changes in its wake<sup>3</sup>. For instance, the introduction of print culture and sporadic growth of press in the Punjab unleashed a new era of socio-political activities. Newspapers were used as a channel for diffusing opinions both orthodox and modern. Socio-religious organizations also gave impetus to the unprecedented rise of journalism in India.<sup>4</sup> The administrative, political and cultural changes, relatively rapid and secure social mobility, census operations, activities of missionaries and the role of reform movements (AryaSamaj, BrahmaSamaj, Singh Sabha, Aligarh Movement, AnjumanHimayat-i-Islam, AnjumanKhuddam-i-Kaaba) played an important role in the constitution and reconstitution of religious identities and precinct communal boundaries<sup>5</sup>.

This paper focuses the process of identity construction in general followed by an analysis of the construction of religious identities in colonial north India and the Punjab. Moreover, emphasis would be laid on making out the process of Muslim identity construction in colonial Punjab with particular reference to the contribution of socio-religious

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<sup>3</sup> AzraAsghar Ali and SajidMahmoodAwan, "Political Development and the Political Parties in Punjab:1849-1947," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 29, no. 1 (June 2009): 65-78.

<sup>4</sup> An English civilian wrote to a friend that 'Punjab was being governed by two entities—the Lieutenant Governor and *TheTribune*.' *TheTribune* was a very influential newspaper established and run by SardarDyal Singh Majithia of Lahore. Urdu journalism in Punjab ranging from Delhi to Peshawar, in terms of number of newspapers and volume, had no parallel indeed. Urdu newspapers were 343 in number which accounted for 80.86percent of the total newspapers in the Punjab seconded by English newspapers numbering 24 which made it 5.73percent of the total. The difference is self-evident as there is yawning gap between the extents of the two. For details see N. Gerald Barrier and Paul Wallace, *The Punjab Press 1880-1905* (Michigan: Asian Studies Centre, South Asia Series, Occasional Paper No. 14, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Ali and Awan, "Political Development and the Political Parties in Punjab:1849-1947," 69-70.

reform movements and communal organizations. Study of this period is significant in the context of construction of religious identities, in general, and Muslim identity construction in particular because “British Empire in India saw major transformations in the identities of its Indian subjects” and “one of the identities which developed most strikingly was the Muslim.”<sup>6</sup> The period of British rule and the changes that it brought about gave ‘firmer edges’ to Muslim identities. There was a sharpening of distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims which was “in part an outcome of the impact of British understanding of India and in part that of religious revivalism.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Framework of Identity Construction**

A conceptual framework can help in the understanding of construction of identities in human groups and religious communities. Following questions can be raised and answered to grasp the phenomenon: What is identity? How do individuals and communities construct their identity? How were communal identities constructed in India during the colonial period? How did Muslims of the Punjab construct their religious and communal identities in the colonial period?

Identity is a complex phenomenon and depends on varied socio-cultural and economic factors which determine a person’s identity. In short, identity is how one is perceived, understood and interpreted by the others. Identities of inclusion and exclusion provide the basis for socio-political interest of an individual or group. These individuals and groups, in accordance with their identity, are informed about their interests that lead them to political action. The socio-political behaviour of an individual or group is, thus, a by-product of that identity. Post-modernists, in the humanities and social sciences, have challenged the traditional concept of identity by arguing that “the fixed subject of liberal

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6 Francis Robinson, “The British Empire and Muslim Identity in South Asia”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, vol. 8 (1998), 271.

7 Robinson, “The British Empire and Muslim Identity in South Asia,” 271.

humanistic thinking is an anachronism,” and it should be replaced by “a more flexible individual whose identity is fluid, contingent, and spatially constructed.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, conception of identity has developed from “something ascribed by others to something acquired by oneself.”<sup>9</sup> This signifies the shift from medieval time attributes that were essentially determined at birth—religion, occupation and economic status in life—to modern identities that are less deterministic and are more choice oriented. Occupation, religion, education, sexual preferences and domestic roles can now be fashioned at will which was not, to such an extent, possible in the past. This refashioning of the conception of identity is an essential part of the modern desire for authenticity and external recognition; this means finding one’s true self and having it acknowledged by others.<sup>10</sup>

In relation to the study of social and nationalist movements, scholarly attention in the field of identity has now shifted from individual to issues of group agency and political action. Resultantly, identity studies have been relocated to the site of the collective. These collective definitions produce political implications for individuals and societies. Moreover, processes are examined at the level of collective that create, maintain and change distinctions. Here comes the role of ‘communication technologies’ that have “expanded the array of generalized others.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of collective is grounded in classic sociological constructs: thus, Durkheim’s “collective conscience,” Marx’s “class

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8 Leonie Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,” *Political Psychology*, 22. no. 1 (Mar. 2001): 127-156. Also see, R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996), and I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

9 Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity”, 137. Also see, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), and Roy. F. Baumeister, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

10 Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, 26.

11 Karen A. Cerulo, “Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 23 (1997), 386.

consciousness,” and Weber’s “Verstehen.”<sup>12</sup> These notions address the ‘we-ness’ of a group stressing the similarities within and distinctions from the out-group. They highlighted natural and essential characteristics as qualities emerging from physiological qualities, psychological pre-dispositions, regional structures and properties of geographical locales and the collective’s members were believed to internalize these qualities suggesting a unified singular social experience.<sup>13</sup> This position has been challenged suggesting an anti-essentialist view promoting the social construction of identity as a more viable basis for assessing the collective self because it favours fluid and spatial conception of identity construction.

The identities of individuals and groups, in the constructionists’ paradigm, are constructed through the interaction of normative and material structures of their spatial realities including geography, environment, society and the state. The normative structure includes the system of shared ideas, beliefs and values of given society, while, the material structure is made of structure of political power that is state, and economic resource distribution. The normative structure provides a society with meanings and rationale to the material structure that in turn makes possible the socio-political agency of individual actors.<sup>14</sup> It is argued that individual actors exercise a degree of self-consciousness and choice of selection within the normative structures but it is conditioned by the material structure as well as the political system in vogue. It is the routine practice of these norms and values over a period of time that develops institutions and these institutions take part in economic, political and cultural activities and assert themselves where they deem necessary.<sup>15</sup> Religious identity

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12 Cerulo, “Identity Construction”.

13 Cerulo, “Identity Construction,” 387.

14 Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal, “BJP’s Politics and the Muslims of India,” (Ph. D Dissertation, Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 2012), 14.

15 Afzal, “BJP’s Politics and the Muslims of India,” 17.

assertion is also an integral part of this process because religion itself is a socio-economic and cultural process and not something given, pre-structured and in ordained form. Religion, taken as a process, is actively embedded in everyday life and is a part of human agency.

### **Nation, Nationalism and National Identity**

To establish the relationship of nationalism with the socio-religious reform movements in colonial India, the concept of nation needs to be defined and explained for preliminary understanding. Many theorists have defined the phenomenon of nationalism in various contexts though the nationalism is a product of the particular historical developments in Europe where many nation states emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An attempt is made in this section to understand and interpret the phenomenon of nationalism: what is a nation? How do nations come into being? How did the communal identities (nations?) define their 'collective self' and the 'collective other' in colonial Indian context?

Various schools of thought have attempted to understand and interpret the origin, characteristics and development of nationalism and nation-state in different ways. These schools of thought can broadly be categorized into three categories: 1) primordialists define the nations as a 'natural order' and argue that the nation is founded upon primordial attachments which can be race, genetic link or culture; 2) perennialists interpret nationalism as rooted in long standing ethnic affiliations but these affiliations need not be immutable; 3) the modernists explain nationalism in constructionists' paradigm in which it is treated as a recent phenomenon that is product of socio-economic transformation and the process of modernization during the last two centuries.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Anthony D. Smith, "Theories of Nationalism: Alternative Models of Nation Formation," in Michael Deiffee, *Asian Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-20. There is also debate about categorization of societies as either traditional or modern and nationalism is placed on the side of the modern. It is assumed that nationalism is the result of the replacement of traditional



One finds very innovative explanations of constructionism, such as Benedict Anderson's influential work on 'imagined communities.'<sup>17</sup> Anderson has defined national identity as a socio-cognitive construct—one that is both spatially and temporally inclusive as well as enabled and shaped by a broad complex of social forces. Anderson pointed out key moments and defining times of identity construction; such times during which cultural (including but not limited to language) and other social factors (capitalism, print technology) converge in a particular given historical epoch, "effectively remaking collective images of the national self."<sup>18</sup> This formulation of collective identity and the political movements spurred by it constitute an important area of interest for identity theorists and scholars. On this pattern, identity politics creates new social (or religious) movements and collective initiatives that are highly self-reflexive and sharply focused on the overt actions of a community.

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with modern society. This is, however, controversial because in many societies nationalism has been the product of diffusion. It means that modernity has not been brought about as historical transition in the European sense but as invasion of the traditional by the modern. According to Louis Dumont, such a situation leads to uneasy combinations as exemplified by Indian "communalism which combines religion and nationalism [emphasis added]," quoted in Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 17. Some of the Indian secularist nationalists, including Jawaharlal Nehru, held the view that communalism will disappear when the society is gradually modernized. However, there are two very important processes which need to be understood. First, that in many pre-colonial societies, including India, there was continuing formation of the state on divergent lines and expansion of networks of economic interdependence which meant that these societies had their own pattern of change that continued during the colonial and post-colonial times too. Second, that in Western discourse the combined force of individualism, secularism and equality became religion of the state.

17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Benedict Anderson, brother of political theorist Perry Anderson, is the author of one of the most influential theories in political geography—that nations are 'imagined communities'. He studied under Eric Hobsbawm and graduated from Cambridge University and then moved to Cornell University to pursue Ph.D. It was at Cornell University that he was influenced by George Kahin, John Echols, and Claire Holt. Anderson is the author of famous 'Cornell paper' due to which Suharto administration banned his entry into Indonesia.

18 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

Anderson defines the nation as follows: "it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." The argument that a nation is imagined cannot be understood as that nation itself is false and unreal so should be singled out from real communities. Rather, "a nation is constructed from popular processes through which residents share nationality in common."<sup>19</sup>It is important to understand how a nation is imagined, limited and sovereign according to this interpretation. Feeling part of a nation means, in other words, that there must be another nation against which self-definition can be conceived and constructed. Anderson has thus argued for the social construction of nations as political communities that possess a limited and defined spatial and demographic extent rather than being organic and eternal entities.

Another important element of the definition of Anderson is that it is sovereign. He argues that the concept of nation developed in the late eighteenth century as a structure of society as replacement of previous monarchical-cum-religious systems. It was, in this way, a new way of conceptualizing state and sovereignty. This sovereignty would be confined to a defined population and territory over which the state, in the name of nation, could exercise power. Anderson reiterates that nations wield such a powerful influence over imaginations of its members that any patriotic calls to arms are understood in terms of a duty of all national residents. National residents, in war times, are equal and class boundaries are eroded in the communal struggle for national survival in its pursuit to establish its greatness as opposed to the other, a collective other.

Anderson has established a great deal of his 'imagined communities' thesis on 'print capitalism'. He opines that the standardization of clocks, a national calendar and a national language was embodied in books and the publication of daily newspapers within a national territory. This created a sense

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19 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

of shared national experiences for people as they became aware of events occurring in their own nation state and nations abroad. Newspapers “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”<sup>20</sup> Scattered events were bounded together and termed as national experiences as people thought that everyone was reading the same thing and had same access to information. In other words, the reading of news items and other materials are made national experience. In his own words “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.”<sup>21</sup>

Anderson has also discussed the role of construction of national memories, national census, national museums, biographies of personalities of national importance and maps. After dealing with mass communication and print capitalism, Anderson turned to the phenomenon of migration, stating that “the two most significant factors generating nationalism and ethnicity are both closely linked to the rise of capitalism. They can be described summarily as mass communication and mass migration.”<sup>22</sup> This explanation of mass migration related with the conjunction of rise of capitalism and print technology is importantly relevant with the case of colonial Punjab: it too experienced a mass migration with the withdrawal of colonialism and creation of nation state.

Charles Taylor, in his identity politics and new social movements paradigm, recommends a different type of agency—a self-conscious collective agency. He contends that identities emerge and movements ensue because collectives, collective selves and collective others, simultaneously, intentionally coordinate actions; group

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20 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.

21 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 46.

22 Benedict Anderson, “The New World Disorder”, *New Left Review* 193, 7.

members consciously develop offenses and defenses, consciously insulate, differentiate, and mark, cooperate and compete, persuade and coerce. In such a context, agency makes more than the control and transformation of one's social environment.<sup>23</sup> Collective agency includes a conscious group feeling as agent of national and communal consciousness.

Bernstein contends that the concept of 'identity' concomitant to social movements can be explained at three distinct analytical levels: 1) a common collective identity is essential for mobilizing a social movement; 2) expressions of identity can be used at the collective level as a political strategy that can aim at what is traditionally thought of as cultural and political goal-oriented; 3) identity can be an objective of social movement activism, either to gain acceptance for hitherto stigmatized identity or constructing new elaborate categories of identities.<sup>24</sup> For political action, all social movements require identity for empowerment as well as constructing oppositional consciousness to create and mobilize a constituency.<sup>25</sup> The study of objects has also been explored as a key to recent research on identification processes. These studies make out ways in which individuals and groups use art objects for articulating and projecting identities. Objects are used to understand, in a better way, the political, cultural, social, and economic contexts in which these objects are produced.<sup>26</sup> It includes, for instance, objects of national identity symbolization such as national anthem, flags, uniforms and caps.

The decolonization process in India, while sharing almost all attributes of nationalism discussed by Anderson, witnessed a phenomenon that can be termed as religious nationalism because the partition of India was sought on the basis of religious identities and Punjab played a very

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23 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 25-32.

24 Mary Bernstein, "Identity Politics," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31 (2005), 59.

25 Bernstein, "Identity Politics," 59

26 Cerulo, "New Issues, New Directions", 396.

important role in the justification of separate state of Pakistan. Socio-religious reform movements had already made ground fertile for the growth of religious nationalism in the Punjab. These organizations, following the models of Christian missionaries, wielded printing presses, issued tracts, pamphlets and periodicals, established educational institutions and had a sustained discourse of dialogue with other religious communities. The Muslim organizations were not only involved in opposition to the Hindus and the Christians but also within various Muslim theological dispositions and sects.

### **Socio-religious Reform Movements, Religious Nationalism and Communal Identities**

The sporadic growth of Hindu and Muslim organizations during the second half of nineteenth century was as a response to the activities and conversion campaign of Christian missionaries. But with the passage of time each community was trying hard to counter and present befitting response to the other communities. As a result of activities of these organizations and factors like repeated practice of decennial census by the colonial state and extensively targeted use of printing press to carry out propaganda, religious identities were sharpened increasingly. Punjab remained the area of focus for not only the Christian missionaries but also for the responding Hindu and Muslim communal organizations. For example, AryaSamaj was established in Bombay in 1875 by DayanandSaraswati but it gained maximum popularity and mass appeal in the Punjab. Talbot's assertion that "the picture which emerges from colonial 'histories' of the Punjab's instability, violence and long established tradition of communal animosity is only a partial and by no means 'innocent' portrayal. It consistently underestimates the shared cultural values of the rural Punjabi communities."<sup>27</sup> A critical study of the process, which

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27 Ian Talbot, *KhizrTiwana: The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

Talbot opines that colonial Punjab witnessed two parallel traditions. The rural areas continued to have tradition of shared cultural values while the

transformed a sizable portion of communities turning them into hostile towards each other despite 'shared cultural values' of the Punjabi communities, is necessary.

The process of formation of Muslim identities sharper and firmer in the colonial Punjab was preceded by a period of Muslim reform movements in the nineteenth century. This period witnessed a vigorous zeal and zest of reform movements in all the major religious communities of India including Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs. These reform movements were a response of the Indians to the challenge of the dominance of Western Christian civilization and its impact on India. We can identify four major Muslim responses to the crisis brought on by the loss of Muslim political power and the rise of an alien Christian rule. These are the modernism of the Aligarh School, reformism of Deoband School, traditionalism of Bareilvi School and Islamism of the Jamat-i-Islami. The institutions and ideas that these movements established continue to influence Muslims in South Asia and abroad till today. The Muslims were transformed by these ideas and became more and more conscious about their self and the community. UshaSanyal, whose work is on Ahmad Raza Khan founder of Bareilvi School, describes the situation as follows:

Indians of all religions were keenly aware of Western criticisms of their religious customs and traditions. The Hindu reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy had responded by rejecting many aspects of contemporary ritual practice, arguing that the "pure" Hinduism of India's "golden age" was rational, simple and devoid of practices which the British described as barbaric (such as idol worship, caste,

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urban areas saw emergence and rise of communal tendencies. This is true for the initial decades of twentieth century but when it comes to the last decade before partition, the rural areas were also engulfed in communal violence. Even the starting point of violence were Sikh villages in Rawalpindi, Campbellpore and Jhelum district attacked by Muslims resulting in killing of 2000-5000 Sikhs and Hindus. It means that whole of the Punjab was in communal frenzy including urban and rural areas. However, by any means those who perpetrated crimes of violence and massacre remained in minority. For detail see, Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy through Secret British Reports and First-Person Accounts* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxiii-xxxviii.

widow immolation, child marriage, and other social practices deemed detrimental to women). He also considered certain Sanskritic texts authoritative, and advocated their study as a means of reforming religious and social practices. In the Muslim case, religious leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoted internal reform as a response to Britain's rule of India. They reasoned that if Muslims had lost political power after so many centuries of rule, it was because they had been religiously negligent. Had they been "good" Muslims, they would have been strong and the British would never have been able to take over.<sup>28</sup>

The emergence and growth of revivalist religious organizations as a response to the proselytizing activities of "Christian missionaries," who "strove hard on the margins to claim this land for Jesus" resulted in the establishment of community schools, colleges, newspapers and magazines by Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs.<sup>29</sup> These developments along with the modernization drive of the colonial state which included decennial practice of census, extensive use of printing press, imperial cartography, and looking at the citizens divided in religious communities helped promote a more exclusive and puritanical religious identity. The

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28 For a brief discussion on the Muslim reform movements, see UshaSanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilvi: In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 19. She is of the opinion that the nineteenth century reformists, although were many groups, shared the broad set of goals including, better knowledge of the textual sources of Islam, greater adherence to religious injunctions by the individual believers and closely following the life of the Prophet as Sunnah. However, based on their attitude towards British rule, they differed in many important ways. Three groups can be distinguished: the vast majority including Shah Abdul Aziz, the Deobandis, the Ahl-e Hadith, the Nadwat al-Ulema and the Ahmadis were relatively uninterested in taking part in opportunities opened up by the British rule although most of them accepted it without protest. The second strand Jihadists including Syed Ahmad Bareilvi and his followers were actively opposed to non-Muslim rule including that of the British. They sought to restore Muslim rule through waging Jihad. The third strand fell in between these two and it was of Faraizi Movement in Bengal who though not declared open Jihad against the British but though they boycotted British institutions and refuse to pay taxes. The last strand was of accommodationists the chief protagonist of which was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of Aligarh school who embraced British rule as positive where Indian Muslims stood to benefit.

29 Ali UsmanQasmi, *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Quran Movements in the Punjab* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

activities of these communal organizations not only sharpened communal/religious identities but also became the forerunners of the development of both Indian territorial nationalism and Muslim religious nationalism.

Nationalism generally tries to show, in historical accounts and as nationalist agenda-project, that nation has always existed which is contradictory in itself. This work, however, focuses on how the religious identities—Hindu, Muslim and Sikh—developed and communities viewed themselves in terms of ‘collective self’ and ‘collective other’. It is argued that nation is a modern construction, an identity that is formed and sustained through using various means. Religious nationalism, it is contended, builds on previous construction of religious community. It is opposed to the claim of two-nation theory approach that presupposes that Hindus and Muslims are primordial communities which have existed with sharp identities from time before the emergence of nationalist era. My contention is in line with Per van der Veer who argued that “religious nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century’s builds on forms of religious identity and modes of religious communication” which is in an unceasing process of transformation during colonial and post-colonial periods.<sup>30</sup> Emergence of nationalism during the colonial period was the outcome of dual role played by the colonial state and the colonized. Although the colonized have attracted scholarly attention recently, the agency of the socio-religious reform movements in this regard has generally been overlooked. Reformism was the explicit agenda of reform movements which wanted propagation of puritanical reformist religion and replacement of fluid and blurred version of religious beliefs and practices. Religious boundaries were sought to be made clear and continuously

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30 Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), xiii. Same kind of arguments have been put forward by Sandria Freitag’s *Collective Action and Community* (1989) and Gyanendra Pandey’s *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1990) and Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986).



policed. An example of the fact that nationalism is not primordial can be found in the historical process of formation of Hindi as Hindu and Urdu as a Muslim language.<sup>31</sup>

For understanding emergence of communal identities in colonial India, the impact of the colonial state on Indian society and the consequences of orientalist study of India on Indian self-perception need to be taken in perspective. The institutions of colonial state developed and started to take shape during the first half of the nineteenth century. After the suppression of War of Independence in 1857-58 and the proclamation of Government of India Act 1858 in which Queen Victoria was declared as monarch of India, the government started massive official projects to count, classify and enumerate Indians to effectively control and govern a huge country that was a mosaic of cultures, languages and religions. In this project many categories like caste and religious communities were applied in the census operation which was started in 1872 to collect information about the population of India. The official discourse of caste though helped in administration of state and society it also had a deep impact on the way Indians viewed themselves and their relations among themselves. Admitted, that caste existed before the advent of the British but important point is that the concept of caste was upheld and maintained by the British administration and its repeated census applications made caste more and more rigid. The mushroom growth, on caste lines, of the *Anjumans*[Urdu: Organisations] and *sabhas*[Hindi: Organisations] during this period speaks volumes about the increased importance of caste in society and its relation to the state.<sup>32</sup>

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31 Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98-136. Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994).

32 For short detail on these socio-religious organizations, See, K. K. Aziz (ed.), *Public Life in Muslim India (1850-1947): A Compendium of Basic Information on Political, Social, Religious, Cultural and Educational Organizations Active in pre-Partition India* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992) and Ahmad Saeed, *Musalmanan-i-Punjab Ki SamajiaurFalahiAnjumanen:*

Viewing Indian society divided into religious communities was ingrained in the perceptions of colonial administrators. For instance, right from the beginning, they made a distinction in “Hindu” and “Muslim” personal law. Such conceptual basis got “institutionalized in the census operations.”<sup>33</sup> Even the concepts of Hindu majority and Muslim minority got wider acclaim after the census and it became basis of the concomitant developments of representative and electoral politics in India. Some may say that religious divisions were present before the arrival of the British colonial state. There is no denial that communities existed but the way they were enumerated, categorized and documented and the way their leaders represented them making these categories overtly known at mass scale was a new phenomenon indeed.

The other far reaching impact was that of orientalist’s perceptions. They viewed India as an ancient civilization with paramount Brahmanical authority. Western and Hindu civilizations were viewed as having common Indo-European linguistic roots and that the understanding of Hindu civilization would facilitate understanding of Western civilization too. The Muslims were perceived as ‘outsiders’, ‘usurpers’, and smashers of Hindu civilization. The British portrayed themselves as helpers of the Hindus who saved them from Muslims. Decline of the Mughals and oppression of the Muslim rule were highlighted because it gave them moral justification of rule over Indians. Discovery of ancient Indian texts, rituals, languages were given much importance and the Indian past was glorified.

This emphasis of the orientalists on glory of the Hindu ancient civilization gave a ready discourse and agenda to the Hindu

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*Aik Tajziati Mutalia* [Urdu: Social and Welfare Organisations of the Muslims of Punjab: An Analytical Study] (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab, 2004). Both these books provide short descriptions of a very large number of organizations founded on social, religious, political, caste, communal and professional lines. This period was unique in the history of Punjab in terms of mushroom growth of socio-religious organizations.

33 Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 20.

religious reform movements. They stressed on the contemporary decline and wished to revitalize the ancient religion and civilization. Following them the Muslim Ulema also viewed the decline of Muslim political power in the decline of religion. They called for revitalization of defeated Islam and wanted to re-establish Muslim glory in India. Muslims also waged a reform agenda and this period witnessed a large number of Muslim reform movements with variations in methodology but almost same objectives. Edward Said's interpretation that 'colonialism and orientalism created the reality in which Indians had to live,' may be accepted with a slight change in the sense that Indians had the agency in constructing their society.<sup>34</sup> The religious reform movements, for example, were actively working on their agenda of change and they had had a deep impact on the course of events.

In the construction of the Muslim 'other,' Hindu religio-nationalist movements have preferred to portray Indian Muslims as 'outsiders' and 'foreign element', who are not son-of-the-soil. This construction of the 'collective self' and 'collective other' and relentlessly pursued by the socio-religious reform movements in their agenda, discourse and actions had been one of the major sources of sharpening religious identities. An important role was played by sacred centers and reform movements in the construction of religious identities in India and continued in the construction of Hindu and Muslim nationalism and social process of maintaining religious boundaries. However, these boundaries were/are not unambiguous but contested and negotiated ones: these boundaries remained continuously negotiated, re-visioned and re-interpreted.

Due to their loss of political power in India, Muslims had continuously been demanding constitutional assurances and guarantees. The British were initially sceptical towards Muslim community especially after the mutiny but the government realized at the start of twentieth century that Muslims were lagging behind other religious communities in their socio-economic and political status. They were lacking in modern education too. Resultantly, the British government conceded the Muslim demands of constitutional guarantees in the shape of granting 'separate electorates' and giving 'provincial status' to the areas of their numerical strength. It was during this period that Muslim religious

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34 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 134.

identity translated itself into political identity that eventually took the form of Muslim nationalism on the basis of which a separate state for the majority Muslim areas was demanded. This demand gained currency especially after the start of election process in India because now Muslims could see clearly that they would be outnumbered by Hindus in the legislatures.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the politics of All India Muslim League and its campaign for establishing a separate country for the Muslims of North-west India gained momentum after using religious symbolism. This religious nationalism and the popular appeal that it received was the result of previous work done by socio-religious reform movements in the Punjab. These movements formed social psychology of communal consciousness. Communalism was fanned further by socio-political parties such as the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam and the Khaksars. The Muslim League was late entrant in the Punjab surprisingly got unprecedented public acclaim and many notable Muslim leaders, who had been associated with the consociational politics of Unionists, changed their loyalties and joined the All India Muslim League. The leaders took this decision on rational basis because of communal realities; all the major religious communities of Punjab—Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs—encamped themselves in religious groups on the basis of communal identities. The occurrence of unprecedented massacre in Punjab, at the eve of partition, was but a violent expression of construction of communal identities which were being increasingly sharpened and crystallized by the communal organizations. This crystallization was done through massive use of printing press for publishing religious tracts, pamphlets and polemical books, carrying out conversion activities, establishing exclusive schools and orphanages on communal lines. The partition related communal violence further flourished communalism and religious nationalism in independent states of India and Pakistan.