

Communal Life in the Market Towns of Jhelum Canal Colony

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Abstract

This article, based on revealing new sources found in the Deputy Commissioner record office Sargodha, explains the communal life in the newly established market towns of Jhelum Canal Colony. Communal organisations championed the interests of their respective communities and competed for resources. Representative politics and element of election was introduced late in Punjab as compared to the other parts of India. In the market towns of the colony, Hindus benefited the most from the new economic opportunities and given their wealth and education they were better equipped to establish their majority in the urban representative institutions. They used their newly acquired political influence to further their community interest often at the expense of other communities. This explains why communalism took hold earlier in urban areas as compared to the rural areas.

Introduction

Punjab was of crucial strategic significance for the Raj. It guarded the possible Russian invasion of Indo-Gangetic plain from the north-west as well as provided military manpower when it became home of the colonial Indian Army in the 1880s. In the late nineteenth century, it became the breadbasket of India owing to the development of nine canal

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colonies. In 1880s the British actively pursued a programme of canal colonisation to tap its abundant land and water resources. In this regard they constructed nine canal projects which led to the establishment of nine canal colonies. They selected grantees from the existing agricultural tribes from the heavily congested central districts as well as from the north-western districts of the Punjab. These colonies became the pace setter of the agricultural development. The aim was to relieve the population pressure on central congested districts and settle the grantees of best agricultural type to boost agricultural production. Canal colonisation accompanied the development of market towns, telegraph, and rail and road networks.¹

Jhelum Canal was opened in 1901 and the Jhelum Canal Colony was settled between 1902 and 1906. In addition to the establishment of 337 colony villages (locally known as *chaks*) new market towns were planned and developed along with the establishment of the colony. To harness the ensuing prosperity of the colony it was imperative to have these centres within the colony at locations most suitable for the transportation of the agricultural produce. Sargodha, Bhulwal and Phularwan, therefore, were established on the Jech Doab Railway line, the construction of which coincided with the establishment of the colony.² Since Sargodha was geographically located in

1 For colonial rule in Punjab see, Ian Talbot, Shinder Thandi, eds. *People on the Move, Punjabi Colonial and Post-Colonial Migration*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988). Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana, The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon, 1996). Ian Talbot, 'The Punjab under Colonialism: Order and Transformation in British India', *Journal of Punjab Studies* 14, no. 1 (2007), Imran Ali, *Punjab under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988). David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988).

2 Railway line from Lala Musa to Malakwal was opened as early as 1886, which was later extended to Miani, Bhera, Khewra Salt Mines, and Khushab in 1887 and to Shershah in 1889. At Malakwal, there was big junction from where it was extended to Sargodha in 1903 and further to Shorkot Road in 1906. The latter branch was called Jech-Doab Branch of the North-Western Railway System and it connected the colony towns with Karachi through

the centre of the colony, it was therefore made the headquarters of the colony. In 1914, the district headquarter was shifted from Shahpur to Sargodha leaving a devastating impact on the former.

Communal Composition

The provincial level literature on colonial Punjab discusses the problem of communalism in big urban centres and highlights the riots that took place at Amritsar and Rawalpindi. However, it is silent regarding the new market towns that developed along the canal colonies. This article addresses this gap. The existing literature argues that the Hindu community, because of its affluence, education and better organisation, was in a better position to acquire political power through representative political institutions. Using the colonial apparatus of Municipal Committees they augmented their community interests mostly at the expense of weaker communities. Religious revivalism in the wake of Christian missionary activities and the vituperative attacks in the press representing the revivalist movements exacerbated communal tension in the urban Punjab. The rural areas remained disinfected from communal antagonism because the British had nurtured a system of political control which encouraged inter-communal cooperation in the countryside. The British established alliances with local landlords across the religious spectrum who were drawn closer because of common agriculturist ideology epitomised in the Land Alienation Act of 1900.³

Shahpur district had 80 per cent Muslim population whereas the Hindus were less than 12 per cent. However, as an unintended consequence of the colonial rule the Hindu commercial classes benefitted the most out of economic transformation. With the establishment of market towns and following the movement of trade, they migrated to these towns in greater numbers. They established new businesses

Khanewal and Lodhran. *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918), 49 & 237.

3 For more details, see Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*.

and by purchasing residential and commercial property established their proprietary dominance, and had become majority in all the new market towns (See Table No. 1).

Table No. 1
Religious Profile of the Market Towns (1921)

Town	Hindus	Muslims	Sikhs	Christians
Sargodha	8,189	6,967	2,168	403
Bhulwal	1,907	1,715	431	29
Phularwan	1,094	762	68	2
Silanwali	976	791	419	19

Source: *Census of India, 1921 Vol. XV Part II Tables* (Lahore: Civil & Military Gazette Press, 1922), p. 25.

Sargodha's population comprised Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians.⁴ The Sargodha Municipality was established in 1914. However, before the establishment of the Committee different communities were relying on their respective communal bodies to advance their community interests. Gradually the element of election was introduced to Municipal Committees. The Punjab Government in 1918, for example, made it clear to the Lahore Municipal Committee that it was 'not averse to municipality choosing its own non-official president.'⁵ In 1920, elections were introduced to Sargodha Municipal Committee, which came to be dominated by the Hindus, who freely built their religious places but ignored the interests of the Sikhs and Muslims. The Deputy Commissioners often had to intervene in order to maintain some semblance of communal balance, which we shall discuss later.

4 There were just 91 Christians in the whole district in 1901, which rose to 8,616 in 1911, however this was not through conversion rather through immigration. The majority of them had come from Sialkot. Although there were no exclusive settlements as the majority of them i.e. 7,778 were settled in Sargodha *Tehsil* as against 787 in Bhera, 38 in Khushab, and 13 in Shahpur. The Anglicans were ministered to by the Chaplain of Jhelum and at Shahpur there was St. Andrews Anglican Church. The American Presbyterian Mission had a Church at Bhera but in that town the mission's influence was more manifested through its Female Hospital. The mission also had a hospital for women at Sargodha. For details see *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918).

5 *Civil and Military Gazette* (Lahore), 27 March 1918.

All the three main communities, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, had their respective representative bodies, based at Sargodha, which worked for the benefit of their respective communities. Muslim interests for example were looked after by Anjuman-i-Islamia and those of Hindus by Sanatan Dharam Yovak Sabha. Almost seventy per cent of the Hindu population worshiped and followed the teachings of Siri Ram Chandra Jee, which we shall discuss later in detail. Like Anjuman-i-Islamia, Sanatan Dharam Yovak Sabha was a registered welfare body. The Sikhs were divided into two groups i.e. the Akalis and the Namdharis. The Akalis' interests were looked after by Managing Committee of Khalsa High School Sargodha. The Akalis were the most vociferous and dominating group amongst the Sikhs in the colony *chaks* as well as Sargodha town. They had established their *gurdwara* and *dharamshala* in Block No. 3 of Sargodha town in the formative days of the colony.

The Namdharis were considered as low caste and non-orthodox Sikhs because of their specific set of beliefs about the Guru Garanth Sahib.⁶ On the other hand the Akalis were considered as the mainstream Sikhs and they looked down upon the Namdharis in the town and in the *chaks*. That is why the tensions between the two groups increased and the Namdharis put forward a demand to establish their separate *gurdwara* in the town. However, this did not lead to communal conflagration in the city. Nevertheless an element of struggle and competition was quite visible as the three main communities wanted to establish their respective educational institutions and places of worship. The colony towns were not, of course, unique in this respect.

The Akalis and Namdhari Sikhs

The Sikh settlers had played a very important role in the success of the Jhelum Canal Colony and therefore, they had a very important communal position in the town of Sargodha.

6 Many Namdharis tended to work as artisans, carpenters, black smiths etc. Namdharis had their own spiritual leaders like Baba Dyal. Moreover, they did not believe in Garanth Sahib as the last Guru and thereby did not believe in the sole authority of Garanth Sahib.

Many *chaks* on the Southern Branch of the Jhelum Canal were solely inhabited by the Sikh settlers and these *chaks* were locally called *sikhan de chak* (the *chaks* of Sikhs). A large number of these grants were held by the retired commissioned and non-commissioned Sikh officers, a factor that made the Sikhs a very progressive and forward looking agricultural community. Their vision was broadened by the military service and they realised the importance of education. The Akali Sikhs felt the need to establish an educational institution as early as 1911 when they established an Anglo Vernacular Primary School for boys in Sargodha. In 1913 the school was raised to middle level.⁷ It started in a rented building and a dire need was felt to house it in a proper building and to provide it with a hostel and a playground. It was required more so because the managing committee of the school wanted to raise its status to the level of a high school. As a makeshift arrangement it was moved from Block No. 14 and housed in the *dharamshala* building in Block No.3.⁸ The manager of the school Narain Singh approached the district authorities to get a piece of land free of cost.⁹ There were already two high schools in the district, one at Bhera and the other at Faruka. Moreover, the District Board High School was sanctioned for Sargodha. The high school at Faruka was already run by the Sikhs. The provincial government was not prepared to allot the land free of cost.¹⁰ Regarding this issue the managing committee of the school called upon the Deputy Commissioner in the form of a deputation in 1916 and extolled the services of Sikhs in

7 A copy of the remarks made by the Inspector of Schools of Rawalpindi Division on his visit of Inspection on the October 23, 1914 to the Khalsa Anglo Vernacular Middle School Sargodha, in File K/II/68, Deputy Commissioner Record Office Sargodha [Henceforth DCRO].

8 The Managing Committee Khalsa High School to The Deputy Commissioner nd, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

9 Narain Singh to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District, 20 March 1914, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

10 From The Hon'ble Mr. J. P. Thompson, I.C.S. Revenue Secretary to the Government Punjab, to the Senior Secretary to the Financial Commissioners Punjab, March 17, 1915, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

the First World War and in the Jhelum Canal Colony.¹¹ They also demanded representation on the Municipal Committee in a proportion higher to their numerical strength in the district.

The district administration was in predicament as the city was already in a cramped position and by allotting land east of the town, as demanded by the Sikhs, would have left no space for extension. The military connection of the Sikhs community would not warrant any refusal either. The Deputy Commissioner reported on 9 August 1917 that the demand from the Sikhs community was getting stronger day by day.¹² The Akalis wanted the grant of land on the same conditions on which government land was provided for the Islamia High School at Shahpur. The school occupied the government building comprising *tehsil* (an administrative subdivision of a district) offices, *Munsif's* (session) court and the police lines. These buildings were vacated by the district government as the district headquarter was moved to Sargodha. The Deputy Commissioner remarked that

The case of the Islamia High School at Shahpur differs most markedly from the case of the Khalsa High School at Sargodha. Since the headquarters of the district was removed, Shahpur has become a half deserted place where land is of little value; and it is difficult to find a use for numerous Government buildings. The Islamia High School there holds 30 acres of land on a nominal rent of Rs. 100/- per annum on a 30 years lease.¹³

Islamia High School was established by the efforts and financial support of Mubariz Khan Tiwana. He was one of the chief collaborators of the Shahpur district and was quite influential in the district. He convinced the district administration about the requirement of a school and the

11 Managing Committee Khalsa School to B.T. Gibson, Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur July 26, 1916, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

12 B.T. Gibson, Deputy Commissioner to Lt. Colonel F. Popham Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, 9 August 1917, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

13 The Deputy Commissioner further emphasized that 'That school, moreover, is the only Islamia High School in the district, whereas there are four Khalsa High Schools in the district' DC, Shahpur District, to The under Secretary to Government, Punjab, December 26, 1922, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

O'Brien Islamia High School was established at Shahpur town in 1916. It was named after the Deputy Commissioner, Major A. J. O'Brien, who sanctioned the school.¹⁴ Mubariz Khan Tiwana was inspired by the Aligarh movement of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan and was annually contributing one *lakh* (one *lakh* is equal to hundred thousand) to Aligarh College. For his educational services in the Shahpur District he was locally known as 'Sir Sayed' of the district. In addition to his inspiration from Ali Garh movement, Muabriz Khan was also influenced by the educational activities of Arya Samaj in the district in general and his efforts to establish a school at Shahpur can be seen as a result of communal competition, as Muslim generally lagged behind in education in the district. However, the Arya High School¹⁵ at Shahpur was built in 1919 after the establishment of Islamia High School.

The Sikh community strongly felt it discriminatory when in 1918 the Provincial Government denied them any free grant of land.¹⁶ The Managing Committee of Khalsa High School demanded that if they were not allowed a free grant of land then at least the price of land should be charged according to the average rate prevailing at the time when they originally made a request in 1914. Moreover, the rate

14 One hall of the School was named Mubariz Hall. After the death of Mubariz Khan Tiwana in 1923 his brother Mumtaz Khan Tiwana took keen interest in the development of the School. In 1929, it was taken over by the government and was raised to the intermediate level. In 1932m, graduation classes were started. In 1934, it was visited by the Governor of Punjab, Jeffery De Montmorency, and was renamed De Montmorency College Shahpur. In 1946, it was moved to Sargodha partially due to the efforts of the Hindus of Sargodha whose children could not travel to Shahpur to receive education and partially because facilities at Sargodha were better. For more details, see Sayed Sajad Shirazi and Shaikh Ahmed Riaz-ul-Huda, *Rood-e-Rawan: Tarikh Government College Sargodha* (Sargodha: Government College Sargodha, 1997).

15 The formal name of the School was Bhai Ram Kishan Gurmat High School and its foundation stone was laid in 1919 by Shiriman Mahant Hira Singh. L. Thakardas Kumhar had provided funds for the construction of some blocks in the memory of his late father L Ram Narain. The author has seen the marble plates mounted in the wall of the school.

16 Revenue Secretary to Government, Punjab to the Junior Secretary to the Financial Commissioner, Punjab, April 2, 1918, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

should be similar to the government waste land when it was allotted as factory sites, worship places and other corporate uses and not as shop sites or house sites.¹⁷

On December 20, 1920 the Punjab Government communicated through the Director Public Instructions that it was prepared to grant the land on the half market value but the government would retain the property rights.¹⁸ The Sikh community could hold it as long as it continued to use the land as a School 'on principles consistent with loyalty to the government.'¹⁹ In response to this offer the Akalis stated that the 'present offer makes a very unfavourable discrimination between the case of the Khalsa High School Sargodha as compared with that of the Islamia High School at Shahpur in the same district.'²⁰

The Akalis were not prepared to accept a site on these conditions. On the other hand the district administration was not ready to give them land at the price suggested by the provincial government. For district authorities the most pressing matter was the cramped position of the city. The Deputy Commissioner wrote to the provincial government stating that:

Sargodha is growing town and will probably grow more. It is penned in and good building sites are scarce and valuable. Moreover, if a valuable site – worth potentially Rs.50,000 an acre – were given to the Khalsa High School for a much lower sum, other communal schools would at once demand the same favour to be shown them. The Khalsa School is, as a matter of fact the best in Sargodha, but even so I would not be prepared to suggest the sale outright to them of any site.²¹

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- 17 Secretary, Khalsa High School, Sargodha to Inspector of Schools, Rawalpindi Division, April 2, 1921, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.
 - 18 Revenue Secretary to Government, Punjab, to the Director of Public Instructions, Punjab, December 20, 1920, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.
 - 19 Revenue Secretary to Government, Punjab, to the Director of Public Instructions, Punjab, December 20, 1920, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.
 - 20 Copy of a letter from the Honorary Secretary, Khalsa High School, Sargodha to the Inspector of Schools, Rawalpindi Division, April 25, 1921, in File No. K II 68, DCRO, Sargodha.
 - 21 Deputy Commissioner, C.M.G. Ogilvie to The Home Secretary to Government, Punjab, 10 February 1923, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

The Akalis were more orthodox in their outlook and were obstinate and stubborn in their demands. It was the time when Gurdwara reform movement was at its peak and Shirimani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akalis were causing political agitation in the province. Akali Jathas were marching to free their Gurdwaras from the 'corrupt' Mahants. Akali movement, in fact, had become nuisance for the British administration. In the wake of prevailing political situation in the province Akali's demands in the district were seen with mistrust and suspicion. This was one of the reasons that the district administration was very apprehensive about granting their demands. The Deputy Commissioner stated that:

I would strongly deprecate the granting of any site to the Khalsa High School until its committee make up its mind more definitely about its attitude towards Government. During the last year or so, that Committee has been professing itself somewhat doubtful whether it wished to take any aid from Government. On the last occasion when I saw the Secretary he was very friendly and pleasant; but just about that time he was communicating a very violent letter to the press.²²

On the other hand the Namdharis claimed to lead a simple and peaceful life and were not interested in any political agitation. They complained that 'our aloofness bring us all the trouble.'²³ Whenever they would come to Sargodha to pay land revenue or for the inspection of their mares, especially by the night train, they found it difficult to get any accommodation as the Akalis would not let them stay in their *gurdwara* and *dharamshala*. However, it was not only the Namdharis of *chaks* who suffered. Those living in the town also received bad treatment from the Akalis, who used to wear black turbans to differentiate themselves from the other Sikh sects. They complained to the district authorities about

22 Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to the Under Secretary to Govt., Punjab, Lahore. January 26, 1922, in File K/II/68, DCRO Sargodha.

23 Petition by Sikhs from various Chaks submitted to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District 12 April 1924, in File No. K II 85, DCRO Sargodha.

their maltreatment at the hands of the Akalis in the following manner:

We the Namdhari Sikhs are feeling great inconvenience without our own *gurdwara* because the other sect of Sikhs known as Akalis are very hostile to us for various reasons. As we do not subscribe to the demands raised by the Akali Sikhs, the latter do not allow us to take part in the religious demonstrations in their *gurdwara*. Consequently our sect of Namdhari Sikhs both local and Mofussil have no place of worship where to offer our prayers. We, therefore, beg the favour of your kindly allotting us a piece of land to enable us to build a *gurdwara* of our own to avoid causes of friction and further quarrels which crop up from time to time amongst the two main sects of Akali and Namdhari Sikhs.²⁴

The Namdhari Sikhs, therefore, applied for four *kanals* (a measure of land equal to 0.125 of an acre) of land to establish their own *gurdwara*. There was a concession on any land to be allotted for religious purposes in the town. According to which, the maximum of two *kanals* for Rs. 500 per *kanal* or half the market value, whichever was the lower price, could be allotted as religious site. In this way the Namdharis had to pay the full market value of any land in excess of two *kanals*. Therefore they changed their mind and wanted only two *kanals* to establish their *gurdwara* and *dharamshala*.²⁵ The Punjab Government on November 12, 1924 sanctioned the sale of the plot of two *kanals* in Block No. 23, which was yet to be developed.²⁶ The Namdharis of Sargodha and the surrounding villages were represented by Suba Hari Singh a Sikh Jat resident of Sargodha who signed the deed of conveyance on their behalf on February 23, 1925. This shows that the Namdharis acted prudently, and peacefully won their demand. This also saved them from the maltreatment at the hands of Akalis who had failed to realise their dream of getting a plot for their school.

24 Harnam Singh to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District June 18, 1924, in File No. K II 85, DCRO Sargodha.

25 Report submitted by the Colony Assistant, June 21, 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

26 H.J. Pearson Deputy Secretary to Govt. of Punjab. Development Department to the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, November 12, 1924, in File No. K II 85, DCRO Sargodha.

The Hindus

The Hindus, in wealth and business terms, were far ahead of other communities in all the market towns of the colony. For example, the applicants for the cotton factories to be erected at Sargodha primarily came from Hindu groups who seized the new economic opportunities which came up with canal colonisation. In the villages, it was the Hindu shopkeeper who provided credit to the farmer and the land owner. However, in the market towns his counterpart worked under the nomenclature of banker and commission agent and provided financial as well as trade facilities to foreign and local trading firms. Many Hindus who became rich moved from the countryside to the new towns. They purchased properties in Sargodha and other towns and accumulated a lot of wealth from their new businesses, which they wanted to invest in the most lucrative cotton ginning business in the market towns.

The cotton industry and the trade in agricultural commodities were practically under the control of Hindus. The market economy of the colony towns saw the emergence of a new class of bankers and commission agents which was tantamount to a disguised social mobility. This was, in fact, a province-wide phenomenon. It was, therefore, not only the local bankers and commission agents wanted to invest their capital in the new cotton industry of the town, but bankers from cities as far away as Lahore and Multan also sent their letters and applications to the colonization officer showing their desire to establish cotton factories at Sargodha. The Hindus in the market towns constituted a wealthy community and later we will see that they used their wealth and education to acquire political influence.

Like the Sikhs, the Hindus were also allotted a religious site in the new Block No. 23 of Sargodha town. It was not a coincidence that when Punjab Government sanctioned the site for the Namdharis' *gurdwara* on November 12, 1924, it also sanctioned the sale of two *Kanals* of land to the disciples of Siri Ram Chandra Jee for a temple in the

proposed Block No. 22.²⁷ The sale of the sites for religious purposes in the new blocks was, in fact, beneficial for the district administration as it would ensure the success of the new blocks. The colony assistant, who investigated and recommended both these cases, extolled the benefits of the sale of religious sites in the new blocks in the following words:

The allotment would prove beneficial to the interests of Government as such like buildings, where general public would move freely, would enhance the valuation of the un-allotted and unsanctioned land of Block 19. I have already submitted in my reports for the allotment of land for such purposes to Namdhari Sikhs, Jai Krishan Sadhus and Sanatan Dharm Girl School in the vicinity that if such like buildings are allowed to be built there it would add to the security of Block 18 and 19.²⁸

Table No. 2
Hindu Sects in the Shahpur District according
to the Census of 1911

Name of the Sect	No of Persons	Total Hindu Population (%)
Sanatan Dharam	63790	94
Arya Samaj	2205	3
Ramdasia	1062	2

Source: *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918), p. 119

In the Shahpur district there were mainly three sects of Hindus, which are shown in Table No. 2. The Sanatanists were in a majority in the district and same was true for the town of Sargodha. The Arya Hindus comprised all castes of Hindus and they adhered to the Hindu revivalist movement started by Dayananda Saraswati of Gujrat.²⁹ In the district they mainly lived in the towns where they formed small societies and established meeting houses and educational institutions of their own, which had a tremendous effect on

27 H.J. Pearson Deputy Secretary to Govt. of Punjab, Development Department to the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, November 12, 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

28 Report submitted by the Colony Assistant, May 26, 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

29 *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918), 119

keeping them united as a body for the dissemination of the tenants of their revivalist philosophy. Besides the Mission Hall, Mission Reading Room, the Jamia Mosque and the *gurdwara*, the list of famous private buildings at Sargodha also included the Arya Samaj building.³⁰ At Shahpur they established their High School just at a distance of one mile from the Khalsa High School. The Hindu philanthropists from the neighbouring villages especially Kandan and the Hindu contractors from Bakharbar contributed to the construction of different buildings of the school.³¹ However, their High School at the town of Bhera was more famous and was as popular as the Government High School Bhera. Table No. 3 shows number of literates among different communities. Talbot maintains that Hindu population was attracted to Arya Samaj for the defence of their economic and political power as well as for its educational activities. Its greatest support came from urban Hindu populations of Amritsar, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi.³² This local level study not only reinforces this but also gives empirical depth to it by demonstrating that Samaj made great headway in towns of Shahpur as well.

As far as the Ramdasias were concerned they lacked numerical strength at Sargodha. They were normally scattered in the villages except one big village of their own, Chakramdas, which was situated on the left bank of the river Jhelum at a distance of 15 miles from Bhera. Ramdasias, in fact, were low caste Sikhs who were at different times seen as members of both the Sikh and Hindu traditions.³³

30 *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918), 297.

31 The author has seen the engraved marble plates mounted in the walls of the Arya School at Shahpur.

32 Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 71.

33 In modern-day social hierarchies they belong to Dalit category.

Table No. 3
Religious Breakdown of Literates in the Shahpur District

Religion	Number of Literates	% of respective population
Hindus	1,143	3.5
Sikhs	1,179	8.0
Muslims	176	0.06
Christians	97	2.6

Source: *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore: 1918), p. 311.

Practically all the orthodox Hindus were included in the Sanatan Dharam. However, almost seventy per cent of the Sanatanists Hindus in Sargodha were the followers of Siri Ram Chandra Jee. His followers, therefore, represented a very powerful sub-sect within the Sanatanists.³⁴ Due to their numerical strength the sect began to assert its demands. The Sanatanists had already established a *mandir* in Sargodha in Block No. 19 but there was no such temple for the followers of Siri Ram Chandra Jee. The followers of Siri Ram Chandra Jee found an influential leader in the person of a famous commission agent and banker Vishnu Dat. He was primarily a well-to-do businessman and had a number of shops in Sargodha town and Silanwali *mandi* (market). He paid Rs 320 as income tax and also had allotted to him a garden site where he constructed a well for public utility for which he was given a *sanad*. He had purchased three shops in Block No. 19 in 1924 but the government did not sanction the sale of the shops. He did not want to lose the site and this diverted him to become the leader of the Sanatanists. In this way his commercial and religious aspirations overlapped and he wrote a letter to the Deputy Commissioner pleading that at the shop sites he originally wanted to build a temple of Siri Ram Chandra Jee; the foundation stone of which was to be laid by the Deputy Commissioner. Moreover, he

34 Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District to the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division September 18, 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

wanted to construct a well for public welfare there.³⁵ Later on, in this regard, he submitted a petition that was signed by 252 Hindus of Sargodha. The petition was also supported by the President of the Municipal Committee, Rai Bahadur Brij Lal Puri, and the Vice-President, Suraj Balram Sawhny, who were themselves followers of Siri Ram Chandra Jee.³⁶ The district administration however, promised to allot only 2 *kanals* of land for the temple, which was sanctioned by the Punjab Government and handed over to the Sanatanists on December 4, 1924.³⁷

The Sanatanists were very well organised. Their main welfare organisation Sanatan Dharam Yovak Sabha comprised 13 elected members and two nominated members. Elections were held every year. Office bearers were selected from amongst the members, who were mostly retired government employees and influential local merchants. The following table shows the list of office bearers and their socio-economic background.

Table No. 4.8
The Office Bearers of the Sanatan Dharam
Yovak Sabha in 1930-31

Designation	Office Bearer' Name	Socio-economic Background
President	Seth Jiwan Dass	Retired Head Clerk, Political Agent Office Kurram
Vice-President	L. Dewan Chand	Commission Agent and Banker, Sargodha
Manger	L. Chaudhary Ram	Cloth Merchant, Sargodha
Secretary	L. Gokal Chand	Record Keeper, English Office of the Deputy Commissioner Sargodha

35 Vishnu Dat Banker of Sargodha to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District, April 2, 1924, in File No. K II 73.

36 See the petition submitted by Vishnu Dat Banker at Sargodha to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District 14 August 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

37 See the indenture signed on 4 December 1924, in File No. K II 73, DCRO Sargodha.

Source: Manager Sanatam Dharam Girls School Sargodha to the Secretary Municipal Committee Sargodha, August 30, 1932, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

It is interesting to note that existing provincial level studies usually see the newly enriched Hindu commercial classes as being members of the Arya Samaj rather than of the orthodox Sanatanist tradition.³⁸ In case of Sargodha these were the Sanatanists who owned the majority of the businesses. Most of their buildings in the town were constructed between 1916 and 1930 but the society was registered as late as March 23, 1928 under the provisions of the Societies Act XXI of 1860.³⁹ The society had three important sub-committees – the Gaushala Committee that was looking after the sacred cows in the *gaushala*, the Sanatan Dharam Girls Middle School managing committee and the *mandir* (temple) committee that was looking after the Sanatan Dharam temple in Block No. 19. Both the Sanatan Dharam *Mandir* and the Sanatan Dharam Girls Middle School were constructed without the approval of the district administration.

In fact in 1915, an area of four *kanals* and four *marlas* (measurement of land, 1/400th of an acre) was sold to the Hindu community in Block No. 19 for building a *talab* (pond). As per rules the Sanatanists could not alter the conditions of the sale without the prior permission of the Deputy Commissioner. However, they gradually reduced the size of the tank and between 1925 and 1928 they converted it into a temple, a courtyard, a girls' school and a veranda. The Deputy Commissioner ordered an enquiry and the Sanatan Dharam Sabha failed to satisfy the district administration with regard to breach of conditions. However, it was condoned by the Commissioner Rawalpindi in 1928 when the Municipal Committee, which was dominated by the Sanatanists, sided with the Sanatan Dharam Sabha. The

38 Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharam: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2006).

39 Manager Sanatam Dharam Girls School Sargodha to the Secretary Municipal Committee Sargodha, August 30, 1932, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

Sabha decided to raise the girls' school to a middle level in 1929.⁴⁰ In addition to this they wanted to extend the building further as well as to get hold of the land lying vacant near the school to use it as a playground.⁴¹ The managing committee applied to the inspector of schools for the recognition of the school.⁴² The Sanatanists were certainly getting strong support from the Municipal Committee as is evident from the recommendation of the Deputy Commissioner who wrote to the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division that:

The site seems to have been kept back from sale probably as a common place for the block. As is the case with all open spaces in the city, the particular site is owned by Government and is in the management of the local Municipal Committee... The Municipal Committee of Sargodha as a custodian of all Government vacant sites has agreed to lease this site to the Sanatan Dharam Yovak Sabha for the purposes of the girls' school playground for a period of 5 years only on payment of a monthly rent of Rs. 3/- vide the enclosed copy of its resolution No: 199 dated 19th July 1930. The rent offered is certainly too low as compared with the extent of the area involved but in view of the fact that the site in question is to be used by a girls' school for a playground, which should be encouraged, I would not raise any objection to the proposal of the Municipal Committee to whose funds the rent is to be credited.⁴³

The Sanatanists were emboldened by these favours and the Gaushala Committee similarly put forward a demand for a piece of land for a period of twenty years on rent. This land was lying on the South of the *gaushala*, where the committee wanted to build a shed for keeping cows. The Municipal Committee sanctioned the lease for five years on a nominal rent of Rs 20 per annum. As a matter of principle, leasing land for religious purposes was quite a normal practice and land was allotted on similar terms to the Hindu

40 Manager Sanatan Dharam Girl School to the Colony Officer, March 28, 1929, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

41 See the recommendation by F.D. Salik Assistant Inspector Western Circle at Lyallpur dated January 23, 1929, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

42 See note by Siri Ram, Sahni Assistant District Inspector Sargodha, dated December 13, 1927, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

43 H.D Bhanot, Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District to Shaikh Asghar Ali, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, December 17, 1930, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

community of Lyallpur (Faisalabad) to erect a *gaushala* there.⁴⁴ The Municipal Committee at Sargodha, which had a Sanatanist majority, looked after the interests of Hindus only and ignored the requirements of other communities.

The Hindu community in 1918 made a request to the district administration that the existing place for *Gharebhan*⁴⁵ was small and they should be allotted more land near the existing site. In Hindu religion *Gharebhan* was an important ritual which had to be performed at the death of a person. Hymns were sung and the ceremony was performed. The females would return after bathing and washing their clothes. The existing place that comprised just one *marla* was very small. Moreover, there was no shelter, for which there was a desperate need during the hot summer. Popham Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, after the approval of Municipal Committee, was ready to give them a piece of one *kanal* free of cost.⁴⁶ However, the demand was for half an acre, which the Punjab government was not ready to grant free of cost. So the Hindu community purchased half an acre at half the market value in 1918.⁴⁷

Another religious site was demanded by the disciples of Sri Krishan Ji. About two hundred Hindus of the town were followers of the teachings of Sri Krishan and had no separate place of worship. They applied through their Mahant Anant Raj to purchase two *kanals* of land to build a

44 See Municipal Committee Resolution No: 238 dated July 29, 1930, in File No. K II 212 DCRO Sargodha.

45 *Ghara* means an earthen vessel and *bhan* means to break, thus the term *Gharebhan* referred to the place where the last earthen vessel of the deceased was broken.

46 Lt. Col. F. Popham Young, Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, to Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District, January 2, 1918 in File No. K II 54, DCRO, Sargodha. Also see copy of Resolution No. 37 Dated 6th April 1918 passed at an Ordinary Meeting of Municipal Committee, Sargodha held on April 6, 1918, in the Municipal Office, in File No. K II 54, DCRO, Sargodha.

47 Financial Secretary to Government of Punjab to the Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, June 28, 1918, in File No. K II 54, DCRO Sargodha.

temple to be known as Jai Krishan Sadhu temple.⁴⁸ The site was sold to them on December 22, 1924.⁴⁹

At the other towns too, various communities, with the increase in population and growing requirements, wanted to establish new religious institutions and extend the existing ones. For example, at Phullarwan a site was allotted to the Hindu community for Thakar Dawara in 1912. By 1925 they felt that it was not sufficient and they applied for its extension. Similarly when the Hindu community of Bhulwal requested in 1928 to extend the existing cremation ground, the Punjab government granted them six and a half *kanal* free of charge.⁵⁰ At Sillanwali, the Sikhs, because of increase in their population, put forward a similar demand. In 1927 they requested for the allotment of 12 and a half *kanals* of land in the proposed new block No. 4 for the construction of second *gurdwara* as the one they already had, comprising 7 *kanals*, was inadequate for catering the needs of the community.⁵¹ They were granted the site on January 7, 1929.⁵²

The Muslims

The Muslims at Sargodha constituted a weaker community as the city was politically and economically dominated by the Hindus. They were met with discriminatory treatment by the Municipal Committee. When the Municipal Committee was constituted in 1914 the members were appointed by official designation as well as by nominations. The Deputy Commissioner was the president of the Committee. Only in his absence the Committee meetings

48 Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, September 18, 1924, in File No. K II 54, DCRO, Sargodha.

49 See the deed of conveyance, in File No. K II 54, DCRO, Sargodha.

50 R. H. Senior Secretary to the Financial Commissioner and Deputy Secretary to Government, Punjab, Development Department, in File No. K II 18, DCRO, Sargodha.

51 A. C. Macnabb, Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to D. J. Boyd, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, in File No. K II 117, DCRO Sargodha.

52 See the deed of conveyance, in File No. K II 117, DCRO Sargodha.

were presided by other members.⁵³ There were three official members. From amongst the eight nominated members only three were Muslims. This composition continued until 1920, when elections were introduced. Brij Lal Puri⁵⁴, a Sanatanist Hindu, was the first person to be elected as the president of the Committee in 1921 and he continuously occupied this position for the next fourteen years. There were high property qualification requirements for members of the Municipal Committee and this meant that only rich Hindu commercial class could get majority in the Committee. The candidates for the elections of the Committee were required to show a monthly income of Rs.150 and should have been paying an annual income tax or should have been residing for one year in a privately owned property worth Rs.10,000.⁵⁵ The Committee was, therefore, dominated by the Hindus.

Talbot, in his provincial level study⁵⁶, has discussed that many Hindus did not use their powers intelligently in the Municipal Committees of the province and Deputy Commissioners had to intervene occasionally to safeguard the interests of the other communities. Such an attitude of the Hindu community leaders contributed to Muslim separatist politics. It is due to this misuse of power, as we have seen in the case of Sargohda, that the Hindus constructed most of their buildings in 1920s without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner. Moreover, they neglected the interests of the other communities especially the Muslims. In the previous section it was noted that given

53 This practice was also common in other districts. For example the Amritsar Municipal Committee was presided by a Hindu member R. B. Gopal Das in the absence of DC. F. H. Burton, *Civil and Military Gazette* (Lahore), March 28, 1918.

54 Feroz Khan Noon who worked in the Sargodha Bar Council as an advocate writes, as a colleague, about Brij Lal Puri 'Brij Lal had a loud voice and used to interrupt other lawyers whom he could out shout. His clients thought he was wonderful. He had started his practice in 1885 and was going strong in 1920.' Feroz Khan Noon, *From Memory* (Islamabad: The National Book Foundation, 1993), 80-90.

55 *Rozana Paisa Ikhbar* (Lahore) September 24, 1912.

56 See Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*.

their privileged position in the urban areas the Hindu community managed to safeguard their community interests easily. However, the Muslims had to struggle hard. For example, when Anjuman-i-Islamia constructed a small bathing place on a half *marla* of land lying vacant near the Muslim graveyard for bathing the corpses of Muslim strangers who died in Sargodha, the Municipal Committee raised a great alarm. It ordered the Special Colony Assistant in 1926 to remove the bathroom causing great tension between it and the Muslim community.⁵⁷ However, the matter was sorted out in 1928 when the Deputy Commissioner intervened and favoured the point of view of the Muslims. He wrote to the Commissioner Rawalpindi that '...since a bathing place of this nature is a real necessity and the present being adjacent to the graveyard is most appropriate, I would recommend that it might be allowed to the Anjuman-i-Islamia Sargodha, free of cost, for the specific purpose for which it is being used.'⁵⁸

In fact, the Muslim community had made an application to the Municipal Committee and after it 'had failed to build such a bathroom'⁵⁹ the Anjuman acted on its own. However, on the favourable recommendation of the Deputy Commissioner, the Punjab Government granted this site to the Anjuman-i-Islamia free of charge in 1928.⁶⁰

The Anjuman met with a similar sort of opposition from the Municipal Committee in 1923 when it wanted to build a mosque in Block No. 18. The Muslim residents of Blocks 11, 13 and 14 had applied to the district administration as early as in 1916 for the purchase of a piece of land for building the mosque, 'the need of which' according to the Deputy

57 Secretary Municipal Committee, Sargodha to the Special Colony Assistant, Sargodha, November 12, 1926, in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

58 H.D. Bhanot, DC, Shahpur District to the Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, November 7, 1928 in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

59 H.D. Bhanot, DC, Shahpur District to the Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, November 7, 1928 in File No. K II 201, DCRO Sargodha.

60 Financial Commissioner to A.C. MacNabb, Senior Secretary to the Financial Commissioner and Dept. Sec. to Govt. of Punjab, Development Department, December 19, 1928, in File No. K II 175, DCRO Sargodha.

Commissioner 'was clearly recognised.'⁶¹ The plot was sold to the Muslim community after it was sanctioned by the Punjab Government on June 18, 1917. When M. Abdul Rahim, the Honorary Secretary of the Anjuman, submitted an application with the Municipal Committee to start work on the mosque, the President of the Committee, Rai Bahadur Lala Brij Lal Puri, pretended ignorance about any such sale of land to the Muslim community. The matter was resolved by the intervention of the Deputy Commissioner who confirmed the sale of the plot to the Muslim community.

It was because of this timely intervention of the district administration that no major communal conflagration, like the riots of Amritsar or Rawalpindi, did take place. Market towns were newly established urban centres with small population sizes and the local press had not much developed yet. Communal antagonism, therefore, had not grown to the extent that was witnessed in other big cities. This local level study, however, reveals that element of communal competition was quite visible in them and the Sargodha Municipal Committee had become tool of community politics as elsewhere in Punjab. This study not only presents a grassroots picture of communal life but also gives empirical depth to our existing understanding of communalism in Punjab.

Conclusion

Colonial rule had a differential impact on the communities. The Hindu commercial classes were the major beneficiaries. They had economic and social influence but traditionally lacked political power. The element of election, however, had put them in an advantageous position. Given their property ownership, education and better organisation they were more qualified to vote. This enabled the wealthy Hindu minority of the district to achieve political power. The Sargodha Municipal Committee, therefore, became a vehicle for community politics. The Hindus dominated the government jobs in the Shahpur district. After politics became representative they dominated the Committee, which was

61 Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to the Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division, October 12, 1916, in File No. K II 54, DCRO, Sargodha.

tantamount to Hindu 'Raj' in a Muslim majority district. While Robinson looks at issues like cow protection in the UP, this study demonstrates the Hindu community as advancing its interests through temple building by using its newly acquired political power. Sanatanists had a dominant position in Sargodha. In the town they got away with getting whatever they wanted for their community. To begin with they acted deviously to construct their temple and a girl's school by converting a portion of their water tank into buildings. Later on they threw the weight of the Municipal Committee behind their interests which caused the district authorities to buckle.

As a contrast we saw that the Akalis failed to get a place for their school despite the fact that they had a strong connection with the army and had played a considerable role as agriculturists to make the colony a success story. The Akalis were not oblivious to the fact that they numbered less in the Sargodha town and that was why they demanded a representation on the Municipal Committee higher than their numerical strength commensurate with their valuable services. Secondly, they were more upfront and they demanded a bigger piece of land, which the district administration could not afford to grant in the view of the cramped position of the city. Moreover, disunity among the Sikhs undermined the community's demands. The maltreatment of the Namdharis at the hands of the Akalis had put the former in an advantageous position as they got their demand of having a separate *gurdwara* fulfilled, which also mitigated against the demands of the Akalis. This certainly suggests that the Akalis had lost their earlier position of strength, which they enjoyed during the formative days of the colony, when they established their *gurdwara* and *dharamshala* in Block No. 3.

With the industrial and commercial growth of the market towns, the Hindus gradually assumed a powerful position. They were in minority in the district but in the towns they became in majority. This was because of the relocation of economic influence in the district. Following the movement of trade they had migrated to the market towns in greater numbers, where they availed themselves of new economic opportunities. They benefitted the most from the transformation brought about by the British. When the dictates of the market economy and their commercial propensity combined they were bound to become the most powerful community in the market towns of the Jhelum Canal Colony.