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Rural Politics in Transition: Okara Tehsil During Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT

This study examines changing political processes of Okara Tehsil in colonial era, with an emphasis on interplay of British rule, socio-economic developments and development of new political forms in rural Punjab. This paper has explored the reasons why traditional rural politics in colonial times experienced great changes during British rule through a keen analysis of colonial land revenue systems, administrative policies and role of local elites. The introduction of centralized administration and indirect government systems transformed the equilibrium in power distribution and this gave rise to emergence of a new group of intermediaries, who were aligned to colonial interests. Through the study of archives, settlement reports and secondary literature, this study contextualizes the political development of Okara, as part of wider context of British colonial policies in Punjab.

Keywords: Muslim League, Montgomery District, Colonial Punjab, Shrine Politics, Biradari, Elections 1937–1946, Pakistan Movement

1. Introduction:

In South Asian colonial period, a new era in the rural areas such as Okara Tehsil in Montgomery District of Punjab started. The traditional power structure founded on the kinship, caste and agrarian leadership structure was re-organized by the British rule to suit the purposes of the colonial government. The British rule of rural Punjab by indirect rule and co-optation of local elites left an indelible mark on political and social landscape of Okara Tehsil. In this paper, an analysis has been conducted to examine the political change in the Okara Tehsil, under the British colonial rule, and how land revenue policies, influence of rural elites and development of colonial government structures have worked out. It is through these dynamics that we can be able to trace the origins of modern patterns of politics and socio-economic organisation in rural Pakistan.

2. Okara Tehsil History:

Before annexation by British, administration in Okara Tehsil was decentralized and based on traditional systems of authority. Agrarian communities were controlled by local chieftains and village elders who resolved conflicts and allocated land. Kinship ties, tribal affiliations and land ownership were major determinants of power. British annexed Punjab in 1849 after which Okara Tehsil fell under British rule. Montgomery district which comprised Okara was important in terms of its fertile lands and strategic position, which made it a center of administrative and revenue policies by British. The colonial powers wanted to change form of governance in the region to be able to collect revenue and political stability.

2.1. Colonial Change of Okara Tehsil (Montgomery District):

The history of Okara Tehsil, which was on the ground of former Montgomery District, was changed by annexation of Punjab following Second Anglo-Sikh War. Before British rule, the area was marked by lack of state incursion, subsistence farming and use of traditional governance systems. Nevertheless, colonialism came with a set of interrelated changes-administrative, agrarian, legal and socio-political which essentially changed institution framework and socio-economic structure of the region. These were not just administrative

reforms but a more general imperial policy that sought to consolidate political power, exploit region more through revenue collection and to bring the region to world of global capitalism. Colonial administrative restructuring of Okara was change of flexible, kinship-based, power systems to a strict, hierarchical and territorial bureaucracy. British established a multi-level system of administration with province, division, district, tehsil and village, thus guaranteeing direct rule to even most distant rural regions. At district level, Administration was centralized with office of Deputy Commissioner, who performed functions of executive, judicial and fiscal power with subordinated positions of Assistant Commissioners and Tehsildars in charge of sub-district administration and revenue collection. This centralisation of power in offices of bureaucrats was a great contrast to pre-colonial systems where power was mediated by the local chiefs and customary institutions. Furthermore, British focus on documentation via surveys, census and revenue books had turned governance into a rationalized and data-based venture. Such bureaucratic standardization, as Metcalf and Metcalf (2012) maintain, enabled colonial state to infiltrate rural society and essentially substituting the autonomy that was exercised locally with centralized power.

The land revenue settlements were closely associated with administrative restructuring and they were the center of colonial economic policy of Okara. British brought about systematic land surveys and methods of land measurements, and finally came up with preparation of detailed Record-of-Rights (jamabandi) that legally established ownership, patterns of tenancy and cultivation. In contrast to pre-colonial systems, where property rights were frequently overlapping and customary, colonial state attempted to establish fixed and individual property rights. This revolution led to commodification of land where land could be purchased, sold and mortgaged in a new market economy that was emerging (Baden-Powell, 1892). Meanwhile, British depended much on local intermediaries, including zamindars and lambardars, with responsibility of collecting revenues and local governments. This policy was not only guaranteeing effective revenue extraction but also consolidation of landlordism as it enhanced position of rural elites. According to Ali (1988), colonial land revenue system in Punjab generated a group of strong agrarian elites whose power and wealth would continue to dominate even into the post-colonial era.

In Okara Tehsil, most radical element of colonial intervention was the creation of canal colonization, which is what radically changed ecological and economical nature of the region. Before British occupation, a good portion of Okara was semi arid wasteland, with minimal agricultural output, as they relied on rainfall. Development of massive canal systems within Bari Doab area allowed massive irrigation that turned the land that was previously not cultivable into arable agricultural land. This infrastructural planning was coupled with formation of planned settlements, called chaks, where land was systematically released to privileged groups, such as military personnel, peasants of over-populated districts and loyal landlords. This not only raised agricultural productivity, but also gave rise to a new type of rural settlement, geometric village layout and formal landholdings. Also, irrigation via canals was conducive to transition to commercial agriculture with more cash crops like wheat, cotton and sugarcane being cultivated. Ali (1988) claims that canal colonization in Punjab was an economic and political project, aimed at improving productivity and at same time strengthening state control over land and people.

British government replaced the native systems of justice such as jirgas and panchayats with written constitution based on British jurisdiction. Civil and criminal courts were established at district and tehsil levels, equipped with trained officials, and official procedures of evidences and documentation. This shift in legal formalism was to create consistency and predictability

in the manner justice is delivered. Nevertheless, it also led to marginalization of customary law and local dispute resolution machinery, which was once highlight of rural society. The establishment of a modern police force was another factor that strengthened the state power further by ensuring law and order and control of political activity. Although these institutional transformations made administrative system more efficient, it also provided feeling of alienation to populations in area as new legal system seemed to be too sophisticated and unattainable. And lastly, colonial transformation of Okara was a planned process of political and social engineering, which was directed towards gaining the allegiance of local populations and providing them with long-term stability. British put in place policies that were biased towards some groups, especially those who were categorized as being agricultural tribes, giving them land, titles and administrative roles. This form of selective patronizing was an appropriate establishment of loyal rural elite that served as a medium between colonial state and rest of population. Instruments of political control, land grants and honors strengthened existing hierarchies and established new ones in accordance with colonial interests. The establishment of limited local self-government institutions like District Boards and Municipal Committees, offered a controlled arena of political participation. Colonialists closely monitored these institutions and they were largely employed to rationalize British rule and not to promote real democratic leadership. Talbot (1988) states that these policies enabled the stability of colonial state because they co-opted elites in the colonies and minimized opposition, making it easy to administer the colonies. In conclusion, Okara Tehsil colonial transformation was a multi-layered and complex process that restructured the administrative, economic, legal and social structures of the area. Bureaucratic reorganization, land revenue settlements, colonization of canals, codification of laws and political engineering were some of the highly centralized and controlled form of government introduced by British. Though these reforms brought about development of agriculture and administration efficiency, they also created social inequalities, were more dominated by elite and suppressed local interests to imperial interests. Legacies of these colonial interventions are reflected in current tendencies in land tenure, political authority and institutional growth in Okara and the Punjab region as a whole.

3. The Land Revenue System and Its Political Implications:

British also brought in a systematic land revenue policy, which taxed according to the agricultural productivity. This policy changed customary landholding arrangements to favor large landowners who were able to meet revenue requirements. In Okara, establishment of canal colonies further intensified importance of land ownership, as fertile lands became a source of wealth and power. The colonial system of revenue also formed a new breed of rural elites such as large landlords and zamindars who were rewarded with political and economic privileges under the promise of allegiance to British. These elites were like intermediaries, as they helped in collecting taxes and keeping order in Okara Tehsil. They were allowed to collaborate with British administration to secure their dominance in the local politics at the expense of the small farmers and tenants.

3.1. British Indigenous rural collaborators in Okara Tehsil:

The post annexation of Punjab by British witnessed that administrators produced indigenous rural collaborators in district. Role of British allies could not be overlooked during War of Independence as far as District Montgomery was concerned. British administrators after understanding role of their loyalty devised a scheme of increasing their control by local elites at district level. Since the 1860s, British were always trying to find allies among rural population of the region, they tried their best to award land, titles and state patronage to all

those who supported British during the War of Independence. British interests were fulfilled by Punjab Government making a decision to employ the energy of native aristocracy of the region¹ which was in British favor at the time of need. Titles like Nawab, Khan Bahadur etc were conferred upon local influential people and brought them in administrative functionaries by making them Zeildars, Tehsildars, Lumberdars and Sufedposh etc. Immediately after War of 1857, British started conferring gifts, titles and jagirs, who performed their loyalty towards British during War of 1857. To ensure law and order in district, British engaged rural intermediaries by entrusting them with role in bureaucracy. By doing so, they felt the need to integrate leaders of agriculturist tribes with their executive powers. To include rural leaders into administration system, British introduced post that was semi-official, which was called zaildar. He was made responsible for two main objectives; firstly, he had to supervise as a headman of circle of villages and to implement government policy in that circle. Secondly, he had to safeguard interests of colonial state. This mediatory role was much valued. It was awarded both as a reward of loyalty and as an indicator of local authority.² British administration bestowed some of its functionaries' roles after War of Independence (1857), which was considered a watchdog of British interests. Those rural intermediaries were given responsibilities like zaildar, lambardars, *Rai Sahab*, members of district boards, divisional and provincial darbaris. The relationship between rural allies and British was further enhanced through awarding more titles, gifts and share in the administration which contributed to forming three tiers of relationship. This three-tier relationship could be divided into local administrative functionaries like zaildars, lamberdars, tehsildars etc., divisional darbaries and provincial darbaris.

The aftermath of Indian Independence of 1857 marked a decisive turning point in the consolidation of British authority in Punjab, particularly in the canal colony regions of Montgomery District (present-day Okara District). The colonial state in Okara Tehsil systematically rewarded those individuals and families who proved their loyalty during the revolt by making them a part of the local administrative structures and providing them land, offices and social status. According to an early administrative report, grants of land and official headships were a reward to the fidelity of some of the local chiefs and landholders in the disturbances of 1857. It was a process that formed the basis of a lasting nexus of ownership of land, political powers and loyalty to the colonial rulers. Some of the beneficiaries of this policy included, a grandson of Dhara Singh Nakai, Teja Singh who was made lambardar of Gashkauri in Okara Tehsil. Such intermediaries were an important element in colonial state. According to the Montgomery District Gazetteer, lambardar is the centre of village government, which is at once the source of revenue and the upholder of order in his estate. These appointments were an effort by British to incorporate loyal families into the agrarian system of canal colony villages (chaks), so that the local government was kept close to the colonial interests.

Likewise, Jive Khan was a significant figure who also actively helped the British to crush insurgent factors in the district in 1857. His fidelity was much prized, and it is said that he was even conferred the title of Son of the Queen. Rewarding such allegiance that existed in the colonial practice was not unique but systematic. As one of the settlement officers said, they who had been on the side of the Government in the hour of danger were not only secured, but elevated to the position of influence in their respective localities. The rewards were not limited to individual rewards but also to family consolidation of power. His descendants

¹ Talbot, Punjab and Raj 1849-1947, p.49, 1988

² Talbot, Khizr Tiwana the Punjab Unionist Party and Partition of India, p.53-54, 1996)

remained in powerful posts in the administrative apparatus of the district after his death. Mian Chiragh Din was a member of the family of Jive Khan and was Senior Vice-Chairman of the District Board, his brothers, Mian Nur Muhammad and Abdul Wahab, being elected to the Board as well. It is interesting to note that Mian Abdul Wahab was also a Zaildar, which was termed in colonial sources as a position, having following description: The chief intermediary between tahsil authorities and cultivating body. This continuity depicts how the allegiance to the colonial state was turned into hereditary political capital, strengthening the elite rule in rural Okara.

The same trend can be observed in the example of Murad Shah of Daula Bala, the place of which was named a hotbed of rebel activity. Murad Shah identified himself with the British interests at a very vital time by supplying intelligence to British on the plans of insurgents. His family, in turn, received land and office. It is specifically stated in Settlement Report of Montgomery District, that grants of revenue-free (*muafis*) were very often granted to those whose services to State were of a political or strategic character.³ His grandson Sher Shah was thus made *lambardar*, and was conceded *muafidari*, which united economic with socio-political power.

The example of Hukam Singh, a son of Machhi Singh Arora of Kaliana also demonstrates the process of assimilation of loyalist families into colonial administrative structure in the form of office of Zaildar. The remaining eminence of his family is seen in the appointment of his grandson, Sardar Datar Singh, as Junior Vice-Chairman of District Board. These were just some of developments in a wider colonial approach. According to David Gilmartin, British in Punjab established a group of rural magnates whose powers were based on their power to control land and their loyalty to the Raj.⁴ These families acted as pillars of colonial rule in area that was experiencing rapid agrarian change, and provided stability. These families were to play a leading role in the restructuring of the agrarian society in the context of Okara change under canal colony system, especially after the construction of Lower Bari Doab Canal. The canal colonization did not only boost agriculture productivity but it also redefined social relations. As Imran Ali observes, "canal colonies were designed as instruments of social engineering, producing a hierarchy of landed interests tied directly to colonial state."⁵ The distribution of land, therefore, was not merely an economic act but a political one, ensuring that those who controlled land also upheld colonial authority. It is clearly showing a clear triadic relationship as land functioned as the material basis of power, allocated through grants, *muafis*, and canal colony settlements; Loyalty, especially during crisis of 1857, served as the principal criterion for access to such resources; Colonial authority institutionalized this relationship by embedding loyal families within administrative and agrarian structures. This structure is succinctly captured in a colonial observation: "stability of district depends less upon direct administration than upon influence exercised by loyal landed families."⁶ As a result, Okara Tehsil developed into a stratified agrarian community whereby a small group of families-controlled land, political office and social power. This colonial system continued to have a strong influence long after independence, with its influence on patterns of rural rule, relations between classes and patterns of marginality in the region continuing into the present.

³ *Settlement Report of Montgomery District* (1916), p. 148.

⁴ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (1988), p. 58.

⁵ Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism* (1988), p. 98.

⁶ *Montgomery District Gazetteer* (1915), p. 76.

The colonial administrative system of Montgomery District (modern Okara District) was a well-organized hierarchy of intermediaries and Divisional Darbaris were an essential second tier between British administration and rural population. These intermediaries operated like channels of power, communication, revenue collection and political control in local level. They were not introduced into colonial structure accidentally or solely because of administration, but were conditional because of manifestations of loyalty to British state, especially in time of political crises like Anglo-Sikh Wars and Indian Rebellion of 1857. The patronage that colonial regime showed towards local elites, according to Ian Talbot, was directly linked to their behavior during times of turmoil, as he writes that patronage of colonial regime by local elites had to be complemented by a demonstration of political loyalty and much stress was put on consistency or betrayal that landowners had demonstrated during crises of Sikh Wars and Mutiny.⁷ In this connection, elite families which had developed closest relationships with British were predominantly those who had been supportive of colonial state at such times of turbulence.

Divisional Darbaris category in Montgomery District (in this context, it denotes a number of elites whose power rested on both their property and their loyalty). The others included Mian Chiragh Din, son of Mian Hussain Bakhsh, a member of Arain caste of Burj jiwe Khan of Okara Tehsil. His family was formally listed as having displayed conspicuous loyalty in events of 1857 thus gaining status in colonial hierarchy as a rather privileged family.⁸ This was not just recognition at a figurative level, it was translated into continued access to administrative power, and even social-political status. Along with these local notables, there are other records of Divisional Darbaris people who were assimilated into agrarian economy with aid of state. According to a government report: There are two other grantees in cattle farm of Divisional Darbaris, son of Chaudhri Bahadur Chand, Arora, who lives between Gogera and Okara, Chaudhri Dost Muhammad Khan, son of Chaudhri Jahangir Khan Wattu of Depalpur Tahsil of Multan District.⁹ This passage brings to the fore how privileges of economy, like grants of cattle farms, were being proffered to loyal intermediaries as a way to strengthen their material power foundation. These grants were intertwined with larger canal colonization and agricultural restructuring, especially after Lower Bari Doab Canal had been developed, turning an area into an agricultural land and making it fruitful. At the higher level than divisional, a third level of mediators, Provincial Darbaris, also developed within colonial state. These were integrated in provincial level assemblies and ritual establishments, allegedly to offer a local representation. They played however a relatively symbolic and minor part. They did not represent local interests, but were mostly consumed by executing orders of colonial state, its responsibilities being to maintain political stability. According to Talbot, administration of land, chiefs of tribes and landowners were connected with administrative system through making them honorary magistrates of darbar.¹⁰ The presence of such elites in provincial darbars had various objectives. It gave prestige to loyal families, introduced them even further into colonial administrative machine and guaranteed their further loyalty. Concurrently, it curtailed ability to express themselves politically independently, since these

⁷ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), p. 49.

⁸ *Montgomery District Gazetteer* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, 1915), pp. 72–75.

⁹ Government of Punjab, *Report on the Political and Administrative Elites of Montgomery District* (Lahore: Government Press, 1935), p. 109.

¹⁰ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (Revised ed., 1996), p. 54.

posts did not come with real representative power. They instead strengthened a hierarchical structure whereby power trickled down through the colonial state, through chosen intermediaries. The functions of Divisional and Provincial Darbaris in Okara Tehsil when combined together demonstrate larger rationale behind British colonial rule in Punjab. Through selective empowerment of families who were loyal landowners by making them have administrative posts, economic grants and ceremonial recognition; colonial state built a system of intermediaries whose position was based on a mixture of land ownership, political loyalty and institutional inculcation. This system not only promoted effective control over government, but also institutionalized an elite-based rural system, the consequences of which were to persist in the post-colonial era in local politics and social relations.

3.2. British nexus with Local Religious elites:

British people practiced rural religion. British people did not embrace religion at first as they wanted to adopt their state system, and then they employed religion to connect state power with rural supporters. British developed shrine relations to alleviate rural natives. Annexation was cherished by many Punjabi sajjada nishins. There was still local power even after Mughals and Sikhs declined. Claiming independence of Mughals, Sajjada nishin of middle of 18th century engaged in struggle against local chieftains of tribes and Sikhs becoming a political leader of a large land. Religion ruled society. District holy shrines were on subsidies. Afterwards, the custodians of the shrines were honored. Were given landed gentry such as bigger district landlords. The appointment of thousands of Sajjada Nishins as Zaildars, as honorary magistrates and as members of district boards increased British assistance to district religious leaders. The British servants Sajjada nishins employed religion to uplift their people. Their religious position within their districts caused Sajjada Nishins to be good state administrators. Southwestern Punjab grants comprised of Montgomery, Muzaffargarh and Multan. David Gilmartin estimated that a third of powerful Muslim families in these districts were granted landed gentry. The canal colonies were also recipients of these grants with Zaildars and progressive landlords taking control of land productivity. Under the 20th century Alienation Land Act, British authorities directly administered a range of Sajjada Nishins. This Act safeguarded the British political assimilation of Saiyid and Querishi agrarian tribes. The Punjabi large estates were secured by the state at the time of economic difficulty. The Court of Wards safeguarded many large estate dynasties which dominated their districts in politics. The Court of Wards would administer the estate and help rural and religious intermediaries in case of emergency. Once problems were solved, court officials would transfer estates to deputy commissioners. This government not permitted sepulchre or dissolution of estates because of mismanagement or financial difficulties. Ward estates were controlled by Sajjada nishins due to financial distress. The form enabled British to take over Punjab without rural Punjabi religious opposition. Islamic leadership was frequently a part of British rule, which softened resistance. District politics was dominated by high-profile personalities and feudal lords who became British patrons and hensemen. Muslim interests were also influenced by the decisions of landlords of districts, which demanded district authorities. The politics was held by rural landlords and urban All India Muslim League members insisted on establishment of a Muslim state which became popular in district politics after 15 years. The division of agriculturist-non-agriculturist was institutionalized in the form of political representation by British administrators.

3.3. Post-1919 Reforms Scenario in Okara:

The 1919 reforms aimed to simplify politics in Punjab region and to a certain degree politics at provincial level and further consolidated regional narrow-mindedness, adversely impacting

national movements. Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were telegraphed to consolidate 70% of provincial legislative assembly seats and, while entailing reforms, expanded divide among rural and urban populace. Several groups, mainly pro-British, received right to vote at expense of general public. Following same pattern, Unionist Party was formed in 1923 with full support of British and landowners. Although collaboration was both ways there, Congress Party in Montgomery District started to become more Hindu, with Muslim representation almost entirely in background. Anjuman-i-Islam became religiously oriented, while until 1923 Congress party included both communities in the district. Local political activity in district remained insignificant prior to first Punjab Legislative Council elections in 1924, when Nawab Sadat Ali Khan Khari and Pir Muhammad Hussain challenged each other as the two largest landowners in district. Khari, an ineffective candidate, lost to Pir Muhammad Hussain, an adept public speaker and backed candidate of local settlers. The elections created a council of predominantly you...landed people, and there were 35 seats for Muslim representatives. Muslim and Sikh landlords all, with support of allied imperialists, joined the political coalition of a party, Unionist Party, for promotion of agriculture and intra-communal peace. This coalition represented rural Muslims' ideational constituency and other Muslims of feudal lords and politicians, even those with relative contradiction and disjunction among them. The Punjab Legislative Council member, Pir Mohammad Hussain, in 1925 advocated for more Muslims to be appointed judges and as a result, a Civil Judge was dismissed in a case of misconduct. While he remained largely unrecognized, he was of considerable worth to Montgomery District. Punjab Government included Pirs of landed gentry dominating Punjab, which created a bridge between imperialistic feudal lords of Punjab and leaders of landed community, Unionist Party. As a religious figure, Hussain had no religious concerns; however, he was in support of Unionist views and Land Alienation Act, which was to advantage of farming tribes. Hussain and other local leaders were British in perspective, which lessened demands for a Muslim viewpoint.

3.4. Role of Mian Abdul Haq in Formation of Montgomery Muslim League:

The rise of institutionalized Muslim politics in Montgomery District (now Okara District) in the late colonial period should be seen in context of larger issue of elite mediation, colonial patronage and the development of nationalist consciousness. Mian Abdul Haq can be regarded as an influential leader of institutionalization of All India Muslim League at the district level in this respect. He was instrumental in formation of Montgomery Muslim League, where he was the President and later on General Secretary thus helping to define Muslim political identity in a region that was traditionally inhabited by agrarian elites who were allied to colonial state. Mian Abdul Haq was born in 1908 in Burj Jive Khan at a very prestigious Arain family in structure of colonial administration. He was son of Noor Muhammad and nephew of Mian Chiragh Din, a long serving member of District Council who is said to have served almost thirty years continuously. The family was also prominent, as title of Khan Bahadur was bestowed on his uncle--a title commonly granted by British to loyal intermediaries as a reward of their services. This background positions Mian Abdul Haq as a representative of a family that met nexus of land and loyalty that characterized the workings of local elites in colonial Punjab, where elite drew power not only through land ownership but also through their closeness. In spite of these relations, political career of Mian Abdul Haq can be defined as gradual transition to support of colonial regime to mobilization of Muslims in politics. His schooling in University of Cambridge where he met Choudhry Rahmat Ali, the coiner of term Pakistan, was a shaping influence. He stayed in London after becoming a Barrister-at-Law and at this place; he was busy lobbying to ensure that the Muslims were recognized as a separate

political group. Such interaction indicates the increasing power of diasporic intellectual networks in the art of influencing the political dialogue of colonial subjects.¹¹ When Mian Abdul Haq came back to India, he tried to put these ideas into tangible institutional projects in Montgomery district. His initiatives involved enhancement of local business and creation of Islamia High School in Montgomery, which was meant to offer educational opportunities to Muslim youth. Notably, he funded this project using his own land, a fact that highlights importance of landed elites in supporting development of community. These activities are in line with larger trends in late colonial Punjab, where education and economic empowerment were to be considered precondition of political empowerment. Meanwhile, Mian Abdul Haq used press to write socio-economic criticism. He pointed out economic problems that Muslims experienced in his articles in *Paisa Akhbar*, both as a result of structural inequities and internal failures. Colonial authorities did not fail to notice his critiques. Archival sources show that district authorities were highly surveilling of vernacular publications especially those which were seen as politically sensitive. According to administrative correspondence, publications which were computed to incite disaffection or criticism of Government policy were to be closely examined and the local notables counselled to check such tendencies in their families. It is in this regard that pressure was allegedly put on his uncle, Mian Chiragh Din, to reduce his activities. The family feud caused Mian Abdul Haq to grow alienated and ultimately deported out of his ancestral home- an event that demonstrates strains between colonial loyalty and new nationalist opposition amongst elite families. He later moved to Faisalabad (then Lyallpur) where he made a living by renting his own lands. This was the stage of his life which was in accord with a time of high political agitation in Punjab in 1930s. The politics were featured by emergence of various socio-political groups such as Khaksar Movement and *Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam*, as well as ongoing effect of Unionist Party. These factions usually acted concurrently, at one time in collaboration and at other times in rivalry thus making it hard to form a single political front of Muslims. In this divided set up, Muslim League leaders, such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, had a great problem in creating a support base among various social groups. As study of Punjab politics has demonstrated, plurality of political bodies in 1930s was an indication of diversity as well as disunity of provincial Muslim political life. The attempt of Mian Abdul Haq at the district level should be thus regarded as a wider fight to align the structures of local elite with new nationalistic ambitions. His career in analytical terms marks a turning point in political history of Okara/Montgomery, which was critical. Though he was born into a family, which was so much part of colonial hierarchy, he slowly identified with a movement which aimed at redefining Muslim identity and political representation. Education, journalism and party organization show that he was a pioneer of a new form of leadership- one that unified elite and ideological activity. Simultaneously, opposition that he faced both on part of colonial officials and his own family highlights boundaries of political change in a system that was still organized around land ownership and colonial patronage. Therefore, process of formation of Muslim League by Mian Abdul Haq in Montgomery District offers a motivating account of how local actors negotiated multifaceted intersections among colonial power, family demands and nationalistic politics, which led to progressive realignment of political forces in late colonial Punjab.

3.4. Political Developments in Tehsil from 1937-1944:

¹¹ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 120–125.

In elections of 1936-1937, decision to not take part in elections as a party was however made by Muslim League. This was because party knew that it was not as popular in district as Unionist party. To vote in elections, some of Muslim candidates in district applied to Provincial Muslim League to allow them to use name of their party. Moreover, there were also those who tried to secure a ticket with Unionist party but when they failed to do so, they went and ran independently or became members of Muslim League. Sultan Mehmood Hotina has written that Rana Abdul Hamid (Pakpattan Tehsil) was first nominated to get a Unionist ticket, but being refused he decided to become an election candidate of Muslim League.¹² District Administration preferred to select large landlords and support them officially so that they could become acceptable in community and be popular among common people. The move by landlords to join Unionist Party was informed by fact that they would get official support which would enhance their chances of winning the elections. In meantime, Unionist Party nominated candidates to 1936 elections who were large landlords in district. Malik Sikandar Hayat proposed *Ch. Jahangir Khan Rabaira*, who belonged to *Fathepur (Rabaira)* in Okara tehsil. He was a prominent landlord patronized by British and Unionist leader. He was given ticket from Unionist Party from Okara Tehsil. Muslim League did not officially participate but allowed individuals to contest elections. In contrast, Unionist candidates organized limited political activity.

District elections in 1936-37 pitted landlords. Even though public was politically awakened, only district taxpayers could vote. Muslim League allowed candidates in 1936-37 elections, but did not field them. League gave them party platform. Political awakening in Okara. Unionist candidates rarely held 100-person meetings. Political observers saw activity in Okara and Dipalpur. Montgomery District Unionists won big in 1936-37. No locals chose settlers. Local versus settler has always dominated District politics. Since locals were in majority, candidates could always win. Only the Unionist Party won 99 of 175 provincial seats in 1937. Muslim League and Congress only won 19 seats, proving that Muslim League failed to destabilize Unionist Party in rural areas in 1937, preventing it from benefiting from India's new state autonomy. District residents became politically active after 1936-37 elections. Political activity in Montgomery District increased a year after election. Political party workers promote their causes. Establishing District Muslim League. Unionist and Congress politics raged. Party meetings were more common in tehsils and districts. Electioneering was understood by many. Constituents visited their districts to resolve issues. 1936 elections sparked this political awakening. Unionist Party agrarian reforms in 1938 sought to reduce moneylender influence and increase party control in province. The district power structure showed that political personalities outweighed party manifestos in winning elections. League political support was nonexistent in rural areas. League needed to strengthen its base and possibly establish a rural base in villages for upcoming elections because villagers did not know League. From 1937 to 1940, Sikandar Hayat was Punjab's leader and a major political figure in India after Fazl-e-Hussain's death.

Mr. Jinnah's support for Jinnah-Sikandar Pact of October 1937 stemmed from the importance of Punjab's Muslim majority, remaining a province of support for Unionists. Jinnah's compromises weakened Muslim League and many historians and political analysts tried to interpret consequences of Jinnah-Sikandar agreement. Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, in her book, mentioned that we took rapprochement with Muslim League into consideration.¹³ Jinnah-

¹² Noraiz Shakoor, *History of Muslim Politics in Montgomery District 1907-1947*, P.39-40

¹³ Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, *Father and Daughter a Political Autobiography* (1971, Lahore), p.164-165

Sikandar Pact suggests that we became Unionists of Muslim League in Party. Zahid Chaudhary claimed Jinnah's leaning for an all-India Muslim union purposefully led to a loose agreement with conservative Punjabi landlords.¹⁴ Muhammad Wasim emphasized that it was with the help of Sikandar that Jinnah was able to develop a strong stance for Muslims of India.¹⁵ Although the agreement aimed to create a wider front of Muslims within province, it created a protracted conflict between two parties. The members of Muslim Unionist Party in Punjab created a deadlock in both provinces. In Jinnah, Azim Hussain, son of Faz-e-Hussain, criticized his father's political and ideological model, which advocated for Unionist Party, built on a non-communal basis, with urban economic viability and stability.¹⁶ Ashiq Batalwi claimed that Pact trapped the Muslim League as a branch of Unionist Party to transform and divided Muslims at the very moment when they were in dire need of a united front, to become a mass organization of Indian Muslims.¹⁷ David Gilmartin argued that Sikandar believed the Unionists would engage with League to fortify both Unionists' control over Punjab as well as consolidate Unionists and Muslims' position. Jinnah contested League's assertion of being the sole Muslim party from subcontinent as it failed to recognize a larger Muslim community.¹⁸ Ian Talbot considered it to be summary of Pact that League relinquished its position in All India politics. Jinnah was forced to politically persuade and accept subservience of League over Unionist Party. Despite diversity of political convictions, the Pact was a unification of two political ideologies, while Jinnah's League stood for provincial Muslim Unity. It was said by Batalwi, Joint Secretary of Muslim League under Allama Iqbal that Sikandar Hayat "neither fully heartily nor insincerely" affiliates with Muslim League. Hayat's Unionist Party failed to politically or economically counter Congress's efforts. Hindu Unionists joining Congress would lead to decline of Unionist Party. Unionist Party would legitimize its status as a political party when Muslim groups from provinces of Congress, namely Sindh, NWFP and Assam, would join Congress.

In 1938, provincial agri-agitations occurred. Lahore, Amritsar and Canal colony protests were organized by Punjab Kisan Committee. The Multan and Montgomery governments would always sell the land to highest bidder. These lands were divided by the tender holders and handed over to rent-paying cultivators who had grown in number since 1929 when cotton and wheat leases competed to get profits.¹⁹ In March 1938, Montgomery District Chak tenants asked Commissioner to reduce rents to back British reforms. Villagers formed committees. They went on strike after observing the payments of land leased by government. Nili Bar peasants obtained concessions they wanted by government. Montgomery and Multan Sikh as well as Hindu tenants engaged in combat over rights with landlords.²⁰ Punjab Kisan Committee (PKC) struggled to support the tenants of Montgomery and Multan village in January 1938. This party was a ruler in residents and tenants. Strike ended by government compliance. District provoked peasants to struggle with Brits. Times changed political consciousness towards factory workers. The leaders were mistreated by factory owners who were fought by unions and organizations. In August, Sutlej Cotton Mills, Okara workers went

¹⁴ Zahid Chaudhary, *Muslim Punjab ka Siyasi Irtiqa 1849-1947*, Vol.5 (Lahore, 1991), p. 222

¹⁵ Muhammad Waseem, *Politics and the State in Pakistan* (Islamabad, 2007), p.68

¹⁶ Saeed Ahmed Butt, *Colonial Montgomery During British Raj 1857-1947*

¹⁷ Trans. Ashiq Batalwi, *Iqbal K Aakhri Do Saal*, (), p.467

¹⁸ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, p.174-175

¹⁹ Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab (1926-47)*, (Lahore, ----), p.130-131

²⁰ Saeed Ahmed Butt, *Colonial Montgomery During British Raj 1857-1947*

on strike to protest victimization by the strike leader in July 1937. This aroused political consciousness.

The British concerns date back to 1939 before First World War. One of parties supported Britain. The majority of leaders of Unionist Party that had formed Punjab National War Front did not oppose British during its darkest moments without propaganda to tarnish image of Congress. Recruitment Bill was introduced by Sir Sikandar in Punjab Assembly. In an assembly speech, he vowed to give Punjab full cooperation in war even at expense of domestic lives. The death of Sikander Hayat enhanced better relations between Unionist-League. Unionist Party, which opposed Khizr Hayat Tiwana Punjabi rural British affiliates, alienated younger Punjabis, who favored Muslim League. Muslim League was assisted by rural support and political apathy of Congress. New politics demanded a new approach and League members who had been recruited to Unionist Party as opposing to political expansion. League leaders knew that they needed to reconcile with Muslim landlords in Punjab to operate. Sir Sikandar did not believe that League would have trouble in negotiating with the opposition of government and congress. He kept reiterating that both sides ought to collaborate and assist government. During wartime, Unionist Party was not a good representative of landlords. A provincial act in support of rural supporters against urban entrepreneurs such as Sikhs and Hindus raised concerns among the party leaders that it would interfere with its war effort. Unionists were too afraid to lose ground in such a precarious war, and thus they could not suggest such legislation. The Unionist Party links with urban business undermined rural strength. In March 1940, Linlithgow visited western Punjab, Montgomery, Multan, Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, Lyallpur and Shahpur, all in British loyalty and distributed money. Sikandar Hyat Khan joined National Defense Council because of his British loyalty.²¹ Lahore Resolution of 1940 was of great effect to District Montgomery residents. Mian Abdul Haq of Okara advocated Muslim independence in 1940 in Lahore Resolution. Mian Sahab in London initiated Planning of Cause, which resulted in Lahore Resolution. The unionists were starting to disown ideology that tied them to British imperialism. The failure of the July 1945 Simla Conference made British rural magnates understand that they would not be able to get to high office in future without collaboration with Muslim League, but not British. During weeks following Simla Conference, rural elite deserted Unionist Party in numbers because of this new awakening and not because of League reiterating Khizr as a foe to Islam. It depended on patronage and protection of landowners. In Punjab, where Unionist Party had strongholds, landlords such as Noons, Daultanas and Hayats, were henchmen of Unionist Party and formed a crippling blow to which Unionist Party could never fully recover.²² The case of league in support of Pakistan was based much on its recognition of demand of Muslims community to be fulfilled by a state of Pakistan and its reliance of an image of a community that would not only be good but essential to Punjabi Muslims.²³ In June 1944, native Muslim leaders were taught by Muhammad Mumtaz, Allah Yar and Nawab of Mamdot in Montgomery. Montgomery meeting of Provincial Muslim League on July 16, 1944. During these meetings, Unionist Ministry and Zamindara League were accused of never re-strategizing their policy of

²¹ Ajeet Javed, *Leftist Politics in Punjab* (India, 1988), p.157

²² Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics & Pakistan Movement Growth of Muslim League in North – West and North-East India 1937-47*, Oxford University Press, 1988), p.97

²³ David Gilmartin, *A Magnificent Gift: Muslim Nationalism & Election Process in Colonial Punjab* (Comparative Studies in Society & History Vol.40, Cambridge University Press, July 1998), p.421

creating Pakistan. League was revived in July 1944 with most of leading Unionist leaders joining League at Montgomery. Individuals began to speak out and shift fashions. They were popular as their rural penetration provided League strength and League accommodated them. Honest conversions, some individual at risk of individual peril, and instrument conversions as demands grew more and as power of League grew as the centre.²⁴

With support of prominent pirs in Punjab, Unionist Party won elections in 1937. In a bid to repeat 1936 Unionist victory, Muslim league established a Masheikh committee of religious personalities to enlist Sufi support. Muslim league resolved to make mosques their propaganda platform and started polling in Montgomery, Rawalpindi and Jhang. The employees in Montgomery district branch launched a small-scale enrollment drive and recruited two Annas of Muslim shopkeepers in the bazaar. On Friday prayers, a maulvi in one of the mosques encouraged Muslims to participate in Muslim League to fulfill the dream of Allama Iqbal that Pakistan was going to be. Muslim League urged Muslims to make first Friday and second Friday Youm-ul-Hajj and Youm-i-Dua to unite Muslims during Ramzan. The third program on Friday is not known. It also created a statement to be read during mosques after Friday prayers, which said that politics and religion can not be separated and to call on Muslims to march like an army and disarm. In April 1943, Muslim League requested Muslim India pirs to make a prayer and request their followers to give everything to a free and independent Muslim India. This was requested by Sajjada Nishins of different shrines since League was a large Muslim voice since Simla. Montgomery district canvassing and movement: League was so effective in Montgomery district, that big landlords became its advocates, and alleviated their fears. There were too many huge masses in the Sher Garh conducted by his brother Rais Sher Garh, Pir Syed Ashiq Hussain, Syed Mohammad Hussain (Sajjada Nishin Sher Garh) and Sahabzada Mohammad Abbas. There were three donors who donated a lot to League. The League was made successful because of the spiritual and temporal impact of Pirs on their numerous village followers. Fatwa was also issued by district Muslim league and Urs was also held to advance the Muslim cause of separate Pakistani state in Tehsil Okara. To involve students and women in politics, League formed student and women subcommittees. During his time, serving Muslim League, the members of Punjab Muslim Students Federation were asked to go to a village and evaluate its social problems to make villagers believe that Unionists were the problem and that they had a solution-Pakistan.

5.5. Political Developments in Okara tehsil during 1945-46 Elections:

The politics of Unionist Party were very problematic as far as Okara tehsil was concerned, since they could not get a proper and suitable candidate to compete in the elections which were to be held in 1945. All India Muslim League had discovered most popular and most appropriate candidate in person of Mian Abdul Haq.²⁵ For participation in elections of 1945-46, Main Abdul Haq sold half square of land situated between District Jail and District Civil Courts. Nonetheless, Unionist Party received formal assistance to pick candidate. Deputy Commissioner of Montgomery was hence assigned responsibility towards proper selection of candidacy in forthcoming elections. In his mind, he remembered that he would choose such person, who will counter influence and personality cult of Main Abdul Haq. He exerted great pressure on Rai Noor Mohammad Peroka to yield candidature on Unionist Party. Former MLA Mr. Jahangir wanted to contest with election on ticket of Unionist Party. Through this, politics of Unionist Party went into doldrums in tehsil, since one group in party began lobbying to get

²⁴ Ian Talbot, Provincial Politics and Pakistan Movement..., p.96

²⁵ Noraiz Shakoor, History of Muslim Politics in Montgomery District 1907-1947, p.60

Mr. Jahangir candidature, therefore party high command declared name of Mr. Jahangir its candidate in 1945 elections. Matters of Unionist Party became more complicated as Mr. Jahangir was rejected as candidature owing to grave charges upon him. It eroded support of Unionists in tehsil. He was again engaged, and Rai Noor Mohammad Peroka, Unionist Party in this area, accepted candidature which he offered. But he was promised the district administration as much assistance as there was possible.²⁶

In January 1945, leaders of Provincial Muslim leagues conducted five meetings in Montgomery district where speakers Nawab of Mamdot, Mian Mumtaz Daultana and Raja Ghazanfar Ali spoke. They had with them a lorry, equipped with a gas plant and a loud speaker. Three branches in village were possible to them and much of relative success in meetings was due to assistance of Communist workers. Provincial league leaders informed audience of British commitment of Indian freedom after war. They also clarified why Jinnah demanded they should have their own country of Pakistan since he wanted to evacuate Muslims to avoid domination of Hindus. Crowds of nearly 1000-3000 and a kitty of nearly Rs. 5500 was collected. They also denounced the funds raising by Unionists of poor Zamindars, since they would be used to fund Zamindara League. They also added blame to Unionist Party because it was purposely not educating children of backward Muslim peasants. The speakers of Leaguer also called on Muslims to participate in session of All India Muslim League that was going to be conducted at Lahore in April (1945). During a meeting, K.B. Ch. Nazir Ahmed indicated that Muslim league party in assembly had proposed improvement of salaries of Patwaris, police officers in province but this proposal was opposed by unionist Party. The speakers also remarked that Unionist Party got in way of Indian freedom. They further said that Muslim league would not just safeguard Muslims interest but will also safeguard the rights of other minorities such as Hindu and Sikhs etc in Pakistan. They also urged Muslims to compel MLAs of Montgomery to quit Unionist Party and join Muslim league that both Muslim league as well as congress was working towards the freedom of India.²⁷

The district administration was variously helpful in assisting candidate of Unionist Party in elections. They left a detailed and clear strategy on how they would win the voting masses to vote in favor of Unionist candidate. They employed the scoundrels and louts of tehsil, who had some kind of grudge and conflict with Mian Abdul Haq. Even entire local administration was as well ordered to assist Unionist candidate against leaguer candidate. Chrisma of Main Abdul Haq could not burnish unionist candidate. Mian Sahb was a most well-acquainted and superior debater of district. Unionist candidate began touring constituency with revenue officers and police. They began to pressurize landowners (Zaildars, Lambardars) and Unionist candidate backing of Muslim League anywhere they journeyed, Rai Noor Mohammad. Sardar Inder Sain P.C.S, Revenue Officer planned and monitored all political affairs. The tehsil government even began to arrest deadly Main Abdul Haq supporters. Similar to case of Omar Hayat, Member District Board, Omer, uncle of Nazar Mohammad Lashari, was apprehended, as he was closely associated and main supporters of Mian Abdul Haq in Okara tehsil. Police promised the accused right to release immediately upon promise to be of active service to Unionist candidate, but they were not fatted and remained true to their aim. Police maintained its action against followers of Main Abdul Haq. His uncle, Mian Abdul Wahab, was even arrested following an allegation on a falsely sworn application of sugar quota on marriages by allegation. He belonged to Board of district members, and was, as such, zaildar,

²⁶ Saeed Ahmed Butt, *Colonial Montgomery During British Raj 1857-1947*

²⁷ Riaz Ahmad, *Punjab Muslim League 1906-1947 Secret Police Abstracts*, pp.213

so he was now deprived of his zaildarship and given his weapons. Kanoongos and Patwaris of tehsil made voters lists of constituencies.

During League leader visits and student visits, the cause for Pakistan became so popular. Shaukat Hayat Khan, the head of League gave a speech on 12 August 1944 at Okara in one such Muslim League meeting, primarily attended by Hindus and Sikhs. In his speech, Shaukat Hayat, who had arrived at railway station, was greeted by local Muslim League workers including ten volunteers of National Guards who wore green bush shirts, white shalwars and green NG armllets and hoped that a compromise might be achieved between Gandhi and Jinnah.²⁸ Likewise, involvement of students in model of election campaigning of League helped it win election in tehsil. In his book, Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza stated that on 13 December 1945, a batch of 15 students patrolled in favor of League candidate, Mian Abdul Haque, covered 40 villages making contact with 30000 of villagers and felt League had every chance of success.²⁹ People were on fire. In meantime, Ahmed Saeed Karmani, Propaganda Secretary Punjab Students Federation, made an appeal with a message to Muslim youth telling them to take an exceptional way of canvassing elections. Similar to its report, Islamia College Election Office remarked that several groups of students (counting over hundreds), managed to complete their duties in Okara and Depalpur constituencies. Due to League campaign, the league candidate gave a worst defeat Unionist candidate in the 1945-46 elections.

Despite all of this, Abdul Haq's unionist candidate lost to lack of adequate public support and balanced charisma and debates. The local administration was noted for political arrests and intimidation of Abdul Haq's voters to gain lists in support of Unionist candidate and overall lack of support for Unionist candidate. With zeal of students and influential leadership of Shaukat Hayat Khan, Muslim League made great strides in Okara. Hayat Khan addressed the crowd on August 12, 1944 and inspired them. Student organizations were instrumental in campaigning of League's candidate. They organized themselves in recruitment drive over large distances and gave speeches to thousands of villagers. Such campaigning energy was at great variance to Unionist Party, which was at a standstill. As a result of all-round enthusiasm of League, 1945-46 elections were won plainly and yet the Unionist candidate suffered a historic disgrace in Okara Tehsil as *Mian Abdul Haq* of Muslim League gained 87.9 percent of the total votes in Okara constituency. From Okara, *Mian Abdul Haq* gave a crushing defeat to Unionist candidate *Mian Chirag Din* with majority votes."³⁰

Conclusion:

The Okara Tehsil, which experienced a change in rural politics, is a manifestation of a systematic reorganization of power and society in British colonial period. The colonial state reaffirmed its control after Indian Rebellion of 1857 by rewarding loyal families with land, titles and administrative offices and so developed a new group of intermediaries including lambardars, zaildars and darbaris. The construction of Lower Bari Doab Canal further altered geography and economy of the region, allowing to organize planned canal colony villages (chaks) which were productive and at same time under control of their political power. This process entrenched a hierarchical rural order in which landownership and political authority were closely intertwined. But at beginning of twentieth century, this structure started to undergo a slight transformation as new political forces began to emerge. The print culture and electoral politics were used by educated elites and reformist elements, including All India

²⁸ Riaz Ahmad, Punjab Muslim League 1906-1947 Secret Police Abstracts, pp.189-190

²⁹ Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, Punjab Muslim Students Federation 1937-1947 (NIHCR Islamabad, 1991), p.312

³⁰ Saeed Ahmed Butt, Colonial Montgomery During British Raj 1857-1947

Muslim League, to mobilize more citizens. Although traditional elites were still dominant, these developments brought about new types of political consciousness and participation. In this way, Okara rural politics transformed into a hybrid, where old colonial structures intertwined with new nationalistic visions, which still has a significant influence on socio-political life of the area.

SCRR