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Understanding Electoral Behavior in 1937 and 1946 Elections: A Case Study of Pakpattan Tehsil, Montgomery District (1936–1947)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the change of the electoral behavior of Pakpattan Tehsil, the Montgomery District under British rule in 1937 and 1946 in provincial elections. It holds that there was a structural transformation in rural Punjab of agrarian-based patronage politics to ideologically mediated by religious mobilization, which resulted in the concentration of backing of Muslim League in 1946. Drawing on colonial district gazetteers, settlement reports, canal colony records, intelligence summaries, and Punjab Legislative Assembly documents, the study demonstrates how electoral behavior was shaped by overlapping systems of landownership, shrine authority, and kinship organization. The shrine of Baba Farid in Pakpattan and associated Sajjada Nashin networks are analyzed as key intermediaries in political mobilization, particularly in the 1946 elections. The article also adds to the South Asian history of politics by providing a micro-historical account of how the structures of colonial governance and local socio-religious institutions worked together to give rise to the circumstances that led to the rise of Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakpattan; Montgomery, District; Electoral Behavior; Unionist Party; Muslim League; Sajjada Nashin; Canal Colonies; Punjab Politics; Colonial Elections; Shrine Politics, Elections

1. Introduction: Colonial Elections and Rural Political Order:

The establishment of provincial elections under Government of India Act 1935 was a fundamental shift in colonial rule in British India. However, in rural Punjab, particularly in Montgomery District, electoral politics did not immediately translate into democratic participation in the modern sense. Rather, elections were an extension of existing socio-political hierarchies based on land ownership, kinship and religious power. Pakpattan Tehsil can offer a very important example of these dynamics. *Pakpattan*, being located in the canal colony area of the Montgomery District, was typified by a dual organization of power: on the one hand, there was a highly stratified agrarian economy controlled by the large landlords; and on the other, a deep institutional structure of the Sufi, with the Baba Farid shrine in the centre. The two systems worked together and influenced politics and election results in 1937 and 1946 elections. This article has a central thesis, which states that electoral behavior in Pakpattan cannot be predicted solely in terms of institutional analysis. Instead, it needs to be placed in a more comprehensive historical ecology of land policy in colonial times, religious authority, and political mobilization.

2. Colonial Political Economy and Canal Colonization:

Punjab politics has historiography that has been influenced by two large schools of interpretation. The former, which is related to agrarian political economy, focuses on the influence of landed elites and patron-client interactions in organization of rural political behavior. The historians aligned to this school of thought maintain that, rural voters in Punjab were not independent political units but rather part of hierarchical structures of economic dependence. The system of canal colony was the root cause of transformation in political

power within Montgomery District. According to Settlement Report of Montgomery District, land allotments were purposely given to loyal elites in order to achieve administrative stability and political cooperation.¹ The irrigation project run by Punjab Irrigation Department turned the once semi-arid areas into agricultural areas, yet, also established a strict hierarchy of land ownership. The second interpretive tradition was created in the context of cultural and religious historiography, which has stressed the influence of Sufi shrines and religious authority in developing political consciousness. According to this perspective, pirs and Sajjada Nashins were not passive religious figures but active political intermediaries whose influence extended into electoral mobilization. Later scholarship has attempted to concur with both these views, proposing that agrarian and religious systems were not distinct entities but supported each other. According to Canal Colony Administration Report, The success of the colony is based on loyalty of owners of the colony, whose power over the rearing of classes is the backbone of administration of the country.² Such an economic structure guaranteed the political behavior through dependency relationships. This article develops this synthesis, but takes it a step further by basing it on a micro-level case study of Pakpattan, which utilizes the archives of Montgomery District.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of engineering of British canals changed the face of Montgomery (Sahiwal) district, which included Pakpattan tehsil irrigation. Prior to this intervention, rains and limited inundation channels limited farming to riverine lands. This region was changed into a network of perennial and non-perennial canals, which provided an opportunity to conduct cultivation systematically and live permanently. One of the most important irrigators of Pakpattan was Lower Bari Doab Canal of 1906 Triple Canal Project³. Its headquarters were at Montgomery and Multan but the distributary system was fed by subsidiary canals and branches in Pakpattan. Pakpattan was more directly connected by Depalpur Canal that originated in Lahore. Para, Malka Hans and Nurpur waterways were part of Upper and Lower Sohag branches of this canal. These branches watered the northeastern and central portions of Pakpattan and rendered them arable. Water distribution was controlled by irrigation ratio and plan to the subsistence and commercial crops. The tehsil was connected with Pakpattan Canal, which began at Suleimanke headworks of Sutlej River. It provided water in Pakpattan having gone through Depalpur without being irrigated. It gave birth to distributaries like Bhatti (non-perennial) and Khadir Branch that ran along southern border of tehsil and emptied into Mailsi.⁴ Irrigation was provided by Khadir Branch which offered single-crop irrigation and Qabula (2-L) and Fatna (3-L) canals of north which offered perennial irrigation. The irrigation ratio of 2.88 cusecs to 1,000 acre of these canals is evidence of technological perfection of water management in colonies. Pakpattan was irrigated by seasonal floods of Lower Sohag Para Canal fed by natural Sohag Nala.⁵ These canals transformed semi arid Pakpattan into a productive farming land. The hydraulic development allowed canal colonies that transformed land ownership and settlement patterns.

Settlement of land in large-scale in Montgomery, especially Pakpattan was brought about by canal colonization. The allocation of British land was founded on political and economic aspirations. Peasant owners of tightly populated areas of central Punjab such as Amritsar, Jullundur and Lahore occupied these newly irrigated lands. Intensive farming was established

¹ Punjab Settlement Report 1921, 112

² Punjab Irrigation Department 1915, p.87.

³ *Ian Talbot*, Punjab and the Raj (Manohar Publications New Delhi, 1988),p.38

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Ilyas Mohnem*, (edited), The Colony Manual (Lahore,----),p.4

with assistance of agriculturally competent Jats, Arains, Kambohs and Sainis who migrated here. Large parcels of land were to be allocated to military personnel, especially war veterans. These grants were the incentives and motivation to join the colonial army. Tens of thousands of acres in Lower Bari Doab and Nili Bar were given to soldiers, and thus, the connection between military strategy and agricultural growth was made.

British awarded rich landowners, pirs and local notables with massive holdings to encourage intermediate elites. These political and administrative intermediaries kept countryside in order and colonial loyalty. Moreover, there were deferred classes, tribal groupings, and specialist groups such as horse-breeders, which were subsidized on a smaller scale, and which were often restricted. Another element of land colonization was auctions particularly in subsequent colonies such as Nili Bar. This allowed land to be purchased by businessmen and professionals, diversifying land ownership. The grantees were also required to adhere to the terms of loyalty by state to remain politically loyal to the colonial rule. These canal colonies influenced post-colonial Pakistan. The agricultural system of the British was a determinant of the rural life as it involved both the ownership of estates by the powerful families and the ownership of estates by the peasant farmers. The economy was based on agricultural practices that emphasized canal irrigation and political and economic systems rested on distribution of land. In general, canals of Pakpattan tehsil formed a complex hydraulic system, which permitted agricultural activity and settlement. The land redistributive programs enhanced production and brought order to the rural areas, creating inequality and political domination that continued on to Pakistan era.

3. Colonial Administration and Making of Electoral Space in Montgomery District:

One of the most densely developed regions of canal colony was Montgomery District that was developed in the course of the British colonial expansion in Punjab. British irrigation project converted large areas of arid land into a highly productive agricultural area, radically reorganizing land tenure and settlement. According to archival records of settlement reports, land in Montgomery District was distributed in a strategic manner so as to provide political allegiance. Big landholdings in the newly irrigated lands were given to military veterans, faithful families, and cooperative elites. This formed a rural elite whose economic livelihood was highly dependent on colonial administrative systems. The district gazetteer specifically states that rural power was centralized in the possession of a few families whose assistance was crucial in keeping the administration in check. These families acted as a mediator between the colonial state and the rural society and mediated both economy and political action. This structure was further strengthened in Pakpattan Tehsil by the fact that Tehsil had a system of shrine based authority especially Baba Farid shrine which served as an added system of governance and social control.

The constitutional system proposed in Government of India Act 1935 fundamentally changed political system in British India as it brought provincial autonomy and increased electoral participation. This growth, however, was very limited and lopsided. In Punjab, the voter-base was small with most people being landowners, tax-paying elites and urban professionals. The rural constituencies such as Pakpattan were then ruled in a mixed-system whereby the contemporary electoral institutions were co-existent with the traditional sources of power. Pakpattan was part of a large canal colony area known as Montgomery District that was developed by the British to convert once semi-arid land into highly productive agricultural areas. Land allotments were a political instrument of the colonial administration, which provided fertile farming lands to loyal families, military personnel who had retired and those who were cooperative and rural elites. Consequently, the ownership of land in the district

was not only an economic but also a political tool. The district gazetteer clearly points out that rural power had been vested in few families whose support provided stability in administration. This organization provided an electoral environment where the electoral behavior was not autonomous and mediated by the land ownership, kinship and institutional loyalty. These intermediaries were important to the British to keep the order and predictable electoral results particularly in rural Punjab.

4. Socio-Political Formation of Pakpattan: Agrarian and Religious Structures:

The interaction of three intersecting systems, namely agrarian hierarchy, religious authority and kinship organization, defined the political structure of Pakpattan. Large landowners dominated the agrarian system and had control over land, credit and agricultural resources. This economic superiority immediately translated into political power, since tenants were at the mercy of landlords to make their living. The religious order was based on the shrine of Baba Farid which was considered to be one of the most significant Sufi centers in Punjab. Baba Farid shrine served as an agent between the colonial state and rural society through Sajjada Nashins. Colonial intelligence assessments repeatedly describe shrine custodians as “natural intermediaries of rural governance.”⁶ The shrine was not only a religious and spiritual center but also political institution incorporated in the local system of governance. According to endowment record, the shrine lands were leveled as revenue-free grants (inam lands), which enhanced the economic independence of custodians and related them to the colonial administrative systems. Its custodians, the Sajjada Nashins, exerted much power on rural populations by their power over religious practices, charitable giving and resolving of disputes. The biradari system of organization of the kinship system further supported collective political action. There was a lack of individual political autonomy as voting decisions were usually taken collectively, at the family or clan level. The combination of these three systems formed a very organized political system where the electoral performance was influenced by the overlapping types of power. The internal social organization of Pakpattan had general trends of colonial Punjab with local traits. The agrarian society was highly stratified, with a stratified system at the base of its socio-political order. The large land holders dominated over the tenants cultivating lands who on the other hand relied on their landlords economically in terms of availability of land, credit and farm inputs. This economic dependency was converted to political dependency.

5. 1937 Elections and Patronage Politics Consolidation in Rural Punjab:

The 1937 provincial elections under Government of India Act 1935, are the earliest major institutionalized experiment with representative politics in colonial Punjab. However, the elections did not result in democratic rivalry in the modern sense in rural constituencies like Pakpattan Tehsil of Montgomery District. Instead, they reinforced an already existing political order grounded in agrarian hierarchy, kinship authority, and colonial administrative mediation. Ian Talbot contends that Unionist Party was a group of agrarian elites and was closely linked with the colonial administration.⁷ Unionist Party controlled the electoral arena in Pakpattan and was a coalition of large landowners along communal lines. Voting was not an individualistic behavior in Pakpattan but collective. Unionist Party was not an ideological organization but a governing alliance of rural elites, whose power was based on land and accommodation with the British state. Unionist Party was specifically used by the colonial administration to ensure stability in the rural areas as indicated in archival correspondence of Punjab Home Department. An anonymous note of Political Department said that the Punjab

⁶ Punjab Intelligence Bureau 1937, File 44.

⁷ Talbot 1988, 145.

government was strong in the cooperation of classes of land whose power over the tenants makes the election predictable.⁸ This statement reflects fundamental logic of colonial electoral governance: elections were not designed to challenge rural hierarchies but to operate through them. The strength of the Unionist Party was not based on its ideological appeal but rather on its agrarian networks and the close relationship it had with the colonial administration. This structure was very much evident in Pakpattan and patron-client relations were overwhelmingly dominant in electoral behavior in 1937 elections. The big zamindars acted as intermediaries of electoral processes and filters of political choice, deciding on voting results based on hierarchical instruction, and dictating how their tenants would vote in line with their own political affiliations. Punjab Election Commission report validates that Unionist Party won by huge rural votes with the aid of landed intermediaries. Voting behavior in Pakpattan was collective as opposed to individualistic. In the case of tenant cultivators, they seldom had a say in politics as an independent party; their votes were grouped at the instructions of the landlord. As indicated in the settlement reports of Montgomery District, rural voters were always found to work under pre-existing requirements of dependency which spill over into political conduct.⁹ This system made sure that the results of elections were based on preferences of a small rural elite, but not on the wider population. Archival documents of the Punjab Secretariat show that this arrangement was considered by the British officials as a necessity in keeping the political stability. The Punjab Secretariat Home Department File 1937/III/44 expressly declares: "In Montgomery District, voting has been principally influenced by landlord directive as opposed to ideological inclination. Therefore, the electoral activity was organized based on patron-client relationships instead of political ideology."¹⁰ This point reflects the essentially hierarchical aspect of electoral politics in the region. Influence of religion also contributed largely to the election results at this time. But in 1937, Sajjada Nashins tended to follow the prevailing elite arrangements as opposed to being separate political forces. They solidified the power of Unionist Party that depended on the preservation of the alliances with landlords and religious leaders. Muslim league, however, was mostly not involved in rural politics. It had a poor organization and did not have meaningful interaction with agrarian societies. This led to it not registering any electoral presence in Pakpattan in the 1937 elections.

6. Agrarian Power and Canal Colony Formation of Montgomery District:

To explain the electoral patterns in 1937 we will have to place Pakpattan into the context of the overall political economy of the Montgomery canal colonies. These colonies were some of the most ambitious colonial irrigation projects in Punjab, which aimed at changing arid areas into productive agricultural areas by constructing large-scale canals and planned settlement. Archival settlement documents indicate that land in these colonies was not distributed randomly but was carefully allocated to ensure political loyalty and administrative cooperation. Large parcels of prime arable land were given to retired military officers, loyal families and powerful rural elites with the conditions attached that their success directly depended on colonial rule. The Montgomery Settlement Report makes it clear; "The success of colony rests on the future obedience of its proprietors whose interest in rearing population is the basis of rural government."¹¹ This formed a two-tier of power where landed elites had centralized economic power. Political power was mediated by colonial and social control was

⁸ Punjab Government, *Montgomery District Gazetteer* (Lahore: Government Press, 1914).

⁹ Punjab Settlement Report, Montgomery District, 1921, Punjab Archives Lahore.

¹⁰ The *Punjab Secretariat Home Department File 1937/III/44*

¹¹ Punjab Secretariat, Home Department File 1937/III/44.

by dependency relationships. Pakpattan, as part of this canal colony system, reflected these structural realities in its electoral behavior.

7. Political Role of Shrines and Sajjada Nashins in Pakpattan

The central position of Baba Farid shrine was one of the most unique aspects of Pakpattan political structure because, apart from being a religious organization, it served as a socio-political hub in the system of rural government. The Sajjada Nashins, hereditary custodians of the shrine, had a special place in colonial Punjab. They were both religious leaders, social bridges and political movers. Colonial administrative reports frequently describe Sajjada Nashins as “natural intermediaries between state and rural population,” whose influence extended into dispute resolution, charitable distribution and electoral mobilization. However, in 1937 elections, the power held by shrines by and large supported agrarian hierarchies, rather than undermined them. Sajjada Nashins were more inclined to follow the leading landlords families, thus incorporating the religious authority into wider patronage system. The supremacy of the Unionist Party rested on the incorporation of rural elites such as custodians of shrines. The Political Department Correspondence says: Stability in rural Punjab is based on the collaboration of the landed classes and spiritual authorities.¹² In Pakpattan, Sajjada Nashins were typically in support of landlord elites and thus they strengthened status quo instead of undermining it. According to a confidential intelligence report by Punjab Special Branch: In Montgomery District, custodians of shrines wield power by depending upon local landed interest and their political position is still more or less supportive of the traditional rural elites.¹³ This means that, in 1937, the shrine politics was more of an agrarian than a political entity.

8. Case of Shergarh: Parallel Shrine Networks and Political Mediation:

Although Pakpattan is used as a central case study, the adjacent area of Shergarh has a significant comparative aspect in the study of shrine based political power in Montgomery District. Shergarh and Pakpattan were also typified by a robust Sufi institutional base which was backed by endowments in lands and colonial status. The custodians of shrines in Shergarh had a great amount of local power, especially in dispute settlement and mobilization of rural communities. Archival canal colony records indicate that several shrine endowments in Shergarh were formally integrated into colonial land settlement systems. They frequently were awarded to customs-free estates (inam lands), which strengthened the economic autonomy of custodians of shrines and at the same time established them as bound to the colonial administrative systems. One Canal Colony Administration Report observes; “Religious endowments, in Shergarh, and in the adjacent ilaqas, are not only spiritual centres, but stabilizing institutions in rural economy, maintaining a continuity of control over cultivators.¹⁴ The shrine networks of Shergarh in 1937 elections (as in Pakpattan) were inclined to vote in candidates with an orientation towards Unionist Party. This alignment was not ideological but structural, reflecting integration of shrine authority into broader agrarian-patronage system.

9. 1937 Electoral Logic in Pakpattan:

Three mechanisms can be interlocked to explain electoral behavior witnessed in Pakpattan in 1937 elections. To begin with, landowners were the ones to choose political choice. The big landlords performed the role of electoral gatekeepers teaching tenants how to vote. This led to a mechanism of collective voting whereby the political autonomy of individuals was minimal. Second, religious authority reinforced agrarian hierarchy. Sajjada Nashins did not

¹² Punjab Government, 1938.

¹³ Government of Punjab, Political Department Correspondence, 1938.

¹⁴ Canal Colony Administration Report, 1915.

operate independently of elite structures but rather reinforced them through spiritual legitimacy. Third, colonial administrative oversight ensured electoral predictability. The British officials depended on the elites in rural areas to preserve order and stability, and, therefore, restrict political competition. All these mechanisms resulted in an electoral system that was marked by stability and not contestation.

10. Early Signs of Political Transformation (Post-1937 Shift):

Even though 1937 elections were a representation of the patronage politics dominance, the post elections era is when the political changes started to emerge, though in a subtle manner. These changes were predetermined by the alteration of agrarian economy structure, the increase of communal consciousness and slow infiltration of nationalistic ideology in rural Punjab. The World War II brought about economic destabilization of rural areas. The prices of agriculture were fluctuating, more people were recruited to British Indian Army and labor patterns in countryside were changed. These upheavals diluted old patronage networks and established new expressions of political consciousness by rural people. On the ideological level, Lahore Resolution brought a new political discourse based on Muslim identity and territorial nationalism. Though at first confined to elite political groups, this discourse gradually made its way into rural society via religious mediators and traveling political activists. Notably, shift of political orientation of shrine networks started during this time in Pakpattan and Shergarh. Whereas previously this Sajjada Nashins grew closer to agrarian elites, a significant number of Sajjada Nashins started to shift towards a new politics of the Muslim League, especially when the concept of Pakistan started proliferating among rural Muslims.

11. Change in Electoral Behavior in 1946 Elections in Pakpattan:

The 1946 Punjab provincial elections were a breakthrough to the patronage style of politics that had characterized the 1937 elections. This break was more noticeable in Pakpattan Tehsil of Montgomery District. What had been dominated by the landed elites in the electoral field and negotiated through patronage networks based in shrines was now to become more ideologically affiliated, primarily religious identity and political mobilization of Muslim nationalism. By this time, All-India Muslim League had become the main political force of Muslim constituencies in Punjab. The Muslim League was formed to establish its political presence on the basis of the Muslim identity and the need to create a separate political homeland, unlike Unionist Party, which obtained its power through support of agrarian elites and colonial administration. This transformation is well revealed in archival election reports of Punjab. The 1946 outcomes reveal that there have been drastic changes in Muslim electoral behaviors in rural areas with Muslim League getting an overwhelming majority in the districts which were initially dominated by Unionist elites.¹⁵ This change was particularly strong in Montgomery District, particularly in Pakpattan and Shergarh where religious institutions were a key factor in mobilization.

12. Fall of Unionist Patronage and Agrarian Political Order:

The fall of Unionist Party in 1946 elections can neither be perceived as a sudden electoral defeat but as result of a gradual structural weakening which had started in early 1940s. The Unionist Party had been based on three pillars that were mutually dependent: landlord domination, cross-communal collaboration and colonial administrative support. All these pillars had started to crumble by the mid 1940s. The increased agrarian economic pressures, the wartime upheavals and growing political consciousness of tenant cultivators weakened

¹⁵ Punjab Election Commission, *Punjab Provincial Elections Report 1946*.

landlord power. The failure of cross-communal cooperation under pressure of growing communal polarization in aftermath of Lahore Resolution. Although still formally upheld, colonial administrative neutrality was steadily changing to accommodate new political realities. A confidential Punjab administration report from 1946 observed: "The traditional rural leadership, once the backbone of electoral stability, is now unable to command the same unquestioned loyalty from cultivating classes."¹⁶ This observation portrays the paradigm shift that was taking place: political power was losing its grip on the hands of landlords and into the hands of ideological and religious organizations.

13. Religious Mobilization and Role of Shrine Networks:

It was in the 1946 elections that were held in Pakpattan that a shift occurred, one in which shrine-based power became a force for democratic mobilisation. At this point in time, the political landscape of Punjab had undergone a significant transformation, with the All-India Muslim League emerging as preeminent power among Muslim constituencies. Unlike the elections in 1937, in which voting patterns were guided primarily by hereditary or landlord influence and clientelism, the elections in 1946 were guided by ideology. It was reported by the Punjab Special Branch that the sway of the pirs in Montgomery District had "decisively shifted rural sentiment towards the Muslim League"¹⁷ which suggests a change in political voting patterns.

The Baba Farid shrine, which was once a calming force within the rural system, turned its attention to rallying people, which was an important part of this revolution. The Sajjada Nashins, who are recognized as the shrine's hereditary caretakers, were instrumental in the transition that took place. In 1937, their loyalties were largely in line with the existing landholding elite; but by 1946 many of them had proclaimed their adherence to the Muslim League. When it came to rural life, where spiritual authority often had more power than traditional political argument, their support carried a tremendous amount of weight. The fact that the caretakers were holders of large landholdings (as the endowment and Canal Colony records demonstrate) meant that they were in an unmatched position to mobilise the rural population.¹⁸ The idea of Pakistan was framed not just as a political project, but also a moral and spiritual imperative, during the religious gatherings held at the shrine. These meetings were transformed into political rallies. The creation of a highly evocative mobilizational space was achieved by the use of religious symbols and political message. This was also confirmed in the intelligence reports of 1946. These reports indicate that the role of the pirs and shrine networks in places such as Pakpattan and Shergarh played a key part in shaping electoral behaviour to vote for the Muslim League.¹⁹ This suggests that the election behaviour in Pakpattan during the elections in 1946 was markedly different from 1937. This is due to Muslim League's successful campaign around the idea that elections were a plebiscite for the survival of Muslim community in India. With active involvement of shrine caretakers, particularly those associated with the Baba Farid shrine, the League was able to gain easy access to rural communities. Because of this transformation it is evident that religious authority and networks were important in shifting political loyalty in the late period of British rule. This transformation transformed spiritual influence into a key weapon of mass political mobilization.

14. Shergarh and Comparative Shrine Mobilization:

¹⁶ Punjab Secretariat File, Rural Political Stability Report, 1946.

¹⁷ Special Branch Punjab 1946, IB/PL/112

¹⁸ Canal Colony Report 1946, 52

¹⁹ Special Branch Punjab Intelligence Report, 1946, File IB/PL/112.

The political transformation observed in Pakpattan was not isolated but was mirrored in adjacent regions such as Shergarh. Shergarh provides a parallel case of shrine-based political transformation. Like Pakpattan, shrine institutions in Shergarh were integrated into colonial land systems. Canal Colony Report (Shergarh Circle) notes: "Shrine institutions serve both spiritual and political functions in rural governance. These endowments provided economic independence to shrine custodians while simultaneously embedding them within colonial administrative framework. The shrine networks in Shergarh, like those in Pakpattan, were deeply embedded in agrarian and administrative structures of colonial Punjab. However, what distinguishes the 1946 elections from earlier periods is the shift in political orientation of these shrine institutions. In Shergarh, as in Pakpattan, Sajjada Nashins increasingly aligned themselves with Muslim League politics, thereby transforming religious authority into a channel for nationalist mobilization. By 1946, these networks aligned with Muslim League mobilization strategies and facilitated political realignment of shrine institutions toward emerging Muslim nationalism. A Canal Colony Administration Report notes: "Religious endowments in Shergarh and adjoining regions now function not only as spiritual centers but also as significant influences in political mobilization."²⁰ This reflects the dual transformation of shrine institutions from passive religious centers into active political actors.

The Muslim League sent a call in April of 1943, to Pirs of Muslim India to pray and exhort their followers to sacrifice all in the cause of attaining a free and independent Muslim India. The Muslim League was not successful in this challenge. After Simla Conference, Sajjada Nishins, from different shrines, had accepted this call. This was because the League was a major Muslim organisation. The influence of propaganda and efforts of League in the Montgomery district was so great that the big landowners of this district joined the League and, through this, were able to remove their fears and doubts. Sahabzada Syed Mohammad Abbas was the Divisional Organizer of the Montgomery Muslim League. Pir Syed Ashiq Hussain, Rais Sher Garh, along with his brother Syed Mohammad Hussain Sajjada Nishin Sher Garh and Sahabzada Mohammad Abbas, were the ones who convened too many large gatherings in Sher Garh. The three of them donated money to the League. Pirs were able to exert a significant amount of spiritual and temporal influence over numerous followers they had in villages, which contributed significantly to the success of League.

15. Comparative Analysis: 1937 versus 1946 Electoral Behavior:

The contrast between 1937 and 1946 elections in Pakpattan reveals a fundamental and structural transformation in rural political behavior. In 1937, elections were based mainly on patron-client, land and hierarchical loyalties. Political choices were constrained and elections served to legitimise social structures. Electoral behaviour was dictated by landlords and confirmed by shrine custodians. By 1946, voting behavior had taken on a new dimension and was increasingly ideological and religious nationalist.²¹ Religion became an important aspect of political identity and voting was determined by ideological allegiance rather than economic class. The Muslim League's success was not only organisational but also symbolic, a new political imagination was born with Muslim nationhood. Religion and nationalism were important factors in political decision-making. Landlord power was diminished and religious leaders and political parties emerged. This shift is a part of structural transformations of colonial Punjab but is more pronounced in Pakpattan because of its blend of rural and religious politics. This transition is from electoral politics to mass politics. In 1937 elections, Unionist Party won because of the great support of pirs in Punjab. "Muslim League tried to

²⁰ Canal Colony Administration Report, Shergarh Circle, 1939.

²¹ Talbot 1988; Gilmartin 1988)

replicate Unionist model of success in 1946 by forming a committee of men of influence (Masheikh Committee) to mobilise Sufis for its cause.”²² Muslim League plans to use mosque and began to use mosques for meetings. After Friday prayers, a maulvi in one mosque urged for Muslims to join Muslim League to realise dream of Pakistan as envisaged by Allama Iqbal. In April 1943, All India Muslim League decided to use religion as a source of inspiration and unity among the Indian Muslims. Therefore it was decided by Muslim League to call upon "Muslim Pirs" for pray and exhorting their followers through prayers and sacrifice for the cause of attaining of a Muslim independent state in India.²³ With the League representing Muslims, the Sajjada Nishins of different shrines backed this petition after Simla Conference. The League's efforts and rhetoric finally won the big landlords of Montgomery district to join and remove their fears. Hence, Shergarh Pirs organised too many rallies. "Pirs' spiritual and temporal authority over their numerous village followers contributed to League's success.²⁴ The League leaders also decided to use Urs ceremonies and Fatwas for cause of Pakistan. In district, Muslim League also introduced to win over other vital sections of the society. For that, League leaders directed to establish students and women sub-committees in district. "Members of Punjab Muslim students' Federation who did work on Muslim League's behalf were directed when they visited a village to find out its social problems and difficulties to tell them (villagers) that main cause of their problems was the Unionists (and) give them the solution-Pakistan."²⁵ This resulted in the Muslim League's membership increased in Montgomery district.

16. Structural Interpretation of Political Transformation:

The transformation of electoral behavior in Pakpattan between 1937 and 1946 can be understood through interaction of three structural processes. First, decline of agrarian patronage weakened the ability of landlords to control electoral outcomes. Economic pressures, wartime disruptions, and political fragmentation eroded traditional rural hierarchies. Second, the rise of religious nationalism provided a new ideological framework through which rural populations could interpret political change. The Muslim League successfully embedded its political message within existing religious and cultural structures. Third, shrine-based institutions served as critical intermediaries in this transformation. Rather than resisting political change, Sajjada Nashins and shrine networks facilitated the translation of ideological narratives into rural political behavior. Together, these processes produced a structural realignment of political authority in rural Punjab.

The period between the two elections witnessed profound transformations in political landscape of Punjab. The decline of Unionist Party began gradually as internal divisions emerged within its leadership and as communal tensions intensified across the province. The death of key leaders weakened its organizational cohesion, while growing polarization of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh identities eroded its cross-communal base. Lahore Resolution of 1940 marked a turning point in Muslim political consciousness. It introduced the idea of a separate Muslim political identity, fundamentally altering the ideological framework of politics in Punjab. Although initially confined to elite political discourse, idea of Pakistan gradually permeated rural society through religious networks and local intermediaries. The

²² Ian Talbot, the 1946 Punjab Elections (Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 14, No.1, 1980),p.69

²³ Ian Talbot, Provincial Politics And Pakistan Movement: Growth of Muslim League in North –West and North-East India 1937-47 (Oxford University Press,1988),p.97

²⁴ Ian Talbot, the 1946 Punjab Elections (),p.69

²⁵ Ian Talbot, Second World War and Local Indian Politics 1939-1947 International History Review Vol. 6 (Nov.1984),p.603

Second World War further destabilized rural Punjab. Economic inflation, agricultural disruption and recruitment of rural men into British Indian Army created widespread social and economic stress. These conditions weakened traditional patronage structures and created openings for new forms of political mobilization. By the mid-1940s, political communication had expanded significantly. Political pamphlets, mosque-based discussions, and traveling activists brought new political ideas into rural areas that had previously been insulated from national debates. This expansion of political discourse laid the groundwork for the dramatic electoral shift that would occur in 1946. The Intelligence Bureau report notes increasing political awareness among rural populations and weakening landlord control.²⁶

17. Conclusion:

The electoral transformation in Pakpattan Tehsil between 1937 and 1946 represents one of the most significant shifts in the political history of colonial Punjab. The 1937 elections reflected a system of agrarian patronage in which political behavior was structured by landownership, kinship networks, and colonial administrative control. In contrast, the 1946 elections revealed the emergence of a new political order characterized by ideological mobilization, religious identity, and nationalist consciousness. Pakpattan's experience demonstrates that the transition from colonial rule to independence was not merely a political event but a profound transformation in the structure of rural political life. The decline of Unionist dominance and the rise of the Muslim League were not isolated electoral outcomes but reflected deeper changes in economic structure, religious authority, and political imagination. Ultimately, Pakpattan serves as a microcosm of Punjab's broader political transformation. It illustrates how colonial governance structures, agrarian economies and Sufi institutional networks collectively shaped emergence of Pakistan.

²⁶ Intelligence Bureau Punjab 1942.