

Research Papers



THE CONGRESS IN PUNJAB PROVINCE

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Abstract

In order to study Indian National Congress in Punjab during 1900-1929, it is necessary to give an idea about the foundation and growth of Congress at all India level, without which the picture in different provinces about the growth of Congress activities would not be clear. The regional study is closely inter-linked with the wider growth of All India National Congress. No picture of regional and local level organization can be properly constructed without forming a picture of National Level organization.

The idea of a united national and of national interests was not a sudden evolution of single year of the revelation of single evangelist, who saw this in a vision and proclaimed this to a wondering people. Great events always cost their shadows beforehand. Indian grievances were accumulating with the rapidly changing conditions of the country. Education was expanding, Indians views and aspirations and Indian's thoughts, from various causes, had been for a long time in a state of formist, vainly seeking for some sort of palliatives for the complicated disease from which the country had been helplessly suffering in almost every direction.¹

Dr. Seal shows that the pressure of Western Influence was most intense in presidency towns like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras where high caste individuals, educated in English and on Western lines lived and were motivated by the interest of economic welfare. They became ambitious and built up hopes for adequate positions in the civil services. Therefore, in Seal's view, the foundation of the Indian National Congress can not be contributed either:

1. A.C. Majumdar, Indian National Evolution p.17

by Hume or by a set of civilians or liberals, but was a consequence of the entire developments in educational and social fields; which resulted in laying the foundation of the Indian National Congress. It must be pointed out that Seal's approach is entirely elitist and completely anti-Marxist. He finally shows that Indian National Congress had nothing to do with the economic compulsions.²

Dr. B.B. Mishra, in the book, the Indian middle classes in which he primarily concerns himself with the middle class in Bengal, shows that the middle class was, in fact, the product of British system of administration. He shows that before the British, there was no middle class in India, and it was at Calcutta that due to commercial activities the commercial Middle Class emerged in India, which led to the rise of industrial Middle class. Due to Western education, the Educational Middle Class also grew. The Land Reforms brought about in existence the landed Middle Class; but is the Educated Middle Class to which Mishra pays great attention. According to Mishra, the Educated Middle Class stood by the British in the 19th Century and Participated the them in the revolt of 1857. Later it became interested in gaining positions in the civil services and also took up

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different professions like teaching, law, medicine, journalism, etc.³

Whatever the course of National Organization was to be, it was apparent that the desire for action was strong with in the educated Indian Community throughout the provinces and presidencies. This development, neither Dufferin nor his advisors, could ignore. ⁴

- 2 For detail see Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism.**
3. Briton Hartin, J.R. New India 1885
4. Ibid.

A Conference of Indian National Union will be held at Poona from the 25th to 31th of December, 1885.⁵ When all the arrangements were thus complete, several cases of cholera appeared in Poona. So it was decided to change the venue of the session from Poona to Bombay.

The newly established Presidency Association readily supplied the place of the Sarvajanic Sabha and the authorities of Gokal Dass Tejpal Sankrit College came forward to sanctify and immortalize their institution by lending its ground, building as well as its boarding house for the meeting and accommodation for the representatives met and discussed the first programme of first National Assembly of India.

The member of representatives registered was 72 and distributed as follows:

Calcutta	-	3	Simla	1	Tanjore	2
Bombay	-	18	Lucknow	3	Kumbackonam	1
Madras-	-	8	Allahabad	1	Madura	1
Karachi	-	2	Lahore	1	Tinnevely	1
Virangam	-	1	Amhala	1	Coimbatore	1
Surat	-	6	Ahmedabad	3	Salem	1
Poona	-	8	Berhampore	1	Cuddapan	1
Agra	-	2	Masulipatam	1	Amantpore	1
Banaras	-	1	Chingleput	1	Bellary	1 ⁶

Some of the main leaders who attended the first Congress session were Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao, Mahadev G. Ranade, Lola Baijnath, Prof. K. Sundaraman, W.C. Bannerji, Narendranath Sen, W.S. Apte, Dadabhai Naroji, Pherozeshah M.Memta, D.E.

- 5. A.C. Majumbar, op.cit. pp. 46-48**
6. Ibid. P47

Wacha, N.G. Chandavarkar, P. Kesanna Pillai etc. Mr. W.C. Bannerji was proposed the President of the first session of Congress.⁷

After the first session of the Congress, the all India provincial Congress was established in very province. Punjab was also one of them. But in Punjab, the influence of All India Congress was rather/less than in other provinces, because Punjab was the last province annexed by the British in 1849.

For emergence and growth of political elite, and for that matter any type of elite in Punjab, was much slower than in Bengal and Bombay. It was in the presidency towns that pressure of Western influence was most intense, producing for reaching consequences.⁸ the study of the rise of political elite involves inevitably an analysis of the process of modernization, which brings about social and economic changes.⁹

As compared with Bengal, Punjab was educationally a backward province. While in Bengal in 1900-1901, 1039 students passed intermediate examination and 329 did their graduation, in Punjab the number was 244 and 127, respectively.¹⁰ Secondly, Punjab was converted into an agrarian appendic, and was incorporated into the system of capitalist world market. Because of the British policy of perpetuating feudal survivals in Socio-Economic structure of their areas, and supporting there exploiting strata, the elite in Punjab developed in a distorted manner. ¹¹

- 7. Annie Besant, op.cit, pp 6-7**
8. Anil Seal, op.cit. p9
9. Ibid
10. S.C. Mittal, op.cit, p.16
11. ibid

It has been estimated that no single family of big landlords in Punjab was able to trace the descent of their proprietary rights to the period prior to 1857.¹² Another striving feature which influenced the social and economic structure of Punjab was the increasing growth of trade and money lending bourgeoisie Gujarati-Morwadi, that began to take root in Punjab during this period (1868 – 1911) ¹³

The landlords had a predominant influence and were loyal to the British. There was a rapidly growing population, with the concentration of landed property in the hands of a few wealthy landlords, which had led to the rise of absentee landlords who indulged in the exploitation of the tenants.¹⁴ there were only two important towns in Punjab and there was hardly any big industry except the woolen mill at Dhariwal established in

1882 and a few processing mills.¹⁵ Because of the predominance of the rich classes, whose main interest lay in land, the scope of investing in main industry became limited. The export from Punjab consisted mainly of agriculture products, which depended on the vagaries of the season.

The following figures would give an idea about the total value of exports and imports.

Year	Total Imports (Rs. In Lakhs)	Total Exports (Rs. In Lakhs)
1901-02	1551	1548
1911-12	3001	2768
1920-21	6142	3946

12. Anil Seal, op. cit p80

13. Ibid. pp 80-81

14. Ibid p. 184.85

15. B.S. Saini, op.cit. p 312.

The imports doubled in ten year and quadrupled in twenty years.¹⁶

So, the class that entirely supported the British was the 'Loyalist', now to be designated as the 'landed gentry', which included some members of old Aristocracy. They provided education to their sons in Public School and threw about their weight on trivial matters, and were given titles, lands and other honours by the Government, with the expectation that they would be supporting it, at least in its hour of trial.

Sunder Singh Majithia and Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana were the most outstanding representative of landed gentry. They rendered great service to the British Government. Thirdly, there were three communities (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) in Punjab, which were great obstacles in the way of the development of Indian National Congress in Punjab.

Muslims: Some of the Muslims of Punjab wanted to set up a political association but Sir Syyyid Ahammed khan was opposed to this idea. By the turn of century, it looked as if they held themselves aloof from all political activity.¹⁷

Not only had the British aided Muslims while suppressing Hindus, They had in addition created the tension and communal mentality, accountable for current religious strife. Lal Chand invidly described the town council of a Punjab city chosen by separate electorates. "The members in the committee meetings arrange themselves in two

rows around the Presidential chair. On the left are seated the representatives of the banner of Islam, and on the right the descendants of the old Rights of Aryavarta. By this arrangement the members are constantly reminded that they are not simply municipal Commissioners but they are Mohammedans versus Hindus and vice versa their activity is not so much to look after Municipal affairs, as to see that no advantage is gained by a Hindu or by a Mohammedan.¹⁸

16. Ibid.

17. S.C. Mittal, op.cit. p14.

18. Kernneth W.jones Arya Dharmo, P286.

Muslim, even though a minority within the British India, did not stand alone. Millions of Muslims bordered Hindu India. The followers of Islam, with their heritage of warfare and unity, stood ready to assist their brethren; while their mere presence in the world influenced the government. The British had already moved to strengthen this Islamic world and limit the geographical area of Hinduism.¹⁹

The total population of Punjab in 1901 was 2,6842,611 and Muslims formed majority of the population (about 49.61%).²⁰ Some of the Muslims of Punjab wanted to set up a political association but Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was opposed to this idea.²¹ Beginning in 1826, Sayyid Ahmed Bareilvi led a Jihad or holy war against the Sikh kingdom of Ranjit Singh. Located on the North-Western border of the Sikh domain, and largely unsuccessful, this campaign exemplified the determination of Muslim thinkers to reestablish Islamic dominance. After the annexation of Punjab, the British inherited this war and finally crushed it in 1868.²² This defeat, and the end of the Mutiny, plunged the Islamic Community into a deeper despair. They had failed to revive their communal fortunes by either political or military means. The lines separating Muslims from non-Muslims were sharpened by forces within the Islamic community and without. This demarcation had always been clearest at the level of high religion, in the cities, and among Islamic thinkers, but there had always been points of conflict between Muslims and Non-Muslims.²³

19. Ibid.

20. Abid Husain, The Destiny of Indian Muslim p.22.

21. Ram Gopal, Indian Muslim: A Pali History, p21.

22. Ibid, p.86.

Communal riots and struggles over the protection of 'Kine' existed long before the arrival of the British, But they soon added another element to the religious competition, the printing press.²³ The creation of modern publishing brought a new dimension to inter communal relations and also opened Punjab to influences, from beyond the province; which in turn acted upon and modified the internal world of Punjab.²⁴ Thus by the turn of century, it looked as if they held themselves aloof from all political activity.

Sikhs: They, Unlike Muslims, were primarily a Punjabi Community. They did not possess a broader sub continental frame work, but would live and die by their unique and specific provincial heritage they were however, bifurcated between cis-Sutlej Sikhs, who resided within British territory, and the reminder of the community within the Sikh kingdom.²⁵ Annexation ended this division and reunited all Sikhs under the British. As a small minority, they had scant choice but to accept British rule, for they themselves could do little and no allies stood steady to join with them. But acceptance of English rule was painful for some Sikhs. The Namdharis exemplify this search, for they would purify the Sikh faith and create a separate world then newly arrived British Raj.²⁶ They had their own religious Sabhas such as 'Singh Sabha's etc.

Hindu: The Hindu of the plains, unlike the Sikhs and Muslims, had no political heritage. They had not ruled the Punjab since the thirteenth century and could only turn to their religious and cultural heritage for communal identity and reitliation. Their history was one of the dominance by foreigners and representatives of two conversion religions.

23. Kenneth W.Jones, op. cit. pp.19-20.**24. Ibid, P.20.****25. Khushwant Singh, The History of the Sikhs, pp. 4-5.****26. Kenneth W. Jones, op.cit p21.**

Punjabi Hindus lost the least, adopted the quickest, and became the most successful of all three communities.²⁷

Hindus were busy with their own religion. The twentieth century opened with the strong influence of Arya Samaj, Which motivated almost every social and educational activity among Hindus in Punjab. In fact, the Government

suspected the activities of Arya Samaj, Which it regarded as a political organization.²⁸

While developments in Lahore remained in the hands of the newly recruited members, Dayanand traveled throughout the province. His first Tour of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, and Jullundhar lasted a little over three months and resulted in three new Samaj branches.²⁹

The Lahore experience repeated itself throughout the Punjab. The establishment of each Arya Samaj forced a series of individuals, and occasionally group choices. The Ferozepore Hindu Sabha joined en-mass and simply changed its name to Ferozepore. Arya Samaj; while Multan, Brahmos deserted the older organization for a newly established Arya Samaj. By the 1880's, only the Lahore and Simla Brahmo Samajas remained vigorous and active organizations.³⁰ The Hindus formed 41.27% of the population of Punjab in 1901, and were first to study English and to hold minor jobs in civil administration. Quite a good number of them took to law, Medicine, Engineering, Business, Teaching etc.³¹

The last point was that literacy was very low in Punjab. The influence of Western education was not so intense here as in other provinces like Madras, Bombay and Bengal, Until the last decade of the last century, there was hardly and close in the Punjab which

27. Ibid, pp 21-22**28. B.R. Nanda, & V.C. Joshi, Studies in Modern Indian History Number one pp. 10-11****29. Kenneth W. Jones, op. cit p. 38****30. Ibid, P. 43****31. A.N. Bali, Glimpses of Punjab's History P. 68.**

inumed the hostility of the Government on political grounds. Educationally, Punjab was one of the most backward provinces of India. The first graduate from the Lahore College passed in 1870 and Punjab University did not come into existence until 1882. According of Punjab Census report of 1901, the proportion of educated persons was one in 26; of which Hindus (Including Sikhs) were on in 15 and Muslim on in 69.³² In the total educated population only one out of 10 was able to comprehend English. In the beginning of the 20th century, the percentage was still low as compared to other provinces.

A movement in favour of education was stimulated by Arya-Samaj and the Singh Sabha, the two vital reform movements., that played and

active role in Social and educational life in Punjab.³³ Punjabis showed little enthusiasm for Congress. Only two delegates attended the first Congress session in Bombay; Pt. Murli Dhar, a pleader from Ambala, And the Brahmo Militant Shive Naryan Agnihotri.³⁴

36. Ibid p. 244

The following year, in 1886, the Lahore India Association chose a delegation of 14, in last minute effort to ensure Punjabi representation.³⁵ The 1887 delegation consisted of 9 men to Arya Sabha pleaders from Western Towns, two Hindu pleaders, an erratic editor known for his libellous articles (Pt. Gopi Nath) and two perennial delegates Murli Dhar and Agnihotri, "The year 1880 marked the first upsurge of Punjab interest in the Congress., their delegation numbered 80, a dramatic increase over the previous years, although still small in

32. G.S. Chhabra, op. cit p 148. See also Census Report of 1901, p. 269.

33. S.C. Mittal, op. cit p16.

34. Tribune, December 19, 1885 p.3 Murli Dhar made a short Speech in meeting the Punjab Needed Legislative Council.

35. Darrier N.G. Punjab Politics and the Disturbances of 1907, p. 42 (Ph.D Thesis Duke University, 1966).

Comparison with other provincial delegations.³⁶ Punjabi Hindu leaders became involved in Congress following the anti-Congress statements of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1887.

Kenneth W. Jones in Arya Dharma has thrown valuable light on the emergence of elite in Punjab; Which shows the growth of English education. First of all, there was nucleus of Brahmo elite at Lahore which was the foundation of Punjab Government, the missionary activities in education and building up of reactionary activities in education and building up of reactionary activities of Lahore; Amritsar Lyallpur, Multan and Peshawar. The official administration control had brought administrative unity by the end of the 19th century; the political elite had emerged and was accruing their influence. That is why the National Congress session was held in Punjab in 1893.

The most striking feature of the early 20th century was the Arya Samaj Movement. The elite was first interested in civic matters but then its interest became wider, such as in National impulses.