Regional Muslim Politics in Multan under the British

Muhammad Shafique Bhatti
Associate Professor, Department of History
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

Lubna Kanwal
Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan
Email. Muhammadshafiq@bzu.edu.pk

Abstract

Whether regional politics was subject to mainstream British Indian politics or was associated with the regional issues, is a major question for the study of the History of British India. The paper evolves around the theme that regional politics under the British had been subject to the imperial structure of elites’ politics. In this structure, the regional political contests were the major reason of the change of parties or formation of political alliances. The introduction of western model of responsible representation shifted the priority area of politics from feudal to the groups and elites having a communal and mass footing. Regional politics emerged as a contest of elites having feudal decorum with those having masses temper and contacts. The success was won by those who had mass-contacts. The success of the political parties was subject to the support of those groups who had mass contacts. In the regional politics of Multan, Gillanis and Qureshis were two major contestants of Politics. Gillanis had a deep-rooted mass contact and won a mass support. The success of the Muslim League was subjects to the mass support which Gillanis has already won.

Keywords: Regional Politics, Elite Politics in Multan, Politics in the British Punjab, British Multan, History of Multan

I. Introduction

The postmodern theorists of ‘social contract’ and ‘political theory’ have given sequential and functional priority to the demographic, anthropological and regional structure of society over the institutional structure. (Gazetteer, 1923) A sort of struggle for political power among the different contestants creates a political hierarchy of interest groups to run the mechanism of state power and authority. However the functioning of authority and power becomes complex in an imperial structure, as imperial structure denies the political equilibrium among the rulers and ruled as well as among the elements contesting for the authority and power in a given society. Yet, the contesting factions try to seek power within the available political structure and environment at multi-levels, through rendering services to the imperial masters and ruled communities.

In this context, the history of politics in Punjab and Multan is explored with a limited perspective of elites contributions (Roseberry, 1988) and role of families of note, feudals and Ulema and Mashaikh, working within traditional Imperial structure of power.
(Griffin, 1940). This political role had been limited to what is called ‘Imperial Masters’ frame of work and reference. Any body, group, party or person challenging the Imperial Masters could not survive within political structure and contesting bodies, groups, parties and persons had to contest within the frame of what was defined as ruled and subjects. Although, historians like Paul Brass (Brass, 1978, p.178), Francis Robinson (1978), S. Akbar Zaidi,(2005, p. 13) Hafiz Malik (1980) and I. H. Qureshi (1962), focus on the role of religious South Asian ideology as a down-tricked political effect on regional politics of South Asia, the historians like S. Qalb-i-Abid (1992), and Ian Talbot (2002) emphasize on the politics of Muslim majority regions to understand the Muslim politics.

The paper evolves around the theme that regional politics was bound to serve the regional divide and struggle of elites to find a status of ‘Ashraf’ or nobles within the imperial structure. (Hardy, 1972) The politics developed a tradition of shifting weightages from one party to other as per regional and group priority. The contest between persons, parties and groups continued to affect the loyalties of the persons, parties and groups at Punjab and Imperial level. Basically, it was a politics of elites that took the form of mass politics due to the reason that one or other group failed to find a dominant place within the ruling elites. As the focus of the research is on Muslims politics, therefore, we will deal with the Muslim structure of politics in the following pages. Explore the issue the problem emerges in the form of scarcity of research materials as well as a somewhat distinctive plural political culture of Multan. No documentation of the regional issues is available for researchers and some scattered hand written explanatory notes and biographical sketches by and on the prominent personalities of Multan provide clue to the historical events and evidences with a lot of exaggerations.

II. The Early Phase of Muslim Politics in Multan

After the British conquest of the Multan, Multan became a district as well as divisional headquarter under the Punjab administration. It was predominantly a Muslim majority region with more than 89 % rural population. However, the politics of the district was dominated by the religious elites residing in the Multan city, having strong following among the rural masses. ‘It was considered as one of the most ancient living centre of civilization in the world, representing a dynamic professional compound of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural urban society, with a structure very diverse from the traditional cast and clan configuration of regional political environ in Punjab, Sind, Balochistan and North Western Frontiers’. (Bhatti, 2013) The city had a dominance of a guild-structure of professional affiliations reflective in the division of the city into professional settlements such as Mohallah Kamangaran, Sotriwat, Lohahat, etc.. The second division of the city was developed on the communal basis with the division of the settlement of religious elites such as Mohala Gillaian, Shah Gardez , Hanu da Chajja, etc.. However, rural society was divided into castes, clans and sects. The leading Muslim political families of Multan district were Gardezis, Gillanis and Qureshis of Multan, Syeds, Shahs and Dahas of Khanewal, Shah, Noons, Langah and Bokharis of Shujabad, Daultanas, Khichis and Pathans of Melsi, Kanjus and Baloch of Lodharan and Bosans of Multan. These families of note had close ties with the second order landed elites of Maliks, Haraj, Hijnirah, Bhattis, Langahs, Siyal, Rajputs, Khokhars, Labers, Mahey, Karloo, Khichhi, Dehars, Sheikhs, Awan and others. ( Gillani, 1938)
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Multan had been a centre of political hold of Muslim elites since the Muslim conquest of the region. The rulers were used to keep close relations with the Muslim religious elites and effective use of the influence of Multani religious elites to control the tribes down to Indus and beyond. During the weak Imperial administration, Multani Muslims were habitual to claim an independent status under the settled groups who had adopted Multani language and culture such as Qureshis and Afghans. However, this independent status was always challenged by new Imperial class and emerging regional powers. At the time of the British Conquests, Multan was under the Sikh control who had subjugated the elite’s representation to armed power of Hindus and Sikhs. Therefore, most of the Muslim masses and elites were unconcerned with the defence of Multan under the Sikhs and Hindus, hence became natural welcome-allies of the British in attack on the Multan city in 1849. The British emerged as liberators for the Multani Muslim elites and it developed a reliable relationship between the Multani elites and the British Imperial administration. The War of Independence 1857 strengthened this relationship between Multani Muslims and British Imperialists as the Multani elites had unanimously supported the British armies and assisted them with the man and material. That is why in the British Imperial administration Multani elites had a prominent representation. Initially this representation was at nomination level and was later extended to electoral level.

The Imperial British administration developed a multiple system for necessary contacts with the indigenous population. Developing a system of generating a class loyal to the British through the grants of land and providing a space in the imperial system of administration through the extension of western education, the British encouraged personified class structure. They developed an evolutionary mechanism of representation, providing a space to the indigenous people from the Council of India, Viceroy’s Council, Governor’s Councils and Executive and interest relations with the local people on a dynamic model of nominations from the indigenous social, political, commercial and religious elites from provincial legislatures to municipal and district administration and lower bureaucracy for regional administration. Rajan Bakhsh Gillani (1878-1936) enjoyed every sort of representation in the British from the member District Board to member Central Assembly from 1921 to his death in 1929. He was called the ‘Baldia ka Bapu’ (Father of Multani Municipality). The same status was enjoyed by his son Reza Shah Gillani.

Although the development of this mechanism had begun very soon after the assumption of the British Indian administration by the British crown, but it took a definite form after the end of First World War and by the introduction of Indian Councils Act 1919 which was implemented through the elections in 1921. Prior to the act of 1919, Multani Muslims had not been able to find a place in the higher imperial administration. Most of the space provided to the indigenous people had been of honorary nature. On the other hand it reflected a class and group representation. The concern of the masses had very little to do with this sort of system of politics that was generally based on the confidence conferred by the imperial masters.

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1 For example Ghulam Yaseen Gillani became the Honorary Magistrate in 1912, Sahib Ali Gardezi was the courtier of Viceroy, Abdul Qadir Badozai Honorary Majistrate in 1914, Ahmed Yar Khakwani was the divisional courtier. There are so many such examples.

2 Aulad Ali Gillani’s narrative has so many examples of this type of representation granted to Qureshis, Gillanis, Gardezis, Kanjus, Daultanas, Shahs, Khokhars etc.
The act of 1919 developed a taste of genuine politics through the introduction of limited representative authority among the indigenous elites with limited and controlled franchise politics. The concern of the public had a limited space in the structure of the act. Therefore a mixed sort of representation, mainly of varied elites was encouraged and managed by the British authorities in the representative institutions. These groups primarily belonged to the religious and landed aristocracy. However by the growth of the public politics and struggle for independence, Indian masses began to be mobilize and new pattern of leadership, having base in the masses began to grow, resulting in the emergence of a leadership representing ‘public will’ and support. In the modern political system, authority and sovereignty of modern state and government are considered the reflection and embodiment of that will, measurement of which is mechanized through the introduction of electoral systems (Blumer, 1948). This sort of public politics and extension of franchise for the execution of electoral process led to the beginning of a mass politics in Multan district like other districts of Punjab.

The All India Muslim League vs Unionist Party and Multani Muslim Elites

The impact of communal and western politics had begun to appear on the local politics of Multan by the mid-nineteenth century and Muslim educational and reformist movements had been launched. In Response to Sir Syed’s movements, in 1882, a Muhammedan Society was established in Multan. An Unjuman-i- Himayat-i- Urdu had already been established in 1881. Multan branch of Muhammedan Educational Conference was also established in 1886 and the three societies, on the common ground send a donation of five thousands for the Aligarh College. (Akhtar, 2005) The Muslims of Multan continued to contribute for the donations to the other Muslim societies, especially of Punjab.

The Indian national politics had not left any remarkable impact on the local politics until the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 but had not established any significant political layout for the region. The communal politics of Muslim League did not match the interests of the religio-political elites of Multan as they were in direct relations with the Imperial Masters. The Muslim League Branch was established in the nearby district of Muzaffargarh in 1906, but failed to establish even a basic unit in Multan. In this culture of politics, the establishment of Punjab Unionist Party in the early 1920s as a pro-British non-communal elitist party became a centre of regional politics. All regional groups of communal, ethnic and cultural Multani elites joined the Unionist Party. In this politics, the issue of communal interests created a major difference as it became a main issue in the politics of separate electorates. Two major groups of Multan, Gillanis and Qureshis, decided to contest future politics on the same issue within the given environment of Unionist Party and the Imperial Masters.

Communal Politics of Multan

Multan district was mainly composed of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, with a dominant Muslim population. However, Multan city was considered one of communally most sensitive regions of Punjab, especially after the introduction of electoral politics. District Gazetteer of 1923 points out:

3 Proceeding of the meeting of the Anjuman i Himayat-e-Urdu at the retirement of Mir Wahid Ali, civil Surgeon Multan, quoted from a periodical “Alwaiz”.
Religious tension in the villages is very ordinary...[but] In Multan city, the case is different, for religious prejudices die hard and although the two communities lie together in peace for years, an unforeseen and trivial incident may stir up latent animosities and give rise to outburst of a fanaticism.(Gazetteer, 1923, p. 118)

The religious tension in the subcontinent was stir up by the events during the Khilafat Movement. After the outbreak of communal riots in the Multan city in 1924, the Muslims began to organize themselves for the defence of their rights. The Muslim League was not yet established in the District and Pir as champions of the cause of religion had taken up the cause of the community. In reaction to the Ghandhi’s policy, they had established social checks on the Hindus. The Hindus attempts to erect temples in the different part of Multan city and cantonment met a strong and successful resistance by the Muslims and four temples erected on the land of cantonment were destroyed by the British administration on the initiatives of the Muslims.

The Gillani’s Mass Politics

In spite of the fact that so many Muslim families had represented the elite groups and the District’s Muslim bureaucracy had served potentially to the communal interests of the community, by the beginning of twentieth century, Gillanis had emerged as indigenous patrons of the Muslim rights with a profound influence over the people not only of district and division, but also of the region. They had already developed a four ladder hierarchical system of leadership to serve the Multani Muslims. At the one end, the hierarchy was religiously linked with the Ottomans and Hashmites as heads of the political and clan successors of the prophet, and at the other end, they were associated with the British ‘Imperial Masters’ as active members of Imperial Indian administration. The two extremes were tied up with each other in the name of dissemination of modern knowledge to the Muslims on the ‘Aligarh model’ ( Akhtar, 2005) of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan by the Gillani elites. For that, they were closely associated with the institutions responsible for the welfare of the people at local level under the British administration such as Municipal Committee and District Board and at higher level of provincial legislature.

Categorically pro-British nature of the hierarchy felt it difficult to oppose or challenge the British authority. As associates of Imperial British administration, the leading figures of the family were bound to act in accordance with the wishes of Imperial masters even in their relations with the other communities. To approach this problem, the family itself developed a fourth ladder of public leadership out of the influence of Imperial administrations through the politics of communal interest. Zainulabidin Zeno Shah Gillani (1876-1960) was the main architect of this approach. Having been associated with all Muslim associations, the Gillanis had emerged as the patrons of the Anjuman-i-Islamiyah Multan since its formation. During the Khilafat Movement Raza Shah Gillani was expelled from the College (Bhutta, p.141) and Zainul Abidin Shah

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4 Proceeding of the meeting of the Anjuman i Himayat-e-Urdu at the retirement of Mir Wahid Ali, civil Surgeon Multan, quoted from a periodical “Alwaiz”.
5 For that the Gillanis had established Anjuman-i-Islamiyah in Multan and had launched educational institutions under the leadership of Willayat Hussain Gillan.
6 Syed Aulad Ali Gillani’s Muraja I Multan provides some documentary proofs of the loyalty of the two families to the British Government.
resigned from the post of Tehsildar to participate in the movement. (Ibid, p.144) Agitation for Pul Shawal Mosque was led by this Syed Zainul Abidin Zeno Shah and he was also the General of Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam. (Bhatti, 2009) In this context, the Gillanis’ role in the communal politics was acknowledged by the government through the nomination of Syed Rajan Bukhsh Gillani for the Committee constituted to probe into the issues related to Huj in 1929. (Gillani, p.300) In 1934 another Gillani, Raza Shah became the first non-official Chairman of Multan District Board. By the 1930 the Gillanis had established their place as the defenders of the rights of the Muslim community. Therefore, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s efforts to revive the Muslim League on the communal bases found a logical ally in the form of Gillani Family.

Qureshites’ Elitist Politics

The group contesting against the Gillanis was Qureshis. They also had enjoyed a great religious reverence among the Muslims as descendants of great twelveth century saint Bahauddin Zakariya of Suhrawardi sufi order. They had a sufi belief in developing good relations with the working governments since centuries to resolve the problems of the common masses. A number of members belonging to the order and family had enjoyed the status of Shaikh-ul-Islam and with this religious connotation they had established a reputation of pro British elites and had shown an unrivalled loyalty to the British. Rather than focusing the religious and communal issues, the Qureshis remained attached with the main stream groups loyal to the British government and mainstream body formed for the defence of the rights of the Zamindars, the Unionists Party. Simultaneously, inspite of the fact that the people of Multan have a great reverence for the holy shrines of the ancestor of the Quraishis, most of their disciples were Sindhis and the Sajadahnasheen of Suhrawardy shrine were more concerned with their disciples than the people of Multan. The position of the Gillanis was further strengthened by the myths associated with their “Tawiz” and “Dua”. The Quraishis have been weakened by the rumours linking the linage of the family with an adopted heir. So the Quraishis had a weak place in the communal politic of Multan.

The real strength of the Qureshis was based on their relations with the government and pro-government non-communal party Unionist Party. After the death of Rajan Bakhsh Gillani, Sir Murid Hussain Qureshi (d.1960) was nominated as the member of Central Assembly. This strength was more consolidated after the marriage of Sir Murid Hussain Qureshi’s cousin’s son Ashiq Hussain Qureshi (d.1947) with the daughter of brother of Shaukat Hayat, a leading Muslim member of the Unionist Party, who later became the premier of Punjab. Therefore, the Qureshites continued to serve non-communal politics in the name of the Unionist Party until the formation of Pakistan.

In the traditional Imperial structure of politics, Qureshis had dominated the houses the powers and had established cordial relations with the elites having close relations with the imperial Masters by 1930s. Gillanis cannot be equal to the Qureshis in the power mechanism of the Unionist Party. The only way to survive in the politics for the Gillanis was to focus on the mass politics. At regional level, they already had established a great

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7 Syed Aulad Ali Gillani’s Muraqa I Multan provides some documentary proofs of the loyalty of the two families to the British Government.
8 In the Election 1946, failing to win ticket of the AIML three members of the Qureshi family of Multan contested the election on the tickets of the Unionist Party and Major Ashiq Hussoan won his seat.
sort of mass contact through Anjuman-e-Islamia, Anjuman-e-Fidayan-e-Islam and through communal politics. The opportunity of that mass politics other than the communal way at provincial and all India level was provided by the Government of India Act 1935 with the introduction of responsible government.

Electoral Politics under the Act or 1935

The government of India Act 1935 introduced responsible and representative system of governance on the western model in India. To implement the Act and to choose the responsible representative first elections were held in 1937. The elections in the region were contested with a traditional approach, and both Qureshis and Gillanis contested from the same plate-form of the Unionist Party. The Unionist Party as well as Qureshis could not afford the lose of the Gillanis’ mass support in the elections. Although Sher Shah Gillani failed to win a Unionist ticket for the Imperial Council against the Qureshis, Willayatussian Gilani and Mustafa Shah Gillani won Provincial Assembly seats of Shujabad and Lodhran on the ticket of the Unionist Party. This second order status was not acceptable to the Gillanis and they began to find out alternate opportunities or politics which was available in the form of local bodies and All India Muslim League.

Gillani Family and All India Muslim League.

Having a marginalized place in the Unionists politics of Punjab in 1930s, The Gillanis focused on the local politics and almost captured its hold. In 1934, Raza Shah Gillani became the first non-official Chairman of Multan District Board. They began to shift the focus of their politics to All India Muslim League before the elections of 1937. After refusing to join the Unionist Party, Zainulabidin Gillani became the natural and logical ally of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s efforts to revive the Muslim League on the communal bases and win the support of Punjabi masses. In 1936, Jinnah visited Lahore to win the support of the Unionist Party through a joint election formula. Although the Unionists refused to cooperate, yet, Jinnah initiated an All India Muslim League membership and organization campaign. Zainul Abidin Gillani met Jinnah through Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, joined the League and took up the task of the organization of Muslim League in the Multan District.(Bhutta, p. 145) In 1937, Multan branch of All India Muslim League, Reza Shah as its first President was established. However, in the election of 1937, the Muslim League remained unable to find even the candidates from the Multan District. Sikander-Jinnah pact 1937, allowing dual membership to the Muslim League members of the Unionist Party provided a solid footing to the Multisim League in Multan District and almost all leading families joined hands with the Muslim League and Musllim League’s Punjab Branch, ‘effectively was under the unionists control’.( Talbot, 1984, p. 90) The Unionist Party was not a mass party and Muslim League was determined to become a mass party, therefore, Muslim League launched a propaganda campaign.

Revival of the Muslim League by 1936, joining of leaders and elites having mass contact, and the adoption of Lahore Resolution 1940 as a war-time manifesto and as a superior end for the Muslim League, made the Muslim League and the Gillanis essential for each other. On the other hand, the Qureshis continued to enjoy the power through the Unionist Party and became part of the war-time misgovernment of the Unionists and resultant displeasure of the imperial masters as well as of Punjabi masses. The Muslim League had become a mass party and wished to make the voter masses member of the party as ‘all Land owners who paid Rs. 5 and onward in Land Revenue were
enfranchised as were tenets who occupied more than six acres of irrigated, or 12 acres of unirrigated land. (Talbot, 1984, p.90)

By the 1942 ‘the war time policies of heavy army recruitment and the requisition and rationing of food grains undermined the Unionist Party’s popularity in the country side’ (Ibid, p.30). Simultaneously, Muslim League launched a membership campaign decreasing the fee to two Annas. In 1942, Nawab Murid Hussain Qureshi joined the Muslim League with a duel membership. By the 1944, the establishment of Muslim Students Federation under the patronage of the Gillanis shifted the focus of the politics from elite to the masses. As Quraishi’s were still unable to transfer all their allegiance to the League, they failed to win a place equal to Gillanis in Multan Muslim League. The Gillani Piris toured the region and advised their disciples to join the Muslim League. They used all their influence for the popularity of the League. Student workers toured the villages exploiting the growing war time discontent along with medical supplies, distributing cloths among the villagers. They linked the solution of their problems with the demand for Pakistan. In this perspective, the Muslim League launched its election campaign for 1945-6. A number of candidates applied for the tickets, however, the strength of the League’s candidates was their long standing attachment with the communal issues and solution of the problems in the form of the establishment of Pakistan. It was totally a Gillanis panel succeeding in wining the League’s tickets. Even Murid Hussain Qureshi failed to win a ticket. The Qureshis still were aligned with the Unionists and Gillanis with the Muslim League. The Unionists and the Qureshis lost all seats from the district as well as from the region. Raza Shah Gillani and Mustafa Shah Gillani became the members from Lodhran and Shujabad Tehsils. The Gillani did not contested direct against the Major Ashiq Hussain Qureshi from the Seat of Multan, but defeated him through one of their Murid and ally Akram Khan Bosan. (Qureshi, p.95) Raza Shah Gillani defeated Murid Hussain Qureshi with a heavy Margin. It was a victory for Gillanis’ mass contact and for the case of Pakistan.

III. Conclusion

The regional politics of Multan during the British period was subject to the elitist structure and families of note within the space provided by the imperial masters. It represents a contest within the elites loyal to the British. All groups contesting in the politics of Multan were loyal to the British including two leading religious families of Gillanis and Qureshis. As long as the regional elites had no alternates, they had to follow the non-communal landlord base composition of the Unionists Party which was dominated by the Qureshis as regional representatives. However, marginalized elites had always sought a space for the alternates through communal and mass contacts as well as political mobilization. In this configuration of politics, marginalized places in the provincial politics as well as local and regional political contests were the major reason for the change of political parties or development of political alliances. The introduction of western model of responsible representation shifted the priority to the groups and elites having a communal and mass footing. Regional politics was a contest of elites having feudal decorum with those having masses temper and contacts. The success was won by those who had mass-contacts. The success of the political parties was subject to the support of those groups who had mass contacts. In the regional politics of Multan, Gillanis had deep-rooted mass contacts and won a mass support. The success of the All India Muslim League was subjects to the mass support which Gillanis had already won. They were associated with the regional communal issues long before Jinnah and were in
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contact with the Masses since long. This led to a political success contributing to the victory of All India Muslim League in the elections of 1946 and resultant formation of Pakistan.

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