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# Role of British Policies and Governance in Communalization of Hindu and Muslim Religious Identities in Colonial India: A Study of Major Contributing Factors

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*The paper explores the background, formation, evolution and intensification of Hindu and Muslim communal identities in British India. It traces the origins of these religious identities, emphasizing the influence and impacts of Colonial policies of modernisation along with the role played by the Christian missionaries and the print capitalism. The imperialist designs and developments of Colonial government further sharpened these identities through the British orientalist, introduction of census and codification of new legal system. Additionally, the role played by Muslim and Hindu social and communal organizations was pivotal in exacerbating these divisions, often leveraging religion as a tool. Consequently, these dynamics led to the rise of Hindu and Muslim separatism, culminating in the bloodiest partition of the Indian subcontinent along sectarian and communal lines.*

**Key Words:** Colonial India, Identity, Intertwined, Communal, Partition

## **Introduction**

Communalism in Indian subcontinent refers to a mindset that relies on religious identity as its foundation. It seeks political loyalty to a particular religious community and advocates for actions to advance the interests of that community. This kind of identity discourse, which holds such political power can only be attained through a single religion, aiming to eradicate diversity and impose homogeneity. In order to increase its political influence, it seeks to assemble as many adherents as it can, frequently highlighting its superiority over competing factions. This creation of religious “imagined communities” frequently ignores other social distinctions such as class or rank.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the 1947 Partition of India, the emergence of two autonomous states Pakistan and India, was based on political, ethnic and communal differences evolved over a period of time. India was the centre of different communities living together since thousands of years, having different religious identities and majority of those were Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. They had different religious beliefs, cultural, ethical and moral values. They were speaking different languages, performing their particular cultural and religious activities without any serious apprehensions. Furthermore, there was no concept of categorizing their communal identities. Their identities were not rigid. They were more fluid in pre-modern India.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of the East India Company (now onward EIC) rule (particularly after the War of Plassey, 1757), greatly affected the Indian communities. The legacy was carried out by the British Government, which replaced EIC’s Government in 1858. The British Government introduced multiple changes in the system of governance. These reformatory measures along with the development of modern institutions, infrastructure, census, education, health, military recruitment, print capitalism and system of canal colonization led to the categorization of different social and communal identities. With the passage of time, the classifications of different ethnic and religious communities become more rigid and fixed. This resulted in increased consciousness among various groups about their identity which finally gave rise to construction of static identities that were unsolidified in past.<sup>3</sup>

Despite of the role played by Colonial Government, Hindu and Muslim social and communal organizations aimed at reforming their particular community, contributed in further sharpening of these religious identities.

### **Religious Identities in Pre-Modern India**

In pre-modern India, different identities coexisted and were employed strategically. But, there a question arises, whether the Hindus and Muslims were conscious about their identities in pre-modern India or not. Many of the scholars and existing literature support the view point that there were certain influences that encouraged greater conceptual and practical unity within religious associations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The propagation of orthodox Islamic doctrine, supported by religious leaders such as Shah Waliullah and later on by his son Shah Abdul Aziz, had a significant impact on Delhi's general populace as well as academics.<sup>4</sup> The increasing interaction between religious leaders and common people resulted in a growing alignment of the mystical and academic streams of Islam. Furthermore, the influence of Muslim aristocracy increased along with the expansion of Muslim rule. Due to the transfer of political power from Delhi to provinces around 1700 A.D., orthodox Islamic practices spread quickly throughout the Indian subcontinent.<sup>5</sup>

Similar efforts and advancements that sought to bring greater unity among the diversity of ideas and practices were seen in Hinduism. Large portions of North India were affected by the success of Vaishnavite sects<sup>6</sup> such as the Ramanandis.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, the rise of new Hindu states, like the Maratha and Jaipur kingdoms, led to a more ritualistic, Brahminical form of religion, influencing communal tensions. While these changes were significant in urban and small-town areas, traditional rituals remained largely unchanged in rural regions. During this period, movements aiming to bridge religious divides emerged, such as Bengali Vaishnavism and the teachings of Kabir. Despite a growing sense of cohesive Hindu or Muslim identity, this did not always lead to open conflict or distinct group formations. For instance, in Delhi, despite Shah Waliullah's revival efforts and a strong presence of Hindu and Jain trade groups, there was minimal Hindu-Muslim animosity. Thus, while religious revitalization did not always create communal identities, pre-modern Hindu-Muslim symbiosis still left room for potential conflicts.<sup>8</sup> It is imperative to re-evaluate the notion that the main objective of eighteenth century Indian forces like the Marathas, Sikhs and Mysore, was religious revivalism in order to tackle this problem. We can investigate the disputes that developed amongst the adherents of different religious traditions throughout this period by examining those traditions interacted with one another.<sup>9</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, as Mughal authority declined with the rise of regional states, Muslim rulers increasingly allied with Sufis. For example,

Sufis like Mansur Shah became close advisors to Maratha leaders such as Mahaji Scindia. After Mahaji's death, his son, Daulat Rao Scindia, honored Mansur Shah's successor, Bala Qadir and Maratha warriors participated in Mansur Shah's funeral rites. The Maratha army frequently welcomed Muslim religious figures. Additionally, leaders like Sindia and Holkar, who built the bathing ghats in Banaras, were followers of Sheikh Moin-ud-din Chishti of Ajmer.<sup>10</sup>

Ranjit Singh established his kingdom around 1800 A.D., despite being connected to the Sikh Khalsa heritage, he acknowledged the authority of the Gillani and Bukhara Sayyids because of the respect that the Muslims in Punjab held for them.<sup>11</sup> While assuming a royal title in 1801, Ranjit Singh made sure Muslim scholars endorsed his assertion that he was an incarnation of God. Additionally, Ranjit Singh appointed Qazi Nizammuddin as the leader of all Muslims in the Lahore area,<sup>12</sup> fulfilling an essential requirement for Punjab to continue being known as Dar-ul-Islam. Unlike Hindu rulers, newly formed Muslim regional powers were also eager to connect with important Hindu sites and festivals, though they did so in a more covert manners.<sup>13</sup>

The Oudh nawabs encouraged Shia court culture and reduced support for Sunni shrines, favoring indirect relations to major Hindu centers. They granted Gosains and Vaishnavite priests in Mathura and Ayodhya large tracts of land. In the same way, Akbar combined Hindu and Muslim customs. Asaf-ud-Daula (nawab wazir of Oudh) personally supported the Hindu reformer Jagjivan Das of Kotwa, who established the Satnami sect.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Salambar was believed by many Muslims and Hindus to have been the resting place of Prophet Sulaiman. Where he acknowledged the villagers, provided them joy by distributing gifts.<sup>15</sup>

Hindu-Muslim Pindari bands created a fusion of religious practices in which goddess Kali and Muslim Sufis and saints were worshipped. Muslim *fakirs* and Hindu *sanyasis* were respected guests who frequently influenced military alliances and talks. The Rohillas respected the faith of their Hindu associates and were supported by Rajputs who had converted to Hinduism. On the other hand, Hindu agriculturalist castes like as the Kurmis, Kacchis, and Malis were encouraged by revenue farmers such as Almas Ali Khan to incorporate Islamic religious symbols into their traditional customs and dress. Since Akbar's reign, Muslim rulers have been influenced by the merging of holy traditions which were common in Hindu states. During later Mughal campaigns, Muslim and Hindu commanders arranged prayers for both religions. Even due to the Jain warriors' fighting for the imperial army, a Jain temple was built near the Red Fort.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the Northern India, Sindh was also a region where intertwined religious identities existed which were shaped by multiple factors, blending historical differences and crossing socio-cultural boundaries. The intertwined identities usually did not express themselves in just one clear way.<sup>17</sup> These mixed identities didn't separate Muslims and Non-Muslims into strict categories based on Islam and Hinduism. Religious differences weren't major political identifiers in Sindh and being Muslim didn't always mean holding power. Power dynamics and religious purity weren't closely tied in history of Sindh. Same was the case with other Indians who converted from Hinduism to Islam, adopting the new name while keeping the old as well. There were no religious sanctions on those keeping the mix names and carrying the cultural traditions of their previous religion. However, the Arab and Central Asian migrants were having their clear identities contrary to the local Indians. In 1920s, the link between politics and cultural purity changed and the cultural purity which was previously acting as shield against divisive politics had weakened.<sup>18</sup>

In the eighteenth century, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and ruler of Mysor, Tipu Sultan's actions such as enforcing strict Muslim law and targeting Hindu temples, were strategic moves to solidify their states' foundations for military expansion. Those were calculated policies, not merely religious fanaticism.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's anti-Muslim acts, banning cattle slaughter and prohibiting public calls to prayer in Amritsar, cannot be labelled as communal but as asserting Sikh sovereignty. Despite occasional Sikh vilification of Muslims, there wasn't a clear communal identity emerging.<sup>20</sup> In 1789, Bengal, which was often considered free from Hindu and Muslim tensions until the nineteenth century, experienced violent clashes during the Muharram and Durga Puja festivals. In North India, Hindu and Muslim riots existed during the period from 1820 to 1850. Hindu and Jain commercial groups grew assertive as Muslim warrior and gentry classes declined. Economic factors also played a role in communal violence among artisan communities, though evidences are limited.<sup>21</sup>

In Bareilly in 1816, dyers and weavers from Eastern Oudh, were notably receptive to Islamic puritanism, sometimes targeting their Hindu neighbors. As seen by the co-existence of Muslim and Hindu craftsmen in localities like Pirana, close to Ahmedabad, syncretism was frequently welcomed in artisan culture. Their shared religious culture was so ingrained that Hindus, while still cremating their dead, buried the right forefinger within the shrine's compound. While some artisan communities were pious, it is incorrect to generalize them as fanatical. Tensions among artisans and

merchants usually stemmed from specific local economic grievances, occasionally manifesting as communal conflict.<sup>22</sup> As previously economic tussles later on transformed gradually into full-scale communal conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

### **Hindu and Muslim Communal Identity Formations in Colonial India**

British Colonial rule had played significant role in the formation and communalization of Hindu and Muslim identities. The large scale communal riots and conflicts were emerged only during the Colonial period. According to Ian Talbot, communal violence in Indian subcontinent was a British construct. Earlier, there was no question of Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs identities. Orientalists also claimed that the social strife was due to the religious division among the Indians.<sup>24</sup>

The post Mutiny period witnessed the shift in government. Victorian period saw the entrenchment of imperial authority, followed by a series of reforms, laws and administrative tactics. The formation of distinct political identities based on “elite-mass” and Muslim-Hindu division was linked to Colonial strategies. This split of society reflected imperial “divide and rule” policy.<sup>25</sup> Two hundred years before the Colonial rule in Indian subcontinent, India was under the Muslim rule till 1857 but the local identities were not sharpened. The key developments that sharpened the process of communal identity formation are critically analyzed below.

### **Major Contributing Factors Sharpening Religious Identities**

The major factors contributing to the sharpening of religious identities were as following:

#### *i. Role of Christian Missionaries*

The role of Christian missionaries was started in eighteenth century with the transformation of EIC from trading company to a political power. Warren Hasting, the first Governor General of Bengal in 1772, formed new policies in his administration. He encouraged the newly appointed energetic servants of EIC to study the Indian vernacular languages including, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. For this purpose, Fort William College was established in 1773 to learn how to effectively control the Indian subcontinent.<sup>26</sup> He was convinced that the study of local vernacular languages would add to control Indian society. As a result, Abu'l Fazl's “Ain-i-Akbari” and “An Account of the Mode of Governing” under Emperor Akbar, was among the earliest books to be translated into English.<sup>27</sup> The study of Persian and Sanskrit was important in late eighteenth century to establish and understand the legal system of Hindus and Muslims. However, Thomas Trautmann draws

attention to yet another crucial venue for the generation of first-hand knowledge regarding Indian languages, cultures and customs. He stressed upon to consult the work of two important orientalist scholars: William Jones (founder of Indo-European languages) and F.W. Ellis (founder of the Dravidian language families). According to Trautmann, the Serampore Mission in Bengal, in particular, was instrumental in early nineteenth century in the documentation of Indian languages. They committed themselves to learning these languages to communicate with Indians directly and translated the Bible into indigenous languages for particular populations. In order to help other missionaries and EIC workers to learn Indian languages, they produced linguistic materials. Through this, missionaries made a substantial contribution to the integration of scripts, languages, and religious communities throughout India.<sup>28</sup>

The Church of England, then known as the Church Missionary Society, spearheaded an international effort to disseminate Christianity in the nineteenth century. Missionaries with enthusiasm and puritanical passion worked to save non-Christians from purgatory. These organizations included the London Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society, Glasgow Missionary Society, Scottish Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society. India was the primary target of the Baptist Missionary Society's mission to spread Christianity.<sup>29</sup> EIC executives, Charles Grant, George Udney and a Calcutta chaplain David Brown, urged Britain to dispatch a Christian mission to India in 1787.<sup>30</sup> William Carey, Henry Martyn, Charles Grant, Charles Treveleyan and Duff were the major functionaries of the missionary activities in India.<sup>31</sup> William Carey, called "Father of the Modern Missionary Movement", was also one of those who asked the government to send Christian missions to India. He was deeply inspired by reading about the German Evangelicals that in 1792, he initiated a movement by writing a pamphlet "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens," His work contributed a lot in bringing missionaries in India as within a month, the Baptist Missionary Society founded in 1792 and he himself was selected for India. It was followed by other voluntary societies such as London Missionary Society in 1799. EIC did not allowed all the missionaries in India at once. There were multiple reasons behind that, firstly the precarious situation after the occupation of Bengal and Oudh. Secondly due to the non-cooperation of William Carey and other officials with EIC Government. Thirdly, the hostile reaction of the natives and public distress over this sensitive issue. All these issues could be threatened the Company rule in India. Even the Company Charter's Act of 1813 did not allow all

missionaries to enter India; however, it gave them an option to appeal directly to the Board of Control.<sup>32</sup>

The very first Christian Missions allowed in Indian subcontinent in Bengal and Punjab were the Serampore Mission (1783) and American Presbyterian (1834). Those were the first ones who used printing press as an effective evangelizing tool. For this purpose, the American Presbyterian Mission founded first press in 1835 in Ludhiana.<sup>33</sup> Ludhiana became an important base for missionaries who quickly expanded their activity after the annexation of Punjab in March 1849. In the 1860s, they created a vast mission network throughout the North-West, despite difficulties during and after the War of 1857. They vigorously promoted Christianity through public preaching and print media. The missionaries were seen as an expansion of the government's two-fold mandate, which was to rule Punjab and evangelize its people. Missionaries targeted the lower strata of society especially the oppressed one. They provided education, health facilities and employment opportunities to them which resulted mass conversion into Christianity. From 1891 to 1911, the total converts increased from 19,750 to 163,994, which was nearly forty-fold increase into Christianity.<sup>34</sup> The mass conversion alarmed the Hindu and Muslim population leading to the degradation of Indian culture and conflict between the classes themselves. The inheritance rights of these converts were safeguarded by the British Government subsequently.<sup>35</sup> This provided the framework which gave rise to Hindu and Muslim socio-religious and cultural revival organizations to counter the Baptist activities. However, these associations further contributed to the sharpening of communitarian identities in Indian subcontinent.<sup>36</sup>

## *ii. Role of British Orientalists*

In late eighteenth century, new political and executive measures were adopted by the British EIC to keep their hold on the newly occupied areas of India including Bengal and later on Punjab. These were supported, altered and replaced by a series of policies with the passage of time, notably with the appointment of every new policy maker. Lord Wellesley assumed the role of Governor General of India amidst the growing threats to British interests in the region. To counter radical thoughts and French influence, Wellesley implemented measures like censorship and visa requirements for Europeans in India. Furthermore, he proposed the establishment of Fort William College in Calcutta. This institution, collaborating with indigenous scholars and British orientalist<sup>37</sup> played a crucial role in imparting knowledge and standardizing administrative practices. The orientalist



contributed significant part in shaping Hinduism into a cohesive religion by integrating various myths, beliefs, rituals, and laws. This process led to the formation of what we now know as “Hinduism.”<sup>38</sup> Over the period of time, Hinduism had undergone continuous reinterpretation, largely influenced by Orientalist perspectives. As a result, emergent national consciousness developed. Individuals who embraced a national consciousness, frequently idealizing themselves, created the understanding of Hindu identity. A significant portion of this identity came from upper-caste Brahmins. It became essential for political mobilization and gaining access to economic resources in the nineteenth century. The competition for middle class jobs further highlighted representation’s emphasis on community size. These elements strengthened the sense of community.<sup>39</sup>

### iii. **Print Capitalism**

Benedict Anderson, in her Work, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, outlined the role of print capitalism in promoting different identities. Through innovative means, modernization has greatly improved and diversified identities. In Punjab in particular, Christian missionaries were among the first to introduce print capitalism to India.<sup>40</sup> Print culture’s arrival in Punjab marked the beginning of a new phase of socio-political activity and made a major contribution to the expansion of journalism across India. The cheap publications gave rise to communal consciousness which was fixed by the censuses. The first printing press, established in Ludhiana (1835), printed texts in Arabic, Persian and a number of local vernacular languages using Indo-Persian fonts. The language and script were chosen by the government and missionaries according to how they perceived their relationship to religious groups. After its establishment, in 1838, the printing press published 70,000 volumes with 24 titles, amounting to over a million pages, in just two years. By 1840, the output reached two million pages. All the material published by the press was in English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Kashmiri<sup>41</sup> and Persian.<sup>42</sup> The Lahore Chronicle Press (1840) was sponsored by government while Koh-i-Noor (1850) was the first Indian Press in Lahore.<sup>43</sup> Presses in Lahore, Amritsar and smaller towns were thriving by the late 1800s. They published books, newspapers and magazines in a number of languages, although Urdu was predominated. Thirteen important newspapers were published by 1873; seven were in Urdu, four in English, and two in Arabic.<sup>44</sup>

The Act XXV of 1867 was passed by the Indian Legislative Council to regulate printing presses and required publishers to provide editorial information to the government. Punjabi newspapers during 1800s, had

strong Sikh, Muslim and missionary tendencies. About thirty newspapers sided with Hindu Samaj organizations, fifteen supported non-Samaj Hindu groups and fifteen leaned towards Islamic ideas. About fifteen papers included the perspectives of Sikhs. In Colonial Punjab, the press had a significant impact on internal conflicts and rivalries amongst communities.<sup>45</sup>

*iv. Census*

After the 1857 Mutiny, social identities in India were systematically categorized. The British used disciplines like statistics, anthropology and ethnology to create a hierarchical classification of Indian society through the decennial census. The main purpose of the census was to record the caste and religion of every Indian.<sup>46</sup> By employing census data to reshape people's self-perceptions, these disciplines supported Colonial aims by internalizing divides between regions and categories. In keeping with their objective of classifying the population, the British made the census their top priority in order to speed up administration. Foucault highlighted the close link between power and knowledge. In a country, categorizing people and the resulting information play a crucial role in connecting and supporting power and knowledge. Political powers generate information and knowledge based on their own interests and perspectives. Those in power, as well as those resisting it, influence the social and spatial categories used in censuses and administration.<sup>47</sup> Over time, shifting identities and group dynamics were reflected in the categories used in the census. They both form new social identities in line with political beliefs and replicate those that already existed. As was seen in India during British rule, these classifications serve to define social groups and have the capacity to confine people to particular groups for the advantage of those in authority.<sup>48</sup>

There was widespread agreement among British officials on the concept of indirect rule, which suggests that in order to govern India effectively, the Colonial power needed to create divisions within the native population. Power relations in direct Colonial authority were defined by interactions between settlers and native populations, while agreements between different native groups, often distinguished by religious connections like those between Muslims and Hindus were necessary for indirect Colonial rule. The Hindu community also showed signs of this religious stratification, which was seen as a source of both unity and division in their shared identity. Since the beginning of the Indian census in 1871, religion has continuously been a major factor.<sup>49</sup>

The censuses conducted in Punjab between 1868 and 1921 were subversive. The manner in which identities were conceptualized and institutionalized was never imagined before. The information gathered for census was not sufficient to categorize the communities. It was based on the observation, assumption and analysis of the census officials and the orientalist. In the first major census of Punjab in 1868, ethnographic information of Punjabi customs and rituals were not included. Communities and the population growth and decline were evaluated primarily based on religion.<sup>50</sup> The only lens through which British officials observed Punjabi society was religion. Between 1868 and 1901, Punjab conducted a census that counted nine major religious groups: Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Buddhists and those who identified as having “No religion.”<sup>51</sup> The census procedure in Colonial India gave rise to contentious disagreements over category inclusion, as officials struggled to adequately register numerous religious sects. Numbers varied between censuses for no apparent reason, perplexing officials who provided a range of answers. The problem was triggered by the enormous diversity of data as well as due to incomplete understanding of it. Particularly, Punjab stood out for being particularly complex owing to its diversity of religions, languages and local customs. Colonial officials attempted to use tables and charts to classify and explain this diversity but these representations frequently failed to capture the complex reality on the ground.<sup>52</sup>

Abrar Zahoor in his PhD dissertation, quoted Denzil Ibbetson, the writer of “The Panjab Census Report of 1881.” According to Ibbetson, all those people who were not able to define their religious affiliation they were following and anyone who was not included in the recognized faith was declared as Hindu.<sup>53</sup>

According to Romila Thapar, the term “Hindu” originally referred to a place, not a religious group. It first appeared in Achaemenid inscriptions for the frontier region and later referred to people living across the Indus River in Arabic texts. Over the period of time, “Hindu” meant “the other” to newcomers, gradually extending to those who did not practice Islam or Christianity by the Colonial government.<sup>54</sup> This idea was shaped by the Aryan Race theory,<sup>55</sup> popular at the time, suggesting that Hindu civilization and religion were developed by Indo-Europeans who invaded India. Aryanism defined the true Hindu community, viewing other caste groups as impurities. Although the Aryan Race Theory is discarded by scholars now but it had influenced the communities living in Indian subcontinent in nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>56</sup> Primarily, those were the British who used word Hinduism for religion as anti-thesis of Islam. Earlier Hinduism

was not only taken as native religion of India but Islam and other religions were declared as foreign, not knowing the fact that Islam was there in the south of India in Kerala much before the Aryan settlement in northern parts. However, after going through the process of census, Indians were conscious about their identities being part of different religious categories.<sup>57</sup>

The essence of census politics in Colonial period was clear; fewer categories to unite, while more to divide, prioritizing the key divisions (often religion) to shape identity. Subjects internalizing these differences with religion were often emphasized as the primary identity. From an imperial standpoint, the British strategically segmented the Muslim community in South Asia to create clear boundaries between Hindus and Muslims. Muslims made up about 25% of India's population before Partition but the British perceived them as a potentially unified and threatening group, especially after the Mutiny and were dubbed as extremists. During Post-Mutiny period, in order to address this perceived threat, British gave power to the custodians of Faith and Landlords. In case of Muslims, rural notables and religious figures were patronized whereas, Gurus and agricultural castes, on the Sikh side and Hindu Jats and Brahmins on the side of Hindus were made incharge. The target was to govern India smoothly which was achieved.<sup>58</sup>

#### v. **Legal System**

Legal reforms during British Government in India had a major impact on the development of religious identity. The fields of justice and law were among the most important ones where this took place. The British made a significant contribution to the formation of social and religious identities by attempting to institute a methodical approach to law enforcement and dispute settlement. They had a significant impact on religious identities through their handling of Muslim and Hindu legal systems. Each community was given its own unique legal framework, which reflected British interpretation and modification. For Muslims, British adopted *shariah* to better suit their administrative requirements, mainly by dividing it into civil and criminal law and making it personal law. This was a shift from the past, when temporal authority and *shariah* were combined by Muslim monarchs. On the contrary, non-Muslims were governed under a legal system called *qanun-i-shahi*, which combined elements of Islamic law, *shariah* with regional legal traditions and Colonial legal theory. Moreover, the Hindu Shastras, which are ancient books that regulate family and personal problems, were compiled and codified, which strengthened the British interpretation of Hindu personal laws, making them more inflexible

and textual in nature. These legal reforms were part of a larger Colonial strategy that limited the civic rights of religious communities within a centralized administrative framework, while granting them some autonomy in personal issues. Both Muslim and non-Muslim populations were able to affirm their religious identities and rights by using this system, which let them manage their personal and legal matters inside these established frameworks.

There were often differences between official policy and social realities, as legal decisions were often determined by practical factors valued over religious dogmas. The realities of many religious communities were shaped by the tensions and inconsistencies that occasionally resulted from this pragmatic approach to how laws were enforced and interpreted locally. By codifying distinct legal systems for Muslims and Hindus, redefining the significance of Hindu personal laws and *shariah*, and offering a framework for religious communities to assert their identities and rights, the Colonial legal reforms in India had a significant impact on the consolidation of religious identities.<sup>59</sup>

#### vi. ***Role of Hindu and Muslim Social and Communal Organizations***

In pre-modern India, during the Mughal period, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624), known as Mujaddad Alf-e-Sani, a prominent Islamic scholar, countered the movement of Hindu revivalism. He opposed Akbar's *Din-e-Ilahi* and advocated the Islamic doctrine of *Tauheed* in its pristine form. He worked for the preservation of separate identity of Muslims and Islam and prevented Islam from being assimilated into Hinduism. Due to this, he is considered the first Muslim, who initiated and advocated the concept of two-nation theory in the subcontinent. The tendency of Sirhindi was carried by Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), an eminent religious scholar of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's period. He criticized the misdeeds of rulers and sought the help of Ahmad Shah Abdali and Najib-ud-Daula, a Rohila Commander of Rohailkhand, and struggled for countering the power of Marathas and Jats. He wanted to end the Hindu domination within the Mughal court and Indian society. He stressed upon the separate Muslim identity and regarded as an advocator of the concept of two-nation theory which was presented by Sirhindi. Later on, in response to the Hindu revivalist movements, various religious reform movements were initiated by Muslim Scholars. Jihad Movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed (1826-1831) and Faraizi Movement of Haji Shariat Ullah (1818-1860), were of those who tried to reform and re-establish Muslim society on the foundation laid down by Islam.<sup>60</sup> In 1884, Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam which was a blend of

social and religious organization aimed at prevention of anti-Islamic propaganda of Christian missionaries and Arya Samaj and dissemination of religious and modern education for the Muslim youth.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, Hindus after embracing Western education, propagated their religious beliefs through movements like Brahma Samaj (1828), Arya Samaj (In 1875 in Bombay and in 1877 in Punjab) and Ramakrishna (1897) Mission.<sup>62</sup> Brahma Samaj emphasized Hinduism's monotheistic core, facing criticism from orthodox Hindus. Arya Samaj criticized Hindu practices like idolatry and caste, highlighting historical injustices by Muslims against Hindus.<sup>63</sup> Ramakrishna promoted the idea of universal truth in all religions.<sup>64</sup> After the establishment of Indian National Congress (1885), Hindu Mahasabha (1915-1948 in Lucknow and Delhi) as a pressure group secured the interests of orthodox Hindus through the platform of Indian National Congress.<sup>65</sup> In fact, these movements reinforced Hindu and Muslim differences.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, tensions between Hindus and Muslims heightened due to social and political changes. In Bengal, conflicts over tenancy reforms triggered disputes, with Congress supporting landlords and causing Muslim discontent. In Punjab, disputes over peasant rights took communal turn, with Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha opposing the protection of Sikh and Muslim peasants from Hindu moneylenders. Political reforms in Punjab, favoring Muslims, exacerbated communal tensions, with the Hindu Mahasabha opposing them.<sup>67</sup> As a result, communalism grew more widespread; there was a rise in communal mass organizations. Within the Muslim community, an organization Tabligh was established in 1920s to counter the Shuddhi campaign by Arya Samaj and the activities of Christian missionaries. The main objective of Tabligh was to purge the Muslim society from un-Islamic practices.<sup>68</sup> Following the Khilafat Movement, another organization, Tanzim, rose to prominence in Punjab and North India in 1920s. Newspaper and Mosque were used as the mouthpiece of the organization along with various committees and volunteers.<sup>69</sup> Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba was established in 1913 with the intention of safeguarding the sacred sites located inside the Turkish Empire's borders.<sup>70</sup> Majlis-i-Ahrar-e-Islam (MAI) was established in Lahore in 1929 by a group of Muslims. It was a faction of Central Khilafat Committee<sup>71</sup> and a forceful expression of pan-Islamism.<sup>72</sup>

In 1931, Allama Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi (1888-1963) laid the foundation of Khaksar Movement in Lahore. The objective of the movement was to unite and discipline Muslims in India so they could fight the British and Hindus together. The movement was inspired by Adolf

Hitler and organized on the same patterns which the Nazi party had carried.<sup>73</sup> The movement declared its intention to use the power of Islamism to conquer the entire world.<sup>74</sup> Through military training, Allama Inayatullah Mashriqi hoped to fortify Muslims so they would be unbeatable when India's decisive moment come.<sup>75</sup> The movement placed a strong emphasis on Muslim unity and the significance of the *Jihad* for Muslims in India.<sup>76</sup>

Anjuman-i-Islamia Punjab Lahore (now onward AIPL) was founded in Lahore in 1869 to promote the needs and interests of Muslims of Punjab.<sup>77</sup> The AIPL was only the representative of Government of Punjab, in order to represent and protect the rights of Muslim of Punjab. Another AIPL was established in 1869 in Lahore. With the intention of uplifting Punjabi Muslims, the AIPL initially concentrated on socio-religious issues. Regaining the Badshahi Mosque (which was used for several purposes during Sikh administration) was one of the main goals. Educating the Muslim elite about their role in community development was another objective.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, among Hindus, associations like Shuddhi and Sangathan backed by Arya Samaj, gained momentum in 1920s. Furthermore, the Hindu Mahasabha's activities and the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (1925) fostered Hindu exclusivism.<sup>79</sup>

### **Impacts of Communalization of Hindu and Muslim Identities in India**

Despite of the fact that Indian subcontinent has historically been a centre of significant religious communities, inter-communal strife existed in India in pre-modern periods and the above mentioned evidences reject the belief in entirely peaceful pre-Colonial times. Instead, it suggests that communal tensions existed earlier due to changes in local governance and social structures. Moreover, the role of political and economic changes in triggering violence, highlight the importance of preconditions in social structures. However majority of these differences and conflicts were the outcome of economic grievances instead of religious fanaticism. The measures and policies adopted by the Colonial Government reveal a critical view of the factors that contributed to the formation and solidification of communal identities. While acknowledging the role of various major factors, such as Christian missionary activities, British orientalism, print capitalism, census and introduction of a new legal system, one can assess the divisive impact of all these factors on the identity, culture and religion of Indian society.

Christian missionaries' endeavors, backed by Colonial powers, sought to evangelize and Christianize indigenous populations, through

various tools including publication of Christian literature through print capitalism, free education, health facilities, employments and lands etc., often leading to cultural erosion and conflicts within Indian communities. The missionary activities created a sense of insecurity among the society about their religious beliefs. Mass conversion into Christianity led to the degradation of culture and tensions in Indian society as a whole. The formation of Hindu and Muslim communal organizations to counter the missionaries and to safeguard the religion of their communities was the outcome of this.

British orientalists, while apparently learning Indian vernacular languages and aimed at understanding and governing Indian society, frequently essentialized and manipulated religious identities to suit Colonial interests, ignited communal tensions. They often provide misleading information to the Government of India about religion, culture, norms, laws and customs of Indian communities that resulted in the imposition of such laws which were drawing lines of distinctions between Hindus and Muslims on communal basis. Orientalists like James Mill and William Jones, who stressed communal distinctions, had an influence on Colonial rulers who classified communities to manage India. The goal of this tactic was to erode Indian solidarity in opposition to British authority.

The introduction of print capitalism, facilitated by Christian missionaries and Colonial authorities, indeed was a modern technology which not only fostered socio-political activities, but provided economic opportunities to the locals. However, it also served as a battleground for competing communal interests, publishing hatred materials against opposite religious communities to further deepening religious divide.

The Census, used as a tool for administrative convenience, played a pivotal role in categorizing and reinforcing communal identities. Due to the lack of understanding and insufficient information about the structure of local indigenous religious communities, all those communities who were not having clear identity, keeping mixed and intertwined identities, were put in the category of “No Religion” and finally declared as Hindus. In fact census had proved the worst tool to draw demarcating and divide lines between Hindus and Muslims, finally entrenching divisions within Indian society.

Furthermore, the Colonial government replaced the previous legal system with a new one, which was produced and designed to serve their imperial interests while sharpening divisions among the Hindu and Muslim communities. The new legal system created by the British Government (that replaced the customary laws for Hindus and Muslims) was based on their



own assumptions and understandings about *shariah* and the sacred Hindu manuscripts Shastras. After creating a sense of inclusiveness about their religion and legal codes among Hindus and Muslims, apparently the legal system was claimed to establish order and resolve disputes, but often perpetuated disparities and inconsistencies, failing to address the root causes of communal conflicts.

The emergence of Hindu and Muslim social and communal organizations initially aimed at countering missionaries, advocated for communal interests. They highlighted and ignited the underlined differences between Hindus and Muslims. The communal identity consciousness which was the outcome of census, separate legal system and other modern development, was further sharpened by these Hindu and Muslim organizations. Employment opportunities were based on religious identities, which led to identity consciousness among Hindus and Muslims to grasp the new economic advantages. Moreover, while adding more consciousness about the distinct identities of Hindus and Muslims, these associations created a sense of hatred among opposite communities. Using religion as a tool, thereby contributed to the polarization of society along religious lines, perpetuating a cycle of communal strife. Increased religious extremism, riots and demands of separate electorates, reservation of seats in executive and legislative assemblies was the outcome of all this. These separatist trends between different communities particularly between Hindus and Muslims culminated in the form of the division of Indian subcontinent on communal lines. The Emergence of India and Pakistan as two sovereign states was the outcome of the above-mentioned factors.

## **Conclusion**

Various communities and groups were living together in pre-modern Indian subcontinent, which was divided hierarchically into caste system. There are also instances of sporadic disputes between different working class individuals. However, these clashes were predominantly driven by the political and economic factors instead of religious fanaticism. The modern developments introduced by Colonial government, notably for their administrative connivance and control, often exacerbated tensions by manipulating communal divisions in India. In a nutshell, the aforementioned elements indicate a complex interaction between indigenous dynamics and Colonial policies that intensified communal tensions and solidified dividing identities in Colonial India. Also there is a need for a critical re-evaluation of the legacy of Colonialism and their ongoing impacts on the present day socio-political realities in the region.

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- <sup>5</sup> C. A. Bayley, "The Pre-History of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1985): 177-203.
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- <sup>7</sup> Ramanandi also known as Ramavats. It is one of the largest sects of Vaishnavas. This sect mainly emphasizes on the worship of Rama, Sita and Hanuman as avatars of Vishnu. The sect was founded by Ramananda, a fourteenth century Hindu Saint.
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- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 180-181.
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- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.
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- <sup>33</sup> Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, 32.
- <sup>34</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: The Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1976), 10.
- <sup>35</sup> The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 was passed to make conversion to Christianity easier. This allowed an Indian converted to Christianity to inherit the property of his/her ancestors. This act was added by another act "Indian Succession Act, 1925" which prohibited the partial treatment with the converts of all major religions in India. Furthermore, the right of inheritance in ancestral property remained unaffected in case of conversion.
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- <sup>41</sup> There was a sizeable Kashmiri migrants were there in Punjab. The objective was to target all the communities including these migrants.
- <sup>42</sup> Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, 32.
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