
***al-Faqiyyah* (Amritsar): Sign of Muslim Nationalism in the Punjab**

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The press always played a very important and strong role in shaping and organizing the public opinion of a society. Punjab witnessed the rise and evolution of press in nineteenth century. Instead of English and Punjabi languages, the Urdu language was dominated in the Punjab. The Urdu Press got tremendous impetus during the British colonial rule (1849-1947).

Being a Muslim majority province, the religious journalism also made its inroads in the Punjab. Hakim Abu'l Riaz Muhammad Mirajuddin Ahmad (1886-1948) started *al-Faqiyyah* as fortnightly Urdu journal from Amritsar in July 1918. Later it became weekly and subsequently monthly. After the establishment of Pakistan in August 1947, *al-Faqiyyah* commenced its publication from Gujranwala and then from Lahore till 1952.

In this paper, an attempt will be made to highlight the evolution of Muslim journalism in the Punjab, focusing on the religious one. For this, *al-Faqiyyah* will be a case study. Its contribution in safeguarding the Islamic Ideology and later, services for the demand of Pakistan will be highlighted. In this historical account, the original files of the *al-Faqiyyah* will be used as source material.

Amritsar (meaning the lake, pool or the ocean of the nectar of immortality) is located in the northwestern part of India in the State of the Punjab. Guru Ram Das (1534-81) founded it in 1577. It is a spiritual and cultural center of the Sikh religion. It is also very important and sacred for the Hindus as well. Although the dominant community was/is Sikh, the Hindus and Muslims are also contributing their due role in the demographic structure of the city. Amritsar is known for the Harmandir Sahib,

commonly known as the Golden Temple and for the incident of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of April 1919.

In Amritsar, before August 1947, almost fifty percent of the total population was Muslim, but financially very depressed. Their literacy rate was also very low.¹ Even then they were divided, mainly into *Ahl-i-Sunnat wa Jama'at* and *Ahl-i-Hadith* schools of thought. Like the rest of India, they were mutually hostile in their religiosity.

On the *Ahl-i-Hadith* side, the most important weekly was *Ahl-i-Hadith*, which started its publication from Amritsar, on November 13, 1903 until August 1, 1947 under the editorship of Mawlana Abu Wafa Sanaullah Amritsari (1868-1948). The other important journal was *Ahl-i-Sunnat wa al-Jama'at* and its editor was Mawlwi Abu Turab Abdul Haqq.² Besides these weeklies *Musalman* (May 1908), *Ittihad*,³ *Tawhid*⁴ (April 1927), *Muballigh*⁵ (January-February 1932) and monthlies *Marq'-i-Qadiyani* (15 April 1907) and *Sahifah-i-Haqqani*⁶ were also published from Amritsar.⁷

Hakim Abu'l Riaz Muhammad Mirajuddin Ahmad (1886-1948) during his more than thirty five years of journalistic carrier was also editor of weeklies *Comrade* (Amritsar), *Hunter* (Amritsar), *Rafiq-i-Sadiq* (Amritsar), *Blitz* (Amritsar) and *Ra'in Magazine* (Amritsar), monthlies *Hanafi Jama'at* (Amritsar), *al-Mu'in* (Amritsar) and *al-Rra'i* (Lahore).⁸ Hakim Mirajuddin due to his Muslim nationalist stand was arrested after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and during the 1947 Sikh-Muslim riots.⁹ He also attempted to kill twice due to his religio-political thoughts.¹⁰

Comrade, started in 1904 and *Hunter* were staunch opponents of the Indian National Congress (December 1885)-(INC) whereas weekly *Tahhiyah Sowta* started in the opposition to the *Akali Dal*. Hakim Mirajuddin also wrote a booklet against INC with the name of *Congress ka kacha chattah*. He also designed some posters against it and the *Shuddi*, *Sanghtan* movements and *Hindu Mahasabha* (1915).¹¹

On July 7, 1918, *al-Faqiyyah* commenced its publication as fortnightly from Amritsar under the editorship of Hakim Mirajuddin.¹² Later in June 1924, it became weekly and after the creation of Pakistan, it became monthly. In August 1948, it commenced its publications from Gujranwala and later in April 1949 from Lahore. *al-Faqiyyah* had its own printing press

situated on the Hall Bazar whereas its office was at Katra Bagh Singh, Amritsar. During the pre-partition period, *al-Faqiyyah* not only read all over India but it also had its readership in the British East-Africa.¹³ It became so popular and reputed that it used to publish the poetry of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) during his lifetime. It also published special numbers on different religio-political issues. In this connection *Hijaz Nambar* (August 7-14, 1926), *Mi'raj Nambar* (January 7, 1930) and *Milad Nambar* (June 21-28, 1933) were most important.

Besides covering the religious, socio-economic and political conditions of the South-Asian Muslims, it gave full coverage to local, national as well as international news and events and comments on them. Being a religious Muslim journal, off course, there was no question of getting advertisements from the government side. Therefore, the journal had to generate its own resources to continue its publication.

al-Faqiyyah due to his anti imperialist stance, in its editorial of April 5, 1919 wrote against the passage of Rowlett Bill (March 1919). '...In fact this Bill is a black spot on the culture and obedience of the Indians and a device to crush the freedom of *Hindustan*...'.¹⁴ Moreover, the editorial also supported and appreciated the response of the Indians particularly in Amritsar against this Bill.

al-Faqiyyah from the very first day treated Indian Muslims as a 'nation' and tried its level best to educate, organize and reform their socio-political and economic conditions. Moreover it believed that the remedy of all socio-economic and religio-political problems of the Indian Muslims lies in the creation of a separate state.¹⁵

Being a representative of the majority, i.e. the Sunni community, it also transformed itself as a champion of the majority's cause. It analyzed and reviewed all socio-political developments occurred in the British India, especially in the Punjab. As the majority of the Sunnis was against the *Khilafat*, non-cooperation and *Hijrat* movements, *al-Faqiyyah* in one of its editorials, published on March 20, 1923, wrote

The so-called concept of Hindu-Muslim unity is a death-warrant for the Muslims. At present, the British are in power even then Hindus are hostile

to the Muslims. If Hindus becomes rulers, they will kick-off the Muslims from *Hindustan* and they will crush Urdu language and every sign of Islamic Culture.¹⁶

Likewise, *al-Faqiyyah* was also critical about the policies of the INC, *Shuddi* and *Sanghtan* movements, *Hindu Mahasabha*, *Akali Dal*, Muslim nationalist organizations and on some occasions, it also criticized the British Government. *al-Faqiyyah* took all of them as a rival and opponent of the Muslims and Islamic Culture.

On the other hand, *al-Faqiyyah* fully supported the All-India Muslim League (December 1906), All-India Sunni Conference (March 1925) and such other organizations which were developing Muslim public opinion in favor of Two-Nation Theory and against the Hindus and later, against the British.

After March 1940, when the Indian Muslims finally decided to get independent state with the name of 'Pakistan', *al-Faqiyyah* devoted itself in the propagation of the Ideology and Demand for Pakistan. It began to write word 'Pakistan' with its publication place, Amritsar on its front page after March 1940.¹⁷ This practice gave a very severe setback to it, as hundreds of its subscribers discontinued their subscription.¹⁸

During the historic elections of 1945-46 and anti-Khizr Movement of January 1947 in the Punjab, *al-Faqiyyah* presented its pages for the propagation of the Pakistan Demand. For its meritorious services rendered for the Pakistan Movement, its editor Hakim Mirajuddin Ahmad was awarded posthumous Gold Medal by the Tehrik-i-Pakistan Workers Trust on 14 August 1996.

Appendix



Front page image of the *al-Faqiyyah* (September 21-28, 1942) showing word 'Pakistan' with Amritsar.

Copy right. Mujeeb Ahmad

Notes and References

- 1 Ahmad Sa'id, *Anjuman-i-Islamiyyah Amritsar: 1873-1947, Ta'limi wa Siyasi Khidmat* (Lahore: Idarah-i-Tehqiqat-i-Pakistan, 1986), pp. 4-5.
- 2 *Amritsar Ga'id aind Da'raktary 1931* (Amritsar: D. M. Das and Co., n.d.), p. 141.
- 3 Its editor was Munshi Mawlwi Bakhsh Kushtah and its publication was ceased in 1921.

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- 4 Its editor was Mawlana Sayyid Muhammad Daud Ghaznawi (1895-1962) and its publication was ceased in 1937.
 - 5 Its editor was Mawlana Muhammad Ishaq Hanif and its publication was ceased in 1947.
 - 6 Its editor was Babu Muhammad Ishaq.
 - 7 Abu Yahya Imam Khan Nosherawi, *Hindustan main Ahl-i-Hadith ki 'ilmi Khidmat* (Lahore: Maktabah-i-Naziriyyah, 1993), pp. 29,101,106.
 - 8 *Amritsar Ga'id aind Da'raktary 1931*, p. 140. Pir Sayyid Khurshidul Hassan Shah (1906-81) started monthly *Shamsul Masha'ikh* from Amritsar in 1937.
 - 9 *Daily Sadaqat* (Lahore), 18 June 1980.
 - 10 *Weekly al-Faqiyyah* (Amritsar), 28 October 1925, p. 1 and 14 -21 November 1925, p.1.
 - 11 Qamar Taskin, *Quaid-i-A'zam Mahad say Lahad tak* (Lahore: Globe Publishers n.d.), p. 765.
 - 12 Before this in 1917, Mawlana Ghulam Ahmad Akhgar Amritsari (1864-1924) started weekly *Ahl-i-Fiqh* from Amritsar.
 - 13 *al-Faqiyyah*, 7 December 1925, p. 9.
 - 14 Fortnightly *al-Faqiyyah* (Amritsar), 5 April 1919, p. 2.
 - 15 Monthly *Ra'i International* (Lahore), October 1989, p. 13.
 - 16 *Daily Mashriq* (Lahore), 29 November 1984.
 - 17 However, so far I traced its issue of September 21-28, 1942 having word 'Pakistan' with Amritsar. See Appendix.
 - 18 Mujeeb Ahmad, 'Tehrik-i-Pakistan aur Sunni Urdu Sahafat - Aik Ja'izah', monthly '*Arafat* (Lahore), August 2003, p.27. (*Azadi Nambar*).