

**Alternative Politics of Caste in Life and Times of Santram B.A.: Revisiting the Socio-
Political Landscape of Punjab (1880-1950)**

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Dedicated to my Parents

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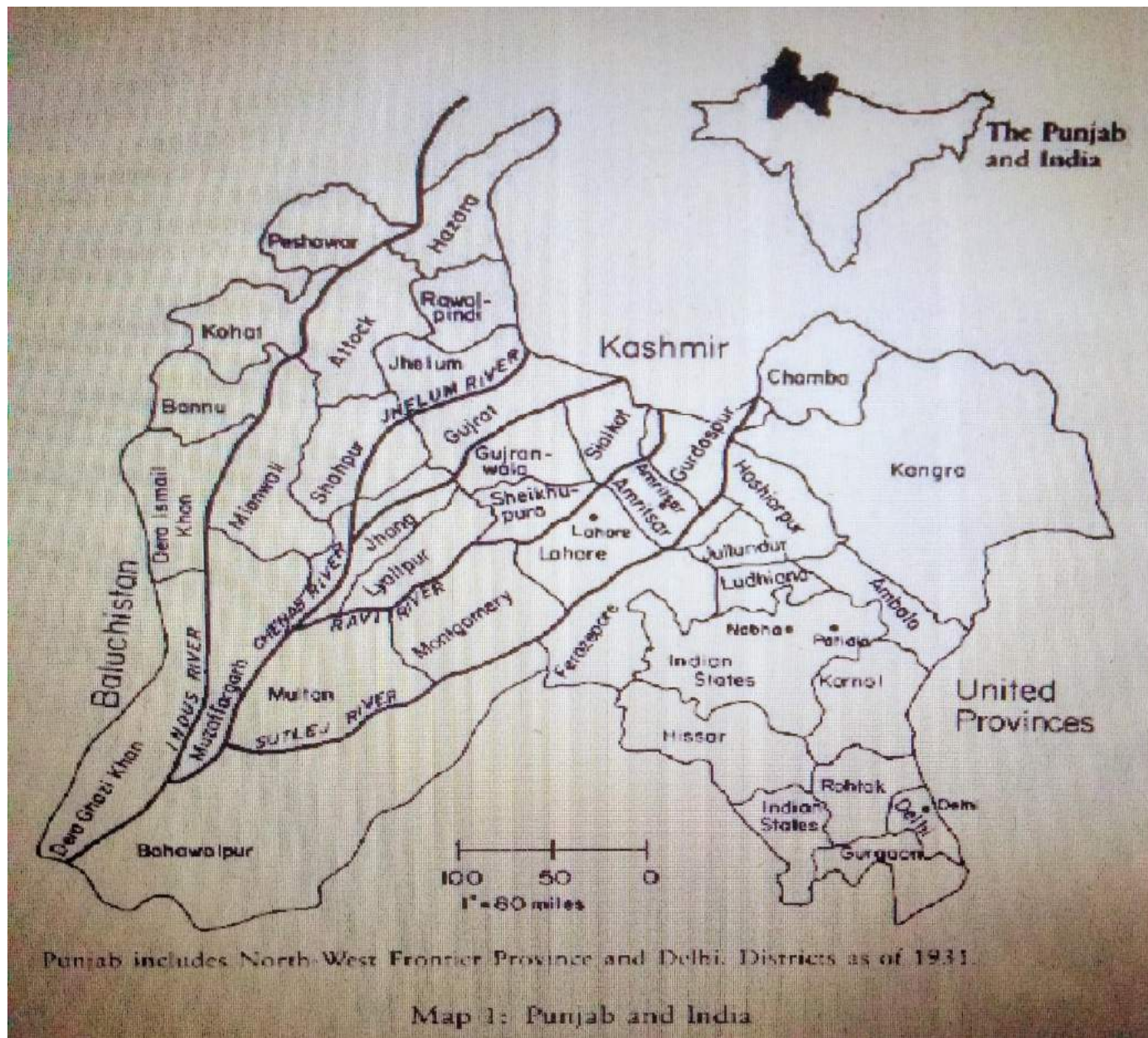
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(Map courtesy- Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab- Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, 1985)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The question of caste, identity and humiliation has always been crucial in the Indian subcontinent. The socially privileged have had the control of the historical narratives. Stereotypically, several Dalit personalities had been shot down as irrelevant or inconvenient. In the said process, the voices on the ground were either taken away or muffled.¹ Such has been the fate of backward classes in Punjab as well. The central theme of this study is one such story of Santram B.A. (1887-1988, resident of Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur, Punjab). He belonged to the *Kumhar* (potter, lower caste) category and dedicated his life trying to scrap the difference between upper and lower castes; fighting for social equality. Despite the numerous writings of Santram in his 101 years of life span there is no substantial work on him till date and his voice has been forgotten in the annals of history.

As per the Census of 2011, the State of Punjab has the highest percentage of Scheduled Caste (SC) population amongst all the States of the country. The SC population in Punjab is 88.60 lakhs which is 31.94% of the total population (277.43 lakhs) of the State. Punjab accounts for 2.3% of the total population and 4.3% of SC population of India.² Another interesting aspect of

¹ To name a few, Kalekuri Prasad (Telugu Dalit activist), Dashrath Manjhi (the Mountain Man who manually carved a road), Phoolan Devi (an innocent girl to a dacoit to a Parliamentarian), Rani Jhalkari Bai (fought 1857 mutiny), Uda Devi Pasi (fought 1857 mutiny), Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule (the couple who pioneered women education in India during 19th century), Shaheed Uddham Singh (freedom revolutionary and martyr) and Matadin Bhangi (sowed the seeds of 1857 revolt). All these revolutionaries have been overshadowed by some or the other upper caste contemporaries. Their caste and identity had prevented them from being considered as worthy enough to be voiced or written about.

² Department of Social Justice and Empowerment and Minorities, Government of Punjab as accessed on 29th June 2018 from:
[http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html#:~:text=As%20per%20Census%2D2011%2C%20the,277.43%20lac\)%20of%20the%20State.](http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html#:~:text=As%20per%20Census%2D2011%2C%20the,277.43%20lac)%20of%20the%20State.)

the scheduled caste population in Punjab is that it mostly resides in rural areas. According to Census reports of 2011, 73.33% SC population lives in rural areas leaving only 26.67% residing in urban areas. This does not imply that the SC population is the landholder; instead most of them are actually agricultural laborers who work as tenants for the upper caste landlords. The SC labor force in the region constitutes 35.88%, out of which, 79.20% and 20.80% are main and marginal workers respectively.³ Despite such visible presence of the Dalits or SCs in the state, caste remains an under explored phenomenon here as Punjab is dominantly known for its Sikh culture; as the land of Gurus or for its communal history during partition of India in 1947. Hence, this study attempts to bring out the caste phenomenon in this region during the colonial period to mainstream history.

Kenneth Jones in *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab* talks about how the nineteenth century history of South Asia was dominated by the interaction between the ruler and the ruled.⁴ The clash of two such varied cultures; the East and the West, was bound to cause similar conflicts in Indian society as well. There was a range of social and political reform movements all over the nation either as an after effect or in reaction to these turbulences. The impact of imperial rule was different for different regions as the movements tended to take the color of the local traditions. This study thus tries to focus on the region of Punjab and the various heterodox movements which prospered here.

In another of his seminal work, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* Jones looks at these heterodox movements under two categories; **transitional and acculturative**. He identifies transitional movements as the ones which were locally inspired and acculturative

³ ibid

⁴ Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1976

movements as the ones which had western influence on them.⁵ In the process of focusing on the binaries Jones skips on the nuances of these movements. There were times when both transitional and acculturative overlapped since it was almost impossible for social reform movements to have linear progression. It was hard to imagine that the ideologies will not clash or that one movement will not affect the other one. A classic example of such unique amalgamation of transitional and acculturative is Santram B.A.

Santram B.A. was an ardent Arya Samaji⁶ in his formative years who diligently believed in the words of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Shradhananda. However, with time he grew out of Arya Samaj's conservative ideas and started a movement against the caste system by condemning the use of caste names or surnames as identity. He co-founded *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* in 1922 at Lahore with the main objective of removing the caste system from Hindu religion. His work and writings reflect how religion and politics interacted in Punjab and how the various social reform movements were not operating under simplified binaries but actually consisted of a wide spectrum of ideologies. This study is thus an attempt to understand the nuances of Punjabi society through the view of Santram.

Hoshiarpur, a socially motivated town

Hoshiarpur gave another social reformist to the nation as Mangoo Ram, who strongly led the *Ad Dharm* movement (which originated in the 1920s) and tried securing a respectable identity for the Dalits through reclamation of the past. Mark Juergensmeyer's research in *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*; shows that *Ad Dharm*,

⁵ Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India, III.1, Socio-Religious reform movements in British India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p-3

⁶ Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in Bombay to reform Hinduism. The Samaj however gained popularity after 1877 from Lahore where it turned to be more than a regional movement in Punjab. It believed in and promoted the supreme authority of Vedas.

created a myth of origin claiming that ‘lower caste’ people were the original inhabitants of India and it was the Aryans who were foreigners and so was the Arya Samaj. Juergensmeyer focuses on the lower caste social reform movements in Punjab and how over the years of suppression these movements took the shape of a newer form of cultural rebellion. He also analyzes the role which religion commands in lower caste struggles for social change. He believes that the leadership of *Ad Dharm* was very critical here as it was Mangoo Ram’s personal charisma too; responsible for the success of *Ad Dharm*. Despite not being a saint or a guru or even an avatar, Mangoo Ram has carved a niche as a leader of religious reforms in the Punjab society and Juergensmeyer credits Mangoo Ram’s personality and his experiences in a foreign country for achieving such a feat. By making religious symbols accessible to everyone Mangoo Ram brought inclusivity in the Hindu religion, which earlier operated mostly on hierarchy and exclusivity.⁷ Punjab was the land of Gurus, instead of idols here Gurus were worshipped and Mangoo Ram emerged to be that kind of figure-head, thereby amassing considerable popularity amongst the untouchables.

A contributing factor to Santram’s and Mangoo Ram’s fight against caste system was their location. As per the data of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment retrieved on 12th July 2012, Hoshiarpur holds one of the highest percentage proportion of Dalits not just in Punjab but all over India which is around 48 percent,⁸ that further implies that almost half the population in the region is Dalit and hence the question of identity and the struggle against discrimination has been quite strong in the region even for the contemporary times.

⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, London: University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, 1982, p-43

⁸<https://web.archive.org/web/20130723091635/http://socialjustice.nic.in/blocksc50.php?format=print> as accessed on 1st July, 2021

Research questions, methods and challenges

In an attempt towards writing 'history from below' it becomes crucial to recognize the local voices which have been neglected in the past. Santram B.A. is that perspective and that voice which helps this project to be cognizant of the caste system in Punjab. The national politics as well as the regional politics was more than Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah and same applies on the social reform movement front as it was more than Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj and B. R. Ambedkar. Hence, the relevance of Santram B.A., increases in manifolds, who by shunning his surname was trying to bring a change in the society. His organisation, *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* (breaker of castes) might seem like a small ripple which originated from Arya Samaj movement and then lost its relevance but when observed closely signifies a tumultuous ocean which was Punjab. To study the region of Punjab I have picked not a leader's but a layman's perspective. Through Santram's extensive writings I have tried to navigate the temper of the Punjabi population during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and how they responded to the various socio-political movements around them.

A major dilemma and the biggest challenge in such a study are to not make it a biographical sketch. This is not a memoir or an endeavor to pen down Santram in the annals of history but an attempt to find his position as an intellectual. Since Santram has not received any major recognition in the past, it has been difficult to locate substantial work on him. Hence, I had to mostly rely on his vast accounts in newspapers and journals and his autobiography titled *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*(1963). However, I have been critical of the validity of his accounts which mostly derive from Santram's memory. Another challenge while dealing with vernacular history is the fear of the actual meaning getting lost in translation. Since most of Santram's work has been in Urdu and Hindi, the challenge becomes more and more obvious. The central theme of the

thesis is Santram but that does not imply that this is a glory sketch or personal account. The purpose of the project is to address the bigger issues, which are: caste, identity and stereotypes through the lens of Santram.

The work does not seek to undertake a retelling of the partition history but to find a connection between the communal and caste issues and how those differences were in essence the same. We tend to see them through different lenses but Santram saw them as the spawns of the same evil; exclusivity. He felt that if Indian society was more inclusive and accepting, all its problems would have been solved and this thesis attempts to find some truth in his claims. The larger idea of the work therefore is to move away from the given standard narratives and focus on the events that may have been underplayed and on the people who have been since long either rejected or misrepresented. There is a large diaspora of Dalit narratives which is unexplored, ignored and at times even forgotten because it does not get voiced. Hence, the main frame of analysis is that while perceiving history from above we tend to miss out the key players who worked on ground and history has been quite unfair to them and this dissertation thus tries to focus on one such narrative, i.e. Santram.

In this study as the words “Dalits”, “Untouchables”, “backward class”, “Harijans”, “Scheduled Castes”, “Depressed class”, “Shudras” or “lower caste” are used, we need to understand the gravity and sensitivity of these terms and how they have affected the masses for generations. Different people identify with different terms but overall the image these terms present is of someone intentionally secluded or forced away from the mainstream society on the basis of birth, someone who is deemed so polluted that is not even considered worthy of any form of contact, not even touch. It is not only unjust and disrespectful but also completely inhumane and unfair to decide the fate and livelihood of children who are not even born. To fight back this injustice,

varieties of methods are used; to claim what was taken away and to search one's identity. I have mostly used the term 'Dalits' because that is the term Dr. Ambedkar identified with but while discussing their social position 'lower caste', 'untouchables' and 'backward class' have been used, they are not meant to be derogatory but to reflect the truth. Dalit in Marathi translates to 'broken men' but its meaning evolved from being ground down to being oppressed and exploited by the society.⁹ The term reflects not the broken people but the broken society who failed its own people. 'Harijans' (loved by God) was the term specifically coined and later used by Gandhi and then his followers which did not catch much popularity amongst the community itself and hence has not been used to address them. 'Scheduled Caste' is used around the time of freedom and post independence as it became a constitutional keyword. Overall, the terminology is vast and I have tried using it as per the cause and the context without meaning them to be humiliating or insulting.

Chapter description

The first chapter '**The 'Many Punjabs' and the debate on caste and *varna***' mainly encompasses the various heterodox sects co-existing on the land of Punjab and their conflicts and compromises. The chapter also probes into the concept of 'new' social consciousness and what role Arya Samaj and *Ad Dharm* played on that end. It further points out how Santram's JPTM grew away from the clutches of Arya Samaj and created its own space. It contemplates the culture of Punjab's society where figureheads came to play a crucial role in the socio-political sphere. The connecting link between all the themes is the question of caste and how it was more or less responsible for ripple effects in the social as well as political landscape of Punjab. The chapter ponders over the question of separate identity and how either due to alienation or

⁹ Anand Teltumbde, *Dalits, Past, Present and Future*, Routledge, New York, 2020, pp.1-2

because of loss of power, rigid identities like ‘martial races’ etc. took shape. It also tries to figure out why the need for conversions and re-conversions arose and why they became a trigger point for various communities where they started competing with each other for more and more numbers.

The new social consciousness, heterodox movements, separate identity, reformation from within and reclamation of the past are the few themes which resulted in ‘many Punjabs’ and the first chapter looks at these bifurcations in the state through the lens of caste. The chapter points out that Santram becomes relevant in the contemporary times because these rifts which he wrote about (caste system, communal antagonism) decades ago are still rampant issues and causing disruptions in the society. Lastly, the chapter attempts to locate the point of view of third party i.e. Santram’s stand in the famous caste debate of 1935 between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

In the line of writing history from below Juergensmeyer investigates how the untouchables in Punjab felt about religion in the twentieth century. He concludes that religion in India and especially in Punjab was a different concept in comparison to the concept of religion in the West. While in the West the basic components of religion would be tradition, church and ethics, Juergensmeyer found that in India, these elements were *dharmic* (pertaining to the larger structure of religion which focuses mainly on the upper caste/class), *panthic* (sect which revered a certain lineage and its spiritual authority) and *quamik* (religious community). He further adds that these elements do not remain in stasis and are rather fluid in essence. For example, Sikhism evolved from being *panthic* to *qaumik* and Arya Samaj gave a *qaumik* hue to the *dharmic* Hindu religion. It was in this Hindu *Dharmic* structure, he points out, that the untouchables were unhappy with their position as outsiders and polluted. He makes a detailed study and identifies how they reacted against this alienation in two ways, firstly, through mass migration to other

panths or *qaums* and secondly, by reforming from within and asserting a respectable identity through bodies like Arya Samaj and Ad Dharm.¹⁰ Jones addresses this revivalist spirit amongst Hindus and concurs how *Ad Dharm* played a defining role in setting social and political reform movements in motion in Punjab. He makes us look closely to the social contexts from where the various heterogeneous movements and sects evolved, prospered and then failed. He speculates how the untouchables find the term ‘Harijan’ patronizing and mostly reject it but he sides with Gandhi, explaining that the latter only wished well to the untouchables.¹¹ Both Jones and Juergensmeyer point to the emerging consciousness in the Punjab population which was self-reflective and curious about identity. This ‘new’ social consciousness went on to play a key role in deciding the fate of the region.

Christophe Jaffrelot in *Hindu Nationalism* argues that Arya Samaj was built on the foundations of the Brahmo Samaj. He claims that Dayanand Saraswati capitalized on the intellectual legacy of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen (Brahmo Samaj propagators) in the 1870s, but the former also took it several steps further, and in a somewhat different direction.¹² It can be argued that the introduction to the western world gave a certain push towards the ‘new social consciousness’, however, Punjab was not lacking in its revolutionary spirit as can be stated from the example of Kuka rebellion (1857) and the Singh Sabha movement (1873)¹³ which were inspired from regional and local factors and not external factors. **Santram was the product of all these heterodox movements constantly crossing and overlapping each other.** He too was

¹⁰Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, p-2-6

¹¹ Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, p-15

¹² Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu nationalism- A Reader*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, p-9.

Brahmo Samaj was a Hindu reform movement started in 1828 in Bengal by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It believed in monotheism and denounced idol-worship. Its agenda was to reform Hinduism and bring its old glory back.

¹³ Kuka rebellion was against the political order of the British and the Singh Sabhas were established to protest against the proselytizing activities of Christian Missionaries and later took charge of revitalizing the Sikh community

part of that revivalist spirit and found himself amidst this striking contrast between the East and the West and his writings are the best example of this amalgamation or the new 'social consciousness'. His very idea of refusing to use caste name as means of asserting identity showed that he was conscious of the impact of caste. Santram reflects the complexities of the nineteenth century and how he oscillated between the liberal and orthodox Hinduism.

Dalit movements at times have been built on some Hindu liberal movement; in the case of *Ad Dharm* and JPTM it was Arya Samaj. Growing under the shadow of the Arya Samaj earlier Santram was apprehensive about the idea of 'other' (in regards to religions) but his education and experiences helped him realize that without acceptance of this 'other' there can be no social unity and justice. His JPTM stood different from the crowd of the various heterodox movements as it tried balancing the modern with the traditional. It focused on bringing more inclusivity within the structure of Hinduism through means like inter-caste marriages and inter-dining and saw exclusivity as the sole problem behind the rifts within the Indian society.

Susan Bayly in *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* analyzes the growth of caste society in India over the period of 350 years and concludes that caste was never an essence of the Indian culture instead it augmented over the time due to drastic political and social changes like colonial conquest. She further affirms that the British were neither interested in caste and nor did they believe that the whole of India subscribed to a single ideology of hierarchical caste value. She claims that by the twentieth century caste as a system was a diverse phenomenon and on account of its fluidity it was not impactful. She also points out that within the reformist and nationalist circles the popular opinion was that caste based

differentiation was persistent only in the south with dark skinned people.¹⁴ While it is true that from north to south the customs and practices of the caste system varied but at the same time it was a major social binding force, its impact was nothing if not powerful. Nicholas Dirks in *Castes of Mind- Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* argues along the same lines and concurs that caste is a modern phenomenon which got fanned by the colonial tendencies.¹⁵ Santram in his writings rejects this idea and argues that the caste system has been the bane of Indian society since forever and it has fed exclusivity to the minds so well that it is a mammoth task to build the idea of a united nation. He doesn't believe that the rigidity of caste structure is a colonial gift and argued that it was due to self serving upper-castes that *varnavyavasthas* which was a simple job based structure turned into hierarchy based exclusion which then amplified over time and reached to the extent of forced exclusion, i.e., untouchability.

In the 1930s while Gandhi and Ambedkar contested over the ideas of caste, *varnavyavastha* and their relevance in society Santram and his Mandal saw it as a festering infection which needed to be removed urgently.

“शूद्र” किसी अलग जाति का नाम नहीं था, वरन् गुण, कर्म, स्वभाव के कारण कोई व्यक्ति ब्राह्मण और कोई शूद्र कहलाता था, तो भी अनेक स्थलों पर ऐसे भी वचन मिलते हैं जिनसे झलकता है कि शूद्र कोई प्रथक जाति थी...इस गड़बड़ का कारण यह जान पड़ता है कि स्मृतियां

¹⁴ Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p-233-55

¹⁵ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind- Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2001

और शास्त्र, जिस रूप में इस समय मिलते हैं, उस रूप में वे एक समय में नहीं लिखे गए थे।

मूल लेखक ने अपने ग्रंथ में जो कुछ लिखा, बाद को उसमें दूसरे लोग मिलावट करते गए।¹⁶

(Initially, Shudra was not a separate caste name, in fact, it depended entirely on merits and character, who was called Brahmin and who was addressed as Shudra. In some writings it is reflected that Shudra was a separate caste but the discrepancy is in the *Smritis* and the *Shastras*. They were written over a long period of time and hence impurities and doubts found their way in the said writings.)

Santram asserted the identity of 'shudra' and believed that when this term was coined there was no negative connotation attached to it rather that happened over a time span. He blamed the *shastras* for that and not the entire Hindu culture. He was strongly opinionated that the way these impurities became part of the Hindu culture, again with time these impurities and negativities could be removed if desired. He identifies the contradictions and paradoxes in the epics and Vedas as there is no clarity who is *Arya*, *Dasyu* or *Shudra*. He argues that, sometimes it is *Panchjana*(five varnas), sometimes it is two varnas and then there are four; there is no clarity about the number and description of the *varnas*. He further explores the origin of caste and *shudras* from Vedas to Manusmriti, from Mahabharata to *What are Shudras* by Dr. Ambedkar.¹⁷ His immense knowledge about *Shastras*, *Puranas* and Vedas make him on par with Ambedkar and Gandhi. When read carefully Santram does not emerge as the puppet in the hands of the handful upper castes, instead he comes off as an optimist who believed in his people and in the

¹⁶ Santram B.A., *Humara Samaj*, Nalanda Prakashan, Bombay, 1949, pp-16-26, (This is the first edition copy and I accessed it from Sadhu Ashram Library, Hoshiarpur, Punjab. Santram dedicated this book to Swami Shraddhanand of Arya Samaj) (the Urdu texts are translated to Hindi by Uzma Mubeen, all translations from Hindi to English are mine).

¹⁷ *ibid*, pp-5-51

idea that change comes from self. He creates his own intellectual sphere and starts fresh debates which we attempt to pursue in the first chapter.

The second chapter ‘**Mapping the Political Terrain and Caste Question in Punjab**’ goes on addressing the issue of social reform movements versus political movements or as Santram puts it, **caste patriotism versus nationalism** and further surveys the politics of representation in Punjab. It reviews the question of urban versus rural where rural politics came to dominate the urban one. It also probes into the question of how land turned into commodity in the twentieth century Punjab and came to play an important role in shaping and compartmentalizing certain identities in the region. With the coming of the Land Alienation Act of 1900, interests were differentiated and priorities were set which later spread along the communitarian lines. The chapter points out how land was then used to grant favors and appease rural against the urban. This appeasement policy gave more power in the hands of landholders which were mostly upper caste and that also increased their say in the polity of the region. Neeladri Bhattacharya in *The Great Agrarian Conquest- The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World* reviews how colonialism created new spaces in the rural societies and reshaped them. He calls it ‘agrarian colonization’ which encouraged categorization along the lines of tenants, agriculturist and non-agriculturist which were created to cater the colonial demand but in the longer run ended up creating permanent rifts in the form of rigid caste and religious identities.¹⁸

The chapter further observes how the social and political spheres are co-related and keep overlapping and influencing each other and analyzes the budding communalist and nationalist spirit in the region of Punjab. Isabel Wilkerson in her book *Caste: The lies that divide us* states

¹⁸ Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest- The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2019

that anytime freedom or political movement is achieved before social justice and liberation, the society continues struggling with its inner flaws. She points out that freedom is complete only when it is both political and social.¹⁹ Santram stuck by the same ideology and professed that any freedom which comes without social justice is partial independence only. Unlike other organizational leaders, Santram was not greedy for higher numbers or perks in the form of government jobs. He simply wished for free and respectful identity for all. His idea of brotherhood and equality is what makes him different; a true leader of the people. While Wilkerson goes on to compare racism with caste system, calling ‘white supremacy’ as equivalent to ‘upper caste hegemony’, Anand Teltumbde in *Dalits: Past, Present and Future*, argues that the severity of the two cannot be compared as race is not sanctioned by religion while caste is.²⁰ However, Teltumbde does not take into account that slavery based on race, was state sanctioned. Race might be a recent concept in relation to caste but that no-where implies that both these issues exist exclusively. They can and do co-exist in the same culture and serve to reinforce each other because they work on the same principles; hierarchy and hegemony.²¹

Rosalind O’Hanlon in *Caste, Ideology and Conflict* while discussing the low-caste movement in western India in the nineteenth century points to the discrepancies of the history writing where low caste social groups were ignored if they did not participate in the nationalist politics. She comments that the marginalized low-castes paved their own way towards social freedom sans religious or political help. Focusing on the social reform movements in western India during the nineteenth century she remarks that these reform movements were not impressionable for their traditional caste antagonism but for their use of traditional symbols in forging a common identity

¹⁹ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: the lies that divide us*, Penguin Publications, 2020, pp.30-38

²⁰ Teltumbde, *Dalits, Past, Present and Future*, p-24

²¹ Wilkerson, *Caste: the lies that divide us*, Penguin Publications, 2020,p-19-27

for low-castes. She further argues that as the British administration handed out opportunities to the literate class and since literacy was the autonomy of the upper-castes, they got the jobs too. Thus, the British regime took away the opportunities from the illiterate, marginalized low-castes and reinforced the hierarchical structure of the caste system. She concludes that the ideological formations in the low caste were the mixed product of such British expectations and political perceptions which was reflected by the non-Brahmin polemicist like Jyotirao Phule.²²

Vijay Prashad in *Untouchable Freedom* goes on to say that it was due to the fear of the masses that the political leaders chose to ignore the Dalit reformatory movements. Instead of letting the masses lead the movement and represent themselves, these politically motivated leaders chose to represent the masses to serve their selfish interests. The result of their ambition was that dalits and other marginalized communities lost the opportunity to voice their opinion. Dalits were given a commodity status where they became relevant only during the talks of Hindu preservation where they were time and again either used for numeral or for ideological warfare against the Muslims.²³ Prashad argues that this was a reason why the mass movements failed since they misrepresented people's interests. Ambedkar too in his critique for Congress in *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, agrees that the national movement did not leave any space for the Dalits to represent themselves.²⁴ Santram is that unheard voice. He proves that the accusations that Dalits were backward and politically unaware were false. He himself condemns the self-appointed leaders for not letting the masses represent themselves. He further refuses to be used as a tool against Muslims or play any role in the communal games.

²² Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth century India*, Cambridge University Press, 1985

²³ Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom-a social history of a Dalit community*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p-75

²⁴ B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, Gautam Book Centre, Delhi, 1945

The fear that even the social reform bodies also played the politics of representation against the Dalits and barely allowed actual Dalit participation on their platforms was constant. Satish K. Sharma in his essay *Arya Samaj Movement in Punjab* says that from 1881 to 1921 most of the leaders of Arya Samaj belonged from the upper caste of Khatri, Bania, Arora, Mahajan, Rajput and Brahman.²⁵ This argument holds some truth and is the reason that marginalized communities including Santram were skeptical about the intentions and the functioning of the Arya Samaj. The doubts enhanced further when in the early 1920s Congress and Samaj's leadership became almost one and the same. Both Congress and Arya Samaj were led by upper castes and thereby raised questions in the minds of the oppressed community. This further inspired *Ad Dharm* and Singh Sabhas to take the centre stage and point out the hypocrisy of the Arya Samaj. Santram a little later figured out the duplicity in Samaj's words and actions and chose not to stay a part of it. He started operating the JPTM outside the clutches of Arya Samaj by criticizing the latter on the matters like *Shuddhi* and received backlash for the same.

The chapter further attempts to analyze the relationship between Arya Samaj and Congress and contemplates over the politics of representation in the region through organisations like Ghadar Party, Hindu Mahasabha²⁶ and Communist Party etc. Prabhu Bapu in *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India* credits the right wing nationalism for the partition of India. He argues that Hindu Mahasabha was found to counter the Muslim unity and hence it was quite militant in character. He avouches that though Mahasabha was not successful in gathering masses under its

²⁵ Satish K. Sharma, "Arya Samaj Movement in Punjab", in Puri. Harish K., Judge, Paramjit S. *Social and Political Movements- Reading on Punjab(ed)*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2000 , p-99

²⁶ In 1915 an organisation; *Sarvadeshak Hindu Hindu Sabha* was formed to present Hindu interests and in reaction to Muslim League. In 1921 the organisation chose to go political under the new title of *Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha*. Its formation had the support of both Arya Samaj and Congress, in fact prominent Congressites like Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai were its crucial members as well. In 1925, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar left the party to form *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or RSS*, to cater to Hindu interests away from politics.

banner but it certainly fanned anti-Muslim feelings and added to communal antagonism.²⁷ There was another movement in Punjab or rather Punjab in essence (as most of it occurred in foreign lands of USA etc), that was Ghadar Party movement²⁸ which was inspired by the militancy of the Punjabis. The members of the Ghadar Party professed that they were impartial and demanded freedom from the shackles of colonial rule. This freedom according to them could be brought upon only through united attack and the support of the military. They took pride in their unity and socially just structure which as per their claim operated outside the barriers of religion and segregation. They further affirmed that they propagated the true spirit of nationalism from their platform. But on the other hand they were not careful with the organization's name itself which pointed to their inclination towards one community in general. On 21st April, 1913, Lala Hardayal (prominent Ghadarite) proposed a resolution suggesting that the name of the organisations should be the 'Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast' and in short the 'Hindi Pacific Association'."²⁹ By picking the term 'Hindi' they alienated the non-Hindi speaking population from the beginning itself.

Emily C. Brown in *Har Dayal- A Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* recounts how the leader of the Ghadar party and their movement came to hate British rule and the Muslims equally. She points out that it was due to his firm belief in Aryan supremacy that Har Dayal had no empathy for other religions or sects.³⁰ Lala Hardayal was a prominent leader of the movement and was

²⁷ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North-India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*, Routledge, New York, 2012, pp-30-35

²⁸ Ghadar Party (initially Pacific Coast Hindustan Association) was formed by Indian migrants residing in North America and Canada. Most of these immigrants were from rural Punjab and when they saw how different life was in first world countries they wished the same for their motherland. Thus, Ghadar Party was formed in 1913 with the sole purpose of bringing down British rule.

²⁹ Gurudev Singh Deol, *The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement*, Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 1969, p-54-60

³⁰ Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal, Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, University of Arizona Press, New Delhi, 1975, p-64-69

also on good terms with V.D. Savarkar of Hindu Mahasabha and hence it becomes questionable if the words about equality were just empty promises and the organisation had the specific community's interests only in mind and looked at the country from a "one religion, one language" perspective. The politics of Hindu Mahasabha and Ghadar Party becomes relevant in contemporary times too because the politics of appropriating the Dalits, Muslims and other marginalized sections of society for the sake of political validity and vote is a big current issue as well.

While writing the introduction for M.S. Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts*, Venkata Rao comments that the national movement led by Congress and Gandhi was politically motivated and lacked cultural spirit.³¹ According to both Rao and Golwalkar, Nehru was not the right leader as he could not get hold of the "spirit of Indian culture". They believed that true independence could have come only by going back to the cultural roots. Golwalkar went on blaming Congress for being more politically inspired which he believed demolished the cause for a free nation and his beliefs were the beliefs of Hindu Mahasabha back then, thereby providing for another contestant claiming political and social representation nationwide.

Despite there being radicalism and aggression in the region against the imperial rule Communism could not grow roots and Vivek Kumar in *Caste and Democracy in India: Perspectives from Below* argues that this was so because the Communist Party underplayed the role of caste in Indian society.³² They did not take into consideration the caste factor and focused mainly on peasant revolts i.e. class factor. However, in Punjab the peasant was mostly a Dalit

³¹ Venkata Rao, Introduction in M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 2000 (Golwalkar led Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, RSS, a very strong right wing organisation for almost 30 years)

³² Vivek Kumar, *Caste and Democracy in India: Perspectives from Below*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2014, p-141

and if the Communist Party would have aligned their goals with the Dalits their movement would have garnered more following in the region.

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* points out that nationalism originated from America which was later adapted by imperial rule. He argues that the nationalism which is seen in the colonies is thereby actually just a mere reaction to imperial rule and hence quite different from its original version. He defines a nation as an imagined, 'socially constructed community' since not everyone knows everyone in the community yet chooses to believe that they are one whole unit.³³ He further argues that there were two factors primarily responsible for the formation of such imagined communities in the colonies, first was 'print capitalism' which used vernacular languages to create a certain image of nationalism and second was protest against the hierarchical or monarchical powers. However, Partha Chatterjee in *Nation and its Fragments* rejects this idea of inferior nationalism of the colonies in Asia and Africa. He contends that since it was reactionary, the colonized nationalism created its own space for sovereignty and identity. In the process, he claims that first the spiritual dimension was conquered and then only political nationalism was birthed and concludes that without understanding the struggle against modernity in the colonial period, the post colonial modernity cannot be understood since they are interrelated.³⁴ Santram agreed more along the lines of Anderson as he believed that the dream of a united nation which Congress showed was a mirage. While Chatterjee believes that Indian nationalism represented the marginalized as well, Santram completely rejects the idea for he believes that the national movement sidelined the social movement and hijacked the intellectual space for the same completely.

³³Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities- Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, Revised Edition*, Verso, London, 2006, p-6

³⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments- Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993

G. Aloysius in *Nationalism Without a Nation in India* criticizes mainstream history for being elite and ignoring the history from below. He further argues that there were two types of nationalism which were part of the freedom struggle, one was cultural nationalism which challenged the hegemony of the high caste and motivated leaders like Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar, while the other one was political nationalism with the primary motive of independence from British rule. Aloysius writes that it was a sad state of affairs that political nationalism dominated cultural nationalism and the oppressed section of Indian society was once again denied their agency to speak and fight for their self-respect.³⁵ In the debate of ‘social versus political’, Aloysius reverses the narrative and claims that it was in fact the social reformers who were true nationalists who were trying to build a united and just nation. Santram has the same sentiment where he believes that the ‘nationalist movement’ of Congress was just an upper caste, upper class attempt to keep the power in their own hands; they had no national interest in their agenda but only self-interest. Aloysius and Santram both are of the belief that India as a nation did not exist, in fact, it simply holds the communities which are constantly at war with each other. The idea that with independence, a nation was born automatically is living in denial.³⁶ Santram contested the idea of India as a nation along the same lines. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that not just the communities were constantly at each other’s throats but they were internally in conflict as well. He did not support the freedom movement on the same grounds as he believed that without unity and integrity the concept of independence and solidarity was a sham. This chapter thus wades through his ideas of nationalism and caste patriotism.

³⁵G. Aloysius, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*, India: Oxford University Press, 2010, p-208-09

³⁶ *ibid*, p-152-153

While discussing the politics of representation the chapter glances through how state's devices like Census were used or eventually came to be used in forming, shaping and solidifying certain stereotypical identities. These stereotypes not only set the tone for the social and political movement in Punjab but also defined the power play in the region. Denzil Ibbetson in *Panjab-Caste, Races, Castes and Tribes of the people of Panjab* says that when the census began in India in 1862 it was more of an administrative and less of a social exercise. The first comprehensive census happened in 1881 and the agenda was to ensure the smooth running of the British policies in the different regions of India but not to uncover or chart out the underlying structure of the population. The top priority was to assess landholdings for revenue purposes. Ibbetson claims that this process had two major difficulties; firstly, abundant and diverse sources and secondly, ignorance of that material by the British officials.³⁷ The census reports also pointed out how the British looked at the Indian society and caste and reflected the fact they were many a times inspired from oriental literature instead of ground reality. Ibbetson even accepts that these findings in the census were no exceptional feat instead they reflected the ignorance of the diverse culture on their (British) side. He argued that by ignoring the customs and beliefs European science is actually denying itself an effective tool of administration.³⁸

Thus, the battle of religion, caste exclusivity, contesting political identities and administrative control, eventually turned into a neck to neck competition between organisations, heterodox movements, political parties and leaders of the social and political movements. The history of these religions, sects and political parties in Punjab as well as in the country itself became **“history of prejudice”** where leaders simply contested for representation mostly ignoring and

³⁷ Denzil Ibbetson, *Panjab Caste, Races, Castes and Tribes of the people of Panjab*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1981,(Original preface to the report on the Census of 1881, iv)

³⁸ibid, pp.iv-v

even side-tracking the interests of the very people they were supposed to represent. In an attempt to become the voice they rather muffled the voices like Santram's in their heated debates contesting for political power. Santram expresses his dissatisfaction with the fact how the political movement tended to overpower the social movement. He felt saddened by the fact that reform leaders never got the same respect and the space which the political leaders easily asserted.

The final chapter '**Tracing the Impact of Caste System on Religion and Gender**' discusses how along the lines of social consciousness, a communal consciousness was built as well and ponders over factors responsible for the aforementioned phenomenon. The chapter speculates the process of nation forming and the idea of India as a nation taking its final shape. It analyses the idea of multiple nationalisms along community lines and focuses on how Sikhism in the late nineteenth century started its search for separate identity from Hinduism and emphasizes on the power struggle between Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. It tries to find the missing link between communal consciousness and social consciousness, which according to Santram was the caste system. It further discusses how space became co-related with identity in Punjab and how the British State as well as Congress used religion and identity to gain political power in the region. The major theme of the chapter thus is locating the question of identity along the lines of religion which Santram saw as a distorted version of identity influenced by the caste system.

Romila Thapar in *The Public Intellectual in India* says that for a nation to exist as an entity, inclusive identity is the most prominent factor. She comments that when colonial rule is removed and the idea of nation finally starts taking shape then various identities start contesting for dominance and thus, religious nationalism takes birth. She calls the rigid identities encircled

around religious nationalism the ‘colonial brainchild’.³⁹ The question this chapter tries to find an answer to is, do these identities exist irrespective of the colonial presence and are they not already contesting for hegemony and autonomy. The anti colonial nationalism which Thapar claims to be reasonably secular, Santram discards its secular character and goes on questioning its existence at all.

Jones emphasizes that the new social consciousness surrounding identity was a primary factor contributing to the growing militancy in the region of Punjab which further expanded to communal hatred. By tracing the genesis and the growth of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, Jones encounters not just the communal aspect of the revivalist movements but also sees the nationalist movement through the eyes of the reformers as well. His work helps us to conclude that the freedom movement and especially Congress failed to make a significant impact in Punjab. Both Jones’ and Juergensmeyer’s work deduce that amidst all that was happening on *dharmik*, *panthic* and *qaumik* level, no political party, especially the ones claiming for the Swarajya movement were able to make a dent in this atmosphere. It was only through the help of local support and sects that at times these parties got any success but overall if compared to the rest of the nation, Punjab was not as politically motivated.

Harish Puri and Paramjit Judge in *Social and Political Movements- Reading on Punjab* believe that the social movements in Punjab like any other movement had the tendency to adopt the regional character, and in the case of Punjab the character became diverse identities. The cultural renaissance in Punjab was heavily influenced with the agrarian changes like canal colonies which made it different from the other British ruled territories in India. Puri and Judge argue that the twentieth century when the Punjab population rejected the Brahmo Samaj and was more

³⁹Romila Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India(ed.)*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2015, p-xiv-xxii

inclined towards Arya Samaj which reflected the communal spirit residing in the region.⁴⁰ While Judge and Puri hold the Hindu reformatory spirit responsible for the communal hatred, Thapar on the other hand puts the entire blame on the colonial rule for reformulating the identities in India and turning them rigid. She argues that as the colonial understanding was different about Indian society it tended to misinterpret the fluid religious identities as strong compartmentalized identities. For instance, as per the colonial regime it was monolithic Hinduism and monolithic Islam and rest all identities were forced under these closed identities. This categorization forced the communities to leave their diverse character and instead engaged them in constant confrontation against each other.⁴¹ Harjot Oberoi in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* too argues that religious lines in Punjab before colonial rule were actually blurred. They got well-demarcated only during the late nineteenth century. He blames the Singh Sabhas as well for bringing this rigidity in Sikhism. He however believes that this new Sikh movement was aided by the British regime. In an attempt to become the new dominant community and to gain favor under British rule, Sikhism lost its pluralistic character.⁴²

N.G. Barrier also blames the Sikhs for their militant character and further asserts that due to the growing Akali enthusiasm and fear of Muslim hegemony, Sikhs resorted to offense before defense. They believed that if Sikhism could be saved from the Arya zealots and Muslim domination it could be only possible with the help of orthodox Sikhs who maintained 5Ks (Kesh (uncut hair), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kaccha (cotton underwear) and

⁴⁰Harish K. Puri, Paramjit S. Judge, *Social and Political Movements- Reading on Punjab(ed.)*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p-17

⁴¹ Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India(ed.)*, p-xvi

⁴² Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, United States: Oxford University Press, 1994

Kirpan (steel sword)) and ostensibly followed set forms of action.⁴³ It was becoming more and more important for the Sikhs to be identified separately from the Hindus not just for the religious reasons or to claim identity but also to grab the perks (land grants, army recruitment etc.) which came along with asserting this identity. The leaders of the respective communities thus did not leave the chance to seize these opportunities in the favor of their people and were quite responsible for amassing the communal feelings.

While discussing the political developments of Punjab from 1919 to 1958 in *Martial Law to Martial Law*, Syed Nur Ahmed constantly defends Mohammad Ali Jinnah against Congress. Ahmed presents the perspective of Pakistan through the eyes of Muslim league and Jinnah and claims that Jinnah deviated from the path of Hindu –Muslim unity only to contest against the Hindu Raj model of Congress.⁴⁴ This book covers the time span of forty years, from the Martial Law imposed on Punjab in April 1919 and Martial law imposed on Pakistan in 1958 and discusses in details the failure of Non-Cooperation movement, birth of the Unionist Party and the disappointing role of Gandhi in the Round Table Conference and how all these reasons came to a full circle in increasing the Hindu-Muslim disparity.

Imran Ali in *The Punjab under Imperialism* comments that the reason for Congress' failure in Punjab region was the 'canal colonization' (1885 to 1930) by the British. Since the Unionist Party served the rural and feudal interests, this version of colonization was most suitable to them and made them pro-imperialist rule.⁴⁵ David Gilmartin in *Empire and Islam* too supports the idea that policies like Land Alienation Act of 1900 made the British rule favorable in the rural region

⁴³ N.Gerald Barrier, "The Singh Sabha Movement 1875-1925", in Puri. Harish K., Judge, Paramjit S. *Social and Political Movements- Reading on Punjab(ed)*, Rawat Publications, 2000 , p-82

⁴⁴ Syed Nur Ahmad, (Edited by Craig Baxter from a translation from the Urdu by Mahmud Ali), *From Martial Law to Martial Law-Politics in the Punjab, 1919-1958*, Westview Press, Boulder and London, 1985, p-144-48

⁴⁵ Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885-1947*, United States: Princeton University Press, 1988

of Punjab.⁴⁶ Both Ali and Gilmartin establish the fact that through customary laws and land allotment, the British kept their rural intermediaries content and on their side. Through land grants the British also assured that a small army was maintained as a favor returned. While Gilmartin sees Pakistan as a sign of Muslim empowerment, Ali notices that despite advancements in agricultural production Punjab in essence remained a backward state. The reason for both analyses can be traced back to the dominant rural politics of Punjab and also prevalence of customary laws.

B.R. Ambedkar in *Pakistan or Partition of India* tries presenting a pragmatic view of the pros and cons of the partition and concludes that partition was a better choice for all the communities involved.⁴⁷ He for these opinions is put under the suspicion of not being nationalist enough and for not caring about the unity of the country. While the nationalists believed that India was one nation, Ambedkar affirmed that without doing away with the social divisions, any kind of political unity was only temporary. Santram shared his opinions and commented on the broke image of independent India,

Under temporary enthusiasm we thought that the country was united. We did not care to remove these holes and dents and convert the heterogenous mass of Indian population into a strong homogeneous nation...it is incorrect to say that the British created the dents in the social body of India. They did exist

⁴⁶ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, 1988

⁴⁷ B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, Thackers Publishers, Bombay, 1945

*before the British came here. They only exploited our social cleavage...now a foreign pressure has been removed we are again going apart.*⁴⁸

Lastly, this chapter while addressing the topic of social status of women in Punjab attempts to trace the steps of how and when the bodies of women became a battleground of politics in the region. Partition ruined a lot of homes on both sides but women were the worst hit because there was no respite for them even after partition. In the process of rehabilitation again families were destroyed and there are numerous stories which share that pain.⁴⁹ The point of this thesis however, is not to bring out those stories, but to figure out why as a society we failed them. Why did the social reform movements themselves fail to see women beyond their bodies? Why from their education to marriage everything for women was under the strict inspection of sometimes the communal rules and sometimes under caste rules? The very idea that 'her virtue' is family's virtue, refuses to see women as individuals and instead grades them as a liability or property which can be accessed forcefully to dominate her family, caste and then community. These questions still have no answers. Their humiliation has become a part of the norm and as Bhikhu Parekh describes, humiliation is most effective when it becomes part of the normalcy.⁵⁰ Hence, this dissertation re-focuses on this normalized humiliation imbibed in the society searching its way through the shroud of communalism and caste politics. We try to see how as a social reformist Santram perceived this issue and in what ways his organization; JPTM contributed towards this cause.

⁴⁸ Santram B.A., "Social Problems", December 17, 1950, (newspaper not mentioned) Private papers of Santram B.A., as accessed from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi

⁴⁹ Check Uravshi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence*, Anam Zakaria in *The Footprints of Partition* and Shobha Rao in *An Unrestored Woman*

⁵⁰ Bhikhu Parekh, *Logic of Humiliation* in Gopal Guru, *Humiliation-Claims and Context* (ed), Oxford University Press, 2009, p-25-26

The chapter locates what reforms expected from women and how it treated them. Jyoti Atwal in *Real and Imagined Widows: Gender relations in Colonial North-India*, addresses how the Indian society perceived widowhood. She presents how the cultural systems were shaped around women just to repress her sexuality and control it. She criticizes the social reformists who further tried controlling these widows through marriage as if that was the only means to emancipation.⁵¹

Veena Das in *Critical Events- An Anthropological perspective on Contemporary India* also studies the codes of honor and purity and reflects how these codes were shaped and reshaped around sati, partition and other sociological issues. She shows how these ideas were then appropriated in the national movement firstly by the women groups and minority groups and then later by the political parties. She studies how all the changes in the society affect the state of the women in them and in the context of India how women just like other marginalized communities are treated as second-hand citizens.⁵²

Santram and Arya Samaj belong to the same section of the reformists who believed that the sole purpose of woman's existence was to cater to man's needs and this chapter thus brings out the irony in the statements of such regressive reformists. The current scenario for women, especially SC women in Punjab is not good either. The overall Sex Ratio of the SC population in Punjab is 892 females per 1000 males, which is lower than the national average of 936 recorded for the total SC population.⁵³

⁵¹ Jyoti Atwal, *Real and Imagined Widows: Gender Relations in Colonial North India*, Primus Books, Delhi, 2016, pp-30-85

⁵² Veena Das, *Critical Events- An Anthropological perspective on Contemporary India*, United States: Oxford University Press, 1997

⁵³ https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_punjab.pdf as accessed on 2nd July, 2021

Conclusion

This study uses the colonial archive as well as the contemporary local narratives to get not just a chronological account of the events of the Punjab during the late nineteenth and twentieth century but also form a chain of linkages which relate these events with the caste system. The first chapter brings out the *panthic* character of the region where internal conflicts were causing rifts in the society and setting the stage for rigid identities. The second chapter focuses on the political character of the region and tries to point out how the question of identity got entangled with that of representation. Lastly, the third chapter discusses the *quamik* character of the state where solid identities were eventually formed, manipulated and used at multiple levels by multiple parties to serve their self-interests. While discussing the public domain of sectarian politics the chapter also attempts to discuss the private domain, i.e. the position of Dalit women in Hindu reform movement and how they too are manipulated and used to serve the patriarchal society.

Through the extensive writings of Santram, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Har Dayal and Savarkar I have tried to look through the issues of communalism, militant nationalism, rigid identities and social reformation especially via the lens of caste and deprivation. Punjab due to its unique location as a frontier region makes the ground reality a bit more different for all the communities, heterodox sects and sub-sects and this study is an attempt to trace all these layers of Punjab during the tumultuous twentieth century and understand why it got so complicated towards the end of the colonial rule.

Santram B.A. remains the focal point of the study as the main purpose is to look at Punjab's evolution through the eyes of a commoner. He related all the problems of the society with the

issue of caste and fought diligently to provide a solution for the same through his writings. This dissertation thus seeks to bring out the alternatives he offered and thereby reflect on those ideas as well. While debating on caste and *Varnavyavastha* Gandhi and Ambedkar leave out some intellectual space which this study tries to assert for Santram. When Santram uses his educational qualification as his surname he quashes the age-old system of identification which is forced since birth. He asserts the identity which he earned for himself, his graduation degree. Many have tried to overthrow the caste system, sometimes through meritocracy and sometimes through conversion. However, the rigidity of caste segregation always finds its way even in meritocracy and conversion and during that time Santram's version of identity presents itself as a viable option. Suraj Yengde in *Caste Matters*, argues that policies like reservation give a very narrow way towards growth. He says that reservation is emancipation where oppressed are made to contest each other and lose solidarity.⁵⁴ This further affirms that as long as caste remains, discrimination and alienation will be the part of the society as well. Santram might have believed that with reformation, the caste system would automatically perish but his arguments post-independence align more to Ambedkar's idea of complete annihilation of the caste. As there is no scope of reformation against racism and only complete demolition of the structure is the only way to ensure equality in the same way inter-caste marriages and inter-dining are only temporary solutions for the bane of the caste system. Caste is not a reformatory social question and hence cannot be negotiated with. The only way to do away with this hierarchical and prejudicial structure is to uproot the caste system completely.

Caste and the issue of untouchability are still relevant in Punjab. Ronki Ram argues that unlike the rest of the country in Punjab, Brahmanical social stratification does not define caste

⁵⁴ Suraj Yengde, *Caste Matters*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2019, pp- 49-58

discrimination, instead, it comes from land ownership. Here caste hegemony is not established through the ideas of purity and pollution but by the fact who are landlords and who are the peasants. He postulates that despite the higher percentage of SC population in Punjab (28.3%) in comparison to that of Indian average (16.32%) (as per 1991 census) the Punjab SC population barely has any land holding. Of the total landholding only 0.4% is cultivated by them and 0.72% is occupied by them. This is a stark reality where the landless SC population which is in majority has to rely on landowning upper castes for survival.⁵⁵

Hence, as caste still lingers as an issue of identity and respect even in contemporary times, Santram's unique ideas and vision stand relevant and should be explored in detail. Santram presents an alternative by claiming that political and social if separated would always give half-hearted results. His work symbolizes that change begins from within and even though social reformers like him have not received their due acknowledgement, his ideas for their novelty and passion certainly left a mark in the society which this study further attempts to reinvigorate.

⁵⁵ Ronki Ram, "Untouchability in India with a difference: Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion, and Caste Conflicts in Punjab", *Asian Survey*, Vol.44, No.6 (November/December 2004), p-896-898

Picture No. 1.1 Santram B.A.

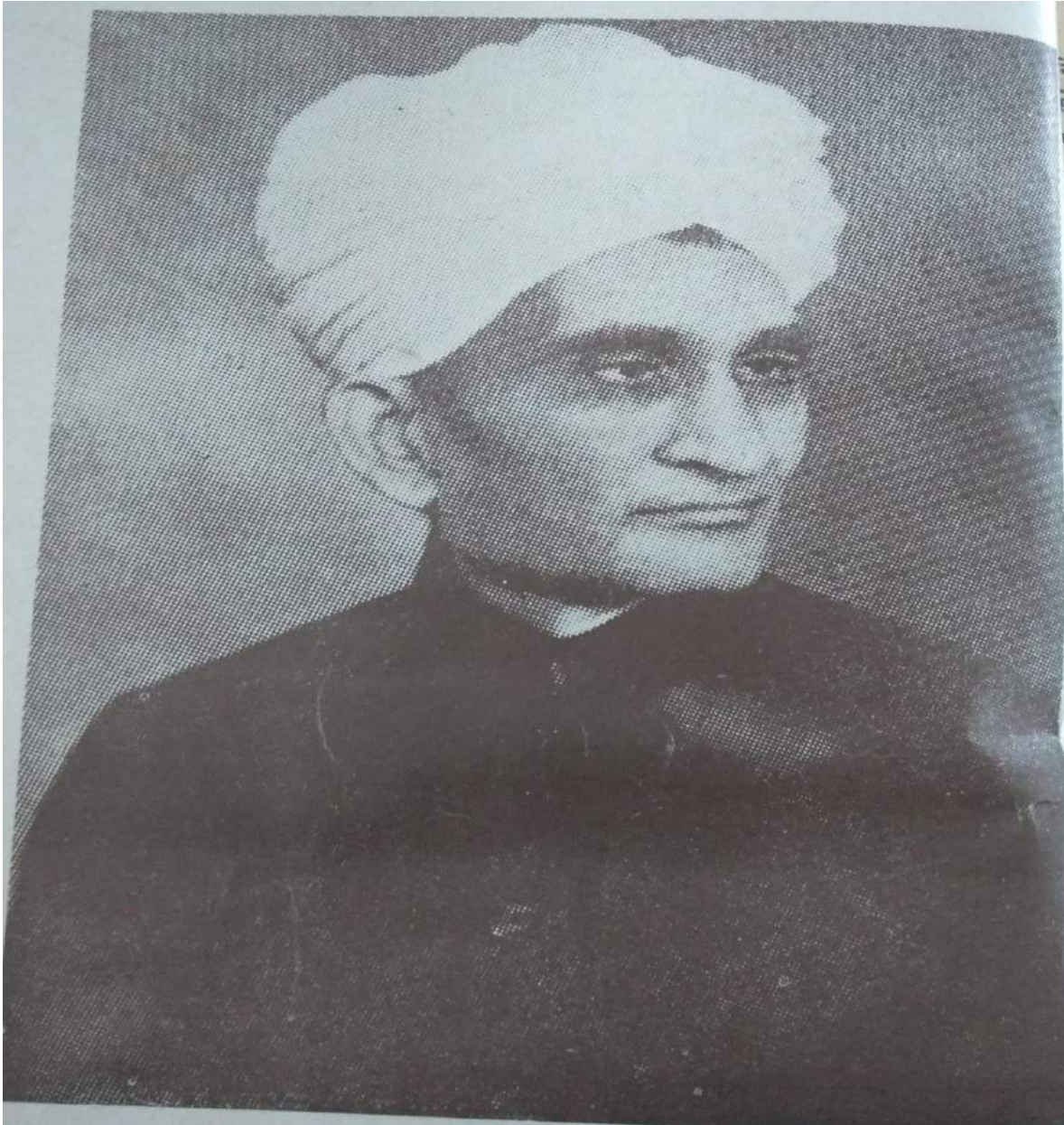


Image courtesy: Hamara Samaj, Nalanda Prakashan, Bombay, 1949

Chapter 2

The ‘Many Punjabs’ and the debate on caste and *varna*

Richard Fox in *Lions of the Punjab* argues that it was due to the colonial policies, regional divides and class consciousness which resulted in a fragmented cultural history of Punjab. Fox believes that it was due to stereotyping on behalf of the imperial rule that individuals and groups were forced to become ‘carriers of the culture’ in Punjab.¹ Due to such stereotyping, distinct identities were formed around religion but before that there was rejection of certain stereotypes too. This chapter thus probes into how as a counter-reaction to these forced identities, there was a wave of socio, religious and cultural consciousness which urged various communities to seek reforms from within and maintain a strong foothold in the region of Punjab. The chapter explores this sectarian character of Punjab and assesses how numerous heterodox movements co-existed and shared the space.

K.N. Panikkar claims that since the 18th century there were significant changes in the society especially along the lines of caste including, “**fragmentation, occupational mobility and sanskritization.**”² While Panikkar is of the opinion that the 19th century intellectuals were mistaken to consider these changes as ‘new’ social consciousness, there is some truth to the fact that the concern for identity was becoming a prominent question of the time. This chapter thereby explores the various heterogeneous sects which appeared in the wake of this new social consciousness. It helps us to see Punjab beyond its stereotype of being a Sikh dominated state and sees it under the actual light of diversity. I attempt to address the complicated question of

¹ Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab- Culture in the making*, University of California Press, London, 1985, pp xi-xii

² K N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika print communication service, New Delhi, 1995, p-6

caste and social history of India, specifically in first half of 20th century while engaging with Santram B.A. (1887-1988), who was an ardent Arya Samaji, promoter of social reforms and leader of *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* (JPTM) which was established in 1922 in Lahore. It aims to point out how the JPTM of Santram was an outcome of complex social and political tussles.

Even in the present times *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* is seen as an arm of Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj and a puppet in the hands of the upper caste, with no separate identity. In an article in *Indian Express* Ravish Tiwari writes that *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* had its origin from bodies like Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj. He further makes the allegation that the Mandal rejected Ambedkar's speech on *Annihilation of Caste* due to objections from senior Punjab Hindu Mahasabhites.³ Hence, the chapter seeks to address such historiographical and contemporary claims against the JPTM. The chapter further points out that though JPTM was an offshoot of Arya Samaj but at the same time it did not flourish over the feelings of exclusivity or militancy, instead, it strived to quash the problems from within and not from the outside. Arya Samaj got involved in a lot of conflicts with other religions over the *Shuddhi* practice but Santram and his Mandal did not believe in this idea at all.⁴ Santram opined that these converted Hindus were still treated as pariahs by the upper castes and the only way to reform Hinduism was to remove caste as a concept of identity. Due to such conflicting opinions not just Arya Samaj but even the founding member of the JPTM; Bhai Parmanand (also a Hindu Mahasabha member) dissociated himself with the organisation and it was actually Santram who led the Mandal for the rest of his life, away from the influence of the upper caste. The chapter thus tries to find a space for

³ Ravish Tiwari, "The Discovery of Ambedkar" *Indian Express*, June 26, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/the-discovery-of-br-ambedkar-5137780/>

⁴ *Shuddhi* is a Sanskrit term which translates to purification. It was a concept introduced to bring the converted Hindus back to the folds of the religion. The communal angle related to the practice is discussed in details in Chapter 3 of the dissertation

Santram in the national intellectual debate and lastly it brings forward the third party of Santram B.A. in the famous caste debate of 1935 between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi.

Historiographical Review: the land of Gurus

J. S. Grewal in *The Sikhs of the Punjab* argues that it was during the 17th century that the Sikh identity under Guru Nanak started taking a distinct shape. There was no social alienation on the basis of caste, creed or gender in his teachings. In Guru Nanak's idea of spirituality there was equality and salvation for all.⁵ The underprivileged were being presented with options and with the promise of life of respect and social justice. There was always an underlying emotion of rebellion against the 'upper caste' and the birth of another religion (Sikhism) as an offshoot of Hinduism was a proof of that. Hence, by catering to these residual feelings of alienation amongst the Shudras, especially the Untouchables, Sikhism took its first step towards separate consolidating identity.

On similar lines, Nandini Gooptu in *The Politics of the Urban Poor in early Twentieth-Century India* further tracks these separatist tendencies in the northern states, especially U.P. (United Provinces) and comments that '*nirguna bhakti*' (divine is formless) propounded by *sants* or *gurus* such as Kabir and Ravidas, had developed gradually in the region from the fifteenth century onwards amongst 'lower-caste' groups. However, '*saguni tradition*' (divine is with form), popular amongst upper castes, was recognized more and exercised dominance.⁶ Punjab had the same 'nirguna' following of Ravidasis by the lower caste. This trend of 'lower caste' following the '*nirguna bhakti*' henceforth continued in Swami Dayanand's and Swami

⁵ J.S. Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India, II.3, The Sikhs of the Punjab, Revised Edition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p-30-42

⁶ Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in early Twentieth-Century India*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, New York, pp-149-150

Shraddhanand's model of Arya Samaj; another reformist body which was found with sole purpose to revive Hinduism.

While Grewal believes that Sikhism since its birth was different from Hinduism, Fox does not agree with the former. He argues that the foundation of distinct identity was laid down only when the colonial policies introduced the divisive concept of 'martial races'.⁷ This martial/defensive identity did not just remain in the army camps but was also carried along by the Sikhs to their homes. Eventually, this identity created class-awareness amongst the Sikhs which then amplified with time. Fox claims that this new self-awareness was the primary reason why Sikhs were so defensive and demanded a separate identity, for they no longer wanted to be associated with the Hindus.⁸ Grewal too agrees that while the idea of reform influenced some to convert, the primary reason was 'growing consciousness of a distinct identity'. He argues that apart from the army recruitments, Sikhs felt left out and struggled to catch up with other communities in terms of literacy and other government services.⁹ This loss of power made them insecure and the situation was worsened when Arya Samaj came up with the idea of *Shuddhi* to not just get back Hindus from the fold of other communities but also to make a spectacle out of it and gain publicity. Grewal recounts that in 1900, Arya Samaj performed *shuddhi* of Rehatia Sikhs by shaving their heads in public.¹⁰ Seeing such open humiliation of the religious sentiments it was only natural that the Sikh reformers would also launch their own programmes (like Singh Sabhas) for conversion and purification and confront the Arya Samaj.

⁷ After the revolt of 1857, the imperial rule divided the Indian population into two halves. The educated classes were designated to be cowards and weak, hence 'non-martial', while backward and brute were categorized as brave and hence 'martial' or suitable for war.

⁸ Fox, *Lions of the Punjab- Culture in the making*, pp.141-145

⁹ Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India, II.3, The Sikhs of the Punjab, Revised Edition*, p-138

¹⁰ *ibid*, p-146

By the end of the 19th century when the Punjabi Hindus outnumbered the Punjabi Muslims on the administrative posts available to Indians, it was a wake-up call for other communities. Muslim associations such as *Anjuman-i-Islamia* and *Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam* were established over the entire province and they formed a network to embrace education, social reform, religion and politics during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. With the coming of the missionaries too in the state, which had the support from the government itself, starting from about 4,000 in 1881; the number of Indian Christians in Punjab rose to over 300,000 by 1921.¹¹ With Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, all contesting for power and position in the society, there emerged the need for internal reformation as well; firstly to keep those who were unhappy within the fold and secondly to attract the outsiders as well. Hence, the numerous heterodox movements in the region during the late 19th century and early 20th century are proof of the ‘many Punjabs’. How these ‘many Punjabs’ took an even more rigid turn and got transformed into ‘many Nationalisms’ in the context of communal consciousness will be discussed in detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

By the late 19th century, it was not just the Sikhs who were getting uncertain about their identity and were soul-searching for roots but within the fold of Hinduism, there was an entire class of under-privileged *Shudras*, who due to their alienation were searching for more respectful options. There were more and more divisions and sub-divisions not just within Hinduism, but within Islam, Sikhism and other religions as well. The social reformers saw the dysfunctional and morally corrupt society rotting at its core and hence took up the challenge to seek equality and justice and get rid of the many social evils in the process. Subsequently came, Radha

¹¹ Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India, II.3, The Sikhs of the Punjab, Revised Edition*, pp-128-133

Swaomi, Satnamis, Singh Sabhas, Ahmadiyah, Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj¹² et al. which were equally inspired by the idea of saving their respective religions and being different from the ‘competition’.

Jones looks at these heterodox movements under two categories, **transitional and acculturative**. He believes that the transitional movements had indigenous roots, propagated by the ones with traditional values and untouched by the colonial era, while acculturative was the product of the colonial imperative and western education.¹³ For someone claiming to be fluent with the dynamics of the socio-religious aspects of India during the colonial period, Jones unfortunately ignores the nuances of these reform movements and does the injustice of compartmentalizing them in water-tight boxes. The 19th century revivalist and reformist movements were quite complex; just like the evils (Sati, Caste system, widow remarriage etc.) they were fighting against. Like, for example, it would be difficult to place someone like Santram who was though inspired by the Arya Samaj in his formative years but evolved during his interaction with western education, in either of Jones’ categories. The reform movements in Punjab could certainly not be categorized into two groups because with time not only the ideologies evolved and overlapped with each other but so did the leaders. Bhai Parmanand was part of both Hindu Mahasabha and *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* and Lala Lajpat Rai was an extremist Congress leader and an ardent Arya Samaji as well. These are just a few examples reflective of the complications that came up when categories like religion, caste and politics got tangled together.

¹² Radha Swaomi is a *Dera* (like sect) which believes in social equality and forbid caste distinctions, Satnamis were a rebellious Hindu sect who believed in equality, Singh Sabha was a reactionary Sikh movement, Ahmadiyah was a modern Islamic sect which believed in final triumph of Islam, Arya Samaj was a Hindu revivalist movement and Brahma Samaj was a Hindu reformist movement

¹³Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India, III.1, Socio-Religious reform movements in British India*, p-3

While Jones looks at the ‘new social consciousness’ in binaries, Owen Lynch in *The Politics of Untouchability* finds a new category of ‘Sanskritised reformers’ for the same. Lynch argues that the untouchables got a vent through the ‘Bhakti’ movement where they could freely protest against caste hierarchy and discrimination. Lynch condemns those reformers who instead of rejecting the caste system altogether try to find a place of superiority within the same system. He finds it ironical that instead of stepping outside the caste hierarchy these reformist movements try carving out a safe space within the same hierarchical structure. He also commends those who spread the message of equality and believes that they only would be able to make a difference in the society.¹⁴ The category or the use of the word ‘sanskritisation’ holds some duplicity as it looks at things in black and white and carries a negative connotation with it. The process, however, can be seen as ‘reclamation of the past’. By claiming a position of respect in the past the reformist leaders assumed that they would be able to reassert the same honorable position in the society even in the present. This reclamation made them accept the same hierarchical structure which was discriminatory to them in the first place. In the constant struggle to prove the self as superior, the caste system was reaffirmed and the other was made inferior again. It was a vicious cycle of the caste system where communities struggled within themselves for respect instead of overthrowing the institution of caste. The Ravidasis of Punjab were an example of this reclamation. Though they were the followers of a ‘*chamar sant*’ yet, they went back to ‘*bhakti*’ and believed that Sant Ravidas might be a *chamar*(low caste whose profession is to deal with animal skin/leather) in this birth but was Brahmin in the previous one and it was his destiny to

¹⁴ Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: social mobility and social change in a city of India*, Columbia University Press, 1969, New York and London, pp. 67-85

emancipate the people of lower caste.¹⁵ This reclamation kept going back to 'Brahmanism' for the search of an honorable identity.

In the same way *Ad Dharm* in Punjab too tried carving the niche in the Brahmanical society by reaching out to the past. Gooptu elaborates on how Swami Acchutanand's Adi Hindu movement grew on this premise of reclamation of superior identity as well. Acchutanand asserted that there was no doubt about the superiority of the pre-Aryan 'bhakti'. He added that even Vedic Hinduism tried incorporating this theological and philosophical feature of 'bhakti' though in a corrupted form. He proclaimed that in the twentieth century however, the true form of 'bhakti' is resurrecting through secret cults and a distinguishable line of saints. Acchutanand and the *Ad Dharm* movement asserted that the Hindus who were in the contemporary times called Untouchables or *Shudras* or backward classes were in fact the original inhabitants of the sub-continent and were tragically replaced by invaders. The reformers of the twentieth century looked back to the same culture and devotion of the original inhabitants but they have a distorted vision of the past. It is now up to the Ad Dharmis to revive this age-old '*bhakti*' and continue its lineage with its rightful heirs; *Shudras*.¹⁶

The province of Punjab was annexed as late as 1847 and hence the wave of reformatory organisations accompanied with western education which was prevalent in other regions especially Bengal and north India also descended quite late upon Punjab. When the Bengali working class moved to Punjab for administrative purposes, Brahma Samaj followed too. But it was Arya Samaj, which gained more popularity in the region. Jones comments that the

¹⁵ Dr. B.P. Sharma, *Sant Guru Ravidas*, Surya Prakashan, Delhi-6, 1973 (this book was accessed from Sadhu Ashram)

¹⁶ Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in early Twentieth-Century India*, p-152

ambivalence towards Hinduism and intolerance towards other religions laid the groundwork on which the Arya Samaj flourished, which was reflective of Punjab's militant character.¹⁷

The year 1910 marked the sudden upsurge of the Arya Samaj in Punjab but Muslims and Sikhs were also competing. In the region Christian Missionaries' initial target was to convert the higher castes but they were not able to attract the desired numbers and when the 'low caste' showed some interest they were accepted half-heartedly. Arya Samaj and other Hindu social reform movements grew under the premise that "*Hinduism is in danger*" and gave the example of a growing population of Sikh, Christians and Muslims as a reference. The expansion of Arya Samaj which came along with DAV (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic) schools and colleges was a mark of its popularity and success but at the same time created some internal rifts too. With more power there were not just more responsibilities but also more difference of opinions where some supported the decentralized structure of the body and some wanted to keep the reins exclusively in their hands, which later broke the Arya Samaj.¹⁸ It was not just internal conflicts which weakened such organisations. Even after conversions or re-conversions the *Shudras* barely got any position of respect. There was upper caste hegemony operative there as well, which treated them as degenerates.¹⁹

The economic independence which came along with higher education changed the towns and cities completely. One such great example was Lahore which saw migration from all over the country and evolved as a new center of learning. In the cities of Punjab, especially in Lahore

¹⁷ Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, pp-66-68

¹⁸ *ibid*, pp-19-22

¹⁹ As we see in Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* (2017) where even after conversion to Christianity the societal status remained the same for the lower caste family or as we see in Om Prakash Valmiki's *Jhoothan* (1999) where despite being educated and living in an urban setup, the author could not get rid of the prejudice which came along with his caste name. Neither conversion nor education could prove to be a guarantee against caste prejudice and humiliation.

there was a huge migration wave which was reflected in the diversified culture of the region. This unique amalgamation of cultures boosted the economy and encouraged steady growth.²⁰ This changing lifestyle further acted as a catalyst for a new consciousness both in class and castes, intellectually and culturally. For many leaving their own religion and aspiring to find social justice somewhere else was a self-defeating strategy and hence discouraged. The popular opinion throughout the century remained the same, to initiate and accept social and religious reforms rather than break with Hinduism completely. Santram was reflective of this mood for he too was of the opinion that things could turn for better only if the caste system could be removed completely. He did not believe in reclamation of the past or assertion of supreme identity. The only option for him was *Jat Paat Todna* or breaking caste. He argued that if the new social consciousness could get some attention from the political leaders it would most certainly be revolutionary. He reckoned that the Indian caste system was not just different from the class system of the West but also worse and went on blaming the privileged upper caste politicians in India for being ignorant towards this difference and hence failing the masses overall. He commented,

This superiority complex in the High Caste Hindus is the real cause of all the Hindu-Muslim animosity and heart burning in the Shudras and the Untouchables. With political awakening in India, here has arisen in the Shudras a consciousness of social equality and self respect. In India caste is crystallized power, as money is in the west. But our political leaders who are

²⁰Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, p-58

mostly high caste people naturally ignore this fact for it does not pinch them.

*They are hit by their political slavery only.*²¹

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a different kind of social and political consciousness which hinted that maybe these were the reformative times on all the fronts. The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920) had become stronger at that point and then there was All India Depressed Classes Association (1910) fighting for the rights of untouchables, Adi Dravida movement(1918) was prospering in South which later more or less inspired *Ad Dharm* movement in Punjab. This all surely presented numerous options in front of the untouchables who were now also looking for a political identity and not just a social one. Gail Omvedt points out that from Phule to Ambedkar to Periyar, most of the anti-caste radicals emphasized on the complete rejection of Hinduism and that made them different from the anti-caste reformists. The radicals criticized the idea of identity and nation as proposed by the nationalist movement. They argued that when hierarchy is based in the roots of Indian society, a united nation and any identity associated with it will lack social equality. They blamed the nationalist leaders for breaking the nation and distorting the Indian identity by not quashing this hierarchical and divisive system of caste. While the radicals believed that discrimination was the essence of Hinduism and hence one cannot be removed if the other survived,²² reformists like Santram believed that the caste system was a mere extra limb of Hinduism which if cut off will liberate the religion without causing any significant harm to the religion itself.

²¹ Santram B.A., "Caste an impenetrable barrier", *Dawn*, December 10, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A, NMML

²² Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution- Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage publications, New Delhi, 1994, pp-3-8

There were Adi movements throughout the nation but in Punjab the situation was different due to the presence of Hindu reform movement- Arya Samaj. The Samaj was already in contest with the Christian missionaries and the *Ad Dharm* movement. Post 1900s Samaj was on a row with its *Shuddhi* movement and was quite successful in the attempt in Punjab. The DAV schools further propagated Samaj's agenda with their conventional yet modern teachings. With their numbers the *Shudras* and especially the untouchables were targets for all, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Arya Samaj etc. Juergensmeyer sums it up aptly and comments that in this race amongst the upper castes and the communal groups the marginalized or the Scheduled Castes were left out to be bystanders. Their relevance in any kind of social movement was only restricted to their numbers, their opinion still did not matter and they had to stay as mute spectators.²³ Juergensmeyer points to the lack of strong will in Gandhi for social reforms, the failure of the Arya Samaj in detaining the loyalty of the very Untouchables it claimed to emancipate and how it tried influencing the caste movements, the inability of the Marxists to recognize the relevance of caste and thus how they ran aground in the region, and finally, the rise and downfall of *Ad Dharm*. The *Ad Dharm* was able to enlist nearly half a million adherents in the 1931 census and influence four times that number but saw sudden downfall in the mid-1930s as it attempted to gain some political power.²⁴ The problem was not just political ideology but also how to change it with time and *Ad Dharm* could not keep up with the pacing of Indian politics. This was not a Punjab specific phenomenon, in fact it was happening all over the country as we see the nationalist movement taking over the social movement. Freedom movement was prioritized over everything else and thereby social reform bodies had to either operate at the back-foot or wait for the right time. Punjab from the 'land of Gurus' turned into a hotspot for contesting identities

²³ Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, p-28

²⁴ *ibid*, pp-72-80

where the political eventually came to dominate the social cause. Thereby, a lot of social reformers lost their voices in the chronicles of history, including Santram.

Santram B.A. and Jat Pat Torak Mandal (JPTM)

Santram B.A. was a social reformer from Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur, Punjab and co-founder of *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* (JPTM). He remained active in Lahore first and post-independence in his hometown. Santram himself came from a 'low-caste', '*Kumhar*' (potters' caste) and he made it the sole purpose of his life that nobody should feel like a 'lower caste' and hence he dedicated his entire life in writing against caste system and drove the Mandal towards the same cause as well. Santram and JPTM got famous in the pages of history when the Mandal cancelled Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's speech in 1935 and later that speech turned into a seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*. There were discussions between Gandhi and Ambedkar regarding the contents of the book which we shall discuss later in the chapter, along with the side of Santram as well.

Santram had his first encounter with the caste rigidity as a young student. Back when he used to go to school in his hometown at Hoshiarpur he and his family held a position of repute there. He never felt that he was different from his classmates in any way but when he was transferred to a city school in Ambala, his classmates started teasing him by his caste name; *Kumhar*. He was ignorant of these issues back at his home in Hoshiarpur where he never felt that being a '*Kumhar*' was something to be ashamed of. It was a cultural shock for his young impressionable mind as the teasing led him to questioning his identity. In his rural space, he never had to face the charge of being inferior but in the city life, he was introduced to castiest slurs and a certain inferior identity along with humiliation was forced upon him. He recounts the painful experience in his autobiography as,

जब चौथी कक्षा में मैं अंबाला स्कूल में भर्ती हुआ तो रजिस्टर में मेरी जाति भी लिखी गई। मेरे अपने गांव में तो हमारी पर्याप्त प्रतिष्ठा प्रभाव था। वहां मैंने कभी अनुभव ही नहीं किया था कि कुम्हार भी कोई नीच जाति है, परंतु अंबाला उन दिनों होशियारपुर की अपेक्षा जीर्णमताभिमानी लोगों का बड़ा गढ़ था। मेरे सहपाठी मुझे कुम्हार कहकर छोड़ने लगे... पहले तो मुझे उनकी बात कुछ समझ में नहीं आती थी परंतु बात को मुझे दुख होने लगा। मैं केवल 10 वर्ष का बालक था। अकेला था। मैं उनके व्यंग चुपचाप सहन करता रहा।²⁵

(When I took admission in class four in Ambala school, my caste was also put up in the register. In my village, we were well respected and reputed. There I never had to experience that *Kumhar* was a low caste, but in those times Ambala was more orthodox than Hoshiarpur. My classmates would tease me with my caste name and at first I was too ignorant of that humiliation. Later when I realized the truth, it hurt my feelings. I was only ten. I endured their taunts quietly.)

Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience- Trauma, Narrative, and History* talks about such a kind of unclaimed trauma which increases in manifolds over time as society never accepts it. She claims that trauma doesn't necessarily have to be physical or violent but it can be mental as well. The growth of this trauma is thus accessed by its unassimilated nature.²⁶ Similarly, Santram's trauma of being treated as inferior owing to his caste made him self-aware of his identity. Facing the impact of this identity he decided to question it and later quash it because he didn't want this feeling of alienation and discrimination to be passed along any further.

²⁵ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, Hindi Pracharak Pustakalaya, Varanasi, 1963, pp-16-17 (this is the first edition copy Santram gifted to his friend Vishwabandhu(founder of Sadhu Ashram and an Arya Samaji) and I accessed it from Sadhu Ashram Library, Hoshiarpur, Punjab)

²⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience- Trauma, Narrative, and History*, The John Hopkins University Press, London, 1996, pp-3-12

In his autobiography *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav* Santram quotes Tulsidas and accuses the likes of him for creating this disparity and causing emotional trauma to him and many like him who belonged to the category of Untouchables. He quotes Tulsidas,

जे बरनाधम तेलि कुम्हारा।

स्वपच किरात कोल कलवारा ॥²⁷

This translates to “everyone who hails from the community of ‘Teli’, ‘Kumhar’, ‘Bhil’, ‘Kol’ and ‘Kalwar’ belongs to ‘*neech varna*’ i.e. low castes.” Santram argued that if popular writers such as Tulsidas himself kept such a low opinion of *Shudras*, how the world could be any different towards them.

His second formative encounter with caste happened when he was pursuing his graduation degree; Bachelor of Arts from Lahore Government College. While using the college mess a chit was left on his seat which stated,

आप क्योकि नीची जाति के है, इसलिए आप चौके से बाहर खाना खाया करें, नहीं तो प्रिंसिपल के पास शिकायत जायगी।²⁸

(Since you are low caste, you cannot eat in the mess. Either you eat outside or a complaint will be filed to the Principle against you). Later it was discovered that a *baniya* (business caste) student left a chit on both his and his friend’s mess seat. He narrates both these humiliating events in detail in his autobiography. Facing such traumatic events at such a young age formed quite an impression on Santram. His desire to work for his community and their emancipation thus brought him closer to the Arya Samaj where he believed he could find the answers to the problems posed by the caste system. That was the reason he became a founding member of *Jat*

²⁷ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, p-16

²⁸ *ibid*, p-17

Pat Torak Mandal so that the bane of caste which took away his childhood and many other opportunities, could be removed from the society for once and for all.

Jat Pat Torak Mandal had two primary aims, promoting inter-caste, inter-state marriages and to abolish caste system which it hoped to achieve while remaining within the folds of Hinduism. Though the Mandal came into existence in 1922 but on paper it was recognized only after its constitution was formulated in 1939. The constitution of the Mandal describes its agenda, functioning, ways and means, memberships and the duties of the members. Apart from his two seminal works *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav* (1963) and *Hamara Samaj* (1949), Santram also translated several Urdu texts to Hindi and went on writing numerous booklets addressing the issue of caste and ways to resolve this issue. For a couple of years the Mandal published a monthly "*Jat Pat Torak*" but as it was in Hindi, it could not become popular in Punjab. Thenceforth they published numerous booklets in Hindi, Urdu and English and continued with the promotion of their idea, to abolish caste. From January 1928 a journal "*Kranti*" was published under the editorship of Santram and this monthly edition surely attracted attention with its writings. But this ambitious project of the Mandal came to a sudden halt due to shortage of funds. In 1932 they started another one as "*Yugantar*" which continued for almost four years. In 1932 the Mandal started a movement to remove the column of caste from all the school and college forms and even in population census. The Mandal even had a separate department for inter caste marriage under the supervision of Rai Sahab Jhangi Ram. Santram was quite enthusiastic about inter-caste marriages as he found them to be the key to breaking caste barriers. His second marriage with Sundari Bai after the death of his first wife Ganga Devi, too was inter-

caste and inter-state which further sets an example in itself.²⁹ He supported the inter-caste marriage on the premise that when such marriages don't occur the ratio of men and women gets misbalanced within closed communities, causing heavy dowries, forced marriages, 'bemel vivah' (age gap marriages) and even suicides which all gravely impacts the self-esteem as well as the position of women.³⁰ He believed that the caste system not only just divides the society in general but also takes away the agency of women and treats them like objects which need to be changed. His opinion on the position of women in society and how they should be treated will be discussed further in the thesis.

Santram started his journey from Arya Samaj getting inspired by the words of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Shraddhanand. He was a graduate from Persian language and yet when the Arya journal *Saddharm Prachark* shifted from Urdu to Hindi he became a devout propagator of Hindi language. He believed that the Hindi language which he was fighting for deserved the status of national language. For him, Hindi was not tinted with provincialism rather it was same for all. He implied that unlike other regional languages like Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi etc. Hindi was spoken and understood by the majority of the population and thus was suitable to be treated as a national language. He further added that when prominent leaders like Swami Dayanand, Gandhi and Guru Nanak could write some of their best works in Hindi, even speak mostly in Hindi, it symbolizes that Hindi truly is a national language which unites all. As per Santram if

²⁹ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, pp-10-165 (Sundari Bai was a widowed woman from Maharashtra, when she married Santram she was 28 years old and Santram was 42)

³⁰ Santram B.A., *Jatpat Tor Kar Hi Byah Kyun*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur, 1962, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

Punjabi is the mother-tongue then it means that Punjab is the motherland which harms the national integrity and unity, so Hindi should be the mother tongue for every Hindustani.³¹

In his initial years of reformation it can be found true that Santram was blindly following the preaching of Arya Samaj. The dedication as well as fear of Arya Samaj in Santram's mind can be observed in his following statement as well.

जात पात ही नहीं, वर्ण व्यवस्था की उपयोगता से भी हमारा विश्वास उठ चुका था परंतु घोर
आर्य समाजियों की अप्रसन्नता के डर से हम स्पष्ट रूप से इसका विरोध नहीं कर पाते थे।³²

(Not just with the caste system, we were done with the *varnavyavastha* altogether but we were afraid that the staunch Arya Samajists would not like our opinions and hence we could not openly oppose it.)

However, as Santram's interaction with western education grew and his worldly experiences enhanced he turned wary of the old-school methods of the Arya Samaj. He read widely and tried grasping the reality of his society. He further tried to share the knowledge through his articles and books as he received it. While criticizing the Brahmanical hegemony he quoted Abbe J.A. Dubois from his French book, which was translated into English, under the title "Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies", by Henry K. Beanchamp about 150 years ago. Dubois called Brahmins the selfish class of society which has a major superiority complex. A Brahmin as per Dubois is incapable of serving any other interest except his own and he would go on to that without any guilt or remorse even if it meant sacrificing others. A Brahmin doesn't belong to his country or to his society, he belongs only to himself and to his caste, for the rest he carries

³¹ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, p-139-150

³² *ibid*, p-152

only the feeling of hate and lacks empathy. Dubois added the caste system is responsible for the moral degradation of the Brahmins and he speculated that if the upper castes have been affected so drastically by the bane of caste system then the low castes must be in a much deplorable situation.³³

Santram agreed with such criticism of the upper castes and that kept on bringing him in direct dispute with the Arya Samaj. His biggest conflict with the Arya Samaj was about the way the latter handled the issue of caste. Coming from a 'low caste' himself, Santram understood the ground reality and knew that people did not care much for *shuddhi* as much as they cared for self-respect. Gooptu mentions that the leaders of the Adi Hindu movement (Achhutanand specifically) saw *Shuddhi* by Arya Samaj as a part of a scam to just increase the numbers of Hindus. With the coming of more socio-political reforms by the Britishers, the numbers became more important and distinct. She claims that it was clear for the *shudras* that *shuddhi* was just a tactic to keep them within the folds of Hinduism as degenerates and Arya Samaj in reality was controlled by the 'higher caste' which had no genuine good intentions for them.³⁴ Santram was somewhere in the middle, he had good intentions for the marginalized and hence was skeptical about the practice of *shuddhi* but at the same time he believed in the number game too. He reckoned that for long other communities like Islam had taken advantage of the disparities in Hinduism hence the process of *Shuddhi* should be followed by invoking equal status i.e. no converted should be treated like an outsider or as an inferior instead should be accepted and treated like an equal. To promote the feeling of mutual brotherhood and inclusivity in his journal *Yugantar* Santram as an editor had a separate column for inter-caste marriages happening in the

³³ Santram B.A., "Ruinous caste system", name of newspaper and date not mentioned, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

³⁴ Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in early Twentieth-Century India*, pp.152-166

region. Even the matrimonial advertisements in his journals said, 'caste, no bar'.³⁵ He believed that conversions and reconversions through *Shuddhi* did not guarantee respect; they only guaranteed a hike in the number of Hindus. He tried explaining this to the leaders of the Arya Samaj but his voice remained unheard.

Santram though had good personal relations with Bhai Parmanand he was critical of the former's organisation, Hindu Mahasabha. Just like Arya Samaj, he had high hopes from the Mahasabha too in the beginning but in the process he realized it to be just another disappointment being handled by upper caste men catering their own interests. He was saddened by the belief that till the time the 'Hindu' awakes, it would be too late and the other communities would have already engulfed his much loved religion. In 1935 when the Hindu Mahasabha refused to hold a conference for the JPTM, Santram was enraged that if the bodies which served Hindu interest do not wake up from their slumber it would be too late. He pointed to the irony in the statements of the Mahasabha leadership. He argued that on one hand the leaders of Mahasabha like Bhai Parmanand claim that this organisation works for the equality and integrity of the Hindus but on the other hand the reception committee of the same organisation refuses JPTM to hold a conference addressing the issue of caste (meant to unite Hindus) on the grounds that the latter's ideas do not align with that of the Mahasabha. Santram commented further as,

May I ask Mr. NC Kelkar, the President of the Reception Committee, if his committee's decision is not against the spirit of the Working President's statement? Will the Sabha not denounce caste system before the touchable

³⁵ *Yugantar, 1932-35*, journal edited by Santram B.A., published from Lahore, Microfilms section in NMML

*Shudras too revolt against the tyranny of the twice born and feel compelled to leave Hinduism. But then it will be too late.*³⁶

Santram in his private collection of newspaper articles describes Arya Samaj's take on caste through Krishan Lall, the then Joint Secretary of Arya Samaj. Lall said that the caste system was the essence of the Hindu society and in the absence of this base the Hindu society is bound to collapse. The caste system ensures Hindu integrity, stability and strength and though the system has its own faults but they are minor glitches which can be done away with some efforts. Lall claimed that if caste is practiced according to the Vedas and the Manusmriti and meritocracy is pushed over lineage then the old glory of Hinduism will return. He further commented,

*If our aim is to achieve the greatest good of the greatest number, we must revert to the old system. Once that is done, the demerits of caste would disappear and even a Sudra[sic] would be capable by dint of merit, of climbing up to the highest of castes. This is what was advocated by that great reformer Dayanand, the founder of the Aryya[sic] Samaj over 60 years ago. If his ideas are accepted, we would not have to scrap the caste system altogether, but reviving its old glory, we could achieve a real division of labour.*³⁷

Santram could no longer associate himself with an ideology which found caste system as an integral part of Hinduism. He refuted the system of so-called 'meritocracy' and challenged its advocates to rather bring in change from within and uproot the *varnavyavastha* in its entirety. His ideology grew in a different direction from that of Arya Samaj. In one of the Arya Samaj

³⁶Santram B.A., "Hindu Maha Sabha and caste system", *Tribune*, December 25, 1935, Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

³⁷ Krishan Lall, (Joint Secretary, Aryya Samaj), "Caste System", *Statesman*, New Delhi, June, 7, 1948, Private Papers of Santram B.A. , NMML

conventions the argument between Santram and Ramdev (Arya Samaji) on 'Jauhar'³⁸ got all heated up with Santram rejecting such practice of suicide whereas Ramdev glorified the same. After that public argument, Santram was banished by the Arya Samaj. Situations got worse when he wrote in *Kranti* that instead of facing the discrepancies of caste system it is better to convert into Islam it raised furor both inside and outside Mandal and everyone started calling him traitor. Lala Lajpat Rai was one of the critics of Santram during the period. On March 9, 1949, Santram even got a letter full of abuses in Urdu.³⁹ He also went to jail for one of his articles in *Kranti* titled '*Behal ho gae bejaan ho gae*' in 1930 under the charge of rebellious writing. He was being criticized on all the ends, by Hindu Mahsabha, Arya Samaj, Muslim population and even the colonial rule for his writings and ideologies. He once also got into trouble for burying bones in his field to serve the purpose of manure. The then Editor of *Arya Gazette* (an Arya Samaj journal) Mr. Sudharshan, wrote a vicious critique of Santram in his journal and the latter had to face lot of heat from the society (he was declared '*Patit*' i.e. fallen) for the same but he didn't back out.⁴⁰ JPTM and Santram thus started functioning outside the clutches of Arya Samaj.

Another Arya Samaji, Indranil Bannerjee accused Santram for creating unnecessary hype against the issue of caste. He argued that caste based discrepancies were tales of the past and the so called 'low caste' people were not being denied equal opportunities anymore. Bannerjee further claimed that the low castes were free from any kind of social, economic or political discrimination. He protested against Santram's denunciation of caste on the grounds that in present time only a handful people practiced untouchability. He believed that the caste system

³⁸ *Jauhar* was the practice of self immolation practiced by Hindu women post the death of their husbands to prevent capture by the enemy.

³⁹ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, pp-239-43

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p-39-42

had overcome its evils and just because Brahmins call themselves Brahmins and Shudras call themselves Shudras does not mean that the caste system needs to be hated or rejected anymore.

Are they (low caste) denied admission to educational institutions? Are they refused admission to public services? On the contrary, places are reserved for them in both, and they enjoy such facilities as relaxation of age-limit, awards of special stipends, etc. are they denied high positions in society? Our money-worshipping age derives no consideration to caste, and social status is judged solely by money, of which some low castes have plenty... I have never known of any Caste Hindu enquiring in a restaurant or confectionary about the caste of its owner. The State and society have done what is practicable for the low castes. Why then do we think that the caste system still exists?⁴¹

Ironically his statements sound like today's anti-reservation crowd whose ignorance on the issue of caste and its gravity, actually originates from their own individual privilege, for instance, their unawareness about 'such Caste Hindus' who willfully practice untouchability. Just because they don't do it or their social circle doesn't practice it doesn't mean that the problem is gone from the roots. Also it appears like instead of giving evidence against Santram's allegation of caste system he was more or less complaining about the boost ups which the marginalized were finally getting. He didn't realize that these are some of the basic rights which had been denied to the majority of the nation by the handful and after independence it became the moral responsibility of the government to increase the opportunities for them in order to bring them gradually on an equal platform. That is why personalities like Santram and their writings are relevant in contemporary times to give a wake-up call to such regressive and outdated reformists. Santram

⁴¹ Indranil Banerjee, "Caste System", *Statesmen*, Calcutta, May 24, 1948, Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

keeps reminding the leaders of the social and political movements about the despicable condition of the marginalized communities. He asks these leaders to work towards improving this situation so that the under-privileged are not taken advantage of yet again by the upper-class and the upper-caste.

*Under the existing conditions (independence movement) of this country the vast majority of the population, who are illiterate and ill-informed and also poverty-stricken, can be easily exploited by a minority which commands both wealth and intelligence. The election results would thus reflect not the will of the people as a whole, but of a small section having influence over them. The illiterate and ill-informed masses are for political matters no more better than children who cannot think for themselves.*⁴²

Santram's growth arc is also interesting to follow over the years. In the year 1913 despite being an Arya Samajist he refused to eat from a foreigner's plate who was a Catholic Christian. However, in around 1931/32 he ate 'meetha pulao' (sweet rice) which came from a Muslim wedding and that too in public which became a topic of heated debate in his village. Once he even let two untouchables sit in his kitchen and eat.⁴³ Despite the rejection and criticism from Arya Samaj, it did not however dampen Santram's spirits and he continued to have faith that Samaj would be the one bringing revolutionary changes in Hinduism. This connection with the Arya Samaj made it seem like that JPTM was only playing second fiddle and post Mandal-Ambedkar controversy in 1935 this theory became even stronger.

⁴² Santram B.A., "Who deserves our vote", *Tribune*, October 26, 1945, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁴³ *ibid*, pp24-47

Conflicts like ones with Indranil Bannerjee and Krishna Lall drew a wedge between Santram and Arya Samaj but his rigid opinion towards other religions kept fluctuating over his life span, however, his faith towards Arya Samaj was unshakable. With time the point of difference must have been resolved as Santram's friendship with Vishwabandhu (another prominent Arya Samaji), founder of Sadhu Ashram (Hoshiarpur, Punjab) grew stronger. Santram published a lot of his books from the Ashram and even co-edited the journal *Vishwajyoti* from 1952 to till his death. In 1988 *Vishwajyoti* issued a commemorative edition in the memory of Santram and there one can observe that Arya Samaj had eventually appropriated the 100 years of this reformer as its own work.

Bodies like Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha reflected the same interests, of representing the upper caste first and social reform later. Hence, they alienated and abandoned Santram for he was done playing by the rules of the upper caste and demanded sustainable reforms from within. His contemporaries were not so kind to him and neither has history been. Despite his contribution to the Dalit literature, Santram has been an ignored name in the historical archives. His name is only remembered in the pages of history while discussing the time when his organisation cancelled Ambedkar's speech in 1935 and how that speech turned out to be 'holy grail' for Dalit Studies as *Annihilation of Caste*. As Panikkar says intellectual history is not just about the history of man or the history of thought. Intellectual history vastly depends on the background and the context. If we skip the context behind the thought, the meaning of the thought can change drastically.⁴⁴ Thus, it becomes important to place Santram B.A. along with the things happening around him in the region of Punjab and to finally bring the third side to the caste debate of 1935.

⁴⁴ Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and social consciousness in colonial India*, p-32

The Caste Debate of 1935

On December 12, 1935 Ambedkar received a letter from Santram B.A. stating,

*I am now very anxious to read the exposition of your new formula-“It is not possible to beat Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the caste system is founded.” Please do explain it at length at your earliest convenience, so that we may take up the idea and emphasize it from press and platform. At present, it is not fully clear to me.*⁴⁵

This was as a formal invitation from Santram for the Presidential address where he was curious to know Ambedkar’s thoughts on caste and religion in detail and understand how the latter wanted to quash this problem. However, as Ambedkar mentions in *Annihilation of Caste*, he was a little skeptical about this invitation as he felt that Mandal was actually controlled by the Arya Samaj which automatically implied ‘caste Hindus’ and it was no point in having a discussion with them as their opinions differed to a vast degree. Eventually Ambedkar agreed to the proposal and worked laboriously towards the address. However when the Mandal received the draft of his speech the members were not comfortable with some parts of it and wrote back to him stating,

*The last portion which deals with the complete annihilation of Hindu religion and doubts the morality of the sacred books of the Hindus as well as a hint about your intention to leave the Hindu fold does not seem to me to be relevant.*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition*, Verso, London, 2014, Prologue, p-1

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p-4

Ambedkar was not pleased with this criticism and took it as a question mark on his principles and refused to make any kind of compromise on his beliefs. He rebuked the Mandal for being too soft and declared them unsuitable for the task of social reformation. He felt that he was right to have his suspicions in the first place about the loyalty and intent of the Mandal towards the emancipation of the marginalized. He believed that the Mandal did not deserve any respect because it was not even trying hard enough for reformation. He further continued with his allegation that Mandal was a 'caste organisation' and hence nothing better could be expected from it. He cancelled his invitation to the Presidential address and pointed out to the irony that when reformist bodies like JPTM are run by upper-caste Hindus, their relationship with the Untouchables can only end in tragedy. The upper castes prefer orthodoxy over reform as it serves their needs and the untouchables have no other option but to keep seeking reforms with limitations and be restricted by that orthodoxy.⁴⁷

Santram tried explaining his position in the controversy stating that the Mandal extended their invitation to Ambedkar not in the capacity of him being some Dalit reformist leader but as someone who has closely worked on the issue of caste and its discrepancies. The agenda of the Mandal was not to particularly politicize caste but to bring out the nuances of it and present them in front of the public who were mostly ignorant or unaware about it. Santram argued that the Mandal did not distinguish between a Touchable Hindu and an Untouchable Hindu and Ambedkar was asked to preside over the address so that the latter could discuss his doctoral thesis which was based on caste issues. The problem arose for the Mandal when in his speech Ambedkar suggested that this would be his last address as a Hindu. JPTM being a reformist body could not stand behind this idea and hence the two parties came to a stalemate situation. Santram

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p-5-6

explains that the object of the conference was to convince Hindus that caste system should be completely annihilated. However, if Ambedkar presides the conference as a non-Hindu, the Hindus will most certainly not listen to his opinions and the objective of the conference would fail.

*The doctor in the supplementary portion of his address insisted on saying that that was his last speech as a Hindu, which was irrelevant as well as pernicious to the interests of the conference.*⁴⁸

Thus the members of the Mandal requested Ambedkar to remove this sentence from his speech as he could easily speak such things on any other platform. Since Ambedkar refused to oblige to their request they had no option left except cancelling his speech as their opinions did not align. Santram clarified that he found the address to be most invigorating but it was still unsuitable for the Mandal platform.

Despite the long explanation, the situation could not be resolved as both parties were not ready to bow out and make a compromise on their ideologies and the address finally stood cancelled and was published by Ambedkar as *Annihilation of Caste*. The debate got further heated up as in the text Ambedkar questioned Gandhi's ambiguous take on the issue of low castes' rights and Gandhi poignantly retorted to the former's accusations as well.

Around the 1920s Gandhi had strong faith in the four *varnas* and in the hierarchy of occupations. He was of the opinion it was the beauty of the caste system that it did not rely upon distinctions of wealth possessions. He believed more strongly in hereditary laws and did not support the class system of Europe. He found that the fourfold division of the society was but only natural and

⁴⁸Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition*, Verso, 3.2

there was nothing objectionable about it. “*It is not possible*”, he said, “*in one birth entirely to undo the results of our past doings*”.⁴⁹ This was almost like putting the blame on a new-born for being born in a *Shudra* family, for inheriting what he inherited because according to Gandhi this was the ‘law of nature’.

According to Gandhi the Indian *Varna* system was not equivalent to the European class system and hence not derogatory like the latter. In fact, such hereditary laws, as per him, gave a uniform structure to the Indian society and prevented it from entering into chaos by pre-deciding the occupation for the people. He commented that after careful consideration he has come to the conclusion that Indian society cannot function properly without the caste system; it is the essence of the society. He further contemplated that even across the world societies are based on some or the other form of *varnavyavastha* or hierarchical structure which helps in their smooth functioning. Gandhi believed that such divisions date back to the birth of mankind and were almost impossible to do away with and methods like inter-dining and inter-caste marriages according to him were in vain as they did not guarantee mutual friendly relations. However, he agreed that untouchability as a practice did not belong within the realms of *varnavyavastha* and needed to be dissolved permanently. He added that the strength of the caste system comes from the society and its individuals and not from the scriptures. His ideas presented a paradox where on one hand he believed that people brought the evil idea of untouchability within the caste paradigm but on the other hand refused to believe that if the same people stop practicing caste restrictions it would not impact the practice of untouchability. Inter-marriages and inter-dining might not have been the final solution towards the problem but these ideas increased inclusivity

⁴⁹ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XXIX, p-410, as accessed from <http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi-volume-1-to-98.php> on 23rd February, 2020 (all the selected volumes of Gandhi have been accessed from this site)

and removed the feelings of alienation. For Gandhi untouchability was a blot on Hindu society which needed to be removed soon⁵⁰ but he could not provide a viable solution for the same.

Gandhi believed that the entire world practiced and needed some structure in the format of *varnavyavastha*. He opined that the *varnavyavastha* was flawless, in fact according to him it was only the clause of untouchability which was unnatural about the system. Hence he advised that instead of quashing the caste system entirely, social reformists should focus on improving the situation of the *Shudras*. However, Ambedkar disagreed with Gandhi on the subject of definition and purpose of *varnavyavastha*. Ambedkar insisted that the object of the *Varna* system is to prevent competition, class struggle and class war. *Varna* means the determination of a man's occupation before he is born and Ambedkar was against this hijacking of one's own agency. He called out Gandhi on creating confusion amongst masses regarding the difference between *Varnas* and caste. In his letter to Gandhi regarding the *Annihilation of Caste* controversy, Ambedkar goes on explaining that for the general public the idea of *varna* and caste are the same things and they find it difficult to locate any philosophical difference between the two. He critiques Gandhi and says that by advocating in favor of the *varnavyavastha*, Gandhi was clinging on to the caste structure and misdirecting his followers towards the same twisted path. He blamed Gandhi and posited that the difference between caste and *varna* which Gandhi is so adamant about cannot be understood by general public because the difference only exists on paper, in reality both *varna* and caste have the same function i.e. to create restrictions regarding inter-marriages and inter-dining and to ensure hierarchy. Ambedkar felt that the Hindu society is controlled by caste and irrespective of Gandhi's faith; Hindus will never intentionally destroy the caste system or untouchability. Thus when Gandhi advocates *varnavyavastha*, Hindus find

⁵⁰ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XV, pp-226-27

another reason to practice caste rigidities through him. Ambedkar's argument against Gandhi's ideology was that the latter in an attempt to disassociate *varna* with caste was actually hindering the process of social reformation. Gandhi might think that untouchability was the only problem with the rigid caste system but Ambedkar's first-hand experience with this social evil had made him aware that this system needed to be decimated. If there was any hope in social equality it was only after the caste system was uprooted entirely. It was foolish on behalf of Gandhi that the upper-caste *Dwijias* (twice born) will willingly shun away their social supremacy and will encourage as well as assist the Untouchable *Shudras* to attain a life of respect. For Ambedkar, seeking the help of ancient literature like *Shastras* to revoke caste was like washing mud with mud.⁵¹

In his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* Gandhi wrote how in the 1880s his disgust towards Christianity augmented when he found that the religion encouraged beef eating and liquor. He had tolerance for other branches of Hinduism and other religions but at that point he was not sure about God's presence and regarded himself an atheist. His reading of Manusmriti did not help matters either. When he intended to move to England for his further studies his caste objected to it and when he refused to oblige, he was declared an outcast. In 1893 when he refused to remove his *Paghadi* in court frowns were raised and he got a taste of being the 'other'. His final tocsin came when he was thrown off the first class carriage of the train at Pietermaritzburg Station (South Africa) despite having the ticket because of his race.⁵² Gandhi did attain some experience with selective alienation and discrimination but that was class difference and racial segregation. Through these incidents he felt, he understood the kind of

⁵¹Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition*, 3.3

⁵² M.K. Gandhi, "The story of my experiments with truth", NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE AHMEDABAD, 1927 p-12-53

oppression the *Shudras* and *Untouchables* were facing on a day-to-day basis since centuries. He concluded that there was no better person to resolve this issue of alienation and intentional segregation than him and hence, he continued believing so till the end of his days.

While Ambedkar regarded *varnavyavastha* as a disease, Gandhi was convinced that it was an integral part of the society. It was not for the first time that Gandhi and Ambedkar went head on head on the issue of caste. Their first encounter was before going to the Second Round Table Conference in August 1931.⁵³ Dhananjay Keer in *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* recounts that before this meeting Gandhi was unfamiliar with the fact that Ambedkar himself belonged to an untouchable community of *Mahars* and went on to tell him that he had been observing and working on the issue of caste ever since his school days when Ambedkar was not even born. Gandhi commented, “*You may perhaps be knowing what enormous amount of efforts I had put in to incorporate this problem in the programme of the Congress and make it a plank of the Congress platform.*”⁵⁴ His tone overwhelmed Ambedkar who had been facing the ramification of being an untouchable since birth. He retorted with, “*Gandhiji, I have no homeland...how can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink? No self-respecting untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land.*”⁵⁵ This meeting was a proof of ignorance on Gandhi’s behalf and justified Ambedkar’s trust issues regarding Congress leadership.

⁵³ The three Round Table Conferences from 1930 to 1932 were organized by the British Government and Indian leaders to discuss constitutional reforms

⁵⁴ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission, Bombay Popular Prakashan, 1971* p-166-167

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p-166-167

After the failure of Second Round Table Conference and signing of the Poona Pact⁵⁶ where Ambedkar had to give up the clause of separate electorates for Depressed Classes (since Gandhi was fasting until death against this clause), Ambedkar had made up his mind that Untouchability was not leaving the folds of Hinduism and hence the best way out was to leave the religion itself and hence in 1935 he publicly declared, “*I will not die as a Hindu*” which acted as a trigger point for many like Gandhi.

On January 3, 1916, Gandhi gave a speech at an Arya Samaj function in Surat. While addressing the issue of reforms he claimed that he understood that parents fear for their daughters because they are afraid of inter-caste marriages. He commented that if reformist bodies like Arya Samaj cannot tackle these issues, what is the point of their existence?⁵⁷ Gandhi very conveniently put the onus of reformation on the bodies like Arya Samaj as if social was a separate entity and political was separate. He was not just adamant on keeping the social and political in separate boxes, but also conjectured that without *varnavyavastha* Indian society would collapse and hence it could not be gotten rid of. For Gandhi inter-dining and inter-marriage would not result in anything conclusive. He believed that surely untouchability was wrong but it could only be removed by mere will power and people’s own choice (he relied on the goodwill of the upper-castes here) and not by encouraging people to eat together or marry irrespective of caste bars. Santram was against this ideology. He strongly believed that no country ever gained political revolution sans social, and that’s why India was far away from attaining freedom. The struggle

⁵⁶ Indian Councils Act 1909 introduced the concept of separate electorates which reserved seats for Muslims and for those seats only the Muslims would be able to poll for the Muslims, the same concept was proposed for the untouchables/depressed classes where only members of depressed classes only were eligible to vote for their representatives. This was unacceptable for Gandhi as he believed that it would separate the depressed classes from Hinduism completely. He went for fast to death until the clause was revoked. Ambedkar was thus forced to sign the Poona Pact in 1932 which stated reservation of seats for depressed classes instead of separate electorates.

⁵⁷ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XV, p-130

for independence was baseless for him unless equality to all was given before freedom and unless Hindus got rid of the *varnavyavastha* there was no scope for true liberation.

मैं पेशी करता हूँ कि हिंदुओं की जो भी आंदोलन यानी तहरीर जात पात तोड़ने को तस्लीम नहीं करती इसका नाकाम होकर टुकड़े-टुकड़े हो जाना लाजमी है। आप धुआंधार तकरीर कर सकते हैं, अगर आप काफी देर तक जिंदा रहे तो आप देखेंगे कि वर्ण व्यवस्था की जंजीरों में जकड़े हुए हिंदू ना तो मिलकर कोई काम कर सकते हैं ना स्वराज्य हासिल कर सकते हैं और ना किसी फतेह फौज की रहनुमा ही कर सकते हैं।⁵⁸

(I can strongly argue that any movement by Hindus which does not involve annihilation of caste will fall apart. We can debate this but if you live long enough you will see that Hindus trapped in the shackles of *varnavyavastha* cannot get anything done for the lack of unity. They can neither attain *Swarajya* nor can win any wars.)

In December of 1916, Gandhi was asked in an interview at Lucknow if he felt the *Shuddhi* movement by the Arya Samaj was a correct move and if this practice does not violate religion. Gandhi replied that *Shuddhi* was against the Hindu scriptures and hence was against the religion. He called the process of *Shuddhi* as unnatural and alleged that this practice of converting Muslims to Hinduism was a futile one.⁵⁹

In one of his letters in 1935 while addressing the issue of temple entry, Gandhi commented that *Harijans* (his term for the depressed classes or the untouchables which literally translates to ‘dear to God’) would need more than temple-entry and that “*Temple –entry is not so much their*

⁵⁸ Santram B.A., *Hind aur Swarajya*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur, 1941, Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁵⁹ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XV, p-287

spiritual need, as its grant is that of the arrogant caste Hindus."⁶⁰ He was more worried about the 'spiritual grace' of the caste Hindus than about the progress which the untouchables were making. Temple-entry surely was not the ultimate social emancipation, but it was a step towards claiming space and respect, free of obloquy. Gandhi assumed that the upper caste, who for centuries have enjoyed the privileges of being 'upper' would leave their comforts on his call and willingly repent for their and their ancestors' atrocities on the 'lower castes'. He still saw the issue of the caste system through the upper caste perspective, i.e. how it affected the latter's *karma* and faith. He requested the upper caste Hindus to serve the *Harijans* and to repent their actions against the latter.⁶¹

Juergensmeyer when studies Punjab and the Indian social reform movements in general, he arrives to the conclusion that in Hinduism, caste system is a basic component which cannot be erased easily⁶², to which Santram also agrees. However, Gandhi went on proclaiming that caste and *varna* were not correlated, the former defined rights while the latter simply stated the duties. He argued that *varnashram* teaches division of labor as per the 'ancestral calling'.⁶³ He did not understand that ancestral calling meant taking away the individual's free will and denying them equal rights and opportunities. He continued believing that pre-deciding the duties helped in the welfare of the society as he was of the opinion that no work is small or big, high or low, pure or impure. He did not realize that he might not care about the difference between a teacher and manual scavenger but the society differentiated between a literate, well dressed man and an uneducated, sewage cleaner. By equalizing the work of a Brahmin and that of a scavenger, Gandhi believed that equality could be established and people will accept the idea of 'no work is

⁶⁰ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.LXVI, p-59

⁶¹ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.LXVI, p-230-32

⁶² Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition*, 3.6

⁶³ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition*, Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment-2, 2.2, Verso

small work'. His intention was right where he aimed to remove the stigma attached with certain occupations. However, that was not the case to be as the idea was quite utopian. With certain kinds of work, humiliation came pre-attached and nobody would drop their life of repute and comfort to risk that. His idea of 'all work is equal work' was too idealistic and impractical. Gandhi thus failed in both understanding and then changing the hierarchical social structure produced by the caste system.

As discussed earlier, Gandhi and Ambedkar held different views when it came to caste and 'varnavyavastha' and this debate on Hinduism got more vocal when Gandhi responded to *Annihilation of caste* in his journal *Harijan*. He accused Ambedkar of seeking popularity, interpreting the ancient texts incorrectly and of seeking the worst in the religion whereas instead he should focus on the best. Gandhi charged the Mandal too, calling it out for its ambiguous approach towards social reform. He said that on one hand the Mandal rejects the authority of *Shastras* just like Ambedkar and hence ceases to have any association with Hinduism but on the other hand declares Ambedkar's speech too radical if he announces that 'he will not die a Hindu'. He questioned the ambiguity in the ideology of the Mandal and their stance regarding being a Hindu reformatory body. Gandhi used holy texts from other religions like Quran and Guru Bible, to justify the relevance of *Shastras* in Hinduism and argued that by defaming the Hindu holy texts Santram was even in a worse position than Ambedkar. He asked Santram to be clear with his ideas and decide if the latter was a Hindu at all or not because if he rejected *Shastras* it meant that he was rejecting Hinduism as well. He refused to believe that the caste system as it exists in contemporary times with the clause of untouchability is advocated in the

shastras. He argued that if such might have been the case he himself would have rejected the *shastras*.⁶⁴

Gandhi's defense for *Shastras* and his religion stood taller than his offense against untouchability, but Santram on the other hand was neither intending to give up on the religion like Ambedkar nor he favored the caste system or as Gandhi called '*varnavyavastha*'. Santram believed that Gandhi's assumptions regarding the goodwill of the upper caste will get cleared up soon and the latter will have to face the reality that the caste system is a baneful system.

*Look Gandhiji, till now you are standing against the British rule and hence not just Hindus even Muslims are supporting your cause but once you stand against caste system, these 'Marwadi Seths', with deep pockets will not shell even a single penny towards you.*⁶⁵

Santram reflects the mood of the Punjabi population which was not ready to give up on their religion. Jurgensmeyer also points to the contemporary temper of the locals of Punjab and says that the Punjabi Hindus, as disappointed as they were with their religion, were not yet ready to leave it and hence saw Arya Samaj kind of bodies as a better option. For them reform was a feasible option but surrendering to other religions was unacceptable.⁶⁶

In 1945 Gandhi showed slight change in his ideologies where he expressed that instead of being divided into four *varnas* let us all become '*shudras*', thereby, the inferior and superior power

⁶⁴Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste, The annotated critical edition* Santram responds to Gandhi, Varna versus caste , 3.5-3.6

⁶⁵ Santram B.A., "Gandhiji and Caste", July 23, 1946 (newspaper not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A, NMML

⁶⁶ Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, p-1

game will ultimately get over and there would be equality.⁶⁷ His shift from reluctance towards inter-caste marriage to 'just inter-caste' marriage was also quite remarkable. Santram too was happy with the progress of Gandhi along the years he had known him and wanted this trend to grow because he knew that people listened to Gandhi. He commented,

*In 1921 he (Gandhi) believed in birth determined caste. But now he has changed so much as to advise the caste Hindu girls to marry untouchable young men. He must attack the caste system direct and with full force otherwise a few inter-caste marriages between the untouchables and the caste Hindus contracted under his advice will serve only as exceptions and isolated examples. It is wrong to think that caste is only a social problem of Hindus. It is a political problem of the whole of India. Mahatmaji should not fear the orthodoxy in attacking caste.*⁶⁸

In one of his articles, - Desh Raj (A JPTM member) admires Gandhi for appealing the young generation to not take dowry during marriage. Gandhi further requested the young men to practice inter-caste marriages and honor the womankind.⁶⁹ This statement by Gandhi in favor of the marginalized was supported by Santram and he was glad that such enormous changes came in Gandhi eventually.

Santram met Dr. Ambedkar personally in Delhi on 20th June, 1945 and they discussed the caste system and other social issues. He supported Ambedkar's cause saying that the caste system has dug its roots deep in the Indian society and uprooting it completely will surely take time.

⁶⁷ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.LXXX, p-222

⁶⁸ Santram B.A., "Gandhiji and Caste", July 23, 1946 (newspaper not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A, NMML

⁶⁹ Desh Raj Bhangi, "Dowry Evil", *Tribune*, March 31, 1950, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

डॉक्टर साहब ने कहा मैं हिंदुओं के साथ ही अछूतों से भी हताश हो गया हूँ। इन पर किसी बात का असर नहीं होता। इस पर मैंने कहा आपको इस प्रकार निराश नहीं होना चाहिए। कम से कम मुझे तो कोई निराशा नहीं होती। सैकड़ों सहस्र वर्ष का पुराना रोग 10-5 वर्ष में कैसे दूर हो सकता है। हिंदू समाज रूपी चिर रुग्ण शरीर में नव शक्ति का संचार करने के लिए बहुत दिन तक और बहुत अधिक यत्न करने की आवश्यकता है। इस पर वे बोले क्या ही अच्छा हो यदि हम दोनों मिलकर काम करें... मैं सिद्धांत के तौर पर जाति भेद का नाश चाहता हूँ राजनीतिक तौर पर इसके नाश में मुझे बहुत कम दिलचस्पी है।⁷⁰

(Doctor Sahab (Ambedkar) said that he is tired of not just the Hindus but of the Untouchables as well for they do not listen to him. To which I replied that you should not feel discouraged, at least I do not because this (caste system) is a million year old disease and cannot be cured completely within a short time-span of five or ten years. To infuse new energy in the decaying body of Hinduism we have to work consistently and diligently. Ambedkar replied to this and said that it would be nice if they could work on this together. He wants to annihilate caste based on the principles and does not care for its political annihilation.)

There was no animosity between Ambedkar and Santram over the cancellation of speech a decade ago which is quite distinct from the accounts of this meeting. In his autobiography, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* Santram even lists the name of Ambedkar as one of the well wishers of the Mandal. Later, in 1937, Santram also published the Hindi translation of *Annihilation of Caste* from his Mandal's Publication house titled *Jati Bhed ka Uchhed*.

Ambedkar did what he promised in *Annihilation of Caste*, he did not die a Hindu, he converted to Buddhism and a lot of his followers followed too (14th October, 1956). He left a legacy which

⁷⁰Santram B.A., "Dr.Ambedkar Se Meri Mulakat", *Dainik Sansar*, July 1945, (date not mentioned) Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

till date is impossible to match up with. His name became a household name for a large section of Dalits. Today he is known as the 'Father of the Constitution' but another image of 'Messiah of Dalits' is getting prominent as well. In Hoshiarpur, Punjab, the home town of Santram himself, we see a statue of Ambedkar in the heart of the city commemorating this great leader. However, sadly enough, Santram BA has not yet received the recognition he deserves.

Conclusion

In the preface of his book Juergensmeyer claims that while analyzing the various social movements in Punjab he has tried to keep their intellect intact. He credits these religious reform movements for their creativity and vigor, however, he himself discredits JPTM of this creativity and shrugs off their role in history as mere trendsetter who in their fight against Arya Samaj in 1924 inspired other lower caste movement, specifically Ad Dharam to take a stand against Arya Samaj and lead their own battles.⁷¹

Like Juergensmeyer, Charu Gupta also discredits Santram by comparing him with Mangoo Ram of the *Ad Dharm* movement. She says that both the leaders took the inspiration from the Arya Samaj but soon rebelled against it and only Mangoo Ram achieved success in the process. Santram chose to stay within the folds of Arya Samaj while Mangoo Ram opted out.⁷² Gupta further argues that Santram intentionally ignored *Ad Dharm* and focused more on his conflicts with Arya Samaj in his personal accounts and that symbolize his passive aggressive stance regarding reformation. In an attempt to locate him always in the middle, Gupta goes on with constant comparisons where Ambedkar is on one end and Gandhi on the other end. It would be a

⁷¹ Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, pp-ii-21

⁷² Charu Gupta, 'Writing caste, writing self: Recovering the life of Santram BA', biography, Volume 40, Number 1, Winter 2017, pp- 16-43, Published by University Hawai'i press, p-30

much better historical analysis if we just locate these sociological movements and their leaders together which if not done, Santram and many other marginalized narratives would just remain a shadow and be posed as the mere after effects of Ambedkar in the annals of history. This is taking away the same individuality which for centuries the marginalized have strived for in their battle for social justice. However, Gupta agrees that Santram's life reflects **stigmatization, suffering, contestation and eventually self-liberation** and recognizes his efforts towards social reformation.⁷³

One thing that strikes here the most is why the *Ad Dharm* movement was more successful and grabbed more attention than the JPTM and the answer lies in the central figure. Mangoo Ram was more of a role model as he was a foreign return and used religious symbols like Saint Ravidas in his favor whereas for Santram it was quite impossible to get out of the image of puppets of upper caste as he remained stuck with his constant belief in Arya Samaj despite them abandoning him and his Mandal. While Santram continued working for reforms within the fold of Hinduism, Mangoo Ram's *Ad Dharm* claimed a separate identity through reclamation of the past. What Santram's JPTM was trying to achieve was already claimed to be done on a wider scale by the Arya Samaj and hence the Mandal could not grab the kind of attention the Arya Samaj was receiving. Arya Samaj had the support and funding from a larger section of Hindus from both inside and outside India, whereas Mandal was more or less locally supported and thereby lacked resources. Santram's intention in the first place was not to expand; otherwise, he could have also chosen the path of politics like *Ad Dharm*. His intention was to inspire, which he believed his writings were self-sufficient for.

⁷³ Charu Gupta, 'Writing caste, writing self: Recovering the life of Santram BA', p-20

Ad Dharm was working to get people's names in the Census under the new category of Ad Dharam whereas JPTM was working towards the end where people stopped giving caste names at all for the Census, the former was demanding separation and the latter equality within the same circle. In Punjab the use of figureheads as done by the *Ad Dharm* movement (like appropriation of Saint Ravidas), attracted more and more followers. The analysis of *Ad Dharm* which Juergensmeyer has done diligently helps us to understand that since JPTM was less political and more social it did not become popular like *Ad Dharm*. It was the *qaumik* character of Ad Dharam which helped it to strive whereas JPTM could never get out of *dharmik* structure and hence remained a shadow of Arya Samaj.⁷⁴

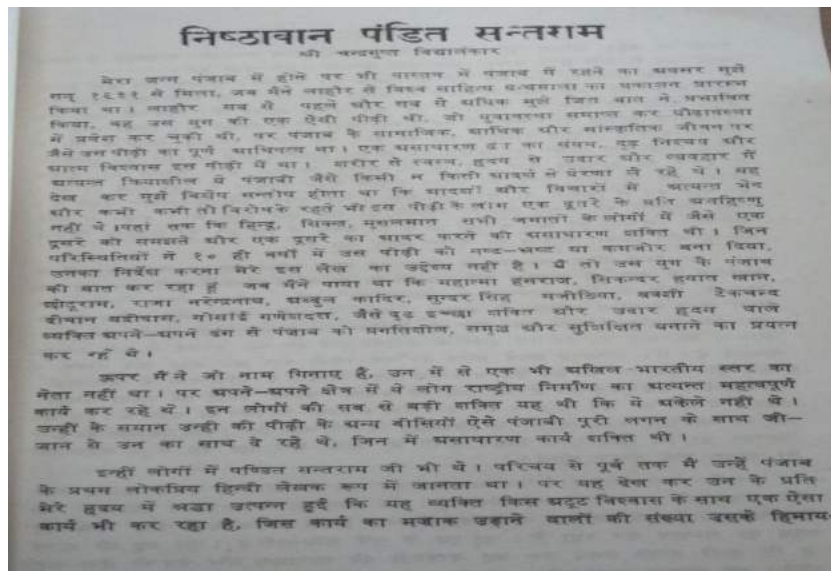
Santram throughout his life kept appealing to stop using the caste names, his own surname; B.A. was his educational qualification, an example of that he practiced what he preached. But it is unfortunate that till date he struggles to find space in the pages of history. He felt sad about the fact that political leaders got more recognition and respect than the social leaders.

देश के लिए मरना इतना कठिन नहीं जितना देश के लिए जीना । देश के लिए मरना हुतात्मा बिजली की चमक के समान एक बार बहुत बड़ा उजाला तो कर देता है परंतु उसके थोड़ी ही देर बाद फिर पहले से भी अधिक अंधकार हो जाता है । उसके विपरीत समाज की बुराइयों को दूर करने में अपने जीवन को लगा देने वाला समाज सेवक दीपक की भांति रात भर जलता है और उसके मंद प्रकाश में भी बहुत काम हो जाता है । उसके परिश्रम से राष्ट्र का सुधार होता है जिससे वह इस योग्य हो जाता है कि अपने बाहुबल से स्वतंत्रता प्राप्त कर सके । ऐसे सामाजिक सुधार का काम करने वालों के नाम और फोटो समाचार पत्रों में नहीं छपते । उनकी प्रशंसा होनी

⁷⁴ Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*, pp-35-142

तो दूर उनके अपने ही बंधु बांधव और आत्म जन उनका विरोध करते हैं पर उनका उनके द्वारा राष्ट्र का जितना उपकार होता है उतना राजनीतिक हुतात्मा द्वारा नहीं।⁷⁵

(It is easy to die for one's country, what is difficult is to live for it. The former shines like a bolt of lightning but then leaves behind darkness starker than before. The ones who live for the country are the social reformers who burn themselves like a *diya* and even in their dim light the work gets done. The nation gets strong enough to fight for independence because of this dim light only. These social reformers however don't get interviewed or photographed by the newspapers. They do not get any acknowledgment, instead are rebuked and alienated by their own friends and family despite all they do for their country. What the social reformers do for the country cannot even be compared to what the political leaders do because the former give so much more.)



The very prefixes and suffixes Santram contested against throughout his life were used on him, like here it says Pandit Santram (implying that since he is qualified and educated he should be

⁷⁵ Santram B.A. "Rashtriya Ka Mool Mantra", September 9, 1945, (newspaper not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

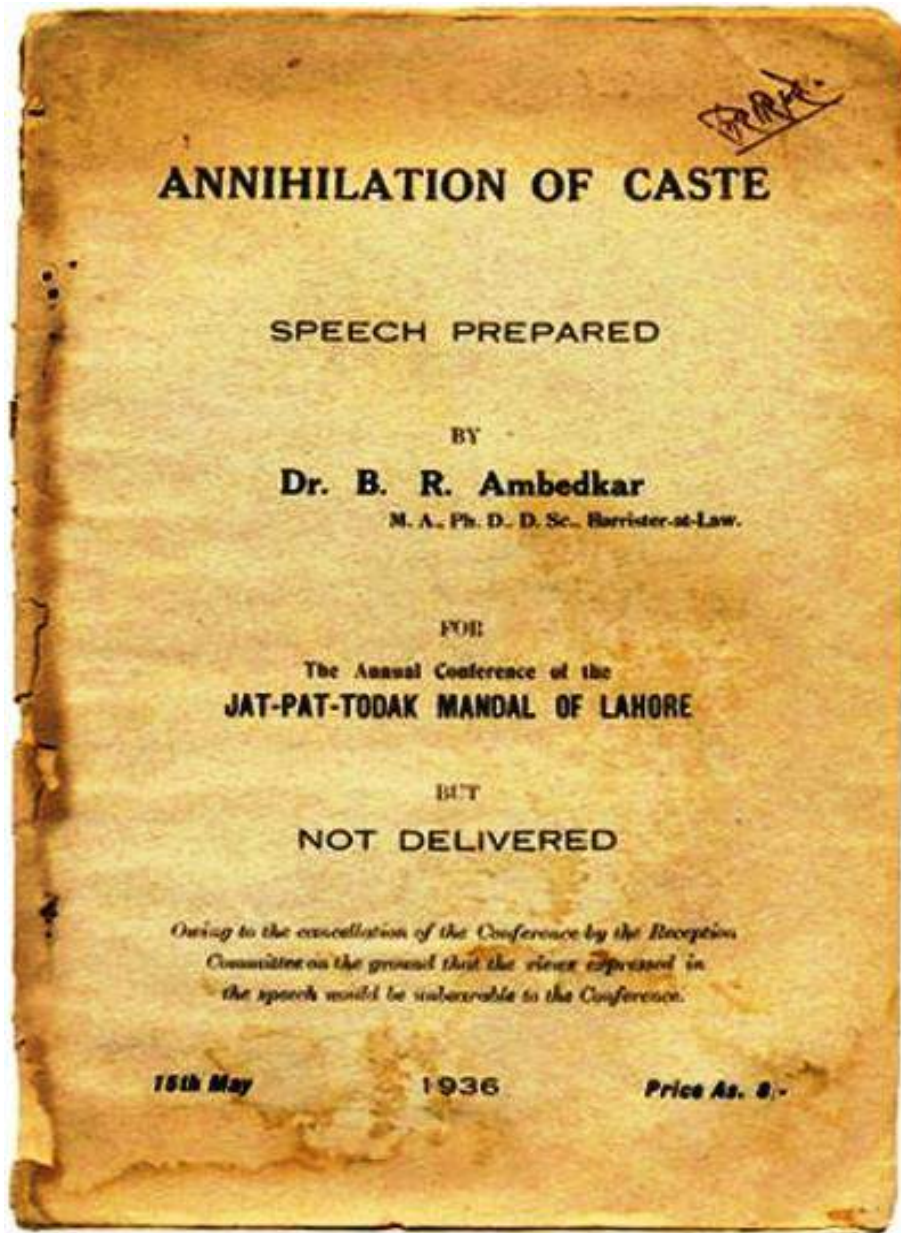
addressed as Pandit, denoting his high status).⁷⁶ This wrongful appropriation of Santram's legacy is unfair and needs to be corrected.

Mohinder Singh in *The Depressed Classes: Their Economic and Social Condition* deduces through Punjab Census Report of 1931 that the proportion of depressed class people engaged in their traditional occupations has declined during 1921-31. In 1931, 18.5 percent Chamars and 57.5 percent Chuhras were found to be following their caste occupations.⁷⁷ This if nothing spoke volumes about the effect of the numerous reform movements in the state. The work of the reformers like Santram did not entirely go into vain. Santram's history is not just his own, his words speak a lot about other people going through almost the same thing and are reflective of the society they are part of in general. As an intellectual he is no less than other mass leaders of his time period.

⁷⁶ Taken from *Shree Santram Ji*, Hindi Vibhag Punjab, Patiala (1969) edited by Lal Singh and Parmanand, this piece was written to commemorate Santram and acknowledge his contribution to the Hindi literature (accessed from Sadhu Ashram)

⁷⁷ Mohinder Singh, *The Depressed Classes: Their Economic and Social Condition*, Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1947, p-73

Picture No. 2.1 Cover page of Annihilation of Caste



(Source: <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/03/80-years-after-annihilation-of-caste-where-do-we-stand/>)

As accessed on 20th May, 2020)

Picture No. 2.2 Constitution of Jat Pat Torak Mandal

1

CONSTITUTION OF THE JAT-PAT TORAK MANDAL LAHORE.

- I. NAMES:- The Association shall be called the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal.
- II. OFFICE:- The Headquarters of the Mandal will be at Lahore (Punjab), or at any other place in India decided by the Mandal.
- III. AIMS AND OBJECTS:- The Aims and Objects of the Mandal are:-
(i) To abolish Caste System among the Hindus residing in India and Indian settlements Overseas with a view to unite them into a strong and consolidated nation, in which there would be no idea of inequality, caste-determined distinctions of high and low, untouchability and restrictions about inter-marriage or inter-dining;
(ii) To create and foster feeling of social equality, fraternity and liberty among the Hindus and to unite them into one coherent nation.
- IV. WAYS AND MEANS:- To achieve the above Aims and Objects the following ways and means shall be adopted:-
(i) To educate and organise public opinion against the Caste system and to hammer down the caste mentality by propaganda from press and platform
(ii) To establish an Inter-Caste Marriage Department in order to encourage and help in arranging inter-caste marriages amongst all the sections of the Hindu Society, inside or outside the various Provinces of India
(iii) To encourage and arrange inter-caste Dinners and to adopt such other means of social intercourse as would be conducive to the removal of untouchability;
(iv) To inculcate among the Hindus the dignity of labour by persuading them to adopt any honest profession.
(v) To create a Common Platform for the Hindus, irrespective of race, caste, creed, language or domicile;
(vi) To start Propaganda Papers or Journals and to publish such literature as would be necessary for the propagation of the Aims and Objects of the Mandal;
(vii) To open Branches of the Mandal and to establish Centres of Activity in the various Provinces of India and abroad;
(ix) To do all such other things as are incidental or the Mandal may think conducive to the attainment of its objects.
- V. MEMBERSHIP:-
(1) Ordinary Members:- Every Hindu, male or female, who pays at least Rs. 2/- to the Mandal as an annual subscription shall be regarded as an Ordinary Member of the Mandal, provided that:-
(i) He or she believes in the Aims and Objects of the Mandal and his or her age is not less than 18 years and provided his or her name is approved by the Executive Committee;
(ii) Every such member shall take a pledge that he or she shall not be governed by any caste prejudices in his or her dealings with other Hindus; in particular, he or she shall endeavour to break caste in his or her marriage (if married) and will try to cross the barriers of caste when the question of marriage of his or her sons and daughters arises.
2. LIFE MEMBERS:- Any Hindu, male or female, who fulfills the conditions laid down for the ordinary membership as in (i) and (ii) above, and pays at least Rs. 30/- to the Mandal as subscription in a lump sum shall be considered a Life Member of the Mandal.
Note:- The Executive Committee shall have the power to remove the name of an Ordinary Member or a Life Member from the list of the members if in its opinion he or she fails to conform to the Aims and Objects of the Mandal.)
3. PATRONS:- Any Hindu, male or female, who is willing to patronise the work of the Mandal and
(a) pays at least Rs. 1000/- or over; or
(b) in the opinion of the Executive Committee of the Mandal deserves this honour by virtue of his or her services to the cause of the country.
4. DISTINGUISHED DONORS:- Any Hindu, male or female, who sympathises with the Aims and Objects of the Mandal and pays Rs. 100/- or over in a lump sum shall be regarded as a Distinguished Donor.
5. SYMPATHISERS:- Any Hindu, male or female, who sympathises with the Aims and Objects of the Mandal and pays Rs. 5/0 or over shall be regarded as a Distinguished Donor.
- VI. GENERAL BODY:- The Ordinary Members and Life Members shall constitute the General Body of the Mandal and shall have the right of voting.
- VII. MEETINGS:-
1. The General Body of the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal shall hold two kinds of meetings:-
(a) Ordinary and (b) Special

- 2. The Mandal shall hold once a year an Ordinary General Meeting for the following purposes:-
 - (a) To select Office-bearers and members of the Executive Committee;
 - (b) To adopt the Report on the annual working of the Mandal;
 - (c) To discuss and decide matters previously notified which the Mandal deems necessary for the carrying out of its objects.
- 3. Special Meetings will be convened by:-
 - (a) Order of the President and the Secretary of the Mandal or
 - (b) by order of the Executive Committee; or
 - (c) On a requisition in writing addressed to the Secretary of the Mandal by five percent of the members or twenty members (whichever is larger) stating reasons and subject matter to be considered in the Special Meeting.
- 4. The quorum in all Ordinary and Special Meetings for transaction of business shall be ten members.
- 5. The Meetings shall take place at the Office of the Mandal or at such other place as the President and Secretary may decide.

VIII. OFFICE-BEARERS:-

- (i) President 1
- (ii) Vice-President 1 or more, up to three
- (iii) Secretary 1
- (iv) Assistant Secretary 1 or more
- (v) Treasurer 1

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:-

- 1. There shall be an Executive Committee to manage the affairs of the Mandal which will consist of not more than 21 members, including the office-bearers.
- 2. The election of the office-bearers and the members of the Executive Committee shall take place every year in the Ordinary General Meeting.
- 3. The Office-bearers of the Mandal shall ex-officio be the members and the office bearers of the Executive Committee.
- 4. The Executive Committee shall have power to form Sub-Committees from amongst its own members or other members of the Mandal to consider any special subject or to carry out a special purpose.
- 5. The Executive Committee shall be regulated by rules and resolutions passed from time to time at the meetings of the Mandal. Subject to such rules and resolutions the Executive Committee shall have full control over the affairs of the Mandal, its management and its funds and shall have full power to devise and enforce such scheme as it may deem necessary and proper for the accomplishment and carrying out of the Aims and Objects of the Mandal.
- 6. The Executive Committee shall frame its own rules and bye-laws of business and such other rules and resolutions as may be necessary for the proper management of the affairs of the Mandal.
- 7. The Quorum fixed for the transaction of business at a meeting of the Executive Committee is one-third of its strength.
- 8. Casual vacancies in Office-bearers or Executive Committee Members shall, if any, be filled up by the Executive Committee and this arrangements shall last till the next regular election of the Mandal.

X. MISCELLANEOUS:-

- 1. The Executive Committee shall have power to exempt any particular individual for any special reason from paying the annual subscription, but the number of such honorary members shall not exceed 1/20th of the total number of the members on roll.
- 2. All matters shall be decided by majority of votes of the members present in a meeting. In case of equality of votes, the President shall have a second as a casting vote.
- 3. The jurisdiction of work of the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal shall be determined from time to time by the Mandal.
- 4. The accounts of the Mandal shall annually be audited & published.
- 5. The Mandal shall have power to amend, alter or rescind the above constitution provided that such power shall only be exercised in the meeting in which not less than 12 or one-fourth members on roll (whichever is less) are present, provided also that no constitutional change shall be made by less than two third majority of votes of the members present.

Dated:- 14.5.1939.

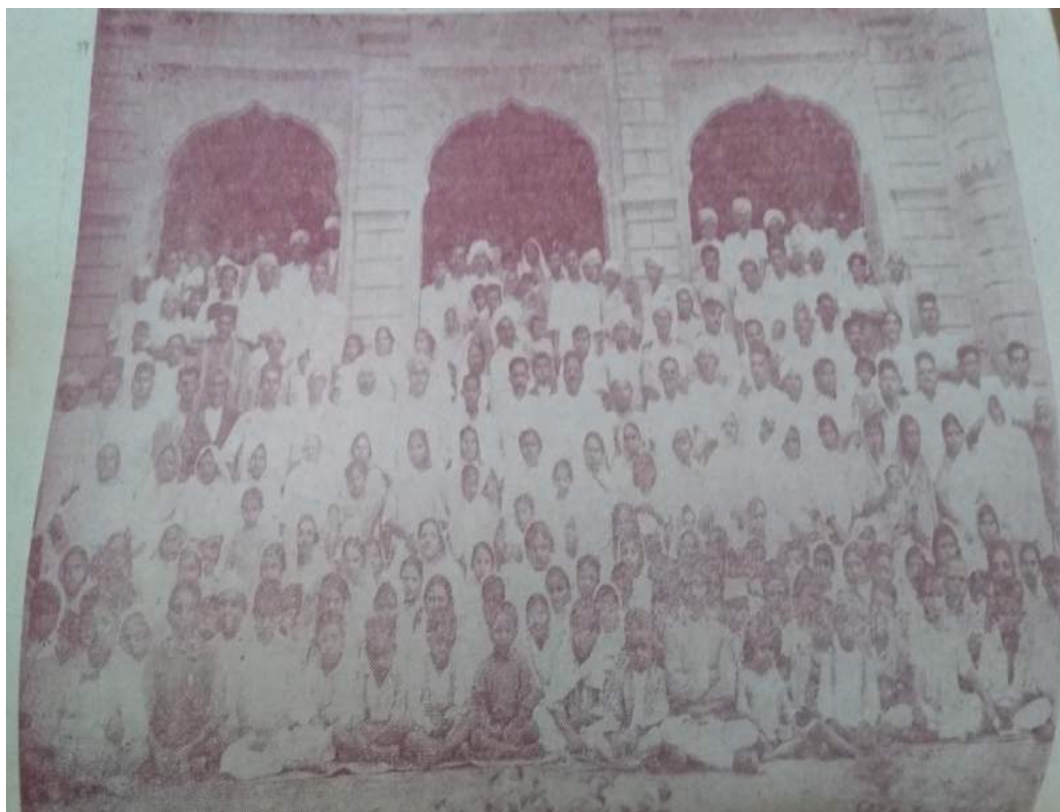
Picture No. 2.3



Santram (right) with Sundari Bai(his wife, second from left) during an inter-caste marriage

Image courtesy: taken from *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*

Picture No.2.4



Jat Pat Torak Mandal, Parivarik Sammelan, Gurudatt Bhavan, Lahore (Year not mentioned)

Picture taken from the *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*

Picture No. 2.5



Promoting Jat Pat Torak Mandal in the colleges of Lahore

Standing- Members of Jat Pat Torak Mandal

Sitting- College Students

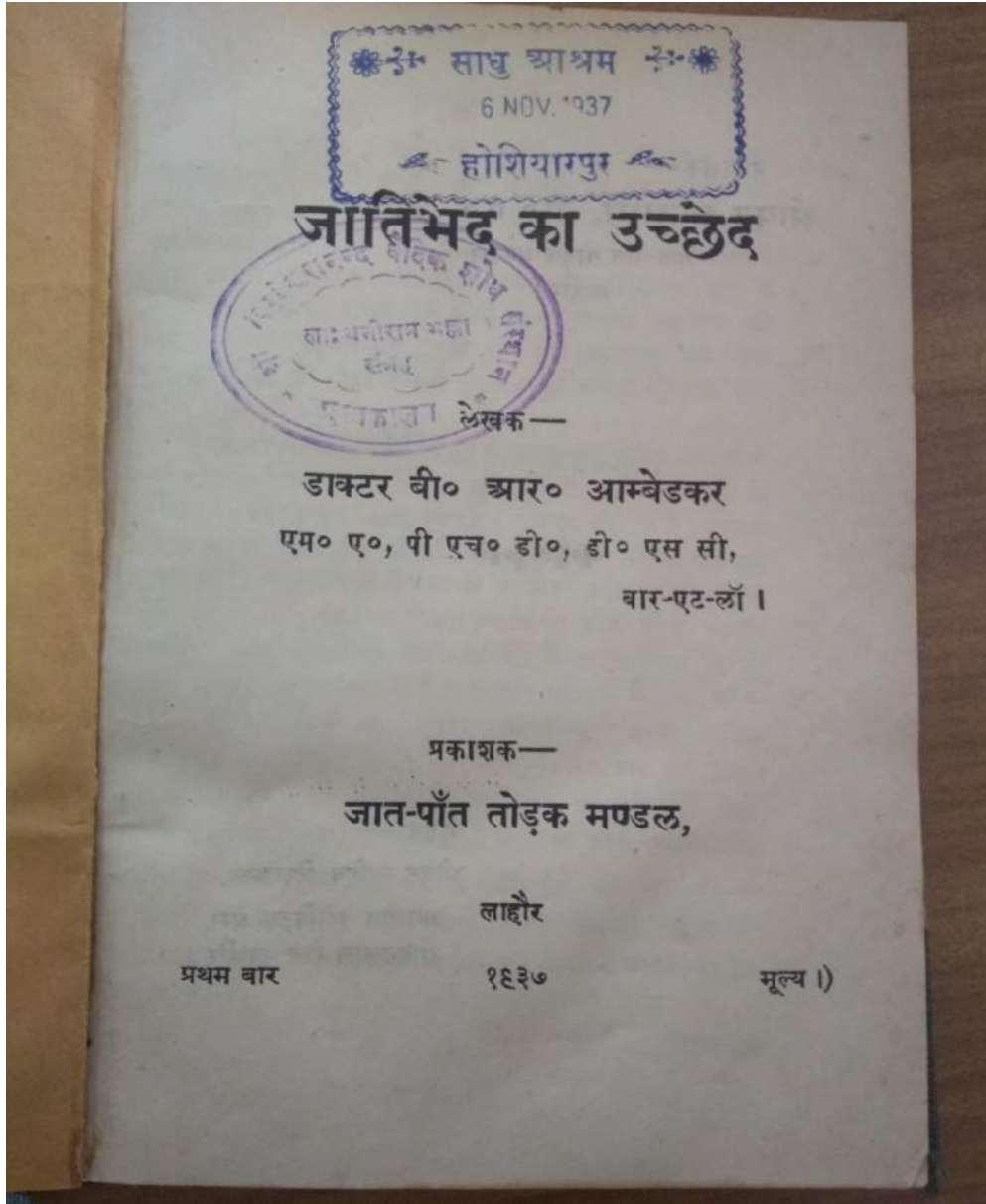
Picture No. 2.6



Vishwajyoti, March, 1952 (one can see the name of Santram as editor)

Image courtesy: the collection of Sadhu Ashram Library, Hoshiarpur

Picture No. 2.7



Jati Bhed Ka Uchhed, B.R. Ambedkar, Jat Pat Torak Mandal, Lahore, 1937

This is the Hindi translation of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* published by Santram's Mandal's publishing house

Image courtesy: taken from the collection of Sadhu Ashram Library, Hoshiarpur

Picture No. 2.8



This is Ambedkar Chauraha in the heart of the city Hoshiarpur, Punjab, the same town where Santram B.A. was born and spent most of his life

The image was taken on March 5th, 2020

Picture No. 2.9



Santram's ancestral home at Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur (the house has been sold by his Daughter-Late Gargi Chaddha)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ During my fieldwork in Hoshiarpur I discussed Santram B.A. with the Deputy Librarian of Sadhu Ashram, Mr. Shiv Kumar Verma, who then said that there are talks going on naming a road after Santram B.A. and even erecting a statue in his memory. However, nothing concrete has yet resulted and even the house in which Santram lived now belongs to someone else, his memory is certainly fading away from the minds of his own town and village

Chapter 3

Mapping the Political Terrain and Caste Question in Punjab

It is not just unfair but also an impossible task to discuss the 'social' question of caste without surveying the 'political'. This inspection is pivotal, especially when the region under scan is a frontier region. Border politics has been and will always be controversial because of its layered culture and across the line conflicts, and that applies to the region of Punjab as well. For hundreds of years people travelled to and from Punjab, a new religion (Sikhism) found its roots here, numerous *panths* and sects emerged out of the existing religions and all of this was visible in its colorful, vibrant, vivid population of the region. Punjab because of its diversity was divided on the basis of religion, caste and economic and community difference. Alongside, there was social segmentation on the basis of *panthic* (sects) differences as well. The region was divided along the lines of martial and non-martial race, militant and passive reformists (both social and political) and this chapter glancing through Santram's lens verifies these sometimes blurry and sometimes distinct lines.

After the Land Alienation Act of 1900 Punjab's population was forcefully placed under two categories; agriculturists and non-agriculturists. Santram observed these categories carefully and came to the conclusion that not only these categories were stereotypical but also castiest and vehemently opposed this Act. He alleged that British rule intentionally created these categories to cause disruption in the society so that the colonial rule can dominate and appease the Punjab population as per its needs and whims. The situation did not improve even post independence as free India continued operating with these categories of agriculturist and non-agriculturist and discriminated accordingly. For instance the Government Agricultural College in Punjab, even

post independence denied admissions to candidates belonging to the non-agriculturist castes. Santram protested against this college policy and argued that by refusing to admit the non-agriculturist castes in the college the government was denying them equality. It is going against the very principles it helped lay down in the Constitution of India, i.e. liberty and equality.¹

By analyzing the relationship between Congress and Arya Samaj and the nuances of the political and social reformist bodies like Ghadar Party, Hindu Mahasabha, Unionist party etc. the chapter also discusses how along the lines, the ‘political’ went on complicating the ‘social landscape’ of Punjab and vice-versa. It primarily focuses on the politics of representation in the Punjab society and how that came on to reflect on the character and functioning of various social reform movements as well. This study explores the idea that political unity and social unity were co-dependent and neither could be attained fully without the other.

This chapter also tries to emphasize that the communities were not just fighting with each other but there was battle within itself too which could be easily predicted from the number of social reform movements which had emerged in Punjab. It focuses on these new identities emerging slowly from differences and insecurity and tries to locate why did these identities formed in such water-tight compartments taking in an insider’s perspective i.e. Santram’s perspective.

The Land Alienation Act of 1900

Before the advent of colonial rule in Punjab, land was managed by the tribal authorities who prevented transfer of land to outsiders through the practice of customary laws. N. G. Barrier says that when the British came into power they switched annual land tax payable to cash putting the peasantry in a dilemma for they were never trained to save or handle money. However, the

¹ Santram B.A., “Restrictions on admission to agricultural college”, July 26, 1950, *Tribune*, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

revenue charged was lower than that charged during the Sikh regime and hence there was some scope left for profit. Since there was an improved irrigation facility as well in the region the profit margin seemed to increase further and hence the value of land increased manifold under the British regime. This created a new kind of problem for the peasantry who were now targeted by the moneylenders to put up their lands as collateral for the debts. A lot of property was confiscated by moneylenders and that created a nuisance for the regime. The peasant got trapped under the clutches of these moneylenders, borrowed recklessly and extensively on his land, lost all the credit and then his land and thereby became a landless tenant.²

Tom Kessinger in his essay on *Regional Economy of North India* studies the land debt situation and the imperial rule's reaction to it. He says that this agricultural indebtedness posed a threat to imperial rule especially in the Deccan region and Punjab. It was no more just a provincial problem but a political problem as well. Kessinger further blames British institutions like private property, contract laws and civil courts which always worked in the favor of the moneylenders and never for the cultivators.³ As the debt piled up, the pleadings of these cultivators fell on deaf ears because the colonial regime believed in the *laissez faire* (**policy of no interruption**) and the authority of local councils and customary laws prevailed. They further encouraged the process of land alienation by giving the peasants the right to transfer. The condition of peasants worsened in the region and debts piled up so high that in 1892 Lord Curzon had to clarify in Parliament that English rule rested upon the contentment of the "real" people of India which were the cultivating

² N.G. Barrier., 'The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2(2), 1965, pp-145-146

³ Tom G. Kessinger, *Regional Economy- North India* in Dharma Kumar and Tapan Raychaudhari ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of India(1757-1970)*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p-263

classes, and he included the debt problem in his “twelve points”; the twelve problems he hoped to solve during his term of office as Governor General of India beginning from 1899.⁴

Eventually after catching some attention of the officials the then Governor General of India, Lord Lansdowne suggested that debt problem should be considered by the commission which was reviewing Dekkhan Agriculturist Relief Act and the responsibility of Punjab was entrusted to Denzil Ibbetson. Ibbetson held the crafty moneylenders and extravagant peasants responsible for the debt situation, and he argued that the most effective means of stopping the transfer of land from the hands of the cultivating class was to restrict their right to transfer, thereby stopping alienation/transfer of land at its provenance. The debt issue was so grave in Punjab that it got special attention from the commission and it acted as a trigger for the colonial rule to re-evaluate its policies regarding revenue and agriculture all over India. Thus, in November 1893, the Revenue and Agriculture Department began a serious examination of alienation restrictions on an all-India basis. However, by 1897 most of the other local government did not appreciate or stood behind this decision of restriction on transfer of land and hence this scheme was dropped by most of the suggested provinces. Punjab’s local government however, understood the gravity of the situation and showed willingness towards following up the commission’s recommendation regarding restrictions and hence the Land Alienation Act came into being in 1900.⁵

Harish Puri postulates that given its commitment to not disrupt the existing political and social dynamics in Punjab, the British Government refused to allot 4,000,000 acres of land part of nine

⁴ N.G. Barrier, ‘The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill’, *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2(2), 1965, p-154,

⁵ *ibid*, pp-148-151

canal colonies project (1885-1940) to the tenants, laborers or other landless men.⁶ Thus, due to the policy of maintaining status quo, the Land Alienation Act saw the prevalence of customary laws as the land was allocated to the ‘dominant castes’, as per the scale of already existing landholding status and the outcastes such as Mazhabis (Chuhrah Sikh), Balmikis and Ramdasias (Chamar Sikh)/Ravidasias (all these belonged to ‘low castes’) were not allowed to own land and were left with no option except working as landless tenants. Neeladri Bhattacharya in *The Great Agrarian Conquest* comments about this vicious act and points out that this differentiation was about to set the political discourse for the future of Punjab as it turned the land into commodity; a notion which was absent in the pre-colonial Punjab. Bhattacharya argues further that the colonial rule “*sharpened the opposition between outsiders and insiders*”, where one was the ‘*proprietary body*’ and the other was the ‘*lower castes*’.⁷ Bhagwan Josh adds further to the argument and says that this Act instilled political spirits within each household in the countryside. The Act initiated the process of differentiating and cut-throat competing where communities made efforts towards mutual alignments in order to defend their self-interests’.⁸ These interests later expanded along the community lines and so did the alignments. In the same spirit Fazl-i-Husain and Chhotu Ram formed a party, i.e, Punjab Nationalist Unionist party in 1923 with the sole purpose of serving the Zamindars of the countryside and this party became a dominating force in the region pretty quickly.

Punjab’s location and the identity as the land of five rivers made it primarily an agricultural state and hence the role of land was quite significant here. This further amplified the importance of the

⁶ Harish K. Puri, ‘Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No. 26 (Jun. 28- Jul. 4, 2003), p-2695

⁷ Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest- the colonial reshaping of a rural world*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2019, p-214-291

⁸Bhagwan Singh Josh, *Communist movement in Punjab (1926-1942)*, p-61, M.Phil dissertation submitted to JNU in 1978 (accessed from online JNU archives)

Land Alienation Act which divided the entire region into two halves, agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists (loosely can also be termed as dominant and outcastes respectively) and thereby giving the rural regions with agricultural land more control in the power game. Barrier goes on to say that this was a political move from the side of the British to avoid agrarian unrest and appease the landlords.⁹ Santram too was of the opinion that this was a political move but according to him the premise of the action was a little different. For him it was a selfish act on the behalf of the imperial rule as through the policy of appeasement they wanted to divide and conquer, where the rural peasants who formed most of the native British army and who had more power were being favored against the urban public.¹⁰

In the press and the nationalist circle the announcement of the Land Alienation Bill was not received well. The idea that the government planned to withdraw rights of transfer from the Punjab cultivating classes raised a few concerns especially regarding the Punjabi agriculturalists. It was common criticism from both within and outside the government that restricting transfer of land would not solve the debt crisis; instead it would further push the agriculturalists into the hands of moneylenders who would now charge higher interest rates on mortgage and loans. It was believed that if a little less harsh revenue laws were implicated that would have been a better solution and might have not left the agriculturalists vulnerable to defend for themselves, but the government under Curzon chose the other way of asserting the rights of landlords and restricting land transfer. Congress played a namesake role in protesting against the bill and backed down as soon as it found a communal angle in the issue. The bill was meant to support the cultivators and put a check on moneylenders' greed. However, in west Punjab, Muslims were the primary cultivators and Hindus were moneylenders. Hence, opposing the bill implied supporting a

⁹ N. G. Barrier, 'The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill', pp.152–155.

¹⁰Santram B.A., "Alienation of Land Act", *The Tribune*, May 2, 1950, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMMML

specific religion which would not have set with the 'secular' image of the Congress which made it step down due to 'conflict of vested interests'.¹¹

The criticism of the Act proved right when the Annual Report on the Working of the Punjab Alienation of Land Act presented its findings. A rise in land prices due to integration of the Punjab market with the world market and expanded irrigation led to a further extension of the cultivator's credit and by 1929, the total debt in the province was over 330 crores. As predicted, the Punjab Provincial Banking Enquiry Commission found that money lending to agriculturists had become Punjab's largest industry.¹² The new bill created a safe haven for the moneylenders and the peasants continued to live in debts. Despite all the opposition and damaging consequences the bill stayed in the region. Even post independence the government had to be reminded of the discrepancies this Act was still concocting in the region. In 1950 Santram wrote in *Tribune* addressing this issue and unveiling the politics of vote bank and vested interests behind it,

*The Alienation of Land Act of the East Punjab deprives persons of certain castes of the right of purchasing land simply on account of their birth, while the Union Constitution says that nobody will be deprived of any rights on account of his or her birth or religion. In the presence of such a law there can never be free voting in the villages where the proprietors of land can persecute the landless members of the so-called non-agriculturist castes in many ways for voting against their wishes.*¹³

¹¹N.G. Barrier, "The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill", p-157-160

¹²ibid, p-161

¹³Santram B.A., "Alienation of land act", *Tribune*, May 2, 1950, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

It was finally B.R. Ambedkar who addressed this discrimination and as law minister, moved to repeal the Act in 1952 to remove this unenviable disability. Puri notes that his extraordinary privilege of the Jat agriculturist which continued for more than 50 years encouraged them (80 percent of whom turned to Sikhism in central Punjab districts by 1921) and contributed further to their caste domination.¹⁴ This proves that caste in Punjab remained an understudied factor which both colonial regime and Free India chose to either ignore or denied their respective accountability on that front.

Urban versus Rural

In the words of David Gilmartin, the late nineteenth century Punjab was not a product of the religious laws but derived from the logic of the kinship system.¹⁵ Therefore, it becomes more crucial to understand the changes brought along in Punjab post nineteenth century which made the region an eye of violence and divided on so many fronts as these feelings of mutual hatred and rigidity were not so unchangeable in the past.

Gobinder Singh argues in *Religion and politics in the Punjab* that the nineteenth century Punjab was in a state of transition from traditionalism to modernism and hence, the religious Gurus felt threatened and that made them more adamant about following customary laws. Through the Land Alienation Act of 1900 the British further legitimized patronage, hierarchy and mediation encouraging these *ulamas* and *gurus* (the self-anointed leaders of the communities) and enhanced

¹⁴ Harish K. Puri, 'Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No. 26 (Jun. 28- Jul. 4, 2003), p-2695

¹⁵ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988, p-15

their say in regional politics. Yet the power was not the same as during the Mughal period and that made these self-appointed leaders strive for more through violent means.¹⁶

According to Antonio Gramsci, the dominant classes exercise their hegemony similarly, i.e. by establishing certain ideological mystification where the idea is said out loud so many times that it starts looking like a reality. He argues that the subordinate class gets trapped in this endless production of false consciousness which is nothing but an upshot of ignorant generic stereotyping. Through this web, the dominant class gets the consent from the subordinate to control them further in the future.¹⁷ In the same way the colonial archive became the extended arm of imperial rule which established the hegemony of the British through its narrative (which was mostly motivated by the idea that Indians were inferior and needed the help of colonial rule to get them back from savagery to civility). Such an example of manipulation was the Land Alienation Act. Guilhem Cassan says that by creating a category of “agricultural castes,” the membership of which was almost compulsory to acquire land, this law created a very strong incentive to manipulate caste identity in order to claim this elite membership. He estimated that 20 years after the law was passed up to 7.5 percent of the non-agricultural-caste population had manipulated its caste identity.¹⁸ Another example of colonial archive reinforcing stereotypes and exercising dominance through hegemony is given below:

John and Henry Lawrence, who were the first set of minds behind the policy making and Punjab administration, laid down three guidelines: (i) all the district officers will manage the affairs personally to control the ‘warlike Punjabi tribes, (ii) rural contentment was the topmost priority

¹⁶Gobinder Singh, *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p-26

¹⁷Hyug Baeg Im, “Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in Gramsci”, *Asian Perspective*, Spring-Summer 1991, Vol. 15, No.1 (Spring-Summer 1991),pp.125

¹⁸Guilhem Cassan, “Identity based policies and identity manipulation: evidence from Colonial Punjab” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (November 2015),p-105

as it ensures peaceful British rule. Thus the officials were instructed to appease the landholders, local aristocrats and peasant cultivators and (iii) the British officials were forbidden to show empathy or side with any Punjabi religions like Hinduism, Islam or Christianity.¹⁹ While the first point established yet another stereotype for the Punjab population of being ‘warlike’, the second and third point reinforced the status quo, where the colonial regime ensured that customary laws prevailed. These rules proved that imperial rule was using all its tools to exercise dominance and hegemony.

As Puri mentions, there was a switch in the region from traditionalism to modernism which was also seen in the form of migration. The large-scale migration of labor during the development of the canal colonies prompted change from traditional occupations. After the Jats and the Arians, the ‘lower castes’ like the Chuhars and Chamars constituted the largest group of migrants to the colonies. That is to say that primarily the agriculturists and the lower castes migrated which proved they were looking for better prospects. Puri clarifies that the migrations to the irrigation projects or canal colonies were based on corporate decisions through the caste panchayats, and became the basis for corporate caste mobility and a rise in status.²⁰ Gilmartin says that such cut-throat politics between urban aspirations and rural power struggle was present even before the advent of the British but when the print media and western education followed British rule, things exacerbated pretty quickly in a larger region.²¹ According to the Census report of 1931, Hindus predominated in the eastern Punjab and Muslims the western Punjab (80 percent Punjabi Muslim were in the western province) and Sikhs were important minority in both the provinces.

¹⁹ N.G. Barrier, “The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill”, p-525

²⁰ Harish K. Puri, ‘Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No. 26 (Jun. 28- Jul. 4, 2003), p-2696

²¹Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, p-79

Of Punjab's total urban population in 1931, 38% was Hindu, 52% Muslim, and 7% Sikh. For whole of the Punjab's population, there were 30% Hindu, 52% Muslim, and 14% Sikh in Punjab's population as a whole.²² There was a higher proportion of Hindus in villages than in cities but overall Muslims were dominant population-wise. The cities were growing as western education and clerical job sector got more appealing with time. With huge migration tribal divisions within the boundaries of the villages transcended to communal and caste differences in the city landscape.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, land played a dominating role in the politics of Punjab and hence when it came to power dynamics the countryside had an upper-hand over the urban Punjab. The British understood this logic and thereby the secondary political role of the cities was confirmed after the 1919 reforms when the British separated rural from urban council constituencies and awarded 27 out of 32 Muslim territorial seats in Punjab to the rural areas, which further highlighted the weak position of urban communal leaders within provincial Muslim politics.²³ In this battle of rural versus urban, the former was turning out to be the winner.

Mushirul Hasan, on the other hand, sees this division of power completely inspired from bias and selfish-motifs. He argues that since the government was highly dependent on the 'martial race' which was coming primarily from the rural lands of Punjab, the state often prioritized rural opinion over the urban one and thereby took the side of the rich landlords/aristocrats. This move served an underhand purpose as well which was creating opposition for Congress through the policy of appeasement. The British figured that if the power holders of the province would be in

²² Census of India, 1931, Vol.17 [Punjab], pt.1,96, pp.290-91, New Delhi, NAI

²³ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, p-80

their pockets then Congress would hold no appeal for them and the national movement would be prone to failure.²⁴ This theory worked for quite some time in the region and Congress struggled to find its hold in there without any local alliance. Barrier adds to Hasan's argument of appeasement and says that after the rebellion of 1857, the 'martial races' proved their loyalty and hence the government felt paternalistic towards them and cared, even if inspired by selfish motives, for their well-being. It was for them that the British broke their rule of *laissez faire* and intervened with the customary laws, bringing forward the restrictions in the form of the Land Alienation Act. Army loyalty was a priority for them and no compromises were made on that end. The imperial rulers feared the growing influence of the Congress in the rest of the country and wanted to control that from happening to their precious 'martial races'. Hence the Land Alienation Act of 1900 was emanated, to prevent all this from happening and to tip the scales on their side through favoritism.²⁵

Within the state of Punjab the relevance of Congress was different from the rest of the Indian provinces. It was only the Unionist Party, which enjoyed some political autonomy in the region by catering to rural Muslim interests. Gilmartin points out that the Unionist Party attained this power because of its use of central Islamic symbols which appealed to the rural people more. On the other hand, challenging colonial rule attracted the urban population more.²⁶ Bhagwan Joshi and Shashi Joshi argue that the 'constitutionalist landlord' based parties, like the Unionist Party in Punjab and the Justice Party in Madras, successfully mobilized sections of peasantry in direct negotiations with the colonial government. The role of nationalist movement, in these

²⁴ Mushirul Hasan, 'Communalism in the Provinces: A Case Study of Bengal and the Punjab, 1922-26', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 33 (Aug.16, 1980), p-1403

²⁵ N.G. Barrier, "The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill", p-146

²⁶ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, pp-81-92

negotiations was negligible and the left was not to be found either. In Punjab, these landlord oriented parties became the mediator between the colonial rulers and the ruled.²⁷ Joshi and Joshi go on criticizing the theory of 'deprivation caused communalism' and say that the argument that Muslims were deprived so it justified their communal stance and anger against other communities cannot explain why the competitive feelings were most obdurate in the areas where development was equal or in fact, where Muslims were more advanced in terms of existing power and influence. They further add that Punjab politics offers an excellent example of an area where Muslims had established themselves in positions of power patronage and cultural hegemony through the inter-communal Unionist Party. The challenge to this hegemony by Sikhs and Hindus led to a clash of communities in the political arena.²⁸ Punjab was the classic example of cultural hegemony being practiced by the dominant group. In this case Muslims and the constant warfare between communities and sects were to hold this hegemony in their hands which was further triggered by the communal consciousness.

Omvedt argues that the Unionist Party did not just appeal to a religion in specific, instead, it stood for the peasants, especially, Hindu and Muslim Jats through its anti-Brahman approach. This ideology even attracted the Hindu social reform groups like *Ad Dharm* on the side of the Unionist Party and they even fought elections together.²⁹ Ronki Ram adds to this argument and says that an alliance was forged between *Ad Dharm* and Unionist Party in the 1945-46 Punjab Legislative Assembly elections where the former's leader, Mangoo Ram was also one of the elected candidates. To claim a separate political space the *Ad Dharm* movement even declared

²⁷Bhagwan Josh, Shashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, Revised edition*, Sage Publications, 2011, Vol.1, p-9-10

²⁸Bhagwan Josh, Shashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, Revised edition*, Sage Publications, 2011, Vol.3, p-14-16

²⁹ Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution- Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, p-179

itself different from the Adi movements in other parts of the country. Ram claims that untouchability in Punjab was not about pollution like the rest of the country but was about prejudice and *Ad Dharm* was ready to strike on the hegemony of 'Brahmin-Bania' with the help of the Unionist Party.³⁰ This was not an isolated instance, the social reform groups like Arya Samaj and *Ad Dharm* contributed to state politics in quite significant manner whenever it suited their organizational interests. It was a symbiotic relationship between the social and political where both used each other's resources to expand their respective partisanship.

While Arya Samaj and *Ad Dharm* from time to time dipped their hands in the provincial politics, Santram saw these provincial elections as unfair, rigged and undemocratic because they gave opportunity only to the rich and upper castes. As per him, the minorities stood no chance in the elections and their opinions did not matter to anyone. He believed that it wasn't the social responsibility which drove these 'social' leaders to active politics but only their vested interests. Santram further said that political freedom without a socially equal society would be a shallow freedom.

यही हालत अछूतों और शूद्रों की है। सवर्ण हिंदू उनको मजलिसी बराबरी देने को तैयार नहीं लेकिन खुद पॉलिटिकल आजादी के ख्वाहिश मंद है। वह मजलिसी गुलामी के दलदल पर पॉलिटिकल आजादी का आलीशान महल खड़ा करना चाहते हैं। मजलिसी बराबरी के बाद ही पॉलिटिकल बराबर हो सकती है।³¹

(It is the same for Untouchables and Shudras. The upper caste Hindus do not want to give them a position of equality but at the same time wish for political freedom. They want to build the castle

³⁰ Ronki Ram, 'Untouchability in India with a difference: Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion, and Caste Conflicts in Punjab', *Asian Survey*, Vol.44, No.6 (November/December 2004), pp.900-901

³¹ Santram B.A., *Hind aur Swaraj*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, Hoshiarpur, 1941,) Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

of freedom over the swamp of slavery and discrimination, which is not possible. Without equality for all there cannot be freedom for all.)

But Santram believed that since in annihilating caste the upper caste interest would clash hence it would be a long journey to attain that goal. He hoped that in a country where upper caste men like Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore could contest for equality for all, maybe it could be hoped for the society in general that vested interests would be kept aside and unity will be attained one day along with *Swarajya*. Thus, while the social and political overlapped time and again, the political always remained dominant which we shall discuss further in the chapter.

Arya Samaj and Punjab Congress

Jones discusses at length how Sikhs and Muslims were finding it most difficult keeping in good terms with the British invasion as it was them who had to forcefully shun their power for the latter. According to him Hindus on the other hand, had come to terms with servility a long time back and did not carry the burden of political heritage as such. Jones recounts that the western influence changed those dynamics for Hindus who started searching the past for a better sense of their identity. He quotes Ruchi Ram Sahni (an Arya Samaji) to explain the emergence of Hindu elite in 1880s and the dilemma it was into,

Intellectual isolation filled us with a feeling of our own importance, not every enviable position for a youth who was standing on the threshold of life but did not know [on] his own what pitfalls lay in front of him or his own capacities and limitations, intellectual, social and spiritual.³²

³² Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, 1976, p-57

With the new class and caste consciousness aroused confusion too, about what was the right option amongst the many available alternatives. The isolation which Sahni talks about was put into use by the Arya Samaj in their favor. There was an intellectual vacuum in the society which was filled by the Arya Samaj's philosophy as the Samaj's ideology catered to the feelings of the marginalized Hindus who were then introduced due to the new world of education and life of respect.³³

For Punjab the cultural interactions have been unique. Since Punjab had to repeatedly face waves of conquerors, change was the only constant for the region and adapting was the only chance for survival.³⁴ Juergensmeyer argues that Punjab was comparatively quiet socially liberal and he attributes this factor to the reason that Hindus were not a majority here. He believes that it is the Hindus who are to be blamed precisely for the overall social degradation as their absence improves the situation. Jones also points out to the inherent issues of Hinduism and comments that social oppression precedes the economic one and it is the untouchables who have to bear the brunt twice. Even in this framework of oppression people don't stand together and are constantly busy in claiming that their caste might be lower than many but not the least of all; Untouchables practice caste system amongst themselves thereby legitimizing the system. He postulated that even within Untouchability there are 'gradations' of Untouchability implying that there is hierarchy in marginalizing as well. This gradation within the oppressed acts as a buffer between them and the upper caste where the latter continues with its hegemony while the former bicker

³³ Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, p-66

³⁴ *ibid*, p-1

amongst themselves³⁵ This layered gradation within the marginalized section was something which Santram also felt and he pointed out to Arya Samaj's failure towards addressing this issue.

कोई भी मनुष्य अपने को नीच और तुच्छ कहलाना पसंद नहीं करता इसलिए हमारे यहां की अछूत जातियां समूह के समूह सिख गुरुओं के काल में सिख और आर्य समाज के आगमन पर आर्य समाजी बने थे। उनको आशा थी कि आर्य समाज में जाते ही उन्हें पूरा सामाजिक अधिकार मिल जाएगा। ब्राह्मण और शूद्र का जन्म मूलक भेदभाव मिट जाएगा। परंतु खेद है कि ऐसा नहीं हो सका। आर्य समाज उनका उद्धार करने में असमर्थ रहा। इसका कारण यह है कि आर्य समाज को वर्ण भेद का अजगर हड़प कर गया है। यह कहने को गुण कर्म स्वभाव की दुहाई देता है परंतु आचरण में 66% आर्य समाजी वहीं कुछ करते हैं जो कट्टर सनातन धर्मी करते हैं। वर्ण के आवरण में जन्म मूलक जात पात को ही स्थिर रखना चाहते हैं। यदि आर्य समाज ने इस वर्ण भेद के झमेले में ना पढ़कर क्षमता और बंधुता का प्रचार किया होता तो आज शायद भारत में एक मुसलमान और ईसाई दृष्टिगोचर ना होता।³⁶

(No human life wants to be treated as garbage or secondary. This is why the lower castes turned to Sikhism and Arya Samaj. They hoped that once Arya Samaj included them they would get their social rights as well and the inherent difference between a Brahmin and Shudra would vanish. However, Arya Samaj failed them. The Samaj was engulfed in the tangled ideas of meritocracy. Samajists are no way better than the Sanatanis as most of them want to keep this caste system intact. If only Arya Samaj could have got out of the shackles of caste difference and focused more on integrity, there would not have been a single Muslim or Christian in the country.)

³⁵ Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, p-20

³⁶ Santram B.A., "Khatre ki Ghanti", *Hindu Saptahik*, October 26, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

As per Santram, Arya Samaj had a chance at a much better legacy if it only focused on the reformation of Hindus and removal of caste. But since Samaj was trapped in the loop of meritocracy or *gunas* and political fever of Punjab, it failed in its purpose and the social revolution died even before it could take place. It was mostly the upper caste aspiration which distracted Arya Samaj towards the contemporary political mood and thereby to serve certain individual interests a short but vivid relationship began between Arya Samaj and Punjab Congress.

Susan Bayly in *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, elaborates on this relationship between Arya Samaj and Congress and claims that during the 1930's Depression, the peasantry or the agriculturists who joined the Congress party were mostly affiliated with Arya Samaj or followed some or the other *dharmic* notions. Congress in Punjab thus became a representative of the religion influenced Jats (agriculturist caste).³⁷ Prior to that in late the 19th and early twentieth century Congress relied mostly on a handful of Brahmo Samajists and just like the latter, it also failed to grasp the attention of the people in Punjab. Even the local leaders like Ruchi Ram Sahni and Dayal Singh failed to secure public interest in the Congress' national movement.³⁸

Barrier says that between 1894 and 1907, there was from minor to almost no difference between Punjab Congress and the Arya Samaj leadership but not all the leaders saw each other on eye to eye level. Congress leader Harikishen Lal considered Arya Samajists, 'bigots', who relied more on fables of the past and less on doing actual work on grounds. He was particularly against the

³⁷ Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p-253

³⁸ N.G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May, 1967), pp-366

growing influence of an Arya Samaji, Lala Lajpat Rai in the Congress. These differences got further intense as 'nationalism' fever spread all over the country and Congress' moderate stand towards imperial rule started being questioned. Arya Samaj became the focal point of extremism and leaders like Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak etc. were extensions of such radicalism. In the 1905 Benares [sic] session Lajpat Rai had to face opposition from the moderate Bengali leadership and a split happened in Congress (moderates and extremists).³⁹

Bayly further points out that the same Lajpat Rai who was ready in 1905 to compromise the alliance with Muslims under the name of extremist politics, tried to regain Muslim political support at the provincial conference in Ambala (in October 1906) by assuring Muslims that the Punjab Congress would remain non-sectarian.⁴⁰ These promises by the Congress leadership seemed to be on appearance level only as Bayly identifies that Tilak and his Brahman nationalist contemporaries were widely portrayed even by the British officials as seditious fanatics with a mission to install 'Brahmin rule' in the subcontinent.⁴¹ This was the nature of Arya Samaj and this was the politics of the Punjab Congress as well.

The alliance between Samaj and Congress broke off during the 1920s when Gandhi took charge and extremism became a laid back policy of Congress where now Gandhi's strategy to agitate and negotiate took forefront. To make the matters worse for Arya Samaj, Lala Lajpat Rai was targeted for the Lahore riots in 1907 over colonization bill and he lost his position of prestige in the provincial Congress. Rai was blamed for playing on both sides and when he could not give an answer to either moderates or extremists he left for England. Rai's abandoning of Punjab

³⁹ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, pp-70-75

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp-31-36

⁴¹ *ibid*, p-237

Congress made the Arya Samajists lose interest in politics and Harkishen was left with a handful of members. He too then retired from politics and switched to business. Barrier infers that with the decline of the Punjab Congress, Punjab politics assumed a stronger communal character. A significant legacy of rifts and disturbances which was left by Congress was later visible as sharp rise in Hindu-Muslim tension and a renewal of Arya Samaj's interest in defending Hinduism through institutions like *Shuddhi* and by maintaining a strong, vocal and large Hindu community.⁴²

The primary concern for the social reform bodies for not actively participating in the nationalist movement was fear of being targeted by imperial rule. The British through Marshall Law and strict control over the press did not make it easy for one to voice their opinion publicly. Barrier says that it was not due to lack of will that Arya Samaj did not actively take part in the national political drama but it was mostly because of the fear of being labeled "disloyal" by the British. To maintain the goodwill of the British, the Samajists redirected their efforts towards issues like serving Hindu interests, cow protection etc. They even at times were hostile towards Congress because their priority was to dig deep in Punjab and for that they wanted to stay on the good side of the foreign rulers. Post 1920s Arya Samajists were reluctant to join Congress out of this fear.⁴³

While Arya Samaj is blamed for not actively participating in the politics, its followers till date try to maintain its self righteous nature. Satyaketu Vidyalkar claims that since Arya Samaj became a prominent body in the 20th century Punjab, the British started seeing it as a potential threat. He argues that Arya Samaj was solely responsible for the new consciousness which made Hindus feel virtuous again and brought them back on the track of self-respect and dignity but the

⁴² N.G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May, 1967), pp.373-76

⁴³ *Ibid*, p-366

foreign rule did not want that as they liked maintaining their 'superior race' status and thus spread a false propaganda against the Samaj that it was seditious in nature.⁴⁴ So, Arya Samaj was being targeted by the British and the leaders had to lay low as social reforms were much more important and thus prioritized over political issues. It was not Arya Samaj's duty to fight the Raj, it was the work of Congress which it failed to do and the Arya Samaj was burdened with facing the enemy (British rule) on multiple fronts. Arya Samaj also showed sympathy to the peasant class. As the economic threat loomed over Punjab due to restrictions because of the Land Alienation Act, Arya Samaj got closer to Congress between 1894 and 1907. The Samaj even helped organize the agitation against the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill.⁴⁵

Vidyalankar blames Congress for being too soft towards imperial rule. He argues that during the First World War when it was the time to strike and free India from foreign control, Congressmen gave their sweat and blood to help the British win the war. It was due to the lack of leadership in the social arena that Arya Samaj had to pick up the pace and do social reform along with the freedom movement. He further adds that Arya Samaj did its duty to the nation when Swami Shraddhanand joined in the national movement in 1919 but after seeing the communal hue the freedom movement was taking through Khilafat movement, Shraddhanand and Samaj thought that they were better off just doing the social work. He implies that Congress, for the sake of power, was ready to do anything and lacked the moral compass which the Arya Samaj leadership had. He further blames Congress and says that the riots which followed later in Multan and Malabar were instigated unintentionally by Congress only. The emotion of rebellion which Congress and Gandhi wanted to use against the imperial rule was used against Hindus and Arya

⁴⁴ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-153-55

⁴⁵ N.G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May, 1967), pp.366-367

Samaj wanted no part in such dirty politics.⁴⁶ It is still a question though that if the Arya Samaj had so many problems with the Congress leadership and they wanted to participate in politics then why they did not offer an alternative. Also if they were such fearless leaders then what was the need for the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha to publish a resolution stating that their movement was religious and had “**no connections with any political body or with political agitation in any shape.**”⁴⁷ The reluctance from Arya Samaj to stay within Congress was a failure on the behalf of Congress party as well because they could not drive the fear of British out of the heads of people and nor could they instill confidence within the people in the region.

Both Congress and Arya Samaj tried playing safe in the region and hence could not sustain political hold over the population. Samaj tried to dominate the reformatory sphere and put the political burden on Congress and Congress did the opposite, not realizing that one could not have been attained without the other. To serve their specific and particular agendas, both organisations refused to show certain flexibility and the result was failure for both.

Social versus Political- Struggle between Caste Patriotism and Nationalism

Congress did not have a popular appeal when it came to the Dalit issues and Santram was one of those voices which were against prioritizing political over social and hence at times turned out to be anti-Congress. His heart cried out for all the converts who gave up on Hinduism. He cursed the ancient Hindu law responsible for this feeling of alienation which drives its own people away and held the ancient scripts responsible for the servile mentality which he believed still existed amongst the Shudras and acted as a social barrier in their progress. The priority for many

⁴⁶ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-554-557

⁴⁷ N.G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May, 1967), p- 377

reformers including Santram was social reform, but at the same time that did not imply that social reformers lacked patriotism at heart. Santram simply believed that evils like untouchability could not be put on hold for obliteration; instead they needed immediate action and complete annihilation. He said, “*I am not as eager of swaraj as I am of abolishing caste system and its direct consequence Untouchability.*”⁴⁸ Santram was as skeptical of the national movement and Congress as Ambedkar. Ambedkar in *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables* says that any Untouchable who gets tempted towards Congress must be a traitor because any Untouchable with a sense of pride would have realized over the years that neither Congress nor Gandhi serve to the best of their interests.⁴⁹

Ambedkar gives incidents to support his doubts towards the intention of Congress for the untouchables. He says that Dadabhai Naoroji in the Second Session of INC in Calcutta in 1886 spoke about Congress’ approach towards social reforms and argued that there are proper times, circumstances, parties and places for every situation and as Congress is a political party its meetings are not for social reforms. Naoroji questioned, *How can this gathering of all classes discuss the social reforms needed in each individual class?*⁵⁰ Naoroji claimed to have people from all aspects of life in the Congress party and yet refused to use that opportunity in bringing overall social reforms based on the excuse that it was not the job of a political party like Congress.

This was a statement of privilege which shunned away the social duties of Congress under the premise that Congress had more important political reforms to bring. These were the founding

⁴⁸Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, Hindi Pracharak Pustakalaya, Varanasi, 1963, p-242

⁴⁹B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, Gautam Book Centre, Delhi, 1945, p-3

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p-13

ideas of Congress where social upliftment was supposed to be an individual's problem as well as responsibility and only political movement supposedly needed a collective effort. Naroji might say that it was a gathering of "all classes" but most certainly it did not represent the Untouchables or else social reforms would have taken precedence in the agendas under the presidential address. If anything, the address was de-motivating and alienating for the deprived whose day to day struggle with identity and hegemony was declared unimportant single handedly.

Early Congress leadership including Naroji, W.C. Bannerjee and Badruddin Tyabji were of the opinion that the question of social reforms can be best dealt by the "leaders of the particular communities to which they relate" but it is questionable that why the same leadership had problem when Ambedkar and Jinnah took up the charge for their respective communities. It was ironic that Ambedkar's patriotism and devotion to the freedom movement were questioned because he did not agree or fit in with the Congress' set guidelines for 'being patriotic'. Ambedkar goes further back and says that in 1892, Mr. W.C. Bannerjee, in his Presidential Address to the Eighth Session of Congress said that he hoped that Congress stayed true to its course by sticking to political course and dedicating its resources towards only political issues only. Bannerjee claimed to have no understanding of the allegations which stated that there can be no political reforms without social reforms. He saw no connection between the two and thereby prioritized political over social. He even went on to mock the deplorable situation of women in the society and said "*Are we not fit for them (political reforms) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries?*"⁵¹ This address did not just ridicule the social reforms in general but also jeered at female education and

⁵¹ Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, Gautam Book Centre, Delhi, 1945,p-14-15

the misery of widows and eventually put a dubious question mark on women's status in the society in the eyes of the Congress leadership.

Ambedkar argued that without social reforms instead of a healthy, just and integrated nation we would get a decaying country with rotten values and beliefs. But the leaders of Congress absurdly chose not to accept that fact. Congress was motivated with the greed of holding popular votes and if inclined towards social reforms that would have meant disrupting its conventional orthodox popular base of the upper-caste, upper-class Hindus. Therefore, they found a way out of this responsibility by abandoning it altogether. This state of denial regarding social issues either came from selective ignorance/acceptance or from the position of privilege. The ones who were speaking were mostly upper caste or upper class and most importantly men, telling that a child widow was not a big deal. They in fact made a mockery of these issues by rejecting them as inconveniences towards the path of freedom.

The belief behind Santram's skepticism towards Congress was that this body of '**high caste Hindus**' was only concerned about its selfish political gains and they would be the new dictators once the colonizers leave. The assumption that Congress was a party of high caste and would only serve them post-independence was very strong and thus Congress could never become the favorite of the *Shudras*. Santram accused Congress and said,

The Congress is undoubtedly a body of high caste Hindus. It does not and cannot represent the untouchable and the touchable Shudras. Number of touchable Shudras in India is not less than 16 crores. But as far as I know, not a single man from their class is a member of the Central Legislative Assembly or Council of State or any provincial Legislature. Most of the voters are high

*caste Hindus and they cannot tolerate the idea of the Shudra being elected a member to any legislature.*⁵²

Bayly argues that for a lot of Congressmen the cause of ‘depressed classes’ and their upliftment was irrelevant towards the national goal of freedom. This does not necessarily mean that they believed in the idea of pre-existing equality, it also meant that they at times believed that inequality and discrimination do not exist at all. She also debates that before Congress, it was the British who took the issue of caste based harassment more seriously and through the Government of India Act of 1919 took actions in that direction. Under the Act, one out of the fourteen non-official nominated members of the Central Legislative assembly was to be a representative of the so called Depressed Classes, and the provincial legislatures were also required to have a fixed proportion of Depressed Class members.⁵³ It was due to the pressure from bodies like the Depressed Classes Conference (1917) that Congress was made to chart out a plan to help the ‘suppressed’. The provisions of the Congress’s 1917 Resolution on Untouchability, which called for social justice for members of the ‘suppressed’, ‘submerged’ or ‘Depressed Classes’, were reaffirmed in the Congress’s 1920 Resolution on Non-cooperation.⁵⁴ This however, was just a namesake formality done on the papers because the agenda which was set forth after the Non-Cooperation movement revolved more on Hindu-Muslim unity and barely if at all was about emancipation of the ‘lower castes’.

Congress’ defense argument against being called an ‘upper caste’ body was that the Untouchables were politically unaware and hence did not know right from wrong and could not

⁵² Santram B.A, “Higher castes of Hindus worse than Hitler and Hirohito”, *The Sunday Observer*, Madras, January 27, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A. NMML

⁵³ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, pp-246-255

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p-247

decide for themselves. However, people like Santram proved that Dalits may not have been united but they cannot be accused of being politically unaware. They were divided as per the caste and the social structure itself made it difficult for them to take a united stand but at the same time that did not take away their political consciousness, they knew when and by whom they were used for ulterior motives and hence never diligently signed off to Congress.

Like Ambedkar, Santram too recounted certain incidents from the previous elections which, according to him, showed an ugly and quite hypocritical side of the Congress.

*In 1920 when the Congress decided to boycott the elections, they planned to make the legislatures objects of contempt. Accordingly they started procession carrying placards saying "Who will go in the Legislatures? Only barbers, cobblers, potters and sweepers". The Congress actually went to the extent of putting up candidates from these despised communities and got them elected, believing that respectable people would not be prepared to sit with them.*⁵⁵

These accusations are further affirmed by Bayly who points out that, apart from Jagjivan Ram (that too quite late in the twentieth century) the provincial Congress barely represented the Scheduled castes or Scheduled Tribes in its committees. High castes, especially Brahmans, had all the power and if not they shared the power with the business class or service *jatis* (*vaishya*).⁵⁶

Santram believed that Congress posed a bigger threat to the under-represented section of the society than the colonial rulers. All the talks of Congress about nation and sacrifice were just a

⁵⁵ Santram B.A., "Higher castes of Hindus worse than Hitler and Hirohito", *The Sunday Observer*, Madras, January 27, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁵⁶ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, p-253

facade for Santram and for the leaders of Congress he coined the term “**caste patriotism**”. He says that,

*A Hindu's love is totally exhausted in his family, sub-caste and caste. Nothing or very little is left in him for his country. This is why caste-ridden India has always been lacking in nationalism. Caste patriotism is the anti-thesis of national patriotism.*⁵⁷

This ‘caste patriotism’ according to Santram was being propagated by the bodies like Aggarwal Sabha, Brahman Sabha and the Kshatriya Sabha. He believed that if Congress had problem with its members joining in the sectarian politics of Muslim League or Hindu Mahasabha then how the caste based *sabhas* were any different. He asked Congress to get rid of its hypocrisy and ban joining of such organisations as well.⁵⁸ He further defined the caste patriotism of the Congress leadership as,

*Caste patriotism is deep rooted in ones' community...the recording of caste perpetuates this pernicious system which is the antithesis of democracy and has proved a solid impenetrable barrier not only between Hindus and Muslims but between different sections of Hindu society as well.*⁵⁹

Santram rejected and condemned all caste based organisations irrespective of them being for upper castes or lower castes. He however failed to criticize Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League on the same premise that they catered to religion specific interest and hence were dangerous to the cause of national unity. In fact he was an ardent supporter of the former. He

⁵⁷ Santram B.A., “Caste patriotism”, *The Sunday Observer*, June 26, 1949, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁵⁸ Santram B.A., “Who deserves our vote”, *The Tribune*, October 26, 1945, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁵⁹ Santram B.A., “Delete the caste column”, December 14, 1946, newspaper not mentioned, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

blamed Congress for the hypocrisy whereas he himself was a part of it. Ambedkar on the other hand believed that entrusting Hindu Mahasabha with the mammoth and vital task of reformation was actually making a mockery of the issue as well as of the Untouchables. He went on bashing the Hindu Mahasabha and said that if there is any body/organisation which is quite unfit for addressing itself to the problem of the Untouchables, it is the Hindu Mahasabha. It is a militant Hindu organisation and its aim is primarily to protect whatever is Hindu as per the conventional norms and that mostly means standing against Muslims. Reformation was not the agenda set for Mahasabha and hence the emancipation of untouchables could never have been its priority.⁶⁰

While the role of Congress and British rule is put under inspection for intensifying the divides along caste and communal lines, Bayly defends the colonial tools of Census and land records and argues that the intention of the imperial rule was just to govern the state better by using these tools. Their method of information gathering was not meant to instigate the rigid feelings around caste or to cause any divides in the society. According to her, the British officials did not even know what to do with the caste related data as they did not understand this hereditary and hierarchical system. Their records were remarkable but should not be held responsible for creating any kind of “colonial consensus” about the castiest aspect of the society.⁶¹ Her argument is quashed by the colonial archive itself as in the Census Report of 1921 it is clearly stated that though the caste system is deplored by the British, they are responsible for breeding the castiest feelings. Since they forcefully label people with their hereditary occupations for their land records and other official documents, the British Government too is accountable for putting people in the rigid boxes of caste.

⁶⁰ Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, Delhi, 1945,p-25-26

⁶¹ Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables* p-102-103

*These castes have been largely manufactured and almost entirely preserved as separate castes by the British Government... We pigeonholed every one by caste and if we could not find a true caste we then labeled them with name of hereditary occupation.*⁶²

Puri too points out the castiest practices within the British regiments. Special attention was paid in the regiments to avoid 'caste pollution' and to ensure that no religious sentiments were hurt. There were discrepancies within the Sikh regiments as well where the regiments remained exclusive for Jat Sikhs and 'laban' or lower caste Sikhs were debarred from joining that regiment. In the same way there was a separate Mazhabi regiment/ Sikh Light infantry which no caste Sikh joined and was meant exclusively for Mazhabi Sikhs. Puri says that the explanation behind such discrepancies within the force was given as, "*The fear of pollution of the high castes could compromise their loyalty.*"⁶³ The paradox is clearly visible here; the ones who deplored the caste system very conveniently used it whenever it suited their needs. But in the least they acknowledged that even if unintentionally they were part of the process and were encouraging caste based disparity.

While discussing the colonial perception on caste in India, Bayly underlines the fact that the British were not India's first data-hungry rulers. Most of what was done in the nineteenth century to classify and aggregate Indians for official purposes was in line with the practices of earlier statecraft. However, Bayly agrees that communal feelings were woken up partially due to colonial policies as well. She claims that to counter the Raj's modern culture the political men in India went back claiming their religious prestige through reform movements and if they were

⁶² Census of India, 1921, vol. XV: Punjab and Delhi. Pat 1: Page 343, para 211, NAI

⁶³ Harish K. Puri, 'Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No. 26 (Jun. 28- Jul. 4, 2003), p-2696

based on specific castes then it was the fault of Indian politicians not the imperial rulers.⁶⁴ Bayly might give clean chit to the British intentions but their role in creating divides especially in Punjab was always implausible. Even those who believed in the 'just' British rule started questioning why this all-powerful regime was unable to do something about the condition of the 'depressed classes'.

Harjot Oberoi in *Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, says that it was the British which categorized the population as 'martial race' and 'criminal tribe' and as 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'. He points to the sheer ignorance from the British and says that by overlooking the complex and diverse nature of the Indian traditions, culture and its religions, the British rule forcefully categorized them in a monochromatic manner.⁶⁵ Gilmartin adds to this argument and points out that the imperial rule did not uphold the religious order; instead it tried securing its position by protecting, encouraging and systematizing the indigenous structure of local, kin-based social organisation.⁶⁶ Thus the customary laws were blamed and the British chose to ignore the cause of uplifting the marginalized section of the society.

Santram questions the intentions of the British regime regarding caste and religion as well. He points out that in 1941 the Adjutant General of India declared that there were no caste restrictions for recruitment to the Indian Army but when Santram saw the application forms issued for all candidates for temporary commission in His Majesty's Royal Indian Navy, Land

⁶⁴Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, p-103-104

⁶⁵Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1994, p-423

⁶⁶ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, p-37

Forces and Air Force Volunteer Reserve, he saw discrepancies in the General's claim. According to the form, an applicant was required to state his caste and sub-caste, and if he is a Brahman, to state whether he is orthodox Brahmin i.e. he has any objection against messing with non-vegetarians, such as Muslims, Christians etc. Santram was flabbergasted with these inquiries. He argued that there was no purpose for such a questionnaire in the form. He questioned why, even after so many years of colonial rule and all the claims of knowing the region and land through tools like the Census, the regime still operated under certain stereotypes. All Brahmans are not vegetarians, nor are all non-Brahmins non-vegetarian and yet there was a divide being created even before recruitment just based on these preconceived assumptions. He called out the hypocrisy of the rule and said that on one hand the British Government abhors the caste system and its effects on social and economic problems but on the other hand through such blasphemy in its recruitment process promotes and fans away the old flame of caste.⁶⁷ It is to be noted here that in his formative years, especially till 1930s Santram believed that the colonial rule has people's interest at heart but it can be inferred that the national movement if not radically then at least moderately changed his faith in the British Government. He still considered Congress hopeless but he started questioning the British regime more and more with time.

Santram held quite a low opinion of Congress and kept appealing to the current British government to not hand over the power to Congress as it would not be democratic self-Government for the *Shudras* or the masses. It would just be the change of 'masters' for them. In April 1942 he wrote an open letter to Sir Stafford Cripps (Leader of the House of Commons and Lord Privy Seal) representing JPTM and asked him to use his power in completely abolishing caste from India before leaving.

⁶⁷ Santram B.A., "Caste and Military Department", *The Sunday Observer*, Madras, July 12, 1942, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

*Even if England retires voluntarily and gives full responsible Government to India there can never be peace here. India will fall into the hands of some other invader. She is not fit to defend herself against any foreign invasion on account of its internal disruption.*⁶⁸

Santram further added that neither Congress nor communal representation can solve the crisis of communalism in the region because **“INDIA IS NOT A NATION”**. He felt that Congress’ claim of unity and integrity was just a facade meant only for vote bank and directed towards attainment of power because the reality was quite different. He further argued that there was distrust in the air because of social hindrances produced by the caste system and unless that issue was resolved even Pakistan would not be able to stay peaceful for long. He contended that only total annihilation of caste (where people stopped identifying themselves with the caste names) could set India right on its path and if the British uproot this baneful caste system from India we would be forever in its debt.⁶⁹ His faith in Cripps and colonial rule was fairly strong and that was not so because he was not a nationalist but because he believed that Congress’ self interest would prevent it from taking any radical step against the institute of caste.

While the social reformists were blamed for siding with imperial rule and not staying true to the cause of the freedom movement, the nationalist leaders were also blamed for not realizing the importance of social revolution. There were contradictions in the political and social life of Congress leaders which did not completely change even post India becoming a Republic. The

⁶⁸ Santram B.A., “Use your influence to kill caste system, open letter to Sir Stafford Cripps”, *The Sunday Observer*, Madras, April 12, 1942, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁶⁹ Santram B.A., “Use your influence to kill caste system, open letter to Sir Stafford Cripps”, *The Sunday Observer*, Madras, April 12, 1942, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

pioneer of Indian constitution; Dr. Ambedkar concluded his presentation on the draft (for the constitution) with this gloomy remark,

*On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality.*⁷⁰

Ambedkar had seen the reality of Congress' promise and knew that the latter had not much to offer on the grounds of untouchables' emancipation. For instance, in the 1920s the 'so called' Gandhians established *ashrams* for spiritual, teaching and training for Halpatis (marginal or landless cultivators and laborers) community of Gujarat. This community had been treated like a serf/slave and there was a need to rehabilitate the community. Bayly says that Congressman Vallabhai Patel told Halpatis that it was their dharmic duty to serve their Patidar (landlord caste) masters without attempting to break their bonds of inherited servitude.⁷¹ This hereditary claim to superiority by extending servitude to other communities was certainly not Gandhian idea of *Harijan* empowerment. Gandhi might have been struggling with how to deal with the issue of untouchability and the Depressed Classes but a significant section of the Congress party, time and again spilled their orthodox guts in the above mentioned manner. Such instances were enough for people to doubt the intentions of Congress for nobody wanted to serve another master after the British.

Ambedkar went on to blame Gandhi for his inconsistent and illogical opinions regarding the caste system. He argued that while in the Round Table Conference (RTC) Gandhi mentioned that

⁷⁰ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian- Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2005, p-36

⁷¹ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, p-247

all Hindus are now ready to take a stand for the Untouchables and right the wrongs done by the previous generations but outside RTC his tone changed again. Gandhi went on to say that unlike Muslims and Sikhs, untouchables are neither united nor aware of political changes happening around them and hence could not be entrusted with making decisions for them. He was of the strong belief that untouchables needed guidance and only Congress could provide such able leadership. He refused to accept that Ambedkar and his suggested 'separate electorates' would be of any help to the untouchables. He gave himself the sole authority on deciding what was good for the untouchables based on the claim that he had lived their life and nobody understood their perils better than him.⁷² One thing which probably remained constant in these paradoxical statements of Gandhi was his Messiah syndrome; that he was the savior and only what he believed and preached was right. He not only threw away the opportunities for the Untouchables forcefully but he willfully bent Ambedkar to his wishes as well, just to prevent separate electorates for Depressed classes from becoming a reality. It most certainly cannot be believed that Gandhi gave up space for other voices to be heard. In fact at times he quashed those voices when they felt disagreeable to him.

Bipan Chandra too blames the approach of Congress leadership. He argues that lower castes were still suppressed and lacking in self-awareness, otherwise they too might have risen in opposition against the symbols reflecting the outlook of the upper caste, as nearly happened in South India.⁷³ The model of nationalism which Congress represented and promoted was not the nationalism for all. Anyone differing from that model was thereby deduced to be anti-nationalist. Richard Gordan adds to this argument and says that while the country was encompassed in

⁷² Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, Gautam Book Centre, Delhi, 1945,p-69

⁷³ Bipan Chandra *Communalism and the Writing of the Indian History* in Romila Thapar, *Historians of Modern India and Communalism(ed.)*, , People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987, p-44

communal antagonism, the claims of any party being the sole representative of nationalism were nothing but false. When Swarajya Party, a bifurcated offshoot of Congress decided to contest elections after the failure of Non-Cooperation movement it was attempting to fill the political void. But at the same time it was also ignoring the influence of strong religious and social norms. Gordon vehemently argues that neither Congress nor Swarajya party held any monopoly over nationalism. They were just misleading the voters just as the communal bodies did when they said that they had the interest of the entire community in their minds.⁷⁴

Santram addresses this narrative by the Congressmen where anyone and everyone who was not a Congressite or even left the party due to difference of opinions, was questioned for lacking real patriotism or for taking bribes from imperial rule. He alleges that if Congress would have supported a democratic structure in its own party ideology then the various local leaders would not have had to give up on the national politics and be forced to resort to narrow communal politics.

Patriotism is not the monopoly of the Caste Hindus only. Every Indian be he [sic] Moslem, an Untouchable or a touchable Shudra, wants freedom for India. But on account of the undemocratic social structure of the Hindus, the self-Government visualized by the Congress in the near future will prove only power for the high caste people and not freedom for the masses. This consciousness dawned on these non-Hindu patriots when the Congress

⁷⁴ Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.9, No.2 (1975), p-147-148

*caravan reached near its goal. So each of them left the Congress and returned to his narrow communal fold.*⁷⁵

Santram laid out a scathing critique of Congress and argued that the high caste associations like Congress function on exclusivity and thereby force other castes and communities to the path of narrow communal politics. Congress' forceful claim of being the sole spokesperson of all communities drove Jinnah out of Congress. Congress also made patriots like Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and Sir Mohammed Iqbal look like anti-nationalists and pro-partition just because their views did not align with that of Congress and also because these Muslim leaders were not ready to submit to the whims of Congress. Hence for Santram, the country had two major problems at hand, one was the caste system and the other one was Congress itself because of its ignorance and arrogance. His argument was that there was a difference between caste patriotism and true nationalism and until Congress kept following and promoting the former, there was no hope for a united nation. He believed that if the Congress could understand the gravity of the caste issue, the nation could attain independence which was for all and not just limited to the upper-class and upper-caste people.

Politics of representation

Geographically, one section of Punjab was Muslim dominated and the other was Hindu dominated and Sikhs had a significant presence on the either sides. According to Denzil Ibbetson who formulated the Census report in 1881, the countryside in Punjab was different, "*where the whole tone and feeling of the countryside is Indian, as it is in the Eastern Panjab, the Musalman*

⁷⁵Santram B.A., "Cause of failure", *Tribune*, July 23, 1945, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

is simply the Hindu with a difference.”⁷⁶ The colonial archive back then perceived the Muslims and the Hindus of the countryside as one and the same only. However, this “difference” which Ibbetson talks about was just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the obvious and public social structure, there was a constant tussle to establish dominance, sometimes through land, sometimes through administrative positions and lucrative government jobs (like army recruitments) and unfortunately sometimes over violence. Diversity also gave birth to conflict of interest and when it was realized that state’s data like Census was being used to distribute power as per the population there was a new kind of race. To have more numbers in the Census, conversions and reconversions (like *Shuddhi*) got a push which triggered further communal feelings. Census of 1931 accounts,

*The spirit of communal antagonism, fanned by the activities of such movements as the “shuddhi”(conversion to Hinduism) and “tanzim”(organization of Muslim community to combat shuddhi), manifested itself in the serious communal riot Multan in 1922, followed in 1926 by even more serious riots in Rawalpindi City and a neighbouring village.*⁷⁷

While the Census blamed movements like *Shuddhi* for the communal antagonism, the perpetrators of the movement blamed Congress and Gandhi for the same. Vidyalkar argues that it was for the lack of organisation that Hindus were being targeted and once Arya Samaj took charge with practices like *Shuddhi*, things looked up for Hindus.

⁷⁶ Ibbetson, *Panjab Caste, Races, Castes and Tribes of the people of Panjab*, [p-178], p-347 (page number in the brackets are from the original edition)

⁷⁷ The Census of India 1931, Punjab Census Report, Delhi, 1931, p-21, National Archives of India (NAI)

खिलाफत आंदोलन द्वारा भारत की मुसलमानों की सांप्रदायिक व जातिगत भावनाओं को अंग्रेजी शासन के विरुद्ध उभारने का प्रबल प्रयास किया गया था। गांधी जी के नेतृत्व में असहयोग आंदोलन का जो रूप था उसने भारत में दो प्रकार की राष्ट्रियताओं का प्रादुर्भाव किया, हिंदू राष्ट्रियता और मुस्लिम राष्ट्रियता। जब सांप्रदायिक भावनाएं एक बार उभर जाती हैं तो उनको काबू में रखना सुगम नहीं रहता और उनका दुरुपयोग किया जाने लगता है।⁷⁸

(Due to the Khilafat Movement the communal and castiest feelings of Muslims were evoked against imperial rule. Under the leadership of Gandhi the Non-cooperation Movement was taking a certain shape which gave birth to two kind of nationalisms- Hindu Nationalism and Muslim Nationalism. Once these communal feelings arise they cannot be controlled, they are just misused thereafter)

Vidyalankar went on accusing Gandhi and Congress for misleading the national movement and commented that once Swami Shradhanand resigned from Congress in 1923, the residual political affiliation the Samaj had with Congress got over as well. The Arya Samaj since then had only three objectives; “दलित उद्धार, शुद्धि और हिंदू संगठन” (dalit emancipation, *Shuddhi* and Hindu unity).⁷⁹

While the members of the Arya Samaj wanted to show that they were positively contributing towards the reformation of the Hindus, Santram too wanted to prove that there were people for whom surname was nothing and if given enough resources, he and his Mandal had the potential to make revolutionary changes in the society. The *Jat Pat Torak Mandal* (JPTM) sent a deputation for the same to meet Dr. Hutton, the then Census Commissioner in Shimla. As per

⁷⁸ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-556-558 (accessed from Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur)

⁷⁹ Ibid, p-557-558

Santram's claim they were able to enter around four thousand names without caste and saw this as a big victory.⁸⁰ *Ad Dharm* under the leadership of Mangoo Ram was far more successful in gathering numbers in lakhs in Census. Both the *Ad Dharm* and JPTM strived for the removal of untouchability and other social evils but never reached a common ground in this battlefield of social revolution. While *Ad Dharm* took the political road and maintained relevance for a longer period, JPTM remained strictly a reformative organization and eventually failed to gather more people under its banner and was left just as a one man army (Santram).

In 1941 when there were talks of Arya Samajists returning themselves as Hindus or Aryas in the upcoming Census, Santram strenuously opposed the idea of Arya Samajists as a different sect. He believed that this would lead to separation of Arya Samaj from the Hindu religion just like Jains and Sikhs. He further commented that,

*These so called Arya leaders should try to grasp the spirit of Rishi Dayanand and should not help the Hindu society to fall into the deep abyss of disintegration. Instead of laying stress on the return of "Arya" they should advise their followers to return 'Nil' in the column of caste against their names.*⁸¹

If there was a civil war brewing on one hand within the country over demography and perks, on the other hand, there was anger brewing in foreign nationals too who were tired of relying on the good will of the British and wanted to take the situation in their own hands and hence came into being, the Ghadar Party (1913) in San Francisco, USA. The party was founded by the disgruntled

⁸⁰ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, Hindi Pracharak Pustakalaya, Varanasi, 1963, p- 114

⁸¹Santram B.A., "Hindus and the coming census", *Tribune*, February 19, 1941, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

Punjabi Indians living across USA and Canada, with the sole purpose of overthrowing colonial rule from India. Ramnath Maia in *Haj to Utopia* says that,

*The Ghadar movement served as a missing link, a source of hidden continuity between the Bengali “anarchist” conspiracies, “national revolutionary terrorism” and Punjabi agitations of the early twentieth century; and the radical Left and revolutionists movements of the 1920s.*⁸²

The Ghadar party was reflective of the radicalism in Punjab and the aggressive politics of representation which was now shaping even in the foreign lands. Harish K. Puri in *The Ghadar movement* points out that the emigrants in USA and Canada were struggling with the dilemma of beliefs, identity and loyalty towards the empire. When they got to see the lifestyle in first world countries like the USA it was a shock for them as they realized the deplorable conditions back at their homeland and they held the colonial rule responsible for that. When they migrated from India they were under the notion that British rule was good for the country but that belief was shattered in the foreign land. Puri calls this as change in conscience and says that the Sikh body in India, that was, Khalsa Diwan could not accept it. They were still rooting for the imperial rule and pledged their loyalty towards the empire yet again in a petition in 1911. However, the immigrants were convinced by leaders like Lala Har Dayal (Ghadar Party member) that the British were the betrayers and that their loyalties were misplaced. The Ghadarites were further inspired by Savarkar’s work; ‘*The Indian War of Independence*’ glorifying the 1857 rebellion which boosted their patriotic spirits against imperial rule.⁸³

⁸² Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia- how the Ghadar movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British Empire*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2011, p-2

⁸³ Harish K. Puri, *The Ghadar movement- a new consciousness in Social and Political Movements- reading on Punjab*, ed. by Harish K. Puri and Paramjit S. Judge, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2000 .147-158

Emily Brown in *Har Dayal, Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, mentions that Har Dayal and V.D. Savarkar were close friends and confided in each other many times while they were residing in India House, London.⁸⁴ Gurudev Singh Deol in *The role of Ghadar Party in the National Movement*, too points to the close association between Har Dayal and Savarkar. He states that Har Dayal proposed a resolution on 21st April 1913 that the name of the organisation should be the 'Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast' and in short the 'Hindi Pacific Association'. The use of the term "Hindi" points to the rigidity of space not just in social circles but in politics too.⁸⁵ The stark similarities between Har Dayal and Savarkar and the organisations and movements they led cannot be simply ignored.

In December 1937, the Hindu Mahasabha adopted a revised constitution at its Ahmedabad session, declaring its aim as *the maintenance, protection and promotion of the Hindu race, Hindu culture and Hindu civilization and advancement and glory of Hindu Rashtra*.⁸⁶ The emphasis was on the word Hindu. The keyword for both Har Dayal and Savarkar was **Hindu**; that was the one and the only important agenda for them. Puri however, in defense of the Ghadar party claims that the Hindu sectarian orientation was only a part of the early phase of the Ghadar movement and later it became all inclusive and tried to represent all communities.

While the Ghadarites tried evolving with time and became more inclusive, Savarkar on the other hand was and remained a through and through radical Hindu. In 1923, the first edition of '*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*' by Savarkar came out which discussed in details Hindu

⁸⁴ Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal, Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, University of Arizona Press, New Delhi, 1975, pp-27-30

⁸⁵ Gurudev Singh Deol, *The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement*, Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 1969, p- 60

⁸⁶ Prabhu Babu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North-India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*, Routledge, 2013, New York,p-75

Nationalism, the ‘other of Islam and Christianity’ and the idea of masculinity. He was of the belief that 1920s revealed a seminal shift from an anti-British revolutionary to an anti-Muslim campaign. To him, Muslims replaced the British as the ‘enemy’ of the Indian nation.⁸⁷ Savarkar further believed that the ‘Varna System’ was integral to the Hindu society for it differentiated the Aryas (pure breed) from the Mlechcha (impure breed) and thus the system could not be removed.⁸⁸ While being dismissive about untouchability and bane of caste system, Savarkar did not want Hindus to lose their autonomy by getting reduced numbers in Census and hence, he tried in vain of being inclusive as well. He claimed that despite the bifurcation within Hinduism in the form of Arya Samaj, Sikhs etc. they were still all part of the Hindu community. He argued that they all shared the same blood unlike the foreigners (Muslims, Christians et al) and belonged to one country, i.e. *Bharat*.⁸⁹ Overall, Savarkar’s idea of Hinduism relied on purity as long as it kept Hindus in preponderance. That is why he claimed the Sikhs, Arya Samajis et al within the Hindu folds and saw Islam as the only enemy. This is also why he was convinced that only Hindi should be the language for Hindustan as any other language would be the language of ‘foreigner’ impure breed.⁹⁰

Hindu Mahasabha met in the Congress pandal at Gaya in December 1920 (Savarkar was President of the Mahasabha then). There for the first time Mahsabha expressed concern for the ‘depressed’ classes including the untouchables, and urged religious leaders to preach and to improve the sanitary and other social habits of these classes (a Brahmanical idea where the untouchables had to behave in a certain way to become worthy of emancipation). Gordon says that this resolution on untouchability committed the Mahasabha to nothing in practice but it did

⁸⁷Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North-India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*, p-61

⁸⁸ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva Who is a Hindu*, p-17

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p-18

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p-19

indicate their growing interest in the social reformation movement.⁹¹ Gordon recounts that in the Sixth Annual Conference of the All India Mahasabha held at Benares in August 1923, the most important resolution dealt with the question of *shuddhi*, the reclamation of converts to other religions, and the untouchables. The discussion in the conference involved an open clash between members of the Arya Samaj and the more strictly orthodox Brahmin pandits of Benares because *Shuddhi* was a tendentious issue. When the Hindu Mahasabha came in support of *Shuddhi* to gather masses under its banner, it upset a large section of orthodox Hindus especially the upper castes who were against being associated with the 'lower castes'. However, Mahasabha stuck by its ideology and supported the Arya Samaj's *Shuddhi* drive by reclaiming the Hindus converted forcibly to Islam by the Moplahs and Muslim converts in Agra District. Gordon emphasizes that this move by Mahasabha accentuated religious feelings on its platform.⁹²

Ayesha Jalal says that the idea of Pakistan originated as a reaction to the Hindu Mahasabha and its paramilitary wing, the RSS. She blames Congress too for turning a blind eye towards the religious fanaticism which the above mentioned bodies advocated. She argues that there was a constant overlap between the Congress and the Mahasabha in Punjab where it was often the same individuals who voiced the Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan slogan most loudly and thus made it an impossible task for the minorities to trust Congress at all.⁹³ Gordon supports this argument of Jalal when he points at Lajpat Rai emphasizing that the Mahasabha was not intended to usurp the

⁹¹ Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.9, No.2 (1975), pp.169-170 (Malviya was careful while writing the resolution as it mentioned to 'recognize them' and nowhere implied that the Hindus had to love them or dine or marry them. This was done to prevent the orthodox Hindus from getting offended)

⁹² *ibid*, p-170, (The All-India Shuddhi Sabha was formed at Agra in February 1923 following the campaign of the Aryas to reclaim the Moplah converts)

⁹³ Ayesha Jalal, 'Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 32 (Aug.8-14, 1998), p-2186, (Madan Mohan Malviya who was a Congressite was also the founder of Hindu Mahasabha)

functions of the Congress. Rai was persistent that on no account were Hindus to give up the Congress; rather they should assist it in ensuring the Hindu hegemony.⁹⁴

Every political party was fighting for representation and to avouch that only they were the true voice of the masses, nationalism was time and again used as propaganda to enhance their self-interests. At the same time most of the organizations and parties were also entangled in internal conflicts. Santram points out one such conflict within the Hindu Mahasabha. He comments on the ongoing conflict in 1938 between Mr. Savarkar, the then President of the Hindu Mahasabha and some other members of the Mahasabha like Prof. Gulshan Rai. Gulshan Rai questioned the leadership of Savarkar and his identity as a Sanatani Hindu (orthodox conservative Hindus) as the latter openly preached and promoted abolition of caste. For Rai, Hinduism without caste was no Hinduism at all and in the road to progress of Hindus he did not see the caste system as a major block. He even warned Mr. Savarkar that with such appalling views, Savarkar will fail to take the orthodox Hindus into confidence and the Mahasabha would collapse under his poor leadership. Santram supported Savarkar's stand on the demolition of caste and critiqued Prof. Rai for his regressive opinions. He says that this shows that according to Prof. Rai, firstly, it is essential for an orthodox Hindu to believe in caste system, and secondly, the social, economic and political upliftment of the Hindus is possible even without the annihilation of caste.⁹⁵ Savarkar didn't just have Santram's sympathy but also his cogent support regarding the strong stand against caste system. The latter believed that the nation needed more leaders like Savarkar. To answer Prof. Rai's advice he says that nearly 99 percent of our Hindu leaders consider the caste system as very harmful and preach by word and action against it because they believe that

⁹⁴ Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926', p-179

⁹⁵ Santram B.A., "Barrister Savarkar and Caste System" *Tribune* (date not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

no solidarity is possible amongst the Hindus unless this harmful system is removed. He argued that it was after toilsome efforts of Arya Samaj and Mahatma Gandhi that things were finally taking a turn for the good of the backward class and when members of social reform movements themselves, like Prof. Rai contest these ideologies postulated by Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Shraddhanand, they quash all those years of hard work and sacrifices. He further argued that there is a great difference between a professional Sanatanist and a true Sanatanist. The latter never objects to any reform which is conducive to the amelioration of Hindus, while the former tries to cling to time-barred rotten things even if they are detrimental to the progress of the community, so it was up to Prof. Rai and the ones who shared his opinions regarding caste system, to decide which one of these categories they want to be associated with. Santram further stipulated that at one time these professional and ignorant Sanatanist were in favour of *Sati* and child marriage and against sea voyage and female education as well but that doesn't make these practices any less evil today or gives the right to the so called 'sanatanists' to continue with these practices under the name of Hindu customs. What was passed as okay in the past needed inspection and thus needed to be changed accordingly. True Hinduism as per him does not imply believing in all sorts of nonsense. He questioned that when orthodox Hindus gladly join the Congress, which is also against caste system (at least on paper), how can they possibly have any objection to the President of the Hindu Mahasabha preaching against this baneful system?⁹⁶ What Santram failed to realize was that for a lot of members; it was not politics of ideas and beliefs over which they contested, instead it was a politics of convenience and vested interests which they chose not to give up. An orthodox Hindu was usually an upper-caste Hindu who

⁹⁶ Santram B.A., "Barrister Savarkar and Caste System" *Tribune* (date not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

benefited from the caste system. For him giving up on caste system implied giving up on the life of comforts and supremacy which therefore he was bound to oppose.

Santram was always a fair critique and never left a stone unturned to point out the flaws in the functioning of the Hindu reformist organisations like Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha. His intentions were clear, if they cannot work for the good of all Hindus there is no point in their existence and he never shied away from expressing this core belief. Though he chose to ignore the communal angle with these organisations, he critiqued them vehemently on the issue of caste prejudice. In December of 1935 when his JPTM proposed to hold a conference under the wings of Mahasabha to further the cause of abolition of caste, the proposal was rejected. The premise of rejection was that the issue of abolition of caste does not come within the fold of the Hindu Mahasabha according to its constitution. This argument infuriated Santram and he argued back saying,

If to consider the means of abolition of caste, which is nothing but graded untouchability, is not within the fold of the Hindu Sabha, it is useless to hold Shudhi and Achhutudhar Conferences. In such as case, the Sabha should not give false hopes to Dr.Ambedkar and his untouchable followers and should openly and honestly express its helplessness to keep them within the Hindu fold. With such orthodox reactionary ideas can the Sabha ever hope to consolidate the Hindu society?⁹⁷

Santram as an individual didn't seem to be a blind puppet in the hands of upper caste leaders. He called spade a spade without being afraid even if that meant going head on with either the leaders

⁹⁷ Santram B.A., "Why Give false Hopes to Dr Ambedkar? Hindu Maha Sabha criticized, Jat Pat Torak Mandal says caste evil must go", (newspaper not mentioned), December 19, 1935, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

of Arya Samaj or Hindu Mahasabha. As big a supporter as he was of these bodies, he was their harshest critic as well and he kept his focus on one goal throughout his lifetime of work and that was **Abolition of Caste**.

Apart from Ghadar Party and Hindu Mahasabha, the public inclination was towards some Marxist tendency too. From the Ghadar Party emerged a journal '*Kirti*' which demonstrated these 'socialist' ideas. Bhagwan Josh points out that the leaders who were responsible for the publication of this journal were quite inspired from the Russian revolution. The journal reflected that the peasant movements needed to expand into a militant mass revolution but it failed to provide any kind of structure for the said revolution and it remained to be just a utopian idea at that point. Eventually, through the efforts of M.N. Roy (founder of Communist Party of India, 1920) and his emissaries, communist movement paved its way in India and Punjab, and with the birth of the Third International which had sworn complete annihilation of colonial rule, the British felt threatened and started creating counter-checks like CID to prevent any further progress of these militant feelings.⁹⁸

Finally, a Communist Party was founded in Lahore by Ghulam Hussain in 1922 that started a newspaper *Inquilab*, which used to publish M.N. Roy's articles but both the party and the newspaper failed to grasp any significant attention. A year later in 1923, Labour and Kisan Party Hindustan started influencing the 'militant' Punjabi population under the leadership of S.D. Hassan but the socialist movement in the region remained pretty dormant only. Meanwhile, Gandhi's call for boycott and non-cooperation fanned these militant tendencies towards the

⁹⁸ Bhagwan Singh Josh, *Communist movement in Punjab (1926-1942)*,p-72-80

freedom movement. However, Josh concludes that Congress as well failed to make an impact on the province despite the despotic Martial Law.⁹⁹

A simple example of this failure of Congress can be seen in the autobiography of Santram B.A. He recounts that after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy when Martial Law was forced on the region, a friend of his, Krishna Dayal got a warrant against him and Santram helped him to escape.¹⁰⁰

Apart from his encounter with his friend he does not mention the impact of the tragedy or the role of Congress in stirring the freedom movement at all. In the early 1930s the number of peasant organisations increased in the region primarily due to national political fever and regional economic depression. Both Congress and Left failed to hold the attention of these organisations and direct their dissent towards the imperial rule due to the lack of unity in their factions. Both Congress and Left were distracted because of their internal feuds and individual interest of their members. Josh points out that the Left leaders might claim that the movement was quite strong in the region but the reality was that quite a number of the left members flipped to Congress and those who were left did not have mass appeal, in fact in many districts there were not even district committees of the Communist Party.¹⁰¹ Socialism and Communism became a fad in the region, as Santram says, “सोशलिज्म एंड कम्युनिज्म एक बिल्कुल मजलिसी निजाम है इसके नुकसानदेह साबित होने पर चाहे जब भी उसे खत्म किया जा सकता है”¹⁰²

(socialism and communism are like big pretentious namesake ideologies, if they start feeling harmful they can be immediately removed or destroyed).

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p-86-103

¹⁰⁰ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, p-77-79

¹⁰¹ Bhagwan Singh Josh, *Communist movement in Punjab (1926-1942)*, p-267-280

¹⁰² Santram B.A., *Bharat ka bhavishya*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, Hoshiarpur, 1948,) Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

Santram was of the opinion that Communism is like a phase, it comes and goes and has nothing useful to contribute to the society which further proves Josh's point that the communist movement in Punjab was like a bolt of lightning which came with thunder but disappeared soon after.

The bodies like Ghadar Party, Hindu Mahasabha and Communist party, lived a short life of glory in Punjab where they served very narrow specific goals which was the primary reason for their demise as well. The politics of representation which they practiced further instigated the communal feelings which we shall discuss further in the next chapter. On the other hand, bodies like *Ad Dharm* and Unionist Party survived and made an impact on the region because they expanded their horizon with time thereby catering to more and more population along with their self-interests.

Conclusion

Jalal believes that the diversity of the Punjab region was reflected in the varieties of nationalism coming out of the province. She argues that despite the Congress's claims of 'one nation' and 'undivided sovereignty' the ground reality was a little different and the region was divided on many fronts.¹⁰³ Santram holds the lack of social reforms responsible for these rifts and commented on the necessity of social reform prior to political independence.

It is wrong to think that India will be free as soon as the British quit her. We are slaves because we are incompetent to be free. Is it not a fact that Indian Rulers employed European officers before the British Rule in India? Is it not a fact that a Moghal Emperor got his daughter treated by a European doctor? Is

¹⁰³Ayesha Jalal, 'Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India', p-2183

it not a fact that the Indian Industry had been over-thrown by the European industry long before India was subdued by the British? Can we be able to manufacture all those things which we import from the west now within ten years after the British quit India(strong claims, check)? I am not writing this to create inferiority complex in my countrymen, but my object is to emphasise the necessity of reforming ourselves in every respect in order to be able to enjoy true independence.¹⁰⁴

Some blamed the British, some blamed Congress and some found other parties to blame but Santram mostly stuck to self-reflection and blamed the social structure for the loss of freedom and integrity along with it. His critique of Congress and his expectations from imperial rule were based solely on credibility which he felt the former lacked and the latter had. In fact it can be seen that on national level leaders like B. R. Ambedkar and on regional level leaders like Santram; none of them could see Congress eye to eye on its methods and tactics on achieving national freedom. Hasan blames a certain section of historians who in the attempt to accentuate the so-called ‘unity’ during the national movement sometimes completely overlooked the discord and the rifts ranging from communal disputes to internal party politics which held the nation in a tight grip.¹⁰⁵ We can call it colonial after-effect or impact of western education but the contemporary social structure which still functions on the premises of caste and community proves Santram right. It makes us wonder that if caste names were removed would that help with resolving the issue of caste based discrepancies and if the caste system is annihilated completely

¹⁰⁴ Santram B.A., “What have we gained from caste? *The Sunday Observer*, May 25, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

¹⁰⁵ Mushirul Hasan, ‘Communalism in the Provinces: A Case Study of Bengal and the Punjab, 1922-26’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 33 (Aug.16, 1980), p-1395

will Hinduism survive or as Ambedkar predicted when he converted to Buddhism that without the caste system Hinduism will fall.

Perceiving Punjab as a communal state or as a Sikh state is viewing the state under a single lens rejecting all its nuances. A biased history can show just the chivalrous national movement or it can emphasize the perks of colonial rule but both these accounts would be incomplete, instead, a fair analysis would be the one which presents all the aspects of the society it claims to write about. In order to write a glorious history of the national movement at times the internal disputes are ignored and henceforth passed over to the background where even voiced opinions go unheard. It is an immense failure on our behalf that only the history of victors gets attention and rest goes unheard or unsung. Santram is one such story. In the politics of vested interests he was like any common man in the search of identity, and he wanted that identity to be free from evils like caste prejudices and he wanted that identity to be acceptable by all. He strived towards that goal and expected that the big names of parties and leaders who wrote in their manifestos “welfare for all” would help him in the cause. However, in his life span he got mostly disappointment from these political leaders because they could never free themselves from the inherent prejudices, which the country still reflects.

Santram never got attached to the political drama happening around in the region. Whether it was Martial Law or if it was boycotting of British goods, despite being aware of these incidents, Santram kept himself aloof from this because he felt that for ‘true’ freedom he had to first work on creating equal opportunities for all. He saw how Arya Samaj failed in balancing political and social fronts and he expected the same fall for his Mandal if it chose to go political as well. The upper-caste hegemony of Congress further created mistrust in his mind where he felt it to be an absolute necessity that the marginalized community got a separate and louder voice. His

disappointment in Congress, Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha was reflected time and again in his writings and this is why he expected a little more compassion from the British rule. Those expectations did not come from his 'less patriotic' heart but from his duty towards his people. In all of the social, political and later, communal chaos in the region, Santram became the symbol of selfless service. He did not want anything to do with money, fame or power, all he wanted was some space to speak and he fought till the end for that without compromising his values and ideologies.

Chapter 4

Tracing the Impact of Caste System on Religion and Gender

The Constitution of India (Article 25) recognizes Sikhism along with Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism as religions in which castes exist and provides for reservation for the untouchable castes.¹ This is one of the many proofs that no matter what the religion originally preached, i.e. unity, integrity etc., hierarchies and hegemony have always followed up their way in the core mechanism of the religions. Within these hierarchies, dominant and submissive relationships are not just established but expected as well and if the submissive anyhow tries to break this hegemony it is seen as a rebellion against the ‘rules’ of the society and is declared a ‘pariah’.

The purpose of this chapter therefore is to find a connection between communal divide and caste divide and how Santram perceived these differences. The chapter further tries to place Santram amidst the debate of who was responsible for these violent outbursts and if they could have been avoided. It also attempts to understand the nuances of this sectarian politics and search its roots within the dynamics of *varnashrama*. This chapter does not question the patriotism of the communities but attempts to analyze why this question arose in the first place that there were different nationalisms as per the different communities. It contemplates the role of the past, the Colonial presence and finally factors in the Congress’ strategy during the freedom movement in determining what led to the colossal damage in Punjab in the 1940s. It investigates the fact that why to highlight nationalism a united identity was forced on the society which in truth was struggling with distinct identities based on caste, sect religion and gender.

¹ Paramjit S. Judge, “Caste Hierarchy, Dominance and Change in Punjab”, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January-April 2015), p-56

Existence of caste-divide is nowhere new for India, but since centuries there has been a constant battle to prove one's self worth. Religions, whose basic foundation has been 'brotherhood', declared warfare on the land of Punjab on the eve of 1947 in the form of partition to claim space and identity and thereby prove this self worth. This was, though, not a unique phenomenon of 1947. Whenever the freedom movement is discussed in the context of Punjab, the pangs of partition find a significant role in the mainstream history but these separatist tendencies had been in making since decades if not centuries. This chapter thus traces the origin of communal antagonism in the caste system.

Panikkar believes that it is a political task to criticize religion and weigh its pros and cons rationally. If we fail to reason with religion it puts a mask on social and economic reality; it is a distraction which the ruling power uses to divert focus from the reality of the society.² This chapter thus ponders on this question as well if the British used religion as a distraction to counter the national movement or if these fissures were already there in the society waiting for a volcanic eruption which the colonial rule just triggered unintentionally. Religion was again and again blamed for stirring animosity between communities while the leaders of the same communities either simply used it to enhance their political career or just ignored the real cause behind communalism which was 'exclusivity' and this chapter thereby critically analyzes this aspect of the Punjab polity.

The final theme of the chapter tries to locate the private zone of sectarian politics, i.e. the women in Punjab. Communal violence targeted women of the Punjab but even before that, caste prejudice had already been using women's bodies as the battlefield for power. Hence, this chapter tries to find Santram's and Arya Samaj's relation with this gender specific discrimination

² Panikkar, *Communal Threat Secular Challenge*, p-4

and find reasons to why women's voice from that time and location still remains under-represented. The chapter thus looks at the Dalit Hindu women in Punjab before partition and how they were either put down or completely forgotten in the struggle for social equality by the so called leaders of the reformation in the region. While we discuss the divide along the lines of caste and communalism it becomes pertinent to discuss the '*Aadhi Aabadi*' (half population) because in the tussle of power it is usually their bodies and identities which become the battleground for dominance. Thus, this chapter not only perceives the issue of communalism from the eyes of social reformers but also addresses what reforms expected of women and how it treated them as well.

The 'Many' Nationalisms of Punjab

हिंदू जाति दिन पर दिन इस्लाम और ईसाई धर्म का शिकार होती जा रही है। इसका कारण यह है कि खतरे की घंटी बजाने वाले सज्जन, हिंदू जाति के रोग के मूल कारण का निदान ना करके केवल जनसाधारण की भावना को भड़काना ही पर्याप्त समझते हैं। ... ईसाई और मुसलमान प्रचारकों ने धावा बोल दिया है और वे लोग हिंदुओं को एक बहुत बड़ी संख्या में पतित कर रहे हैं। हिंदुओं की अवस्था इस समय एक ऐसे मरणासन्न पशु के समान है जिसकी मृत्यु को नोचने के लिए इस्लाम और ईसाई रूपी गिद्धे ताक रहे हैं। उनसे बचने का उपाय गिद्धों को कोसना या उस मरणासन्न पशु के गिर्द बाड़ लगा देना नहीं वरन उस के रोग को दूर करके उसे निरोग और हृष्ट पुष्ट बनाना है। उसके निरोग से ही उसे किसी का भय ना रह जाएगा। क्या कारण है कि केवल हिंदू प्रदेशों को ही ईसाई या मुसलमान होने का भय रहता है? मुसलमानी प्रदेशों में मुसलमानों को हिंदू या ईसाई होने का डर कभी सुनाई नहीं देता। जो सेना दुर्ग में बंद रहकर

सदा अपनी रक्षा में लगी रहती है उसके लिए एक दिन हथियार डाल देना अनिवार्य होता है। यह एक अटल नियम है।³

(with every passing day Hindus are being targeted by Muslims and Christians because the so called reformers instead of realizing the actual issues just keep on ringing the bells of communal differences...the propagators of Christianity and Islam have declared war and they are turning large number of Hindus impure by converting them. Right now, Hinduism is a dying religion and Christianity and Islam are hovering around it like scavenging vultures. The only way out of this situation is not to create a fence around Hinduism but to cure its disease. One should think about what is the reason that only the Hindus states are under the constant threat of conversion and why the Islamic or Christian states don't possess the same fear. It is because we are only defensive and not offensive and hence losing the war, it is high time that we learn to attack as well.)

This is just a prelude to what the reformers like Santram felt about the changing dynamics in Punjab. At least Santram here felt that reformation was important to bring inclusiveness, Arya Samaj on the other hand was working in the opposite trajectory. The Samaj felt threatened by the growing numbers of converts in Islam and Christianity and then only realized the importance of the marginalized. From being the oppressed section of the society the marginalized turned to mere numbers. “अछूत जातियों में ईसाई मत के बढ़ते हुए प्रचार को देखकर आर्य समाजीयों ने भी यह समझ लिया कि हिंदू जाति के इस दलित वर्ग का उद्धार किए बिना विधर्मियों के प्रयत्न को विफल करना असंभव है”⁴

³ Santram B.A., “Khatre ki Ghanti”, *Hindu Saptahik*, October 26, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁴ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-105(accessed from Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur)

(There was growing trend of Christianity amongst the Untouchables and that made the Arya Samajists realize that without the upliftment of the Untouchables, it will be impossible to get rid of these heretics)

Santram knew this reality of *Shuddhi* and argued that this exclusiveness which Hindus have inherited is the sole reason why their re-conversion approach has failed so miserably. He speculated that Hindus appreciate such social separations as they believe it maintains purity. The Arya Samajists who claim to be the social reformers are not friendly towards Muslims and hence the latter has all the reason to not trust the Hindus and be insecure as they are a minority.

*Professor Gulshan Rai(Arya Samaji) suggests that opportunities should be found for the different communities to meet each other on festive occasions. But the question is what will they do by meeting. What link is there to unite them?...there is a danger of their breaking each other's head on such occasions if they meet in large numbers.*⁵

Santram said that all the plans of this pretentious unity between Hindus and Muslims are headed towards failure until the issue of caste is resolved.

On 29th July 1896 the *Khalsa Gazette* (Lahore) reported that the feeling of mutual distrust was increasing between Hindus and Muhammadans and that they have started arguing over construction of religious sites now. On 5th August 1896 the newspaper further claimed that certain Muhammadan journals were publishing threats against Hindus like “*Muhammadans are still strong enough to break the heads of the pulse-eating (dalkhor) Hindus, and that they will not*

⁵ Santram B.A., “Hindu Muslim Harmony”, *Tribune*, July 2, 1941, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

leave India without making the land flow with blood.”⁶ Similarly a Muslim newspaper, *Chaudhwin Sadi* (Rawalpindi) reported on 1st August 1896 that certain Muslim communities were unnecessarily targeted by Hindus for beef eating. It stated, “*the Hindus of Peshawar appear to be determined to cause a disturbance. Their object is to compel the Muhammadans to give up a practice which existed even when Peshawar was under Sikh rule (Beef eating).*”⁷ The communities were looking for reasons to engage in dispute and even the smallest of the issues was given a communal color. As Panikkar says, “*Religious universalism gave way to religious particularism*”⁸ where the idea that a certain religion was universal and best, quickly passed along the lines that ‘only’ this religion was universal and the best and hence a feeling of competition arose within communities.

During the first half of the 1890s there was a heated debate between Pandit Lekhram (Arya Samajist) and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (Kadiyan chief). Pandit Lekhram said that Islam was established through force and violence and appealed the converts to come back as the threat had passed and now they had no reason to be afraid of Muslims. Ahmad said that Lekhram was insulting the Prophet and the former built up societal pressure asking the latter to burn his books and apologize, or else he would take the matters to the court. A few local Muslim newspapers like *Punjab, Paisa Akhbar* and *Chaudhwin Sadi* continuously wrote instigating reports how Lekhram was openly insulting the Prophet and yet Muslims were doing nothing about it.⁹ Lekhram eventually got clean chit from the Delhi Magistrate but the Muslim community could not handle this open humiliation. In March of 1897, Lekhram was killed by a fanatic Muslim.

⁶ Native Newspaper Reports(Punjab), *Khalsa Gazette*(Lahore), Basant Singh (publisher), Microfilms, NMML

⁷ Native Newspaper Reports(Punjab), *Chaudhwin Sadi* (Rawalpindi),Siraj-ud-din-Ahmad(publisher), Microfilms, NMML

⁸ Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, p-31

⁹ Native Newspaper Reports(Punjab), 1896-1924, NMML

Vidyalankar emphasizes that the primary reason for this conflict was *Shuddhi*. As Samajists were getting quite successful in the late 19th century with the reconversions, Muslims were getting frustrated and hence resorted to violence.¹⁰

Santram shares such an incident of communal hatred which happened around 1915. Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (established in Punjab in 1885) to commemorate Pandit Lekhram used to publish an Urdu monthly journal under the name of *Hutatma*. Some Muslim journal then tried to make fun of the journal writings about Hindu *Shuddhikaran* (conversion) and claimed that the Hindus use cow dung and urine for the purification but the items used for the purpose are so disgusting. Santram was agitated after reading such mockery of Hindu customs so he answered back claiming that even Islam glorifies Hazrat Mohammad's bodily ablutions saying that it once cured a sick girl. He went on to argue that how can a cow be a disgusting animal if its dung is used to prepare food in every household. He added on the insult and said that those who claim that humans are better than cows should maybe try human excreta to prepare their own food.¹¹ This was just a small example of how hostile the communities were against each other. It is ironic that the ones who experienced the taunts around the practice of 'latrine cleaning' on a daily basis and struggled for respect themselves were using the same humiliation and disgust to bring down another community. It speaks volumes why as a nation; unity seems an alien word because we do not even share the same sorrows as prejudice has drawn so many boundaries around us. It was not as if Santram carried this intention of hurting others' religious sentiments but it was his social conditioning which made him ignorant about the impact of his statements. The bias towards this 'other' was quite visible in his opinions.

¹⁰ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-106-107

¹¹Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, Gautam Book Centre, Delhi, 1963, pp-30-31

Barrier takes up the incident of Lekh Ram's murder to point out that it was mostly rivalry between the Arya Samaj and the Muslims which communalized the region. He believes that when there was temporary truce between the two communities during 1898 and 1907 only then did the Arya Samajists showed any active interest in the country politics but as soon as they smelled communal riots around partition of Bengal, the temporary truce was dissolved and the communities were back at being at each other's throats.¹² Both Vidyalankar and Barrier seem to be ignorant of the fact that the accusations were not just thrown around between Hindus and Muslims. The communities were not just at war with each other but the sects within the communities did not have cordial relations either. Vidylankar himself mentions that a rival Hindu sect, the *Sanatan Dharm*, charged the Arya Samaj with spreading revolution and "disseminating hatred" however his sentiments towards *Sanatan Dharm* were not as rigid as those towards Islam and Christianity.¹³

Barrier further blames the Arya Samaj for the growing communal feelings. He talks about how through the medium of revivalism Samaj actually promoted militant spirit in the Hindus. He describes that due to Samaj's close ties with Punjab Congress, there was a new fear of sedition looming over it and hence the Samajists tried spreading propaganda questioning the loyalty of the Muslims towards the Raj. He points out that around 1907 when there were chances of economic restrictions against the Arya Samaj, the Muslim officials saw it as a great opportunity to expand their influence in the region. Muslims were called greedy job seekers and traitors who were spreading false rumors about the Arya Samaj so as to seek jobs and Muslims threw the

¹² N.G. Barrier, "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May, 1967), p-368

¹³ *ibid*,p-377.

same accusations back at the Samaj.¹⁴ What Barrier sees and interprets as a communal equation, it was rather an economic issue. As Jalal says, every small incident was seen under the communal light but the truth was that there were other factors responsible as well. Barrier himself says that Ibbetsons' employment circulars were leaked¹⁵, which describes that it was an act of desperation and a large section of people just wanted jobs. Religion was not a topmost priority for everyone but it was made to look like that was the case. The British policy-making, especially, favoritism based on sects/religions was equally responsible for the tiff and this idea will be further explored later in the chapter.

Post 1907 the *shuddhi* activities were intensified. In fact in 1909 an All India Shuddhi Sabha was launched which was mostly led by the Punjabi Arya Samajists and Hindu Mahasabha. Their mission was defending Hinduism and their motivation (or rather fear) was that the Government was turning pro-Muslim.¹⁶ Barrier is too quick to judge the Arya Samajists ignoring the fact the latter themselves acknowledged; they feared the government turning against them. If the government was pro-Muslim it would mean that economy would also shift in their favor and the political dynamics would also get disrupted. Vidyalankar says,

आर्य समाज द्वारा जिस ढंग से भारत में नवजीवन उत्पन्न किया जा रहा था और जनता में स्वधर्म, स्वदेश तथा अपनी संस्कृति के प्रति प्रेम तथा गौरव की भावना प्रादुर्भूत की जा रही थी उससे विदेशी ब्रिटिश शासकों का चिंतित होना स्वाभाविक था इसलिए बीसवीं सदी के प्रथम दशक में आर्य समाज को राजद्रोही संस्था समझा जाने लगा।¹⁷

¹⁴ N.G. Barrier, "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908", pp-365-378

¹⁵ *ibid*, p- 377

¹⁶ *ibid*, p-379

¹⁷ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.2*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1984, p-153

(The way Arya Smaj was infusing new life in the country with her work, the population was inclining towards ideas like *Swadharm* (my religion), *Swadesh*(my country) and my culture and there was new found love for all these things. It was only natural that British would fear this self-love and hence in the early twentieth century they started targeting Arya Samaj as an anti-nationalist body.)

Jalal keeps emphasizing that the conflicts in Punjab were not always about religion and picks up handful incidents to make a generalized comment that the violence in the region was not communal. She observes that in Punjab; sub-regional and class considerations were more powerful than communitarian feelings. People were unwilling to give social space as it was a matter of identity for them too. She blames scholars like Partha Chatterjee for forming binary categories like ‘secular nationalism’ and ‘religious communalism’.¹⁸ These domains did not exist separately as inner or outer, they co-existed and very much overlapped as well. She might be wrong in painting the entire issue in the same color but she is right to say that no incident was spared to give it a communal hue.

During these communal disturbances Santram too agreed that while others are getting concerned regarding Jinnah’s two-nation theory, they are still blind towards the fact that this divide has existed since centuries. He says,

Since the first invasion of India by the Arabs, Muslims and Hindus have never enjoyed each other’s confidence for any considerably longer period. A Hindu regards this social separation, not from Muslims only but from other Hindu castes also, as a blessing for the purity of his religion. If, therefore, on a fair

¹⁸ Ayesha Jalal, “Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab’s Role in the Partition of India”, p-2183

*trial, it has been found that the Hindus and Muslims cannot live happily together as parts of one India nation, let them separate...We do not wish to see the two communities united like those wretched twins from Siam...constant plague to the other...tormented by each other's infirmities and doomed to perish miserably by each other's dissolution.*¹⁹

Santram was not the only one to believe that Pakistan was a way out for both Hindus and Muslims against this age-old rivalry. He was however, one of the few who believed that communalism originated and got stronger from caste division. For Santram, Pakistan was not the future; it was already the present; a reality which existed due to the faults of Hindus. Any version of unity which then came out from Hindus was only temporary because division was a distinct part of their culture. Ambedkar took this argument further and said that these castes get united against common enemy, i.e. Muslims but as soon as the communal threat passes away, they get back to being indifferent towards each other. "A caste has no feeling that is affiliated to other castes", Ambedkar argued, "except when there is a Hindu-Moslem riot."²⁰ He blamed that this unity was only on temporary basis only for it existed only when communal antagonism got stronger than caste disparity.

Gordon says that the fear of Hindus stood corrected when Moplah's uprising in Malabar in 1921 became a reality. The Khilafat leaders had created this aura of aggravated Islam with their talks of holy war. There were efforts from both the ends of Congress and the Khilafat Committee to show their united spirits but the cracks were appearing and the alliance was falling.²¹ Fear was the operative key behind the reactionary politics of Arya Samaj and Singh Sabhas, but more than

¹⁹ Santram B.A., "Pakistan Scheme and caste system", *Tribune*, May 2, 1940, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

²⁰B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, Thackers Publishers, Bombay, 1945, p-171

²¹Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926", p-163

that it was tussle for power and jobs. It was mostly fear of losing power and hence the question of identity was raised by the leaders to attract masses under their respective banners. The public opinion might have been directed towards 'saving Hinduism', 'saving Sikhism' or 'saving Islam' but the central motivation for all the communities was 'saving power'. This is the reason why so many reformatory bodies could not help but join in politics; *Ad Dharm* joint Unionist Party, Arya Samaj's and Hindu Mahasabha's members were on and off important members of Congress as well. However, the reality for the masses was different from that of their leaders. The ongoing struggle between proponents of Islam and Arya Samaj resulted in the assassination of the Arya Samaj leader Pandit Lekh Ram in 1897 and this was just the beginning of the communal violence which was soon to follow.

Santram tried hard to promote inter-caste and inter-religious companionship. However, the rifts within Hinduism were never really gone but at the same time his work was getting some recognition. According to 1931 census,

*A tendency was noticeable for persons of low castes, well placed in life, to return no caste, and there had been a propaganda in this connection, particularly by the Jat Pat Torak Mandal (an association designed to do away with the caste system). But only a very few of the Brahmanic Hindus have refrained from returning their caste although there was a considerable propaganda against the return of caste, particularly that emanating from the Jat Pat Torak Mandal.*²²

²² The Census of India 1931, Punjab Census Report, Delhi, 1931, p-325

It is to be noted here that the report says ‘persons of lower castes’, i.e. the tendency to return no caste was more popular in the lower castes. Census report further verifies that only a handful upper caste Hindus especially Brahmins participated in this agenda and returned no caste²³, proving people were still interested in maintaining the *status quo* in Hinduism. Hence, though the upper caste organisations were in full support of *shuddhi*, there was no interest in removing the caste names themselves or to rehabilitate those who underwent *shuddhi*. In fact *shuddhi* was just used as a tool to stop their ‘own’ people from ‘lower castes’ from converting and to send a strong message to other communities that they were ready to fight back for representation. This further promoted the feeling of competition and mutual distrust within the communities in Punjab.

The feeling of exclusivity was not limited to Hindus; Muslims too operated as per their vested interests. Gilmartin says that post the decline of the Mughal rule and under the imperial rule, the Muslim identity was lost as well. Thus, the religious leaders like the *ulamas* and *pirs* were trying to find that old position of respect and power through public speeches, debates, and print-media and finally by reviving the past. During the national movement the *ulamas* got divided as pro-Khilafat and anti-Khilafat. The pro-Khilafat section wanted the old glory of Islam to be revived but they had to face some hesitation on the account that another section of Muslim leaders did not want to enter into an open conflict with the British regime. Gilmartin attributes the communal character to the city and Islamic character to the countryside. He argues that since the colonial structure was inclining towards a democratic system, these two characters were thereby clashing. The Muslims of the city were participating in national movement, getting involved in identity struggle, whilst the Muslims of rural Punjab were more submissive towards colonial

²³ *ibid*, 1931, p-357

structure and preferred minding their own respective business. Their political interest revolved more or less around local issues and that's why the Unionist Party got its support from them.²⁴

Jalal says that events of the late 1920s pushed the 'inclusive nationalism' towards 'exclusive communitarianism'²⁵ but that is an understatement in the eyes of Santram. The latter believes and tries proving as well, that inclusiveness had never been our strong pursuit, especially for Hindus.

Owing to their caste restrictions, Hindus are not an organized majority. They are like a heap of sand particles. Muslims are increasing and Hindus are decreasing in every part of India. Hindus cannot absorb newcomers from other religion on account of their caste system. Their Shudi[sic] and Achhutodhar movements have failed on account of their pride of caste. The result is that there is practically Pakistan even at present in Sindh, NWF Province, the Punjab and Bengal.²⁶

Ambedkar in *Pakistan or Partition of India* says that from 1920 to 1940 a civil war brewed over between the men of both religions, Hindus and Muslims and despite the frantic efforts of Gandhi communal hostilities kept piling up. He pointed out that the amount of savagery and barbarism both the communities projected over each other screamed "two nations". He blamed Indians in general for not believing in common goals and taking motivation only from local or self-interest. He felt disappointed that there was no desire for commonality and unity and that even the

²⁴ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan, Volume 7 of Comparative studies on Muslim Societies*, p-9-64

²⁵ Ayesha Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2183

²⁶ Santram B.A., "Can a Brahman Treat a Muslim as a Brother, Untouchability movement failed due to Hindu caste pride, Muslims have grievances which must be redressed", *The Sunday Observer*, March 29, 1942, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

popular mass leaders, despite their claims of representing all the communities, were unsuccessful in bringing all communities under one banner of brotherhood. The carnage which the people of India laid down without feeling any remorse or empathy proved that Congress' version of nationalism was shallow as people had no unity amongst themselves. When the reality of nationalism was shallow then Ambedkar felt no point in sticking with 'one nation' theory. If we are divided, Ambedkar opined, we should accept it and embrace it willingly in the form of partition or there will be further unnecessary bloodshed.²⁷

Both Santram and Ambedkar expected homogeneity under heterogeneous essence of Indian culture but while Ambedkar focused more on having commonality Santram emphasized on inclusiveness which gave more space to diverse spectrum instead of a forced unity.

एक हिंदू जब दूसरे हिंदू से मिलता है वह उसका पहला सवाल होता है आप कौन होते हैं? दूसरे के ऐसे जवाब में मैं हिंदू तो कहूँ पूछने वाले की तसल्ली नहीं होती। वह फिर से उसकी उपजाति, गोत्र पूछता है। इसकी वजह से यह है कि हकीकत में हिंदू कोई है ही नहीं। यहां तो कोई ब्राह्मण है कोई राजपूत या कोई जाट, इसलिए जब किसी हिंदू पर कोई मुसीबत आती है तो उसकी बिरादरी और जात वाले ही उसकी मदद को आते हैं। जब कोई आदमी कहता है कि मैं मुसलमान हूँ या इसाई हूँ तो पूछने वाले कि उसके इस जवाब से तसल्ली हो जाती है। वह फिर उससे नहीं पूछता कौन मुसलमान या कौन इसाई।²⁸

(When Hindus meet they ask each other *Which one are you?* If the person replies that I am a Hindu, that answer is not enough and he is asked again about his caste and *gotra*, implying that being Hindu is not a complete identity, in fact caste is the only identity in Hindus. We are either Brahman or Rajput or Jaat and the Hindus help only those from their own caste. If a person says

²⁷ Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, p-167-171

²⁸ Santram B.A. *Kaun Jaat*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, 1957,) Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

that I am a Muslim or a Christian, no further questions are asked. Unlike Hindus, their identity is simply just that.)

While Santram puts the blame on Arya Samaj and Hindus for being stubborn and creating divisions in the society first under the banner of caste system and later under the banner of religion, Ambedkar on the other hand holds Muslims equally responsible for this stagnated culture. Ambedkar blames Muslims for their apprehension towards future and modernity. He says that Muslims are so involved in their perpetual struggle against Hindus that they have put everything else, including reformation and progress, on the back-foot. This is the primary reason why Muslims are not supporting democratic rule because they believe that as per the majority rule power will shift to Hindus and they cannot tolerate that. They can accept being a part of a rotten polity but they cannot tolerate being a part of Hindu dominant polity. Hence, Ambedkar said Pakistan solves this problem for all. It frees both the communities from the fear of enslavement and encroachment. Once this balance is restored through separate constitutions he believes there is hope that at least then these communities will prioritize social issues and get working on bettering the lives of their people. He saw Pakistan not as a threat but as a solution.²⁹ Both Ambedkar and Santram saw something rotten in both the communities which according to them around the 1940s had almost made it impossible for them to survive happily together.

Santram also blames the self-appointed leaders of the national movement for not putting a stop to such religious conflicts and says,

²⁹ Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, p-206-216

*These men dare not touch the root cause of animosity. Instead of removing it, they try to conceal it. Religion is made the scapegoat and blamed for all troubles.*³⁰

The very fact that post partition, many Hindus chose to stay in Pakistan and many Muslims stayed back in India proves that, while for some, identity revolved around their religion but for many others it revolved around their land. Therefore, space is equally crucial in understanding the events that manifested in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a failure on the behalf of the national movement leaders that instead of figuring out a way to entangle the complexities around caste, identity and religion they willfully ignored these issues. By not addressing the problem at its origin these leaders enforced their idea of freedom and democracy which was not acceptable to all and thereby intentionally or unintentionally pushed the concept of multiple nations.

To further Ambedkar's argument for commonality, Bipan Chandra believes that the argument of identity crisis is absolutely right. Indeed people wanted to belong, but since a common national identity was not available, this new social consciousness drove them towards "**false consciousness of the past**" that was communalism.³¹ This consciousness was further intensified by all the varieties of difference already present, caste, tribe etc. He emphasizes that when communal issues are discussed, it is portrayed as if Hindus and Muslims were two separate entities which lacked unity but it veils the fact that these entities held no unity within themselves either. Chandra remarks that heterogeneity of the country was seen as a problem but the heterogeneity of the community itself was not even accepted. When there were no homogenous

³⁰ Santram B.A., "Caste system must go", *Tribune*, December 25, 1942, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

³¹ Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* in Romila Thapar, *Historians of Modern India and Communalism* (ed.), , People's Publishing House, 1987, pp.40-42

communities then how can there be a possibility of a homogenous nation consisting of the same communities. When there were constant inner conflicts it was irrational to demand peace on the outside. Chandra like Santram contests this idea of communalism where it was assumed that if on local polity level, Hindus and Muslims were not able to co-exist then it implied that on a religious basis too they had issues against each other. Chandra argues that while throwing in claims of rigid religious feelings why it is forgotten that Hindus and Muslims even separately lacked unity. They were not homogeneous communities themselves, so putting up the expectation that they would peacefully coexist with other communities was impossible. It is a known and accepted fact that India is a country of diversity then why were Hindus or Muslims as communities seen as a whole unit with no internal conflicts. He blames the communalist writers who ignored any other factors contributing to the tension and put the entire blame on religion.³²

In continuation to Bipan's argument, if we see Jalal's stand, the picture gets clearer. Religion was just faith for some but for some it was the question of identity. A person can still live without faith but not without an identity. The social violence which caught under the radar of communalism was actually a struggle for identity. Both Jalal and Chandra argue that the warfare in Punjab was not about faith, it was about identity. Jalal comments that while communities fought with each other yet the majority was against the idea of partition on the basis of religion.³³

While many sociologists and historians opine that religion was the reason which drove the county to the brink of civil war, Jalal brings in other factors, i.e. majoritarianism. She discusses at length the 'alternative visions of nationalism' which became a stark reality of Punjab and challenged the Congress' version of undivided national movement. While oriental school blames

³² *ibid*, p-41-42

³³ Ayesha Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2187

the distinct past of the sub-continent for the communal atrocities, Jalal looks at the present and blames the majoritarianism of the Punjab which brought such a dark phase over the region. She believes that it was intolerance on one end and fear on the other which drove humanity away from the minds of the people. She makes a strong case of how hegemony of one community operated in the state and comments that the anarchical rule of the dominant was becoming the new political overtone of the region.³⁴

Jalal further argues that demand for a separate state was wrongly interpreted as religious communalism whereas actually it was a revolt against homogeneity. Their demand was sovereignty and getting rid of concepts like majoritarianism and minoritarianism. By claiming colonial privilege again and again a lot of attempts towards communal solidarity actually went in vain since it became a race. This feeling of competitiveness created rifts within the broader spectrum of Indian nationalism. She adds that Indian nationalism was tainted with religious ‘majoritarianism and minoritarianism’ where the lines between nationalism and communalism were actually blurred implying that one community’s idea of nationalism was seen as communalism by the other one and vice versa.³⁵ In this equation while Congress tried taking the sole charge of nationalism it drove the minority forces to the edge of communalism. Further when the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS gave the call for Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan the mirage of such expected sovereignty was shattered. Muslims were attracted to Muslim League’s lucrative idea of ‘separate nation’ because the party which claimed to represent all (Congress) had at times the same individuals from Hindu Mahasabha and they seemed to be a part of one and the same majoritarianism. Jalal believes that every political party and its leaders were playing bluff over

³⁴ *ibid*, p-2185

³⁵ *ibid*, p-2183

partition to undermine the other party/community but the plan did not work for any of them as no one called out that bluff in the fear of losing face.³⁶

Like Jalal, Chandra also says that the need for identity was obvious and since the new national identity was not available, this search for identity led to the older, more familiar identities however unsuitable they might be in the new situation. Identity around religion was of course not the only one available. Caste, language, tribe and region also could, and did, serve the purpose. Chandra argued that it would be incorrect to treat communalism as a remnant of the past or as the revival of traditional ideology. Communalism was, and is, the false consciousness of the historical process of the last 100 years being created in the present. Later, as we shall see, under the impact of contemporary communal politics, it also became, in the hands of historians, a false representation of the past.³⁷

The Orientalist School of Thought believed and wrote that if not for British rule, India would have remained its old barbaric self. Gobinder Singh, in *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, taking forward this point of view argues that religion in most of these societies (second and third world countries) is not separate from state. Religion instead gets internalized in the political and economic functioning of the state.³⁸ This implies that India did not just directly switch from colonial mode to nationalist mode but also made a deadly mix of religious fervor and nationalism where at times the two could not even be separated. Singh's argument implies that India always lacked ideas like 'Secularism' and during the freedom movement different versions of nationalisms thus emerged due to their different religious colors and that due to our backward

³⁶ *ibid*, p-2185-88

³⁷ Bipan Chandra, *Historians of Modern India and Communalism* in Romila Thapar, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (ed), pp.40-41

³⁸ Singh, *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, p-24

past, our politics was a symbol of communal divide. However, Harjot Oberoi strongly makes the case that it was the doing of the British which brought the rigidity of religion in the politics and this was done entirely for their self-interest. According to Oberoi, before 19th century religious categories like, 'Hindus', 'Muslims', 'Sikhs' were ambiguous and fluid at least in Punjab, there was no purity or exact definition attached with these terms. He goes on to blame Tat Khalsa for its rigidity in making the boundaries distinct between the communities but more importantly he blames colonial rule for causing the divide through sheer ignorance.³⁹

Even the colonial archive observed that the communal tension was increasing by leaps and bounds in the province but the reason it enlists shuns responsibility for the same. The 1931 Census of Punjab showed that the strength of minor sects was very much on the decrease owing to a general tendency of modern times to do away with sub-sects in the interests of the community as a whole. As 1931 Census notes,

In recent times the importance of the figures of religion has been greatly enhanced on account of their relation to the strength of representation of the various communities in the legislature... In fact as observed...communal consciousness has been growing during the last decade and has occasionally manifested itself in rather serious Hindu-Muslim riots.⁴⁰

There was a trend of forming bigger and more powerful communities which can fight for dominance in the region. As per the Census report of 1931, for the first time in 1931 Urdu lost its separate position in Punjab and both Urdu and Hindi were recorded as Hindustani. Savarkar opined that ensuring that Hindi gets the status of national language is not unfair or forceful in

³⁹ Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, p-418

⁴⁰ The Census of India 1931, Punjab Census Report, Delhi, 1931, p-290

any way as Hindi deserves this status since forever. He concluded that only Hindustani can represent Hindustan.⁴¹ This might have also posed a threat to the Muslims who were anyways uncertain about their sense of belongingness. As they were nearing democratic free India they could feel power slipping within their hands and that further stirred the communal consciousness. People like Santram were getting more and more dissatisfied with the presence of the ‘other’ especially in the context of language. For the Northern provinces he promoted Hindi to be the national language which made the situation for other tongues even worse.

*The whole atmosphere of the province is being surcharged with Urdu words secretly and imperceptibly. I request the lovers of Hindi and Hindu Dharma to rise and protest strongly against the teaching of such adulterated Hindi to their children.*⁴²

It is not that Santram had something against Urdu; in fact a lot of his writings even post independence was in Urdu only. He simply had more devotion towards Hindi language as he hoped that a common language would bring the country together. This devotion became less radical post partition but it still stayed. He was against the use of provincial languages (like Punjabi) as well and said that **“Like narrow nationalism, narrow provincialism is also injurious...we should cease to think in terms of narrow territories”**.⁴³ He believed that if we allowed the provincial languages to prosper they would keep creating further divides in an already divided nation. Post-partition even Santram’s opinion about national language became less radical as he realized that a common language did not guarantee unity. He felt that as long as

⁴¹ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva Who is a Hindu*, p-18

⁴² Santram B.A., “Hindi in the Punjab”, *Tribune* November 27, 1940, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁴³ Santram B.A., “Detractors of Hindi”, July 7, 1949, (newspaper not mentioned) Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

people do not sit together to eat and marry, and practice these basic norms of a healthy functioning society, no amount of commonality could keep them united.⁴⁴ He finally called it out and said that there are too many nations in the country and for them to coexist is becoming more and more impossible because of the rigidity of the communities.

On one hand where fear instilled consciousness, on the other hand, intolerance did the same. These feelings were in fact mutual on both ends. Both communities were insecure about the new political setup which was coming up and wanted to have some control over these changes. Santram too questioned this struggle for identity of Muslims and said,

*Our Muslim brothers have lived in Hindustan for centuries now, their body is built by the air and land of the country, they die on the same land and yet they sing in Arabic and Farsi, name their children in Arabic and even pray in Arabic.*⁴⁵

He further argued,

About 95percent of the Sikhs are Jats or agriculturist castes and about 99.5 percent of the advocates of Hindi belong to Brahmin, Khatri and Bania caste. The Jats had no main connections with Banias hence their interests are not common. This is why the Sikhs try to make language question a stepping stone for their political domination. Though it is a bitter truth, nevertheless it is no less truth that there are as many nations in India as there are caste and you

⁴⁴ Santram B.A., "Caste and Language", *Tribune*, August 26, 1949 Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁴⁵ *Yugantar*, 1932-35, journal edited by Santram B.A., published from Lahore, Microfilms section in NMML, Taken from *Hans* (journal), December, 1932

*have yet to wield them into a nationality if you want to maintain your freedom.*⁴⁶

He failed to relate that the alienation which the low-castes were facing was at times faced by the people of other communities as well. Calling them 'Vidharmis' (impure) and foreigners did not help the case for unity either. Muslims took this challenge to language as a threat to their culture and practices. This intolerance was new and reflected that the air in Punjab was filled with doubts and insecurity. Muslims were treated as foreigners and that mentality went a long way in pushing them towards the other side of the border. As Santram says, Hindus were not a very inclusive body from the beginning of the times with their discriminatory *varnashrama* and that made it impossible for Muslims to feel at home in India. Partition was not the symbol of two kinds of nationalisms, instead it symbolized a basic human nature; desire for home.

There are not only two nations- Hindu and Muslim- in India, but as many nations as there are caste, for the social, political and economic interest of the caste are not common. Untouchability is no isolated disease. It is a natural consequence of the caste system. It cannot be removed if caste remains.

This is a statement of heavy heart and anguish from Santram. Commenting after four months of partition, it is visible in the dialogue that Santram experienced fatigue in failing to keep not just his community united but his nation as well. He blamed the caste system for creating innumerable rifts in the country and was quite certain by then that there was no hope for a united India unless the caste issue was dissolved completely.

⁴⁶ Santram B.A., "Hindi controversy in east Punjab", October 28, 1949, (newspaper not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A, NMML

In peaceful times, Santram's problem with other religions, unlike other Hindu reform movements, was quite limited. Instead he had a lot of sympathy for them as he believed that they were just his brothers and sisters who merely converted and now it was the responsibility of his Mandal and other Hindu social reformatory bodies to not just get them back home but also to prevent others from going. He did not care much for *shuddhi* but the incidents of unsuccessful 'conversions' surely made him upset and for that he blamed Arya Samaj for not uplifting its own community. He argued very strongly in the favor of Muslims when their loyalty was questioned during communal riots, and said that "*Patriotism is not the monopoly of the Caste Hindus only.*"⁴⁷

Third Nationalism

Whenever communalism in India is discussed, two communities are targeted the most, Hindus and Muslims where either party is a perpetrator and the other one a victim. However, in the case of Punjab, there was a third party too which needs to be accounted for i.e. Sikhs. The Sikhs' search for identity had driven them far from Hinduism and there was a large section which wanted nothing to do with Hinduism.

Arya Samaj had close relations with the Sikhs of Punjab during its initial years; in fact some of its core committee members were from Sikh community. This equation changed when in conferences Arya Samajis started comparing Dayanand Saraswati and Guru Nanak, claiming that the latter might be a nice man but he lacked in education and by that logic had lesser understanding of the universal truths as compared to Dayanand Saraswati. Sikhs, who recently had lost political dominance in the region, saw that they were losing their grip in the social

⁴⁷Santram B.A., "Cause of Failure", *Tribune*, July 23, 1945, also in *Hindutva Jo Hindutva Ko Hi Le Duba*, Jat Pat Torak Mandal Prakashan, Purani Bassi, Hoshiarpur, 1962,) Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

hierarchy as well. In the 'Land of Gurus', the Gurus were being targeted to establish supremacy over them and that was unacceptable for the Sikhs. These actions of Arya Samaj infuriated them and they did not just break all ties with Arya Samaj but also formed a separate body i.e. Singh Sabha to serve the interests of Sikhs (the Singh Sabha movement came into being in 1873 in Amritsar for revitalization of Sikhism and turned radical later in the 1880s).⁴⁸

Things were strained between Hindus and Sikhs because of the whole idea around identity and this animosity with the Muslims was even older. The Imperial Gazette of India (1886) traces this religious rivalry further back to the Mughal period and points out that in the 16th century a power was rising as a reaction to Mughal monarchy in the form of Sikhism.⁴⁹ It recognizes the third version of nationalism way before other historians and forces us to shift our focus from Hindu versus Muslims to Sikhs against Muslims as well. One thing which united all the communities under one banner was fear of turning into a Christian nation. Juergensmeyer points out this fear and says that on October 19th, 1892 a certain article in *Tribune* claimed that Punjab had quite a high rate of conversions and it might see a spike in Christian demography, both Hindu and Sikh elite were shook and that made them strive for higher numbers by any means including strong claim for separate identity.⁵⁰

Baljeet Singh contests that 'Sikhism is a religion without caste'. He argues that the Sikh Gurus vehemently opposed and denounced the caste system and that is the primary difference between Sikhism and Hinduism.⁵¹ Singh points out that against the Mughal persecution Sikhs might have

⁴⁸ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877-1905', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.32, No.3 (May, 1973), p-464,

⁴⁹ Imperial Gazette of India (1886), pp-262-266, accessed from archive.org on April 14, 2020

⁵⁰ Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: the Social vision of the Untouchables*, p-181

⁵¹ Baljeet Singh, "Religion, Social Rebellion and Deras- a case study of Punjab", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.70 (2009-2010), p-1161

made a temporary alliance with the Hindus but that alliance was weak and broke at the first sight of disturbance between Arya Samaj and Sikhs. If the Mughals were militant in spirit, so were the Sikhs. In the 1920s the Singh Sabhas led a movement to get rid of the Hindu Mahants hegemony in the Sikh Gurudwaras. One of the main demands of the movement was ‘unquestioned entrance to Sikh places of worship’ to all; it was the beginning of de-hinduisation.⁵² When the Singh Sabha leadership chose to assert a separate and distinct identity to underline their boundary demarcation from the Hindus at the beginning of the 20th century, the key differentiating factor they referred to, was rejection of ‘*varnashram*’ and purity-pollution syndrome which were central to Hinduism.⁵³

Ronki Ram demolishes all these claims by Sikhs of being without caste. He points out how there are separate cremation grounds for Dalit Sikhs and upper caste Sikhs. He argues that the first Singh Sabha movement and later Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee from 1926-33 passed all kinds of resolutions supporting the cause for equality for all Sikhs but there were no concrete efforts made in that direction. Hence, today, as a result, there is absolutely no difference between the Dalit Sikhs in Punjab and their Dalit Hindu counterparts.⁵⁴ Hence, the tussle for Sikhs to identify separate from Hindus was not completely socially motivated (that the former were not castiest like latter), there were political and economic reasons to this separation as well. Harish Puri too points out the discrepancies in the class structure propagated by the Sikh Gurus. He argues that the Gurus intentionally put the Jats in the position of power as the latter were known for being indifferent towards the caste system. However, this sudden accession to the seat

⁵² *ibid*, p-1162

⁵³ Harish K. Puri, “Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No. 26 (Jun. 28- Jul. 4, 2003) p-2693

⁵⁴ Ronki Ram, “Untouchability in India with a difference: Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion, and Caste Conflicts in Punjab”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.44, No.6 (November/December 2004), p-899

of authority resulted in strong Jat hegemony and they became an influential class which dictated the terms culturally and socially. If not caste, they formed a distinct class and the difference between them and other Sikhs was quite visible.⁵⁵

While discussing the contemporary situation in regards to Sikhs and the Deras, Baljeet Singh comments that the Radha Soamis, Sacha Sauda, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Divya Jyoti Sansthan, Bhanjarawala and Ravi Dasis are among the non-Sikh deras. Some of them are very popular among the Punjabi diaspora and have overseas branches in almost all the continents of the world. The composition of these deras is along caste lines. Though the majority of followers in every case come from dalits, backward castes and the poor Jat Sikh peasantry, their command is still in the hands of the upper caste.⁵⁶ This proves that despite all its claims of being ‘purity-pollution’ free, Sikhism too got trapped in the vicious circle of domination and hegemony.

Kenneth Jones believes in the idea of Sikhs being the militant race. He says that Sikhs were the defensive community since the time of Islamic warfare and they carried on that tendency during the time of Ranjit Singh, followed up by the British conquest and then eventually against Hinduism. In leading the de-hinduisation movement, Sikhism took an aggressive approach. Jones, however, also mentions that since the clause of ‘martial races’ worked in the favor of orthodox Sikhs i.e., the ones who are not idol worshippers, believe in 5 Ks et al, that gave them a nudge to practice orthodoxy and remain separate from the Hindu identity because they got boost up in military recruitments.⁵⁷ Sikhs knew that having this distinct identity had its economic perks and that certainly added incentive to their need for separate identity.

⁵⁵ Harish K. Puri, “Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective”, p-2694-95

⁵⁶ Baljeet Singh, “Religion, Social Rebellion and Deras- a case study of Punjab”, p-1166

⁵⁷ Kenneth W. Jones, “Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877-1905”, pp.459-460

Mushirul Hasan says that though Sikhs formed only 14 percent of population in Punjab yet they claimed 30 percent seats in legislature on the premise that they were the previous rulers of the province and contributed largely in the army services.⁵⁸ This proves that like every other community, Sikhs too had political and economic ambitions. A.S. Narang adds to this theory and says that since their loss of numerous sacred shrines in Western Punjab to colonial forces along with their cultural centers, the Sikhs were trying hard to regain their strength by moving to other parts of India. However, when they moved in, Hindus felt displaced. This clash of political and economic interests made the communities further suspicious, hostile and aggressive towards each other.⁵⁹

On the issue of Hindu-Sikh identity Grewal comments that the Khalsa Panth was indeed 'Third panth' and to answer such doubts Kahn Singh wrote '*Ham Hindu Nahin*' first in Devnagri (1897) to address Hindus primarily and later in Gurmukhi (1898) for his Sikh brethren. This book became the source of Sikh identity, rejecting any association with Hinduism or Islam. Kahn Singh says that this separate identity is not a colonial imperative instead Sikhism has had a distinct identity since the sixteenth century or at least the consciousness for it. Colonialism just put a new perspective to the religious identities; it did not introduce any novel idea, but Grewal points out that even though part of this claim was true but assertion of separate identity was not a selfless act from the Singh Sabha. It was a pragmatic step taken to gain educational, political, and other benefits from the government.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Mushirul Hasan, "Communalism in the Provinces: A Case Study of Bengal and the Punjab, 1922-26", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 33 (Aug.16, 1980), p-1401

⁵⁹ A.S. Narang, "Politics of Alienation in Punjab", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No.4, Golden Jubilee Number: State Politics in India (Oct.-Dec. 1987), p-546

⁶⁰J.S. Grewal, *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition-History, Literature and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp-277-304

While Grewal says that it was part colonial policies and part self-consciousness which revolutionized the Sikhs' idea of identity, Vidyalankar credits the Arya Samaj for the same. However, this new consciousness came less from the western exposure and more from the biased policies of the empire. Under British rule being a Sikh came with its own set of perks and prestige and it was certainly a motif to claim a distinct identity. This is also why for centuries the same Hindus who took barely interest in Sikhs or their identity now suddenly found their growing population as a threat and were motivated to bring back them within the folds of Hinduism. The insecurity that Islam or Christianity will take over was another major reason behind *Shuddhi* movement.⁶¹ However, they treated the reform organization of each others' communities as attention seeking practices claiming identity in these times only for political gains while they themselves were busy in the same attempt. Santram blames the upper caste Sikhs for provoking feelings of separatism for their individual interests.

*It is chiefly the Jats who have been vehemently opposing the right of the Untouchables to purchase land and be declared agriculturists. Narrow caste patriotism is so rampant among the Hindus that we have separate caste schools, caste restaurants and caste dharamshalas...We want neither Jatasthan nor Sikhastan nor Pakistan. We want a free Punjab where all people could live freely and enjoy equal rights not only political but social and economic also.*⁶²

Revivalist Hindu groups getting threatened by new Sikh identity was not a one sided phenomenon. The Sikhs were threatened too. The concept of monolithic Hinduism as propagated

⁶¹ Satyaketu Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, Vol.4*, Arya Swadhyaya Kendra, New Delhi, 1986, p-105

⁶²Santram B.A., "Province for Jats?", *Civil and Military Gazette*, May 24, 1947, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

by Brahma Samaj was seen as a threat by Sikhs but the real challenge came from Dayanand Saraswati as it was more upfront. Grewal says that Dayanand Saraswati was brutal and opinionated towards other religions. The way he openly criticized Sikhism and the Gurus proved that he had no space for Sikh traditions in his reformation model. The fact that for Sikhs these reformative *shuddhis* were happening in public where their hairs were being cut off for everyone to see was proof of such brutality and its symbolism was not too subtle to be ignored by the Sikhs.⁶³

Puri points out that in the spirit of communal competition and assertion of identity, each religious community in Punjab got more involved in the issues of untouchability, conversion and reconversion. It is another issue that this movement soon was dominated by high castes and they concentrated their efforts in securing their own personal interests. Hence in 1936 when Ambedkar was considering joining Sikhism post giving up on Hinduism, there were whispers of doubts amongst the Jat Sikhs. They were afraid that they would have to hand over the Darbar Sahib to Chuhras (low caste). They were also threatened by Ambedkar's entry into the fold that he would cause political imbalance and take away their position in the society. The apprehension against Ambedkar, demolished the notion that Sikhism was a liberated religion free from discrimination. Even if the religion was comparatively liberal, it too was controlled by the upper castes and was used for their political interests. They saw Ambedkar as a threat and instead of welcoming him, they rejected his arrival.⁶⁴ Thus, inherent prejudice which was essence of the caste system became a crucial part of communal rifts as well where Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism contested against each other for the position of supremacy.

⁶³ J.S. Grewal, *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition-History, Literature and Identity*, p-294-95

⁶⁴ Harish K. Puri, "Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective", p-2697-2698

Role of the British Rulers in Communal Antagonism

Thomas Metcalf in *Ideologies of the Raj* discusses how Orientalists like Alexander Dow and Robert Orme in an attempt to make Oriental despotism justifiable painted the rulers before them in a negative shade. It was the doing of such colonial writing that certain stereotypes about Muslim rulers were set. Muslim rulers were called savage (who ruled by swords and slavery) and womanizers who brought the practice of polygamy and debauchery with them.⁶⁵ To further prolong their agenda of 'white man's burden' they went on describing a native Hindu as a perfect match for Islamic despotism as he was effeminate and submissive, suitable to be dominated by rough and tough masculine Muslim invaders.⁶⁶ This discourse/narrative was intended to humiliate the two dominant communities (Hindus and Muslims) and to prove that they were no better than savages before the British arrival. This image also puts into perspective how the colonial archive looked at women as weak and fragile beings. It also represents the intensity of the colonial after-effects because when the call for national movement was given India was portrayed as Mother India shackled in chains by the British and its sons were expected to free her. The portrayal of fragile Indian women who needed saving took away their agency to speak about their traumas and experiences as an individual. Women were seen only as victims but the nuances of their experiences were ignored, instead they were seen as one and the same with no distinct identity. An upper caste woman's experiences were equalized with that of lower castes and their emancipation was directed only towards one goal, to make the lives of men easier. This theme addressing the position of women in Hindu reformations will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

⁶⁵ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India, III.4, Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge University Press, 2008 pp-7-9

⁶⁶ *ibid*, pp.38-48

To counter such humiliation these communities were forced to reflect on the past to seek some validation or glory. This attempt led them to seek not just a separate identity but also made them competitive about which was better and who dominated whom. H.H. Risley (Census commissioner) also emphasized on using the caste system as a means to keeping the Indian society intact and thus caste was upheld as a “*regulatory form of civil society appropriate for India under the circumstances of its limited political and social development*”.⁶⁷

Caste thus became a version of colonial vision which justified their despotic rule and maintained it as well. Bernard Cohn observes the Censuses and comments that during the nineteenth century caste and religion were the two most important sociological tools crucial in understanding the character of Indian society and its people. He says that as the Census data kept coming, the British army was also shuffled and re-organized on the basis of ‘martial-races’. This discrimination was not just limited to the army recruitments but also transmitted to public services and educational opportunities. It was assessed which community was participating more in the revolt against British rule and based on that certain perks were given or taken. This policy of ‘carrot and stick’ went a long way in affirming British supremacy in the region. Cohn accepts that caste, its origin and function played a pivotal role in deciding policy making during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ But he rejects the theory that it was the doing of Census which brought the Indian population face to face with their identity. He blames that the enumerators themselves were responsible for any feeling of distinct identity or segregation they had based on caste, religion etc.

⁶⁷ Harish K. Puri, “Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective”, p-180

⁶⁸ Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the historians and other essays, The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia*, 1987, OUP, Delhi, New York, p-243

According to the Census report of Punjab, 1931, from 1881 to 1931 “*The figures for Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims for purely British Territory have during this period altered from 40.29 to 26.83, from 6.58 to 12.99 and from 51.72 to 56.54 per cent., respectively, and for the Punjab States from 54.94, 15.41 and 29.45 to 46.26, 20.56 and 32.53 per cent, respectively.*”⁶⁹ This data proved that Hindu population was on decline and thus was used to evoke the religious sentiments of the Hindus and a movement began to reclaim those who were lost through conversion. However, this was not a unique phenomenon limited to one religion only. Earlier Tat Khalsa had also given a call for ‘Sikhism in danger’ as they were trying to be identified separately from Hinduism.

The politics of representation was digging roots within the reform movements as well and the leaders as well as organisations were ready to do whatever it took to have a larger number in the Census so that they would get favored by colonial rule. The British also took advantage of the opportunity and presented Sikhs with lucrative positions based on ‘separate identity’. The colonial archive, i.e. Census, itself speaks that the agricultural tribes in the countryside of eastern and central Punjab were dropping Hinduism and adapting Sikhism for the upgraded social status that came with the latter.⁷⁰ There were even Zamindari scholarships established by the Punjab government for Sikhs and Hindu Rajputs which was nothing if not favoritism.⁷¹ Susan Bayly says that with the provision of the separate electorates in the Government of India Act of 1935 the stakes were much higher and the question of who precisely was to be classified as members

⁶⁹ The Census of India 1931, Punjab Census Report, Delhi, 1931, (National Archives of India-NAI), p-291

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 1931, p-294

⁷¹ Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the historians and other essays, The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia*, p-249

of the Hindu and Muslim 'communities' acquired more significance than ever before. This cut throat political race fanned the already existing communal distress.⁷²

As discussed in the previous chapter, land was a bone of contention between the two dominant communities (Hindus and Muslims) of the region. Barrier points out how this debt issue was taking a communal turn but the government was not ready to take any action. In west Punjab Muslim debtors were causing 'cow riots' to kill the Hindu moneylenders or to destroy debt records. One of the British officials at Dera Ismail Khan (1884), S.S. Thorburn could not see the plight of the Muslim peasants and asked the Government to review the situation claiming that if Hindus were allowed to dominate the militant Muslims, the latter might rebel against the colonial regime and thence, the interaction between these communities and their power dynamics needed to be controlled.⁷³

The official colonial reports which had no relation with social issues also started reflecting the communal consciousness in the region. For instance, Government of India Department of Revenue and Agriculture Land Surveys' report in 1920 stated,

Mr. T.W. Babonau (aged 52 years) Deputy Superintendent, Survey of India, in charge of No.2 Party has recently become a convert to Mohammedanism and married a Mohammedan wife. In the Indian Defence Force register, Mr. Babonau described himself as a European British subject. He has always passed as a Christian. He has a Christian wife residing in England, and 3 children, namely, two sons aged 23 and 14 respectively, and one daughter

⁷² Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p-260-61

⁷³ N. G. Barrier, "The Formulation and Enactment of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill", *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2(2), 1965, p- 148

aged 21. On 1st April 1918 Mr. Babonau was admitted as a convert to Mohammedanism in the Jama Masjid at Delhi under the name of Mr. Salim. On April 5th or 6th, Miss Mouze became a Mohammedan convert at the Jama Masjid, Delhi, and about April 10th Mr. Babonau was married to this lady at Delhi according to Mohammedan rites.⁷⁴

Even the land reports were stating how conversion was happening in the region and it was not just Hindus but the Christians as well who were getting influenced. These accounts are proof that the government operated under certain prejudices and stereotypes which through its officials and policies were engraved deeply in the minds of the ruled. It is curious though to notice that their empathy too was at times one sided only.

Hence, the colonial archive signifies how much importance was given to customary laws and to the rural population at least in the initial years of imperial rule. It also points out that the militant image of the Punjabis was well established after their role in the 1857 revolt. We need to see how colonial rule manipulated the inherent weakness of the Indian state and turned it into a bigger calamity. They are not solely responsible but they had their fair share and ill intentions involved. It becomes a little hard to accept that the British who ruled their colonies with a strong hand since forever suddenly were so weak that they had to leave the nation bloodied and divided.

Role of Congress in the communal rage

Punjab was not always a communal state but its unique position on the map made the situation different for the region. That Punjab was the hotspot for Hindu-Muslim conflicts was an agreed

⁷⁴ Survey of India reports, Cartography section, Reference number- 4146, Government of India Department of Revenue and Agriculture Land Surveys, 1920, NAI

idea. It was believed that from here only the communal wave spread all over India.⁷⁵ While some blamed Congress for its rigid communal national movement Romila Thapar on the other hand believes that the nature of anti-colonial movement was mostly secular and it was only during the final years of freedom movement that two separate nationalisms, i.e., Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism emerged.⁷⁶

However, these communal differences don't just emerge from nowhere; they are brewed and stewed for years and decades. Whenever the call for 'Ram Rajya' was given it was natural that certain communities would be insecure about their space in this ideal version of Hindu society. The national movement stirred up these emotions of 'sense of belonging' and while liberty was desired, security and sense of belonging were needed as well.

Gandhi's first response to the question of Hindu and Muslims being two separate states was published in *Harijan* 28th October 1939 where he stated that the claims of religious nationalism are false. He argued that India was one nation and those who said that Hindus and Muslims do not comprise one nation are working under false pretense. If the Muslims of China and England can be Chinese and English respectively, why the Muslims of India cannot be Indian. There are Christians and Parsis and many other religions in India as well, that does not imply that there are as many nations too. The Punjabi Muslim is same as the Punjabi Sikh and Punjabi Hindu as they all share the same cultural roots.⁷⁷

Something similar was in Santram's mind as well so he wrote an open letter to Jinnah, questioning why things were so different for Muslims in India than for the Muslims in the other

⁷⁵ Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2183

⁷⁶ Romila Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India*, Introduction, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2015, p-xix

⁷⁷ Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XXIX, p-410

parts of the world.⁷⁸ He did not just suspect the intentions of the Muslim League, he was equally if not more vocal about Congress' intentions as well. He argued that calls like *Hindu Pani* and *Musalman Roti* which Congressman Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan made at the Anti-Communal Conference are vague attempts. They will not resolve any issues for the problem is much more deep seated but Congress has failed yet again in understanding this. He attacks the leadership of the Congress by calling out their duplicity (especially of Malviya). He says,

*The Hindu young man has religiously become a free thinker and atheist and boasts of his irreligiousness yet he is socially very narrow minded and very conservative. He cries that he is neither a Hindu nor a Musalman but simply: Hindustani when speaking from the Congress platform, but in his practical social life he is nothing more than a Malviya or a Kaystha. His social life from birth to death is strictly communal and limited to the narrow caste.*⁷⁹

Not the colonial rule, neither the Arya Samaj nor the Hindu Mahasabha, in the eyes of Santram, Congress was the biggest culprit and responsible for the partition of India.

It is not Mr. Jinnah's attitude but the blunder committed by the Congress ignoring the social boycott of Moslems and of the touchable and the untouchable Sudras, based on caste prejudices by the high caste Hindus which is the greatest obstacle in the attainment of National Government...Mr. Jinnah has himself said many times that caste is the cause of India's slavery. Can anybody believe that a Jinnah-Gandhi Pact can ever make Moslems and the Sudras cease to feel the unjust social behavior of the high caste Hindus and to

⁷⁸Santram B.A. letter to M.A. Jinnah, 7 August, 1944, copy, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁷⁹ Santram B.A. "Hindu Pani", *Leader*, April 1941, (date not mentioned), Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

*live amicably? We cannot expect peace even if Pakistan be conceded. Therefore it is no use trying to corner Mr. Jinnah or laying blame on Mr. Churchill. It will not help India's cause in any way. You cannot build a magnificent palace of democratic Self-Government on the slippery sands of social inequality based on birth.*⁸⁰

Ambedkar too felt that if there was some inclusiveness in the Hindu religion and leaders not just preached but also practiced unity, the question for Pakistan would not have reached this disastrous stage. He blamed Hindu Mahasabha for being arrogant and Congress for being weak and people pleaser.⁸¹ Both Ambedkar and Santram were of the opinion that if Congress was not so ignorant and took into consideration the rifts in the society along the communal and castiest lines, it could have prevented partition in its making itself.

Santram suspected that even after partition the bloodshed was not going to stop because the leadership the British rulers left behind was weak and was just trying to make a fool out of the public.

लोगों को ढाँढस बंधा ने के लिए नेता लोग कहते हैं कि जब शासन बदलते हैं तो जनता को ऐसे कष्ट सहने ही पड़ते हैं, जनता को धैर्य रखना चाहिए। पर यह उनकी भूल है। राज्य परिवर्तन के समय गड़बड़ अवश्य होती है पर कष्ट उसको होता है जिससे बलात राज्य सत्ता ली जाती है, जिसके हाथ में राजसत्ता आती है वह तो सुखी होता है।

भारतीयों ने यह स्वराज्य लड़कर भी नहीं लिया यह तो अंग्रेजों का दान है। जर्मनी और रूस दो विभिन्न राष्ट्र थे, वह स्वतंत्र रक्षा के लिए लड़े थे, पर यहां तो अपने ही देश बंधु आपस में लड़ रहे

⁸⁰ Santram B.A., "No use trying to corner Mr. Jinnah, Lahore view on C.R.'s move, Talk of national government pure nonsense", *The Sunday Observer*, July 30, 1944, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁸¹ Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, pp-235-240

हैं। इसका दोष अंग्रेजों को नहीं दिया जा सकता, कारण यह है कि तीसरा मनुष्य तभी तक लड़ सकता है जब लड़ने वालों को ज्ञान ना हो कि वह लड़ रहा है। जब भारतीयों को ज्ञान है तब फिर भी क्यों लड़ते हैं? यह कल कुछ आज का भी नहीं है। अंग्रेजों के आगमन के पूर्व भी हिंदू मुसलमान आपस में लड़ते थे। वह लड़ते ना होते तो अंग्रेजों को पैर जमाने का अवसर ही ना मिलता।

सांप्रदायिकता का वेश केवल साधारण जनता तक ही सीमित नहीं रह गया... वह केवल प्रेम करो प्रेम करो कहने से दूर नहीं हो सकता। मुझे तो ऐसा दिख रहा है कि अंग्रेजों की छत्रछाया के दूर होते ही गृह युद्ध नहीं वरन नियमित रूप से पाकिस्तान का हिंदुस्तान पर आक्रमण होगा ...उस समय अराजकता सी फैल जाएगी।⁸²

(Our leaders are saying that during transfer of power it is only natural to face minor inconveniences but they are wrong here. Transfer of power is hard for those who lose it not for those who get it. We haven't even fought for this Swarajya, it is a charity from the British regime. Countries like Germany and Russia fought for their independence but in India people are just fighting each other. We cannot blame the British for this as a third party can instigate such a situation only when the other two are ignorant of the reality. When Indians know the reality, why are they still in conflict? It is not a story of one day, Hindus and Muslims have been fighting even before the arrival of Britishers, if not the latter would not have got an opportunity to colonize here. Communalism is now expanding beyond the local population. Just by saying we love each other we cannot get rid of this evil. It seems to me that when the British officially leave the country there will not be just civil wars but Pakistan will attack India on a daily basis as well and there will be just utter chaos all around.)

⁸² Santram B.A., "Pakistan Hindustan par Aakraman Karega", *Sansar*, May 4, 1947,) Private papers of Santram B.A., NMML

Chandra too blames Congress leadership and especially the approach of Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose and Ram Rajya model of Gandhi saying that how could Muslims be expected to get enthusiastic about a national movement based on the religious imagery, theology and practices of the Hindus? ⁸³ Bayly adds that Tilak and his Brahman nationalist contemporaries were widely portrayed by the British officials as seditious fanatics with a mission to install 'Brahman rule' in the subcontinent.⁸⁴ Thus, the model of nationalism which Congress represented and promoted was not the nationalism for all.

While Chandra blames the leaders of Congress, Jalal gives a clean chit to Lala Lajpat Rai while discussing communal tensions. She says that Lajpat's proposal in 1942 stating division of the two main Muslim-dominated provinces was not a prelude to a partition of India; it was a labored attempt to forestall such an eventuality. A partitioned Punjab and Bengal were to remain part of an undivided India and under Hindu majority rule.⁸⁵ Jalal says that while Lajpat Rai was correct when he protested against the separate electorates based on religion on the premise that it was in communal spirit, he himself gave a huge blow to the claims of inclusive nationalism when he explicitly defended the rights of just the Punjabi Hindus. Jalal argues that such actions proved to Muslims that the promises of equal citizenship were hollow and the reality of independent India would deny the Muslim community their rights in Punjab as a majority.

The prospects of Muslims did not seem bright in the free country as the proposal from Rai was to always treat Muslims like a minority even in the region of Punjab where they were undoubtedly in majority, but he also expected unconditional support from them in the national movement. In

⁸³ Chandra, *Historians of Modern India and Communalism*, in Romila Thapar, *Communalism and the Writing of the Indian History* (ed), p-44

⁸⁴ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV.3- Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, p-237

⁸⁵ Ayesha Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2183

1942 when he proposed division of Bengal and Punjab, he meant to keep these two Muslim dominated regions under the control of supreme Hindu majority. Jalal says that it was only fair that Muslims of Punjab could not accept to just give away their right of majority; a lot was being expected from them with no returns. This call for sovereignty was lopsided as it worked in favor of Hindus only. She doesn't question the intention behind the actions rather focuses her attention at the ignorance towards the gravity of the situation.⁸⁶

Jawed Naqvi poses an interesting question about Gandhi's intentions and questions that why Gandhi sat on fast for Communal Awards which would have given the Dalits some rights and a position of respect. If Gandhi was ready to die to save Hinduism from getting divided, why did he not show the same kind of zeal and enthusiasm over the division of the country itself? It was quite hypocritical on Gandhi's end that on one hand he was worried for Pakistan and that it should not be cheated out of its share from British India but at the same time he denied equal opportunities to the oppressed and the marginalized Dalits. Gandhi eventually accepted Jinnah as the leader of the Muslims but refused to accept Ambedkar as the representative of the Dalits. Naqvi adds that the fact that Malviya (a staunch Hindu) signed the Poona pact with Ambedkar on behalf of Gandhi signifies how communal and caste interests were aligned. He adds,

*Gandhi unwittingly or deliberately (none can say) courted a regressive leadership of Muslims while cultivating the most dubious Hindu allies...it is that sensibility, consciously or reflexively, that set India's Hindu-Muslim trap into which Jinnah and Gandhi, Nehru and Azad plunged headlong.*⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2183-2184

⁸⁷ Jawed Naqvi, "The Indian Intellectual and the Hindu-Muslim Trap" in Romila Thapar, *The Public intellectual of India (ed)*, p-126-127

Naqvi argues that the entire able leadership of the country fell in this trap of communal lines and the creation of Pakistan was a failure on all their behalf. He believes that the leadership had the strength to fight partition but for lack of unity and sheer will, Pakistan was born. In order to become the star of the show against imperialism, Congress' tactics gave the communal feelings a more fiery color and the consequence was Pakistan and bloodshed. Santram kept urging the party to look inside, to reform and understand the upper caste privileges and work on those but his voice was not heard. He commented that, **“To change the name of a person from Abdul Qadir to Bhagwan Das is not assimilation”** and that the root cause of trouble in India is social and not political.⁸⁸ He believed in actual reforms and called these namesake actions of Congress towards fraternity their selfish propagandas. Unfortunately, his opinions and efforts were neither heard nor valued.

Private of sectarian politics- Hindu women , Arya Samaj and Santram B.A.

It is not new for women to be treated as a repository of virtue for their family, caste, community and society. Whenever the question of dominance is raised, a woman's body immediately comes under threat. While communal fever rose in Punjab, even Santram lost his patience and started talking about revenge instead of rehabilitation. He says,

The main teaching of the Ramayan is that the person who molest or disgrace our wife should never be permitted to go unpunished...But the present day Hindus have totally forgotten this teaching. Hundreds of Hindu women are abducted every year but no Hindu has even tried to punish the culprits. On the contrary the Hindus have taken quite a different lesson from it, that is a

⁸⁸ Santram B.A., “The Curse of Caste”, March 26, 1950, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

*woman should at once be driven out even on the slightest suspicion about her character.*⁸⁹

Santram felt sad about the fact that when Hindu women are abducted, Hindu men do absolutely nothing about it. Instead of punishing the culprit, they drive the victim out suspecting her character and chastity. He says that one should learn from Ramayana and fight for the virtue of their women but he forgets the part where Ram too left Sita on account of ‘questionable character’ despite taking her ‘Agni Pareeksha’.⁹⁰ That was just the tip of the iceberg presenting the low status of women in Indian society.

Anshu Malhotra in *Gender Caste, and Religious Identities* says that caste status was clearly reflected in how sexuality was treated, i.e., women represented caste status along with the level of modernity. She argues that while in the politics of identity, communalism was the public face of debate; other layers of identity were discussed and formed in private as well. Caste is one of those issues and it has a hidden connection with disciplining and controlling women which forms a building block of middle class routine.⁹¹ So, while communal debate took over the stage and formed the mainstream narrative, gender divide was pushed to the backstage and it was barely even recognized as a prominent issue. It was a major backdrop of Santram’s detailed study on pros and cons of caste that he forgot to segregate the sexes and looked at them as a whole, whereas in reality the experiences of women differed from that of the men even if they belonged to the same caste or community. A poor lower caste woman comes at the lowest tier of social

⁸⁹ Santram B.A., “What Have Hindus learnt from the Ramayan”, *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*, November 9, 1946,) Private papers of Santram B.A.,NMML

⁹⁰ Santram B.A., “Threat to Hindu society”, *Civil and Military Gazette*, November 15, 1946,) Private papers of Santram B.A.,NMML

⁹¹ Anshu Malhotra, *Gender Caste, and Religious Identities- restructuring class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, 2002, New Delhi , p-2

hierarchy; in layman's terms, the life of a poor Dalit woman was and still is a cursed one. While discussing the problems of Dalit women, her identity revolved just around being a Dalit, her trauma and experiences which came from being a woman were either discarded or not taken seriously because religion was the focus for political and reformatory parties and organisations.

Santram who claimed to be an advocate of inter-caste marriages went on to say,

*the question is whether in the presence of caste prejudices of the Hindus, marriages of Hindu girls with Muslim youngmen will create communal harmony or not. Many such Hindu-Muslim marriages have already been performed, but instead of abating the communal tension they have created a feeling of resentment and heart burning in the Hindus, who think such girls to be lost for the society. The reason is that the Hindu girls who marry Muslim men are absorbed in the Muslim society, but the Hindu society cannot absorb Muslim girls marrying Hindu young-men.*⁹²

He talked as if the sole purpose of the marriages was social emancipation and nothing beyond that. He implied that if the marriages did not serve the purpose of communal harmony and cause any kind of resentment, it was better that if other methods were searched for. Inter-faith marriages did not get the kind of support from Santram which the inter-caste marriages did. In awe of the communal harmony he too forgot to take into account the most important thing in marriage, i.e. consent of two people. He nowhere talked about the struggles of women involved in the inter-caste and inter-faith marriages. The agency from woman was not just taken away but also when she forcibly took it; it was not recognized at all under the garb of things like caste

⁹² Santram B.A. "Hindu Muslim Marriages", *The Sunday Observer*, December 1, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

reforms and communal harmony. This phenomenon of treating women as tools and not as individuals was not unique to Santram but extended till Arya Samaj as well.

When Madhu Kishwar in *Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar*, goes on discussing women education in Punjab focusing on Arya Samaj schools she points out how even the motive behind teaching the daughters was to ultimately please their future husbands. The so-called modernity was covering up for the age old beliefs that women had only and only household roles to play.

*The reformers argued that an educated man needed an educated wife...Education for women was advocated primarily as a means to bridge the mental gap between husbands and wives, mothers and sons.*⁹³

There was also the fear that if the women were kept away from modernization for long, the missionaries would snatch them away from the folds of Hinduism. Hence education also became an escape aimed at preserving culture, tradition and ultimately religion. The progressiveness of the movement was quite limited when it came to women as it restricted the role of women to a large extent by keeping a strict check in regards to what they read, how they lived in hostels, what they wore etc. However, Kishwar argues that Lala Devraj's attempt to build a Kanya Mahavidyalaya (KMV)⁹⁴ and provide quality education to girls proved to be an outstanding experiment and surprisingly a successful one. In the school journal *Panchal Pandita* issues like dowry, superstitions, women empowerment, and nationalism were not just addressed but also

⁹³ Madhu Kishwar, 'Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.21, No.17 (Apr.26, 1986), p-WS-10

⁹⁴A separate institute to educate Hindu girls was established in Jalandhar in 1886 by Lala Devraj. The institute was named Kanya Mahavidyalaya in 1896.

rigorously engaged with. The journal from time to time also published about women's achievements across the world setting role models for the girls in schools.

The attempt to impart education to women did not go well within some sections of the orthodox Hindus. KMV was starting a new trend of making the daughter independent and free willed which was indeed a radical attempt. Kishwar observes that this attempt to educate girls was revolutionary as the girls had now options ahead of themselves where they could not be just a homemaker but also become an equal participant in the freedom struggle. Their social circle was being widened from family to country and their identity expanded along the same lines; from being a daughter to being a citizen of the country.⁹⁵

Ironically, the opposition towards this revolutionary change came not just from the outside but from within the Arya Samaj as well. There was a great furor when English education was brought into the institute because there was a fear that it would 'westernize our women' and westernization directly implied moral corruption. It was argued, "*Different curricula for men and women were therefore a must or else the result would be "unsexed monstrosities" of the kind which the "present system of education has produced."*"⁹⁶

The donation for the institute majorly came from the upper middle class who though promoted education were not a fan of working women or self-sufficient women. It was a backdrop from the side of the institute as well that the girls were not taught life skills like decision making, handling conflicts and income. The Arya Samajists used Dayanand against women saying that he also believed that nature has created men and women differently and hence women have to be submissive or the society will fall into pieces.

⁹⁵ ibid, p-WS18

⁹⁶ ibid, p-WS21

Not just in Arya Samaj schools, education of women was controlled irrespective of the institute, language and religion. As Malhotra recounts, Urdu was taught in indigenous all boys schools but the Hindu and Sikh reformers objected against teaching Urdu to ‘their’ girls. It was not just that Urdu was seen as foreign language and hence deemed to be unworthy of learning but since Urdu was the official/clerical language hence women had no use for it. A man could be put to risk of getting polluted by a foreign language to secure a government job but the same rules were not applicable for a woman because she had no use of a job.⁹⁷

The Singh Sabhas established in the region in the late nineteenth century had the same objective, to purify language and purify women, which at times intertwined. The restrictions on the language Urdu further created insecurities in the Muslim community and women lost employment; it was two shots with one arrow. Since control of land determined the distribution of status and authority in most Punjabi villages, the structure of “tribal” kinship dictated that inheritance by daughters had to be strictly controlled. So it was not just education and a healthy lifestyle which was denied to women but also her right in the paternal property as well. The upper caste women who were usually home schooled or at least made literate were not allowed to work either which further made it difficult to have female teachers in the school. It was a full circle where a woman’s chastity, identity, self-awareness all were locked in the name of religion.

The burden of sanctity and purity was always on women and if she was a widow, poor and young things just got worse for her, which Santram also discusses in detail in his work. For instance he had a sworn sister, Poornadevi, who got widowed at quite an early age, so instead of providing her education he thought of remarriage as a better option because as a young woman she was vulnerable and prone to all sins of the society and according to him, marriage was the

⁹⁷ Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities- restructuring class in Colonial Punjab*, p-8

only way to protect her virtue. He said, "महाविद्यालय में भेजने से तो यह कहीं अच्छा है कि इसका कहीं अच्छी जगह पुनर्विवाह कर दिया जाए, जवानी में लड़की के ठोकर खा जाने का सदा डर रहता है।"⁹⁸ (instead of sending her off to University it is better to get her married else there is a risk of her getting wayward).

To make the point that a woman cannot be trusted Santram picked a Sanskrit quote, "स्त्री चरित्रं पुरुषस्य भाग्यं, देवो ने जानामि कुतो मनुष्य", which means, "a woman's character and a man's luck cannot be predicted even by the Gods, humans are far back in the attempt".⁹⁹ He even says, "a politician who does not have an agreeable wife can still do wonders like Abraham Lincoln, but for a social reformer it is crucial to have an agreeable wife or he will not be able to work at all."¹⁰⁰

When Santram was posted in Himachal as a teacher around 1913 he claims that his character and integrity were at risk because of the beautiful yet loose 'mountain women'. He could save his integrity only because he did not want to ruin the name of Arya Samaj with which he was associated and looked up to. "व्यभिचार और अनाचार में पड़ने से मेरी तो हानि होगी ही, परन्तु मेरे उस आर्यसमाज के पवित्र नाम पर भी कलंक का धब्बा लगेगा, जिसका मैं अपने को अनुयायि समझता और कहता हूँ। इससे मैं ऐसे प्रलोभनों के वशीभूत नहीं होता था।"¹⁰¹ (If I turn immoral and practice adultery it is not just my name which will get tarnished but the name of Arya Samaj will get ruined too. Thinking this, I was able to control myself)

⁹⁸ Santram B.A., *Mere Jeevan Ke Anubhav*, p-42

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p-59

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, p-155

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, p-23

On one hand he fought against the Arya Samajists on the issue of the notion of maintaining the 'purity' through the practice of 'Jauhar' and strongly argued that such practices are nothing but derogatory not just for women but for the entire human race and Hindus were fools to still believe in such customs,¹⁰² while on the other hand he passed lewd comments for women like, "हुस्र की हर हर अदा पर जानो दिल सके मगर।

लुत्फ कुछ दामन बचाकर ही निकल जाने में है।।"¹⁰³ (My heart skips a beat every time it sees a thing of beauty but it is better if I save myself from that beauty)

And उछलता है कलेजा दिल नहीं रहता आपे में।

जवानी याद आती है अब मुझको बुढ़ापे में।।"¹⁰⁴ (My heart desires a lot and is uncontrollable, in this old age I miss my youth)

Kumari Meethan A. Tata, wrote in *Yugantar*,

*Women are taught to fear change but I firmly believe that they pick up on trends quickly. So, even if they are illiterate, but they realize it's them who can change the destiny of the degrading Hinduism they will definitely break the shackles of caste...Mother India is calling for its daughters to free her and unless the homemakers decide this revolution will not come through the efforts of men alone."*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² ibid, p-126

¹⁰³ Ibid, p-29

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p-32

¹⁰⁵ *Yugantar*, 1932-35, journal edited by Santram B.A., published from Lahore, Microfilms section in NMML, June, 1932 (Hindi journal, all translations are mine)

Her writing reflects the difference on how a woman sees her gender all empowered whereas the man only sees are as a tool or means to an end. She is also an example of the effects of the ongoing national movement and marks the increasing participation of women in the same. Santram failed to relate with this “aadhi aabadi’s” alienation as he was too busy in saving their morality. There was an often published section in his journal *Yugantar*, titled as “*Nari Jagat*” meaning, ‘women’s world’ and most of the topics covered were related to their duties as wife or as a mother as if their individuality was not even in the question. There was an article, ‘*Santan Palan Sambandhi Kucch Aavashyak Updesh*’ (guidelines for raising children) and it had total one hundred thirty eight points!¹⁰⁶ Santram in his book *Sukhi Jeevan* too had tips for married couples and especially for women.

पुरुष बहुत आसानी से गिरकर पर स्त्री गमन कर सकता है परंतु वह इसके साथ ही अपने को संभाल भी जल्दी लेता है । इसके विपरीत स्त्री में इस प्रकार की गिरावट इतनी आसानी से नहीं आती । पर एक बात अवश्य है, स्त्री में एक बार गिरावट आ जाने पर अपने को संभालना बहुत कठिन होता है । पुरुष अपने गिरावट से उठकर अपनी पत्नी से सच्चा प्रेम फिर भी कर सकता है । इसलिए स्त्री का मन जब कभी भी व्याभीचार के लिए सोचे तो उससे उसके परिणामों पर शांति पूर्वक विचार कर लेना चाहिए ।

पत्नी के लिए सर्वाधिक संतोषजनक बात यह होनी चाहिए कि वह और उसका घर पति के लिए मनोयोग का केंद्र बन गया है । क्या पत्नी के लिए यह बात चरम कृतज्ञता की नहीं है कि जो व्यक्ति पहले किसी का नहीं था अब जीवन भर के लिए उसका हो गया है ? इस वजह और सफलता पर पत्नी को असीम कृतज्ञता और संतोष की भावना से परिपूर्ण हो जाना चाहिए ।

¹⁰⁶*Yugantar*, 1932-35, journal edited by Santram B.A., published from Lahore, Microfilms section in NMML, November, 1932

वह स्त्री जो बात बात पर पति की बात काट दी है और उससे मतभेद प्रकट करती है उसके विनोद पर नाक चढ़ाती है और सदा अपनी राय पर पड़ी रहती है या वार्तालाप में आवेश पूर्ण भाव ग्रहण करती है और स्वयं को श्रेष्ठ प्रकट करती है वह विचारे पति में निराशा और उदासी का भाव उत्पन्न कर देती है । पति सहयोग और प्रेम का भूखा होता है ।¹⁰⁷

(A man can get involved in adultery but he can also easily recover from it. While a woman does not easily get corrupted but when she does she cannot recover from this sinful act. A man can fall in love with his wife again even after adultery but a woman cannot reciprocate. Hence, she should think twice before falling to such immoral practice...the wife should be happy that her husband feels entertained at home. She should feel some gratitude that a man who earlier did not belong to anyone now belongs to her for life. She should feel elated at this thought...the wife who cuts off her husband while he is talking and argues with him, frowns on his humor and is stubborn or the wife who orders around her husband and tries to be dominant, such wives cause pain and sadness to their husbands. Husbands need love and support so wives should just provide that)

He justified adultery when the perpetrator was a man, but when a woman did the same thing, it was the most unforgivable crime.

There was no respite for women in other communities either. Jalal says that it did not matter if the woman was Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, she was the biggest victim of the communal violence. Men of these communities used the body of women to safeguard their respective community interests. The barriers which were put up by religion came crashing down when it came to

¹⁰⁷ Santram B.A. *Sukhi Jeevan*, Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 1961 (accessed from Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur)

inflicting atrocities on specific gender. Jalal adds that post partition toxic masculinity was a common factor in all the religions. She comments,

*Men of all three communities (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) delighted in their momentary sense of power over vulnerable women; such as the courage of these citizens of newly independent states.*¹⁰⁸

The notion of exercising masculinity irrespective of religion meant only one thing, exercising dominance over women. Their education was to make them better daughters and wives, their existence revolved around men and their choices revolved around pleasing men. Gender crossed all the barriers as the discrimination was universal and unanimous. Even the social reform movements could not cross these religious barriers, but being a woman did. Santram felt that if education came to villages then the situation of women would improve, but the problem was not rural mindset or illiteracy, the problem was that focus was not on educating women as individuals, educating them for jobs or educating them so that they can defend themselves. Their liberation came with a 'Lakshman Rekha'. The line was to sooth the ego and masculinity of men and it was expected that these men when educated will automatically start respecting women. Instead of letting women take charge, the reform movements let women take a backseat and allowed men to make amendments in the society as per their whims.

Conclusion

Santram made a strong case for the rehabilitation of women. He constantly urged whoever had some kind of power that if Hindus become inclusive most of the problems of the country would be solved. But it was not possible for the organisations and the leaders to shun their vested

¹⁰⁸ Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2189-90

interests and work on the public welfare. From many sects to castes to religions to nations, Punjab had to travel a bloodied road to finally taste freedom. This freedom came at an immense cost where not just lives but space and memories were sacrificed too. The social reform movement which took place in the early twentieth century within a couple of decades took such a militant turn that nobody could stop the birth of Pakistan.

Jalal says that it was not religion which was the drawing force of partition. It was material greed, desperation and most importantly British administration's hurried departing decisions which resulted in bloodied baptism of Pakistan.¹⁰⁹ The assumption of Congress that it had some kind of monopoly over nationalism also made it exaggerate the communal catch-cries. In the thirst to represent all, Congress at times suppressed those very voices and when minorities could not find any other vent, communal lines got more distinct.

Hinduism had this unique character of alienating its own people because of its caste system which now reflects in other religions as well. Omvedt says that to say that it's a false claim that Islam and Christianity in India are caste free. They just don't practice the same pattern as Hinduism. Outside South Asia these religions do not have caste based segregation but within India they practice caste differentiations of a different order and degree. Omvedt discredits the role of South Asia in this process and argues that it is because of continuing influence of Brahmanic and hierarchical thinking within these communities that they are not able to overcome the disabilities assigned since birth through the caste system.¹¹⁰ It is the presence of the Brahmanical Hindus which corrupts the Indian society with the ideas of prejudice and hierarchy.

¹⁰⁹ Jalal, "Nation, Reason and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", p-2189

¹¹⁰ Gail Omvedt, "Caste System and Hinduism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 11 (Mar. 13-19, 2004), p-1179

Jones on one hand skillfully describes the growth of general militancy as the price of reviving Hindu vigor¹¹¹ but on the other hand, Hindu revivalist groups and people associated with it like Satyaketu Vidyalankar feel that it was partially Congress' and majorly Muslims fault that there was communal unrest in the region.¹¹² However, this dilemma which ended in partition and massacres is well described but both the narrators of this tumultuous past by burdening one community fail in the analysis of the complete picture.

The new consciousness which was both social and political had hints of communal consciousness as well. While escaping the evils of past, all the prominent communities of the region, i.e., Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism tried reclaiming a piece of past which was glorious for them. For Hindus it meant Aryan civilization, a time before all foreign invasions. For Islam it meant the Mughal period when they were sole authority and mustered as much power as they could. And for Sikhs it meant a distinct identity from Hindus and Muslims. With the whole concept of conversion and *shuddhi* a new race began which made all these communities and sub-communities forget about peaceful and amicable living. In the thirst of glory they forgot the years and centuries spent together. They even forgot that the whole point of revivalism was to get rid of their own evil, cleansing from inside and self reflection, and not pointing out the flaws and discrepancies of the other communities. Even attempts from Congress in national movement reeked of communal spirit.

While the public face of sectarian politics in Punjab is talked about all, the private face, i.e. the women are mostly forgotten in the historical archives. Thus it is no surprise that even the most brilliant reformatory minds at times held quite derogatory opinions about women. Santram is a

¹¹¹ Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab*, p-1

¹¹² Vidyalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas*, volume 4, 1986, pp-556-571

true example of this internalized patriarchy where though he professed his love for equality he did not consider women to be part of that social equation. He fights for their basic rights like remarriage and against practices like *Sati* and *Jauhar* but at the same time he believes that a wife should be perfect and that a woman's body is to be protected and conserved at all cost. The time he lived in, inter-caste marriages were also breaking the norms, hence, he was quite ahead of his time but there was a lot more scope to what could have been done if he would have taken into account the women's agency as well. And this rule is not just applicable for him but for organisations like Arya Samaj as well. Reformation of society could never be achieved if the women are left behind or if their progress is seen only through the eyes of men. Their consent and participation in the movement is equally crucial which most of these reform movements forgot to take into account.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Santram in his 101 years of long lifetime and almost 70 years of constantly working as a social reformer kept repeating the idea that without social freedom, Indian democracy and political freedom will fall apart. He vehemently argued that if the British left without annihilating the prejudiced caste system, freedom would come but only for few. This project has tried to locate his position back on the visionary board by exploring his philosophy and political approach towards contemporary issues. Santram never used his caste name; instead he used his educational qualification, his Bachelor's degree B.A., which he was so proud of. His appeal to not use the caste name as a suffix is relevant till today.

One of the prominent issues with the backward projecting of history is that we start looking at the past through the lens of the present. For instance when history is written from a communal point of view or a nationalist point of view, the studies project their current findings to the earlier period and that leads to misinterpreted history. Today Santram has two images because of that backward projecting. His first image is that of a puppet in the hands of upper caste and second is of an ardent Arya Samaji. Both these projections fail to take into account his conflicts with Arya Samaj, reconciliation with Ambedkar and lastly his Mandal's independent functioning out of the Arya Samaj. This study tracks down his growth not just as an individual but the expansion of his ideas as well.

Thapar defines a liberal as someone who fights for space and change especially when the society is against that reasoned thinking¹ and by that definition Santram was a true liberal. He was

¹ Romila Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India(ed.)*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2015, p-23

impartial and criticized all evils he found in the society. While Gandhi and other orthodox leaders of Arya Samaj were promoting *varnavyavastha*, refusing to accept the evils of the caste system, Santram explained the harms of *varnavyavastha* as,

*It (caste) has made our Brahmans intellectuals but vain, our Kshatriyas brave but indiscreet, our Vaishyas good businessmen but cowards and our Shudras hard working but void of all sense of humanity, for the caste prohibits intermixing of different blood by intermarriage.*²

Santram lies in the centre somewhere as a pacifist who does not have much against the British or the Congress but was willing to support any leadership, provided they abolish the caste system. Unlike Ambedkar he didn't lose faith in his religion and Arya Samaj and kept that faith strong even when he was dishonored and kicked out of the Samaj. He never shied from going against his family, wife or colleagues. He dismissed the popular opinion that class difference existed worldwide and was crucial for proper functioning of the society. He retorted back with the argument that caste and class were not based on the same premise, while the latter left some scope of improvement through financial changes the former enforced the hierarchy with a strong hand. A Brahman who was cunning and clever was presumed to be a dignified member of the society while an educated Shudra was still an outcast; there was no scope of improvement in either case.³ In contemporary times we still see only Brahmans getting appointed as the priests in temple there are still some spaces which are exclusively meant for the upper caste and openly promote caste discrimination. In the same way almost all the manual scavengers come from the Dalit section of society because just like the work they are still treated as the polluted ones.

² Santram B.A., "A National Need", *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, December 18, 1947, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

³ Santram B. A., "Chaturvarna", *Tribune*, June 3, 1951, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

In independent India, Santram talks about the politics of naming roads and how we were going back to man-worshipping instead of ideals-worshipping, repeating the same mistakes as in the past of glorifying selected and discriminating others. This politics behind naming and renaming is still rampant in India. He even discusses the irrelevance of idols and the pretentious customs and rituals of the Hindu society which the upper caste do not ever let go because they are trying to secure their as well as next generation's future through that. These rites do not elevate mankind in any way; instead make it vulnerable to exploitation.

Thapar says that 'the meaning of 'intellectual' is crystallized around the notion that such a person need not be a scholar but has to be someone who has a recognized professional stature, and who seeks explanations for public actions from those in authority, even if such explanations required criticizing authority and power. She further adds that those that ask questions are anathema to any kind of autocratic authority⁴ and especially those who offer solutions are even a bigger threat. Santram not only critiqued the British regime and Congress but offered them a solution as well, they were just not ready to listen or take responsibility.

The British Government in India acted on the policy of divide and rule. Instead of eradicating the caste differences it tried to perpetuate them in many ways. It divided the whole population of Punjab into two-sections, agriculturists and non-agriculturists by birth.⁵

The anti-communal spirit which wasn't so active in his formative years or at least was not really visible in Santram's writings gets pretty charged up post-independence. He was unapologetic about his strong opinions and it would be unfair to consider him the lapdog of upper castes.

⁴ Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India*(ed.), p-5-16

⁵ Santram B.A., "Caste agriculturist", December 17, 1952, newspaper not mentioned, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

Santram even spoke his mind in front of Ambedkar despite being an ardent follower and that is why his perspective stands out.

When a Professor Gulshan Rai (Sanatanist) suggested that anything derogatory regarding any religion should be banned Santram countered and asked if Rai was ready to discard the holy status given to the *Smritis*, *Puranas* and other religious books which lay down discriminatory statements against the touchable and the untouchable Shudras.⁶ Santram was of strong belief that mere words or banning of derogatory texts will not result in anything productive. To get rid of communal antagonism and caste system only one thing was needed and that was social revolution. Instead of slinging mud all the time at other communities he believed in introspection and reformation.

While critiquing the Indian intellectuals Thapar argues that there is no good reason why the intellectuals started focusing on the religious binary instead of highlighting the more prominent caste system. It was as if suddenly caste based humiliation and segregation was forgotten.⁷ However, Santram stood true to his cause and did not waver from his path of social emancipation of Dalits but he failed to get the much deserved recognition in his times.

Santram looks at the communal hostility through the lens of caste and claims that Jinnah or Churchill are not to be blamed for partition as it is the inherent exclusivity of the Indian society which breeds social inequality and discrimination. Caste system was not just a job-based structure; it prohibited any kind of transfer from one field to another despite the merit. It thrived on exclusivity and alienation and degraded the moral structure of the society. It is our incapability, Santram believes, that we were never able to prevent the disintegration of our

⁶ Santram B.A., "Hindu Muslim Harmony", *Tribune*, July 2, 1941, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁷ Jawed Naqvi, "The Indian Intellectual and the Hindu-Muslim Trap" in Romila Thapar, *The Public intellectual of India (ed)*, p-126

country neither during foreign invasions nor during the partition. Indians have failed to retain their freedom against the British because of their defective social system.⁸ He further blames the twice born (*dwija*) upper caste Hindus who have kept education away from the reach of women and Shudras because if the marginalized had access to education they could have easily broken this mirage of caste system and the hegemony of upper caste to claim a respectful identity. He argues that it is through education only that Muslim became aware of their vulnerable status in the country and hence rebelled. He mentions how certain separatist forces take advantage of the communal tensions and further increase the misunderstandings between the communities. This practice is rampant till date where for some political gain even the smallest issue is given a communal hue.

Santram was very cautious when it came to the text books as he understood that manipulating or editing history affects contemporary politics significantly. He was against the distortion of history implying the young minds should be told exactly what happened and they should decide for themselves what is right or wrong. The emphasis on Rajput history against the Mughal history will not help the religion in any way. He did not give credit to the past for the present disharmony.

*Communal harmony cannot be achieved by misrepresenting historical facts. It is like making history a harlot, which prostrates before every powerful aggressor. Our past history is not the cause of present day communal bitterness.*⁹

⁸ Santram B.A., "No use trying to corner Mr. Jinnah", *Sunday Observer*, July 30, 1944, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

⁹ Santram B.A., "Distortion of history", *Sunday Observer*, June 6, 1946, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

While addressing the communal antagonism in the region of Punjab Santram holds the the uneducated sections of the society responsible for rampant violence and bloodshed claiming that a well educated person can never bring himself to perform such brutality. The fact that education is not the guarantee of a civilized behavior and to blame the lower sections for all the murders will be unfair as well as unjustified. It was a limitation on Santram's end where he overestimated the advantages of education.

Amidst all the disparities there was the Land Alienation Act in Punjab which discriminated between castes by separating them as two categories: 'agriculturists' and 'non-agriculturists'. So even if the person was from a working class but belonged to the Jat community (agriculturist caste) he would be granted certain land related privileges whereas someone, a non-Jat, who was very poor and whose livelihood was just the small piece of land, was denied any authority over it because he belonged to a non-agriculturist community. It was very similar to 'Martial Law' which deprived many communities the right to be part of the military force because according to the British they were not 'genetically efficient' to be soldiers. When Santram took notice of this disparity he constantly reminded the Government even post-independence how this was against the very cause of equality and justice. These agriculturists were the same Jats he believed, who claimed a separate 'Jatasthan' (separate state for Jats). He contended that giving such outrageous privileges to selective communities was the cause of such separatist tendencies. According to him the superficial distinction between martial and non-martial races and agriculturists and non-agriculturists races by the Government in Punjab made them on par with the Nazis who differentiated between Aryans and Jews. He pointed out again and again that caste was not just a social problem of the Hindus. It was a political problem of great magnitude for the entire country which needed to be resolved on a priority basis.

Santram was in full support of the Hindu Code Bill and said that if marriage is a spiritual relation for a woman it is the same for a man as well and hence divorce implies the same feeling on both the sides. A man can get married as many times as he wants but as a woman she cannot and has to rot in a monotonous life whereas she deserves equal happiness. Rules of ancient times do not have to necessarily be applied in present context too, rules are for people, but people are not for rules. He finds the caste barrier in regards to marriage to be irrational. He prefers breaking the notions of sacredness and purity when it comes to same caste marriage and propagates the idea of inter-caste marriage which would further make the religion stronger with the bonds of equality and justice. If the caste barrier is not removed people will continue getting married under Civil Marriage Act and Hinduism will continue losing its children. He postulated that the *varnavyavastha* has deteriorated the condition of women as well in the country and taken away her right to choose for herself. He pointed out that it was high time that we take the issues of women into account as well and remove this social evil.

While Santram is in favor of inter-caste marriages, he doesn't show the same level of acceptance towards inter-religion marriages. When he talks about the Hindu women converting to Islam for marriage he calls this action inspired from lust and sexual desires. He does not consider affection or love as the reason but desire for sex as the operative force here. He says that since time immemorial Hindus have been playing defensive tactics only they should attack as well. For instance if instead of just protecting their respective princesses and queens the Rajputs had attacked the women of Muslim rulers they would not have lost to them. In the process of standing for caste related issues he sidetracks the issues of women completely. For him, women reformation was relevant only if benefitted the collective Hindu cause.

Santram reflects the complexities of the social reform movements in Punjab. His argument of reforming Hinduism from within comes to a standstill when his own daughter takes up her husband's surname; Gargi Chaddha. This proves that the institution of caste is not something which can be reshaped, adjusted or reformed. The caste system cannot be negotiated with and the only way to ensure equality is complete annihilation of caste as Ambedkar suggested. The contemporary of JPTM, *Ad Dharm* movement after independence, was absorbed in Ambedkar's Scheduled castes Federation that was later transformed into the Republican party of India. The Ad Dharmis were listed as one of the Scheduled Castes of the Punjab and were clubbed with the Hindus once again. While *Ad Dharm* lost much of its momentum as a social movement during the post independence period, it was able to give a new sense of identity to the Chamars of the Doaba.¹⁰ The JPTM on the other hand despite making commendable efforts and getting noticed in the census was not impactful like *Ad Dharm* and lost its left relevance post independence because of its pacifist nature.

In today's Punjab, the Radha Soamis, Sacha Sauda, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Divya Jyoti Sansthan, Bhanjarawala and Ravi Dasis are among the non-Sikh deras. Some of them are very popular among the Punjabi diaspora and have overseas branches in almost all the continents of the world. Baljeet Singh says that the composition of these deras is along caste lines. Though the majority of followers in most of the deras come from dalits, backward castes and the poor Jat Sikh peasantry, their command is still in the hands of the upper castes.¹¹ Things have not really changed even after a century.

¹⁰ Baljeet Singh, "Religion, Social Rebellion and Deras- a case study of Punjab", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.70 (2009-2010), p-1164

¹¹ *ibid*, p-1166

There is a lesson in all of this “Nations have to be built on an inclusive identity”¹² because whenever we strive for *panthic*, *quamik* or religious identities we fail in achieving an all over growth/reformation. If instead of having Aggrawal Samaj or Muslim League or Singh Sabha we strive for such identity which has space for all, caste system will be gone within few years. The more we try for exclusive identity the more divides increase and no society and polity can come out of this never-ending loop like the kind in which Santram and many others were stuck. The way elections are contested and won in the country today, its precedent was set during colonial times only. Leaders then also played caste and community card and they still do. If there were Muslims fighting along the communal lines there were also examples of those who were an important part of the national movement. Even the same thing applies for Hindus and Sikhs and others. So to target the Muslims or any other community claiming that they were not a part of the national movement or that the social reformers ignore their duty towards the nation would be making preposterous assumptions. There were of course internal conflicts, some agreed while others didn't but everyone contributed for the national movement and that cannot be denied on any reasonable grounds. Priorities changed from time to time but then again it was the part of the package for a culturally diverse land that people would differ on all the things.

Thapar says that in contemporary times that intellectual space has shrunk but the harsh reality is that selective opening for intellectuals has always existed. People in power have always treated this intellectual space as their hegemony allowing only those stories out whichever suited them. She further argues that the current authorities are demarcating the religious identities and their politics revolve around this purpose only which drives the society further away from justice and equality. She says that we are still caught in a trap constructed by colonial interpretations of what

¹² Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India*(ed.), p-xix

we like to believe are representations of our tradition.¹³ So, the question which I try to answer is if Santram is trapped too. To a certain extent, yes, but he questions the logic of all things which does not leave him trapped for long. The first chapter; **The ‘Many Punjabs’ and the Debate on Caste and Varna** tries to locate Santram in the new social consciousness of Punjab where he constantly struggled between liberal reformism of Arya Samaj and radical reformism of Ambedkar. The chapter demonstrates how he eventually grew towards Ambedkar’s idea of annihilation of caste and freed himself and the JPTM from the clutches of the upper castes. The second chapter, **Mapping the Political Terrain and Caste Question in Punjab** further discusses the political opinions of Santram especially regarding Congress and Arya Samaj. By analyzing the political situation of the region the chapter reflects how social reforms were not given priority and how reformers like Santram had to compete against caste patriotism to bring reforms in the society. The third chapter, **Tracing the Impact of Caste System on Religion and Gender** investigates the claims made by Santram that caste system is responsible for communal antagonism. It observes the inherent flaws in the Indian society where acceptance comes with lots of difficulty but it is much easier to alienate. Along the lines of alienation the chapter also discovers how various social reformists including Santram are ignorant of the perils of women. Any kind of social reform for women is not based on their needs but on the need of the man. Santram tries to be a progressive reformist but he fails to acknowledge the agency of woman.

Santram by the end of his life is free of all Arya Samaj, Congress and Colonial rule. He proves that the question of identity in Indian context has time and again been used by the ruling power, whether it was imperial rule or Congress rule, to dominate the society and the same strategy was used to crush away the minorities’ and underprivileged voices including his very own. Now, the

¹³ Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India(ed.)*,p-xviii

idea of inclusivity should mean acceptance without judgment and acknowledging diversity as a part of culture instead of discarding it or alienating it. As Santram said, to save democracy we need to learn to live together because, “*Cross sections of society at different levels of development tend to make democracy a failure*”.¹⁴

Santram expresses his gloom over the fact that social reform movements are not as appreciated as political movements. If you challenge the government you become a hero in public’s eyes but if you challenge the rotten time barred age old practices of religion even your family turns against you let alone the general mass. He believes that this is the reason why people are reluctant to join the social reform forces. There might be some flaws in his ideologies or texts, his Mandal might have failed to attain the goal of abolishing the caste but his contribution to the literature as well as the society is undeniable and should be acknowledged.

¹⁴ Santram B.A., “Inter caste marriages”, *Tribune*, May 30, 1951, Private Papers of Santram B.A., NMML

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