"The Punjab (land of five rivers) was the name given to a vast region of plains at the foot of the Himalayas in the Northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent of which the river Indus and the Jamuna formed the two boundaries."\(^1\) The Punjab was annexed by the Britishers in 1849 after the Second Anglo-Sikh War. The Delhi District was added to it in 1958, and it remained a part of the Punjab till 1911. In 1911 when it was decided to shift the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi, the District was remodelled and placed under a separate local government as an independent unit. The province was divided into 29 districts and Lahore was made its capital.

Punjab had a complex society consisting of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, numerically dominated by the Muslims, but almost balanced by the Hindus and the Sikhs taken together. The percentage of each community varied from one region to another. Muslims were predominant in seventeen Districts, i.e. Lahore, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Gjawan, Sheikhupura, Gujrat, Shahpur, Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Attock, Mianwali, Montgomery, Lyallpur, Jhang, Multan

\(^1\)Census Report of Punjab & Delhi, 1921 (Hereafter Census).
Muzaffargarh and Dera Ghazi Khan - their population varying between 91% in Attock and 51% in Gurdaspur. In Jullundur, Amritsar and Ferozepur Districts their numerical strength was greater than that of the other two communities taken singly. Thus Western Punjab was the stronghold of the Muslims and their proportion decreased as one moved from the West to the East. In the Himalayan region their population was hardly 5%. The Hindus were in majority in six Districts - Hisar, Gurgaon, Rohtak, Karnal, Simla and Kangra. Their proportion ranged between 91% in Kangra and 65% in Hisar, while in two Districts, i.e., in Ambala and Hoshiarpur, they were more numerous as a community, their proportion being 46% and 40% respectively. The proportion of the Hindus steadily decreased as one proceeded westward.

The Sikhs did not have a clear majority in any of the Districts, but in Ludhiana District they were more numerous than the Hindus or the Muslims, their proportion being 47%.

In its origin the Sikh community was not organised as a separate entity from the Hindus - Khatris and others. It was organised as a separate "class" of people of various castes of the Hindus to serve as an 'army', but later on the Sikhs acquired the character of a separate
"religious community", particularly during the rule of the Sikh misls; and, therefore, they became an exclusive group as distinct from the Hindus. This tendency of becoming a separate 'community' was strengthened by various British policies, reform movements, etc.

The Sikhs and the Muslims had a long history of communal hatred, which was the result of oppressive policies of the Mughal rulers against Sikh Gurus, and Sikhs in general. The memories of these sufferings and the bitter struggle between the Sikhs and the Mughals became a part of the communal heritage of the Sikhs which determined, to a great extent, their attitude towards the Muslims.

Thus "continual invasion and cultural confrontation had produced a society composed of three different but sometimes overlapping segments, each with its customs, and traditional elites (landed and religious). There was a heritage of conflict involving war, rioting and struggle for converts".2

The Britishers annexed the Punjab from the Sikhs who had been exercising a great political, social and economic influence in the region after the fall of the Mughal empire.

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The rise of the Sikh movement and their political dominance had very far reaching effects on the Punjab society. J.R. Barrington Moore, whose observations are based on Prof. Irfan Habib's thesis (On the downfall of the Mughal empire) maintains that, in socio-economic hierarchy of the medieval times a class of the Zamindars called the 'Smaller Zamindars' formed local aristocracy. By its nature - disunited and attached to the localities - and position - being between the Monarch and the peasant masses - this class played a decisive role in acting as a challenge to, and substitute for, royal despotism. He says that as the imperial system decayed and became more oppressive, zamindars, large and small, became the rallying points for peasant rebellions. "This led to a situation in which the old system was undoubtedly undetermined but remained there because of the absence of alternate theory of social relations and polity." The history of the eighteenth century Punjab thus presented two phenomena: one, the weakening of the Central authority giving rise to local patriotism symbolized by the Sikh movement; and, two, a political pattern which enhanced the power of the agriculturist sections.

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The dominance which the landowner class had acquired during the Sikh rule continued, and the possession of land became a status symbol. "Throughout the period covered in the records, land has remained both the most important economic resource and one of the most important determinants of social and political status in Punjab villages."

However, it would be wrong to say that the rise of the Sikhs was simply the rise of the agriculturist class. The other classes which gained dominance were the Khatris, together with the Aroras and Baniyas. This is indicated by the fact that all the Sikh Gurus were Khatris. In fact the success of the Sikh movement can be attributed to the combination of Khatris and Jats, i.e., the business and the agriculturist classes.

The coming of the British, instead of bringing any fundamental change, strengthened and reinforced the position of these two classes. The impact of the British on the social order of Punjab can be described in the following words of L. Hazlehurst: "The seventeenth century is significant, for it marks the transformation of the society from one based on the hegemony of the chiefs and rulers to the social dominance of the merchants and the agriculturists."

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The Punjab was essentially an agricultural region with the predominance of peasant-proprietors. Habitation was mostly in villages - with a few towns, mostly small but a few of them quite large also.

The British Government adopted the land tenure system on the basis of past history, that is, on the recognition of hereditary rights. It was made not as a breakthrough but as a continuum of the existing system. It depended mainly on the extent and nature of the partition of land that had been effected till the land settlement was made. The chief characteristic of the tenure was that the proprietors were associated together in village communities, having, to a greater or lesser extent, joint interests and jointly responsible for the payment of revenue assessed upon the village land. Thus a sort of 'Mahalwari system' was adopted. "It was an incident of tenure, that if any of the proprietors wished to sell his rights, or was obliged to part with them in order to satisfy demands upon him, the other members of the same community had a preferential right to purchase them at the same price as could be obtained from outsiders."  

Large areas were lying waste in the western parts of the province. These lands were made fit for cultivation by the introduction of canal irrigation, and they came to

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8 Land of Five Years - Punjab Administration Report, 1921-22, and Decennial portion of the Report, p. 120.
be known as "Canal Colonies". On being irrigated they were granted, or sold at concessional rates, to settlers from old districts. The grants took various forms; sometimes lands were given to persons who deserved well of Government. Usually lands were granted to persons on the condition that the grantees would take up residence and build houses on a site provided for the purpose.

The British land revenue system in the Punjab, though similar in form to that of the Mughals and the Sikh period, and conservative in spirit, differed from that of its predecessors in one fundamental respect. "The British made the revenue records into a permanent legal record of rights in the land, as well as a source of information for assessment and collection of revenue."\(^9\)

Punjab was industrially a backward province; there were many obstacles in its industrial progress. Punjab lacked electric power and there was scarcity of natural resources. There was also scarcity of markets. Only small industries which produced goods for local requirements could survive. Such industries were food, clothing, building material and instruments required in agriculture, which sprang up in the beginning of the 20th century. The state of industry

\(^9\)T.G.Kissinger: 'Sources for the Social and Economic History of Rural Punjab' in Sources on Punjab History, \(\textit{op. cit.}\)
was so poor that Punjab exported raw cotton and imported cotton goods even till 1919 and after.¹⁰

The egalitarian tradition of Islam had some, though no great, influence on Punjab society. The feeling against lower occupations and craftsmen was not so strong in the Muslim west. The land-holding castes, both of the eastern and the western tracts—like Jats, Gujars and Rajputs—were not affected in social position by conversion to Islam.¹¹ "Society in the Punjab conformed to no strictly hierarchical pattern. Only the lower levels of society (menials and artisans) were universally recognised as such."¹²

The establishment of the British rule provided opportunities in various fields, such as, education, law, medicine etc. There grew competition for Government jobs which became prestigious position in which the Hindus followed by the Sikhs were most successful. "The impact of western rule and education on Punjabis was such that from the end of the 19th century they tended to align according to community — Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims — all

¹⁰Census.


¹²Ibid.
fearing each other and calculating that they were losing out in the new era.¹³ In the economic field also the Hindu money-lenders from towns and cities started buying the property and wealth of rural peasantry — not only Muslim but also Hindu. This trend of communalism increased after 1880's when the system of elective principles to the local self-government institutions was applied. Competition for positions on village, district and Municipal bodies came to be determined by community and caste rather than by class. Thus the Punjabis were involved in all areas of politics — from local self-governing bodies to social, public and political associations of various kinds. On the other hand, they were not anti-British, but were growing in communalism. "All the three communities, by the end of the nineteenth century, had developed their own associations in order to protect both their specific religious interests and their material interests. The Sikhs had their Singh Sabhas, and Muslims their Anjumans and Hindus the Arya Samaj. These bodies had the effect of bringing their members into various political arenas — local, district, provincial and national."¹⁴ Governments' unconcerned attitude further aggravated the situation. "British neutrality accentuated unrest by indirectly favouring the Hindus and thus perpetuating the growing cleavages among Punjabi religious


These forces and organisations were the first to effect social mobilization and politicization in the Punjab, rather than the nationalist movement. "They — rather than the Congress party — produced the bulk of the leadership and the cadre, as well as orientation, towards socio-politic issues which comprised the core elements for nationalist politics during the beginning of the 20th century."  

The establishment of British rule required a large number of English-educated clerks, teachers, pleaders, doctors etc. — the important pillars of the British raj. As Punjab could not provide such men they were brought from Bengal and the United Provinces - the majority from Bengal. They formed a Bengali elite between the British and the Punjabies. The most influential section of Bengalis in the Punjab was of Bengali Brahmos who came in large numbers in 1850's and 1860's and founded the 'Lahore Brahmo Samaj' with the help of a dozen Bengalis and five or six Punjabi Hindus.

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The orthodox Punjabi Hindus resented the criticism Brahmos made of Hinduism. Gradually there emerged a Punjabi elite, after receiving English education, who started joining new professions. Herein they came to face the competition of the Bengalis, and, therefore, started resenting the Bengali dominance.

In the social life there arose a zeal for social and religious reform among the newly emerged Punjabi elite. The new Punjabi elite did not want to join the Brahmo Samaj but craved for something different and the Arya Samaj satisfied this craving. When Dayanand made a tour of Punjab during 1877-78 he found ready acceptance and Arya Samajes were established in various parts of the province and Brahmo Samaj lost its grounds. Most of the Punjabi who had turned Brahmos joined the Arya Samaj. Brahmo Samaj had a great following amongst the students of the Government College, Lahore, but later the college became a centre of the Arya Samaj. All important Arya Samaj leaders — Pt. Guru Dutt, L. Munshi Ram (later Swami Shraddhanand) L. Lajpat Rai, L. Sain Das, Bhagat Ishwar Das, etc. had been members of the Brahmo Samaj in their student days, but they changed their allegiance to the Arya Samaj after its establishment.

The Arya Samaj thus became a popular creed of the English-educated Punjabi Hindus. By adopting the Arya Samaj he could remain a Hindu and yet be different from the uneducated
masses. A large number of Hindus took advantage of the opportunities provided by the British rule: they took to English education and became acquainted with the liberal, democratic and radical ideas of the west. "J.P. Thompson, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab, was told a very simple way of recognizing an Arya Samajist, that every Hindu who could talk English was a member of the Arya Samaj." 18

Though some of the Arya Samajists had a knowledge of Sanskrit but very few of the old Sanskritists joined the Arya Samaj. For years the Arya Samaj remained the preserve of the elites and it remained concerned with the question of social work. "Arya Samaj assumed an educative role in establishing western-type schools and tried to bring into its fold as converts Untouchables, Muslims and Christians. It hence played a considerable role in promoting community awareness and community differences in Punjab." 19

Gradually the Arya Samajists realized that they should have the support of the masses, that the reform work could not be of lasting value, unless the gulf between the 'classes' and the 'masses' was bridged and the two were linked together closely. The Arya Samaj became most popular among the Jats

19 Jim Masselos, op. cit.
of Rohtak, Hissar and Delhi and was successful in spreading national consciousness among its followers. "So great was the influence of the Arya Samaj that once a Deputy Commissioner had some dispute with L. Chandu Lal (President of the Hissar Arya Samaj) and this led to a hartal in the entire town. The Commissioner who came for an enquiry said to him "You are the Raja of the District."  

The Arya Samaj and its success indicated the separation of the trading section from the agrarian one. There came an end to the historic Jat Banya Combination. The economic effects of the British rule had produced a pattern which was more in favour of stability. It demanded mitigation of the gap between the city and the village. Agriculture was dependent upon the technical innovations made in the city, being the centre of economic, administrative and hence political activity generated by the formation of local bodies, could not flourish without the rural support. In social terms, this mutual dependence was that of urban (Hindu) sections and rural (Hindu, Muslim & Sikh) agriculturist section. But the religio-cultural factors checked this dependence. The subordinate position of Indian economy to British economy led to a situation in which rational factors went into the background, and place was taken by traditional methods of socio-economic organisations. Applying this to Punjab situation B.B. Misra says that the

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weakness of capitalism produced a situation in which religion became, in essence, a subject of politics. The rise of Arya Samaj in the Punjab, according to him, was an illustration of the manner in which religion contributed to the growth of capitalism.21

The success attained by the Arya Samaj, and the ideas propagated by it worried the Muslims and the Sikhs. The idea of Hindu Nation taught by the Arya Samaj alarmed the Muslims who were already backward and the Sikhs who were in a minority. N.G.Barrier says, "Militantly anti-Muslim, the Arya Samaj inculcated the mission of a Hindu Nation among its members."22

So the Muslims started their Anjuman-i-Islamia and the Sikhs their Singh Sabhas with similar aims and programmes. The Shuddhi crusade launched by the Samaj was resisted by the Muslims and the Sikhs and had an important effect on the relations of the three communities.

In 1880's emerged a socio-religious movement amongst the Muslims, namely, the 'Ahmadiya movement'. Its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad laid emphasis on religious revival with few social and educational reforms. He published sixty works in

21 B.B.Misra: The Indian Political Parties, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1976, p.52.

Urdu, the most important of them being 'Brahin-i-Ahmadiya', in which he presented the first Islamic rejoinder to the statements of Dayanand Sarawati against Islam.23

The Sikhs also started seeking their identity and examining their relations with the Hindus. The result was the publication of books like 'Ham Hindu Nahin' (1899) by S. Kahan Singh, its opposite, 'Sikh Hindu Hain' (1899) and Bawa Narain Singh's 'Sikh Hindu Hain' (1899). "This action and reaction broke up the close social relationship which had existed between the two sister communities."24

Pamphlets were distributed which appealed to the people to support a particular institution, idea or a project. Prominent pamphleteers were Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Babu Teja Singh Overseer. In 1894 was formed the Khalsa Tract Society to carry out the work of the distribution of the pamphlets, and in 1908 was formed the Khalsa Handbill Society. "A predominantly agrarian community, the Sikhs pioneered in programmes to link rural and urban co-religionists with publicity tracts and prachar (preaching) teams."25

Throughout the years 1908-03 Sikhs debated with Aryas on the meaning of Sikhism, on their separateness from

Hindu Community, and on the alleged job discrimination by the Government, as economic competition between educated Sikhs and Hindus added fuel to the existing communal competition."26

Thus the middle classes of the Punjab, which had provided leadership for the nationalist movement in other provinces, remained wholly concerned with local, communal or religious issues. Nationalism seemed irrelevant in the light of these issues. Punjab lacked leaders who could work across provincial, communal or religious lines. They worked within caste and religious organisations. Moreover, the middle classes had not much to complain against the British. Punjab was the last province to fall under the British sway and it was given a parental form of government. The middle classes enjoyed the opportunities they had never enjoyed before.

The transfer of power in 1849 from the Sikh to the British hands weakened the position of the landed aristocracy but not of the urban classes. The annexation of Punjab by the British was followed by a recession in Sikh fortunes, particularly those of the rural Jat Sikhs. The period of peace under Ranjit Singh had brought about an increase in the pressure of population in the fertile plains tract, and the disbanding of the Khalsa Army further aggravated the conditions.27 "The


27 W.H. McLeod: The Evolution of Sikh Community, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1975, p. 54.
majority of the soldiers of the Sikh Army (the Jat Sikhs) returned to practise agriculture in their native Majha and Malwa areas.”

The urban classes benefitted as the British rule opened up opportunities in various fields. Then there were grants of lands to be made in the Canal Colonies because of which the people did not want to incur the wrath of the Government. One more advantage conferred by the British on the traders, who later became the middle classes — Khatris, Aroras and Banias — was the exemption from taxation. Before that there was a tradition of taxation on traders. ”Historical accident and economic theories prevalent in Britain at the time of annexation of the Punjab led to the condemnation of existing methods of taxing traders without the substitution of any different methods.”

Thus Punjab acquired a reputation of being non-political before 1919. N.G. Barrier says, ”In fact the Punjab was politicised but in a fashion dissimilar to that of other provinces. Karl Deutsch had suggested that communication networks consist of two aspects relevant to political development — structure and content. In the Punjab, both reflected parochial (provincial) patterns and interests. Economic and

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social considerations (tribe and caste) influenced emerging links among agriculturists. Urban politics tended to revolve around religious communalism.\(^\text{30}\)

Thus agrarian and communal associations had created the political scene within which the Congress had to operate.

Of all the communal organisations, the Arya Samaj was the most popular and best organised with branches in various parts of the province. In a province in which the influence of the Arya Samaj was so great, any nationalist organization like the Congress had to work through the branches and support of the Samaj to establish itself.

The Congress was founded in 1885 by a retired British Civil servant Allan Octavian Hume. It was done at the suggestion of Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy. Indian nationalists were also keen to have a political association to voice their grievances. During the 19th century the Congress remained a moderate organization, its work being presentation of charters of demands to the Government. In the 20th century the Congress slowly became a national organisation and no area could be thought to be politically active without the Congress.

The Congress had a great difficulty in establishing itself in the Punjab, since the Arya Samajists were not in

favour of it. They regarded the Congress as a handiwork of the Englishmen, and they said since Englishmen love their country, therefore, they will never be successful in winning political freedom for India. They believed that Congress had been formed by Englishmen to keep busy the Indian intelligentsia. They were of the view that Indians should make themselves stronger through education, by popularising Swadeshi and by the smuggling of arms and then, when they became strong, they should oust the British. They were not in favour of Hindu-Muslim Unity as they believed that such unity would make the Muslims politically very strong. They said that the Congress movement would divert energy from the work for Hindu solidarity and Hindu reform. They argued that political involvement would make the British suspicious of the Hindus and thus would harm them, so they should remain aloof from political movements and remain concerned with social reform. Still there were some men like Bakshi Jaishi Ram, Babu Jogendra Chandra Bose and L. Harkishen Lal in the Samaj who had contacts with the Congress in the province. It was due to their efforts that in 1893 Punjab invited the Congress, yet Arya Samaj leaders did not take any conspicuous part in the Congress. This was the conflict between religion and modernization which split the Arya Samaj in 1893. The split was an indication of the change

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31 L. Lajpat Rai: *Autobiographical Writings*, op. cit., p. 87.
in the leadership pattern. Earlier the Samaj had been the stronghold of trading and commercial classes under the sway of Brahminical tradition. But the rapidly growing English education soon produced a class of modern elite represented by the 'college party' - which challenged the traditional and orthodox leadership of the Arya Samaj. This elite could not work independently. It owed its position partly to the Government, which was the chief source of its patronage, and partly to the positions of the classes to which it belonged. Thus it remained in a captivated position both socially and economically, which became a hindrance for the growth of the Congress. One example of such leadership was L. Harkishen Lal, about whom L. Lajpat Rai said, "The beauty of it is that L. Harkishen Lal's political outlook was the same as that of the Arya Samajists but ostensibly he was a Congressman.... He ridiculed the social and religious ideas of the Arya Samajists and called many of its members humbugs, but he knew that in this province no movement could be successful without the help of the Arya Samaj.\(^{32}\)

The statement shows the imprisoned position of the Congress leaders. The statement can be equally applied to Lajpat Rai's own case. About the 1893 Session of the Congress, Lajpat Rai, who had by that time earned the reputation of an important Arya Samaj leader writes - "I did not join the Reception Committee of the Congress but by no means took an

\(^{32}\)L. Lajpat Rai: *Autobiographical Writings*, op. cit., pp. 95-96.
active part that people expected me to take." Gradually the influence of Bakshi Jaishi Ram increased and most of the Arya Samajists leaders were his friends. So the Punjab again invited the Congress in 1900 and this time the Arya Samajists took keener interest in it. Out of 567 persons who attended the session, 421 were members of the Arya Samaj.

Unfortunately, the emergence of the Indian National Congress in this province coincided with the rise of the situation that led to the enactment of the Land Alienation Act, which created communal tension in the province and marred its proceedings. The Hindu bourgeoisie who dominated the Congress felt annoyed with it on account of its failure to take a strong action for the repeal of the Land Alienation Act. The Hindu delegates from the Punjab had raised this question at several sessions but the attitude of the Congress leadership towards this question left both the communities dissatisfied. For instance, a strong resolution against the Bill passed by the Congress at its Session held in December, 1899, hurt the Mohammedans in the province. When the Hindus raised this question again at the 1900 session, the Congress leadership was reluctant to endorse their earlier decision on

33 Ibid.
34 Report of the Congress Session, 1900.
account of the determined opposition of the Mohammedan delegates.  

The Land Alienation Act added to the strengthening of divisive forces in the economic conditions of the three communities. It accentuated the difference between agricultural and non-agricultural classes in the rural areas. The act was to safeguard the interests of the agriculturists. "The question as to who was or was not an agriculturist was not decided by actual occupation but by caste, therefore, it sowed the seeds of racial separatism. All Jats and Rajputs were declared agriculturists while all Khatris, Aroras and Banias were classed as non-agriculturists. The Act did not provide for an exception in the case of Jat moneylenders or Arora agriculturists. In certain districts Brahmins were declared agriculturists. However, cases of individual hardships were not as serious as the breaking up of the population on a new racial basis."  

Since most of the moneylenders were Hindus the main axe of the Act fell on them. "Though the Government could not be blamed for it, but the way it was made to work created a suspicion amongst them (the Hindus) that this measure was

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deliberately designed to punish them for their enthusiasm for the national movement, and not for removing economic inequalities. The Muslims, amongst whom the caste system did not exist, were not affected by the Act. A supporter of the Hindu viewpoint stated that while the Census Report prior to this Act recorded 53% Hindus, 59% Muslims and 75% Sikhs engaged in agriculture, the Land Alienation Act notified only 32% Hindus, 60% Muslims and 68% Sikhs (as agriculturists). "39

Further, the policy of the Government to open non-agriculturist professions to agriculturists, the majority of whom were Muslims, added to the grievances of the Hindus. One Hindu leader pointed out that the Hindu Sabha came into existence in the Punjab mainly with a view to bringing about pressure on the Government to repeal the Land Alienation Act. 40 The Indian National Congress could not take up any issue over which the major communities in the province were divided. This policy of the Congress prevented many Hindus from joining the Congress.

As a result of such measures the Government created a class of big landlords amongst Mohammedans, who, having acquired vested interests in the existing order became its strong supporters. O'Dwyer, in his memoirs stated the following advantage of the Act: "As a result of the Act, 

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40 Ibid.
the Punjab landowners, the finest body of the peasantry in
the East,... have been standing loyal to the British."\(^{41}\)
Moreover, among the Muslims no strong middle class had
emerged. In the absence of such middle class, the Muslims
looked for leadership to landed families which owed their
wealth and status to the government. The Muslims had been
against the Congress since its inception. Most Muslims after
1887-88 opposed the Indian National Congress, and many
pamphlets warned the Muslims of the dangers in not doing so.
These included Saujad Hashim Bukhari's - National Congress Se
Mussalmanon ko Bachna Chahiye ('Mussalmans should beware
of National Congress') and Munshi Shams-ud-din's Aina-i-
National Congress ('Mirror of the National Congress').\(^{42}\) When
the Congress session of 1893 was held in Lahore the Central
Mohammedan Association of Lahore was hostile to it. "It was
reported by an observer that Mohammedans were so vehemently
antagonistic to this session that none of them was coming
forward to attend it till Maulvi Moharram Chisti undertook to
bring a contingent of them."\(^{43}\) However, he was not very
successful, as out of 481 delegates of Punjab only 49 were
Mohammedans.\(^{44}\) This caused a serious damage to the prestige

\(^{41}\) M.O'Dwyer, op. cit.
\(^{43}\) Punjab in the Nineties, The Tribune, May 31, 1925.
\(^{44}\) Report of the Congress Session 1893.
of the Congress among the Mohammedans. Thus the sessions of 1905 and 1906 attended by large contingents from Punjab could claim just a few Mohammedans.

In December 1906, a Muslim political organisation — the Muslim League — was established. This was formed as a counterpoise to the Congress which was regarded as a Hindu organization. In 1907 a branch of the Muslim League was established in the Punjab also, and Mohammed Shafi, who belonged to landed aristocracy, became its Secretary.

The Sikh leaders were equally cautious. They refrained from giving offence to the Government which had been well disposed towards them. The Singh Sabha that appeared in the last quarter of the 19th century to promote and protect Sikh interests pledged itself to cultivate loyalty to the Government. Its membership was not open to the persons who had proved abnoxious to the Government. It was provided in its fundamental rules that nothing against the Government could be discussed in its meetings. "The Government also favoured the tendency among the Sikhs to distinguish themselves from the Hindus, since it fell into their scheme of segregating as many elements as possible from the general body of Hindus who were held

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45 Ibid.


47 Teja Singh: Essays in Sikhism; Lahore, 1944.
responsible for the political agitation against the British. A British Scholar even suggested state support to Sikh religion for maintaining its identity in view of the wonderful absorbing power of Hinduism. The Sikh remained averse to the Congress. The Chief Khalsa Dewan did not respond favourably to the 1893 Congress Session held at Lahore and expelled three of its members who had attended it.

Thus the political life of Punjab remained different from that of other provinces. A secular All India organization like the Congress could not be successful in the Punjab. The people of other provinces always spoke of Punjab as a politically backward province. The Hindustan noted in 1916 - "For the past ten years the Punjab had been in deep slumber. From political point of view this province is so inactive that, while the public men of all other provinces have expressed their opinions regarding the operation of the Press Act, the public of this province has shown no activity except in publishing a few article on the subject. Then, again, when other provinces are preparing for the coming Session of the Indian National Congress, nothing is being done in the Punjab, where the provincial Congress Committee wakes up only once a year when nearly a dozen residents of Lahore meet and

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48 Ibid.
reluctantly perform the duty of electing two or three delegates to the Congress." 50

"The Punjab was politically active in the 19th century, but that activity revolved around control of resources within local organisation or between sects instead of agitation directed against the British. 51 When the Government created resentment in the countryside by passing the so-called 'Canal Colony Act' in 1906, there was a fierce opposition to it. Towards the end of 1906, the Canal Colony bill was introduced in the Punjab Council to establish uniformity of tenure. But the bill gave rise to a cry of 'breach of faith' against the Government. Again, on the Bari Doab Canal, in the Lahore District, the water rates were enhanced and this was resented by the people. N.G. Barrier says, "Punjab Government's zeal to protect canal colonists created the very situation it most feared and aroused countryside susceptible to the anti-British propaganda." 52 He says that the British Government felt that the landholdings were becoming fragmented. When the original colonists died, the occupying rights of their land was sub-divided among sons. The British became alarmed at a process which, if unchecked, might eventually leave the

50 Quoted in V. N. Dutta: New Light... op. cit.


52 N. G. Barrier: Masses Politics, op. cit.
colonists with only a few acres."  

The provisions like the restriction of colonisers to make wills and rights to cutting trees caused a great resentment. The bill was severely criticised in the Indian press and also by members of the Punjab Legislative Council. "Pratap Singh Ahluwalia, speaking on behalf of the Sikhs, protested that the bill sought to make the government both landlord and administrator." The weekly journal 'The Punjabi' took up the case of the settlers. The writer and publisher of the paper were arrested. Popular demonstrations against the arrest were held throughout the Punjab on the 22nd February, 1907 and led to clashes between the public and the police. "There was some thing like a mass uprising throughout Punjab."  

These grievances were worked up into anti-British feelings by Ajeet Singh, which led to assaults on Europeans in Lahore and Rawalpindi. He organised the 'Indian Patriots Association' mainly for the betterment of the condition of the peasantry. "The demands were not limited to the removal of agrarian grievances but was for Swaraj." Lajpat Rai also

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54 Khushwant Singh: A History of the Sikhs, op. cit.

55 Arun Chandra Guha: First Spark of Revolution - The Early Phase of India’s Struggle for Independence, p. 328.

56 Ibid.
joined the movement and became its leader. Mass demonstrations were held not only in rural areas but also in cities like Rawalpindi, Lahore, Amritsar, etc.

This was the first occasion when participation of the public was across communal lines. The agitation was made to spread in the whole of the province - the agitation spreading from Canal Colonies to the regions from which the Canal Colonists had actually come. The anti-partition agitation of Bengal was also used by Lajpat Rai to make the movement a success. He tried to popularise the slogan of Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott (of British goods) and National education picked up at the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in 1906. The idea of Swadeshi was very successful and this was due to the full cooperation of Arya-Samajists who had great faith in it.

Though the agitation failed, it had a great influence on the Punjab. "Despite all that the Government had done to suppress political agitation in the Punjab, enough of the political fervour survived to enable the Punjabi Congressmen to invite the annual session of the Indian National Congress to Lahore in 1910." People always remembered it, it became an example of anti-Government demonstration. From now onwards terrorist activities gained ground in the Punjab.

57 S.R. Sharma: Punjab in Ferment; S. Chand, Delhi, 1971, p. 100.
One instance of terrorist movement was the Ghadar movement started by secret agents of the Ghadar party formed in U.S.A. in 1913. Their programme was the programme of the terrorists - the killing of Europeans, looting of Government property, non-cooperating with the government, and forcing the British out of the country with the help of Germany, America, etc. However, due to lack of leadership, organisation and support, the movement was crushed. The vast majority of the Ghadrites were Sikhs. The eruption of the Ghadar movement brought a complete change in the outlook of the Sikhs. "The return of the Ghadrites was the first live contact that the Sikh peasants experienced with politics of any kind." It marked an end to the loyalty to the British Raj.

Inspite of these disturbances the politics of Punjab remained different from that of other provinces. The people remained concerned with local and parochial issues. In these movements the people agitated against local grievances and raised the issues which wholly concerned the province. The national issues did not attract the attention of the people of the province. Its politics was largely communal and local. Therefore, the people of other provinces described Punjab as a politically passive and backward province.

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58 Khushwant Singh & Satindra Singh: Ghadar - India's First Armed Revolution, p.