



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**State, Religion and Religious Minorities in Pakistan: Remembering  
the Participation of Christians in Punjab Legislative Assembly  
1947-55**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> April 07, 2020 <b>Accepted:</b> June 15, 2020 <b>Online:</b> June 30, 2020	This study "State, Religion and Religious minorities in Pakistan: Remembering the participation of Christians in Punjab Legislative Assembly 1947-55" exclusively focuses on their participation of the religious minorities the Christians in Punjab Legislative Assembly in early crucial years of independence 1947-55. The Christian community had considerable representation in the Punjab Legislative Assembly and took part in almost in every debate, resolution and reform of the province. Their services contributed to the development of the state and society in Pakistan to create a plural society. The study is based upon the proceedings of the Punjab Legislative Assembly (archival material) which hitherto has not fully utilized by the historians to construct the role of minorities in Pakistan.
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**Introduction**

Pakistan is an Islamic State where every citizen has equal rights and responsibility to be a better part of the country. Christian community rights remained the debatable subject in this state as far as their rights are concerned. They are struggling for human right and legal protection. It is the time when we should revisit Jinnah's democratic, tolerant and plural ideas. In this modern time, non-discrimination and equal rights should be the priority of every democratic country. The objective of this article is to highlight their historical contribution in early crucial times of the Punjab in this way perhaps religious and ethnic diversity can be protected in Pakistan.

Christian leaders provided unconditional support to Jinnah before 1947 at that time when there was substantial opposition in and outside the country. At those times when many people especially, religious class were criticizing Jinnah and called him

British Agent. Christian community continued to support Mr. Jinnah even Britishers were their co-religionists. They organized many historical receptions of Jinnah to express their affection and to support his Cause. At the King's Garden of Faisalabad historical and grand reception was arranged on 19 November 1942. In large Hall of Loring Hotel in Lahore another reception on very next day was hosted by them, Nawab Mamdot Sir Sikander Hyat Khan and Miss Fatima Jinnah were there as well. Jinnah at that time said if you have not cooperated with us, we would never win your support. Registrar of the Punjab University Dewan Bahadur S.P Singha and his staff Union hosted a grand reception of Jinnah and assured him their unconditional favor for Pakistan. Student and teachers of Forman Christian College also assured their support and confident on the leadership of Jinnah. Mr. Ameer-ud-din the president of Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam a prominent Muslim Leaguer in July 1946 contested election for the Mayer ship of Lahore. Unfortunately, he was betrayed by Muslim Leaguers whereas he won the election with the support Christian community. In General elections of 1946 it was the Christian community who supported Jinnah and side by side the Muslim Leaguer contested the elections. (Ahmad, 1983)

After these elections, Muslim League emerged as sole spokesman party o Muslim of India and denied all the claims of Congress. Dewan Bahadur and Mr. Fazal Elahi were elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. At that point when Muslim league was declared successful party the Christian Leader Joshua Fazal-ud-Din issue a news declaring that Now It is the responsibility of the British Government to accept facts moreover Congress would bring instability in the Country.

### **Christian Community after the Creation of Pakistan**

It was estimated that at the time of partition in 1947 there were 516,000 Christians in the new State and the census of 1951 same numbers were given but, in the census of 1961; their numbers were reached to 733,000. Their treatment and status after the creation of Pakistan was defined as caste deliberation rather than religion. Its present respect and honor to the minority in the society. Through inner reformation, Islam also elevates the status of minority. In the First constituent assembly's address Jinnah assured equality and promise of religious freedom to all communities of Pakistan on 11 August 1947. He stated that

“Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizen of state... you are free to go to your mosque or to any place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed... that has nothing to do with the business of the state”. ( The Nation, 2001)After partition, the minorities in Pakistan participated wholeheartedly in the political process of democracy. There were twelve members from the minorities in Pakistan's Constituent Assembly; wherein Sindh Assembly, NWFP and Punjab a suitable number of minorities community representatives were playing their due role in politics. It was the inclusive policy of Jinnah that a schedule Hindu Jogendra Nath became first Law Minister of the Country. Fazal Ilahi was the Deputy Speaker of the Punjab Assembly

Chaudhary Lal his successor was also Christian. The Deputy Speaker of National Assembly was also Christian Cecil Edward Gibbon. They were enjoying powerful and prestigious positions.

### **Christian Members of Punjab Legislative Assembly 1947**

In the Punjab all the four minority members, S. P. Singha, C.E. Gibbon, Fazal Ilahi and B. L. Rallia Ram, were Christian, and they had made a significant contribution to the Radcliffe award and on the 23rd of June, 1947 a meeting of the PLA was arranged, to consider whether the Province, still undivided at the time, should be part of Pakistan or India. The three Christian members of the Assembly had met the night before at Singha's Davis Road home had determined to vote for the insertion of the whole of Punjab in Pakistan. (Munir-ul-Anjum, 2012) On the morning of the meeting, leader of the militant Sikh Akali Dal Party Master Tara Singh stood on the broad flight of steps in front of the Assembly with a bared *kirpan*, threatening to use it on any member who would vote in favor of union with Pakistan. Coming up the steps, Dewan Bahadur Singha confronted the armed Sikh leader, announcing that he indeed intended to vote for Pakistan, and challenged him to do his worst. S. P. Singha raised slogan "Seenay Pay GoliKhain Gay Pakistan BunaianGayhay" (for the establishment of Pakistan we would die) (Gazette, 1953) A scuffle broke out, but violence was prevented by other members.

The vote itself was 88 for remaining with India and 91 for joining Pakistan. The three votes (actually four) which created the majority were the three votes of Christian members Dewan Bahadur Singha, Mr. Cecil Gibbon and Mr Fazal Elahi, plus Singha's additional vote as Assembly Speaker and thus it was decided that Punjab would be part of Pakistan. (A Citizen Report on Minorities in India and Pakistan) But the division of Punjab itself - the Great Tragedy of the Partition - now came to the fore. When the Boundary Commission started its proceeding, the Christian leaders, led by Singha, recorded their statement that, the Christian populations should be incorporated with, and in fact termed as, Muslim populations for the demarcation of the Boundaries.

### **Chaudhary Chandu Lal**

Chaudhary Chandu Lal was serving as a lawyer representing the Christian community, inter alia visiting Pathankot and Gurdaspur districts to obtain a resolution from the Christian populations there that they wished to be included in Pakistan. He served as Deputy Speaker of Punjab Legislative assembly between 1951-55. He was also among those political figures who supported unconditionally to Pakistan. (Nasir, 2004) Chaudhary Chandu Lal stressed on social, religious, economic and political rights of the minorities in the newly established country in the result Jinnah assured all light-minded Christian leaders who were cooperating that equal rights would be given to all the minorities. Chandu Lal along with S.P Sinha participated enthusiastically in annual convention of AIML held in Faisalabad and supported to Jinnah. When the first constitutional Assembly was formed total members of the Assembly were 69 among

hem 18 were non-Muslims. When discussion on the right of separate electorate was started these Christian members supported separate electorate in Punjab whereas Hindus' in East Pakistan supported Joint electorate. Chaudhary Lal with other Christian leaders in Punjab filed a constitutional petition in High court that two electorate systems could not be approved by the constitutional assembly for two parts of the country. Although Judge dismissed their petition and declared that it would be the parliament who is sovereign in modifying and forming a constitution. (Aqeel, 2018)

### **Mr. Cecil Gibbon**

Mr. Cecil Gibbon while appeared before the Commission, demand that the city of Lahore must be considered as part of Western Punjab. (Some of the readers of this piece may be surprised to learn that the fate of that historic city was ever at issue, but it had been!) Gibbon additionally desired that all the Anglo-Indian Christians in Punjab should be transported to Pakistan. In 1906 Gibbon was born in Allahabad. For schooling he went to St. Joseph's College, Nainital, and later in Shillong to St. Edmund's College. On his family background, he had told the Radcliffe Award quoted as, "in fact I am an Anglo-Muslim. By descent I am a European-Muslim because my great grandfather married a Muslim princess." In 1938, from Hyderabad, he was elected as the President of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association. Approximately the same time, even though he was critical of its politics, he joined the Indian National Congress. Gibbon addressed a public meeting in March 1939 where he asked communists to join the Congress in large numbers "By the Removal of its so-called spiritual outlook forward policy could be mold on more human lines ... the Indian National Congress could claim to be a beyond doubt innovative body determined to protect the complete freedom of our Motherland purged of spiritualism." Gibbon in 1941 was posted in the Punjab and he joined the Government of India Food Department. Here he was elected as the president of Anglo-Indian Association, Punjab chapter, and from an Anglo-Indian constituency in 1946 was elected to the Legislative Assembly. He remained the Parliamentary Secretary to CM Sir Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana. Gibbon honestly supported the demand of establishment of Pakistan from May 1947 onwards and was disqualified from the Anglo-Indian Association and Congress for doing so. In August, Alongside SP Singha and Fazl Elahi established the Anglo-Pakistan Association in his office at 13 Jail Road, Lahore. On June 23, 1947, he was one of the three Punjab Assembly legislators who voted for Pakistan. Gibbon was among those who during its proceedings of the Punjab Boundary Commission chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe he was summoned, from July 21 to July 31, 1947.

There were only 5,891 Anglo-Indians in Punjab at the time of partition according to the statement of Gibbon before the commission. He told in detail the position of the Punjabi Anglo-Indians to the commission in the following words: "it is pleasure for Anglo-Indians to be in Pakistan ... It is a renowned fact that the Anglo-Indian community, scream' comes from the Punjab. Their origin linked back almost to 200 years ... in the Punjab, many of us Anglo-Indians could even mark out our link from the Kings of Oudh ... Such is the folder with just about 99% of the Anglo-Indians

were in the Punjab. They are the offspring of the Anglo-Muslim race. (Gazette, 1953)“ After the establishing the new -country, Gibbon had the honor to be a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights of Citizens and Minorities of Pakistan. On August 12, 1947, the committee was formed by the first Constituent Assembly. Other committee members were Sir Mohammad Zafrullah Khan, DewanBahadur S.P. Singha; Chaudhry Nazir Ahmad Khan; Jamshed Nusserwanji Mehta; PhoniBhusanBarua and Khawaja Shahabuddin. In November 1949 after death of Singha’s, Rallia Ram was chosen to the committee in his place. On August 29, 1947, Gibbon wrote to Jinnah to articulate his harmony in the wake of an influx of refugees and communal riots from India. He uttered his grievances in the following words: “The sorrow and grief which fills your heart of Excellency is shared by my community. Our people are doing all that can be possible humanly to lessen suffering and assist the management in restoring law and order. In Lahore the Anglo-Indian community wishes, most sincerely, to pay their admiration to your Excellency and to show their devotion to your individual and the state. At the Burt Institute arrangements were made to hold a meeting of Anglo-Indians, Lahore, 31, at 10.30 am on Sunday. it would be a great honor if Your Excellency were to give time to address just in a few words to the Anglo-Indian community of Pakistan, and from us receive a contribution for donation for the West Punjab Refugees Relief Fund.” (Daily Times , 2017) Gibbon wrote an article on the birth anniversary of Mr. Jinnah in 1949, how he was introduced to Mr. Jinnah and over the course their various conversations of what with time became a long-lasting association. He comments, “I was introduced to Mr. M. Ali Jinnah in the year of 1935 by the late Sir Henry Gidney, in the Indian Legislative Assembly he was representative of the Anglo-Indian community. I have a glowing remembrance of a series of talks which took place between Sir Henry Gidney, Mr. Jinnah, I and others, in New Delhi and Simla and 1939 and 1934. The conversation centred on the partition of India into two separate states- Pakistan and Hindustan. “Amusingly none of us, except Mr. Jinnah, were assured at that time of the possibilities of such a partition but, overtime the Congress became more communal-minded we started to see that what we well-thought-out to be a dream may sooner or later become a truth.” (A.Z. Hilali) In April 1952 it was noted in his statement on the floor of the house: “I wish to ask for a motion...to talk about a specific issue of urgent community importance, that is, a situation of the grave arising out of the plan of the government in respect of the extensive expulsion of Christians from their home assets, thus exposed almost 300,000 Christians homeless and on the brink of starvation, and it would have too horrible consequences.” (Debates, 1953, p. 103) Gibbon played a very significant role as a member of the first and second Punjab Assemblies. Especially in his second tenure in the Punjab Assembly, he pointed out many chilling questions and as the deputy opposition leader discussed important topics. He was the Leader of Opposition in the absence of Mian Abdul Bari in the session held from 22 November, 1954, to 11 December, 1954’. Gibbon won a National Assembly seat in June 1955 from the Punjab – interestingly this was the only seat allocated for non-Muslims. He was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly in August. Many sessions of the National Assembly were chaired by Gibbon. That debated ‘the Establishment of West Pakistan Bill and the Constitution Bill’. He was very active in raising voice for

Christian families, still displaced: He had been 'outspoken especially in his condemnation of the rehabilitation policy' of the new Country. After the establishment of Pakistan, thousands of Christian household's peasants were expelled from villages because their Sikh lords gone for India and the Pakistani administration were ignoring this inside displacement. In 1951, Gibbon wrote a Catholic publication, that efforts "are being made to hinder and curtail the growth and activities of our educational institutions; and in the Punjab thousands of Christians have been expelled from their lands and are now reduced to starvation and poverty.", he declared In March 1952 that "in search of to make them happy some dissatisfied people the government had adopted a policy of robbing Peter to pay Paul, and formed a dishonest management" (Debates, 1953, p. 234). He always advocated separate electorates: Most important reasons to support Pakistan by many Christian leaders were the idea of separate electorates. Gibbon was also a strong supporter of separate electorate scheme. He was also the members of the Committee on Fundamental Rights of Citizens and Minorities, both Barua and Gibbon was in favor of the joint electorate system in 1952. From East Pakistan many Hindu leadership thought that the separate electorate system had 'Islamic implications. Following to their thoughts, Gibbon quoted "Leave me alone so that I can follow my religion and develop my culture. I do not want to connect a supporter to represent me." (Debates, 1953) He was of the view that minorities were 'sufficiently strong to defend their interests in East Pakistan'. His enthusiasm for separate electorates also featured a lawsuit in 1956 he filed against the federation in the High Court of Karachi. He unfortunately lost that legal battle.

#### **Dewan Bahadur SP Singha (1893-1948).**

S.P. Singha, a prominent Christian leader of pre-Partition Punjab. Hailing from Pasrur, near Sialkot, Singha moved to Lahore. He rose to Registrar of Punjab University (Munir-ul-Anjum, 2012) His services in Punjab University were tremendous he introduced intermediate level degrees and Metric examination system due to his effort he was titled Dewan Bahadur. His grandfather was Bihari and his Grandmother was Bengali and he married a woman from UP. Elected to the Punjab Assembly in 1937 before entering politics, Singha would emerge as a staunch supporter of the Pakistan Movement. Moreover, he forcefully and courageously used his position as Speaker of the PLA to further the cause of State. At a time when many of the so-called Ulema were categorically opposed to the Pakistan concept, to the ML, and especially to Mr. Jinnah, the leaders of the Christian community were consistently strong supporters of the Quaid-e-Azam's vision. When Singha was asked by a journalist the cause Christians support to the ML, he said, 'before the independence of Pakistan, Muslims were a minority community of the sub-continent, after creation of Pakistan they became the majority. The Muslims would keep in mind the troubles faced as a minority and would not carry on the same destiny for other minorities'. (Ahmed Salim' Interview with Cecil Chaudhry) When Master Tara Singh waved his sword in front of the gate of United Punjab Legislative Assembly and asked that anyone asked for Pakistan would be Killed it was S.P Sinha who replied "seenay pay GooliKhain gay Pakistan Bnain gay" in 2016 Government of Pakistan officially

recognized and reclaimed the services of Dewan Bahadur and issued a commemorated postage stamp of 10 Rs so that his services can be acknowledged (Times, 2016).

### **Joshua Fazluddin**

Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah chose veteran journalist Pothan Joseph as editor of the newspaper that he founded. He became the member of Punjab legislative assembly in 1954. In 1942, the All India Christian Association (AICA) guaranteed unconditional full collaboration to the founder of Pakistan. The leaders of the Church in the Punjab strongly endorsed the Pakistan concept and advised their brethren to move to Pakistan when it would come into existence. The evolution of the Pakistan concept saw an intellectual like Joshua Fazluddin write in the daily *Inqilab* that the region of Pakistan, with its connection to Central Asia and its distinctive history, was a separate country from the rest of India. Fazluddin considered himself in harmony with Chaudhry Rehmat Ali (who devised the name Pakistan) about the partition of this territory from India "as it was in just according to the wish of God". (Gabriel., 1988) Joshua wrote a book which was published in 199 titled "future of Christian in Pakistan" explained evolutionary events with regard to the minorities in Pakistan. (Fazal-ud-din) He wrote another book in same time *Separate electorates: The life Blood of Pakistan* preface of this book was published in 1956 by Modudi. (Joshua Fazal-ud-din, 1956)

Some other examples are Chaudhry Chandu Lal, Fazal Elahi, journalist Elmer Chaudhry (the latter was the father of Squadron Leader Cecil Chaudhry, celebrated Pakistani war hero and educationist) and B.L Ralia Ram.

When Mountbatten's June 3 Plan, the Partition of India was announced, Dewan Singha and the Christian community in Punjab expressed their opposition to the separation of Punjab and asked for the whole of Punjab should be part of Pakistan. Joshua Fazluddin, in a news statement, called the Congress that the partition of the province would result in a human disaster. When the horror that was the Radcliffe Award was announced shortly after Independence, one of the first voices raised in concern was that of Dewan Bahadur Singha, who asserted that the Plan was tailored to wreck Pakistan's economy while facilitating Indian occupation of Kashmir.

### **Fazal Ilahi**

Fazal Ilahi appointed 1st Deputy speaker of the Punjab Assembly in 1948 he was born in Daska and nominated for this position by Jinnah himself. He individually visited the refugee camps and organize medical and other relief supplies for misery sufferers. The Christians had supported the cause of Pakistan in the faith that a Muslim society by its nature would be more secular and fairer to them than the caste-ridden Hindu society that would inevitably emerge in India. Pakistan, they believed, would be more concerned for the rights of minorities. Observing the deadly antics of the *Hindutva* mobs presently prevailing in India, that assessment, it seems, was at least partly correct. But, for the other part? Well, in August 1947, Dewan Bahadur S.P. Singha became the first Speaker of the new West Punjab Assembly, an office he

endeavored to fulfill with dignity. However, after the passage of the Objectives Resolution in 1949, he was obliged to step down as it was now felt that a non-Muslim should not preside over a Muslim House. The Christian members of the Punjab Assembly accorded fundamental importance to the rights of the minorities. They gave special attention to the problems and difficulties of the Christian community because Hindus, the Sikhs after the migration were the only significant minority remained in the province. On 20 January 1948 S.P. Singha in his speech delivered in the house has acquired the form of a historical reference. In this situation, the Christians in the province, he denounces the strategy of Sikhs for choosing to the country for their sake after living here for centuries and for leaving behind an inheritance of suffering and misery for the Christians community. (A Concise History of Pakistani Christians, 2007) Families of sixty thousand Christian in this situation who had been inhabitants of Sikh landlords became now on the streets and without jobs. Muslim refugees were distributed much of the evacuee land, and six to eight acres was given to each family, but these Christians who were living under the Sikh landlords had been overlooked totally and whatever small piece of land they tilled had been handed over to the refugees. Singh admitted in spite of all that when this situation was brought into the notice of the authorities by him they had issued instant orders that the Christian community would carry on to have the right on the crops they had grow and they ought to get their due share. (Father Francis Nadeem, 1997, pp. 48-53.) The Christian political leaders performed very commendably during the turmoil of partition, exceptional were C. E. Gibbon, S. P. Singha, and Master Fazal-Elahi they were members of the PLA. Singha tried to bring peace between the various religious factions by establishing an inter-faith "Peace Council" but this effort proved unsuccessful. In 1951, the government of India Act, 1935 was amended for the Election 1951 which was held on the basis adult franchise. The Christian representatives C. E. Gibbon, Ralia Ram, Chaudhry Chandu Lal, S. P. Singha and Fazal Elahi were elected. Chaudhry Chandu Lal afterwards was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the PLA. (Akhlaq Hussain Shamsi, 2011)

#### Christian Representatives in the legislature (1946-1955)

Election 1946 -PLA	Election 1951 - PLA	Election 1954 - PLA
B. L. Ralia Ram	C. E. Gibbon	C. E. Gibbon
C. E. Gibbon	Chaudhry Chandu Lal	Fazal Elahi
Dewan Bahadur S. P. Singha	Fazal Elahi	Joshua Fazal-ud-Din
Fazal Elah	S. P. Singha	S. P. Singha

#### Conclusion

The above discussion has proved the underlying hypothesis that the religious minorities in Punjab were not marginalized. Instead they play significant role in the state-building, especially the Christian leadership in the institution of Punjab Legislative Assembly. They served with dedication with a spirit of service to humanity. They were ready to share the difficulties of the common Pakistanis deprived of basic amenities of life. Political perspective is used to analyze the



importance of Christian's contribution in politics of Pakistan. They not only supported the cause of Pakistan but played a substantial role in the early crucial time of the country. They stood side by side with the Muslim community in every thick and thin.

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