

Title—Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan

Author—David Gilmartin

Year—1988

Categories: Colonialism, Islam, Politics, State

Place: Punjab & British Raj

Time:

Argument Synopsis:

David Gilmartin's *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* attempts to provide a more nuanced explanation for the movement for Pakistan outside of merely citing it all to **communalism**. Gilmartin claims that communalism alone is not sufficient to explain the full history of the movement for Pakistan. He argues that the movement for the creation of a new Muslim state can only be understood by examining the relationship between Islam and Empire in the context of British India. The first section outlines the imperial system of authority established by the British in the Punjab and its relationship to Islamic ideas and institutions, while the second section focuses on the crucial political conflicts that occurred in the decade between 1936 and 1946. Gilmartin decides to focus on Punjab because of its substantial Muslim population; the 1931 census showed 56% of the population was Muslim.

An overview of the establishment and legitimization of British imperial authority in rural Punjab, with a focus on the development of **classifications and categories** that defined and justified hierarchies within the imperial system. The British focused on the concept of 'tribe' as the center of rural Punjab social organization, as the British found little ideological foundation in religion for the exercise of imperial power. According to Gilmartin, the Land Alienation Act in 1900 formalized the assumptions underlying the British imperial administration, establishing agricultural tribes as dominant majority in Punjabi politics. The Land Alienation Act served to become the ideological justification for British rule.

Although tribal identity became the dominant categorization under imperial rule, Gilmartin discusses on the role of religion in colonial politics, with a focus on rural Islam. He claims that **tribal identities and religious organization** developed in close association in rural Punjab, pointing to the network of shrines that spread political influence in pre-colonial times. Gilmartin notes that both the Mughals and the British used close relationship with rural shrines to extend hegemony and legitimize their regime, with the rural leaders of shrines becoming very politically important.

Gilmartin concludes his book with a discussion of Pakistan's early history, to demonstrate the lasting effects of empire and empire's relationship to Islam. He argues that the history of the movement for Pakistan highlights many of the underlying contradictions in the development of colonial nationalism, the use of the British imperial structure to legitimize power as an example. Gilmartin posits that the most central problem of Pakistan, since its creation, has been the definition of the cultural relationship between the state and its people.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The Muslim League utilized the apparatus of imperial power to legitimize itself
- 1958 successful military coup is a reflection of the difficulties of reconciling Pakistan's ideological foundations as an Islamic state with a state structure inherited from colonialism