

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

Author—David Gilmartin

Year—1989

Categories: Islam, Empire, South Asia, Politics

Place: British Raj

Time: 1840-1947

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 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 book can be divided into two parts: 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 provides 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. Gilmartin highlights how 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. Although tribal identity became the dominant categorization under imperial rule, Gilmartin discusses on the role of religion, specifically Islam, in colonial politics, with a focus on rural Islam. Gilmartin identifies the cities as the most important place for defining a Muslim community, which contrasts with the peripheral position of cities in the British ideological structure. Gilmartin argues that the communalism that emerged in the city was a product of the state's ambiguous cultural position. Communal consciousness was a strong influence on urban politics; urban leaders articulated Islamic community in politics through defense of Islamic symbols.

Jinnah's Punjab Muslim League and its role in the lead up to the creation of Pakistan is emphasized. Gilmartin posits that the League launched a direct assault on the ideological position of the Unionist party, declaring the party was a creation of the British and the communities that Unionists claimed to protect were artificial. The decisive victory of the Muslim League in 1946 cemented the reality of Pakistan. Gilmartin underscores the central irony: the Muslim League leaders used the colonial order for the realization of Pakistan, demonstrating the endurance of the British imperial structure. 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. This led to difficulties reconciling Pakistan's ideological foundations with a structure of state authority inherited from colonial period.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The conflict between the Unionist Party and the All-Muslim League is central to the establishment of a separate Muslim state (Pakistan)
- British did not find much ideological foundation within Islam to justify colonialism
- Punjab had a Muslim population that made up 66% according to 1931 census