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Mapping Political Change: Tehsil Depalpur under British Colonial Administration (1857–1947)
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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the study of shift in political formations, socio-economic relations and administrative arrangements in Depalpur Tehsil during the British colonial period (1857-1947). Nestled within framework of Montgomery District in colonial Punjab, Depalpur offers a microcosm to understand the interaction between empire and society. The study traces the transition from pre-colonial decentralized authority to a structured colonial administrative system, emphasizing the role of canal colonization, land settlements, and elite collaboration. It also examines the rise of political awareness with constitutional changes and electoral activism in the early 20th century. Through detailed case studies including Depalpur town, Haveli Lakha, Basirpur, and shrine-based networks linked to Pakpattan and Shergarh the paper demonstrates how colonial interventions reshaped traditional power structures and facilitated the rise of new political actors. The research shows that colonial policy not only imposed its will but it also reconstructed local institutions and paved the way for contemporary political practices.

Keywords: Depalpur, Montgomery District, Colonial Punjab, Canal Colonies, Rural Politics, Shrine Politics, Political Mobilization

1. Introduction:

The British conquest of Punjab in 1849 marked the beginning of the era of new political order, which significantly shaped the socio-economic and political order of the region. Within this broader framework, Depalpur Tehsil, located in the southern part of Montgomery District (modern Okara), emerged as an important site for examining the localized impact of colonial policies. Depalpur, once a major urban and administrative site of various regimes, such as Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire, had long played a pivotal role in the political history of the region. But by the mid-19th century, it was reduced to a predominantly agricultural town with decentralized power and stagnant economic activity. The British took over this multifaceted socio-political landscape and tried to reshape it through a series of administrative reforms, land revenue measures and infrastructure building. The years 1857 to 1947 are crucial in the political history of Depalpur. The uprising of 1857 marked a critical rupture, prompting the colonial state to adopt new strategies of governance aimed at ensuring stability and loyalty. These included the incorporation of local elites; expansion of irrigation works and establishment of representative institutions. This article aims to chart these changes by answering questions like how did British colonial policies transform political power in Depalpur? What role did local elites play in mediating colonial governance? What were the effects of socio-economic transformations on political mobilization? How did local cults and political leadership play a role in political transformation? This book brings together macro and micro perspectives on colonialism to offer insights into governance and its consequences for local politics.

2. Literature Review:

The study of colonial Punjab has been marked by a number of themes, including agrarian change, canal colonisation, and state-society relations. Scholars such as Imran Ali and Ian Talbot have emphasized the centrality of land revenue systems and irrigation policies in restructuring rural economies. Ali (1989) explains that the colonial state in Punjab established a "controlled agrarian society" through amalgamation of economic and political strategies. Likewise, Talbot (1988) points to the leadership of local elites in ensuring legitimacy of colonial state, revealing that British depended on intermediaries, including landlords and religious figures. Studies on canal colonies, particularly by David Gilmartin, have demonstrated how irrigation projects were not merely economic initiatives but also instruments of political engineering. These canals enabled migration, established new colonies and asserted state control. At a district level, works on Montgomery District highlight growth of district from a marginalized region to a productive agricultural district. However, there is a dearth of micro-level studies on Depalpur. Available literature, including Mughal (2018), offers valuable perspectives on the history of Depalpur but does not address its political change under colonialism. This research fills this gap by providing a micro-level examination that considers administrative, economic and socio-cultural aspects of political transformation.

3. Depalpur before 1857 & Its Aftermath:

Pre British annexation of Punjab, Tehsil Depalpur was governed by a decentralized system of chieftains, tribal chiefs and elders. The basis of power was family relationships and agricultural practices, while local leaders played an important role in the resolution of disputes and resource allocation. The decline of the Mughals and the rise of the Sikhs had no significant impact on this. In fact, there were no significant changes. The chiefs continued to enjoy a high degree of autonomy and this led to political fragmentation. Agricultural activities were largely dependent on rainfall and floods, which resulted in very low productivity and a limited surplus. While trade existed, it was not yet well developed. There was a considerable role that religious bodies, particularly Sufi shrines, played in the social cohesion and peace-making process.

The events of 1857 were a watershed moment in the history of Depalpur and Montgomery in general. Punjab was a province that witnessed strong resistance from local groups, although the uprising in Punjab was comparatively limited when compared to northern India. The British colonial government-initiated policies in Punjab with the aim of obtaining revenue and ensuring stability. Tehsil Depalpur was a centre for the reform of agricultural economy, which was done to benefit colonial government. Tehsil Depalpur is known for its fertile lands. The reaction from British was prompt and harsh. Attempts were made to suppress rebellion through military action, and those suspected of aiding rebellion were punished. Land confiscation, property destruction and death of suspected rebels were part of this. In the wake of rebellion, colonial government began a total reform of its administration. Spying, development of loyal natives, and surveillance of the environment were stressed. With this starting event, a new cycle in which administrative power was centralized and bureaucratized began.

4. Administrative Reorganization and Colonial Governance:

The British, after annexing Punjab, set out to create native rural allies in District Montgomery. The 1857 rebellion showed need for allies, so the administration sought out prominent families, rewarding them with land, titles, and government favors. Since 1860s, this strategy was to rule through rural allies, especially Muslim and Sikh landowners loyal to the British. After introduction of a well-organized administrative system in Punjab by British, districts were divided into tehsils, then further divided into smaller units. Depalpur, with its own

administrative apparatus, came to be an integral part of Montgomery District. The most significant features of this system included the establishment of courts and police stations, maintenance of accurate land records, recruitment of local officials (patwaris and zaildars) and periodic settlement of land revenue. As a result, they were given titles like Nawab and Khan Bahadur and appointed as zaildars, tehsildars, lambardars and sufedposh. These measures not only strengthened state's control in the countryside, but also enhanced its revenue collection. They also transformed old power structures by co-opting local elites into administrative system. To maintain stability, the British integrated these rural leaders into bureaucracy, especially through semi-official post of zaildar, who supervised village clusters, implemented government policies, and protected state interests. This intermediary position was an inducement for loyalty and deference. Post-1857, these intermediaries served as protectors of state interests and they were further empowered with a three-fold hierarchy: local functionaries (zaildars, lambardars), divisional darbaris, and provincial darbaris, all connected to the administration with titles, offices and rewards. This benefited a number of people in Montgomery, especially Depalpur and Pakpattan. These included Lala Charn Das (Zaildar, Rai Sahab), Teja Singh Nakai, Chirag Din, Bahadur Shah, Sher Shah, Hukam Singh and Allayar Chishti. They were rewarded for their services and brought into government. The next level comprised divisional darbaris like Pir Mohammad Hussain, who were recognized and others like Chaudhri Mahla Singh and Chaudhri Dost Muhammad Khan who received cattle farm grants. At the third level, provincial darbaris, such as Dewan Said Mohammad Chishti, Mian Nur Ahmad Maneka, Mian Khan Mohammad Khan and Raja Fazal Dad Khan were rewarded. These elites were linked to colonial regime as honorary magistrates and officials, but were mainly to back the state. They also provided land grants to pirs and landlords, who transformed into powerful zaildars and benevolent landlords in canal colonies. The British also safeguarded large estates through judicial bodies such as the Court of Wards, which administered estates in times of financial or administrative emergency, thus preserving elite power. In this way, politics in Montgomery shifted towards landed elites patronized by the British, who became intermediaries and decision-makers at the local level. This institutionalized the divide between the agriculturist and non-agriculturist population and set the stage for local politics, with the early Muslim political movement that occurred primarily in urban areas and expanded into rural society.

6. Canal Colonization and Agrarian Change:

One of the major developments in growth of colonial Punjab was canal irrigation. In Montgomery District, where canals were built, vast tracts of land that were previously barren were transformed into productive agricultural land. Canal colonization in Depalpur led to an increase in area under cultivation, an increase in agricultural output, migration of settlers from other parts of country and creation of a new class structure. Government loyalists, such as ex-soldiers and prominent landowners, were often granted land. This led to the creation of a class of agricultural elites close to the colonial state.

A well-constructed canal system under British rule changed irrigation of Depalpur tehsil in colonial Montgomery (Sahiwal) district. Prior to canal works, region depended on haphazard rainfall and few outlets of flooding and thus farming was limited to the areas near rivers. With late nineteenth century, introduction of perennial irrigation and controlled irrigation, in particular, turned vast areas of Depalpur into a field of cultivation and incorporated it into system of canal colony. The greatest canal that impacted Depalpur was Lower Bari Doab Canal

(LBDC) which was built in 1906 as part of Triple Canal Project¹ and was completed in 1917. It supplied Montgomery and Multan districts with vast quantities of water chiefly by means of Ravi, but with a small portion of water brought in by link canals of Chenab and Jhelum. In Depalpur, distributary network of LBDC, especially Gugera system and left-bank distributaries provided perennial irrigation. These canals enabled periodic cropping and enabled growth of settled agriculture in semi-arid regions. The Depalpur Canal system was also very vital as it irrigated the tehsil directly. The canal was formed in Lahore district, and, after a course of some 40 miles, it entered Depalpur in neighborhood of Bhila Gulab Singh. It split at Rukanpur into Upper Sohag and Lower Sohag. The Lower Sohag branch extended deep into Pakpattan, while in Depalpur it fed distributaries such as Para, Malka Hans, and Nurpur channels. These distributaries supplied water to northern and northeast portion of tehsil so that areas were covered with both perennial and seasonal irrigation. The design irrigation ratio (approximately 3.48 cusecs/1,000 acres) is an indication of technical planning of system.² Depalpur was also supplied with irrigation by Lower Sohag Para Canal which was based on natural Sohag Nala.³ It was mostly seasonal, but it supplemented water supplies in selected tracts, and was part of earlier colonization projects. Pakpattan Canal was another significant channel, which was formed at Suleimanke headworks. Although it had initially flooded through Depalpur without irrigation, its distributaries especially Bhatti and Khadir branches, eventually served surrounding regions such as some southern Depalpur and surrounding tehsils. These canals combined to form an extensive irrigation system that transformed Depalpur into a fruitful agricultural land. Several crops were possible due to presence of guaranteed water supply, settlement was encouraged and land values went up. It was also the foundation of the setting up of canal colonies in area.

The canal colonies introduced a radical shift in land settlement pattern whose impacts were felt into post-colonial Pakistan. The British new land distribution system of land allocation was a combination of economic and political interests. Peasant settlers in overpopulated areas of central Punjab like Amritsar, Jullundur and Lahore were resettled on large blocks of newly irrigated land. These were settlers, usually belonging to agriculturally skilled groups such as Jats, Arains, Kambohs and Sainis, and were instrumental in development of intensive agriculture in Depalpur. Meanwhile, large tracts of land were set aside to military officers, particularly war veterans. These grants served as rewards for service and incentives for recruitment, linking agrarian expansion with military policy. In places such as Lower Bari Doab and subsequently Nili Bar tens of thousands of acres were devoted to soldiers, a cohort of agrarian loyalists was formed. British also enhanced the strength of intermediary elites by giving land to local notables, pirs, sajjada nashins and big landowners. These groups served as political and administrative intermediaries, responsible for collecting revenues and ensuring the order in rural areas. Marginalized groups like so-called depressed classes and some tribes received smaller allocations, but were usually conditional and restricted. The other significant aspect of land settlement was the establishment of auctions especially during later stages of colonization. This enabled the acquisition of land by non-agricultural groups, like traders, moneylenders and professionals, thus altering make-up of the rural elites. Besides this, grants were occasionally conditional on services like agricultural experimentation, infrastructure development, or in support of the colonial administration.

¹ *Ian Talbot*, Punjab and the Raj (Manohar Publications New Delhi, 1988), p.38

² Montgomery District Gazetteer, 1933 (Lahore, 1935), p.181

³ *Ilyas Mohnem*, (edited)., The Colony Manual (Lahore, ----), p.4

The long-term impact of these policies is clearly visible in Pakistan's agrarian structure. The irrigation basin continues to play a central role in sustaining agricultural activities in such areas as Depalpur and land tenure patterns, set up during colonial era, consisting of peasant and large estate owners, still dominate rural society and politics. The canal network in tehsil of Depalpur has been used to turn a semi-arid area into a productive agricultural area using a system of large canals and distributaries. The settlements of the canal colony which accompanied them not only increased agricultural output, but also provided a more organized and hierarchical rural society, which continues to be visible in current Pakistan.

7. Town of Depalpur as a Center of Administrative Work:

During the British period, the town of Depalpur became a center of administrative and economic activity. The establishment of offices, markets, and roads were among the reasons for its growth. The town particularly in early 20th century became a center of political activity. Local elites used their positions within bureaucratic system to consolidate their power. In Depalpur's example, interaction between colonial and local elites is an example of hybrid nature of governance, which entails the transformation of local authority in the framework of a modern bureaucratic system. Colonisation through the canal system was vital in influencing rural culture and society and Haveli Lakha is a good example of this. Before irrigation, it was a sparsely populated and economically marginal area. The canals led to development of this region as an agricultural success. This led to an influx of people from other parts of Punjab and changes in population structure and the emergence of new groups. There was also a shift in landholding patterns, including creation of large estates of elite families. In realm of politics, Haveli Lakha became a center of rural leadership and landowners played a crucial role in mobilising people for the policies of the colonial rulers and later for political parties. For scholars interested in borderland politics, Basirpur, which was located in close proximity to southern border of Montgomery District, offers useful insights. It was situated in close proximity to other administrative districts and princely states, and as a result became an intersection of political systems. In a region that was characterized by dynamic populations, colonial state attempted to bring Basirpur under its administrative jurisdiction, while maintaining order. In particular, in the elections of 1930s and 1940s, Basirpur emerged as a major political site of activism in the second half of colonial period. Politics at Depalpur was shaped by the religious institutions that existed in the area. A significant center of spiritual and social influence, shrine of Baba Farid at Pakpattan served as a focal point for the community. Sajjada Nashins, who managed these shrines, acted as intermediaries between government and rural people. They were willing to work with other shrines to attract support for the British, in return for land grants and political influence. These networks were able to extend their influence from Pakpattan to shrines in other areas such as Shergarh, and into Depalpur. By 1940s, shrine-based authority had transformed into an important part in politics, particularly with respect to mobilizing rural votes.

8. Emergence of Electoral Politics (1909–1947):

The shift from bureaucratic to participatory politics was marked by constitutional reforms. This advancement in political representation was achieved through the reforms of 1909, 1919 and 1935. This allowed for the emergence of political leaders in Depalpur who combined traditional methods of leadership with modern political strategies. Landlords and religious figures were active in elections as they could mobilize votes through their influence. The region became actively involved in the politics of the All-India Muslim League in the 1940s, which was typical of trends in Punjab.

9. Biradari-wise Voting Patterns of Depalpur between 1937 and 1946:

In order to create a comprehensive historical picture of the pattern of voting in Depalpur using the biradari system from 1937 to 1946, it is important to go beyond simple data collection and to delve into the society of rural Punjab. Official reports of elections held in the colonial era contained details about voters' religious backgrounds, such as Muhammadan, General or Sikh; however, they did not include information regarding the voters' caste or biradari. On the other hand, as it has been proven by academics such as David Gilmartin and Ian Talbot, real functioning of politics in areas such as Depalpur was profoundly interwoven in kinship networks. Rather than being an essentially individual act of political expression, voting was more a collective act, which was shaped by biradari loyalties, patron-client relations and the influence of political leaders. The area of Depalpur (which used to be part of the Montgomery District) was inhabited by a hierarchy of dominant agricultural biradaris (such as the Arains, Jats, and Rajputs), pastoral groups (such as the Wattoo clan), and religiously elite lineages (such as the Syeds and Qureshis). The groups were not only sociological in nature, but also political. Each biradari had its own leadership, which was usually headed by a chaudhry, malik or sardar. These leaders were responsible for making political deals with political candidates and mobilising *biradari* to vote as a cohesive block. This approach ensured that elections were highly structured affairs, with election outcomes being determined by the ability to secure the support of leadership of powerful biradari. This method was adopted to facilitate elections. This party was closely linked with the Unionist Party in the 1937 elections. In Punjab, Unionists, who were a combination of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh aristocratic families, were able to successfully embed themselves in the rural hierarchy. Their dominance at Depalpur was based on their relationship with big landholders, many of whom had benefited from British land settlements and canal colonization schemes. This was the basis of their power. It was not just through the ownership of land that these landlords acquired a large degree of control over the tenants and small farmers; they also had power over them through credit, employment, and social influence. During the elections, the political decision-making of landlords became the voice of the biradari.

The Arain biradari, which is well-known for its market-oriented agriculture and intense cultivation, often allied itself with Unionist candidates due to the fact that the policies of the party encouraged agricultural stability and irrigation growth. Similarly, Jat clans, which were more diverse, mostly supported Unionists, but Jat clans' voting behaviour could be altered depending on the rivalries that existed among local elites. The Rajputs, whose status relied upon landholdings and honour, tended to remain loyal to the political regime that was favoured by the British. Pastoral clans such as Wattoo in the south of the Depalpur district demonstrated a more negotiated form of politics; but they were also brought into the political circles of the Unionists, due to their influence. The same and equally important role was played by religious leaders. A significant amount of influence was exercised on rural inhabitants, including those in Depalpur, by the shrine of Baba Farid, which was located in Pakpattan. Also, associated networks that extended to places such as Shergarh were created. As custodians of the shrines, the Sajjada Nashins were afforded a position of spiritual respect, which in turn afforded them political influence. In 1937, a large number of these religious figures supported the Unionist party, in turn strengthening the power of ruling elite by mobilising the people along religious lines. As a result, electoral system that was prevalent in Depalpur during this era can be seen as a multi-layered system. This was a system that saw the intersection of landlord power, biradari solidarity and religious prominence, with the result of high levels of predictability in voting outcomes. However, between 1937 and 1946, this electoral system went through certain subtle yet significant shifts. In an attempt to deal with challenges of

growing communal tensions and changing political agendas, cross-communal coalition that Unionist Party was a part of began to weaken. Meanwhile, All-India Muslim League was increasing its organisational presence in countryside of Punjab. Unlike in 1937 when it had a small presence, League began actively working with biradari institutions, instead of trying to bypass them. The party organised conferences targeted at particular areas, and sought support of powerful landlords and pirs. In town of Depalpur, where biradari system remained intact but was open to re-alignment, this strategy was highly successful. In the case of Arain biradari, for instance, there was a shift towards Muslim League as their economic push and political aspirations coincided with League's advocacy for Muslim unity and power. Age differences more clearly emerged amongst Jat clans; those who had been exposed to military or urban environments were more receptive to the new political ideas, while old leaders were reluctant to accept these ideas. Despite this, when prominent leaders of major clans decided to join League, a large number of biradari did the same. It was religious elites that saw the biggest shift. Many Sajjada Nashins, particularly those who were connected to the major shrines in Pakpattan, switched their vote from Unionists to Muslim League. The transformation is important for the society. The League could mobilize voters beyond the limits of specific biradaris thanks to the fact that power structures associated with shrines spanned multiple biradaris. The employment of shrines and religious symbols alongside political themes for election campaigns meant that voting was transformed into a more widespread movement that is related to Muslim political identity.

By the time of elections in 1946, these changes had produced a major shift in political allegiances among voters. Despite the fact that mechanism through which the vote was cast, namely, Biradari system and elite intervention, had not changed, the vote had completely turned towards the Muslim League. The disastrous decline of Unionist dominance in Muslim rural electorates was shown in the fact that League won three-quarters of Muslim vote in Montgomery District, which included Depalpur. This translated into the fact that in the city of Depalpur, same biradaris who voted for Unionists in 1937 voted for the League. They were often headed by the same landlords and pirs who had joined a different political party. This shift did not represent the end of biradari politics; it actually demonstrated its strength. Although the biradari remained basic unit of political organisation, its organisation was changed to suit ever-changing circumstances. In case of Muslim League, the refashioning of family relations into a mass political organisation brought about success. This was achieved by League's ability to adapt to existing social structures. In this sense, the elections held in Depalpur in 1946 were both a continuation of the past and an aberration from these norms. While they continued traditional practices of collective voting and elite domination, they also provided a new ideological aspect which, in turn, linked local politics with the larger goal of the Pakistan movement. One can see evidence of a dynamic interaction between the old and the new in voting patterns of Depalpur between 1937 and 1946, by biradari. The persistence of family-based political structure ensured the stability of electoral behaviour but changes in elite loyalties and propaganda made rapid transformation possible. These elections can be seen as one where traditional institutions were re-aligned for new political purposes. This is because, rather than seeing these elections as a transition from "traditional" to "modern" politics, they were more accurately seen as such. As a result, Depalpur is a prime example of how colonial electoral institutions interacted with indigenous social structures, resulting in a particular type of political transformation that continues to have an impact on rural politics in Pakistan to this day.

10. Political Activities from 1937 to 1947 in Diplapur Tehsil:

Both League and Unionist Party put forward strong candidates to the position of Dipalpur tehsil council president, respectively. The choice of Mian Noor Mohammad Manika Watto, who is regarded to be one of the strongest figures in Watto family, is the responsibility of Unionist Party. Mian Noor Mohammad Manika Watto was an experienced politician who finally emerged victorious in an election in 1936 in Dipalpur. He managed to win. He was the most qualified candidate to hold the position because he had a substantial influence in the area. The candidate of League, the League decided on Pir Syed Ashiq Hussain, a popular member of Sayyid family, who is a native of Sher Garh. Most likely, voters would consider Mian Noor Mohammad Manika Watto a feeble candidate when they compare her to Mian Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Watto⁴, who has filed his candidacy as an independent candidate. This is however the case only when the two candidates are compared by voters. The Deputy Commissioner of Montgomery, P.M. Ismail, was entrusted with duty of ensuring that Mian Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Watto did not participate in the elections. Unionist Party vested this duty on him. To convince Mian Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Watto to take part in the elections, Unionist High Command was informed about the fact that there were two personalities, i.e. Kanwar Mohindar Singh Bedi and Mian Usman Khan Jagirdar, who had a powerful influence over him. The Unionist High Command came to know about this information. It is obvious that the Deputy Commissioner had attained his object, which is indicated by the fact that Mian Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Watto had recalled his papers of candidacy to the elections.

The district administration employed numerous tactics and techniques to make sure that Unionist candidate would win the election. Because of possibility of Unionists finding an ally among some members of family of Syed Ashiq Hussain, the government managed to achieve an impressive level of success in the given setting. This directly resulted in the major progress of tehsil. To commemorate anti-League activities carried out by three people, the district administration gave one square of land to each of nominated people. These men were known as Syed Mohammad of Rehmat Wala, Syed Ashiq Hussain of Syden Shah and Syed Muzafar Ali of Sher Garh.⁵ Despite the fact that the only person who received the assistance of district administration was Mian Noor Mohammad Manika, citizens living in area united around Muslim League candidate and began to volunteer to serve League. Molvis fought for the cause of Muslim League fiercely and when they prayed, they would repeat prayers that League candidates would win in prayer session. Molvis worked towards the realization of objectives of Muslim League. An effort to intimidate those individuals was aimed at those who were the loyalists of the Muslim League. They began procedure of making false allegations against Haji Mian Ali Gouhar⁶, Haji Fazal Haque Maho⁷, Molvi Naser-ud-Din and Mian Ghohar Mohammad⁸. Haji Mian Ali Gouhar of Moza Mohib Ali Autar, a staunch supporter of Muslim League, was involved in a bogus case of sugar black marketing. Meanwhile Unionist candidate also complained to Sardar Kanwar Singh, an Extra Assistant Commissioner and President of Notified Area in Havli against Mian Ghulam Dastgir, secretary of Notified Area in Havli and eldest son of Haji Mian Ali Gouhar. Lala Molraj, tehsildar Pakpattan, registered bogus cases against Haji Fazal Haque Maho, a supporter of Muslim League. They desired to take these people to justice. Furthermore, the administration tried to distract the people who were in favor of the League.

⁴ Noraiz Shakoore, *The History of Muslim Politics in Montgomery District 1907-1947*, p.90

⁵ Saeed Ahmed Butt, *British Colonial Montgomery*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lala Molraj, tehsildar Pakpattan, registered bogus cases against *Haji Fazal Haque Maho*, a supporter of Muslim League.

⁸ *Mian Ghohar Mohammad*, a blind chief, owned whole property of Chak Dogar in *Thana Haveli*, which was situated at a distance of two miles from the village of Mian Noor Mohammad Manika.

The attempt was made not to allow Molvi Naser-ud-Din, who was a member of Rukan Para Thana Autari, to vote League candidate by taking away six calves which he owned. He was tried to hinder his voting. At the same time two buffaloes which belonged to Mian Ghohar Mohammad were taken under control by the government. This was done as a direct result of his categorical refusal to support Mian Noor Mohammad Manika, who was the Unionist organization candidate, in their dealings. The voters of League are bent on having the candidate raised by League. District authorities were very active in campaigning in support of the Unionist candidate and among these were Kanwar Shir Singh, sub-divisional officer of Pakpattan, and Lala Molraj, Tehsildar of Diplapur. These two individuals were in authority. The police tried their best, with the aim of getting Mian Noor Mohammad Manika Watto supporters on their side. Students showed a great deal of interest in election campaign of candidate of League in this particular tehsil. A group of students of Dyal Singh College Muslim Students Federation visited Depalpur, with Abdul Hamid being the head of group.⁹ Their canvassing, which they conducted in the seat of Syed Ashiq Hussain, was against him as he was the league candidate. Voters were also inculcated with a rekindled passion and enthusiasm towards the election, as a result of successful propaganda campaign that the League used. To prove their support to League, voters were persuaded that it was an obligation to support League morally. Conversely, attempts of Tehsil administration to introduce different approaches and procedures failed because of passion and will of electorate that voted the League candidate on day of elections. The Tehsil administration employed several different strategies in their attempt to achieve their objective of defeating League candidate and his supporters. The results of this gave Syed Ashiq Hussain, the League candidate, a big win during elections held in 1945-1946.

The election show that was held in 1945-1946 had a large number of students with a considerable amount of participation. During their visit to Tehsil Pakpattan, a group of Montgomery Students Federation students visited thirty Chaks. Some of the Chaks included in this group were Khoblanwala, Siadanwala, Pattanwala, Kentarpur, Gharhi, Rekhiyan, Nishirkot, Bahawalnagar, Khokhranwala, Alwardi and Jafarka. They succeeded in convincing people of tehsil to cast their vote in favor of candidate seeking membership into League through a well-designed promotional program. In the time span of beginning of 1945 to 1946, students of Islamia College covered about 40 miles in the tehsil. Besides this, they held open forums with aim of laying out the reasoning behind the manifesto of League that was meant to be presented to Pakistan. The Indian Muslim League created a women wing of Montgomery Muslim League. This is a female oriented organization. The growth of popularity of Muslim League as a political party in the region was greatly contributed by women of Montgomery tehsil. This popularity was as a direct consequence of the work of community. Mrs. Ch. Nazir Ahmad, Mrs. Sh. M. Abdullah, Mrs. Agha Bashir Ahmad, Mrs. Nasim Hassan and Mrs. Mehboob Jilani were responsible in carrying out a door-to-door canvassing campaign individually. Moreover, they organized financial support to the candidate running to League. The police put them under pressure not to vote on day of election and they could not. Voters failed to take advantage of transportation service which was provided by League candidate to cast their votes (League candidate). They could either go directly to polling place. The outcome of campaign that was organized by workers of league allowed candidate of league to win elections against strong Unionist candidate. This was won in framework of elections. Provincial Muslim league has given an order to district league of Lahore to erect a team of defense lawyers so that they can defend

⁹ Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, *The Punjab Muslim Students Federation 1937-1947* (National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research Islamabad, 1991), p.334

people who have been implicated in matters relating to elections. This is in an effort of representing those people.

By obtaining 68.3 percent of total vote in Dipalpur constituency during the elections held in 1946, Syed Ashiq Hussain, who was running as a candidate for All-India Muslim League, was able to secure a decisive electoral victory. Within the Montgomery District, where there has been a significant increase in support for Muslim League, this outcome is a reflection of larger political transformation that is taking place throughout the district. Rafique Safdar was cited by Mushtaq Adil in his work *Tarikh-e-Sahawal*, who stated that electoral momentum of 1946 was comparable to a "tsunami,"¹⁰ which symbolized overwhelming shift of public allegiance towards League. Muslim League was able to secure all four Muslim constituencies in district with an unprecedented accumulation of votes thanks to the concerted political efforts of Syed Haider Imam and Syed Mohammad Shah. These efforts played a pivotal role in mobilizing voters, which ultimately enabled the Muslim League to secure electoral victory. Reportedly for the first time in his political career, Khan Bahadur Noor Ahmad Khan was defeated by Syed Ashiq Hussain of Shergarh.¹¹ This defeat highlights the extent of political realignment and erosion of entrenched local elites in the face of rising League influence. It is a particularly noteworthy development at this point in time.

11. Conclusion:

The transformation of Depalpur Tehsil under British colonial rule was a complex and multifaceted process. From the suppression of the 1857 revolt to the emergence of electoral politics in the 1940s, the region underwent significant changes in governance, economy and society. Colonial policies reshaped traditional authority structures, creating new forms of political power that combined bureaucratic control with local influence. The role of canal colonization, land settlements, and elite collaboration was central to this transformation. The case studies presented in this article demonstrate that political change in Depalpur was not merely a top-down process imposed by the colonial state but involved active participation and adaptation by local actors. The legacy of these transformations continues to influence the political landscape of the region, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial governance on contemporary politics.

¹⁰ Mushtaq Adil, *Tarikh-i-Sahawal* (Sahiwal, May 2009),p.46-47

¹¹ Allah Bakhsh Tariq, *Tehrik-i-Pakpattan* (Sahiwal,1990),p.132-133