

A Brief History of Caste and Scheduled Caste Hindus Politics in Pakistan: An Analysis

Sadia Mahmood*

ABSTRACT

In the early years of its polity, the Scheduled Castes politicians from the East Pakistan kept the debate on Scheduled Castes alive in politics of Pakistan. However, soon after the creation of Pakistan, the caste question disappeared from Pakistan. This paper presents a brief historical overview as how the new polity dealt with the caste question by revisiting early era of Pakistani politics. This paper builds on the fact that early era Pakistani politics of the 1950s had necessitated electoral unity between caste and Scheduled Caste Pakistani Hindus unlike the politics of colonial era, when a hard political divide between the upper castes and scheduled castes prevailed. In brief, the paper discusses why did the Scheduled Caste Movement disappeared from Pakistan after the Partition of India?

Introduction

The story of Partition has focused on three actors—the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, with little thought of the Dalit communities who were adversely affected. Although the partition and caste politics constitute two long-established subfields within South Asian history, scholars have only

* Assistant Professor, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Email: msadia@qau.edu.pk

recently looked upon the implication of one for the other¹. There is a renewed interest in the subject in South Asian academia and thus more knowledge is being produced on the subject. The works of Dwaipayan Sen and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay² are significant contributions in this regard. These academics point out to reasons other than political or constitutional because of which the Scheduled Caste movement disappeared from East Pakistan after the Partition. These include violence, physical displacement, and a hegemonic Hindu identity politics which appropriated autonomous Scheduled-Caste politics in East Pakistan after the partition³ as well as their apprehension as a part of the Hindu minority by the state.⁴ However, very little is known about the Scheduled Castes in West Pakistan soon after the Partition. Dwaipayan Sen writes:

We need to know more, for instance, about how Dalits who found themselves on the so-called "wrong side of the border" in West and East Pakistan fared, or whether freedom and independence from colonial rule lived up to the expectations of those who remained on the "right side"; or whether and to what extent violence between unmarked Hindus and Muslims and its tragic consequences in forced migration and resettlement led to the erasure of caste-differences between caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes. Another question demanding further attention is whether Partition violence necessarily meant that Dalits and Muslims severed solidarities that

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- 1 Dwaipayan Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," *History Compass* 10, no. 7 (2012): 512–522.
 - 2 See, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal," *Asian Studies Review* 33, no. 4 (2009): 455-67. doi:10.1080/10357820903363736 and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, "Partition in Bengal: Re-visiting the Caste Question, 1946–47," *Studies in History* 33, no. 2 (2017): 234-61. doi:10.1177/0257643017717897 and M. Usuda, "Pushed towards the Partition: Jogendranath Mandal and the Constrained Namasudra Movement," in *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, 221 (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1997).
 - 3 Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture, and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004).
 - 4 Dwaipayan Sen, *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the Defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 184.

they had nurtured for many decades prior to this great divide. Yet other concerns whether the respective political regimes that came to power in India and Pakistan and particularly the divided territories of Punjab and Bengal in the immediate post-Partition context fulfilled the kinds of demands that Dalit leaders articulated during the late colonial period. One hopes that future research will provide answers to these questions...⁵

This paper takes up the challenge that Sen put to scholars of South Asia challenging the eclipsing of the politics and experience of caste by the actual enactment of Partition.⁶ At the time of Partition, there was a considerable Scheduled-Caste population in East Bengal and Sindh in Pakistan.⁷ As stated earlier, the Scheduled Caste political discourse disappeared from Pakistani politics in the late 1950s hence it is important to find out the dimensions of Scheduled Caste politics from the late 1940s to early 1970s in Pakistan. Whereas some academics have worked on Scheduled Caste politics in East Pakistan⁸ this is a difficult challenge in light of the absence of oral or archival history when it comes to Sindh.⁹ Before Partition, Holaram Punjabi, the leader of Sind Scheduled Castes Federation asserted that the interests of Scheduled Castes could only be secured in Pakistan.¹⁰ Given the years leading to unrest in East Pakistan in the 1960s and the lack of availability of

5 Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 8.

6 Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 8.

7 Sadia Mahmood, "Minoritization of Pakistani Hindus (1947-1971)," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2014).

8 For example, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Dawaipayan Sen. Bandyopadhyay showed how in East Pakistan, Dalits who had been unable to migrate prior to Partition like many amongst the upper-caste gentry, increasingly became the targets of anti-Hindu intimidation and harassment and were apprehended as but part of the Hindu minority. Acts of violence against them were increasingly assimilated in India by the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha as evidence of the anti-Hindu policies of Pakistan. See: Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 8.

9 There were no Scheduled Castes members from Sindh in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan after the Partition.

10 Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 8.

documented history after 1971, there is a gap that remains to be filled regarding what were the experiences of Scheduled Castes towards the break-up of Pakistan¹¹ in Pakistan? Currently, there are 1.77million Hindu voters registered in Pakistan, Scheduled Castes being more in numbers than the caste Hindus.¹² The majority of them live in Sindh province.¹³ In order to understand Scheduled Caste history in Pakistan, it is important to historicize the contemporary Scheduled Caste narrative in Pakistan as well.

In this paper, I demonstrate that the Scheduled-Caste narrative and the designated categories that classify them are although heavily conditioned by the empirical reality constructed through census¹⁴ during the colonial period (although there is a school of thought that argues for continuities between the early modern and colonial era¹⁵) and carried on by the nation-state. However, these electoral and census categories where might still be hardening identities within an assumed community and reveal power struggles within such a defined and presumably permanently fixed "minority," the political community may decide to play

11 Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 8.

12 Iftikhar A. Khan, "Number of Non-Muslim Voters in Pakistan Shows Rise of over 30pc," *Dawn* July 04, 2018. Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410442>

13 Khan, "Number of Non-Muslim Voters in Pakistan Shows Rise of over 30pc."

14 See, Bernard S. Cohen, *The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia* (Copenhagen: Soertryk, 1984). Also see, Norbert Peabody, "Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 4 (2001): 819-50. Also see, Arjun Appadurani, *Number in the Colonial Imagination* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). Also see: Barrier, Norman Gerald Barrier, *The Census in British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981).

15 See, C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998). Also see, Sumit Guha, "The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India C. 1600-1990," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 01 (2003). doi:10.1017/s0010417503000070

with the official categories. The study of Pakistan's Scheduled Castes also blurs the conventional understanding of "communal" in South Asia. The term communal in the context of the Middle East has been historically defined in sectarian terms whereas in British India by referring to Hindus and Muslims or to religious communities. This has let the communalism within an assumed religious community go undocumented. A quick overview of Scheduled Caste history in Pakistan shows how it blurs the now prevalent understandings of "the communal" (Hindu vs. Muslim) in contemporary South Asia and may shake up the *status quo*.¹⁶

The paper draws upon archival research, data drawn from official documents available in Pakistan and recent critical scholarship on minorities particularly Dalits.

The Discontinuity

The Lucknow Pact in 1916 struck a deal between the All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress to separate electorates for Muslims and weightage in their favour. Gandhi agreed to extend these provisions to the Sikh minority but insisted that recognition for minorities would not extend further than these two communities. He opposed the idea of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes vehemently on the grounds that they were part of the organic unity of Hinduism, and that therefore they should not be counted separately. On the other hand, other Indian political leaders, namely, Jinnah, Aga Khan and the representatives of Christians, Sikhs, and Anglo Indians, supported separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. The Minorities Committee came to a halt in August 1932 and the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, gave his solution to the problem in the form of Communal Award. It gave separate electorates to Depressed Classes in the provinces in which they were most populous, but also allowed them to vote in

16 Romila Thapar, "Communalism and the Historical Legacy: Some Facets," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 6/7 (1990): 5. doi:10.2307/3517476.

general constituencies. Thus, they were given a double vote. In dismay at the Communal Award, Gandhi entered upon his famous fast unto death on September 20, 1932. Intense pressure was put on Ambedkar, the leader of Untouchables from around the country, to withdraw his claims, which he ultimately did. This resulted in the Poona Pact in 1932. The Poona Pact was an agreement between Ambedkar and Hindu leaders which withdrew the separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes but gave them an increased representation for a 10-year period which ensured that Untouchables were retained within the general electorate of Hindus.¹⁷

After the foundation of Pakistan, the Scheduled Castes were present in both wings of the country; however, they had a stronger political presence in the eastern wing of the country as majority Scheduled Castes districts in East Bengal fell into Pakistan.¹⁸ At the time of the foundation of Pakistan, the East Bengali Scheduled Caste leaders, unlike the caste Hindus, proudly associated themselves with the Pakistan movement.¹⁹ It was understood by all political sides that any Hindus who would remain in Pakistan would get status as a minority. Those who stayed hoped they would still be relevant to the post-colonial state and be part of the nation. Both the Scheduled Caste community and the caste Hindus (a majority of whom were also from East Bengal), offered allegiance and loyalty to the Pakistani state at its inception.²⁰ At the opening session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, on 11 August 1947, Jogendra Nath Mandal (a

17 Anuradha Dingawney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, ed., *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (London: Due University Press, 2007), 55-58.

18 See: Bandyopadhyay, "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal," 459.

19 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956, *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, February 21, 1956; *The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, (Karachi: Manager of Publications. 3381).

20 Mahmood, "Minoritization of Pakistani Hindus (1947-1971),".

Namasudra²¹ politician from East Bengal and the leader of B.R. Ambedkar's All-India Scheduled Caste Federation in Bengal)²² congratulated Jinnah on behalf of the eight million Scheduled Castes of Pakistan. While congratulating Jinnah, he said:

I have to represent the great section of the minority communities inhabiting Pakistan, the section of people who are backward in all respects, who are backward politically, economically and socially. I feel I am not strong enough to carry out my mission, and it may be that you will always find myself alone to raise a single voice on behalf of the eight million of Scheduled Castes of Pakistan on behalf of the eight million of the Scheduled Castes and other small minorities... I assure you our whole-hearted support and sincere loyalty. I shall always be found asking more and more for the backward minorities. But unless the backward section of the people of your beloved Pakistan is raised to the level of the other people, the State of Pakistan cannot be prosperous, happy and peaceful. Although my people are backward in education, although my people are backward socially and economically, they are not backward in faithfulness and service. I assure you, Sir, that the service of the millions of the Scheduled Caste people of Pakistan will be always at your disposal.²³

But soon after the foundation of Pakistan, the Scheduled Castes found themselves excluded from the project of nation-making in Pakistan.²⁴ Sen in his chapter "Betrayed Expectations: East Pakistan and West Bengal, 1947-1950" explains the struggle of Scheduled Castes to remain integrated in the polity especially in East Pakistan.²⁵ He mentions that the East Bengal government failed to integrate Dalits into new polity and their past educational concessions

21 One of the two major Dalit castes in East Bengal at the time of Partition in 1947.

22 Sen, "Caste Politics and Partition in South Asian History," 2012: 4.

23 *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*. 11 August 1947. Congratulations to the President. Karachi. 15.

24 Dwaipayan Sen, *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the Defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

25 Sen, *Decline of the Caste Question*, " 183-210.

and privileges were also discontinued despite Mandal's repeated reminders to the government.²⁶ From this point, the history and struggle of Pakistani Scheduled Castes becomes obscured within the larger political context of early national politics in Pakistan and India.²⁷ Pakistan declared itself an Islamic Republic on 23rd March 1956, and the electoral category of "general" was converted into "Hindus" (designating them as a religious minority) by the nation-state. The new Pakistani constitution divided "Hindu" into two sub-categories: Caste Hindus (*jaati*)²⁸ and Scheduled Castes. Following this, the Scheduled-Caste category which earlier was under the "general" category was now collated under the designation "Hindu" as "Religious Minority." All Pakistani "Hindus" therefore went from being "general" or a majority to "a religious "minority." After the nation-state bundled caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes into one category (i.e. Hindus), the new religious minority now had to negotiate its relationship with the new polity and reconfigure its identity, externally as well as internally, in relation to the nation-state. According to Bandhyopadhyay, the Namasudra Peasants who remained in Pakistan had the "Hindu" minority identity imposed on them by the growing power of Islamic nationalism in Pakistan.²⁹ The Pakistani Scheduled Castes thus now had two layers of identity to negotiate with: Hindu Minority identity and the Untouchable identity.

To understand the history of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan, one must understand the continuity of hostility towards "Hindus" in post-colonial Pakistan. These politics, of which both Caste and Scheduled Castes bore the brunt, was one of the leading factors in muting the Hindu and resultantly the

26 Sen, Decline of the Caste Question," 187-188.

27 See, Sadia Mahmood, "Minoritization of Pakistani Hindus (1947-1971)," (Dissertations, Arizona State University, 2014).

28 Jāti, literally derived from jaat, born to. Its use is contextual and can be used both for an individual or group.

29 Bandhyopadhyay, "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal," 2009: 459.

Schedule Caste voices in Pakistan. The loyalty of Scheduled Castes politicians was questioned in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan as much as the loyalty of caste Hindus during several foundation debates. They were easy targets of communal accusations and point scoring by the Muslim Leaguers. Jogendra Nath Mandal abandoned Pakistan in 1950. This abrupt departure of Mandal rattled the Pakistani state.³⁰ It is not clear from documents why the Muslim League ignored the Scheduled Castes after achieving the state. Long after Mandal's departure from Pakistani, the attacks on Scheduled-Caste politicians continued in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. During the debate on the nature of Pakistani state, another Scheduled Caste politician, Rasa Raj Mandal,³¹ was singled out for his stance in favour of a democratic state in Pakistan over that of an Islamic state. While responding to the allegations levelled against him and maintaining that he did not require a certificate of loyalty from anyone in Pakistan as he was among those who had struggled for Pakistan, he reminded lawmakers that he had previously worked with the Muslim League during the last Sylhet Referendum and advocated for the creation of an independent Pakistan. He further reminded that it was the representatives of the Bengal Scheduled Castes Federation who helped put the Muslim League Ministry in power even before the Partition. He stated that in the fight for Pakistan the Scheduled Castes had supported Mr. Suhrawardy (then premier) through and through. He reiterated that he didn't need a certificate of loyalty to the State from anybody. He pointed out that many anti-Pakistan people have made it to government benches while several non-Muslims who struggled for Pakistan were

30 JogendraNath Mandal. File No. 3 (18)-PMS/50, National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

31 Member Second Constituent Assembly of Pakistan from 1955-1958. <http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/formemembers/2nd%20Constituent%20Assembly.pdf>. Accessed, August 24, 2020.

being sidelined.³² Besides a few mentions of reservations for Scheduled Caste students in East Bengal in the 1950s in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, there is very little mention of Scheduled Castes in government documents or national newspapers of the time.

By the early 1950s the “Hindu” politicians had given up hope of getting themselves integrated into the new polity. There are two debates from the early constitutional history of Pakistan which involved discussion on untouchability and Scheduled Castes and are worth mentioning here. The first is regarding untouchability and the second about the government’s attempts to award a separate electorate to the Scheduled Castes in Pakistan.

Untouchability in Pakistan

Officially, the British colonial government had established the practice of non-interference in religious matters of India. The changes to Hindu and Muslim personal laws were justified as responses to popular demand and community opinion instead of government interference.³³ Although, the post-1947 nation-state constantly engaged and interpreted Islam while invoking an Islamic identity for itself, it adopted the colonial attitude of not interfering in the customs of Hindus. The debate on untouchability which was mentioned in the directive principles of the state is one such example. The directive principles outlawed untouchability in the following manner: “The notion of untouchability being inconsistent with human dignity, its practice is declared unlawful.”³⁴ On 6

32 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, February 21, 1956; *The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 3381.

33 See, Rina Verma Williams, *Personal Laws and Noninterference: The Late Colonial Era, 1920–47; Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66-91.

doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195680140.003.0003.

34 See, Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, Friday, October 6, 1950. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 133.

October 1950, while discussing the “Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters relating to Minorities”³⁵ Dhirendra Nath Dutta asked to amend the clause regarding untouchability and to classify it under “Fundamental Rights” instead of the directive principles of the state.³⁶ He also proposed to make untouchability an offence punishable by law. He suggested rewording the clause as follows: ‘untouchability’ in Hindu society is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.” The Chair pointed out the involvement of religion in this and inquired further if untouchability had its roots in religion (i.e., Hinduism). Dutta replied that untouchability was a social issue and colonizers didn’t want to eradicate social evils of Indian society hence it should be abolished and penalized once independence had been achieved. The Muslim members insisted that untouchability was prescribed by Hinduism and thus it is an internal matter of Hindus; the Hindu members insisted that the state should not follow the example of the colonizers and must intervene in the social customs of people. The example of the Indian constitution was also mentioned to convince Muslim members about how Hindus as a community thought about untouchability post-independence.³⁷ Nurul Amin, a Muslim Leaguer from East Bengal, termed the demand of Hindu members “propaganda” and questioned their sincerity about

35 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, Friday, October 6, 1950. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 133.

36 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, Friday, October 6, 1950. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 133.

37 See: Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, Friday, October 6, 1950. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 134-135.

eradicating untouchability from Hindu society. He asked Hindu members to do away with untouchability by setting example of inter-marriage, inter-dining etc. He also called for ending the practice of untouchability among Hindus not only for the sake of Hindu society but also for the rest of humanity. "If any Adibasi enters their kitchen or their house, Sir, the kitchen, the whole house is polluted. Sir, all the utensils have got to be thrown away...any other human being of another society enjoying the highest position in the society, if he enters the house, the whole house is polluted..."³⁸ Akshay Kumar Das, a Scheduled-Caste member, sided with the opinion of Nur-ul Amin and claimed that the upper-castes had created untouchability. According to him, since the Scheduled Castes are now a majority of Hindus in Pakistan, they shouldn't be stigmatized as 'Untouchables' by the tiny minority of higher caste-Hindus. It was also pointed out during the discussion that, since Pakistan was established to run according to Islamic principles, equality was to be an important aspect to be practiced by the state and the society. At this stage Liaquat Ali Khan intervened and said if the original wording in the clause to abolish untouchability was not adequate, and if the Hindu members thought that it should make a reference to a certain community then they should be vocal about it outside the Constituent Assembly too ("...in a sense that some people may take it in the light that the Constituent Assembly has interfered with Hindu religion...").³⁹ He then suggested amending the original clause in this way: The notion of untouchability being inconsistent with human dignity, its practice is declared unlawful and any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.⁴⁰ Then he suggested moving the said article to the

38 Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, 1950,137.

39 Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, 1950,144.

40 Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, 1950,143.

“Fundamental Rights” instead of putting it under the directive principles. The chair of the Constituent Assembly adding to the discussion, asked Dhirendra Nath Dutta to withdraw his amendment: “The wording is very unhappy: ‘“Untouchability’ in Hindu society is abolished...”⁴¹ The chair then moved the amendment as proposed by Liaquat Ali Khan and it was adopted by the house.⁴²

Poona Pact in Pakistan

In colonial India, the Congress Party was against separate electorates. According to them, it divided the nation and was the cause of emergence of two-nation theory. The now-Pakistani Hindu politicians who had once belonged to the Congress party continued their stance of demanding a joint electorate and a one-nation theory for all Pakistanis irrespective of their religion.⁴³ Soon after the Partition, D.N. Dutta had started his campaign for a joint electorate in the East Pakistan.⁴⁴ However, despite their protests and a lengthy debate on electorates and what they considered was the ‘vivisection’ of the Hindu community in Pakistan, the government decided to give a separate electorate to the Scheduled Castes in 1952. In April 1952, the bill for adopting a countrywide separate electorate for Muslims, caste Hindus, Scheduled Castes, Christians and Buddhists was introduced in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.⁴⁵

41 Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, 1950, 144.

42 Interim Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and on Matters Relating to Minorities, Official Report, 1950, 145.

43 Muhammad Ghulam Kabir, *Minority Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-1971* (Master's thesis, UBC, 1978), 39-40.

44 Kabir, *Minority Politics in Bangladesh*, 22.

45 See, Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 179-220. Also See, National Assembly Pakistan, *The National Assembly of Pakistan Debates: Parliamentary Debates - Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill – Introduced and consideration not concluded*, April 22, 1957 (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 839-875, 887-911. Also See,

The bill proposed to amend the Government of India Act of 1935 in order to conduct the first general elections under adult franchise in the East Bengal, while introducing the idea of creating a separate electorate in the Scheduled-Caste constituencies. The official document mentioned that the government intended to introduce a separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes, citing that the existing system of election did not represent the real desire of the Scheduled Caste community. It stated that the system of joint electorate created by the Poona Pact⁴⁶ had not at all served the interests of the Scheduled-Caste community and that the community was ready to support the system of Separate Electorate for the General Election of representatives to the Provincial Assembly.⁴⁷ It also noted that the Scheduled Caste Federation (of Pakistan) had demanded a Joint Electorate in 1949. Further, the 1952 Comilla Minorities Conference demanded a Joint Electorate for minorities. The Minorities Conference was attended by 300 Scheduled-Caste delegates and "only a few of them had supported a Separate Electorate out of their own personal opinion."⁴⁸ In March 1952, Separate Electorates were proposed for Pakistan's Muslims, Hindus and Scheduled Castes.⁴⁹

National Assembly of Pakistan Debates – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report, The Electorate (Amendment) Bill), April 23, 1957, 935-972.

- 46 Needham and Rajan, ed., *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, 55-58.
- 47 In 1951, there were 30 General (Hindu) seats in the East Pakistan Legislature compared to 10 in the Sind (h) province, as opposed to 36 seats for Scheduled Castes in East Bengal and none in Sindh. (Currently, ten seats out of 342 in all in the National Assembly are reserved for all religious minorities. See, Meena Menon, "An Unequal Election for Pakistan's Minorities," *The Hindu*, September 08, 2016. Accessed May 22, 2021. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/an-unequal-election-for-pakistans-minorities/article5231812.ece>
- 48 Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Secretariat. 195/CF/51 (37/CF/51, 109/CF/51) "1. Delimitation of Seats in East Bengal, 2. Revisions of Seats in East Bengal Legislature, 3- East Bengal's Elections," National Documentation Center, Islamabad Pakistan.
- 49 Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Secretariat. 195/CF/51 (37/CF/51, 109/CF/51) "1. Delimitation of Seats in East Bengal, 2. Revisions of Seats in

The Hindu politicians were, in particular, in favour of a joint electorate so that they could remain integrated in polity and society and claim equal rights as citizens of Pakistan. Their insistence on a joint electorate was rejected by the ruling party. The Hindu members were unable to understand why, if 20 percent of the population had agreed to be part of a joint electorate, were being pushed toward a separate electorate.⁵⁰ In favour of their stance, the Hindu politicians argued that both caste and Scheduled-Caste communities were still bound by the Poona Pact. They maintained that, without abrogating the Poona Pact, which had not been annulled by the parties concerned (caste and Scheduled Castes), the separate electorate could not be imposed on Pakistan's Hindus. They further contended that the Muslim community had no right to annul the Poona Pact.⁵¹ Hindu leaders then demanded a referendum of the Scheduled Castes to decide the issue of electorate. Upon this demand, a Muslim legislator reminded them of the circumstances under which the Poona Pact had been accepted by Ambedkar (to save Gandhi's life).⁵² This debate which took place in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was long and communal in nature yet the Hindu politicians kept demanding that there be only one electoral roll for Pakistan.⁵³ The Muslim Leaguers maintained that the caste Hindus feared a separate electorate because they did not

East Bengal Legislature, 3 - East Bengal's Elections," National Documentation Center, Islamabad Pakistan.

- 50 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications, 50).
- 51 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 50.
- 52 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 190.
- 53 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 51.

want to get excluded from the electoral rolls altogether.⁵⁴ “If 55 lakhs of East Bengali Scheduled Castes part ways with the Caste Hindus, their political power would drop drastically.”⁵⁵ They also accused caste Hindus of not wanting untouchables to get rid of untouchability.⁵⁶ On April 20, 1954, Bhupendra Kumar Datta expressed the sentiments of Pakistani Hindus and the sense of discrimination in his community in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in the following formidable words:

We have been persistently demanding joint electorates. But no, that gives you equal citizenship, you Jimmies [*zimmis*] and slaves, you cannot have it. In our Pakistan you shall remain as drawers of water and hewers of wood... Plainly we are extra-territorials, we are not Pakistani citizens, and we are a stateless people.⁵⁷

Despite the vehement opposition by the Hindu politicians, the Pakistani state extended the Government of India Scheduled Castes Order 1936 to the entire West Pakistan. The Scheduled Castes Declaration Ordinance of 1957 declared 40 non-Muslim castes in Sindh and Baluchistan as Scheduled Castes (West Pakistan was “one unit” then). But the East Pakistan legislature jointly decided to adopt a joint electorate in the East Pakistan. In 1957, the issue of electorate was once again debated in the National Assembly

54 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 182-183.

55 Pakistan. Constituent Assembly, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19, 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 191.

56 Pakistan. Constituent Assembly, 1955-1956. The Government of India (Third Amendment) Bill – Passed as amended April 19 1952. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 187.

57 Constituent Assembly Pakistan, 1955-1956. The Central Budget – General Discussion- Concluded March 20, 1954. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Karachi: Manager of Publications), 261.

of Pakistan.⁵⁸ At this point, it is interesting to note the electoral preferences of different communities in the nascent polity.⁵⁹ To some West Pakistani lawmakers, the separate electorate was a foundation of Pakistan and a fundamental of Islam,⁶⁰ therefore the concept of a joint electorate struck at the very root of Pakistan.⁶¹ The minorities of West Pakistan had objections to the joint electorate, whereas the minorities in the East preferred a joint electorate. The minorities of East Pakistan strongly refuted the perception that they demanded a joint electorate, rather termed it “propaganda” by the center. They alleged that a fear of Hindu domination had been created in the West Pakistan, where Muslims were now 98 percent of the population.⁶² The question of a separate electorate divided other religious minorities in West Pakistan. Gibbon, a Christian member of the Assembly, who supported a separate electorate for the minority community in West Pakistan, alleged that the Government of West Pakistan wanted a joint electorate in order to neutralize minorities.⁶³ On the other hand, Muslim lawmakers argued that a separate electorate was essential to politically stabilize Pakistan.⁶⁴ During the debate, the East

58 When the proposal of a separate electorate was presented, there was opposition in the assembly regarding introducing two separate systems in two wings of the country.

59 Suhrawardy, the then-premier, campaigned that West Pakistani minorities should opt for a joint electorate instead of asking for a separate electorate.

60 *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill – Introduced and consideration not concluded. 843.

61 *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill – Introduced and consideration not concluded. 969.

62 *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill – Introduced and consideration not concluded. 845.

63 *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill), April 23, 1957. 943.

64 *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report. The Electorate (Amendment) Bill), April 23, 1957. 948.

Pakistani Hindu politicians were accused of taking their dictation from Delhi.⁶⁵ Since the majority of East Pakistani Muslim lawmakers were in favour of a joint electorate in the East Pakistan, they too became the target of communal accusations by the majority.⁶⁶ On April 24, 1957, Muslims, Hindus and Scheduled Castes of the East Pakistan voted in favour of a joint electorate.

Conclusion

The political struggle of Scheduled Castes in united Pakistan went into oblivion after this period. It reemerged in post-1971 (East Pakistan became Bangladesh) Pakistan, in the border district of Tharparkar in Sindh province. Seventy years after the Partition, some Hindu communities have come out of the political isolation and are claiming equal citizenship and upward mobility, as well as seeking new spaces to share power⁶⁷ in the post-colony. The internet has connected Pakistani Scheduled Castes with international Dalit forums. The narrative of Pakistani Scheduled Castes aims to dismantle the normative understanding of the majority/minority binary. The colonial construction of electoral categories of majority and minority still plays a leading role in the political narrative of caste and Scheduled Caste Hindus in Pakistan. The Scheduled Castes claim to be the largest minority in Pakistan. They have managed to assert the importance of their vote and have found a voice through social as well as the local Sindhi media. However,

65 "... but our friends have refused up to this day to accept this theory and have constantly been clamouring for Joint Electorate...in spite of their vehement professions of allegiance to Pakistan, they get their inspiration from Delhi." *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report, The Electorate (Amendment) Bill*, April 23, 1957. 966-967.

66 "Hindus were consistent in their demand of Joint Electorate, but Muslim politicians of East Pakistan have changed and those who used to hate Hindus have now become lovers of *Hindus*." *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates – Parliamentary Debates – Official Report; The Electorate (Amendment) Bill*, April 23, 1957. 967.

their narrative has yet to register on a national level. Besides this, the census, a colonial administrative tool, remains one of the main locations of Scheduled-Caste identity politics in Pakistan. Solidification of caste, the census and electoral politics can be highly polarizing for Pakistan's caste and Scheduled Caste Hindu communities. Although Pakistani caste and Scheduled Caste Hindus insisted on their electoral unity in the early history of the post-colony as they found themselves to be excluded from the "nation", the years leading to unrest in East Pakistan and unavailability of documented history after 1971, there is a gap that remains to be filled regarding what led to change in political stance of Pakistan's Scheduled Castes. These Scheduled Castes maintain a post-colonial identity, and the Scheduled Caste politics uses the colonial era's political vocabulary. There is definitely a disconnect between the early era and contemporary caste and Scheduled Caste politics in Pakistan. The contemporary Scheduled Caste narrative in Sindh has developed after 1971. The dimensions of Sindh Scheduled Caste politics from the 1960s to the early 1980s are hard to identify in the absence of oral or archival history. However, the contemporary Scheduled Caste politics in Sindh is set to not only assert the power of numbers but also a separate identity. Whereas, for Scheduled Caste activists assert that earlier patronage networks with upper-caste Hindus need to be discontinued. New forms of commensality are beginning to develop in the region, that is challenging earlier hierarchies.