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Colonial Hydraulic Infrastructure, Princely States, and the Partition of the Punjab

Abstract

The discourse of scientific water management was an effective discursive tool that not only enabled the British to develop an integrated irrigation network in the Indus Basin but also created an infrastructural space to exercise their state authority. In 1947, however, the colonial vision of a rationally designed and administratively integrated hydraulic infrastructure came into conflict with the imperatives of emerging political formations that were based on visions of communally defined territorial nationalism. The Punjab Boundary Commission, therefore, was not only tasked to divide a province between two nation states but also the hydraulic infrastructure the British had built for a single administration. This article explores the history of Sutlej Valley Project to provide an alternative explanation to why the Punjab Boundary Commission awarded the controversial Ferozepur weir to India. Built in 1920s, the project was to serve three political entities namely Punjab, Bahawalpur, and Bikaner. The later was a non-riparian state and its inclusion, otherwise justified in a scientific and utilitarian language, this article argues, was made possible by an unvarnished application of British paramountcy. This article foregrounds the claims of Bahawalpur, Bikaner, the Muslim League, and the Indian National Congress around the Ferozepur weir to show how the artificially created hydraulic interests of the Bikaner state played a determining role in the ‘final’ Radcliffe Award whereby the strategically critical Ferozepur weir was given to India. The award of the weir, this article demonstrates, was the final act of British paramountcy, the very same kind of political imposition that had ensured the inclusion of Bikaner State in the Sutlej Valley Project in the first place.

Introduction

Karl Wittfogel in his classic study, *Oriental Despotism*, has explained that the expansion and consolidation of state authority in ‘despotic’ regimes occurred through the development of centrally controlled hydraulic infrastructure.¹ In this regard, David Hardiman has argued that it was the British colonial state in India which represented a classic case of ‘Oriental Despotism’ rather than any other previous Indian regime.² In the Indus Basin, the centralization of hydraulic administration started from 1857 onwards. It was part of the larger British project to systematically transition from ‘mercantile to territorial colonialism’, to use Manu Goswami.³ The fundamental pre-requisite of ‘territorial’ colonialism was to

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integrate unruly Indian landscape into a single geography of economic administration. It was within this context that the development of colonial hydraulic infrastructure played an important role.

The colonial hydraulic regime in the Indus Basin was characterised by the utilitarian principles of productivity and efficiency outlined in the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act of 1873. The act enabled the British to develop an integrated hydraulic infrastructure and stake exclusive claims on the water resources of the Basin. It was probably the first law with region-wide implications making the Indus Basin, otherwise politically divided in British provinces and princely States, a single geography of colonial water management. By 1930, the British had built an irrigation network in the basin which commanded around 30 million acres and was comprised of such canals, the total length of which would more than girdle the earth twice over.⁴ Of which, the single largest infrastructure was developed under the Sutlej Valley Project in 1920s. With four weirs and eleven canals, it was designed to irrigate over six million acres in three political entities, namely, the Punjab, Bahawalpur, and Bikaner. This article explores the peculiar history of this grand colonial project to explain why the controversial Ferozepur ‘salient’ along with strategically critical Ferozepur weir was given to India by the Punjab Boundary Commission. Based on both colonial and princely documents, this article argues that the award of the Ferozepur ‘salient’ to India was simply to protect the hydraulic interests of Bikaner State.

This article begins with an overview of the history of Sutlej Valley Project and shows how the British, despite strong opposition from Bahawalpur Darbar, used utilitarian principles of productivity and efficiency to include a non-riparian political entity, i.e., the Bikaner state in the project. Drawing on memorandums submitted to the Punjab Boundary Commission, it then moves on to explore and chronicle the conflicting claims of the ‘interested parties’ on the Ferozepur weir. In the last part, it shows how the artificially created hydraulic interests of Bikaner played a determining role in the ‘final’ Radcliffe Award whereby the Ferozepur weir was awarded to India.

Sutlej Valley Project and British Paramountcy

When first proposed in 1899 by the Punjab government, the Sutlej Valley Project was just a single weir- two canal project meant to serve the British province and the princely state of Bahawalpur. From 1899 to 1906, several proposals emerged but could not be materialised because both the stakeholders failed to agree on the location of the weir. In 1906, the Bikaner state was also included in the proposed scheme as a potential partner. Its inclusion was justified on technical grounds. The colonial irrigation experts claimed that sufficient surplus water was available in the Sutlej River over and above the legitimate requirements of the other two partners.⁵ For the British, the availability of surplus water was both an opportunity and a challenge for the legitimacy of their rule. How could an efficient, scientifically advanced, and benevolent government let that surplus water go to waste without any productive use? This technical discourse theoretically transcended the political distinctions between British and princely territories on the one hand the question of non-riparian status of the Bikaner state on the other.

Evidence shows that the colonial government's decision to include Bikaner was mainly inspired by the overall political landscape of the early twentieth century. During the first quarter of the century, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner emerged as one of the most influential rulers of princely India.⁶ The Rajputana state was an exotic destination for hunt-loving colonial elites. Julie E Hughes, in her recent work *Hunting, the Environment and Power in the Indian Princely States*, has shown how the practice of hunting shaped the princely relations with the colonial government. Lord Curzon was one of the most frequent visitors to Bikaner's hunting fields. In 1905, Maharaja Ganga Singh requested Lord Curzon to include his state in the Sutlej Valley Project.⁷

The Bahawalpur Darbar opposed the inclusion of Bikaner both on technical and legal grounds. First, the Darbar challenged the British claims regarding the availability of surplus water in the Sutlej River. In an apparent attempt to resolve the technical issues, the Punjab Government commissioned several surveys in order to ensure whether there was any water available in the Sutlej River in excess of the 'legitimate' demands of the Bahawalpur State. The reports, all prepared by Punjab officials, concluded against the claims of Bahawalpur, that such an excess existed.⁸ For the Darbar, their own claims regarding the inadequate water supplies were based on both their historical engagement with the Sutlej River and reports prepared by their British technical advisors.⁹ Since the colonial expert departments were an integral part of the colonial state apparatus, their findings were considered to be potentially biased in favour of the colonial government. For colonial officials, on the other hand, their conclusions were simply based on empirical knowledge. At stake was the political value of British-directed surveys. The claims of the Bahawalpur Darbar were not acceptable because they could have undermined the credibility of colonial scientific knowledge. Such credibility was the very foundation of the British qualification to speak for all in the hydraulic affairs of the Indus Basin.

The Bahawalpur Darbar also highlighted the non-riparian status of Bikaner. For them, the Punjab and Bahawalpur State both were 'riparian owners of the coast of the Sutlej', giving both a 'right to a reasonable use of water for domestic purposes or for irrigation, but only in their respective territories.' No riparian state, in Bahawalpur's view, had the right to give over any supply of water to a non-riparian state without the full consent of the other. They urged the Punjab government that the Bikaner State 'should be kept out of the Sutlej Valley Project 'for the furtherance of the interests of British territory and Bahawalpur State.'¹⁰ For colonial irrigation experts, on the other hand, the riparian law was not applicable in India. They believed that the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act of 1873 was the best available legal framework to regulate the hydraulic affairs of the Indus Basin whereby the British had assumed such powers as to best use the water resources of the basin. They asserted that this utilitarian principle had 'certainly been observed in irrigation practice in imperial works in the past irrespective of any riparian law or right of ownership. They gave the example of the Sirhind Canal system in the Punjab where Patiala, Jind, Nabha, and Faridkot states were 'permitted' to benefit from the scheme although they had no riparian rights.¹¹

However, the precedent of Sirhind Canal was described by the Bahawalpur Darbar as a ‘case of acquiescence’, hence no exception to riparian law.¹²

After almost 20 years long history of failed negotiations between the Punjab government and the Bahawalpur Darbar, the colonial government stepped in to end the stalemate. On 16-17th of December 1918, a conference was held in Delhi under Sir Claude Hill, the Public Works member of the Government of India. The Bahawalpur did not agree to the canal colonisation project up to the very last day of the conference. At the end, the colonial government resorted to its paramount status vis-à-vis the Bahawalpur state and gave the princely delegation mere thirteen hours to decide whether the princely state would join the project or not. This ultimatum was backed by a naked threat to proceed with a purely British-Bikaner project. Under such circumstance, the Bahawalpur delegation, keeping in mind the consequences of an independent action, conditionally agreed to have Bikaner as its third beneficiary.¹³ A perennial canal would branch out of Ferozepur headworks to irrigate around 500000 acres in Bikaner.¹⁴ This artificially created stakes of Bikaner in the Ferozepur weir, this article will show in the following pages, played an important role in the final demarcation of the Punjab boundary in 1947.

By 1947, the Sutlej Valley Project effectively made the hydraulic infrastructure of Bahawalpur and Bikaner permanently dependent on Punjab-controlled headworks. But this colonial administrative control failed to permanently defuse the competing visions of water rights that, back in 1918, had been settled by the colonial government applying simultaneously the discourse of rationality and their paramountcy. On 3rd June of 1947, when the British announced their departure from the subcontinent and decided to divide the province of Punjab between India and Pakistan, it greatly alarmed the princely states of Bahawalpur and Bikaner. Since the headworks of their canals were located in the Punjab, the location of the new Punjab boundary was critical to their hydraulic interests in the Sutlej Valley Project. The following section of this article examines how each ‘interested party’ framed their case around the strategically critical Ferozepur weir before the Punjab boundary Commission.

Proceedings of the Punjab Boundary Commission

Constituted under the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the Boundary Commission was comprised of politically nominated members of high ‘judicial’ standing. Justice Din Muhammad and Justice Munir represented the Muslim League, while Justice Meher Chand Mahajan and Justice Teja Singh were there as nominees of the Congress and the Sikhs. To chair the Commission, Mountbatten chose a prominent English lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliff.¹⁵ The set criteria on which the Commission should base their decisions included ‘contagious majority areas’ and ‘other factors’.¹⁶ Hydraulic infrastructure played a central role within the rubric of ‘other factors’.

By 1947, almost 2500000 acres of Bahawalpur land had become completely dependent on the Punjab-controlled irrigation headworks. Therefore, it was quite natural that the Darbar proactively approached the colonial government to ensure that the princely state should be regarded as a party in the whole scheme of the partition of the Punjab. On 6th of June, the Darbar submitted a detailed memorandum to Mountbatten carefully highlighting the Darbar’s profound sense of

grievance over a 'lost' river, especially how the unilateral application of British paramountcy had long deprived the state of its physical control over the Sutlej.¹⁷ The memorandum also reminded the paramount power that it had 'special obligation' to safeguard Bahawalpur's interest while demarcating the boundary between India and Pakistan. To that end, the Darbar not only demanded that it should be given an opportunity to represent its case before the Punjab Boundary Commission but also proposed a vaguely worded clause that suggested to make it mandatory for the commission to consider 'the desirability and necessity of preserving the integrity of the irrigation system.'¹⁸ However, both Mountbatten and the Congress leadership refused to give any special terms of reference to the Punjab Boundary Commission beyond what had already been agreed in the Partition Plan.

The Bahawalpur Darbar appointed the stalwart diplomat and lawyer Sir Zafarullah Khan to represent their case before the commission. When the Muslim League, too, decided to appoint Sir Zafarullah as their legal counsel, the Bahawalpur Darbar worried about a potential conflict of interests. They thought it to be 'somewhat embarrassing' for the lawyer to simultaneously argue two different, if not strictly opposite, cases before the commission, and suggested to the Nawab to appoint another lawyer. But the Darbar could not find a better legal mind to present their case.¹⁹

In framing the case of Bahawalpur State, Sir Zafarullah Khan harked back to the origins of the Sutlej Valley Project and how it made the State an integrated and dependent part of a Punjab-controlled irrigation system. The Bahawalpur State had the largest stake in the whole Sutlej Valley Scheme, with an area of over 2,500,000 acres and a population of 1,500,000 wholly dependent on the new infrastructure. Although the Eastern Grey canal from Ferozepore headworks directly commanded only a small area of 65,000 acres in Bahawalpur, the Darbar claimed the headworks owing to their strategic location. The Darbar demanded the commission to draw the new boundary line that did not undermine the hydraulic interests of the state. Their main focus was the inclusion of Ferozepur and Sulemanki headworks in West Punjab.²⁰

The Muslim League's case, on the other hand, was based mainly on the principle of 'contiguous majority areas' and not on 'other factors.' The whole idea of the partition of the Punjab, the League argued, was predicated on the very principle of a contiguous majority population. The decision to divide Punjab was also taken by the representatives of their respective communities who voted separately. For the Muslim League, therefore, the prime job of the boundary commission was to draw a line that divided contiguous Muslim areas from that of the non-Muslims ones. Once that done, only then the 'other factors' could be considered to make 'an equitable adjustment' based purely on 'local' factors.²¹ For instance, as explained in the Muslim League Memorandum to the Boundary Commission:

If on demarcating the boundary line on the principle of contiguous majority areas, it is discovered that the headworks of an irrigation system which in its entirety or in main, serves one part of the province, is in the other part, a deviation of the boundary line, which would not involve the transfer of any

*considerable section of the population from its majority area to a minority area, may be adopted to adjust the boundary so as to include the headworks in the same part of the province with the irrigation system it is mainly designed to serve.*²²

It appears that for the Muslim League, the consideration of 'other factors' was possible only if they did not involve the transfer of any 'considerable' population from its majority area. With that in mind, the commission, according to the League, should modify the line to award the headworks to the province where its supplies were most needed. This argument rested on the old utilitarian principle of the 'greatest good for the greatest number', which here meant the inclusion of an irrigation headworks in the province where its water resources were most strongly required. The Ferozepore weir was the case in point. It was located in Ferozepore which was a Muslim majority tehsil (55.2%) and most of its canals served to a territory the Muslim League considered as part of a contiguous Muslim majority area. As the League demanded 'tehsil' to be the appropriate unit for determining the question of contiguity, the tehsils of Jullundur (51.1%), Nakodar (59.4%), Zira (65.6%), and Ferozepore (55.2%) were claimed as forming a contiguous Muslim majority area, which for this simple reason was demanded to be included in West Punjab. In addition, the League also claimed a compact majority area of Muslims (75%) contiguous to the Ferozepore tehsil running along the banks of the river Sutlej through Fazilka tehsil up to the border of the Bahawalpur State.²³

It was here, that the claims of the League intersected with those of the Bahawalpur Darbar. Most of the area in Fazilka tehsil, the Muslim League claimed as a compact contiguous Muslim majority area, had historically been part of Bahawalpur. Back in 1844, the State had 'gifted' 29 villages including, the town of Fazilka to the British. The original document under which the villages were granted to the East India Company used the phrase '*batariqa-e-tawzu-e-be-taklufana*', literally meaning 'by way of informal courtesy'.²⁴ On behalf of Bahawalpur State, Sir Zafarullah Khan demanded that this area should be returned to the State after the lapse of paramountcy.²⁵ This demand served the interests of both the Muslim League and the Darbar. If the commission was to take its decision on the basis of a contiguous majority population, then the area should become part of West Punjab. But if the boundary commission was to give due weightage to 'other factors', instead, the joint hydraulic interest of the League and the Darbar would have to be considered than any rival claim. The return of the 29 villages to the Bahawalpur State after the lapse of paramountcy was an added factor in this regard.

Predicating their case entirely on the principle of 'other factors', the Congress and Sikh demanded the inclusion of larger portions of hydraulic infrastructure along with the canal colonies of certain districts in West Punjab especially Montgomery and a part of Multan. They emphasised Punjab's cultural and economic homogeneity which was mainly brought about by an interconnected hydraulic infrastructure. In order to ensure what they termed 'economic security' of the East Punjab, they demanded a rational division of the existing hydraulic infrastructure, its share in water, canal colonies, and crown lands. The Congress interpreted the development of colonial hydraulic projects as structures of 'diversion' of the Eastern rivers to canal colonies in the Western districts. On this basis they argued that 'no partition of the province can be just which does not divide this essential

asset, namely the river waters and [their] source of revenue equitably between the two parts of the province.’ It particularly claimed control over the Suleimanke Headworks to strengthen their case for Montgomery district as the canal colonies in the district were depended on the Pakpattan Canal which takes off from the weir. In the Congress memorandum, however, there was no mention of the Ferozepore Headworks. This is quite understandable, given the fact that Ferozepore district, a non-Muslim majority district, was, in their view, clearly going to be part of East Punjab.²⁶

It was the case made by Bikaner State that came in direct opposition with the claims of Bahawalpur and the Muslim League. Jointly prepared and presented by Lal Kanwar Sain, its Chief Engineer Irrigation, and Sir Tek Chand, a retired judge of Lahore High Court, their representation was the most precise and revolved around just one concern, that is, the inclusion of the Ferozepore headworks in the Indian Union so as to protect the supplies of the Ganga Canal. The memorandum specifically mentioned the Bahawalpur Darbar’s historic opposition to the inclusion of Bikaner in the Sutlej Valley Project because Bikaner was not a riparian state. But the British government had contended that as paramount power, the responsibility for the disposal of the Sutlej water to ensure ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’ lay with them and insisted upon the inclusion of the Bikaner tract. Quoting from the 1920 Sutlej Valley Project Agreement, Bikaner’s memorandum pointed out that the project was based on the principle ‘that the waters of the Sutlej should be distributed in the best interest of the public at large, irrespective of provincial and state boundaries.’ Assuming that Bahawalpur would eventually join Pakistan, Bikaner state feared that if the control of Ferozepore headworks went to the West Punjab, the historic frictions between Bikaner and Bahawalpur over the former’s inclusion in the project would seriously jeopardise its interests. For this reason, Bikaner found it essential that the Ferozepore Headworks and the relevant parts of the Bikaner canal should form part of the territories of Eastern Punjab. By this time, the Bikaner State had officially joined the Constituent Assembly of India and told the commission that it would be a member of the Indian Union.²⁷ The dispute between Bikaner and Bahawalpur over Ferozepore headworks, therefore, was not simply about the security of their respective share in the Sutlej water, but also about the peculiar history of how the hydraulic relationship between a riparian and non-riparian state was established in the first place.

The Radcliffe Award

Announced on 17th of August 1947, the larger part of Radcliffe’s preamble to the actual boundary award addressed the role of hydraulic and railway infrastructure in determining his decision, and how he understood the claims of Bahawalpur and Bikaner, especially with regards to Ferozepore headworks. For Radcliffe, the interests of princely states were of a ‘private’ nature, and hence could not ‘weigh directly in the question before us as to the division of the Punjab between the Indian Union and Pakistan’. He assumed that the Partition would not affect the ‘rights of private property’ and that ‘any agreements that either of those States [had] made with the Provincial Government as to the sharing of water from these canals or otherwise [would] be respected by whatever government hereafter assume jurisdiction over the headworks concerned.’ ‘The truly debatable ground’,

according to Radcliffe was how to divide the hydraulic infrastructure over the Beas and the Sutlej, which was ‘developed only under the conception of a single administration.’²⁸

Radcliffe’s framing of the hydraulic infrastructure resonated with the colonial vision of infrastructure development projects as being ‘apolitical’, thus immune to the kind of political considerations now thrown up by the Partition process. The colonial engineers had always seen the hydraulic infrastructures as a common asset. David Gilmartin has shown how a politically motivated partition of an integrated hydraulic system ‘stunned’ some British engineers.²⁹ For them, the partition was an act of politics which was against the apolitical engineering principles that had shaped a scientifically modelled hydraulic infrastructure in the Indus Basin. They, however, ignored the fact that the very development of this integrated hydraulic system was only made possible by colonial claims to paramount status in India which was never purely a ‘technical’ or ‘non-political’ question, but rather relied repeatedly on the supremely political act of asserting British colonial state power. The British insistence on the scientific nature of these infrastructure development projects was a way to dispel political questions between different contenders. The division of hydraulic infrastructure at the time of Partition served as another classic case of such colonial developmentalism. Radcliffe imagined the Sutlej River system as an integrated structure and found it ‘difficult to envisage a satisfactory demarcation of [the] boundary at this point that [was] not accompanied by some arrangement for joint control.’ At the same time, however, he validated the entirely ‘political’ decision of the ‘paramount’ power to include Bikaner State in the Sutlej Valley Project, when he finally decided not to extend the territories of the West Punjab to include the Ferozepore Headworks in the province. The only justification he gave was that he did not want any disruptions in the hydraulic infrastructure. Given the fact that the inclusion of Ferozepore headworks did interrupt the supplies of the Divalpur Canal into West Punjab and the Eastern Grey canal into Bahawalpur State, the only disruption he avoided, was disruption to the Bikaner canal.³⁰

The Bikaner Factor and the fate of Ferozepur Weir

What ‘made’ Radcliffe to award Ferozepur weir to India has been the subject of conspiracy theories ever since. Plausible evidence is available to conclude that the award of Ferozepore headworks was the final act of British paramountcy – the very same kind of political imposition that had ensured the inclusion of Bikaner in the Sutlej Valley Project in the first place. Records show that on 9th of August 1947, Nehru sent a ‘secret letter’ to Mountbatten ‘urging him that the Ferozepore headworks must be awarded to India.’³¹ In his official reply to Nehru’s letter, Mountbatten wrote that ‘it is most important that I should not do anything to prejudice the Independence of the Boundary Commission, and that, therefore, it would be wrong for me even to forward any memorandum, especially at this stage.’³² Though, Mountbatten’s reply suggests that he was not willing to intervene in the Boundary Commission’s proceedings, it seems odd that a person like Nehru was mistakenly optimistic when asking the Viceroy to influence the award of Ferozepore headworks to India.

Further evidence became available in 1978 from Mr. Kanwar Sain, who was the principal author of Bikaner's case over the question of the Ferozepore headworks. In his autobiography, *Reminiscences of an Engineer*, he conspicuously pointed out how the 'Ferozepore salient' became part of India through a last-minute alteration in the original Boundary Award, and what had caused this modification. He claims that on 10th of August 1947, he was informed by Sarup Singh, the Chief Irrigation Officer of the Punjab, that Ferozepore headworks was going to be awarded to Pakistan. The Irrigation Officer got this information from the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepore District who was instructed by the Governor Jenkin's administration that he should establish Ferozepore district headquarters outside the Ferozepore tehsil.³³ Subsequently, on the same day, a telegram from the Maharaja of Bikaner was sent which Mr. Sain has quoted in his book. Though there is no trace of this telegram in either the Mountbatten papers or the India Office Records, but it is now part of The Transfer of Power documents in reference to Mr. Sain's book. The telegram read:

"It is strongly rumoured that Boundary Commission is likely to award Ferozepore Tehsil to Western Punjab. This Tehsil contains Headworks of Bikaner Ganga canal and under existing agreement State is entitled to receive for its perennial canal specified amount of water. Fear greatly that administration and regulation of this water exclusively by Western Punjab may gravely prejudice interests of Bikaner State as its economic life is to very large extent dependent on water supply from Ganga Canal. Have every confidence that Your Excellency in finally arriving at decision on award of Boundary Commission will be good enough to safeguard interests of Bikaner especially as we as one of the parties to the Agreement were not consulted in arrangements that are being made. Request Your Excellency to very kindly give an opportunity to my Prime Minister and Chief Engineer Irrigation, to place facts before Your Excellency prior to final decision being arrived at. They are reaching Delhi on morning Monday eleventh."³⁴

Sain along with Sardar Panikar, the prime minister of Bikaner State, took the Maharaja's personal aeroplane to fly to Delhi on 10th of August to meet Mountbatten. Mr Sain recalled:

"On arrival in Delhi, I contacted George Abell, private secretary to His Excellency, and showed him a copy of the telegram sent by His Highness. He said that H.E. was far too busy. I pleaded with him that in case H.E. could not spare any time to see us, we would go back but His Highness would be very much disappointed. Hearing this Abell, went in, took the telegram which I handed over to him and after about ten minutes, came back and said, "His Excellency would see Panikar and yourself at nine clock sharp tomorrow morning for five minutes". The next morning, as Sardar Panikar opened the subject, Lord Mountbatten shouted at him and said. "The Viceroy had nothing to do with the Radcliffe commission. That commission has been appointed by His Majesty's Government. Radcliffe is not to report me." As H.E stopped us from going further, I picked up the courage to say to H.E, our Master has asked us to convey that if the Ferozepore Headworks and the Ganga Canal go to Pakistan, His Highness,

in the interest of his subjects, would have no option but to opt for Pakistan. As I said this, I could see a change in the colour of the face of Lord Mountbatten. He said nothing, and we left H. E's room.³⁵

In 1989, Herbert Christopher Beaumont, who served as private secretary to Cyril Radcliffe, prepared a note entitled "The Truth of the Partition of the Punjab in August 1947".³⁶ He left this note with a request that it would be made available to selected persons only after his death and that too after prior permission by the Warden of All Souls College, Oxford, and the Foreign Office. This document was de-classified in 2000 and a copy of it is now available in his private papers in the British Library. His note narrates the story of the last days of the Punjab Boundary Commission and what caused the elimination of Ferozepore Headworks from West Punjab. His account corroborates the claims made by Mr Sain, and is worth quoting at length:

"Radcliffe had completed the Punjab line. Ferozepore and Zira Tahsils were allotted to Pakistan. Sir Evan Jenkins, Governor of the Punjab, had asked Sir George Abell to let him know the course of the Partition Line so that troops could be sent to those areas which were most under threat of violence from the inevitable dislocation which partition involved. Abell asked me where the line would be. I told him [and] a map showing where the line would run was sent by Abell to Jenkins who unfortunately never destroyed the map, which after his departure in mid-August came into the hands of the new Pakistan Government. Hence the suspicion by Pakistan (justified) that the line had been altered by Radcliffe. This was under pressure from Mountbatten, in turn under pressure from Nehru, and also almost certainly from Bikaner, whose State could have been very adversely affected if the canal headworks at Ferozepore had been wholly in the hands of Pakistan. Radcliffe and I were living alone on the Viceregal Estate. After the map with the line had been sent to Sir Evan, probably the night of 10th August towards midnight while Radcliffe was working, V.P Menon – the key figure after Nehru in Indian Politics at the time – appeared at the outside door, was let in by police guard on duty and asked me if he could see Radcliffe. I told him politely that he could not. He said that Mountbatten had sent him. I told him, less politely, that it made no difference. He departs with good grace. I think he anticipated the rebuff. He was a very able and perceptive person. The next morning [11th August] at breakfast I told Radcliffe what had happened. He made no comment. Later that morning Radcliffe told me that he had been invited to lunch by Lord Ismay (Mountbatten's private Secretary imported from England for the purpose of Mountbatten's Vice-Royalty), but he had been asked by Ismay not to bring me with him – the pretext being that there would not be enough room at the table for the extra guest. Having lived for six months in the house occupied by Ismay, I knew this to be untrue. But my suspicions were not aroused as they should have been. I was leaving India the next week, had many pre-occupations and welcomed the chance to get on with my own affairs. This was the first time, however, that Radcliffe and I had been separated at any sort of function. That evening the Punjab line was changed: Ferozepore going to India.³⁷"

Explaining how and when the alteration had happened, Beaumont recalled that Nehru and Patel doubtlessly warned Mountbatten that the award of Ferozepore to Pakistan would result in war. During the lunch on 11th of August, Mountbatten and Lord Ismay used the ‘threat’ of war to persuade Radcliffe to alter the award. Although, Beaumont was ‘deftly excluded’ from the lunch, he was later told by George Abell that ‘this was what happened.’ At the end, he explicitly conceded that ‘Mountbatten interfered, and Radcliffe allowed himself to be overborne.’ In defence of his boss, however, Beaumont argued that Radcliffe yielded to what the latter ‘thought was overwhelming political expediency’. In 1992 this confessional note made headlines in *The Daily Telegraph*, ‘How Mountbatten bent the rules and the Indian Border’. Mr. Beaumont was hailed as a ‘whistle-blower’ by the author of the *Telegraph* article Mr. Simon Scott Plummer.³⁸

Taking all this into account, a retrospective analysis of the Radcliffe award can provide a clearer understanding of the factors which influenced the award of Ferozepore headworks to India. By 8th August 1947, the proceedings of the Punjab Boundary Commission had been completed and the Ferozepore ‘salient’ was earmarked to go to West Punjab. On administrative grounds, advance information of the award was given to Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor of the Punjab, who then instructed the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepore to transfer his headquarters out of Ferozepore tehsil. That information was passed onto Bikaner and Nehru through officials of Irrigation department. Nehru approached Mountbatten urging him to award Ferozepore headworks to India. Maharaja of Bikaner, on his part, sent a letter by his prime minister and chief engineer who reached Delhi on 10th of August and gave Maharaja’s letter to Mountbatten. In the evening, Mr. Panikar and Mr Sain met Nehru, Menon and Patel. It was the same evening when Menon, came to see Radcliffe but got rebuffed by Beaumont. The next morning on 11th of August, Mr. Panikar and Mr. Sain met Mountbatten and conveyed the message of their “Master” that if Ferozepore headworks went to West Punjab, Bikaner would follow. That day Mountbatten and Lord Ismay had lunch with Radcliffe and persuaded the latter to alter the award. In the evening, Jenkins received the ‘eliminate salient’ message, which awarded Ferozepore to India.

Given the fact that the award of Ferozepore headworks was an afterthought, it is not surprising that a larger part of Radcliffe’s explanatory notes to his award addressed the role of hydraulic infrastructure in determining his decision. He, however, specifically mentioned that the claims of Bahawalpur and Bikaner ‘cannot weigh directly in the question before us as to the division of the Punjab between the Indian Union and Pakistan since the division of the province does not affect rights of private property’. His argument that the princely stakes in the hydraulic infrastructure over Sutlej River were outside the scope of the Boundary Commission contradicted the very purpose of the Boundary Commission. He overlooked the fact that owing to the integration of their hydraulic infrastructures with that of the Punjab, both Bahawalpur and Bikaner were officially ‘interested parties’ in the partition of the province. Moreover, princely states were not ‘private property’ but rather political entities which existed under British paramountcy.

Conclusion

This article puts the troubled history of the Sutlej Valley Project centre stage to show how the artificially created hydraulic interests of the Bikaner state played a determining role in the final Radcliffe Award whereby the strategically critical Ferozepur weir was given to India. While designing the Sutlej Valley Project in 1910s and 1920's, the British persistently couched the canal colonisation project in the language of scientific water management and rationality. Yet, they failed to convince Bahawalpur about the rationality of their decision to grant Sutlej waters to Bikaner, a non-riparian state. Finally, in 1918, the British used their paramount power to coerce Bahawalpur into submission. This decision of the British to include Bikaner, this article demonstrates, played vital role at the time of partition of the Punjab. While fighting their case, both princely states harked back to the history of the project to lay their claims over the strategically critical Ferozepur weir. Plausible evidence is provided in this article to argue that Radcliffe was pressurized by key colonial and Congress leadership to alter his earlier decision so as to protect the hydraulic interests of Bikaner contradicting their own visions of irrigation projects as rational structures. Since, the combined stakes of the West Punjab and Bahawalpur were larger than the Bikaner, the Ferozepur headworks could have been awarded to Pakistan if the division of the hydraulic infrastructure was to be on rational basis.

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