

THE SALT RANGE THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The paper surveys the interplay of the powers through this very unique area being the gateway to the South Asia in general and the Punjab in particular. In the recent history of the previous millennium to the advent of the 19th century it was a crossroad of the major powers from North West presenting a scene of continuous warfare and large scale plundering. It was only after subduing and the crossing of this wearisome terrain that the whole of the sub-continent was just like a plate before the intruders and then the rivers of honey and milk were waiting for them. But the advent of the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh saw the interdict of such incursions which had been a frequent trait since ancient times. The study would take into account these circumstances all through the period above mentioned till it was taken over by an alien colonial power, the British. The difficult terrain and the warlike tribes were really the formidable factors to decide the tress passing. So every intruder had to negotiate with them through the warfare or diplomacy. Keeping in view these situations an attempt has been made to explore certain facts and counter the fallacies connected with this area and its inhabitants. The important decisive factors being the Pind Dadan Khan Valley and the Khokhar tribe are the main concerns which are discussed during this study.

The area in the Punjab under the present study known as *Kusk, Koh-i-Jud*, or the 'Salt Range' has been the doorway of the province through which many of the invading armies attacked the South Asian sub-continent. The Geographic location of the Salt Range has been defined by different writers. One to quote is:

The great Salt Range of the Punjab springing from roots of the *SufedKoh*, extends eastward to the Indus, which it crosses at Kalabagh and continuing its eastward course across the *Sindh Sagar Doab*, terminates somewhat abruptly on the right bank of the River Jhelum.¹

According to Malcolm Darling, "The Salt Range is a rocky offshoot of the Himalayas, which 3,000 years ago sheltered the *Pandus* in their exile and produces best salt and some of the finest soldiers in India. Vegetation is thin and trees are few."²In view of that the Salt Range is a hill system in the province of the Punjab (Pakistan), deriving its name from its extensive deposits of rock salt. The range extends from the Jhelum River to the Indus across the northern portion of the Punjab. Administratively, the area is divided into four districts: Attok, Chakwal, Jhelum and Khushab. The Salt Range contains the great mines of Kalabagh, Khewra, Mayo and Warcha, which yield vast supplies of salt and coal of a medium quality is also found.³ The prominent lakes of the area are Kalar Kahar Lake, Khabikki Lake and Uchali Lake which fascinate the tourists from home and abroad.

The earliest chronicles of the sub-continent history also throw light on the imperative strategic location of the area. The remnants of the ancient civilizations

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of the world show the past glory of the area. The noteworthy archaeological sites and forts (which are counted as about twenty three), in the area, i.e., "Dilawar, Dhamiak, Gandhala, Jalalpur, Kalar, Kitas, Maira, Makhiala, Malot, Nandana, Rohtas, Old Bhera, Shivaganga, Tilla, etc."⁴

The inhabitants of this area, falling on the main gateway to south Asia, are well structured, may be due to crossbreed, generally put up major resistance against the invaders over the centuries. The earliest historical event especially connected with the area is the battle of Alexander the Great with Raja Porus,⁵ which was fought on the banks of the River Jhelum in the summer of 326 B.C. The scene of the struggle has been variously quoted by different writers. The classification generally accepted is that of the Cunningham's. He identifies Bukephala, with the small modern town of Jalal Pur Sharif, at the extreme east of Pind Dadan Khan Plain, and to fix the site of Nikaia at Mung, a few miles upstream on the other side of the river Jhelum.⁶ The people of the area have always been warlike by necessity and their struggle against the Macedonian conqueror was a type of subsequent conflict in defense of their liberty. According to a local historian, Alexander had to face severe resistance from the local chiefs near Rawalpindi. After defeating them he forwarded to the river Jhelum and camped near Pind Dadan Khan. The camping ground was spread over many miles.⁷

Of the period between Alexander's invasion and Mahmud of Ghazni's incursions, the information about the history of the area is very scanty and names or events connected with it are very rare.⁸ Farishta writes that, "In 404 A.H. Mahmud laid siege to the fort of Nandana. He reduced the fort and placed it in charge of his own men."⁹ While plundering the area, Mahmud encountered here a stern and stoutest resistance. Mahmud's son Masud, on his march from Kabul to Lahore in A.D. 1034 A.D. was also given a tough time here and he had to give up all lavishness, "Threw all the liquor he had into the river Jhelum",¹⁰ and only then was able to pass through this area and counteract hostilities. Later on Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and others were successively unable to proceed to the conquest of India proper until the resistance here had been subdued.¹¹ Griffin has referred the *Pandu's* presence in the Salt Range while tracing the *Janjua's* history. "The tribe being the descendant of the *Pandus* followed the footsteps of their ancestors to the salt area in about 980 A.D. migrated from Jodhpur".¹²

Presence of different races and tribes are reported to inhabit here from earliest time but the prominent being the Khokhars, Ghakhars and Awans. Different historians have thrown light on the Khokhar's presence and their warlike activities in the Salt Range. The earliest reference to this context is found in Tajul Maasir, a history written in 1205 A.D. which records; "The Kokars razed the country between Sodhra(Chenab), and Jhelum, the Chiefs of the Kokars, who thrust their heads of the collar of obedience ••• by the aid of a crowd of the dependents of Satan, their power increased"¹³ At the return of Shahabuddin Mohammad Ghori(1202-1206), from Khwarizm he deputed Qutabuddin Aibak(1206-1210), to counter the Khokhars and the Sultan himself accompanied the campaign against them. The Khokhars were completely defeated and, "in that

country, there remained not a single inhabitant to light a fire.”¹⁴ One of the sons of the Kokar Rai, the Chief instigator of these hostilities, rushed into the river Jhelum to a fort on the hill of Jud. The next day, the Sultan advanced towards the fort of Jud and captured the fort. According to Aziz Malik, “On October 20, 1205, the Khokhars of Salt Range under the leadership of Raja Rai Sal revolted against Shahabuddin Mohammad Ghori.”¹⁵ He further writes that Ghori attacked the Khokhar entrenchments on November 9, 1205. During the early hours the Khokhars had a control over the battlefield but afterwards, the fresh troops under Qutbuddin Aibak, a general of Ghori, turned the tables. After the settlement of the area, Ghori started his back journey but was killed at Dhamik in February 1206. According to a myth the Khokhars murdered him in revenge.¹⁶

The Khokhar activities in the salt area are also narrated by Minhaj Siraj in *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*, “The Kokars and tribes of Koh-i-Jud had broken out into revolts when Sultan Mohammad Bin Sam was engaged in preparing his expeditions against Turkistan.”¹⁷ Dr. Agha Hussain Hamadani has come out in his Ph.D. dissertation that all the references in the original sources of the sub-continent history of Khokhars are “obviously Gakkhars who ravaged the area between Jhelum and Chenab.”¹⁸ The English editors and translators of the earliest indigenous chronicles generally suggest Gakkharsan emendation. Probably because they could not differentiate both the words, i.e., Khokhar and Gakkhar, whereas both are totally distinct and after a careful study of the available sources, one is easily convinced that the Khokhars were settled centuries before the Gakkhars arrived in the Salt Range. The Khokhars had been settled earlier all over the area.

Inappropriately Farishta has also confused the word Khokhar with Gakkhar. The British writers followed the same mistake otherwise this is a fact that during the period under question, the Gakkhars were neither in power nor they were found in the area. The names of Rai Sal, Sarka and Bakan were never found in the Gakkhar family tree. About all the historians before the time of Farishta agree that the Khokhars, not the Gakkhars, killed Shahabuddin Ghori. Farishta has certainly confused these two tribes. Thus he frequently refers to Sheikha and Jasrat as Gakkhar chiefs whereas there are no such names in the Gakkhar’s hierarchy.

Raverty has noticed the invariable confusion between the Gakkhars and the Khokhars and declares that it is a great error to ascribe to the former the attack on Mahmud’s camp. He points out that, the Gakhars are mentioned by none of the available native historians upto the time of Babur. The Janjuas, Khokhars and others are known to have been settled in the Salt Range tract three centuries before Babur’s time for these tribes are mentioned by the author of the *Tabqat-i-Nasiri* as dwelling in the Koh-i-Jud in his time: but there is no mention whatever of the Gakhars.¹⁹ Whereas Agha Hamadani has not only neglected the Khokhar’s presence in the Jud area but has not even mentioned the tribe in his chapter captioned as “The tribes of Koh-i-Jud.” In the *JahanKushai* it is stated that, Sultan Jalaluddin of Khwarizm, in about 1215 A.D. sent one of his generals to the mountains of Jud, who plundered the area and obtained much booty. The Sultan also obtained the daughter of RaiKokar Saknin in marriage.²⁰ However, the discussion of the “K” and “G” should not be further pursued being lengthy one, but

one may add that Khokhar may be a misreading of Gakkhar.

During the reign of Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-65), the Sultan sent Ulugh Khan, one of his generals, who afterwards succeeded him under the title of Balban (1266-1287), to revenge the people of Jud and Jhelum because the chiefs of the hills had assisted the 'infidel Mogols' whose incursions caused much trouble in those days. Balban himself had to send another expedition probably for the same reason; "The country was plundered and a large number of horses fell into the hands of the soldiers, so that the price of a horse in the army came to be forty *Tankas*."²¹ Ziauddin Barni has also recorded Balban's attack on the area, "Balban accordingly marched thither with suitable forces and inflicted chastisement upon the hills of Jud and the vicinity."²²

Jalaluddin Firoz Shah Khilji (1290-95) also had an occasion to discipline the Salt Range, for he is recorded to have said, "I made the blood to flow in Janjua so that a boat might have glided within the hills of Jud."²³ It happened during his first invasion against Chajja, Governor of Kasra. When Tamerlane invaded India (1398-99), he came and returned through the Salt Range. The subsequent events show that the Khokhars, the then rulers of the area, showed no major resistance to him. In *Malfuzt-i-Taimuri*, it is recorded that the, "Rais and the Chiefs of the Jud mountain came respectfully to pay homage and to make presents and were therefore well treated."²⁴ It is further written "It was now (September 24, 1398) that the princes and Raja's of the mountains in country of Jud ••• sought my camp with tributes and presents, when they were honoured by kissing the soil (Earth) in my presence. They returned home happy and full of joy."²⁵

After the invasion of Tamerlane, the tribes of the Salt Range became more independent with the area presenting a scene of anarchy and turmoil. The Jud Mountains and the adjacent area appear in Zaheeruddin Babur's account of his invasions. He had to face an opposition from the populace of area but he overpowered them. He visited the area in the course of his third expedition, about 1522 A.D. to punish those who had revolted against him. When on his fourth invasion (1524) he passed through the country of the Gakkhars, whom he reduced to obedience. During the next year he was again in the area.²⁶

Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545), had also to construct the Rohtas Fort to establish law and order in the area and had to keep an army of 30,000 horsemen in its neighbourhood.²⁷ The Mughal emperor Humayun (1530-1556), had a chance to visit the area, Although nothing notable happened against him to be referred. *Aain-i-Akbari*, the work of AbulFazl a court historian of Akbar (1556-1605), identifies Shams Abad, the old name of Pind Dadan Khan, the proprietors being the largest income giving in the entire Salt Range. The holders of this Pargana were the Khokhars.²⁸ Jahangir (1605-1627), also marched through the Salt Range and gave an interesting account of his journey by way of Rohtas, Tilla, Bhakra (Bakrala), and Hatiya.²⁹ Mahabat Khan, a rebel general also kept him captive in the Rohtas Fort and the place was thus for time being turned out to be the seat of Jahangir's Government.³⁰

During the reign of the later Mughals, the area had become a favourite

and shorter route through which the invading armies of Nadir Shah Afshar (1739), Ahmad Shah Durrani(1748-1770), his son Taimur Shah (1772-1793), and his grandson, Zaman Shah (1793-1800), also organized strides through the vicinity. The Durrani knew the strategic importance of the area and maintained a governor and a garrison at Rohtas. Due to lack of strong political unity, chaos and schism prevailed in the area and the mutual rivalries always resulted into a continuance of feuds and bloodshed. The local tribes of the area became more independent and the region was the scene of a perpetual but petty war fare. Tribe fought with tribe, chief with chief and village engaged against village. In some villages, at a high place, bystanders were always stationed to beat the alarm drums on the approach of an enemy.

During the decline of the Mughal Empire the entire Salt Range became politically very unstable. Sometimes it was attacked by the Kabul rulers like the Durrani, because none of the twelve misls of Sikhs had crossed the Jhelum River before they had defeated the Gakkhars at Gujrat in 1765 A.D.³¹ The grandfather of Ranjit Singh, Sardar Charat Singh captured Rohtas Fort from Nooruddin Khan Bamizai (an Afghan official), and conquered the whole Durrani area. When Sardar Charat Singh arrived at Pind Dadan Khan, the ruler Sahib Khan Khokhar paid him as much as he demanded and saved the town from devastation. Sardar Charat Singh left two of his relatives, Baddah Singh and Gaur Singh at Pind Dadan Khan to construct fort and a division of about 7,000 artillery men were stationed at there to shield the Attock boundary in the later period.³²

The close of the eighteenth century witnessed the advent of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign (1799-1839), and the Salt Range went completely under the mighty Sikh rule. The Pind Dadan Khan Rajas were treated with leniency, until early in Ranjit Singh's reign Sarfraz Khan Khokhar rose in insurrection. A force was sent against him, and after an extensive fight he was defeated and compelled to flee to Makhiala.³³ He later made his peace and received some villages in jagir, though Pind Dadan Khan was never restored to him. The reduction of the ruling tribes of the area to mere renters is narrated by Griffin in the following words:

With the advent of the Sikh era the ancient tribes, the Gakkhars, the Awans, the Janjuas who had held their own against the Emperors of Delhi, were now tenants on the lands which they had once ruled as lords; the Afghans had been driven beyond the Khyber and the whole frontier side, after a thousand fights, had been compelled to acknowledge Lahore as supreme. Kashmir had been conquered, and the chivalrous ruler of Multan had been slain with his sons in the helpless defense of his capital.³⁴

Ranjit Singh, a lover of horses³⁵ was always in search of the best breed. Pind Dadan Khan was rich in livestock, especially the horses and the oxen. Within a couple of years of his coming into power, he visited Pind Dadan Khan in 1801 and went back to Lahore with four hundred nicely bred horses for his cavalry.³⁶ He also held a Durbar-i-Aam at Pind Dadan Khan on April 12, 1801, and adopted the title of Maharaja. He struck the Nanak Shahi currency and a mint was established at here.³⁷ After eight years, Ranjit Singh again came to the area to attack the Kusak Fort.³⁸ The offending chief Sultan Fateh Khan had to surrender due to scarcity of water in the fort. The Sikhs took over the salt mines and the

Sultan family was exiled to Haran Pur.³⁹ After the defeat of Fateh Khan, there was left no significant resistance from the local people against the Sikhs. Due to the presence of the Sikh forces at Pind Dadan Khan, the area was calm under Ranjit Singh who wanted Shah Shuja (the deposed Amir of Afghanistan), to live at Pind Dadan Khan. Shah Zaman (Grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali) was already staying at Rawalpindi in Sikh asylum. Afterwards, when Ranjit Singh visited Rawalpindi to see both the former Kings of Kabul, he gave away Talumba, in Multan Division for Shah Shuja's living along with a handsome stipend.⁴⁰

The Salt Range under the Sikhs remained almost passive. It was to the acclamation of the Sikh rule that during half century of its tenure, the incessant incursions from the North West were totally stopped, not only that the mighty Maharaja acquired the lost land from the Afghan domain. The town of Pind Dadan Khan developed so much that even heavy cannons and their ammunition was locally manufactured for the Sikh arsenal.⁴¹ Pind Dadan Khan during the period preceding British annexation (1849), was generally known as Nimak or salt, was a Sikh mint town.⁴² Fleming gave a full description of the methods employed in the mint, which he visited in 1848, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* for the following year (1849).⁴³ The local Hindus were very prosperous and they helped the Sikhs with a loan of one and a half lakh rupees during the Anglo-Sikh War.⁴⁴ In 1848-9, almost the whole district joined the standard of Chattar Singh in the Anglo-Sikh Wars. They fought bravely at Chilianwali and Gujarat and afterwards experienced the punishment of "rebellion" at the hands of Major Nicholson and the other British officers who made the first Summary Settlement.⁴⁵ After the fall of the Sikhs, the area along with the rest of the Punjab came under the British rule.

NOTES

- ¹ Syed Muhammad Latif, *History of the Punjab*(Lahore: 1966), 12. The area is spread over Khushab, PindiGheb, Talagang, Chakwal, Pind Dadan Khan.
- ² Darling Malcolm, *The Punjab Peasants*(Lahore: 1947), 74.
- ³ Shafiur Rahman Dar, *Pre and Proto Historic Evidence in the Salt Range& in the Soan Valley* (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2006),45-47.The average height of the Salt Range mountains is around 2200 feet(671 meters), the highest peaks are Tilla Jogian and Sakaser. Another feature of these mountains is the attractive evidence of fossiled animals preserved by the best preservant the salt which is found in abundance here. The archaeologists have discovered pieces of ancient civilizations like flint axes along with the fossiled remains of various animals. The region is a wonderland for geologists, zoologists and for archaeologists. The significance of this area is that it has rich fossiled deposits in various geological strata which go back into millions of years. These finds may help to map the evolution and geological history in the region.
- ⁴ Aziz, Malik, *Pothohar* (Islamabad: 1978), 148-149. He has referred about twenty three forts in the Pothohar Range. He has also located a fort *Kanday Wala* near Pind Dadan Khan.
- ⁵ There are certain myths about the area and the people i.e., Raja Porus was a very brave ruler of the area having an extra ordinary structure, 7 feet 6 inches tall. In 326 BC, Alexander whose forces were then fighting against the army of Porus, at the left bank of river Jhelum near Southern Salt Range, wrote in a letter to his mother and said, 'I am involved in the land of *Leonine* (lion-like) and brave people called 'Khukhrain', where every foot of the ground is like a wall of steel, confronting my soldiers. You have brought only one son into the world, but everyone in this land can be called an Alexander." *The Shah-Namah of Firdausi*, trans. by Alexander Rogers (London, 1907), 370.
- ⁶ *Punjab District Gazetteer Series; Jhelum District* (Lahore: 1983), 51.
- ⁷ Muhammad Hussain Malik. *Tarikh-i-Pind Dadan Khan* (Pind Dadan Khan: 1952), 20. The author relates that a British official found a statue of Alexander's empress near Pind Dadan Khan and he took it away to Europe.
- ⁸ Syed Muhammad Ashfaq, *Bedrock of Human Prehistory in Pakistan*(Karachi, University of Karachi, 2004), 42.Towards the end of 20th century the historical and archaeological horizon hardly extended up to seventh century AD. Some coins have been found dating back as far as 2nd and 3rd century BC. However, the new discoveries have shown that the making of stone axe at Rawat (near Rawalpindi), two million years ago continued his struggle. Due to his determination after a long period a man of that time thus became successful to come out of caves and started living like a civilized human being. Shafiur Rahman Dar is of the view that the evidence of the last phase of the Stone Age i.e. The Early Harrapan period is now available from at least 14 sites from a limited area in the Salt Range lying between two rivers: Soan and Jhelum. Dar, *Pre and Proto Historic Evidence*, 52.
- ⁹ *Punjab District Gazetteer*, 62. The Khokhars were a powerful tribe during the attacks of Ghazni and never submitted to the foreigners but always resisted them whenever the opportunity came to their hands. The major clash of the tribes with Mahmud of Ghazni took place in his third invasion after the defeat of Jaipal at the Battle of Bhera in 1004-5A.D. (Jaipal's son Anandpal also sought support of the Khokhars against Mahmud in 1008-9A.D. During this fight Mahmud lost much of his ransack which he had acquired from Somnath. He, like every invader on this way back flight from the area had to compromise or to fight back. Finally when Bhera was sacked by Mahmud the local chief Biji Rai instead of submitting committed suicide by ending his life with his own dagger.
- ¹⁰ Stanley Lane Poole. *Medieval India under Mohammadan Rule 712-1764*(Lahore: 1979), 48.
- ¹¹ *Imperial Gazetteer of India-Punjab*, Vol. I (Lahore: 1976), 125-6.
- ¹² Lepel Griffin. *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, Vol.II (Reprint) (Lahore: 1940), 210-13.
- ¹³ Sir H.M. Elliot& Dowson (Eds). *The History of India as Told by its Historians*, Vol. II (Lahore: 1976), 233.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 234-35.
- ¹⁵ Malik, *Pothohar* , 40
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

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- ¹⁷ Quoted by Dr. Agha Hussain Hamadani, "Frontier Policy of the Delhi Sultans", Ph.D. Dissertation, History Department, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad: 1984, 264. Also, Elliot, *The History of India*, Vol. II, 145.
- ¹⁸ Ibid,278.
- ¹⁹ *Punjab District Gazetteer; Jhelum District*, 91.
- ²⁰ Elliot, *The History of India*, Vol. III, 553. Selections from the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* by Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, Ed. N. Elias tr. E. Denison Ross 2nd ed. (London: Curzon, Press 1898).
- ²¹ Ibid, 537.
- ²² Ziauddin Barni. *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* (Aligarh: 1954),150.
- ²³ Elliot.*The History of India*, Vol. III, 537. Another scholar A.H. Rose in his work, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Provinces of India* (Lahore,1911), Vol. II: 513,records, "It is said to be that Ala-ud-Din Khilji attempted to impose widow-marriage upon the Khattris (a Hindu caste). The western Khattris resolved to resist the innovation, they joined the Khokhars in rebellion."
- ²⁴ Ibid. 410.
- ²⁵ Ibid. 482.
- ²⁶ Ibid. Vol. IV, 540.
- ²⁷ Ibid.415.
- ²⁸ *Extracts from the District Jhelum Gazetteer*,Vol.I, 67.
- ²⁹ Elliot.*The History of India*, Vol. III, 308.
- ³⁰ Ibid.420-481.See also, Lane Poole, *Medieval India*, 323.
- ³¹ KaniyaLal Hindi. *Tarikh-i-Punjab*(Lahore: n.d.), 118.
- ³² Malik. *Tarikh-i-Pind Dadan Khan*, 19. (The ruins of the Sikh Fort are still found near the Civil Hospital, Pind Dadan Khan).
- ³³ Lepel H. Griffin. *The History of the Principal States of the Punjab*(Lahore: 1976), 252.
- ³⁴ Ibid.189.
- ³⁵ The British exploiting this weakness of Ranjit tried to befriend him in 1831 by sending a golden chariot, pulled by 4 mares and a horse of Dray horse breed, mini elephants which, the people of the orient had never seen before.
- ³⁶ Anwar Beg Awan. *DhanniAdab-O-Saqafat*(Chakwal: 1968), 41-42.
- ³⁷ Malik, *Pothohar*,72.
- ³⁸ *Gazetteer of District Jhelum*, 50.*Kuskis* remarkable mainly on account of its striking situation on a precipitous minor peak of the Salt Range overlooking the Pind Dadan Khan plain. It also enjoys the distinction of having been besieged by Ranjit Singh in person in 1801.
- ³⁹ Ibid. 70.The Sultan family was able to return back in the *Kusk* later when the Sikhs were defeated by the British and the Punjab was annexed in 1849.
- ⁴⁰ Kaniya Lal, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*, 211.
- ⁴¹ Malik, *Tarikh-i-PindDadan Khan*,22.
- ⁴² Furthermore the town was the district headquarter for some period after annexation of the area by the British but later on Jhelum was selected to be the district headquarter and this was the main reason of the decline of importance of the town. The Church, attached Christian graveyard and the other ancient buildings are the proof of this position.
- ⁴³ *Punjab District Gazetteer, Jhelum*,52.
- ⁴⁴ Muhammad Hussain Malik, *Tarikh-i-Pind Dadan Khan*,23.
- ⁴⁵ *Punjab District Gazetteer; District Jhelum*,70-71.