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The Impact of Annexation of Punjab by East India Company for Consolidation of British Rule in Indo-Pak **Sub-Continent**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the seizure of Punjab by the East India Company, emphasizing the province's significance to consolidate its power in India. Punjab was the most productive and populated province of India. It was considered as the grain basket of India. After the establishment of Afghanistan as a new state in 1747, Ahmad Shah Abdali took control of most of the area of Punjab adjacent to Afghanistan. The weak administration of Mughal dynasty gave rise to Sikh rule in Punjab and they took control of Lahore in 1799 under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. The successors of Ahmad Shah could not resist to the might of Sikh's and they lost control of Peshawar in 1818. After the death of Ranjeet Singh in 1839, the East India Company started their campaign of capturing the Punjab. In March 1846 Gulab Singh signed two treaties with East India Company, "The treaty of Lahore" and "The treaty of Amritsar". After three years of these treaties the company formally captured Punjab in March 1849. This success consolidated their power in India from Dhaka in the East to Peshawar in the North-West. The strategic and economic importance of Punjab for British rule in India is discussed in detail in the paper.

Key Words: Annexation, Punjab, British India, East India Company, Sikhs..

Introduction

The province of Punjab has always held significant importance due to its strategic location. Historically, Punjab served as the main entry point for outsiders from Central Asia, often entering India through this region. The North West Frontier was valued not only for its political significance but also for its role in trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. During British rule, Punjab included the former kingdom of Lahore, the East India Company's territories between the Sutlej and

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Jumna rivers and several princely states. Administratively, Punjab was much larger than its geographical boundaries (Rose, 1963).

The English victory over the Spanish Armada, along with reports of immense wealth in Indo-Pakistan from travelers like Ralph Fitch, motivated a group of merchants to file a plea to Queen Elizabeth for an approval to trade in the India. The Queen approved them the title of "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East India," providing them with a 15-year contract (Ali, 2008). The EIC leveraged its military prowess to emerge as a formidable entity in regional conflicts and disagreements. This strength was augmented by the financial backing from certain local Indian traders and financiers who perceived the EIC's rising influence as an unparalleled business prospect. Following triumphant military campaigns at Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764), the EIC was bestowed with the Diwan of Bengal, affording it authority over the region's governance and taxation. Simultaneously, its dominion extended over regional rulers in the south, fundamentally reshaping the power dynamics by the 1770s. The company's expansion persisted, culminating in the defeat of rivals like the Marathas in western India and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. By 1818, the EIC had ascended to become the predominant political force in India, directly governing two-thirds of the subcontinent's territory and exerting indirect influence over the remainder (Andrea 2017).

In 1799, Ranjit Singh began the process of unifying various regions to form an empire by the early nineteenth century. He built and trained a highly efficient army, modeled after the East India Company's forces. Additionally, he employed the traditional suzerain-vassal system to exert political control. By personally overseeing revenue administration and trade across his extensive territories, he restored prosperity in Punjab. He also extended state patronage to all major sections of the population, thereby securing their loyalty to the emerging empire (Grewal, 1990).

Since, start of the Sikhs had maintained very cordial relations with the English. Both the power observed peace after the treaty of Amritsar signed in 1809 maharaja Ranjit Singh proved himself a trusted friend of the East Indian Company. He even did not create trouble for the Britain when they were at war with the Gurkhas and Marathas. On the other hand Ranjit Singh in 1839 the circumstance changed drastically.

The successors of Ranjit Singh were assassinated and changed in quick succession in the main time Sikh Khalsa became all powerful. In 1845 the conditions were so insecure that even Lal Singh the Sikh Wazir was force to conspire with the Lahore Darbar to weaken the Sikh khalasa. It was determined that the Sikh army should be encouraged to launch an attack on British territory.

Consequently the first Sikh war was fought from 1845 to 1846 the Sikh army was defeated in this war. The Sikhs felt disgraced by their defeat at the hands of the English. They wanted to avenge their defeat similarly the British too wanted to crush the power of Sikh forever.

In 1848, Mulraj the governor of Multan was forced to resign and the two English men were assassinated. As the result the Sikhs rose in revolt against the English and the second Sikh war fought from 1848 to 1849 the Sikhs were again defeated in this war. Thus ended the Sikh rule and Punjab was annexed to the British Empire on March 29, 1849. The Sikh Raja was sent on pension and the province was placed under Sir John Lawrence the first Chief Commissioner.

On February 1st, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General known for his decisiveness, asserted that "the peace and vital interests of the British empire now require the defeat and overthrow of the Sikh Government, and the abolition of their dynasty." Describing the victory at Gujarat on March 29, 1849, he proclaimed that "the kingdom of the Punjab is dissolved, and the territories of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are henceforth part of the British Empire in India." All Punjab inhabitants, including Sardars and the populace, were urged to peacefully submit to British authority. Lord Dalhousie warned that while the British government would rule leniently over obedient subjects, any renewed resistance or violence would be met with severe punishment. The downfall of the Sikh government reflected the fate of governments unwilling to govern wisely. The entirety of Punjab fell under the British flag, extending from the sea to the Himalayas and Suleiman mountains. During the great mutiny of the Bengal Army, the Sikhs once again took up arms, this time as loyal soldiers of Queen Victoria, fighting alongside their English comrades (Gordon, 1904).

After Punjab's annexation, the province was organized into seven divisions. The first division, referred to as the Cis-Sutlej Division, occupied the eastern bank of the Sutlei River, while the second, the Trans-Sutlei Division, was positioned to the west. The third division was Lahore or the Central Division. Progressing southward, the fourth division was Multan, situated near the confluence of the Indus River and its tributaries. The fifth division, named the Sind Sager Doab Division, covered a specified geographical region. Peshawar was placed in 6th division, including the current districts of Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshehra and Swabi. The area from Kohat to Dera Ismail Khan was placed in 7th division. The Lahore Division included the upper regions of the Ruchna and Bari Doabs, incorporating major cities such as Lahore and Amritsar. While, the Jhelum Division comprised the Chuj Doab and areas within the Salt Range. The Multan Division covered the lower portions of the Ruchna and Bari Doabs, including districts like Multan, Jhang, Sahiwal and Pakpatan. The Leia Division encompassed the Sind Sager Doab area, including southern regions of the Salt Range and Trans-Indus Zones up to the latitude of Kalabagh (Ali, 2018).

Why Punjab was important for British East India Company

One of the primary reasons Punjab was crucial for the British East India Company was its strategic location. Situated in the northwest of India, Punjab acted as a buffer zone against potential invasions from Afghanistan and Central Asia. The British were particularly concerned about the expanding influence of Russia in

Central Asia, known as the "Great Game." Controlling Punjab provided a defensive barrier that was critical for protecting the rest of British India from northern threats (Yapp, 1980). Punjab was also economically valuable due to its fertile land, which was ideal for agriculture. Punjab's rivers, particularly the Indus and its tributaries, facilitated extensive irrigation, leading to high agricultural yields. The British capitalized on this by promoting the cultivation of cash crops such as wheat and cotton, which were vital for feeding the growing population of British-controlled territories and for export to Britain (Singh, 2004). This not only fed the local population but also contributed significantly to the British economy, making Punjab an economic cornerstone of British India (Gilmartin, 1994).

The annexation of Puniab in 1849 after the Second Anglo-Sikh War marked a significant expansion of British territory in India. The Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been a formidable power, and its integration into British India eliminated a potential rival. The incorporation of Punjab bolstered British control over northern India and facilitated further expansion into the northwestern frontiers (Grewal, 1990). Punjab provided a substantial recruitment ground for the British Indian Army. The martial reputation of the Sikhs, along with other communities such as the Punjabis and Pathans, made them desirable recruits. The British relied heavily on these soldiers, particularly after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, to maintain order and extend their control over the subcontinent. The loyalty and effectiveness of the Punjabi soldiers were pivotal in the British military strategy, both within India and in other parts of the British Empire (Tan, 2005). Punjab's diverse population, which included Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, posed both a challenge and an opportunity for the British. The British administration used the policy of divide and rule to maintain control, exploiting the differences between these communities. This approach helped them to manage and mitigate resistance, ensuring a more stable and manageable colony (Talbot, 2006).

Data Collection and Methodology

This research study is basically descriptive, analytical and qualitative in nature. Data was collected from primary as well secondary sources i.e. books, Articles, Research reports, journals, and focus group discussion.

Literature Review

Ali, (2018) stated in In their journal titled "Anglo-Sikh War and its Consequences in the Punjab: A Case Study of Lahore and Multan," it is asserted that the decline of Sikh rule rapidly ensued after the first Anglo-Sikh War due to the absence of a capable successor. The executive leadership lacked dedicated Sikhs to counter British intrigues, providing the British with an opportune moment to engage with conspirators, something they couldn't do during Ranjit Singh's reign. The incapacity of his sons to navigate such perilous circumstances, coupled with the assistance of the Dogras and Brahmins in their elimination, further weakened the

Sikh Kingdom after the second Anglo-Sikh War, leading to its eventual decline. These wars marked a pivotal moment in Sikh dynasty history, altering the political landscape of Punjab and Multan. Following the second Anglo-Sikh War, direct British control over Punjab and Multan dismantled the Sikh state established by Ranjit Singh. It is evident that Ranjit Singh's successors alone cannot be blamed for the decline; Ranjit Singh himself bears some responsibility. The appointment of Dogras and Brahmins, who lacked involvement in founding the Sikh state, to key positions, as well as the exile of confederacy chiefs from state management, were strategic errors with catastrophic consequences for the Sikhs. Had the civil administration been entrusted to skilled and loyal Sikh Sardars instead of the Dogras and Brahmins, this catastrophe might have been averted.

Cunnigham, (1975), expressed in his book "History of the Sikhs" that the commencement of hostilities between the Sikhs and the British in December 1845 signaled the climax of events unfolding within the kingdom since 1839. However, it is crucial to contextualize this within the broader framework of Anglo-Sikh political relations dating back to the early 19th century. Even during the early 1840s, there was a prevailing belief on both sides of the Sutlej border that war was inevitable, a sentiment that had endured over time. The rationales behind this belief varied. Ranjit Singh, his successors, and the Punjabi populace perceived that the English East India Company consistently aimed to encircle the kingdom with the ultimate goal of absorption, prompting the Sikhs to brace for conflict to forestall such a scenario. As observed by Cunningham, a British officer sympathetic to the Sikhs, in the late 1840s, this perception resonated with an Eastern viewpoint of history and civilization, depicting the British as a burgeoning force within the Indian landscape, possessing a significant destiny and formidable military strength.

Kaur, (2012), In her thesis titled "The Sikh Studies and The British Administration - Case of M.A. McAuliffe," it was noted that the British annexation of Punjab in 1849 marked a culmination of their interactions with Sikhs dating back to the 17th century. The pre-misls formation conditions in Punjab and the British Government's dependence on its officials for formulating Indian policies were also discussed. By the late 18th century, Punjab, under various Sikh misls, was rapidly evolving into the formidable Sikh empire, ultimately realized under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Additionally, it was emphasized that the administrator John Malcolm played a pivotal role in elevating Sikh studies. His 1809 publication, "Sketch of the Sikhs," underscored the significance of Sikh Scriptures in their political life. The robust presence of the Sikh kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh posed a significant challenge to British officials and the government. Consequently, concerted efforts were made to undermine and encircle the Sikh Raj. Malcolm, as a seasoned administrator, was viewed as a reliable asset by the British in executing their diplomatic endeavors within or concerning Maharaja Ranjit Singh's realm.

Talbot, (2007), stated in his article titled "The Punjab under Colonialism: Order and Transformation in British India" It was observed that upon annexing Puniab in 1849, the British had already established a robust system of political governance, backed by an efficient land revenue administration. Drawing from their experiences in Madras and Bengal, the British recognized Punjab's potential as the 'Model Agriculture Province' from the 1860s onward. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the prevailing peace and prosperity in the province made service in the Puniab commission of the Indian civil service highly coveted. The lovalty and prosperity of the cultivators underscored Punjab's significance, leading to measures aimed at curtailing 'troublesome' nationalist agitators. However, balancing political stability with agricultural development posed a formidable challenge. Despite annexing the Sikh kingdom of Punjab in 1849, the British had already exerted control over most of the subcontinent since the mid-eighteenth century as territorial rulers. This dominion was supported by a well-established system of political control, financed through efficient revenue administration. While in Madras, this system was built upon the encouragement of peasant proprietors, and in Bengal, it relied on the protection of the zamindars. Nevertheless, within a few years, Punjab was acclaimed as India's exemplar agricultural province.

Singh, (2011), his book "Anglo-Sikh Relation and the World Wars" highlights that during events such as the Indian Mutiny and the North-West Frontier campaigns, as well as in battles like Saragarhi, the strength of Anglo-Sikh solidarity was severely tested. However, by the turn of the century, Anglo-Sikh relations had reached a pinnacle. Nonetheless, the British were cognizant that the Sikhs harbored deep-seated sentiments regarding the loss of their kingdom and thus maintained a vigilant stance towards Sikh activities while also honoring them. When the struggle for freedom against British rule ensued, the freedom-loving Sikhs emerged as prominent figures, contributing to over 80% of the sacrifices made during that period. Having examined the 19th-century backdrop to Anglo-Sikh relations, attention is now turned to the role of the Sikhs in the two World Wars of the 20th century. Whether on the Indian subcontinent or abroad, the Sikhs were destined to occupy a significant position.

The Anglo-Sikh wars in Punjab

The origins of the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846) can be traced to mounting tensions between the British and the Sikh Empire under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Following Ranjit Singh's demise in 1839, the Sikh Empire grappled with internal political instability and power struggles, leading to a weakening of its unified military prowess (Singh, 2004). Recognizing the potential threat posed by the formidable Sikh military, the British strategically positioned themselves along the borders of Punjab. Incidents of skirmishes along the Sutlej River escalated into full-fledged conflict by December 1845. Major engagements, such as those at Mudki, Ferozeshah, and Sobraon, resulted in significant casualties on both sides,

ultimately tilting in favor of the British owing to their superior artillery and military strategies (Grewal, 1990).

The Treaty of Lahore in March 1846, marked the end of the First Anglo-Sikh War, enforcing severe conditions upon the Sikhs. These included the cession of valuable territories such as the Jullundur Doab, payment of a substantial indemnity, and the establishment of a British Resident in Lahore, effectively placing the Sikh Empire under British influence (Cunningham, 1918). Additionally, the Sikh army was significantly reduced, and the British secured the strategic control they desired. However, peace was short-lived as the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-1849) erupted due to continued unrest and revolts against British interference in Sikh affairs. The immediate cause was the murder of two British officers in Multan, prompting a full-scale British military response (Smyth, 1973). Key battles at Ramnagar, Chillianwala, and Gujarat demonstrated the resilience of the Sikh forces but also highlighted their disorganization and lack of unified command. The decisive Battle of Gujarat in February 1849 signaled the ultimate downfall of the Sikh army, culminating in the official annexation of Punjab on March 29, 1849 (Grewal, 1990).

The annexation of Punjab had profound implications, completing the British conquest of northern India and providing them with a strategic buffer against potential threats from Afghanistan and Central Asia. Economically, Punjab's fertile lands and established agricultural systems became crucial assets for the British administration (Tan, 2005). Politically, the integration of Punjab into the British Empire was marked by the establishment of efficient administrative structures. The annexation facilitated the recruitment of Punjabis into the British Indian Army, capitalizing on their martial reputation. This recruitment became particularly significant after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, as Punjabi soldiers played crucial roles in maintaining British control (Carter, 1997). Culturally, the British adopted a divide-and-rule strategy, exploiting religious and social divisions to maintain order and prevent unified resistance. These combined strategies ensured British dominance in the region while also sowing seeds of long-term social and political challenges.

Approaches and tactics employed by the British East India Company in the Annexation of Punjab.

The British East India Company's annexation of Punjab involved a multifaceted approach, incorporating military prowess, strategic diplomacy, and administrative actions. Initially, they weakened the Sikh Empire through military conflicts like the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846), leveraging their superior artillery and tactical acumen to achieve victories at engagements such as Mudki and Sobraon. These triumphs ultimately led to the Treaty of Lahore, which effectively brought Punjab under British sway (Grewal, 1990). The treaty's stipulations included the surrender of significant territories, the imposition of a hefty indemnity, and the

deployment of British troops in Lahore, thereby eroding Sikh autonomy (Cunningham, 1918).

The British capitalized on internal divisions and unrest within the Sikh Empire. The murder of British officers in Multan provided a pretext for renewed hostilities. Key battles, particularly the decisive Battle of Gujarat, showcased the British ability to suppress resistance, culminating in the formal annexation of Punjab on March 29, 1849 (Smyth, 1973). While, Post-annexation, the British implemented a robust administrative framework, integrating Punjab into their colonial structure. They established a system of governance that included efficient revenue collection, law enforcement, and infrastructural development, ensuring comprehensive control over the newly acquired territory (Tan, 2005). Additionally, the British employed a policy of divide-and-rule, exploiting religious and social divisions to prevent unified opposition and maintain order. These strategies were instrumental in maintaining their dominance and control over Punjab (Carter, 1997).

The Impacts of Annexation

The seizure of Punjab was a landmark achievement of the company. It left a significant impact on the socio-economic and political structure of the whole subcontinent. It not only ended the mighty rule of Sikhs but also confined the Mughal dynasty to red fort Delhi. They were now seriously working on the administrative reforms, which initially annoyed the local populace but were brutally subdued in 1857 revolt (Grewal, 1990). Immediately after the revolt the company mission completed and they handed over the authority of colonized India to Great Britain. Punjab was important to them for many reasons, it not only served them as a hub of agricultural production but also its huge population was turned into a source of man power. They started recruiting the local people in British Indian Army. In order to maintain law and order they introduced police reforms, giving them immense power to tackle any kind of situation. The deputy commissioners were given full power and authority to control their respective district administration (Tan, 2005). The local landlords also offered loyalty to the new masters, so their status were not changed rather they were made responsible to cooperate with the district administration and police.

Although there was resentment and struggle for independence among the Indians but most of the population in Punjab remained calmed during that period. That is why they peacefully introduced and implemented one of the largest canal irrigation systems in Punjab. The Sikh battalion and Punjab regiment was a driving force for the British rule, not only in India but it served them in the two great world wars (Carter, 1997). With the intention of making Punjab the agricultural hub of the empire, the British conquest of Punjab resulted in profound changes to land ownership and agricultural methods. Large tracts of barren land were transformed into productive agricultural zones through extensive irrigation projects, which included the building of canals (Ali, 1988). Due to this, cash crops

like wheat and cotton were able to flourish, bringing Punjab into the global economy and making it an important source of raw materials for British businesses (Imran, 2005). Traditional agricultural methods were superseded by commercial agriculture, which also led to an increase in farmer debt because farmers frequently had to take out loans to invest in new crops (Ali, 1988). The tax system put a lot of responsibilities on peasants and caused widespread rural hardship and frequent famines because it was created to increase British income extraction (Imran, 2005). The region saw advancements in infrastructure, including railways and canals, along with the establishment of a modern administrative framework. However, this period also brought considerable social and economic disruption. Landlords were in direct contact with the Deputy Commissioners and Police officers while the local peasants were left at the mercy of land owners.

Conclusion

The British East India Company placed great importance on Punjab's strategic location. Punjab, which is in the subcontinent's northwest, was an important entry point into Central Asia. The first Chief Commissioner of Peshawar Sir Herbert B. Edwards considered the north-west area as a first line of defense of India against the Czarist Russia. They gained a crucial defense against any threats from Afghan and Persian territories as a result of its conquest. The Indus River and its tributaries provided significant agricultural production to the Punjab plains, which was crucial for maintaining the colonial economy and the British military's presence in India. The British East India Company gained significant economic benefits as a result of the conquest of Punjab. The rich soils and crop production of the area, especially in wheat and cotton, greatly increased the Company's earnings. Agriculture potential of Punjab fueled British India's economic stability by supplying food for locals as well as the larger colonial export system (Gilmartin, 1988). The British were also able to create a potent military presence in the area as a result of the annexation. In order to bolster the colonial military apparatus, the Sikhs and other local masses were recruited into the British Indian Army. In order to enhance effective governance and consolidate control, the British also instituted administrative changes. The British were better able to rule and collect resources from the Punjab by streamlining administrative procedures through the creation of the Punjab Civil Service and codify of laws (Singh, 2004).

Even though the British gained a great deal from annexing Punjab, the people and local leaders opposed them. Initially, there were uprisings and resistance activities in response to the Sikh Empire being overthrown and foreign control being established. But over time, the British were able to put an end to the opposition and incorporate Punjab into their colonial mindset. In order to maintain their own status and influence, the local landlords often collaborated with the British as they adapted to the new power dynamics.

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