

## **Political Economy of the Annexation of the Punjab, 1849**

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The Punjab had become one of the most powerful states in Asia. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's chief strength was in his grand army and the able men he had gathered around him. The abundant richness of the soil of the Punjab was undoubtedly one of the greatest natural resources of the Punjab. The British eyed the Lahore Kingdom since the signing of Treaty of Amritsar in 1809. They watched over the developments from the Ludhiana post. Most of the historians have focused on diplomacy and chaos within the Lahore Kingdom. For land revenue and raw material, the East India Company resorted to constant wars and conquests making it most the indebted entity. With the onset of Industrial Revolution in England, the British industrial class precipitated the case of annexation of the Punjab. Fully backed by political economy of the British Empire, Lord Dalhousie forced his viewpoint to the finish and from then onwards the deficit of the East India Company turned into surplus.

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### **Introduction**

The British annexation of the Punjab in 1849 remains one of the most important events in the Punjab and Indian history as it changed the priorities of the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> The Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh had become 'one of the most powerful states' in Asia. Principal strength was in his grand army and the able men he had gathered around him. The abundant richness of the soil was undoubtedly one of the greatest natural resources of the Punjab.<sup>2</sup> In the tradition of Annales' School, philosopher David Hackett Fisher claims that "history is, in short, a problem solving discipline".<sup>3</sup> Constant wars within India and against neighbouring countries had turned the East India Company as the most indebted entity.<sup>4</sup> Two pertinent questions demand attention: (i) what were the economics of the trading East India Company and who financed its expansion (ii) why and how did the British exhaust the subsidiary alliance option within three years (February 1846-March 1849) as it was in the cis-Sutlej states and rushed towards the annexation in March 1849? So far, historians have focused on diplomacy and chaos within the Lahore Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The present attempt is to venture into that domain when the industrial prowess of the British Empire was unleashed on the North-Western borders of India ie the Indus basin with special focus on the virtual occupation and final annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

### I. Post Maharaja Ranjit Singh Punjab

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a born leader of men, and his unfailing political foresight and indomitable perseverance were combined with greatest courage and endurance.<sup>6</sup> He raised 'a majestic fabric' with the help of rather insignificant or uncompromising fragments. He created opportunities for members of several sections of society to improve their social position.<sup>7</sup> He was primarily a conqueror and a military organizer, rather than a civil administrator who put a full-stop to the constant foreign intrusions into the Punjab from Central Asia after 800 years. However, he accepted the existing methods of administration.<sup>8</sup> He left mustering 50,000 disciplined soldiers, 50,000 well-armed yeomanry and militia, and more than 300 pieces of cannon for the field. The army was adapted to the European methods of fighting. It was the most efficient, the hardest to overcome that the British had ever faced in India. Moreover, it was a 'national army without mercenaries',<sup>9</sup> in fact, his army was equal to his ambitions.<sup>10</sup> In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's lifetime, he had always moved in concert with the army; Maharaja Ranjit Singh was all powerful, though in theory was no despot, but a commonwealth, of which he was only the head. He was generous, kindhearted, merciful and charitable.<sup>11</sup>

In 1980, Professor Surjit Hans estimated the per capita income of Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It turned out to be Rs. 18. *Cambridge Economic History of India* estimated the per capita income of pre-British India between Rs. 15 and Rs. 20. In 1980, per capita income of India was Rs. 1630 and that of the Punjab was Rs. 2674. A hundredfold rise in prices between 1830 and 1980 made Maharaja Ranjit Singh 'more prosperous' than India in 1980.<sup>12</sup> In 1839, the Punjab was the 'most prosperous and powerful state in Asia including China and Japan'. Denzil Ibbetson put forth that in the East Punjab under the British, famines occurred in 1812, 1817, 1824, 1833, 1837, 1841, 1842. There was no famine in the Lahore Kingdom due to the encouragement of irrigation by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>13</sup> In 1834, Henry T Prinsep reported the resources of the Punjab as about Rs. 2.58 crore and the military force as 82,014 with 376 guns and 370 swivels.<sup>14</sup> About half a dozen European travelers visited the Lahore Kingdom during 1820-1839. They were keen observers of flora and fauna; agrarian and agro-based industrial production. They also commented on the plight of the poor, peasants and prosperity of the ruling class.<sup>15</sup> The polity of the Lahore kingdom was essentially feudal in structure; the sovereign assigned to his chieftains the land revenue of certain villages or whole tracts of territory.<sup>16</sup> The *jagirdar* was not a landlord but he collected the land tax. In return, he was called upon to render military service.<sup>17</sup> Professor Nurul Hasan argued that Maharaja Ranjit Singh successfully worked the *jagirdari* system of Mughal Emperor Akbar in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century whereas the Mughals failed it in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century India.<sup>18</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died at Lahore on June 27, 1839, after nominating his eldest son Kharak Singh as his successor with Raja Dhian Singh as the Wazir, a position he had held under the Maharaja.<sup>19</sup> The Maharaja had left seven sons. The eldest son Maharaja Kharak Singh was the least suited to rule over the

Punjab.<sup>20</sup> He was a man deficient in intellect and in energy and passed the whole of the time in a state of semi-inebriety.<sup>21</sup> The Kingdom of Lahore was left in the throes of danger which came in the wake of the British intervention in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> From October 1839 onwards, murders became a regular feature of the Lahore Darbar.<sup>23</sup> The Army became 'paramount'. General Ventura anticipated a long period of anarchy. The British perceived the Punjab "falling under their management". It was estimated that the Khalsa lands were worth half a million and the payment from the Jagirs could be as much.<sup>24</sup> The Lahore Kingdom was created through the magnificent Khalsa army which Hari Ram Gupta called 'New Model Army trained on the Western model' and was maintained through the same. Finally, it ended with its end.<sup>25</sup> Professor Surjit Hans has further elaborated it. The Lahore Kingdom was 'a militarized state; out of an annual income of 3.25 crores, the Maharaja spent one crore on the army. The state collapsed under the weight of militarism.'<sup>26</sup>

## **II: The British Imperial Project and the Punjab (1830-46)**

### **A. Ascendancy of the British Empire**

The British Empire was the archetypal colonial empire, the epitome of a modern empire. It was a seaborne empire.<sup>27</sup> The Empire had a bloody process of expansion which gained momentum after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1814-15. Colonies played an important part in the expansion of the British Empire along with the British centre.<sup>28</sup> The British were the first conquerors of India representing a society with obviously higher socio-economic and other historical characteristics. The wars carried on in a country demonstrated advantages of capitalist forms of production, distribution and social organization.<sup>29</sup> The British East India Company's political and commercial influence, as well as its military power, enabled it to annex into its direct rule some 2.5 million square kilometers, over 60 per cent of the territory of the Indian sub-continent containing three quarter of its people.<sup>30</sup> With the great expansion of the international economy and territorial expansion within, colonial rule was firmly established in India.<sup>31</sup>

The Charter Act of 1813 imposed the will of the rising class of factory owners on India and its trade. The Act abolished entirely the monopoly of the East India Company over Britain's trade with the East.<sup>32</sup> After 1815, it was from London that the world's 'financial system was articulated'.<sup>33</sup> By 1818, with the final defeat of the Maratha Confederacy, the British political supremacy was recognized throughout the whole of Indian sub-continent. In fact, the British ascendancy was 'absolute' with the functions of paramountcy.<sup>34</sup> The wars with Nepal and the Marathas during 1814-1819 turned the Company into deficit of £5.50 million.<sup>35</sup> The Pax Britannica had 'begun'<sup>36</sup>, consequently, there emerged Britain's Indian Empire.<sup>37</sup> In fact, in the experience of most Indians, Pax Britannica meant mainly 'Tax Britannica'.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the British East India Company ruled purely as an 'agent' of the British Empire.<sup>39</sup> By 1835, the

Company's armies were much larger than the whole British army, at home and abroad. India provided resources that could be turned to the task of conquest. During the 1840s, India had become a major asset for a trading empire.<sup>40</sup> After 1840, the British Empire formed the core of a larger British 'world system' managed from London. Its expansion was provided by subsidized mail services, telegraph wires, undersea cables, an expanding rail network, fast passenger steamers and imperial air routes.<sup>41</sup> In 1850, Britain was a modern and wealth producing industry<sup>42</sup>, and the industrial revolution gave Britain the lead in labour productivity, paving the way for its non-equivalent exchange with other countries on an unprecedented scale. Britain used force to include India in the world market as a producer of raw materials.<sup>43</sup>

Daniel R. Headrick in his work *The Tools of Empire* (1981) identified tools as steamboats, quinine, Breechloader gun, steamships, submarine cable, railroads for deepening the reach of Imperialism in Asia and Africa.<sup>44</sup> The Indian Army worked for the consolidation of the British Empire. The Madras and Bengal Armies were employed in Ceylon in 1819 in dealing with civil disturbances there, and the Madras Army was in Malacca in 1831-32, and in Burma in 1829-31, 1852, 1853 and 1854 to 1857.<sup>45</sup> The British East India Company converted Ludhiana as an important 'outpost' of the Empire. It could scan from its tower the horizon of the Kingdom of Lahore and to invigilate over the Cis-Sutlej chiefs.<sup>46</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s, the British Empire had the ghost of Great Game haunting on the North-Western borders of the Indian sub-continent. In 1826, Lord Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control, East India Company, was extremely disturbed. He stated: "we shall have to fight the Russians on the Indus".<sup>47</sup> The Lahore Kingdom was autonomous politically but very significant geographically. The long shadow of the British Empire was looming large over north-western frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. It makes Indian colonial history an integral part of the global history in the age of Imperialism.<sup>48</sup>

The British economy was undergoing rapid transformation from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The British expected that India could emerge as an excellent source of raw materials and a never-failing market for the finished products of English factories.<sup>49</sup> Between 1760 and 1830, the United Kingdom was responsible for around two-thirds of Europe's industrial growth of output. Britain had emerged as 'hegemon'.<sup>50</sup> After 1832, the most powerful section in the House of Commons was the pro-free traders.<sup>51</sup> In 1833, the monopoly of the East India Company in China trade was abolished. Karl Marx (1818-1883) noticed, 'an exceptional interest of the ruling classes of Great Britain in the progress of India. The millocracy discovered that the transformation of India into a productive country had become of vital importance. The English millocracy intended to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses, cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. He expected the railway system to become truly the forerunner of modern industry in India'.<sup>52</sup> The region could be opened up as a market 'for the produce of British labour' and be developed into a supplier of raw material and foodstuffs.<sup>53</sup> In 1852, Lt. Colonel Tremenhare

underlined the potentialities of the Punjab better than the discovery of the richest mines.<sup>54</sup> Economics of Imperialism guided the politics of Imperialism which became open in the sixth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century India.<sup>55</sup> The period of 1843-56 witnessed the triumph of the free trade doctrines in England. It also saw the most relentless phase of British expansion in India.<sup>56</sup> The Utilitarians expressed their hopes of progress in commercial and industrial liberalism. Lord Dalhousie emerged as the utilitarian administrator who guided policy towards the annexation of the Punjab.<sup>57</sup> The 1840s were a time of railroad fever in the Western world and most of all in England. During 1830-50, England laid down the grand work for a modern industrial economy.<sup>58</sup> During the 1800s and 1850s, the rate of capital formation in England increased from 5 per cent to 10 per cent.<sup>59</sup>

Sind had strategic location astride the Indus River. It appeared as a conduit linking India to West and Central Asia. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had regular connections with Sind after the conquest of Multan in 1818. The Amirs of the Sind doubted his intentions. In fact, in 1831, Lord Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control, decided to send Alexander Burnes to 'explore the river Indus, ascertain its commercial possibilities and reach Lahore'. He wanted to block the Sikh expansion into Sind. Moreover, his real purpose was collection of political and geographical information. When Burnes first entered the Sind River, a rude Bilochi soldier cried, "the mischief is done, you have seen our country". A Syed near Thatta made an observation, "Alas! Sindh is now gone, since the English have seen the river which is the high road to its conquest".<sup>60</sup> In 1841, the British suffered a humiliating defeat in Kabul. Lord Ellenborough, the Governor General of India (February 28, 1842-June 1844), wanted Sind because of 'political necessity' and planned to extend the frontiers of British India to the Indus River. Henry Lawrence hated the whole affair of the annexation of Sind. However, Charles Napier, the Commander of EIC forces as Major General declared war without provocation,<sup>61</sup> and the conquest of Sind went ahead on the flimsiest of grounds. Social reformer Lord Ashley described it as an act of 'foul stain' on the nation's honour.<sup>62</sup> Charles Napier called the annexation of Sind in 1843, as 'a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality'. He remained the Governor of Sind during 1843-47.<sup>63</sup> In fact, he anticipated something which was to prove decisive later in securing the Punjab.<sup>64</sup> The conquest of Sind was a step towards annexation of the Punjab.<sup>65</sup>

### ***B. The First British-Punjab War (1845-46) and Politico-Economic Squeeze***

In July 1844, Lord Henry Hardinge replaced Lord Ellenborough as the Governor General. It caused nervousness in the Lahore Darbar circles. In September 1844, Major Broadfoot replaced Colonel Richmond as the British Agent at Ludhiana. The former was "rather too prone to war". In January 1845, Lord Hardinge reported that 'the affairs of the Punjab were more unsettled than ever'. He anticipated 'a successful mutiny in the Khalsa Army' yet rejected 'no immediate necessity for interference'.<sup>66</sup> The British had thrown a network of cantonments near the Punjab border; British spies and intelligencers, secretly assisted by

Lahore dignitaries, were everywhere in Lahore and around. Roads were repaired and the Governor General and Commander in Chief of the Army visited adjoining areas of the Kingdom.<sup>67</sup> In October 1844, Hugh Gough, the Commander-in-Chief of the East India Company's forces in India came up to inspect troops at Ludhiana and Ferozpur. The Punjab army was alerted against a possible invasion.<sup>68</sup>

In 1839, the Lahore army consisted of about 1,10,000: the Regular army as 70,000 and Irregular army 40,000. Sardars and chiefs had a force of 30,000. The payment to the Regular army was Rs.1,27,96,282.<sup>69</sup> The total army of the Lahore Kingdom increased from 85,000 in 1839 to 1,20,000 in 1844. The total expenditure on the army amounted to Rs. 6 million in 1844.<sup>70</sup> By autumn of 1845, the British assembled 'the largest ever force on the Punjab frontier'. It reached to 40,000 men and 66 guns.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the British could increase the Indian Army by 1,20,000 men and 1000 officers from 1837 to 1846 with the cost of 10 million sterling annually.<sup>72</sup> In the first week of January 1845, the British assembled 20,000 men and 60 guns including seven of His Majesty's Regiment. There was plan to collect 33,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry and 100 guns in about six weeks.<sup>73</sup> The Lahore Durbar deployed 60,000 men and 150 guns.<sup>74</sup> Fierce battles followed: Mudki (December 18, 1845); Ferozeshahr (December 18, 1845); Buddowal (January 21, 1846); Aliwal (January 28, 1846) and Sabraon (February 10, 1846).<sup>75</sup> The British were barely saved by the treachery of the Sikh leaders.<sup>76</sup> The War lasted for 45 days. Lord Hugh Gough, the British Commander-in-Chief described the Battle of Sabraon as 'the Waterloo' of India. The Treaties of Lahore were signed on March 9, 11, 1846; Treaty of Bhairawal was signed on December 16, 1846.<sup>77</sup> The monarchy formed by the genius of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was 'reduced to insignificance'.<sup>78</sup> The First British-Punjab War (1845-46) cost the British half a million pound sterling.<sup>79</sup> It had destroyed the Lahore Kingdom for all intents and purposes.<sup>80</sup>

The Treaties of Lahore were signed on March 9, 11, 1846: The Lahore Kingdom was compelled to give up the Jullundur Doab; to pay a war indemnity of Rs.1.5 crore; reduced its army to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry; handed over all the guns used in the Sutlej campaign; a British unit was posted in Lahore and the British Resident was appointed.<sup>81</sup> The Jullundhur Doab was taken over by the British; British force of 10,000 men was kept in Lahore under the command of John Littler at the expense of the Lahore Durbar. The Resident was empowered 'to direct and control the duties of every department'.<sup>82</sup> The State of Lahore was not merely smaller and weaker, it was 'a protected state for all practical purposes',<sup>83</sup> a virtual 'protectorate' of the British.<sup>84</sup> During the period of Regency (1846-49), the British had worked on the potentialities and resources of the Punjab. The Resident, Henry Lawrence had complete control over every affair of the State,<sup>85</sup> virtually a 'dictator' in the Punjab.<sup>86</sup> He could disband and recruit Sikh armies or replace them by British troops throughout the Punjab.<sup>87</sup> The Lahore Durbar agreed to pay to the British Government Rs.22 lakhs per annum for the maintenance of 10,000 British troops in the Punjab till 4<sup>th</sup> September 1854. The Treaty was ratified in a public Durbar held at Lahore on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1846. Lord Henry Hardinge presided in the presence of Lord

Hugh Gough, the Commander-in-Chief.<sup>88</sup> Henry Lawrence became “the uncrowned King of the Punjab”, the rule of ‘Titans’ began.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, the Sikh force, which in 1845 was about 85,000 and 300 guns, was reduced to 24,000 regular and 10,000 irregular troops, with majority of them employed in the N.W.F. Provinces.<sup>90</sup> In the words of Lord Hardinge, the Punjab was, never by the Treaty of Lahore, ‘intended to be independent state’. Maharaja Dalip Singh was in ‘fetters’.<sup>91</sup> The Lahore Kingdom was reduced to a “subsidiary state”,<sup>92</sup> leading to “partial annexation”.<sup>93</sup> By the 1840’s, the Court of Directors pursued ‘an aggressive policy towards the Indian states’. Each Governor General followed the policy.<sup>94</sup>

Lord Hardinge began mulling over the annexation of the Punjab and its feasibility both in military and financial terms. He worked out the revenues of the Punjab at about £700,000 and cost of the annexation at around one million pounds. The annexation would extend the frontier at the greatest distance from all resources hence it would be ‘a source of weakness and not of strength’. Consequently, he defended the Regency.<sup>95</sup> John Lawrence was more enthusiastic in the area of land reforms. It caused uneasiness among the land owning classes and *jagirdars*.<sup>96</sup> Henry Lawrence set out to reform the Revenue Department.<sup>97</sup> Administrative changes were introduced both in the annexed territories which were administered in the name of the Lahore Durbar.<sup>98</sup> The finances were scrutinized; the arrears justly due from the tax-gathers were demanded with vigour, arrangements were made to fix and limit the demand on the people; summary settlements of the land revenue were made.<sup>99</sup> John Lawrence thought that the prosperous peasantry would be the bulwark of the country rather than the Sardars.<sup>100</sup> During the winter of 1846, a general money assessment was commenced in all the districts immediately under the Durbar. In that season, it was completed in four Doabs, Hazara and some portion of Peshawar.<sup>101</sup> The assessment of land revenue on each village was determined through the agency of the British assistants.<sup>102</sup> There was no survey or measurement. The officers who were entrusted with this duty were assisted by the production of Durbar accounts of past collections and by the local knowledge of the *Kardars*.<sup>103</sup> John Lawrence insisted upon punctual returns from the *Kardars*. A *Kardar* was to be suspended on the first neglect of this duty.<sup>104</sup> The Regency period (1846-49) in the Punjab was that of measuring potentialities of physical resources of the Punjab, especially land and water. Extensive surveys and mapping were conducted. Economy was enforced. Development of resources received attention. Plans for the repair of old and construction of new public works were prepared.<sup>105</sup>

In 1847, total revenues collected were as follows: from *Kardars* Rs. 25,49,873; from heads of villages Rs. 18,23,556; from coparcenary communities Rs. 89,44,658, and with the total amounting to Rs. 1,33,18,087.<sup>106</sup> John Lawrence made revenue settlements directly with representatives of village communities, thus bypassing *Chaudharies* and *Lambardars* who were in consequence deprived of the privilege of rent-free lands. The revenue officials became as disgruntled as the *Jagirdars*.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, all the *awabs* or cesses were to be abolished and the state demand consolidated into one sum; secondly,

where the past assessment, direct or indirect, exceeded one half the produce, it was reduced to two fifth; thirdly, the practice of collecting land in kind was abolished throughout the Punjab and the assessments were all fixed in money.<sup>108</sup> The survey paid attention to contextual features such as geographical location, irrigational facilities, class of people taxed, seasonal changes in the area, quality of soil and whether the tillers can pay in money or kind'.<sup>109</sup>

The main features of fiscal reforms were: (i) all the depressing and harassing restrictions on internal trade were abolished. With the disappearance of the town and transit duties, home productions became free to traverse the Kingdom from one end to the other without any hindrance; (ii) the principle of progressive taxation was introduced; and (iii) innumerable custom houses and outposts which cut the country into endless fiscal divisions were abolished. As a result, with the loss of Rs. 2,22,292 of revenue, taxes to the amount of Rs. 6,62,192 had been abolished, among which were included the chief necessities of life. The Lahore Kingdom had been freed from transit duties and customs, and confined to import and export duties.<sup>110</sup>

### **III: Lord Dalhousie, Annexation, and Imperial Incorporation of the Punjab**

Lord Henry Hardinge was succeeded by Lord James Andrew Browne Ramsay, Xth Earl, Marquis of Dalhousie who became the Governor General of India at the age of 35. Lord Dalhousie landed in Calcutta on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1848.<sup>111</sup> By nature, he was an autocrat in power.<sup>112</sup> By birth and training his instincts were 'authoritarian and conservative'.<sup>113</sup> Between April 18 and July 14, 1848, no effort was made to suppress the Multan rebellion either by the British Resident or the Lahore Durbar. Lord Dalhousie favoured delay upto September as in the rainy season it would be 'a war against God Almighty, and his Clements'. He anticipated 'heavy reparation'.<sup>114</sup> Meanwhile, Lord Dalhousie in his Minute of September 30, 1848, expressed himself in favour of annexing the Punjab.<sup>115</sup>

On January 13, 1849, the Battle of Chillianwala was fought. Both sides claimed victory. The British loss was heavy and amounted to over 2000 men, and six guns and several stands of colours. It was the worst defeat suffered by the British since their occupation of India.<sup>116</sup> The Battle of Gujrat on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1849 ended the organized Punjabi resistance to the British.<sup>117</sup> Sardar Chattar Singh and Sher Singh surrendered to Major General Gilbert at Hurmuck, near Rawalpindi on March 11 and 14, 1849.<sup>118</sup> Hari Ram Gupta considers the Second British-Punjab war as a 'misnomer as it was no war in reality',<sup>119</sup> and Philip Mason calls it 'an interruption' in the work of British officials in the Punjab.<sup>120</sup> Diwan Mulraj's Revolt of 1848 at Multan precipitated the matter leading to annexation which was executed 'with caution and threat'.<sup>121</sup>

The Regency was a temporary measure in the British scheme of things. Annexation remained a major concern since the conquest of Sind in 1843. In January 1847, Lord Hardinge noticed that the Punjab was sliding into annexation'. He favoured it in the light of sound economics and advocated audit till 'the Pear is Ripe'.<sup>122</sup> The policy was to annex a state into the British



territories on all suitable occasions.<sup>123</sup> A strong British army moved into the Punjab in early November 1848 under the command of Lord Hugh Gough, with the object of “defeating, disarming and crushing all forces of the Sikhs”. It was an invasion without any declaration of war.<sup>124</sup> On February 1, 1849, Henry Lawrence assumed the charge of the Residency. He favoured *status quo* in the Punjab. However, in his meetings with Lord Dalhousie at Ferozepore, he admitted ‘the justice of annexation but disputed its expediency’.<sup>125</sup> On 11 March 1849 and on 14 March 1849, the Sikh soldiers with tears in their eyes, kissed their swords and laid them down never to see them again, exclaiming, with choked throats: ‘Today is Maharaja Ranjit Singh dead’.<sup>126</sup>

The Punjab was to be governed, preferably in the interests of the new social forces which had begun to dominate British society. With a view to transforming India into a productive country, England intended ‘to gift her means of irrigation and of internal communications’.<sup>127</sup> The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie acted without the consent of the Court of Directors. Nevertheless, the President of the Board of Control approved the annexation.<sup>128</sup> Lord Dalhousie regarded annexation as a thoroughly sound plan.<sup>129</sup> In a letter to Hobhouse on August 15, 1848, Lord Dalhousie represented annexation as the most “advantageous policy” open to the British. He and John Lawrence magnified the defects of the subsidiary system to prove it unworkable.<sup>130</sup> He pushed his case for annexation. In the case of denial, he thought to resign.<sup>131</sup> The situation in Multan and the British Punjab War was an excuse by the British to conquer the Punjab.<sup>132</sup> The fall of the Punjab was the result of Britain’s advances in the fields of industrial production, communications, military strategy, weapons and the intelligent use of modern cartography.<sup>133</sup>

The British Commander-in-Chief Hugh Gough had reached Lahore on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1849. Mr. H.M. Elliot, Secretary, Foreign Department deputed with full powers, arrived on March 28, 1849. The British colours were hoisted on the Citadel of Lahore. The Council of Regency signed submission to the British power and surrendered the *Koh-i-noor* to the Queen of England, Victoria.<sup>134</sup> Lt. Col. W. Sherry, Commandant, Govindgarh Fort Amritsar reported that ‘the streets filled with rejoicing crowds and illuminated the city most brilliantly’.<sup>135</sup> The conditions signed by Maharaja Dalip Singh at Lahore on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1849 were ratified by Lord Dalhousie on the April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1849. Proclamation was issued on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1849, announcing in every station of British India that the country of the Five Rivers was henceforth an English possession.<sup>136</sup> Henry Lawrence was resistant to the idea of annexation; Dalhousie desired the opposite as he wanted “utter destruction and frustration of the Sikh power, the subversion of its dynasty, the subjection of its people, and this must be done fully and finally”.<sup>137</sup> In fact, long before the battles of Chillianwala and Gujrat, Lord Dalhousie wrote to Frederick Curry on February 21, 1849 that he had made up his mind to put an end to the Sikh rule in the Punjab. Dalhousie wanted integrity of the British Indian Empire.<sup>138</sup> By the annexation of the Punjab, Lord Dalhousie abolished that ‘intervening military nationality’.<sup>139</sup> Lord Dalhousie received a Marquisate with the addition “of the Punjab”. Thus, he parted with the tradition from “to be a Scottish Earl of 1633 to be an English Marquis of 1849”.<sup>140</sup> The

two million sterling, which the Punjab including the Jallandar Doab was expected to yield by way of annual revenue was considered sufficient to pay the additional army to be maintained for the purpose of the Indian Empire.<sup>141</sup> All pro-annexationists mentioned economic advantage for the Company, Britain and themselves. Even high moral ground was also introduced to 'civilise' indigenous population under the British governance.<sup>142</sup>

The Board of Administration was constituted on March 31, 1849, having "wide powers and unrestricted control over all matters pertaining to the Punjab".<sup>143</sup> The Board was formed by the orders of Lord Dalhousie as he resolved to convert the Punjab into a safe British province and to make it a source of strength instead of a source of danger. Thus, 'really effective system of defence was created on the North-Western Frontier against the races of Central Asia'.<sup>144</sup> Henry Lawrence was appointed President and entrusted with matters connected with Defence and relations with the Sardars. John Lawrence was put in charge of the settlement of land and other fiscal matters. C.G. Mansel was entrusted with the administration of Justice and Police. The President did not have the powers to overrule his colleagues in matters specifically assigned to them. Moreover, the Board of Administration was manned by both civilian and army officers.<sup>145</sup> On the eve of the annexation, Lord Dalhousie was determined to give the Punjab 'a strong administration'. The military form of Government on the Sind pattern was the obvious precedent advocated by the Commander-in-Chief Charles Napier. Lord Dalhousie preferred 'a mixed form of Government which would combine military strength with civil justice and erecting an administration compared in equal proportions of trained civilians and military officers'.<sup>146</sup> The Board enjoyed wide powers and unrestricted control over all matters pertaining to the Punjab. The members wielded triple powers, civil, fiscal and criminal, even to the extent of awarding death sentence and exercised general superintendence of every moral and material improvement of the Punjab.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, the Board was entrusted with power to communicate directly with the Governor-General.<sup>148</sup> The members of the Board had special charge of their departments, though all worked jointly when any question of more than ordinary importance arose.<sup>149</sup> Lord Dalhousie conceived and gave birth to his instrument of government, a triumvirate, novel administrative machine, directed and controlled from without by a master mind. The tenderness of Henry Lawrence was countered by his hard-headed brother John Lawrence. In between was pitted a peace maker, C.G. Mansel, a dilettante philosopher and critic, whose habit was to raise objections to every proposal but never, to come to any conclusion himself.<sup>150</sup>

The British Government was eager to annex the Punjab, also an account of its economic as well as political aspects. The cotton crop of the Punjab was one of the chief attractions to the British who foresaw in the land of five rivers a favourable market for the consumption of their goods. The Punjab also offered vast opportunities of employment for a large number of British civilians and politicians with handsome salaries, allowances, furloughs and pensions. It also offered facilities of extensive cantonments and mountainous training grounds for the British troops.<sup>151</sup> With a view to speed up the transformation of Punjab

into a productive unit, while keeping down the expenditure of its administration, the Non-Regulation System was developed in which its administrative staff was not governed by an Act of Parliament or regulations of the Government of India.<sup>152</sup> The Punjab experienced 'complete fulfillment' and became 'the greatest example' of the Non-Regulation System in British India.<sup>153</sup> Its main objective was to further the process of social transformation and bring the Punjab in line with the more developed provinces of British India. However, it paid due regard to customary law and social traditions.<sup>154</sup>

A Proclamation was issued calling upon the people to surrender their arms and demolish all private fortifications and strongholds. Headmen of the villages were involved to carry out the measures and they were held responsible.<sup>155</sup> Lord Dalhousie maintained that "there will never be peace in the Punjab so long as its people are allowed to maintain the means and opportunity of waging war".<sup>156</sup> Throughout the Punjab, about 1,20,000 stands of arms were surrendered.<sup>157</sup> The leading 'rebels' were punished not only by confiscation of their jagirs but of their entire property.<sup>158</sup> The early British administrators of the Punjab were anxious to tap every source of wealth and material prosperity, partly to justify their imperialistic hold on the country and win the good will of the new rising class - in industrial aristocracy and partly to show to the Directors at home that the new conquest was a paying concern.<sup>159</sup> The rate of assessment was reduced. Resultantly, revenue from land increased from Rs. 130 lakh in 1849 to Rs. 160 lakh in 1851.<sup>160</sup> The British always looked for revenue surplus as excessive military interventions bled the treasury white. The Company had ceaseless military campaigning with a large and expensive sepoy army. During 1839-1849, due to the number of wars against Afghanistan, Oudh, Gwalior and the British Punjab Wars, debt had risen to £51 million involving an annual payment of £2.50 million. In the case of the Punjab, the deficit in revenue stood as follows: £1,496,865 in 1845-46; £1,911,986 in 1847-48; and £1,473,225 in 1848-49. In the post-annexation phase, as the wars ended, the revenue of the Company turned surplus: £354,187 in 1849-50, and £415,443 in 1851-52.<sup>161</sup>

The British East India Company had the parliamentary sanction and strength. By 1843-44, British spies and intelligencers were everywhere in Lahore, secretly assisted by the dignitaries of the Kingdom. The Sind occupation in 1843 provided a template to move towards the First British Punjab War (1845-46). The British occupation in 1846 fragmented and bled the Lahore Kingdom within, both economically and politically. Resources were assessed and estimated to derive at economics of annexation. The rise of England as the dominant industrial power in Europe and as hegemon encouraged the industrial class to push forward an annexation of the Punjab. Lord Dalhousie considered it his mandate to execute the policy of annexation. It extended the Empire's geographical and political frontier in the North-West. The basic feature of the Punjab's economy was its rapid colonization after 1850, leading to its integration with rest of the Indian colonial economy and also with the world capitalist economy in a subordinate position.<sup>162</sup> The philosophy of Utilitarianism derived imperial policy in India. The Lahore Kingdom though, militarily powerful and economically sustainable, had to face the collective might of the

British Empire and the Indian subsidiary system which had forced them towards collaboration with the local rulers. The British Empire in India had a structured political and military system, while the Lahore Kingdom had yet to institutionalize its polity. The Company was highly indebted due to imperial wars, a novel situation for a trading company, and finally imploded and collapsed with the Uprising of 1857.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is the updated and revised version of the *Hari Ram Gupta Memorial Lecture* presented on March 18th, 2024, Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
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- <sup>3</sup> David Hackett Fisher, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. xv. For details on the Annales School see, Peter Burke, *The French Historical Tradition: The Annales School, 1929-89*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 26-27.
- <sup>4</sup> In 1837-38, the Company had total debt of £33.8 million out of which the Indian part was £30.2 million. It had to borrow in India and England: Nabendu Sen, *India in the International Economy (1857-1913): Some Aspects of Trade and Finance*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992), p. 4.
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- <sup>6</sup> George Dunbar, *A History of India from the earliest times to the present day*, (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2004; first published 1935), p. 446. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 113.
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- <sup>9</sup> J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battle of the Sutlej*, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918) (first published 1849), p. 222. See also, Charles Gough and Arthur D. Innes, *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars: The Rise, Conquest, and Annexation of the Punjab State*, (London: A.D. Innes & Co., 1897), p. 40. Hari Ram Gupta, *Soldierly Traditions of the Sikhs upto 1849*, Macauliffe

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- George Dunbar, *A History of India from the earliest times to the present day*, p. 446.
- 11 Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs: The Sikh Lion of Lahore, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, (1799-1839)*, Vol. V, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991), pp. 588-589. See also, *The Maharaja Duleep Singh and the Government: A Narrative*, Lahore, 1884, p. 20.
- 12 Surjit Hans, "Why are we sentimental about Maharaja Ranjit Singh?", *The Panjab Past & Present*, Patiala, Vol. 37, part I, April 2006, p. 46.
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- 14 Henry T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, (Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1834), pp. 184, 186.
- 15 Kulwinder Singh Bajwa, "Early Nineteenth Agrarian Economy of the Punjab: Reflections in European Travel Literature", *The Panjab Past & Present*, Patiala, Vol. 38, Part I, April 2007, pp. 50-59.
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- (Shinghai), ‘informal’ colonies of commercial provenance (Like Afghanistan) and the Persian Gulf: John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System (1830-1970)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1,5.
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- <sup>74</sup> Hardinge to Lady Hardinge, December 25, 1845, Ferozepore Camp: *The Punjab Papers* (Ed. Bikramajit Hasrat), p. 100.
- <sup>75</sup> Lord Hardinge to his Wife, 20, 25 December 1845; 31 January 1846; 1 March 1846: Hugh Gough to Governor, 13 February 1846, Kasur: *The Punjab Papers* (Ed. Bikramajit Hasrat), pp. 99-103, 130-134.  
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