

**HARI SINGH NALWA:
A PRAGMATIC DRAFTSMAN OF SIKH RAJ IN HAZARA**

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Abstract:

Hari Singh Nalwa is known as one of the most acclaimed generals in the political history of Sikh rule. Main objective of the present study is to see that how his remarkable character contributed in the expansion of Sikh rule all over the Punjab and its adjacent areas up to greater extent. Hari Singh was a multitalented person who proved his worth as a general, administrator and fine town builder etc. Numerous books, articles and research papers have been published on various aspects of his life yet an important span of his life as the governor of Hazara remained largely unexplored. Current study by consulting some primary sources including Sikhs accounts of wars and their accomplishments, travelogues and journals of that era along with various secondary sources etc biographies, research papers and articles etc focuses his role as a governor of Hazara during 1822 to 1837. In spite of the fact, that majority of the Tribes in Hazara, at that time, were rebellious in nature and unruly for any foreign intruder making it a tough area for control and administration yet his work as administrator of Hazara contributed a remarkable share in the settlement of Sikh rule.

Key Words: Punjab, Hazara, Hari Singh Nalwa, Haripur, Sikh rule, British Raj

INTRODUCTION

Sikh rule in Punjab formally started with the capture of Lahore city by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in 1799 (Prinsep, 1834). Prior to the establishment of the Sikh authority, Punjab remained a part of the great Mughal Empire during 16th and 17th centuries which later on came under the domination of Nadir Shah and his successor Durani rulers. However, with the weakness of Duranies, Sikhs rose to power and conquered the entire Punjab with later expansions to the areas of nearby states. Two years after the capture of Lahore Ranjit Singh proclaimed himself as the Maharaja of the Punjab. Primarily Punjab under the Sikh rule was divided into four provinces e.g. Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Kashmir (Prinsep, 1834). It means the territorial boundaries of the Sikh rule stretched from Khyber Pass to the border of Sindh. Hazara region also became a part of Punjab during the Sikh era. Renounced Chinese traveler Xuanzang has discussed various accounts of this territory in

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his travelogue during the seventh century (Hovey, 1996). There are varied traditions regarding etymology of word Hazara but the most accepted one refers the name Hazara to Tamerlane, who while passing through it, felt captivated by its stunning landscape and decided to establish a cantonment in the valley comprising of one thousand Turk soldiers, from which the word Hazara was possibly derived (Panni, 1996). Turk chiefs and soldiers lost their martial character with the passage of time and they became lethargic which invited foreign invaders to capture their territory.

In year 1752, Ahmed Shah Durrani annexed the Hazara region as part of his invasion to India. His successors held control over Hazara with the help of local tribal chiefs from 1760's to 1818 (Singh, 2008). However, when in 1818, a local Turk Chief Hashmat Khan murdered an influential Pathan Kamal Khan, his heirs approached the Sikh Governor of Rawalpindi Makhan Singh for helping them to take revenge from the Turk Chief. They, in return, assured the Sikh ruler to assist them in campaign of Hazara. In addition to this, the internal squabble between the Muslim tribesmen provided a golden opportunity to the Sikh rulers to invade Hazara valley. Ultimately, Makhan Singh attacked Hazara and reached up to Sarai Saleh where he constructed a fort to mark the control of Sikh rule over the territory. Local tribes got together and attacked the newly constructed Sikh fort in which General Ram Dayal was killed and Sikhs suffered defeat in the hands of local tribes but soon thereafter reinforcement from Lahore arrived and Sikhs regained control of the area (Nayyar, 2005). Although Hazara remained a flash point since 17th and 18th centuries but it posed a stiff resistance to the Sikh invaders. A strong tribal network of local inhabitants had made this region a turbulent area, difficult to be ruled.

Nevertheless, after the settlement of Sikh rule, Sardar Amar Singh Majithia was appointed as the first governor of Hazara by the Lahore Darbar. However, shortly after his appointment he was killed by the Karlal tribes during a campaign in the hilly tract of Samandar Katha. After his murder Sardarni Sada Kaur and Kunwar Sher Singh, for a short time, governed Hazara but the Sikh regime had almost lost its control in the territory of Hazara (Griffin, 1905). Ranjit Singh, in order to reclaim Hazara valley, sent his most capable general Hari Singh Nalwa in 1822 to escalate a campaign against tribes of Hazara (Griffin 1905, 208). Hari Singh Nalwa, in the beginning contacted splinter groups and individual dissatisfied with their tribes to fetch their sympathies. He accessed those notables who could easily be lured through offers of positions and large estates. He managed a sizeable support in his favour to launch a ruthless offensive against the local tribes unwilling to offer a pledge of loyalty before Sikh authorities (Sandhu, 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the literature shows that very little work has been done on the administrative skills of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. Although, numerous scholars have carried out extensive research on the life of Hari Singh Nalwa but his role as a governor of Hazara is never

touched by historical accounts. Besides that, few scholars have addressed behavioral and social aspects of Nalwa's life. Political diary of James Abbott (1911), reveals the social, cultural and economical aspects of Hazara during 1846-49, but it is silent about the Hari Singh's governorship. Sadaf Butt (2018) provides deep overview about the two Anglo Sikh Wars and the decline of Sikh Raj in Punjab and Hazara in the focoused context of the life and works of James Abbott but does not cover the administrative works of Hari Singh Nalwa in Hazara. Shair Bhahdur Khan Panni's book Tareek-e-Hazara (1996) covers the atrocities of Sikhs in Punjab and Hazara, while the biography of Hari Singh Nalwa by Autar Singh Sandhu (1987), present the warrior skills and deeds of Hari Singh but does not care about his long term governorship in Hazara. Gazetteer of Hazara District 1907 by H. D. Watson (1908), share useful information about Hazara but does not explain the Sikh Raj comprehensively. These scholarly works mostly show Hari Singh Nalwa as a warrior but do not cover the other and quite different aspects of his life. Hence, the instant study is being conducted to fill the existing academic gaps regarding Hari Singh Nalwa's administrative contributions as a governor of Hazara from 1822 to 1837.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology has been utilized for this study. Some primary sources such as Sikhs accounts of wars and their accomplishments, travelogues and journals of that era and various secondary sources such as biographies, research papers and articles have been utilised. This study mainly focuses on the role of Hari Singh as a governor of Hazara from 1822 to 1837.

HARI SINGH NALWA AS GOVERNOR OF HAZARA

Before deputing in Hazara, Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed as Nazim of Kashmir where situation was quite peaceful but here in Hazara the condition was different. It really became a great challenge for him as the land was largely inaccessible due to high mountains and people were equally hostile to the Sikh regime. However, Ranjit Singh trusted Nalwa's abilities and assigned him a new position of governor of Hazara with the task to bring the territory thorough submission (Singh, 2008). With short intervals, Hari Singh Nalwa remained governor of Hazara from 1822 to 1937 (till his death). At that time, situated in North West of the Punjab Hazara region was consisted of the territories of Mansehra and Haripur with a tract of Tanawal territory, however, Abbottabad was yet not founded. Hazara under the Sikh rule roughly comprised of 3062 square miles. Lands in its valleys were cultivated through rich streams and the crops were also grown on the terraces along mountainous slopes (Sandhu, 1987). Despite a high potential of agricultural produce, predecessors of Hari Singh Nalwa could only collect a little taxes since no revenue system had been existing in Hazara territory. He focused on expansion of tax base so that he could please his master in Lahore Durbar.

However, bringing the mountaineers under control was an uphill task which Hari Singh took three years to complete, but it could not last for long and the unruly tribes again stood up against Nalwa. That is why his horses always remained saddled (Latif, 1889). A little improvement in favour of Sikh regime during the first years was just an illusion and the warrior tribes refused to surrender before Khalsa Raj especially on the mountains. According to Griffin, conquest of Hazara was a lengthy and tiring operation for which Sikh rulers had to pay a high cost in terms of money and men. Compared to the plains of Punjab the agricultural produce and expected tax money thereof, was disproportionate to the high cost of war and it was much to embarrass Lahore Durbar (Latif 1889, 421). On the other hand, Sikh generals and their troops were born and raised in the plain areas of Punjab who had little understanding of the warfare in hilly areas and this phenomenon gave heavy set back to the Sikh army in Karal Mountains, Sirikot, Gandhgar Mountains and in the valleys of Kaghan and Bhogarmang (Singh, 2015).

Besides local tribes and sardars, Hari Singh faced a great Muslim uprising against the Sikh Raj under the leadership of Syed Ahmed and Syed Ismail who declared a holy war against Sikhs. Victimized by the Sikh Raj, local Muslim tribes took no time to join the columns of the army of Syeds. The Skirmishes continued between the two armies in the gullies and valleys, plains and hills, forms and forest which did not allow Hari Singh to gain absolute control over the vast areas away from the Sikh forts, garrisons and strongholds (Panni 1996, 132-48). The army of Syeds, with great enthusiasm guarded ridges of mountains confining the Sikh's control to the plains. Economy of Muslim tribes rested upon agriculture, forestry and livestock, whereas, non Muslims were mostly traders and money lenders. As a result Muslims were largely inhabited in villages atop the hills, whereas, the town and cities were mostly populated by non Muslims (Panni, 1996). This demographic arrangement provided the Sikh rulers an easy access to urban areas and resistance in the rural territory. Since the Sikh Army was welcomed in the towns, they misunderstood the geographical situation of the area and hailed it as their ultimate victory without anticipating the insurmountable frontiers ahead.

CONSTRUCTION OF HARIPUR

Hari Singh Nalwa, besides being a general kept the taste of town building; therefore he hired an engineer named Rangella Ram to assist him in planning and construction of a town, envisioned by Hari Singh as future capital of Hazara (Nalwa, 2005). The city was carefully planned to cater for the future needs of a capital. The city was a marvel of town planning during those times since its roads and streets were designed on grid lines. A main avenue between the front and rear gateways was the centre of business activities where shops and trade centers were lined alongside the main avenue. Separate bazaars were reserved for different businesses like Shoe makers (nowadays called Mochi bazaar), blacksmith and iron work (Lohar bazaar). These bazaars were crossing the main avenue (nowadays called Main bazaar). These little bazaars were constructed on both sides of two

water channels passing through the town to provide plenty of water to the thriving capital of Hazara. Temples and Gaurduwara's were constructed on water channels to provide ablution and bath facility to the worshippers (Nalwa 2009, 95).

Banyan and Peepal trees were planted everywhere in the town to provide shady harbor to the travelers and vendors. A broad fortification wall was constructed all around the town to protect the capital from any outside attack (Singh 2015, 132-48). The fortification wall of the town no more stands today but a circular road runs in place of the city wall as its reminiscent. In fact, rampart of the town provided space for the famous road circling around the town. Hari Singh Nalwa grew an orchard outside the town and planted it with special trees collected from various distant places. The garden was full of olives, dates, oranges, apricot (Sandhu 1987, 55). It still has towering pines and fruit laden plants which hang to the ground and remind the glory and taste of Hari Singh. The Hari Singh's garden was handed over to agriculture department during British times and today it is known as Sarkari Bagh by the locals. To irrigate the gardens and orchards and to ensure uninterrupted water supply to the town, Hari Singh Nalwa constructed an irrigation system, little above the town, on the river Daur which is still known as Rangila. The system comprises of a large tank where the water is collected and then distributed to a number of Water channels through a series of aqueducts. The irrigation system was named after the then Chief Engineer of Hazara Rangila Ram (Hussain, 2012).

Hari Singh Nalwa built a fort outside the city of Haripur to guard the town and the fort was named as Harkishangarh dedicated to the eighth Guru of Sikhs. The fort was garrisoned by a large number of troops equipped with modern weaponry of that time. Artillery batteries were also stationed at this fort under the command of a European officer Colonel Frances John Canara (Abbott, 1911). The fort was surrounded by a high wall and a deep ravine to strengthen its defense. Hari Singh Nalwa understood the importance of communication as a lifeline to any government. In order to strengthen his control and to gain strategic depth inside the valleys and to the mountains, Hari Singh planned a network of local roads in all corners of the territory under his command. He engaged local chiefs to provide the men and material to construct roads mainly comprising of a chain of dirt roads connected through hanging and wooden bridges (Sandhu 1987, 55). The newly constructed roads provided easy access to the far-flung areas of Hazara and facilitated prompt mobility to his army. The roads network also facilitated flow of information through messengers regarding any unrest or resistance in the territory of Hazara.

REVENUE REFORMS DURING NALWA'S GOVERNORSHIP

It is scholarly admitted that before the governorship of Hari Singh Nalwa, no organized system of revenue collection existed in Hazara. His predecessors both Sikhs and Durranies collected land revenue and taxes from local farmers, traders and cattle keepers through local chieftain. That revenue system mainly depended upon the relation of local chief with

the rulers and there was no standard for levying taxes. Under the governorship of Hari Singh Nalwa, Hazara was declared as Suba headed by a Nazim, which was further divided into pragnas or districts, administered by Kardars. Each pragna or district was further subdivided into Taluqas. Each Taluqa comprised of mouzas each managed by a panchayat. Revenue officers at each level of local administration were appointed to levy taxes according to a given tax schedule (Nayyar, 2005). This system enabled the rulers to take direct control of revenue collection in their hands as per their provided standards and made them independent of the local chiefs whose role was made limited to only provide assistance to the revenue officers in tax collection. However, Hari Singh Nalwa taking advantage of the efficacy of new revenue system imposed heavy taxes and by doing so he aim to present large revenues to Lahore Sovereign, thus, strengthening his position in Durbar. This system provided a broad tax base to the Sikh Raj but the local population was adversely affected by it. The local population was subjected to all kinds of taxes mainly from the produce of home industry and indigenous agriculture, Fuel, corn, ghee, vegetables and assorted commodities of the poor which were included in their menu were brought to taxation (Butt, 2018). The district administrators or Kardars were given financial as well as judicial powers who could punish a non tax payers beyond any pardon. Little consideration was paid to the financial condition and personal liabilities of the tax payers (Butt 2018, 57). Kardar being a revenue collector as well as a magistrate was the most powerful person under almost no check and balance. He was also a custom and excise collector for his area of jurisdiction. Nalwa introduced the system of collective liability for any crime, damage or resistance against the Sikh rule, whereby the entire village or tribe was penalized for the act of an individual (Nayyar 2005, 49). Under this arrangement, whole villages were surrounded and burnt or persecuted with torture or indiscriminate killing.

DEEP ROOTED INSECURITY OF SIKH RAJ

Hari Singh Nalwa sensed local resentment against the Sikh rulers and fortified all his garrisons by constructing forts and fortress. The forts or Garh were constructed in the districts whereas, fortresses or garhi were constructed to house the military formation and administrative offices in Taluqas. In various mozas, posts or chowki were constructed where needed (Griffin, 2011). Hazara land is still dotted with forts and fortresses of Sikh era all along its length and breadth which is unprecedented during the eras prior to and after the Sikh rule. This shows a deep rooted insecurity among the Sikh rulers as they understood that local population did not accept them. Forts from Durrani, Mughal or British era are scarcely found in Hazara compared to a large network of fortified Sikh establishments (Chitra, 1967). All the government offices were kept inside the forts with the exception of Harkishangarh fort which was constructed next to Hari Singh's own town Haripur for its protection, all other forts were built away from the local population showing a wide gap between Sikh regime and the locals. In fact, Sikh rulers and local Hazara tribes always kept in isolation from each other.

As discussed earlier, Hari Singh was a trusted general of Ranjit Singh whom he assigned various additional tasks besides his governorship of Hazara. He was sent to a diplomatic mission in 1831 to Governor General of British India Lord William Bentinck (Chitra 1967, 110-16). The purposes of diplomatic envoy was to discuss the modalities of trade relation between East India Company and Sikh Raj. During the meeting, Governor General sought permission of Sikh government to carry out trade through Indus River. During those days, the most effective mode of transportation was rivers. Hari Singh Nalwa did not agree to the suggestions due to his apprehension of British intervention in the Sikh territory. He held the view that British would gain access and strategic depth in the guise of trade (Nalwa 2005, 101). Nalwa knew that majority of the Punjab consisting of Muslim population had yet not acceded to the Sikh rule and the British may take advantage of the dissatisfaction among Muslim peasantry by providing them with arms and logistical support for any uprising. Nalwa's skepticism resulted a deadlock in the diplomatic dialogue between the Sikh government and East India Company. The stance of Hari Singh gives understanding of the deep rooted insecurity among the Sikhs, since they did not enjoy support of the majority of population.

As mentioned above, Hari Singh Nalwa remained the Governor of Hazara from 1822-37 with short intervals, the entire span is marked with military expeditions in the plains and mountains of the region (Panni 1996, 52). He arrived in Hazara amidst the atmosphere of unrest and hostility between Sikhs establishment and the locals even his predecessor Amar Singh Majithia was killed in an expedition (Nayyar 2005, 57). Hari Singh's appointment was associated with abundant expectations from Lahore Durbar. It was a great challenge for him to subjugate the local tribes and bring them to submission. Soon after assuming the office of Governor of Hazara, he contacted the disgruntled elements against the local chieftains. Failed to obtain the loyalty of a considerable number warriors and chiefs, he turned ferocious. He waged a series of battles against the local tribes at Bogharmang, Nawasheher, Sirikot, Nara, and Dhamtor followed by innumerable skirmishes from village to village (Watson, 1908). During the clashes, Hari Singh Nalwa treated his opponents ruthlessly showing no mercy to anyone. Villages were burnt, trees were cut and livestock were taken away (Griffin 1905, 215). Till the end of his appointment in Hazara he could not maintain a lasting peace, although he largely managed to suppress resistance against him in the Hazara territory.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this discussion, it is concluded that being Governor of Hazara, Hari Singh's role remained multifaceted, however, his main contribution is known as a city of Haripur. It was planned and constructed by him under a map with straight roads, clean streets and defined business centre etc. Like any other developed city of that time, a protective wall was raised around the town with four gates to restrict the entry and exit of town. Similarly in order to safeguard the city of Haripur, a fort was also constructed quarter a mile away

from the town, wherein troops were stationed. A state of the art irrigation system was also constructed, comprising of a large tank and associated water channels through its aqueducts on river Daur. The water channels irrigated the farms and orchards in Hazara valley while passing through middle of the town which was a unique engineering during that time. This irrigation system was dedicated to the name of the chief engineer Hazara Rangela Ram. Hari Singh Nalwa grew a vast orchard near Haripur town known as Hari Singh Bagh, where a variety of rare plants still grow in his memory. He constructed various forts and fortress dotted all along Hazara to maintain the writ of his government, among those, Harkishangarh fort, dedicated to the eighth Sikh Guru still stands as district headquarters of various departments in Haripur. He fought battles in every corner of the region to subjugate the local tribes and to conquer the tracts, mountains and valleys of Hazara. While doing so his army committed cruel atrocities against the local population in the form of indiscriminate killing, burning of villages, destruction of mosques, damaged to the forests and livestock at various places. Yet, he appears as a well organised administrator who strengthened his government in the field of revenue, land records, treasury and local administration. Consequently, despite the atrocities committed by the Sikh rulers against the local Muslim tribes and a stiff resistance from the locals in return, Hari Singh Nalwa's positive contributions in the areas of administration such as town building, horticulture, irrigation and local developments are still dedicated to him and his associates. That is how his legacy lives in Hazara, till present days.

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