

**The Board of Administration After Annexation of Punjab in 1849**

Pardeep

M.A History from -Department of History  
**Panjab University Chandigarh**

***Abstract***

The British connection with the territory to the North-West of the Yamuna began with the treaty Anjangaon, 30 December 1803, by which DaulatRaoSindhia hand over all his forts, rights, and territories up to the Yamuna river to the British. Due to the decline of the Mughal power the whole area between the Yamuna and the Sutlej had fallen prey to three forces – the Marathas, the Bhattis of Sirsa, and the Sikhs. Upon the defeat of the Marathas, the British wished to make the Yamuna the limit of their territory towards the North West.

Hepolicy of buffer states was seriously endangered by the encroachment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh South of the Sutlej. When Ranjit Singh had succeeded in combining the scattered misls, north of the Sutlej into a single federation under himself. He turned his attention towards the branches south of the Sutlej. Then the rulers of these areas assembled at Samana and their representatives talked to a British resident, Sir Archibald Seton, at Delhi. An appeal from the Sikh Chiefs of the region for their protection by the British against Maharaja Ranjit Singh was gladly entertained by the British. Due to the above circumstances, Ranjit Singh in obligation had to sign the treaty of Amritsar in 1809 A.D. The main term of this treaty was, British Government would not interfere in the Northern side of the Sutlej, in the same way, Ranjit Singh would not interfere in affairs of southern territories. But the British had kept an eye on Punjab for a long time. After the death of Ranjit Singh, the British entangled the Sikhs through their policy of expansion due to that in 1845-46 A.D. 1st Anglo-Sikh War has fought and again for the second time in 1848-49 A.D. In the Second Anglo-Sikh War, the Sikhs were defeated completely. So, on 29 March 1849 A.D. an open Darbar was held at Lahore in which occupation of Punjab by theBritish. The first result of the second Anglo-Sikh war was that Punjab was annexed to the British Empire.

### ***Annexation and The Board of Control***

As per Lord Dalhousie, 'The right to annex Punjab is beyond cavil.' John Lawrence supported Dalhousie and believed that the annexation was 'both undeniable and pressing', while his brother Henry Lawrence was against this decision. As Dalhousie was given complete support by Lord Harding and then by the Court of Directors of the East India Company, Henry Lawrence was forced to draw the proclamation of the annexation without his willingness.

Dalhousie to portray the sovereignty and power of the British ordered the removal of Maharaja Dalip Singh as well as the lowering of the Sikh flag and hoisting the Union Jack on the ramparts of the fort at Lahore. Another step was the stoppage of Sikh coins and the introduction of the Company's sicca rupee for the transaction.

However, this annexation was followed by several aspects that were to be taken care of by the British officers. A few major problems were:

- Restoration of law, peace, and order in Punjab as there was the total state of anarchy.
- To disband the Khalsa army which was on a lookout for their revenge Sikh disarmament
- Reorganization of administrative structure
- Defense for North-Western frontier and to subdue internal conflicts
- Generation of more revenue from Punjab

Therefore, the major objectives in Punjab were to bring political stabilization by dealing with the law and order problems along with bringing modernization to support the British cause of annexation which was drawing of maximum revenue. Thus, the clash between the objectives of political stability and modernization resulted in the formation of what the historians have aptly characterized as a 'Janus-faced' state.

### ***Board of Administration***

Concerning how the newly annexed Punjab should be governed, there were varied opinions. As per Sir Charles Napier, the commander-in-chief after Lord Gough felt that Punjab, like Sindh, should have a military rule, while others believed that it should be ruled by civilians. Thus, Lord Dalhousie decided to govern the state by a mixture of both

civil and military codes and so he formed the Board of Administration. The Board of administration of Punjab comprised of three commissioners, namely, Henry Lawrence who was appointed Chairman of the Board, since he was highly popular amongst the people of Punjab as he had worked as the British Resident in the Lahore Darbar after the second Anglo-Sikh war. The second was John Lawrence and then Charles Mansel, who was replaced by Robert Montgomery in 1851 AD.

The board worked on the principle of divided labor and common responsibility as per M.M. Kaye. This meant that all the three members looked after different work but were equally responsible for every mistake. The division of work was as follows:

- Henry Lawrence- Looked after political and military affairs along with defence and relation with sardars
- John Lawrence- Looked after land revenue and fiscal matters
- Charles Mansel- Looked after the judiciary and policing system

The board was the final court of appeal for all the people and also served in matters of excise, revenue, and police. Concerning the system of governance, Lord Dalhousie wrote to Henry Lawrence that, 'You shall have the best men in India to help you.' While slightly contradictory to Dalhousie's outlook, Henry Lawrence worked on the principle of 'rule by strength rather than precision.'

In the words of Kushwant Singh *"Out of the 36 covenanted officers, 29 were from the army and 27 from the Civil Service. A fair combination of Military and Civil Systems of administration was in the organization of the Board. The Board also enforced Non-Regulation System. It meant to give importance to local laws and traditions to the extent they did not clash with the British sense of equality."*

However, as the aims of service were different for the members of the Board there was resentment and a clash of ideologies from the very beginning of the term of the board. It was due to the same clashes that the board had to be dissolved in 1853.

Concerning these circumstances, Bosworth Smith is of the view that the "Board contained the seeds of its own dilution. A chasm separating the two brothers of political matters was unbridgeable."

While Dr. N.M. Khilnani holds the view, "Thus from the very outset the Board did not possess the unity of purpose, a set procedure and concentration power, vital for the pacification and consolidation of a new province."

### ***Administration and Works by the Board of Control***

#### **Setup of units in Punjab:**

Divisions/Commissionary(Head- Commissioner)



Districts- 27(Head- Deputy Commissioner)



Assistant/ Additional Commissioner



Extra Assistant Commissioner (cadre specially constituted to provide jobs for 'such natives as might have filled offices of trust under the Durbar')



Tehsils (Head- Tehsildar, civil powers extended to deciding cases up to the value of Rs 300.)

This was a hierarchical system that was set up for the proper administrative functioning of Punjab where the subordinate officer took orders from the officer higher in rank for smooth functioning. Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner were usually British officers however the tehsildars were locals who were aware of their surroundings.

In the words of Herbert Edwards, "Perhaps in no other state of the British Empire in India, had able officers gathered in such a large number as in the Punjab". While Charles Raikes describes the organization of the administrative system in the words, "This administrative system was simple and suited to the sentiments of the people."

Along with this, a major addition to the boundaries of Punjab was that of the Cis-Sutlej and the Trans-Sutlej areas. They were placed under the same administration of the Board.

**Demobilization of the Khalsa Army:** The annexation of Punjab brought in the main problem before the British of the Khalsa army. If the Khalsa army would have remained in existence, it would have posed danger to the British. The men were chiefly collected at Lahore and there paid up and disbanded. The most promising among them were taken into the British service. All those whom they could not admit received gratuities and pensions. The other soldiers went to their homes and started their old profession of agriculture. The British encouraged them to promote agriculture. This diverted the attention of the soldiers and it also helped in the development of the economy of the state.

**Army Police for North Western:** The security of the North-west frontier had been a nuisance for the Indian rulers for many years as the province was inhabited by are freedomloving martial-war-loving tribes. The tribes never obeyed any government order and created a ruckus for the common people. Thus for the security and control of the 800km long North-West frontier, the Board took many stringent steps. In the initial phase able, mature, and experienced officers like Edwards and Nicho were appointed to instruct the setting. A mature consideration of the services performed by the Guide Corps in Punjab since its institution in 1846 by Lord Dalhousie had strongly impressed the Board of Administration with the advisability of adding to its strength. The Board of Administration wanted an increase of the Guide Corps to three troops and six companies with the addition of a third European officer as Adjutant. Professional hunters and brigands were accepted in the security forces as they were well versed with the topography of the areas and the skills posed by the tribes while the toughest of all men were recruited. Further, a special military force consisting of 12000 soldiers was organized and was called the Punjab Frontier Force or Panjab Frontier Security Force. This army did not attack at one place rather continued to move with tip and run policy and helped in wiping out the insurgent elements the region. The most important item was pay; the Board of Administration proposed that the horseman should get Rs.10 a month and a footman Rs.7; that neither should draw Bhatta. Following this, new forts were constructed and the old ones were renovated. Also, the roads were constructed, so that the army might rush in there easily in the hour of need. To support this, a detailed scheme was worked out to extend G.T. Road from Lahore to Peshawar. Following this, Military cantonments were set up at different places in the frontier province and help was also sought from the local tribal sardars to establish peace. A major step was the

encouragement for the common people to stand strong against those who create a nuisance. Therefore, as a result of these stringent measures, the Board of Administration succeeded, to a large extent, in restoring security, peace, and order in the North-West frontier.

**Setup of an efficient Policing System:** Anarchy was the order of the day after Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 A.D. The British government however paid special attention to setting up an efficient police system to restore peace and order. A Military Police consisting of 8000 jawans was commissioned who were mainly Punjabi Mussalmans. The foot constabulary was meant to guard treasuries and gaols, the mounted police to patrol highways. Further, for the assistance of the police, help was sought from the spies and old detectives. A secret intelligence service (*khufiā*) police comprised of informers and detectives (*jasūs*) while professional trackers (*pagī, khojī or khure pat*), who brought with them their uncanny gifts for following spoor of missing cattle over long, dusty tracks were also stationed to help the police. In Civil Detective Police there were about 6,900 soldiers. The detective or civil police were organized on the same footing as in Bengal and NorthWestern Provinces. The whole of Punjab was divided into 228 police divisions or thanahs. Each division was placed under a police officer, assisted by one or two deputies and on an average of 30 policemen. The Detective Civil Police consisted of regular establishment paid by the state; the city watchmen, and the regular constabulary paid by the people. BhaiMaharaj Singh and his two colleagues, Colonel Rachpal Singh and Narain Singh, were reported to be active in the Majha area and thus, more vigilance was kept there. Then at the village level, the Chowkidar System was reintroduced. The watchmen remained alert for the security of the village and kept a watch at night. The Tehsildars and the revenue collectors were given special police powers. To give strength to the civil power and some the military being constantly called for aid. Ordinary police did patrol, investigation, tracking the criminals, and assisting the civil authority. The organized police furnished jail guards, escort civil officers, guards the forts, treasures in the interior. At Lahore, Amritsar, Peshawar furnished guards at gates. As a result of the efficient police system, peace and order was restored in Punjab within two to three years. The people heaved a sigh of relief. This peace and order proved helpful in the development of Punjab.

**Judicial System:** The Board of Administration made a special arrangement to deliver justice to the people. The chief characteristic of the British judicial system was its

simplenature. The cases were decided not according to the written laws and local conventions. People could plead their cases without the help of any lawyer. For the assistance of the judges, laws based on Hindu and Muslim custom traditions were codified in the form of Civil Codes. The British judicial system was in keeping with the temperament of the Punjabis and was also less expensive. In the system, special importance was given to the decisions of the village Panchayats. The court of Tehsildar was above the villa Panchayat. The Tehsildar was empowered to hear cases up to Rs. 300. The appeals against decisions were heard by Assistant Commissioner or Additional Commissioner who was empowered to decide cases up to Rs. 1000. Above him was the court of the Deputy Commissioner. He would hear cases above Rs. 1000, and appeals against the lower courts. In the Commissioner's court, cases of civil and criminal nature were decided. Above all, there was the court of the Board Administration. It was empowered to award capital punishment also. By the year 1853, a regularly organized department of the judiciary was set up, civil and criminal justice was brought to the doors of the village peasants, police for the detection of crime was working vigilantly and jails-reformatory and deterrent were established in every district. The crime was thoroughly investigated and wrongdoers brought to justice to suffer for what they had done, and to improve for the future. The system as a whole was made popular with the people and they availed of the facilities provided by the government. The procedure in the courts was much simplified and official misconduct was severely punished and in place of anarchy and absolutism that prevailed before the beginning of the British Rule a regular government based on modern principles was set up

### **Summary**

**Economic Developments:** The management of economic affairs was under John Lawrence. He got the lands measured and fixed land revenue under the **Settlement** for two or three years. On very fertile land 1/4th or 1/5th part of the crop, and on less fertile land 1/8th part of the crop was realized as land revenue. There was a difference of opinion between Henry Lawrence, Chairman of the Board, and his brother, John Lawrence over the point of whether the revenue should be taken in the form of cash or kind. For the relief of the farmers, Henry Lawrence wanted to collect revenue in the form of crops, but John Lawrence was a strong supporter of the cash mode. Since John Lawrence was backed by Lord Dalhousie, his point of view was carried through. The farmers had to suffer a heavy loss because after 1849 A.D., agricultural output did

increase to some extent but the price of crops was greatly reduced. So this economic system caused much economic loss and suffering to the farmers. As stated in the Punjab Administration Report, *"Despite the reduction in the rate of assessment, revenue from land increased from 130 lacs of rupees in 1849 to 160 lacs in 1851 The Board was able to show a balance sheet with a surplus of 102 and 96 lacs in the first two years of its administration of the province."* Besides this internal duty was abolished and octroi posts on the borders of the province were started to collect maximum taxes through imports.

Along with this, The Durbar had as many as 48 different kinds of the levy, tolls were charged on ferries, the salt mines were taken over and, instead of being farmed out to contractors, were exploited by the state itself with a levy of Rs 2 per maund. About 27 articles were exempted from tax as they were reproduced in the state and aided the development of the cotton industries and trade. Excise was imposed on spirits and drugs while stamp duty was also imposed on civil suits. Though the Board simplified the taxation system yet it yielded Rs. 25000 more and saved the common Punjabis from the greedy government officers.

**Introduction of New crops:** One of the Board's major concern was to win over the peasantry. New varieties of crops were introduced to improve agriculture and a variety of root crops began to be grown in the plains. New Orleans cotton, sugarcane, flax, tobacco, and a variety of root crops began to be grown in the plains; tea was planted on the slopes of the Murree hills and in the Kangra Valley. Punjab had already a large number of mulberry trees; the import of silkworms gave sericulture a boost. Italian merino rams were crossed with local breeds, with beneficial results for both the yield of meat and wool. Cotton from Punjab was exported for a cheaper price to Britain while costly readymade garments were brought in causing financial loss to the common people.

**Improvement of the Canal System and Public Works:** Being the land of five rivers, Punjab had an extensive channel of canals. The Public Works Department cleared the Harisli canal or Shah Nahar, which supplied water to the temple tanks in Amritsar and the Shalamar Gardens in Lahore was cleared, and work was started to extend it and to dig branch canals. Trees were planted on canal banks and alongside the roads. Rest houses were built to accommodate the officials on tour, and afforestation of barren lands was undertaken. In the districts of Lahore, Gurdaspur, and Gujranwala, a million saplings were planted. These included as many as ninety different varieties of timber. Large tracts



were set apart as grasslands—*rakh*. Landholders were encouraged to plant trees and coppice lands were exempted from taxation. Also, the Grand Trunk Road from Peshawar to Delhi was reopened and work was started for connecting the bigger cities and military outposts. Post offices were opened in many cities and the first post offices were managed by readers posted at police stations but from 1851A.D. onwards, separate postmasters were appointed.

**Social Work:** Evil practices such as the destruction of female children on birth, sati, etc. were forbidden while marriage customs, dowry, divorce were modified to remove the hardship on women. Rules of inheritance of property were recognized while tehsildā were entrusted with the necessary judicial powers since they were conversant with the laws and had a strong connection to the local people. In terms of education, Erstwhile Punjab beat many British provinces as it had many elementary schools, including 16 for girls in Lahore. The Board thus allowed the native madrasas and Grukuls to function and to promote education established many central schools for higher education in the bigger cities. Also, the use of Persian for official records in the newly annexed region and Urdu for eastern Punjab was deemed necessary.

### ***Report by the Board***

In August 1852 the Board presented a report on its work in the first two years. It stated with pride that ‘in no part of India had there been more perfect quiet than in the territories lately annexed.’ Further, complimenting the people of Punjab it read as, ‘There are fewer prejudices and elements of hindrance in Punjab than elsewhere... Sikh fanaticism is dying out, the Hindus are less superstitious and priest-ridden and the Mohammedans less bigoted and less bound by traditional practice than their co-religionists in any part of India.’ Thus, acknowledging the work of the Board, the governor-general and directors of the East India Company felicitated the Board ‘for the prosperous and happy result’.

### ***Breakup-of the Board of Administration***

Though the functioning of the Board was going smooth, still within the Board itself there was increasing friction. It became known, not perhaps to the public, but the European officers around the center of affairs, that Henry Lawrence and John Lawrence were not always in accord regarding policy and practice. Between Henry and John, there was

agreement in many essential matters such as the military occupation and the pacification of the province, the guarding of the Trans-Indus Frontier, the political relations with the Native States comprised within Punjab, the development of material resources, the progressive policy of the administration. But they differed more or less on certain other points. The difference related mainly to three points:

- The system of collecting the land revenue
- The management of the finances and
- The introduction of British rule

Majorly, Henry Lawrence was in favor of the Sikh Sardars and did not want that their Jagirs should be confiscated. He wanted to give to the farmers the facility of paying their land revenue in the form of kind rather than in cash. On the other hand, John Lawrence nursed anti-Punjab feelings. He was in favor of confiscating the Jagirs of Sikh Sardars, realizing land revenues in cash and expansion of Canals.

For three years Henry Lawrence had to face humiliation and odd situations. In February 1853 the Board was dissolved and, in its place, John Lawrence was made the Chief Commissioner of Punjab. Henry Lawrence was shifted to Rajputana as its Resident.

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### **Conclusion**

The span of four years (1849-53), proved very vital for Punjab as the Board of Administration did much useful work. By pulling Punjab out of the burning fireplace of disturbance and anarchy, the Board gave it the cool relief of peace and order. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1839 A.D.), the people realized for the first time that there was something of the name of the government in Punjab. With a proper police system, the life and property of the people were saved. By disbanding the Sikh army and disarming the Sikhs, the Board put an end to the future possibilities of revolts. In keeping with the temperament of the people, the people were given a less expensive judicial system and by introducing useful reforms in the administrative and economic structure, avenues were opened for administrative efficiency and economic progress. The Board also took over the burden of many public welfare works such as the construction of roads, bridges, canals, and rest-houses. The Board, therefore, achieved remarkable success in the northwest frontier area.

In the words of Charles Raike, 'by describing the administrative system of the Board as simple and in keeping with the aspirations of the people had talked.' While Khushwant Singh while assessing the works and achievements of the Board, says, "The administration by the Board was an unqualified success. It brought peace and prosperity to the country which had passed through ten years of civil strife." Thus the British Rule in Punjab made the new Province a durable and reliable bulwark of its power in India.

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