

# Analysis of British Government's Policy in Cis-Sutlej States During Uprising of 1857 As Given In *The Rajas of Punjab*

\*Pushpinder Singh

## Abstract:

Rebellion of 1857 A.D or First war of independence of India disturbed the British rule in several parts of India. However, British Government remained successful to suppress it. Princely states were in the support of British Government especially chiefs of Cis- Sutlej. This paper presents that what kind of policy the British Government had adopted towards Cis-Sutlej States of Punjab and what were the purpose and circumstances due to which Princely states of Cis-Sutlej of Punjab rendered help to British Government during uprising of 1857A.D. Analytical approach has been made to define this topic through examining the Lepel Henry Griffin's work *The Rajas of Punjab*.

**Keynotes:** Lepel Griffin, Cis-Sutlej, British Government, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Anglo-Sikh

## Introduction:

In the rebellion of 1857 A.D chiefs had helped the British Government. It's generally believed that chiefs were pro- British and it was natural for them to help the British. However, it cannot be entirely accepted because tactics and politics of British Government towards Cis-Sutlej states of Punjab during 1857 A.D were not as simple as it seems. Its roots are connected with British and princely chief's political relations prior to rebellion. For the very first instance when first Anglo Sikh war had broken out these princely chiefs didn't help British Government properly.<sup>1</sup> Lepel Griffin states that during Maharaja Ranjit Singh time they had understood that only British could save them from his wrath but after death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh all their fear had gone. "There was no longer a strong and sagacious ruler like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who made British protection sound pleasantry in the ears of neighbouring princes; and this protection now seemed a little more than a restraint, without which each chief fancied that he himself might play the part which, under the circumstances, the Raja of Lahore had played with so much brilliancy and success."<sup>2</sup> So they didn't want to risk their own chief ship by confronting Lahore Government. Lepel Griffin exclaims that from 1809 A.D chiefs had taken under British Government and till 1845 A.D their relations with chiefs remained unchanged which were being protected by Proclamation of 1809 A.D, against the ambitions of Lahore.<sup>3</sup> Lepel Griffin further claims that British Government kept on facilitating them with great benefits under their protection and when time to repay them

<sup>1</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, Low Price Publication, Reprint 2014, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> C.U Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, vol. viii., Government Printing, Calcutta, p.144.

with loyalty and to serve them they secretly or openly joined its enemies.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Nabha and Kapurthala were being punished for misconduct, they had to pay heavy price for opposing the British Government, Raja Davinder Singh was deposed and 1/4<sup>th</sup> land of the Nabha was taken away out of which some portion divided among Patiala and Faridkot as a reward of service in the war.<sup>5</sup> Territory of Kapurthalla, which lies in south of Sutlej was declared an escheat of British Government as punishment.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Rajas of Punjab* a report of Governor General is given. In which reasons behind the failure of chiefs in providing help during Anglo Sikh war are provided. It can be trace in several documents like British official records, *Punjab di Sair* etc<sup>7</sup> but prime points which should be noted that common people opposed the British rule though they had been living under it since 1809 A.D. On the contrary, even after more than thirty years of rule British Government had failed to create a strong bond with Cis-Sutlej Chiefs and with the people of their country. Therefore, Anglo Sikh war forced British to implement precautionary measures for future. Though, Lepel Griffin gives hint of new policy for common people to create better connection but failure of British policy again confronted them in the shape of revolt of 1857 A.D but in meantime they succeeded to win over the chiefs into their side during the revolt.

It is given in *The Rajas of Punjab* that Government awarded Raja Sarup Singh of Jind for his services during Anglo Sikh war with *Sanad* in which confirmation over his ancestral possession and assurance of renewed protection was granted.<sup>8</sup> It is worthy to note that by issuing the *Sanad*, most probably, it would not be unjust to say that British Government had precisely got 'two strings at one bow' tactically. Though Raja Jind was seeking his own safety and protection, he wanted assurance and security for his land and property from British Government in future because Government had autonomously applied rule at various occasion over Jind by considering themselves as Lord Paramount power. On the contrary, British by issuing mere a *sanad* of assurance to Jind got much more important right in exchange from Jind. As per agreement if any enemy would approach to Cis-Sutlej side with the purpose of conquering it, Raja would join the British with his army to expel the enemy. Second, British put another burden on him because as per agreement Raja was told that he would build and repair military roads in his territory for the passage of British army from Amabla to Ferozpur even the width of road was to be decided by British engineer. British Government had experienced that in future if some disturbance

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>5</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, pp. 458-459.

Foreign Department Secret Consultation, 26 December 1846, no.1280-1313, See also; Giani Lal Singh (trans.), Rai Kali and Tulsi Ram, *Punjab Di Sair*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1971, p. 283. Also; *District and States Gazetteers of Undivided Punjab*, vol. iv, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1895, p. 299.

Ganda Singh, *Patiala and East Punjab State Union*, Archives Department, Patiala, p. 62.

Jeet Singh Seetal (trans.) Kanhyia Lal, *Traikh – i-Punjab*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1968, p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

*Kapurthala State- Its Past and Present* by an official, Kapurthala, 1928, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> To esquire from Commissioner and superintendent, Foreign Department, Political Consultation, 30 December 1848, no.166-68. See also: R.R Sethi, *The Ciz-Sutlej States and First Sikh War*, *Journal of Punjab Historical Studies*, vol. iv, Punjab University, Lahore 1935, pp. 144-153.

<sup>8</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 388.

Punjab State Gazetteers, *Phulkian States*, Vol. XVII, Punjab Government Press, Lahore 1904, p. 216.

occurred they would need allies like chiefs of Ciz-Sutlej States and military roads for safe transportation and passage of military in difficult time. As a result during rebellion Patiala and Jind troops were deployed for safer passage of British army over these routes.<sup>9</sup> Thus this pre -planning helped them in near future when in 1857 A.D mutiny happened. At that time protected chiefs stood along them as pillars of British power in Punjab.<sup>10</sup>

Lepel Griffin also shares that the during Anglo Sikh wars troops were not much under control of the chiefs because of their attachment with Lahore troops.<sup>11</sup> From the official letter it gets clear that number of relative of soldiers were in Lahore army that's why their sympathy was more with the Lahore than with British.<sup>12</sup> However, in 1857 A.D British got relief from this factor because as per Ganda Singh, Sikh dislikes intensely the Poorbia soldiers due to their role in destroying the independence of the Kingdom of the Punjab in 1849. There was hardly any unify link between the Punjabis and Poorbi soldiers, they could not make common cause with them to throw off the British yokes.<sup>13</sup> Ganda Singh further adds that that mutiny was aimed to restore the power of Mughal emperor Bahdur Shah but people of Punjab had suffered a lot in the hands of Mughals and had fought against them several times during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, therefore they were not expected to help mutineers at all.<sup>14</sup>

Lepel Griffin highlights that during the interruption of 1857 A.D no other Indian ruler showed great loyalty or rendered more evident service to the British Government than the Maharaja Narinder Singh of Patiala. He was well known head of Sikh Rajas; here Griffin tells that his hesitation or disloyalty would have cost British Government with the most disastrous results. As his ability, brave character and high position would have made him the most formidable leader against our Government. But due to honorable and principled environment of gratitude as well as the loyalty provided by British Government to Maharaja due to which Maharaja without any doubts placed his whole powerful resources and energy under the absolute command of England, at that time when less sincere friends did not bother much. Importance of Maharaja Narinder Singh which was discussed by Lepel Griffin, can be traced in official letters of correspondence between Punjab Government and British Government. They were well aware of the significance of Maharaja Narinder Singh to stop mutiny as they needed allies like Indian rulers because losing grasp even over a single vital leader or ruler especially alias like Narinder Singh who was very capable of leading a leaderless mutiny might have pose serious trouble to British Government. Fear of British Government that Patiala chief could change his side and may join the rebels , is well traceable in Official letters, Phulkian state Gazetteer as well as given in *The Rajas of Punjab*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, pp. 235, 393.

<sup>10</sup> To see the agreement see- C.V. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties Engagements and Sanadas*, vol. viii, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p.203.

<sup>12</sup> Governor Genral Minute, 17 November 1846, Foreign Department, no.4-5, Secret Consultation, 26 December 1846, no.1280-1313.

<sup>13</sup> Ganda Singh, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857 and The Sikhs*, The Missionary, 1959, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Ganda Singh, *Patiala East and Punjab States Union*, Archive Department, Patiala, 1951, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 233-234.

It is worthy to note that chiefs were bounded to assist the British Government with their armies in the time of difficulties and it was result of lesson taught by British to these chiefs during 1809- 1856. That ensured their loyalty and active support.<sup>16</sup> It can also be presumed that they have learnt that their disloyalty would not only mean for them the personal loss of their *gaddis* but might also involve the loss of their territories and, perhaps total annexation of their states. These chiefs could not forget that the chiefs of Ropar, Ladwa and Anandpur had been liquidated for their disloyalty. On the other hand A.C Arora says that the chiefs of Princely states helped British Government not due to liberal attitude of British Government towards them as told by Lepel Griffin rather they sought it as a golden opportunity to win over the gratitude of British government by rendering their services to government and then in return to get concession from them for an example - Papers of Requests.<sup>17</sup> It should also be added that even chief of Faridkot also attain much benefits because as per Lepel Griffin he did excellent service in Firozshar battle and remained loyal. For this he got from British what he wished for i.e. Kotkapura.<sup>18</sup> According to I. Banerjee, British Government awarded the chief also with title 'Raja' for his distinguish services.<sup>19</sup> While according to Khrishan Lal, jealous rivalry among ruling houses was the actual cause of offering services to the British Government as Nabha and Jind were also on the side of British and Maharaja Narinder Singh would not let the rewards of loyalty pass to them.<sup>20</sup>

According to Lepel Griffin Patiala chief was eager to fight with mutineers thus he expressed his desire repeatedly through the letters to go to Delhi. But the appeal was continuously rejected by the British Government. Lepel Griffin gives explanation through the words of chief commissioner that the local people were confused with various rumors about the cartridges, adulteration of flour etc but when Maharaja Narinder Singh himself took the charge courageously and heartily on our side, these mischievous reports began to be discredited because Maharaja was an orthodox Hindu, whose support at such moment was as similar as Brigade of English troops to us and served more to tranquilize the people more than a hundred official disclaimers would have ever done.<sup>21</sup> But according to Raj Khalsa he was a staunch sikh.<sup>22</sup> Here this is to be noted that in the absence of Maharaja whole cis - sutlej could have arise against the British Government but now he was expected to

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Consultation, no. 42. See also: *Phulkian State Gazetteer*, p.49.

<sup>16</sup> See clause 4 and 5 of the Proclamation; C.U Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, p.144.

<sup>17</sup> *After rendering distinguish services during mutiny of 1857, chiefs of cis- sutlej states demanded eight request as a favor for their services were called Papers of requests.* For detail see A.C Arora, *Phulkian Chiefs Papers of Requests, The Punjab Past and Present*, April 1971, p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, 619.

<sup>19</sup> I. Banerjee, *Bengal Past and Present, The Cis-Sutlej States in The Crisis of First Anglo-Sikh War*, Vol. LXXIV, Serial no. 138-139, 1955, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> Krishna Lal, *The Role of Mahraja Narinder Singh of Patiala in the Rebellion of 1857-58, Punjab History Conference Proceeding*, March 1968, p. 284.

<sup>21</sup> Letter Commissioner Ciz – Sutlej States to Chief Commissioner Punjab, 9 March 1858, Foreign Department, Political Proceedings, 2 July 1858, no. 182, para 4.

<sup>22</sup> Giani Gian Singh, *Raj Khalsa*, vol. ii, Lassen Street, Northridge, U.S.A, p. 59.

convince other ciz-sutlej states to follow him in order to serve British Government.<sup>23</sup> S.N Banerjee added that in geographical and strategically manner that Patiala had occupied the important position because of its connectivity to Grand trunk road which made rest parts of India get associated with Punjab and on other hand Delhi wasn't far away but without Maharaja's hostile service from Patiala would results much severe for British as communication would have been cut off between Delhi and Punjab. So the help provided by Patiala chief was much necessary and his presence was too.<sup>24</sup> But according to Salahuddin Malik, probably most significant reason behind it was that the repeated requests made by Maharaja, made British officials cautious as they suspected that opposition may persuade this distinguished chief to join rebel's side. Their doubt on Maharaja issue was not baseless because Emperor Bahadur Shah had made frequent requests to Maharaja Narinder Singh that he will be bestowed with a noble rank and lordly dignity if in return he will be doing their favor and become their vassal, so that they together could arise against the British Government and marched jointly with their armies to Delhi.<sup>25</sup> Lepel Griffin also discussed about the attempts made by Bahadur Shah to lure Maharaja on his side but instead that Maharaja gave these letters to the M.C.G Barnes.<sup>26</sup> While Barnes had once wrote a letter to Montgomery (Judicial Commissioner) about suspicious act of Patiala state when Nihal Chand Diwan of Narinder Singh released 100 fugitive mutineers.<sup>27</sup> It seems that British had taken each and every incident so seriously that they were not in favor to give any opportunity to rebels or to take any risk. Thereby, British Government confidentially took precautionary steps to intercept and vigilance over their own trusted chiefs and people, primarily leaving no chance for any leader to instigate rebels. So, why they didn't be because Muslim and Sikh community brotherhood could pose serious challenge to British Government.

In the opinion of Lepel Griffin, the Raja Nabha was so anxiously wanted to march to Delhi as Raja of Jind had done but it was not allowed and said that he was very young and his life could not be put on the risk. A point should be noted to this fact that the Raja Davinder Singh of Nabha was dethroned by British because he had not helped the British Government therefore naturally Nabha State lost his status and his trust in front of British Government and when mutiny broke out, it came as a God sent chance for new chief of Nabha State to prove his loyalty. That's why Nabha chief to regain his status which had lost due to his predecessors showed much interest to help the British Government during mutiny. Even then a force comprised of 300 men was sent under the command of the Didar Singh to Delhi.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Punjab Government to Government of India, 29 March 1859, Foreign Department, Political Consultation, 29 April 1859, no. 42.

<sup>24</sup> S.N. Banerjee, *A History of Patiala*, vol. II, N.D, p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Salahuddin Malik, *The Punjab and the Indian Mutiny*, *Journal of Indian History*, August 1972, p. 346.

<sup>26</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 234.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of G.C Barnes to Bob Montgomery, 5 February 1858, cited by S.N Banerjee *A History of Patiala*, p.97.

<sup>28</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 465.

See also: Statement of Service Rendered by Raja Bahrpur Singh during Late Disturbance, Foreign Department, Political Proceeding, 2 July 1858, No. 168, para. 27. (N.A.I)

Lepel Griffin says that Raja of Kapurthala served well during rebellion of 1857 A.D though Kapurthala was not bound to render any military services.<sup>29</sup> But the policy of Government got changed after Queen's Proclamation of 1858 A.D. In spite of this, even after 1857 A.D this term was added to the duties of Kapurthala. The exact motive of this term can only be traced from the remarks of Canning's Dispatch. Canning said that British Government instead of focusing on extending their territories they must focused on strengthening their rule within the present limits because they didn't have sufficient European force, no adequate British staff and financial condition were also feeble in current situation to manage any further extension. He further acclaimed by giving Malcom's long back said remarks that "If we would keep on turning all India into Districts, our rule may last only for fifty years but if we would manage to keep number of Native states without political powers but as our loyal instruments, we would exist in India for long."<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion:

The revolt lasted for more than a year. It is well clear from all historical accounts that repression was not an easy task for British. But they successfully managed with the help of allies like chiefs of Cis-Sutlej States to stop the first war of independence of India even when the other parts of India were confronting British, at that time the majority of chiefs and people were in the side of British this could only happened due to the policy of British Government towards Cis-Sutlej states. British Government after First Anglo Sikh war had clearly understood that if they want to thrive in India than they need allies among native state. Thus their decisive policy helped them in future. They succeeded to keep chiefs by their side during the crucial times. Although chiefs are said to be sided with British for their own benefits but it could only be possible due the decisive diplomacy of British that being an alien power it managed to get support among Indians to stand against their own.

<sup>29</sup> Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 576.

<sup>30</sup> Canning's Dispatch to Secretary of the State for the India, April 1860, No. 43-A, para 35.