Venus Upad Part of a Special Serie

3

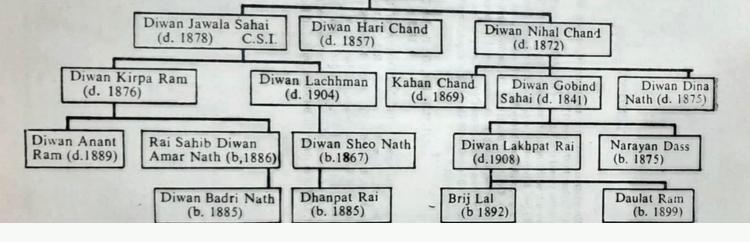
The Dewans of Dogra Kingdom, Power Politics of the Frontiers and the Anglo-Sikh War Indemnity that Eventually Got Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh







Part of a Special Series entitled 'From Kashmir to Haridwar' based on family history, anecdotes, cultural linkages and ancestry, by journalist Venus Upadhayaya.





A 1979 picture of the palace of the Dewan family that was then functioning as a school. The room on the top floor is where my father, a young teacher, lived (Image courtesy: Surinder Spolia).

"History is not black or white, I wouldn't even say it's hoary – it comes in various colours and characters. To escape illusory deposition and propaganda we should try to understand the many layers of incidents and events that underlie big events. Demonizing historical characters or glorifying them doesn't help."





**Venus Upadhayaya** is a Senior Reporter, India and South Asia for The Epoch Times. She was born in Jammu and her ancestral home is in a village in the lower shivalik ranges that are also home to the Dogra/Pahadi culture. Her ancestral home has always fascinated her and this series is her journey to discover her roots. The Gurnal Project is her brainchild.

**Bridge India** is a progressive non-profit think tank dedicated to discourse on public policy. Given its diversity, everything about India, and its polar opposite, is true in unison. Bridge India seeks to highlight and celebrate this nuance, to help India-watchers understand India better.



A 1979 picture of the palace of the Dewan family that was then functioning as a school. The room on the top floor is where my father, a young teacher, lived (Image courtesy: Surinder Spolia).

Downtown Jammu's story is logged into the ledger of my life. In his early youth my father worked as a teacher in a school instituted by Diwan Badrinath, a descendant of Dewan Jwala Sahai, the Prime Minister of Maharaja Gulab Singh. And before my parents married, my father lived in a top-floor quarters in the Dewan family's massive palace which by then had been turned into a school.

My parents moved out of the school into the bustling neighbourhood behind Mubarakmandi, when my mother was a few months pregnant with me. It was not just the case of my father, but the Dewan family had given shelter to scores of other people including the 1947 partition refugees in their family properties in the downtown.

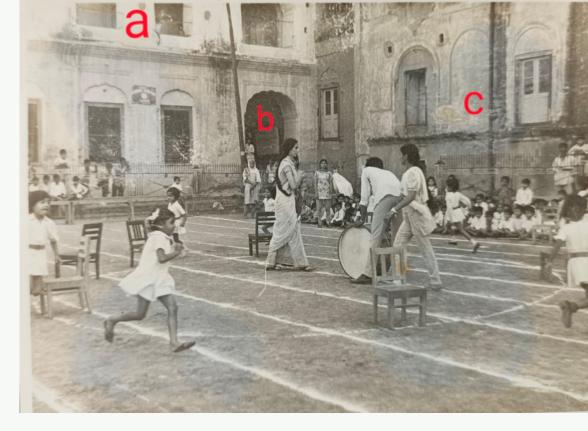
This also included my maternal grandfather's mother who after widowhood lived by the magnanimity of the Dewan family. I'm told the pandatain (Pandit's wife) would attend to non-priestly, prayer-room chores and look after the cleanliness of the Dewan's family temple at their home in the downtown.

Her husband, Anant Ram Khajuria was employed in the Dogra police, and they lived at Dounthali bazaar, just at the entrance of Mubarakmandi or the palatial complex of Dogra rulers in Jammu. This bazaar, once a hob-nob of colourful cultural life, still stands there. After Anant Ram died an untimely death the poor widow with very young children had a tough life in a city where the charitable disposition of rich families like that of the Dewans played an important role in maintaining general welfare.

The Dewans of the Dogra rulers hailed from the famous Eminabad family which is now in Gujranwala in Pakistan (1). Starting with Jawala Sahai, Maharaja Gulab Singh's Prime Minister, the Eminabad family (descendants of Sahai) maintained their monopoly over



The playground of Dewan Badrinath School in late 1970s. a: the lateral wall of Gadhadhar temple, b: andheri gali (dark tunnel) leading to the central garden of Mubarakmandi; it still exists c: a lateral wall of the Mubarakmandi complex; this is under restoration today (Image courtesy: Surinder Spolia).



the Dewan's or the Prime Minister's office for almost the greater length of the Dogra dynasty.

They were rich, influential and their history of almost five centuries of influential presence in the Indus River basin along the trade routes implied they understood this region unlike anyone else. No wonder by the time Dogra dynastic rule started they had an important role to play.

According to Sir Lepel Griffin (1), the British diplomat and author, the Sahais "have from the commencement of Maharaja Gulab Singh's reign practically monopolized the office of the Dewan or Prime Minister, and are therefore responsible for much of the good or the evil repute attaching to the rule of Dogras in Kashmir."

The Dewan Badrinath School, as it continues to be called, was almost everyone's alma mater in 1970-80s and 1990s – maybe half of downtown Jammu's population studied there with almost everyone running shops and businesses today in downtown's Pacca Dunga market having some connection with that educational ecosystem.

The school was like a massive fourfloured castle – on one side it merged with a bustling neighbourhood and on the other side it merged with the outer wall of the two-century-old Gadha Dhar ji temple whose ceilings even in my early childhood boasted of Victorian balloon chandeliers and massive idols of Radha, Krishna and Balrama. The temple was built by the first Maharaja Gulab Singh and one of the temple's purohit nearly six decades ago was my maternal great grandfather, Shiv Ram Padha and later his sons.

They were employed by the Dharmarth trust that was also set up by the Maharaja with a religious endowment immediately after the creation of the kingdom. I have fond childhood memories of our weekly visits to this temple and of attending a few marriage events of relatives that happened in the massive veranda of the temple.





"They were rich, influential and their history of almost five centuries of influential presence in the Indus River basin along the trade routes implied they understood this region unlike anyone else. No wonder by the time Dogra dynastic rule started they had an important role to play."

As a child I would stretch myself to look over the parapet walls of this veranda to catch life unfolding on the playground of the Dewan's school. In fact, the ground was once a pond as is generally the case with a Hindu temple's vicinity.

With many in downtown Jammu studying in Dewan's school, my case was no exception, and I too studied the first step of kindergarten there. I remember my school had a zoo and a mini train as well. It stood just outside the massive, south-western entrance gate of Mubarak Mandi, the palatial complex and the summer capital of the Dogras. It still stands there in a muchreduced form both in infrastructure and population. Its classical architectural features were removed and replaced with time.

The first eleven years of my life were very closely connected to Mubarak Mandi! It was almost a daily affair in summers to pluck pink bougainvillea flowers from the outer wall of the school; to watch boys play cricket in its ground or to witness manja makers spread an intricate mesh of strings before gumming, colouring and coating them with glass powder, just before the kite festival's fervour gripped the entire downtown Jammu annually.

In fact, the neighbourhoods around the school remain some of the most densely populated regions of Jammu even today. Many of the old city's landmarks still lend their names from the Dewans like the Dewaney-Da-Malla (The Dewan's neighbourhood) and the massive Dewan mandir whose residential quarters for decades hosted the families that migrated in 1947 from across the western border.

The Diwan mandir, also called the "Lakshmi Narayan mandir" was built by Jawala Sahai who donated it to Pt. Narain Dutt, the traditional purohits of the Eminabad family. The purohits with the surname "Vasudev" belonged to the gotra "Vatsya" who trace their ancestry to Gujarat.

The samadhis of Jawala Sahai and Dewan Anant Ram today reside within this temple premises while the 8th-9th generation of Pt. Narain continues to serve the temple that urgently calls for conservation and care.

The Dewan Mandir like the Dewan



Badrinath School was another highlight in downtown Jammu's cultural life. I remember visiting it during childhood and being enchanted by its regalness. The open courtyards with ample ground for children to run and play were particularly attractive.

The Ramleela (Ramayana based theatre) performed in this temple that continues to this day produced some star performers of pre-independence era like KL Saigal and Om Prakash who went on to create a mark for themselves in the history of Indian cinema in Calcutta and Bombay (today's Mumbai) (2).

There's also a Diwana Mohalla at Eminabad where the ruins of family's properties stand today in Pakistan (3). The Dewan Badrinath school in Jammu was set up under a trust by Badrinath's wife Dewanini Vidyawati in 1963. However, the first educational institution was established in 1908 as <u>Anglo Sanskrit High School Eminabad</u> in Gujranwala by Dewan Badri Nath's father, Rai Saheb Dewan Amar Nath, the former governor of Jammu (appointed 1893) and later the Foreign Minister of Kashmir (4).

Amar Nath owned an estate of over



The Anglo Sanskrit School of Eminabad on August 23, 2020. It was set up by Dewan Amar Nath, the then Foreign Minister of Dogra kingdom in 1908. It continues to house a school in Pakistan (Image courtesy: Ali Usman Baig).



10,000 acres in Gujranwala (today's Pakistan) and adjoining districts as well as a jagir in Kashmir which also fed his social endeavours (1). The educational institution set up by Amar Nath in Gujranwala had a hostel and a medical dispensary also.

Dewan Badri Nath had graduated from Trinity College Cambridge. Later he did a LLD (doctorate of law) from Glasgow University and was also called to the Bar (1). He was the private secretary of the third Dogra ruler, Maharaja Pratap Singh but he died very young in his early thirties leaving behind a young widow, two daughters and no male heir. My father has passed on to me a few stories of the royal richness of the



The remnants of a 120-room haveli in the Dewana Mohalla in Eminabad, today's Pakistan in 2020. This haveli belonged to the second Khatri Eminabad family, also a Quanungo. The two families were related (Image courtesy: Ali Usman Baig).

Dewanani (Dewan Badrinath's wife).

After partition the Dewan's home in downtown which consisted of about 100 rooms also housed the partition refugees for a few decades until it was converted into a school.

The original school building in Eminabad continues to house a school (4) and some other properties of the family still exist in <u>ruins</u> in Gujranwala (3) that shares the border with today's Samba and Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir and with Pathankot of Punjab.

In the 70-80s the Jammu school not only stood architecturally integrated into the South-west side of the Dogra capital complex of Mubarak mandi which then housed government offices but overall, it stood as a hub-knob of social interaction and cultural identity of Jammu citizenry and played a very important role in its education.



## Untold History of the Dewans of Kashmir

The Dewans were as important and significant in the history of India's northern frontiers as Marco Polo is to the history of China. They created diplomacy and contributed significantly to the literati of the Dogra dynasty. Their contribution to the diplomacy and administration of the wider region can match the contributions of Gulab Singh and his Jamwal Brethem to the war front. "After partition the Dewan's home in downtown which consisted of about 100 rooms also housed the partition refugees for a few decades until it was converted into a school."

Sheikh Abdullah, the former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in an event at Dewan Badrinath School in 1979 (Image courtesy: Surinder Spolia).



It's thus important to know the story of the Diwan family which served the Dogra dynasty from the beginning to almost the end. Here's an attempt at answering many unanswered questions in the history of Kashmir through their story.

Jawala Sahai's ancestor Rai Ugarsen

was from a place <u>called Bhatner</u>, (now known as Hanumangarh) in Bikaner district, close to the Haryana-Rajasthan border (5). He served as the Secretary (called Peshkar) to Mughal Emperor Babur from 1526 to 1530 AD. During one visit to Punjab with Babur, Ugarsen <u>married the daughter</u> of a wealthy official, a *Quanungo* (the one who





keeps the quanun, or law) from a Khatri family of Eminabad in Gujranwala district and settled in the region (5).

Quanungo was an official title for the keeper of revenue records and Eminabad family was the Quanungo for the Mughal administration unit, Pargana. The office of the Quanungo remained with the family for several generations. Henceforth in history the family was called the Eminabad family.

Eminabad itself is a very interesting town in lore, literature and history (6). It was an important junction on the Grand Trunk Road and in the early 16th century existed by the name of Saidpur (6). It was one of the six parganas in the region under Mughals. Eminabad that consisted of 733 villages including part of what's today's Sailkot district in Pakistan also finds its mention in Ain-e-Akbari where it's described as one of the important mahals in Lahore suba (6).

What's important to understand in this context about the Khatri Eminbad family is that they held influence over a land well connected on an ancient trade route and over a land that was inhabited by extremely wealthy merchants. You imagine how much influence and access to political resources this connectivity would have given them across the entire Indus basin. In feudal society where influence was inherited in the family line, five centuries meant a lot of inherited authority as well as political acumen.



The remnants of the 120-room haveli of the Dewan Amarnath Chopra of the famous Eminabad family in Dewana Mohalla, Eminabad, today's Pakistan in 2020 (Image courtesy: Ali Usman Baig).

"You imagine how much influence and access to political resources this connectivity would have given them across the entire Indus basin. In feudal society where influence was inherited in the family line, five centuries meant a lot of inherited authority as well as political acumen."





And this authority finds mention in both the Punjab plains and the hills that later were ruled under the Dogra dynasty. One can trace many characters of influence from the family among various kingdoms and dynasties of the region. For example, another of Jawala Sahai's forefathers and Ugarsen's descendant, Bisham Dass (1) was employed as a writer under Sardar Mahan Singh Sukarchkiya, the father of Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It's to be noted that the Sikh Maharaja's grandfather, Charat Singh took over Eminabad in 1760 and as history evolved in the Punjab plains, Eminabad family's presence in the Lahore court was natural.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave Gulab Singh the jagirs of Beol and Kharoti for his services during the Sikh campaigns in Kashmir in 1813. Jawala Sahai's father Dewan Amir Chand was then appointed as the Karkun (managing agent) of these jagirs by Gulab Singh (1).

Later in 1822 when Ranjit Singh appointed Gulab Singh as the Raja of Jammu based on heredity, the latter appointed Amir Chand as the Madar-ul-Maham (Chief Minister) of Jammu (1). As Gulab Singh's power grew, so grew the power of Amir Chand but it was not because the Chief Minister was rich and financing Gulab Singh's military campaigns.

Contradicting the stories about the Dewan family extensively funding Gulab Singh including loaning huge sums of money to Gulab Singh to pay the British in lieu of Kashmir, I have found no literary evidence of any such thing. Amir Chand became powerful because of his loyalty to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and he accompanied his master in almost all the frontier campaigns. He even took money on credit to buy lead and gunpowder during a campaign on Riasi during the first Maharaja's time. Amir Chand died while on tour with his master at Kidarabad in 1836 (1).

Jawala Sahai continued with his father's work for the Dogra dynasty from then onwards as Dogra's Chief Officer and led Gulab Singh's many diplomatic missions to both the British and the Sikh Kingdom. He later on even played an instrumental role in the diplomatic talks and the treaty signed with the Ladakhis and Tibetans. Sahai was instrumental in winning the British support for Maharaja Gulab Singh and remains a most undiscovered figure in the historical connection between the fall of the Sikh empire and the rise of the Dogra dynasty in its aftermath.

Propaganda mongers have sown hate between the Dogras and Sikhs since decades citing that Jamwal Dogra brothers betrayed Maharaja Ranjith Singh.

Between the fall of Sikhs and the rise of Dogras many historical and complex events unfolded marked by the times of a differently complex political culture. This culture was characterized by dynastic aristocrats, war hardened chieftains and feudal lords living on jagris won for their roles in war victories in the fertile plains of Indus.

The economy of those times devoid of the contemporary economic and political systems and devoid of today's open society approaches was also controlled by those victorious in wars or those facilitating those victories or







The massive South-west gate to Mubarak Mandi complex, just outside the playground of Dewan Badrinath School on Jan. 21, 2024 (Image courtesy: Venus Upadhayaya).

"Contradicting the stories about the Dewan family extensively funding Gulab Singh including loaning huge sums of money to Gulab Singh to pay the British in lieu of Kashmir, I have found no literary evidence of any such thing."

those involved in post-war negotiations. Since the Indus basin remained the Western corridor through which invaders, traders and influencers constantly marched into Indian civilisation, imagine how much of wars' and trans-kingdom trade would have influenced the polity of the region – making such influential, rich families the prominent centre of those days' geopolitics.

I consider Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Sir Lepel H. Griffin and Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Col. Charles Francis Massy, Indian State Corps (Volume I, II & III) a significant work of political importance for the then British administration. The Volume II lists two Quanungo families from Eminabad. Both these families find their mention in first the politics in the Lahore court and later in the Dogra kingdom.

Both these families incidentally today have their *devtas* (community gods) enshrined in the premises of the Dewana mandir in Jammu. The second family is referred to by Sir Lepel as the Nanda Khatri family of antiquity (1).

The fact that Sir Lepel H. Griffin's work lists the genealogy of every aristocratic family and the three volumes were printed by the Civil and Military Gazette Press 1910 of the British Empire lends weight to my thinking about how feudal families of those days on the trade routes of the Indus basin or what's popularly referred to as Punjab were geo-political players before the onset of nation states.

The reality of those times can't be understood with today's concepts. The Sikhs and



A sign board at the Dewan Mandir, downtown Jammu on Jan 21, 2024 (Image courtesy: Venus Upadhayaya).



the Dogras should be studied as the 19th century powers of the Indus basin along with the Afghans. A linear chronology of events can't determine the complexity of their interactions, enmity and friendships - they constantly transformed from employer to employee, from friendships to enmity to at times peaceful and sometimes forced coexistence, to many times fierce competition.

There were times when the Sikhs tried to wrestle power back from the Dogras like the first half of 1845 (7) when the Sikhs rose against Gulab Singh with all their military might. Many Sikh officers of the Dogra garrison also fell off. It was the Diwan family which all throughout never left Gulab Singh's side. Imagine the intrigues and the diplomatic acumen involved!

During the course of their many generations of work, the Eminabad family, like certain other prominent families in the frontier corridor, gained wealth, jagirs and gifts of great value in lieu of their services to the kings they served, particularly from the Dogras and their allies, The British.

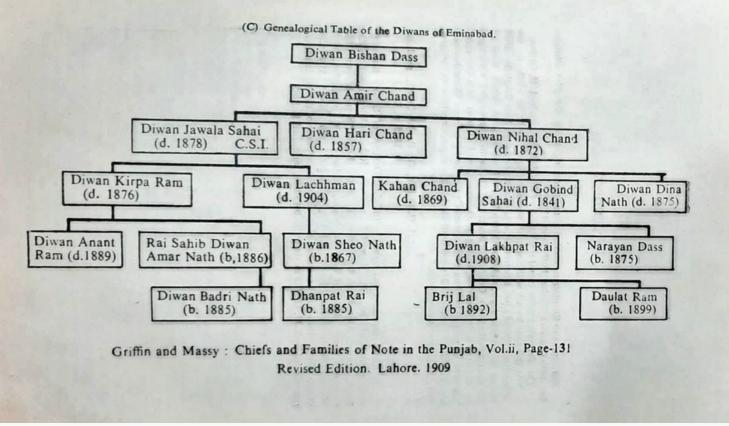
For his successful "facilitation of negotiations" between Gulab Singh and British for the transference of Vale of Kashmir, the family was granted extensive jagirs and for perpetuity an entitlement of four rupees out of every 1000 rupees that the Dogra kingdom would earn (1). This should be particularly noted wasn't granted because the rich Diwans had loaned Gulab Singh the money needed for the transfer of the Vale of Kashmir.

Diwan Kirpa Ram writes in Gulabnama that after the signing of the Treaty of Lahore, the Maharaja alighted in Jasrota and awarded a jagir of rupees ten thousand in royal coin yearly to Jawala Sahai and his descendants. This was in addition to the above fief of four rupees every thousand rupees (8).

Jawala Sahai's son Kirpa Ram took over from him as the Diwan during second







second Dogra Maharaja Ranbir Singh's time while his brother Diwan Hari Chand was mainly employed in military expeditions right from Gulab Singh's time – his participation is noted in the expeditions beyond Ladakh and also to Yasin and Chilas (1).

Jawala Sahai's nephew, Gobind Sahai was appointed in Gulab Singh's court as Mehmandar or host on occasions of visits of ceremony by high Indian British officials. Gobind's father, Diwan Nihal Chand was appointed as confidential agent of the Lt. Governor of Punjab in 1855 and Gobind took over this rank and later in 1885 got promoted to a Mohtamid (confidential agent) with the British Governor-General of India (1). This amply also showcases the wider family's relations with the British.

For these services the British granted him 1500 acres of cultivable land in Hafizbad tehsil of Gujranwala during the times of British viceroy Earl Lytton. The total estate of Gobind was over 11,000 acres and he paid the British an annual revenue of 8000 rupees. His annual earnings from his Kashmir Jagir was Rs 1000 and Rs 3500 from Jammu estate. His other properties in Jammu were earning him another Rs 4000 annually (1). There are other people from the family tree who held important positions in other courts/kingdoms of the region.

More importantly it was Diwan Kirpa Ram who wrote Gulabnamma, a biography in Persian of Maharaja Gulab Singh that lists the general history of Jammu from the very ancient times to 1857 AD, the year of the death of Gulab Singh. Kirpa Ram also wrote a history of Kashmir. He remained Dewan (1) for about a decade from 1865 to 1876, until his early death – a jinx that remained with the descendants too.

Sir Lepel Griffin describes (1) him as an "oriental scholar of some repute" and





highlights that he was "less conservative" as compared to his father and "zealous in encouraging education, establishing hospitals, opening up thoroughfares, introducing silk and other industries, and improving the system of revenue collection."

There were also occasions when certain officials from the family were dismissed – it happened twice during third Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh's time (1) after British residency was established in the state.

Since this coincided with increasing interference by the British in Dogra politics, it needs to be investigated if the decreasing presence of Dewans in the Dogra court was responsible for grave political problems that followed or if their fall was designed by those seeking to replace them.

Even if none of this was the truth, the Diwans of the Dogras who by the time of partition had no male heir left just vanished from Jammu and Kashmir's political history. This could also be a reason why despite holding such economic might and influence in united Punjab they had no one playing any role even in the partition politics.

### Geo-political events from before 1846 Treaty of Amritsar

Before and after the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar – concluded between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the British Government by Frederick Currie and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence - much transpired in the power corridors of Lahore, Calcutta "It needs to be investigated if the decreasing presence of Dewans in the Dogra court was responsible for grave political problems that followed or if their fall was designed by those seeking to replace them."

and across the territory dealt with by this treaty.

This complexity was underlined by the fact that Gulab Singh's acquisition involved consolidation of a territory which had never before been effectively united under one ruler and much of it, with the exception of Kashmir, had never known a settled government (7). Moreover, geography placed this new kingdom at the territorial gateway of the fertile Indian sub-continent and thus at the crossroads of human civilization. It included such diversity of population, interests, climate and lack of continuity in the past that Maharaja Gulab Singh becoming its sovereign ruler at the age of fifty-three was an unprecedented event in history.

The success for bringing such unruly frontiers together would surely go to the Maharaja's astute leadership but







The picture of Jawala Sahai (L) and his son Kirpa Ram (Image courtesy: J&K Archives, Jammu Repository).

there are also certain personalities from history who remained loyal and committed to his command and forged the spine of his endeavours. The foremost in this list is: Jawala Sahai, Gulab Singh's Prime Minister and his lead diplomat.

To understand Sahai's contribution, it's important to understand the events that transpired before and after the treaty was signed. Here are a few events that underlie the significance of his diplomacy:

#### 1: Battle of Toyo in Central Tibet

While Gulab Singh was helping the retreating British force from Afghanistan after they were beaten at the Khyber Pass, news reached him about his general Zorawar Singh's martyrdom at the Battle of Toyo in Central Tibet.

He embarked his Prime Minister, Jawala Sahai on 17 February 1842 to British Resident, Henry Lawrence's camp at Lahore (7). He was afraid that the news of Zorawar's death would cause mutiny among his troops, and he requested Lawrence to not disclose the news of the debacle to the public. Zorawar Singh is remembered in history as Gulab Singh's most valiant warrior and in those times of no phones and lack of swift communication channels, the death of such a warrior could have become fodder to much unrest and insecurity.

#### 2: 1846: Attacked from all sides

Immediately after the Treaty of Amritsar was signed, Maharaja Gulab Singh gained the legal title of the territory, but he was yet not in possession of it. The governor of Sikh's who was still presiding over Kashmir refused to surrender the province. In the battle that ensured the Dogra wazir was killed. Simultaneously, the Lahore durbar also instigated rebellion in Rajouri and Rampur.

In this desperate situation, the Maharaja sent Sahai to the British Governor-General seeking his lawful possession of his territory. The details of this event for which Sahai had to





travel to Shimla are mentioned in the Gulabnama. (8)

The British Governor-general sent Colonel Lawrence to Maharaja's assistance. The British compelled the Sikhs in Lahore to instruct their Governor in Kashmir to yield the province and the Sikhs had to thus send an army against their own agent (7).

They were joined by a small British force under Lawrence, by a force from Jammu under the then Prince Ranbir Singh, another force under Colonel Edwardes joined the Maharaja at Reasi. Kashmir province finally ceded to Gulab Singh who marched into Kashmir on Nov. 9, 1846.

Jawala Sahai's work of leading Gulab Singh's diplomacy with the British and his overall contributions to consolidating the Dogra kingdom can be compared to the work of Sardar Valabhbbai Patel who played a frontline role in consolidating various princely states into free India after its liberation from the British.

However, the context in which these two personalities were embedded were different in their political nature – one was an aristocrat with a lineage of authority in the centuries-old politics of feudal Punjab. Sahai held his loyalty against all odds to a Raja who then became a Maharaja while Sardar Patel was a freedom fighter and a nationalist leader who went on to lay the foundations of a democratic India. Both played significant roles in their times.

#### 3: 1847 Hazara Rebellion

Post the signing of the Amritsar treaty,

Sahai's other contribution came at a time when the tribes of Hazaras rose to rebellion in 1847. Dogras inherited Hazara from the Sikhs like other territories in the region with the signing of the treaty with the British.

Initially the Maharaja had sent Sahai's brother, Dewan Hari Chand to tame the rebels but when he wasn't able to deal with it, Dewan Jawala Sahai was sent to deal with the situation, and he brought it under control (7).

At this time, Maharaja Gulab Singh decided to exchange the territory of Hazara with Munawwar and Garhi with the British. The latter two territories were awarded as jagir to Captain James Abbot for marking the boundary line (7). Again, the Maharaja sent his top diplomat, Jawala Sahai for negotiations on this matter with the British. This resulted in Hazara being assigned to Lahore administration while the region between Muzaffarabad and river Jhelum was given to the Dogras.

#### 4: Ambitions of Dhyan Singh's Sons

The character of Dhyan Singh, the brother of Gulab Singh is talked with lots of animosity by Sikh historians and his conspiracies are credited with the downfall of the Sikh empire.

However, there are certain things about the descendants of Dhyan Singh that could intrigue historians even in context of the treaty of Amritsar.

First when Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh installed Gulab Singh as the Rajah of Jammu in 1822, he gave the jagir of Ramnagar with a title of Rajah to Suchet Singh but Dhyan Singh who







Raja Suchet Singh's memorial tomb at Durbargarh Road that leads to Mubarak mandi, Jammu on Jan. 22, 2024. Heirless Suchet Singh had adopted Gulab Singh's son, Ranbir Singh who inherited his jagirs after his death (Image courtesy: Venus Upadhayaya).

"After the death of Maharaja Ranjith Singh's grandson, the Dogra brothers supported different camps at Lahore durbar - the unwavering kinship of Dogra brothers had finally dislodged."

enjoyed high repute at that time in the Lahore court wasn't given any jagir.

When Gulab Singh requested the Sikh Maharaja to also award Dhyan Singh a jagir, Ranjit Singh said he didn't grant him a jagir because he wanted to establish him as a "Raja-i-Rajagan" meaning the king of all kings (7), according to Paniker.

Lately, however Dhyan Singh was given the district of Poonch as a fief by the Sikhs. Upon his death and the death of his eldest son, Hira Singh, the territory was confiscated by Lahore durbar considering their alleged treachery. After the death of Maharaja Ranjith Singh's grandson, the then third Sikh Maharaja Nau Nihal Singh, it's to be noted that the Dogra brothers supported different camps at Lahore durbar - the unwavering kinship of Dogra brothers had finally dislodged. In the intrigues that followed Dhayan Singh, and the heirless Suchet Singh were killed.

Later when Poonch came under Gulab Singh's control he passed it on to Dhyan Singh's eldest surviving son, Jawahir Singh whom he had earlier also shielded during the bloody Lahore intrigues (7).

But instead of being grateful to his uncle, Jawahir Singh laid claim to Jasrota, the jagir of his slain brother, Hira Singh. He also sought a part of the income of Kashmir and a share in Gulab Singh's personal property. He also demanded that his name be included in the Treaty of Amritsar. He did this claiming these to be a joint property of



all the three Jamwal brothers (7).

Keeping in mind the family culture and society of this region, I can understand Jawahir Singh seeking share of the personal property of Gulab Singh because in feudal societies the elder brother was the patriarch and akin to a father.

However, from any political analyses of past or present, his seeking a share through the Amritsar treaty appears a farfetched preposition. It also highlights the difference in their strategic intellect and their understanding of the British strategic culture.

"Jawahir Singh seeking a share through the Amritsar treaty appears a farfetched preposition. It also highlights the difference in their strategic intellect and their understanding of the British strategic culture.

As expected, Gulab Singh referred this conflict with Jawahir Singh to the British and his agent was once again Jawala Sahai (9). The matter came before Henry Lawrence on 11 August 1847 who asked for a personal interview with Jawahir Singh in Lahore. Paniker writes that Jawahir kept playing for time because he didn't want to face Lawrence whom he perceived to be a close friend of Gulab Singh (7).

Once Sir Frederick Currie replaced Lawrence as Lahore's resident, Jawahir came down to Lahore to meet Sir Frederick and an agreement was signed according to which Jawahir was given the jagir of Chalayar and Moti Singh his younger brother, the jagir of Watala - both got the titles of Rajah. They were asked to annually give one horse with gold trappings to their uncle, the Maharaja Gulab Singh and consult him on all matters of importance. This meant their territories came under Dogra suzerainty.

Panikar writes in his (7) book "Gulab Singh" that their claim to be included in the Treaty of Amritsar was "dismissed as being preposterous" by the British. However this didn't satisfy Dhayan Singh's sons who again quarrelled with each other in 1852 and their conflict of interest again reached the British administration in Punjab. The British awarded Poonch to Moti Singh on the same conditions but following this this Jawahir Singh's intrigues didn't end.

He sent his diwan, Maulvi Nazar Ali to Swat to raise an army who was intercepted by the British and expelled from Punjab. Upon this Jawahir Singh made a visit to Colonel Lawrence seeking that he be made an independent ruler. Keeping in mind what the British perceived as untrustworthiness, the British finally confiscated his estate. By this time, the





kingdom had passed into the hands of second dogra Maharaja Ranbir Singh who exiled Jawahir Singh to Ambala <u>on an annual stipend (11).</u>

## **Relations of two Eminabad families**

It's interesting to note that the two Quanungo families of Eminabad were related and the other Quanungo family had a member, Karam Chand employed by Dhyan Singh (10). Their relations and their enmities formed an important backdrop to the Sikh and Dogra politics.

Karam Chand was Jawala Sahai's cousin – their mothers were sisters but they were feuding (5) and Sahai and Chand also inherited this quarrel. (10) The powerful Sahai got Karam Singh imprisoned. This miffed Jawahir Singh who considered Karam Chand to be his late father's loyal servant and got him released after much effort. Singh employed Chand under him.

While Sahai's fortune and reputation increased leaps and bounds with Gulab Singh's destiny, Karam Singh's waned with Jawahir Singh's misfortunes.

After the 1857 mutiny, he was employed as a commandant of a Police Battalion with the British for which he also earned a minor jagir near Eminabad (10). He then worked as an Honorary Magistrate in Gujranwala before joining the Dogra court in 1874. Some of his descendants continued to work in the Dogra court before disappearing from politics.

Some descendants of the second Eminabad family, also called the Nanada Khatri family, were working in the Dewan Badrinath school as well. In fact one was my father's colleague and I remember accompanying my young parents to this old-style classical home in a narrow lane in the old Jammu city and carrying the gift of a lovely frock back home. The home no longer exists and is likely replaced by a modern structure but I can still tell where it stood in the lanes of the locality called Kucha Nahar Singh. This location was just a 3 minutes walk from Dewan Badrinath School or the Gadha Dhar temple.

The relations between the two Eminabad families provide us a rare documented glimpse into the lives of feudal lords and their families – their relations, intrigues, ambitions and how they impacted politics and were in turn impacted by it.





### If the Diwans didn't pay for the 'Vale of Kashmir', who did?

Gulab Singh's payment of 75 lakhs to the British for "Vale of Kashmir" is an extremely debated topic. Ironically in history this wasn't an incident established by an easy event. A linear definition or an intent to simplify this event thus will always be an unjust endeavour aiming at easy and false propaganda. Contradicting the information available online on a few social media and online media platforms, historical evidence says that the Dewans didn't loan any money to Gulab Singh to pay for Kashmir.

In fact it wasn't Gulab Singh's intention to pay for the valley of Kashmir. There are two events that support it: First, Gulab Singh was offered Kashmir by Sikhs even before the treaty of Lahore was signed (7). Clause 12 of the treaty shows that the areas between Ravi and Indus were to be handed over to Gulab Singh for facilitating a treaty between the British and the Sikhs after the Anglo-Sikh war. The British were open to let Gulab Singh negotiate because he hadn't fought against them.

Second, despite this clause, Misr Lal Singh, the Prime Minister of aggrieved Sikh Rani Jindan offered the British all the hilly land between the rivers Beas and Sindh including the valley of Kashmir for the 1.5 crore indemnity "for the expenses of the war" in cash the British had demanded under the Treaty of Lahore after the war from the Sikhs.

Thus in a letter to Lord Ellenborough, Lord Hardinge wrote (7) (Chapter: VI) explaining his actions vis-a-vis the Treaty of Amritsar: "There was no sale of Kashmir at all. ... It should clearly be understood that the Treaty of Amritsar does not stand by itself. It is to be read along with the Treaty of Lahore, which will make it clear Kashmir was not sold."

Two years before the signing of the Treaty of Lahore, Gulab Singh had secured his release from the Sikhs after the loss of his forces at Satwari (roughly today's location of the Jammu airport) for 68 lakh rupees. This event was itself contrived because he was suspected to have looted the Lahore treasury and Lahore court ordered Gulab Singh's arrest when it didn't even have money to pay salaries. This should rest aside some suspicions that Gulab Singh paid the British from what he looted from Lahore.

When Gulab Singh heard about Lal Singh's cunning proposal to the British, he offered to retire to Varanasi and requested the British to make his son, Ranbir Singh the Rajah of Jammu. It was a common practice to retire to the sacred town of Kashi during those days. Many kings and chieftains have recorded history of doing this in the sub-continent including from the Sikh court.

However, Lord Hardinge had a different comprehension of the situation and he instead decided to give the territory to Maharaja Gulab Singh for one crore rupees. Later the Colonial rulers kept Chamba, Kullu, Mandi and some regions of Sutlej and Beas rivers within their own administration and thus 25 lakhs (2.5m) was reduced from one crore (10m) rupees.





The memorial stone inside the tomb of Raja Suchet Singh, the heirless brother of Gulab Singh whose 15 lakhs, kept in Ferozpur paid the first instalment to the British for the Sikh provinces of Hazara and Kashmir (Image courtesy: Venus Upadhayaya, 22 January 2024).

In a letter to the Secret Committee, Lord Hardinge wrote (7): "that the trans Beas portion of Kulu and Mandi with the fertile district and strong position of Nurpur and the celebrated fort of Kangra and the key to the Himalayas in native estimation with its districts and its dependencies should be in our possession".

Gulab Singh's younger brother, Suchet Singh had buried Rupees 15 lakhs in Ferozpur (16). East India Company refused to give this to the Lahore Durbar and this in turn was reduced from the 75 lakhs leaving only 60 lakhs to be paid by Gulab Singh.

Ten lakhs (1m) rupees were further forgiven by the British (16) and the rest 50 lakhs was paid by Maharaja Gulab Singh in instalments. It's said that Gulab Singh loaned some amount of what he paid to the British from Shaikh Saudagar, the transport supplier to the Sikh Government. Shaikh was in return made the Wazir of Jammu. The <u>money was paid</u> to the British in four instalments and the last was paid on March 14, 1850, according to a recent media report in Kashmir Life.

This could be a possible scenario, however it's difficult to find primary sources of this media report nor does the media give any. It's also very difficult to find <u>substantial information</u> about Shaikh Saudagar. He is mostly remembered in public life for a pool he had dug and a garden he had planted in the heart of Sialkot (which after partition went to Pakistan). His haveli (royal residence) existed in Jullaka Mohalla in downtown Jammu, the locality where I attended my primary school (17).

Propaganda mongers have also accused Maharaja Gulab Singh of levying heavy taxes on his subjects to pay what he owed to the British. Sir Walter Roper Lawrence, the first Settlement Commissioner of Kashmir whom Kashmiris fondly called "Lawrence Sahib" termed these as "exaggerated reports."



"Exaggerated reports state that the purchase-money paid for Kashmir was recouped in a few years, but this is not correct. Maharaja Gulab Singh took care that the revenue reached the treasury, and he took care that there should be no unnecessary expenditure," said Lawrence in his book "The Valley of Kashmir" (12).

While traveling and digging through history, I have come across a few accounts of how much the Jamwal brothers acquired from the individual treasuries of all jagirs or small kingdoms they won in war between 1822 and 1847. Before acquiring Vale of Kashmir, Gulab Singh had already extended his rule over the 84 jagirs surrounding Vale of Kashmir.

Each of these wars would also have cost him but each would have also earned him. Plus his kingdom included traditionally rich jagirdars and he controlled most important trade-linked mountain passes to central Asia, Tibet and to the Indian mainland. If he could pay 68 lakhs (6.8m) to Sikhs for his release just two years before the Treaty of Amritsar was signed, then why could he not afford paying 50 lakhs (5m) for the Valley of Kashmir.

The Maharaja had also offered to pay 1.2 lakh (1.2m) (15) per annum to the Sikh Governor of Kashmir while negotiations were going on between the two after the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar. Even though Paniker talks about the difficulty in paying the "75 lakhs" - in the context of the larger state of affairs and much geopolitical at stake both for the Dogras and the British, I don't think it was significantly tough for the Maharaja who surely knew the economics of the region more than anyone else.

Above all, he had the trust of the British who, post the intriguing geo-politics of Anglo-Sikh war and threatened by the approaching Russians from the north, deliberately anointed him as an important king in the strategic region. There's no doubt that the British had tested waters with Gulab Singh and knew his military might and leadership in the region.

It's very visible that the British Empire made it easier for Maharaja Gulab Singh to make the payment of 75 lakhs (7.5m). If they wanted to make it difficult they had every means and ample opportunities to do that but instead they went every possible way to reinforce Gulab Singh's power.

According to one Sikh source (14), after the signing of the treaty of Lahore, when British let the Sikhs know that would offer Hazara and Kashmir to Gulab Singh if he paid the war indemnity the Sikhs owed, the Sikhs tried to raise the money. But the British foiled their plans by insisting that the Sikhs have already given the territory to the colonial rulers.

The British wanted a powerful Gulab Singh to reinforce their control over the rebellion-prone Punjab chieftains – history amply proves how the British and Gulab Singh came to each other's military aid whenever problems rose in these frontiers where the British had just arrived and where Singh traced his many generations of ancestry. A powerful Gulab Singh meant a powerful court consisting of powerful, rich and loyal feudal lords like Jawala





Sahai.

Due to his constant absence from Jammu right after he was appointed its Raja, the administrative affairs were mainly looked after by Sahai (7) – the British knew his importance in the region. Moreover, the British favoured Gulab Singh because they felt it wise to anoint a Rajput Raja as they were also wary of both the Sikhs and the Afghans.

A British scholar (14) mentioned that by creating a Dogra kingdom under Gulab Singh, Governor General Henry "The British favoured Gulab Singh because they felt it wise to anoint a Rajput Raja as they were also wary of both the Sikhs and the Afghans."

Hardinge had followed the policy of the earlier Sikh rulers to separate the plains of the Indus river basin from the basin's hills. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, according to British Civil Servant Sir George Clerk, "fostered in the north of his kingdom a Rajpoot power, because it could have no affinity with turbulent Khalsa on one side, or with malignant and vindictive Islam on the other" (14).

The same can be said for Sahai's case too – both Gulab Singh and the British favoured him because of his ancestry and his connections in the region and obviously his statecraft and his administrative acumen too.

Sahai's relations with the British and the fiefs and the titles granted and awarded to him by the British also indicates that the British policy and interests benefited from him – if not equally or more than Gulab Singh but certainly as someone held in high trust on matters of unruly territories of the frontiers. The latter is the key in understanding the complex state of affairs and characters in history in this part of the world.

History is not black or white, I wouldn't even say it's hoary – it comes in various colours and characters. To escape illusory deposition and propaganda we should try to understand the many layers of incidents and events that underlie big events. Demonizing historical characters or glorifying them doesn't help. It can help the least in this complex region.



# Bibliography

(1) Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Sir Lepel H. Griffin and Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Col. Charles Francis Massy, Indian State Corps (P-131 to 134) (Volume II) Printed by the Civil and Military Gazette Press 1910

(2) Dewan Mandir Ram Leela: A Dying Heritage of JAMMU. Article published in the Daily Excelsior on Feb. 6, 2022/ https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/dewan-mandir-ram-leela-a-dying-heritage-of-jammu/

(3) Haveli of Seth Dewan Amarnath Chopra, Eminabad. (2020), travel blog of Pakistani photographer, Ali Usman Baig, June 10, 2022/ http://aliusmanbaig.blogspot.com/2022/06/haveli-of-seth-dewan-amarnathchopra.html

(4) ANGLO SANSKRIT HIGH SCHOOL EMINABAD (2020), travel blog of Pakistani photographer, Ali Usman Baig, June 20, 2022/ http://aliusmanbaig.blogspot.com/2022/06/anglo-sanskrit-high-schooleminabad.html

(5) Family website: Choppra Khemlani family (Old Documents, referred to the Haridwar reference of migration from Bhatner)

(6) Eminabad: Fact, Fiction and Fame by Imran, a blogger from Ontario. (https://www.meemainseen.com/2019/01/eminabad/)

(7) Gulab Singh by K.H Paniker

(8) Gulab nama by Diwan Kirpa Ram (Translated from Persian & Annotated by Sukhdev Singh & Anita Charak Billawaria, GULSHAN BOOKS, P-339, C-51).

(9) Gulab nama by Diwan Kirpa Ram (Translated from Persian & Annotated by Sukhdev Singh & Anita Charak Billawaria, GULSHAN BOOKS, P-341, C-51).

(10) Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Sir Lepel H. Griffin and Chiefs and the Families of Note in the Punjab by Col. Charles Francis Massy, Indian State Corps (P-135 to 137) (Volume II) Printed by the Civil and Military Gazette Press 1910

(11) The Story of Poonch Kingdom published July 16, 2019 by Travel The Himalayas (https://travelthehimalayas.com/kiki/the-story-of-the-poonch-kingdom)

(12) The Valley of Kashmir by Sir Walter Roper Lawrence (P-201)



# Bibliography

(13) <u>http://malicethoughts.blogspot.com/2018/09/part-iv-three-brothers-and-nephew-raja.html</u>

(14) Sir Henry Hardinge and the Crisis in Punjab 1844-8, Anthony Kellett, M. A. Thesis, Department of History, McGi11 University. (149) (150) (<u>https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=TC-QMM-50250&op=pdf&app=Library&oclc\_number=895262220</u>)

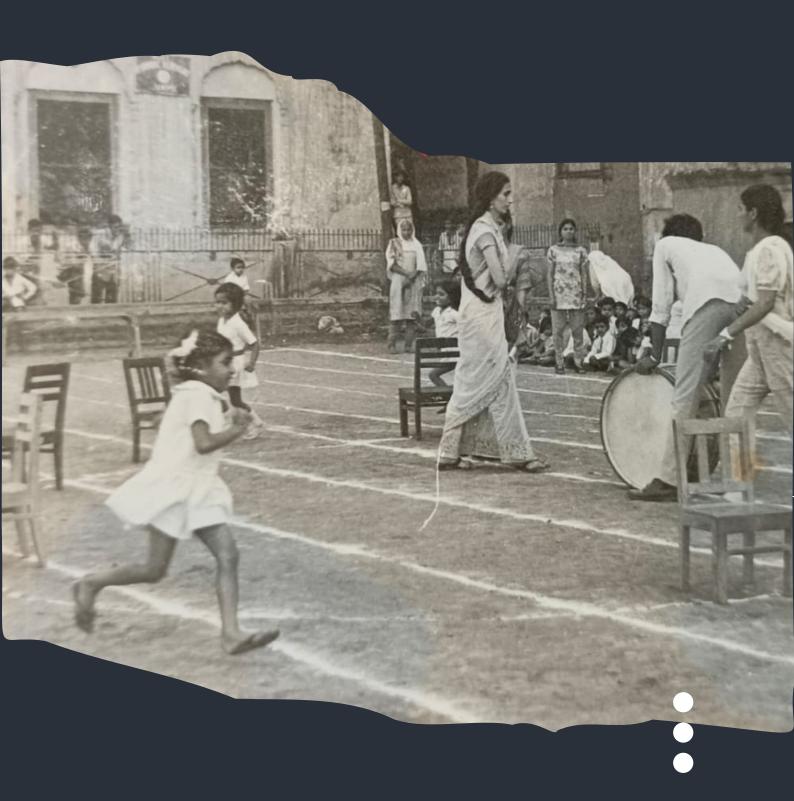
(15) Rulers of India, Viscount Hardinge by Charles Viscount Hardinge, B.A.(Oxford at the Clarendon Press) (P-148)

(16) Maharaja Gulab Singh by Mansa Ram 'Chanchal' in Hindi by Manvi Publications, Panjtherthee, Jammu (P-145)

(17) Jammu and Kashmir State Research Biannual (Editor Dr. S.M. Iqbal (Vol. I, No. II)







Find out more at www.bridgeindia.org.uk