

Role Of The Patiala State Against The Namdhari Movement

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This research paper is based on the role of the Patiala State against the Namdhari Movement. It is an attempt to highlight the behaviour and policy of the Patiala State to suppress the Namdhari Movement. The states were playing a great role in suppressing the movement. The States were in fact British government loyalists which were bound to their loyalty with Government.

The British influence on the Phulkian states was visible by the early nineteenth century during the British Government for seeking protection against the rising power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. There was no doubt that Ranjit Singh was very moderate towards the Phulkian Rajas and he was never hesitant to solve their intricate problems whenever such situations occurred. But in due course and with the rising power of Ranjit Singh, they become suspicious of his designs and hence sought British protection. The leaders of the Cis-Satluj states send a deputation to the British Residence in Delhi under Mr. Seton and presented their memorandum to the British Resident on 1 April, 1809.¹ They pledged their loyalty to every succeeding power in Delhi and formally sought protection of the British. The proposal was readily accepted by the Government and he was instructed to issue a proclamation to the Cis- Satluj chiefs defining their future relations with the British power on the other hand. A treaty had been concluded on the 25th of April, 1809, between Mr. Metcalfe on the part of the British Government and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But the articles of this proclamation were to be as follows:²

1. An assurance of permanent protection against the authority and control of Raja Ranjit Singh.

2. Exemption from all pecuniary tribute.
3. The exercise of the same rights and authority that the rulers had hitherto enjoyed within the limits of their respective possessions.
4. Facility and accommodation to the British troops whenever the Government shall judge necessary, for purpose connected with the general interests of the state, to march into their country.
5. Zealous co-operation with British power on any invasion of their territory.

Ochterlony issued a proclamation to all the Cis-Satluj states on May 2, 1809, on the lines suggested by the British Government. Meanwhile, a treaty had been concluded on the 25th of April, 1809, between Mr. Metcalfe on the part of the British Government and Maharaja Ranjit Singh.³ According to which he undertook to abstain from committing any encroachments on the possession or rights of Cis-Satluj states. Thus the Cis-Satluj States came under the protection of the British Government. By the treaty of 1809 with the British, as soon as the Cis Satluj states were free from the fear of Ranjit Singh, they tried to demolish and rob each other. Hence, the British found another proclamation on 22 August 1811 to protect them against each other as well.⁴ This had increased their power of interference, patronage, reprimand and even armed intervention, so that these states as time went on, became absolute dependencies of British regime rather than independent rulers in treaty alliance with the British power, of equal rank in law if not in fact.

Patiala, the premier Indian State in the Punjab, was essentially a military States and was the largest and most important of the Sikh States belonging to the group known as Phulkian States. It ranked among the first twelve States in India. Its Rulers had played a very important part in the

consolidation of British rule in India.⁵ The Patiala family descended from the second of the sons of Phul and it had been established as a ruling power of the Sutlej regime since 1753, when the present capital was founded by Sardar Ala Singh, a grandson of Phul.⁶ Ala Singh was certainly one of the most distinguished Sikh Chiefs of his Days. He was the most powerful chief in the south of Satluj. He had three sons Sardul Singh, Bumman Singh and Lal Singh who all died during his life time. When Raja Ala Singh died in August 1765, his grandson, Amar Singh became the Raja of Patiala. Raja Amar Singh made Patiala the most Powerful State between the Jamuna and the Satluj. In February 1781, Raja Amar Singh who was only thirty five years of age also died, but after his death administration fell into disorder, and in 1812 the British Government temporarily took over the affairs of the State. Raja Sahib Singh, the new Chief of Patiala State was only six years of age. Raja Sahib Singh succeeded Amar Singh and the state was wisely administered during part of his life-time and during the minority of his son by his wife, Rani Aus Kaur, a woman of great ability. Rani Aus Kaur was a very ambitious and her relation with her husband became very strained. She turned her arms against Raja Jaswant Singh of Nabha and Raja Bhag Singh of Jind.⁷ For this Purpose, she made alliance with Bhai Lal Singh of Kaithal and Sardar Bhanga Singh of Thanesar. Raja Bhag Singh and Raja Jaswant Singh requested Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore to interfere in the matter. Ranjit Singh felt very happy in getting an opportunity of interference and on 26 July 1806, crossed the Satluj with a big force. He did not make sincere efforts to restore friendship between the Patiala Raja and his Wife. He had received from both large sums of money to secure his good-will. Moreover, in spite of the heavy expenses incurred by the Patiala State in connection with the visit of Ranjit Singh, the relation between the Raja of Lahore was the signal or a renewal of the conflict between Raja Sahib Singh and Rani Aus Kaur.⁸ So Ranjit Singh and his forced went back to their Kingdom.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was again invited and he reached Patiala in September 1807, with a big force. Both Raja and Rani did their best in order to induce him to espouse the cause of one party or the other. It was mere question of Money and Diamonds;

she gave Ranjit Singh brass gun taken by the English during the Satluj campaign. In order to strengthen the ties of friendship with Raja Sahib Singh of Patiala, Maharaja Ranjit Singh arranged a meeting with him at Lakhnour (Ambala District) on November 1808. He received Raja Sahib Singh with the utmost kindness and swore to remain always his friend. As a token of eternal brotherhood, Ranjit Singh changed his turban with Sahib Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a taken this diplomatic step so that Raja Sahib Singh might not seek the shelter of the British. But Raja Sahib Singh did not believe in the sincerity of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He along with other Cis-Satluj chiefs requested the British Government to give protection to them against the aggressive designs of the Sikh Maharaja. The British Government acceded to their request and according to their treaty with Maharaja Ranjit Singh made on 25th April 1809, Cis-Satluj chiefs were made free from any kind of interference from Lahore Government.⁹ The title of Maharaja was conferred on the Ruler of the Patiala State in 1810 by the emperor Akbar II.¹⁰

Under Maharaja Sahib Singh, the State of Patiala was taken under the special protection of the British Government¹¹. It should be seen that from the year 1809, when the Chiefs were taken under British protection, till 1845, their relations with that Government had undergone no change. Protected by the proclamation of 1809 against the ambition of Lahore, and by that of 1811 from one another the Cis-Satluj Chiefs had enjoyed thirty-six years of the absolute peace and security. They were allowed absolute civil, criminal, and fiscal jurisdiction within their respective territories, subject to the general authority of the Governor-General's agent, while the British- Indian Government had most scrupulously abstained from any interference with their internal and domestic affairs. Under its strong protection, which asked for no return save good conduct and loyalty, they had greatly prospered.¹² At the time of first Anglo Sikh War Narinder Singh was a maharaja. He helped the British Government materially during the war and his assistance was acknowledged by an increase of territory. During the disturbance of 1857-58 no ruler in India showed greater loyalty or rendered more conspicuous services to the British Government than Maharaja

Narinder Singh¹³. Maharaja unhesitatingly placed his whole power, resources and influence at the absolute disposal of the English during the darkest and most doubtful days of the mutiny. Patiala supported the British with 8 Guns, 2,156 Calvary, 2,846 Infantry and 156 officers; while 1858 the drafts included 2 Guns, 2, 930 Infantry and 907 Swords.¹⁴

On the 7th January on the occasion of the assumption by the her Majesty of the title of Empress of India, His Excellency the viceroy, in company with the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, visited Patiala, where he was received with great state, honours and he himself installed the Maharaja. The address of His Excellency on the occasion was as follows:-

“That the confidence then reposed by the Phulkian Chiefs in the honesty, the wisdom, and the strength of that Government was not misplaced, satisfactory evidence exists in the fact that at this moment the wealth, the dignity and the power of Patiala are greater than they were at the time of the engagement which guaranteed to this State the protection of the Government in which its Chiefs have so loyally trusted. On their part, meanwhile, all the Maharajas of Patiala, and especially your Highness’s father and grandfather, have faithfully and with unswerving and unbroken active loyalty fulfilled their obligation to the Suzerain Power. In the year 1857, his highness Maharaja Narinder Singh placed all his resources and his great personal influence absolutely at the disposal of the Government. His Highness then sent to Delhi a contingent, whose valuable services we still gratefully remember, and the assistance then rendered by the Maharaja has already been acknowledged and rewarded by Her Majesty’s Government.”¹⁵

Maharaja Narinder Singh was one of the first Indian Prince who had received the Knight Grand Commandership of the most Exalted Order of the Star of India in 1861, and about same time he was made a member of the Legislative Council of the Government of India for making laws and regulations. He died on 13 November, 1862, at the age of thirty nine. Mohinder Singh, the only son of the Maharaja, was only 10 years old at the time of his father’s death¹⁶. During the time period of Maharaja Mohinder Singh a Kuka incident took place in 1871.

The founder of this remarkable movement was Baba Ram Singh, a man of great personal charm and magnetism. The Namdharis while reciting Sikh Mantras and repeating the name, of God/Guru often developed emotions screamed and shouted turbans in their hands and hair streaming in the air, hence they were called Kukas or the Shouters.¹⁷ The Namdhari Movement had particularly its socio-political character. The Kukas were also believed to have propagated their doctrine among the native princes. The Government kept its sharp eye on the activities of the Namdharis. The Government had the effect of putting a stop to the movement. The Government had been taking cooperation with the Patiala, “it was better that this sect did not exist” meaning that it was better that it were put down. In Patiala and Nabha authorities did not really like them. In Jind, they had been firmly systematically discouraged.¹⁸ The Raja of Jind was an honest well wisher of the British. He had discouraged the Kukas, and had his troops in five orders and was considering the matter of employing a thorough safe British officer to drill his troop. His force would be a real stand by in rising.¹⁹ The Kukas had their strong feelings against cow slaughter. After annexation of Punjab the Governor General in 1849 modified the former orders declared that for future “No one should be allowed to interfere with the practice by his Neighbour; of customs which that neighbour’s religion permits”.²⁰ The Board of Administration ruled that the prohibition which had formerly been maintained solely out of difference to a Sikh sovereign, must now be removed and that in every large town a spot for the shambles and butchers shops should be appointed. But particular care should be taken not to select the neighbourhood of any Hindu religious buildings and the cows should be severely slaughtered outside. These orders were carried out in Amritsar by Mr. C.B Saunders in 1849, which selected the shop at a short distance from the city and caused an enclosure to be erected there and forbade the sale of the flesh of kine in city in shops or in an open manner. From that day to this the same system has continued.²¹ There was opened the Slaughter house near the gate of the Golden Temple at Amritsar. In 1871 Ram Singh followers made an attack on the butcher of Amritsar. Three butchers were killed on the spot and three were badly bounded. Baba Ram Singh was ordered to produce

himself before the magistrate and confess their guilt. On their own confession, four Namdharis were hanged on 15th September 1871. Namdharis had again taken attack on butchers of Raikot in the Ludhiana District on 15th July 1871. Four butchers were killed and seven badly injured. The police working in this case was admirable because not a single person had been unnecessarily arrested. To the real co-operation of the Patiala, in conjunction with police and tracers, there took place the arrest of these culprits.²² L.H Giffin also mentioned in his telegram 29 July 1871 about the rendered help of Maharaja of Patiala;

*"I have heard by telegraph of arrest of the seven Kukas in Patiala territory, whither they had been traced from Raikot. Three sword were also found, further particulars will be sent when are received by his honour the Lieutenant-Governor. The Sikhs naturally wish to fix the crime on the obnoxious sect of Kukas, and is as yet no certainty that the right person have been arrested. His Highness the Maharaja of Patiala is giving every assistance in the following case. Seven Kukas were traced and arrested by the Patiala police."*²³

Seven Namdharis were arrested in Raikot murderer case. Five Namdharis were belonged to Nabha and two to Patiala State. These culprit Namdharis had been arrested with the help of Maharaja of Patiala and Nabha. In this case, three of the above Kukas, named Mustan Singh, Gurmukh Singh, Mangal Singh were hanged at Raikot among the two Hundred spectators. Suitable rewards have ordered to be given at once to the Patiala Thanedars and subordinate officers and men of the police, as well as to any others by whose assistance the Kukas have been arrested.

In the Telegram from E.C. Bayley, C.S.I. Secretary of the Government of India to Secretary of the Punjab had also mentioned about excellent service of Patiala.

"The Government General in council having been demi-officially informed of the excellent services rendered by the officials of his Highness the Maharaja of Patiala, in tracing and arresting the criminals in the case of murder at Raikot in the Ludhiana District, I am desired to express his gratification in hearing of the loyal assistance

*which has been thus afforded to the officers of Government."*²⁴

On 13th January 1872, a group of about 200 Kukas attacked the fort of Malaud situated about twenty miles south of Ludhiana. This occurred about 2 p.m. This was a free fight with the Sikh feudal Chiefs of Malaud in which two men of Namdharis and two men of Sardan Badan Singh group were killed. The object of the attack was presumably to obtain arms. The Sergeant of police a few hours afterwards reported that they went away from Patiala state and had gone in direction of Rampur. Then he immediately warned the Vakils of Patiala and Malerkotla and noticed it to the District Superintendent of police about the gross negligence of the Deputy Inspector in not having had this gang followed up and watched.

The next morning a large group of Kukas attacked on the Fort of the large town of Malerkotla. This was the capital of the Muslim State, about 30 miles south from Ludhiana. Heera Singh and Lehna Singh were the leader of the group of Namdharis. Ram Singh informed the police of their intention to do some mischief and had confessed that he had no control over them. They were armed with axes, sticks, etc, only and were said to have declared that the town of Malerkotla would be the object of attack.²⁵ Intimation had been sent to the Maharaja of Patiala by letter and telegram, informed him that Heera Singh and Lehna Singh were reported leaders, and told him to have them captured and give assistance.²⁶

Mr. Cowan telegraphed both these facts to Jalandhur and to the Lieutenant Governor for troops, and applied for assistance also to the Chief of Nabha, Raja of Jind and Raja of Patiala. On the evening of the 15th February 1872 and the early part of 16th, Mr. Cowan appeared to have been employed in taking evidence against the prisoners captured at Malaud. Mr. Cowan received the intelligence of the bulk of the Kukas having been surrounded at Rurr, and he telegraphed to the Government of the Punjab not to send the troops previously asked for. As he got nearer to Malerkotla, he met the troops sent by Rajas of Jind and Nabha but a contingent had also been sent by the Maharaja of Patiala. In Mr. Cowan first letter of the 17th they consisted of artillery, cavalry and infantry, their total number, with the addition of

Malerkotla troops must have been considerably higher. Mr Cowan also met the Naib Nazim of Amargarh, and learned from him the particulars of the captured sixty eight Kukas at Rurr and the fact that they had been detained for the night in safe custody at the Patiala fort of Sherpur or at a distant that was about 18 and 19 miles from Malerkotla. Of course Baba Ram Singh and his doctrines were seemed responsible for what had happened, and he had become the danger to the State, as similar disturbance might be created at any time by his followers in future also. Baba Ram Singh was under regulation III, of 1818 for the detention in custody in the Allahabad jail with his most influential Subas.²⁷

Letter of Mr. Cowan: From: L.Cowan, Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, To: T.D. Forsyth, Commr. And Supdt., Ambala Division, Dated: Camp Malerkotla, 16th January 1872. Reads :

*"The gang of rebels, for no other name will adequately characterise them, never numbered more than 125. Of these there were at Malaud two killed, four captured; at Kotla, eight killed, thirty one wounded. Of those wounded twenty five or twenty six escaped at the time, but sixty eight, including twenty seven wounded, have been captured in the Patiala State at Rurr, a village twelve miles from this. The entire gang has thus been nearly destroyed. I purpose blowing away from guns, or hanging, the prisoners tomorrow at day break"*²⁸

Mr .Cowan,s letter to Mr. Forsyth, dated, 17th January 1872 claimed:.

"I have the honour to report to you that sixty eight rebel Kukas were brought in today from Rurr, of these two were women, leaving sixty six men: twenty two of the men were wounded, most of the slightly.

The conduct of these prisoners was most defiant and unruly; they poured forth the most abusive language towards the Government and the Chiefs of the Native States. All of them admitted that they were present at the attacks on Malaud and Malerkotla. They said that they had attacked Malaud for the propose urging arms, and Malerkotla because their religion had required them to slay the killer of cows.

The two women were resident of Patiala state, and I made them over to the officer commanding

*Patiala the troops for conveyance to Patiala; 49 of the rebels were blown away from the guns this afternoon on the parade ground of the Malerkotla Chief in the presence of the troops of Patiala, Nabha, Jind and Malerkotla. The remaining 16 rebels to be executed there tomorrow, but one man escaped from the guard and made a furious attack upon me, seizing me by the beard, and endeavouring to strangle me and he was very powerful man. I had considerable difficulty in releasing myself. He then made attack on some officers of the Native States who were standing near me. These officers drew their sword and cut him down"*²⁹

Thus it was Mr. Cowan letter that had showed the real attitude of the British Government. To the Government the Namdharis were great rebels. Mr. Cowan's real purpose was blowing away Namdharis from guns. He felt that the Namdharis were open rebels offering contumacious resistance to constituted authority, and his aim was to prevent the spreading of the disease. It is absolutely necessary that repressive measures should be prompt and stern. He was satisfied that he was to act for best and that this incipient insurrection must be stamped out at once. The native Chiefs were standing with British Government. They were bound to show their loyalty by protecting the Mr. Cowan and Mr. Forsyth with his barbaric acts. The chiefs of Patiala, Nabha, jind and Malerkotla States gave all possible help to the British administration.

Report of Maharaja Patiala; Latter dated 15th February 1872, From: His Highness the Maharaja Patiala, G.C.S.I., To the Secretary of the Government of Punjab, L.H. Griffin. That reads:

"In reply to a telegram from you, I promised, in my latter of 20th ultimo, to make inquiries as requested by his honour the Lieutenant Governor, his honour's information, that from many proofs it is quite certain that Ram Singh's real motive and ambition was bent, upon religious pretext, to reign and acquire dominion, and he deceitfully implanted this capricious notion in the minds of his ignorant and superstitious followers that their creed was to predominate and that everywhere the Government of the country would be very soon in their hands. They had the fullest belief of this

absurdity. He never failed to excite their minds and keep them in agitation and earnest expectation to attain their objects.

His followers were full of blind bigotry and zeal and had now increased to enormity and vastness. He therefore had a sanguine hope of success, and excited them to view with the utmost horror and hatred the act of cow-killing."

The report was further says:

*"In exciting this prejudices, his motive was a under the religious pretext the cartridge prejudice subverted and put in commotion the whole of India in 1857. It was practically an ignitable match. He was to rise up and excite the feelings of the whole Hindu community, including the chieftains, gentry and the troops. He stood up and was sympathised in sport of a common cause of hatred against the rulers of country, anticipating, the some reason, a results from the confusion which would follow, that was in every class and grade of the community. He would be held in respect which he was long in earnest."*³⁰

The report was also happy to notice:

*"Had not this appalling punishment been inflicted so promptly and so well as was the case, and had not Ram Singh and his Subas been deported from the province, there was no hope of the disturbance being quelled soon; and without doubt there would have been an endless waste of money and life before tranquillity and confidence would have been restored. If they had more meagre success; the whole sect would have sprung up like friends, who were all anxiously watching the results of this pantomimic attack."*³¹

This report referred to its own mode of investigations thus:

"The above is a brief result of my inquiries, which have been recorded after the most careful observation. There is one reality recorded after the most careful observation. There is one thing more which I think it right to bring to your notice. I have learnt from newspapers that the Government of India has expressed its disapprobation at the manner of Punishments awarded by the local authorities. I believe the object of the Government will be misunderstood by the native public, and the particularly by the benighted sect, who will no doubt attribute it to the supernatural power of their 'Satguru'. This will in a great measure tend to frustrate and invalidate the excellent action and efficient measures adopted in the coercion and eradication by the district authorities and native nipped in the bud before bringing for the blossoms of

further evil, would made them look light and unimportant.

*I am of the opinion that misconstruction of the intentions of a Government by the public is always fraught with unpleasant consequences, and I deem it right to inform you of the views I take on the subject."*³²

The above letter of Maharaja of Patiala was no doubt a remarkable performance to enable the Lt. Governor of Punjab to save his position, and also that of his two officers who were mainly responsible for blowing off the Namdharis. Many files are related to Patiala, Nabha, Jind and Malerkotla. These states sent his cannons against the Namdharis. The number of cannons was nine and out of this seven cannons were used for martyred the Namdharis Sikhs. Two cannons reserved so that if the Namdharis attacked it should be useful at that time.³³ There were number of results which had been stressed by Maharaja Mohinder Singh. Maharaja of Patiala felt that Baba Ram Singh's real motive to establish the Khalsa Raj according to him. Namdharis wanted the Government would be in their hands very soon. They had not any feeling about Cow protection upon religious pretext. His real motive under the religious pretext was political manner or mode. Maharaja was appreciating punishments in Malerkotla case as given by Mr. Cowan and Mr. Forsyth which had been inflicted so promptly and so well. Maharaja wanted Ram Singh and his Subas might be deported from province. Obviously the Princely sates had always sided with British Government. They had always stood along with the imperialists. In the telegram dated 18th January 1872, he had mentioned about chiefs help of different states.

There had been a phrase from the editorial columns sent was by T.H. Thornton, Secretary to the Punjab Government, East India United Service Club about Maharaja Patiala. That reads:

*"The Maharaja of Patiala is ruler of the most important of the Sikh States of the Punjab, and his territories adjoin those of Malerkotla, where the fanatics made their principal attack. He is a young man of enlightened views and generous disposition, and I believe the last person in the life. Under these circumstances, his opinion of the necessity for the executions appears entitled to considerable weight"*³⁴

This shows that British Government had adopted illegal manner to suppress this Movement. Its incidents were a complex of barbarity. British Government did always keep an eye on Namdharis activities or when they went to attend any fair. The Kukas were punished with death from the cannon's mouth. There have been no order issues in the State and as this form of punishment was more suitable for setting example to others. Baba Ram Singh the leader of Kuka sect was deported at once from Punjab and then he was sent to Allahabad. In this incident or endeavourer all Native States were sided with British. All the princely states Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Malerkotla were under the protection of British Government. The States had signed the treaty to go under the Protection of British. According to proclamation, the Rajas of the Sates always stood for cooperation with British and had given rendered help in any bad situation. All Chiefs had received full support if any disturbance or revolt occurred in their States. So Chiefs of the all States gave full support in suppressing the Kuka Movement. They were helped with Calvary, Infantry and arms. Maharaja Patiala gave all possible help to capture the Kuka Prisoners. This Incident finally happened in parade ground of Malerlotla. All Native officers were present when Kukas were blown away. Letters of thanks were sent to all Native Chiefs for rendering help in this whole case. British Government distributed the rewards to Native Chiefs. Against this Namdhari movement Chiefs of Native States had played a great role.

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