

Princely Bahawalpur: On the Brink of Muslim Rule in India

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Abstract

Bahawalpur State, a premier Muslim state of northern India, preponderate a rich historical legacy. Bahawalpur evolved as an Islamic entity and assimilated with the Mughal rule of India. This paper evaluates the state during both the traditional Mughal polity and the rule of East India Company. The paper concentrates two areas; first it investigates the lesser-known aspects of the history of warrior band of daudputras that how they apprehended in this realm and consolidated a scattered area. The other is to search the advantages of entering the political relationship with the British and to review the extent of their cooperation with them when their local patterns were replaced according to the imperial interests.

Key words: Muslim state, Mughals, nawabs, political transition, British India

Introduction

Daudputras, an ethnic group from Sindh appeared in the regional history when Mughal's hold over the region was deteriorating and new political view in form of East India Company was rising. This period in the history of India was full of disorders and chaos. In the early eighteenth century, Daudputras landed in this region and obtained a fertile land from Mughal governor of Multan where they established a new town being their capital.

Their introduction in this land was that of a martial group with good administrative qualities that proved to be a support for the declining Mughal power in this area. Formerly, this area was not under control of a single power. On the southern side, a large portion of Sadiqabad and small part of Khanpur was controlled by Nur Muhammad kalhoras. Uch and a large part of Bahawalpur and its surroundings were controlled of Mughal Governor of Multan and Shehar Farid was run by Farid Khan Lakhwera. The forts of Winjrot, Bhingarh, Derawar, Marot and southern desert land of Sadiqabad and Khanpur were held by Jaisalmer while the forts of Wallhar, Phulra, Anupgarh ruled by Zorawar Singh of Bikanir.¹

They emerged out of a political vacuum and laid profound transitional impact on the course of ensuing period. They subdued several small states through political diplomacy, matrimonial alliances and warfare. Eventually, they succeeded to join the scattered territory into one kingdom that became the second largest Muslim State of Bahawalpur and survived until 1954. The State had an overwhelmingly Muslim population and was the single administrative unit in the subcontinent where the civil suits relating to common social affairs were settled according to the Islamic Shariah.²

Bahawalpur was the second largest Muslim State of India. Due to its Muslim character and spirit that it willingly acceded to Pakistan though India made several attempts and grand financial offers to integrate it. But the nawab turned down the offers and even, after accession with Pakistan, it shared the financial burden and helped the new Islamic country to overcome the monetary constrains in the initial phase after the partition. Having a surplus budget, Bahawalpur was in the front line to support the country. Richard B. Barnett placed the rise of Bahawalpur State in the following category and posits;

... this new realm, the Bahawalpur State emerged in a vacuum both demographically and politically. It was because of that vacuum that it was never considered a viable part of the empire. It

created on a separate agrarian, commercial and political foundation ...³

Historical Perspective of Bahawalpur Realm

The region comprising the Bahawalpur State remained a central part of Buddhist Empire as a Buddhist monastery belonged to Kushan dynasty erected at Sui Vihar was the evidence.⁴ Afterwards, Roy Dynasty ruled over there, which extended from Kashmir and Qanuj to Qandahar and Seistan and on the West to Makran and on the South to Surat. Out of six famous forts constructed by Roy Sahans Kahore in his kingdom, two were erected at Mau and Uch inside the territory of Bahawalpur State.⁵ Then the Arabs arrived and gradually occupied the whole country from Debal to Multan including Uch and the present Bahawalpur.⁶

With the disintegration of Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad, Sind was the first province to slip from their control and divided into two principalities; Multan and Mansurah. The territories of present Bahawalpur region became a part of Multan principality until the foundation of a separate state.⁷ However, Cholistan part was throughout associated with the Rajasthan.⁸ The political and administrative change from Mansura to Multan was not only a political change but also was a socio-cultural transformation from Sindhi to Multani influence as the boundaries of the state were adjacent to Sind in south and Multan in the northeast.

Daudputra Abbasids claimed their ancestry to the Abbasid empire in Baghdad and then in Egypt.⁹ The Abbasids landed in Sindh during the last half of the 14th century when Sultan Ahmed II marched into Sind through Kech Makran, owing to the internecine wars and succeeded in establishing their political power.¹⁰ Rai Dhorang, a local ruler of Sindh, tied the knot of his daughter with him and gave a one third of land as dowry. Sultan Ahmad consolidated his power in Sindh. Over time, his descendants attained the position of spiritual guides besides their political control.¹¹ Their political supremacy was acknowledged by the Mughal court and among his successors, Ghani Khan (known as Channi Khan in

the local dialect), was given *Punjhazari* title, with a land grant at Swistan and authority to collect revenue from Ubauro to Lahori Bundar.¹²

After the death of Ghani Khan, the Abbasids broke away into two sections as he left two sons; Mehdi Khan and Daud Khan. Thus arose the division of the Abbassis, Mehdi Khan's offspring were known as kalhoras who were the political successors of Ghani Khan in Sindh. His other son named Daud Khan, whose descendants were known as daudputras (sons of Daud) and were considered spiritual and religious leaders.¹³ However, this division caused hostility between both groups. Constant combats with kalhoras compelled them to leave Sindh. After many years of clashes and passing through many vagaries, daudputras under the headship of Amir Bahadur Khan succeeded in establishing the city of Shikarpur on the right bank of Indus River in 1617 CE and settled their clan over there. However, once again they became the victim of inter-clan clashes, had to leave Shikarpur due to their defeat in a combat with Kalhoras and settled in the Bahawalpur regions.¹⁴

Disintegrated Mughal Rule and Daudputras

The ensuing period was marked by political unrest and anarchy in the subcontinent. It was actually during the period of the downfall of Mughal dynasty that the tracts comprising of the Bahawalpur region slipped from the control of central government and came under the control of different regional chiefs of adjacent principalities. It was a crucial time for the Mughal government, who was already in search of the influential warriors to control these areas and restore their income. These were the prevailing conditions when this land was awarded to the newcomers arrived from Sind. Daudputra Abbasids proved to be the best choice for that purpose. Here they professed allegiance to the Mughal court and performed excellent military services for the Mughals in the subsequent years that ultimately earned them the trust of the Mughal Court.

Amir Mubarak Khan descendant of Bahadur Khan was an able leader and excellent commander of daudputras. He rendered valuable services for

Mughal particularly against the *Mizaris* who revolted in Dera Ghazi Khan. After the demise of Amir Mubarak, Mohammad Sadiq Khan Abbassi (1727-1746) became the chief of Daudputras. He furnished assistance to the Mughals in many occasions.

As a reward of his excellent services, Sadiq Khan received a productive area as *jagir* called *Chaudarri* from the Mughal governor of Multan, Hayat Ullah Khan in 1727.¹⁵ Actually, Multan was a large province of the great Mughal dynasty and this area was a part of it. By the time, the Abbasid consolidated their position at their *jagir* and established the town of 'Allahabad' in 1729. Moreover, it was the expression of their Muslim identity as they named it 'Allahabad'. This *jagir* was fertile being located on the eastern bank of Indus and Punjnad. The political history of the State as a separate entity started with its establishment.

The early history of Daudputras in this region was full of struggle for their political survival. The Daudputra chief made great efforts to protect the frontier area of Multan on both sides of the river Sutlej from the harassment of the Rajputs of Bikaner and Jaisalmer States. After settling themselves, the Daudputras succeeded to suppress the revolt of Farid Khan Lakhwera, a local chief who had refused to pay annual tribute to the Mughals. Sadiq Khan defeated the forces of Farid Khan Lakhwera, and in 1731 took control over all his possessions.¹⁶

Prior to the Daudputras, the forts of Winjhrot, Bhimwar, Derawar, Marot and the country around the two latter belonged to Jaisalmer. Daudputras also occupied the fort of Derawar in 1733, which was a stronghold of Bhatti rulers of Jaisalmer.¹⁷ In fact, Derawar was a safe place and well known for its magnificent fort that was founded by Rawal Dev Raj in the 834 CE.¹⁸ This victory gave them a powerful stroke to the defense of northwestern frontiers for all times to come. Derawar shortly turned into a center of political, social and cultural activities of Daudputras.¹⁹

Besides, they were greatly suffered from the exertions of Kalhoras, Sikhs, Afghans and other depredators.²⁰ At that time, they were distinctively

warriors and overcame all the challenges. However, the Afghan attacks on Bahawalpur between the periods from 1785 to 1788 caused to create troubles in the area during the last decades of 18th century. Afghan sovereign, Temur Shah (1747-1793), vandalized the Bahawalpur city and turned it into ashes.²¹ Therefore, the first precautionary step of Daudputras was to arrange the security measures. Against any disruption by antagonists, they had already moved first two primacies to Derawar that became the center of their military strength and therefore, was free from collateral threats. Later on, with the foundation of Bahawalpur City, all activities moved towards the new capital. However, Abbassid rulers had always been attached with Derawar as their ancestral place.

In addition, daudputras had to face environmental challenges as well. It was naturally a desolate country with dry hot weather. One third was deserted area and rest of the land comprising jungle, which need to be clear with hard labour in order to make it suitable for living. Though, sparse population was placed on the river banks but these riverine areas were also prone to flooding in the seasonal inundations.

The process of the expansion and development of daudputras was started. Gradually, they extended their control over the surrounding area, established new towns with proper arrangement of canals. The nawab Bahawal Khan I (1746-1749) founded a city Bahawalpur in 1748, on the left bank of Sutlej. The establishment of Bahawalpur was a hallmark in the history of the region. Daudputras formed the region into a State and all political activities moved towards this new capital. In a way, the hub of power moved to Sutlej valley from its ancient hub of Punjnad and Indus valley. It was located in a significant place, right in the mid of their possessions to watch their all terrains. Likewise, all possessions under Daudputras were organized into one entity named 'the Bahawalpur State'.²² Nevertheless, it was still a loose confederacy under nominal leadership of Daudputra chief. The daudputra clan was subdivided in different sections as Pirjani, Bakshani, Kehrani, Marufani, Tayabani,

Arbani, Hilani, Mamdani, Fatani, Jamani, and Ghamrani.²³ During the early period of the State, these kinsmen were its powerbase. Gradually, the Abbasids extended their supremacy over all those independent regional entities.²⁴ In a way, Daudputra Abbasids succeeded in composing the region into one political unit and organized it into a proper State with centralized power and hereditary form of government.²⁵ Their enduring greatness lies in the fact that they maintained law and order, and replaced the anarchy in their domain with absolute peace that extended from Sabzal Kot in Southwest to Rana Watwan in Northeast.²⁶ As Shahamet Ali acknowledged that;

*Bahawalpur was now considered a place of the greatest security. The disorder and anarchy occasioned throughout India by the dismemberment of the moghal empire, on the one hand, and the declining power of the khorasan monarchy on the other hand, induced several respectable families to settle at this place for safety.*²⁷

The nawab Muhammad Bahawal Khan II (1772-1809), was the first Abbasid ruler who had the status of a sole leader of all the area and laid a proper administrative structure. During his reign, all the surrounding areas came under the sway of his single rule. Shah Shuja Emperor of Delhi, bestowed him the titles of *Rukn-Ud-Daula*, *Nusrat-E-Jang*, and *Mukhlis-Ud-Din*. These titles were continued to hold the following rulers. For instance, there were two commendable achievements in his reign. First was the foundation of state mint in 1802. Second was the beginning of relations with East India Company in 1808, when Sir Elphinston made a visit of the State while going on his mission to Kabul. This voyage had far-reaching impact on the upcoming political and economic scenario of the state.

However, his successor Sadiq Muhammad Khan II (1809-1825) faced a period of chaos prevailed throughout in India due to the breakdown of Mughal Empire. The rise of Sikh power was a major consequence of Mughal downfall. Therefore, Sadiq Khan II had to focus on

strengthening the state army in order to face the increasing power of Sikhs, which was marched to clutch the State. The next regime of Bahawal Khan III (1825-1852) was remarkable for the tranquility and peace. The special feature of his tenure was that State entered into the treaty relations with East India Company on 22, February. Bahawal Khan III was the first nawab of the State, who entitled to a salute of seventeen guns, by British government in 1849.

Bahawalpur in the new Political Landscape

During the 18th century, the political and economic changes occurred in India. On the political scene, the East India Company (EIC) emerged as a supreme entity. As William Lee has analyzed its policy with regard to native states evolved in three periods. In the first phase (1757-1813), the EIC assumed a Policy of Ring Fence with the allied states in order to protect its territorial possessions. In the second stage (1813-1857), it had a policy of Subordinate Isolation that largely succeeded in subduing all princely states to the British through treaties and engagements.²⁸ By that manner, the native states lost their control over foreign affairs and defense, but were independent in internal matters of administration. During this period, policy of Escheat and Laps was enforced by Lord Earl Auckland and strictly followed by his successor Lord Dalhousie.²⁹

Consequently, Oudh, Sind, Punjab, and several small states were annexed by the British. In the third phase (1857-1947), the EIC adopted the Policy of Union. This means the effective transfer of administration from EIC to the British Crown, which brought a change in the policy towards native states because the native rulers remained loyal to the British during the uprising that partially was the fruit of the earlier policy of annexation.³⁰

The British-Bahawalpur formal relations started during the second stage of the three-phased policy of the British. Due to the threat of combined attack of Napoleon and Russia on India, the British required a fence between the British India and Russia. The Sind, Bahawalpur and Sikh territory made a boundary wall.³¹ The geo-strategic position of the

Bahawalpur State played an important role in determining the relations with British. Particularly, the Bahawalpur State was located in the close proximity to Sindh and the Cis-Sutlej States. Located at the base of Punjab and having a long conjoint river border that formed a natural boundary.

Therefore, the British planned to open the traffic in the rivers Indus and Sutlej. On the other hand, advancing power of Ranjit Singh was a threat not only to Bahawalpur but also to the other areas as his plan was to control the seaside. By the Indus Navigation Treaty of 1832 with the Sikh government, the EIC obtained the rights of trade in the Sikh territory.³² While with regard to the Bahawalpur State, the matters were settled through the Indus Toll Treaty in 1833.

The foremost impact of this agreement on the State was that it secured the State from Sikh threat.³³ For instance, the right of the Bahawalpur State on the rivers within its territory was also recognized and the State became entitled to levy a moderate duty on all merchandise in transit. This pact was the first in the series of treaties that the British India made with the State for its commercial interests and was followed by many supplementary accords.

However, by the treaty of 'Subordinate Cooperation' in 1838, the absolutism of the nawab ruler was ended and he became subordinate to the British. In this capacity, the State rendered assistance for the Afghan campaign (1838-41) both in facilitating the strategic roads for troops and in furnishing the supplies.³⁴ In their effect, all these treaties contained the spirit of the British superiority and bound the nawab ruler to the British wishes while in turn they secured the native political aristocracy.

Since the transfer of political power from the EIC to the British Crown in 1858, the administrative set up of the country changed. The territories of the British India were under the direct control of the GOI while the Princely India was administered through Governor, Lt. Governor and Financial Commissioner. The Princely States were independent in their internal matter except defense, communication and foreign affairs

departments, which were under the control of the GOI. The British policy of non-intervention in internal affairs of the Princely States was adhered to even during the years of civil war and internal disturbances.³⁵ The Bahawalpur State was administrated through the Agent to Governor General of Punjab States Agency.

Conclusion

In eighteenth century, Sindhi warriors Daudputras landed in this region and obtained a *jagir* of Choudarri from Mughal governor of Multan where they established a new town being their capital. Their introduction in the region was that of a martial group with good administrative qualities that proved to be a support for the declining Mughal power in this area because this period in the history of India was full of disorders and chaos. Daudputra Abbasids succeeded to act as per the needs of central government and paid them annual tribute. Latter, they came through composing the region into one unit and organized it into a proper State with centralized power. With the arrival of the British in India, the colonial patterns were introduced throughout the country. These endeavors also assumed in the Bahawalpur and stimulated the modern patterns particularly political and administrative policies, which brought amelioration in the existing native system. Eventually, State accomplished its motive of attaining a stable political system and consolidated economy for the welfare of its people as well as to achieve recognition of a modern State by maintaining its identity as a Muslim unit.

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