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**ADMINISTRATIVE EVOLUTION OF THE PUNJAB  
AND BRITISH RULE (1849-1859)**

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# Administrative Evolution of the Punjab and British Rule (1849-1859)

Rajni Thakur\*

Assistant Professor in History, SMDRSD College, Pathankot

**Abstract – After annexing the Punjab to the British Empire on March 29, 1849, the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie's next task was to decide as to what form of administration would be best suited to this newly occupied province. Charles Gough, the British Commander-in-Chief, suggested that the Punjab, like Sind, should have a military rule. Other Senior Officers were of the view that like the other provinces of India, it should be ruled by civilians. Dalhousie decided to combine the two systems by setting up a civil administration in the Punjab manned by both. He established Board of Administration with Henry as President and two other members, John and Mansel as his colleagues on an equal footing. To each member of the Board was assigned a task, suited to his aptitude and favourable to his genius. According to Willam Kay the members of the board were certainly different but their responsibility was common. Every member was responsible for proceedings of other members. Documents of every problem went to the each member. He wrote his views on it and it came to the board, and some decision was taken jointly. This board worked from 1849 to 1853 A.D. for about four years. The board accomplished the work of transition from the Sikh to the British rule. The people of the Punjab had gradually accepted themselves to the new order of things. The Board of Administration was abolished in 1853 A.D., and the Punjab was made a Chief Commissioner's province. Thus, Punjab was administered by three commissioners again-(i) Chief Commissioner (ii) Judicial Commissioners (iii) Financial Commissioner. They were John's assistant and not his colleagues in any sense. John gave such peace and prosperity to the people as had never been known in the province within the living memory of man. By 1857, he had perfected the Machinery of every department and won over the martial people of the Punjab to such an extent that the province remained loyal during the fateful days of the Muting for them.**

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Punjab, the land of five rivers, was generally believed to be the tract situated between the river Indus and the Yamuna and bounded by the Himalayan Mountains towards the North and North-East. The British connection with the territory to the North-West of the Yamuna began with the treaty Anjangaon, 30 December 1803, by which Daulat Rao Sindhia hand over all his forts, rights and territories upto Yamuna river to the British. Due to the decline of the Mughal power the whole area between Yamuna and the Sutlej had fallen a prey to three forces – the Marathas, the Bhattis of Sirsa and the Sikhs. Upon the defeat of the Marathas the British wished to make the Yamuna the limit of their territory towards the North West. A Resident was appointed at Delhi in 1803 to keep peace and to interfere as little as possible in the actual administration of the country. Col. David Ochterlony held the post as first Resident at Delhi from 1803 to 1806 A.D. The policy of buffer states was seriously endangered by the encroachment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh South of the Sutlej. When Ranjit Singh had succeeded in combining the scattered misls, north of the Sutlej into a single federation under himself. He turned his attention towards the branches south of the Sutlej. Then the rulers of these areas assembled at Samana and their representatives talked to British

resident, Sir Archibald Seton, at Delhi. An appeal from the Sikh Chiefs of the region for their protection by the British against Maharaja Ranjit Singh was gladly entertained by the British. Due to above circumstances Ranjit Singh in obligation, had to sign the treaty of Amritsar in 1809 A.D. The main term of this treaty was, British Government would not interfere in Northern side of the Sutlej, in same way Ranjit Singh would not interfere in affairs of southern territories. But the British had kept an eye on the Punjab for a long time. After death of Ranjit Singh, the British entangled the Sikhs through their policy of expansion due to that in 1845-46 A.D. 1<sup>st</sup> Anglo Sikh War was fought and again for the second time in 1848-49 A.D. In the second Anglo-Sikh War, the Sikhs were defeated completely. So, on 29 March, 1849 A.D. an open Darbar was held at Lahore in which occupation of Punjab by the British. The first result of the second Anglo-Sikh war was that the Punjab was annexed to the British Empire.

After that conquest, administration of Punjab was handed over to a Board of three commissioners. Henry Lawrence was appointed Chairman of the Board. This Board provided peace and prosperity to Punjab, which had been burning for the last ten

years. The Board worked from 1849 to 1853 A.D. for about four years. The executive staff was to consist of Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners and Extra Assistant Commissioners while the three first grades would consist of commissioned officers, to the fourth might belong both Europeans and natives. All officers were vested with triple powers, criminal, civil and fiscal. The commissioners were to be Superintendents of revenue and police, and to exercise the legal proceedings of a civil and the criminal powers of a Session's Judge. The Deputy Commissioners were to be Magistrates and Collectors of revenue, and to try all civil suits exceeding in value 1000 Rs. Assistant Commissioners Subordinate to Deputy Commissioners, were to exercise various gradation of powers. The Extra Assistant Commissioners were to perform the duties assigned to Assistant Magistrates, Deputy Collectors, and Subordinate native Judges.

In the fiscal department, the first object of, attention was to check the records of tax free land. After that it was decided which land was to be taxable and which was to be exempted from taxation. In the management of the revenue, the maintenance of village communities, and the demarcation of boundaries, the rules in force throughout the North-Western Provinces were to be observed. There was need of establishment of peace in the Punjabi society. After the death of Ranjit Singh game of murders in Lahore Darbar had increased number of thugs and robbers in the Punjabi society. The Board needed a powerful policy to abolish those robbers and thugs. So before work of improvement of society, it was very essential to abolish those enemies of the society. The resources of the country were to be developed, trade, agriculture, and commerce were to be explored. River Navigation was to be promoted.

The newly annexed territories were divided into four main circles of Commissionerships. The most important Division was that of Lahore, comprising the upper portions of the Beas and Rachna Doab. It was divided into five districts, Lahore, Batala, Amritsar in the Bari Doab, Wazirabad, Sheikhpura in Rachna Doab. The second division that of Jhelum, comprising the Chaj Doab the country of the salt range of Hazara in the Sind Sagar Doab. The third division was that of Multan which includes the power portions of the Bari and Rachna Doabs, and was divided into three districts Multan and Pakpatan in the Bari and Jung in the Rachna Doabs. The fourth division was that called Leia (Derajat). It formed four districts Derajat, Khangur in the Sind Sagar Doab, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, including Bannu, on the right Bank of the Indus.

The Punjab after its annexation to the British dominions in India in 1849 was not attracted to any of the old presidencies but was kept as a separate province. It was divided into seven divisions in charge of commissioners, with headquarters at Ambala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Lahore, Multan, Derajat, Rawalpindi. By the time that annexation was proclaimed, a numerous staff of civil officers had been

summoned from the North-Western provinces and placed at the Board's disposal. All were directed to meet at Lahore as a central place of meetings. The number of commissioned officers were at first 79, which was afterwards increased to 84.

| Total number of post | Rank  | Salary (per month) |
|----------------------|---|--------------------|
| 07                   | Commissioners                                   | @ 2750/- per month |
| 11                   | Deputy Commissioners of I <sup>st</sup> Grade   | @ 1500/- per month |
| 06                   | Deputy Commissioners of II <sup>nd</sup> Grade  | @ 1200/- per month |
| 12                   | Deputy Commissioners of III <sup>rd</sup> Grade | @ 1000/- per month |
| 19                   | Assistant of I <sup>st</sup> Grade              | @ 700/- per month  |
| 06                   | Assistant of II <sup>nd</sup> Grade             | @ 600/- per month  |
| 18                   | Assistant of III <sup>rd</sup> Grade            | @ 500/- per month  |

The number of uncovenanted Judicial Officers was 42. The Revenue Establishment and the staff of Writers, Native and Europeans for the various officers at the central stations of districts, were formed on a lower scale. The rough outline of the districts and Divisions above described having been formed,, no time was lost in despatching the officers to their respective jurisdiction. All these introductory measures were resolved very rapidly within the year. Attention was immediately directed to those political matters which affected the public peace. Board, first of all considered essential work the disarmament of Punjabis because they feared that they would not obey the order. Officers were ordered to take weapons from people of the villages but they should not act harshly because with this there might be any danger. Board achieved success in disarming Punjabi army and people. It was essential to indulge power of soldiers somewhere who had become unemployed. In this way, Board on one side satisfied soldiers who were discharged from armies and on the other side, they began to utilise their valour for their interests.

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

An armed Police Force, foot and horse was raised and partially organised, both for the protection of the Frontier and the preservation of internal peace. Civil and Criminal courts were established offenders were seized, and during the course of the year 8000 convicts were lodged in custody. The Board of administration was abolished in 1856, John Lawrence was appointed as its first Chief Commissioner. He worked from 1853-1858 A.D. During this period, he did so many important and praise worthy works in the Punjab. Which consolidated the British rule in the state. He appointed Financial and Judicial

Commissioners under him who helped him a lot in the administration. The next three years from 1853 to the close of 1856 constituted the period of consolidation, during this time the works started in the earlier years were completed. During their eight years of rule in Punjab, the British made every effort to win hearts of the Punjab. John Lawrence was a very experienced ruler. By reforming in every sphere he had established closeness with the Punjabis.

The revolt of 1857 was started from Barakpur which spread like a wild fire from Calcutta to Delhi. At that time there were eleven thousand Europeans, 31000 were Hindustani soldiers and about 14000 were Punjabi soldiers. The ratio of European soldiers and Indian soldiers was 1:4. First of all area between Sutlej and Jamuna accepted influence of revolt. People of that area had sympathy with the rebels. In this territory the rebellions committed their rebel activities at a very wide scale. The British had almost lost that area. It was hoped that the whole of the Punjab would rise against the Britishers on hearing the news of the great revolt; but this did not happen. After all, why Punjabis did not actively participated in this revolt. Firstly the English rule in the Punjab had established permanent peace in the Punjab. Besides this, English had done many works for the welfare of the Punjabis and they were fully satisfied with the rule of the English. Secondly, the government made sufficient arrangements in time to check the influence of the revolt in Punjab. Due to the revolt of 1857 A.D. Punjab was brought under Lieutenant Governor. John Lawrence was appointed the first Lieutenant Governor until 1859 A.D., he remained at this post. After him Sir Robert Montgomery was sent to Punjab. He remained Lieutenant Governor of Punjab from 1859-1865 A.D.

The foundation of solid administrative structure had been laid by the Board of Administration during the period 1849-53 A.D. The roots of the British Power had been dug fairly deep in the soil. It now insisted upon to build that foundation which had been laid, to develop, to organize and to consolidate. John accomplished the work initiated by the board in a short period of four years. John Lawrence became more flexible and sensitive to the feelings and requirements of the people. His measures for the development of agriculture, fiscal reforms and the construction of works of Public utility had their basis in one thought, i.e. how to improve all the condition of the people in a maximum way.

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## Corresponding Author

**Rajni Thakur\***

Assistant Professor in History, SMDRSD College,  
Pathankot