



Agrarian Policies under the Rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Jasmeen Walia¹

Dr. Seema Parihar²

1. Research Scholar in History, School of Humanities and Physical Education, CT University, Ludhiana Punjab.

2. Assistant Professor in History, School of Humanities and Physical Education, CT University, Ludhiana Punjab.

Abstract

Since the centuries, agriculture has been remained the backbone of not only economy of Punjab but all over India. There 90% of the population of Punjab during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh depend upon agriculture. Ranjit Singh was a Sikh ruler who established the Sikh empire in the early nineteenth century, he was born on 13 November 1780 at Gujranwala (now in Pakistan). During his time period agriculture played an important role to increase the economy of the region. For the betterment of the economy Ranjit Singh introduced various agrarian reforms and policies aimed to improve agriculture productivity. With his agrarian policies he got a success to protect the rights and lives of the farmer in the Punjab region.

Introduction

Maharaja Ranjit Singh “*The Lion of the Punjab*” was one of the most fascinating personalities of his age. He grew into one of the most powerful rulers of India of his days. Although he did not have the advantage of any systematic education or any special training in the art of civil administration or military welfare, yet by sheer force of mind, personal courage, effort and inherent skill as much in war as in diplomacy, he built up a grand Sikh kingdom in the Punjab.



When Ranjit Singh occupied the throne in 1799, he had an ambition to become the king of Punjab to fulfill his desire, he needed a strong military system. A powerful military system would be established on the base of sound brain and finance only. He was the master of his mind and for finance, he tried to increase the income of the state. During the early period of his rule, no records of financial or political transactions were kept, and official business was transacted on the oral orders of the Maharaja. In 1808, Ranjit Singh appointed *Bhawani Dass* as his Finance Minister. The Diwan, soon after his appointment, divided the financial transactions of the state among the source of income Daftar (department) : *Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Mal* : This department dealt with the accounts of the revenue receipts, and was sub-divided into (a) *jam'a kharch-i-T'aaluqat*, and (*jam'a kharch-i-sairat*) The *T'aaluqat* section comprised entries referring to the land revenue; while the *sairat* included all other sources of income, the most important being *nazrana* (tributes and presents), *zabti* (escheats and forfeitures), *abkari* (excise), *wajuhat-i- moqarar* (registration fees), and *chaukiyat* (customs and transit duties).

Land revenue

It was the main source of Ranjit Singh's income and was the backbone of the whole administration in his time period. There were two harvests in Punjab and that's why revenue was taken twice year. The two harvesting seasons in Punjab were *Rabi* (April-May) and *Kharif* (October-November). At level of province the revenue collection took place under the guidance of the *Nazim* (governor), who were responsible to Maharaja. His primary duty was to collect revenue and deposit to the royal treasury. The *nazim* who enjoyed long terms of office were also some of the bests: Diwan Sawan Mal in Multan and Misr Rup Lal in the Jalandhar Doab. Misr Rup Lal was regarded as 'an able and humane ruler' who had keen interest in the prosperity of the Jalandhar-Doab and whose assessment was '*light and equitable*'. Diwan Sawan Mal 'handled the revenue affairs of Multan with commendable ability, brought the country under cultivation, made the people contented and happy and submitted larger revenues to the royal treasury than any of the former functionaries.



Methods of Assessment

No doubt, from the medieval period, different rulers in India tried to establish different methods of assessment of revenue. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not establish of uniform system of collection or assessment of revenue in the state. Due to different condition of the land in different part of the state various methods were used for assessment of land revenue. He tried to bring reforms in that. These are as follows:

Batai System

In the beginning of Ranjit Singh's career, the most common method of land revenue was Batai under this system the land revenue was assessed and collected by the state on the threshing floor after the harvest was gathered. The state's demand varied from $\frac{1}{2}$ (one-half) to $\frac{1}{3}$ (one-third) of the gross produced in un-irrigated lands and $\frac{1}{4}$ (one-fourth) to $\frac{1}{6}$ (one-sixth) in irrigated land. many people were deputed to keep watch on the cultivators from the time of sowing of seeds right till the time of harvesting. This system was abolished in 1823 CE Because of drawback in the system.

- i.It was difficult task to weigh grain of peasant.
- ii.A part from that unless the heap of grain was divided, it remained outside, due to which peasants had always fear of theft of grain. there was always fear of rain and storm for heap of grain lying outside.
- iii.It was not easy for the officers to take the grain to the ground.
- iv.Government needed to appoint guards for the protection of the grain, so it was expensive.

Kankut System

Ranjit sing applied Kankut system in 1824 CE. According to this system the governmental share was appraised on the basis of standing crops on the basis of this this estimate, the government collected its share in kind at the time of harvest the system was an improvement on the previous system. It saved the government of the expenses of maintaining a large number of supervisors to guard the grain. The main defect of this system was estimate might be wrong so some peasants had more burden of revenue and sometimes government also suffered due to the wrong estimate.



Cash Payment System

It was another method for measuring land revenue. During his reign he started cash payment system in agriculture. According to it peasants instead of yield or crop deposited land revenue in cash in government treasury. This system did not become popular and was not strictly enforced.

Mixed System

The most common system of assessment was the mixed system. The revenue was assessed both in cash and kind. Certain standard crops were liable to be assessed on Kankut basis while crops like cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, vegetables etc, whose produce could not be accurately estimated in kind were assessed on cash basis.

Bidding System

After 1834, Ranjit Singh began to encourage Bidding System which had already existed to a limited extent. Under this system vast estates of irrigable land under assessment were put to auction and the land was leased out to the highest bidder who deposited a fix sum of money with the government and got the right of collecting the land revenue. *According to Dr. Chopra* this practice of leasing out the large districts was further developed by selling the farms of the villages as a whole of the contractors and middle men were eliminated.

By this contract the farmers of revenue were, however, required to submit a detailed report of the produce and the money collected by them from the cultivation.

Bigha Basis

In some parts of the kingdom such as in the district of Attock, the revenue was assessed on Bigha basis. According to this system, the produce of a representative Bigha was collected and on its basis the governmental share was fixed on the rest of the land.

Plough System

Another system of assessment in vogue was the plough system. Under this system the land revenue was assessed on the basis of plough. The state officials estimated the yield of each crop per plough. It was exactly like the Bigha system with the difference that the unit of



assessment in the case was rather bigger. The unit under plough system was the extent of land which could be easily cultivated by an average team of bullocks i.e., about 15 acers.

Well Basis

In some parts of the kingdom the assessment of land revenue was made on the basis of well. According to this system a lump sum of charge was levied on the unit of land which could be irrigated by an average well constituted a unit for the purpose of assessment.

Analysis of the Agrarian System

- (i) Ranjit Singh gave back with one hand what it took with the other. The employment of the state where numerous and every Jat villager sent recruits for the army.
- (ii) Maharaja charged 10% of the produce in certain cases but that was only from those peasants who had highly fertile lands. From the peasants who had less fertile lands he charged less.
- (iii) The Maharaja concern for the agrarian policy was always very personal one. The peasants were not to pay fixed amount when the famines stalked the land or the rains failed. During the time of natural calamity, he issued the instructions to his officers to redress their grievances and ameliorate their lot.
- (iv) Ranjit Singh took particular care in promoting artificial means of irrigation in the tracts where the rainfall was less. He built canals in Multan, Lahore and Muzzafargarh.
- (v) Ranjit Singh issued special instructions to the military officers to protect the crops during the march of the army. In case, the crops of the cultivated were unavoidably destroyed the suffers were compensated.

Conclusion

The land revenue system of Ranjit Singh was beneficial for both the state and the cultivators. The state was able to collect a fixed share of the produce, which provided a steady source of revenue. The cultivators were also benefited as they were not burdened with heavy taxes and were allowed to retain the other half of their produce. This system encouraged agriculture production and increased the prosperity of the region.

Overall, the land revenue system of Ranjit Singh was considered a significant achievement in the economic and administrative history of the Punjab region.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

References

1. Osbourne, W.G. (1840). *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, Heritage Publisher.
2. Ali, Shahamat, (1847). *The Sikhs and the Afghans*, Punjab Languages Department Patiala.
3. Griffin, Lepel, (1905). *Ranjit Singh*, S. Chand and Co. Delhi.
4. Court, M. Henry, (1905). *History of the Sikhs*, Language Department of Punjab 1970.
5. Banga Indu, (1978). *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications.