

## **From Jammu to Glory: Dogra Warriors in the Court of Ranjit Singh *An Examination of Power, Loyalty, and Expansion in the Sikh Empire***

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### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the pivotal role played by the Dogra dynasty of Jammu in the military, political, and administrative consolidation of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Tracing their rise from regional chieftains in the hills of Jammu to influential courtiers and commanders in the Lahore Darbar, the study highlights how Dogra leaders—most notably Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh—combined martial prowess with astute diplomacy to secure their place at the heart of imperial power. Through a detailed analysis of their contributions to territorial expansion, internal governance, and strategic alliances, the paper examines how the Dogras balanced loyalty to Ranjit Singh with their own dynastic ambitions. In doing so, it sheds light on the complexities of power-sharing, identity, and regional dynamics within the broader framework of the Sikh Empire. Through their contributions to territorial conquests, governance reforms, and foreign policy initiatives, the Dogras became indispensable actors in the empire's expansionist vision, particularly in frontier regions such as Ladakh, Baltistan, and Gilgit. The paper draws from archival sources, historical accounts, and contemporary scholarship to assess the lasting impact of the Dogra ascendancy on the political landscape of 19th-century North India.

**Key words:** Dogras dynasty, Lahore Darbar, Territorial expansion, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Gulab Singh.

### **Introduction:**

The relation of the Sikh & the Dogras goes back to the days of Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Bahadur. Both of these leaders were compelled to take refuge in the Jammu hills whenever chased by the army of Mughals.<sup>2</sup> However relation between these two different communities the Sikh and the Dogras grew up toward in the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Mughals and Afghans struggled for the possession of Lahore.<sup>3</sup>

During the second quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century the Sikh had organized them into small bands known as *Deras* or *Misls*.<sup>4</sup> These Sikh *Misls* had carried out for themselves small principalities at different places.<sup>5</sup> They were better organized and were developed into formidable forces in their respective regions especially the Sukherchakiya, Kanhiya and Bhangis.<sup>6</sup> Whenever they were defeated, the Sikh

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<sup>2</sup> S.D.S Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan State*, Part II, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, P.117

<sup>3</sup> Ibid P.118

<sup>4</sup> M.L Kapur, *History of Jammu and Kashmir State*, Vol I, The Making of State Under Maharaja Gulab Singh, Kashmir History publications, Jammu, 1993, P.13

<sup>5</sup> M.L Kapur, P.17

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, P.18

chiefs and their followers used to seek shelter in the territory of Ranjit Dev. They were therefore familiar to the topography of the region <sup>7</sup>

When Punjab become disturbed in the late 40's of the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to fall of the Mughals and Durrani invasion, these Misls become very active and began to acquire territorial expression and Jammu become a place of discard among these Misls <sup>8</sup>.

The Bhangis, the most powerful Sikhs Misls was the first to cast its eyes on Jammu.<sup>9</sup> They had surrounded Jammu from south and west and had more extensive possession, spreading from Pathankot in the east and Rawalpindi in the west<sup>10</sup> The Kanhiyas had grown into a considerable power, therefore provided a great challenge to Ranjit Dev authority. The Sukherchakiya were also the immediate neighbors' of the Dogra's principalities of Jammu.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Ranjit Dev was surrounded by the Sikh from three side of his neighborhood, who cast eyes on famous principality. As attracted by the wealth and prosperity of Jammu, Sikh Misls began their plundering operation. In 1756, the Bhangis chief captured Lahore and next year Bhangi chief Gujjar Singh attacked Jammu and seized Islamgarh, Poonch and Dev Batala.<sup>12</sup> They made a number of attacks on Jammu and in 1770, they made Ranjit Dev to pay tribute.<sup>13</sup>

Ranjit Singh Started his carrier of conquest at the age of 16 as Sukherchakiya chief holding the principality of Gujranwala, he subdued one chief after another and adding their principality to his own.<sup>14</sup> He was only son of Mohan Singh. His mother Mian Malwain ruled the confederacy in the name of Ranjit Singh. Little care was given to his early education as he spent his days in hunting, and other activities. He was married to Mehtab Kour and thus his mother-in-law Sada Kour widow of Gurbaksh Singh sardar of Kanhiya Misls had also much to do with the conduct of the affairs<sup>15</sup> Ranjit Singh now began to entertain idea of making himself master of Lahore and was supported by Sada Kour. In the same year 1800 A.D Ranjit Singh proceeded to Jammu<sup>16</sup>

Jammu first attracted the attention of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1800, when the Sikh forces marched from Lahore seized Mirowal, Narowal and Jasarwal. Ajit Singh was ruler of Jammu at that time. As he was very weak ruler was not in a position to fought against them or resist the invasion, he accompanied by Main Mota went to offer him an amount of rupees twenty thousand and an elephant Maharaja Ranjit Singh in return bestowed upon him a robe of honor<sup>17</sup>

In the following years, internal rivalries become worse and court of Jammu was divided into two. Ajit Singh being weak and incompetent, lost his control over the administration and was carried by Rani Bandral who was very ambition and intrigues queen. She soon antagonized Mian Mota Prime minister

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<sup>7</sup> J. Hutchison and J. Vogel – *History of Punjab Hill State*, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1999, P.15

<sup>8</sup> M.L Kapur- P.1

<sup>9</sup> M.L. Kapur P.18

<sup>10</sup> Hari Ram Gupta, *Punjab on the Eve of First Sikh War, 1844*, Punjab University, Hoshiarpur, 1956, PP. 4-5

<sup>11</sup> Ganesh Das Badehra, *Raj Darshani*, Eng tr., S.D.S Charak, Jay Kay Book House, Jammu, 1991, P. 208-I

<sup>12</sup> Sayyid Mohd Latif, *History of Punjab from the remoted antiquity to the present time*-P.303

<sup>14</sup> Sayed Mohd Latif, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh-Punjab's Man of Destiny*, New Delhi, 1999, P.6

<sup>15</sup> Ibid- P-9-10

<sup>16</sup> Sayyid Mohd Latif, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh –Punjab's Man of Destiny* , P-11-15

<sup>17</sup> Hutchison and Vogel, P.123; Major Henry Court, *History of Sikhs*, Rima Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985, P154; S.M. Latif p352

of Jammu and a very intelligent person expelled him out to live in exile in Puramadel about thirty kilometer south of Jammu.<sup>18</sup>

As Ranjit Singh want to expand his empire and with the Treaty of Amritsar in 1809, to which he could not conquer the territories across the left bank of river Sutlej. Therefore, he had to move toward north conquer many principalities. The Sikh forces attacked Sailkot and conquer it from Jiwan Singh,<sup>19</sup> Maharaja encamped at Kaluwal, twenty kilometers away from Jammu. From there he himself returned but one of his chief Hukma Singh Chimni marched on Jammu.<sup>20</sup> As Ajit Singh and his wife were incapable of organizing defense against Ranjit Singh they sent appeal to Mian Mota to help them and to save Jammu principalities from Sikh<sup>21</sup>. Main Mota firstly refused but latter on agreed to help them and at his call gathered a number of Rajput from his neighboring areas near Gumat gate of the Jammu city and famous Battle of Gumat was fought.<sup>22</sup> The Sikh forces were encamped on the bank of river Tawi opposite to the Gumat gate. In the beginning, the invader had an upper hand. When the battle was joined by two young Rajputs Main Dido and Gulab Singh, the enemies were beaten back and Sikh had to retreat to their territories<sup>23</sup>. As Sikhs were very powerful and Dogra did not want any further attack from them. Hence, two days after the battle of Gumat, they sent Mian Mota and Misser Diwan Chand for peace. Maharaja Ranjit Singh agreed for peace. Mian Mota and Ajit Singh\* personally present before him and agree to pay an annual tribute of rupees seventy-three thousand.<sup>24</sup>

### **Gulab Singh at Lahore Darbar:**

After the Battle of Gumat when Hukman Singh chimmi told Majaraja Ranjit Singh that a young Rajput boy fought with great strength and valour and also about his personality in battle field. Maharaja was so impressed that he asked Main Mota to send Gulab Singh down to him. In A.D 1809 Gulab Singh joined the army of Ranjit Singh at Daska, a village few kilometer from Sialkot Gulab Singh was taken into Ranjit Singh army as a commander of a regiment on a monthly salary of rupees 275.<sup>25</sup> After Gulab Singh, Dhyan Singh also got employment in Lahore darbar on a monthly salary of rupees sixty-six.<sup>26</sup> Kishore Singh father of Gulab Singh also got employment on a monthly salary of fifty-dive rupees. After two year, Main Suchet Singh also got the employment. Ranjit Singh loved him like his own child and he came in court without any hesitation.<sup>27</sup> He held the command of a large force of the *ghurcharas*

They got jagirs from Maharaja Ranjit Singh and held very important place in Lahore Darbar. Dhian Singh got the battle of *Dastor-i-Muazam* and was appointed as prime minister at Lahore

<sup>18</sup> Diwan Kirpa Ram, *Gulabnama*, Eng tr., S.D.S. Charak, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2005. P.-51-52

<sup>19</sup> M.L. Kapur, P. 22

<sup>20</sup> M.L Kapur, P.23

<sup>21</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis- *Gulab Singh Bani-e-Rayasat Jammu wa Kashmir*, S. Chand Publication House, Jammu, 1959, P.23

<sup>22</sup> Kirpa Ram, PP.52-53

<sup>23</sup> M.L. Kapur, P. 24

\* We hear nothing about Raja Ajit Singh after his deposition but he had been living definitely up to June July 1822. When he signed a declaration renouncing all his rights and those of his successors to his ancestral state of Jammu in favor of Raja Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh and Raja Suchet Singh.

<sup>24</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 13

<sup>25</sup> K.M. Panikar, *Gulab Singh, (1792- 1858), Founder of Kashmir*, London, 1930, PP.17-18

<sup>26</sup> -ibid P.19; S.D.S. Charak, *A Short History of Jammu Raj*, P. 38

<sup>27</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 26

G.L Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State (1799-1839)*, Thomas Press (India) Limited Publication, New Delhi, 1975. P. 98

court.<sup>28</sup> Suchet Singh also got the title of Raja.<sup>29</sup> He placed great confidence in Raja's good sense and fidelity and considered him one of his sincerest friends.<sup>30</sup>

Hira Singh was brought up by the Raja as his own son and he loved him so much that he formally invested with the title of *farzand-i-khas*.<sup>5031</sup> The Rajput brothers are now all in all in Lahore Darbar.<sup>32</sup> Dogar family tried their level best in the expansion of Lahore Darbar and in effective administration. They soon attracted Ranjit Singh's notice because of their valour, alacrity graceful bearing.<sup>33</sup>

### **Dogra Influence in the Lahore Darbar's Expansion**

Kashmir was under Afghan ruler when Ranjit Singh conquered it. Although Ranjit Singh cherished a great ambition for the conquest of Kashmir, but he wanted Gulab Singh to accomplish it.<sup>34</sup> The administration of country was left to the arbitrary decisions of governors.<sup>35</sup> In 1812, Ranjit Singh started on his first expedition against Kashmir in alliance with Fateh Khan, minister of Shah Mahmud of Kabul. General Mohkam Chand was in charge of expedition on behalf of Ranjit Singh move toward Kashmir. But on the way, the alliance broke up as Fateh Khan tried to forestall the Dewan.<sup>36</sup> In 1813, second expedition was carried out but it was also unsuccessful. In 1814, Ranjit Singh planned another expedition to secure Kashmir for himself. In this expedition, Gulab Singh played a prominent role. On the advice of Aghar Khan of Rajouri the Sikh army was divided into two parts.

One group was headed by Ranjit Singh himself and other by Ram Dyal. Ranjit Singh moved toward Poonch and Ram Dyal toward Beramgalla. This division proves to be disastrous as Ram Dayal and his army was cut into pieces by enemies. Gulab Singh showed a great encourage in reassembling his force and bring them back safely. His father Main Kishore Singh was greatly wounded in this campaign. Ranjit Singh was greatly pleased by Gulab Singh that he gave him jagirs of Khotri Beyol.<sup>37</sup> Kashmir was finally conquered in 1819. At that time Kashmir was ruled by Jabar Khan on behalf of his brother Azim Khan who had deported to establish himself at Peshawar. Another favorable circumstance arose from the arrival of Birbal Dhar,<sup>38</sup> the able minister of the governor of Kashmir. He gave useful information to the Maharaja concerning the strength of Kashmir. A large expeditionary force was organized for expedition of Kashmir.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis P.39

<sup>29</sup> Kirpa Ram -116

<sup>30</sup> G.L. Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, P. 98

<sup>50</sup> Khushwant Singh- *The Fall of Kingdom of Punjab*, Penguin Group, New Delhi, 2014, P.63<sup>51</sup> G.S. Smyth, *A History of Reigning Family of Lahore with Some Account of Jummoo Rajahs, The Seik Soldiers and Their Sardars*, w. Thacker and Co. St. Andrew Library Calcutta, 1847, PP.250 251

<sup>52</sup> J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battle of the Sutlej*, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1966. p.138

<sup>53</sup> Kirpa Ram, *Gulabnama* translated by S.D.S. Charak, P.56

<sup>54</sup> G.L. Chopra, *The Punjab as Sovereign State (1799-1839)* printed at the V.V.R Institute by Deva data at Hoshiarpur

<sup>36</sup> K.M. Panikar, p 20

<sup>37</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.28

<sup>38</sup> G.L. Chopra, P.16

<sup>39</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.90

The army was divided into three sections.<sup>40</sup> An adequate army led by Misar Diwan Chand and few other eminent chiefs were deputed to that direction<sup>41</sup>. The second detachment was placed under Kharak Singh who has to support Mohkam Chand and third was under Ranjit Singh himself.<sup>42</sup> Gulab Singh was accompanied by Pandit Birbal Dhar.<sup>43</sup> On 23 June, 1819 Mohkam Chand attacked Rajouri and Poonch rajas and routed them. Mirza Rahim Ualh khan of Rajouri submitted and undertook to guide the troops. On the 5<sup>th</sup> July the Sikh advanced on Shopian and attacked army forces. Sikh army under Gulab Singh came in touch with Kashmir forces under Jabar Khan. In the battle, Gulab Singh's superior generalship won and Jabar Khan fled away. Thus valley was accompanied without further opposition by the victorious army of Ranjit Singh<sup>44</sup>

After the conquest of Kashmir, Gulab Singh made his mind to conquer Kishtwar in 1821.<sup>45</sup> Kishtwar was ruled by Teg Singh. He was also called Saif Ullah Khan. The Raja of Kishtwar by this time appointed a minister Lakhpat Rai. Who had play an important role in Kishtwar history<sup>46</sup> It is said that Shah Shuja of Kabul fled from Lahore and reached Kishtwar and was royally entertained here for two years. Ranjit Singh sent an order to Teg Singh to deliver him up. Teg Singh declined to do so and hence Ranjit Singh commanded Gulab Singh to conquered Kishtwar.<sup>47</sup>

When Gulab Singh reached Bhalwalta, Diyal Chand the Raja of Chaneni was asked for help. Firstly, he refused it but latter accept to help them<sup>48</sup> on advice of his minister Jura Singh.<sup>49</sup> Gulab Singh prepared a forged letter-containing invitation to Ranjit Singh from wazir Lakhpat Rai to invade Kishtwar. This letter fell into the hands of an informer who presented it before Raja and Raja ordered wazir's murder. Who escape from there and went to Jammu.<sup>50</sup> There he entered the service of Gulab Singh. The administration of Kishtwar had become confused and frightened on hearing the rumor of arrival of invading army. He tendered his submission and left for Lahore.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Kishtwar also came under the control of Sikhs. Gulab Singh played a prominent role in the expansion of Lahore Darbar. Multan has become a Suba of Durrani empire of Kabul in A.D 1752. When Ranjit Singh invade Multan, Muzaffar khan was the ruler of Multan. Before this he laid many expeditions in 1802, 1807, and 1810 but all were unsuccessful.<sup>52</sup> In 1818, Ranjit Singh again laid on expedition against Multan. A force of 2000 men under Misr Diwan Chand was order to attack Multan. Prince Kharak Singh was made a nominal commander of army. Artillery was under the command of Ilahi Baksh. Nawab Muzaffar Khan was aware of all these preparations so he roused the people of country side to fight a holy war<sup>53</sup>. He failed in his object and also his resources were already weakened by Ranjit Singh's repeated attack. *Zam-Zama* was also brought from Lahore and by firing *Zam-zama* more than once, they succeeded in breaking wall of fort.<sup>54</sup> After that, a large number of Sikh army under command of Gulab Singh marched toward fort<sup>55</sup> and mounted the breach near khiziri gate and Sikh forces killed

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<sup>40</sup> G.L. Chopra, P.16

<sup>41</sup> Kirpa Ram, P. 90

<sup>42</sup> G. L. Chopra, P.16

<sup>43</sup> Kirpa Ram P.90

<sup>44</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P. 40

<sup>45</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 34

<sup>46</sup> Hutchison and Vogel, P. 659-662

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 659-662.

<sup>48</sup> Kirpa Ram, P. 96, S.D.S. Charak, P. 57

<sup>49</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 158

<sup>50</sup> Hutchison and Vogel, P. 662, S.D.S. Charak, P. 57

<sup>51</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.97

<sup>52</sup> Ibid p77

<sup>53</sup> Khushwant Singh *Ranjit Singh –Maharaja of Punjab*, publisher George Allen and Unwin Ltd London. 1962, P. 64.

<sup>54</sup> G.L Chopra P. 10-12

<sup>55</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.31

Nawab and his five sons<sup>56</sup> & thus fort was captured in June 2, 1818. The conquest of Multan ended Afghan influence in Punjab<sup>57</sup> Ranjit Singh was greatly pleased with the bravery of Gulab Singh and he gave him *Nazrana* of twenty thousand.<sup>58</sup>

Since 1818, Peshawar had been made a tributary by Ranjit Singh with Jahan Dad Khan as governor, later on replaced by Sultan Muhammad Khan. On 12 March 1833, Ranjit Singh entered into a treaty with Shah Shuja exiled ruler of Kabul. He acknowledged the claim of Ranjit Singh on a number of territories to the west of Indus including Peshawar. So Ranjit Singh asked his officer to occupy it. Hari Singh Nalwa occupied it with little difficulty<sup>59</sup>. On this occupation Sultan Mohammad fled to Amir Dost Muhammad and told him that if they become successful then Ranjit Singh annexed all area which had been left to Sultan Mohammad Khan. Amir dost Muhammad equipped an army and advanced for battle. Dost Mohammad made full preparations of war. He gave it the character of *Jihad* and assumed the title of *Amir-ul- Mominin*.<sup>60</sup>

Ranjit Singh asked Gulab Singh, Sardar Hari Singh sahib, Raja Suchet Singh and Sindhanwalia Sardars to march toward Peshawar. The troop assumed by Dost Mohammad was up to forty thousand. He had thirty-seven guns and treasures of thirty-one lakhs and large supply of grain in the Peshawar valley about this time<sup>61</sup>

It was great anxiety for Ranjit Singh he sent Harlan Feringhee and Aziz ud din to negotiate with Dost Mohammad so that he gain times to concentrate on his force.<sup>62</sup> The enemy dammed the channel of Brach Stream and diverted the watercourse. Due to shortage of water, the Khalsa army was in great distress. Ranjit Singh when came to know about this advance in person.<sup>63</sup> Gulab Singh made an arrangement of interview between Ranjit Singh and Sultan Mohammad and thus by hearing about that treachery Dost Mohammad march backed to Kabul on March 11, 1835.

Earlier, Ranjit Singh had made a negotiation with him and made an offer of jagirs of thirty thousand on condition that he would end all claims over Peshawar and cease to molest Sikh troops, but it end.<sup>64</sup>

Now both armies are up to seven kos from each other. Ranjit Singh with great valour lead his troops and almost surrounded Dost. Dost realize that it is impossible for him to gain victory, he fled away and were pursued by the Sikh to the mouth of Khahtar pass.<sup>65</sup> Gulab Singh played an important role in this war. He fought with such vigour and strength that enemies had to fled away<sup>66</sup> and Peshawar was again under Ranjit Singh.

Reasi was a small town on the left bank of the river Chenab in Jammu division. Up to the first quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the time of Ranjit Dev. Reasi was an independent principality in the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> A.D. It was conquered and annexed to Jammu by Ranjit Dev.<sup>67</sup> Gulab Singh's expedition in Reasi pargana took place in 1816-17. In 1817, Gulab Singh was at Jammu when Ranjit Singh invited Main Diwan Singh who was grandson of Raja Ratan Dev Jamwal got pargana of Reasi as jagir.<sup>68</sup> Mian Diwan in April 1817 annexed the country on the north west of Jammu and incited Khasalis to a general revolt<sup>69</sup> He was also suspected in the murder of Mian Mota as he was in close relationship

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<sup>56</sup> G.L. Chopra, P.12

<sup>57</sup> Khuswant Singh, P. 126

<sup>58</sup> Narsingh das Nargis, P. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.147

<sup>60</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.148

<sup>61</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.149

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. P. 148

<sup>63</sup> N.K. Sinha p 98

<sup>64</sup> Anon, P. 133

<sup>65</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.150

<sup>66</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis p 38

<sup>67</sup> Kirpa Ram, PP. 77,78

<sup>68</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 31

<sup>69</sup> S.D.S. Charak, PP.42 43

with Rani Bandral. When Ranjit Singh came to know about that, he put him in confinement.<sup>70</sup> Ranjit Singh sent Bhagwan Singh with orders to Gulab Singh for the occupation of Reasi.<sup>71</sup>

When Gulab Singh reached Reasi, the people welcomed him. But Mian Bhup Singh son of the deposed chief Main Diwan Singh instigated the Khasalis to disregard Gulab Singh authority.<sup>72</sup> When Gulab Singh came to know about that he marched toward Slal fort and khashal. Main Bhup Singh locked himself inside the fort. Gulab Singh with little efforts subjected them and they took to flight.<sup>73</sup> He made a mud fort and named it Bhingarh and put Diwan and his two commander there and returned to Lahore.<sup>74</sup>

Once again, a serious challenge broke out to the authority of Dogras in Reasi by Mian Bhup Dev. When he purchased the release of his father Main Diwan Singh and secretly brought him there and fabricated a *parwana* on the behalf of Ranjit Singh and said that jagir of Reasi is restored to them.<sup>75</sup> The native people put faith in him and set siege to the Reasi fort which was defended by Zorawar Singh Khaluria.<sup>76</sup> He made arrangements for command and defense of fort. When the information reached Raja Kishore Singh who was at Ramgarh, he dispatched a small force under Diwan Amir Chand. He asked for military help from Rajputs but none of them agreed to give troop. He therefore took credit cash from Bhawani Shah Bhabrah. Sahukar of Jammu.<sup>77</sup> He purchased gunpowder and lead and set off for Reasi. He was with 40 soldiers but was joined by loyal chiefs and their number swelled to thousands. The force un-nerved the rebels and in no time they lifted the siege without delay. The victorious army occupied Reasi.<sup>78</sup> On the next day, when Mian Jawahar Singh Agavaria accompanied by few persons was going along foothills, the rebel opened fire on them. Wazir Zorawar Singh rushed to the spot. The enemy force was completely routed by Dogras and Bhup Dev crossed the mountain and escaped.<sup>79</sup>

Gulab Singh soon arrived at Reasi and impressed by them. He killed Surata Bhagial who was the leader of rebel entrusted the administration of Reasi to Wazir Zorawar Singh.<sup>80</sup>

The Dogra expeditions for the conquest of Ladakh started in 1834. Gulab Singh had before embarking on his Himalayan conquests extracted consent from Maharaja Ranjit Singh and ascertained British views. By conquering Ladakh Ranjit Singh extend his kingdom beyond the Himalayas.<sup>81</sup> It is also important for the occupation of Kashmir valley. British did not want to enter in that remote area because of lack of interest or because of treaty of 1909 with Sikhs. The idea of conquest of Ladakh was generally originated in Jammu not in Lahore. Gulab Singh was also tempted by the considerable economic benefit of the Ladakh. Control on Ladakh gave them monopoly not only on Leh's flourishing trade frequented by merchants from Tibet, Sinkiang and Kashmir but also control of the important route between Tibet and Kashmir which carry Pashima trade.<sup>82</sup>

The invasion was made through Kishtwar. From there, there are two routes to Ladakh. In 1821, it was placed under the charge of Zorawar Singh Kahluria.<sup>83</sup> In 1834, in summer Gulab Singh mustered an

<sup>70</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 31

<sup>71</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.78

<sup>72</sup> S.D.S Charak, P.43

<sup>73</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.31

<sup>74</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.79

<sup>75</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 32

<sup>76</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P. 43

<sup>77</sup> Kirpa Ram, P. 81

<sup>78</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P. 43

<sup>79</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.32

<sup>80</sup> S.D.S Charak, P.43

<sup>81</sup> Sita Ram Kohli *Sunset of the Sikh Empire* publishers Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1967, P. 19

<sup>82</sup> Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu fox A Biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir 1792-1857* Heritage publishers New Delhi 1988 p25

<sup>83</sup> M.L Kapur, P. 60

army of ten thousand men and ordered his able Governor Zorawar Singh. He entered the Ladakh, defeated a Ladakhi force and established his control over western province Purlig by the middle of August.<sup>84</sup> He enter the area of Purlig from Maryum La or Bhot khol pass. They defeat Ladakhi forces and reach upto Kartse. From their they marched toward Suru river and gave another defeat to Ladakhis in Pashkhyam<sup>85</sup>

Tshe-Pal Namgyal was the ruler of Ladakh. He said that Dr. Henderson was an envoy of British and had come here with an offer of assistance. Dogras ruler therefore stop their expedition and gave information to Gulab Singh. Gulab Singh gave this information to Ranjit Singh, which he later gave to British. They replied that they did not have a slightest intention of stalling the Maharaja plan of making conquest of North.<sup>86</sup>

As winter was approaching so Zorawar Singh want to go to warmer place, want to enter into negotiation.<sup>87</sup> They refused to negotiate and took Gurella warfare. The Ladakhi army marched to Lang Kartse where the Dogras had encamped for winter. Dogra's armies attack them. No efforts were made by them to defend themselves but ran away. The Ladakhi army retreated to Leh. Tsepal Lose hope and agreed to negotiate<sup>88</sup> Zorawar Singh and he came to Bazgo where meeting took place. Tsepal was installed as ruler of Leh holding power from Gulab Singh. He was asking for war indemnity of Rupees fifty thousand and annual tribute of twenty thousand. After this, Zorawar Singh came back to Jammu.<sup>89</sup>

The Governor of Sikh Mihan Singh instigated the Ladakhis to rise in revolt against Gulab Singh's authority and hence the Dogras garrisons in Suru were put to death. Zorawar Singh reached there and quelled the rebellion ruthlessly<sup>90</sup> He placed garrison in forts and put Dewan Daya Ram as an agent to the king and came back to Jammu.<sup>91</sup> In 1836, Zorawar Singh again go back to Leh to deal with another uprising led by Gyalpo supported by Mahan Singh. They even kill agent Dewan Daya Ram. He suppressed the rebellion and put Ngorub Stanzin in place of Gyalpo.<sup>92</sup> After few months, rebellions broke out and twenty Dogras were put to death. Zorawar Singh again came to Leh with three thousand soldiers. Ngorub stanzin was deposed, who was accused of rebellion and reinstalled Tsepal<sup>93</sup> Tsepal was a nominal ruler but real power was vested to Mian Singh and Gobind Ram as his assistant.<sup>94</sup>

The conquest of Iskardu or Baltistan, also known as 'Little Tibet' was made by Zorawar Srinagar. It was ruled by Ahmed Shah and Gulab Singh and Zorawar Singh was adequately provoked by him. He also gave shelter to the rebellious people from Ladakh.<sup>95</sup>

Unrest prevailed in Baltistan between the Baltis and Balti dynasty. The ruler of Baltistan Ahmed Shah had strange relation with his son Mohammad Shah. Mohammad Shah request Zorawar Singh for help to recognized his claims.<sup>96</sup>

In 1840, Zorawar Singh with Dogras and five thousand Ladakhis move toward Baltistan. They were order to enter Baltistan by Hanu and Charbat Pass. Ahmed Shah put a check on Zorawar Singh. They set their camp at a high plateau. They also broke down the bridge and hence Dogra had to face great

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<sup>84</sup> Bawa Satiender Singh, P.26

<sup>85</sup> M.L. Kapur, P. 60

<sup>86</sup> Bawa Satiender Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, Heritage Publisher, New Delhi, 1999, P. 27

<sup>87</sup> K.M. Panikar, P.77

<sup>88</sup> M.L. Kapur, PP. 60 61

<sup>89</sup> K.M. Panikar PP 78 79

<sup>90</sup> Kirpa Ram, P.208

<sup>91</sup> K.M. Panikar PP 78 79

<sup>92</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P. 112

<sup>93</sup> M.L. Kapur P.62

<sup>94</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis P. 113

<sup>95</sup> M.L. Kapur, P. 62

<sup>96</sup> K.M. Panikar P.78-80



problems. It was month of December<sup>97</sup> and winter was set in with heavy snowfall. The Dogra army had stayed there for 15 days. Then they set out in search of Passagee across the river.<sup>98</sup>

Zorawar Singh with the help of Mehta Basti Ram and few soldiers constructed an ice bridge secretly in few hours. They crossed the bridge and made an attack on enemies<sup>99</sup>. They reached cheche-Thung. The Baltis retreat leaving two hundred men dead. Thus, Dogras got victory in the battle of Thamo Khon. He then moved toward Hamza Gond where another battle was fought. Dogra again got victory.<sup>100</sup> He stayed at Kharmang then he proceeded toward Gol where Ladakhi army joined him and they reached at Iskardu. Ahmed Shah had shut himself up in a fort of Khar Poche. The Dogras attack on fort and blocked all roads and all garrison were either killed or taken and Raja himself become a prisnor. The Fort was razed to the ground and gold, Jewellery and clothes was taken away as war indemnity valued about two lakhs.<sup>101</sup>

After consolidating his hold on Ladakh and Baltistan, Gulab Singh planned to enter into the domain of Tibetan province. Up to the reign of Singe Namgyal in Ladakh the region of Western Tibet formed a part of Ladakhi Kingdom. Zorawar Singh assert Ladakhi claim on those territories which lies to the east and south east of Ladakh.<sup>102</sup> In 1841, Zorawar Singh called upon the governor to acknowledge the supremacy of Sikh in those area which were lost by Namgyal in a battle. Therefore, Dogras at present master of western Tibet revived the claims to these districts and demanded tribute from him. The governor sent only five horses and five mules. This offended Dogra General. He ordered his troop to make an attack on Ngari.<sup>103</sup> In May, 1841 Zorawar Singh entered Tibet with a force of five thousand men comprised of soldiers from Jammu, Ladakh and Baltistan.<sup>104</sup> His army of invasion has been estimated by A.H. Francke about six thousand to seven thousand Dogras in addition to Balti's and Ladakhis a total of about ten thousand.<sup>105</sup>

The expedition was planned during April 1841, but by the mid of 1841 Zorawar Singh moved his troops into the outposts of Western Tibet. Zorawar Singh had gathered full information about the military strength of Tibetans. At first, the Dogra commander without any opposition swiftly occupied Rudok and Gartok. Ladakhi Chief Nono-bsodnams, the minister of Bazgo and and Gulam Khan the deposed chief of Baltistan joined them. He divided his forces into three columns of about three hundred to five hundred men one under himself and other two other Gulam Hasan and Non-Sodam respectively.<sup>106</sup> From Chushul he entered the Tibetan District of Rudok and conquered it on 5 June 1841 and then moved south where he joined the forces with first two division and captured Gartok. Tibetans fled toward Taklakot a place about fifteen miles from border of Nepal. Zorawar Singh advanced for conquest of Taklakot so that he occupied it up to the Majum Pass.<sup>107</sup> Zorawar Singh stationed his own pickets at every important post. He put one hundred fifty people for the protection of Taklakot fort. Zorawar Singh himself camped at Trithapuri while Colonel Basti Ram was at Taklakot. It was in November 1841 when there was unbearable cold and he did not expect any serious attempt from Tibetan forces. He went to Mansorver. On 7<sup>th</sup> November he heard that Lahasa force was approaching toward them. He sent a small detachment under Nono-Sodnam but they were cut into pieces by Tibetan forces. Nono Sodnam escaped from there and save his life. After that, he again sent a force of six hundred soldiers under Nono Sodnam, Gulam Khan, Mohan Singh and Mian Singarah on 19 November. They were again defeated by Tibetan forces, and Nono Sodnam and

<sup>97</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.114

<sup>98</sup> S.D.S Charak, P. 122

<sup>99</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, P.114

<sup>100</sup> Ibid P. 115

<sup>101</sup> S.D.S. Charak P. 126-129

<sup>102</sup> S.D.S Charak, P.142

<sup>103</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis P. 116

<sup>104</sup> Bawa Satiender Singh, P.32

<sup>105</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P.146

<sup>106</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P. 148

<sup>107</sup> S.D.S. Charak, P. 152

Ghulam Khan made prisoner.<sup>108</sup> It was realized by Zorawar Singh that it is impossible to retreat through snow and the enemy who was facing him was more than twice the number he had under his command. He did not lose hope and attack on enemy on 10, December 1841 and war continued for three days. On 12 December Zorawar Singh was vouched by a bullet, though he fought like lion but after this a Tibetan soldier pierced him with his lance.<sup>109</sup> Gulab Singh was at Peshawar at that time to assist British troops into Afghanistan<sup>110</sup> Cunningham also record that out of a sizable Dogra force “not more than one thousand escaped alive and of these seven hundred were (made) prisoners of war.” After Zorawar’s death the Dogra suffered untold hardship. The Ladakhis rose in revolt. They never fully accept Jammu’s sovereignty and found them in distress rose a revolt. Jigmet nam-gyal who had become gyalpo rose against Dogras. Even some Baltis also join them. The Tibetan began to dream of bringing Leh back into Lahasa. Thus, there was a great hardship for Dogras, to restore them<sup>111</sup>. Gulab Singh did not lose heart. A new army was raised and dispatched under Dewan Hari Chand and Wazir Ratnu.<sup>112</sup> When Dogra forces reached Ladakh, the Tibetan fled toward Shyok and Dogras occupied Leh. As Tibetan forces did not want to gave up, so a strong Tibetan force of three thousand men was sent by Lahasa authorities. They met at Drangtse where the Tibetan had entrenched themselves. It was difficult for the Dogra to defeat them, as they were entrenched. They dammed up a river, flooded entrenchments, and thus forced them out of their strong position. A fierce battle took place and thus Tibetan were defeated. Their general was killed on the spot. Thus, Lahasa Government agreed to seek peace and the following treaty\* was signed on 15 august 1842<sup>113</sup> between Raja Gulab Singh and Shri Guru Lama and Wazir Khushal Chu was witness.<sup>114</sup>

Though officially, Ladakh and Balitstan now become a part of Sikh Kingdom and the Lahore authority reached up to Leh and Ladakh region. But real was power vested in the hand of Dogras.<sup>115</sup>

### Conclusion:

The expansion of the Lahore Darbar during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh marked a transformative period in the political and territorial landscape of 19th-century North India. At the heart of this imperial consolidation stood the Dogra family of Jammu, whose influence extended far beyond their regional roots. Through strategic loyalty, administrative competence, and military leadership, key Dogra figures such as Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh not only contributed to the strengthening of the Sikh Empire but also carved out a unique and powerful position within its political hierarchy.

The Dogras played a crucial role in extending the empire’s frontiers into regions such as Ladakh, Baltistan, and the hill states, demonstrating their capacity to act as both imperial agents and autonomous power brokers. Their ability to maintain a balance between service to the Lahore Darbar and the pursuit of their own dynastic ambitions highlights the complex interplay of loyalty, pragmatism, and political foresight that characterized their rise.

Ultimately, the Dogra family's involvement in the expansion of the Lahore Darbar was instrumental in shaping the geopolitical contours of the region. Their legacy continued with the establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir—arguably one of the most significant political outcomes

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<sup>108</sup> Narsingh Das Nargis, PP.117-118

<sup>109</sup> K.M. Panikar, PP. 81 82

<sup>110</sup> Bawa Satiender Singh, P. 36

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, P. 35

<sup>112</sup> K.M. Panikar, P. 83

\* Translation of the Persian copy by K.M. Panikar reproduced in *Gulabnama*, P.264

<sup>113</sup> N.D. Nargis, PP. 119,120

<sup>114</sup> K.M. Panikar, P.85

<sup>115</sup> Bawa Satiender Singh, PP. 35-36

of the Sikh Empire's expansionist phase. The Dogras, therefore, must be recognized not only as loyal courtiers but also as shrewd architects of a broader imperial vision that left a lasting imprint on the subcontinent's history.

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