

The Rise of the Dogra Brothers: Pioneers of Duggar's Political Unity (AD 1810-1846)

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Abstract

The rise of the Dogra brothers Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh within the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh marked a transformative era in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. This study examines their ascent from modest beginnings in the Duggar region (Jammu) to becoming pivotal political and administrative figures at the Lahore Durbar. By leveraging diplomacy, strategic alliances, and military astuteness, the Dogra brothers secured influential positions within the Sikh court and subsequently laid the foundation for the independent Dogra state. The research highlights Dhian Singh's role as wazir, exploring his administrative and political impact, while examining Gulab Singh's leadership in territorial expansion through campaigns in Ladakh, Baltistan, and Tibet and Suchet Singh's contributions to diplomacy and regional stability are also emphasized, providing a balanced representation of their unified efforts. Key administrative reforms, including revenue collection and infrastructure development, are analyzed to illustrate their governance strategies. The establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, formalized through the Treaty of Amritsar, is presented as the culmination of their collective efforts. Employing a multidisciplinary methodology, the study integrates primary archival sources, traveler accounts, and historical analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of their legacy. This research contributes to the historiography of South Asia by exploring how the Dogra brothers' vision and leadership reshaped the political geography of the region.

Keywords: Dogra Brothers, Sikh Empire, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh Campaign, 19th-Century Statecraft, Treaty of Amritsar..

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Introduction

The early 19th century was a transformative period in the Indian subcontinent, characterized by political upheaval, territorial expansion, and shifting power dynamics. Punjab, under the charismatic leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, emerged as a formidable empire during this time. Known as the "Lion of Punjab," Ranjit Singh unified disparate Sikh states and established an administration that effectively balanced governance and military prowess. His reign marked the zenith of Sikh power, with Lahore serving as a vibrant cultural and political hub. However, within this environment of centralized authority, regional leaders and influential court officials played crucial roles in shaping the broader narrative of Punjab's history. Among the most notable figures of this era were the Dogra brothers Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh. Originating from the hilly Duggar region, these brothers rose to prominence at the Sikh court, becoming indispensable to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's administration.

Their ascent was neither accidental nor straightforward but the result of astute political maneuvering, strategic alliances, and exceptional administrative capabilities. Each brother brought unique strengths to the table: Gulab Singh with his military and territorial ambitions, Dhian Singh as a trusted advisor and administrator, and Suchet Singh as the excellent statesman. Together, they played a transformative role in the history of the Duggar region, by unifying it, and reestablish it in the form of an independent princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846.

The story of the Dogra brothers Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh represents determination, political skill, and remarkable adaptability during a time of great upheaval in North India. Born into a relatively modest Rajput family of Jammu, the three brothers rose to prominence through their talent, ambition, and firm loyalty to the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Gulab Singh, the eldest brother, began his career as a soldier in the Sikh army. His courage, military acumen, and leadership on the battlefield quickly attracted the attention of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, earning him increasing responsibility and influence. Dhian Singh, known for his intelligence, charisma, and political insight, became one of the Maharaja's most trusted courtiers and eventually emerged as a key figure at the Lahore Darbar. Suchet Singh, also played an important role in strengthening the family's position through military service, diplomacy, and loyal support.

As Maharaja Ranjit Singh sought to consolidate and expand his empire, he relied heavily on capable and trustworthy officials. The Dogra brothers proved invaluable in this regard. They were entrusted with important administrative and military responsibilities and contributed significantly to the extension of Sikh authority into frontier regions such as Ladakh, Baltistan, and western Tibet. At the same time, they skillfully navigated the complex and often turbulent politics of the Lahore court, where

rival factions constantly competed for power and influence.

The death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 plunged the Sikh Empire into political instability and succession struggles. Amid this uncertainty, the Dogra brothers demonstrated remarkable resilience and strategic foresight. Gulab Singh, in particular, emerged as a shrewd statesman who successfully balanced diplomacy with military strength. Through careful negotiations and calculated political moves, he gradually established an autonomous power base in Jammu. These efforts ultimately culminated in the creation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846. While Gulab Singh is often remembered as the founder of the Dogra State, his achievements were deeply rooted in the collective efforts of all three brothers. Their complementary strengths and political skills enabled the family to rise from regional nobility to one of the most influential dynasties in nineteenth-century South Asia. Their legacy continues to shape the historical and cultural identity of Jammu and Kashmir today.

Research Objective

This study seeks to analyze the political and administrative rise of the Dogra brothers, focusing on their transformation from court officials to sovereign rulers. By examining their early careers, roles at the Sikh court, and contributions to the formation of the Dogra state, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of their historical significance. Specifically, the objectives of this paper include:

1. To explore their early careers and rise to prominence
2. To evaluate their role at the Sikh court
3. To examine their contributions to the Dogra state
4. To contextualize their military campaigns
- 5.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical research methodology based on the analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include archival records, treaties, official correspondence, administrative documents, and contemporary accounts such as those of Alexander Gardner, Alexander Burnes, William Moorcroft, and Joseph Cunningham. The Treaty of Amritsar (1846) and records of the Lahore Darbar have been critically examined to understand the political, military, and administrative role of the Dogra brothers.

Secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, and historical studies on the Dogra dynasty, the Sikh Empire, and Jammu and Kashmir, have been consulted to provide context and interpret historical developments. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, using source criticism and cross-referencing to ensure the authenticity and reliability of historical evidence.

Early Careers and Rise

Descendants of Raja Ranjeet Dev, the Dogra brothers Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh originated from the rugged and strategically significant Duggar region, located in the foothills of the Himalayas. This area, now encompassing parts of Jammu, has historically been known for its martial traditions and cultural distinctiveness. The brothers were born into a family which held considerable respect in the regional socio-political hierarchy. Their father, Kishore Singh, served as a local zamindar (landowner), managing a small estate. Though their initial social and economic standing was unremarkable, their lineage and upbringing ingrained in them the values of loyalty, bravery, and adaptability, qualities that later propelled their rise in the Sikh Empire's intricate political framework (Kaul, 1989).

Born in 1792, Gulab Singh was the eldest of the three brothers, followed by Dhian Singh (1796–1843) and Suchet Singh (1801–1844). Raised in the Duggar region, which had a long tradition of local chieftainship and military service, the brothers developed qualities of leadership, diplomacy, and warfare from an early age. As the Sikh Empire expanded under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century, the Dogra brothers capitalized on emerging political opportunities and entered Sikh service. Their experience in local administration and military affairs laid the groundwork for their rise within the Sikh court and their subsequent influence in the affairs of the empire.

Entry into the Sikh Court

The Dogra brothers' entry into the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was neither immediate nor accidental but the result of calculated efforts to prove their mettle. Gulab Singh, the eldest, initially served ordinary soldier, as '*Hazer Bash*' at Lahore durbar, under Jamedar Kushal Singh (Latif, 1891), demonstrating exceptional military prowess during campaigns in Punjab's frontier regions. His early victories, particularly in subduing rebellious territories, caught the attention of Ranjit Singh, who valued loyalty and competence in his officers. This recognition marked Gulab Singh's entry into the Lahore durbar, a critical turning point for the Dogra family's fortunes (Hasrat, 1977). Dhian Singh followed a different trajectory, entering the court as a junior official before rapidly ascending the ranks due to his intelligence, charisma, and administrative abilities. Recognized for his astuteness, he became a most trusted and favorite of Ranjit Singh, eventually being appointed as the Maharaja's

Prime Minister. This appointment placed him at the heart of the Sikh Empire's governance, allowing him to wield significant influence over state policies and court dynamics (Singh, 2005). Suchet Singh, the youngest, complemented his brothers by excelling in diplomacy and forming strategic alliances that reinforced the Dogras' position within the empire. He was the polished courtier and handsomest minister at the durbar. The Dogras' rise was facilitated by their ability to navigate the complex power dynamics at the Lahore Durbar. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, known for his meritocratic approach, rewarded competence and loyalty, qualities that the Dogra brothers exemplified. Through their combined efforts in administration, military service, and diplomacy, they secured a foothold in the Sikh court, setting the stage for their eventual emergence as regional powerbrokers.



Figure 1: *Painting of Imam Baksh Lahore : Seen of the Conversation Between the Sikh and Dogra Brothers , Portraits of The Dogra Brothers, Raja Gulab Singh, Raja Suchet Singh , Standing Behind the Sons of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, And in White Beard Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. picture source: Acc.no. 3722 Government museum art gallery Chandigarh.*

Key Turning Points in Their Rise

Several key developments in the early careers of the Dogra brothers marked their steady rise within the Sikh Empire and laid the foundation for their later political prominence. Among the three brothers, Gulab Singh who emerged as an exceptionally capable military commander and administrator

was granted extensive jagirs and increasing authority within the region. A defining moment in his career came in 1822 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh formally installed him on the *gaddi* of Jammu and personally performed the *Raj Tilak* ceremony at Jia Pota, Akhnoor. According to tradition, the Maharaja applied the saffron tilak in a downward stroke on Gulab Singh's forehead, symbolizing his wish that Gulab Singh's authority would take deep root and endure for generations. This event not only legitimized Gulab Singh's position as the ruler of Jammu but also signified the growing trust and confidence that the Sikh ruler placed in the Dogra family.

Following his elevation, Gulab Singh devoted considerable effort to strengthening the administration of Jammu and expanding Dogra influence in the northern frontier regions. Through a combination of military expeditions, diplomatic initiatives, and effective governance, he consolidated authority in territories such as Ladakh and Baltistan, thereby extending the strategic reach of the Sikh Empire. These achievements enhanced his reputation as a capable statesman and military leader while simultaneously elevating the status of the Dogra family within the imperial hierarchy (Snedden, 2015).

Dhian Singh's rise was equally significant, though it was achieved primarily through political acumen rather than military exploits. His intelligence, diplomatic skills, and ability to navigate the complex factional politics of the Lahore Darbar earned him the confidence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who appointed him *Wazir* (Prime Minister) of the Sikh Empire. In this influential position, Dhian Singh played a central role in managing court affairs, mediating disputes among rival factions, and maintaining administrative stability. His prominence at the Lahore court substantially strengthened the political standing of the Dogra family and enabled them to exert considerable influence over imperial decision-making.

Suchet Singh, although often receiving less attention in historical accounts, also contributed significantly to the family's growing power. As a reward for his loyal service, he was granted the jagir of Ramnagar and Samba bestowed with the title of Raja. Through his participation in military campaigns and his engagement in regional diplomacy, Suchet Singh contributed to the consolidation of Dogra authority and the expansion of their political network.

Taken together, the achievements of Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh illustrate a coordinated process of political advancement built upon military service, administrative competence, and strategic diplomacy. Their complementary talents enabled the Dogra family to transform itself from a regional noble house into one of the most influential power centres of nineteenth-century North India, laying the foundations for the emergence of the Dogra State in Jammu and Kashmir.

Strategic Alliances and Diplomacy

One of the defining aspects of the Dogra brothers' rise was their strategic use of alliances and marriages to consolidate their power. Marriages were a key tool for forging political connections in pre-colonial India, and the Dogras adeptly used this practice to their advantage. Gulab Singh's marriage to the daughter of a prominent zamindar not only strengthened his local support base but also facilitated his integration into the Sikh Empire's elite circles. Similarly, Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh cultivated ties with influential families at the Lahore Durbar, ensuring their inclusion in the empire's decision-making processes (Rai, 2004). Beyond familial alliances, the Dogras engaged in pragmatic diplomacy to safeguard their interests. They maintained a delicate balance of loyalty to Maharaja Ranjit Singh while positioning themselves as indispensable intermediaries between the Sikh Empire and its frontier territories. This approach not only secured their survival during periods of political instability but also enabled them to expand their influence without directly challenging the central authority. The brothers' diplomatic foresight was particularly evident in navigating the post-Ranjit Singh succession crisis. While many courtiers struggled to maintain their positions amidst the empire's factional conflicts, the Dogras emerged as key players, leveraging their alliances and administrative control to consolidate their power. Thus, between 1827 and 1835, all three Dogra brothers emerged as some of the most powerful nobles within the Sikh Empire. This strategic vision and careful consolidation of power ultimately laid the foundation for their transformation from loyal servants of the Sikh Empire into the architects of the Dogra State.

Dhian Singh's Prominence

Among the three Dogra brothers, Dhian Singh emerged as one of the most influential figures in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court. Appointed as the *wazir* (Prime Minister) in 1828, Dhian Singh's tenure at the Lahore Durbar was marked by his exceptional administrative mastery and his capacity to navigate the complex political environment of the Sikh Empire. His appointment reflected Maharaja Ranjit Singh's confidence in his abilities and a broader recognition of his indispensability within the administrative machinery of the state. Dhian Singh's influence extended beyond his official position; he was a master strategist who understood the intricate patronage networks that underpinned the Sikh Empire. One after another they were raised to the dignity of the Raja, Dhian Singh earned the title of *Raja-i- Rajagan, Raja Hindpaat, Raja Bhadur*: (Latif .1891) Through his role, he mediated disputes among the empire's diverse factions, ensuring the smooth functioning of the court while maintaining the Maharaja's authority. Dhian Singh's ability to balance competing interests among Sikh Sardars (Chiefs) and regional administrators cemented his reputation as a stabilizing force within the empire. His reforms aimed at streamlining governance, particularly in revenue collection and provincial ad-

ministration, further strengthened the empire's foundations (Kaul, 1989). Furthermore, Dhian Singh cultivated a close personal relationship with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. While he displayed immutable loyalty to the Maharaja, he was not above leveraging his position for the Dogra family's benefit. This dual role as a loyal servant of the Sikh Empire and a shrewd proponent of Dogra interests highlighted his political dexterity. Ranjit Singh pleased with the service of the Raja Dhian and his brothers he ordered to address the Dhian Singh as "*Raja Kalan Bahadur or 'Chief Raja' champion of the state*". (Latif. 1891). His influence, however, waned after Ranjit Singh died in 1839, as the empire descended into factionalism, but his legacy as a pivotal figure in Sikh court politics endured (Hasrat, 1977).

Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh

While Dhian Singh was a prominent figure in Lahore, his brothers Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh contributed significantly to the Dogra influence in the Sikh administration through key military and administrative assignments. Gulab Singh, the eldest, held a crucial role as a military commander and administrator. His early successes in consolidating Sikh control over frontier territories such as Jammu, Ladakh, and Baltistan showcased his tactical brilliance and administrative capability. As the governor of Jammu, Gulab Singh implemented policies that reinforced Sikh authority while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the Dogra state's eventual independence (Singh, 2005). Suchet Singh, the youngest of the trio, played a complementary role in furthering the Dogra family's prominence. While less celebrated than his elder brothers, Suchet Singh's contributions were integral to the family's strategy of consolidating power. His military expeditions and diplomatic engagements with regional rulers helped secure alliances that bolstered the Sikh Empire's stability. Suchet Singh's efforts also ensured that the Dogras maintained a unified front, particularly during times of internal court rivalries (Rai, 2004). The collective influence of the three brothers was instrumental in reinforcing the Sikh Empire's dominance in the northern territories. While Dhian Singh maintained a strong presence in the Lahore durbar, Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh extended the Dogra reach across the empire's frontiers, ensuring that their contributions were felt both at the court and on the battlefield.

Interplay of Loyalty and Ambition

The Dogra brothers' relationship with Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Sikh court was defined by a delicate interplay of loyalty and ambition. Dhian Singh, in particular, was a trusted confidant of the Maharaja, who relied on him for advice and mediation in court matters. This relationship, however, was not without tension. As Dhian Singh consolidated his position, rival factions within the court often sought to undermine him, accusing him of advancing Dogra's interests at the expense of Sikh unity (Snedden, 2015). Despite these challenges, Dhian Singh's loyalty to Ranjit Singh remained steadfast, and his ability to outmaneuver his detractors highlighted his political resilience. Gulab Singh's in-

teractions with the Sikh court were marked by a pragmatic blend of service and self-interest. While he remained a loyal military commander during Ranjit Singh's reign, his ambitions extended beyond serving the empire. His strategic alliances with British officials and regional leaders demonstrated his foresight in preparing for the eventual decline of the Sikh Empire. These alliances would later prove critical in securing the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, which established Jammu and Kashmir as a princely state under his rule (Kaul, 1989).

Suchet Singh's relationship with the court, while less central, also reflected the family's balancing act between loyalty and ambition. His efforts to strengthen Dogra's influence were characterized by his role in court diplomacy and military engagements. Together, the brothers exemplified a strategic approach to power, wherein their loyalty to the Sikh Empire was balanced by a clear vision for Dogra's ascendancy.

Administrative Policies and Governance

The Dogra brothers' approach to governance was marked by a commitment to stability and development. Gulab Singh focused on creating efficient administrative structures in the territories under his control. He implemented reforms in revenue collection, established a robust judiciary, and ensured the protection of trade routes, which contributed to economic prosperity. Recognizing the importance of agriculture, he introduced policies to support local farmers, including tax incentives and infrastructure development for irrigation. His emphasis on building administrative institutions allowed for effective governance and long-term stability in Jammu and the annexed regions (Hasrat, 1977). Dhian Singh, as the prime minister of the Sikh Empire, complemented these efforts by advocating policies that ensured a balance between the interests of the central government and regional autonomy. His influence extended to administrative appointments and policy-making, which helped consolidate the Dogra presence in frontier areas. Dhian Singh's governance strategies reflected a deep understanding of the socio-political complexities of the empire, enabling the Dogras to navigate competing interests effectively (Rai, 2004). Suchet Singh, though less prominently involved in governance, played a critical role in supporting these initiatives. His efforts in maintaining military readiness and securing alliances ensured that external threats did not undermine the Dogra brothers' administrative reforms. Together, the brothers created a model of governance that prioritized stability, economic development, and integration, ensuring the longevity of the Dogra rule in Jammu.

Formation of Jammu as a Power Base

The Dogra brothers' political and administrative vision was instrumental in transforming Jammu from a relatively modest principality into a powerful and strategically significant entity. Gulab Singh, the

eldest and most prominent of the three, played a pivotal role in consolidating Jammu as a power base. Under Gulab Singh's leadership, Jammu became a hub of regional authority. He annexed Ladakh in 1834 through a well-planned military campaign and later expanded Dogra's influence into Baltistan and parts of Tibet. These territorial expansions not only increased the geopolitical importance of Jammu but also established the Dogras as significant players in the subcontinent's power dynamics (Kaul, 1989). His administrative prowess ensured stability in newly annexed regions, fostering economic growth and integrating diverse populations under Dogra rule. A Sikh garrison was stationed in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, and a tribute of Rs. 30,000 was imposed. The deposed Raja's complaints to the Chinese Minister in Lhasa proved futile, as the new ruler continued to pay the fixed subsidy without issue.

Upon returning to Jammu, Zorawar Singh was dispatched to Lahore with gifts from the newly subdued territory. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was pleased with the offerings and entertained by Zorawar Singh's bold declaration that, if commanded, he was prepared to extend his military campaigns to the borders of the Chinese empire. Hugel writes Gulab Singh with his brothers, Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh possesses a large district, which extends over inaccessible mountains from Attock to Nupoor in the southeast and thence north to Ladakh, besides other large estates in Punjab (Hugel, 1995). Initially, the Duggar region was historically divided into twenty-two small principalities. However, through the determined and collective efforts of three visionary brothers, these fragmented territories were unified into a single political entity under Jammu. This consolidation laid the foundation for a strong and powerful dominion in the Duggar region, giving rise to the popular proverb: "*Bais Raja Pahad De Bich Jammu Sardar*" "Among the 22 hill chiefs, Jammu is the leader."

The unification of these regions, which extended the dominion as far as Tibet, is a testament to the heroic endeavours of these lords of Jammu. Their achievements not only transformed Jammu into the central authority among the hill states but also paved the way for its eventual emergence as the nucleus of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846.

Unified Objective: Maharaja Gulab Singh an architect of Dogra empire

While Gulab Singh often receives the lion's share of recognition for the establishment of the Dogra state, the contributions of Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh were equally significant in shaping its foundations. Dhian Singh's role as a policymaker at the Sikh court ensured that Jammu's interests were represented at the highest levels of administration. His political influence enabled the Dogras to secure favorable terms and resources from the central government, strengthening their position in the region. Additionally, his efforts in mediating disputes within the Sikh Empire preserved the

Dogras' autonomy during a time of political instability (Singh, 2005). Suchet Singh's contributions, though less visible in historical narratives, were equally vital. His military campaigns and diplomatic missions ensured that the Dogra state remained secure and cohesive. Moreover, his collaboration with Gulab Singh in managing regional affairs demonstrated the unity and shared vision of the Dogra brothers. This collective effort in governance and state-building underscored the synergy between their strengths, ensuring the success of their broader objectives.

However, brothers of Gulab Singh could not fully enjoy the fruits of their success. In the ensuing power struggle marked by Sikh and Dogras, both Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh met tragic ends before the Treaty of Amritsar with the British in 1846. Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh were killed in this, leaving Maharaja Gulab Singh as the sole surviving brother to carry forward their legacy. Suchet Singh died without a male heir, and his *jagirs* were subsequently reduced and brought under the administration of Maharaja Gulab Singh in Jammu. The territories established and consolidated by the brothers ultimately passed into the hands of Maharaja Gulab Singh and Dhian Singh's successors, shaping the foundation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

After founding the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh's zeal for territorial expansion remained undiminished. Despite consolidating his ancestral domains, he embarked on campaigns to further extend his rule. In response to rebellions in frontier regions, he entrusted his son, Ranbir Singh, with suppressing uprisings in areas such as Yasin, Hunza, Nagar, Hazara, and Peshawar. Through strategic military and diplomatic efforts, Maharaja Gulab Singh unified numerous hill principalities into a single dominion, creating what is now known as the Dogra state. By the time of his death in 1857, he had established an extensive dominion spanning over 85,000 square miles, the largest of all Indian princely states. His legacy also included expansions into Tibetan and Chinese territories, solidifying the Dogras' prominence.

Maharaja Gulab Singh's achievements transcended the creation of a mere state; he laid the foundation for what should rightly be regarded as the Dogra Empire. Much like the Sikh Empire, the Dogra domain represented a vast and powerful entity, a testament to the vision and determination of its architect. His legacy continues to inspire pride among the Dogras, who honor him not just as a ruler but as the founder of an empire that reshaped the region's history.

The extent of his authority and influence was acknowledged by contemporary observers. Henry remarked that, "His possessions were vast and his power was almost equal to that of the ruler of Punjab" (Henry, 1894), highlighting the remarkable stature Gulab Singh attained within the political landscape of the region.

Historical Legacy

The Dogra brothers' contributions to regional governance and unification left an indelible mark on the history of South Asia. Their efforts not only established Jammu as a powerful state but also created a legacy of political and administrative innovation. The unification of diverse regions under Dogra rule spanning the culturally distinct areas of Jammu, Ladakh, Baltistan, and Tibet was a remarkable achievement in an era marked by fragmentation and competing loyalties (Snedden, 2015). The establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, through a combination of strategic diplomacy and careful negotiation during a period of significant political transformation in North India, Gulab Singh succeeded in realizing his long-cherished ambition of creating an independent and sovereign state.

A decisive milestone in this process was the Treaty of Amritsar, signed on 16 March 1846 between the British Government and Gulab Singh following the First Anglo-Sikh War. Under the terms of the treaty, Governor-General Lord Hardinge recognized Gulab Singh as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and granted him sovereignty over the extensive hill territories situated between the Indus and Ravi rivers, including Chamba but excluding Lahaul. In return, Gulab Singh agreed to pay the British Government a sum of seventy-five lakh Nanak Shahi rupees. The treaty further stipulated an annual tribute consisting of one horse, twelve shawl goats (six male and six female), and three pairs of fine Kashmiri shawls. While the Maharaja formally acknowledged British paramountcy, the agreement did not permit direct British interference in the internal administration of the state, thereby allowing him substantial autonomy in governance (Panikkar, 1953).

The Treaty of Amritsar thus represented far more than a territorial settlement; it laid the constitutional and political foundation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Building upon the military successes, diplomatic initiatives, and administrative structures established over previous decades, Gulab Singh transformed a collection of diverse territories into a unified political entity. The new state emerged as one of the largest and most geographically varied princely states in British India, encompassing a remarkable range of cultures, languages, religions, and ecological zones.

The creation of Jammu and Kashmir was not merely the achievement of an individual ruler but the outcome of the collective efforts of the Dogra leadership, whose vision, resilience, and statecraft shaped the political landscape of the western Himalayas. The institutions they established and the territorial framework they created continued to influence the region's governance and identity for generations. Consequently, the Dogra rulers occupy a significant place in the history of nineteenth-century South Asia, remembered not only as regional rulers but also as architects of a

state whose legacy continues to resonate in the political and cultural consciousness of the region.



Figure2: Map of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, 1946. Adapted from a map published by the National Geographic Society in National Geographic Magazine.

Short Overview of Military Campaigns

The military campaigns undertaken by the Dogra brothers, particularly under the leadership of Gulab Singh, were instrumental in expanding the territorial reach of the Dogra state. These campaigns, primarily focused on Ladakh, Baltistan, and Tibet, demonstrated the Dogras' military acumen and strategic foresight. The Ladakh campaign of 1834 stands out as one of the most significant achievements. Led by Gulab Singh and his trusted general Zorawar Singh, the campaign aimed to bring the economically and strategically vital region under Dogra control. Despite the challenging terrain and climatic conditions, the Dogra forces succeeded in annexing Ladakh, securing access to trade routes that connected South Asia with Central Asia (Kaul, 1989). This victory not only enhanced the Dogras' regional influence but also established their military credibility. Following the Ladakh campaign, the Dogras turned their attention to Baltistan. The campaign, initiated in 1840, sought to integrate this culturally and geographically distinct region into the expanding Dogra state. Zorawar Singh once again led the expedition, achieving notable success despite facing stiff resistance. The incorporation

of Baltistan further solidified Dogra's control over the northern frontier, creating a contiguous territory that spanned diverse cultural and geographical landscapes (Hasrat, 1977). The most ambitious of the Dogra campaigns was the attempt to expand into Tibet. Although ultimately unsuccessful, this campaign highlighted the Dogras' aspirations to extend their influence into the broader Himalayan region. Zorawar Singh's foray into western Tibet in 1841-42 was marked by initial successes, including the capture of several strategic locations. However, the harsh winter conditions and logistical challenges led to significant setbacks, culminating in the death of Zorawar Singh and the eventual retreat of Dogra forces (Rai, 2004).

Strategic Importance

These military campaigns were not undertaken solely for territorial expansion; they also had profound implications for the Dogras' political legitimacy and strategic positioning. The annexation of Ladakh, in particular, was a major milestone that elevated the Dogra state's status within the Sikh Empire and the broader South Asian geopolitical landscape. By securing control over key trade routes and fortifying their northern frontier, the Dogras positioned Jammu as a regional power capable of influencing trans-Himalayan dynamics (Singh, 2005). The success in Baltistan further underscored the Dogras' ability to govern diverse populations and integrate culturally distinct regions into their administrative framework. This achievement enhanced their reputation as capable rulers and bolstered their claims to legitimacy as sovereign leaders. Although the Tibetan campaign failed, it underscored the Dogras' ambition and their willingness to engage in high-risk endeavors to expand their influence. Collectively, these military endeavors demonstrated the Dogras' capacity for strategic planning and execution. By extending their territory and securing key positions, the brothers reinforced their political authority and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846. These campaigns, while military in nature, were deeply intertwined with the Dogras' broader state-building efforts, reflecting their vision for a unified and influential Dogra state.

Results and Analysis of Political Strategies

The Dogra brothers demonstrated exceptional political acumen, leveraging diplomacy and strategic alliances to secure their rise to power. Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh utilized marriage alliances and loyalty to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to solidify their positions within the Sikh Empire. Gulab Singh's marriage to a local Rajput family of influence enhanced his regional support base, while Dhian Singh's rapport with influential Sikh sardars and key court factions allowed him to mitigate potential conflicts at the Lahore Durbar. Suchet Singh complemented these efforts by forging alliances

with military commanders and regional leaders, ensuring that the Dogra influence extended beyond the confines of the court (Hasrat, 1977; Rai, 2004). Their ability to adapt to the dynamic political environment of the Sikh Empire was crucial. By strategically aligning themselves with the Sikh leadership during its zenith and subsequently navigating the factional rivalries after Ranjit Singh's death, the Dogra brothers ensured the survival and growth of their power base. Their diplomacy extended to interactions with the British, whom Gulab Singh cultivated as allies, laying the groundwork for the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, which secured his position as the ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

1.Role in the Sikh Court

The Dogras' influence over the administration and politics of the Sikh court was profound, particularly through Dhian Singh's role as *wazir* (Prime Minister). As one of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's closest confidants, Dhian Singh was instrumental in shaping court policies, mediating disputes, and managing the intricate patronage networks that underpinned the empire. His ability to maintain balance among the diverse factions of the Sikh durbar enabled the smooth functioning of the state during Ranjit Singh's reign. Dhian Singh's position also facilitated the integration of the Dogra brothers into key administrative and military roles. Gulab Singh's appointment as the governor of Jammu and Suchet Singh's military responsibilities were direct results of Dhian Singh's influence. Collectively, the brothers strengthened the Sikh Empire's northern frontier while simultaneously advancing their family's interests. Their active involvement in court affairs ensured that they remained indispensable to the administration, even during periods of political turmoil (Kaul, 1989; Singh, 2005). After securing the strong position over the large hill territories, He only made occasional visits to the capital, rarely appearing there unless summoned by his brothers to consult on matters of mutual interest or to provide his advice when required. Over time, these three Rajput brothers gradually monopolized all the power and influence at the Lahore court, reducing the Maharaja to little more than a figurehead, an instrument of their will. Among them, Raja Dhian Singh, with his exceptional abilities, rose to such prominence that he effectively became the regent of Punjab during the latter years of the aging sovereign, Ranjit Singh, while outwardly appearing to be his most humble servant. Once Raja Gulab Singh was entrusted by the Maharaja with the governance of the hill territories, the Sikh troops and civil officials previously managing the district were withdrawn from Jammu. Left to his own devices, the young Raja ruled his subjects with an iron fist, extending his control over the neighboring petty independent chiefs.

To understand this remarkable period, Syed Muhammad Latif's *History of the Punjab* serves as an invaluable source. It offers detailed and reliable accounts of the Sikh Empire, the rise of the Dogras,

and many of the significant events that shaped nineteenth-century North India. Likewise, the observations of Baron Charles von Hügel, who travelled through the territories governed by Maharaja Gulab Singh, provide a vivid picture of the region, its people, and its administration. Together, these contemporary accounts help reconstruct the history of the Sikh Empire and highlight the important role played by the Dogra brothers in shaping the political destiny of Jammu and Kashmir.

2. Contributions to State Formation

The Dogra brothers' collective efforts culminated in the establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, a historic achievement that transformed the political landscape of the region. Gulab Singh played a pivotal role as the architect of this state, utilizing his military successes and diplomatic negotiations to carve out a territory that spanned diverse cultural and geographical regions. His annexation of Ladakh and Baltistan expanded the Dogra domain, while his astute handling of British relations ensured international recognition of his sovereignty through the Treaty of Amritsar. Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh's contributions were equally significant in this process. Dhian Singh's administrative reforms and his role in securing resources from the Sikh court provided the foundation for state-building. Suchet Singh's military campaigns and his efforts to secure regional alliances reinforced the Dogra state's stability. Together, their efforts unified culturally distinct regions under a centralized administration, laying the groundwork for a sustainable political entity (Snedden, 2015).

Conclusion

The Dogra brothers Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh rose from modest beginnings in the Duggar region to become pivotal figures in 19th-century South Asian history. Their ascent within the Sikh Empire, driven by strategic alliances, military acumen, and administrative expertise, was a remarkable achievement in an era marked by political turbulence. Gulab Singh's military campaigns, Dhian Singh's administrative leadership, and Suchet Singh's diplomatic and military contributions collectively established the Dogras as indispensable players at the Lahore Durbar under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Their influence was multifaceted: Dhian Singh's role as *wazir* allowed the Dogras to shape the Sikh Empire's administration and navigate complex factional rivalries, while Gulab Singh's territorial expansion into Ladakh, Baltistan, and Tibet laid the foundation for the Dogra state. Suchet Singh's contributions ensured cohesion and strength within the Dogra ranks, particularly during periods of political instability. Together, their efforts culminated in the formation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, a milestone that highlighted their ability to transform regional ambitions into a lasting political entity. Their governance strategies, characterized by economic reforms, infrastructure development, and integration of diverse populations, demonstrated their vision for a

unified and prosperous state. Despite challenges, including resistance from local populations and the inherent difficulties of managing a multicultural domain, the Dogras succeeded in establishing a model of governance that balanced central authority with regional autonomy.

The Dogra brothers' contributions had a profound and enduring impact on the political geography of South Asia. The establishment of Jammu and Kashmir as a princely state marked a significant reconfiguration of power dynamics in the region, placing the Dogras among the foremost rulers of their time. Gulab Singh's Treaty of Amritsar with the British not only legitimized his sovereignty but also positioned Jammu and Kashmir as a strategically important entity in the broader imperial landscape. Their legacy extends beyond territorial acquisitions and governance reforms. The Dogra brothers' efforts to integrate culturally and geographically distinct regions under a single administration left an indelible mark on the subcontinent's history. This unification laid the groundwork for a distinct regional identity that continues to shape the political and cultural discourse surrounding Jammu and Kashmir. In a broader context, their rise underscores the interplay of ambition, strategy, and circumstance in historical state-building. The Dogras' ability to adapt to shifting political realities, maintain unity despite individual prominence, and leverage their strengths in military, administrative, and diplomatic arenas serves as a compelling case study of leadership during a transformative era. While the princely state they created would later become a focal point of political contention, the Dogra brothers' achievements remain a testament to their vision and perseverance. Their story is not only a significant chapter in the history of the Sikh Empire and British India but also a reflection of the enduring challenges and opportunities inherent in governing diverse and dynamic regions. The Dogras' legacy continues to resonate, offering insights into the complexities of leadership and statecraft in a multicultural and politically fragmented world.

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