

Mapping the Chronology Conquest of the Rise of Maharaja Gulab Singh—A Perspective from Primary Sources

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Throughout history, small states have come out of nowhere, and rapidly become great powers. This was the case of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, which was the creation of Maharaja Gulab Singh who was one of the exceptionally capable warrior-king of the 19th century who led his armies from the front. Coming from a modest background, he had lands to conquer, rebellions to quash and finances to rise and the making of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, therefore, was no mean feat. However, this greatest military commanders of his era, Gulab Singh broke through all the shackles of time and space to launched an impressive series of battle right since his early days which resulted not only into the making of one of the largest princely states of India but also managed to expand the geographical contours of India into new territorial domain.

However, the saga of his military achievements has hardly been a matter of serious concern in the existing historiography. The result is that the Maharaja Gulab Singh has not been accorded the place he so rightfully deserves in the annals of Indian history. Despite his surprisingly illustrious record of conquests which had critical bearing on the political geography of North western India in the 19th century, his name rarely commands the same immediate recognition as several highly visible military leaders of our country. This results partly out of the absence of any historical narrative wherein his military achievements have been recorded in consolidated manner and also partly out of the lack of desire among modern historians to record, understand and analyze his extensive military achievements and the nature of bearing it had

on the events that shaped and influenced the history of Indian for the time to come.

The present paper, therefore, is an attempt to fill this gap by organizing it in a chronological sequence about the various conquests which the Maharaja undertook since his early age. The arguments made in the paper are largely based on the accounts of Ganesdas Bادهhra's, *Rajadarshani, A Persian History of North-Western India from the earliest times to A.D. 1847*(Translated S.D.S Charak, Annotated by Anita Billawaria),Jammu, 1991),DiwanKripa Ram's, *Gulabnama, A History of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu & Kashmir*, 2005 andAlHaajMaulviHashmatullah Khan Lakhnavi, *A Brief History of Jammu, The Province Conquered by Maharaja Gulab Singh Bahadur, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir and Aksai Tibet, along with, A Brief Contemporary History of Jammu and Biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh Bahadur, 1937*, in the order of their compositions. The last text has largely been examined in the light of the first two texts *Rajadarshani* and *Gulabnama*.

All through the paper there has been a constant attempt to work out the elements of commonality and divergence of the details of the conquests before drawing the final balance sheet in order to achieve fair degree of objectivity.

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Kalahana, who wrote the historical text *Rajatarangini* on the basis of which one could construct the fascinating historical profile of Kashmir, was simply unavailable in the context of Jammu. Thus, the domain of historiographical discourse on the region largely remained as an unexplored space till as late as the beginning of the fourth decades of the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the middle of the same decades this

uncharted space was sought to be appropriated and hegemonies through the production historical narrative by the new Maharaja, heading the new political entity called Jammu and Kashmir state and the colonial authority who had collaborated with the new Maharaja in the making of the new political entity. In the first historical narrative of the region called *Rajadarshani*, the author has discussed in details the life history and achievements of the ruling families of Jammu from ancient times to Maharaja Gulab Singh. However, Gulab Singh's period is not described in detailed.

Badehra also tries to establish the royal pedigree of Maharaja Gulab Singh and legitimize his authority over territory he had acquired by giving detailed account of how the areas within his state and even outsides were conquered by the kings of his lineage at different points of time in history. At places he goes out of the way to prove that the ancestors of the Maharaja were great rulers and warriors and one of them even managed to conquer the whole of Indiaⁱ. While his account of the conquest of the area falling outside the state are rather brief, his account becomes more elaborate and an extra element of authenticity is sought to be added when he talks about the conquest of those areas which came under the jurisdiction of the new state. He takes this to a logical conclusion and lists the names of the areas which were under the control of Maharaja RanjitDev by the beginning of the eighteenth centuryⁱⁱ. The list of the areas given by c included all the areas which came under the control of Maharaja Gulab Singh.

Though the central purpose of Badehra's *Rajadarshani* was to write the history of the Jammu woven around the ancestral history of Maharaja Gulab Singh, he tries to situate it in the larger context of the history of 'north western India'ⁱⁱⁱ. Thus, two narratives seem to run parallel all along the text; one related to the

history of North -Western in general and other to the history of Jammu in particular.

Thus we see the construction of another historical narrative under the royal patronage in the form of the *Gulabnama*, which was authored by none other than the Diwan of the court. The *Gulabnama* is a biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh, a great Asian soldier-politician, who started his career as a petty soldier and rose to the exalted status of an independent sovereign state which was entirely his creation. Maharaja himself was interested in seeing the compilation of *Gulabnama*. The Maharajahad often times in his own life-time desired Kripa Ram for “undertake the completion of the history of his achievements.” To quote the author, “the late Highness had been, with a view to patronize this one exalted of is favour, sending commands for writing his account of the achievements of his august personality”.

It was, however, GanesdasBadehra, the author of *Rajadarshani* who had proposed the composition of *Gulabnama* to Maharaja. For some reason, GanesdasBadehra decided to move away from his court to serve the colonial authority^{iv} and, the responsibility to write *Gulabnama* fell on the Diwan of the court known as Kirpa Ram^v. Like GanesdasBadehra’s Diwan Kripa Ram also starts with a detailed statement on the sources of his narrative which was he gathered “after tremendous enquiry and deep research”. Written in highly ornate Persian style, the *Gulabnama*, essentially starts with where *Rajdarshani* ends and, at many places, he attempts to strengthen the GanesdasBadehra’s construct by adding extra information, not necessarily verifiable one.

The author of *Gulabnama* projects his Master, Maharaja Gulab Sing as a born king and a hero, often attributing, in a very subtle manner, the element of divinity as well^{vi}. All through the book he is depicted as a man in whose vein

run the royal blood, who was brutal in battle field and kind and generous at home and extremely rational reasonable and benevolent when at throne. As to the royal pedigree of the Maharaja, the author starts by stating that “I will first of all put the discourse in order by the narration of the eminent pedigree from the appearance of Brahma to the rising of the stars of his highness, which may be perpetual and eternal like the time itself”. The chapter in which the details of the “eminent pedigree” of maharaja have been detailed by the author is titled as “*Statement of the Late Highness’ Angelic pedigree from the appearance of Brahma to the Blessed personality,*” which gives a good idea of the content of the chapter in advance.

Like GanesdasBadehra’s, Diwan also tries to legitimize the claims of Maharaja on Kashmir and other territories which now became part of new Jammu and Kashmir State.

The third text authored by AlHaajMaulviHashmatullah Khan Lakhnavi in his book provides us the information related to the ancient history of the Dogra dynasty. He primarily discusses the life and times of Maharaja Gulab Singh. Though the book is a biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh but it does not gives us the detailed information about the early expeditions, when he was a soldier in the Sikh army. But when it comes to the conquests related to Kishtwar, Ladakh, Baltistan, Tibet under Zorawar Singh till 1841A.D. he has given the detailed description of above-mentioned areas.
