



Military Strategy of Dogra Rulers of J&K State: Its Present Relevance

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Abstract: Military strategy means a policy implemented by military organisation to pursue desired strategic goals. In the 19th century, military strategy was viewed as one of the triangle of 'arts' or 'sciences' that govern the conduct of warfare, tactics, the execution of plans and manoeuvring of forces in battle, the logistics and the maintenance of an army. The study of formation of any state is incomplete till it is not studied from military point of view. The study of military strategy in the formation and consolidation of J&K State is of utmost importance in the present scenario to formulate policies regarding India's relation with Pakistan and other neighbouring countries. The State of Jammu & Kashmir extends over an area of 2,22,870 kms and occupied a dominating position in the political geography of undivided India. It was one of the largest states of Indian Union. As the ruler of J&K state was a general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore Darbar, so his military strategy was inherited from Sikh administration with essential modifications suitable to the conditions of mountainous region. The present paper explains the military strategy of Dogra Maharajas of Jammu and Kashmir both in the formation and consolidation of the state on strong foothold.

Keywords: Sikh rule, Dogra campaigns, Military strategy, ethnic communities, Dogra army.

I. INTRODUCTION

The State of Jammu and Kashmir was formed by Maharaja Gulab Singh. So, the strategy for wars and other military administrative affairs was also framed by Maharaja Gulab Singh. During the 18th and early 19th century, various princely states were formed along the Himalayan frontiers. The Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir was formed and took its present shape after passing through a number of phases and developments. In the initial stage of its formation, it came under the Sikh rule. In the early 19th century, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh were separate principalities ruled over by separate dynasties. Ladakh was under the Afghans governor of Kashmir. Kashmir was also under the Afghans dominion. In the case of Jammu, it was divided into twenty-two small principalities ruled over by petty chieftains. Jammu was the most important principality ruled over by Raja Ajit Singh, who was an inefficient ruler. Hence, the work of administration was in the hands of Mian Mota - a head chief in his court and Rani Bandrall, wife of Raja Ajit Singh. The weak administration of Jammu principality encouraged the Sikh ruler of Lahore Darbar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh to lead an expedition against Jammu in 1809. The Sikh armies under the commander, Hukma Singh Chimney fought war against the Dogras near the Gumat Gate of Jammu. Gulab Singh, along with his brother Dhian Singh and father, Kishore Singh also took part in the battle of Gumat and gave stiff resistance to the Sikhs. But the Sikhs lost the battle and went back. In 1810, Maharaja Ranjit Singh summoned Gulab Singh to Lahore Darbar and enrolled him as a gorchara or cavalryman. In 1811-12, prince Kharak Singh, son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh succeeded in conquering Jammu. Thus, Jammu came under the Sikh rule and Raja Ajit Singh was pensioned off by giving the jagir of Jaganu.

Gulab Singh, the hero of battle of Gumat, was steadily rising in favour at the Lahore court. Later in 1812, his father, Mian Kishore Singh, and younger brothers, Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh were also employed in Lahore Darbar. In 1813, Gulab Singh and his father took active part in a pitched battle which the Lahore forces fought and won against Fateh Khan of Kabul for the possession of Attock. In 1814, conquest of Kashmir by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Gulab Singh played a remarkable role. For this act, Maharaja Ranjit Singh granted him the jagir of Kharoti and Beyol and also promoted him to the command of twenty-two horses. Within four years, Gulab Singh had become a jagirdar from a mere wanderer in 1810. In 1815, he received in jagir Lala Chobra in Sialkot district, and Ramgarh near Samba, for his valuable services in the reduction of Garh Domala fort in the Jullundhar Doab. In the frontier campaigns between 1815-1820, Gulab Singh played a prominent and remarkable role.

In the year 1820, Maharaja Ranjit Singh bestowed the *Talluqa Chakla Jammu*, meaning all the territory connected with Jammu, as jagir to the entire family - Mian Kishore Singh and his sons, along with Patti

Bhoti, Bandralta, Chenani and Kishtwar except the territory to the south of Kashmir. This grant also gave the family the right to conquer and add new territories to their jagirs. So, Gulab Singh added Rajouri, Bhimber, Reasi and Akhnoor to his jagir by crushing the seditions there. On 17 June, 1822, Ranjit Singh installed him on the throne of Jammu and performed the Raj Tilak. Soon after the conferment of Rajaship on Gulab Singh, he started the expansionist policy more aggressively. Between 1820-27, Gulab Singh brought under his effective control the various principalities lying between Kashmir Valley and Jammu-Bhaderwah, Reasi, Padar, Kishtwar, Rajouri and Samarth etc. In this way, Gulab Singh became the ruler of a vast territory of Jammu region by way of his military campaigns. He also captured the Ladakh region by military campaigns under the able leadership of his military general, Zorawar Singh Kahluria. Later, he bought the valley of Kashmir from the Britishers by signing the Treaty of Amritsar, 1846 and became the master of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh region. He united the three provinces and led to the formation of Jammu and Kashmir State. In all his military campaigns, he used the strategy suitable to win the wars in such hilly and mountainous region.

II. MILITARY STRATEGY REGARDING J&K STATE

As the State of Jammu and Kashmir was formed by Maharaja Gulab Singh, so the strategy for wars and other military administrative affairs was also framed by Maharaja Gulab Singh. Jammu was his ancestral land and he had the plan of making it an independent state by overthrowing Sikh supremacy. The Sikh control over this principality was not so effective. Gulab Singh knew this weakness of Lahore Darbar. He also realized the strength and security of a well-knit hill principality against the weak and less organised Sikh rule. It is important to mention here that the Sikh rule grew weak after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Instead of staying in Lahore, Gulab Singh was more interested in consolidating and strengthening his native state. He spent most of his time at Jammu and its neighbourhood, first in consolidating, and then, in extending his power, though when the occasion so required, he would dutifully join the Sikh army in their military operations. All the outer hill regions and most of the middle mountains except Rajouri were brought under the authority of Dogra brothers. He extended the frontiers of Jammu principality across the Himalayas in the north and up to Jhelum in the west. Also by serving Ranjit Singh in frontier campaigns, he established his influence over the tribals of Kabul.

By the middle of 1830's, Maharaja Gulab Singh had realised the value of holding Ladakh for himself and so, he took adequate steps to conquer it. He did this in order to strengthen his means of seizing Kashmir itself, whenever the opportunity may come. This shows the tactics employed by him for the conquest of Kashmir, which happened later in 1846 and also that he was a great military strategist. The only direction in which he could extend his territories was towards the north, the areas which suffered from political disturbances and power vacuum. The conquest of Ladakh was thus planned. As the extension of Jammu territories was, in fact an extension of Sikh Kingdom, Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave approval to Maharaja Gulab Singh's plans. Maharaja Ranjit Singh desired to conquer these hill territories since 1821, so he readily approved Maharaja Gulab Singh's proposal of Ladakh conquest. Due to the severe cold of mountains and high altitude of about 15,000 feet above sea level, the Sikhs were unable to conquer it.

Maharaja Gulab Singh formed the project of expedition and this plan was carried out by his General Zorawar Singh, though at the cost of great difficulties and loss of his life. After Ladakh conquest, they improved communication with that province, repaired roads and removed some of the obstacles in their advance through these passes. In the Baltistan conquest, they used diplomacy or strategy more than the military skill or power. They got benefits from excising bribing and prevailing disunity in the royal family of Baltistan. The plans and arrangements were made in consultation between Maharaja Gulab Singh and General Zorawar Singh. Regarding manoeuvring of forces, the forces for hill campaign consisted of nearly 5,000 expert and well trained soldiers. They moved via Kishtwar. Complete training was given to them for such mountainous campaigns. Moreover, a battalion of infantry, with two heavy guns, was to go by road from Kashmir to Ladakh and finally, join the main army under General Zorawar Singh. They also used the locals of Ladakh and Baltistan to carry their backloads and made some Tibetans as prisoners to guide them in order to get huge wealth.

Being a prudent diplomat, Maharaja Gulab Singh fully realised the political implications of the conquest of Himalayan countries and had, therefore, ascertained beforehand Lahore State and British government views. He extracted in some form Maharaja Ranjit Singh's implied consent. In conquering Ladakh, the Maharaja had, in fact, provided a base from which the dominions of Lahore Darbar could be extended

beyond Himalayas. This proves Gulab Singh as a great strategist and diplomat as he conquered Himalayan countries in the name of Lahore Darbar but in actual, he conquered these territories to expand his own state of J&K. Ranjit Singh became neutral regarding Himalayan affairs and also did not provide any military or financial help to Gulab Singh for the conquest.

The British East India Company was interested in acquiring share in Pashmina trade but it seemed that Dogra interference in Ladakh would disrupt the regular trade and then the Tibetans would be compelled to mobilize trade in British India. Therefore, the Britishers also interfere in his policy of expansion. Moreover, the international affairs were also favourable. There was instability in the politics of Nepal and Tibet. In both the states, power struggle was going on. China was also facing opium war and Muslim revolt. British were busy with Afghanistan, China and Burma affairs. Maharaja Gulab Singh took full advantage of the situation and prepared war strategy to give shape to his design of expansionist policy and carved out a separate state for himself.

In addition to the above mentioned strategy of Maharaja Gulab Singh, another important reason which forced him to frame such a policy was the economic benefits from the trade monopoly. The occupation of Himalayan kingdom assured him not only the monopoly over Leh's flourishing entrepot frequent by merchants from various countries like Tibet, Sinkiang and Kashmir, but also the control over the most important trade route between Tibet and Kashmir famous for pashmina trade. The strategic position of Ladakh, between Kashmir and India on the South, and the Chinese province of Yarkhand, Khotan and Kashgar in the north was the main reason for Ladakh, being important trade route. By conquering Ladakh, Gulab Singh also wanted to monopolise the flourishing pashmina trade of that time.

III. MILITARY SYSTEM

The State of Jammu and Kashmir formed by Maharaja Gulab Singh was formerly a princely state of Jammu under Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore Darbar. Hence, the military system of Jammu and Kashmir State under the Dogra rulers was almost the same as inherited from the military system of Lahore Darbar. Therefore, a study of the military system of Sikh rulers is necessary in order to understand the military system of Dogras. The war strategy and military system of the Dogras had a good deal of resemblance with the well thought out Sikh inspired military strategy. The military set up of Lahore State was evolved and strengthened by Maharaja Ranjit Singh soon after his accession in 1801. Like the other Indian Princes who succeeded in raising their armies to any degree of efficiency, Maharaja Ranjit Singh appreciated the value of European officers. He employed European officers in his army in order to train regular army and established arsenals for the manufacture of cannons, small arms, ammunition and military stores. These European officers were handsomely paid and enjoyed the confidence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The ablest and the most important among them were four French officers - General Ventura, Allard, Court, and Avitable. They held the commands of the strong trained divisions of infantry, artillery and cavalry, the first in rank, equipment and discipline forming the old guard of army on which Ranjit Singh wholly relied for success. Ranjit Singh trained his army in discipline and the art of organised warfare through these Generals. He used the energies of turbulent Sikhs in the form of guerilla warfare and at the same time employed them for pitched battles on European methods. His army composed of men from all sections -

Hindustanis, Gurkhas, Afghans, Purbeas (Easterners - Biharis, Bengalis and Oriyas), Dogras, Katoch and Punjabi Musalmans. The only battalions exclusively composed of Sikhs were the *Fauj-i-Ain*, or regular brigades, under the French Generals.

Maharaja Gulab Singh had been a military officer and Jagirdar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, so, his army had been on the lines of army of Lahore State. As a result, Gulab Singh had also included some of the European officers of Ranjit Singh's army like Gardner and Honigberger into his military system. Zorawar Singh, who was the General of Gulab Singh, continued the same system of army organisation with necessary local modifications in his trans-Himalayan campaigns. Originally, the system was based on European principles as had been introduced in Ranjit Singh's army and inherited in Jammu and Kashmir State by Maharaja Gulab Singh. In the Dogra military system, as most of their campaigns were mountainous, infantry remained the main arm and an important unit because the use of cavalry on mountains was impossible. Of course, in lower hills, cavalry was also used.

The first armed force to be raised by Gulab Singh was a company of 200 soldiers in 1815 on being granted the jagirs of Lala Chobra and Ramgarh for the valuable service provided in the reduction of Garh Damala fort in Jallandhar Doad. Thereafter, in 1820, Raja Kishore Singh and his sons were obliged to maintain 400

sawars for the service of Lahore Darbar under the terms of the grant of Jammu jagir to them. In 1822, when Gulab Singh became Raja of Jammu, he was expected to keep small regular army of horse and foot soldiers to be presented annually at the Dushehra festival for review at Lahore. The exact strength of the original force of Dogra brothers was not known but it is obvious from the events that followed that there was a rapid rise in strength of Jammu army within the first few years. Infact, increase in the strength of army must have become necessary in the very first year of its raising. After seeing Gulab Singh firmly in the jagir of Jammu, all the troops of Lahore State were withdrawn from Jammu, leaving Raja Gulab Singh in independent possession of Jammu principality. The greatest impetus to the development of Jammu army came from the policy of territorial expansion pursued by Gulab Singh himself and his General Zorawar Singh. In 1833, Raja Gulab Singh was firmly established in his little kingdom. The time was now right for putting into practice the policy of conquests and territorial expansion of the Jammu region.

The most important feature of the Dogras army was its ethnic character. It was composed of distinct ethnic communities, the Dogras formed the largest ethnic group. The Dogras communities within the state were not enough to meet the demands of the state force Raja Gulab Singh's reign and later kings when the state was required to maintain a standing army of 26,000 to 30,000 men. Thus, Maharaja Gulab Singh and Maharaja Ranbir Singh were obliged to enlist 'foreigners' in the state force. Among these, *Purbias* figured maximum in historic records. However, being armed force, they did not perform well. Infact, their reputation was very low than the Dogra troops. Nevertheless, the Purbias were paid more than the local Dogras. By 1885, they were gradually removed from the military service of the Dogras State. Another community that was enlisted freely in the state army during the earlier days were the Sikhs. A large number of Sikhs were enrolled in the Dogras army.

By the end of 1846, the foundation of J&K State was complete. Now, Maharaja Gulab Singh could devote more time to the organisation and training of the state force on European lines. He requested the British for providing some officers of their army for this purpose. Captain Broome of the Artillery and Lieutenant J. Nicholson of the Native Infantry were nominated to look after Maharaja's army. The organisation of the army was based on several systems prevalent in those days. In addition to the usual division of artillery, infantry and cavalry, there were distinctions of the *Khula Fauj* and the *Jungi Fauj*.

A Company consisted of one hundred men was commanded by a Subedar. Eight Companies formed an infantry battalion which was commanded by a Kumedan or commandant, assisted by an assistant Kumedan. A Bakshi performed the duties of the adjutant. An infantry Battalion had the following establishments : a Pandit, who teaches religious preaching to the troops; a Hakim or Vaid, who normally cures the ill troops; a Surgeon, who like a doctor operates and cures the troops who fall ill and had any serious complications regarding their health; a Musadi or accountant, who used to look after the account details of the army and maintain the army records; Munshi or clerks, whose main function was to make regular attendance of the troops and distribute their pays and other such things. Artisans, like blacksmiths, cobblers, carpenters, cooks, masalchis and water-carriers, dak orderly, mates and coolies, transport personnel were also included in the infantry batallion of Dogras army. The mountainous expeditions of General Zorawar Singh mostly used the infantry regiment of the army.

Cavalry was also organised on the pattern of infantry. Each sawar was provided his own horse and carried a sword, a shield and a lance and a match-lock. The sawar was responsible for feeding the horse. He was given enough pay to be able to earn more than infantrymen even after paying for the maintenance of his horse. General Zorawar Singh used hill ponies for the purpose which was habituated to ascents and descents and the climatic and geographical conditions of the mountains. The State had one squadron of cuirassiers, armed with lances, as its heavy cavalry. There was also a mounted booty of Mian Rajputs called the Gorchars. They were not drilled nor did they wear uniforms. They received no pay but held jagirs in lieu of service. Many of them were related to Maharaja. A number of outposts on frontier between Astor and Gilgit were held by the Kashmiri Pathans mostly from Machipura where they held jagirs on the condition of furnishing guards to the posts, for which they received no other pay. They were bound to maintain three reliefs of 160 men and though undrilled, they were armed like the Khula Fauj. With the increase in the number of state jagirdars, the number of troops provided by them also increased. Ultimately, they were formed into separate battalions. The troops of jagirdars called 'Bargirs' were paid directly by the jagirdars and not by the state.

The Khula Fauj which mostly consisted of the infantry was organised on the lines of Kashmir army under the Afghan rule before the Sikh conquest. It was composed predominantly of Pathans with a small portion of Sikhs, Dogras and Purbias. The Khula Fauj was organised into 'Bradris' each consisting of one of

Jamadar, one Havildar, one Nishanchi (standard bearer) and 22 sepoys. Four such Bradris constituted a Dasta which was commanded by a Dastadar. Three Dastas formed the command of a Sardar. The men of Khula Fauj were required to bring their own arms but for the sake of uniformity, the state started providing arms to these men on payment. Besides these, there was a fine soldier race of Kashmiri Pathans, who were well disciplined. With the passage of time, Maharaja started replacing them by more reliable Dogras and Sikhs. Most of the appointments of Sardars in the Khula Fauj were filled up with the Sikhs and Rajputs by Gulab Singh.

The Jungi Fauj of Gulab Singh was of the pattern set by General Ventura under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The infantry under Jungi Fauj consisted of nearly of 26 battalions but not all up to the strength of 430 men as existing in the Sikh army. The Dogras battalions, during the early years, varied in strength from 200, all ranks to 585. Evidently, some of the battalions were named carrying a prefix 'Fateh' like Fateh Lachman, Fateh Devi, Fateh Ranbir, Fateh Padamnabh, Fateh Hanuman etc. The artillery also formed part of Jungi Fauj. It was organised into field and mountain batteries. The mountain gun known as Dasti Tope was carried on man pack basis or on ponies back. There were also other types of guns for artillery regiments known as Tope Khanas and Sher bachas. Rajput and Punjabi Mussalmans were mainly included as gunners. There was not less than six or seven kinds of fire arms manufactured in the factories at Jammu, Srinagar and Lingham (a place in the road of Gulmarg). The principle arms factory was the one which was at Jammu. Iron was imported from Bejapur via Muzaffarabad for making service gun barrels. There was also a gun powder factory at Jammu.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO

The Dogra army was very well organised and better equipped. The Dogras, who formed part of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army, had learned more upto date techniques of fighting. They were well disciplined and trained to fight both on Himalayas and in the plains of Jammu, Kashmir and Punjab. To conclude regarding the war strategy of J&K State, it is assumed that Gulab Singh formulated the strategy based on his experience at Lahore Darbar. He used the experience gained at Lahore Darbar with necessary modifications as needed to suit the mountainous region of his state. He used both strategy and diplomacy in their Ladakh and Baltistan conquest. The military system of J&K State was far more superior than most of the other Princely States at that time.

The J&K State extends over a large area and occupied a dominating position in the political geography of undivided India. It was one of the largest states of Indian Union. It has a geographically important position in Indian sub-continent due to its north-west location. It occupies the frontier position and hence, an important issue in the present politics of India and Pakistan. To the north lies Russia, Turkistan, China; to the east lies Tibet and to the south and west lies Punjab and North West Frontier Province. Three greatest empires of the world - British, Russia and China, thus meet on its borders. The central location of the state on the map of Asia also makes it a strategic location. Moreover, a number of trade and caravan routes pass through it linking Central Asia with Southern Asia since ancient times, which was known as Silk Route.

V. CONCLUSION

Due to its strategic location, Jammu and Kashmir was the frontier post to occupy and strengthen it in order to avoid foreign invasions. Therefore, every ruler paid much attention to this strategic position and place strong unit of army to defend the borders. The Dogra rulers were also aware of the its strategic importance and therefore, appointed their able Generals for its maintenance. Due to its frontier position and Pakistan having certain parts of J&K occupied through tribal raids in October 1947 and now known as disputed area, also makes it a vibrant issue in the Indo-Pak relations. For such reasons, study of military system and strategy of Princely State of J&K is of utmost importance to understand the ground realities and to take initiatives for future security concerns regarding the state.

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