

AN OVERVIEW OF GEOGRAPHICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITION OF POONCH, THE STATE OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR DURING DOGRA RAJ

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ABSTRACT

The region of Poonch holds immense historical significance as it has been ruled by outsiders and locals from time to time since 326 BC. In the light of the Amritsar Treaty of 16 March 1846, Dogra Gulab Singh purchased the territory of Kashmir along with its inhabitants and founded a new state called the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Dogras ruled the state of Jammu and Kashmir for 101 years from 1846 to 1947 and the Poonch region was also under the influence of the Dogra rulers of Jammu and Kashmir in one way or another. The Dogra Raj usurped the political and social rights of the residents of Poonch region especially Muslims by imposing unnecessary and dual taxes. The people of Poonch strongly resisted the oppression of the Dogra rulers and started a movement against the Dogra Raj to get their political and social rights. The present research paper is an integrated account of the geographical, political, social and economic condition of Poonch Jammu and Kashmir during the Dogra Raj. This research is descriptive and historical in nature and is based on primary and secondary sources.

Key Words: Geography, Politics, Economy, Poonch (J&K) and Dogra Raj

INTRODUCTION

The present research focuses on the geographical, political, social and economic situation of the "Poonch Jagir" of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Poonch Jagir was one of the rural areas of the state and also known as 'Mini Kashmir' because it is located on the extreme border of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and people of other religions lived together in Poonch with harmony and tolerance. The two most spoken languages in Poonch are Gujri and Pahari. However, other languages such as Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Kashmiri are also spoken in many areas. (Maini, 2009) The altitude of Poonch ranges from 2900 feet to 15560 feet above sea

level and its geography is hilly and mountainous. The Jagir of Poonch is situated at the southern foothills of the Pir Panjal range near the confluence of the Beitar Nala and the Poonch Nala. The highest mountain of the Pir Panjal range is "Tata Koti" which is 15560 feet above sea level along with a series of gorges, valleys, glaciers and streams of Poonch region. Poonch is located on the Line of Control (LoC) that divides it into Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) and Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K). Haji Pir Dara used to connect this area to Udi, Jammu and Kashmir in the north. (Asad, 2015) A famous Chinese traveler Han Tsing visited the Poonch region in 632 AD and wrote that the local

people of Poonch called the region "Prunas or Poonch". In Sanskrit the word Poonch means the border region of any kingdom and in Kashmiri language this region is still called 'Prunas' or 'Provinsa'. (Baloch, 2012) Kashmiri historian 'Pandit Kalhan' in his ancient historical book 'Raj Tarangani' has named Raja Lalata Daitya as the founder of Poonch region. (Kalhana, 1879) In 1850, Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh, the founding ruler of the state of Jammu and Kashmir declared the region of Poonch as a subordinate area of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and officially announced the status of Poonch as a Jagir of the state by awarding the title of 'Raja of Poonch' to his nephew Dogra Moti Singh. (Asad, 2015)

Review of Literature

Review of Literature is the base of any type of historical enquiry. It is an overview of prior research on a particular subject under investigation. It can be part of a larger research project report, a thesis, or a standalone bibliographic article published in an academic magazine. It comprises both published and unpublished works that are related to the subject being researched. A review of the literature can help an investigator develop a theoretical and conceptual foundation for a study's goals to be validated. It aids in the confinement and planning of the research project. Only by a well-executed and thorough analysis of previous works can the concepts and thoughts related to the subject under research be clarified.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study are;

1. To present an overview of the Poonch State during Dogra Raj.
2. To construct a coherent account of geographical, political and socio economic condition of Poonch, the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Methodology

For the purpose of gathering information regarding the struggle for social and political rights in Poonch during the Dogra Raj, published material like books, newspapers, research journals, and official documents have been consulted. The primary and secondary data has

been evaluated using qualitative and historical approaches.

Geopolitical Situation of Poonch

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is commonly referred to as 'Kashmir'. Geographically, Kashmir is also called "Heart of Asia" and "Crown of the Subcontinent" as it is located almost in the middle of the continent of Asia and just north of the continents of India and Pakistan. Geographically, the state of Jammu and Kashmir can be divided into three regions. 'Outer Plains and Outer Hill Region', 'Middle Mountains of the Pir Panjal Region', including Kishtwar, Badrawah, Ramban, Doda, Banhal, and the "Greater Himalaya" in the Kashmir valley. (Qazi, 2005) The border of the Jammu and Kashmir region meets the borders of the three nuclear powers of the world. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is bounded by Russian and Chinese Turkistan, on the North, Chinese Tibet, on the East, Punjab (India and Pakistan) on the South, North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan on the West. (Raina, 1981)

The total area of the state of Jammu and Kashmir is 84471 square miles whose geographical delimitation was established on March 16, 1846 under the Treaty of Amritsar between the British and Dogra Gulab Singh. This state is a confederation of different regions and nationalities whose regional division includes Jammu, Kashmir Valley, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan and Poonch region. Gulab Singh, a Dogra of Jammu, occupied the Kashmir valley after the Treaty of Amritsar and became the Maharaja of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Dogra rule in Jammu and Kashmir lasted for almost a century from 1846 to 1947, during which the Kashmiri people were oppressed and subjected to various kinds of unnecessary taxes. Before the Dogra Raj, the rulers of the Kashmir Valley were foreigners, while the Dogras were the natives of the region. The Dogras considered the state of Jammu and Kashmir as their personal fiefdom and treated the people as farmers and tenants, which was the reason that the Dogra dynasty lost control of Jammu and Kashmir after a century and ended the persecution of the Dogras. (Iqbal, 2005) Before 1947, the territory of the state of Jammu and Kashmir consisted of Kashmir, Jammu, Ladakh (Northern Areas), the small state of Poonch and Gilgit Agency. This is

confirmed by Lord Birdwood as; "Previous to 1947, the State of Jammu and Kashmir divided into the Kashmir Province, Jammu Province, the small State of Poonch, the Gilgit Agency, which included Hunza and Nagar, and the mountain areas of Baltistan and Ladakh." (Birdwood, 1956) A geopolitical structure based on national boundaries and territorial states indicates that our conceptions of the world are not comprehensive but rather permanent. (Dodds, 2007) It is an indisputable fact that every region has a geographical, political and socio-economic history. Poonch state of Jammu and Kashmir is also rich in geographical, political and socio-economic history. The region of Poonch is an abode of mixed civilizations. Poonch State occupies an important and unique position in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of its history, culture and civilization. (Iqbal, 2005) The poets, writers, political, economic and social leaders of the state of Poonch have a clear in the political, economic, social, cultural and historical scenario of Poonch, which is a reflection of the uniqueness of the region of Poonch in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. (Khan, 2001) The region of Poonch, located in South Asia between Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, has gone through a richly colorful and dynamic historical period in which numerous political, economic, social and cultural changes have taken place. (Hussain, 2003) Poonch is a state with a long history which is frequently mentioned in 'Sanskrit literature'. The historical continuity of Poonch was shaped by the influence of many dynasties, kingdoms and empires during the medieval period. (Hussain, 2023)

Historical Overview of Poonch

The state of Poonch has a rich cultural and historical heritage that stretches back to the Middle Ages. Several religious and cultural traditions converged in the region, influencing social structure and regional identity. Of course, to understand the historical, social and religious dynamics of the region, one must have a solid understanding of the social, political, religious and cultural aspects of the medieval period. The history of Poonch has seen a number of significant historical events, the region has been ruled by foreigners and locals alternately before its partition into Azad Jammu and Kashmir and

Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The history of Poonch has been greatly influenced by its geographical location, political, economic and social aspects. The region served as a crossing point between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia, located in the foothills of the Himalayas. The region's advantageous location along the historic Silk Road promoted trade, cultural affairs and the influx of various civilizations. Sarfraz Hussain has stated in his research paper that the geographical location of Poonch played an important role in its history. Located in the foothills of the Himalayas, this region served as a gateway between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. Its strategic position along the ancient Silk Road facilitated trade, cultural exchange and the arrival of different civilizations. In ancient times, Poonch became a melting pot of diverse influences and different civilizations, giving birth to a unique socio-cultural landscape. (Hussain, 2023)

The Poonch region was termed as Drava Abhisar after two warrior tribes, Drava and Abhisara, when Alexander the Great invaded the lower Jhelum belt in 326 BC to fight Porus. This area began to be recognized as a part of Kashmir, as the renowned Chinese traveler Huien Tsang observed in the sixth century AD. The majority of historians concur that Raja Lalata Datiya of the Karkota dynasty constructed this city in 695 AD. (Khan, 2001) Despite other historians claiming that Raja Bik of the Gunanda dynasty was responsible for its construction in 850 AD, Raja Nar founded the Poonch Principality by announcing Lahor Kot as its capital. According to Kalhen's famous book "Raja Trangani", Mahmood Ghaznavi invaded this region in 1020 A.D. Raja Trilochanpal of Poonch resisted him courageously. During the 14th and 15th centuries, the area was ruled by the Shah Miri dynasty, which was established by Swat Valley noble Shah Mir. It was well known that the Shah Miri dynasty supported religious organizations as well as the arts and culture. They made a big contribution to the growth of Sufi customs and Islamic education in Poonch. (Hussain, 2023)

Poonch was ruled by the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century. When Mughal King Jahangir came to this region in 1596, he crowned Siraj-ud-Din Rathore as the ruler of this area. A Gujjar leader named Ru-ullah Sangu became the

monarch of this area. (Maini, 2009) In 1814, Maharaja Ranjit Singh decided to conquer Kashmir and the hill states and add them to Lahore Darbar. Raja Sultan Khan of Bhimbar respected Ranjit Singh's wish and immediately supported him. Raja Agar Khan of Rajouri also welcomed the Maharaja and provided all facilities including provision of Rajouri as a base camp for all operations against Kashmir. Meanwhile, the Raja of Poonch and Prime Minister Ru-ullah Sangu were reluctant to offer assistance to the Maharaja on the pretext that they had cordial relations with Azam Khan, the Governor of Kashmir. Meanwhile, Azam Khan had also deployed his forces at 'Tosha Maidan' to face Ranjit Singh's attack on Kashmir. However, Ranjit Singh was advised by his commanders that the Raja of Poonch must be defeated before attacking Kashmir so that there is no possibility of any threat from the rear. Ranjit Singh followed the advice of his colleagues and decided to attack Poonch first. Despite the threat of Ranjit Singh's army, Prime Minister Poonch Ru-ullah Sangu stuck to his decision and vowed to face the consequences. Although Raja Poonch slipped to some extent, Ru-ullah Sangu still stood firm. (Grewal, 2022)

Ranjit Singh took stock of the situation and ordered his forces to attack Poonch city. His forces entered the city on 28 June 1814 and captured Mir Baz Khan Sangu, grandson of Ru-ullah Sangu. When Mir Baz Khan Sangu was arrested in Poonch city, he immediately offered to become an ally of the Punjabi forces, but Ru-ullah Sangu refused and after a strong resistance, the Sikh army returned unsuccessful. In June 1819, the Maharaja made another attempt to capture Kashmir, in which he succeeded. After conquering Kashmir, Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed Mir Baz Khan Sangu as Raja of Poonch and ended the Muslim rule. Poonch was ruled by Sikhs in the 19th century as part of the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The region enjoyed the durability and prosperity in the economy under the rule of the Sikhs. (Hussain, 2023) From 1819 till 1850, Poonch was a part of the Khalsa Darbar in Lahore. In Poonch, 'Dogra Raja' Moti Singh established the Dogra Raj in 1850. The distinct Principality known as Poonch state was established in 1850 by Raja Moti Singh, the Prime Minister of Khalsa Darbar. The history

Poonch underwent another important stage during the British colonial era. The British imposed suzerainty over the area, instituting institutions of governance and instituting administrative reforms. With influences from the British Empire as well as the Indian subcontinent, colonial rule had a significant impact on sociopolitical structure of Poonch. A dynamic interaction of political, social, and cultural forces defines the historical setting of medieval Poonch. The region's strategic location and distinctive geography attracted a wide range of influences and civilizations, adding to its historical significance. The Shah Mirs, the Mughals, the Sikhs, and the British were among the successive ruling dynasties that shaped the administrative, religious, and cultural landscapes of Poonch. (Hussain, 2023) After Sikh rule the State of Jammu and Kashmir was established by Dogra Gulab Singh in 1846. State of Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by Maharaja Gulab Singh, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, Maharaja Partap Singh and Maharaja Hari Singh till its division into Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Indian held Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Beltistan.

Dogra Raj in Poonch

Khalsa Darbar Lahore ruled Poonch from 1819 to 1846 AD. 'Dogra Raja' Moti Singh laid the foundation for the Dogra principality of Poonch in 1852. Poonch town, along with the areas of Islamabad, Haveli, Suran, Mandi, Tat, Bheramgala, Plangi, Dhar Mankote, Mong, Bagh, Pallandri, Jawahargarh, Thakiala Prava area, and three villages in the Jammu district, made up the 1627 square mile territory. (Maini, 2009) Some historians say that in the early days of the Dogra era, Dhyhan Singh got the estate of Poonch and Kotli. Dhyhan Singh was the brother of Raja Gulab Singh and had two sons Jawa Singh and Moti Singh. Dhyhan Singh divided his portion of the state between his two sons in such a way that the Kotli region fell to Johar Singh and the Poonch region to Moti Singh. These two states were semi-sovereign, but in practice the supremacy of the Jammu and Kashmir government was established over them.

According to the family traditions, after the death of Raja Jawahar Singh, the area of Kotli was to be given to Raja Moti Singh of Poonch. During the Dogra era, the state of Poonch was reduced to a

small state in Jammu and Kashmir. After the Treaty of Amritsar, the state of Jammu and Kashmir came under the complete control of the Dogra rulers. In 1850 Maharaja Gulab Singh made his nephew Moti Singh the Raja of Poonch thus Moti Singh became the ruler of Poonch state. In 1888, Raja Baladev Singh and in 1918 Raja Sukhdev Singh became the Rajas of Poonch state. In all this period, Poonch remained as a state, but after the death of Raja Sukhdev Singh in 1927, the status of Poonch state was reduced and its administration was taken over by the Jammu and Kashmir government. Maharaja of Kashmir announced the status of Poonch and gave it to Raja Jagat Dev Singh as a Jagir. (Mir, 2001) The officials of the state of Jammu and Kashmir have almost always interfered in the governance of Poonch. When Poonch had the status of a state, the interference of Jammu and Kashmir was insignificant. But as soon as the status of Poonch state was reduced to independent state and Jagir, then the interference of state of Jammu and Kashmir increased so much that the Maharaja Hari Singh established his dominion over Poonch by ignoring the all old treaties.

The post of Assistant Resident had been abolished. Officers of various departments in Poonch used to come from British India but now the local officers of the state of Jammu and Kashmir were deputed and Poonch began to be written as Jagir instead of state in official papers. (Hasrat, 2003) Poonch was a Jagir so the word state would not be written in its internal and external correspondence and in this way, all the prevailing laws of the Government of state of Jammu and Kashmir are in force in Jagir Poonch, like other 'Jagirs' under the Government of state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this way, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir reduced the status of Poonch state to a Jagir in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. (Taseer, 1981) In 1935, Maharaja Hari Singh forced the Raja of Poonch to accept his power and obedience and took complete control of Poonch himself. Despite this, it proved very difficult for Maharaja Hari Singh to rule over the people of Poonch. They refused to accept the obedience of Maharaja Hari Singh which they demonstrated in practice in 1947. (Khan, 2005) In the state of Poonch, where there were changes in terms of geography and administration, it also affected the people of Poonch. Ideologically, the

people of Poonch were also divided into two groups. Some believed that Poonch had its own separate history, culture and geography which should be preserved completely. Some thought that the Raja of Poonch should be removed and the Jagir of Poonch should be completely included in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. There was also a group which said that the Poonch state should not exist in either of the above cases but that Poonch should be included in British India, although this view did not find much acceptance in Poonch. (Iqbal, 2005)

Geographical, Political and Socio-economic Context of Poonch

Poonch has an ancient historical and geographical background. The geographical conditions of Poonch have been changing in different periods. The region of Poonch once enjoyed the status of an independent state, sometimes a Jagir and sometimes a princely state and eventually came under the dominion of the Dogra Rule as a district of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This region is known today for its unique history, culture and geography but ironically, the written material regarding this area is very few and non-existent. (Iqbal, 2005) The antiquity of the Poonch region can be estimated from the fact that the name of this region is mentioned in various contexts in the ancient religious books of the Hindus. Maha Bharata is an ancient work that mentions Panjal Des. The name of the king of this country was Panchal Naresh, which refers to the mountain range of Pir Panchal. Many historians agree that Pir Panjal was originally Panjal Des. (Maini, 2006).

1. Geographical Context

Poonch found in the Greater Himalayan Pir Panjal Range and encircled by rivers, valleys, and mountains that are all breathtakingly beautiful. The area is known for its untamed landscape, which includes lush valleys, deep canyons, and thick forests. Poonch is bordered by the Line of Control (LoC), which divided it in Indian Occupied Kashmir and Azad Kashmir. The region is strategically located as it serves as a gateway between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. The geographical position of Poonch

facilitated trade and cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Road, contributing to its historical significance. (Hussain, 2023) Geographically, Poonch is located in the south of Kashmir, in the north are the districts of Bara Mulla and Muzaffarabad, in the south are Ramban and Rajouri areas and in the east are the areas of Pratab Singh Pura, Awanti Pura and Kulgam in the west are Marri and Kahota Tehsils of District Rawalpindi, Punjab Province of Pakistan. (Khan, 2016) The climate of the area is moderate, with chilly winters and pleasant summers. Hilly terrain of Poonch is a home of a wide variety of plants such as alpine meadows, coniferous forests and various wild animals.

2. Political Context

The rise and fall of various ruling royal families, kingdoms, and dynasties defined the political environment of historical Poonch. There were changes in the region's political allegiances and the implementation of different administrative structures. Several governing powers had an impact on Poonch during the middle ages. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the area was ruled by the Shah Mir dynasty, which Shah Mir established. They founded a local government and were instrumental in the Sufi tradition and the propagation of Islam in Poonch. (Hussain, 2023) Poonch was conquered by the Mughal dynasty in the sixteenth century. The Mughals left a lasting impression on the area when they introduced their administrative system, social, political and cultural customs. As a result of the Mughal regime's decline, the rule of Poonch became fragmented, with regional tribal leaders staking claims to dominance. (Maini, 2009) Poonch came under the authority of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 19th century. The region experienced economic growth and security under the rule of the Sikhs. Poonch played a

significant role in the development of trade and cross-cultural interaction as a Sikh administrative outpost. (Hussain, 2023)

3. Socio-Economic Context

The socioeconomic environment of Poonch has been influenced by a number of elements. The socioeconomic circumstances of the time had an impact on the way of life, social structure, and general well-being of those living in Poonch. The socio economic impacts of Poonch are as follows;

a. Livestock and Agriculture

The principal source of income in Poonch was agriculture. Numerous crops, including barley, wheat, rice, maize, and fruits like walnuts, apricot and apples, were cultivated in the area due to its fertile valleys and pleasant climate. The local economy and population were significantly supported by the agricultural sector. The livestock growing, especially of cattle and sheep, was an important component of the social and economic issues in addition to agriculture. Food, milk and cheese, and natural resources for a variety of industries, such as navigating wool and tanning leather, were supplied by livestock. (Hussain, 2023)

b. Trade and Business

Poonch enjoyed a prosperous trade and commerce due to its advantageous location as a trade route that connected the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia. The area facilitated the flow of goods, concepts, and cultural impacts by acting as a vital link on the historic Silk Road. Trade routes connected areas like Punjab, Kashmir, Ladakh, and Central Asia, and they passed

through Poonch, traders that deal in goods like metals, precious stones, textiles, spices, and silk. Poonch developed into a thriving center of commerce, drawing merchants from nearby areas and promoting regional economic expansion. (Hussain, 2023)

c. Craftsmanship and Artistry

Poonch was renowned for its expert craftspeople and workmanship. Numerous artisanal activities flourished in the area, influencing the economic and social climate. Crafts people with expertise in weaving, ceramics, metalworking, stone and wood carving and beautiful textiles, ceramics, jewelry, metal utensils, and intricate woodwork were all products of their skill. (Hussain, 2023) Through trade routes, creative works of skilled workers of Poonch found demand outside of their home market and were highly appreciated. Quality craftsmanship and creative expression were essential to both economic growth and cultural identity. (Hussain, 2023)

d. Hierarchy and Social Organization

A multilevel system of society typified the Poonch economic environment. The feudal lords and other members of the ruling class possessed substantial wealth and power. They ruled over the local populace because they had control over the land, the assets, and trade. The peasant, artisan, and workers classes, which comprised the majority of the economy, were also included in the social structure. These communities had a connection to the land and

frequently served the feudal lords as laborers or tenants. They contributed significantly to the regional economy, manufacturing, and production from agriculture. (Hussain, 2023)

e. Cultural Institutions and Patronage

Religious and cultural institutions of Poonch were largely supported by the generosity of wealthy people and rulers. The growth of religious and intellectual endeavors was encouraged by the support and patronage given to mosques, temples, monasteries, and educational institutions. Learning and intellectual development were encouraged by the development of educational institutions, such as madrasas and schools. Under the protection of kings, intellectuals, poets, and artists flourished, enhancing the region's cultural diversity. (Hussain, 2023)

The Line of Control (LoC), which divides Poonch into two parts as a District of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir and a Division of Azad Kashmir. Due to its advantageous location and history of political unrest, the region is significant from a strategic standpoint. Gaining an understanding of political and geographical background of Poonch can help one better understand the region's historical dynamics, relationships with adjacent regions, and place within larger political landscapes. It aids in understanding the forces that molded the area's medieval sociopolitical structures, religious practices, and cultural norms. Poonch's agricultural

methods, commerce and trade, artisanal skills, and hierarchical social structure defined its socioeconomic landscape. Gaining knowledge of these socioeconomic facets helps one to comprehend the daily routines, means of subsistence, and financial situations of the Poonch population. It clarifies how the region's social and political structure, cultural norms, and economic activity interacted during that time.

Social and Political Condition of Poonch, during Dogra Raj

The state of Jammu & Kashmir had a distinct identity all its own. Even so, Kashmiris' general attitude toward the Dogras remained extremely antagonistic. Undoubtedly, a number of developmental initiatives, such as the state subject and others, were implemented to help the locals by giving them security. Undoubtedly, several steps were taken to boost the state's economy and link Kashmir with other regions via various routes, such as the Banihal Cart Road, the Jehlum Valley Cart Road, the Zojilla Pass, etc. People were given access to health and educational resources so they could consider change. On the other hand, a number of unlawful levies were applied to weaken their standing as "Balhars" in medieval times. The talented workers of the well-known and lucrative industries of silk and wool were subjected to heavy taxes; a shawl weaver, for example, makes only four paisa a day. The authorities used this as an opportunity to exploit them, which caused them to lose interest in their craft and ultimately led to the demise of craft and art centers. In addition to the taxes that were legalized for their crafts, they also had to pay other taxes, and in light of their predicament, they eliminated their index finger and thumbs to become disabled. The collection of taxes such as 'malikana tax', 'shaqdar tax', 'mandri/ashgal tax', 'Qaber tax', 'traki tax', 'patwari tax', 'chinars tax', 'nazrana', 'rasum', 'Rashim tax', 'shawl tax', 'Begar', 'Tirni Tax', 'Bakri Tax', 'Chula Tax', house tax, marriage tax, sheep tax, fruit tax, plough tax, horse tax, and additional taxes etc., can be used as

evidence of the brutality of the Dogra rulers. (Andrabi, 2017) The taxation was so severe that Dogra rulers snatched more than ninety percent of total income, leaving them with less than ten percent. With the help of fruits, the people were able to save their lives. Everything was taxed, except for air, which appears to be exempt.

From 1846 to 1947, Ghulab Singh and his ancestors disregarded the rights of Kashmiri Muslims to participate in the state affairs. Dogra rules nominated twenty eight prime ministers of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, none of them was Muslim, and Kashmiri Pandits consistently held high positions. (Hussain, 2022) The Dogras took a pro-Hindu stance despite the fact that the bulk of their subjects were Muslims. Discrimination and ignorance on the part of the ruler ignited resentment against the despot. One man, the Maharaja, had absolute authority and ruled by himself. Because the pundits controlled the entire system and helped them, Muslims became victims despite being a greater population. One of the most terrible kinds of exploitation was the baigar, in which the army of Dogra used Muslims as transporters to provide food to soldiers at the border, treating them like animals, in hazardous areas. Furthermore, the conditions for workers and peasants were more difficult under the Dogra Regime, when they were treated like dumb driven animals. (Ali & al., 2019)

Taxes on everything surrounding the peasants, such as houses, animals, fruits, orchards, etc., squeezed them more even though cultivated lands produced the majority of the revenue. Crafts people and artisans were compelled to work for the wealthy. The only two ways the Muslims of Kashmir could have survived in this situation were to either surrender to the state or run away. (Hussain, 2022) The majority of Muslims live in abhorrent poverty. A Muslim peasant appears to be a famished Begar, dressed in rags and going barefoot. The majority are landless laborers who serve as slaves of landlords. Muslim masses bear nearly the whole burden of official occupation. The amount of rural debt owed to Hindu moneylenders and landlords is astounding (Bose, 2003). The Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir developed a political as well as social awareness as a result of sociopolitical issues. After 1846, the Dogra Raj became despotic and oppressive to

Muslims. Such discriminatory policies and laws aided the Kashmiri people in banding together and raising their voices to oppose the Dogra Rulers and their state policies. (Hussain, 2022) In 1819, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, occupying the hill states of Kashmir, gave the Poonch region to the 'Dogra Raja' of Jammu as a Jagir and wanted to establish the rule of the Lahore court over it, but the zealous people of Poonch strongly resisted. Finally in 1832, Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent Dogra Gulab Singh with large number of army to crush the rebellion of Poonch. After a fierce battle, Gulab Singh arrested the Muslim leaders of Poonch and skinned them alive at Mong to serve as an example to the rest of the people. He crushed all rebellions in Poonch and brought the region of Poonch under the shadow of the Lahore court. After the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh tried to declare Poonch as a part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, but Dogra Moti Singh and Jawahar Singh of Jammu filed a case. According to an agreement in 1850, Gulab Singh appointed Dogra Moti Singh as the Raja of Poonch and the supreme power remained with the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. The history of the state of Poonch saw many ups and downs, ruled by various Dogra rulers. Overall, Poonch was a Muslim majority region and the rulers were non-Muslims. Unnecessary taxes were imposed on Poonch, people of Poonch were disturbed due to immoral and illegal measures. In short, the overall situation of Poonch was very deteriorated.

Civilization of Poonch

The Poonch is a region with a wonderful civilization and culture. Here people are meticulous, hardworking, warriors, hospitable and humanitarian. People of Poonch have their own rules and regulations, their color and appearance is different from the common people of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. They love their land very much and consider the land of Poonch in particular and Jammu and Kashmir in general as their mother. It is this spirit that the people of this place defeated the Dogra army in the military field. In all aspects of life, the love of country is revealed here. (Iqbal, 2005) The native language of the people of Poonch is Pahari, most of the people speak the Pahari language, but some people speak the Gojri language, who live in the

mountains and mostly bringing up animals. The Gojri speakers do not have a permanent residence throughout the year, living in villages, pastures in summer and in cities in winter. (Khan, 2001) The people of Poonch prefer to join the army rather than farming at a young age and after receiving a small pension, they turn to their land for agriculture and farming. These people are trustworthy and friends of friends and enemies of enemies. They never leave their friends alone in difficult times. These people are convinced of extremes both in friendship and enmity. In matters of love, these people prove to be very violent, leaving everything behind to achieve their heart's desires. No one hesitates to suffer and does not care about caste, religion and race. (Iqbal, 2005)

The people of Poonch can be completely trusted with respect to life and property. They never deceive their friends and masters, when they find out that they have chosen the wrong person for trust, their hate for that person increases to the point that they do not hesitate to kill him. Though they were defeated by the invaders of the past, but the invaders did not find this task easy. The people of Poonch maintained their masculinity despite being subdued and held their heads high in front of their enemy. (Ramay, 1960) The lifestyle of the people of Poonch is very dignified; these people are the pioneers of impartiality and equality in the region.

Division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Poonch

In 1947, when the people of Poonch region raised a revolt against the oppression and brutality of Maharaja Hari Singh, as a result of which the state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two parts. One part became a semi-autonomous state called Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) and the other became part of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) under Indian control. After the partition of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Poonch was also divided into two parts. In terms of area, most of Poonch went to Azad Jammu and Kashmir and less part went to Occupied Kashmir, but its importance is more in the sense that the main city of Poonch went to Indian Occupied Kashmir. In 1947, there were four subdivisions of Poonch, out of which two full and two half became part of Azad Kashmir. (Iqbal, 2005)

Administrative Division of Poonch Region after 1947

After 1947, the Poonch region was divided into two parts, Poonch Division of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) has four districts and Poonch District of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir which has one district and four subdivisions. The detail of current administrative division of the Poonch region of Jammu and Kashmir is as follows;

Administrative Division of Poonch, Azad Kashmir

Administratively the Poonch region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) is a division of AJ&K which has four districts; Poonch, Bagh, Pallandri and Haveli. (AJK At A Glance-2023) Kotli was also part of Poonch in 1947. (Ram, 1977).

Administrative Division of Poonch, Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir

Administratively the Poonch region of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) is a district of IOJ&K which has six sub divisions; Balakot, Haveli, Mandi, Mankot, Mendhar and Surnkot. (Viewvillage, 2024).

Conclusion

The above discussion is based upon the geographical, political, socio-economic history of Poonch. This information which was scattered has been collected in one place for the convenience of readers and knowledge seekers. Here the ancient history of Poonch, its origin and the accounts of the early rulers of Poonch have been mentioned in detail. Civilization, culture, Dogra family in Poonch region and overall political and social situation of Poonch have been briefly reviewed. After the partition of India in 1947, Poonch was also divided into two parts, one part went to Azad Kashmir and the other to Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and an infamous blood line divided the region of Poonch and its people. In earlier periods, invaders tried to suppress the Poonchis but could not easily succeed. The people of Poonch always remain proud despite being oppressed; they neither oppress nor flatter to anyone. The people of Poonch bravely faced all the atrocities of the

Dogra rulers and never compromised on their self-respect.

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