

# Dharmarth grants to Non-Sikhs by Officials of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh

## Abstract

Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's officials such as nazims, kardars, muqqadams, chaudharis, patwaris and zamidars played very significant role in strengthening his empire. Ranjeet Singh gave dharmarth charities without any religious prejudice to non-Sikhs, this pattern was followed by his officials also. They got jagirs from Ranjeet Singh and from it they granted some part for the patronization of Sikhs and non-Sikhs. Ranjeet Singh's European officials also participated in the alienation dharmarth charity of the non-Sikh section of the society. This article tries to explore Ranjeet Singh's official's patronization to the non-Sikh individual and institutions which they granted without any religious prejudice like their ruler and helped Ranjeet Singh to strengthen his position in the heterogeneous population of the Punjab.

**Key words:** Non-Sikhs, Administrators, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, Dharmarth grants.

## Introduction

Dharmarth was the term used for charity that was given to religious individuals and institutions by the ruler or other chief authorities. During Ranjeet Singh's period this charity was known by various names such as dharmarth, madad-i-mash, dar-wajah-i-ma'ash etc, the most common terms used for dharmarth grants in the orders of the Sikh rulers are ma'uf<sup>1</sup> and waguzar.<sup>2</sup> However, the sole purpose of all terms remained the same. As we know Ranjeet Singh was a great patron of dharmarth charities to the Sikh and non-Sikhs. Numbers of grants were given by the said ruler to his officials in terms of cash or kind and the same framework was followed by his administrators to grant religious charities to different sections of the society to strengthen their own and ruler's position amongst the heterogeneous inhabitants of the Punjab under Ranjeet Singh. In this article, main discussion would be on the dharmarth charities given to the non-Sikhs by officials of Ranjeet Singh.

## Aim of the Study

The aim of study is to draw attention of historians and research scholars towards the contribution made by Ranjeet Singh's official in the consolidation of Sikh empire by granting dharmarth or revenue free charities specifically to the non-Sikh individuals and institutions of the empire.

## Review of Literature

In 1849, J.D. Cunningham's work 'A History of the Sikhs' for the first time threw light on the secular grants alienated by the ruling class to the Sikhs and non-Sikhs. H.R Gupta & K.S.Narang's 'History of the Punjab' give references only to the Ranjit Singh's religious charities to non-Sikh educational institutions such as pathshalas and madrasas. N.K. Sinha's work, Rise of the Sikh Power (1936) highlighted that during Ranjeet Singh's period Muslim public figures such as ulema and other saintly spirits obtained dharmarth charities from the said ruler. B.N. Goswamy & J.S. Grewal's 'The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori (a study of 52 Persian Documents from the Pindori Collection (1969) highlighted the patronage given by Sikh rulers to the pindori sadhus and their institutions. Diminutive discussion in this work is about the Vaishnava pindori's patronization by the official class of Ranjeet Singh. Indu Banga in her work 'Agrarian System of the Sikhs (1978) in one chapter has discussed various aspects of dharmarth grants in detail but very less attention has been paid to the grants given by official class of Ranjeet Singh to different segment of the society. Veena Sachdeva in her work 'Polity and Economy of the Punjab: during the late Eighteenth



**Gurpreet Kaur**  
Research Scholar,  
Deptt. of History,  
Punjab University,  
Chandigarh

and early Nineteenth century (1993) has mainly focused on the dharmarth charities given by the rulers to Sikhs and non-Sikhs mainly in the trans-Satluj territory of the Punjab. Meera Nagpal in her thesis 'State Patronage in Punjab: 1750-1850 (2013) has discussed in detail the state patronage from every aspect and has also discussed the religious charities of the official class of Ranjeet Singh to different sections of society but in her work, she has collectively discussed the charities given by official class to Sikh and non-Sikh individuals and institutions, where as this paper goes into detail of the dharmarths given by the civil administrators of Ranjeet Singh to non-Sikhs. The literature available so far does not elucidate much on the dharmarth grants given specifically to non-Sikhs, by officials of Ranjet Singh. Hitherto, this paper tries to fill that gap.

#### **Main content**

The officials of Ranjeet Singh alienated revenue free charities to the non-Sikh religious system and individuals. Like their ruler, the officials also patronized every section of society either the Hindu Pandits, puroits, or Muslim fakirs, qazis or other religious dignitaries of both the religious system.

The administrators of Ranjeet Singh such as nazims, kardars, muqaddams, chaudharies, zamindars, were the grantor of Brahmins and purohits. The nazims were the main authority after Ranjeet Singh to manage his administration in allotted area. While the administering their areas, these officials alienated religious charities to the different sections of the society to maintain their ruler's as well as their own influence on people. Various dharmarth charities were alienated by officials of Ranjeet Singh. The nazim or jagirdars who alienated religious charities to different religious sections of the society were Hari Singh Nalwa, Khushal Singh, Gulab Singh, Diwan Sawan Mal, Diwan Moti Ram and Shaikh Imanud-din. Hari Singh Nalwa was nazim under Ranjeet Singh at various places and granted number of jagirs to non-Sikhs. 'His family purohit, Madan Das got a well in dharmarth from this nazim in 1808.<sup>4</sup> 'Hari Singh Nalwa's grants to the pandas of Haridwar in 1808 and 1809 coincided with his victory at Qasur and Sialkot, this was followed by a grant in 1836 which might be on his occupation of Peshawar in 1834.<sup>5</sup> In Gujrat, Diwan Moti Ram assigned a village worth value of 500 to Ramji, a family purohit of Moti Ram.<sup>6</sup> In 1818, Sukh Dial, nazim of Multan gave cash grant of 88 rupees to Brahmin.<sup>7</sup> Same amount of cash grant was granted by Hazari Badan Singh in 1821 to another Brahmin. The Nazim of Jalandher Doab Ghulam Mohiuddin, granted a jagir worth 400 rupees in 1824 to a Brahmin.<sup>9</sup> Other branches of Hindu religion were also patronized by Nazims of Ranjeet Singh. Desa Singh Majithia, nazim of Kanga territory granted six kanals and ten marlas of land to a temple of Devi in the pargana of Gurdarspur.<sup>10</sup> 'During his tenure as nazim in Kangra, he is also known to have built the present structure of Vajresvari Temple in Kangra.<sup>11</sup> Shrines of dadupanthi fakirs were also received patronization from the nazim of Ranjeet Singh. 'In 1834, at Dera Ghazi Khan Sawan Mal granted ninety rupees to a sirapanthi faqir, Keval.

Grants to Muslim establishment were also granted by nazims of Ranjeet Singh. The tomb of Shaikh Chunar Bandagi and Sayyad Murad Shah.<sup>13</sup> At Dera Ghazi Khan, Diwan Sawan Mal granted seven annas for oil to the khanqah of Balak Shah.<sup>14</sup> Muslim individuals also got patronization from the nazims of Ranjeet Singh. 'Ramjan, Ghulam Rasul and Muhammad were the influential individual who received patronization from Diwan Sawan Mal, Nazim of Multan.

Another category of officials who alienated dharmarth Charities were the kardars of Lahore durbar. 'They worked as subordinator to nazims. In fact most important official in sphere of local government was Kardar rather than the Nazim.<sup>16</sup> 'The kardars also gave grants to the pandits and purohits.<sup>17</sup> In 1815, Nand Singh, Kardar of Amritsar patronized Sukha Nand purohit with the piece of land worth sixty rupees. Various kardars gave dharmarth charity to non-Sikh individuals or institutions. In 1825, Kardar of Gujrat Diwan Devi Sahai gave grant to a hakim worth four rupees. Miser Amir Chand and Devi Sahai were the Kardars of Ranjeet Singh those alienated revenue free charities to the physician.<sup>19</sup> 'Kishen Kaur, the Kardar of Ranjeet Singh alienated cash grants to the jogis of Rawalpindi and Dera Ghazi Khan.<sup>20</sup> Various Shaivite jogis were patronized by various kardars of Ranjeet Singh. The kardars, who patronized jogis at Rawalpindi and Dera Ghazi Khan were Devi Dial, Kishen Kaur and Mahu Singh.

Next category of officials was the muqaddams of the Ranjeet Singh. They were the village level official but they also alienated dharmarth charities to the religious or non-religious sections of the society. In the National Archives of India, we get various examples of religious charities granted by this section of officials. Few of muqaddams identified here, who alienated religious charities to the different sections of the society. They were Maya and Rupa, Muqaddams of village Rehab in Pargana Talwandi, Gulab Muqaddam of village Khakarke in pargana Talwandi, Gurmukh Singh Muqaddam of village Joura in pargana Amritsar, Karam and Wazira, muqaddams of village Hapowal in pargana Shakargarh, Bakht Mai, Sewa Singh and Rattan Singh, Muqaddams of village Nangal in pargana Talwandi.

Not only muqaddams, even qannungos and zamindars of the villages also alienated religious charities to non-Sikhs under the rule of Mahraja Ranjeet Singh 'A temple of devi in the Pargana of Batala got ten kanals land worth seven rupees from qanungo, Shiv Sahai. In 1793, A sadh named Gian Das patronized with a village, Dhing Shaikhpora by chaudhri Sahib Rai and Chanda.<sup>24</sup> Few of zamindars also came to light, who alienated religious charities to non-Sikhs. 'The zamindars of Sialkot pargana, Dulla, Shanker and Ratna gave land worth ten rupees in dharmarth charity. Other Zamindar was Haveli Singh, who alienated dharmarth charities.

One interesting fact came to light is that Ranjeet Singh's European officials also participated in the alienation of dharmarth. 'Ventura was a Colonel in Napoleonic infantry. He joined service with Maharaja

in 1822 along with Allard. He was given the task of training Sikh infantry and he raised four battalions of Fauji-Khas. Ventura is said to have served in the campaigns of Multan, Derajat and Peshwar.<sup>27</sup> At Dera Ghazi Khan, Ventura gave cash grant worth of 104 rupees to a blind person at Peshwar.<sup>28</sup> Other dharmarth granted by this official to Muslim mullas, named Aziz and Khuda Bakhsh at Dera Ghazi Khan. Avitabile was another outstanding officer enlisted Ranjeet Singh. Avitabile granted a piece of land worth twelve rupees to Shaikh Usman.<sup>30</sup> These religious charities were done by them from their own resources which they had collected from Ranjeet Singh in the form of inam or service jagirs. So, every official of Ranjeet Singh either its big or small alienated dharmarth charities to the religious and non-religious sections of the society. By doing so, they got favor of different sections of the society 'sometimes sentiment of piety was attached to such grants.

### Conclusion

In retrospect, we can say that Ranjeet Singh established an independent Sikh state with his strategic mind, diplomacy and with the help of his officials. Without their contribution it was not possible for the Sikh ruler to maintain such a great empire. As like Ranjit Singh, his officials adopted very generous attitude towards the non-Sikhs. Every administrator such as nazim, kardar, muqaddam, chaudhary or zamindar alienated revenue free charities to the non-Sikhs. They gave dharmarth grants without any religious prejudice to non-Sikhs either Hindu or Muslims. Moreover, Ranjeet Singh's European administrators also participated in the alienation of dharmarths to the non-Sikhs. It was a new kind of example that was established by Ranjeet Singh's European officials.

Under Ranjeet Singh's officials, non-Sikh individual and institutions enjoyed great number of dharmarth charities and the financial assistance helped non-Sikhs to nurture and provide prosperous ambience for their evolution.

### Endnotes

1. *Mu'af: the land exempt from the payment of land revenue.*
2. *Exempt from the payment of land revenue.*
3. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 3 April 1850, No.228; 16 September 1859, Nos.53- 59; *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 31 December 1847, No. 2200; 14 November 1851, Nos.44-47; 7 January 1853, No. 241; 27 May 1853, No. 211
4. Vaneet Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa: Champion of the Khalsaji (1791-1837)* Hari Singh Nalwa Foundation Trust, 2009, p.284.
5. *Ibid*, p.252
6. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 15 October 1852, No. 117
7. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 18 March 1853, No. 157
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 31 December 1847, No. 2200
10. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 28 November 1856, No.1372-B

11. *Shantilal Nagar, The Temple of Himachal Pradesh*, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, 1990, p.115
12. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 23 August 1850, Nos. 59-61
13. Vaneet Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa: Champion of the Khalsaji*, p. 312.
14. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 11 October 1849, Nos. 132-134
15. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 25 June 1858, Nos. 274-76; *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 28 November 1856, No. 1372 B; 5 December 1856, No. 210; 8 April 1859, Nos.64-66
16. G.L. Chopra, *Punjab as a Sovereign state (1799-1839)*, V.V.R. Institute Publication, Hoshiarpur, 1960, p-84.
17. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 7 January 1853, No. 225
18. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 18 March 1853, No. 156.
19. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 23 August 1850, Nos. 59-61; *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 7 January 1853, No.241
20. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 16 September 1859, Nos. 53-55; *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 14 January 1853, No.241; 27 May 1853, Nos.193 & 208
21. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 7 January 1853, No. 241; *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 23 August 1850, Nos. 59- 61
22. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 15 October 1852, No. 117
23. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 8 August 1856, No. 206
24. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 14 January 1853, No. 238
25. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 14 January 1853, No. 213
26. *Foreign/Political Proceedings*, 8 August 1856, No. 206
27. J.M.Lafont, *Maharaja Ranjeet Singh: The French Connection* ( ed. By Prithipal Singh Kapur) Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar,2001, p.3
28. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 14 February 1851, No. 19 A
29. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 3 April 1850, Nos. 196 -98
30. *Foreign/Political Consultation*, 14 February 1851, No. 19 A
31. Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late eighteenth and Early nineteenth century*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1978, p.128.

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