

British Administration in the Punjab from 1849-53; Structural Changes and Development

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Article History:

Received: 12-12-2024

Revised: 25-01-2025

Accepted: 05-02-2025

Abstract:

In 1849, when the British annexed Punjab to the British Empire, they paid attention to the Administration of Punjab. Punjab was a big state that included the areas from the Sutlej to the Indus River. The land was fertile and the people were economically strong. Apart from this, there were some difficulties like the fact that Punjab was located on the North-Western frontier. Due to this, Lord Dalhousie paid special attention to the administration of Punjab and he established a good administration in Punjab during his early years. Under this, a three-man Board of Administration was established, the members of which were Sir Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence and Charles Mansell. Henry Lawrence had been living in Punjab since 1846 CE. Due to this, he had good knowledge of the people of Punjab and was also popular among many of the chieftains of Punjab. But his relations with Lord Dalhousie were not very good. Therefore, Lord Dalhousie did not give him all the power of the Board of Administration. He was given all the rights related to politics. John Lawrence was the brother of Henry Lawrence but he was a supporter of Lord Dalhousie. Therefore, all the financial rights were given to him. Charles Mansell was given judicial rights. In this way, all the power of the Board of Administration was divided among the three members. As a result, he soon brought the people of Punjab under the British Empire. In this paper, I will mention the initial administrative policy of the British in Punjab.

Keywords: Board of Administration, Lord Dalhousie, Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, People of Punjab

1. Introduction

After the first Anglo-Sikh war, the British did not subjugate Punjab. Rather, with the Treaties of Lahore and Bhairawal, Lord Hardinge had weakened Punjab politically. Along with this, a British Resident was also appointed. Who was living in the Lahore Darbar and was keeping a close eye on the Sikhs. When the Sikhs saw their independence being lost by the British Resident, the second Anglo-Sikh war started in 1848 CE. In which the Sikhs were defeated and Punjab became part of the British Empire. After making Punjab a part of the British Empire, the biggest challenge before Lord Dalhousie was to establish complete peace in Punjab and provide good governance to the people of Punjab. So that the resentment against the British among the people of Punjab and the Sikh chiefs could be eliminated and they could be made supporters of British rule. Thus, Lord Dalhousie

established a different type of British administration under the supervision of three capable British officers compared to the other provinces of British India.

2. Literature Review

(Edwin,1862), in his book *The Marquis of Dalhousie's Administration of British India Vol.I* has mentioned Dalhousie policy towards Punjab. It discuss the steps taken by the Governor General of India, Lord Dalhousie, for the administration of Punjab. (Trotter,1866), in his book *The History of the British Empire in India, 1844-1862 Vol.I*, regarding early administration policy under the British in Punjab has been mentioned. (Smith,1883), *Life of Lord Lawrence, Vol.I*, is a biography of the Lawrence brothers. It has 15 chapters. Which mentions the early life of both brothers, Henry Lawrence and John Lawrence, their arrival in India and the works done for the British rule at different places and the contribution of establishing the British rule in Punjab from 1846 to 1858. (Khilnani,1951), *Punjab under Lawrence*, is an important work on the Lawrence brothers in Punjab. He discusses the Board of Administration and the new administration established in the Punjab under John Lawrence. (Mathur, 1973) has written 8 chapters in his book *British Administration of Punjab (1849-75)*. In the first chapter the establishment and structure of the Board of Administration has been discussed.

3. Research Methodology

- Collection of data from primary and secondary sources
- Critical evaluation

4. Establishment of the Board of Administration

In 1849, Lord Dalhousie established a three-member Board of Administration to re-establish the administration of the entire Punjab. These were members: Sir Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence and Charles Mansel. Henry Lawrence had been living in Punjab since 1846, when the Sikhs were lost the First Anglo War. After that, according to the Treaty of Bhairowal (1846), a British Resident was established in Lahore, of which Henry Lawrence was appointed as the head. Thus, he was working in Lahore as a British Resident. He had good contact with the people of Punjab and was fully informed about all the issues of Punjab. He had a sympathetic attitude towards the peoples of Punjab and the Chiefs. Due to this, he became very popular among the Punjabi people. When the Governor General Lord Dalhousie incorporated Punjab into the British Empire, Henry Lawrence opposed it. Because according to Henry Lawrence, it was a treachery action. Because of this, his relations with Lord Dalhousie were not good and he even resigned from his post. But on the request of Lord Dalhousie's Foreign Secretary Elliot, Henry Lawrence withdrew his resignation. Lord Dalhousie knew that if peace is to be established among the people of Punjab, it is necessary that Henry Lawrence be included in the administration.

Along with this, Lord Dalhousie also felt that the entire responsibility of the administration of the state should not be given to Henry Lawrence. Therefore, he established a three-member Board of Administration. According to the British Commander in Chief Charles Gough, (1897), there was no other man than Henry Lawrence who had already won the personal admiration and confidence of Punjabis in such an effective manner. Second in rank after him was his brother John Lawrence, who

was of a stern nature and a hard heart. His ideas were more pleasing to the minds of the Western people, that is, the British, and the Indian people did not like those ideas. Henry Lawrence was considered a man who, with his truth and ability, could turn the Punjabis into supporters of the British. He was the only person who could soothe the hearts of the Sikhs who were hurt by the war between the British and the Sikhs and had the ability to create a good relationship between the victors and the vanquished. Therefore, Lord Dalhousie gave Henry Lawrence the responsibility of political and military affairs. Disarming the people of Punjab, disbanding the Khalsa army and strengthening the north-west frontier were all given to Henry Lawrence. John Lawrence was given the responsibilities of the Finance Department and the Land Revenue affairs. Because he had the ability to solve these issues very competently. Charles Mansel, who was a great thinker, calm mind and able to eliminate the feeling of opposition from the minds of opponents and was a very wise man. He had a legal and scientific approach to everything. Because of this, he was made the head of the Judicial department. But he could not remain a member of the Board for very long. In 1851, Robert Montgomery was appointed in his place. Thus, we can say that although the responsibilities were given to everyone separately so that good management could be made, the responsibility for their successful implementation was combined of the three members.

4.1 Problem of the Board of Administration

Although the Khalsa army was defeated, the fire of dissatisfaction towards the British was burning in its mind. This army was still disarmed. Therefore, the British had a serious problem that they should not only disarm them. Rather, they had to extinguish the fire burning in their minds towards the British and appease them. Many Sikh Sardars who had made many efforts to save the Khalsa Raj but could not succeed. Now there were many doubts in their minds towards British rule. The Board had to remove their doubts also so that a feeling of sympathy towards British rule could be created in their minds. Due to the unrest after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the number of thieves and robbers had increased a lot in Punjab. They were also a big concern for the common people. A good police system was needed to eliminate them. This was also a big challenge before the Board of Administration. The north-western frontier of Punjab, which bordered Afghanistan, was home to very dangerous tribes who could spread chaos in Punjab at any time. Securing this border was also a big problem for the Board of Administration.

4.2 Achievements of Board of Administration

4.2.1 Non- Regulation Pattern of the Board of Administration and its aims

According to (Latif, 1964), The Board of Administration did was to bring the people of Punjab under the protection of the law in order to give them complete justice. The complex provisions of the law and some unpleasant customs were abandoned. Although there were some shortcomings in this system and the law was not implemented as strictly as it was implemented in other provinces under the British. But it was according to the exact needs of the people of Punjab. According to (Aitchison, 1897), The administration of Punjab was to be carried out according to the rules but these rules were free from the constraints of legal minutiae. If the law was silent on this matter, decisions had to be made according to the voice of the soul. According to this system, three principles were specially kept in mind. First, the whole of Punjab was divided into districts. Which were so small in terms of

area, population and taxation that it was very easy for the civil officers to get a complete knowledge of those districts and to get personal information from the popular people of that area. Second, from the highest civil officer to the lowest officer, judicial, financial and executive powers were to be given according to his official status. In such an Administration, everyone has a common responsibility. Third, the law and its procedure that was implemented were to be made very simple and as far as possible based on local customs and traditions.

On this basis, the Board of Administration divided the entire Punjab into seven divisions. The divisions were then divided into districts. A Commissioner was appointed in each division. Whose main objective was to create peace and law and order and to carry out public welfare works. A Deputy Commissioner was appointed in each district. The Deputy Commissioner was given many powers. An Assistant Commissioner and an Additional Assistant Commissioner were appointed to assist him. All these officers were responsible for the smooth administration of the district. Whose main objective was to maintain peace and law and order in the district. Each district was further divided into tehsils. In which a chief officer called Tehsildar was appointed. He was also a very capable officer who managed the tehsil with the orders of the Deputy Commissioner of the district. In this way, the Board of Administration completed its first step towards establishing peace in Punjab by making a smooth administrative division.

4.2.2 Disbanding the Khalsa Army

The biggest problem before the British was the Khalsa army. Which had put the British in the nose in the first and second Anglo-Sikh Wars and with great difficulty they had succeeded in defeating this Khalsa army. Now they wanted to eliminate the power of this Khalsa army so that their British rule could continue in the future. In this task, Henry Lawrence showed great wisdom. He gathered about 50 thousand Khalsa army in Lahore. All the soldiers were dismissed after paying their previous salaries. Their weapons were taken away from all those soldiers. In a very short time, the Board of Administration disarmed the entire Khalsa army. According to (Khilnani,1951), Khalsa army that used to put the kings and Maharajas of its country on the throne and remove them. In front of whose power even the great chiefs were afraid. Now it humbly followed the orders of its foreign masters. But after disarmament, it was necessary to direct the power of the soldiers in some direction. Otherwise, there was a danger that they might start doing thieves, dacoits or any other raiding work. The Board of Administration paid special attention to this matter. The British started forming new regiments of Punjabis. In which Punjabis got the opportunity to enlist. But these were very few in number. With difficulty, one-tenth of the entire Sikh army was taken into the British army. Now the Board of Administration took special steps to improve agriculture. Due to which the dismissed soldiers started taking interest in it. Since many soldiers belonged to farmer families, they were also experts in ploughing. They again took up farming. As a result, Punjab's agriculture developed a lot. In a short time, Punjab became the home of grain. Which was very beneficial for the British. In this way, the Board of Administration also abolished the Khalsa Army and, on the other hand, very cleverly resolved the problem of soldiers who were idle in front of them.

4.2.3 Disarming of the People of Punjab

After eliminating the Khalsa army, the British decided to disarmament of all the people of Punjab. Because the people of Punjab were armed due to continuous participation in wars for the past many centuries. The Board of Administration did not want to delay this work either. Because it was possible that after some time the people of Punjab would unite against British rule and rebel. Now the Board of Administration announced that all the people of Punjab should hand over their weapons to the government and demolish personal forts. To implement this announcement, the Board of Administration acted very wisely. They took the village chiefs and other influential men into their confidence. With their help, they started disarming the people of Punjab. This policy of the Board of Administration gave very good results. Soon the personal forts were demolished and the people of Punjab started handing over all their weapons to the government. In this work, the British achieved more success than expected. Thousands of weapons, including swords and guns, were handed over to the British. The government issued an order that people of Punjab would not possess weapons only Europeans could possess weapons. If they did so, they would have to pay a heavy fine.

4.2.4 Operations related to the North-West Frontier

There were many freedom-loving and rebel tribes living on the north-western border of Punjab. They used to disturb the peace of Punjab by their plundering activities. The Lahore Darbar had a very strict control over these tribes and during that time the British did not have to face this problem. Because the Lahore Kingdom acted as a strong security between the tribal areas and the British. Thus, during the time of the Lahore Kingdom, the British had no connection with the north-western border. They were only ever worried about the politics of Central Asia. But now after the annexation of Punjab in the British rule, the big problem before the British was how to protect the British rule from this border. For this work, Henry Lawrence established the Guide Corps, a military unit. In this army, he recruited those people who had good knowledge about the geographical situation of the north-western region and the people there. This army started keeping an eye on these tribes. To protect the plains of Punjab from the attacks of these rebel tribes, Henry Lawrence established the 'Punjab Frontier Force'. It had 12 thousand cavalry and infantry soldiers. This irregular army was formed to deal with the robbers coming from the hilly areas in the plains. They did not have much equipment like the other army. The soldiers of this army were very agile and due to the lack of equipment, they were able to chase the tribal raiders very quickly. There were also some soldiers expelled from the Khalsa army who did not like any other occupation and joined this army. As a result of the actions of this army, peace was established to a large extent in the north-west frontier area and border security arrangements had also become much stronger. According to (Nijjar,1974), now the security arrangements were so efficient and complete that there was never any serious threat to the peace of Punjab in the future.

4.2.5 Judicial System

The Board of Administration also paid special attention to the judicial system of Punjab. According to the system of justice developed by John Lawrence, justice was available cheaply and quickly. According to (Payne,1970), the judicial system established by the Board was a new invention. This judicial system was people-friendly. There were no lawyers in the courts and more space was given

to the village panchayat. Panchayats or councils of wise elders decided all small and big cases. In order to maintain the competence of the panchayats, the judges were instructed to ask the people to decide the disputes through an elective person. Although the power to implement and change the decision was with the judge. While determining the law, the Board of Administration gave priority to the prevailing and customary customs instead of the religious laws of Hindus and Muslims. The Board of Administration itself was the highest court that heard appeals in both criminal and civil cases. This court could also sentence the accused to death. Below the Board of Administration was the Commissioner's Court. In which decisions were made on major civil and criminal cases. Similarly, there were smaller courts below this. For example, the Tehsildar used to organize courts and decide civil cases up to Rs 300. Many cases went to the Tehsildar's courts. According to (Mathur,1973), Two-thirds of the judicial work in Punjab was done in these courts. The main objective of the Board of Administration was that people should get justice as soon as possible instead of getting confused in the intricacies of the law like today.

4.2.6 Financial reforms

To strengthen the financial system, the Board of Administration paid attention to land tax. Since Punjab was an agricultural province and agriculture was done on a large scale, the Board of Administration recommended that the farmers use modern Technique in agriculture. People were encouraged to sow new seeds of new types of crops. It was recommended to sow new crops like cotton, tobacco, jute, etc. A lot of new land was prepared for agriculture. Similarly, arrangements were made for raising good breed sheep. Land tax was reduced and fixed at one-fourth of the total production. In many places, one-eighth of the production was fixed. Farmers were ordered to deposit land tax in cash instead of grain. Due to which the farmers were forced to sell their crops in the markets. As a result, the economic condition of the farmers started deteriorating. Although the yield of the farmers had started increasing, the result was that the prices of the crops decreased and the farmers could not sell their grain in such places where they could get more money. Because of this, the farmers accepted the British policy of collecting cash taxes for all their problems. That is why they were repeatedly insisting that they should be allowed to deposit taxes in the old way. Henry Lawrence wanted to accept this request of the farmers, but John Lawrence did not agree with this.

5. Dismantling the Board of Administration

The Board of Administration was dissolved in February 1853. The main reason for this was the difference in ideology of two members of the Board of Administration, Henry Lawrence and John Lawrence. As we have already mentioned, the farmers had repeatedly requested that their tax should be deposited in the form of grains. Henry Lawrence was ready to accept this request of the farmers. But John Lawrence did not agree with this. A big difference was aroused between the two members on this issue. After this, the policy regarding the Jagirdars created even more confusion. Henry Lawrence wanted that the Jagirdars should not be deprived of their estates and that they should be made friends of the British government. John Lawrence did not agree with Henry Lawrence's idea. He wanted Jagirdars to be deprived of their properties. This clash of ideas reached the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie. Lord Dalhousie had always supported John Lawrence. He had no confidence in the experience, thinking and wisdom of Henry Lawrence. He was personally opposed

to Henry Lawrence. The third member of the Board of Administration, Robert Montgomery, was a supporter of John Lawrence. Thus, Lord Dalhousie, taking the side of John Lawrence, abolished the Board of Administration. John Lawrence was appointed Chief Commissioner of Punjab and Henry Lawrence was removed from Punjab and appointed to a new residency in Rajputana.

6. Conclusions

In the end, we can say that the Board of Administration, during its short four-year tenure, established the foothold of British rule in Punjab with its reforms. It made reforms in every field of administration. The Board of Administration knew very well that if we could not give good governance to the people of Punjab, then perhaps we would not be able to keep them under our control. Because Punjab was the last state in India to come under the control of the British. Therefore, the Board of Administration keeping this challenge in mind, made every possible effort to make the Punjabi people in favor of British rule. None of the work of the Board of Administration was based on oppression, even if they disarmed the people of Punjab, their policy was very sensible in this regard. Similarly, the Punjab was divided into divisions, the appointment of new officers in the districts, securing the North-West Frontier, judicial reforms, financial reforms, all these were the result of the true hard work and dedication of the members of the Board of Administration. This period in the history of India during the British period holds a special significance because during the short period of the Board of Administration, they had consolidated British rule in a large province like Punjab. The province whose people's bravery was known as far as Central Asia.

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