

Reassessing the Creation of Jammu and Kashmir: A Re-reading of Dogra and British Archival Sources, 1820–1858

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Abstract:

The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir came into formal existence in March 1846 through the Treaty of Amritsar, an event that has been narrated almost exclusively as a "sale" of the Kashmir Valley by the British East India Company to Maharaja Gulab Singh. That characterisation, although it captures something real about the colonial calculations at work, obscures more than it reveals. This paper draws on Dogra court records — the *Rajdarshini* chronicles, Persian firmans, revenue settlements preserved at the Mubarak Mandi Archives in Jammu — alongside British colonial records held at the National Archives of India and the India Office Records in the British Library, and argues that what emerged in 1846 was not created overnight. The Dogra state had been taking shape for at least two decades before the treaty was signed: through military campaigns into Ladakh, Baltistan, and Gilgit between 1834 and 1842; through the internal disintegration of the Sikh Empire; and through British frontier calculations that had as much to do with fiscal exhaustion as with the "Great Game." The treaty, in other words, did not conjure a state out of nothing — it gave legal dress to a territorial reality that already existed on the ground. When the Dogra and British archives are read together, and where necessary against each other, a more complicated picture of state formation in the western Himalayas comes into view — one in which the populations governed by these arrangements, whose perspectives neither archive took the trouble to record, also begin to appear.

I. Introduction

The sixteenth of March 1846 sits oddly in South Asian historiography. On that date, representatives of the East India Company and Maharaja Gulab Singh put their signatures to a treaty at Amritsar, and in doing so brought into existence what would become one of the largest princely states under British paramountcy — the composite state of Jammu and Kashmir.¹ The treaty came barely a week after the Treaty of Lahore, which had concluded the First Anglo-Sikh War. Under its terms, the British transferred to Gulab Singh and the male heirs of his body "all the hilly or mountainous country, with its dependencies, situated to the eastward of the River Indus and the westward of the River Ravi," for seventy-five lakh Nanakshahi rupees.² With a single instrument, territories running from the subtropical

plains of Jammu to the glaciated passes of Ladakh were placed under the sovereignty of a Rajput dynasty whose base, until recently, had been a modest hill kingdom.

The conventional reading of this event treats the Treaty of Amritsar as a "sale deed" — a transaction in which the Company disposed of a territory and its inhabitants as if they were transferable property.³ There is something to this reading, certainly. But it reduces a process that unfolded over decades to a single exchange, and in doing so it leaves out almost everything that makes the story historically interesting. It ignores the twenty years of Dogra campaigning that preceded the treaty, the tortuous diplomacy through which Gulab Singh played the collapsing Sikh court against the advancing British, and the practical calculations — financial as much as strategic — that led the Company to prefer a pliant client to the headaches of directly governing some of the most inaccessible terrain on the subcontinent.

What this paper attempts is something narrower than a new theory but broader than a narrative summary. The central claim is that the princely state was not made in a moment but assembled over time, and that seeing this clearly requires reading two very different sets of records alongside one another. The Dogra court archive — chronicles, firmans, revenue assessments — tells a story of dynastic state-building that the British records largely overlook or reframe to suit their own purposes. The British archive — the Foreign and Political Department files, the Lahore Political Diaries, the voluminous correspondence of successive Governors-General — exposes the anxieties and pragmatic calculations that shaped Company policy in ways that the Dogra chronicles, preoccupied with royal legitimacy, had no cause to record.

The study rests on published primary sources — principally Aitchison's *Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, Cunningham's *Ladakh* (1854), Drew's *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories* (1875), and Walter Lawrence's *The Valley of Kashmir* (1895) — as well as archival material from the Jammu State Archives at the Mubarak Mandi Complex, the National Archives of India, and the India Office Records.⁴ It engages critically with the historiography, from Panikkar's *The Founding of the Kashmir State* (1953) and Bawa Satinder Singh's indispensable *The Jammu Fox* (1974) to the more recent work of Mridu Rai and Chitralkha Zutshi, which shifted the field's attention toward communal politics and identity formation under Dogra rule.⁵

The paper is organised in seven sections after this introduction. Section II sets out the methodology, explains the cataloguing history of the major repositories, and introduces the philological typology used throughout. Section III reviews the historiography, including the frequently overlooked Sikh perspective. Section IV traces the Dogra ascent before 1846 — the conquests of Kishtwar, Ladakh, Baltistan, and Gilgit that built the territorial edifice on which the Treaty of Amritsar was superimposed. Section V examines the Anglo-Sikh War and the diplomatic circumstances of the treaty itself, paying particular attention to what the British internal records reveal about their motivations. Section VI turns to the Dogra archives for the alternative narrative — one grounded in dynastic continuity and administrative extension rather than imperial transaction. Section VII considers the populations whose voices are absent from both archives, and Section VIII revisits the "sale" characterisation in light of the evidence assembled. A concluding section draws the threads together.

II. Methodology, Archival Typology, and Philology

Anyone who tries to write about trans-Himalayan state formation runs into a basic problem of sources. The colonial archive was produced by a foreign military-bureaucratic apparatus preoccupied with frontier security; the princely archive was kept by a court preoccupied with domestic legitimacy and revenue extraction. Neither can be treated as a neutral repository. Both are, in their different ways, instruments of political assertion, and the historian who reads either one as a transparent window onto the past will be misled.

To work with these materials responsibly, one must first understand their physical and cataloguing history. The Jammu and Kashmir State Archives (JKSA) at the Mubarak Mandi Complex in Jammu contain a composite body of administrative records whose organisation dates to the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh, who in 1928 established a Central Record Office to consolidate loose documents from across the princely administration.⁶ The consolidation sorted the material into three broad categories: the Persian *Daftar-i-Diwani*, covering the reigns of Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh; the Political Department records, which dealt with relations with the British Residency and frontier areas; and the Old English files. Over the decades since, successive reorganisations have made the cataloguing somewhat fluid. Navigating these records requires working across original register numbers, the *Daftar-i-Diwani* indices, and modern bundle numbers assigned by the J&K Department of Archives, Archaeology, and Museums. Because the princely repositories have never been systematically digitised or uniformly catalogued, citations to Mubarak Mandi records in this study are cross-referenced, wherever possible, with published translation volumes — particularly the annotated editions prepared by Sukh Dev Singh Charak — and with regional gazetteers, so that subsequent scholars can verify the references independently. The National Archives of India (NAI) in New Delhi hold the Foreign and Political Department files, in which the *Secret Consultations* and *Political Consultations* are indexed by consultation dates and serial numbers reflecting the Company's internal bureaucratic structure.⁷

The Dogra court archive itself falls into three broad genres, each produced under different circumstances and serving different functions.

The first is the **court chronicle (*tawarikh*)**. The most important examples are the Persian *Rajdarshini* of Ganesh Das Badehra, composed in the mid-nineteenth century, and the later *Gulabnama* of Diwan Kirpa Ram, published in 1876.⁸ These are, in form, court-commissioned narratives — their purpose was to trace Gulab Singh's lineage back to the solar dynasty (*Suryavansha*) and thereby affirm Dogra sovereignty over a strikingly heterogeneous population. But dismissing them as mere hagiography would be a mistake. The *Rajdarshini*, read with care, turns out to contain a surprising amount of ethnographic detail about the hill tribes, geographic data on the Chenab and Indus valleys, information about local trade, and records of dispute resolution among regional clans. The shift in its later portions from classical court Persian toward a markedly Sanskritised vocabulary also tells us something about the court's deliberate effort to align itself with classical Indian notions of *Rajdharma*.

The second genre comprises the **Persian firmans and sanads** — royal decrees and deeds of grant.⁹ These are the working documents of governance. Written in a stylised administrative Persian inherited from the Mughal and Sikh periods, often incorporating Dogri and Punjabi terminology, they record land grants (*jagirs*), tax exemptions for religious institutions (*dharmarth*), appointments of local governors

(wazirs), and instructions to frontier commanders. They are far more revealing than the chronicles about the practical negotiations between the central court and regional power-holders, and they demonstrate a continuity of administrative practice that spans the 1846 transition. Working with these documents demands familiarity with the *shikasta* script and the formulaic seal-signatures (*mohr*) that constituted the ultimate sanction of royal authority.

The third genre is the **revenue settlement and administrative files**.¹⁰ Written variously in Persian, Urdu, and English, these detail agrarian tax collection, trade duties, and the administration of state monopolies — notably pashmina wool and saffron. They reflect a fiscal apparatus under pressure, scrambling to service the costs of military campaigns and the seventy-five-lakh treaty payment. The shift from Persian to Urdu as the working language of administration later in the century marks a bureaucratic reorganisation that gradually brought the princely apparatus into closer alignment with the practices of British India.

These three genres of documentation can be read through a comparative philological lens that exposes the conceptual gap between Western legal categories and indigenous political vocabulary:

- The British classified the Treaty of Amritsar as a bilateral **treaty** between two powers. In the Dogra administrative vocabulary, however, the same instrument was frequently described as a *sanad* — an imperial grant or warrant. A treaty implies a contract between equals; a *sanad* implies a concession from a paramount authority to a subordinate. The Dogra court absorbed the treaty into its own administrative framework as a *sanad-i-milkiyat-i-istimrari*, a deed of permanent proprietorship — thereby reinterpreting an instrument of colonial subordination as a warrant of dynastic legitimacy. The conceptual distance is visible in the language itself: a land-grant *sanad* issued by Gulab Singh in 1846 (JKSA, Mubarak Mandi, Persian Records, File No. 42 of 1846) uses the administrative formula "*dar tasarruf-i-khud dashta bashend*" — "they shall keep in their possession/jurisdiction." The Treaty of Amritsar, for its part, renders a comparable transfer as "independent possession" (Article 1). The English phrase suggests absolute ownership under Western property law; the Persian *tasarruf* points to something closer to customary political-revenue control within a tributary hierarchy. It should be noted, however, that *tasarruf* carried varying shades of meaning in different administrative contexts — from physical occupancy to broad governance rights — and the contrast drawn here, while analytically useful, requires careful verification against local administrative registers.
- The British conceived the transfer as conferring territorial **ownership** (*malkiyat*). The Dogra records, by contrast, frame the court's authority in terms of **taluqdari** — the right to collect revenue and exercise administrative jurisdiction — and **sardari** — military-political lordship. This distinction, which I offer as an interpretive reading rather than a settled consensus, suggests that while the British understood the seventy-five lakhs as a purchase price for the land, the Dogra court may have understood it rather differently: as the acquisition of sovereign revenue-extraction and political rights, with the underlying agrarian landownership (*malkiyat-i-zamin*) remaining structurally separate. Whether these categories always functioned in the rigid opposition suggested here is a question that specialists in Indo-Persian legal terminology are better placed to adjudicate.
- The Dogra administration also relied on **jagirs** (revenue-free land assignments given in exchange for military or political service) and **dharmarth** grants (tax exemptions for religious and charitable

purposes) to bind regional elites to the central court. These mechanisms reflect a style of personalised governance that ran alongside whatever formal bureaucratic structures the state possessed.

The British colonial records, for their part — held mainly at the NAI and the India Office Records in the British Library — look at Jammu and Kashmir from the outside, through a lens shaped primarily by security concerns.⁷ They consist of the Secret Consultations and Political Proceedings of the Governor-General in Council, and of the Lahore Political Diaries and Residency Records compiled by figures such as Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, and Herbert Edwardes.¹² These diaries are intelligence reports, not dispassionate observations. They document the daily intrigues of the Lahore Durbar, track the movements of hill chiefs, and offer assessments of native rulers that are shot through with the assumptions of moral paternalism and administrative superiority that characterised the British "politicals."

The method adopted here treats neither archive as possessing a monopoly on truth. Where the British secret minutes cast the Treaty of Amritsar as the logical outcome of frontier policy and fiscal necessity, the Dogra chronicles frame it as a belated diplomatic acknowledgement of a sovereignty already won through conquest. Neither version can be taken at face value. The Dogra firmans' claims of administrative order, for instance, must be weighed against the reports of British frontier officers and the petitions of local subjects, both of which document administrative difficulties, local resistance, and heavy fiscal burdens. What matters is the tension between these records — the way in which terms of sovereignty and property were translated, redefined, and sometimes distorted as they moved between the Persian-based Dogra administration and the English-based British Residency.

III. Historiographical Review

The scholarship on the creation of Jammu and Kashmir has long been divided between those who approach the question through the lens of high diplomacy and those who are more interested in the internal social and religious structures that the state produced.

The earliest serious treatment belongs to the **imperial-administrative school**, whose most prominent figure is K.M. Panikkar. His *Founding of the Kashmir State* was the first scholarly biography of Gulab Singh, drawing on British political diaries and Sikh-era records to argue that Gulab Singh was, above all, a statesman — a man who read the collapse of the Sikh Empire correctly and secured an independent Rajput kingdom as a result.¹³ Panikkar's study was groundbreaking for its time, though its apologetic tone — Panikkar was himself in the service of princely states — and its reluctance to address the coercive side of Dogra rule have long been recognised as limitations.

A sharper perspective came with Bawa Satinder Singh's *The Jammu Fox*, which remains perhaps the single most important work on the subject.¹⁴ Satinder Singh used English, Persian, and Urdu sources to construct a portrait of Gulab Singh that was considerably less flattering: a brilliant diplomat, certainly, but also a ruthless one, whose rise depended on intrigue, shifting alliances, and cold financial calculation. The book's biographical focus, however, means that institutional and administrative questions are somewhat subordinated to the story of a single personality.

The major historiographical turn came with Mridu Rai's *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects* and Chitrlekha Zutshi's *Languages of Belonging*.¹⁵ These works redirected scholarly attention away from high politics

toward the socio-religious architecture of the princely state. Rai argued that the Dogra regime, operating under British paramountcy, constructed a system of "Hindu sovereignty" that systematically marginalised the Muslim majority through inequalities in landownership, taxation, and access to state employment. Zutshi examined the cultural and political processes through which Kashmiri identities — regional and religious — were shaped in response to the administrative pressures of Dogra rule. Both studies were transformative, though their reliance on British colonial sources left the internal administrative records of the Dogra court largely untapped.

There is also a **Sikh dimension** to this historiography that has not received the attention it deserves. Historians such as Khushwant Singh, Ganda Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, and Indu Banga offer a strikingly different account of Gulab Singh's conduct during the First Anglo-Sikh War.¹⁶ Far from being a state-builder, in their telling he was a treacherous vassal who betrayed the Lahore Durbar at its moment of greatest peril — maintaining a calculated neutrality, negotiating privately with the British Resident, withholding Dogra forces from the decisive engagements at Ferozeshah and Sobraon. Khushwant Singh treats this as self-interested opportunism, pure and simple. Grewal and Banga situate the transition in a broader political-agrarian context, showing how the dissolution of the Sikh state enabled regional governors like Gulab Singh to convert tributary relationships into territorial sovereignty.¹⁷

This paper does not claim to introduce a fundamentally new method. The bi-archival approach has precedents — Panikkar, Bawa Satinder Singh, and Huttenback all worked, to varying degrees, with both British and Dogra materials. What I have tried to do, rather, is to bring the insights of the diplomatic historians into conversation with the structural critiques advanced by Rai and Zutshi, while also incorporating the Sikh historiographical tradition. By reading the Dogra court chronicles, firmans, and revenue records alongside the British political diaries and secret correspondence, the aim is to show that the formation of Jammu and Kashmir was neither simply an act of dynastic state-building nor a colonial transaction, but a process shaped by regional military campaigns, imperial strategic anxieties, and the continuous negotiation of legitimacy.

IV. The Dogra Ascent: Pre-1846 Territorial Expansion

The Treaty of Amritsar is often treated as the founding document of the state. But from a military and political standpoint, a substantial trans-Himalayan state already existed by the time the treaty was signed. The distinction that matters here is between **political state-building** — the actual extension of territorial control and administrative networks — and **legal-constitutional recognition** under British paramountcy, which came in March 1846.

Gulab Singh rose within the structure of Ranjit Singh's Sikh Empire. Born in 1792 into the Jamwal clan of Dogra Rajputs, he entered Sikh military service and distinguished himself quickly. In 1822, Ranjit Singh rewarded him with the title of Raja and the hereditary *jagir* of Jammu, a grant that gave him a secure territorial base from which to begin expanding.¹⁸

The first stage of that expansion was the **conquest of Kishtwar** in 1821.¹⁹ The significance of Kishtwar was strategic: it controlled the upper Chenab valley and the main routes into Ladakh. Gulab Singh exploited succession disputes within the ruling family, using a combination of force and diplomatic manipulation to annex the territory without a prolonged campaign. What followed was administratively

important. Rather than contenting himself with tribute collection, Gulab Singh integrated Kishtwar into a centralised revenue system, appointed his own officials, and built fortresses to secure the routes.²⁰

The campaigns that mattered most, however, were those directed into **Ladakh, Baltistan, and Gilgit**. These were planned by Gulab Singh and executed by his most capable general, Zorawar Singh Kahluria. Between 1834 and 1841, Zorawar Singh led a series of expeditions into Ladakh that brought the region under Dogra control despite extreme geography and stubborn local resistance.²¹

The reasons for the Ladakh campaigns were both strategic and economic. Ladakh controlled the passes to Central Asia and western Tibet, offering Gulab Singh the possibility of bypassing the Sikh-controlled Punjab. More immediately, the campaigns aimed at the pashmina wool trade. Under Sikh administration in Kashmir, raw pashmina from western Tibet was funnelled exclusively through the Valley of Kashmir, where it was woven into shawls that generated enormous state revenue. By taking Ladakh, Gulab Singh sought to divert this trade directly to Jammu, undermining the monopoly of the Sikh governor in Srinagar.

The primary account of these campaigns comes from Mian Basti Ram, a Dogra officer who served under Zorawar Singh and was subsequently appointed Wazir of Ladakh.²² Basti Ram's narrative, recorded by Alexander Cunningham during his boundary commission work in 1847, describes the capture of the fortresses of Kartse and Leh, the imposition of a regular tribute on the Ladakhi king (*Gyalpo*), and the suppression of local revolts. It shows a military occupation gradually hardening into a regular administration, with tax collectors (*thanadars*) posted in the main towns and garrisons at key points.

After Ladakh, Dogra forces moved against **Baltistan** in 1840. The target was the fortress of Skardu, and the method was familiar — exploiting a succession quarrel between the ruler, Ahmad Shah, and his eldest son. Zorawar Singh's forces, augmented by Ladakhi auxiliaries, took Skardu after a siege, deposed Ahmad Shah, and left a garrison behind.²³ With Baltistan subdued, the Dogra state extended a loose influence over Gilgit through alliances with local mirs and small frontier outposts.

The limits of this expansion were reached in 1841 with the **Tibet expedition**. Zorawar Singh, seeking to control the pashmina trade at its source in western Tibet, led a force across the border. The campaign ended catastrophically in December 1841, when he was killed at the Battle of To-yo by a combined Tibetan and Chinese force.²⁴ A Tibetan counter-invasion of Ladakh followed but was beaten back at Chushul in August 1842. The resulting Treaty of Leh — formally known as the Treaty of Chushul, signed in September 1842 — stabilised the frontier, confirming Dogra control over Ladakh and preserving traditional trade arrangements.

What emerges from this record is clear enough. By 1842 — four years before the Treaty of Amritsar — Gulab Singh controlled Jammu, Kishtwar, Ladakh, and Baltistan. This territory had an increasingly centralised administration that collected taxes, controlled trade routes, and maintained garrisons. The treaty of 1846 did not create this state. It added the Kashmir Valley to what already existed and wrapped the whole in a legal framework acceptable to British paramountcy.

V. The First Anglo-Sikh War and the Making of 1846

The opportunity that led to the legal formalisation of the Dogra state came with the First Anglo-Sikh War of 1845–46. The war grew out of the crisis that followed Ranjit Singh's death in 1839. Factional

struggles within the Lahore Durbar and the growing assertiveness of the Khalsa army's regimental committees (*panchayats*) had eroded central authority, and the Company watched the situation with mounting alarm.²⁵

Gulab Singh's conduct during the war was shaped by a deliberate policy of **strategic neutrality**. Although he held the rank of minister in the Lahore Durbar and commanded a substantial force in Jammu, he refused to commit it against the British. The Lahore Political Diaries show that throughout the conflict he maintained a separate correspondence with British political officers, signalling his peaceful intentions and his interest in reaching a private settlement.²⁶

This neutrality was decisive in the war's final phase. After the Sikh defeats at Mudki and Ferozeshah, Gulab Singh was summoned to Lahore and assumed the office of Prime Minister (*Wazir*) in January 1846. He used the position, however, not to rally the Sikh forces but to delay the dispatch of reinforcements and supplies. At Sobraon, the engagement that broke the Sikh army on 10 February 1846, the Dogra forces were still in Jammu. Sikh historians have not forgiven this, and they characterise Gulab Singh's neutrality as a calculated betrayal — the trading of the Sikh state's survival for a personal kingdom in the hills.²⁷ Dogra defenders counter that he was acting to protect his own domains from the wreckage of a state whose leadership had already fatally divided itself.

The **Treaty of Lahore** (9 March 1846) formalised the Sikh defeat. It required the Lahore Durbar to cede the territory between the Beas and the Indus and to pay a war indemnity of one and a half crore rupees. The treasury was empty. Article 12 of the treaty provided the mechanism: the British agreed to recognise the independent sovereignty of Gulab Singh over territories to be settled in a separate agreement.²⁸

That separate agreement was the **Treaty of Amritsar** (16 March 1846). It transferred to Gulab Singh "all the hilly or mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of the River Indus and the westward of the River Ravi" for seventy-five lakh rupees.

Why the British chose to transfer the territory rather than keep it has been debated for over a century. The early and influential explanation centred on the "Great Game" — the desire for a buffer state on the northwestern frontier to block Russian or Afghan expansion. More recent scholarship, however, has complicated this picture considerably. Huttenback, Yapp, and Grewal have all argued that the strategic calculation, while real, was only one factor among several and perhaps not the most pressing.²⁹ The correspondence of Governor-General Hardinge and his secretary Frederick Currie indicates that financial and logistical constraints weighed heavily. The Company was in poor fiscal health after the Gwalior and Sind campaigns. The Court of Directors in London was actively discouraging further annexations. Governing the mountains of Kashmir and Ladakh directly would have required expensive military commitments in remote terrain with little prospect of early revenue. Transferring the territory to Gulab Singh solved multiple problems at once: the British recovered half the Sikh indemnity immediately, avoided the costs of a difficult frontier, and gained a loyal client without extending their military footprint.

The treaty's terms make clear that Gulab Singh's sovereignty was subordinate. Articles 4, 5, and 9 restricted his authority in external relations, required him to submit disputes with neighbouring states to British arbitration, and prohibited the employment of British subjects or Europeans without official

permission.³⁰ The state that came into legal existence in March 1846 was not an independent polity but a vassal within the hierarchical structure of the British Indian Empire.

VI. Dogra Sources and the Alternative Narrative

The British records tell one story — that strategic calculation and fiscal expedience produced a client state. The Dogra archives tell a quite different one. It is worth hearing it out on its own terms before weighing the two accounts against each other.

The court chronicle that matters most is the *Rajdarshini*, composed by Ganesh Das Badehra in the mid-nineteenth century.³¹ It does not present the acquisition of Kashmir as a purchase from the British. The framing is entirely different: what happened in 1846, in the *Rajdarshini*'s telling, was the restoration of a historic regional sovereignty. The chronicle traces the Jammu Rajputs across several centuries and presents the unification of Jammu, Ladakh, and Kashmir under Gulab Singh as the natural completion of a long process of regional consolidation. The *Gulabnama* of Diwan Kirpa Ram, published in 1876, takes a similar line — emphasising Gulab Singh's personal virtues, his military campaigns, and the dynasty's intrinsic right to rule, with the Treaty of Amritsar treated as nothing more than the formal recognition of a power that had already been established by arms.³²

The administrative records reinforce this narrative of continuity. The Persian *firmans* and *sanads* from the Mubarak Mandi Archives demonstrate that the administrative structures governing Kashmir after 1846 were not invented fresh but were extended from the pre-existing apparatus in Jammu.³³ The revenue system, the judicial offices (*adalats*), the local administrative divisions (*parganas*) — all were modelled on arrangements that had been developed in Jammu, Kishtwar, and Ladakh during the 1820s and 1830s.

The *Dharmarth Trust*, established by Gulab Singh and expanded by Ranbir Singh, provides a window into the state's use of religious patronage as an instrument of governance and cultural integration.³⁴ Funded by state revenues and royal donations, it supported the construction and maintenance of Hindu temples, Sanskrit schools (*pathshalas*), and charitable institutions across the state. The trust worked in two directions at once. It burnished the religious credentials of the ruling dynasty, and it created a network of institutions — temples, schools, endowments — that helped hold together a territory whose geography and ethnic composition might otherwise have pulled it apart.

The revenue records held at the Mubarak Mandi Archives show the fiscal pressures under which the early Dogra state laboured.³⁵ The seventy-five-lakh treaty payment had to be recovered, garrisons on the Ladakh and Gilgit frontiers had to be maintained, and the state's response was to impose a centralised tax on the agricultural produce of the Kashmir Valley.

The resulting administrative system combined elements of institutional centralisation with established revenue collection methods. To service the treaty indemnity, the state leaned heavily on **sairat** — customs and transit duties on commodities like salt, sugar, and pashmina wool — as recorded in the trade registers of 1846.³⁶ At the same time, it maintained the Sikh-era **batai** system in the Kashmir Valley, under which the state claimed up to half the rice harvest directly from the peasantry. Alongside this extraction, the state pursued institutional reform: in 1848, Gulab Singh established the **Sadar**

Adalat, a Chief Court in Jammu that replaced the fragmented judicial authority of local hill chiefs and jagirdars with a centralised appellate structure answerable to the dewan.³⁷

The continuity is visible not only in institutions but in personnel. Administrators like Dewan Jawala Sahai and Dewan Kirpa Ram, who served the Dogra state after 1846, had been in the family's service in Jammu for decades. Their experience in governing the hill principalities was applied directly to the integration of the Kashmir Valley, which ensured a substantial degree of administrative continuity across the transition.

The following table summarises these transitions:

Administrative Area	Before 1846	After 1846
Revenue Administration	Centralised fiscal control in Jammu and Kishtwar	Extended to the Kashmir Valley
Judicial Offices	Localised dispute resolution and customary law	Centralised appellate court (Sadar Adalat)
Military Command	Trans-Himalayan garrisons in Ladakh and Skardu	Expanded frontier garrisons in Gilgit and Astor
Tax System	Crop-sharing (batai) in hill principalities	Extended to Kashmir Valley; customs duties (sairat) added

Note: This table synthesises evidence drawn from the Mubarak Mandi revenue and settlement files, the Sadar Adalat decree of 1848, and the military garrison records discussed in the preceding sections.

VII. The Absent Voices: Kashmiri, Ladakhi, and Frontier Populations

For all their differences, the British colonial archive and the Dogra court records share one striking limitation: neither preserves the perspectives of the populations over whom the state claimed authority. In both sets of documents, the people who lived under Dogra rule appear as objects — taxed, conscripted, administered — but almost never as agents with views of their own.

Fragments of those perspectives can, however, be recovered — not from the official chronicles, which had no interest in recording them, but from the administrative files and from the scattered records of local resistance. The transition of 1846 was not accepted quietly. The last Sikh governor of Kashmir, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, refused to hand over the administration and led a popular rebellion against the Dogra forces in the autumn of that year.³⁸

Imam-ud-din found support among sections of the local population, including the armed shawl-weavers (*karkhandars*) and peasants who feared — correctly, as it turned out — that the new regime would mean higher taxes and the loss of traditional rights. The rebellion was put down only after a British force under Henry Lawrence marched to Srinagar to enforce the treaty. The NAI Secret Consultations record a population that was anything but passive during the transition, and that used the political instability of 1846 to press its own demands.³⁹

In Ladakh and Baltistan, local resistance took different forms. Ladakhi oral traditions preserve a popular memory of the Dogra conquests that stands in stark contrast to the heroic narratives of the court chronicles.⁴⁰ These oral sources describe damage to the fortress of Leh, reports of disruption at

monasteries (*gompas*), and the conscription of local men as carriers and soldiers for the ill-fated Tibet expedition.

The *arz-dasht*, or petition, provides another avenue into local perspectives. These documents, written in Urdu and Persian, were the main channel through which communities could appeal against the decisions of regional governors or protest excessive taxation.⁴¹ The petitions of the Kashmiri shawl-weavers, who went on strike in Srinagar in 1865 to protest the state monopoly and the heavy duties on their produce, show a working class that understood its economic situation clearly and was capable of organising collective action.

In the frontier districts of Gilgit and Astor, Dogra authority was under near-continuous challenge throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The state's military department files record attacks on garrisons, the cutting of communication lines, and the refusal of local communities to pay tribute or provide transport labour.⁴² Control of the northern frontier, such as it was, depended on ongoing military operations and the curtailment of local political arrangements.

None of this amounts to a systematic recovery of subaltern voices — the sources are too thin and too mediated for that. But read alongside the official chronicles and state correspondence, these records of resistance, petition, and oral memory do recover something of the agency of those who had no seat at the table in 1846. Their actions marked out the practical limits of state authority and compelled the Dogra administration, however reluctantly, to negotiate and adapt.

VIII. Reconsidering the "Sale" Narrative

The characterisation of the Treaty of Amritsar as a "sale deed" has been persistent. It originated in contemporary British critiques of the treaty and was later taken up by Kashmiri nationalist historians, who used it to argue that the Company had sold a territory and its population for seventy-five lakh rupees.⁴³

A forceful counter-reading, most fully developed by Mridu Rai, holds that the historical depth of Dogra state-building does not diminish the normative significance of the treaty as a founding act. In Rai's interpretation, the treaty was the legal instrument that institutionalised the imposition of a "Hindu sovereignty" over a Muslim-majority population without their consent. By transferring the Kashmir Valley to Gulab Singh, it created a structural imbalance in which the state's legitimacy derived not from its subjects but from its relationship with the British paramount power. Even if political state-formation was a multi-decadal process, the legal-constitutional recognition of 1846 remains, in this view, the decisive moment that fixed the communal architecture of the princely state.

That critique carries real force, and nothing in this paper is meant to dismiss it. But the "sale" narrative, taken on its own, is historiographically insufficient — and for reasons that can be stated fairly directly.

First, the seventy-five lakhs was not a commercial purchase price. It was the political settlement of a war indemnity. The Treaty of Lahore had imposed on the defeated Sikh state an indemnity of one and a half crore rupees. The transfer of the hill territories to Gulab Singh was the mechanism by which the British recovered half that sum immediately, while avoiding the expense of governing a remote and difficult frontier.

Second, the treaty did not confer absolute ownership. What it created was a form of subordinate sovereignty, embedded within British paramountcy. The British retained the right to intervene in the state's affairs — a right they exercised from c. 1851–52 with the appointment of a British Officer on Special Duty, and more permanently from 1885 with the establishment of a Residency in Srinagar.⁴⁴ The Maharaja's sovereignty was subject to ongoing monitoring and constraint.

Third, the "sale" framing overemphasises the Kashmir Valley at the expense of the state's other territories. Jammu and Kashmir was a heterogeneous entity that included Jammu, Ladakh, and Baltistan — all of which had been brought under Dogra control through military campaigns and administrative integration well before 1846. Focusing exclusively on the valley transfer erases the longer history of state-building that had already established the territorial scaffolding of the state.

A more adequate characterisation would describe the Treaty of Amritsar as a **post-war geopolitical settlement** — shaped by the convergence of Dogra territorial ambitions, Company fiscal constraints, and the collapse of central Sikh authority. Situating the treaty in that broader context does not make it less consequential, but it does produce a richer understanding of the institutional and political pressures that shaped the state's subsequent development.

IX. Conclusion

The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was not made in a day, and the dominant interpretations — colonial transaction on the one hand, dynastic conquest on the other — each seize on one dimension of a process that in reality involved multiple actors, competing interests, and fundamentally different ways of recording what had happened.

By reading the Dogra court records alongside and against the British colonial archive, this study has tried to reconstruct the formation of the state as a convergence of regional military expansion and imperial strategic anxiety. The territorial foundations were laid through the conquests of Ladakh, Baltistan, and Kishtwar in the decades before 1846. The Treaty of Amritsar did not conjure a state from nothing; it provided the legal framework that recognised existing territorial realities under British paramountcy, while adding the Kashmir Valley to the Dogra domain.

The case of Jammu and Kashmir has implications beyond its own borders. It illustrates the broader transition of Indian states from fluid tributary arrangements under regional empires — the Sikh Empire being the relevant case here — to defined territorial regimes under British indirect rule. Paramountcy operated as a dual force: it bureaucratised and restructured state administrations, demarcated clear boundaries, and at the same time preserved the autocratic dynastic structures that suited British purposes. J&K illustrates one significant pattern of colonial statecraft — a pattern in which the British consolidated their position not through direct annexation alone, but by incorporating regional military elites into the system of indirect rule and thereby lending them a legitimacy they might not otherwise have possessed.

This was not a pattern unique to Jammu and Kashmir. The Scindias in Gwalior underwent a comparable transition, moving from a loose military confederacy under the Marathas to a centralised princely state with defined borders following the Gwalior War and subsequent treaty settlement of 1843–44. In both cases the British consolidated the ruling dynasty's administrative apparatus while conserving its

autocratic character. But Jammu and Kashmir remained distinctive — set apart by its trans-Himalayan geography and by the extreme ethnic and religious distance between the Rajput ruling elite and their predominantly Muslim and Buddhist subjects.

The history of Jammu and Kashmir should therefore be understood not as the creation of a state through sale, but as the transformation of an already expanding regional polity into a legally recognised princely state under British paramountcy.

Notes:

1. The signatories of the Treaty of Amritsar (16 March 1846) were, on the British side, Frederick Currie and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence, and on the Dogra side, Maharaja Gulab Singh. For the full text, see Aitchison, *Treaties*, vol. XII, 20–22.
2. Treaty of Amritsar, Article 3. Reproduced in Aitchison, *Treaties*, vol. XII, 20.
3. For a representative scholarly use of the "sale deed" framing, see Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, 10–12.
4. These resources represent the main published primary materials for the administrative and geographical history of the state. See Cunningham, *Ladakh*; Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*; and Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*.
5. Panikkar, *Founding of the Kashmir State*; Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*; Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*; Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*.
6. On the cataloguing and history of the Mubarak Mandi records, see the departmental guide, "State Archives Repository, Jammu," Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums, Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The records were consolidated into the Central Record Office in 1928.
7. The records of the Foreign Department of the Government of India are held at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. These include the Secret Consultations, Political Consultations, and General Proceedings.
8. Ganesh Das Badehra, *Rajdarshini*, ed. Charak; Diwan Kirpa Ram, *Gulabnama*, ed. Charak.
9. These documents are preserved in the J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. See specifically JKSA, *Mubarak Mandi Repository, Persian Records, File No. 42 of 1846* (decree of Maharaja Gulab Singh confirming land grants in Jammu).
10. For administrative and financial files relating to the pashmina trade, see the Persian revenue and trade records held at the J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. On the broader economics of the wool trade, see Rizvi, *Trans-Himalayan Caravans*, 180–195.
11. See note 7 above.
12. The *Lahore Political Diaries* contain the daily intelligence reports compiled by British assistants at the Lahore Residency. See NAI, *Lahore Agency Records, Political Diaries of the Assistant Residents at Lahore, 1846–1847*, vol. IV.
13. Panikkar, *The Founding of the Kashmir State*, 87–95.
14. Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, xi–xii.
15. Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, 28–32; Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, 190–205.

16. For Sikh perspectives on the First Anglo-Sikh War and Gulab Singh's role, see Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol. II, 45–55; Ganda Singh, *Private Correspondence*; and Gupta, *Panjab on the Eve of First Sikh War*.
17. Grewal, *Sikhs of the Punjab*, 107–125; Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, 150–165.
18. Panikkar, *The Founding of the Kashmir State*, 28–32; Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, 12–15.
19. Kapur, *Kingdom of Kishtwar*, 78–95.
20. See the administrative reports in JKSA, *Mubarak Mandi Repository, Persian Records, File No. 12 of 1823* (assessment of revenue for Kishtwar).
21. Cunningham, *Ladakh*, 330–345; Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, 75–90.
22. Mian Basti Ram's narrative was recorded by Cunningham during his boundary commission work in 1847. See Cunningham, *Ladakh*, 336–340.
23. On the Skardu campaign, see Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, 110–115; Cunningham, *Ladakh*, 348–352.
24. The Tibetan expedition of 1841 is documented in both Dogra chronicles and British political consultations. See NAI, *Foreign Dept, Secret Consultations, 18 Jan 1842, Nos. 98-102*. The Battle of To-yo took place in December 1841, and the Treaty of Leh was signed in September 1842.
25. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 115–120.
26. For correspondence between Gulab Singh's agents and the British Resident prior to the war, see NAI, *Foreign Dept, Secret Consultations, 20 Dec 1845, Nos. 142-145*.
27. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 48–52.
28. Treaty of Lahore, 9 March 1846, Article 12. Aitchison, *Treaties*, vol. XII, 19.
29. For internal British discussions on the financial and administrative aspects of the transfer of Kashmir, see Hardinge Papers, India Office Records, British Library. See also Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, 145–155; and Huttenback, *Kashmir and the British Raj*, 30–45.
30. Treaty of Amritsar, Articles 4, 5, and 9. Aitchison, *Treaties*, vol. XII, 20–22.
31. Ganesh Das Badehra, *Rajdarshini*, 210–225.
32. Diwan Kirpa Ram, *Gulabnama*, 315–330.
33. Persian firmans, J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. See JKSA, *Mubarak Mandi Repository, Persian Records, File No. 45 of 1846* (appointments of regional officials).
34. On the establishment and activities of the Dharmarth Trust, see Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, 65–75.
35. Revenue records, J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. On the agrarian tax system in post-1846 Kashmir, see Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, 401–415.
36. On customs and transit duties (*sairat*) in the early Dogra state, see the trade records held at J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. See also Drew, *The Jummo and Kashmir Territories*, 210–220.
37. Judicial files, Mubarak Mandi Repository. See JKSA, *Mubarak Mandi Repository, Persian Records, File No. 14 of 1848* (creation of the Sadar Adalat).
38. The rebellion of Sheikh Imam-ud-din is documented in NAI, *Foreign Dept, Secret Consultations, 26 Dec 1846, Nos. 1025-1027* (reports on the military operations in Kashmir).

39. For Henry Lawrence's reports on the pacification of the Valley, see *NAI, Foreign Dept, Secret Consultations, December 1846* (correspondence of the Resident at Lahore). See also Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox*, 150–160.
40. On Ladakhi oral memories of the Dogra conquests, see Cunningham, *Ladakh*, 336; and Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, 138–145.
41. Petitions of the shawl-weavers (*arz-dasht*), J&K State Archives, Srinagar Repository. See also Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, 190–195.
42. Military reports, J&K State Archives, Mubarak Mandi Repository, Jammu. See JKSA, *Mubarak Mandi Repository, Political Department Records, Bundle No. 3, File No. 14 of 1847* (garrison reports for Baltistan and Gilgit).
43. For early British critiques, see Thorp, *Cashmere Misgovernment*, 30–35.
44. On the Residency question, see Huttenback, *Kashmir and the British Raj*, 45–70; and Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India*, 350–380.

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