



British Intervention and the Case of Gilgit Agency: 1846-1892

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Abstract:

The paper seeks to underscore major significant developments in the history of Kashmir. Kashmir was strategically important for the British as it formed a part of the all North Western Frontier. In order to be informed about the happenings on the frontier the British interfered in the Kashmir of and on during the paper under study. In A.D. 1873 a proposal for the appointment of a Resident was made by the Government of India. But the Maharaja Ranbir Singh opposed the proposal tooth and nail. Another significant development was the establishment of Gilgit Agency in A.D. 1877. It was one of the different means that British Government of India adopted for the protection of their north and Northern-Western frontier

Keywords: *Gilgit Agency, Chitral, British India, Resident, Kashmir, North-West Frontier,*

Introduction

Gilgit was strategically important to the British India Government. It covers all the passes over the Hindu Kush from the eastern most one, the Shimla, to those at the head of the Yassin River, in the west. All these passes descended to the valleys of Gilgit River and tributaries.¹ Gilgit, or more correctly, the Gilgit Agency, is just west of Baltistan and outside of Kashmir proper. The Gilgit Cantonment is a little less than 5000 feet in altitude and much lower than the rest of the area, which is very high, an extremely rugged.²

Gilgit also afforded to the British a direct communication through Kashmir territory to the protected state of Chitral, which would be otherwise removed from their influence by the interposition of countries at that time closed to them (Kight, E. F. 2007) Again, from Gilgit mountain roads radiated into all the surrounding of valleys. It's difficult terrain rugged and inhospitable environment lend Kashmir an impregnable frontier. Located in the lap of the Himalayas its numerous deep valleys and mountains make it inaccessible and invincible. With a radius of 56 miles around Gilgit, there are innumerable peaks. Eleven peaks varying from 18000 feet to 20000 feet, seven from 20000 to 22000 feet, six from 22000 to 24000 feet and eight from 24000 to 26000 feet.³

Gilgit and its surrounding territories were known as Dardistan in the olden days. The entire country from Anmb to Rondu is known as Dardistan and its

¹ E.F, Knight, *where three Empires Meet*, 1905, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2007, p, 271.

² Hashmat Ullah, Khan, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, 1939, (Urdu), p. 766

³ Madhavi, Yassin, *British Pramountancy in Kashmir 1876-1894*, New Delhi, 1986, Atlantic Publisher, p. 25.

inhabitants as Dards. Gilgit is surrounded by Chitral, Darel, Tangir, on its west; Hunza, Nagar and Pamirs on its north; Chilas on its south; and Baltistan on its east.⁴

That there were two colonial powers in the area, Kashmiri and British, governing with different though not always clearly delimited competences and competing in many respects determined to a large extent colonial relations in Gilgit until 1947. Troops from Kashmir established their control in Gilgit for the first time around 1842. At that time, Kashmir was a part of the empire of the Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh. For two or three decades prior, Gilgit had been under the control of rulers who too were not "at home" in Gilgit but had invaded the place from neighboring valleys such as Yasin (Suleman Shah and Gohar Aman), Punial (Azad Khan), and Nager (Tahir Shah). The domination established by these rulers could be regarded as "colonial" some sources describe local resistance at least against the rajas of Punial and Yasin, who were accordingly regarded as foreign usurpers of rajaship in Gilgit. Legitimacy of rule was at that time mostly conceived in terms of dynastic legitimacy; that is, it was more a matter of relations among the dominant than of relations between rulers and the ruled.⁵

After defeating Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Punjab, the British made over Kashmir by the famous Treaty of Amritsar (1846) to the Dogra Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, who thus became Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir under the treaty of Amritsar, 13, March 1846. Gulab Singh's actual takeover of Kashmir had to be aided militarily by the British due to much resistance to the new ruler. By assuming power in Kashmir, Gulab Singh also became successor of the Sikhs in Gilgit, even though Gilgit was formally excluded in the Treaty of Amritsar, which ceded only the territories east of the Indus to Gulab Singh. Nevertheless, Frederic Drew, an English man who served Gulab Singh's son Ranbir Singh in a range of important positions, tried to legitimate the claim of the Dogras to control Gilgit. According to him, the geographical specification of the Treaty of Amritsar was simply due to a lack of appropriate knowledge, not to the explicit intention to exclude Gilgit from the territory sold to Gulab Singh.⁶

Gilgit was the northern Gate of India, through which the invaders could advance. Lord Curzon, who served as the Viceroy of British India from A.D 1899 to A.D 1905 spelled the British policy as under:

It was a fortune day when the misgovernment of the Kashmir State and contemporary events in Central Asia compelled the India government to look more closely into and eventually to make itself responsible for the border defenses of Kashmir. In A.D 1877, the British John Biddulph appointed first British agent or Political officer was appointed to reside at Gilgit. In the customary waves of political reaction, he was presently withdrawn. But the intrigues of Russia, then in her most chauvinistic temper, on and beyond the outer frontier, compelled the Indian government to reconsider its decision and the post was revived and made permanent in A.D 1889. Simultaneously the

⁴ Hashmat Ullah, Khan, op.cit., p. 765

⁵ Martin Sökefeld, From Colonialism to Postcolonial Colonialism: Changing Modes of Domination in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Nov., 2005), pp. 939-973.

⁶ *Ibid.*,

duty of providing the frontier garrisons was withdraw from the Kashmir Darbar, and was entrusted to the newly constituted Kashmir Imperial Service Troops, commanded by the British officers, in whose hands it has ever since remained. Thus it was that almost unwittingly to start with as is the way with British Government but not too soon, Great Britain made himself accountable for adequate defence of what are the natural boundaries, not of a feudatory state, but of the Indian Empire itself, and assumed a task which has ever since been invested not with a local, but with a imperial significance.⁷

The maharaja was opposed to the posting of a British agent in Gilgit. From its inception, Biddulph's mission was regarded by the maharaja as a surveillance of Kashmiri activities that is, a restriction of Kashmiri domination. Consequently, from the beginning, Biddulph was to suffer a hostile and very obstructive attitude of the Kashmiri authorities. Kashmiri personnel effectively boycotted him, and the governor even prohibited the people of Gilgit from working for Biddulph or trading with him. The Biddulph in turn was very critical of the Kashmiri way of governing the area and wrote in his report:

“The misgovernment and oppression suffered by the people of Gilgit during the last three years exceed what they had to endure from former Governors. After the result of this had become apparent in the recent disturbances, it would be thought that some relaxation of harshness would be found advisable. During the last two months things have gone from bad to worse, and the system of oppression has changed to one of wholesale plunder”.⁸

Making of the Gilgit Agency

Lord Lytton, who arrived in India in A.D 1876 as the Governor-General and Viceroy of India, was sent by the Conservative Government at home as a deliberate choice to meet fresh imperial objectives. The objectives set out from him was to see that the frontier administration ‘be viewed as an imperial concern’ and measures be adapted to co-ordinate the entire trans-frontier policy of the Government of India from Ladakh and Kashmir to Persian Gulf in accordance with the exigencies of imperial objectives. One related problem was the uncertainty about the political future of the tribal territories lying between the river Kunar and Indus, their significance had increased in view of the discoveries made about the passes in the Pamir range by two Forsyth mission in A.D 1870 and A.D 1873.⁹

Douglas Forsyth was sent on a commercial mission to Yarkand in A.D 1870 by the Government of India. The Forsyth made by the British did not seek only to explore the mountain passes at the Karakoram watershed; they were also conducted to verify the significance of the region as the context of universe. He found that the principle passes of the great mountain range separating Chitral and Yassin from the valley of the Oxus were the Baroghil and the Ishkoman passes. Both of them were easily passable by troops. He added that the possession of the later would practically

⁷ F.M, Hussnain, *British Policy towards Kashmir-1846-1946*, Publisher: Gulshan Books, 2010, p. 74

⁸ Sökefeld, Martin, *op.cit.*, pp. 939-973

⁹ U.K. Zutshi, *Emergency of Political awakening in Kashmir*, Panohar Publication, New Delhi, 1986, p. 59-60

command the former. He added all these details when he went for his second mission in A.D. 1873.¹⁰

Doughlas Forsyth was convinced that the rulers of chitral and Yassin received money from Maharaja of Kashmir. He urged that the British make their influence paramount in the direction of Badakhshan and Balkh, and establish an agent at Gilgit who would gather information about the regions less known to the British Indian Government.¹¹

The Dardi principalities, which included Hunza, Nagar, Chilas, ponial, Yassin and Gilgit, were still considered vulnerable if Russian crossed the Baroghil and Ishkoman passes to the north-west. 'it would be suicidal,' Lytton wrote to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Salisbury in A.D 1876, 'in our present uncertain and menaced position to leave to the mercy of chance, in the hands of any weak chief surrounded by powerful and aggressive neighbours that strip of territory containing the Baroghil and ishkoman'. At the same, the extension of Dogra power into the Dardistan was viewed with concern by the Mehtar of Chitral, who, as ruler of an independent kingdom, regarding the Maharaja as an unwelcome competitor, particularly in Yassin.¹²

The starting intelligence report of Doughlas Forsyth led to a reappraisal of the entire frontier policy. This inevitably involved a reconsideration of its relations with Kashmir¹³ In the face of this situation, the control of the Baroghil and especially of the Ishkoman pass become necessary for the Government of India, with the result the means to secure it began to be discussed.¹⁴ There were two alternatives to achieve the desired end. The first was the direct annexation by the British India Government of the tribal territories in which the two passes lay and the second was to bring those territories under the control of their feudatory *i.e*, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, and thereby exercise indirect control over them. But the Government of India had decided against any fresh annexation. Moreover, the direct annexation of the tribal territories in question would considerably tax the resources of the Government, both in men and money. This left the Government of India only with the second course.¹⁵

A new Kashmir policy thus came to be formulated. Lord Lytton saw money advantages of it. According to him, it would indirectly secure for the British "a vicarious but virtual control" over the tribal territories without casting anything.¹⁶ Lytton termed the tribal area 'board belt of independent barbarism' and desired its control. He added, if it was not, the Indian army when attacked;

"Would have had no alternative between forcing the passes, under conditions of much difficulty and danger, in order to meet its adversely in a hostile country, for from its base, and without any friendly support within reach of else, with a great river (the Indus) at its back, awaiting

¹⁰ Foreign Department, Secret, Nos. 34-60, Proceedings, July 1877, N.A.I.

¹¹ (Parshotam, Mehra, *An Agreed Frontier*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p. 45

¹² Victogria, Schofield, *Kashmir in The Crossfire*, Viva Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1997, p. 77.

¹³ S.N. Gadru, Kashmir Papers; *British Intervention in Kashmir*, Freethought Literature Company, Srinagar, pp. 22-21

¹⁴ Foreign Department, Secret, Nos. 34-60, Proceedings, July 1877, N.A.I.

¹⁵ M. L. Kapoor, *Kashmir Sold and Snatched*, Jammu Tawi, 1969, p. 19

¹⁶ Lady Betty, Balfour, *The History of Lord Lytton's Indian Administration*, 1899, p. 186.

his arrival behind a frontier line of one thousand miles in length, pierced passes open to the enemy at points too numerous to be effectively guarded”.

Thus, policies in the tribal areas for the first time became imperial issues, to be dealt with simultaneously as ‘indivisible parts of a single imperial question’.¹⁷

The Maharaja was to be asked to extent his frontiers, in reversal of the earlier policy towards Kashmir which required of its rulers to make no attempt to extend his authority beyond the limits which had been conferred on his father. The Maharaja was not to be given unbridled to bring the tribes under his control. But the consent was circumvented with the condition that British officers were to be located in Gilgit or elsewhere in the territory throughout the year. Moreover, the British troops were also to be stationed at Gilgit, when deemed necessary, by the Indian Government.¹⁸

While the Maharaja would be glade enough over the permission to extend his authority over the tribal areas, the contemplated conditions could not but be unpalatable to him. The Government of India realized it and, therefore, through it desirable to secure the acceptance of the Maharaja by bestowing a number of ‘favours’ on him. The most important of the proposal ‘favours’ were as follows:

- (a) Grant to the Maharaja and his successors of the title of “Maharaja Adhiraj”
- (b) Present of a mountain Battery and 1000 Enfield Rifles.

Stripping of the officer on Special Duty in Kashmir of his political status (I.e., authority to deal with Central Asia affairs) and allowing him only to keep order among the visitors.¹⁹

Madhopore Arrangement

Lord Lytton on 17th and 18th November A. D 1876 put his proposals to Maharaja Ranbir Singh. Gulab Singh's son as successor of Maharaja of Kashmir, at Mahdopore was ready enough to extend his territory into Yassin with the promise of British assistance, but he was against the appointment of a British Agent at Gilgit. He seems to have been most afraid of the sort of high-handed interference in domestic matters and at one stage it looked as though the negotiations would break down altogether over this issue. Lytton only got his way by keeping quite about his plan to keep the British Resident in Kashmir all the year, and by giving written assurance that there would be no interference by Gilgit Agent in the domestic affairs of Kashmir.²⁰

At the first meeting the Governor-General told the Maharaja that the rapid march of events in Central Asia had made it necessary for the Government of India to take certain measures to ensure the peace and security of Indian borders. He expressed his anxiety in regard to the Kashmir frontier and observed that the country beyond the borders of Kashmir state was inhabited by a rude and barbarous people who owed allegiance to various chiefs in no respect more advanced than the populations over whom they exercised suzerainty, and stated that it was essential that such states as Chitral and Yassin should come under the control of a friend or ally of the British Government, like the Maharaja, rather than be absorbed, in the course of events by powers inimical to Kashmir. This became the more necessary from their being certain

¹⁷ G.J. Elder, *British Indian's Northern Frontier*, Longmans, India, 1963, p. 105.

¹⁸ Foreign Department, Secret, Nos. 34-60, Proceedings, July 1877, N.A.I.

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ G.J. Elder., *op.cit.*, p. 118

passes through the mountain range bounding these territories on the North, which passes, it was believed, were more or less practicable, or could be made practicable for the passage of troops.²¹

The Governor-General at this stage invited the opinion of the Maharaja about the best means for carrying out the above objects, Maharaja offered three ways to secure the objects pointed out by the Governor General, viz., (1) to take advantage of the internal dissention which so frequently occurred in those countries and use the opportunity so offered for annexing the states; or (2) to endeavor by negotiations to obtain political control over those states; (3) to reduce the country by force of arms. The Maharaja expressed his willingness to adopt either of those courses if the Government of India desired it.²²

To the Governor General the second course of political negotiations was the best and most effectual means of bringing Chitral and Yassin under the control of Kashmir. He expressed his readiness to aid such negotiations by any means in his power and gave an assurance that in the event of the Maharaja's action ever involving him in military operation (which was very probably), the British Government would be prepared to give him countenance and material assistance. The Maharaja agreed with the Governor General and showed his willingness to entire at once into negotiation with the rulers of Chitral and Yassin. But he was loath to do this unless the Governor General gave him a written authority to do so. Foe he feared that without any written authority, evil disposed persons would have the power accusing him entering into relations with foreign states for his own ends.²³

To the question of appointing a British Agent at Gilgit for the further security of the frontier and the transmission of regular reliable information the Maharaja shoed his readiness to agree to the proposal if and when the circumstances demanded such an appointment. For the present, however, he offered to construct a telegraph line to Gilgit so that the same requirements could be met through direct communication. Thus, the Maharaja thought, would obviated the British need to station an Agent at Gilgit. When Lord Lytton still insisted on the appointment of such an officer, Maharaja pleaded that the idea was too new to him and asked for him to consider it. Lord Lytton acceded to this request of the Maharaja and with this the first meeting between terminated. The following day, November 18th, A.D 1876 the Maharaja conveyed his willingness to meet the wishes of the Governor General in regard to the Gilgit appointment. At the same time, however, he asked for permission to write to the Government of India to seek certain assurances. Lord Lytton agreed to it.

Consequently, the Maharaja addressed him a letter on 20th November, A.D 1976, requesting to grant him a '*sann*d' containing the followings assurances.

1. That no interference would ever be made in any affairs affecting trade or administration or any matter concerning the subjects, officials and servants of the state.

²¹ Foreign Department, Secret, Nos. 34-60, Proceedings, July 1877, N.A.I.

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ *Ibid.*,

2. That the Government of India would always respect the conditions of the Maharaja: *sannaad* the proclamation of her Majesty and the establishment usage and custom in force within the state territories.
3. That the duties of the officer to be appointed would be specified, so that the Maharaja might have a clear idea of the business the officer would have to do.
4. That rules would be framed defining the power of the officer and the manner in which he would exercise them and the Maharaja would be furnished with a copy of the same before the officer was appointed.
5. That the power of the officer would be confined to matters affecting countries beyond the state territories.
6. That the said officer would never issue any order on the state official without taking the Maharaja's opinion and consent.
7. That the person in the employ of, or subordinate to, the said officer would remain subject to the laws of the state.
8. That the appointment of the officer under reference would not be made a precedent.
9. That the consequences of this arrangement would never be made occasions for impairing the integrity and dignity of the state.
10. That the selection of the officer would be made in consultation with the Maharaja.
11. That if any misunderstanding arose between the said officer and the state officials, any representation that the Maharaja made on the subject would be taken into serious consideration.
12. That false report by interested persons about the Maharaja's relation with the frontier states or any reckless adventure by the officer in penetrating the frontier would never be made grounds for injuring the Maharaja's reputation.²⁴

The assurances Maharaja wanted clearly indicate that they were aimed at stopping any impairment of the integrity and dignity of the state and the erosion of his powers within it.²⁵

The Governor-General replied on 22th December A.D. 1876, after authorizing the Maharaja, as desired by him, to open negotiations with the rulers of Chitral and Yassin to bring them under his control, he alluded to the assurance required by the Maharaja in his latter of the 26th November A.D. 1876, and stated that he required the request contained therein as in every way reasonable and worthy of consideration. He therefore, with pleasure, conveyed that the functions of the officer stationed at Gilgit would be confined to; (a) collecting and furnishing information regarding the frontier at the progress of events beyond it, accompanied by such advice to the Maharaja and to the British Government as his military experienced might enable him to offer in regard thereto, (b) and assisting, should occasion required it, the organization of any

²⁴ Maharaja to Viceroy, 22 November, 1876, Ibid., No. 39

²⁵ Viceroy to Maharaja, 26 December, 1876, Ibid., No. 40

military measures on the border which may have previously received the free assent and full approval of your highness.²⁶

Thus was established the Gilgit agency with Capt. John Biddulph as the first Officer on Special Duty. His instructions indicated that his chief duty was:

“to furnish reliable intelligence of the progress of events beyond the Kashmir frontier . . . and . . . in consultation with the Kashmir authorities, to cultivate friendly relations with the tribes beyond the border in view to bringing them gradually under the control and influence of Kashmir”.²⁷

Need of Chitral:

In the meanwhile events on the north-western frontiers of India were moving very fast. The British were anxious to isolate Afghanistan which showed leanings towards Russia. The relation between Afghanistan and Chitral were rather strained, because the Afghans wanted to invade and conquer Chitral.²⁸ To exploit the situation the British government formulated the policy to secure the friendship of Chitral, so that it could keep watch over the frontiers between Russia and India. With these objects in view, Capt. Biddulph was deputed to Chitral in A.D 1877.²⁹ The British, as they were situated at that time, could not directly render any military aid to Chitral. The viceroy was anxious to secure an indirect control over the Hindu Kush, through the Maharaja of Kashmir, who was asked to go ahead according to his plans. The suggestion was most welcome to him, for it fulfilled his personal ambition as well as brought immunity to Gilgit from raids by Chitral. Sandwiched between Afghanistan and Kashmir, the Mehtar of Chitral changed his mode from time to time. His main aim was to go more and more aid from any quarter so as to recover those territories which he considered as his own. As such, he followed a policy of keeping everyone in good humour.³⁰ Thus came into existence the political relationship between the British Government of India and Chitral on the one side and between Kashmir and Chitral on the other side. The Mehtar of Chitral accepted aid and recognized Ranbir Singh as his suzerain. But, at the same time, he accepted the Amir of Afghanistan also as his suzerain. Lord Lytton, told Ranbir Singh to ask the Mehtar that:

“Having accepted the suzerainty of the Maharaja, he was not at liberty to change it for the suzerainty of Kabul”.³¹

Ranbir Singh was further promised material aid and support in his difficult task. Thus, he deputed his envoy with present to Chitral. As the same time, he deputed his spies, mainly the Afghan refugees, to ascertain the actual position of the happenings there. All the information thus gathered by the Maharaja was passed on to the viceroy, who deputed Henderson to Chitral fully informed of the progress of events. The British Government wanted to secure the allegiance of Chitral, Dir and Bajour, so as to isolate them from having any friendly relations with Afghanistan. The

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ G.J. Elder., op.cit., p. 118

²⁸ File No. 4 of 1884, (Old English Records), State Archives, Jammu.

²⁹ Younghusband G.J and E. Younghusband, Frank, *The Relief of Chitral*, p. 2, as quoted by F.M. Hassnain, *British Policy towards Kashmir*, 2009, p. 77.

³⁰ Bates, *A Gazetteer of Kashmir*, New Delhi, p. 116

³¹ Lytton to Ranbir Singh, May14, 1874, Kashmir Government Records.

rulers of those chiefships changed sides at their convenience and as such it was considered advisable to bind them in some sort of agreement and understanding.³²

It resulted in Kashmir-Chitral treaty of A.D 1878. Among other things Mehtar of Chitral, Aman-ul-Mulk agreed that he will always, sincerely endeavor to obey and executed the orders of the Maharaja. The Maharaja on his part agreed to an annual mawajib of Rs. 12000 to the Mehtar.³³

Despite this paper commitment, Aman-ul-Mulk did his best to minimize the significance of his relations with Kashmir and to maintain as close ties as possible with Kabul. Lord Lytton was prepared to turn a blind eye to this, if it would prevent any overt Afghan action against Chitral, but it made things very difficult for Biddulph at Gilgit. Because the relations between Afghanistan and India had reached to brink of war in A.D. 1878 and it was impossible to guess which way Amun-ul-Mulk would go. Biddulph visited Chitral and Yassin in October A.D. 1878 and was given a friendly welcome. Both rulers, however, were loud in their contempt of Kashmir connection. Pahalwan Bahadur of Yassin claimed that he has met with ‘nothing but bad treatment and bad faith from Kashmir; that in consequence he had determined on sending no more *Vikils* to Jammu’. Aman-ul-Mulk was even more contemptuous of the Kashmir subsidy- ‘I can take a few Kaffir women and sell them for as much’, he said-and was clearly disappointed that Biddulph had brought with him nothing more than platitudes about the need for friendship with Kashmir.³⁴

Biddulph had returned from Chitral and Yassin at the end of A.D. 1878 convinced of Aman’s treachery, although still hopeful that something could be done with him by paying off against him his nephew in Yassin. But in March A.D. 1879 Biddulph proposed that the attempts to win Amun-ul-Mulk which had been given on since Madhopre should be abandoned.³⁵

The Gilgit Agency in Abeyance:

The approach of the tribe was aloof towards the British India. A systematic and continuous propaganda against the British was carried on at the behest of the acting Governor, Bhai Gurbuksh Singh of Gilgit, long before the arrival of Buddulph. He was harassed and all sorts of troubles were created for him.³⁶ Being distraught, he complained against the governor of Gilgit to the Maharaja. Maharaja immediately replaced the Governor, but took no responsibility for the safety of the resident.³⁷

Lord Ripon, who succeeded by Lytton, was a great admirer of John Lawrence and a natural opponents of Lytton’s ‘forward’ policies in almost every sphere of Government activity. As for as he was concerned, the Gilgit Agency was a ‘mistake’.³⁸ Buddulph was unable to establish whatever the British regarded as “friendly relations” with these rulers because of reorientation of British frontier politics, the Gilgit Agency closed down after four years July A.D. 1881.³⁹ The British

³² File No. 794/A of 1877, (Old English Records), State Archives, Jammu.

³³ F.M. Hassanain, *Gilgit, The Northern Gate of India*, Sterling Publishers Pvt, New Delhi, 1978, p. 64

³⁴ G.J. Alder, *op.cit.*, pp. 122-123

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ S.C. Bajpai, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

³⁷ Madhavi, Yassin, *op.cit.*, p. 20

³⁸ Foreign Department, Secret, Nos. 396, Proceedings, July 1888, N.A.I

³⁹ Martin Sökefeld, *op.cit.*, pp, 937-973

had consolidated their position in the North-West Province and Afghanistan had been completed won over. They had gained much strength both politically and military throughout this part of the world.⁴⁰

The withdrawal of Gilgit Agency had not proved to be a particularly valuable post and the Maharaja was left to guard the northern frontier on his own. Blame for the failure of the Agency was also laid on Buddulph. 'In a few weeks he found himself surrounded by a network of local intrigues. He was apparent quite unable to cope with such tactics and he seems to have been grievously in his judgment of the character and capacity of the chiefs and others whom he came in contact'. According to Indian assessments he by passed the Kashmiri authorities, established direct contact with the tribal chieftains, played one against the others and deliberately created disaffection among the tribal leaders against the Dogra. The active political interest the Dogra took in the region and the indiscriminate intervention in the internal affairs of the tribal chieftainship by the British officer, turned the tribal's against both.⁴¹

Re-establishment of the Gilgit Agency

In A.D. 1885 Colonial Lockhart, an officer of the Government of India was deputed on a special mission to Pamirs. The State Government was asked to provide all necessary facilities to him during his visit. His mission was complete success. But the tribal people again rose against the Dogra, under the leadership of Malik Aman of Yassin, who led an attack on Roshan Fort in A.D. 1886 and compelled the Maharaja to take defensive measures.⁴²

Sir Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary to the Government of India and one of Dufferin's closest friends and advisors, had been of the opinion that the Gilgit Agency would have to be re-stored and the British grip on the northern districts strengthened. In a persuasive memorandum of 21 May 1887, he strongly advocated a return to the forward policy. Every effort should be made ' . . . to bring them [the tribes of the Hindo Kush] under our influence, to open up their country as far as possible for the movement of our officers and troops, and to organise them for the purposes of defence against any external enemy . . .'.⁴³

The chief of Hanza and Nagar in A.D. 1888 made a combined bid to throw out the foreigners and starting attacking the state garrisons. In the battle of Chaprot Kashmir troops suffered reverses and tribal chiefs succeeded in capturing a large number of the troops and sold them as slaves to Kirghiz in the Pamirs. The British, who had withdrawn their Political Agent from Gilgit, reconsidered the overall position and again thought of establishing an Agency there duly equipped with full military defence. The recent events made British uneasy and they sent Colonel Algernon Durand in A.D. 1889 on a political mission to Gilgit.⁴⁴

When Algernon Durand returned from Gilgit, he reported to his brother Sir Mortimer Durand that he had heard that a Russian officer, Captain Grombchevsky had been in Hunza, this news added to British fears that the Russia could pass through

⁴⁰ F.M. Hassnain, *British Policy towards Kashmir*, p. 81

⁴¹ Victoria, Schofield, *op.cit.*, p. 78

⁴² File No. 56/19 of 1945, Samvat, (1888) Kashmir Government Records.

⁴³ Foreign Department, Secret, No's 286-29, Proceedings, October 1887. N.A.I.

⁴⁴ File No. 21 of 1889, (Old English records), State Archives, Jammu

the Pamirs into the sub-continent and that India therefore was within range of their faces. The following year, in July A.D. 1889, Algernon Durand was sent back to Gilgit to re-establish the Gilgit Agency. In March 1889, settled that 'the Gilgit Agency be re-established. Captain Durand himself was chosen for the post, with a couple of Assistants and an Agency Surgeon.⁴⁵

The reasons, which influenced the British in the re-established of the Agency at Gilgit are given in the dispatch to the Secretary of the State known as the Blue Book relating to the Chitral, C. 7864 of A.D. 1895. It reveals that the circumstances made it necessary to protect the British Indian Empire from attacks from the northern passes of the Hindu Kush. As such, the re-establishment of the Gilgit Agency was inevitable.⁴⁶

Algernon Durand was dissociate himself from the Kashmiri officials and tried to establish direct relation with important persons of the agency. His mission entered into negotiations with the frontier chiefs, with the aim of subsiding their fear and gaining their friendship. He informed the Resident of Kashmir that it would be necessary to increase subsidies in favour of the tribal chiefs. The British Agent at Gilgit recommended increase in the allowances of the chiefs of Hunza, Nagar and Chaprot, to strengthen the defence of the northern frontier of Kashmir. The Kashmir Darbar agreed to the grant of an annual allowance of Rs. 2,000 to each of the states of Hunza and Nagar, leaving the question of the manner in which the grant should be distributed for the consideration of the British Agent at the Gilgit. Durand employed many means to enable trust and respect on the part of those locals whom he regarded as the "natural leaders of the country".⁴⁷ In 1891 Durand showed that he was determined to turn symbolic superiority into "real" domination whenever it was required for British interests. Safdar Ali, Mir of Hunza, was not ready to accept British domination but played with the option of opening Hunza for a Russian force. He was ordered, as a consequence, by the Government of India to ensure complete access to Hunza for the British. When Safdar Ali defied the order, the British military attacked a combination of men from Hunza and Nager at the fort of Nilt in Nager. Although the position of Hunza and Nager seemed quite invulnerable due to topographical conditions, the forces commanded by the British officers succeeded in capturing the fort. After that victory, both Safdar Ali and Azur (Uzr) Khan, son of Mir Jafar Khan of Nager, fled and resistance in Hunza and Nager collapsed. Nazim Khan replaced Safdar Ali as Mir, and in Nager power was reverted to the old Mir. Except for the "siege of Chitral" in 1895, this "Hunza-Nager campaign" was the only time when for the "siege of Chitral" in 1895, this "Hunza-Nager campaign" was the only time when the British used violence against one of the little states on the "Northern frontier." Durand's strategy exhibited an almost Foucauldian insight into the rules of the power game. He and his successors used force and violence only when their domination and power were challenged. But for the most part, they relied on techniques of "impression management" they strove to appear less as antagonists and

⁴⁵ Victoria, Schofield, *op.cit.*, p. 83

⁴⁶ Algernon, Durand, *The Making of a Frontier*, Jhon Murray, London, 1899, p. 164.

⁴⁷ Martin Sökefeld, *op.cit.*, pp, 937-973

usurpers of power than as protectors and benevolent rulers.⁴⁸This strategy was summarized by a later British observer as follows:

[Durand's] edifice rests upon three main props: (1) a firm belief in the invincible strength of the British Empire, (2) an unquestionable assurance that the British officer, and especially the Political Agent, is a creature of superior clay, who will give protection against the Kashmir ogre, and whose voice must be hearkened to and obeyed, as if it were the voice of a god, (3) a policy towards the people of the Political Districts and their rulers based on liberality, justice and courtesy, with a minimum of interference, by which their contentment should be secured.⁴⁹

This “wise policy” of the British, as journalist E. F. Knight called it was very effective in “pacifying” the region. This “pacification” was very different from the strategy of domination that Kashmir had tried before and which never had allowed the maharaja to enjoy a ruler ship of the area that did not constantly face resistance and which was always in danger of eviction. The Kashmiris in Gilgit were never in a position in which they could renounce violence-violence that nonetheless was hardly effective. The British “pacification” of the Gilgit Agency bore all characteristics of Edward Said’s description of that mode of domination-all of which Kashmiri rule had lacked: “In a word, the Empire must be wise; it must temper its cupidity with selflessness and its impatience with discipline”.⁵⁰ Thus a British Political officer was appointed for Hunza and Nagar by the Government of India in A.D. 1892.

Conclusion

The Gilgit Agency was set up in A.D. 1877 so as to secure the North and North-Western Frontier. It was one of the different implies that British Government of India received for the assurance of their northern and north-western frontier. Maharaja Ranbir was asked to extent his frontiers for bringing the tribal territories like, Chitral, Darel, Tangir, Hunza and Nagar under his influence. Lord Ripon, who succeeded Lord Lytton in A.D 1880, said that the Gilgit Agency was a ‘mistake’. In July A.D 1881 he withdrew temporary the Gilgit Agency. The Chief of the Nagar and Hunza in A.D 1888 made a combined bid to throw out the foreigners and started attacking the state garrisons. In the battle of Charpot Kashmir troops suffered reverse and tribal chiefs succeeded in capturing a large number of troops and sold them as slaves to Kirghiz in the Pamirs. The British who had withdraw their Political Agent from Gilgit, reconsidered the overall the position and again thought of establishing an Agency there duly equipped with full military defence. They sent Colonel Algernon Durand in A.D. 1889 on a political mission to Gilgit. In March 1889, settled that 'the Gilgit Agency be re-established. Captain Durand himself was chosen for the post, with a couple of Assistants and an Agency Surgeon and thus political officer was appointed for Hunza and Nagar by the Government of India in A.D. 1892.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁰ E. F. Knight, *op.cit.*, p, 285.

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