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BETWEEN CONQUEST AND CONTROL: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SIKH RULE IN KASHMIR (1819-46)

Dr. Hareet Kumar Meena
Professor, Department of History, Central University of Punjab

ABSTRACT
The period between 1819 and 1846 marks a significant phase in the history of Kashmir, when the region came under the control of the Sikh Empire led by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This transition followed decades of Afghan rule under the Durrani Empire, a period often remembered for political instability and economic hardship. When Sikh forces entered the Kashmir Valley in 1819, many inhabitants initially perceived them as liberators who would restore order and stability. However, the nature of Sikh governance soon revealed a more complex reality. This article examines Sikh rule in Kashmir through a historical lens, analyzing its administrative structure, economic policies, religious measures and broader social impact. By situating this period within the larger framework of regional politics and imperial expansion, it seeks to provide a balanced understanding of both its achievements and its limitations. It also examines how these changes affected the everyday lives of Kashmiris and altered the historical trajectory of the region.

KEYWORDS: *Durrani Empire, Exploitation, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Governor*

INTRODUCTION

Before 1819, Kashmir had passed through a long and difficult phase under the rule of the Durrani Empire of Afghanistan (c. 1752-1819). This period, stretching across several decades, was marked by deep administrative instability, economic hardship and widespread social distress.[1] Afghan governors, often appointed for short tenures, tended to focus on immediate revenue extraction rather than long-term governance. As a result, the system lacked continuity, accountability and sensitivity to the needs of the local population. For the people of Kashmir, governance during this time often felt distant and burdensome rather than protective or just. Heavy taxation formed one of the most visible and painful aspects of Afghan rule. Land revenue demands were high and frequently collected through coercive means. Peasants, who formed the backbone of the agrarian economy of Kashmir, bore the brunt of this pressure. Many struggled to sustain themselves, as a significant portion of their produce was taken away as tax. This not only weakened agricultural productivity but also created a cycle of poverty that was difficult to escape. In addition to economic exploitation, there were also reports of administrative corruption and arbitrary decision-making, which further eroded public trust in the ruling authority.

Social conditions during this period were equally troubling. The combination of economic hardship and administrative neglect led to a decline in overall living standards. Communities that had once thrived under earlier regimes began to experience stagnation and uncertainty. The memory of earlier Mughal rule, which had brought relative political stability and encouraged art, culture and trade, stood in sharp contrast to the Afghan period. Under the Mughals, Kashmir had been integrated into a larger imperial framework that, despite its flaws, ensured a degree of order and prosperity. By comparison, Afghan rule appeared harsh and disorganized, leaving many Kashmiris disillusioned.

It was against this backdrop that the arrival of the Sikh forces in 1819 was received with a sense of cautious hope. Led by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Empire had been steadily expanding its influence across northern India.[2] When Sikh troops entered the Kashmir Valley and defeated the Afghan authorities, many locals initially saw this as a moment of liberation. The end of Afghan rule raised expectations that a new and more stable administration would take its place. For a population weary of exploitation and uncertainty, even the possibility of change seemed promising. The Sikh conquest also marked a significant historical transition. It brought an end to nearly four centuries of Muslim political dominance in Kashmir, a period that had included both the Mughal and Afghan regimes. This shift was not merely political but also symbolic, as it altered the structure of power in the region. However, it is important to note that the initial optimism among Kashmiris was not necessarily based on ideological alignment with the new rulers, but rather on a desire for relief from the hardships of the previous regime.

In the early phase of Sikh rule, there may have been some attempts to stabilize administration and assert control over the region. However, these efforts were soon overshadowed by the realities of governance under the Sikh Empire.[3] The optimism that had accompanied the arrival of Sikh forces began to fade as the nature of their rule became clearer. Instead of bringing significant relief, the new administration often continued and, in some cases, intensified, the patterns of exploitation that had characterized the Afghan period. Under Sikh rule, Kashmir did not function as an independent political entity led by its own sovereign monarch. Instead, it became a governed province within a larger imperial framework, with authority flowing directly from Lahore, the centre of Sikh Empire. The administration of the region was entrusted to appointed officials, commonly known as governors or subedars, who acted as representatives of the central power rather than autonomous decision-makers. This arrangement marked a significant shift from earlier periods in the history of Kashmir, when local rulers exercised direct control over the region's political and administrative

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affairs. These governors were not merely ceremonial figures; they played a crucial and active role in shaping the day-to-day governance of Kashmir. Their primary responsibility was to ensure the maintenance of law and order in a region that had historically experienced political instability and periodic unrest. By enforcing the authority of the Sikh state, they worked to establish a sense of control and predictability, although the effectiveness of their efforts often depended on their individual capabilities and administrative style. Another key duty of these officials was the collection of revenue, which formed the backbone of the economic structure of the Sikh Empire. Kashmir, known for its fertile land and valuable resources such as shawl wool, was an important source of income. Governors were tasked with organizing efficient systems of taxation and ensuring that revenue reached Lahore without significant loss. However, this emphasis on revenue extraction sometimes led to heavy taxation, which could place a burden on the local population. In many cases, the pressure to meet financial targets set by the central authority encouraged strict and, at times, harsh methods of collection. In addition to maintaining order and collecting taxes, the governors were responsible for implementing policies issued by the Sikh administration. These policies covered a wide range of areas, including trade regulation, security measures and administrative reforms. Since these officials operated as extensions of the central government, their actions reflected the priorities and interests of the Sikh leadership rather than the specific needs or aspirations of the Kashmiri people. As a result, governance during this period often had a top-down character, with limited scope for local participation in decision-making. The relationship between the governors and the local population was complex.[4] On one hand, the presence of a structured administrative system brought a degree of stability compared to earlier periods marked by frequent power struggles. On the other hand, the lack of local autonomy meant that many Kashmiris had little influence over how they were governed. The effectiveness of governance largely depended on the personality and approach of each governor. Some officials were known for their administrative efficiency and attempts to maintain fairness, while others gained a reputation for corruption or excessive severity. It is also important to note that these governors operated within certain constraints. They were accountable to the central authority in Lahore and were expected to fulfill specific objectives, particularly in terms of revenue generation and political control. Failure to meet these expectations could result in their removal or replacement. This system created a dynamic where governors were constantly balancing the demands of the central government with the realities on the ground in Kashmir.

As mentioned earlier, governors in Kashmir were primarily concerned with maintaining control and ensuring a steady flow of revenue to the imperial center. This focus on revenue collection meant that economic pressures on the population remained high.[5] In many cases, administrative practices were rigid and unsympathetic, leaving little room for addressing local grievances. The lack of effective oversight from Lahore further exacerbated the situation, as there were limited mechanisms to hold officials accountable for their actions.

For the people of Kashmir, this meant that the hoped-for transformation in governance did not materialize. Instead, the experience of rule remained characterized by hardship and limited agency. While the identity of the rulers had changed, the underlying structures of exploitation and inequality persisted.[6] In some respects, the continuation of these conditions may have been even more disheartening, as it followed a brief period of hope and expectation. At the same time, it would be overly simplistic to view Sikh rule as entirely uniform or unchanging. Like any historical period, it contained variations and complexities. However, the broader pattern suggests that the administration struggled to balance imperial interests with the welfare of the local population. The combination of economic demands, administrative autonomy and geographical challenges created a system that was often disconnected from the everyday realities of Kashmiri life. In retrospect, the transition from Afghan to Sikh rule in 1819 can be seen as a moment of both change and continuity. It marked the end of one era and the beginning of another, yet many of the structural issues that had affected the region remained unresolved. For Kashmiris, the shift in power did not immediately translate into improved conditions, highlighting the limits of political change in addressing deeper social and economic challenges. This period also set the stage for future developments in the history of Kashmir.

Lahore as Administrative Capital

One of the most influential factors shaping the administrative experience of Kashmir during this period was its geography, a feature as majestic as it was consequential.[7] The valley, cradled by towering mountain ranges, possessed a natural beauty that seemed almost protective, like a fortress sculpted by nature itself. Yet, this same enclosure that gave Kashmir its distinct identity also contributed to its political and administrative isolation. Distance was not merely measured in miles but in the difficulty of traversing rugged terrain, unpredictable weather and narrow passes that could turn impassable without warning. From the perspective of governance, this geographical isolation placed Kashmir at a significant remove from Lahore, the capital of the Sikh Empire. Lahore was the heart where decisions were made, policies were framed and authority was consolidated. Kashmir, in contrast, lay on the periphery, connected to the center by long and often unreliable routes. Communication between the two was slow and inconsistent, making it difficult for the central administration to maintain a constant and effective presence in the region.

In an age without modern transportation or communication systems, this distance translated into a gap in oversight. Orders issued in Lahore might take considerable time to reach Kashmir and reports from the valley faced similar delays in reaching the capital. By the time information travelled back and forth, circumstances on the ground could have already changed. This lag created a situation where real-time supervision was nearly impossible and the central authority had to rely heavily on the integrity and efficiency of its appointed officials. As a result, local governors, or subedars, operated with a significant degree of autonomy. They

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were entrusted with the responsibility of administering the region, maintaining order, collecting revenue and implementing imperial policies. On paper, they were representatives of the Sikh state, bound by its laws and accountable to its leadership. In practice, however, the physical distance from Lahore allowed them to function with a level of independence that often blurred the lines between delegated authority and personal control.

This autonomy carried the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. In theory, it could have enabled governors to adapt policies to suit local conditions. Kashmir's unique geography, climate and social structure required a nuanced approach to governance and officials on the ground were better positioned to understand these complexities than distant authorities. Flexible administration could have meant fairer taxation, more responsive decision-making and policies that aligned more closely with the needs of the local population. However, the reality often unfolded differently. Instead of fostering responsive governance, the lack of oversight frequently opened the door to misuse of power. With limited supervision and delayed accountability, some governors exercised their authority in ways that prioritized personal gain or immediate targets over long-term stability and fairness. The absence of regular checks created an environment where decisions could be made with little fear of immediate consequences. This situation can be likened to a stage where the spotlight rarely reaches, allowing the actors to improvise without a script. While some may perform with integrity, others may take liberties that alter the entire narrative. In Kashmir, this translated into administrative practices that varied widely depending on the individual governor in charge. The quality of governance was no longer consistent but fluctuated with each new appointment. For the local population, this unpredictability added another layer of uncertainty to their lives. Policies could shift abruptly and the enforcement of rules often depended on the disposition of the current official. In some cases, governors attempted to maintain order and fairness, recognizing the challenges faced by the people. In others, the emphasis on revenue collection and control overshadowed concerns for welfare, leading to practices that could be perceived as harsh or exploitative. The geographical isolation also limited the ability of the local population to appeal directly to the central authority. In regions closer to the capital, grievances might reach higher officials more quickly, allowing for intervention or redress. In Kashmir, however, the distance made such appeals difficult and time-consuming. This further strengthened the position of local governors, as their decisions were less likely to be challenged or overturned in a timely manner.

At the same time, the central administration was not entirely indifferent to these challenges. It recognized, at least to some extent, the difficulties posed by governing a distant and geographically complex region. However, the tools available to address these issues were limited. Replacing a governor or issuing new directives could only go so far when the fundamental problem of distance remained unchanged. This dynamic created a governance structure that was both centralized in intent and decentralized in practice. Authority formally resided in Lahore, but its effective exercise in Kashmir depended heavily on intermediaries whose actions were shaped by local conditions and personal inclinations. The result was a system that lacked uniformity and, at times, stability.

Over time, this pattern contributed to broader consequences for the region. The combination of limited oversight and significant autonomy influenced not only administrative practices but also economic and social conditions. Decisions made at the local level had far-reaching effects, shaping the experiences of communities and the trajectory of the region as a whole. In essence, the geographical isolation of Kashmir acted as both a barrier and a catalyst. It shielded the region from direct and constant control while simultaneously amplifying the power of those who governed it on behalf of the state. The mountains that defined Kashmir's landscape thus played a subtle yet powerful role in shaping its historical experience, turning distance into a force that influenced authority, accountability and the everyday lives of its people.

Nature of Sikh Administration in Kashmir

Sikh rule in Kashmir developed a distinct administrative character that combined strong central authority with highly personalized local governance. While the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh was known for its relatively organized structure in core regions like Punjab, its governance in distant territories such as Kashmir often took a different form. The system relied heavily on governors appointed from Lahore, who were entrusted with maintaining order and, most importantly, ensuring a steady flow of revenue to the imperial center. In theory, this arrangement was meant to balance authority with efficiency. In practice, however, it frequently resulted in localized despotism, where officials exercised considerable power with limited oversight.

Contemporary accounts from the period, including those written by European travellers, paint a vivid picture of the conditions under Sikh rule. These observers often described a system that was harsh, rigid and heavily tilted in favour of the ruling elite. While their writings must be approached with caution due to potential bias, they nonetheless provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of the people. Recurrent themes in these accounts include economic hardship, administrative severity and a general sense of neglect among the local population.

At the heart of this administrative structure was an economic system that placed immense pressure on agrarian base of Kashmir. Agriculture was the backbone of the economy, supporting the majority of its population. Recognizing this, the Sikh administration imposed heavy taxes on agricultural produce as a primary source of revenue. However, the scale and manner of taxation often proved excessive. In many cases, peasants were required to surrender a significant portion of their harvest, leaving them with barely enough to sustain themselves and their families. This economic burden had far-reaching consequences. For the peasantry, it meant

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living in a constant state of insecurity, where a poor harvest or unexpected crisis could quickly lead to destitution. The lack of surplus also limited opportunities for investment in better farming techniques or tools, further constraining productivity. Over time, this cycle of high taxation and low output began to weaken the agrarian economy itself. Land that could have been cultivated remained unused, either because farmers lacked the resources to work it or because the returns were too small to justify the effort.

The strain on rural life extended beyond economic hardship. Social structures within villages were affected as families struggled to cope with the demands placed upon them. Migration emerged as one response, with some peasants leaving Kashmir in search of more favourable conditions elsewhere. This movement not only disrupted traditional communities but also contributed to a gradual decline in the agricultural capacity. In addition to economic pressures, the Sikh administration implemented policies that had a significant impact on the religious and cultural life of the population, particularly the Muslim majority.[8] Certain measures were perceived as restrictive and discriminatory, contributing to a sense of marginalization. Among the most notable of these were the closure of major mosques and the imposition of limitations on public religious practices. The banning of the adhan, or the public call to prayer, held particular symbolic importance. It represented not only a restriction on religious expression but also a broader curtailment of community identity. These policies affected daily life in subtle as well as overt ways. Religious practices are often deeply intertwined with social routines and any disruption to them can have wide-ranging consequences. For many Muslims in Kashmir, the inability to openly practice their faith created a sense of exclusion and alienation. It also reinforced existing divisions within society, as governance appeared to favour certain groups over others.

However, it is important to approach this aspect of Sikh rule with nuance. While there is substantial evidence of restrictive policies, the extent and consistency of their enforcement may have varied across time and place. Not all governors implemented policies in the same manner and local conditions could influence how rules were applied. Nonetheless, the overall perception among the population was one of inequality and limited freedom in matters of religion. The combined effect of economic exploitation and social restriction contributed to growing resentment among the people of Kashmir. The initial hope that had accompanied the end of Afghan rule gradually gave way to disappointment and frustration. For many, the change in rulers did not translate into meaningful improvement in their conditions. Instead, it seemed that the structures of authority remained distant and unresponsive, regardless of who held power.

At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the experience of Sikh rule was not entirely uniform. There were moments when the administration attempted to address specific issues, particularly during times of crisis. For example, in response to famine or economic distress, certain measures such as tax reductions or financial assistance were introduced. These efforts indicate that the administration was not completely indifferent to the plight of the population. However, such measures were often temporary and reactive, rather than part of a sustained effort to reform the system. Ultimately, the character of Sikh governance in Kashmir can be understood as a combination of structural challenges and administrative priorities. The need to maintain imperial authority and secure revenue shaped policies that often-placed heavy burdens on the population. At the same time, the geographical isolation of Kashmir limited effective oversight, allowing local officials to exercise power in ways that were not always accountable or equitable. For the people of Kashmir, this meant navigating a system that offered limited opportunities for participation or redress. Their experiences were shaped by forces beyond their control, from imperial policies to local administrative practices. The result was a period marked by hardship, resilience and a persistent struggle for stability.

Political Context and Regional Dynamics

To understand the governance of Kashmir under Sikh rule, one must zoom out from the valley itself and look at the wider political stage on which it was set. The Sikh Empire, with its center in Lahore, stood as a powerful force during this time, weaving together diverse regions under a single political authority. Yet, like a grand structure built on a delicate balance, its strength depended heavily on the leadership at its core.

At the heart of this empire was Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a figure whose political skill and military strength held the state together. His leadership was not merely authoritative but deeply strategic. He managed to unify various factions, maintain relative stability and expand the boundaries of Sikh Empire. Under his rule, distant regions like Kashmir were brought under control and integrated into a larger administrative framework. However, this integration was not seamless. Governing such a diverse and geographically complex empire required constant attention, negotiation and balance. Within this imperial structure, regional figures began to emerge as significant players. Among them, Gulab Singh stands out as a particularly influential personality. Initially a noble within the Sikh court, Gulab Singh did not remain confined to a passive role. Through a combination of military campaigns, political alliances and careful manoeuvring, he gradually expanded his authority. His rise was not accidental; it reflected the opportunities that existed within a system where regional ambition could intersect with imperial needs. His growing influence illustrates the interconnected nature of regional and imperial politics. The Sikh Empire relied on capable local leaders to manage its territories, especially those that were distant or difficult to control directly. In return, these leaders gained power, resources and recognition. It was a relationship built on mutual benefit but also one that carried the seeds of future tension. As regional figures grew stronger, they sometimes developed ambitions that extended beyond their original roles.

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This delicate balance began to shift dramatically after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839. His passing was not just the loss of a ruler; it was the removal of the central pillar that had supported the stability of the empire. Without his leadership, the political structure he had carefully maintained began to weaken. Internal conflicts emerged, as different factions within the Sikh Empire competed for power and influence. The court in Lahore, once a center of coordinated authority, became a space of rivalry and uncertainty. This period of instability had far-reaching consequences, particularly for regions like Kashmir. Already distant from the center, Kashmir now found itself even more loosely connected to an empire struggling with its own internal challenges. The weakening of central authority meant that governance in such regions became less consistent and more dependent on local actors. The ability of the Sikh administration to effectively monitor and manage distant territories declined significantly. As the grip of the Sikh Empire loosened, regional figures like Gulab Singh found new opportunities to consolidate their power. The shifting political landscape allowed them to operate with greater independence, shaping events in ways that aligned with their own interests. Gulab Singh, in particular, demonstrated a keen understanding of this changing environment. By strengthening his position in surrounding areas, including those connected to Kashmir, he positioned himself as a key player in the political future of the region.

At the same time, external pressures began to mount, adding another layer of complexity to the situation. The expanding influence of the British East India Company introduced a new and formidable force into the political equation. The British were not merely observers; they were active participants, seeking to extend their control and influence across the subcontinent. Their presence intensified existing tensions within the Sikh Empire and created new challenges for its leadership. The interaction between internal instability and external pressure created a dynamic environment in which power was constantly shifting. For Kashmir, this meant that its governance was increasingly shaped by forces beyond its immediate boundaries. Decisions made in Lahore, actions taken by regional leaders like Gulab Singh and strategies pursued by the British all converged to influence the region's fate. The rise of Gulab Singh during this period is particularly significant because it highlights how individual agency could intersect with broader structural changes. By aligning himself strategically and expanding his control over key territories, he transformed from a regional noble into a central figure in the political landscape. His actions were not isolated; they were deeply connected to the weakening of the Sikh Empire and the growing influence of external powers.

The turning point came with the First Anglo-Sikh War, a conflict that marked the beginning of the end for the Sikh Empire. The war exposed the internal weaknesses of the state and demonstrated the growing power of the British. The defeat of the Sikh forces led to significant political and territorial changes, reshaping the map of the region. In the aftermath of the war, the Treaty of Amritsar formalized a new arrangement that would have lasting consequences for Kashmir. Under this treaty, Kashmir was transferred to Gulab Singh, effectively placing the region under his control. This marked the end of Sikh rule in Kashmir and the beginning of Dogra rule, a transition that would shape the history of Kashmir for decades to come. This moment can be seen as the culmination of the political dynamics that had been unfolding over time. The weakening of central authority, the rise of regional figures and the intervention of external powers all converged to produce a decisive shift. The transition from Sikh to Dogra rule was not a sudden or isolated event but the result of a complex interplay of forces operating at multiple levels.

In reflecting on this period, it becomes clear that the governance of Kashmir cannot be understood without considering these broader dynamics. The valley was not merely governed; it was influenced, shaped and ultimately transformed by the currents of regional and imperial politics. The story is one of connection rather than isolation, where the fate of a single region was tied to the ambitions, conflicts and decisions of a much larger world.

CONCLUSION

The early nineteenth century marked a decisive turning point in the history of Kashmir. In 1819, the region transitioned from Afghan control under the Durrani Empire to the expanding Sikh Empire led by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This shift did not merely represent a change of rulers; it signified a deeper transformation in governance, economy, society and regional power dynamics. For the people of Kashmir, particularly the Muslim majority, the end of Afghan rule initially brought hope. However, these expectations soon collided with the realities of Sikh administration, which many contemporaries described as harsh and exploitative.

The transition from Afghan to Sikh rule brought both continuity and change, with new forms of governance layered upon existing social and economic structures. While the Sikh conquest initially raised hopes for stability and relief, the realities of administration led to widespread dissatisfaction. Administratively, the system combined centralized authority with local autonomy, often resulting in inconsistent governance. Economically, the emphasis on revenue extraction placed significant strain on the agrarian sector, contributing to hardship and migration. Socially and culturally, religious policies influenced communal relations and shaped the lived experiences of the people. Simultaneously, the rise of Gulab Singh and the consolidation of Dogra power introduced a new dimension to regional politics. Through strategic expansion and political manoeuvring, Gulab Singh laid the foundations for a new political order that would soon redefine the history of Jammu and Kashmir.

In examining this period, it becomes clear that the history of Kashmir is not simply a sequence of rulers but a complex interplay of power, society and resilience. The experiences of this era continue to resonate, offering valuable insights into the region's enduring challenges and transformations. In the broader context of history, Sikh rule represents a complex and often difficult chapter. It

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highlights the challenges of governing a diverse and geographically remote region, as well as the consequences of prioritizing revenue over welfare. At the same time, it provides important insights into the social and economic dynamics that would continue to influence the region in the years to come.

ENDNOTES

[1] Before the Sikh conquest, Kashmir had been under Afghan control since the mid-eighteenth century. The rule of Ahmad Shah Durrani and his successors was characterized by heavy taxation and administrative inefficiency. These conditions contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among the population, particularly the agrarian classes.

[2] The expansion of the Sikh Empire into Kashmir must be understood within the broader ambitions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who sought to consolidate power across northern India. In 1819, Sikh forces defeated the Afghan governor and established control over the valley. This marked the end of nearly four centuries of Muslim political dominance, including both Mughal and Afghan rule.

[3] Initially, the arrival of Sikh authority generated cautious optimism. The promise of stability and relief from Afghan oppression created expectations of improved governance. However, these expectations were not fully realized, as the new administration adopted policies that often-prioritized control and revenue extraction over welfare.

[4] As a result, governance in Kashmir during this period was characterized by a combination of centralized authority and localized despotism. Governors often exercised power without effective oversight, prioritizing revenue collection over the welfare of the population. This administrative pattern contributed to the perception of Sikh rule as rigid and, at times, oppressive.

[5] The economic structure of Kashmir under Sikh rule was heavily dependent on land revenue. Agriculture formed the backbone of the region's economy, and the state's primary objective was to maximize revenue from this sector. High taxation rates placed significant pressure on peasants, many of whom struggled to sustain themselves.

[6] Contemporary accounts suggest that the tax burden was often so severe that large portions of cultivable land were left unused. This decline in agricultural activity had far-reaching consequences, including reduced food production and increased vulnerability to famine. The economic system, rather than promoting growth, often contributed to stagnation.

[7] The geographical distance between Kashmir and Lahore played a crucial role in shaping this administrative reality. Surrounded by mountains and accessible only through difficult routes, Kashmir was not easily governed from afar. This remoteness created a gap between central authority and local administration, allowing governors to operate with a degree of independence that sometimes crossed into arbitrariness. Without consistent monitoring, many officials focused more on fulfilling revenue targets than on addressing the needs or grievances of the population. Governance, therefore, became less about public welfare and more about maintaining control and extracting resources.

[8] Religious policy was another significant aspect of Sikh rule in Kashmir. The administration introduced measures that disproportionately affected the Muslim majority, contributing to a sense of marginalization. Restrictions on religious practices, including limitations on public expressions of faith, had a direct impact on daily life. It is important to consider these measures within the broader context of governance. The Sikh Empire relied on centralized authority to maintain stability across diverse territories. In Kashmir, this emphasis on control often translated into rigid policies that left little room for cultural flexibility.

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