



him to the indisputable conclusion that rather than original as *farmans* and *pattas* were acknowledged, these were mostly *parwanas* voicing follow-up action on the original grants. Their chronological arrangement showed gaps into which have sunk factors that went into their writing. What they best conveyed was information about the painters, patrons and functionaries through whom items of patronage became available to them. The terms, defining their engagement also found a mention in these documents. In the whole range of art history, they represented the only body of evidence that threw light upon the patronage the Sikh rulers extended to Pahari painters and the difficulties they faced in the new dispensation.

The process of deciphering and decoding to which Goswamy has subjected these documents reveals a lot about the polity of Ranjit Singh. As is evident from documents (I to X, XII) the beginning would invariably be with the invocation of *Onkar* or *Akal Purkh* standing for the universality and unity of God. In a couple of documents (XII, XIV) the Hindu deity, Shri Rama, is invoked along with so as to convey the impression that the Hindu and Sikh views of God were identical. This impression was quite widespread otherwise it would not have figured in official documents. There is no denying the fact that such was the view that lurked in the popular imagination of the people. Had it not been so, the people of the Punjab would not have nurtured oneness that as per the following lines of Shah Mohammad they did with all the fond feelings at their command:

Hindus and Muslims have lived in peace

But a great disaster has befallen now.

Punjab had never suffered, says the bard,

A third race's advent on its soil.

Another thing that comes as a pleasant surprise is that in the

documents (1, V, VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XV), the seal affixed is in the name of the Immortal God. The name of the ruler, i.e. Ranjit Singh does not figure there at all. This shows that the project he embarked upon for setting up a sovereign kingdom did not have personal agenda. He claimed to do so for the glory of the Immortal God whom all the people, irrespective of their religious differences, cherished in the kingdom. This speaks of the past-significance of his project that very few rulers in history have shared with him. There accrues to it a present meaning as well. Who of the present rulers and politicians can claim to have foregone self-aggrandisement, power and pelf for the service of the people? In India Tipu Sultan might have been the only one with Ranjit Singh who put benevolence above everything else.

These documents are penned to the local functionary at the behest of someone assigned by Ranjit Singh to exercise authority over the Hill area. Since it is from a subordinate, so to show his order efficacious and veritable at the same time, the epistle tends to acquire a mandatory tone. Being subservient in hierarchy, he as in document (I) is careful to repeat verbal assurance got from a person like Dhian Singh Dogra who enjoyed great proximity with Ranjit Singh. Sometimes, as is evident from document (II) the local functionary is audacious and does not act upon the order. In that case, the person exercising authority assumes a harsh tone and instructs him to implement the order without any reluctance whatsoever.

Wherever in these documents (I, III, VI) the over-arching presence of Ranjit Singh is invoked, it is by putting his name without any appellation to exalt him. The appellation of *Raja* or *Maharaja* does not figure at all with his name because the value-system ordained in *Gurmat* did not lend to it any credence. No wonder his *vizirs* and *suzerains* had no compunction in appending it to their names. For Ranjit Singh such

appellations as *Hazur*, *Sarkar*, *Sardar* and *Sahib* sounded more prestigious. Along with past significance, this characteristic of Ranjit Singh had present meaning, worthy of note at the present historical juncture. The Akali government has squandered a vast amount of money, two hundred crores approximately, to celebrate the second centenary of Ranjit Singh's coronation as the *Maharaja* of the Punjab. The fact of the matter is that he neither wanted to be hailed as the *Maharaja* nor did he believe in coronation, an exercise in utter futility. By celebrating such a hypothetical event, the Akali government inflicted double injustice upon his memory, first by assuming him as the hero of the celebration he did not believe in and second by attributing him a belief to which he lent no credence at all.

The unostentatious way in which his name appears in these documents, leads us to recall further aspects of his exceptional career. Several historians of his times, including Sohan Lal Suri in whose magnum opus minor details of his daily routine are faithfully recorded, testify to the fact that Ranjit Singh never wore a crown upon his head. This was against his nature that maintained a vital contact with commonsense as well as the life of the common people. Likewise he never sat upon a throne however burnished or bright it might have been. Instead of these inanimate objects of startling grandeur, his fondness was reserved for animated beings, a horse or mare for that matter. No wonder, he waged a battle against the Afghan ruler of his times to wrest from him the legendary mare, probably known as Laila.

From the documents, there emerges a narrative about the making and unmaking of the painter's economic well-being. The earlier ones show how the *nazim*, acting as intermediary for Ranjit Singh the patron in the final dispensation, is intent upon safeguarding the painter. He sees to it that the intention of the *parwana* be



implemented in its true spirit. Then complicating factors begin to intervene. The intermediary himself becomes the patron and assigns grant from his own *jagir* in the plains. Little wonder, the treatment to be meted out tends to undergo a change. The painter's economic well-being improves but troubles begin to gather on other scores. As goes a hint in the document (VII), he gets implicated in a murder case. His benefactor approaches the *nazim* to get him exonerated and released. That to get his purpose served he has to indulge into a pleasantry verging on filial feeling, becomes evident from the document's content.

From an artist upon whom *jagir* is bestowed, the painter becomes the employee of the *nazim* or some other *sardar* in the court at Lahore. He shifts his residence to the plains but his *jagir* in the hill area remains intact. For all this his status does not get unenviable because the interest in his work does not flag. A drastic change takes place with the advent of the British. As several documents (XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX) make it abundantly clear, patronage vanishes. As the owner of the land, that earlier being as *jagir*, was exempt from revenue, he has to square his accounts with the authorities concerned. Since it is not in his nature to do so, he has to suffer botheration now, though *ipso facto* it does not cause any decline in his affluence. No wonder, these documents are received from petty functionaries of the revenue departments. Very impersonal and business-like, they are bereft of situations figuring in the earlier documents. As Goswamy underlines in his Notes to a document (XIX): "in the phraseology of these documents, one notices the gradual emergence of a standard form which then is followed as a matter of routine." So far as painting goes, this botheration acts as a distraction. The painter loses interest in his work. To engross himself in painting or portrait-making that earlier was his wont, does not interest this worldly

person now.

Except to make very brief remarks, those too of the introductory sort, Goswamy hardly says anything about the portraits and paintings now added to the new edition of the book. Apparently it seems that the Pahari painters composed them out of deep regard combined with awe for the subjects. Where this combination of regard and awe is intertwined, in the portrait or the painting it comes out immaculately. Ranjit Singh's portrait at the title page and 'Guru Gobind Singh on horseback' as frontispiece are flawless compositions of this sort. In spite of the fact that several deep colors are used in both, they do not give the impression of gorgeous ostentation. Ranjit Singh's portrait gives evidence of regality in conjunction with simplicity. Guru Gobind Singh's image of a hero, poet and prophet embedding both commonsense and good sense gets marvellously reflected in this work of Nainsukh, the most important of the Pahari painters.

Where awe in combination with regard is not fully internalized, or rather where awe seems to lurk in the foreground, the result is either a painting like "Sardar Jai Singh Kanhaiya conferring with hill chiefs", or a portrait as "Maharaja Sher Singh." In the former, the Sikh Sardar, regarded highly in the community, could not cut much ice in history due to his acute differences with Ranjit Singh. He is shown here in conference with the hill chiefs. He sits at the head of them all and has a *sewadar* holding a costly whisk over his head. He listens intently to the hill chiefs raising some crucial points. The Sikh Sardar, it seems, is in grasp of what they contend. Effort is made to show that this conference resolves all issues coming to the fore with the conquest of the Hill areas by the Sikhs. The portrait of Maharaja Sher Singh denotes the aftermath of this conquest, with the provision that the Hill people have accepted their subjugation. The gorgeous dress, ornaments

opulently there around the head, neck and shoulders, sharply raised moustaches and the left hand resting on the sword, are meant to confer this impression.

That this conquest was not totally symmetrical can be deconstructed from the painting 'A Sikh Chief carousing with a lady.' In the painting, the Sikh Chief sits on a golden colored *diwan*. By its side is another, grey-colored one, upon which a lady, presumably from the Hill area, sits in a responsive posture. She is richly bedecked whereas the chief is only sparsely dressed to show that he reserves the right to go on the initiative. The right knee of the lady touches the bare one of the chief whose right hand rests upon that of the lady. In his left hand he holds a cup meant for some intoxicating drink. The lady's left hand with the index finger raised seems to suggest that he should observe discretion. Her whole demeanour is meant to reverse the notoriety the ladies from the Hill area carried in the court at Lahore. As such literary masterpiece as 'Puran Bhagat', where the celebrated *kissa* by Kadar Yar seems to suggest that the women from the Hill areas charmed the rulers with their startling beauty, endangering the very stability of the kingdom. Their voluptuous charms, enticing looks and erotic gestures were beyond their control as well for they were the offspring of families from low castes. The lady in this painting seems to reverse the damning image become one with women from the Hill areas. This painting, significant for its deconstructive stance, was again composed by Nainsukh. As a result, he gets entitled to importance of the ideological import as well, whereas in this, otherwise valuable book, Goswamy has hailed only his prestige and the patronage he was bestowed upon in the Sikh Court.

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