



Bhimber, the history beyond Stein's footnote in Rajtarangini

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Bhimber is located in the southern part of J&K state on the route that was followed by the Mughals. Before partition Bhimber was known as the Gateway of Kashmir. Up to 1925 Bhimber area was a part of Mirpur district. During the happenings of 1947 Bhimber was the first township captured by Pakistan sponsored forces. In 1996 tehsil Bhimber was elevated to the level of District with three tehsils namely Barnalla, Bhimber and Samani.

The climatic conditions of Bhimber resemble the neighbouring area of west Punjab. During summer season temperature crosses forty five degree and witnesses monsoon from June to August. The total area of the district is 1511 square Km while the population as per 1998 census was 343000. The district is located in between 32° 48' to 33° 34' latitude and 73° 55' to 74° 45' longitude.

GT Vegni had passed Bhimber while going to Kashmir in 1860. He wrote in his travelogue that Bhimber was a township 27 miles from Nowshera in the foot Hills of Adhidakh Mountain. There are two important mosques and one beautiful rest house in the town. Amar Singh Fort was six miles away from Bhimber constructed on the top of a mountain. Mughal Sarai was situated in the center of the town.

In the southern side two buildings had been constructed for the convenience of tourists. Bhimber attained the status of district in 1860 during Dogra rule. Rajouri Ilaqa was also merged with this district. In 1904 Rajouri was separated from Bhimber and merged with Reasi district. This setup continued up to 1947.

In 1947 Bhimber was an attractive and prosperous township where Hindus and Muslims were living peacefully. The natives were hospitable and cordial to each other. Bhimber was a trade center and linked with Gujrat and western Punjab. The total population of Bhimber town was about 5000. This township became first target of Pakistan sponsored forces when on 24th October the town was attacked by Pakistan and captured because a contingent of 70 Jawans of state forces could not face the offensive of 1000 force. Mohammad Yousif Saraf wrote in his book 'Kashmiries fight for freedom' that number of Hindu and Sikh woman committed suicide by consuming poison or jumping into well. The most prominent were Ayodha Nath and his daughters. However in the surrounding villages Muslim neighbours provided shelter to Hindus and Sikhs families who later on migrated to India.

There is no reference of Bhimber in Rajtarangni of Kalhan. However M.A. Stein, the commentator of Rajtarangni wrote in a foot note that Bhimber was a part of Drava-Abhisara (Pir Panchal Region). Onkar Singh Chib, the writer of Tarek-e-Chabal, reveals that centuries ago Katooch Rajputs migrated from Kangra to present Bhimber town under the leadership of Partap Chand Katooch.

In 13th century AD Narayan Chand Katooch married his son Chib Chand with the daughter of local Raja Sripat. Raja Sripat had no son, therefore after the death of Sripat, Narayan Chand Katooch succeeded in making his son Chib Chand, the Raja of this territory. He was a warrior who prevailed upon the local Thakyal Rajputs and became the Raja of Bhimber on the condition that Chib Chand will change his caste from Katooch to Thakyal.

After long discussion it was decided that in future instead of writing Thakyal or Katooch, the Raja will write the surname Chib with his name. Thus the royal family adopted Chib caste and the whole principality was named as Chibal. The language which they were speaking was also named as Chabali (local name of Pahari Language). With the passage of time Raja Boom Chand established a township on his name as Boompur which gradually changed from Boompur to Bhimber and the whole area was also designated as Bhimber.

For pretty long time, Hindu Chib Rajas ruled Bhimber they constructed palaces and pucca houses on the north of Bhimber town. In those days Ibrahim Lodi was the Emperor of India. He invited Boop Chand, the Raja of Bhimber to Delhi and motivated him for embracing Islam. After Boop Chand the Muslim Chib Rajas ruled Bhimber for centuries together.

Bhimber got great importance during Mughal periods from 1586 onwards when Mughal captured Kashmir via Bhimber. During the invasion of Mughals, Raja Jamshed Khan of Bhimber had helped a lot to invading forces. As per Iqbal Nama Akbari, in 1587 when the Caravan of Emperor Akbar halted at Bhimber while going

to Kashmir for the first time, Akbar passed orders for the construction of Mughal Sarai at Bhimber and provided 50 percent funds to Raja Jamshed Khan for the construction of Sarai.

The emperor also passed orders that whoso ever will establish a trade venture near the Sarai and construct house will also get fifty percent subsidy for this purpose. Therefore with the construction of Mughal Sarai, hundreds of houses and shops also came up in a very short period and Bhimber attained the status of an attractive township. Since this township was located exactly on Mughal road therefore hustle bustle of Royal caravans started at this halting station and the importance of local Chib Rajas tremendously increased.

Bhimber principality was located on the south of J&K state whose border was touching Nowshera in the north and Manavar Tawi in the southern side. The western boundary was touching Gujrat area now in Pakistan. Chib dynasty ruled Bhimber up to 1825. The last independent ruler was Raja Sultan Khan Chib.

During his rule Gulab Singh and his brother Dyan Singh got employed in the forces of Raja Sultan Khan. Gulab Singh was posted at Kotli fort. Later on due to some differences between Gulab Singh and Raja of Bhimber, he left his service and joined Punjab Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1822 Maharaja Ranjit Singh designated Gulab Singh as Raja of Jammu. In 1825 Gulab Singh invited Raja Sultan Khan to Jammu for discussion about some official matters. However after reaching Jammu, Raja Sultan Khan was arrested and kept at Royal Bahu fort because Gulab Singh had old rivalry with Raja Sultan Khan when in 1914 during the first invasion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Kashmir, Sultan Khan had betrayed Maharaja and revolted forcefully when Punjabi force was moving towards Pir Pass.

At that time Gulab Singh was one of the commanders of Maharaja's force. Therefore Gulab Singh did not forget this incident. The other cause of irritation was Khatoon Begum, the wife of Raja Sultan Khan who had abused Gulab Singh when he was an employee of Raja Sultan Khan. Therefore after arresting Raja Sultan Khan he was sent to notorious Gajpat prison located on the top of mountain across River Chenab on the opposite side of Chanderkote in Ramban area.

Ultimately Raja Sultan Khan was kept blind and he died at that very prison 1925. Raja was buried at Chanderkote. It is said that a Hindu shopkeeper who was a friend of Raja Sultan Khan decided to construct a tomb on the grave of Raja. In the meantime Raja Gullab Singh came to know about the intension of shopkeeper and immediately warned him to stop construction otherwise he will be banished from the Ilaqa. Therefore the memorial of a Raja Sultan Khan was left in a halfway.

After the death of Raja Sultan Khan, Bhimber had gone under the occupation of Khalsa Darbar Lahore in 1925. In 1927 Chibbal Ilaqa was presented by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to his Prime minister Raja Dhayan Singh in the shape of Jagir along with Poonch Ilaqa. At that time it was a Jagir of Rupees two lakhs and two thousand. This principality was known as Chabal and comprises of Nowshera, Mangaldai, Balisouro, Kangri, Amargarh, Batalakandi, Samanani, Anskhal, Thakyal, Parava, Nyabat, Pallhal, Chalyar, Salla and Kotli. After the death of Sultan Khan his son Faiz Talib Khan met Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore and requested for the release of Chabal principality in his favour.

The area was not released in his favour but he was designated in charge of Chabal family. In 1839 after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the circumstances changed and Lahore Darbar confiscated Poonch-Chabal Jagir and Faiz Talib Khan was nominated the representative of Khalsa Darbar in 1846. Later on, in 1846 when Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of J&K state, Chabal area also became the part of new state. Raja Faiz Talib Khan presented his case in the court of Mr. Lowrance, the resident of Lahore, who decided that Faiz Talib Khan is entitled to get pension of Rupees, ten thousand per year.

However in 1849 due to differences with Maharaja Gulab Singh, Faiz Talib Khan was banished from the principality. Therefore Faiz Talib Khan migrated to Ilaqa Thutha Roy Bhadur and later on shifted to Chakori where he died in 1869. He was succeeded by Raja Ali Bhadur who was living in Gujrat and died in 1908. Then Mohammad Akram Khan succeeded him, who remained the president of Jehlum Municipality and died on 30th June 1952 and his elder son Mohammad Afzal Khan succeeded him on 7th December 1952.



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