



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Power Relations and the Changing Orientalist Discourse regarding  
Nawabs of Bahawalpur during First Half of Nineteenth Century**

Samia Khalid<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Fiaz Anwar<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Department of History, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

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**Corresponding  
Author:**

Samia.Khalid@  
iub.edu.pk

**ABSTRACT**

This study explores Orientalist discourse presented in colonial sources on Bahawalpur State documented during first half of nineteenth century. More specifically, here focus is on image of Nawabs presented in British travelogues and intelligence reports. The representation of 'Nawab' in documents modify with the changing aims and interests of British government. So long as the Nawab served the British interests, the European writers valued him with praise. Contrary to this, if Nawab was guilty of any leniency or weakness to yield the wishes of British, his image dwarfed by underlying textual criticism. For better understanding of mechanism of such shrewd manipulation of literary as well as political power, some abstracts from different historical records are amalgamated in this treatise which followed textual analysis. These abstracts are exhausted into three categories: travelers of pre-First Afghan War era, Army men of First Afghan War, and Post-First Afghan war traveler

**Introduction**

The Bahawalpur State emerged in 1727 and its ruling family of Bahawalpur was known as Daudputras. This family appeared on the political landscape of subcontinent in Sindh where Kalhoras, cousins of Daudputras ousted them from Sindh (Hughes, 1876, p. 30). These running Daudputras got shelter from Sheik Abdul Kadir Bukhari of Uch. At that time, Sadiq Khan Abbasi I was leader of Daudputras. Sheik Abdul Kadir Bukhari introduced Sadiq Khan I to the Governor of Multan, Shah Newaz Khan, who bestowed his kindness on Abbasis and allotted them a Chodree *Tallooka* (district). At this place Sadiq Khan Abbasi I (1727-1737), laid down the foundation stones of Bahawalpur State (Muhammad Din, 1904, pp. 117-118). During eighteenth century, this State was under Afghan domination;

however, by start of nineteenth century, it was transferred to Sikh rule. British started cultivating good relations with the Bahawalpur State in 1808 and gave it an official status in 1833 by signing a commercial treaty. Finally, in 1838, Bahawalpur State integrated into colonial India after acquisition of status of British Protectorate State.

### **Orientalism**

The discourse of Orientalism was started with the book of Edward Said *Orientalism* (1978) which explained that Orientalism is actually about stereotypization of the East by the West but at the same time it was not only about creating stereotypical image of East but it has manifold and multidimensional causes interplaying behind the creation of these stereotypes. Said concentrated mainly on French and British Orientalism of nineteenth and early twentieth century, and eventually he discussed contemporary American Orientalist literature regarding Middle East.

Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse draws on various academic and non-academic sources relevant to Middle East. According to Jukka Jouhki, Said explains Orientalist literature under two themes: manifest and latent. Manifest has been comprised of "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology etc." Latent "Orientalism has been more stable, unanimous and durable mode of thought." (Jouhki, 2006, p. 3). Latent are the aims and ideas working behind the Oriental literature and manifest is the depiction of these ideas. In the following pages, the latent and manifest of colonial sources regarding Bahawalpur written in first half of nineteenth century will be discussed.

### **Travelers in pre-First Afghan War era**

Bahawalpur State was significant for British due to its geostrategic location. As in west, there was Punjab; in east, Bikaner; in south, Sindh and Jaisalmeer; and in north, Ferozpur. Topographically, west was bounded with Sutlej and Indus rivers whereas, in East, there was Rajhistan Desert. So British decided to use Bahawalpur State as buffer zone owing to such geostrategic significance during Afghan war (1838-1842), annexation of Punjab (1842), annexation of Sindh (1848) and to create good relations with Bikaner and Jaisalmeer State.

In 1808, Elphinstone was sent on mission to Afghanistan to sign a treaty with Afghan ruler Shah Shuja. On his way to Kabul, Elphinstone visited Bahawalpur State and met Bahawal Khan II (1772-1809). He recorded about the family background of Nawab as: "His family, which is called Dawood-pooter, was from Shikarpoor, and was originally in a low station, but now claims descent from Abbass, the uncle of Mahommed." (Elphinstone, 1842, p. 233). This statement depicts that British officer was highlighting a generally criticized phenomena about the origin or family lineage of Dadudputras. State discourse of Bahawalpur State or according to State Historians of Dadudputras, the ruling family of

Bahawalpur State is an offshoot of Abbasid of Arabia, and that the forefathers of Daudputras landed in Sindh after the debacle of Baghdad (Aziz-ur-Rehman, 1938, 1939, 1942). But British sources opined that they were locals and belonged to lower castes. It is important to mention here that this was a time when British did not know that Shah Shuja could refuse to sign a treaty with British Raj but this mission was hopeful so they were just visiting all these areas of India and trying to be on good terms with them. So this mission was not very much interested in portraying Nawab very positively. Moreover, Kaye, an Army man who later visited this State quoted a manuscript of Mr. Strachey, who accompanied Mr. Elphinstone's Mission in the capacity of secretary, he said, "Bahwul Khun might also be induced, in the event of actual hostilities, to invade the territories of Runjeet Singh at any point we might suggest, and thereby form an important diversion, whilst the British army would be advancing from another quarter of the Sikh territory." (Kaye, 1857, p. 75).

This shows that in 1808 British were not sure to trust this State for military expeditions that's why Elphinstone criticized the genealogical background of Daudputras. Later on Masson travelled through India and went to Afghanistan. He also crossed Bahawalpur State on his way to Afghanistan and he recorded about his meeting with Nawab Sadiq II (1809-1825) when:

He was seated, cross-legged, on a carpet, reclining on a large pillow, with his left arm resting on a black shield. He was plainly dressed in white linen, but had magnificent armlets of turquoises, set in gold. Before him was lying a double-barreled fowling-piece, and on each side of him European sabres. His countenance was remarkably handsome, and bore every indication of goodness, although I recollected as I beheld it, that his accession to authority had been marked by the slaughter of some of his father's ministers, an usual consequence of the transfer of power in oriental states, yet barely excusable on that account. He was not above twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. He politely welcomed me, and directed his arms to be shown to me, that I might ascertain their fabric, while he explained how he had procured them. (Aziz-ur-Rehman, 1938, pp.14-15)

Although Masson tried to mitigate criticism to some extent and protested against Nawab's order to kill the ministers of his father and then generalized this act of Sadiq II and applied this to 'oriental states'. This is strong evidence of Eurocentric approach.

From 1815 onwards, Nawab of Bahawalpur started putting forward his request to British Government for protection but British government was not interested to do so at that time. In February 1815, an application of Nawab of Bahawalpur for the protection of his cis-Sutlej territories against Ranjit Singh was received by British (The Punjab Government, 1915, p. 32). Lieutenant Murray, Assistant at Karnal replied as under: "It does not seem necessary to bind ourselves

to the Nawab of Bahawalpur for the protection of his cis-Sutlej territories. His Vakil may be told that Ranjit Singh being excluded by treaty from interference on this side of the Sutlej there, there need be no apprehension of his invading the Bahawalpur territories situated cis-Sutlej." (The Punjab Government, 1915, p. 60).

In May 1818, Nawab of Bahawalpur submitted two *arzis* to British. One for lodging a complaint of the depredations of Sikhs on the south-east frontier of his territory and the other begging that the portion of his territory on the left bank of the Sutlej may be considered under British protection (The Punjab Government, 1916, p. 74). But British were not ready to offer such protection, therefore, attacks on Bahawalpur territories continued. So the blunt statement of Masson about Nawab is also a reflection of British not-interested attitude.

In 1833, Captain Wade appeared in Bahawalpur State on behalf of Lord Bentinck, Governor-General of British India, for the opening of navigation of the Sutlej and Indus rivers. Resultantly, a commercial treaty signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1833 and under its fourth clause Lieutenant Mackeson became Assistant Political Agent at Bahawalpur to monitor the riverine trade but he was not allowed to interfere with the affairs of State. In line with this treaty, Bahawalpur State became British ally State and now onwards it was supervised through British Agency of Ludhiana. Captain Wade maintained a record of areas situated on both banks of Sutlej River. He mentioned in his records that "...On their first settlement in the country, the Daudputras, to add consequence to their name, as well as to increase their power, are said not to have been very scrupulous how they swelled their numbers, and people of all descriptions were admitted into their tribe." (Mackeson, 1837, p. 169). He further explains about the origin and nature of Daudputras:

The opinion I formed of the lower orders from what I saw to-day was not very favorable. One cannot be long in their society without being struck with the absence of that urbanity which is so universal among all orders in *Hindustan*. With each other they appear to be on easy terms, using little ceremony. With strangers they are either rough and betray a suspicion and distrust in their manner, or their courteousness is awkward and descends to servility. One of our guides, whose garments would hardly have gained him admittance into any gentleman's gateway, gave me to understand that he was no common person, but one who lived in the Khan's presence. I should not have believed him but for an anecdote which I heard of one of the former chiefs soon after my return to camp, and which was to the effect " that the first Bahawal Khan would have given a severe bastinado to any person who had dared to come to his *darbar* in new or clean clothes." The person who related this

anecdote to me, lamented the degeneracy of the present ruler, "who has brought himself," said he, "to look upon clean clothes without aversion, and, what is worse, allows his prime minister to ride in a *baili* or a bullock carriage...(Mackeson, 1837, p. 217).

In supra quote, Wade is generalizing his limited knowledge about Nawab Bahawal Khan II and further quoting anecdote to strengthen his argument, which is of course, an unreliable source. On the whole, this British officer gave a negative image of Daudputras and specifically the Nawab. Then a series of treaties was concluded and signed between two parties from 1833 to 1848. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1838, political clauses of the original treaty of 1833 were renewed and Bahawalpur State became British Protectorate State from a British allied State. Resultantly, Bahawalpur State facilitated the passage of troops owing to the Afghan war and served the purpose of constructing a military road through the State. Other than these political reasons, there were also strong economic reasons. Therefore, these treaties were related to trade and commerce in which Bahawalpur State assured full cooperation to British in return of political protection. So from 1808 to 1838, many officers were sent on missions to study Bahawalpur State along with its surrounding areas for military and economic reasons. One of them was Alexander Henry E. Boileau, an engineer of Bengal. He was appointed to Rajhistan desert area to solve the boundary problems among Bikaner, Jesalmeer and Jodhpur and Bahawalpur States. He says about Nawab Bahawal III (1825-1852) that:

During my brief stay at Buhawulpoor, a Hindoo religionist came to claim Persecution of my protection in behalf of his spiritual superior, who was said to be confined at Hindo the *kotwalee* on some trifling pretext, and was threatened with death if he would not embrace the Mohumudan faith. On sending to the police office and making further inquiry, there seemed to be some truth in the story, so I brought the case to the notice of Durgahie Khan, the kamdar, who accompanied me on the part of Buhawul Khan, and the man was set at liberty pro tempore: but I afterwards heard that the unfortunate individual had again been seized and actually put to death by hanging, about the season of Mohurram, because he persisted in his refusal to quit the faith of his fathers and embrace that of Islam. It is to be hoped that this report is not true, or, at any rate, if true, it would be a pity to think that so superior a man as Buhawul Khan should permit any such atrocities to be perpetrated in his dominions; but a lurking suspicion that the Daodpotra chief had at least been guilty of non-interference in this matter, tended to lessen the high respect which his general conduct excited, and tarnished that "couleur de rose" which had hitherto thrown so pleasing a tint on everything connected with the Khan and his country. (Boileau, 1837 p. 89)

While reading the above statement, one should keep in mind that Boileau was talking about a state where Hindus were in minority notwithstanding 60 percent administrative staff was Hindu. They were designated on all levels of administrative hierarchy and enjoying religious liberties. Therefore, such blasphemous behavior and the act of depriving someone of his sacred worship seems doubtful.

Now coming to the criticism on Nawab, Boileau was mild in his criticism to Nawab a 'superior a man' because Nawab Bahawal Khan II cooperated with this mission more than any other ruler of state to solve the boundary problems (Boileau, 1837 p. 35). As Boileau himself states in initial pages of his book:

...It is highly creditable to the good sense and good faith of Buhawul Khan, that when this result of the negotiation was communicated to him, though he felt considerably annoyed at being obliged to make good the losses of his troublesome Bhattee neighbors, yet he once confirmed the agreement entered into by his deputies, and declared to Lieutenant Mackeson, that if the full number of cows were not forthcoming on the appointed day, he was ready to complete the amount from his own farmyard, which was amply stocked.... (Boileau, 1837 p. 35)

Although Nawab cooperated with this mission wholeheartedly still, in previous quote, writer did not spare a moment to point out loopholes and flaws in Bahawalpur State administration.

### **Army men of First Afghan War**

The disastrous British campaign in Afghanistan (1839-42) was to encompass an attempt to put back Shah Shuja on the Kabul throne. In this venture, British rendered full support, so in 1838 British military troops crossed land of Bahawalpur State on their way to Afghanistan. The officers of these troops maintained travelogues and war histories. Afterwards, these accounts published in book form.

This was the time when British had realized the geostrategic important of State as Havelock recorded in his book that: "The Northern frontier of Upper Sindh cannot in like manner be attacked by land without traversing the country of the Nawab Bahawal Khan of Bahawalpore..." (Havelock, 1840, p. 31). For Nawab, it was his first experience to host such large army previously Nawabs faced armies only to combat, still Nawab tried to render his services. However, initially, the British soldiers who traversed Bahawalpur State were not satisfied with arrangements for marches of British army. In these circumstances, Havelock penned following lines:

The road from Ferozpoor to Bahawalpore, and through that country, was made by Lieut. Mackeson, Pol. Assist., who, as well as Dr.

Gordon (Pol. Assist.) were, for a long time, employed in collecting grain, and experienced great difficulty, owing to the neglect of Bhawul Khan's people. Many boats were sent to Ferozpoor from Bhawulpore for the grain. Now the Khan of Khelat, as well as the Nuwab of Bhawulpore, was considered, in 1838, to have been our ally. (Havelock, 1840, pp. 108-109)

Withal another officer of Bengal Artillery, Kaye crossed Bahawalpur State and he recorded similar sentiments of anger in harsh words:

It was found necessary to remind the Khan [Bahwulpore] of his "obligations" and "responsibilities." His officers affected to believe that the British force would not march, and, whilst laying in supplies for the Shah's troops, hesitated to make an effort in behalf of our supporting columns. The "obstinacy and perversity"—the "duplicity and equivocation"—the "neglectful, if not reckless conduct of the Bahwulpore authorities," was severely commented upon by our political officers; and it was apprehended that the march of the army would be delayed by the misguided conduct of our respectable ally. The reluctance of the Bahwulpore authorities was soon overcome; but the demands made upon the forbearance of the Ameers of Sindh were of a more oppressive and irritating character. The Bahwul Khan has ever been held up to admiration as the most consistently friendly of all the allies of the British Government; but the expedition was distasteful to him and his people, and the real feeling broke out in the beginning, though, after a while, it was suppressed. (Kaye, 1851, p. 400)

Notwithstanding, Sir Henry Fane surpassed all contemporary colonial officials in his rigorous criticism to Nawab and his State. Fane recorded on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1838 in his journal *vide-infra*:

After we were all seated the conference began, which was a mere string of compliments and professions of esteem on his part, and an occasional rap on the part of our chief at *false and pretended friends* — wolves in sheep's clothing — he (Buhawul Khan) having been under the displeasure of government for not providing supplies for the army, and entering cordially into our measures. On the day of the General's arrival, he had come down to his boat to attempt to justify himself and make up for what he had lost. (Fane, 1842, p. 21)

Soon Nawab overpowered all short-comings and British army peacefully and happily crossed the State then Havelock, gave following comments about services of Bahawalpur State:

Supplies continued plentiful, and the disposition and conduct of the authorities of the country most friendly. Moosa Khan the governor of

Khanpoor, accompanied our route many marches, gave us valuable aid in procuring grain, and means of transport, and left us at length the happiest of provincial khans, when complimented with a looree, a brace of pistols, and a nuzzur of ninety-nine rupees. At the town, over which he exercised authority, we had obtained on the requisition of Lieutenant Mackeson a considerable reinforcement of camels at moderate prices, which, combined with those procured at Bhawalpoor through the same intervention put once more upon a tolerably respectable footing the diminished carriage of the army. (Havelock, 1840, pp.112-113)

Now this praise of British writers continued and on return of British Armies after Afghan War, Orlich, another military officer recorded in 1842 following lines of iconic description:

...As we turned the corner of the verandah, to the east side, the most striking image of an Indian Court presented itself to our view. The Khan was seated in the centre of the verandah, on a pure white, silk carpet, supported by large cushions, and surrounded by a semicircle of more than 200 of his chiefs and officers, whose picturesque costume and various groupings and different arms realised a scene of the Arabian Nights. His sword, guns, and pistols lay before him. On our approach he rose, with his attendants, embraced us, shook hands, and invited us to sit down by him. His Highness is so tall, handsome man between forty and fifty years of age; but the expression of his large dark eye is faint and languid in consequence, it is said, of his free indulgence in the harem. He had a long, dark brown, silky beard, and his hair fell partially curled upon his shoulders. He was dressed in a white muslin garment trimmed with gold lace, wide silk pantaloons, and a rose-coloured turban, with a handsome dagger in his red silk scarf. He wore no jewels except a few rings, and a necklace of large pearls which were fastened by a diamond clasp. As soon as we were seated, a servant with an immensely large fan approached to cool us.... (Orlich, 1845, pp. 143-144).

Now in aforementioned lines, Nawab emerged as a hero with a court resembling the knights' court. In fact, this was not appreciation of Nawab Bahawal Khan-III but of his furtherance of an effort to serve British interest. This quote mirrored British opportunistic and timeserving behaviors which forced their writers to temper the rational picture of existing circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

During the first half of nineteenth century, Bahawalpur was significant due to its geostrategic location. In this politics of power relations, Eurocentric colonial sources established stereotypes regarding Bahawalpur State authorities according



to their requisites; no rational approach was adopted but picture of Nawab was always monochrome. If British Raj satisfied with Nawab he had clean image; if not, then colonial authors painted him as black sheep. In short, formulaic or stereotype images of ruler of Bahawalpur State were created due to power game.

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