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Changing Geography of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Administrative geography of Himachal Pradesh has been a saga of several territorial surgeries and shuffling. This hill state has a colonial past and since its formation on April 15th, 1948 it has undergone a number of administrative readjustments and alterations. This process has been of merger of new areas and realignment of internal boundaries. This resulted into gradual increase in the geographical area of the state along with changing territorial expressions. The entire course of administrative realignment was not an arbitrary or spontaneous process but it was interplay of various cultural, politico-historical and geographical factors. In the present study, administrative history of Himachal Pradesh since 1872 to 2001 has been examined from a geographical perspective using administrative maps of different time periods prepared by Census of India. This study is primarily focused on changing nature of administrative boundaries in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Administrative, Hill, Politico-historical, Himachal Pradesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

The evidences of human occupancies in the Himalayan region can be traced back to two million years ago. As the time passed, primitive human groups organized themselves into tribal republics, which were called *janapadas* in Sanskrit literature. These were both a state and a cultural unit. There is a reference in the Mahabharata about four famous *janapadas* existing at that time in the Himalayas namely Audambara, Trigarta, Kuluta and Kunindas (Singh, 1997) [7]. This is also verified by Panini in his *Ashtadhyai*. Thus the emergence of *janapadas* signified the birth of administrative geography in the history of Himachal Pradesh. This was the time when primitive men learnt to call a geographical space as their own territory. This geographical space was separated from those of other communities, which might be friendly or hostile to them.

The cultural landscape of Himachal Pradesh witnessed emergence of numerous princely states of varying size however, most of them have been very small. There was no single powerful empire or dynasty, which could control all the princely states. Due to this fact, the political matrix of Himachal Pradesh has always been fragmented and the present geographical manifestation of Himachal Pradesh could never be experienced in the ancient and medieval times. Thus, the present geographical extent of Himachal Pradesh is the outcome of the interplay of various social, cultural, political and historical processes in the last 200 years.

II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The geographical personality of Himachal Pradesh depicts a rich physiographical and cultural diversity. The physio-cultural diversities have been of paramount significance in shaping the political units of the state since ancient times. In the discipline of geography, physiographic and cultural aspects have been recognized as a vital tool and basis for regional studies. In Himachal Pradesh, physiographic contours have also played a great deal in socio-political arena even after attaining the present shape. The state of Himachal Pradesh has always been haunted as old and new Himachal and with the change of the political seats of the government the debate of old and new Himachal catches fire which

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undermines the evolution and entity of this hill state. The present study is an attempt to comprehend the administrative history of Himachal Pradesh from a geographical and regional perspective.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Present study is primarily based on secondary data extracted from Administrative Atlas published by Census of India in the year of 2005. Beside this some official documents and books have also been consulted to validate and substantiate the historical facts. This is a descriptive as well as analytical research wherein administrative maps of different time periods have been described from a geographical perspective using cartographic techniques. Along with it an effort has been made to identify various factors, which have influenced the changing administrative geography of Himachal Pradesh.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN 1872

The state of Himachal Pradesh started taking a territorial expression only after the coming of the British people. After the defeat of Gurkhas in 1815, British started organizing the state of Himachal Pradesh (Mittu, 2002) [6]. They kept the princely state of Chamba, Mandi, Suket, Bilaspur, Sirmoor, Bushehr and its feudatories under their indirect control by giving them internal autonomy by signing 'Sanads' (a written document) in 1862 (Singh, 1997) [7] while the Kangra, Kullu and Lahul and Spiti were put under the direct control due to their strategic importance. So this was the spatial arrangement of administrative units during the formative period of British raj in Himachal Pradesh.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN 1951

After India became free there was a demand from some quarters for the merger of the hill states with the East Punjab; but it was met with vehement opposition from the rulers as well as people due to distinct cultural identity of the hill region. Solan Constituent Assembly meeting of January 1948 could not bring any desirable results on account of adamant attitude of the rulers. The political forces of East Punjab were earnestly advocating for its merger with Punjab but Pt. Nehru and Sardar Patel rejected this idea recognizing the distinct entity of this hill region. They felt an intensive effort for development as an important consideration to keep it a separate political unit. (Singh, 1997) [7].

The state of Himachal Pradesh came into existence on April 15, 1948 as a Chief Commissioner's province. It was formed by merger of 26 Shimla hill states and 4 Punjab hill states. In 1951, Himachal Pradesh was divided into four districts of Chamba, Mandi, Mahasu and Sirmour. The state of Bilaspur was an independent entity during that time. Erstwhile princely states of Chamba and Sirmour became district Chamba and Sirmour respectively. Mandi district was formed by merging areas of former Mandi and Suket states. Mahasu district was organized by grouping of 26 Shimla hill states viz. Bushehr, Khaneti, Daleth, Keonthal, Koti, Theog, Madhan, Ghund, Kumarsain, Mahlog, Dhani, Balsan, Kuthar, Kunihar, Beja, Darkoti, Tharoch, Mangal, Bhajji, Jubbal, Rawingarh, Ratesh, Bhaghat, Baghal, Dhadi and Sangri (Thakur, 1997) [8]. At the time of its formation the total geographical area of Himachal Pradesh was 25829 sq. kms (Jaret, 2006) [4].

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN 1961

In 1953, the Government of India constituted State Reorganization Commission in order to determine the political boundaries of the states. It is worth mentioning that the State Reorganization Commission in its report, submitted on September 30, 1955 recommended the merger of Himachal Pradesh with the neighbouring state of Punjab, though the commission chairman Fazal Ali was personally against this move due to distinct identity of culture, religion, ethnic diversity, and history of Himachal Pradesh (Attri, 2000) [1]. In 1961, the state of Himachal Pradesh was comprised of six districts of Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur, Mahasu, Sirmur and Kinnaur. Part 'C' state of Bilaspur was merged into Himachal Pradesh on July 1, 1954 and became the fifth district. Kinnaur, the sixth district of Himachal Pradesh was carved out of Mahasu district in 1960. Mahasu was the largest district and Bilaspur was the smallest one in terms of geographical area. With the merger of Bilaspur the total area of the state increased to 28192 sq. kms (Jaret, 2006) [4].

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VII. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN 1971

Himachal Pradesh attained its full statehood on Jan 25, 1971 and became the 18th state of the union of India. Due to Reorganization of Punjab states Act 1966, drastic jurisdictional changes were experienced after 1961. This Act was mainly aimed at consolidation of the geographically fragmented territories of both the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh was lying far away from rest of the Himachal Pradesh. Similarly some parts of Punjab were lying between the geographical limits of Himachal Pradesh. On November 1st, 1966 four districts of Punjab state viz. Lahul and Spiti, Kullu, Kangra and Simla were merged in Himachal Pradesh (Punjab State Reorganisation Act, 1966) [3]. With the integration of these districts 27263 sq.km area was transferred from Punjab and the total geographical area of Himachal Pradesh was increased to 55,673 sq. km. (Jaret, 2006) [4]. In 1971, there were ten districts in Himachal Pradesh viz. Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, Lahul and Spiti, Kinnaur, Mandi, Bilaspur, Mahasu, Simla and Sirmaur. These were further divided into 40 tehsils 13 sub-tehsils.

VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS AFTER STATEHOOD

In 1972, once again, some alterations were made in district boundaries and in this process Mahasu district lost its entity. It was, renamed as Shimla district. A new district Solan was also carved out of Mahasu district. Besides this, two new districts of Una and Hamirpur were carved out from Kangra district. Thus it was only in 1972 the final alignment of the administrative boundaries get materialized. The total number of districts was twelve. After 1972 no alterations have been made in the district boundaries till date. Lahul and Spiti with 24.85 percent of the total area is the largest district and Hamirpur (2 percent) is the smallest district of the state. The administrative changes of Himachal Pradesh were not arbitrarily done, but there have been several factors, which influenced the existing alignment of administrative boundaries. Some of these factors, which have played an important role in the administrative and geographical history of the state, have been discussed as under:

A. CULTURAL FACTORS

The culture of an area acts as both uniting and divisive forces because the people of any area are very conscious about their culture. Cultural factors played a predominant role in shaping the district boundaries in Himachal Pradesh. Religion and dialects are the two most important factors responsible for it. In the north-eastern part of the state the Indo-Tibetan contact zone presents the influence of socio-religious modes of Tibetan Buddhism while along the southern fringe, the Indian plains has brought in the influence of more universalized Hindu faith (Joshi, 1984) [5]. The districts of Lahul and Spiti and Kinnaur have been created on the basis of their distinct cultural identity. Both of the districts have a strong influence of Buddhistic culture and hence created as two separate districts. Likewise, the influence of dialect can be observed in the other districts. For instance Mandyali in Mandi, Chamyali in Chamba, Kehluri in Bilaspur, Pahari in Shimla etc. Thus dialects have also their bearing on the formation of political units in Himachal Pradesh.

B. POLITICO-HISTORICAL FACTORS

As mentioned earlier, that Himachal Pradesh was comprised of several small principalities during the ancient times. These princely states were distinct political units with a close social and political relationship with their subjects due to single administrative structure. After the formation of Himachal Pradesh, the princely states of Chamba, Mandi, Sirmur, Bushehr, Bilaspur, Kullu were organized as the districts of Chamba, Mandi, Sirmaur, Mahasu, Bilaspur and Kullu respectively. Thus political and historical factors have also influenced the formation of district boundaries.

C. PHYSICAL BARRIERS

As it is a well known fact the physical barriers such as mountain ranges, rivers, deserts etc. affects the culture of a region and function as physical, cultural and administrative divides. In fact culture is the outcome of man's interactions with his physical environment. Influence of physical environment is more in the areas where the, level of technological

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advancement is low e.g. Lahul and Spiti and Kinnaur. The peculiar culture of these two districts is attributed to its typical geographical conditions. Due to very harsh climate, rugged topography and isolation from the outer world such a distinct culture has evolved in this region. The lofty mountain ranges and the rivers have served as natural boundaries of administrative units. The Pir Panjal range separates the district of Lahul and Spiti from Kullu, Chamba and Kangra districts. The great Himalayan range forms the boundary between Kullu and Lahul and Spiti districts. Likewise, Nag Tibba range forms boundary between Sirmour and Shimla districts and Dhauladhar range makes the boundary between districts of Mandi and Kullu. The river Satluj forms the boundary between Kullu and Shimla, Kullu and Mandi and Mandi and Solan districts. Similarly the river Beas makes the boundary between Kangra and Hamirpur and Kullu and Mandi districts in some parts. The river Giri forms the boundary between Shimla and Sirmour districts. Similarly, Yamuna and Tons river separates Himachal Pradesh from the neighbouring state of Utterakhand. Thus the physical barriers have also played a paramount role in determining the administrative boundaries in Himachal Pradesh.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

The administrative history of Himachal Pradesh has been the history of small local principalities in the ancient and medieval periods and British rule in the modern period. Since the formation of the state on April 15th, 1948 several alignments and realignments have been made in internal and external boundaries of the state. During its formative period Himachal Pradesh was an administratively fragmented political unit. Transfer of some hilly regions from Punjab state with the enactment of Punjab States Reorganization Act, 1966 was a landmark development in the administrative history of Himachal Pradesh. On this date, the state of Himachal Pradesh attained its complete geographical expression. Though some internal reshuffling of boundaries was made in 1972 but the outer limits of the state remained intact. Thus in the year of 1972 the state attained its present administrative shape. For the purpose of delimitation of district boundaries cultural, political, historical and physical factors have played a significant role. Along with it regional aspirations of the people have also been recognized by the state and have been accommodated cautiously in the process of realignment of administrative units and to uphold the unity and integrity of the state. Thus in spite of the futile debate on Old and New or Upper and Lower Himachal this hill state has remained resilient and consistently treading the path of development.

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