CONCLUSION

During the Sikh domination over Kashmir, which lasted from July 1819 to March 1846, ten governors were sent from Lahore Darbar to administer Kashmir. The average tenure of their governorships was two years and eight months. The longest tenure of office was seven years and four months; which was enjoyed by Colonel Mehan Singh (1834-41), the ablest of all the Sikh governors of Kashmir.¹

The interest of the rulers of Lahore in Kashmir was motivated by economic considerations. They looked upon Kashmir as their colony and mercilessly exhausted its rich economic resources without least bothering about the betterment of her people. "Ranjit (Maharaja Ranjit Singh) assuredly well knew that the greater the prosperity of Kashmir, the stronger would be the inducement to invasion by the East India Company. 'Apres moi le deluge' has been his motto; and most assuredly its ruin has been accelerated, not less by his rapacity than by his political jealousy, which suggested to him, at any cost, the merciless removal of its wealth, and the reckless havoc which he has made in its resources."²

¹ See supra, p. 154n
² Vigne, op.cit., I, p.316.
Agriculture has been the backbone of the economy of Kashmir and the chief source of revenue to the government. Despite this, the Sikh governors did not take any active interest in developing it. Instead of improving agricultural productivity of Kashmir, the Sikh government realized nearly three-fourth of the gross outturn of produce as land revenue without spending a single penny on agricultural cultivation. On the other hand, the peasants got hardly one-fourth of their produce in return for their sweat and toil. This share of the produce was insufficient to keep their body and soul together. So they lived mostly on vegetables, watermelons and fruits for the greater part of the year. They lost all interest in their land but were forced by the government to plough it. However, a few Sikh governors did try to improve the lot of the peasantry by introducing some new high yielding agricultural seeds. Dewan Moti Ram, the Sikh governor (1822–25) imported seeds of brown cotton from Yarkand and melons from Tibet into Kashmir, Patatoes were introduced in Kashmir for the first time during the period under study.

The Sikhs confiscated all the jagirs in Kashmir which were granted by the former rulers viz; the Mughals and the Afghans. They reduced thousands of jagirdars to absolute destitution. They granted the jagirdars to their own favourites

4. See supra, p. 143.
whom they considered loyal and helpful in strengthening the Sikh rule in Kashmir. However, they not only confirmed the madad-i-ma'ash/dharmarth grants of the former rulers but also sanctioned fresh revenue free land grants to the priestly class and religious institutions. As against this, some Muslim religious establishments lost a portion or whole of their subsidy for political reasons. The Sikh rulers did not, however, declare all arable land as khalsa. The peasants of Khwud-kasht lands enjoyed proprietary rights over their land holdings in its strict judicial sense and these rights could be gifted, mortgaged, sold and purchased freely.

No doubt some industries like shawl, carpet, arms and papier-mache were in a flourishing condition and provided subsistence to a considerable number of the populace. The shawl industry had earned a world-wide name and fame for its delicate shawls and they were in great demand in Europe and elsewhere. This was not due to any special care taken by the Sikh rulers in the development of industries, but the increasing demand for Kashmir arts and crafts in foreign markets was instrumental in sustaining them. But for this demand, they would have perished long before, in view of the horrible and oppressive taxation policy of the Sikhs. Some expert craftsmen did not display their art but preferred to live in obscurity to avoid

5. See, supra, p.119.
Sikh oppression. Several others chopped off their fingers, so that they might not be forced to pursue their profession.

The direct contact of Kashmir with the Punjab accelerated the demand for Kashmiri trading commodities not only in the Punjab but also in British India; it created better avenues for the trade and commerce of the valley. The Sikhs, however, made no distinction between an ordinary commodity and the rarest luxury in levying customs duty.

The living standard of the people remained very low. No doubt, the ruling class, shawl karkhanadars and merchants enjoyed a prosperous life. Their affluence was based on the exploitation of the working class and on huge fortunes from the export trade of shawl goods. But the common masses were half-starved. They had neither sufficient clothes to protect themselves from the severities of weather nor had they adequate food stuffs to make both ends meet. This was due to the high rate of land revenue and the imposition of tax on all possible articles of production and craftsmanship.

The ageold customs and traditions of the people did not undergo any appreciable change. Nevertheless, certain ideas, beliefs and dogmas of the Sikh religion and culture were introduced in Kashmir. This influenced the prevailing Kashmiri culture.

7. See, supra, pp.72-75.
Some social evils were introduced by the Sikhs for the first time and a few such evils already existing here were further encouraged by them. Thus they intensified trafficking in women, which had been the saddest social evil during the Mughal and Afghan rule, and also introduced the sale of children, especially of little girls who promised to turn out pretty. 7 Prostitution was institutionalized and tax was imposed both on marriages and divorces for the first time in the history of Kashmir. 8 The inhuman practice of sati, which had been banned by the Muslim rulers, was revived. Likewise, the Sikhs encouraged the practice of corvee, which finally led to the institution of khanadamadi. 9

The Sikh governors, as we have seen, were generally, intolerant towards the Muslims of Kashmir. The Sikhs discriminated against Muslims, considering them their traditional opponents. The places of worship of the Muslims were brought under the state control and many of them were locked up or converted into granaries of paddy or destroyed for purposes of utilizing the material in laying out gardens. The Sikhs persecuted the Muslims indiscriminately under the pretext of maintaining law and order and on alleged offences of cow slaughter; which was a crime forbidden by law and punishable with death.

7. See, supra, pp.72-75.
8. See, supra, pp. 68, 70-71.
9. See, supra, pp.75-77.
The Sikh governors, especially Hari Singh Nalwa (1820-22) who was a very zealous Sikh, tried their best to propagate their faith in Kashmir. Hari Singh Nalwa went to the extent of announcing that those who had previously been forcibly converted to Islam could get reconverted to their original faith. The Hindus of Kashmir who hailed the Sikh rule as dharamraj enjoyed a good number of facilities.

The Sikh rulers like their predecessors, the Afghan rulers, showed no interest in the development of art and architecture. No doubt some Sikh governors did construct some gurdawars, forts, etc. mainly to commemorate their regimes, but generally they showed no interest in constructing palaces, gardens, kiosks and cascades as the Mughals had done. They had neither time nor inclination to promote literature. However, a few individual scholars contributed to various fields of literature. It is surprising to note that the Sikh governors of Kashmir made no positive efforts to introduce Gurmukhi script in Kashmir.

However, it goes to the credit of the Sikh governors that they extirpated the galwans (highway robbers). The galwans had made it quite impossible for people to travel in solitariness, especially during the anarchical phase of the Afghan rule. The Sikhs also subdued the tribal Rajas of the Khokha and Bombas of Muzaffarabad and Uri and saved the people of the valley from their plunders and ravages.

10. See supra, pp. 102-106.