INTRODUCTION

Within four decades after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the mighty Mughal empire started to crumble down.¹ Fissiparous forces break out suddenly or directly within the empire which in a passage of time developed into breaches and chasms, resulting the decline and decay of the imperial edifice. In the provinces, however, superficial appearance of empire was sustained by the nobles, governors, chiefs or groups who had been bulwarks of the imperial order and were now became rulers of the various regions. The weak later Mughal rulers, instead of checking this insolence with the sword, submitted and agreed to pay them some part of the revenues of those provinces which had been subjected to their depredations.² The trends of the pattern of politics and power changed. The centre which controlled the province earlier on came subsequently to be controlled by them. In the meanwhile, several successor states and new indigenous powers cropped up and shortly established their sovereign rule in different provinces.³

The course of decay of the Mughal authority was largely determined by the nature of the Sikh movement in the Punjab which was emerging as a significant force and consequently challenged and corroded the basis of the Mughal power structure. The Sikh movement had its own concepts of the ruler and rulership. In addition to, the development outside the north-western frontiers had crucially influenced the history of the region in the form of successive foreign invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1750s and 1760s which accelerated the process of disintegration of the Mughal empire.

¹ In the reign of Aurangzeb, according to George Forster, the Mughal empire for its wealth, magnitude or military resource was the most distinguished empire in the Asiatic world: George Forster, A Journey from Bengal to England through North India, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Persia, and into Russia by the Caspian-Sea, Vol. I, R. Faulder, London, 1798, p. 169.
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The span of time of Ahmad Shah Abdali’s invasions on the Punjab greatly damaged peace and prosperity. The cities situated on the route of his march suffered a much destruction and consequently abandoned by its inhabitants. The larger proportion of city’s composition formed not only by the non agricultural classes like traders and craftsmen but also agriculturists. Their combined proportion did not withstand before the warm wave of Abdali’s invasions. Their interests were adversely effected. Every time Abdali played havoc in the minds of the people and extracted from them a greater proportion of wealth in the form of plunder and loot. This hampered the economic activity which directly correlated with the peace and prosperity of the region. This led, in a greater proportion, to the negation of trading and manufacturing activity which succumbed and afterwards adopted a process of running down in the form of snail.

Ahmad Shah Abdali, being a man of extraordinary skill and ability, did not create a strong impression on the minds of the people in a positive manner. His inability was not to winning the trust and beliefs of the people and evolves a systematic framework which could create impression that he was a part of the inseparable feelings of the people of the Punjab. The people had a strong belief of his foreign origin and considered his inability to adapt themselves according to their requirements, as done by the various former foreign invaders of North-West who came as a winner and permanently settled down in India. This kind of impression was fully exploited by the various new rulers of the Punjab in general and the Sikhs in particular who emerged to the ascendant either by taking advantage from the Mughal administrative framework or resisting or setting aside that.

When the new rulers came into power in the various pockets of the Punjab, they realized the indispensability of trade and manufacturing activities for the prosperity and progress of their territories, which was threw down in the five waters of the Punjab by Ahmad Shah Abdali during his successive invasions. However, majority of the towns and cities suffered either decline or destruction during Ahmad Shah Abdali’s successive invasions. After establishing themselves at a particular place, being headquarters, for their political operation, they concentrated their attention to the revival and growth of that place and some other important places which came directly or indirectly under their influence. For this purpose, they took
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some significant steps in this direction to ensure stability which determined not only
the growth of towns and cities but also presents a competition and collaboration
among the various rulers to show their skill and ability in terms of the management
of the affairs of towns and cities. The biggest challenge for the new rulers was to
build a confidence among the people and make strong the foundations of economic
structure. In this connection, they, first of all, preoccupied themselves to pacify the
feelings of the inhabitants by providing peace and security. They constructed new
forts and repaired the old ones. After sometimes, they realized the importance of the
trading community. Traders, craftsmen and businessmen of different areas and
regions were encouraged to change their habitation and settle in their respective
territories.

REVIEW OF HISTORICAL WRITINGS

W. H. Moreland mentions the crafts of the towns and cities and their
organisation, the administration of the provincial cities and sea-ports of the Mughal
empire and the role of urban centres in trade and commerce. In another work, The
Agrarian System of Moslem India, he has devoted a chapter to the agrarian
developments in the eighteenth century.4 But the study is brief and no attempt has
been made to correlate it with the other administrative developments in the empire.

The first brilliant achievement in the field of agrarian history emerged with
the publication of Irfan Habib’s Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707) in
1963.5 It encompasses not only land revenue administration but also agrarian
economy and social structure. Moreover, it adds both description and perception in
the treatment of agricultural technology, price movements and the village
community. This book is a classic on agrarian history which guided the prospective
researcher.

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University Press, Delhi, 1999 (reprint- first pub. in 1963).
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A few more relevant aspects of economic structure are brought out in the works of H. K. Naqvi. In her first work, H. K. Naqvi studies the capital cities of Delhi, Agra and Lahore and the ‘commercial towns’ of Patna and Banaras with regard to their location, hinterland, water supply, industry, commerce, morphology and state patronage. Though this work is a substantial advance on that of Moreland, it remains disproportionate and disjointed. In the second monograph, H. K. Naqvi is more explicit about the multiple roles of the towns, their dependence on the hinterland and the importance of their links with one another. This work provides useful information on the trading centres of Kabul, Lahiri Bandar, Thatta, Ahmedabad, Surat, Cambay, Burhanpur, Anjeli, Jalesar, Satgaon and Hugli.

Noman Ahmad Siddiqi examined the nature of the land revenue demand and its magnitude, the institution of zamindari and its ramifications and the working of the wizarat and its impact on the agrarian system during the early eighteenth century.

First work on agrarian history at regional level appeared with the publication of Indu Banga’s Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century in 1978. Besides a exposition of the political and institutional developments, which had a bearing on the agrarian system, the main focus of the study were the vassal chiefs, the jagirdars, the Dharmarth grantees, the peasants, land revenue, revenue administration and land tenures.

But the major limitations of this study are that it deals more comprehensively with the political aspsects than agrarian. It does not touch trading economy. On the other hand, the footnotes cover equally larger space on the main text. Similarly, the main focus is rested on the early part of the nineteenth century than late eighteenth century.

7 Noman Ahmad Siddiqi, Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals (1700-1750), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1970.
8 Indu Banga, Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, Manohar, New Delhi, 1978.
Tapan Raychaudhury and Irfan Habib (eds.) & Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai (eds.), in *The Cambridge Economic History of India* draw attention on the Indian subcontinent as a whole. Both studies based on the uniformities rather than the diversities and on the forces which affected the course of economic life in the greater part of the territory. The studies provide separate treatment for each of these regions. Both the Cambridge economic histories covers the geographical background, agrarian economy, non-agricultural product and urban economy, the currency system, the maritime trade of India, population, the system of agricultural production, agrarian relations, inland trade, foreign trade, town and cities and standard of living.

Some beneficial information regarding the Punjab economy had provided with an equal ease and it is confined to some aspects. Indeed, the scope of both the studies is extensive and engulfed the whole of the Indian subcontinent.

J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga have taken up some aspects of the structure of economy such as trade, different social groups, and fiscal administration of the town or its self-administering institutions. The study of a particular aspect in greater detail helps to analyse the role of that specific variable in the development of a city or a town.

Daljinder Singh Johal’s PhD thesis on *Society and Culture as Reflected in Punjabi Literature (1750-1850)* analysed the Punjabi literature during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century from the view point of socio-cultural standpoint. Although the society is the main base for the economic activity but this study did not provide any concrete information regarding commercial and agrarian economy. As compared to the late eighteenth century his thesis emphasized more on early nineteenth century.

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Muzaffar Alam\textsuperscript{12} focuses on the interplay of imperial collapse with regional restructuring in Awadh and Punjab. He analyses the workings of the \textit{jagirdari} system and nature of the \textit{zamindari} uprisings, and the problems these posed to imperial power during the early eighteenth century.

Veena Sachdeva in her \textit{Polity and Economy of the Punjab: during the Late Eighteenth Century}\textsuperscript{13} takes into account the non-Sikh as well as Sikh rulers and deals with administrative organization, agrarian production, urban economy, \textit{jagirdari} and state patronage as well as polity.

Although the conclusions drawn are new and different from what has been said earlier on the subject by most of the historians. But the information regarding economic aspects are meager and limited as the larger portion of the study cover the political structure than economic life.

In 1998, Alexander I. Tchitcherov, in his monograph \textit{India: Changing Economic Structure in the Sixteenth – Eighteenth Centuries},\textsuperscript{14} describe how in a feudal system, on the eve of the colonial period, the output of textiles, metal products, salt, sugar, wood work, leather items and so on was transformed from household village crafts supported of wage labour and dependence of merchant capital. These trends analysed in the context of the separation of agriculture and crafts, disintegration of rural communities, expansion of trade and agricultural marketing. This study discusses patterns of trade, rural and urban markets, merchant state nexus, coinage and money supply.

The study belonged to the different states which existed on the subcontinent in the sixteenth – eighteenth centuries: mainly to the Mughal empire and Maratha state in the northern and central parts of the subcontinent, Bijapur, Golconda and Vijaynagar (later, Mysore state), in the south.


\textsuperscript{13}Veena Sachdeva, \textit{Polity and Economy of the Punjab: During the Late Eighteenth Century}, Manohar, New Delhi, 1993.

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Radha Sharma in her *Peasantry and the State: Early Nineteenth Century* highlights the proprietors and non-proprietary cultivators along with those contributing labour and skill towards agricultural production.

Satnam Singh’s M.Phil dissertation entitled *Economy of the Punjab (1765-1799): Late Eighteenth Century* makes a substantial advance upon all previous studies in the context of economic writing on the Sikhs as it takes into account both commercial and agricultural economy. The study covers trade and commerce, manufacturing activities, revival and growth of towns, land revenue, tribute, sources of income generation etc.

It adds altogether new dimensions to our understanding of the history of Punjab from economic point of view. But, the scope of the study is slightly limited as the sources used for this study are not numerous. Secondly, it is based on secondary sources.

Some recent attempts have been made by the historians to study the economic foundations in different towns and cities of the Punjab. These studies break fresh ground in the field of economic historiography of the Punjab, but their approach is ‘biographical’ tracing the history of the town from early times to the present, the manufacturers of the town and its linkages with the vicinity, the social structure of the town and activities of the various social groups along with a brief

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description of the social and cultural life. The scope of these works is not extended to the changing pattern of economic life in the region during the late eighteenth century. The historians studied the particular town in the sphere of its own geographical, political, economic, social, religious and cultural settings.

Besides, distinguish historians of India and abroad tried to write some serious and comprehensive studies of different parts of India regarding state of economy and the role of the merchants, bankers, businessmen, zamindars and governors to control the main base of economic production. The historians limit their generalization to the period and the regions they examines and attributing the stability of the regions to traders, merchants and bankers participation in the sphere of politics during the early or latter phases of the Mughal era. In this respect, however, several aspects of the economic structure of the Punjab during the late eighteenth century tend to be overlooked when a majority of historians examines the problems of the period solely with the objective of explaining the political rise of the Sikhs and their struggle and conflicts with Sikh and non-Sikh rulers operated in different parts of the Punjab. The establishment of the Sikh rule in the Punjab gave a rise to historical writings on the Punjab in general and on the Sikhs in particular. By and large, the main trust of the historians has been political while the economic history received scanty attention. Nevertheless the premises on which modern historians builds their conclusions get adequate support from the existing studies relating to the rise of the Sikh and non-Sikh chieftainships and their foundations of a

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planned economy. In this connection, however, their explanations and interpretations are worth considering and cannot be dismissed summarily.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THEME

The chronological limits of the present study are formally set with the occupation of territories in the Bari Doab by the leaders of the Sikh bands which show the rising power of the Sikhs in the early 1750s. Jai Singh Kanhiya, for instance, started issuing orders to local officials in 1750; Hakumat Singh in his *parwana* dated 02 May 1752, ordered the *amils* not to interfere with a religious grant in the *pargana* Kahnuwan. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia occupied Fatehabad in 1753 and it served as his headquarters for thirty years. After 1753, the number of such Sardars rapidly increased and many had come to exercise influence over substantial piece of territory.

At the time of Ahmad Shah Abdali’s seventh invasion in 1764-1765 the areas stretching from Multan to Delhi, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and Shikarpur encompassing the whole of Punjab were in a state of disturbance and tumult. The Sikh Sardars created widespread havoc all over the Punjab. They led expeditions and vanquished the Afghans wherever they stood against them. For Ahmad Shah Abdali the Sikhs were represented as breaking down mosques, indignating and infringing Islam, taking away the Muslims and their children as prisoners and above all dominating the areas in close proximity of Lahore. Lahore was the symbol of sovereignty during the reign of hereditary governorship of Abdus Samad Khan and his successors (Zakariya Khan, Yahiya Khan and Shah Nawaz Khan). Occupation of Lahore by the Sikhs was not tolerated by Ahmad Shah Abdali.

When Ahmad Shah Abdali alongwith his troops traversed and forded the rivers Indus and Chenab, the Sikhs united themselves and launched a comprehensive plan of attack after the armies of the Shah crossed the river Ravi and entered the city of Lahore in the Bari Doab. As a matter of fact, they persistently wanted to eliminate the menace of the successive foreign invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali which disturbed and broke down the political, economic, social, religious and cultural structure of the Punjab. The Sikh Sardars wanted to establish their own political
hegemony in the Punjab. They were fighting for a cause to uproot and eradicate the foreign Afghan rule. They vigorously fought against the successive invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali. When Ahmad Shah Abdali was returned to Afghanistan the Sikhs occupied all the important towns and cities after dislodging the administrators or commanders who were deputed to serve in the capacity of maintaining law and order and collection of revenue from the farmers.

The invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali aimed at suppressing the rising power of the Sikhs had failed desperately. After realising the pros and cons of the situation with regard to the affiliation of the Sikhs with the gentry and peasantry, the commanders of the Shah suggested him to take help from Jats and Marathas who have abundance of troops and all of them are exemplary. Arrange from them armies and leave on Sikhs to pull out their roots because hare of each land is astute but the dog of the same country can hold it certainly.

It is interesting to note that Ahmad Shah Abdali was still in the Punjab when, in 1765, three Bhangi Sikh Sardars namely Gujjar Singh, Lehma Singh and Sobha Singh occupied the provincial capital Lahore and parcelled out among themselves and struck a coin to mark their sovereign status. Afterwards, there started a process of acquisition of territories in which not only the Sikh chiefs but also non-Sikh chiefs contributed largely. The extension of the Sikh power was totally and permanently established in the various parts of the Punjab and their influence had extended upto Baluchistan. Ahmad Shah Abdali offered to Mir Nasir Khan and other Baluch chiefs the territories of the Chenab, Jhang, Multan and the Deras (Ghazi Khan and Ismail Khan) as reward for their services. But such was the fear of the Sikhs instilled in their minds that all of them refused to accept the offer. Apparently for fear of their inability to hold them against the rising power of the Sikhs.

Timur Shah, son and successor of Ahmad Shah Abdali, wanted to preserve the foreign possessions of his father. In the first part of his reign he made some desultory expeditions in India. But on the issue of an unsuccessful campaign with the Sikhs, he was compelled to relinquish the whole of the Punjab territory. Later on Zaman Shah in the last decade of the eighteenth century was desirous of sharing in the fertile province of Punjab especially of getting possession of Lahore.
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This period is deeply associated with Ranjit Singh’s background in which his predecessors Charhat Singh and Mahan Singh Sukerchakia played their role in all spheres of life and left this glorious legacy to Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh’s vision was so vast and outstanding that he wants to control the spear of politics to change the future course of history because for him, the tomorrow never dies.

The study came to an end with the conquest of Lahore by Ranjit Singh Sukerchakia in the year 1799. Afterwards, Ranjit Singh started the process of absorbing territories of numerous chiefs who had established in the various parts of the Punjab.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

An attempt has been made to delineate the economic structure from 1750 to 1799 A.D., the period which generally known as the Misaldari period in the annals of the Punjab history.


20 For the purpose of the study the Punjab refers to the area between the rivers Sutlej and Indus covering all the five Doabs or inter-fluvial area between any two rivers: the Bist Jalandhar Doab between the Beas and the Sutlej, the Bari Doab between the Beas and the Ravi, the Rachna Doab between the Ravi and the Chenab, the Chaj Doab between the Chenab and the Jhelum and the Sindh Sagar Doab between the Jhelum and the Indus. The further delimitation of the study is that only those parts of the Himalayas are covered which fell within the jurisdiction of the Mughal province of Lahore and the vassal principalities attached to it. This equates the Punjab of our study with the former Mughal province of Lahore. Similarly, only those areas of the Mughal province of Multan are taken which lay between the rivers Sutlej and Indus.

21 The term ‘misl’ is usually taken to denote ‘equal’ or ‘alike’. An essential feature of the misl was the supreme power of the Sikh Sardar who was ‘paramount in peace and war’: Gurbachan Singh Nayyar, ‘The Sikh Misl’, Proceedings Punjab History Conference, 3rd Session, Patiala, 1968, pp. 169-172.
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The meaning of economy is vast and extensive. From economy I mean orderly arrangement and management of economic affairs or development and regulation of the material resources by the various Sikh and non-Sikh rulers of the Punjab during the late eighteenth century. In this context, the nature of economy described in terms of commercial and agrarian economy.

The researcher intensified and explored the knowledge and the unforgettable facts on the organizing constituents or elements of the economy which remained hidden and not come to light throughout the centuries. This period is significant not only in the context of the Indian history but also in the history of the Punjab. On the whole, in the history of the Punjab it is marked with the outstanding political activity as well as organization of economic structure on the ruins of Ahmad Shah Abdali’s successive invasions by various Sikhs and non-Sikh chiefs.

Late eighteenth century is a transitional phase or stage in the process of change or development in the history of the Punjab. Earlier, it witnessed, on the one hand, the coercive, tyrannical and formidable rule of the Mughal and Afghan governors of Lahore namely Abdus Samad Khan, Zakariya Khan, Yahiya Khan, Shah Nawaz Khan and Muin-ul-Mulk and on the other, it witnessed the rise of Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia who was set to the arduous and strenuous task to welding the discordant misals into a united whole in the early decades of the nineteen century. The rise of the Sikhs and non-Sikh chiefs to political power was the direct outcome of the first process.

At last, Ahmad Shah Abdali wanted to conciliate with the Sikhs. He made a proposal of conceding some territory to the Sikhs under the condition of accepting him their overlord or supreme sovereign and sending tribute or a part of revenue. His proposal was never carried out by the Sikhs because, at that time, they embarked upon a career of conquest and consolidation. The conquests of the Sikhs made by

22 William Allan Neilson (ed.), *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 815.

23 The dominance of British power in India begins with the battle of Plassey in 1757 which gained tremendous momentum after the conquest of Mysore in the fourth Anglo-Mysore war in 1799. In the history of the world context, the Americans were still plotting their independence, while the French were fiddling with the concepts of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity after the outbreak of French revolution in 1789.
incursion must be retained by the power of the sword. The Sikh Sardars wrested Punjab with great difficulty and sacrifice from the influence of the Afghans. They fought the war of independence and, in this context, their rule over the Punjab was legitimate because they were the indigenous product of the Punjab. Under these conditions and circumstances they never come to friendly terms for the transfer of powers from foreign invader.

The study examines the different areas of the Punjab and shows how the period 1750-1799 saw the emergence of a new political order with local and different regional idioms, even though echoes from the former Mughal imperial time continued to be heard. The semblance of empire was sustained in the interests of individuals and groups who had acted against the Mughal imperial order and were now become independent rulers in the different parts of the Punjab.

The main emphasis is placed on trade and commerce, industry and manufacturing activity, revival and growth of towns and the urban economy, business community, agricultural production and distribution, irrigation, land revenue, peasant and the village community, the jagirdars and the sources of income generation etc., which remained the important constituents in the structure of economy.

The Mughal province of Punjab lay in close proximity to imperial capital and was fully integrated into the empire at the beginning of the period of our study. The geographic and economic position of the Punjab occupied a strategic importance in the entire region because the Punjab linked the Mughal Empire, through commercial, cultural and ethnic intercourse, with Persia and Central Asia. The province was of strategic importance not only for watching the movements of armies beyond Kabul and Qandahar, as well as the hill chiefs in control of the Himalayan range, but also protecting the provinces of Multan and Kashmir from occupation by hostile forces. The route from Kabul and Kashmir to Delhi passed through the

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24 Kabul was considered a gateway to Hindustan. For protecting the boundary line from the side of Iran the Mughal rulers spend a considerable amount for its defense. When the Kabul comes directly under control of the Mughals, Punjab remained safe, peaceful and populous: Sujan Rai Bhandari, Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh (tr. Ranjit Singh Gill, ed. Fauja Singh), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972, p. 97.
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Punjab and the latter had vital commercial links with these provinces. The Punjab region also had an opening through the Indus to Lahari Bandar, an important seaport of Mughal India. Any uprising or revolt in Multan might well disturb the southwestern districts of the Punjab. In this period when the various rulers had begun to look for avenues to build their own bases for political operation in the various parts of the Punjab, the passing of any one of these provinces or territories into the control of a powerful ruler of chief was likely to a serious threat to the structural stability of the Punjab in a positive or negative bearing.

Late eighteenth century economic history of the Punjab needs to be studied in terms of its own structure, disregarding and neglecting for a moment perhaps what preceded and followed this period. This has already been recognized in the writings on the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century by scholars who studied in greater depth the new political formations in Punjab against the background of Mughal disintegration earlier under the Persian invasion of Nadir Shah and latter under the successive invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali, resulting in the rise and expansion of the Sikh power in the Punjab.

Ahmad Shah Abdali was set out to destabilise the regional economy by provoking an Indo-Afghan conflict in general and Punjab-Afghanistan in particular. This was a very complicated and dangerous situation and required a high level of cooperation among all the rulers to coup with or rebuilding previous politico-administrative, social, economic and cultural structure. Inherently flawed structure of political integration was based on the coordination of the interests and the political activities of the various new rulers and social and religious groups led by local magnates. This, in turn, was dependent on the latter realizing that they could not make fortunes by themselves. Traders, merchants, businessmen, artisans, jagirdars and officials of principality was dependent for their position and power directly or sometimes indirectly on the rulers who regulated and controlled their activities according to the demands of the time. It appears that everyone had no hereditary estates to consolidate or bequeath to their successors. Checking the official, banker or merchant’s ambitions to build a personal base was meant to strengthen the ruler’s organization of principality but it implied an inconvenience for

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25 H. K. Naqvi, Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India, 1556-1803, pp. 44-46.
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the official, bankers and merchants who, in all probability, resisted its enforcement and as a result it was left no option for them either to abandoned his territories or secretly entered into alliance or agreement with an another ruler to safeguard their interests.

Political anarchy and chaos following the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the successive invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali did not mean the drying up of all the economic sources of growth in society. However, no area of Punjab was in a position to maintain itself in complete isolation of other areas. Despite decentralization and the various rulers’ war against each other, the different areas of the Punjab remained integrated through trade and monetary transactions. In this connection not only the trader, merchant, businessmen and artisan but also the farmer, jagirdar, the village and qasba based Dharmarth grantees and a very large number of lower level officials drawn from various social and local communities were all integrated into the framework of the ruler’s principality. In the conditions of unrestrained political and military tendencies to take risks which accompanied and followed the decline of Mughal and Afghan power, none of the new chief or ruler was strong enough to be able to win the allegiance of the others and become one unified paramount power in the region. All of them struggled separately to make their vested fortunes and threatened each other’s position and achievements.