



**EMPIRE DAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE PRINCELY STATE OF
KALSIA: IMPERIAL PROPAGANDA AND WAR ORIENTATION THROUGH
THE INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (1918-1940)**

Puneet

Research Scholar, Department of History
Himachal Pradesh University
Summer Hill, Shimla- 5

Abstract

This paper is about the 'Empire Day Celebrations' initialized by the department of education, Ontario, Canada on 24th May, 1899 CE to commemorate the Queen Victoria's birthday. It was celebrated in the elementary and secondary schools. It was introduced to Britain in 1904 CE and afterwards became a permanent ritual in Britain and as well as in the colonies of the British. Even India could not remain untouched by this kind of celebration and this day too celebrated in India as well. In northern part of India, the princely state of Kalsia was an ardent loyal state towards British Empire. This was the only reason that the Empire Day Celebrations were very frequent in the state. All of you know that from 1918 to 1940 CE, British Empire went through the two very disastrous world wars and the recruitment of soldiers was the major concern for the empire. One important thing which we observed during these two world wars was the British agenda of the propagation of war and with the help of these efforts, turning the wind in their favour. They wanted to create imperial propaganda and war orientation through the involvement of teachers and students. The ideas of loyalty and fidelity have to be inculcated into the minds of young students. The lectures and the loyal speeches by the teachers and the special poems recited by the students on this occasion was the prominent feature of these celebrations. Empire Day was renamed as Commonwealth Day in 1958 CE and it is celebrated every year on the second Monday of March.

Keywords: *Princely State of Kalsia, Empire Day Celebrations, Commonwealth Day, Chachrauli, M.K. High School.*

In 1899 CE, the department of education of Ontario, Canada decided that Queen Victoria's birthday on 24th May, 1819 CE would henceforth be celebrated as 'Empire Day' throughout its elementary and secondary schools.¹ The idea of Empire Day celebrations initiated by 'Reginald Brabazon' the seventh earl of Meath.² He extremely inspired by the Canadian example and he wanted to replicate these celebrations in the British Empire too. He also wanted to create a sense of loyalty, collective identity and imperial responsibility among

the young students, so called young empire citizens. So, basically Empire Day celebrations in the Britain as well as in the colonies under the Britain were an endeavor to create a sense of solidarity and fidelity towards the British Empire in the hearts of the school children because they are the future of any nation.

After that the Empire Day celebrations became a ritual in Britain as well as in the entire British Empire in 1904 CE³, the popularity of this important day grew day by day and it became a significant feature of the national calendar for over half a century.⁴ The purpose of celebrating Empire Day was to propagate the imperial patriotism into the heart and minds of the school children and the youth of the subjugated countries. The date 24th May, 1819 CE was the significant day in the history of England because this particular day was celebrated as the birthday of Queen Victoria.⁵ The celebrations were very frequent in Britain and also celebrated very enthusiastically in the colonies under the British Empire. These celebrations conducted both in schools and in much larger scale in parks and soccer stadiums. The Times, one of the most leading newspapers in Britain reported that it had undoubtedly become a festival of national importance.⁶ Initially it was performed like a ceremony in schools, lectures were organized to highlight the history of empire, poems recitations by the students, rousing songs were sung, flag salutation and distribution of sweets and candies to the school children were also the integral part of the 'Empire Day Celebrations'. In most of the cases, school children took part in various activities like drills, dances, dialogues or other forms of pageantry, most importantly they were provided half a holiday by the schools. It became so widespread that by 1919 CE, three years after the official recognition in parliament, the holiday was recognized by 27,323 schools within Britain.⁷ The grand celebration also became an integral part of the schools of Kalsia State.

In India, Empire Day was also celebrated enthusiastically. British Indian Empire had been divided into two parts; one part was under the direct control of the British government and other one was under the indirect control. Actually these were the princely states of India, who were under the indirect control of the British government. These states had complete loyalty towards the British rule and the princely state of Kalsia was one of them. Kalsia State with its capital Chachrauli had an area of 192 square miles and was

situated in the Ambala district, with the exception of seven villages of sub tehsil Chirak, which lies in the Firozpur district. The total population according to the census 1921 CE was 57,371.⁸ Raja Ravi Sher Singh was the ruling prince of the Kalsia State, succeeded on the death of his father Sardar Ranjit Singh in the year 1908 CE.⁹ At the time of his coronation ceremony, he was a minor, so the state affairs were managed by a Council of Regency.¹⁰ He was invested with full powers on 6th April, 1922 CE.¹¹ Raja Ravi Sher Singh was a quite loyal towards the British Empire. So it was quite obvious that Empire Day celebrations were very frequent in the Kalsia State.

Empire Day Celebrations in the Kalsia State, 1918 CE

On 24th May, 1918 CE, the First World War was near to close and the victory of Allied Nations was visible. On this occasion, Empire Day was celebrated in the Kalsia State. A big meeting was organized at Dera Bassi.¹² In this meeting, the report on the contribution of the state in the First World War was presented by the state officials. Sixty-five men were offered as recruits by the state on this day. Of whom fifty-three men, after being declared medically fit, duly enlisted. Impressive speeches were delivered to stir up all present there to promote recruiting work in the state with increasing vitality.¹³ The state also expressed the loyalty and devotion to the British crown and praying for the speedy and victorious termination of the world war. Simultaneously the Empire Day was also celebrated with great enthusiasm at Chachrauli, in the head quarter of the state as well. The day was declared a public holiday and prayers were offered in all the Temples, Gurudwaras and Masjids of the town, for the long life of the King Emperor, the ever increasing prosperity of British Raj in India and the speedy success of the British and their allies in this worldwide conflict.¹⁴

Empire Day Celebrations in the Kalsia State from 1919 to 1940 CE

The Empire Day celebrations were a regular feature or phenomenon in the state of Kalsia. The capital Chachrauli witnessed the every year celebrations of the Empire Day on May 24th, with great pomp and show. In 1920 CE, a meeting of the state officials, teachers and the school children was held under the

chairmanship of different high level officials, likewise BawaBhag Singh, president of the Council of Regency, Kalsia State.¹⁵ LalaShibLal, sub-judge and magistrate Ist class, later Home member, Executive Council, Kalsia State.¹⁶ SardarDharam Singh, Tahsildar, Chachrauli.¹⁷ PanditMaharajKishan, M.B.E.¹⁸, Diwan of Kalsia¹⁹ and many other important officials. In the every year meeting, the officials expressed their heartfelt feelings of loyalty and devotion towards the British crown. Brief but impressive speeches were delivered by all the officials and the important persons of the state. The events will be incomplete without the special mention of the teachers from Meredith Kalsia High School²⁰, with special reference to BabuRadhikaNarain, Head Master of the Meredith Kalsia High School, Chachrauli²¹, Inspector of Schools and also holding the charge of the Education department of the state.²² He played a vital role in the commencement of Empire Day celebrations at the M.K. High School. The other teachers were BabuSurja Ram, IInd Master, Pandit Hans Raj, Pandit Jai Gopal and LalaKanshi Ram; they all are from M.K. High School, Chachrauli.²³ They all were eulogizing the countless blessings of the British Raj in India, which were followed by prayers and recitations from the students of the State High School.²⁴ Afterwards the assembly stood and offered a heartfelt prayer for the long life and the everlasting prosperity of the King Emperor and the blessed British Raj, while the state band played the 'Rule Britannica'.²⁵ Sweets were distributed to the school children and the day was declared a public holiday.²⁶

These programs were regularly organized by the state, teachers and the students of the M.K. High School, Chachrauli were the key participants and performers of these events. Teachers made these events successful by their worthy lectures and so many special poems were recited by the students. In 1935 CE, the program was cut short on account of the sad and untimely demise of Kunwar Sahib Naunihal Singh of Murasan.²⁷ Initially the Empire Day was celebrated at state fort, so all the officials and teachers along with the students of M.K. High School, Chachrauli came to the state fort²⁸ be the part of the celebrations. After some time it was celebrated in the ground of the M.K. High School, Chachrauli²⁹, M.K. High School was the first school established in the state and it was a more convincing and appropriate place for the gathering of the students in the playground of the school. The news of these celebrations was regularly forwarded to

the editors of Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore, The Pioneer Allahabad and The Tribune, so that information about the celebration could reach as many people as possible.³⁰

So the Empire Day celebration in all over the colonies of British Empire was very important and significant event because through this idea or celebration, they propagate the idea of imperialism. The schools are the cradle of socialization for any human being. Students learned the behaviour skills and collect the knowledge and information about the world through the schools and education. So through the Empire Day celebrations, the British Empire wanted to inculcate the idea of loyalty and fidelity into the minds of the children and this was an essential move to long live the imperialism or British Empire. Teachers played their great role in this propagation. Three students of the M.K. High school, Chachrauli were enlisted in the Armies of the King Emperor. This is clearly mentioned in the annual administration report of the Kalsia State of 1917-18 CE.³¹Two more students of M.K. High School were enlisted in the army of the King Emperor according to the annual administration report of 1918-19.³² Boys and teachers contributed to the 'Our Day' fund, for the help of the Indian soldiers wounded in the battle- fields. L. RadhikaNarain, Head Master of the M.K. High School took a keen and practical interest in the cause of recruiting, war loan and other war related works.

The Ladies 'Our Day' Celebrations in the Kalsia State

The 25th November, 1917 CE was a memorable day for Chachrauli in the Kalsia State. On the wishes of Her Highness the Rani Sahiba, a ladies 'Our Day' gathering took place in the DiwanKhana. Her highness memorable address was read over to the gathering, which was followed by a suitable speech by the mistress of Girls school.³³ Magnificent support by the Rani Sahiba and all the royal ladies in 'Our Day' fund and all the royal females donated munificently in the fund.³⁴These collected funds had been used for the help of the Indian soldiers wounded on the battlefield during the First World War.

Total War Recruitment by the Kalsia State in Two World Wars

The total recruitment in the First World War by the Kalsia State was one thousand three hundred and twenty.³⁵ Out of one thousand three hundred and twenty recruits, one thousand and fourteen were state residents and three hundred and six recruits were from other districts. Ninety-one were from Ambala district, twenty-two were from Ferozpur and thirty-one were from Lahore district (the remaining hail from other districts). On recruitment process the state efforts were commendable and state stood 3rd at the end of 1918 CE, among her sister States of Punjab.³⁶ In recognition of the tremendous services of the state, the British government was gracious to confer the hereditary title of Raja on Ravi Sher Singh Sahib Bahadur, the promising minor chief of the state in 1916 CE and also granted rewards to some officials and gentlemen of the state on 11th March, 1919 CE, out of all the dignitaries, LalaRadhikaNarain, Head Master of M.K. High School, Chachrauli got Government of India Sanad³⁷ and rupees hundred, in addition to other rewards he won from time to time from the state during the period of the First World War.³⁸ Forty-four recruits by the state were enlisted during the Afghanistan war in 1919 CE.³⁹

In the Second World War, two thousand and six hundred recruits were enlisted by the state up to 31st of March, 1945 CE.⁴⁰ Sixty-two men were also recruited in the very next year till 31st of March, 1946 CE.⁴¹ During the Second World War, the war news were given to the students daily at the time of morning prayers and some war propaganda was carried out by the scout master and other teachers of M.K. High School for the recruitment and general help in the war. Haig fund⁴² badges were given to the boys and the amount collected was remitted to the war fund. In all schools both urban and rural, prayers were offered for the victory of the allied nations at the termination of general prayers and before commencement of the daily routine.⁴³ Teacher is the role model, an ideal for the students and if the teacher was eulogizing the British Empire then it could be a great chance for the convincement of the students. The lectures and the poems put great pressure on the psyche of the students. So the Empire Day celebration was very great movement of its time to popularize the ideology of the British Empire.

‘However, as the empire dissolved, so did the desire to have a holiday devoted specifically to it. By 1958 CE, The Empire Day was renamed as Commonwealth Day and moved to the second Monday in March.’⁴⁴ Now every year it is celebrated as a commonwealth day.

Conclusion

The points mentioned above cleared the situation between British India and the princely states of India. During this time (1918-1940), the national movement was growing steadily in the major parts of the British India. Important or major movements like Non- Cooperation and Civil Disobedience were leaving their marks on the history of India. Swarajists were trying to do something out of the box and revolutionaries were playing their important role in the freedom struggle of India. British government was trying to pamper all the sects of Indians through the reform acts like Act of 1919 CE and after that the arrival of Simon Commission, Round Table Conferences and finally the Government of India Act, 1935 CE. In the year 1939 CE, they were trying to pursue all the Indian political parties specifically the Indian National Congress for much needed help of Indians in the Second World War.

On the other hand almost all the princely states were in the favour of the British Empire; especially the princely states of Punjab were completely submissive towards the British Empire. They were willingly or enthusiastically helping the British Empire in both the world wars. They contributed through war donations, war loans, recruitments and through every possible means, as they could help the British Empire. The total recruitment by the Kalsia State for the help of the British government in two world wars was almost three thousand nine hundred and twenty. Kalsia was also a loyal state by every means towards the British Empire. Kalsia contributed through monetary help as well as recruited many candidates for the help of British Empire. The school teachers were the State employees and they were supposed to be loyal towards their master or their king and their master was loyal towards the British Empire. So the through the Empire Day Celebrations in the princely states specifically in the Kalsia State was the event to present and promote

their loyalty and fidelity towards the British Empire. So, in the one part of India, national movement was moving steadily and in the other part loyalist movement towards the British was moving perpetually.

Notes and References

- ¹Brockener, Dustin, *The meaning of Empire Day: Imperial Citizenship and Youth in Edwardian England*, (A Thesis Submitted at Middletown, Connecticut, 2009), p. 12; the birthdate of Queen Victoria is 24th May, 1819 CE.
- ² English, Jim, *Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2006, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091747>, p. 2; Earl of Meath is a title in the Peerage of Ireland. It was created in 1627 CE, and is held by the head of the Brabazon family.
- ³ English, Jim, *op.cit*, p. 247.
- ⁴Ibid, p. 247.
- ⁵Brockener, Dustin, *op.cit*, p. 12.
- ⁶Ibid, p. 1.
- ⁷Ibid, p. 2.
- ⁸*Report on the Administration of the Kalsia State, 1924-25*, Shanti Printing Press, Saharanpur, p. 1.
- ⁹*Ruling Princes and Chiefs, Notables and Principal Officials of the Punjab Native States, 1918*, Superintendent Government Printing, Lahore, p. 1.
- ¹⁰Ibid, p.2; The council of regency consisted of a Sikh president and two other members.
- ¹¹*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State, 1922-23*, Model Printing Press, Ambala, p.1.
- ¹²Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 28, File No. 7*, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, Punjab, p. 4; a highly attended meeting presided over by Mr. H.A. Casson, C.S.I., I.C.S., commissioner and political agent Ambala division, on behalf of the great and just cause for which the benign government has taken up arms since August, 1914 CE.

¹³Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid,p. 1.

¹⁵Kalsia English Records,*Basta No. 28, File No. 07*, p. 8, 24th May, 1920.

¹⁶Ibid,p. 18, 1923.

¹⁷Ibid,p. 39, 1927.

¹⁸Ibid;The M.B.E. was the famous title given by the British government to the important personalities and the meaning of the title was ‘Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire’.

¹⁹Ibid,p. 84, 23rd May, 1931, because on 24th of May, 1931 was Sunday.

²⁰Ibid;The School was known as ‘Meredith Kalsia High School, Chachrauli’ named after the Senior British Official of the Ambala district.

²¹Ibid,p. 8, 1920.

²²*A Combined Report on the Administration of the Kalsia State, 1930-31, 1931-32, 1932-33*, p. 62.

²³Kalsia English Records,*Basta No. 28, File No. 07*, p. 24.

²⁴Ibid,p. 70, 24th May, 1930.

²⁵Ibid,p. 137, 24th May, 1934.

²⁶Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 28, File No. 06*, p. 13.

²⁷Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 28, File No. 07*, p. 152.

²⁸Ibid,p. 13, 24th May, 1922.

²⁹Ibid,p. 152, 24th May, 1935.

³⁰Ibid,p. 8, 24th May, 1920

³¹*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State, 1917-18*, L. GopalSahai and Son’s Press, AmbalaCantt., p. 21.

³²*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State, 1918-19*, L. GopalSahai and Son’s Press, AmbalaCantt., p. 21.

³³Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 36, File No. 3*, p. 25.

³⁴*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State*, 1917-18, p. 4.

³⁵*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State*, 1918-19, p. 4.

³⁶Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 32, File No. 2*, p. 165.

³⁷*Ibid*, p. 165; sanad is a recommendation letter issued by the British Indian government to the various princely States

³⁸*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State*, 1918-19, p. 5.

³⁹*The Annual Administration Report of the Kalsia State*, 1919-1920, Model Press, Ambala, p. 2.

⁴⁰*The Report on the Administration of the Kalsia State*, 1944-45, The Printer's Limited, Ambala, p. 24.

⁴¹Kalsia English Records, *Basta No. 1, File No. 15 A*, p. 53.

⁴²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haig_Fund; The Haig Fund (more properly the Earl Haig Fund) is a charity set up in 1921 at Scotland by Field Marshal Douglas Haig, 1st Earl Haig.

⁴³*The Report on the Administration of the Kalsia State*, 1944-45, The Printer's Limited, Ambala, p. 21.

⁴⁴Brockener, Dustin, *op.cit*, p 12.