**Khalsa Land issue in GB**

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The region of Gilgit-Baltistan is in the news again and this time re garding the Khalsa land issue. - The Sikh Empire which was formed under Ranjit Singh lasted for 50 years and the empire was officially known as Sarkar-iKhalsa. The Sikh invasion of Gilgit and its subsequent attacks for occupation of the occupied lands were referred to as the Khalsa Sarkar lands. Sikhs struggled to maintain their control for four years before Dogras established their foothold in 1861. Since then the terms ‘Khalsa Sarkar’ and ‘Nautore’ have been in use. The Khalsa land is unoccupied barren land, which is the property of the government, and by virtue of the concept introduced by the Sikhs government claim the ownership of land. In case of Nautore (waste reclaimed) locals (selected) were allowed to use wasteland for cultivation. During the Dogra regime, all the cultivatable and barren land was recorded by the settlement department and taxes were collected. First, the settlement was done in Skardu in 1887 and the settlement in Gilgit started in 1906. Proper records were maintained for tax purposes and all the pastures, deserts and barren lands were declared Khalsa land. At the time of the settlement, the district Gilgit comprised of Gilgit, Astor and Bunnji. A comprehensive assessment report (1914 to 1916) was compiled by Thakur Singh settlement officer of Gilgit. The report was endorsed and commented by wazir wazarat, political agent and a resident of Kashmir. Details of lands, cultivation and income discussed including Khalsa land, nautore and trees on roads declared state property. Professor Usman Ali in his book “Gilgit Ki Roug Kahani” described the atrocities and cruelties of Rajas and later by Sikhs and Dogras on the people of Gilgit. Dogras levied extensive taxes and introduced different concept like ‘kar-begar’ (forced labour), ‘begar-doodh’ (tax on milk), ‘Hukmi Kharid’ forced purchased of grain from farmers. According to wazir wazarat in 1861, Mian Jawhir Singh, to meet the requirement of garrison at Gilgit, every village was made to pay revenue on land, fruit trees, goats, butter, water mills and grazing of goats. Shops on Khalsa land were also liable to pay tax. The people protested and resentment was shown against these inhuman taxes but to no avail. Nautore rules were introduced by the Dogra regime in 1936 to bring under cultivation the barren/Khalsa lands. The Gilgit Nautore Rules were introduced in 1942 and land was allotted to locals based on their services to the regime. Rules included property and occupancy rights and revenue was assessed. In 1978, the Northern Areas Nautore Rules were introduced by the government which covered the entire region. All the fresh allotments under these rules were banned in 1986. The people complain that the Khalsa land has been occupied by influential people or allotted to individuals by courts or distributed among communities. For quite some time the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have been raising their voice for the Khalsa land and its ownership. In 1974, the then government of Pakistan introduced judicial and administrative reforms in the region and these changes allowed non-state subjects to own property in GB. A segment of society demands the revival of state subject rule. However, a confusion still prevails and which the GB government has to clear. There was a recent protest at Minawar, 8 miles short of Gilgit city by the locals where they prevented government officials from the construction of a building. The protesters accused the administration that they are depriving them of their ancestral properties. The government’s claim is that the land in question in Khalsa is under its ownership. Before 2018, all the barren land was considered federal land under the Ministry of Kashmir affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan. Back in 2018, all the lands in the region were made provincial subjects. There are major land issues at Chilmis Das, Maqpun Das, Dong Das, Konou Das between different groups claiming ownership. The people of GilgitBaltistan’s demand is do away with the concept of Khalsa land and nautore rules. A resolution has already been tabled by the opposition in the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) demanding a revocation of the colonial concept and to accept the rights of locals over the ownership of lands. The opposition parties termed these rules as unconstitutional and against the Islamic principles. The GB government has already constituted a committee to revise the existing rules. The Indian media took full advantage of the incident and reported exaggerated claims by embellishing stories. The people of GB love Pakistan and consider Pakistan their identity. All the misconceptions and misunderstandings need to be addressed while taking all stakeholders on board as this is sensitive matter. The government needs to take substantial steps to address the issue, and the sub-nationalists and Indian media should not be given any opportunity to exploit the issue.