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# THE STATE OF CHENANI: A STUDY OF ITS EMERGENCE

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**Abstract:** The state of Chenani belonged to 22 hill states of the Jammu and Himachal region practicing fragmented political system during the medieval period. That it was an important state is proved by the fact that Chenani is mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abu-l-Fazl as well as in travel records of many foreign travelers such as G.T.Vigne and George Forster. Yet not much is known about how the state of Chenani was formed and who its early rulers were. This paper is an attempt to trace the circumstances under which the state of Chenani was formed and who were the early rulers of the state. Further, an attempt has also been made to define the boundaries of the state during the medieval period. The sources consulted for the study include secondary sources such as biographies, travel accounts of the travelers and other sources on Jammu history as well as primary sources including oral traditions and unpublished work by the members of the royal family.

**Keywords:** Anthal, Chandel, Chenani, History, Jammu, Medieval Jammu.

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**Introduction:** Presently, Chenani is a Sub Division in District Udhampur of Jammu and Kashmir. It is having a rich historical as well as cultural heritage. There are many temples, forts and palaces belonging to the medieval period. Also the area is famous for some important religious pilgrimages, for example, the temple of Sudhmahadev. Chenani having a latitude 33° 2' and longitude 75° 20' is a neat and clean village 57 miles north east of Jammu and 30 miles south west of Assar, a village on the left bank of Chandrabhaga river. Chenani is built on the eminence on the right bank of the Tawi (Bates, 2005).

Hutchison and Vogel write that the mountainous areas of the Punjab region retained a distinct political condition of its own till the nineteenth century. From the Indus to the sources of the Ganges, the outer ranges of the Punjab Himalaya were divided up among numerous native states, each under its own hereditary chief. Some of these principalities were founded as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> or the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while others dated from the early centuries of the Christian era, and two at least- Kashmir and Trigarta were still older (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999). According to Sir A. Cunningham, the oldest classification of these states divided them into three groups, each named after the most powerful state which was the head of the confederation. These were Kashmir, Duggar and Trigarta. The state of Chenani was part of the Duggar states. According to Sir A. Cunningham, the following states belonged to the group- Jammu, Bhao, Rihasi, Akhnur, Punach, Rajori, Kotli, Bhimbar, Khariali, Bhadrwar, Chaneni, Bandralta, Samba, Jasrota, Tricot, Mankot, Badwal, Ballawar (Cunningham, 1871). To this list may be added Bhoti, Lakhanpur and Bhau.

Hutchison and Vogel write that the history of these hill states was of almost continuous warfare. When a strong ruler rose to power, the larger states absorbed or made tributary their smaller neighbours, but these again asserted their independence as soon as a favourable

opportunity arrived. These wars, however, did not lead to any great political change. On the whole, the hill chiefs were considerate of each other's rights. Being all of the same race and faith, and also nearly related to one another by marriage and even closer family ties, they were content to make each other tributary or to replace a deposed chief by one of his own kinsmen.

That the state of Chenani existed and was a considerable state is evident from the fact that it has also been mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl. It is mentioned that Chenani had an area of 6201 bighas and revenue of 240000 dams. The infantry is given as 30 in number and cavalry at 200. It was ruled by the Hatiyalah (ANTHAL) caste (Jarret, 1978).

The polity and culture of the whole Jammu hill states, particularly of the Jammu region was similar in nature and Chenani was no exception. They subjugated to the powerful state when the situation demanded but mostly they asserted their independence and considered themselves as independent rulers. During the reign of Ranjit Dev (1728-1780) of Jammu, apart from the home districts of Jammu, rest of the kingdom was parceled out into various hereditary principalities as grants of Jagirs. In its palmist days the state of Jammu comprised the principalities of Bhau, Dalpatpur, Samba, Jasrota, Lakhanpur, Tricot, Mankot, Bandralta, Chenani, Bhoti, Bhadu, Balor, Rajori, Bhimber and Khari-khariali (Charak, *A Short History of Jammu Raj*, 1983). Thus, Ranjit Dev asserted his full independence and claimed supremacy over these hill states. The raja of Chenani was Raja Shamsheer Chand at that time. This shows that Chenani was also a part of Jammu state during Ranjit Dev's reign, but it remained quite independent in its internal matters.

After Ranjit Dev, the central authority weakened and these hill states became virtually independent and remained so till the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1820, the Jagir of Jammu was given to Gulab Singh. The taluqua Jammu was bestowed on Gulab Singh including Patti Bhoti, Bandralta, Chenani and Kishtwar (Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan States*, Vol V, 1980). But in 1822, the Raja of Chenani went to Lahore and on appealing to Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839), he was granted permission to reside in his own state in enjoyment of the Jagir (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999). This shows that Chenani managed to retain its independence even when Gulab Singh was subjugating all the major Jammu hill states.

Travelers like G.T. Vigne and George Forster also passed through Chenani and gave a description of the town. G.T Vigne writes, "Chinini is a large and neat village, overlooked by the old palace- if it deserves such a name- of its legitimate Rajahs. The river Tauai has its sources in the mountains to the eastward of it, and comes rattling down the ravine, which conducts its stream to the foot of the eminence on which the village is built, and afterwards it flows, in a straight course, towards the plain, which is about seventeen miles distant." (Vigne, 2008).

George Forster writes, "At the vicinity of Nagrolah commence the districts of Chinnanee chief, a dependent of Jambo, who possesses a revenue of about a lakh of rupees. This state does not remit any tribute to his superior, but assists his government with a quota of troops in the event of exigency; and conformably to this tenure he now serves in the campaign against the Sicques." (Forster, 1970). He further writes, "on the 20<sup>th</sup>, at Chinnanee; a neat and populous town, situate on the brow of a hill; at the foot of which, on the eastern side, runs a rapid stream, passing to the left." (Forster, 1970).

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**Methodology:** Appropriate methodology was followed during the present study. The study started with the interviews of elderly and experienced people of Chenani having first-hand experience of living in the state of Chenani during the reign of last rulers of the state and having great knowledge about the history of the state. Besides, some of the local scholars of the area were also interviewed who are having a good knowledge about the history of the state. Further, major sources of the history of Jammu region were consulted to bring accuracy in the present study. An unpublished record of a member of the royal family was also consulted.

**Results and Discussion:** The present study revealed that the state of Chenani was an important state during the medieval period and remained so till 1947. Further the study revealed about the boundaries of the state, the nomenclature of the state and the process of state formation.

**Boundaries:** G.T Vigne tells us about the boundaries of the state. He writes, “The territories of the Chinini Rajah extend from Dodhera on the north west, and south ward to the village of Bari” (Vigne, 2008). Regarding the boundaries of Chenani, Hutchison and Vogel give us the information that Chenani state was bounded on the north by Chinab river, on the east by Bhaderwah, on the south by Gaddian dhar and Bandralta, and on the west by the Biroh nala and Bhoti. It includes two main portions, separated by Dodhera or Ladha ka dhar- one in the upper Tawi valley and the other in the Chinab valley (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999). S.D.S Charak fixes the boundaries of Chenani as Jammu on the west, Bhoti on the north, Bhaderwah on the north east, Basohli on the east and Mankot on the south Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan States*, Vol. VI, 1988).

So, it is evident that Bhoti, Bhaderwah, Basohli, Jammu, Bandralta, Mankot, Kishtwar states shared the boundaries with the state of Chenani and it comprised some areas belonging to present day Districts of Udhampur, Doda and Jammu. The area of the state kept on shrinking with the passage of time but it maintained an independent status throughout.

**Name of The State:** The state of Chenani derived its name from the capital town which was Chenani. The original name of the state was Himta or Hiunta, meaning the snow country. The rulers of the state derived their clan name from Himta. They used the clan name Himtal which is now pronounced as Anthal. All the other hill states and their rulers also derived their clan names from the capital town or the name of the state, for example, the rulers of Jammu used the clan name of Jamwals, the rulers of Bhuti used the clan name Bhutiyals etc. According to the local traditions and statements of many scholars, it is well established that the ruling family of Chenani, which is of Chandervanshi origin, originally belonged to Bundelkhand. The rulers claimed their descent from the royal line of Chanderi in Malwa. This family descended from raja Shishupal of Chanderi (Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan States*, VOL VI, 1988). From Chanderi they claimed their clan name of Chandels which is now corrupted to Chand only with the passage of time. But the adoption of clan name can also be attributed to the fact that they claimed descent from the Chandervanshi line of Rajputs so they adopted the title of Chand as did the rulers of Kangra. Thus, the rulers of Chenani used both the clan names of Chand and Anthal.

**Formation:** The state of Chenani was founded by the Chandels who migrated from Bundelkhand region and first established themselves at Bilaspur. A cadet of this royal family from Bilaspur, Raja Gambheer Chand established the principality of Chenani. Before the coming of Raja Gambheer Chand, the area was under the sway of Thakurs and Ranas like in all

the other hill states. The rulers of Chenani established it as an independent state. It is believed that the rulers first made Mantalai their capital and after that they shifted their capital to Chenani which remained the capital till the merger of the state.

One of the rulers of this family was Raja Harihar Chand. Narsingh Das Nargis states that Raja Harihar Chand belonged to the 36<sup>th</sup> generation of this lineage whose time is about 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. S.D.S Charak writes that he might have ruled about 800 A.D (Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan States*, Vol. VI, 1988).

Raja Harihar Chand, probably during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, decided to go on a pilgrimage to the famous Jawalamukhi temple in present Himachal Pradesh which was then under the control of Raja of Kangra. He was accompanied by his four sons and some army. One son stayed at Chanderi to look after the affairs of the state. The four sons who accompanied Raja Harihar Chand were Beer Chand, Gambheer Chand, Kabeer Chand and Sabeer Chand (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999). After the pilgrimage, Raja Harihar Chand made his mind to go back to Chanderi but the Raja of Kangra insisted on him to stay for some more days with him as a guest of the state. Raja Harihar Chand agreed and decided to stay as per the wishes of Raja of Kangra. One day the Raja of Kangra asked Harihar Chand to test the abilities of both the armies. They decided to compete in the game of Tent Pegging. Next day in the open ground of Kangra, the game of Tent Pegging started. Raja of Kangra asked Harihar Chand's forces to go first in the game. Raja Harihar Chand agreed and every soldier of his army succeeded. When the turn of army of Raja of Kangra came, they were not able to do it. Naturally the Raja of Kangra felt humiliated on that defeat. Now the Raja of Kangra asked Raja Harihar Chand to have another round. Few days after, again the game started on the Kangra ground. But this time the raja of Kangra wanted to defeat Raja Harihar Chand by hook or by crook. There was a tree in the ground and the Raja of Kangra got it transformed into the shape of a peg with the roots firmly fixed in the ground.

Now on that day again, the army of Kangra went first but naturally they were not able to pick it up as it was made of a tree with roots firmly in the ground and it was difficult, rather impossible to pick it up. Now came the turn of Chanderi forces and no one from their side also was able to pick it up. Seeing this, the eldest son of Raja Harihar Chand, Rajkumar Sabeer Chand took the permission from Raja Harihar Chand to participate in the game and the permission was granted by Raja Harihar Chand. He sat on his horse and went with full force and great speed. He was able to pull the peg out of the ground but in the process, his horse fell down and he died on the spot, but he was able to unearth the peg and along with it the whole treachery of the Raja of Kangra was also unearthed. Seeing this, Raja Harihar Chand became very angry and a battle took place between the forces there. In the battle both Raja Harihar Chand and the ruler of Kangra were killed (Unpublished, Rajkumar Lakshman Chand). Sometime later, his elder son Beer Chand founded the state of Kahloor or Bilaspur and in a similar manner Kabeer Chand established himself at Hindur. The third brother Gambheer Chand seems to have lived with Beer Chand at Kahloor.

During those centuries, according to the many records found and agreed upon by many scholars like S.D.S. Charak, Jammu region from the Ravi to the Jehlum seems to be under the sway of Thakuraian or Ranahun polity. The areas of Basohli, Bhaderwah, Bandralta, Kashtwar, Jammu and Chenani itself were divided among hereditary petty chiefs called the Ranas and Thakurs. They did not recognize any superior power and ruled independently. The period when they ruled was known as the Apthakuri or Apthakurai and the territory of the Ranas was

called Ranhun while that of Thakurs called Thakurai or Thakuri. These states were small and they did not have any fixed boundaries. Also the polity of the states was not organized (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999). The descendent families of these Ranas and Thakurs exist to these days in the inner mountains. At the same time, a ruling cum agricultural class of people called megh had also entered the hills, possessed themselves of large agricultural tracts in the region and established their rule here and there. The founders of Jammu and several other hill states of the region were confronted by these meghs at the time of their migration to these hills. The historical traditions relating to Chenani also confirm these facts and mention the mutual hostility of the local Ranas and the megh leaders (Charak, *History and Culture of Himalayan States*, Vol. VI, 1988).

After the Kahlur state was founded by Beer Chand, some local chief from Mantalai, who was a megh came to him and asked Beer Chand to help him against the local Ranas and Thakurs who were creating trouble for the megh chief. Beer Chand being unable to go himself asked his younger brother Gambheer Chand to go to that place and help the megh chief. Gambheer Chand agreed to go and help him. They left Kahlur with some army and reached the areas of the megh chief. On arriving on these hills, Gambheer Chand fought with the Ranas and Thakurs and vanquished them with the help of the megh, who then made over to him all his territories and also became his subject. Gambheer Chand thus founded the Hiunta or Himta state which later came to be known as Chenani after its new capital was founded by this Chandel ruling house (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999).

Regarding the formation of the state, S.D.S Charak is of the opinion that the state was founded in the early part of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and Hutchison and Vogel concluded that Kahlur state was founded in 900 A.D, so Chenani state was also founded at the same time (Hutchison and Vogel, 1999).

**Conclusion:** The present study underscores that Chenani state was formed during a period when the process of state formation was going on in the entire Jammu hills. The period dominated by the Ranas and Thakurs was ending and the adventurous chiefs from Rajputana, especially were bringing these areas into their sway. The state of Chenani played an active role in the polity of the hills and its rulers were considered important. The rulers of Chenani played an important role in promoting the cultural interactions among the states and played a role in cultural development of the state.

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