

CHANDIGARH: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE POST COLONIAL PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

The making of Chandigarh was a crucial challenge for the post colonial Punjab. The present paper will discuss the various issues and debates on the very idea of a new capital, selection of site, legislation and finances for the building of the city and the agitation against it. It is concerned with the problems after partition which made the establishment of a new capital essential for the Punjab and the government's decision about its location at Chandigarh. This decision resulted into diverse responses by the politicians, officials and the local people. These responses were in the form of suggestions of different sites by the officials, politicians and the protestors; criticism of the selected site and agitation by the villagers which were displaced for the capital.

KEYWORDS: *Chandigarh, capital, Punjab, problem, government*

INTRODUCTION

Chandigarh was built as the new capital of East Punjab after the partition of India and the loss of Lahore. It was the symbol of the newly acquired independence, the future, the hopes and aspirations of the nation and the free choice of the nascent republic of India. The idea of Chandigarh did not originate in one day or by any one person but was a steady evolving of ideas and plans mulled over and implemented over several years before it took actual shape. Immediately after the partition the major concern was to have a capital for the Punjab state. The idea of the new capital however, was hampered by various difficulties and faced several kinds of obstacles.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of scholars from various disciplines have shown keen interest in the study of Chandigarh and have studied some aspects of the city to understand its architecture, planning, controversies related to its establishment, administration as well as economic and social issues.

Ravi Kalia's *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City* (1990) traces the historic circumstances surrounding the creation of the city and also highlighted the identity crisis facing the city since the reorganisation of Punjab state in 1966, and the possible impact of these changes on the city's planning and development. The said work deals with the controversies related to Chandigarh that had emerged on its creation, size, selection of the site, architects and its political status. It presents the information on the plans of Mayer and Le Corbusier and also critically analysis Chandigarh as a planned city. The principles of master plan based on western experience that gives more importance to physical features than local or regional socio economic realities.

Sangeeta Bagga's *Significance of Chandigarh as an Architectural Heritage* (1998) is an attempt to understand the concept of modernity and how it has shaped the architecture, urban design and form of cities in late 19th and early 20th centuries. It elaborates Le Corbusier's ideas and principles of the international style, the process of modernisation of India. It also makes a comparison of Chandigarh with the three modern heritage cities of Brasilia, Tel Aviv and Le Havre as a case study.

Ravinder Kaur in her *Urban-Rural Relations in India (A Case Study of the Inter State Chandigarh Region)*,(2004) studies the urban rural relations in terms of social and economic interdependence of the interstate Chandigarh region. Pippa Maryann's *Growth of Modern Planned State Capitals in India: A Case Study of Chandigarh* (2000) is a comparative study of Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar and Gandhinagar. It studies town planning, urban pattern and land use patterns in these cities. Krishan Mohan's *Religion in a Planned City* focuses on the location and functions of the religious institutions.

Rajiv Lochan and Kavita Sharma's *Chandigarh Life Scape: Brief Social History of a Planned City* (1999) have briefly studied Chandigarh in the historical context, looking at the circumstances that led to the establishment of the city, selection of the site of the city, protests by the evacuated villagers and some demographic attributes. It also highlights the problems faced by the people during its initial development and also the socio-cultural environment in the city.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This research paper has been written to find out the challenges in the way of the making of new capital of Punjab. All hurdles and solutions have been analysed in the way of this project one by one. It has been seen that these have been solved by the government and various other individuals involved in this project.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this research paper is to highlight the issues in the making of the new capital of Punjab after the partition of India. It has analysed all these controversies and the ways these are sorting at the administrative levels. This project had many fold objectives namely the provision of headquarters of government, creation of a nucleus for rehabilitating displaced persons, initiating economic progress in the state, providing some psychological balm and raising the tone of the social and cultural life of the state.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the study both descriptive and exploratory design had been used and both primary and secondary data information was used. Interviews were conducted with a number of persons who were displaced from the villages in Chandigarh and now rehabilitated in villages like Badheri, Saneta and Lakhnaur.

DISCUSSION ON THE ISSUES AND FINDINGS

The need for a new capital for Punjab led to various issues and debates on the very idea of a new capital, selection of site, legislation and finances for the building of the city and the agitation against it. The first issue was whether the new capital should actually be made or not. The idea of a new capital was at first rejected just due to the economic and political situation which existed in the country after the partition. The Finance Department of Indian Government objected to the scheme on grounds of paucity of funds available with the Government of India.¹ It was difficult to think of a new city established from scratch during a period when the country was suffering from a series of financial problems.

The second issue was the selection of site for the capital. The administrators like M.S. Randhawa and the politicians like Hukam Singh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Bhim Sen Sachar suggested various cities that could be further developed as a State Capital. These

cities included Phillaur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Baldev Nagar, Nangal, Shahbad, Karnal, Amritsar, Ambala and Shimla.ⁱⁱ The choice of the politicians was merely dependant on the constituencies which they represented. All the existing cities were rejected because of over population, lack of essential amenities and services, and inadequate areas for expansion in the future. Jawaharlal Nehru, P.L. Varma, P.N. Thapar and A.L. Fletcher who were associated with the idea of the new capital since its inception had the vision of a town which would be planned like the ‘western’ cities. They were neither ready to accept any of the present cities in Punjab as its capital nor to develop sites around these cities.

The government had set up a committee for the selection of the site for the East Punjab Capital. It recommended sites in Hoshiarpur district, and between Phillour and Goraya. Various factors were considered for selecting the site for the capital like security, communication, availability of essential sources like water and space for future expansion. It was also kept in mind that the selected land should not be very fertile. After much consideration, the Punjab government had decided in March 1948 to locate its new capital near Chandigarh in Kharar Tehsil of Ambala district.ⁱⁱⁱ

During this decision the Chief Minister of Punjab was Gopi Chand Bhargava (August 1947 to April 1949). However, the decision had been taken but the actual work started after 1950. After Bhargava, Bhim Sen Sachar became Chief Minister from April 1949 to October 1949 who was in favour of Ambala as the capital of Punjab. The Sachar government wanted to think again about the site of the capital. The Punjab government could not take a final decision due to political pressure by the vested interests which caused delay in the decisions. The delay was also on the ground of scarcity of finances for the capital project. The decision was reaffirmed with the coming of Bhargava Ministry (October 1949 to June 1951) again in November 1949. It was possible with the full support of P.L. Varma, P.N. Thapar, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Gopi Chand Bhargava and Prithvi Singh Azad.

Now the ‘Chandigarh’ site was opposed on various grounds such as lack of security and connectivity to the other cities.^{iv} Such objections were raised by M.S. Randhawa who was posted as deputy commissioner of Ambala at that time; Shamsheer Singh who was a politician and Joginder Singh an advocate. On the government side, there was not any problem with the location, communication or water supply which had been proved with the surveys conducted by the government officials. The native land owners were not ready to give up their fertile

land for the sake of the capital and they started an agitation against the government's decision.^v They set up an Anti Rajdhani Committee in Kailor village. Its main representatives were Joginder Singh, Shamsheer Singh Josh, Bakhtabar Singh, Lala Duni Chand and Pritam Chand. The political supporters included Pritam Singh Gojran (Akali leader), Bachan Singh M.L.A, Shamsheer Singh Josh (Socialist Party), Pritam Chand (Hind Kisan Panchayat).^{vi} It did not appear that all the leaders who had opposed Chandigarh site or suggested other cities as capital like Hukam Singh, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur and the administrator M.S. Randhawa were the part of this agitation. Some of the Akali leaders were involved because they were in opposition at that time. The chief participants in this agitation were the people of all the affected villages and surrounding villages. However, the people from far away villages did not take part when they get to know that their land and villages would not be the part of new capital. Women and children had also participated in the gatherings. The protestors created problems for the officials who came for survey in the villages and various incidents occurred.

The initial reaction of the government towards this agitation was to arrest the protestors and take them to faraway places like in Ropar and Pinjore from where they had to return on foot.^{vii} The motive was to realise the people that they had to go from this site. The government leaders and officers negotiated with the people and their representatives. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd and also attempted *lathi* charge on the protestors. With the arrest of leaders the *satyagraha* was weakened by October 1950. It had also died down due to the delay in presenting objections against the acquisition of land. People did not know actually what they could demand for their land. Negotiations were among the leaders of the committee and the government.

On one side the agitation was going on at the selected site while on the other hand the government officials were working on other matters like finalising the area which was to be acquired then compensation to the people of this area and then proper planning of this town. The acquired area could be decided when they know about the size of the proposed town. On this issue again, there was debate between the Chief Engineer, P.L. Varma and A.L. Fletcher. Varma was optimistic and favoured a capital planned for five lakhs inhabitants.^{viii} He estimated the population of new capital to be 1½ lakhs which would increase to five lakhs with time. Fletcher was of positivistic approach and opposed the idea of a large town with five lakhs population.^{ix} He based his argument on the New Town Planning practice which

was going on after the Second World War in England to uproot the existing industry from the congested urban areas of London and rehabilitate it in a number of new cities. New towns did not grow as visualised by the Chief Engineer. Fletcher had proved this with the examples of Washington, New Delhi, Ottawa, Letchworth and Welwyn.^x The Chief Engineer asserted that they could not take the report of New Town Committee as their guide as conditions in Punjab were quite the reverse. This committee was constituted in England as a result of the policy of dispersal of industry from already congested areas such as London. There were towns where development had taken place within two decades only like in Russia, Japan and even in America. The chief engineer assured the growth of town with the applications which were received for the new capital.^{xi} Varma was in favour of providing industries in the capital which would provide vocational employment for the people. For Fletcher the scheme would fail if they wanted to make this new town administrative as well as industrial town.

Various proposals were prepared for the acquisition of land which had been changed many a time. The Deputy Commissioner presented a list of villages which scattered far away; Public Works Department showed an area of 8091 acres spread over twenty eight villages; on 17th April 1950 the Cabinet Committee proposed to acquire 7750 acres of 17 villages; on 27th April 1950 Chief Engineer showed a land of 7950 acres of 18 villages was to be acquired which was consisted of 15 whole and 3 villages partly. This plan, however, was revised once again.^{xii} In the next plan of 29th May 1950 land of 17 villages covering an area of 10970 acres was to be acquired for the capital site. Thus in each plan the number and area of the villages was different. The government had been preparing the rehabilitation scheme since 1948 for the displaced land owners from this site. It recommended to give land for land as a majority of the people of these villages were agriculturists and they wanted to continue with the same occupation.^{xiii}

The non-agriculturists who were skilled artisans were to be provided work in the construction work in the capital. The displaced people could be provided evacuee houses of the Muslims which were left during the partition.^{xiv} During the survey of these houses, it was revealed that most of these were not suitable for habitation as they had been damaged. It was suggested to provide building materials to the oustees or gave cash compensation so that they could build houses in the villages in which they were allotted land. It was also recommended that the government could build model villages for them. These were only suggestions and the compensation in actual practice was yet to be held. Tehsildars and Patwaris had prepared the

records in detail about the land available in Ambala district which could be provided to the oustees. They tried to provide land in Kharar tehsil only so that the oustees did not go much far away from this area. A survey was conducted for the land belonging to Maharaja of Faridkot, Sardar Amrao Singh of Manauli, Kanwar Ranjor Singh of Nahan and Rana Bikram Singh who hold land in Kharar Tehsil.

The construction of a town from scratch need policies for different aspects concerned with the development of the town like provisions of public amenities and services as water supply, drainage, maintenance of open spaces, electricity. The government had conducted various surveys on the selected site for all these purposes. Since the inception of the idea the government officials discuss about the planner for the new town, process for his selection through international competition, by demanding suggestions from prominent planners or by sending officials to western countries. On this issue, there was contradiction between Nehru and Punjab government officials. The first idea was left as it was very extravagant. The sub-committee on capital had decided to send Varma to U.K. for selecting the planners. The Prime Minister did not agree on this issue as he felt that such selected town planner would not have the knowledge of the society and other aspects of the life in this country necessary for the planning.^{xv} On Nehru's recommendation Thapar met Koiengsberger and Albert Mayer who were in India at that time. Punjab Government engaged Mayer in December 1949 who would plan the capital with the help of provincial planners. It would be an opportunity for local engineers to gain experience in town planning as Britishes did not provide such training schools in India. Mayer started work on this project immediately and prepared a plan in May 1950.^{xvi} Thapar and Varma opined that they required two prominent architects for the detailed planning and designing of the main buildings. Nehru did not like this idea again and rejected this demand. But he had to agree to send P.N. Thapar and P.L. Varma to Europe when Nowicki had died. By December 1950, they had signed contract with Le Corbusier, Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew and Pierre Jeanneret. Le Corbusier introduced his own ideas although he had been hired to execute Mayer's Plan.^{xvii}

There were two other important issues concerned with the capital that also needed the government's consideration. These were the legal issues and financial problems, which actually resulted in the delay of the 'Capital Project'. The government was conscious to formalise the law, under which land would be acquired. These laws had to be in favour of the people who were to be displaced for the sake of the capital. For the acquisition of land three

acts were considered namely the Act XVII of 1947, Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and East Punjab Requisitioning of Immovable Property (Temporary Powers) Act, 1948.^{xviii} The government did not want to apply the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 as it would create problems for compensation, therefore they had to enact various laws to legalise the development and control of the new capital.^{xix}

The later act was considered more suitable for acquisition when the government decided to give land for land as compensation to the displaced land owners for the first phase. From 1955 onwards all land for the city had been acquired under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. The East Punjab Government issued an ordinance under the title 'The Land Control (East Punjab Capital) Ordinance of 1949' for maintaining the homogeneity of planning of a town and to control the development operations in the area. For the legal control of the city the Capital of Punjab (Development and Regulation) Act 1952 and the Punjab New Capital (Periphery Control) Act of 1952 were passed. Building Rules and Chandigarh (Sale and Site) Rules, Tree Preservation Order and Advertisement Control Order also passed in 1952. Various other bye laws were discussed to be implemented in the city for better rules and regulations.

There were financial obstacles in the way of establishing the capital which could only be removed on the assurance of help from the Central Government and the Capital Project was eventually taken in hand. There was controversy between Punjab government officials, Officer on Special Duty and the Chief Engineer. Officer on Special Duty, A.L. Fletcher prepared the heads of expenditure for the development of a town which were based on the second interim report of the New Town Committee. Varma pondered that certain items were not applicable in the case of East Punjab capital.^{xx} The expenditure on the new capital was divided into two parts of productive, expenses on development works and un-productive on the government buildings. On these bases, various estimates had been prepared by the Financial Commissioner, Chief Engineer with consultation to the other officials. The estimates also varied as the acquired area varied with time. The first estimate was made for the acquirement and development of 50 square miles for which 17.5 crores were required.^{xxi} Then an estimate was prepared for an area of 8000 acres which cost 9.89 crores and in another it was estimated to 11.4 crores.^{xxii} Fletcher suggested to take the advice of New Town Committee for estimating the costs of the new capital that had based its calculations on the

1939 prices increased by 15 percent. In the same way the income had also assessed on the basis of land utilisation proposals.

Although the scheme was considered as self supporting in the case of productive works but during the initial stages it was essential that the government made investment in the project. The Punjab Government found incapable to meet the expenses on account of extremely limited resources of the state. Punjab had applied for grant of loan from the central government. A High Power Committee was set up under the Chairman of Gopalswami Ayangar to advice the Central Ministry of Rehabilitation on rehabilitation schemes. In his recommendations, Thapar suggested that this grant could be used for giving loan for building purposes and for making building advances to the displaced persons both for building houses and shops.^{xxiii} The High Power Committee had decided in January 1950 to give Rs. one crore at the interest of 3½ percent every year for three financial years as a loan. It was repayable in 20 annual instalments.^{xxiv} The central government gave this loan on two conditions; the first was that the amount of Rs. 1 crore would be spend on the provision of houses and employment of displaced persons on the site of the new capital. The second condition was that the Punjab Government should provide an equal sum during the year from their own resources for the building of the new capital.

The Secretary to government Punjab requested to the central government that this amount should be considered as a grant and not as a loan.^{xxv} He argued that it was not only the responsibility of East Punjab to finance this scheme but this financing should be the responsibility of the centre also. The partition of India was in the interest of the whole country and led to the loss of Lahore. It was demanded that the expenditure on the construction of essential government buildings for the administration should incurred from both central and state sources in equal shares. Chandigarh was constructed partly with national funds as part of the first three five year plans. The estimated expenditure for the first phase amounted to Rs. 17.44 crores which had increased to Rs. 25.37 crores due to the merger of PEPSU with Punjab which created additional demands for office and residential accommodation. In the first five year plan of 1951-56 Rs. 12.56 crores was sanctioned for the expenditure on the capital project.^{xxvi} This amount had come from different sources like the Rehabilitation Ministry, the Planning Commission and the State government.

CONCLUSION

Chandigarh came into reality as a capital of Punjab after sorting out all these issues. A number of adjustments had been made at the government level. It was outcome of the efforts of a number of individuals. The major opponents of this idea were the centre government and the local people who would have to leave their houses for the sake of a new city. The former opposition was on the basis of scarcity of finances after the independence of India. The later had no importance of a new capital. When these obstacles were sorted out, other issues came into front in the way of making of Chandigarh such as selection of the site for the city, controversies over the size of the city between Fletcher and Varma, selection of planners and finally the budget. However, all these issues overcome after discussions and with the policies according to the situations. The new capital was seen as a way to economic progress, development of urbanisation in the state, a source of inspiration for the future and a psychological balm to the people of Punjab and the nation as well.

REFERENCES

ⁱ Nehru. Letter to the Premier of East Punjab. August 13, 1949.

ⁱⁱ For details see: Dr Manveer Kaur. Urban Development in Post independence India: A Case Study of Chandigarh. PhD Thesis. Panjab University Chandigarh. 2015. 44-48.

ⁱⁱⁱ A note prepared by the Deputy Commissioner, Ambala on 10.8. 1950 for the meeting of the Capital Sub Committee of the Cabinet held on 14th August 1950.

^{iv} M.S. Randhawa, Deputy Commissioner of Ambala. Letter to P.N. Thapar, Financial Commissioner of East Punjab. 17 May 1949.1-5. See also: A copy of representation submitted by Joginder Singh to the Punjab Government. 1-2.

^v For details see: Dr Manveer Kaur. Urban Development in Post Independence India. 51-57.

^{vi} Interview with Nirmal Singh, a resident of Nagla village and now living in Saneta village of Mohali district.

^{vii} Interviews with Dr. Shamsheer Singh, Prem Singh and Angrej Singh Badheri who were now residing in Lakhnaur and Saneta villages of Mohali district.

^{viii} Notes by P.N. Thapar on 21 July 1950 and P.L. Varma, Chief Engineer of the Capital Project on 9 August 1950.

^{ix} A.L. Fletcher. 'A Note on the New Capital' January 1949.

^x For details discussion between A.L. Fletcher and P.N. Thapar see: Dr Manveer Kaur.

Urban Development in Post Independence India. 59-62.

^{xi} Note on Appendix A of the agenda for Sub Committee's meeting to be held on 3 December 1948.

^{xii} A note prepared by the Deputy Commissioner, Ambala on 10.8. 1950 for the meeting of the Capital Sub Committee of the Cabinet held on 14th August 1950.

^{xiii} Meeting of the Chandigarh Capital Project Control Board on 17 July 1958.

^{xiv} Report of the Sub Committee on the Compensation and Rehabilitation of the Land Owners of the site of the New Capital 1948. Appendix C.

^{xv} Minutes of an emergency meeting of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on capital held on Sunday 25th December, 1949 at Barnes Court.

^{xvi} For details on the selection and working of planners see. Dr Manveer Kaur. Urban Development in Post Independence India. 69-70.

^{xvii} P.N.Thapar. Telegram to the Chief Minister, Punjab December 3, 1950.

^{xviii} Copy of Resolution No. 5 dated 13-9-1948 and Memorandum on Acquisition placed on 14-10-1948.

^{xix} Agenda for the Sub-Committee Meeting to be held on 3rd December 1948. Appendix E.

^{xx} P.L. Varma. A Note on the Acquisition and Development Costs. P. 36. For more details see: Dr Manveer Kaur. Urban Development in Post Independence India. 80-81.