

From Regional Commander to Imperial Figure: Reviewing Zorawar Singh's Contribution to the Rise of the Dogra State

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Abstract

This review article summarises the literature on the role of Zorawar Singh in the development of the Dogra State in its military strategies, political influence, historical impact, and regional politics in order to fill gaps in the context of his multifaceted contribution to state formation in the Himalayas of the 19th century. The purpose of the review was to examine the knowledge of his military strategies, political impact, historical impacts, regional politics, and social-political changes. The interdisciplinary studies that used archival research and historiographical critique were systematically analysed to incorporate the military, political, and socio-cultural viewpoints. Results have shown that the novel high-altitude military operations of Zorawar Singh played a central role in the expansion of the territory despite logistics problems; his political destiny, which was mainly military, helped him internalize Dogra and define its relationship with the neighbouring states and Britain. This review highlights

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the importance of military, political, and social analysis to understand the influence of Zorawar Singh on Himalayan geopolitics and contributes to modern discussions about state formation in the region and the politics of the border.

Keywords: *Zorawar Singh, Dogra State Formation, Himalayan Military Campaigns, Frontier Expansion, 19th-Century Jammu and Kashmir History*

Introduction

The contribution of Zorawar Singh to the development of the Dogra State has become a challenging topic to research because of its significant impact on the political and military situation in the northern Indian subcontinent at the beginning of the 19th century (Crowden, 2023; Huttenback, 1961). This historical development is associated with the unification of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the ensuing rise of the Dogra dynasty characterized by martial expeditions of Zorawar Singh in Ladakh and western Tibet (Prinsep, 2017; Tu et al., 2022). The study has a significant practical and theoretical value, given that it sheds light on the establishment of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is an area of long-standing geopolitical complexity and cultural heterogeneity (Bhutani, 2000; Pir & Sheikh, 2016). Interestingly, the military campaigns of Zorawar Singh expanded the Dogra influence into the difficult conditions of the Himalayan regions and predetermined the formation of the regional politics and state borders that remain in the modern world (Hutchison & Vogel, 2008; Sa & Bg, 2016).

Although a lot has been documented in history, there is one particular issue that has remained unresolved in the full development of the history of Zorawar Singh, especially his military tactics, political influence and historical impact when compared with the overall development of the Dogra state (Puri, 1982; Singh, 1971). The literature gap currently observed is the lack of understanding of how his military adventures were combined with the political process of uniting, as accomplished by his successors, in particular, Maharaja Gulab Singh (Huttenback, 1961; Singh, 2022). There are also controversies over the connotation of the campaigns of Zorawar Singh, whether it was a strategic build-up or an overambitious attempt that resulted in expensive losses (Crowden, 2023; Singh, 1971). The consequences of this gap are serious, as they influence the understanding of Dogra legitimacy and historical accounts of power relations in the region (Pye & Schofield, 2000; Sinha, 2024).

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The three main constructs that this review conceptualizes include military strategy as the tactical and logistical choices used by Zorawar Singh (Crowden, 2023; Huttenback, 1961); political influence as the ability to influence governance and territorial control in the Dogra polity (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Pir & Sheikh, 2016); and historical impact as how these measures continue to shape the politics of the region and state-building (Bhutani, 2000). The two notions are connected, where the success of military supports the political power, which also determine historical trends (Moran, 2019; Wang, 2023). This is how the comprehensive analysis of the contributions of Zorawar Singh to the rise of the Dogra State will be conducted.

This systematic review aims to critically review the existing literature on the topic of the military and political contributions by Zorawar Singh to seal the gaps in existing knowledge by combining the different opinions and historical evidence (Andrabi, 2017; Crowden, 2023). This review is valuable because it helps clear up disputed meanings and puts the legacy of Zorawar Singh in the context of the geopolitical and cultural context of the formation of the Dogra State (Bhat, 2020, 2024). It seeks to offer a subtle insight that enlightens historical knowledge as well as regional studies today.

This review has used an inclusive approach that includes a critical review of primary and secondary materials, with the inclusion criteria being that of materials that cover military aspects, political aspects, and historical aspects of the role of Zorawar Singh (Bray, 2008; Rai, 2009). The results are arranged in the form of thematic discussions, which go through the military approach to the political unification of the country, and historical implications, making it easier to develop a consistent historiography that indicates the intricacy of the topic discussed (Dar & Negaroo, 2015; Jahangir & Shah, 2022).

Purpose and Scope of the Review

Statement of Purpose

This report aims to review the available literature on the topic of the role of Zorawar Singh in the emergence of the Dogra State, the military policies, political influence, historical contribution, and local politics. To bring together a comprehensive comprehension of how his military conquests and political intrigues helped to ascertain and cement the Dogra authority in the Himalayan

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region. One of the advantages of this review is that it puts the strategic innovations and leadership of Zorawar Singh into a broader context of geopolitical developments in the 19th century South Asia. It will attempt to describe his role in the politics of the area, how the Dogra State was established, and what socio-political outcomes ensued, thereby bridging gaps in the historiography and clarifying the existing perception of the establishment of the Himalayan states and border politics.

Objectives

- To evaluate current knowledge on Zorawar Singh's military strategies and their effectiveness in territorial expansion.
- Benchmarking of political influence exerted by Zorawar Singh within the Dogra dynasty and neighbouring powers.
- Identification and synthesis of historical impacts resulting from Zorawar Singh's campaigns on regional politics.
- To deconstruct the role of Zorawar Singh in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- To compare socio-political and administrative actions during Dogra rule influenced by Zorawar Singh's military and administrative actions.

Methodology of Literature Selection

Transformation of Query

The first research question, which is the significance of Zorawar Singh in the rise of the Dogra State with the focus on his military strategies, political influence, historical impact and local politics, was logically divided into the series of more specific search statements that enhanced the efficiency and scope of the literature review process. By converting an overarching question to several specific questions, it is possible to cover a wide area of the topic as well as find the necessary scholarship effectively. This is a systematic process that makes it less likely to miss specialised or terminology-based study, besides making sure that every search string corresponds to a different thematic aspect of the research problem.

Based on the main research question, the thematic search queries were the following:

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1. The role of Zorawar Singh in the development of the Dogra State with specific reference to the military strategies and the practices of the frontier warfare.
2. The political power, historical effect, and the political climate of the region of Zorawar Singh and the Dogra power solidification.
3. Other socio-economic effects of the Dogra rule in Jammu and Kashmir, such as the regional interactions influenced by military build-up, under the leadership of leaders like Zorawar Singh.

The socio-political changes and the reform movements witnessed under Dogra rule (Jammu and Kashmir) are studied concerning the military policies of Zorawar Singh and their ramifications for the political organisation of the region.

It is a multi-query approach, which contributes to the orderly and thematic organisation of the literature review, including military history, political consolidation, socio-economic change, and regional geopolitics in a single analytical framework.

Screening Papers

The transformed search queries were then applied in each case with the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to be used in order to retrieve a narrow and relevant body of literature. This methodical screening exercise was done on a large academic database, which facilitated comprehensive coverage of the scholarly outputs. The use of the criteria led to the selection of four primary studies that were closely related to the thematic focus of the review. In order to make the literature base more complete and thorough, a citation chaining strategy was used to find more related works.

Backward Citation Chaining: In case of each core study, the reference list was carefully reviewed to determine previous underlining research that influenced the theoretical framework, research methodology, or historical interpretation of the study. This backward tracing made sure that the seminal and background works were not forgotten and this placed the review in the greater scholarly lineage of the subject matter.

Forward Citation Chaining: In addition, forward citation tracking was conducted to identify more recent publications that have cited each core study.

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This approach facilitated the identification of emerging debates, subsequent empirical validations, critical reinterpretations, and methodological developments, thereby capturing the evolving trajectory of scholarship related to Zorawar Singh, Dogra state formation, and Himalayan regional politics.

Together, these procedures enhanced the rigour, breadth, and temporal depth of the literature selection process and identified 29 more papers.

Relevance scoring and sorting

After the database search and citation chaining processes, 33 candidate studies were assembled, among which 4 papers were found using structured search queries and 29 papers were found using backward and forward citation chaining. Relevance-ranking process was then undertaken to narrow down on studies that will best fit the research objectives. All the papers were measured in the context of the central analytical aspects of the review: military policies, political influence, historical effects, and regional political processes related to Zorawar Singh and the formation of the Dogra State. Thematic relevance, analytical depth, historical rigour, and contribution to the understanding of state formation in the Himalayan setting were used as criteria to rank. The evaluation concluded that each of the 33 studies was very relevant to the research question. Based on this, the ultimate set of works to be revised included 33 very relevant academic articles, which were the basis of evidence of thematic synthesis and interpretation.

Results

Summary of the Studies

This part charts out the research territory of the literature on the role of Zorawar Singh in the development of the Dogra State, with respect to military policies, political influence, historical effects, and local politics. The studies reviewed can be divided into historical studies, political evaluations, and socio-cultural research, which are mainly concentrated on the 19th-century Himalayan region, focusing on Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh. Interdisciplinary approaches exist in the form of methodologies, which include the archival research and historiographical critique, and socio-political narrative analyses. This comparative synthesis will answer the research questions by outlining the military innovations of Zorawar Singh and his political manoeuvres, and their long-term impact on the territorial state building and socio-political evolution.

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Table 1 Summary of the Studies

Study	Military Strategy Effectiveness	Political Influence Scope	Historical Impact Assessment	Regional Political Dynamics	Socio-Political Transformation
(Crowden, 2023)	Challenged by harsh terrain and logistics, innovative supply forts used	Limited direct political influence; military focus predominant	Defeat at Taklakot but strategic territorial gains in Ladakh	The campaign altered border control and the regional power balance	Campaign hardships affected local populations and military morale
(Puri, 1982)	Military conquest pivotal in Ladakh annexation	Significant role in Dogra expansion into Ladakh	Annexation led to uneasy integration of Ladakh	Regional alliances, integrating ethnic tensions, persisted post-conquest	Cultural and ethnic tensions persisted post-conquest
(Pir & Shiekh, 2016)	Military and diplomatic successes foundational for state formation	Influential in the Dogra dynasty's consolidation and British relations	Established Jammu and Kashmir's territorial boundaries	Geopolitical restructuring under Dogra and British influence	Created a heterogeneous state with complex administrative challenges

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(Singh, 2022)	Military campaigns instrumental in territorial acquisition	Manoeuvring facilitated British support for the Dogra state	The transfer of territories shaped the independent Dogra state	British-Dogra relations redefined governance	Socio-political conditions influenced by British policies
(Huttenback, 1961)	Military actions in Ladakh are critical amid regional instability	Limited direct political role; focus on military frontier control	Campaigns influenced Ladakh's precarious political status	Conflict with Tibet and neighbouring powers intensified	Military presence affected local governance and stability
(Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020)	Military legacy under-pinned Dogra political dominance	Zorawar Singh's role is recognised in the early Dogra political structures	Campaigns had a lasting impact on the Dogra state's political evolution	Regional politics shaped by Dogra-British interactions	Political institutions evolved under Dogra rule
(Andrabi, 2017)	Military conquest initiated Dogra rule, but	Political influence extended to socio-economic exploitation	Long-term socio-economic exploitation	Regional dissent and unrest emerged	Harsh taxation and policies led to social decline

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(Sa & Bg, 2016)	Military consolidation preceded administrative reforms	Influence expanded through governance reforms	Established administrative revenue systems	Regional governance is structured under the Dogra authority	Socio-economic reforms aimed at stabilising the peasantry
(Jahangir & Shah, 2022)	Military dominance enforced Dogra control in Pooch	Political repression sparked social and political movements	Resistance movements shaped the regional political landscape	Conflicts between Dogra rulers and Muslim subjects intensified	Social movements reflected political grievances
(Bhat, 2020)	Military campaigns set the stage for political repression	Marginalisation of Muslims under Dogra rule	Campaigns contributed to Muslim political awakening	Regional politics marked by communal tensions	Emergence of Muslim political identity during the Dogra era
(Bhat, 2024)	The military foundation enabled feudal Dogra dominance	Political opposition grew against the Dogra autocracy	Campaigns indirectly led to reform efforts and unrest	Regional politics evolved with the rising political consciousness	Socio-political reforms emerged from popular resistance

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(Bhutani, 2000)	Military conquests integrated Kashmir into Dogra domain	Subordination to British limited Dogra autonomy	Campaigns redefined Kashmir's political affiliations	Regional alliances shifted under British-Dogra dynamics	Socio-political structures reflected colonial influence
(Rai, 2009)	Military history intertwined with colonial archaeology to legitimize Dogra rule	Political use of archaeology influenced cultural-political narratives	Campaigns influenced historical interpretations	Regional identity contested through historical narratives	Socio-political identity shaped by colonial and Dogra agendas
(Bray, 2008)	Military-imposed labor systems persisted under Dogra rule	Political control maintained through forced labor policies	Campaigns reinforced Dogra authority over Ladakh	Regional governance included coercive labor practices	Socio-economic conditions marked by exploitation and resistance
(Schofield, 1996)	Military conquest pivotal in Kashmir's transition	Political shifts from Sikh to Dogra rule analyzed	Campaigns set stage for prolonged conflict	Regional politics influenced by successive regimes	Socio-political instability rooted in military-political changes

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(Dar & Negaroo, 2015)	Military dominance met with silent peasant resistance	Political repression led to covert social protests	Campaigns provoked non-violent resistance forms	Regional governance challenged by grassroots movements	Socio-political transformation through everyday resistance
(Wang, 2023)	Military campaigns part of broader state formation processes	Political consolidation linked to institutional development	Campaigns contributed to Himalayan state transition	Regional politics shaped by religious and economic factors	Socio-political structures evolved with state consolidation
(Moran, 2019)	Military actions influenced borderland state sformations	Political roles included familial and regent influences	Campaigns affected communal identities and border politics	Regional dynamics shaped by border-making practices	Socio-political identities formed through state and family ties
(Sminova, 2024)	Military history contextualized within broader historiography	Political narratives evolved through historical source analysis	Campaigns reinterpreted in changing historical perspectives	Regional politics understood through multi-source	Socio-political identity linked to historiographical shifts

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(Bhat et al., 2023)	Military imposed Sikh Empire dynamics	Political use of campaigns indirectly influenced territorial gains	Campaigns of Sikh Empire impacted Dogra relations	Regional politics intertwined with Sikh and Dogra interactions	Socio-political transformation through religious-economic institutions
(MGregor, 2010)	Military history of Sikhs contextualized Dogra emergence	Political developments in Punjab affected Dogra state	Campaigns linked to broader Sikh political history	Regional alliances influenced by Sikh-Dogra interactions	Socio-political culture reflected Sikh and Dogra influences
(Prinsep, 2017)	Military operations under Ranjit Singh set Dogra stage	Political life of Sikh ruler impacted Dogra ascendancy	Campaigns contributed to territorial and political shifts	Regional politics shaped by Sikh military campaigns	Socio-political conditions influenced by Sikh governance
(Parah & Malviya, 2024)	Military governance under Sikh rule preceded Dogra	Political conditions under Sikh rule influenced Dogra policies	Campaigns under Sikh rule affected Kashmir's political fabric	Regional transition from Sikh to Dogra control	Socio-political impact of Sikh administration on Kashmir

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(Singh, 1971)	Military role in Anglo-Sikh War critical for Dogra rise	Political manoeuvring during war shaped Dogra state creation	Campaigns influenced territorial dismemberment and state formation	Regional politics marked by war-time alliances and betrayals	Socio-political consequences of war on Dogra legitimacy
(Pye & Schofield, 2000)	Military conflicts central to Kashmir's contested status	Political history traced through successive military struggles	Campaigns contributed to enduring regional conflict	Regional politics shaped by India-Pakistan rivalry	Socio-political instability linked to military confrontations
(Gul & Khan, 2023)	Military patronage supported religious institutional growth	Political use of trusts reinforced Dogra authority	Campaigns indirectly influenced socio-religious structures	Regional politics intertwined with religious administration	Socio-political transformation through religious-economic institutions
(Kaur & Sharma, 2018)	Military and cultural influences merged in Dogra art	Political identity shaped by Sikh and Dogra cultural exchange	Campaigns reflected in artistic and cultural transformations	Regional interactions	Socio-political identity expressed through visual culture

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(Hutchison & Vogel, 2008)	Military history of hill states contextualized Dogra expansion	Political relations among hill states affected Dogra rise	Campaigns influenced regional state formation and alliances	Regional politics marked by treaties and conflicts	Socio-political structures evolved with Dogra dominance
(Huttenback, 1975)	Military biography of Gulab Singh highlights strategic acumen	Political career traced from soldier to ruler	Campaigns pivotal in Dogra state establishment	Regional politics shaped by Gulab Singh's leadership	Socio-political transformation linked to Gulab's rule
(Sinha, 2024)	Military and political rebellions shaped frontier relations	Political collaboration and resistance influenced Dogra state	Campaigns affected integration into Indian Union	Regional politics marked by rebellion and alliance shifts	Socio-political consequences of insurgencies

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Military Strategy Effectiveness

An overview of the literature reviewed has shown that there is a considerable amount of scholarship that points to the tactical innovation as well as the limitations defining the military leadership of Zorawar Singh. One of the ten reports that his campaigns were characterized by innovative and adjustive tactics that would fit a mountainous terrain, at the same time, had to face serious logistical and environmental obstacles, especially in a high-altitude warfare (Bray, 2008; Crowden, 2023; Huttenback, 1961). Moreover, seven of the studies highlight the strategic value of these campaigns in supporting the expansion of the territory, particularly in Ladakh and western Tibet, saying that the value in terms of geopolitics in the long run did not decrease despite some military losses (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Pir & Sheikh, 2016; Puri, 1982).

Scope of Political Influence

Examination of existing literature also brings out the political aspect of the contribution of Zorawar Singh in the formation of Dogra state. His political power is described in nine works as mostly military based, but even though he did not have a direct impact on the court politics, the campaigns he participated in were decisive in terms of consolidating the territory and expanding the Dogra authority (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Crowden, 2023; Huttenback, 1961). Moreover, six of them highlight his contribution to the development of relations with the neighboring states and the British, indicating that due to his diplomatic activity and military intervention, the further processes of the Dogra state formation and political stabilization in the region became possible (Pir & Sheikh, 2016).

Assessment of Historical Impact

A large part of the literature focuses on the long-term historical implications of the military campaigns of Zorawar Singh. Eleven studies agree on the fact that his expeditions contributed significantly to the territorial formation of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, thus forming a structural basis of the formation of the Dogra State (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Pir & Sheikh, 2016; Puri, 1982). Simultaneously, six articles also indicate that, despite the fact that his military actions had been used in the process of the territorial growth and the political unification, they also led to the instability of the regional situation and the appearance of the long-term contradictions (Andrabi, 2017; Crowden, 2023).

Dynamics of Regional Political

The literature also highlights the overall regional politics of the campaigns by Zorawar Singh. Eight books show that his military operations drastically transformed the regional alliance and governing systems which helped in integrating different territories under Dogra rule (Bhutani, 2000; Pir & Sheikh, 2016; Puri, 1982). Furthermore, five sources highlight the issue of intricate interaction of Dogra, British, and Sikh, as well as neighboring forces and state that changing alliances and decrees affected the results of his campaigns (Moran, 2019; Pye & Schofield, 2000).

Socio-Political Transformation

Another aspect of the reviewed literature is the socio-political changes that were related to Dogra rule in the context of military expansion. According to ten studies, significant administrative and economic reforms were the consequences of military conquest and reshaped the structure of governance and revenue collection throughout the region (Andrabi, 2017; Bhat, 2020; Sa & Bg, 2016). Moreover, seven articles underline the rise of political awareness and the rise of social movements among suppressed groups, especially Muslim ones, under Dogra rule, and associate these changes with the processes of socio-political transformation and opposition (Bhat, 2020, 2024; Jahangir & Shah, 2022).

Critical Analysis and Synthesis

The review of the literature on the contribution of Zorawar Singh to the emergence of the Dogra State gives a complex picture of his military policies, political sphere and influence in the historical context of 19th century geopolitics of the Himalayas. Although some studies praise his strategic novelty and conquest conquests, a certain variety of interpretations exists in the ways and extents to which his campaigns worked. The political aspects of his power are usually coupled with the further integration of the Dogra dynasty, but even literature can identify deficiencies in the incorporation of socio-political implications in the lives of the various communities residing in the area. Moreover, there are differences in the methodological approaches, as some of them focus on the archive materials, and the other ones are based on the narrative studies, which provides a restricted comprehension of the legacy of Zorawar Singh. This is a critical synthesis that assesses these themes based on the strengths and weaknesses of the major aspects of the available research.

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Table 2 *Critical Analysis*

Aspect	Strengths in Literature	Gaps / Weaknesses Identified
Military Strategies & Campaigns	Studies detail Zorawar Singh's bold Himalayan campaigns, strong logistics (supply forts), and adaptability to extreme terrain and climate.	Mostly narrative; limited analysis using military strategy frameworks. The Taklakot defeat is discussed descriptively, with little evaluation of alternative strategies or internal command issues.
Political Role in Dogra Expansion	Recognized as a key military force behind Dogra territorial consolidation and Gulab Singh's rise. Linked to wider diplomatic and administrative expansion.	His individual political agency is underplayed. Limited discussion on his dealings with neighbouring powers and Dogra–British political complexities.
Impact on Regional State Formation	His conquests are seen as shaping the territorial structure of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, influencing later administration and governance.	Focus remains state-centric; insufficient attention to local resistance, ethnic diversity, and long-term socio-political tensions in annexed regions.
British Imperial Context	Literature connects Dogra expansion with British strategic interests in the Himalayas, situating campaigns in imperial geopolitics.	Weak engagement with contested territorial transfers and military diplomacy during Anglo-Sikh conflicts; negotiation processes underexplored.
Socio-Political Transformations	Some works link his campaigns to later Dogra administrative reforms and state-building processes.	Adverse socio-cultural and economic effects on local populations receive limited multi-ethnic perspective and critical analysis.

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Methodology & Sources	Uses archival records, regional histories, and geopolitical perspectives, offering a strong empirical base.	Heavy reliance on colonial sources; limited critical historiography and source bias evaluation.
Legacy & Historiography	Acknowledges his dual legacy — celebrated military hero and symbol of Dogra expansionism; placed within Himalayan border politics.	Interpretations often polarized by nationalist or regional bias; lack of balanced reassessment of his long-term historical role.

Thematic Review of Literature

The available literature on Zorawar Singh and his contribution towards the establishment of Dogra State widely centre on his military policies, political role and the historical and geographical effects of his campaigns. The focus has been on such central themes as the examination of his original military strategies in rugged Himalayan conditions, his political gambles with the Dogra dynasty as well as the neighboring powers and the resultant development of the socio-political landscape of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Researchers also highlight socio-political changes during the Dogra rule, which was pre-conditioned by the Sikh rule and the British colonial policy. Further, overlapping themes are the memory of the Dogra rule and how the regional identities were integrated into it by conflict, negotiation and cultural assimilation.

Table 3 Thematic Review of Literature

Theme	Frequency	Brief Description
Military Strategies and Campaigns of Zorawar Singh	7/33 Papers	AHighlights his innovative mountain warfare, use of supply forts, and high-altitude tactics. His 1841 Tibet campaign ended in defeat at Taklakot, but later Dogra victories sustained the military relevance of his campaigns.

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Political Influence and Dogra Power Consolidation	7/33 Papers	His campaigns enabled Ladakh's annexation and supported Gulab Singh's rise, contributing to Dogra state formation amid Sikh decline and British involvement.
Geopolitical Impact on the Himalayan Region	7/33 Papers	His expeditions reshaped Himalayan geopolitics, border dynamics, and regional power balances, influencing the later structure of Jammu and Kashmir as a princely state.
Socio-Political Changes under Dogra Rule	6/33 Papers	Dogra expansion led to administrative reforms but also social inequalities, taxation pressures, and resistance movements that shaped later political consciousness.
Interaction with Sikh Empire and British Powers	5/33 Papers	Dogra rise occurred amid Sikh-British power struggles, with territorial transfers and shifting alliances shaping regional politics.
Regional Identity and Cultural Integration	4/33 Papers	Integration of diverse regions like Ladakh created cultural and religious tensions, influencing identity politics and governance patterns.
Legacy and Historical Memory of Zorawar Singh	3/33 Papers	Portrayed as both a heroic military leader and a controversial expansionist, with interpretations shaped by regional memory and border politics.

Chronological Review of Literature

The literature on Zorawar Singh and the rise of the Dogra State spans from detailed historical accounts of early Himalayan politics to contemporary analyses of geopolitical and social-cultural impacts. Early works focus on the military and political exploits of Dogra leaders, especially the consolidation of power under Gulab Singh and the aftermath of Sikh and British influence.

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Mid to late 20th-century studies delve into the socio-political dynamics under Dogra rule, including resistance movements and administrative reforms. Recent scholarship examines the legacy of Dogra military and administrative structures in frontier regions, advocating for balanced civil-military relations and investment in local governance capacity.

Table 4 Chronological Review of Literature

Year Range	Research Focus	Brief Description
1960–1982	Foundational Historical Narratives	Early works provided biographical and military accounts of Gulab Singh and Zorawar Singh, explaining Dogra expansion and state formation within Himalayan geopolitics.
1996–2009	Political History & Colonial Context	Studies examined Dogra rule in relation to British colonial policies, socio-religious changes, regional integration, and emerging political identities.
2010–2017	Socio-Political Conditions & Resistance	Dogra rise occurred amid Sikh–British power struggles, with territorial transfers and shifting alliances shaping regional politics.
2018–2020	Political Administration & Regional Governance	Scholarship analyzed governance structures, British influence, and socio-cultural changes shaping Jammu and Kashmir’s political evolution.
2022–2024	Geopolitics & Borderland Studies	Recent studies link Dogra military campaigns with Himalayan border politics, territorial transfers, and their long-term impact on regional identity and power dynamics.

Agreement and Divergence Across Studies

There is broad consensus across studies that Zorawar Singh was a pivotal military leader whose campaigns significantly contributed to the territorial expansion and political consolidation of the Dogra State, especially in the Himalayan region. Researchers generally agree on the challenges faced in his military expeditions, including logistical difficulties and harsh climatic conditions. However, divergence arises in the assessment of his long-term political influence and the socio-political transformations under Dogra rule, with

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some emphasizing his foundational role and others highlighting subsequent developments beyond his era. The complexity of Dogra state formation is reflected in the varied interpretations, influenced by different historical foci, temporal scopes, and disciplinary approaches.

Table 5 *Agreement and Divergence Across Studies*

Criterion	Agreement	Divergence	Reason for Difference
Military Strategy Effectiveness	Recognized for bold campaigns, logistical skill, and early successes in Ladakh and Tibet despite harsh terrain.	Some stress his final defeat and death; others emphasize long-term territorial gains and Dogra consolidation.	Focus on short-term military outcome vs. long-term strategic impact.
Political Influence	Seen as a key military figure enabling Gulab Singh's rise and Dogra state formation.	Debate on whether his political role was secondary to Gulab Singh and British influence.	Individual military leadership vs. broader structural and diplomatic factors.
Historical Impact	Agreed that his campaigns shaped Dogra territorial boundaries in Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh.	Differences over his legacy beyond conquest—administrative and socio-political consequences debated.	Emphasis on military history vs. long-term socio-political analysis.
Regional Political Dynamics	Linked to Himalayan power struggles involving British, Sikh, and regional forces.	Some view him as central; others see him as one actor among many.	Multi-actor geopolitical context leads to varied interpretations.

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Socio-Political Transformations	Acknowledged role in laying foundations for Dogra administration and reforms.	Views differ: oppressive rule and resistance vs. administrative development and stability.	Differences in disciplinary approach, regional focus, and ideological perspectives.
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Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The developed results support the importance of military policy and logistical creativity in the formation of states in harsh landscapes, and the case of Zorawar Singh campaigns in the Himalayas is supportive. His attempts to use supply forts and to adapt to the high-altitude warfare also add to the military historiography of mountain warfare and expansion of frontiers (Crowden, 2023; Sa and Bg, 2016).

1. The review criticizes dichotomous accounts of Dogra state-building by emphasizing the multifaceted interaction between military power, political relations, and British rule, not by explaining Dogra dominance with references to military skills or British support (Pir & Sheikh, 2016; Singh, 1971).
2. The political impact of the Zorawar Singh and his successors is theorized as an experienced driver to integrate the ethnically and culturally diverse areas within a heterogeneous princely state, making theories of homogeneous nation-state formation complex and highlighting the importance of coercion and negotiating forces behind the politics of the borderlands (Bhat, 2020; Pir & Sheikh, 2016; Puri, 1982).
3. Theoretical frameworks are informed by the historical contribution of the Dogra rule, such as socio-political changes, and resistance movements, as well as the heritage of resistance in Muslim-majority states (Andrabi, 2017; Bhat, 2024; Dar & Negaroo, 2015). The literature enhances the knowledge about regional geopolitics by placing Dogra expansion in a broader context of Himalayan relations, such as Sikh demise and British imperial policies, thus broadening

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theoretical approaches to imperial borderland statecraft (Parah & Malviya, 2024; Tu et al., 2022).

4. Historical military operations of Zorawar Singh, particularly their impact on the formation of future regional wars and territorial conflicts with Tibet and China, offer empirical support to the hypothesis of historiography of military behavior with regard to the contemporary geopolitical tensions of the Himalayas (Crowden, 2023; Huttenback, 1961; Pye & Schofield, 2000).

Practical Implications

1. The experiences of the military logistics and frontier strategies of Zorawar Singh have a great impact on modern military planning and border security in mountainous areas and these aspects can be effectively learned through the experiences of supply chain resilience and acclimatization to harsh environments (Crowden, 2023; Sa & Bg, 2016).
2. The attested socio-economic effects of the Dogra rule, such as taxation policies and opposition movements, highlight the significance of the fair governance and culturally oriented development policies to avoid marginalization and unrest in multi-ethnic enclaves (Andrabi, 2017; Dar & Negaroo, 2015; Jahangir & Shah, 2022).
3. The historical discussion of the British-Dogra relations and territorial transfers is a critical background of the modern-day diplomatic negotiation and conflict resolution in Jammu and Kashmir, which focuses on the long-term implications of the decisions of the colonial era on the stability of the region (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Pir & Sheikh, 2016).
4. These results can guide existing policy discussions on governance and integration in ethnically diverse and geopolitically sensitive border regions, which means the inclination to include administrative frames (Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020; Moran, 2019; Pir & Sheikh, 2016).
5. The Dogra military and administrative system legacy provides a model of the contemporary state-building efforts in frontier areas, which promotes equal civil-military relationships and commitment into the local governance capacity (Moran, 2019; Sa & Bg, 2016).

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Table 6 *Limitations of the Studies*

Areas	Description	Papers having limitations
Geographic Bias	Number of studies on Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, often neglecting peripheral regions such as Poonch or Gilgit. This geographic concentration limits the external validity of findings, potentially overlooking diverse regional dynamics.	(Puri, 1982; Jahangir & Shah, 2022; Bray, 2008)
Historical Source Limitations	Several works rely heavily on colonial or early historical accounts, which may carry inherent biases or incomplete perspectives. This reliance constrains the methodological robustness and may skew interpretations of Zorawar Singh's role and Dogra state formation.	(Bhutani, 2000; Rai, 2009; Huttenback, 1975)
Political Bias and Interpretation	Interpretations of key figures like Gulab Singh and Zorawar Singh are often polarized, reflecting regional or political biases. Such partiality undermines balanced historiography and complicates objective assessment of their military and political influence.	(Singh, 1971; Singh, 2022)
Limited Focus on Military Strategies	Few studies provide detailed analysis of Zorawar Singh's military tactics and campaign logistics, restricting comprehensive understanding of his strategic innovations and their effectiveness in territorial expansion. This gap affects the completeness of military historiography.	(Crowden, 2023; Sa & Bg, 2016)
Insufficient Socio-Political Context	Some literature emphasizes political events or military transformations or the perspectives of local populations, limiting the depth of analysis regarding Dogra rule's broader impact.	(Andrabi, 2017; Bhat, 2020; Dar & Negaroo, 2015)

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Temporal Scope Constraints	Several studies concentrate on specific periods (e.g., Dogra rule post-1846 or Sikh rule pre-1846) without bridging transitions or long-term impacts, which restricts understanding of continuity and change in regional politics and state formation.	(Pir & Shiekh, 2016; Parah & Malviya, 2024; Bhat & Chowdhary, 2020)
Overreliance on Secondary Sources	A number of papers synthesize existing secondary literature without incorporating new primary archival research, which may perpetuate existing gaps and limit novel insights into Zorawar Singh’s historical impact.	(Sminova, 2024; Tu et al., 2022; MGreger, 2010)

Table 7 *Gaps in the Studies and Future Directions*

Areas	Description	Future Directions	Justification of the study	Priority of Research
Critical Analysis of Zorawar Singh’s military tactics	Existing studies describe his campaigns but lack comparative analysis with contemporary military doctrines and alternative strategies.	Conduct detailed comparative military analyses of Zorawar Singh’s tactics against 19th-century warfare doctrines; explore alternative strategic options and internal dissent during campaigns.	Understanding tactical effectiveness beyond narrative accounts will clarify his military innovation and failures, especially in the Tibet campaign (Crowden, 2023).	High

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Direct political agency of Zorawar Singh	Research often subsumes his role under broader Gulab Singh's narrative, underrepresenting his individual political influence.	Investigate archival and regional sources to delineate Zorawar Singh's direct political actions and influence within Dogra court and diplomacy.	Clarifying his nuanced role in Dogra state formation will provide a more balanced understanding of his contributions(Pir & Shiekh, 2016; Singh, 2022).	High
Socio-political impact on subjug-ated communities	Limited focus on the experiences and resistance of ethnic and religious groups affected by Dogra military conquests.	Employ ethnographic and social history methods to document the socio-political consequences of Dogra rule on Ladakhi Buddhists, Kashmiri Muslims, and other marginalized groups.	Addressing this gap will balance state-centric narratives and highlight local resistance and identity formation under Dogra rule (Andrabi, 2017; Bhat, 2020).	High
Integra-tion challenges of annexed territories	Insufficient exploration of the long-term integration and governance challenges in culturally distinct regions.	Analyze administ-rative records and local histories to explore integration strategies, resistance, and human cost of military expansion.	Understanding dynamics key to explaining regional stability and coherence post-Dogra state formation (Bhutani, 2000).	Medium

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Socio-economic consequences of military-imposed labor systems	Insufficient analysis of the continuity and change in forced labor (begar) systems under Dogra military administration	Investigate archival trace the evolution of corvée labor and its socio-economic impact on local populations.	Understanding exploitation reveals the human cost of military expansion and governance (Bray, 2008).	Low
Comparative study of Dogra	Lack of comprehensive comparative studies	Analyze Sikh and Dogra military records to compare	This contextualization will clarify the	Low
and Sikh military-political strategies	analyzing Dogra strategies in relation to Sikh or British influences.	this will deepen understanding of interplay between military power and socio-political stability(Gull & Khan, 2023).	This contextualization will clarify the	Low
Role in British-Dogra relations and diplomacy	Under-explored complexities of Zorawar Singh's involvement in negotiations with the British and neighboring powers.	Examine British colonial archives and Dogra correspondence to reconstruct Zorawar Singh's diplomatic role during transfers and Anglo-Sikh conflicts.	This will clarify his contribution to state legitimacy and territorial acquisitions under British suzerainty(Pir & Shiekh, 2016; c, 2022; Singh, 1971).	Medium

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Historio-graphical biases and narrative fragmentation	Existing literature shows polarized portrayals influenced by nationalist or regional biases, lacking integrated frameworks.	Develop interdisciplinary historical studies that critically assess biases and synthesize diverse narratives on Zorawar Singh.	A balanced historiographical essential for objective understanding and reconciling conflicting narratives (Singh, 1971; Pye & Schofield, 2000).	Medium
Military and political interplay in frontier regions	Limited research on how military campaigns influenced frontier political dynamics and local governance.	Conduct case studies on frontier regions like Poonch and Gilgit to explore military-political interactions and their effects on local governance.	Understanding labour, labour mobilization	Medium
Cultural and religious institutional impacts of military conquests and Sikh military-political strategies	Limited exploration of how military campaigns influenced religious institutions and cultural identity under Dogra rule. Situating Zorawar strategies, political maneuvers, and their influence on regional power shifts.	Study the role of military patronage in religious trusts and cultural production to assess their impact on political and social functions. and regional accommodations in annexed regions.	This will deepen understanding of the interplay between military power and socio-religious structures(Gull & Khan, 2023) (Kaur & Sharma, 2018).	Low

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Overall Synthesis and Conclusion

A general literature on the role of Zorawar Singh in the establishment of the Dogra State demonstrates an intricate interaction of innovations in militarism, political unification, and regional change on the unstable Himalayan landscape of the nineteenth century. Zorawar Singh stands out as a first of its kind military leader whose war efforts, which were defined by bold logistical preparations and acclimatization with the harsh Himalayan landscape, played a major role in extending Dogra control over territories, specifically, the annexation of Ladakh and the campaigns into western Tibet. His tactical resourcefulness is evident in his ability to strategically use supply forts and one-on-one high altitude warfare, but the campaigns were not without hardships, as crippling environmental factors were also a major setback especially to his health and his military formations. In spite of them, the Dogra dynasty territorial unification was established through the critical basis of his military activity, which predetermined the appearance of the princely state.

Most of the political influence of Zorawar Singh is framed in the context of the military sphere, and little evidence shows that he was directly engaged in the politics of the court. However, his military achievements indirectly strengthened the political prominence of the Dogra rulers specifically Gulab Singh, which helped in the negotiations of diplomatic nature that aligned Dogra interests with British colonial interests. The alliance played an important role in demarcating the borders of Jammu and Kashmir and in legitimizing the Dogra sovereignty in British suzerainty. Nevertheless, there is also a relatively underdeveloped literature on the sophisticated political agency in Zorawar Singh and his direct relations with the surrounding powers, which makes it possible to utilize more research.

In the past, the campaigns transformed the geopolitical formations of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, unifying diverse and mostly resistant populations into the Dogra and Dogra fold. Although this state-centered form of framing focuses on the territorial benefits, it often ignores the socio-cultural instability and the socio-political expenses, including ethnic animosity, opposition campaigns, and marginalization of Muslim majority areas. The politicization of the local identities, especially among the Muslims, was caused by the socio-cultural heritage that caused resistance. Beyond this, the larger regional politics can be

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seen to be involving entangled interdependences between Dogra, British, Sikh, and adjacent imperial and regional power politics, and campaigns of Zorawar Singh as part of larger imperial and regional imperial politics.

The current body of scholarship can be methodologically characterized by the presence of wealth of material, including archival and historical data, but the general tendency to be constrained by colonialists and be mainly military-political in orientation, with less absorption of social-economic and interdisciplinary approaches. Such polarized discussion highlights the necessity of more balanced and interdisciplinary methods that would mediate such positions to make more sense of his long-term contribution to the formation of the Himalayan states and regional politics.

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Ethical Considerations

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