

The Punjab under Law:
The Development of the Judiciary in the Punjab in the 19th Century
by
Yaqoob Khan Bangash

The development of the judicial system and the judiciary are one of the least researched areas in the Punjab. Especially the 19th century, the transition from Sikh to British rule, from customary law to common law, is a period which requires further investigation and understanding.

This paper, which forms part of a larger work on the history of the judicial system in the Punjab, focuses on the process, change and impact of the transition from Sikh to British rule in the Punjab. Starting with the era of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the paper gives a broad overview of the judicial system during his reign. Then the paper looks at the period of instability from the death of Ranjit Singh to the annexation of the Punjab by the British in March 1849, and how this period challenged notions of the 'rule of law.' Then, finally, the paper assesses the changes brought about by the British in their initial decade of rule in the Punjab, their impact and the response of the people towards these changes. This paper also offers a comparative perspective with other British Indian provinces and also sheds light on the development of the 'Punjab' school in the judicial system.

Taken together this paper substantially improves our understanding of the development of the judiciary in the Punjab and enables us to understand how concepts like 'rights', 'rule of law', 'fair trial' etc began to be understood and take root in 19th century Punjab.