

# **Depalpur: Rise and Fall of a City**

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## ***Abstract***

*Punjabi cities and villages offer a sound study of the culture, agriculture, interfaith harmony and combined living but little work has been done on the regional history. The article examines the history of Depalpur, an important city of South Asia. Depalpur remained one of the most important cities from the ancient period, now situated in the Punjab Pakistan. Once a capital of the province of Punjab and hub of political activities, in modern times, it has been relegated to the status of an insignificant district of the Punjab. Thus the article seeks into the factors behind the varying vicissitudes of a city, tracing its history from ancient to modern times. It also focuses on the socio-economic transformation, archaeological and historical remains of the past and political role of the elites. It also examines the defensive role of the city in Sultanate period against Mongole invasions in the Subcontinent.*

## **Introduction**

There are two towns of Depalpur in Subcontinent, one is in district Indore of state Madhya Pradesh, India and other is in district Okara in the Province of Punjab, Pakistan. Now the Depalpur under discussion is a Tehsil of District Okara, Province Punjab in Pakistan. It is the Tehsil headquarter of the Tehsil depalpur. It is a place of antiquity and has its importance in the history.(Bourne, 1932, p. 30)It is situated on the bank of Beas River in Bari Doab about 17 miles from Okara railway station, 12 miles from Basirpur railway station and 20 miles north of River Sutleg. The distance of Depalpur from the district capital Okara is 25 kilometers. There is an assumption that Depalpur Tehsil is the largest Tehsil of Pakistan and the oldest city after Multan in Subcontinent. In 1870 the Tehsil Headquarters were transferred from Hujra Shah Muqem to Depalpur.(Bourne, 1932, p. 68) This

place (Depalpur) was used by traders from Dera Ismail Khan and other places towards frontiers on account the main road from Fazika passing through it.(Bourne, 1932, p. 68) This historical town was also used to be a citadel on the route from Sind, Pakpatan, Multan and Dehli. The town is surrounded by an old wall with three gates, one Thattiyari(Dehli drwaza) towards the east, Multani towards the west and the third is called Shumali Drwaza.(Bourne, 1932, p. 68) The important buildings in the town are the Temple of Lalu- Jas- Rai, Shahi masjid, an old masjid of Khan-e-Khanan Wazir of Shah Jahan, Emperor of Dehli and Tomb of Imam Shah.(Bourne, 1932, p. 68) There is a legend about the monastery of Lalu-Jas-Rai, that Lalu-Jas-Rai was the young and beloved son of Raja Dipa Chand, the founder of Depalpur. He sank into earth due to a curse by his stepmother Rani Dholran. Raja Dipa Chand constructed this monastery in the memory of his son. The old town is on high mound and defended by a trench. The land of the town is irrigated by the channels of the Khanwah Divion of Depalpur canal. There is a metalled road from Dipalpur to Okara.

## **History**

Depalpur is an ancient city about 2000 years old. The city has been demolished and rebuilt several times. According to the historian Abnashi Chander Das “AC Das”, the original name of this city was Siri Pura or Siri Nagar after the elder brother of Raja Salvahan of Sialkot (who was the explorer of Sialkot). Raja Dipa Chand, the founder of the city renamed Dipalpur after his beloved son Raja Depa. In the opinion of AC Das, that about 2000 years ago Aryans entered the Subcontinent. They began to live in the land of Pert Sindh (The land of Seven Rivers) including River Ravi, Chinab, Sutleg, Jhelum, Beas and Kabul. So the famous civilization which was developed was Ajodhen (Pakpatan), Qabula and Depalpur.

There are, however, several other stories concerning the name of Depalpur. According to General Cuningham the foundation of the place is attributed to Raja Deva Pala.(Bourne, 1932, p. 69) Another tradition is that the town was founded by one Bija Chand, a Khatri and called Sripur after the son's name of the founder, Sri Chand.

Subsequently Raja Her Singh surrounded it with a wall and changed its name to Depalpur.

### **Depalpur under Slave Dynasty (1206-1290)**

From the very beginning the Turkish Empire was under the threat of mangols invasions but timely and wisely decision of Sultan Shams-ud-din Altmash not to allow Jalal-ud-Din Khwarzm Shah(R.C., 2008, p. 276) (who was defeated by Mangol chief Tamoojan known as changez Khan and flew to Punjab and requested for shelter to Sultan Atmash) to live in India by pertaining that the atmosphere of India was not suit for him. Mangols under his leader Changez Khan ran after Jalal-ud-Din Khwarzm Shah and reached Indus river. Changez Khan considered unsuitable to attack impartial Turkish Empire. But afterwards Mangol started attacks in India frequently. During the Balban's period of Minister of Sultan Nasr-ud-Din Mahmood Mangols attacked Multan and repulsed by Sultan army under Sher Khan(R.C., 2008). Balban strengthened the forts of sind, Multan, Depalpur and Bthinda. Depalpur played avital role to defend Dehli Kingdom(R.C., 2008). To check the Mangol attacks Balban(during Balban himself was Sultan of Dehli) made three defensive lines of forts, Depalpur was one of them and others were Uch and Multan, Samana, Sunnam and Hansi. Balban's cousin Sher Khan Sanqar was the governor of Depalpur gave tough time to Mangols invaders and proved like the walls of Gog and Magog to them(I.H, p. 273)After the death of Sher Khan, Balban's eldest son Shehzada Muhammad was appointed governor of Depalpur(I.H, p. 273). In 1279 Balban's sons Muhammad Khan and Bughra Khan defeated Mangol' army near Depalpur. Mangols invaded Punjab under their leader Timar Khan in A. D. 1285, Balban's eldest son Prince Muhammad Khan, the Governor of Multan and Depalpur, proceeded to Depalpur and Lahore to fight against Mangols(R.C., 2008, p. 253). He defeated Mangol General Timer Khan after crossing the Ravi River near Depalpur in 1285. According to R. C. Mojamdar, Prince Muhmmad Khan was martyred by Mangol chief near Depalpur on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1285(R.C., 2008, p. 253) when he was offering prayer with his companions and was buried in Dehli. The

famous poet saint Amir Khusru was taken prisoner to Depalpur who was with Shehazada Muhammad.

### **Khilji Period (1290-1320)**

To check the Mangols, invasion and counter the Mangols menace Sultan Ala- ud- Khilji adopted Sultan Balban's frontier policy(R.C., 2008, p. 292) and gave much importance to Depalpur in the defensive point of view of Dehli. He maintained Balban's three defensive lines and appointed garrisons in the outpost of Samana and Depalpur(R.C., 2008, p. 292). He strengthened the forts at Uch, Multan, Dipalpur, Pakpatan, Bhatner, Ptnah, Bthinda, Samana, Sunam Hansi. Ghazi Malik (later on Sultan Ghyas-ud-Tughlaq), the subordinate ruler of Punjab was made the warden of defences at Depalpur who ably defended the frontier and checked the Mangols' attacks(R.C., 2008)(R.C., 2008, p. 292). He advanced against the forces of Kabak and defeated them on the bank of Ravi(R.C., 2008, p. 293).

### **Tughluq Dynasty (1320-1414)**

Khusrave Khan (so called new Muslim) killed Qutb –ud-Din Mubark Khilji, the Sultan of Dehli, and occupied Dehli(Abdullah, 1977, p. 86). He became Sultan with the title of Nasr-ud-Din(Abdullah, 1977, p. 286). He favoured Hindus and appointed them on key posts(Abdullah, 1977, p. 287). He also insulted the Alai nobles(Abdullah, 1977, p. 287). His insulting attitude offended the Alai nobles(R.C., 2008, p. 305). They took stern action to topple the throne of Dehli under the leadership of Ghazi Malik(R.C., 2008, p. 305), the governor of Depalpur and they asked him (Ghazi Malik), to attack Dehli and dethrone Khusrave. In those days Ghazi Malik's son Fakhr-ud-Din Joona Khan (later on Sultan Muhammad Tughlq) was at Dehli and he ran away to Depalpur to his father(I.H, p. 293). After satisfying from his son, Ghazi Malik marched against Khusrave(Sultan of Dehli), defeated, arrested and executed on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1320(R.C., 2008, p. 305). At the place where he killed Mubark Khilji (Sultan of Dehli). On the insist of Alai nobles Ghazi Malik put himself on the throne of Dehli on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1320(I.H, p. 293) under the title of Ghiyas-ud-Din Tughluq(I.H, p. 297). Thus the Governor of Depalpur became the Sultan of Dehli(I.H, p. 319). The third Sultan of Dehli, Feroz Shah

Tughlaq was Muhammad's first cousin, son of Ghyas-ud-Din Tughluq's younger brother Rajab(I.H, p. 319). His mother Naila was of Depalpur origin. She was the daughter of Rana Mall Bhati, the chief of Abuhar from Depalpur(I.H, p. 319). In the reign of Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351-1388), Depalpur was a favourite residence of the Emperor(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 31). (now the residences of Gilani Syeds and called Noghra). He frequently visited the town, his hunting excursions extending in this direction from the neighbourhood of Sirsa and Hisar(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 70). He built a mosque outside the city which is called Shahi Mosque(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 31). He (Feroz Shah Tughluq) erected a 96 miles long canal from the Sutlej for the irrigation of its lands(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 31).

### **Depalpur at the Time of Taimur's Invasion in India (1398-1399)**

At the time of Amir Taimure's invasion in India, Depalpur, was second only to Multan in size and importance(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 70). It was renowned of its 84 towers, 84 mosques and 84 wells(Robert Montgomery and the daughter slayers: A punjabi education imperative, 1855–1865, p. 70). In A.D. 1398 Amir Taimur also known Timer Ling's grandson Pir Muhammad conquered Pakpatan and Depalpur. After appointing Musafer Qabooli as governor of Depalpur, Pir Muhammad proceeded to Lahore. After the departure of Pir Muhammad the people of Depalpur killed Musaffer Qabuli, ran away to state of Bikaner and took refuge in strong fort of Bhatner (in those days Rai Dewal Chand was the ruler of the Bhatner Fort) and this action of the people of the Depalpur infuriated Amir Taimur. He besieged the fort, conquered it and slaughtered ten thousand people. He captured several areas on his way to Dehli, massacring many inhabitants of the areas(I.H, p. 328) and reached outskirts of Dehli(I.H, p. 328) on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1398. After three days sultan's army attacked

Taimuri army secretly and was defeated. The infuriated Amir Taimur after butchering one lac captives(I.H, p. 328) he ordered to attack Dehli. Mahmud Shah (nominal Sultan of Dehli) and Mlu Iqbal (prime minister of Dehli) opposed Taimur but was defeated and took weeks to their heels to Gujrat and baran respectively(Bargoti, 1993, p. 171) and Taimur's army entered Dehli(R.C., 2008, p. 328). At Dehli a skirmish took place between the citizens of Dehli and soldiers of taimur army when they were collecting war indemnity and some Taimuri soldiers were killed(I.H, p. 320). This incident infuriated Taimur and he ordered large scale massacring(I.H, p. 320) which remained five days and ferocious Turki soldiers brutally massacred(R.C., 2008, p. 328) one lac inhabitants. Amir Taimur stayed fifteen days at Dehli, returned to Firuzabad (a few miles away from Dehli a city settled by Firuz Shah Tughluq nowadays new Dehli) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1398, held his Darbar and had Khutbah read in his name there. He proceeded to Kashmir, the Hindu Raja of Jammu accepted Islam and Sikandar Shah, the king of Kashmir subdued to Taimur. On 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1399 Taimur held departing meeting in Kashmir and appointed Khizar Khan Sayyid (who helped and guided Taimur during his campaign of India) governor of Multan, Depalpur and Lahore(I.H, p. 320). He set him on to Samarqand through Afghanistan by crossing Indus on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1399. After the departure of Taimur, Khizar Khan held Punjab and Upper Sind as Taimur's viceroy(R.C., 2008, p. 329). Mahmud Shah returned to Dehli and remained puppet in the hand of Mlu Iqbal(R.C., 2008, p. 329). Mlu Iqbal died in fight with Khizar Khan, the governor of Depalpur on 12 November 1405(R.C., 2008, p. 329). Mahmud Shah died in Kaithal in February, 1413 after a nominal sovereignty of about twenty years and Tughluq dynasty came to an end(R.C., 2008, p. 321).

### **Sayyid Dynasty(1414-1451)**

Daulat Khan Lodhi succeeded Mahmud Shah Khilji(R.C., 2008, p. 330). Khizar Khan the governor of Depalpur marched against Daulat Khan Lodhi captured Dehli, dethroned Lodhi and founded the sayyid Dynasty(R.C., 2008, p. 330) on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1414, the governor of Depalpur became the Sultan of Dehli. Khizar Khan died on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1421 and was succeeded by his son Mubarak Shah. He ascended the throne of Dehli with the title of Nasir-ud-Din in 1421(I.H, p. 323) and

was murdered on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1434(Translated, p. 241). The nobles of Dehli raised Sayyid Muhammad, son of Furqan, nephew of Mubarak Shah and grandson of Khizar Khan nominated as Sultan of Dehli by the murdered Sultan, to the throne of Dehli (1434 and 1445)(R.C., 2008, p. 331). The last Sultan of Dehli of Sayyid Dynasty was Alam Shah son of Muhammad shah enthroned Dehli with the title of Ala-ud-Din Alam Shah(R.C., 2008, p. 331) (1445-1451), made over the throne to Behlol Lodhi(R.C., 2008, p. 331), the governor of Depalpur, on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1451(R.C., 2008, p. 332). Thus three governors of Depalpur later on ascended the throne of Dehli (Ghazi Malik, Khizar Khan and Behlol Lodhi) Sultan Feroz Shah was the grandson of Bhati Rajput Rana Mal belong to Depalpur(Talib, p. 42).

### **Lodhi Dynasty (1451-1326)**

Bahlol Lodhi the governor of Depalpur succeeded Alam Shah (Ala-ud-Din) the last Sultan of Sayyid Dynasty in 9<sup>th</sup> April 1451(I.H, p. 327) with the title of Sultan Abu-Ul-Muzafar Behlol Shah Ghazi(I.H, p. 327). Dolat Khan Lodhi (Uncle of Ibrahim Lodhi Last Sulatn of Dehli) the governor of Punjab including Depalpur invited Babur to invade India. Babur after conquering Lahore captured Depalpur. Babur appointed Alam Khan lodhi (uncle of Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi) the governor of Depalpur. Daulat Khan lodhi occupied Depalpur and the governor of Depalpur Alam Khan Lodhi fled to Kabul and reported the situation. Babur defeated Daulat Khan Lodhi and recaptured Depalpur.

### **Mughal Dynasty (1526-1857)**

In A. D. 1523 the lodhi governor of Punjab, who was discontented with Ibrahim Lodhi, the Sultan of Dehli because of cruel behave of the Sultan, he had meted out to his (Daulat Khan) son Dilawar Khan, invited Babar (the founder of Mughal dynasty in India Zahir-ud-Din-Muhammad Babur also Sabr-ud-Din) to invade Sub- continent(I.H, p. 335). He also promised to give army assistance and accept Babur,s claim of ownership on Punjab. Alam Khan (pretender to the throne of India) and Rana Sangha (Rana Sangram Singh) also invited Babur to invade India. Alam Khan Lodhi an uncle of Ibrahim Lodhi(Talib, p. 446). Babur responding the invitation invaded India, entered Punjab,

occupied Lahore(I.H, p. 446). Soon after he captured Depalpur in 1524(I.H, p. 446). Daulat Khan lodhi met babur at Depalpur and disclosed his wish, Depalpur should be with him which was not fulfilled(I.H, p. 446). Babur divided jallundur and Sultanpur between Daulat Khan and Daulat Khan's son Dilawar Khan respectively(I.H, p. 446). Alam Khan Lodhi was appointed the governor of Depalpur. After stationing Mughal army at Depalpur, Lahore and Sialkot Babur returned to Kabul. Daulat Khan Lodhi snatched Dipalpur and Sultanpur from Alam Khan Lodhi and Dilawar Khan lodhi respectively immediately after Babur's retired to Kabul. The former fled to Kabul, complained against Daulat Khan lodhi and asked Babur to invade India. In November, 1525 Babur marched from Kabul and reached straight Sialkot, the cant of Mughal army. First of all he defeated Daulat Khan(R.C., 2008, p. 420), arrested him, sent to Bhera but, he died on the way. After conquering Punjab including Depalpur Babur proceeded against Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi the ruler of Dehli, met him on the historic field of Panipat, defeated on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1526, occupied Dehli and Agra. In this way Depalpur came under the direct control of Mughal Empire till Raja Ranjit singh, the ruler of Punjab, occupied it. Humanyu after crossing the River Indus, entered Lahore on 24 February 1555 and captured Depalpur next(R.C., 2008, p. 460). One of Humanyu's Liutenants, Abu Muali, defeated the Afghans at Depalpur(Bargoti, 1993, p. 32). Of the three sarkars into which the Multan Suba was divided during the Akbar's reign one was Depalpur. It was containing 20 Mahalas or Perganas. Six perganas of Sarkar Depalpur lay on the left side of the Sutlej. Akbar the great with his son Shezada Saleem stayed in Depalpur when he came to pay homage to the saint Farid-ud-Din Ganj Shakar (Masood) at Pakpatan. Abdul Raheem khan-e-khana was the governor of Depalpur during Akbar's rule(Bargoti, 1993, p. 32). Baba Gurru Nanak also stayed in Depalpur some time. The Gurdwara Nanak, the place also called Niki Nanaki (small Nanaki) reminds his stay at Depalpur. Depalpur was rebuilt by Mirza Abdul Raheem Khan-Khanan, (the son of Bairm Khan tutor of Akbar the great) the Mughal governor of Depalpur which had not recovered from the effects of the Babur's attack. In Alamgir's reign (1658-1707) the old term for a cluster of Perganas was changed Chakla. Depalpur was called Chakla Depalpur. Shergarh is



situated in Depalpur where Sher Shah Suri built a fort to protect the Nakkah (border- edge)

### **British Period (1857-1947)**

Depalpur had a population of 3,435 souls in 1881, as recorded by W.W. Hunter Vol.9 page 498 In the Imperial Gazetteer of India 1886. The population was 8000, 9,452, 15136 and 25347 in 1947, 1961, 1972 and 1981 respectively. In 1925 Depalpur was declared a small Town under the small Town Act with the Tehsildar as its ex-officio President. It was divided into wards under notification No 20971 dated 30 September, 1925. Each ward was to return one member, the strength being 494 Muslims and 396 Hindus and others. The elections took place and 3 Muslims and 2 non Muslims elected. The President of the Committee was to be the Tehsildar under the Act. The town people objected so strongly to the Act of small Town Committee that in 1926 the original notification was cancelled and the committee was abolished. It was used to be a Panchayat before 1925.

### **Roll of Gilani family of Depalpur in Movement of Pakistan**

Gilani family of Depalpur settled here 350 years ago. The prominent saint Syed Abdullah Shah well known Sakhi Sedan Sain was from this family. His Urs (annual gathering on the grave of some spiritual personalities) is observed on 10<sup>th</sup> March of every year. Gilani family of Depalpur played a vital role in the Independence Movement. Syed Roshan Ali Shah and Syed Zafar Ali Shah established Muslim Walantier Core in response to the Hindu organization "Rashtriah Sevik Singh" to remove the threat of Rashtriah Sevik Singh from the mind of the Muslims of Depalpur (Muhammad, 1997, p. 20). Muslim Valantier core was comprised of forty young and Syed Zafar Ali Shah was the Dy. Commander of the Core (Muhammad, 1997, p. 20). It observed march in the city. It also performed duty to maintain law and order on the occasion of Eid-Milad-un- Nabi and Muhram-ul- Hram. Syed Zafar Ali Shah attended the All India Muslim League session held in 1940 in Lahore Minto Park (now Iqbal Park) in which historical Lahore Resolution was passed (Muhammad, 1997, p. 21). Pakistan Primary Muslim League was set up in Depalpur in 1940. Syed

Manzoor Ali Shah Gilani and Syed Roshan Ali Shah Gilani became the President and Secretary Primary Muslim League Depalpur respectively. Syed Zafar Ali Shah was the member of working committee. Mian Abd-ul- Haq jeveka the then President of Muslim League District Montgomery (Sahiwal) came to Depalpur on organizational tour and appointed Syed Roshan Ali Shah and Syed Zafar Ali Shah President and Secretary Tehsil Muslim League respectively and they remained in this office till Pakistan came in to being.

In 1946, two groups of students came from Aligarh to Depalpur to propagate the movement of Pakistan. One of them went to Head Sulemanki under the leadership of Syed Zafar Ali Shah. In a meeting held at Koeki Bahawal Mian Noor Samand Khan Wattoo joined Muslim League and Muslim League strengthened in the area. The other group of Aligarh students went to the area of Pipli Pahar with Syed Roshan Shah to ask the Muslims to vote for Pakistan. One League group from Depalpur including Syed Roshan Ali Shah, Sardar Muhammad Aslam Mokhal of Qila Jwind Singh, Muhammad Husain Nonari of Bkhshy Wala, Mian Saeed Muhammad Headman of Bahripur and Syed Zafar Ali Shah went to Hujra Shah Muqem and persuaded Imdad Ali Shah (sjadah nasheen Bhawal sher qlander) to join Muslim League and succeeded (Muhammad, 1997, p. 27). Syed Imdad Ali Shah not only joined Muslim League but also presented his son Nisar Ali Shah for Pakistan National Guard. Syed Ashiq Shah Kirmani was the candidate of Muslim League who defeated Mian Noor Ahmad Khan Maneka with the majority of ten thousand votes (Muhammad, 1997, p. 22). When agitation was started against Khizar Hayat Tiwana Premier of the Punjab the first group was imprisoned in Montgomery Central Jail was from Depalpur, Syed Zafar Ali Shah was one of them. Syed Zafar Ali Shah entered the jail first of all at night at one and remained in jail for 31 days.

### **Depalpur after 1947**

The population of Depalpur was 8000, 9,452, 15136 and 25347 in 1947, 1961, 1972 and 1981 respectively. By 2009, the population of Depalpur was 1,030 million which was comprised the 46% of the

whole population of District Okara. When Pakistan came into being Depalpur was the Tehsil of Montgomery (Sahiwal) District. After Okara became District in 1982, it became a Tehsil of District Okara. In 1951, it became notified Area Committee and attained the status of Town Committee in 1959 Syed Roshan Ali Shah Gilani was elected the first chairman of Town Committee and remained in office till his death 1962. Then Syed Zain-ul-Abad a prominent Advocate was elected as chairman for the rest of period till 1964. He again elected as chairman in 1964. He was very bold and upright personality. He boldly declared that he was going to vote for Miss Fatima Jinnah against President Ayub Khan in the presidential elections of Pakistan held in 1965.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, it can be argued that Depalpur is a city which has a history dating back to 2000 years. In the ancient period, with the coming of the Aryans, the north-western regions of India, including Depalpur began to flourish. However, during the medieval period as the trade and commerce developed, Depalpur, being on the main trading route, grew in importance. It became the headquarter of the province and during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries worked as a bulwark against the Mongol marauders. With the coming of the Mughals, the city retained its importance but during the British period, the city lost much of its importance and became one of the old cities of the Punjab.