

The Town under the crown The District Sirsa

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The Sirsa District had following Deputy Commissioners to Administer the District.

1. J.H. Oliver (1858-68)
2. Colonel Dwyer (1869-70)
3. Meivill (1870-73)
4. Makefield (1873-77)
5. Captain H. Lawrence (1877-80)
6. Trafford (1880-83)
7. Major wood (1883-84)

Mr. J.H. Oliver, who succeeded Captain Robertson in 1858 and was the first Deputy Commissioner of the Sirsa District, first joined the district in the custom department in 1844. He became Assistant Superintendent in 1848, and for nearly ten year held charge of the Fazilka subdivision of the district. In 1858 he became Deputy Commissioner of the whole district and held charge with intervals of leave until 1869, so that altogether he served for nearly 25 year in the district. He was commended in 1852 by Mr. Thomson for the zeal with which he exerted himself to promote the prosperity of the new pargana of Wattu. The colonization of the prairi round Abohar was manage by him with signal success in 1852-7 and he was highly commended by of North-western provinces Government for the way in which he had encouraged the people to settle, During the muting he managed to maintain himself at Fazilka with the aid of the peasant of the Pargana, and received high praise and special promotion for his conduct on that occasion. As deputy commissioner of the district he completed in 1863 the first regular settlement by the mutly. The people of the North-West end of the district, among whom he lived so long, have a much more vivid recollection of him than of any other ruler, and often speak of what happen in Oliver's time (Alverala rela) They tell tales of his power as a Tiger-slayer and of his skill as a colonizer and Administrator. His influence over the people must have been great, and the development of that portion of the district is chiefly due to him. Altogether he has left more mark on the district and on the minds of the people than any other officer. During his absence on Furlough from 1866 to 1868 Colonel Dwyer held charge, and Mr. Oliver's transfer in 1869, Colonel Dwyer succeeded him, but only for a short time⁽¹⁾.

Colonel Dwyer was succeeded in 1870 by Mr. Melvin, who was removed by the post in 1873, and after Mr. Mackworth young had officiated for a short time. Mr. Wakefield, who had formerly been Assistant Commissioner in the district, assumed charge as Deputy Commissioner Mr. Wakefield held charge until 1877, and during his term of office he carried out considerable irrigation schemes on the Satlaj and Ghaggar. The Satlaj scheme was successful in bringing inundation in to the old Padi Nala which had not run well for some time and greatly increased the irrigation near Fazilka but the Ghaggar scheme the principal part of which was the construction of the Sikanderpur, Nali, through at first very promising failed owing to a strict prohibition against erecting embankments in the bed of the Ghaggar. Mr. Wakefield also induced many villages in the dry tract to plant a few good trees near the village site.

Caption H. Lawrence held charge of the district from 1877 to 1880, and Mr. Trafford held charge from 1880 to 1883, when he was succeeded by major wood⁽²⁾.

The revolt of 1857 inflicted a severe jolt to the British Administration in India and made its reorganization quite essential. The act of parliament in 1858 transformed the power to govern from the East India Company to the British crown under the Act, government was to be carried on as usual by the Governor-General who was also given the title of Viceroy or Crown's personal representative⁽³⁾. In February 1858, the region of Haryana was ceded from the north west province and annexed in to the Punjab province. Haryana was divided into two division Delhi and Hisar. The Delhi Division comprised Delhi, Gurgaon and Panipat districts while Hisar Division consisted of Hisar, Rohtak and Sirsa district⁽⁴⁾. In each district, The Deputy Commissioner of district officer was vested with the power of a Magistrate, Collector and Civil Judge under whom functioned a general staff of assistants, extra assistant and Indian officer who acted subordinately to him in all department over each circle of districts or division was appointed a Commissioner who would be the session judge for criminal trials and would also be sole appellate and controlling authority in every branch of the administration. The Commissioners of divisions were again subordinated to the Judicial and Financial Commissioners at Lahore in their respective departments which were placed under the general supervision for the Chief Commissioner of the province Punjab⁽⁵⁾.

In 1858 the district of Bhattiana and Hisar with the rest of Delhi territory were transferred to the Punjab and the district of Bhattiana was hence forth known as that of Sirsa⁽⁶⁾. Ratan Singh Maharaja of Bikaner State died in 1851, and was succeeded by his son, Sardar Singh. He did good service during the mutiny by sheltering Europeans and co-operating against the rebels of Hansi and Hisar, and as a reward received in 1861 a grant of the Tibi Pargana, consisting of forty one villages of Sirsa district⁽⁷⁾.

In November 1884 the Sirsa district was abolished and the whole of the Sirsa Tehsil, consisting of 199 villages and 126 villages of the Dabwali Tehsil, were added to the Hisar district and from the present Sirsa Tehsil, with effect from March 1st and from the present Sirsa Tehsil with effect from March 1st 1889, 15 villages forming a detached block of British territory⁽⁸⁾. This district was abolished by Punjab Government Notification No. 6845, dated 15th October 1884, It is administered by a Tehsildar and Naib Tehsildar whose head quarter are at Sirsa while there is also a Naib Tehsildar with head quarter at Dabwali. At Sirsa there is a sub divisional officer who is usually an Extra Assistant Commissioner in the summer and an Assistant Commissioner in the winter⁽⁹⁾.

The following statement shows the different parganas into which the district was formerly divided with the number of villages in each at last settlement (1852-63) and the number now:—

Tehsil	Paragans	No. of villages at last settlements	No. of villages now	Description and remarks
I. Sirsa	1. Darba	44	44	South of the Ghaggar valley, round the village of Darba. Partly colonized by the Bikaner Raja and resumed from him in 1828. Transferred from Hisar to this district in 1838. Generally known as the pain Talisa "The 45" as it formerly contained 45 villages.
	2.Sirsa	71	69	The Eastern part of the Ghaggar and Satar valleys with some highlying villages round Sirsa. Taken from the Bhattis in 1818. The reduction in the number of villages is due to the junction of small villages in to one.

	3.Rania	128	86	The western part of the sotar valley round Rania with neighbouring high lying villages. Taken from the Bhatt in 1818. In 1861, 42 villages, annual rental Rs. 14,291 were transferred to Bikaner, leaving 86 in the pargana.
Total of Tehsil Sirsa	243	199	
II. Dabwali formerly Sahuwala	4. Rori	10	8	The east corner of Dabwali Tehsil round the large village of Rori confiscated from Nabha in 1847. Two small shaks have been included in the parent villages
	5.Guda	140	149	The rest of the Tehsil, so called from the large, village of Guda near the South-east end, resumed from Patiala in 1837.
Total of Tehsil Dabwali	159	157	
III.Fazilka	6.Malaut	129	129	The southern portion of the tehsil the chief village of which was Malaut resumed from Sikh chiefs in 1837.
	7.Mahajani	45	45	The tract immediately south east of the Danda or old bank of the

				Satlaj resumed from sikh chiefs in 1837.
	8.Wattuan	80	80	North west of the Danda down to the Satlaj so called from its chief tribe the wattus. Ceded by Bhawalpur in 1844. It was divide in to the Khadar with its 45 estates and the Bangar with its 35.
	9.Bhahak	31	40	Also between the Danda and the Satlaj, above pargana wathan. So called from its chief villages of Bahak. Settled as part of Firozpur district and transferred to this district in 1858. Increase in number of villages due to alluvion.
Total of Tehsil Fazilka		293	294	
Total of district	695	650	

Famines and Droughts: Whole of the tract between the Yamuna and the Satlej, the district was visited with Severe famine in 1860-61. The harves of 1858-59 were poor and in 1859-60 the kharif almost entirely failed, and the rabi was for below the average. The crope of both the kharif and rabi harvest failed entirely, and as, owing to the three previous bad years, the district was ill prepared to meet such a scarcity Much distress was felt here as well as in the whole country between the Yamuna and the Sutlej. Barely, the one cheapest grain trebled its price in six months and sold at 13 seers (1 seer=0.933 kg.) a rupee of the kharif demand of 1860, Rs. 58416 or nearly one third of the total annual (revenue) demand was suspended on account of the drought, and many of the people left the district temporarily to seek a means of livelihood elsewhere. Large number of cattle died. An amount of Rs. 16,000 were spent on famine relief and Rs.

23000 were distributed to 283 villages in advances for the purchase of seed and cattle, only 53 percent of the revenue demand was realized during the year, and almost the whole of the balance was remitted⁽¹¹⁾.

The districts of Hisar and Sirsa again suffered, more perhaps than any other district in the cis-Satlej Tract, in the famine of 1869-70. The people were losing heart, fodder was almost unprocurable, and wheat rose 11 or 12 seers the rupees. The state of affairs in August will be seen from the following extract from a letter from the Deputy Commissioner.

“The district is exposed to the first shock of the immigration of the starving population of the Rajputana states. Considering then that, being always poor. We have no resources left unused; that there will have been no harvest for two years; that for all practical purpose cattle no longer exist in the district; and that we are being inundated by a flood of paypers from Bikaner, Jaipur and other state, the calculation which give tree quartes of the people of district as the number will have to be fed by government. If they are not to starve, does not seen incorrect. Indeed in saying that one fourth of the population can do without aid, it is only on the supposition that the canal authorities will afford a reasonable supp of water to the district. It appears then that, in case the kharif fails. There will be some 350,000 people to whom relief must be given. It is in vain to expect that every exetion possible can prevent a fearful mortality.

The people are so reduced by starvation and want that their bodies are almost rotten; the least below bring on a festering sore. To use physical force to such is impossible. Many of them are so wild with hunger, and other wish to get more than their share by scrambling. That order to keep quit and to wait till the turn of each person come are quite unheeded, and as soon as the food is brought, a general rush takes place, and the people shave and scramble like so many wild beasts”⁽¹²⁾.

The losses of the different classes were estimate as follows:—⁽¹³⁾

Tribs	Number of villages	Cattle before the famine	Death during the famine	Surviving	Percentage surviving.
Sikh Jat	128	55079	33999	21080	38
Bagri Jat	230	70353	56842	13511	19
Muhammadan	268	76895	57749	19146	25

Bhattis					
Total	626	202327	148590	53737	26

In 1877-78 the deficient rainfall caused an almost complete failure of fodder and great loss of cattle. The estimated outturn of the rabi was 75 percent of an average, 55,532 head of cattle were reported to have died during the year. Still 92 percent of the revenue was collected without much difficulty, and the remainder RS. 3799 were remitted Rs. 10000 were advanced for the purchase of seed and cattle in this and the following year.

In 1880-81 the rainfall was very much below the average. The heavy the grass dried up and fodder sold at famine prices. The cattle became enfeebled by starvation and a good many died. Yet the revenue was realized without difficulty, and the end of the year the balance was only Rs. 5690 or less than 3 percent of the demand⁽¹⁴⁾.

The district was again hit by drought in 1895-96. The rabi harvest of 1895 was poor and this was followed by poor kharif in 1895 and a very bad rabi in 1896. The monsoon of 1896 failed completely. The prices which had been rising steadily since April 1895, reached their highest point in November 1896. Only two years elapsed and the district was again visited by a famine. The kharif of 1898 was bad, and was followed by had rabi in 1899 and then came one of the worst monsoon on record. The scarcity of fodder caused immense mortality among cattle and the distress among people was intense.

The district remained force from famine for the next three decades in 1929-30, the district was again gripped by scarcity. Famine conditions prevailed in the district in 1932-33, 1936-37, 1938-39, 1939-40, 1940-41 and 1941-42 of these, the famine from 1938-40 was of severe nature and reduced the district in particular to a state of distress and poverty unknown since 1899. Number of measures were taken to provide relief to the famine affected people. There has been no famine since 1941-42, but scarcity still occurs due to drought condition and brings economic strains to the agriculturist in particular and the rural masses in general⁽¹⁵⁾.

After a gap of nearly four decades, the district was again hit by drought during 1979-80. 92 villages during kharif harvest of 1979 and 158 villages during rabi harvest of 1980 were affected by the drought. Government took several relief measures. Land holdings tax was remitted to the time of Rs. 12.26 lakh and recovery of taccavi was postponed.

Famine is now a thing of the past. Because of better means of communication and transportation. Food can easily be transported from one place to another in case of shortage of supply in any part of the country. Moreover, with the extension in irrigational facilities and improved agricultural technology. Agricultural production has increased manifold. Increased agricultural production has helped in buffer stocking for lean period and buffer stocked food grain has been used to help of the people in drought affected areas invariably⁽¹⁶⁾.

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