

# Geographical Environment In Jaisalmer: A Brief Study

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## ABSTRACT

The district exhibits an undulating terrain, mostly covered by blown sand and rocky waste forming part of the desert region of Rajasthan. The region between east of Jaisalmer and Ramgarh is formed of a series of scraps with relief of about 35 m. presenting beautiful step-like features. The area of the north of Ramgarh and southwest of Sam is occupied by extensive sand dunes. Though dunes are present in the southern parts of terrain is punctuated at places by high hills as seen near Randa. The only drainage is constituted by a few ephemeral streams like Lathi, Sukri, Gurgi, Baisaklu and Kak. Natural depressions filled with rain water, called Rann, are observed near Kharwala, Kanodwala, Kharia and Metha, all located to the north of Jaisalmer, and Dadika, Jhalri and Lawas south of Pokran.

## 1. Location and Extent

Jaisalmer, the largest district of Rajasthan State, covers an area of 38,401 sq.km, in the extreme western part of the State along Indo-Pakistan border. While the district has a common boundary with Jodhpur district in the east, in the north it is flanked by Bikaner district and in the south by Barmer district. In its west the district has a long international boundary with Pakistan.

Spanning about 2 degree of latitude between 26°1' N and 28°12' N and about 3 degree of longitude between 69°30' E and 72°20' E. Lying in the extreme western part of Rajasthan and forms the major part of the great Indian Desert – THAR.

The district has 344577 (1991) population and 3 thesils with 518 inhabited villages.

## 2. Geology

The basement rocks are the metamorphites, granites and rhyolites which are exposed near Birmania. They are unconformably overlain by dolomitic limestone, shale and sandstone of the Marwar Super Group. Resting over these with unconformity are the Jurassic rocks made up of the Lathi Formation sandstone, grit and variegated shales with plant fossils), Jaisalmer Formation (predominantly fossiliferous limestone, Baisakhi Formation (Siltstone, shale and sandstone with interactions of gypseous and bentonitic clays) and Badesar Formation (sandstone, limestone and shales). These are followed by the rocks of the Cretaceous System represented by fossiliferous limestone and felspathic sandstone and grints.

The Eocene rocks are constituted by gypseous sandstone and bentonitic clays (Khuiala Formation) and by shales, foraminiferal limestone and bentonitic clay (Banda Formation). Large areas in the district are covered by recent conglomerates made up of loose cobbles and pebbles and sometimes boulders of heterogeneous composition.

## 3. Ground Water

The depth to water varies from about 30 m. to 130 m. Regional studies reveal that considerable quantity of water can be obtained from the Lathi-Chandan-Bairwa area has the greatest potential for medium to large scale development f

groundwater. The annual average rainfall of Jaisalmer district is 15.6 cm. But the rainfall in the region varies from 20 cm. in the eastern part to less than 10 cm. in the north western part. The district receives not only the lowest quantity of rainfall in the entire arid regions of Rajasthan but also the most variable rainfall from year to year. The coefficient of variation of annual rainfall of the district is between 49% to 91%.

The monsoon normally sets over the region between 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July and withdrawal from the region during the first week of September.

## Temperature

The district experience high temperature up to 45°C during May to July with mean day time temperature of about 41°C. Similarly, during winter the average minimum temperature is less than 10°C. The recorded highest temperature in the region is 47.8°C whereas the lowest is 4.4°C. During winter period, occasionally cold waves prevail resulting in frost damage to vegetation.

A strong wind regime prevails from March onwards resulting in dust storms and dust raising winds. Jaisalmer was founded by king Jaisal. The word Jaisalmer is said to have been derived from a combination of words Jaisal and Meru-a local name of Jaisal's Fort. Prior to Jaisalmer, the capital of the state was Lodarva which Rao Jaisal, found unsafe from defense point of view. So he shifted his capital to a new town Jaisalmer, which he considered to be quite safe and built there an impregnable fort-"Meru" Lodarva still lies in ruins, 16 km. north-west of Jaisalmer. Geologically the region possesses the evidence of the traces of Palaeozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic periods. The rocks of Eocene period discovered in Kutch, Jaisalmer and Bikaner regions suggest extension of sea in this area. Subsequent to many other changes in rainfall, climate and dry land, the migration of people started to this region.

## Ancient Period

The former ruling of Jaisalmer claimed that they are descent of Lord Krishna, the Yadva prince. After the battle of Mahabharat great number of Yadavas began to migrate from Mathura. Some of them migrated to this region. After sixth century B.C. the region of Jaisalmer appears to have formed a

part of Sauvira Mahajanpad which consisted of several clans and petty YAdu Chiefs (the ancestors of Bhatias).

The first important Bhati Chiefs of the region said to be Salivahan. He ruled about 583 A.D. and founded the city of Salivahanpur (Sialkot) and conquered whole of Punjab. In the time of his successor Baland the incursions of Turks began. But Baland's son Bhati repulsed the attack and subdued neighboring princes.

Bhati was succeeded by his son Mangal Rao who in turn by Manjam Rao and the later by Kehar. Kehar was first of the Bhati tribe to occupy the territory near Jaisalmer. He founded a fortress called Tanot in the honour of the goddess Tannu. Kehar was succeeded by his son Tannu in 806 A.D. He ruled for eighty years and gave his throne to his son BijaiRaj. The Barahas took the throne from Bijai Raj I by revolt. They subsequently sucked Tanot and put inhabitant to the sword, and the Bhati tribe in Tanot became nearly extinct for a time.

However, during revolt Deora (Son of Bijai Raj I) fled to his maternal abode through the help of a Brahman. The Buta Chief of this country gave him some land where he erected a fort called Deogarh or Derawal after himself. Gradually he acquired strength and defeated Buta's, established the power of the Bhati family in the desert track.

Among successors of Rawal Deoraj the important one is Lanjha Vijay Raj. He was popular for his extravagant nature. After the death of Lanjha Vijay Raj, his son Bhoj Dev inherited the 'Gaddi'. In his time Muhammad Gauri led an expedition (1178 A.D.) against Chalukyas of Gujrat and was defeated decisively near Abu. Muhammad Gauri has advance through Ladorva and desired to place it in the hands of some puppet and friendly chiefs. So that his rear and supply might remain safe. Such a chief he found in Jaisal, the uncle of Bhoj Dev. Jaisal conspired against Bhoj Dev; with the help of Muhammad Gauri and dethroned him Ladorva was taken and sacked. It lost all its pride and glory as the capital with the loss of its last ruler, Bhoj Dev. Soon after seizing the power, Jaisal transferred his capital to the present site of Jaisalmer.

The Jaisalmer fort, which now houses VAishnava and Jain Temple and is decorated with sculptures of Gods and Goddess, dancing figures and methodological scenes and contains invaluable collection of old manuscripts, was founded by Jaisal.

Jaisal built the city of Jaisalmer on a low range of nummulitic limestone hills and made it his capital. The place was more secure than Ladorva which was in open plain. Jaisal began building the fort which was named Jaisal-Meru after him. Only its gateway and part of the fort and been completed when he expired. The successive princes were constantly engaged in battles and raids and whose taste for free booting proved disastrous.

History in Medieval Period is full of outside invasion from Muslim and Mughals. First invasion is traced to rule of Jaitsimha. During his rule Sultan of Delhi sent general Kamaluddin and Malik Kafur with a force of 7,000 to capture Jaisalmer. They besieged the fort and Jaisalmer was occupied by Muslim garrison, which after holding the place of two years dismantled and retired.

Bhati chief Duda and his brother Tilak Singh, who survived in the besieged, again built the settlement. During Duda's region a Muslim invasion again took place. In 1299 A.D. the Army of Alauddin Khilji under the command a Uhugh Khan

arrived in Jaisalmer captured the fort and killed large number of people including Rawal Duda and Tilak Singh.

Rawal Duda was succeeded by Gharsimha a nephew of Mulraj I, who had been captured at the first siege and taken to Delhi where, by his courage and gallant bearing he gained the favour of his hereditary dominion with permission to re-establish Jaisalmer which the Muslims had captured during the days of his predecessor, Rawal Duda. After a reign of about thirty years, he died in 1361 A.D. and was succeeded by his brother Kehar II. He was a great lover of architecture and built a Jain temple in the fort.

In August 1542, the Mughal Emperor Humayun arrived in Jaisalmer with Mughal followers and is said to have indulged in cow slaughter which was forbidden in the state. Rawal Lunkaran, king of Jaisalmer at that time took serious exception to it and sent his Rajput envoy to Humayun demanding an explanation for the misdemeanour of men. Humayun imprisoned the envoy, on which Lunkaran took stern steps and order his men to guard the route and water reservoirs and to prevent the conveyance of grain from reaching the Mughal camp. At the same time prince Maldeo of Jaisalmer attacked the Mughals camp and rescued the envoy and after that allowed the Mughals to go unmolested.

Maldeo succeeded to the 'Gaddi' in 1550 A.D. It was during the reign of story of Dhola-Maru composed in Marwari prose by Kavi Kallol. Rawal Maldeo was succeeded in 1561 by his son her Raj entered into a friendly alliance with Akbar and gave his daughter in marriage to the great Mughal. Rawal her Raj died in 1577 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Bhim. Bhim's daughter was married to Jahangir who was a prince and he gave her the title of Malika-Jahan.

After Rawal Bhim many successor passed unnoticed till Sabal Singh, who was great son of Rawal Maldeo. Rawal Sabal Singh was a contemporary of Shah Jahan. He did not belong to the direct line of succession to the gaddi. He had severed the Mughal army with at Peshawar, where on one occasion he saved the royal treasure from being captured by the Afghan Mountaineers. As a reward for his action, Shah Jahan ordered that he should be installed as a ruler of Jaisalmer.

Rawal Sabal Singh was succeeded by his son, Amar Singh, a wise farsighted and valiant chief who did not allow any robbery to be committed in his territory. He died in 1702 A.D. and was succeeded by Rawal Jaswant Singh. The period between 1702-1722 A.D. is a gloomy period in the history of Jaisalmer. Internal fights and maladministration resulted in heavy losses to the state. But in 1722 Akhai Singh clan of Rawal Jaswant Singh stormed the fort of Jaisalmer and occupied the throne. Akhai Singh ruled for about forty years (1722-1761 A.D.). His rule was notable, particularly for the introduction of Akhai Singh coins in his country and regions around it,

It is significant that Jaisalmer was a flourishing town at this time. Big capitalists, surrounded by Banjaras, had their shops of stock and exchange in central part of the town. Cloth-dealers, grocers and confectioners had their own compartments in separate markets. Similarly craftsman such a goldsmith, dyers, thread-weavers, tailors and arms manufactures had their different places allotted in the market. The famous Manick Chowk and the grain market flooded daily with caravans of camels; loaded with articles for sale.

The first decade of the nineteenth century was a transition period for the Jaisalmer State. Mulraj II (1726-1819) the successor of Akhai Singh, proved to be a weak ruler. During his rule a great part of the fertile land of the state and the fort of Gurtu were lost to the Rathores of Bikaner and Jodhpur and to Amrits of Sindh. Mulraj II, therefore, longed for peace and at the same time desired restoration of his lost territory.

On 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1808, Mulraj II addressed a letter to the government of India and expressed his desire for the bonds of amity the sincere attachment. He also wished extension of the British power over North India, so that the British, being his friend, may help him in recovering his lost territory and adjusting his affairs in a happy manner. On 12 December, 1888, Mulraj II concluded a treaty of protection with the British Government of India. The treaty guaranteed to the ruler and his posterity the principality of Jaisalmer.

During the first Afghan war of 1838-39, the British had to dispatch their troops to assist their many armies by way of river Indus. At that time the then ruler of state Gaj Singh, made excellent-proof arrangements for the transportation of the troops. For this act of timely help and co-operation the British government felt grateful to the ruler. In 1844, after the British annexed Sindh, the forts of Shahgarh and Ghotaru, which formerly belonged to Jaisalmer, were restored to the state.

Gaj Singh died in 1846 A.D. without having a heir behind him. The Ranawatiji, widow Rani of Gaj Singh exercised power and adopted the Maharawal's nephew Ranjit Singh a minor son of Kesri Singh of Nachana and installed him on gaddi.

The affairs of the state were conducted by Kesri Singh during the minority of the ruler. In the history of Jaisalmer, it was for the first time that the craftsmanship and industry of Jaisalmer received universal appreciation and recognition when in 1855, the court of Jaisalmer received the award of Medal by the lords commissioners for the attractive articles sent to the London Exhibition of 1851.

On 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1864, Maharawal Ranjit Singh expired without any issue and was succeeded by his younger brother, Bairi Sal aged fifteen. He probed a controversial enquiry in Lani Scandal. Lani was ceremony observed among the Maheshwari Mahajans not only in Jaisalmer, but elsewhere also in Rajasthan. It consisted of distribution of sugar in a brass vessel. It was an act concerning great distinction of distributor.

Bairi Sal died in 1891 A.D. and was succeeded by Salivahan (Shyam Singh). Since the ruler nearly five years after the succession of Maharawal Salivahan the administration had to face a unique revolt from a section of people of Jaisalmer. Several complaints were lodged by the Maheshwari Community against the levy of lanicess.

Maharawal Solivahan died in 1914 A.D. leaving no heir by blood or adoption to succeed him. The government of India consulting the Sardars selected Jahawar Singh, the adopted son of Maan Singh (Thakur of Era) as ruler of state and he was installed on throne. The early years of Maharawal Jawahar Singh's reign were mostly covered by the events of first world war.

In the proposed scheme of an all India Federation under the Government India Act 1935, Jaisalmer was assigned only half a seat each in the council of state and the Federal Assembly and was grouped with Kishangarh State. During the thirties and forties of the present centuries the administration of Jaisalmer suffered a great deal by quick changes of Dewans and the consequent instability in administration.

The events were moving very rapidly and India achieved Independence in 1947. The process of integration of India states had begun. The government of India agreed to merge their states into an integrated body known as United State of Rajasthan which came into existence in 1949 and which finally merged into other such units to form Rajasthan.

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