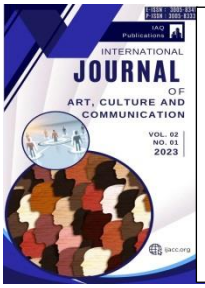

International Journal of Art, Culture and Communication

Journal Homepage: http://ijacc.org/index.php/Journal/

Volume No. 05 Issue No. 01 (2026)

Social Banditry and Colonial Power: Reinterpreting Malangi and Nizam Lohar in Colonial Punjab

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Abstract:

This article covers the stories of Malangi (Daku) and Nizam Lohar, two men revered in Punjab as icons of resistance to British authority. Although colonial documents refer to them as criminals, this study contends that such classifications were political rather than objective legal judgements. The British used crime-related terminology to quell local opposition and justify their authority over Punjab. The article demonstrates how colonial practices like land confiscation, the n/lambardari system, punitive taxes, and labelling entire populations as "criminal tribes" disturbed village life and exacerbated inequality. These circumstances prompted many ordinary people to fight colonial rule in everyday ways. The article demonstrates how Punjabi communities remembered Malangi and Nizam Lohar as justice fighters rather than lawbreakers by combining official data with folk music, oral traditions, and popular memories. These shared memories undermined the British narrative of history and maintained alternate notions of fairness and dignity. This study situates Malangi and Nizam Lohar within a larger legacy of local resistance in Punjab, calling for a novel and critical interpretation of colonial archives that have long overlooked the political importance of popular defiance. Akhtar Sandhu highlights a lapse in Punjab historiography, which ignored 'culture' while addressing historical events. Historians focused on colonial power, administration, or governance, ignoring folk wisdom, folklore, social trends, and local heroic traditions. To Sandhu, ignoring culture in writing regional history leaves a major gap in Punjab historiography (Sandhu, 2025). Malangi and Nizam were products of Punjab's society, but this important aspect was overlooked while writing under colonial pressure.

Key words: *Social banditry*[3]*, popular resistance, colonial Punjab, oral history*

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[3] Banditry is defined as organised illicit activity, such as robbery, extortion, or assault, carried out by people or organisations working outside of state jurisdiction (Yenen, 2024).

Introduction:

The history of colonial Punjab is marked by power-based silences. British rule managed not only land and revenue, but also the manner in which events and persons were documented. Malangi and Nizam Lohar are only mentioned in colonial records as outlaws and criminals, but they are venerated in Punjabi oral tradition as icons of resistance and justice. This stark disparity reveals a deeper conflict over who had the right to define criminality, legitimacy, and political activity during colonial control (Guha, 1983, pp. 3-5).

The major thesis of this article is that the colonial label of *criminality* used to describe Malangi and Nizam Lohar was not an impartial judicial judgement. It was part of a larger political strategy aimed at delegitimising public opposition and portraying colonial authority as natural and right. Postcolonial historians have established that British dominance was based not just on military force, but also on epistemic control—the ability to classify, label, and explain social reality in ways that supported imperial rule (Chatterjee, 1993, pp. 33-36). Acts of disobedience from below were thus robbed of their political significance and reduced to lawlessness.

Akhtar Hussain Sandhu's research on colonial Punjab sheds light on how this method worked in practice. Sandhu contends that British law operated under an authoritarian framework that valued order over justice and safeguarded colonial interests and loyal elites at the expense of rural communities. Peasants, craftsmen, and marginal occupational groups were subjected to land confiscation, surveillance, and legal exclusion, but their answers were rarely viewed as political resistance. Instead, the colonial administration utilised criminal laws to quell opposition and remove its causes. In this context, Nizam Lohar's disobedience as a blacksmith, as well as Malangi's refusal to leave forest settings, indicate social protest anchored in daily hardship rather than arbitrary violence.

This study uses Eric Hobsbawm's idea of social banditry to help analyse such figures. According to Hobsbawm, individuals branded as bandits frequently originate from cultures marked by inequality and a lack of moral legitimacy of the state, where they are viewed as protectors rather than criminals by local communities. Scholars in Subaltern Studies disagree with Hobsbawm's classification of such opposition as "pre-political." Guha (1983) shows that even when peasant insurrection took place outside of formal politics, moral ideals, collective memory, and notions of justice impacted it (pp. 6-8). When these ideas are combined, Malangi and Nizam Lohar might be viewed as players articulating different political ideologies rather than marginal lawbreakers.

This writing also goes beyond the colonial archive to discuss oral traditions, folklore, and popular memory. Sandhu argues that vernacular narratives preserved moral economies and local concepts of power that colonial documentation did not capture (Sandhu & Mahmood, 2014, pp. 264-266). Folk melodies, stories of redistributive justice, and memories associated with sites like the Changa Manga Forest served as a counter-archive challenging colonial depictions of order and crime. These materials provide insight into how Punjabi communities remembered and passed down resistance through generations.

This study argues for the inclusion of Malangi and Nizam Lohar in a longer continuity of anticolonial resistance in Punjab by situating them within a broader historical and cultural framework. Their lives show how ordinary people belonging to the marginalised class fought against the colonial power, affirmed dignity, and kept political meaning via daily activities and memories. Rereading colonial records alongside vernacular sources lead to a more balanced and decolonised understanding of Punjab's past, recognising subaltern agency and challenging empire's resistance categories.

The Colonial Furnace

When the British seized Punjab in 1849, they did more than just install a new administration. They transformed understanding of justice, authority, and resistance. Colonial rule created new legal categories that criminalised traditional social behaviours and justified imperial power as both natural and necessary. Malangi and Nizam Lohar are only mentioned in colonial archives as dacoits (Daku) and lawbreakers. Nonetheless, they are remembered in village folklore and folk memory as guardians of the poor and challengers to injustice. This conflict between official documentation and vernacular memory illustrates what postcolonial academics refer to as epistemic violence: empire's ability to define reality by categorising, identifying, and criminalising indigenous life (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 8-10; Stoler, 2009, pp. 34–36).

Ranajit Guha famously described colonial writing as a "prose of counter-insurgency," recasting all resistance as criminality and disorder (Guha, 1983, pp. 45–47). This prose was part of everyday governance in Punjab. Lambardari, amended revenue settlements, and expanded criminal laws were not neutral administrative reforms. They were tools used to discipline peasants, reward loyal intermediaries, and break up collective opposition (Major, 1999, pp. 82-85; Condos, 2017, pp. 63-66). By monopolising the authority to define acceptable violence, the colonial state assured that any independent statement of justice, however ethically grounded was immediately declared illegitimate.

Banditry arose in this context as a political discourse rather than a social pathology. People who were denied access to courts and protection resorted to tactics of resistance that were illegal under colonial laws. The Changa Manga Forest served as both a shelter and a symbol of prowess. It provided physical protection from official surveillance and had a history of disobedience, with the name referring to previous fugitives who opposed authority. The forest, as a region outside of ordinary colonial rule, served as an alternate realm for other concepts of justice to be practiced and remembered (Dawn 2016). Such landscapes functioned as subaltern geographies, in which the colonised reclaimed autonomy through movement, concealment, and shared memory rather than formal politics.

Existing nationalist and colonial histories have frequently ignored these kinds of resistance. According to Sargana (2020), elite political narratives tend to focus on organised movements and notable leaders, while ignoring the daily struggles of peasants, craftsmen, and marginal people. Malangi and Nizam Lohar deconstruct these narratives. Their stories demonstrate that resistance was not limited to congress halls or revolutionary groups, but also existed in the woodlands, in nocturnal raids, in discreet acts of redistribution, and in folk ballads that refused to accept colonial dominance as inevitable.

The study's unique addition is that it demonstrates that the colonial state criminalised entire ways of life rather than just individuals. What the archives describe as disarray was frequently an endeavour to maintain dignity, economic survival, and moral fairness in the face of expropriation. Malangi and Nizam Lohar emerged from what may be defined as a colonial furnace: a realm of coercion, economic pressure, and narrative erasure that created resistance while denying its legitimacy. To recover their experiences, we must first examine the categories used by the colonial archive to describe crime, order, and politics. This study broadens the definition of anti-colonial resistance and gives historical agency to individuals who resisted the empire from the periphery.

The Ironsmith's Insurgency

Nizam Lohar's narrative begins at a time of great turmoil. Born about 1835 in Tarn Taran Sahib, he grew up during the last years of the Sikh Empire, which is recalled in Punjabi collective memory as a time of relative autonomy, social dignity, and local sovereignty (Singh, 2017, pp. 41-43). Nizam was still a youngster in 1849, when the British seized Punjab. Like many of his generation, he witnessed the humiliation that followed defeat: the demise of indigenous authority, the introduction of foreign rule, and the gradual deterioration of ordinary dignity. These changes did not come gradually; rather, they were abrupt and intensely felt in village life.

Nizam was a blacksmith (lohar) by profession, which put him at the centre of rural society. Blacksmiths were more than just craftspeople; they worked in agriculture, transportation, and, most importantly, weaponry. Under colonial control, these abilities were politically sensitive. While Nizam is reported to have operated under new order conditions at first, Punjabi oral traditions constantly emphasise the friction he felt between forced accommodation and quiet hatred of foreign dominance (Awan, 2020). This internal conflict mirrors a larger truth about colonial Punjab: resistance was often born out of lived contradiction rather than theory.

According to popular recollection, a watershed moment occurred when a British officer publicly insulted Indians, prompting Nizam to violent vengeance. Colonial records depict this as a murder, while Punjabi memory sees it as the birth of a rebel (Dawn, 2016). This difference in perception reveals more than just a debate over facts; it also exposes the politics of naming. According to Guha (1983), colonial archives habitually converted acts of disobedience into crimes in order to depoliticise them (pp. 45–47). Nizam's flight into the Changa Manga jungle signalled his change from subject to outlaw, as well as from silence to rebellion.

Unlike Malangi, whose rebellion appears to have been motivated primarily by moral and economic complaints, Nizam's opposition evolved into a more structured form of resistance. It is vital to clear up a common misconception: assertions linking Nizam Lohar to the Babbar Akali Movement are historically incorrect. The Babbar Akalis formed in the early 1920s, some decades after Nizam's death in 1877 (Hobsbawm, 2000; Singh, 2004). This anachronism is instructive, as it implies that later revolutionary forces retrospectively integrated figures like Nizam into a broader line of resistance. Rather than lessening Nizam's significance, this process highlights how his legacy served as a symbolic antecedent to structured anticolonial mobilisation (Guha, 1983; Yang, 1987).

What separates Nizam the most is his use of craft labour as a weapon. His blacksmithing abilities were repurposed into resistance, such as making guns, repairing rebel tools, and transforming his workstation into a clandestine centre of opposition. According to James C. Scott (2009), when states monopolise law and production, common skills frequently become the foundation of insurrection (pp. 183–185). Nizam's insurgency was thus both violent and constructive. He resisted by making, turned labour into politics.

His activities went beyond just using weapons. According to vernacular reports, Nizam targeted moneylenders and local accomplices, destroying debt records and revenue documents before giving stolen wealth to the poor. These activities were not random attacks, but deliberate blows against what Ann Laura Stoler (2009) refers to as the colonial "paper regime"—the bureaucratic structure that exercised power, controlled territory, and imposed surveillance (pp. 34-36). Nizam undermined the archive's authority by destroying materials. He seems to comprehend that colonial power was written on paper as much as on people.

Because the British controlled modes of communication, the judiciary, and local administration, acts of resistance like Nizam Lohar's were officially classified as dacoity. In popular Punjabi memory, however, these same actions were frequently recalled as measures of justice taken in response to exploitation and abuse. This divergence of perceptions demonstrates that colonial law did more than just punish individuals; it also discarded and obliterated entire local conceptions about right and wrong. According to Sandhu and Mahmood (2014), British legal frameworks in Punjab primarily supported landlords and loyal elites, whereas peasant dissent was either disregarded or criminalised. Ranajit Guha (1983) makes a similar claim, saying that colonial rulers classified popular resistance as a crime precisely because it followed moral standards that contradicted colonial legal theory (pp. 44–47). Eric Hobsbawm (2000) refers to such individuals as "social bandits," who are viewed as criminals by the state but as agents of justice and reparation by local communities (pp. 20-23). In this light, Nizam Lohar's account reveals the limitations of colonial beliefs about crime and order, demonstrating that they were not neutral concepts but rather tools used to dominate rural life and stifle alternative moral perspectives (Yang, 1987, pp. 300–304).

Nizam was slain in 1877 after being betrayed or encircled, according to several accounts, and this uncertainty has further added to his legendary stature. His death did not bring an end to his politics; rather, it made them a memory. Folk ballads, dhollas, and other cultural portrayals portrayed him as a martyr rather than a criminal (Rana, 2018). These cultural forms serve as a counter-archive, challenging colonial historiography's silences and elevating subaltern resistance in public consciousness.

This study reframes Nizam Lohar as an example of how labour, place, and memory came together to form resistance in colonial Punjab, rather than just as an outlaw or an early nationalist. His insurgency demonstrates that anticolonial politics extended beyond formal movements and elite leadership. They were also made in workshops and forests, as well as via legends passed down from generations. To comprehend persons like Nizam Lohar, we must look beyond colonial legal categories and see resistance where it truly exists—in the material and moral lives of ordinary people.

Twin Flames of Defiance

Reading Malangi and Nizam Lohar's lives together shows more than just two stories of individual struggle. It reveals a unified political landscape formed by imperial violence, rural dispossession, and popular imagination. Despite being separated by time and personal history, both men traversed the same woodland areas, confronted the same landlords and revenue agents, and opposed the same imperial system. Their continuous use of the Changa Manga Forest, which is well-known as a sanctuary for fugitives, demonstrates how geography itself became a tool for resistance. According to newspaper *Dawn* (2016) and Stoler (2009), the forest served as a counter-sovereign place where local justice could be expressed and colonial surveillance was reduced.

Malangi and Nizam both focused on the economic basis of colonial power rather than its symbolic centres. Landlords, moneylenders, and tax brokers were frequently targeted, not for personal revenge, but because they represented colonial extraction at the village level. When wealth was confiscated and redistributed, the act had political consequences. It questioned colonial property relations and revealed their reliance on coercion. Such activities are consistent with what E. P. Thompson subsequently described as a moral economy, in which popular ideals of fairness contradict state law (Thompson, 1971, pp. 78-80), as well as what Hobsbawm (2000) refers to as social banditry—resistance based on community acceptance rather than legality (pp. 23-29).

Their contrasts, however, are equally telling as their commonalities. Malangi's rebellion sprang directly from lived grievances, including land loss, social isolation, and lambardari system abuses. His resistance was motivated by a desire to survive. It was personal, reactive, and deeply ingrained in ordinary rural injustice. This type of resistance corresponds to what Guha (1983) refers to as peasant insurgency motivated by moral anger rather than ideological goals (pp. 6-9). Malangi's banditry evolved where there was no legal recourse, making lawlessness the only available means of political expression.

Nizam Lohar's uprising took a different path. Earlier stories incorrectly associate him with the Babbar Akali Movement, which emerged decades after his death. However, this anachronism is illuminating rather than deceptive. It exemplifies how later revolutionary traditions claimed figures like Nizam as forerunners. In actuality, Nizam belonged to a previous phase of resistance, formed by fresh recollections of Sikh sovereignty and the shock of rapid annexation. His significance stems not from formal organisational connection, but from how he transformed artisanal labour into political infrastructure.

Nizam's status as a blacksmith was strategically important. His workshop became a center of resistance, creating weapons and tools that fuelled insurgent activities. According to James C. Scott (2009), when states monopolise law and production, everyday skills frequently become tools of resistance (pp. 183–185). Nizam's opposition was so materially based. He questioned colonial power not only through violence, but also through production, undermining the state's grip over labour and weapons. In this way, he symbolises an early type of organised opposition based on work rather than philosophy.

The contrast between Malangi and Nizam represents a greater trend in Punjabi resistance to British power. Nizam acted during an era when colonial control was still being consolidated and alternatives to imperial authority were still possible. Malangi operated at a later date, when colonial intermediaries had become entrenched and resistance had dispersed. As a result, his disobedience manifested itself as social banditry—individualized yet politically significant (Sargana, 2020, pp. 113–116). Together, they demonstrate how resistance adapted to changing colonial conditions rather than dying altogether.

Their common legacy is eventually found in the politics of naming. Colonial officials branded both men as dacoits, but Punjabi culture regarded them as justice-seekers. This conflict represents what Subaltern Studies researchers call the contest over historical meaning: whose definitions survive and whose voices are silenced (Guha, 1983, pp. 12-14). Malangi and Nizam, through folk songs, dholas, and later visual culture, created a vernacular counter-archive that challenged imperial silence.

They join personalities like Imam Din Gohawia and Jagga Jatt in a lineage of popular opposition in Punjab. This heritage implies that banditry was not an anomalous diversion from politics, but rather a culturally acknowledged means of resistance when formal routes were shut down. This study's unique addition is that it argues that such figures should be viewed as political players formed by colonial conditions, rather than criminals on the edges of history.

The Architecture of Illegality

To understand why characters like Malangi and Nizam Lohar were deemed criminals, we must look beyond their conduct and consider how colonial power defined legality itself. British control in Punjab did more than merely execute laws; it redefined the basic concepts of law, crime, and justice. Acts that questioned colonial power were often turned into crimes, whilst loyalty to imperial control was portrayed as virtue. In this sense, the colonial state built a moral environment in which resistance was seen deviant and criminality became evidence of the colonised population's purported inferiority. The colonial archive is thus not a neutral record of facts, but rather a political tool used to define, discipline, and justify rule (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 8-12; Stoler, 2009, pp. 34–38).

Eric Hobsbawm's concept of social banditry contributes to our understanding of how this system worked. According to Hobsbawm (2000), social bandits are criminals in the eyes of the state, but heroes in their communities, where they are viewed as avenging injustice and defending the underprivileged (pp. 23-29). This approach helps to explain why Malangi and Nizam Lohar instilled loyalty rather than terror among the locals. However, Hobsbawm's perspective has been attacked for defining such resistance as "pre-political," implying a lack of deliberate political intent. Scholars linked with Subaltern Studies argue against this viewpoint. Guha (1983) and Chatterjee (1993) argue that lived experience-based resistance is political precisely because it responds to specific forms of oppression while also articulating moral claims about justice, authority, and dignity (Guha, pp. 6–9; Chatterjee, pp. 33–36).

This critique is especially important in the context of colonial Punjab. Calling Malangi or Nizam Lohar "pre-political" perpetuates colonial thinking that regarded indigenous resistance as illogical or illegal. Their efforts of redistributing wealth, erasing exploitative records, and

attacking revenue intermediaries were not random acts of violence. They were political initiatives that called colonial authority into question and revealed the economic system's inequalities. Ranajit Guha's concept of the "prose of counter-insurgency" explains how the British eliminated its political significance. Colonial narratives transformed every act of resistance into proof of disorder, every raid into proof of savagery, and every challenge to authority into a threat to civilisation (Guha, 1983, pp. 45–47). This narrative tactic enabled the empire to justify repression while concealing the colonial people's political intentions. When viewed alongside organised anticolonial movements, the greater pattern becomes obvious. For example, the Ghadar Party did not form on its own. According to Tirmizey (2018), Ghadar activists framed their revolutionary politics around past forms of peasant resistance, including bandit traditions. This genealogy implies that personalities such as Malangi and Nizam Lohar were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a larger continuum of resistance that fed into later anticolonial activities. Their disobedience laid the groundwork for subsequent structured revolutionary politics.

Mark Condos' description of colonial Punjab as a "insecurity state" adds to this study. Condos (2017) believes that British government in Punjab was driven by a continual fear of uprising, resulting in a concern with surveillance, classification, and pre-emptive punishment (pp. 3-5). Because rural people frequently refused to cooperate with colonial authorities—for example, by refusing to testify against bandits—the state imposed exceptional legal penalties. Laws like the Punjab Frontier Crimes Regulation permitted collective punishment and the suspension of due process, demonstrating that colonial legislation was adaptable when imperial dominance was at stake (Nichols, 2013, pp. 101-104).

The designation of "criminal tribes" is the most obvious manifestation of this theory. Under the Criminal Tribes Act, entire groups were dubbed hereditary criminals, not because of proven crimes, but because they were perceived as nomadic, autonomous, or resistant to colonial control. By the early 1900s, these regulations had notified about 150,000 Punjabis (Radhakrishna, 2001, pp. 27-29). These restrictions were aimed less at avoiding crime and more at restricting movement, enforcing sedentary behaviour, and neutralising politically threatening groups.

In this light, the criminalisation of Malangi and Nizam Lohar reflects imperial fear rather than criminal activity. Their outlaw status was created by a state that hated opposition, tried to monopolise violence, and exploited the law as a tool of power. The study's fundamental point is that illegality under colonial rule was not the absence of law, but its architecture—a meticulously crafted system that transformed opposition into crime and justice into chaos. Recognising this permits us to read colonial records critically and interpret characters such as Malangi and Nizam Lohar as challengers to an unjust legal order rather than adversaries of the law.

A People’s Verdict

While colonial archives listed Malangi and Nizam Lohar as offenders, ordinary Punjabis formed a different conclusion. In ballads, oral histories, and village memories, these characters are depicted as protectors of dignity and justice rather than lawbreakers. These popular tales challenge us to reconsider fundamental questions such as what constitutes justice, who has the ability to define crime, and how resistance is remembered. From the

perspective of the colonised, their actions were not mindless violence, but rather reasoned responses to a legal order based on invasion, extraction, and humiliation.

British legislation in Punjab was never politically neutral. It was intended to safeguard imperial interests, generate revenue, and discipline rural life. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), colonial legal systems enforced obedience while invalidating indigenous moral claims (pp. 15-18). In such a society, breaching colonial law does not necessarily imply moral guilt. Instead, refusing to obey unjust rules frequently became a form of political expression—a rejection of colonial power itself.

Malangi and Nizam Lohar's acts make this quite evident. Both targeted landlords, revenue officials, and moneylenders who served as colonial extraction agents. The lambardari system and revenue settlements sapped peasants' income and drove them into debt, shifting resources to the colonial state (Condos, 2017, pp. 71–74). Malangi and Nizam stopped the flow of money by seizing it and dispersing it among the needy. These activities created a counter-economy of justice, based on local fairness and not imperial law. Their actions revealed colonial property relations as imposed, weak, and ethically challenged.

Punjabi tradition vividly depicted this issue. The popular couplet "Din nu raj Firangi da, raati raj Malangi da" ("By day, the British rule, by night, Malangi rules") is more than just a literary statement. It is a concise political philosophy. It implies that colonial sovereignty was restricted rather than total, powerful during daylight hours but unstable once public assent ceased. Night and woodland, like Changa Manga, became places where colonial monitoring diminished and alternative authority evolved (Stoler, 2009, pp. 25–27). Malangi's midnight control and Nizam Lohar's forge-based opposition are examples of vernacular critiques of empire, expressed through action rather than textual theory.

Although neither Malangi nor Nizam belonged to formal nationalist organisations, their resistance shaped a political culture that later movements drew upon. Scholars of anticolonial history show that revolutionary groups such as the Ghadar Party and, later, the Babbar Akalis inherited narratives of rural defiance and popular justice from earlier figures (Tirmizey, 2018, pp. 3–6). The frequent retroactive association of Nizam Lohar with later movements, though historically inaccurate, reveals how collective memory used figures like him as symbols of a longer struggle rather than isolated rebels.

This continuity undermines elite-centered nationalist histories. According to Iftikhar (2019), Punjab's anticolonial mindset was not limited to structured parties or urban leaders. It thrived in villages via moral outrage, sacrifice, and daily opposition (pp. 88-91). Malangi and Nizam demonstrated that colonial authority might be challenged, justice could be imagined outside of imperial courts, and sovereignty could exist—if only temporarily—beyond the Raj's framework.

Thus, reclaiming Malangi and Nizam Lohar as figures of resistance is not romanticism. It is a necessary step towards decolonial historiography. According to Abbas and Shafique (2024), the British purposefully moulded historical narratives to portray resistance as criminality in order to disguise the brutality that underpins empire. Reading the colonial archive allows us to see how power shaped the record itself. This study's key contribution is to claim that popular memory served as a people's court, rejecting imperial judgements and preserving

alternative understandings of justice, legitimacy, and resistance long after the empire collapsed.

Conclusion:

Malangi and Nizam Lohar's story does not end with their death or with colonial police investigations. They live on because they answered a topic that ordinary people cared profoundly about: what should justice look like when the law is unjust? This analysis established that their activities were not random acts of violence or criminal ambition. They were answers to a colonial system that threatened land, dignity, work, and moral order. When the law sided with power, resistance took different forms.

One of the most important findings of this research is that colonial control established a gap between legality and legitimacy. The British governed via laws, but they failed to govern by consent. Malangi and Nizam Lohar came to fill the void. They were not outside politics; they were the result of a political system that made it difficult for rural Punjabis to seek justice through official means. Their opposition was forged by lived experience—debt, humiliation, and dispossession—and articulated using the instruments at their disposal: forests, labour skills, redistribution, and memory.

This study also reveals that resistance in colonial Punjab cannot be understood solely through formal movements, parties, or written manifestos. Much of it took place discreetly, locally, and culturally. Night raids, burnt documents, shared wealth, and folk songs were not indicators of chaos, but rather measures of restoring balance in a world turned upside down by conquest. Malangi and Nizam Lohar were not only anti-state insurgents. They were members of an alternative moral order that their communities recognised and respected.

This study claims that popular memory functioned as a people's court. While colonial law established guilt, Punjabi society formed its own decisions. Songs, couplets, and oral traditions kept judgements that imperial records could not erase. These memories refused to embrace colonial definitions of justice, instead preserving the sense that resistance might be ethical, vital, and honourable. This helps to explain why such figures are remembered with pride rather than shame.

Bringing Malangi and Nizam Lohar to the forefront of history is not an attempt to glorify or romanticise violence or insurrection. It is an attempt to comprehend how colonial power functioned and why it elicited the responses it did. It questions the tendency of interpreting colonial documents without considering their production contexts. When we read against the archive, alongside folklore, oral history, and rural memory, we get a better picture of Punjab's past. Malangi and Nizam Lohar remind us that history is written not only by those in power, but also by those who persist. Their stories challenge us to pay closer attention to voices from below and to understand that what empire termed crime, people frequently called justice. That appreciation is more than just historical. Long after the empire has vanished, it continues to influence how communities perceive power, resistance, and dignity. The anti-British fight by Malangi and Nizam breaks the myth that only martial races of Punjab could exhibit on a

battlefield. The prowess demonstrated by Malangi and Nizam proved that Punjab has been a fertile land for resistance against marauders and invaders (Sandhu, 2025).

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