THE HERITAGE OF THE SIKHS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE SIKHS—a small, well-knit community of fewer than eight million—are a unique people in the religious civilization of the world. Practical and progressive in their outlook, they are deeply attached to their faith. Religious belief is their living impulse and the mainspring of their national characteristics and history. Few other people are so devoted to their religion as they are.

The Sikhs are widely known as good soldiers and farmers. In a foreign land a Sikh may be hailed as a representative of the Indian princely order—such is his physical mien and stature. Tribute has not been lacking for the Sikhs' handsome beards and headgear and for their qualities of courage and adventure, but appreciation of the underlying sources of their inspiration and tradition has generally been rather limited.

The Sikhs are a deeply devoted people and faith is an essential trait of their nature. An immense reserve of spiritual energy has been their strong asset in many a crisis during their 500-year-old history. In the latest, when at the partition of the Indian subcontinent nearly one-third of the nation was reduced to a homeless, landless refugee population, they showed great recuperative power and fortitude. The Radcliffe line, which marked off the two sovereign States of India and Pakistan from each other, ran through the middle of the Sikh population. Migrating *en masse* from what then became the West Punjab province of Pakistan, the uprooted sections of the community re-established themselves gradually, but securely, in their new homeland. A firm and unflinching faith was their sole support in a most trying situation.

Rather than produce any truculent or fanatical spirit, the Sikhs' religious zeal has resulted in some shining deeds of noble heroism and sacrifice. For, at the root of their history lie simple virtues such as tolerance, humility and service, so sedulously inculcated and preached by their Gurus, or prophet-teachers.

The foundation of the Sikhs' central shrine—the Golden

Temple at Amritsar—was laid at the request of the Guru by a Muslim divine. The Guru made four entrances, one on each side, to distinguish the holy building from the traditional Indian temples with only one entrance. His object was to emphasize that a Sikh place of worship was open to all, irrespective of differences of caste or creed.

In the Sikhs' holy book are hymns composed by pious men from among Hindus as well as Muslims. It also contains verses by the so-called low-caste Shudras, who, by orthodox Indian standards, were forbidden to hear or utter the sacred word. The Fifth Guru, who compiled the Sikh Scripture, broke through such narrow divisions and gave an honoured place to the writings of holy men from other communities beside his own and those of his four spiritual predecessors. The resultant *Granth Sahib,* or the Revered Volume, is unique among the world's religious books for its mystic ardour and catholicity of design and spirit.

When, after a long period of desperate and bold struggle against religious persecution, the Sikhs succeeded towards the end of the eighteenth century in establishing their own rule in the Punjab, they readily forgave their Muslim persecutors and treated them with the utmost tolerance and friendliness. Ranjit Singh, the Sikh sovereign of the Punjab, was a ruler of liberal vision and maintained a cosmopolitan court. His most trusted minister was a Mohammadan, Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, who was also his personal physician and tested everyday his master's food before it was served to him. Raja Dina Nath, a Hindu, was the finance minister. Among Ranjit Singh's army officers were Frenchmen, Italians, Americans, Poles, Greeks, Russians and Englishmen, besides, of course, Hindus, Gurkhas and Muslims.

Heirs to such liberal traditions, the Sikhs are bound by no strict dogma or ritual. They recognize no caste divisions. They must not, of course, smoke, nor cut or trim their beards and hair. These are the inviolable injunctions of Sikh discipline as laid down by the Guru and are followed by the faithful with the reverence due to the Master's command.

The Sikhs' outward symbols have played a significant part in their national history. They impart to them unity and a distinct individuality and have preserved them from reassimilation by Hinduism, a great absorbent of races and

creeds. Important as this external form is, the essential fact about the Sikhs is the moral prestige they have built up by their steadfast and, often, severely trying adherence to their religious faith.

The first date in Sikh history is 1469—the year in which the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak, was born. The Muslim rule in India was then five hundred years old. Its originators, the Arabs, were followed by further streams of Muslim invaders through the North-Western mountain passes. The two cultural trends—Hinduism and Islam—mingled on the Indian soil, giving rise to new modes of thought.

Guru Nanak's mission, though it shared some of its teachings with older religions, had its own transcendent and dynamic character. The chief doctrines as preached by Guru Nanak were "the unity of God, brotherhood of man, rejection of caste and the futility of idol worship." He undertook long journeys to spread his ministry. From the high Himalayas in the north to Ceylon in the south and from Assam in the east to Mecca and Baghdad in the west, he travelled arduously, accompanied by a Muslim companion, Mardana. Wherever he went, people were attracted by his humility of manner and simple teachings.

While singing the praises of the Almighty in ecstatic lyrical hymns, which are preserved in the Holy Granth, Guru Nanak attacked vigorously the evils that had crept into society and religion. His was the only strongly vocal protest in India against the invasion of Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. At Eminabad, during one of his travels, he stayed with a lowly carpenter, declining the invitation of a caste-proud rich nobleman. Seeing the devotees of the idols in the temple of Jagannath lighting small lamps in silver trays to propitiate the gods, he burst into a song describing how Nature's tribute to the Creator was superior to man's:

> In the disc of the sky
> The sun and moon shine as lamps,
> The galaxy of stars twinkle like pearls,
> All zephyr is incense, the winds are fanning,
> All the woods are bright with flowers,
> Oh, Saviour of the World, Thine *arati* (adoration)
> Is wonderful indeed!
>
> [Tagore's translation

Guru Nanak appointed one of his followers as his spiritual inheritor. The line of prophetic succession continued until the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh character and organization thus developed in the care of ten successive leaders, each emphasizing a particular lesson, truly exemplified in his own life, or contributing a new national trait rehearsed under the stress of changing times and environs.

The Third Guru presented the ideal of personal service, the Fifth that of sacrifice. The latter was the first martyr of the Sikh church, having been tortured to death for his religious belief by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. His example generated a new impulse for calm suffering and sacrifice which runs undiluted throughout the course of Sikh history, ennobling and animating a great many of its pages. He also gave the Sikhs their Bible, the *Granth Sahib,* and their Mecca, the Harmandir at Amritsar.

His son, Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Master, taught the use of arms. Seeing how peaceful resistance to oppression had proved abortive, he recognized recourse to the sword a lawful alternative. The Ninth, Guru Tegh Bahadur, again bore the cross. He was offered the choice of Islam or death by the mightiest of the Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb. He chose the latter and was beheaded in a main thoroughfare in Delhi. A shrine, with a tall Sikh pennant fluttering above it, stands upon the spot of this martyrdom and is the Sikhs' most sacred cathedral in the Indian metropolis.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last of the Sikh prophets, brought to consummation the work started by Guru Nanak. He introduced the baptism of the sword and the Sikh movement reached in his time its highest fulfilment. The sect of saints and martyrs turned into a band of bold warriors, without losing its original attributes of compassion and selflessness. The process of evolution was stepped up by the intolerance of the Mughal rulers. The Sikhs were engaged in many an unequal battle with them. Guru Gobind Singh's four sons and many of his followers fell martyrs to the bigotry of the ruling race.

The struggle became very bitter after Guru Gobind Singh's passing away in 1708. For almost a whole century Sikhs suffered untold oppression and misery. The object of

the rulers was to completely exterminate the rising nation and towards this end they directed themselves in a most relentless manner. Peaceful life was rendered impossible for the Sikhs and they had to flee their homes, seeking shelter in the hills and jungles. Rewards were offered for their heads and their temples were either barred or demolished. The use of the word *Gur* (molasses) was banned lest it should remind one of the Sikh "Guru." To discountenance reference to the Sikh Scripture, the word "Granth" was proscribed and substituted by "Pothi" (book). The sacred pool at Amritsar was filled up with the debris of the temple that had stood in the middle of it since the time of the Fifth Guru. Thousands of Sikhs were hanged, drawn and quartered. But they remained unvanquished and their spirit only toughened under the impact of every fresh calamity.

Once Nadir Shah, the Persian invader of India, questioned the Governor of Lahore who these Sikhs were. To which the latter made answer in this wise:

"They are a group of faqirs who visit their Guru's tank twice a year, and, bathing in it, disappear."

"Where do they live?" asked Nadir.

"Their homes are their horses' saddles," was the reply.

"Then take care," said Nadir, "for the day is not distant when these people will take possession of thy country."

Nadir was not far wrong in his warning. The Sikhs came out of their jungle homes to establish gradually their sway in the country. When at last Ranjit Singh, a leader of great military prowess and political astuteness, occupied Lahore in 1799, the Sikhs had laid the foundation of a powerful kingdom.

Ranjit Singh conquered the far-flung provinces of Multan, Peshawar and Kashmir and extended the limits of his domains in the north to Ladakh and the Pamirs. The Sikhs built up a commanding position on the North-Western frontier, checking for the first time the inflow of invaders who had incessantly swept down the hills to loot or rule India since the discovery of the route by the earlier Aryan groups about 2,000 B.C. Ranjit Singh vanquished the proud Afghans and secured from Ahmad Shah Durrani's heirs the peerless Koh-i-Nur.

Sikh sovereignty did not last long. The English had by then taken almost the whole of India except the Punjab.

They were chary of trying their strength with the mighty Ranjit Singh. But after his death, in 1839, they closed in on the Sikh empire, forcing upon it two successive wars. The Sikh kingdom was annexed to the British dominions and Duleep Singh, the minor son of Ranjit Singh, was deposed. The Koh-i-Nur, the celebrated diamond, was taken away and presented to Queen Victoria. Kashmir was sold out to Gulab Singh, one of Ranjit Singh's courtiers, who had broken fealty to the Sikh sovereign in the Anglo-Sikh wars.

The loss of the Punjab was extremely galling to the Sikhs and they nursed a deep grudge against the English. But the latter won over the chiefs and Sardars by settling upon them grants of land and privileges. The opening of canals in the country brought prosperity to farmers and traders inducing temporarily a mood of resignation.

The Sikhs did not recover from the setback until a current of religious revival arose among them towards the end of the nineteenth century. This renaissance restored the dignity of Sikh values and resuscitated the Sikh spirit. It also gave rise to unprecedented literary and cultural activity. The Sikhs awoke to a new consciousness of their national heritage and overcame the psychological after-effects of defeat.

Fed on the reformist ideology of the Singh Sabha, they began to realize that their holy places had, in the hands of the old priestly class, become centres of hollow superstitious ritual which was contrary to the teaching of the Gurus. This they meant to remedy, but met with strong opposition from the Government who took the part of the priests. A long, strenuous struggle ensued in which the Sikhs re-enacted their history of bold sacrifice and suffering for their faith. Thousands courted imprisonment and faced police bullets and bludgeons. During this period (1920-25) the Sikhs grew politically very alive. Some of them had already been to foreign lands such as the United States and Canada and imbibed ideas of political freedom. In the States they had founded a Freedom Centre which published an extremist newspaper *Ghadr* ("Revolt") in seventeen Indian languages. The paper was banned in India, but it continued to be smuggled in despite all vigilance on the part of the Government. The Punjabi version of the paper continued to be published, in different form and style though, from Los

Angeles until its editor, Gyanee Bhagwan Singh Pritam, returned to the Punjab in 1958.

The Sikhs eventually won their peaceful battle, fought under the auspices of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal, against the priests and the English authority in India. They were given control of their holy places (Gurdwaras) and a law was passed providing for an elected body of Sikhs for their management. This was the first major victory won by methods of peaceful passive resistance and the Indian leaders appreciated the Sikhs' spirit of sacrifice and tenacity of purpose.

This central administration of the holy places—some of them richly endowed with vast landed estates from the days of the Sikh rule—placed in the hands of the controlling organization, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, ample financial resources. For the first time since the days of the Dal Khalsa, which had led the Sikhs through the turbulent 18th century, a representative and central institution had emerged capable, by virtue of its constitution and character, of commanding the allegiance of the whole community and advancing the cause of Sikhism.

Politically, the Sikhs came to be divided into several mutually hostile groups, though they preserved their religious homogeneity and laid aside their differences and jealousies for the sake of a common purpose. Over the question of Shahid Ganj, a shrine near the Lahore railway station, to the possession of which the Muslims of the Punjab made a claim on historical grounds, they all united and acted by mutual counsel. When the British Government announced in 1935 a substantial instalment of political responsibility to the Indian provinces in the form of the Communal Award, laying down each community's share in the legislative assemblies, Sikhs protested that they had been placed under perpetual communal domination of the Muslims who were in a majority in the Punjab. All different Sikh groups rejected the Award in a collective gathering at Ranjit Singh's mausoleum in Lahore and resolved to fight it until it was scrapped. The upper sections of the community who were generally moderate and pro-British in political opinion found themselves in agreement with the extremist school and offered to work in co-operation with it.

About subsequent British proposals to transfer power to Indians also there was a fair amount of unanimity in Sikh opinion. All Sikhs were, in sentiment, with the Indian National Congress and they supported it in its efforts to win freedom from the British. They were at the same time apprehensive of their own future since it had become apparent that, as a concession to Muslim stubbornness, India would ultimately be split on a communal principle, reducing their own political position to insignificance on either side of the dividing line. The representatives of the British Government, who came out to India in the spring of 1946 for negotiations with the Indian leaders, expressed in their final proposals an appreciation of the Sikhs' difficulties, but regretted their inability to be of any help to them in view of their small numerical strength.

The British partitioned the country into two independent States of India and Pakistan. But the communal feeling had been worked up to such frenzy that disastrous rioting broke out on both sides of the border. In India it was limited to the Punjab and a few adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh. The Sikhs, in a hopeless minority in Pakistan Punjab, were the worst sufferers. More than two million of them had to leave their homes and lands and trudge their weary way into India in most distressful and tragic circumstances.

Today, there are few Sikhs in Pakistan. The Sikhs had always had an effective share in the police and civil administration of pre-Partition Punjab. In Pakistan there is not a single Sikh government functionary now. The sacred shrines lie closed without any devotees, among them the holy Nankana, the birthplace of Guru Nanak. For the last few years a score of Sikhs have been allowed to stay in the Nankana temple to look after it and perform the daily services. A visit by a limited number of pilgrims on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak is also now possible, subject, of course, to the sanction of the Pakistan Government.

In India, Sikhs are chiefly confined to the border State of the Punjab, which has recently been enlarged by the merger with it of PEPSU, short for Patiala and East Punjab States Union. The latter came into existence in 1948 as a result of the integration of eight Princely states, six of them ruled by Sikh Maharajas.

Sikhs have ventured out to other parts of India as well and there are substantial numbers of them in cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Patna, Kanpur and Dehra Dun. The 1947 migrations led to this wide dispersal. The Sikhs are also well known for their wanderlust and have always been foremost among the Indians to seek out avenues of trade and employment in foreign lands. There are Sikh farmers in Canada and the United States; traders and business men in Afghanistan, Iran, Siam, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia; and workers and professionals in Great Britain and East Africa. Wherever a Sikh goes, he carries his Holy Book with him and builds his own temple. There are Sikh schools and temples in London, Stockton and Vancouver and in towns in Iran, East Africa, Malaya, Sumatra, Japan and the Philippines.

The Sikhs are fewer than two per cent of the Indian population, but their share in the country's life is by no means negligible. For one thing, they add colour to the scene. Upright and handsome, with a fine sense of matching colours in the clothes he wears, a Sikh is recognizable among a thousand. Sikhs make excellent soldiers and they proved their mettle in the two world wars and in India's recent fight against the invading armies of China. They form a substantial portion of the Indian army, filling posts of responsibility and occupying high positions as officers. In the civil administration also they hold many honoured jobs. Sikhs have a great natural aptitude for practical trades and crafts. They are good engineers, craftsmen and architects. Those from non-peasant stock adapt themselves more easily to business and there are some very prosperous Sikh traders and contractors in Delhi and Amritsar and in Malaya, Iran and East Africa.

The Sikhs have shown notable enterprise in the field of education. They have a higher literacy percentage than any other Indian community, barring Parsees and Anglo-Indians. Large numbers of Sikh young men go in for vocational and university education. Sikhs also run their own schools and colleges which share, in their designation, the usual appellation of "Khalsa." The Khalsa College at Amritsar, their premier institution, is famous for its magnificent buildings and a rich cultural tradition. There are Sikh colleges in Delhi, Bombay, Patna and Calcutta and in almost all important towns of

the Punjab.

In the arts and literature also Sikhs have made their mark. The Gurus composed the sacred hymns in the language of the people—Punjabi—in preference to the traditional medium of religious poetry and philosophy in the country. The propinquity thus achieved between the people's tongue and the language of literary expression stimulated creative activity. The Sikhs' contribution towards the enrichment of Punjabi literature is very substantial. Bhai Vir Singh, the precursor of modern Punjabi writing, was a prolific writer. As a poet, he ranked among India's best. Sikh lore and tradition were the chief sources of his inspiration.

Mural paintings in the Gurdwaras preserve the best specimens of Sikh art. Some excellent *motifs* can be seen in the Golden Temple at Amritsar and other older Gurdwaras. One of the modern painters, Amrita Shergil, daughter of a Sikh philosopher, Umrao Singh Shergil, has left a deep mark on contemporary painting. In her premature death in 1943 the world lost one of its most promising and original painters. Music is a part of the Sikhs' religious tradition. The Sikh Scripture, the *Granth Sahib*, is set to musical patterns and congregational chanting of hymns is an essential part of morning and evening service in the Gurdwaras. There has grown up among Sikhs a class of religious minstrels who cultivate the art and help preserve the tradition of Sikh music which in its verve and variety marks a departure from the stylized forms of older schools.

A Sikh on the field of sport represents the finest specimen of Indian manhood. None can match his physical skill and fighting stamina. The best Indian athletes are Sikhs.

The Sikh spirit shines even brighter through their womenfolk. They have played a noble part in the difficult periods of Sikh history. Sikhism has been a potent influence in the emancipation of Indian womanhood. Sikh women do not observe *purdah* (veil) and there are no restrictions on their attending or conducting prayers in the Gurdwaras. In fact, the Sikh religion gave women equality with men and raised strong protest against their centuries-old social disabilities.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDER

TRADITION and politics have played capriciously with the date and place of Guru Nanak's birth. He was born in the month of April—that is what modern research has conclusively established. But his birth anniversary has, by custom, come to be celebrated in October-November. He was born at Talwandi, Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan. Since the partition of India, in 1947, pilgrimage to the place has depended on diplomatic permission and procedure.

He was called Nanak after the name of his sister Bibi Nanaki. She was given this name because she was born at her *Nanake,* i.e., the place of her mother's parents.

Nanak's father, Kalyan Chand, kept revenue record of the village and wanted to train his son for a similar career. Nanak was first put to the village school of indigenous accountancy. Later, he attended the Sanskrit school and then the Maktab, school kept by a Maulvi, or Muslim priest.

At the age of nine, Nanak was required to wear the *Janeu**, or the sacred thread. That was to distinguish him from the casteless Shudras. He saw no use for the thread and refused to wear it. Addressing himself to the family priest, who presided over the ceremony, he said:

> Make mercy thy cotton, contentment thy thread,
> Continence its knot, truth its twist.
> That would make a janeu for the soul; if thou have it,
> O Brahman, then put it on me.
> It will not break. nor become soiled, or be burned, or lost.
> Blest the man, O Nanak, who goeth with such a thread
> on his neck.
>
> [Macauliffe's translation

Nanak had times of isolation and truancy from work and play and showed no inclination to take to any useful calling. This worried the father who expected him to settle down and exert himself to earn a livelihood. If he would not take up service, let him do business. He gave Nanak money for that purpose. Nanak left home and, meeting some hungry Sadhus

* Called in Sanskrit 'Yagyopavit.'

on the way, bought them food with money his father had given him for business.

Nanak was not planning renunciation. He had a mission to fulfil, but he did not have to give up the world for the sake of it.

He got married when nineteen and had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. He took up service with the Muslim Nawab of Sultanpur Lodhi and was put in charge of his stores. For thirteen years he remained in Sultanpur.

Then suddenly he disappeared. He had gone out in the morning to bathe in the stream running past the town. He did not return for three days. When he reappeared, a new lustre illumined his face. "There is no Hindu, there is no Mussalman," were the words at his lips. He had received his commission to go out among the people with his message.

At the age of thirty, he set forth on his travels. For twenty-three years he kept on the move, returning home between whiles to see his sister, Bibi Nanaki, and Rai Bular, the local Muslim dignitary, who was the first man to recognize him as God's chosen one.

Guru Nanak travelled far and wide in pursuit of his mission. From references in his hymns connected with the various places he visited, the monuments commemorating his visits to those places and the old biographies, one can form a fairly comprehensive idea of his travels which took him to foreign lands such as Arabia, Ceylon and Tibet.

During these journeys Guru Nanak visited places of pilgrimage sacred to the Hindus, the Muslims and the Buddhists. There he could see religion as commonly practised by the multitudes in those days. His object was to bring out the essence and purity of religion which had become more a matter of superstitious dogma and ritual. Against formal observances he had expressed himself strongly and decisively even as a boy when he was asked to wear the *janeu*. True religion, according to him, consisted in love of God and love of man. This ideal he preached wherever he went.

Guru Nanak clad himself significantly for his travels. His dress included elements of common wear used by the Hindu and Muslim holy men. This composite garb was symbolic of his common mission to all sections of society.

It also attracted quick notice. For his journey towards the east, for instance, he had the head-dress of a Muslim saint, wore a necklace round his throat and put a saffron mark on his forehead in the style of a Hindu.

He heightened the effect of his apparel by improvising some dramatic gesture to arouse still further the people's curiosity. At Hardwar, sacred to Hindus, he saw the devotees bathing in the Ganges toss water to the east. He also went into the holy river and took to throwing water to the west. The pilgrims gathered around him and asked what he was doing. In reply to his own similar question, he was told by the pilgrims that they were offering water to their departed ancestors. "It is all right, then," said the Guru, and continued his procedure with even greater earnestness. The people became puzzled. "What do you mean by throwing water to the west?" they asked him again. "My farm near Lahore needs watering. I thought I had better do something about it," said the Guru. The listeners felt amused and said, "How could anyone send water so many miles away?" "How far must our ancestors be from here?" asked the Guru.

Guru Nanak also made use of music in the propagation of his mission. Bhai Mardana, the Muslim musician, who accompanied him on his journeys, played on his rebeck while the Guru sang the divine song. On blunt and hardened souls this song had a miraculous effect.

Once Guru Nanak happened to visit the house of one Sheikh Sajjan who seemed to welcome anyone for a night's lodging and meal. Many a traveller felt relieved and grateful when, at the end of a day's journey, he was led into such a hospitable home. The sleeping guests were Sajjan's victims and their goods his property.

The far-seeing Sajjan read in Guru Nanak's lustrous face the signs of affluence. The guest was all the more welcome and entitled to more than usual courtesy. But the Guru tarried long before going to bed. Sajjan got impatient. At last, he came near the door to see inside the room. Mardana was playing on the rebeck and the Guru singing a hymn in enraptured devotion. The sight held Sajjan. The sweet music thrilled him. It calmed the agitation in his heart and sweetened his whole being. He felt a new consciousness welling up in him.

Sajjan was converted. He was appointed the first missionary of Sikhism.

Thus were people drawn towards Guru Nanak's mission. His simplicity of manner and the universality of his teaching appealed to the hearts of men. A new way of life opened before those who accepted him as their teacher. Repudiation of caste and ritualism was the first distinguishing mark of this new order. Its members now partook of a living faith which led to the crystallization of the true religious spirit and produced a more enthusiastic and vigorous approach to life.

How Guru Nanak anticipated the future trends of the Sikh movement is apparent from his reaction to Babar's invasion of India. His heart was deeply anguished and he described the sorrows of Indians—Hindus and Muslims alike—in accents of intense power and suffering. His poems, preserved in the Holy Granth, are charged with deep patriotic fervour. Indian literature of that period records no more vehement or virile protest against the foreign invading hordes. Said Guru Nanak:

With his wicked expedition, Babar hastens from Kabul
and demands forced gifts.
Decency and law have vanished : falsehood stalks abroad.
The vocation of the Qazi and the Brahman is gone and
Satan performs the marriage services.
The Muslim women recite the Koran, and, in suffering,
call upon their God.
So do suffer the high and low-caste Hindu women.
Paeans of murder are being sung, O Nanak, and blood is
being shed in place of saffron.
In this city of corpses I sing of God's goodness, and I
strike this note of warning.
That He Who made these people and assigned different
places to them is witnessing it all.
That He and His decisions are just and that He will mete
out exemplary justice.

And Again :

God took Khurasan under His wing and exposed India
to the terrorism of Babar.
The Creator takes no blame unto Himself ; it was the
death that made war on us.
When there was such slaughter, such groaning,
Didst Thou not feel the agony, O Lord ?
Creator, thou belongest to all !

At the age of fifty-two, Guru Nanak returned to settle down at Kartarpur, on the Ravi, and again took upon himself

the duties of everyday life. He worked on his farm and provided for his family. Morning and evening, however, he held congregations and recited the sacred hymns. He had won over innumerable people during his travels. Kartarpur was now a place of pilgrimage for his followers. Here he organized a *langar*, free community kitchen, for his Sikhs and all those who, forgetting the distinctions of caste, sat down together in a row (*pangat*) for a meal. The missionaries appointed by the Guru in different parts of India to propagate his mission brought reports of their work and offerings from their flock. Kartarpur thus became the centre of the Sikh faith which was gradually developing the characteristics of an organized church.

In 1539, at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak passed away, leaving behind his spiritual successor, Guru Angad, and a large number of followers scattered all over India and in other lands.

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLE AND THE MECCA

GURU ANGAD (1539-52) had come to Kartarpur as a seeker. He was then known as Lehna and had spent many years in the worship of the goddess Durga. Once he heard a Sikh, Bhai Jodha, sing the hymns of Guru Nanak and was so deeply touched that, on his next pilgrimage to the goddess's temple, he broke journey at Kartarpur to have a sight of the Guru. This was the end of all his quest and journeying. He discovered in the Guru's word the truth and solace he had been seeking and found joy in offering him his devoted service.

Bhai Lehna so truly imbibed the spirit of Sikhism and impressed everyone so greatly by his piety and nobility of character that Guru Nanak chose him as his successor in preference to his own sons. He embraced him and called him "Angad," part and parcel of his own being, and, placing five pice as an offering before him, made obeisance to him. Thus "Guru Nanak's light blended with Guru Angad's."

Guru Angad carried forward Guru Nanak's work and the Sikh movement developed in his time a more specific character. He popularized the Gurmukhi script which had been introduced by Guru Nanak and had the latter's hymns as well as life-stories written in it. This was the beginning of the religious literature of the Sikhs. The institution of *langar* gained importance as an instrument of a far-reaching social revolution.

Guru Angad's successor, Guru Amar Dass (1552-74), expected every visitor to partake of the food in *Guru-ka-Langar* before seeing him. The Emperor Akbar who once came to pay his respects to him had to eat out of the common kitchen like any other pilgrim. The food in the *langar* in those days was usually of a rich Punjabi variety, but the Guru himself ate a very simple meal earned by his own labour. Whatever was received in the kitchen during the day was all used by night and nothing was kept over for the morrow. A distinctive contribution of the Third Guru to the growth of the Sikh organization was the establishment of twenty-two *manjis* (dioceses), covering several parts of India, to preach

Guru Nanak's mission. Amelioration of the position of women was the aim of the social reforms he introduced. He deprecated in particular the customs of *purdah* (veil) and *sati* (immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband).

Guru Ram Das (1574-81) was the Third Guru's son-in-law. He proved a true and devoted disciple and achieved such perfect spiritual kinship with the Master that the latter nominated him his successor. For seven years Guru Ram Das guided the destinies of the new faith. He founded the town of Amritsar which in course of time became the centre of Sikh religion and the most flourishing trading city of Northern India.

Guru Arjun (1581-1606), the Fifth Guru, played a role in the Sikh movement consistent with his place in the numerical order. The work of the first four Gurus was preparatory. It assumed definite form in the days of Guru Arjun, who gave to Sikhism its Scripture, the Holy Granth, and a central place of worship, the Amritsar temple. He taught, by example, non-violence in thought and deed and adherence to truth in face of the hardest trial. The later Gurus expounded the tenets of Sikhism as embodied in the Holy Granth and inculcated the principle of sacrifice laid down by Guru Arjun. He thus marked the central point in the development of the Sikh religion.

Guru Arjun was born in 1563. Youngest of the three sons of Guru Ram Das, the Fourth Apostle, he was of a deeply religious temperament, and his father's favourite. This excited the jealousy of his eldest brother, Prithi Chand. Once Guru Ram Das had an invitation to attend a wedding at Lahore. The Guru, unable to go himself, wanted one of his sons to represent him at the ceremony. Prithi Chand excused himself on a false pretext. The second son, Mahadev, was ascetically inclined and had little interest in any worldly festivity. Arjun, the youngest, who offered to do the Guru's bidding willingly, was sent to Lahore with instructions to remain there until recalled and preach Guru Nanak's word to the people.

Arjun stayed on in Lahore waiting for word from his father to come. He had, in the meantime, organized a Sikh congregation in the city. But he longed to go back to

Amritsar and see his father. He wrote, in verse, an epistle which he sent through a special messenger. The letter was intercepted at Amritsar by his brother, Prithi Chand. Another epistle met with a similar fate. The third, which Arjun took precaution to mark Number Three, did reach Guru Ram Das. The Guru made enquiries about the two previous epistles and discovered what Prithi Chand had done.

Arjun was sent for at once and was received warmly by the Guru who expressed his appreciation of his work at Lahore and of the affectionate letters he had written to him. Arjun extemporized a fourth one, giving vent to his feelings of joy at meeting his Guru. The Guru was pleased with him and knew that he was the fittest person to inherit the ministry. Before his death, he named him his successor.

The first task Guru Arjun undertook was the completion of the Amritsar tank. Sikhs came from all over the country to join in the work of digging. This kind of voluntary labour of love called *sewa,* or service, is considered by the Sikhs an act of the highest merit and virtue. The Guru also started extending the town of Amritsar, then called Ramdaspur after the name of the founder, Guru Ram Das.

Guru Arjun laid out a temple in the middle of the Amritsar tank. He had the foundations of the building, which was called Harmandir, laid by a Muslim divine, Mian Mir. The temple had four doorways which meant that the Sikh worship was open to all and that there was no restriction on any caste, including the so-called Shudras, entering the temple.

The Guru left Amritsar on a tour of Majha, the country between the Ravi and the Beas rivers, taking his message to the remotest village. When he came upon the site of the present shrine of Tarn Taran, he was so much attracted by the beauty of its natural surroundings that he obtained the land from the villagers with a view to founding a colony. He constructed a tank which is now one of the sacred places of Sikh pilgrimage. In Jullundur Doab, between the rivers Beas and Sutlej, Guru Arjun founded another town and named it Kartarpur.

The Guru then visited Lahore where many Hindu and Muslim saints came to see him. They were all impressed by his spiritual dedication and humility. The Mughal viceroy

of Lahore paid homage to him and had a Sikh centre of worship built at his own expense.

On his return to Amritsar, Guru Arjun set about compiling a sacred book for the faithful. He sent messages to Sikhs all over the country to collect and pass on to him the hymns of his predecessors. The Gurus had travelled extensively and their compositions lay scattered all over the country. some committed to writing by their followers, others only remembered and handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth.

Baba Mohan, son of the Third Guru, had a collection of his father's verses. Guru Arjun sent Bhai Gurdas, a learned and revered Sikh, to fetch the volume from him, but Baba Mohan refused to see the Guru's messenger. Bhai Buddha. one of the oldest disciples of the First Guru. was similarly turned away from his door. Then Guru Arjun went himself. On seeing him. Baba Mohan, in banter. said. "Why have you grown such a long beard?" "To dust the feet of saints like you." Baba Mohan was disarmed and gave the Guru what he had come to ask for.

The Guru also collected songs and hymns of other Indian saints, both Hindu and Muslim, which were in keeping with the spirit of the new faith. He incorporated in the Holy Granth compositions of Muslims such as Sheikh Farid and the so-called Shudras such as Ravidas.

Guru Arjun was himself a great poet. He added to the sacred volume his own hymns full of divine love and deep human sympathy and awareness. His *Sukhmani,* appropriately called the Psalm of Peace, is a masterpiece of devotional poetry. There is in literature nothing more soul-soothing and sublime than *Sukhmani.*

The hymns were arranged according to *ragas,* or musical measures. Bhai Gurdas transcribed the hymns from Guru Arjun's dictation. Sikhs came to Amritsar in large numbers to see the *Granth Sahib* when it was ready. It was installed in the Holy Temple, or Harmandir, with ceremony and Bhai Buddha was ordained its first priest. The Guru enjoined on the Sikhs to reverence the Book which, he said, was the embodiment of the teachings and spirit of the Gurus.

The Holy Granth, containing hymns of Sikh Gurus and of Hindu and Muslim saints, was a puzzle to people of

orthodox views. No one had known a religious book of this kind. Complaints were made to the Mughal authorities that the Book was derogatory to Islam and other religions. Akbar, who was then passing through the Punjab, also heard the criticisms and sent for Guru Arjun. The Guru sent Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas with the Holy Granth to be read from. The Holy Granth was opened at random and read from a spot pointed out by Akbar. The hymn read was in praise of God. So were the others read out at subsequent attempts.

Akbar was highly pleased and made an offering of fifty-one gold mohurs to the Holy Book. He presented Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas with robes of honour and gave them a third one for the Guru.

Akbar visited Guru Arjun at Goindwal on his way back to Delhi. He tasted his food in the Sikh *langar* and besought the Guru for spiritual guidance. The Guru recited to him the following hymn from the Holy Granth:

One man invoketh Ram, another Khuda;
One man worshippeth Gosain, another Allah;
Some speak of the cause of cause of causes,
others of the Benevolent.
Some talk of the extender of mercy,
others of the Merciful.
Some bathe at the Hindu sacred places,
others visit Mecca.
Some perform the Hindu worship,
others bow their heads in the Mohammedan fashion.
Some read the Vedas,
others the Musalman books.
Some wear white,
others blue.
Some call themselves Hindus,
others Musalmans.
Some aspire to the heaven of Hindus,
others to the heaven of the Mohammedans;
But he who recognizeth God's will, saith Nanak,
knoweth the secret of the Lord God.

[Macauliffe's translation

Jahangir, who succeeded Akbar on the throne of Delhi in 1605, was not as liberal in his religious policy as his father. He had not taken kindly to the Sikh faith and felt alarmed at its growing influence. In his *Tuzuk*, or Memoirs, he writes: "So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims, too, had been fascinated by his [Guru's] ways and teachings . . . For many years the thought had

been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic, or that he be brought into the fold of Islam."

Detractors of Sikhism now had their chance. Among them was a Hindu official of the Mughal viceroy of Lahore, Chandu Shah, who bore the Guru a personal grudge. A campaign of slander was started and the Emperor ordered the Guru to be arrested. To quote again from the Emperor's Memoirs: "I fully knew his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his houses and family be made over to Murtaza Khan, that his property be confiscated, and that he should be put to death with torture."

For five days the Guru was subjected to extreme physical torment. He was seated on red-hot iron plates and burning sand was poured over him. He was dipped in boiling water. Mian Mir, the Guru's Muslim friend, came to see him and offered to intercede on his behalf. But the Guru forbade him and enjoined him to find peace in God's will.

Guru Arjun was then taken to the Ravi. A dip in the river's cold water was more than the blistered body could bear. Wrapped up in meditation, the Guru peacefully passed on. A nobler example of self-immolation and cheerful acceptance of suffering in the cause of truth does not exist.

CHAPTER IV

HEROISM OUT OF THE HOLY TRADITION

GURU ARJUN'S martyrdom marked a turning-point in the history of the Sikh faith. Instead of the rosary and other saintly emblems of spiritual inheritance, his son, Guru Hargobind (1606-44), chose himself a warrior's equipment for the ceremonies of succession. He sat on the *gaddi* with two swords, declaring one to be the symbol of his spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. This was a very significant gesture which vitally influenced the subsequent course of events in the Punjab.

Until the time of Guru Arjun, the Sikhs had been a sect of peaceful people given to the pursuit of religious truth as revealed by the Gurus. The Fifth Guru himself set a noble example of non-violent resistance to tyranny and made the supreme sacrifice to uphold his faith. Realizing that sterner methods were required to meet the growing intolerance of the Mughal rulers, his successor, Guru Hargobind, adopted the style of a soldier and gave a martial turn to the career of the community. The process of this transformation is as eventful as it is miraculous, and, although his task had been made easier by the awakening brought about by his predecessors, it is remarkable how Guru Hargobind created a warlike spirit among people emasculated by prolonged submission to foreign rule, and how he forged the instruments of a mighty revolution.

Born in 1595 at Wadali, near Amritsar, Guru Hargobind was eleven years old when his father was tortured to death under Emperor Jahangir's orders. The rising community faced a grave crisis and its leader a novel responsibility for one so young. But he rose to the occasion and was, by his wisdom and courage, able not only to preserve the spirit and unity of the people but also to build up a viable force of resistance.

As a small boy he had been entrusted by his father to the care of Bhai Buddha, the revered Sikh blessed by Guru Nanak himself, and enjoined to master the manly arts of archery and swordsmanship along with the sacred lore.

Alert and handsome, he showed great aptitude for learning and acquired a rare proficiency in the physical skills. He turned out to be an excellent horseman and loved to follow the chase. Few could match his dexterity with the sword or his boldness of spirit.

Soon after his accession. Guru Hargobind sent out messages to the Masands, or missionaries of the Sikh religion, that, as far as possible, the Sikhs should in future bring him gifts of horses and arms. He kept a bodyguard of fifty-two armed Sikhs. Many more came from all over the Punjab—from Majha, Malwa and the Doaba—to offer him their services. To five hundred of them he gave horses and weapons of war and thus laid the foundation of an army willing to dare and die for the Guru's cause. Bidhi Chand, Pirana, Jetha, Piara and Langah were appointed leaders, each with a command of 100 men. To fortify the city of Amritsar he built a fortress called Lohgarh. In front of the Harmandir, which was the focal point of religious inspiration, he constructed another building and named it Akal Takht, or the Eternal Throne. From here he conducted the secular affairs of the community, dispensed justice and delivered sermons for the benefit of the faithful. In the open space between the Harmandir and Akal Takht were held tournaments of physical feats every afternoon and ballads and odes full of martial fervour were recited.

A new impulse of chivalry arose in the Punjab. Its mainspring was the spirit of belief and courage engendered by the teachings of the Gurus. In spite of his soldierly preoccupations, Guru Hargobind observed in his personal living the ascetic standards established by his predecessors and carried out the religious duties of his office with the same divine intuition and dedication. It was, in fact, in fulfilment of the mission of the House of Nanak that he cultivated the military ideal and gave this new direction to the movement.

But this further ruffled the Mughal authority. Alarmed at the reports he got, Jahangir ordered Guru Hargobind to be detained in the fort of Gwalior. Here the Guru remained imprisoned along with a number of Indian princes from various parts of the country. The royal prisoners were captivated by the personality of the Guru who combined dignity of demeanour with pious devotion. When at last

he was going to be released, he refused to leave the fort until his co-prisoners were allowed to come out with him. His wish was acceded to and a number of princes gained their freedom with him. From this day the Guru was known as *Bandichhor*, or Deliverer.

Jahangir's attitude towards Guru Hargobind became increasingly friendly and the latter was able to extend the work of his religious ministry beyond the limits of the Punjab. His missionary travels took him as far as Kashmir in the north and Nanakmatta in the east. Returning to the Punjab, he founded the town of Kiratpur, in the Sivaliks, where, besides Gurdwaras, he built at his own expense temples for Hindus and mosques for Mohammadans.

With Shah Jahan's accession to the Mughal throne, the policy of religious bigotry again became the order of the day. Many Hindu places of worship were demolished by the royal fiat and the conversion of Muslims was forbidden. The Sikhs had a special cause for annoyance in the desecration of their Baoli at Lahore which was filled up and replaced by a mosque. Their first clash with the Mughals would have occurred in the Punjab capital but for another incident which took place at Amritsar.

The Emperor Shah Jahan was on a hunting excursion in the neighbourhood of Amritsar when one of his favourite hawks strayed and fell into the hands of a party of Sikhs out on a similar expedition. The royal messengers came to claim the hawk, but the Sikhs refused to part with it. The Emperor was annoyed and sent a body of troop under Mukhlis Khan to arrest the Guru and take him to Lahore. Guru Hargobind, who was then busy making preparations for his daughter's wedding, was taken unawares. But he fought back. Mukhlis Khan was killed in the skirmish which took place at the site now occupied by the Khalsa College, and his soldiers fled back to Lahore. This was in 1628, barely a year after Shah Jahan's succession to the crown of Delhi.

It was a small incident in itself but pregnant with a moral far beyond its obvious implications. The Sikh church, turned militant under the impact of Mughal persecution, had challenged the authority of the rulers.

Guru Hargobind retired to the village of Jhabal to perform

the wedding ceremony of his daughter. From there he went to live at Kartarpur, a town built by his father in the Jullundur Doab. Another conflict took place here. Abdullah Khan, the Faujdar of Jullundur, made an attack upon the Guru. The Jullundur force lost its leader and suffered a complete rout.

A still more decisive victory was won by Guru Hargobind at Mehraj, in the Malwa, where a powerful army led by Lalla Beg Kabuli and his brother, Qamar Beg, waylaid him. Their object was to take away the horses, which Bhai Bidhi Chand, a bold Sikh, had by clever stratagem and resource recovered from the possession of the Mughals. The horses belonged to a Sikh, who was bringing them from Kabul as an offering for Guru Hargobind, and were seized on the way by Kasim Beg, the Governor of Lahore. Disguising himself first as a hayseller and then as an astrologer, Bhai Bidhi Chand gained access on two successive occasions to the Lahore Fort where the animals were kept, riding a horse away to safety each time. The Mughal governor felt slighted and sent out a force to punish the Guru and bring back the horses.

Guru Hargobind then had 4,000 armed Sikhs with him. This number was augmented by stalwarts from the Malwa territory—the Brars and the Gills, the Dhaliwals and the Dullats, the Chahals and the Sandhus—who came forward fired with the enthusiasm to fight for their faith. A pitched battle took place in which nearly 1,200 Sikhs were killed. The imperial troops suffered a much heavier loss and were eventually repulsed. Their commander Lalla Beg fell to a blow of the Guru's sword. Rao Bhallan, an ancestor of the Faridkot House, fought in this battle with distinction and won the blessings of the Guru by his feats of bravery. On the site of the action Guru Hargobind built a tank, Gurusar, to commemorate the victory.

Back in Kartarpur, Guru Hargobind was involved in yet another clash with the Mughals. One of his own commanders, Painda Khan, a Pathan, who had come to him as a young orphan and stayed at his court since, turned against him. He received help from the Emperor and attacked Kartarpur with a strong force which included Qutub Khan, the Faujdar of Jullundur, and Kale Khan, brother of Mukhlis

Khan, who had lost his life in the battle of Amritsar. Painda Khan fell in single combat with the Guru. Kale Khan, the commander of the imperial troops, was also killed, and the Sikhs emerged triumphant once again. This was Guru Hargobind's fourth successive victory against the Mughals.

The last ten years of his life the Guru spent peacefully at Kiratpur, devoting most of his time to meditation and to organizing missionary activity to spread the message of Sikhism. Old warriors like Bhai Bidhi Chand were sent out as missionaries of the faith. For Sikhs the roles of saint and soldier had become mutually complementary.

The inculcation of martial spirit was Guru Hargobind's distinctive contribution to the evolution of the Sikh people. His work has, however, been misinterpreted sometimes and the innovation he introduced regarded as a reversal of the principles enunciated by his predecessors. This is a wholly erroneous view. Guru Hargobind took up arms only to defend the religious values established by the Gurus before him and for the vindication of which his father had given away his life. None of the battles he fought was of his seeking, nor did he attempt to annex any territories in consequence of his military successes. To fight intolerance and tyranny was in keeping with the spirit of the teachings of Guru Nanak who had censured the oppression practised by Mughal invaders in clear, ringing terms. The inner principle of Sikhism as determined by the founder worked itself out during the lives of nine succeeding Apostles. What happened in Guru Hargobind's time was a historical necessity prescribed by the peculiar circumstances of the situation.

Although no armed conflict took place during the tenure of Guru Har Rai (1644-61), Guru Hargobind's grandson and successor, the discipline the Sikh church had developed was maintained. Guru Har Rai kept a force of 2,200 horsemen and went out hunting, but, since militarism for its own sake was not their object, the Sikhs preserved the truce as long as they were left alone. However, when Aurangzeb came to the throne of Delhi, difficulties began to arise. Guru Har Rai was summoned to the capital but instead of going himself he sent his son, Ram Rai. The latter, with a view to pleasing the Emperor, deliberately misread a verse from the Holy Granth. This was an unpardonable sin in the

eyes of the Guru who would not concede his principle for any worldly gain, nor permit anyone to tamper with the sacred texts. He disowned his son for his heresy.

Ram Rai was bypassed in favour of his younger brother, Har Krishan (1661-64), who was a small boy when he assumed the responsibility of leadership. Nevertheless, he acted with great circumspection and sagacity. What intuitive judgement he brought to the conduct of the community's affairs is evident from his choice of Tegh Bahadur as his successor whom he was able to mention but allusively from his sick-bed just before he died. He ignored several near relations to choose Tegh Bahadur, who, though least desirous of them all, was most deserving of the honour.

Like Guru Arjun, his grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur, (1664-75) also suffered death in defence of his religious faith and thus became the second great martyr of the Sikh faith. Large-scale conversions of Hindus started in the time of Aurangzeb. A group of Kashmiri Pandits came to see Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur—the town he had founded in the foothills of the Sivaliks—and besought him to save them from the fanatical policy of the rulers.

As Guru Tegh Bahadur sat contemplating what could be done to redeem the people from their abjectness, his young son, Gobind Singh, then aged nine, happened to go past along with his playmates. Seeing his father in a thoughtful mood, he tarried to ask why he looked so deeply preoccupied.

"Dharma is at stake. Some truly virtuous person should come forward to lay down his life to save it," said the Guru.

"Who could be more virtuous than yourself?" remarked Gobind Singh.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was pleased to hear this brave answer. He asked the visitors to go back and tell the Mughal Emperor that if he converted him (Guru Tegh Bahadur), they would all voluntarily accept Islam. The Guru himself resolved to go to Delhi and lay down his life to create among the people a spirit of courage and resistance.

When Guru Tegh Bahadur arrived in Delhi, Aurangzeb tried his utmost to tempt him to embrace Islam. Realizing that he could not achieve his object by cajolery, he resorted to torture. Eventually he ordered the Guru to be put to death. On November 11, 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded

in the Chandni Chowk in Delhi. One of his Sikhs, Bhai Mati Das, was sawn into two from head downwards.

Like his three predecessors, Guru Tegh Bahadur also maintained an army, but he did not engage in battle and chose the path of sacrifice to protest against the tyranny of the rulers. This was the second great moral challenge to Mughal authority in India.

CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENT OF STEEL

GURU GOBIND SINGH (1675-1708) was the last of the Sikh Apostles. His father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, while travelling in Eastern India, had left his family at Patna, in Bihar. Here Gobind Singh was born in 1666. Hearing the happy news, a large number of Guru Tegh Bahadur's followers made a pilgrimage to Patna : among the very first to arrive was Syed Bhikhan Shah, a Muslim saint of great repute and piety. On seeing the day-old infant, he declared he was a divine being.

Gobind Singh lived in Patna until he was five. He was then taken to Anandpur. At the age of seven he began to take lessons in Sanskrit, Hindi and Persian. Sahib Chand Granthi taught him the two former and Qazi Pir Mohammad the last. Among his classmates was Maniya, later Bhai Mani Singh, who became the head priest of the Amritsar temple and suffered death by torture in the worst days of Mughal persecution which overtook the Sikhs at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Gobind Singh made quick progress in his studies and acquired wide knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian lore. Throughout his life he retained his love of learning. At Paonta, on the banks of the Jamuna, he kept in his employ a number of scholars who created a vast treasure of Hindi and Punjabi literature by making translations from Sanskrit. He himself wrote poetry and his compositions are incomparable for sublimity of style and virility of content. Rarely has poetry in any tongue aroused greater zeal and vigour, or inspired such martial ardour and courage. Unique in the whole range of literature is his description of the divine attributes in *Jap Sahib*. The autobiographical *Vichitra Natak*, the Wonderful Drama, *Akal Ustat* and *Chandi-di-Var* are some of Guru Gobind Singh's works preserved in the Dasam Granth.

Gobind Singh was nine years old when his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was martyred at Delhi. The responsibility of guiding the destiny of his people and fulfilling the

mission of Guru Nanak now became his and he began to prepare himself for the great work that lay ahead of him. He performed his devotions and held morning and evening congregations to give expositions of the Sikh doctrine as laid down by Guru Nanak and interpreted by his successors. He practised the use of arms and went out hunting. Sikhs came from great distances to do homage to him, bringing offerings, especially of arms and horses.

With a view to immortalizing the new spirit which now inspired the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh initiated the order of the Khalsa. The manner of initiation was novel and dramatic.

Baisakhi day, March 30, 1699, saw large numbers of Sikhs gathered at Anandpur from all parts. The Guru rose early, as usual, and sat in meditation. He then donned his uniform and arms and appeared before the assemblage. Suddenly, he drew his sword and, addressing himself to his Sikhs, said, "I want today a head. Let any one of my true Sikhs come forward. My sword wants a head."

His words numbed the audience. They did not know what the Guru meant and gazed in awed silence until he spoke again. Now confusion turned to fear. For the third time the Guru reiterated his demand. Daya Ram, a resident of Lahore, arose and said, "My head is at thy service, my true Lord !" The Guru took him into a tent nearby and returned with his sword dripping blood. He demanded another head. Faces paled. This was something beyond the endurance of many and they began leaving the place, while others went to complain to the Guru's mother. But Dharam Das of Delhi stood up and said with folded hands, "Take my head, O great Lord !" Guru Gobind Singh made three more calls. Muhkam Chand of Dwarka ; Himmat of Jagannath ; and Sahib Chand of Bidar advanced and offered themselves. These devoted spirits, known as the Five Beloved, were blessed by the Guru. They—three of them the so-called Shudras, a Kashatriya and a Jat—formed the nucleus of the new self-abnegating, martial and classless fellowship of the Khalsa.

Guru Gobind Singh then held the ceremony of baptism. Filling an iron vessel with water, he stirred it with a two-edged sword and recited over it the sacred verses. His wife,

Mata Jitoji, put in some sweets. Amrit, or the nectar of immortality, was now ready. The five Sikhs each drank five palmfuls of it. They were ever to wear *keshas*, long hair; *kangha*, a comb; *kara*, a steel bracelet; *kachh*, short drawers; and *kirpan*, a sword. They were enjoined to help the poor and fight the oppressor, to have faith in One God and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of caste and religion. They were to be the saint-soldiers, devoted to the worship of God and to the duty of defending Dharma.

The five Sikhs were the first full-fledged members of the Khalsa commonwealth. Guru Gobind Singh now supplicated them for initiation and was administered the baptism with the appointed ceremony. Nearly 20,000 people were received into the Khalsa fold that day. The Sikhs returned to their homes kindled with the new enthusiasm and charged with the task of baptizing as many followers of the faith as they could.

Guru Gobind Singh had heard complaints against the official missionaries of Sikhism, known as Masands, who had held their dioceses in various parts of the country since the days of the Third Guru. They had strayed from the path of duty. Most of them lived in luxury and neglected their religious office. The Guru decided to abolish this priestly order which oppressed the people. He summoned all the Masands to Anandpur and charged them with corruption and frivolity, awarding punishment to each according to his crime.

Under Guru Gobind Singh, Anandpur developed the attributes of an autonomous State and became the centre of a religious movement which in course of time engulfed the whole of Northern India. The place was surrounded by small hill principalities ruled by Rajput princes who reacted inimically towards the new order. They disliked especially the free mixing in it of the four castes of the Hindus. The Sikh *langar* was a challenge to their time-honoured social customs. They were jealous, also, of the growing influence of the Guru and of the royal state he kept. Some of them had marched upon him in 1686 when he was at Paonta, a town he had built on the banks of the Jamuna. Coming out to meet their combined forces, Guru Gobind Singh had inflicted on them a severe defeat at Bhangani, six miles from

Paonta. In this battle a Muslim saint, Budhu Shah, had fought on the Guru's side with his sons and disciples.

The hill monarchs continued hostilities against Guru Gobind Singh, but met with little success. They eventually sought help from the Emperor Aurangzeb who ordered the governors of Sirhind and Lahore to jointly organize an expedition. In 1701, a large force consisting of troops of the Rajas and the Mughal governors attacked Anandpur. The Sikhs, including the Guru's eldest son, Ajit Singh, fought valiantly.

At the end of the day's fighting, complaints were made to the Guru that a Sikh called Kanhaiya had been giving water and aid not only to the wounded Sikhs but to the enemy also. The Guru asked Kanhaiya if this was true. "Yes, my Lord, it is true in a sense," replied Kanhaiya. "I have been giving water to everyone who needed it on the field of battle. But I saw no Mughals or Sikhs there. I saw only the Guru's face in everyone." The Guru, pleased with the reply, blessed him and told his Sikhs that Kanhaiya had understood his mission correctly.

The chieftains suffered heavy losses, but succeeded, in the end, in laying siege to the fort of Anandpur. The Sikhs continued the struggle and for several months the fight went on. Provisions ran short inside and the Sikhs faced starvation, but their spirit remained undaunted. As the siege persisted, the position of the garrison worsened, and some Sikhs suggested evacuation. A few of them wavered in their faith and insisted on leaving. The Guru told them they could go if they were prepared to disown him. Some of the Sikhs wrote a statement disowning the Guru and left.

Guru Gobind Singh was, however, finally forced to leave Anandpur, pursued by the Mughal troops. He gave battle after crossing the Sirsa, taking up a position in a small fortress at Chamkaur, now in Ambala district. Most of the handful of his Sikhs were killed. He then sent in his two eldest sons, aged seventeen and fourteen, both of whom died fighting bravely (December 22, 1704).

Losing nearly all his brave and devoted Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh left the fort of Chamkaur. Two of his sons had been killed in battle. The younger two were, under the orders of the Mughal governor of Sirhind, bricked up

alive in a wall. As they became unconscious, they were taken out and cruelly put to execution two days later. But unshaken was Guru Gobind Singh's faith in his mission. Reclining under a tree in a lonely jungle with a broken vessel supporting his head, he sang:

> Soft beds, dear Friend, are but a torment without Thee,
> Residence in mansions like living among serpents!
> Wine-bottles like the cross; wine-cups like the dagger;
> All this like death from a butcher's knife;
> My Friend's pallet is better, far better;
> Cursed be pleasure in palaces!

Guru Gobind Singh sojourned widely in South-East Punjab. From Dina, a village in the former Nabha state, he wrote to Aurangzeb a letter in Persian verse entitled *Zafarnamah,* the Epistle of Victory. In that letter he explained his mission to Aurangzeb and told him how the Emperor's men and the hill chiefs had forced the war on him. He declared that in the end victory would be his. "If an enemy practise enmity a thousand times, he cannot, as long as God is the protector, injure even a hair of one's head."

From Dina, Guru Gobind Singh marched towards Kot Kapura. Kapur Singh, ancestor of the Faridkot family, took Amrit from the Guru who bestowed on him a sword and a shield. These are preserved with reverence by his descendants to this day.

The Mughal force had been in pursuit of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs, who had renounced the Guru at Anandpur, also sought him, full of penitence. They meant to make amends for their apostasy. At Khidrana, now Muktsar, they engaged the pursuing force, putting up a spirited fight against heavy odds. Guru Gobind Singh also came to their help, raining arrows on the Mughal troops from a vantage point some distance away. The Mughals were forced to flee the battlefield.

All the forty Sikhs who had deserted Anandpur had fallen in battle, except Maha Singh of Rataul who lay dying. The Guru, full of praise for the sacrifice and heroism of these warriors, promised him any boon he might ask of him. Maha Singh was happy to see his Master just before his end and begged him to tear up the letter of disavowal he and his

companions had signed before leaving Anandpur. The paper, which the Guru had carried with him through many a crisis, was torn up and the forty dead were blessed as the Forty Emancipated Ones.

Guru Gobind Singh now repaired southwards to meet Aurangzeb who had sent messengers inviting him to come to the Deccan. While journeying through Rajputana, he heard the news of the death of the Emperor and turned back to Delhi. On the advice of Bhai Nand Lal, a devoted Sikh and his own former *Munshi,* Prince Muazzam, eldest son of Aurangzeb, requested for the Guru's help against Prince Azam, his younger brother, who had usurped the throne of Delhi. Guru Gobind Singh despatched a body of Sikhs under Dharam Singh to defend the right of Prince Muazzam. In the battle of Jajau (June 18, 1707), Azam was killed and Muazzam became the Emperor of India with the title of Bahadur Shah.

Bahadur Shah received Guru Gobind Singh with great honour at Agra and presented him, in token of his gratitude and reverence, with a *khillat,* including a jewelled scarf, a *dhukhdhukhi* and an aigrette. The dress of honour was carried by one of the Guru's attendants to his camp.

Guru Gobind Singh was expecting to return to the Punjab after finishing parleys with Bahadur Shah. Letters were sent out to the Sikhs. One of these, translated into English by the Sikh historian, Dr Ganda Singh, and quoted in his essay entitled *Last Days of Guru Gobind Singh,* reads as follows:

> To the *Sangat* of Dhaul. You are my *Khalsa.* The *Guru* shall protect you. Repeat *Guru, Guru* (always remember the Great Master). With all happiness, we came to the *Patishah.* A dress of honour and a jewelled *dhukhdhukhi* worth sixty thousand was presented to us. With the *Guru's* grace, the other things are also progressing (satisfactorily). In a few days we are also coming. My instruction to the entire Khalsa *Sangat* is to remain united ; when we arrive in Kahlur, the entire Khalsa should come to our presence fully armed. He who comes shall be happy . . . *Sammat* 1764, dated Katik 1st.

But Bahadur Shah had to leave suddenly for the Deccan to quell a rebellion by his brother, Kam Bakhsh. Guru Gobind Singh, instead of coming to the Punjab, travelled south with him to complete the negotiations aimed at bringing

the Mughal administration round to a fair policy towards all religions.

In early September, Guru Gobind Singh arrived at Nander, on the bank of the Godavari. Here he came upon the hermitary of a Bairagi Sadhu, Madho Das, who was believed to possess magical powers. Finding him absent from his hut, the Guru laid himself down on his couch to wait for him, while his Sikhs killed a goat to cook meat for the evening meal. Madho Das was furious at this profanation of his monastery and burnt with the desire to chastise the strange visitor for his temerity. But no sooner did he set his eyes on the Guru than all his anger was gone: so was his sorcerous will of which he was greatly proud. He fell at the Guru's feet and called himself his Banda, or slave. The brief colloquy which took place is set down by Ahmad Shah Batalia in his *Zikir-i-Guruan wa Ibtida-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-Eshan,* which was based on contemporary records of his ancestors.

Madho Das : Who are you ?
Guru Gobind Singh : He whom you know.
Madho Das : What do I know ?
Guru Gobind Singh : Think it over in your mind.
Madho Das (after a pause) : So you are Guru Gobind Singh.
Guru Gobind Singh : Yes !
Madho Das : What have you come here for ?
Guru Gobind Singh : I have come so that I may convert you into a disciple of mine.
Madho Das : I submit, my Lord. I am a Banda (a slave) of yours.

Madho Das was baptized and admitted to the discipline of the Khalsa Panth.

Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind felt apprehensive at the friendly turn of relations between the Sikh Guru and the Emperor and deputed two of his trusted men to get the former out of the way. These two Pathans secretly pursued the Guru and overtook him at Nander. They frequently visited his camp and one day, as the Guru lay resting after the *Rahiras* prayers, one of them stabbed him in the left side near the heart. Before he could attack again, Guru Gobind Singh struck him down with his sabre. His companion fell under the swords of the Sikhs.

When Bahadur Shah heard the news, he sent expert

surgeons, including an Englishman, Cole by name, to attend on Guru Gobind Singh and his injury was healed. But, not long after, as he stretched a powerful bow, the wound broke out again and bled profusely. The shock was too great. The Guru bade the Sikhs his last farewell with the words *Wahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Sri Wahiguru Ji Ki Fateh* (the Khalsa belongs to the God Almighty: victory to the Lord Master) and passed away in the early hours of October 7, 1708.

Guru Gobind Singh's last injunctions to his Sikhs were: "He who wishes to behold the Guru, let him search the Holy Granth. The Guru will dwell with the Khalsa; be firm and faithful; wherever five Sikhs are assembled together there will I also be present."

The apostolic succession thus passed on to the Holy Granth which, along with the Khalsa Panth, symbolized the personality of the Guru. The collective will of the community guided by the teachings contained in the Holy Granth carried with it the authority of the Guru who was ever the protector of the honour and integrity of the Khalsa.

Guru Gobind Singh's work is best understood as the fulfilment of Guru Nanak's mission. Explaining the purpose of his life the *Vichitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh says:

> For this purpose was I born,
> Understand all ye pious people,
> To uphold righteousness, to lift up the good,
> To destroy all evil-doers root and branch.

Guru Gobind Singh's struggle was against religious intolerance and oppression. He did not fight for any territory or wordly power, or against any religion or sect. The Sikh organization took on the semblance of a State during his time. But amidst all its splendour Guru Gobind Singh maintained the simplicity of an ascetic in his personal life. Guru Nanak had started his work on a quieter note, but no one could mistake its sternness and implacability towards injustice, cruelty and hypocrisy. The conditions prevailing during Guru Gobind Singh's days emphasized, of necessity, the latter attitude.

CHAPTER VI

TESTING TIME

THE eighteenth century in the Punjab was a period of great political upheaval and turmoil. It witnessed a prolonged drama of constant battle, foreign invasion and internal conflict. Warring powers, such as Mughals, Marathas and Afghans, strove with each other for supremacy. Their mutual fighting produced conditions of utter confusion and anarchy. But order gradually evolved out of a completely chaotic situation and the process took a whole century to work itself out. The Mughal authority in the Punjab had begun showing signs of weakness soon after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, and the subsequent perplexity and disharmony continued until 1799—the year the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, occupied Lahore and laid the foundations of a peaceful State.

For Sikhs this was a time of grim trial and of supreme moral exaltation which accrued to them because of their heroic fight for their faith and their perseverance in meeting the challenge of a sustained and fierce persecution. They suffered continual oppression almost throughout the century and there were moments when their persecutors thought they had extirpated the entire sect. To crushing their existence the Mughal rulers had, in fact, vowed themselves. They were outlawed and ordered to be killed at sight and a severed Sikh head brought the tyrant a reward from the Government.

The Sikhs matched the situation with a rare power of endurance and resolution. They sanctified this period of their history with deeds of unparalleled sacrifice and courage and the Sikh character presented in this testing time its noblest aspect. In the strife that was forced upon them lay seed of their subsequent political ascendancy and they were able to set up their authority in the Punjab after vanquishing their persecutors. But in the midst of direst struggle they never went back on their high-minded religious ideal, nor forswore their spirit of magnanimity.

History records a high and unusual tribute to Sikhs' qualities of courage and integrity during this period of harrowing oppression. The attester is their sworn enemy, Qazi Nur

Mohammad, who came to India with the army of Ahmad Shah Durrani at the time of his seventh incursion into the country (1764-65) and was witness to Sikhs' battles with the invader. In his poetic account, in Persian, of the Durrani's invasion, he refers to the Sikhs in rude and imprecatory language, but cannot at the same time help proclaiming their many natural virtues. In Section XLI of his poem, for example, he says :

> "Do not call the 'dogs' [his contumelious term for Sikhs] dogs, for they are lions, and are courageous like lions in the field of battle. How can a hero, who roars like a lion in the field of battle, be called a dog? If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in the field. They will demonstrate it to you in such a way that one and all will praise them for it. If you wish to learn the science of war, O swordsman, learn from them how to face an enemy like a hero and to get safely out of an action. *Singh* is a title [a form of address for them]. It is not justice to call them dogs. If you do not know the Hindustani language [I shall tell you that] the word *Singh* means a lion. Truly, they are like lions in battle and, in times of peace, they surpass Hatim [in generosity] ...
>
> "Leaving aside their mode of fighting, hear ye another point in which they excel all other fighting people. In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maidservant. There is no adultery among these 'dogs' ... they do not make friends with adulterers and housebreakers ..."

The Sikh leader who presaged a troublous century's daring chain of events was Banda Singh Bahadur. From Nander where the last of the Sikh prophets, Guru Gobind Singh, had died, he came to the Punjab armed with the Guru's blessings and with a drum, a banner and five arrows as emblems of the authority the Guru had bestowed upon him. He issued *hukamnamas*, or edicts, to Sikhs in the Punjab calling upon them to join him. His object was to attack the town of Sirhind where two of Guru Gobind Singh's sons had met with a cruel fate at the hands of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor. Seizing Samana and Sadhaura, Banda Singh reached Sirhind on May 14, 1710, and occupied the town routing the army of Wazir Khan. Baj Singh, one of Banda Singh's leading companions, was made the governor of Sirhind.

Banda Singh thus laid the foundation of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. He assumed the style of royalty and struck coin in the name of the Guru. Rendered into English, the Persian inscription on his coins read:

> By the grace of True Lord is struck the coin in the two worlds;
> The sword of Nanak is the granter of all boons, and the victory is of Guru Gobind Singh, the King of Kings.

Banda Singh's rule, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Punjab. With it began the decay of Mughal authority and the demolition of the feudal system of society it had created. Banda Singh abolished the Zamindari system and made the tillers masters of the lands they had been cultivating for their landlords. This marked a revolutionary change in the social order in the Punjab and led to the emergence of peasants as a potent force in the political life of the country.

Banda Singh's increasing influence roused the ire of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, who journeyed northwards from the Deccan to punish the Sikhs. Instructions were issued to the Subadars of Delhi and Oudh and other Mughal officers to march towards the Punjab. Prohibitory laws against the Sikhs were passed. Fearing that some Sikhs might not have smuggled themselves into the royal camp disguised as Hindus, Bahadur Shah ordered all Hindus employed in the imperial offices to shave off their beards.

The massive imperial force drove the Sikhs from Sirhind and other places to take shelter in the fort of Lohgarh in the submontane region. Here they made a determined stand. "It is impossible for me," says Khafi Khan, a Muslim historian of that time, "to describe the fight which followed. The Sikhs in their faqir's dress struck terror into the royal troops. The number of casualties among the latter was so large that for a time it appeared as if they were going to lose."

Further reinforcements arrived and sixty thousand horse and foot closely invested Banda Singh's hilly retreat. For want of provisions, Sikhs were reduced to rigorous straits. They killed their horses for food and, when they could stand

up to the enemy no longer, they made a desperate nightly sally to escape into the hills of Nahan.

Banda Singh was far from vanquished. A *hukamnama,* which he issued to his followers within a fortnight of his leaving the fort of Lohgarh, showed the spirit which swayed the Sikhs during that difficult period. The following is an English version of Banda Singh's letter:

Deg o teg o fateh o nusrat bedirang
Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh
The kettle and the sword [symbols of charity and power], victory and unreserved blessing have been obtained from Guru Nanak-Gobind Singh.
One God! Victory to the Presence!!
This is the order of Sri Saccha Sahib (the True Great Master) to the entire Khalsa of Jaunpur. The Guru will protect you. Call upon the Guru's name. Your lives will be fruitful. You are the Khalsa of the great Immortal God. On seeing this letter, repair to the presence, wearing five arms. Observe the rules of conduct laid down for the Khalsa. Do not use bhang, tobacco, poppy, wine, or any other intoxicant . . .
Commit no theft or adultery. We have brought about the Golden Age (Satyuga). Love one another.
This is my wish. He who lives according to the rules of the Khalsa shall be saved by the Guru.

Sikhs came out of their mountainous haunts to recover their lost territories and occupied once again Sadhaura and Lohgarh. Farrukh Siyar, who came to the throne of Delhi in 1713, launched against them the sternest proceedings that political authority stirred with a fanatical religious zeal could devise. They were hounded out of the plains of the Punjab and their main column, under Banda Singh, was subjected to a most stringent siege at the village of Gurdas-Nangal, about four miles from Gurdaspur. Gurdas-Nangal was the epic of purest heroism in face of heavy odds. According to Mohammad Qasim, the Muslim author of *Ibratnamah,* who has given an eye-witness account of this campaign, Sikhs' "brave and daring deeds were amazing. Twice or thrice a day, some forty or fifty of them would come out of their enclosure to gather grass for their animals, and, when the combined forces of the Emperor went to oppose them, they made short work of the Mughals with arrows, muskets and small swords, and, then, disappeared. Such was the terror

of these people and the fear of the sorcery of their chief that the commanders of the royal army prayed that God might so ordain things that Banda should seek safety in flight."

The supplies having run out, the Sikhs suffered grave hardship and lived on animal flesh which they had to eat raw, for there was no fuel to make a fire. To quote Khafi Khan again, "Many died of dysentery and privation ... When all the grass was gone, they gathered leaves from trees. When these were consumed, they stripped the bark and broke off the small shoots, dried them, ground them down and used them instead of flour, thus keeping body and soul together. They also collected the bones of animals and used them in the same way. Some assert that they saw a few of the Sikhs cut flesh from their own thighs, roast it, and eat it."

For eight long months, the garrison resisted the siege under these gruesome conditions. The royal armies at last broke through and captured Banda Singh and his famishing Sikhs. Nearly three hundred of them were killed on the spot, filling, as another contemporary Muslim historian Kamwar Khan, the author of *Tazkirat-us-Salatin,* says, "that extensive plain with blood as if it had been a dish." The rest, along with Banda Singh, were taken to Lahore, and, thence to Delhi. The cavalcade to the imperial capital formed a most awesome spectacle. Besides 740 prisoners in heavy chains, it comprised seven hundred cartloads of the heads of decapitated Sikhs with another 2,000 stuck upon pikes.

C. R. Wilson, a Bengal civilian, has given in his *Early Annals of the English in Bengal* the following description of the entry of the Sikh captives into Delhi:

> Malice did its utmost to cover the vanquished with ridicule and shame. First came the heads of the executed Sikhs, stuffed with straw, and stuck on bamboos, their long hair streaming in the wind like a veil, and along with them to show that every living creature in Gurdaspur had perished, a dead cat on a pole. The teacher (Banda Singh) himself, dressed out of mockery in a turban of red cloth, embroidered with gold, and a heavy robe of brocade, flowered with pomegranates, sat in an iron cage, placed on the back of an elephant. Behind him stood a mailclad officer, with a drawn sword. After him came the other prisoners, seven hundred and forty in number, seated two and two upon camels without saddles. Each wore a high foolscap of sheepskin and had one hand pinned to his neck; between two pieces of wood. Many were also dressed in sheepskin with woolly side turned outwards. At the end of the

procession rode three great nobles, Muhammad Amin Khan, sent by the emperor to bring in prisoners (from Agharabad to the Lahori gate of the palace), Qamr-ud-Din, his son, and Zakariya Khan, his son-in-law, who being also the son of Abd-us-Samad Khan had been deputed to represent his father at the ceremony. The road to the palace, for several miles, was lined with troops and filled with exultant crowds, who mocked at the teacher and laughed at the grotesque appearance of his followers. They wagged their heads and pointed the finger of scorn at the poor wretched as they passed. 'Hu! Hu!, infidel dog-worshippers, your day has come. Truly, retribution follows on transgression, as wheat springs from wheat, and barley from barley!' Yet the triumph could not have seemed complete. Not all the insults that their enemies had invented could rob the teacher and his followers of their dignity. Without any sign of dejection or shame, they rode on, calm, cheerful, even anxious to die the death of martyrs. Life was promised to any who would renounce their faith, but they would not prove false to their Guru, and at the place of suffering their constancy was wonderful to look at. 'Me, deliverer, kill me first,' was the prayer which constantly rang in the ears of the executioner. One there was, a young man, an only son, whose widowed mother had made many applications to the Mughal officers, declaring that her son was a Sikh prisoner, and no follower of the Guru. A release was granted and she hastened to the prison-house to claim her son. But the boy turned from her to meet his doom crying, 'I know not this woman. What does she want with me? I am a true and loyal follower of the Guru.' For a whole week the sword of the executioner did its butcher's work. Every day a hundred brave men perished and at night the headless bodies were loaded into carts, taken out of the city, and hung upon trees. It was not till June 9 (Sunday, the 29th Jamadi-ul-Akhir, 1128 A.H., June 9, 1716 O.S.) that Banda himself was led out to execution, all efforts having failed to buy him off. They dressed him, as on the day of his entry, set him again on an elephant, and took him away to the old city, where the red Qutb Minar lifts its proud head of white marble over the crumbling walls of the Hindu fortress. Here they paraded him round the tomb of the late emperor, Bahadur Shah, and put him to a barbarous death. First they made him dismount, placed his child in his arms and bade him kill it. Then, as he shrank with horror from the act, they ripped open the child before its father's eyes, thrust its quivering flesh into his mouth and hacked him to pieces limb by limb.

The ambassadors of the East India Company, John Surman and Edward Stephenson, who were then in Delhi and had witnessed some of these massacres, wrote to the Governor of Fort William:

> The great Rebel Gooroo [Banda Singh] who has been for these 20 years so troublesome in the Subaship [suba] of Lahore is at length taken with all his family and attendance by Abd-us-Samad Cawn, the Suba [Subadar, i.e., Governor]

> of that province. Some days ago they entered the city laden with fetters, his whole attendants which were left alive being about seven hundred and eighty all severally mounted on camels which were sent out of the city for that purpose, besides about two thousand heads stuck upon poles, being those who died by the sword in battle. He was carried into the presence of the King, and from thence to a close prison. He at present has his life prolonged with most of his *Mutsuddys* in the hope to get an account of his treasure in the several parts of his Kingdom, and of those that assisted him, when afterwards he will be executed, for the rest there are 100 each day beheaded. It is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatized from his new formed religion.

This letter was written on March 10, 1716. Executions continued and, on June 9, came the turn of Banda Singh. Harshest torments were reserved for him. His eyes were pulled out and his hands and feet chopped off. His flesh was torn with red-hot pincers. The end came, mercifully for him, with the executioner's axe falling on his neck.

CHAPTER VII

SUFFERING CREATES POWER

THE CARNAGE at Delhi was followed by further tyrannous action against the Sikhs. But every fresh adversity imposed on them only stimulated their will to survival and self-assertion. A commanding figure who led them through this dark and exilic period was Nawab Kapur Singh, the founder of the Dal Khalsa. By his bold example and wise leadership he welded the Sikhs into a strong fighting force and implanted in their minds the vision of an independent State. He was the true embodiment of Sikh character forged by the alchemy of a fiery ordeal and enjoyed unique esteem for his spirit of courage, sacrifice and religious devotion. When, in pursuance of peace, an offer of Nawabship and a *jagir* for the Sikhs came from the Mughal Government, he was unanimously chosen by the Sikhs to receive the title on their behalf.

Nawab Kapur Singh was born of a Virk family of Jats in 1697. His native village was Kalo-ke, in Sheikhupura district. Later, when he seized the village of Faizullapur, near Amritsar, he renamed it Singhpura and started living there. He is also known as Kapur Singh Faizullapuria and the small principality he founded as Faizullapuria's or Singhpuria's State.

Kapur Singh was eleven years old at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's demise and nineteen at the time of the massacres at Delhi. He had thus passed his early life in an atmosphere charged with the fervour of faith and sacrifice. He came into living touch with the new impulse then directing the energies of his people when he took baptism at a large gathering of Sikhs held at Amritsar on the occasion of the Diwali. Bhai Mani Singh who had been sent to Amritsar as head priest of the Darbar Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh's widow, *Mata* Sundari, presided at the ceremony. Kapur Singh's youthful heart was fired with a new enthusiasm. His father, Dalip Singh, and brother, Dan Singh, were also among those who were baptized into the fold of the Khalsa on that historic day.

Kapur Singh's physical courage and warlike spirit were

valuable qualities in those days of high adventure. He soon gained a position of eminence among his people who were then engaged in a desperate struggle against the Mughal Government. Zakriya Khan, who became the Subadar of Lahore in 1726, launched a still severer policy against the Sikhs and let loose terror upon them. Kapur Singh headed a band of warriors who, with a view to paralyzing the administration and obtaining food for their companions forced to seek shelter in remote hills and forests, attacked the Government treasuries and caravans moving from one place to another. Such was the effect of their depredations that the Subadar was soon obliged to make terms with them.

In 1733, the Mughal Government decided at the instance of Zakriya Khan to lift the quarantine forced upon the Sikhs and make an offer of a grant to them. Subeg Singh, a Sikh resident of village Jambar, near Lahore, who was for a time Kotwal (or police inspector) of the city under Muslim authority, was entrusted with the task of negotiating with the Khalsa. He reached Amritsar where the Sikhs had been allowed to assemble and celebrate the festival of Baisakhi after many years of exile, and offered them on behalf of the Government the title of Nawab and a *jagir* consisting of the parganas of Dipalpur, Kanganwal and Jhabal.

After some mutual discussions, the Sikhs accepted the offer. The Khalsa commonwealth, reared from the beginning on a democratic principle, was now faced with the question of choosing a fit person to be invested with the title of Nawab. Kapur Singh, who delighted in simple deeds of service when he was not fighting, was trying to soften the rigours of a hot day by stirring the air over the assembly with a hand-fan. All eyes centred on him and he was, with one accord, selected for the honour.

Kapur Singh was reluctant, but he could not deny the unanimous will of the Panth. As a mark of respect, he placed the robe of honour sent by the Mughals at the feet of five revered Sikhs—Bhai Hari Singh Hazuria, Baba Dip Singh Shahid, Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Bhai Karam Singh and Sardar Buddha Singh, great-grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh—before putting it on. The dress included a shawl, a turban, a jewelled plume, a pair of gold bangles, a necklace, a row of pearls, a brocade garment and a sword.

Nawab Kapur Singh looked magnificent in this accoutrement. But he lost none of his native humility or simplicity of heart. The first request he made to his comrades after the investiture was that he should not be deprived of his old privilege of serving in the community kitchen.

Word was sent round to Sikhs passing their days in distant jungles and deserts that peace had been made with the Government and that they could return to their homes. Nawab Kapur Singh undertook to consolidate the disintegrated fabric of the Sikh organization. The whole body of the Khalsa was formed into two sections—Buddha Dal, the army of veterans, and Taruna Dal, the army of the youthful. The former was entrusted with the task of looking after the holy places, preaching the Guru's word and inducting converts into the Khalsa Panth by holding baptismal ceremonies. Nawab Kapur Singh was himself in charge of this section. The Taruna Dal was the more active division and its function was to fight in times of emergency.

Nawab Kapur Singh's personality was the common link between the two wings of the Dal Khalsa. He was universally reverenced for his high character. His word was obeyed willingly and scrupulously and to receive baptism at his hands was counted an act of rare merit. But he was so humble by temperament that he always thought his position among his people to be a gift from them rather than the result of any qualities he possessed. Once Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who, owing to some years spent in Delhi, had the habit of mixing Urdu words with his Punjabi, complained to him that some of his companions had given him the derisive nickname of *Hum-ko-tum-ko*. "Why should you mind what the Khalsa say," said Kapur Singh, "for you do not know their ways. In their kindness, they bestowed Nawabship upon me and might one day make a *Padishah* (king) of you!" Jassa Singh came to be known as *Padishah* from that day. The word became a title of endearment and authority when Jassa Singh, as leader of the Dal Khalsa, occupied Lahore in 1761. He was proclaimed by the Sikhs the *Sultan-ul-Qaum*, or King of the Nation.

The Taruna Dal rapidly grew in strength and soon numbered more than 12,000. To ensure efficient control, Nawab Kapur Singh split it into five parts, each with a

separate centre. The first batch was led by Baba Dip Singh Shahid, the second by Karam Singh and Dharam Singh, the third by Kahan Singh and Binod Singh of Goindwal, the fourth by Dasaundha Singh of Kot Buddha and the fifth by Vir Singh and Jiwan Singh Ranghretas. Each batch had its own banner and drum, and formed the nucleus of a separate political State. The territories conquered by these groups were entered in their respective papers at Akal Takht to avoid any conflict or confusion. From these documents (or *Misls*) the principalities carved out by them came to be known as Misls. Seven more groups formed subsequently and, towards the close of the century, there were altogether twelve Sikh Misls ruling between them the land of the Five Waters.

The *entente* with the Mughals did not last long and, before the harvest of 1735, Zakriya Khan, the Subadar of Lahore, sent a force and occupied the *jagir*. The Sikhs were driven away towards the Malwa by Lakhpat Rai, the Diwan of Lahore. They were made welcome by Ala Singh, the leader of the Phulkia Misl, who took the opportunity of receiving the baptism from Nawab Kapur Singh. The latter continued his missionary and military activities in the cis-Sutlej parts. Another important chief to take the baptism at his hands was Hamir Singh, ancestor of the Faridkot family. During his sojourn in the Malwa, Nawab Kapur Singh conquered the territory of Sunam and made it over to Ala Singh. He also attacked Sirhind and defeated the Mughal governor of the place in a fierce action.

Nawab Kapur Singh led the Sikhs back to the Majha to celebrate Diwali at Amritsar. But he was defeated by Diwan Lakhpat Rai's army near Amritsar and forced to turn away. The Taruna Dal promptly came to his help. The combined force fell upon Diwan Lakhpat Rai before he had reached Lahore and inflicted upon him a severe defeat. The Diwan's nephew, Duni Chand, and two important Faujdars, Jamal Khan and Tatar Khan, were killed in this battle.

The Mughal Government pursued its policy of persecution with greater vigour and thoroughness. To cut off the Sikhs from the chief source of their inspiration, the Amritsar temple was taken possession of and guarded by the military to prevent them visiting it. Sikhs were then living in exile in

the Sivalik hills, Lakhi jungle and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. To assert their right of ablution in the holy tank at Amritsar, they would occasionally send riders, who, in disguise or openly cutting their way through the army guards, would reach the temple, take a dip in the tank and ride back with lightning speed on their fiery steeds. Many a heroic tale of such daring adventure is recounted, the most dramatic and valorous being that of Mehtab Singh of Mirankot and Sukha Singh. These intrepid spirits set out from their desert resorts in Rajputana to avenge the sacrilege perpetrated by Massa Ranghar, the Muslim chieftain, who had occupied the Amritsar temple and converted it into a nautch-house. Dressed as Mohammadans, Mehtab Singh and Sukha Singh, with bags full of stone-pebbles on their arms, entered the precincts, ostensibly, to deposit the land-revenue they pretended to have collected. While Sukha Singh stood guard at the door, Mehtab Singh went inside and suddenly fell upon Massa Ranghar and his revellers. Massa was killed on the spot and, before his companions realized what had happened, both Mehtab Singh and Sukha Singh were gone out of harm's way.

The Subadar of Lahore, Zakriya Khan, sent a strong force under Samad Khan to seek out the Sikhs. When the latter heard that Samad Khan was pursuing them, they came out to fight openly the tyrant who was responsible for killing with tortures Bhai Mani Singh, the revered Sikh divine. Samad Khan was killed in the action and the Mughal force suffered a severe reverse.

Nawab Kapur Singh now made a plan to capture Zakriya Khan. With a force, 2,000 strong, dressed in green, their hair hanging loosely behind in Muslim style and a green Muslim banner leading them, he entered the city and went on to the Shahi Mosque where, according to the intelligence received, the Mughal governor was expected to attend the afternoon prayers. But Zakriya Khan did not visit the mosque. Kapur Singh was disappointed at the failure of his mission. Throwing off the disguise and shouting their usual war cries of Satsriakal, the Sikhs marched out of Lahore and vanished into their jungle homes.

The Buddha Dal once again crossed the Sutlej and marched right up to the vicinity of Delhi. On the way, they

triumphed over the chieftains of Jhajjar, Dadri, Dojana and Pataudi and received tribute from them. Over-running Faridabad, Ballabgarh and Gurgaon, the Dal returned to the Malwa.

In the early months of 1739, Nadir Shah, the Persian invader, was returning home after a hearty plunder of Delhi and the Punjab. With a view to avoiding the heat of the plains he kept close to the hills on the backward journey. The Khalsa Dal lay not far from the route he had taken. When he reached Akhnur on the river Chenab, they swooped down upon the rearguard, relieving the invaders of much of their booty. On the third night, they made an even fiercer attack and rescued from their hands a large number of Hindu girls who were restored to their families. For many a long mile the Sikhs pursued Nadir in this manner.

Zakriya Khan carried out his policy of repression with redoubled zeal. A pitiless campaign of manhunt was started. Sikhs' heads sold for money and the Mughals offered a prize for each head brought to them. This difficult period is full of countless deeds of heroism and sacrifice. Just to prove to the world that the Sikhs had not been annihilated or vanquished, one Bota Singh Sandhu stood in the most important highway in the Punjab, stick in hand, levying a tax on all passersby. Finding that everybody was tamely submitting to his demand, he wrote a letter to the governor of Lahore. who sent a batch of troops against him. Bota Singh fell fighting valiantly.

To encompass the destruction of the defiant race, the Mughal governor of Lahore and his minister, Lakhpat Rai, launched an all-out campaign and set forth with a large army. The latter's consuming passion to avenge the death of his brother, Jaspat Rai, who had died in a battle with the Sikhs, put a sharp edge of personal malevolence on the adventure. The Sikhs were brought to bay in a dense bush near Kahnowan, in Gurdaspur district. They put up a determined fight, but were overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy and scattered with heavy losses. They were chased into the hills and hunted down. More than seven thousand Sikhs lost their lives. "To complete his revenge," says Mohammad Latif, the Muslim historian of the Punjab, "Lakhpat Rai brought with him 1,000 Sikhs in irons to Lahore, and having

compelled them to ride on donkeys, bare-backed, paraded them in the bazars. They were, then, taken to the horse-market, outside the Delhi Gate, and there beheaded one after another without mercy." So indiscriminate and, considering the total Sikh population in those days, so extensive was the killing that the campaign is known in Sikh history as the First *Ghalughara,* or Holocaust.

In 1748, a section of the Dal Khalsa, under Charhat Singh, grandfather of Ranjit Singh, gave chase to the fleeing troops of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Afghan invader of India. The other, at the instance of Nawab Kapur Singh, decided to march towards Amritsar. Nawab Kapur Singh entrusted the command of this campaign to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

The Sikhs were able to celebrate Baisakhi (March 29, 1748) at Amritsar after a long interval. On this occasion Nawab Kapur Singh begged the Khalsa to be relieved of his office, and, at his suggestion, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was chosen the supreme commander of the Dal Khalsa.

For a quarter of a century, Nawab Kapur Singh had led the Sikhs through most trying and difficult times. Few men had ever to contend with heavier odds; few ever engaged in such an unequal fight. Yet, striving valiantly against strenuous circumstances, he step by step built up the sovereignty of the Khalsa and, by the time he retired, he had conferred on the Dal the lineaments of an independent State. In the midst of this life-long preoccupation with war and fighting, he maintained an irreproachable ethical standard and was universally esteemed for his devout character and heroic spirit.

CHAPTER VIII

TURN IN HISTORY

AHMAD SHAH DURRANI'S repeated invasions brought further chaos to the Punjab and added to the perplexities of the Delhi kingdom. In the dissipation of the authority of the Mughal Government, the Sikhs had the opportunity of extending their influence and assuming power as successors to the Muslim rule in Northern India. But before this culmination was reached, they had to pass through another terrible ordeal of fire and blood. By their stern and obstinate opposition to the Durrani and constant harassment of his armies and his vice-regents in the Punjab, they had earned the direst wrath of the Afghan Emperor who came out more than once pledged to exacting vengeance and scourging the entire sect.

Before Ahmad Shah launched his onslaughts against them, the Sikhs had been through another spell of hideous tyranny and persecution at the hands of the Governor of Lahore. Mir Mannu (1748-53) proved a worse foe of the Sikhs than his predecessors, Zakriya Khan and Yahiya Khan, and started the witchhunt with even greater fierceness and severity. Sikhs—men, women and children—were apprehended from wherever his soldiers could lay their hands on them and brought to Lahore for daily executions. So ruthless was Mannu's campaign against them that his name passed into contemporary folk-tradition. The Sikhs called him their "sickle" which mowed them mercilessly. "But the more the sickle mows, the more we multiply," sang they, defiantly.

The Sikhs were especially the target of Ahmad Shah's sixth incursion into India. News had reached him in Afghanistan of the defeat, after his withdrawal from the country, of his general, Nur-ud-Din Bamezei, at the hands of the Sikhs who were fast spreading themselves out over the Punjab and had declared their leader Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, King of Lahore (1761). To rid his Indian dominions of them once for all, he set out from Qandahar. Marching with alacrity, he overtook the Sikhs as they were withdrawing into the Malwa after crossing the Sutlej. This moving caravan

comprised a substantial portion of the total Sikh population and contained, besides active fighters, a large body of old men, women and children who were being escorted to the safety of the interior of the country.

Surprised by Ahmad Shah, the Sikhs threw a cordon round those who needed protection, and prepared for the battle. In this formation and continuing their march, they fought the invaders and their Indian allies desperately. The Sikh Sardars, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Ala Singh, Charhat Singh, Karora Singh, Hari Singh and Nahar Singh, led their forces with skill and courage. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia sustained twenty-two wounds on his body in this action and Charhat Singh rode to exhaustion five of his horses one after the other. Ahmad Shah succeeded, in the end, in breaking through the ring and glutted his revenge by carrying out a full-scale butchery. His orders were for everyone in Indian dress to be killed at sight. The soldiers of the Governor of Sirhind fighting for him were to wear green leaves of trees on their heads to distinguish themselves from the Sikhs.

Near the village of Kup, six miles from Malerkotla, about 15,000 Sikhs lay on that ghastly field at the end of a single day's action (February 5, 1762). In this battle known in the Sikh history as *Wadda Ghalughara,* or the Great Killing, was also lost the volume of the Holy Granth prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib.

Even such a disaster as had overtaken them at Kup caused no despondency among Sikhs. When the survivors of the Great Carnage assembled in the evening for their community prayer, a Sikh got up and said, "No harm done, Khalsaji! The Panth has emerged purer from the trial: the alloy has been eliminated." Within four months of the *Ghalughara,* the Sikhs had inflicted a severe defeat on the Governor of Sirhind. Four months later, they were celebrating Diwali in Harmandir which the Shah had demolished, and were fighting with him again a pitched battle forcing him to withdraw from Amritsar under cover of darkness (October 17, 1762). After this quick action the Sikhs once again retired into the Lakhi jungle and there was no further fighting with Ahmad Shah who left Lahore for Afghanistan on December 12, 1762.

Although the Punjab was claimed to be part of the

dominions of Ahmad Shah who had his nominees, Kabuli Mall and Zain Khan, as Governors in Lahore and Sirhind, respectively, the shadow of the expanding Sikh authority spread across the whole country. The Afghan Governors were helpless witnesses to this dramatic process of changing fortunes. While a batch of Sikhs remained in Amritsar under the leadership of Charhat Singh to cleanse the holy tank and rebuild the temple, destroyed and desecrated by Ahmad Shah, the rest of them went about establishing their own *thanas* and fortresses in the country. How the Sikh Sardars set their seal of authority on the territories they acquired is graphically described by Cunningham. "Riding day and night," says he, "each horseman would throw his belt and scabbard, his articles of dress and accoutrement, until he was almost naked, into successive villages, to mark them as his." These acquisitions were then recorded in the *Misl* of each Sardar at Akal Takht at Amritsar.

The Sikhs thus liberated the Punjab from foreign rule inch by inch and became symbols of India's honour and independence. Once, while the Sarbat Khalsa were assembled in a diet at Akal Takht on the occasion of the Baisakhi (April 10, 1763), some Brahman inhabitants of Kasur, an Afghan stronghold in the neighbourhood of Lahore, came with a complaint that the wife of one of them had been carried away by the Afghan chieftain, Usman Khan. Hari Singh Bhangi and Charhat Singh at once prepared to go out to Kasur to punish the tyrant. Usman Khan, who was engaged by the Sikh force, was killed and the Brahman woman was restored to her husband. The town was laid waste and the Sikhs acquired a considerable amount of booty.

On Diwali day (November 4, 1763), news reached the Sikhs at Amritsar that one of Ahmad Shah Durrani's generals, Jahan Khan, was coming out with an army. Suspending work on the construction of the temple, they went forward to bar his way. Charhat Singh and the Bhangi Sardars, Jhanda Singh and Gujjar Singh, routed Jahan Khan in a contest at Sialkot. The Afghan general fled back to Peshawar and a number of his relatives and dependents fell into the hands of the Sikhs. "But as the Sikhs of old would not lay their hands on women," says Ali-ud-Din in his *Ibratnamah*, "they sent them safely to Jammu." This testimony of a

Muslim author is significant of the scrupulous standards of chivalry the Sikhs observed even in the midst of fiercest conflict.

The Sikhs crossed the Sutlej under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They took a bloody vengeance on Bhikhan Khan of Malerkotla for the part he had played in the *Ghalughara.* They then pushed their arms up to Sirhind, accurst from its association with the massacre of the two infant sons of Guru Gobind Singh. The Afghan governor, Zain Khan, was killed in battle and the town given up to plunder. The spot where the Guru's sons had been martyred was marked out and a Gurdwara, called Fategarh Sahib, or the Fort of Victory, was built there. Since none of the Sardars was willing to accept possession of Sirhind, it was made over to Bhai Buddha Singh, one of Guru Gobind Singh's old followers. The town was later purchased from him by Maharaja Ala Singh of Patiala and remained till recent times part of the state he had founded.

The Sikhs now had a free run of the country and they ranged abroad unchecked obtaining surrender of far-flung provinces. The Sukkarchakkias, the Nakais, the Kanhaiyas and the Ramgarhias returned to the north of the Sutlej. They took the Jullundur Doab and advanced towards Lahore. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, along with Karora Singh, Baghel Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh, crossed the Jumna into the Uttar Pradesh and captured Saharanpur (February 20, 1764). The Sikhs overran the territory of Najib-ud-Daulah, the Ruhila chief, and returned after realizing from him a tribute of eleven lakhs of rupees.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia came to Amritsar to make obeisance at Harmandir and offer his share towards the rebuilding of the temple. Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkia and Gujjar Singh Bhangi secured a very significant victory over Sarbuland Khan, the Afghan faujdar of Rohtas. Sarbuland Khan fell a captive into the hands of the Sikhs who treated him with magnanimity. So deeply impressed was he with the courtesy and consideration shown him by Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkia that he offered to serve as a governor under him if the Sardar proclaimed himself king. "The kingship is already conferred on us by the Guru," said the Sardar, "but we want to keep you a prisoner so that the world may

know that Charhat Singh has captured the uncle of the Shah." "There is a still greater distinction in releasing me," said Sarbuland Khan. "For, they will say that Charhat Singh captured the uncle of Ahmad Shah and, then, set him at liberty." The Khan paid a tribute and was allowed to return to his country.

The Sikh insurrection in the Punjab caused grave dismay to Ahmad Shah. He planned yet another crusade and, inviting his Baluch ally, Amir Naseer Khan, to join him in the adventure, he wrote, "How can you think of going to Mecca while this depraved sect is causing havoc? You should march from that side while I am moving from this, so that we may destroy these people root and branch. *Jehad* (holy war) against these idolators, you may rest assured, is more meritorious than *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca)..."

Ahmad Shah started from Afghanistan at the head of a strong army in the month of October, 1764. The Sikhs. following their usual tactics, withdrew out of the invader's way retiring into their jungle haunts. The Durrani reached Lahore and, on December 1, 1764, attacked Amritsar which he had destroyed and polluted several times before to gratify his own malice and to seal the source of Sikhs' religious and moral replenishment. A small batch of thirty Sikhs stood ready to face the might of the Afghan Emperor and lay down their lives to protect their holy shrines. These intrepid warriors, belonging to the band of Gurbakhsh Singh Shahid, desperately charged on Afghan and Baluch armies. "They had neither the fear of slaughter nor the dread of death," says Qazi Nur Muhammad, the author of *Jang Namah*, who was accompanying the imperial camp. "They grappled with the *ghazis*, spilt their own blood and sacrificed their lives for the Guru."

Ahmad Shah came down to Sirhind without encountering anywhere the main body of the Khalsa. This time he went no further than Sirhind. As he was marching homeward through the Jullundur Doab, the Sikh Sardars including Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Charhat Singh Sukkarchakkia, Jhanda Singh Bhangi and Jai Singh Kanhaiya kept a close trail constantly raiding the imperial caravan. These series of depredations caused great annoyance to the Shah who lost much of his baggage to the Sikhs. The floods

in the river Chenab took a further toll of his men and property and he returned to Afghanistan considerably mauled and shaken.

The Sikhs resumed their territories and reasserted their authority in the country. On Baisakhi day (April 10, 1765), barely a fortnight after the Durrani had left, they took counsel at Amritsar and resolved to capture Lahore. The Bhangis, Lehna Singh and Gujjar Singh, moved out with two thousand Sikhs. Kabuli Mall, who was the governor of Lahore on behalf of the Afghans, was then away to Jammu. His nephew, Amir Singh, tendered his submission without much resistance and the Sikhs became masters of the capital of the Punjab (April 16). This they regarded as a special gift bestowed on them by the Guru and struck coin quoting, in gratitude, the Persian inscription from Banda Singh's seal.

The fear of his Indian empire falling to the Sikhs continued to obsess the Shah's mind and he led out another punitory campaign against them. This was his eighth invasion of India. The Sikhs had recourse to their old game of hide-and-seek. They vacated Lahore, but faced squarely the Afghan general, Jahan Khan, at Amritsar, forcing him to retreat, with six thousand of the Durrani soldiers killed. Ahmad Shah offered the governorship of Lahore to the Bhangi Sardar, Lehna Singh, but the latter declined the proposal. He returned to the Shah the fruit he had sent him, saying that such delicacies were meant for royalty. The Sikhs, he told the messenger, lived on parched gram. Of this he gave a quantity to the messenger to be presented to Ahmad Shah on his behalf.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, with an army of thirty thousand Sikhs, roamed in the neighbourhood of the Afghan camp impinging on it with impunity and plundering it to his heart's content. Never before had Ahmad Shah felt so helpless. In the words of a contemporary news-writer, "The Shah's influence is confined merely to those tracts which are covered by his army. The *zamindars* appear in general so well affected towards the Sikhs that it is usual with the latter to repair by night to the villages where they find every refreshment. By day they retire from them and again fall to harassing the Shah's troops. If the Shah remains between the two rivers Beas and Sutlej, the Sikhs will continue to remain in the

neighbourhood, but if he passes over towards Sirhind the Sikhs will then become masters of the parts he leaves behind him."

The outcome of the unequal, but bitter, contest lay clearly in favour of the Sikhs. The ageing Shah had realized that his Indian dominions were at the mercy of the Sikhs and he bowed to the inevitable. His own soldiers were getting restive and the summer heat of the Punjab was becoming unbearable. He, at last, decided to return home, but took a different route this time to avoid molestation by the Sikhs. As soon as Ahmad Shah retired, the Sardars reoccupied their territories. The entire country between the Indus and the Jamuna owned Sikh supremacy.

Twelve Sikh independencies, known as *Misls*, had formed in this process of Punjab's emancipation. The Ahluwalias, who derived their title from the village in which their leader Jassa Singh was born, held territory in the neighbourhood of Kapurthala in the Jullundur Doab and some villages in the Majha such as Sarhali, Jandiala, Bundala, Vairowal and Fatehabad. The Bhangis, Jats of the Dhillon caste, owned Sialkot, Gujrat, Multan, Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Lahore. The Ramgarhias who took their name from Ramgarh (originally, Ram Rauni), the Sikh fort at Amritsar, had in their possession Qadian, Batala and Sri Hargobindpur, in the Bari Doab, and Miani, Sarih and Urmur Tanda, in the Jullundur Doab. To Singhpurias, Virk Jats, belonged Jullundur and the villages of Banur, Ghanauli, Manauli and Bharatgarh, in the Malwa. The Sukkarchakkias possessed Gujranwala and parts of Pothohar and the Kanhaiyas the pargana of Batala. The Shahids, Sandhu Jats, descendants of honoured martyrs such as Baba Dip Singh, had their possessions in the present districts of Ambala (pargana of Shahzadpur), and Saharanpur, in Uttar Pradesh. The Nakais ruled over the country south of Lahore between the Ravi and the Sutlej and the Dallewalias, under Tara Singh Ghaiba, held Rahon, Mahatpur, Nawanshahar and Phillaur, in the Jullundur Doab. The Nishanwalas, the standard-bearers of the Khalsa army, had their centre at Ambala. The Karorsinghias, adopting the name of their leader, Karora Singh, a Virk Jat of Birkian, took Hoshiarpur and the surrounding district. The Phulkias embraced the territories of Patiala,

Sirhind, Nabha and Jind.

What impelled these Sikh confederacies to selflessly united and zealous action was their faith in the common destiny of the Khalsa. Any call for a Panthic cause was joyfully answered and greatest sacrifices willingly made for its realization. Their living conviction that the Guru had invested them with moral and temporal dignity and charged them with the duty of liberating the country imparted an element of philanthropy to their extremely dangerous and heroic adventure.

To die fighting for the Panth was the consummation most cheerfully sought: to compromise with evil and injustice was considered the extreme of degradation and pusillanimity. This brave new spirit created a revolutionary impulse in the country. The Sikhs thus gave a new direction to the course of Indian history. When Shah Zaman, the grandson of Ahmad Shah Durrani, reached Peshawar on January 30, 1799, harassed and plundered by the Sikhs on his homeward journey after his Indian adventure, history had taken a decisive turn. No more Muslim invaders came into India from the north-west as had been happening for more than a thousand years.

Though the times were troublous and uncertain and the Misaldar Sardars engaged in endless fighting, they preserved in their territories "good order and a regular government." To quote Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "The Sikhs have now established their rule over much of the Punjab and given to the people of that province internal security and the promotion of agriculture in a degree unknown for sixty years past." Writing in 1776 in what is the first account of the Sikhs by a European, Colonel A. L. H. Polier, a Swiss officer in the service of the East India Company, said, "The extensive and fertile territories of the Seiks, and their attachment and application in the midst of warfare, to the occupations of agriculture, must evidently produce a large revenue. The districts dependent on Lahore, in the reign of Aurangzeb, produced, according to Mr Bernier, a revenue of two hundred forty-six lacs and ninety-five thousand rupees; and we are naturally led to suppose from the industrious skill of the Seiks in the various branches of cultivation that no great decrease of that amount can have taken place since the Punjab has fallen into their possession."

Themselves victims of the worst kind of religious tyranny, the leaders of the Sikh *Misls* established a just and humane rule. They treated the Muslims with tolerance and made no distinctions among their subjects on grounds of caste or religion. In times of distress they helped them alike. In 1783, when the Punjab was stricken by a severe famine, the Sikh chiefs continued their *langars* to feed the poor and the needy. Speaking about a Sikh Sardar of the Montgomery tract, a report quoted in the *Gazetteer* of that district says, "The famines of 1783 A.D. occurred in Budh Singh's time. He is said to have sold all his property, and to have fed the people with grain from the proceeds."

CHAPTER IX

MAN OF DESTINY

THE principalities the Sikhs had carved out were integrated into the sovereign State of the Khalsa by Ranjit Singh. Born heir to one of these confederacies, he had the foresight to visualize a united Sikh kingdom. By his superior military genius and political acumen, he succeeded in integrating the existing states and in joining the people of the Punjab into a strong nation.

Ranjit Singh was born at Gujranwala, now in Pakistan, on November 13, 1780, in a family which had distinguished itself by its warlike exploits. One of his ancestors, Buddha Singh by name, spent most of his years in battle and bore on his body the scars of forty wounds by spear, sword and match-lock. Ranjit Singh's grandfather, Charhat Singh, struck against Ahmad Shah Durrani's armies several times and won renown as a fearless fighter. He added to his family's power and possessions and left his son Maha Singh master of a considerable estate.

Some fifty years before Ranjit Singh's birth, his ancestors had built a small fort in their village, Sukkarchak, to keep off the raiders and dacoits. No one then knew that from that fortress would rise a power which would establish peace and order and set up a mighty rule in the Punjab. From the village Sukkarchak the family came to be known as Sukkarchakkia.

Budh Singh was the name given to Ranjit Singh by his mother. But his father, who received the news of the birth of a son as he was coming home victorious from a battle, called him Ranjit Singh—the Victor of Battles. This name proved truly representative of his character and forestalled his career of conquest and victory.

Ranjit Singh was fond of manly sports. He rode and swam a great deal and went out hunting. He gave little attention to learning, but mastered the art of war. This was the equipment which every youth of spirit aspired for in those tumultuous times.

Young Ranjit Singh accompanied his father on expedi-

tions. Once he joined him in an attack on the fort of Manchar which belonged to the Chathas who were old rivals of the family of Ranjit Singh. Maha Singh's army invested the fort. All of a sudden, Hashmat Khan, the uncle of the Chatha chief, clambered on to the elephant on which Ranjit Singh was riding. The latter showed great presence of mind and, before Hashmat Khan could lay his hands on him, he bore him down with his sword. Maha Singh felt very proud to know of his son's brave deed and so were all his soldiers.

In 1792, Maha Singh fell ill while attacking the fort of Sodhra, three miles from Wazirabad. He made over the command of his forces to his son, Ranjit Singh, and retired from the battlefield to his home at Gujranwala. His illness grew worse, but news of his son's victory had reached his ears before he died.

Once, while leading a body of troops to Batala to help his mother-in-law, *Mai* Sada Kaur of the Kanhaiya *Misl*, against her enemies, Ranjit Singh, who had succeeded his father in the leadership of the Sukkarchakkias, halted at Lahore for two days. He saw the fort which was then held by Sikh Sardars of the Bhangi *Misl* and set his heart on it, for he knew that without Lahore, which had been the royal capital for centuries, his dream of uniting the Punjab under a single rule would not materialize.

Shah Zaman, Ahmad Shah Durrani's grandson, became the King of Kabul after his father Timur. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, he led an expedition into the Punjab and, meeting with little resistance on the way, reached Lahore. Here he was trapped by Ranjit Singh and other Sikh Sardars who laid siege to the city.

An interesting story is told of Ranjit Singh's daring by a contemporary chronicler, Sohan Lal Suri. One day he surprised the Afghan guards and reached the fort. Standing below the Samman Burj, the tower in which Shah Zaman used to sit, he fired a few shots and called out aloud, "Behold, grandson of Ahmad Shah. Here is the grandson of Sardar Charhat Singh come to meet you. Come, if you dare, and accept his challenge." As there was no answer from inside the fort, Ranjit Singh had to retire without a trial of strength with the Durrani.

Shah Zaman was reduced to such a predicament that

he had to leave the fort and return to his country. He was pursued by the Sikhs up to the river Jhelum constantly harassed by their plundering raids.

Shah Zaman's general, Ahmad Khan Shahanchibashi, was still in Lahore with 12,000 soldiers. Ranjit Singh collected his forces at Ramnagar where he was joined by other Sikh Sardars such as Sahib Singh Bhangi and Nihal Singh Attariwala. Ahmad Khan, forestalling Ranjit Singh's plans, marched upon Ramnagar, but was killed in the pitched action which took place. The Bhangi chiefs reoccupied Lahore and Ranjit Singh returned to Gujranwala.

Differences arose among the three Sardars who ruled over Lahore and they often quarrelled with one another. The neighbouring Muslim Nawab of Kasur, taking advantage of the situation, made preparations to attack the city. The citizens who wanted neither the Bhangi Sardars nor the Nawab, sent a message to Ranjit Singh to come and take possession of Lahore. Among those who signed the letter were two Muslim notables, Mian Ashiq Mohammad and Mian Mohkam-ud-Din, and a Hindu, Hakim Hakam Rai.

Ranjit Singh sent one of his trusted men, Qazi Abdur Rehman, to Lahore to watch the situation and himself proceeded to Batala to take counsel with Mai Sada Kaur. She fell in with Ranjit Singh's plans and placed her troops at his disposal. Together, they set out for Lahore with 25,000 soldiers. Spending a night at Majitha, near Amritsar, they reached Lahore the next day and camped outside the city in Wazir Khan's garden.

The Lahore rulers, instead of coming out to fight, shut themselves inside the city. Ranjit Singh blew up the wall and rode in with two thousand horsemen and four guns. The Bhangi chiefs were surprised by Ranjit Singh's quick manœuvre. Two of them, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh, fled with their men, while Chet Singh remained to make his surrender. Ranjit Singh treated him kindly and gave him a *jagir* for his maintenance.

Ranjit Singh who became master of Lahore on July 7, 1799, ordered his soldiers not to rob or molest the citizens. The city had changed hands many times during the century, but never so peacefully. Ranjit Singh's rule brought relief and security to the people after years of disorder and trouble.

As Ranjit Singh's power grew, many of the Sardars acknowledged his authority. Establishing his position in Lahore and the surrounding districts, he set out to conquer the more distant parts. One of his earliest adventures was towards Jammu. The ruler of the state gave in without a fight. Narowal, Sialkot and Dilawargarh were other places which fell to Ranjit Singh during this campaign.

The Baisakhi day, in 1801, was chosen to crown Ranjit Singh as Maharaja of the Punjab. A royal Durbar was held inside the Lahore Fort and prayers were held in mosques and temples for his long life. The investiture ceremony was performed by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak. Ranjit Singh presented robes of honour to his Sardars and nobles and distributed charity among the poor.

Ranjit Singh had won over the Kanhaiyas and Nakais by marriage and taken Lahore from the Bhangis. He made friends with the Ahluwalias through their chief, Fateh Singh, who was invited by him to go with him to the holy Sikh temple of Tarn Taran. There they exchanged turbans in token of a pledge for lifelong friendship and promised to help each other in time of need. Ranjit Singh made offerings at the Gurdwara and had two sides of the sacred tank bricked. The other two sides had been built by Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia.

Ranjit Singh, accompanied by Fateh Singh, overran the north-west districts and annexed territories beyond the Jhelum. His next target was the important province of Multan. The governor, Nawab Muzaffar Khan, surrendered without a fight and pledged loyalty to the Sikh ruler. The Nawab of Jhang fought back, but was defeated. He laid down arms and was allowed to retain possession of his district.

In 1803, Ranjit Singh visited Amritsar and held a military Durbar at which he conferred ranks and honours on his nobles and generals. A chronicler, who was present on the occasion, recorded the names of those who were honoured. Desa Singh Majithia received command of four hundred horse and Hari Singh Nalwa of eight hundred horse and foot. Hukam Singh Chimni was made superintendent of light artillery, with command of two hundred horse. Ghause Khan, a Muslim officer, had charge of heavy artillery, with command of two thousand horse.

Ranjit Singh had been a watchful observer of the progress of the British in India and their victories over the Marathas and other Indian powers. He attributed their superiority to the exact discipline of their soldiers, and wanted to give his army the same kind of training. So great was his keenness to introduce among his own troops the British methods of drill and training that a story, apparently apocryphal, gained currency that he had once visited the East India Company's territory in disguise to watch the soldiers on parade.

By his wise policy and persistent care and by example of his own courageous action and bravery, Ranjit Singh made his army powerful and efficient. Foot service was looked down upon by Sikh soldiers, but he prevailed upon them to overcome this prejudice and succeeded in building up a strong infantry. He subsequently employed a number of foreigners some of whom had served as officers in Napoleon's army.

Towards the end of 1805, Ranjit Singh was camping near Multan when he received a message from his son, Prince Kharak Singh, that the Maratha ruler, Jaswant Rao Holkar, was coming to the Punjab in search of shelter, pursued by Lord Lake, the British Commander-in-Chief. Ranjit Singh at once returned to Lahore where the agent of the Maratha chief met him. Arrangements were made for Holkar's stay at Amritsar where he was kept in royal style. A congress of the Khalsa was held to decide what Ranjit Singh might do to help Holkar. The Sikh ruler was counselled against engaging in an armed conflict with the British. The argument was that he had been on the throne of Lahore for barely six years and was not sufficiently well established in the Punjab to cross swords with such a mighty power.

Ranjit Singh met Holkar at Amritsar and wrote a letter to Lord Lake with a view to arranging a treaty of peace between the Maratha chief and the British. He showed his guest great courtesy and attention throughout his stay in the Punjab and took him to the Durbar Sahib and held military parades in his honour. As a result of Ranjit Singh's intercession, a treaty was made between Holkar and the East India Company. The Maratha ruler secured the greater part of the territory which had been seized by the British.

Ranjit Singh came to the Malwa to settle a dispute between the Sikh rulers of Nabha and Patiala. Other cis-

Sutlej chiefs had also taken sides in the conflict, Raja Bhag Singh of Jind siding with Nabha, and Sardar Mehtab Singh of Thanesar and Bhai Lal Singh of Kaithal supporting Patiala. As Ranjit Singh crossed the Sutlej and approached the territories of Nabha and Patiala, both chiefs turned out to meet him. Their mutual quarrel was resolved in the gaieties which followed. On his way back to Lahore, Ranjit Singh captured Ludhiana and bestowed it on his uncle, Raja Bhag Singh of Jind. He gave Kot Bassian, Talwandi and Jagraon to the Raja of Nabha.

Early in 1807, Ranjit Singh annexed Kasur to his kingdom. Qutb-ud-Din, who had been appointed governor of the city, refused allegiance to the Sikh Durbar. The town was attacked and occupied after a fierce battle. Two of Ranjit Singh's generals, Hari Singh Nalwa and Dhanna Singh Malwai, fought with conspicuous skill and gallantry. Qutb-ud-Din was caught while fleeing the fort, but Ranjit Singh set him at liberty and made over to him, as *jagir*, Mamdot and a few other villages on the left bank of the Sutlej.

CHAPTER X

THE ANGLO-SIKH TREATY AND THE CONQUEST OF PESHAWAR

NAPOLEON'S victories in Europe had alarmed the British who feared a French attack on the country through Afghanistan. In order to defeat any such designs, they decided to win the Sikhs over to their side and sent a young officer, T. C. Metcalfe, to Ranjit Singh's court with an offer of friendship.

Metcalfe crossed the Sutlej and reached Khem Karan, near Kasur, where the Sikh ruler was camping. The Maharaja sent Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Diwan Mohkam Chand, with an escort of 2,000 cavalry, to receive him. Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was appointed to look after the guest's comfort. The ceremonial did not fall in with the wishes of the British envoy, who, for the sake of the "rank and dignity of Government" he represented, expected the embassy to be received by Ranjit Singh himself either in Lahore or in Amritsar.

Metcalfe met the Maharaja in his camp on September 12, 1808, taking with him a large number of presents sent by the Governor-General of India. He expressed his government's desire to have friendly relations with him and presented to him the draft of a treaty.

Ranjit Singh did not credit the theory that the British had made the proposals to him because of the danger from Napoleon. He suspected that their real object was to put a seal on his southern boundary and draw a permanent line between his dominions and their own. He rejected Metcalfe's terms and made his own seeking the British to recognize his authority over the Sikh country to the south of the Sutlej.

Metcalfe expressed his inability to make any changes in the draft of the treaty he had brought, but offered to forward Ranjit Singh's proposals to the Governor-General. Ranjit Singh suddenly struck camp and crossed the Sutlej. Metcalfe followed him from place to place without being able to secure another interview with him for any serious discussions. Ranjit Singh overran the territory on the left bank of the river, thus shrewdly imposing on his English guest the role

of a witness of his cis-Sutlej acquisitions.

Ranjit Singh's bold and skilful policy would have borne fruit, had the situation in Europe remained unchanged. When the British realized that the danger of Napoleon's attack had passed, they became arrogant in their attitude. On his return to Lahore, Ranjit Singh received a message from the Governor-General that the British had taken the Sikh chiefs south of the Sutlej under their protection. The British sent a force under the command of Colonel David Ochterlony who, passing through Buria and Patiala, came very close to the Sutlej and stationed himself at Ludhiana. Ranjit Singh also started making warlike preparations. Diwan Mohkam Chand was asked to proceed with his troops and artillery from Kangra to Phillaur, on the Sutlej. The fort of Gobindgarh at Amritsar was fortified. The guns were mounted and powder and supplies laid in. Sardars and nobles were asked to keep their soldiers in readiness. Over a lakh of troops gathered in Lahore in a few days' time.

Metcalfe, who had followed Ranjit Singh to Lahore, presented a new treaty which was based on the terms first offered by the British and the proposals made by Ranjit Singh. The treaty in this form was acceptable to the Sikh ruler. Although it stopped him from extending his influence beyond the Sutlej, he was left master of the territories, south of the river, which were in his possession before Metcalfe's visit. The treaty was signed at Amritsar on April 25, 1809. It provided that the British Government would count the Lahore Durbar among the most honourable powers and would in no way interfere with the Sikh ruler's dominions to the north of the Sutlej. Both governments pledged friendship to each other. Ranjit Singh appointed Bakhshi Nand Singh Bhandari to stay at Ludhiana as his agent with the English. The English sent Khushwaqt Rai to Lahore as their representative at the Sikh capital.

The treaty of Amritsar settled the southern limit of Ranjit Singh's kingdom. With a friendly neighbour on that side, he could now turn his undivided attention to the north.

The Gurkhas had returned to the valley of Kangra after Diwan Mohkam Chand's departure for Phillaur. Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra sent his brother to Ranjit Singh to request for help. Ranjit Singh himself marched to the valley

at the head of an army and guarded all approaches to it to cut off the invaders. The stranded Gurkhas made a stand near Ganesh Ghati and fought with their usual valour and skill. But they could make little headway against Ranjit Singh's tall and daring soldiers. The Gurkha leader, Amar Singh Thapa, fled leaving the field to the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh entered the fort and held a royal Durbar which was attended by the hill chiefs of Chamba, Nurpur, Kotla, Shahpur, Guler, Kahloor, Mandi, Suket and Kulu. Desa Singh Majithia was appointed governor of the Kangra valley.

Ranjit Singh sent a force under the command of Hukam Singh Chimni to Jammu and himself marched on to Khushab. The fort of Khushab was held by Jaffar Khan, a Baluch chief. He gave up the city to Ranjit Singh, but defended the fort stoutly. Ranjit Singh invited him to vacate the fort and accept a *jagir* from him. The latter made a bold reply and said that he would lay down his life rather than give in. The siege was continued and the walls were dug up at the base and filled with powder. Realizing how desperate the situation was, the Baluch accepted Ranjit Singh's demand for submission. He was given a *jagir* and allowed to remain in Khushab with his family.

While at Khushab, Ranjit Singh learnt that Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, grandson of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who had been turned out of his country by his brother, Shah Mahmood, had crossed the Attock to seek shelter in the Punjab. Ranjit Singh, who invited the Shah to meet him, treated the exiled king with utmost courtesy and offered him the choice of any place in the Punjab for his residence. Shah Shuja preferred to be in Rawalpindi where hospitality consistent with his exalted station was provided by the Sikh ruler.

After a while, Shah Shuja made a bid to regain his lost kingdom. With the help of the Afghan Governor of Kashmir, Atta Mohammad Khan, who was the son of his old minister, he took Peshawar and marched on Kabul. He ousted Shah Mahmood and occupied the throne once again. But he was not destined to retain it long. Four months later he was captured by the Governor of Attock, Jahandad Khan, and sent to Kashmir. His wives and children were in Rawalpindi with his brother Shah Zaman, himself an exile, who had been blinded and turned out of Kabul by

Shah Mahmood.

Ranjit Singh went to Rawalpindi to meet Shah Zaman with whom he had measured swords as a young man. The royal camp was put up two miles from the city. Ranjit Singh received Shah Zaman with honour and ceremony. He had taken with him his ministers, Diwan Bhiwani Dass and his brother Diwan Devi Dass, who had been in the employ of Shah Zaman at Kabul and knew the manner and custom of the Afghan court. They were entrusted with the duty of entertaining the old Shah.

Ranjit Singh expressed great sympathy with Shah Zaman and invited him to come and stay in Lahore. He settled upon him a monthly allowance of fifteen hundred rupees. Shah Zaman shifted to Lahore where he was accorded a welcome befitting his rank. Shah Shuja's wives and children also followed him to the Sikh capital to stay with him.

Shah Shuja was kept in custody by the Afghan governor of Kashmir for more than a year. Meanwhile, his enemy, Vizir Fateh Khan of Kabul, made plans to attack Kashmir and seize the royal prisoner. Fateh Khan requested the Sikh ruler for help in his campaign against Kashmir. The latter welcomed the suggestion but was then too preoccupied to immediately undertake the venture.

The family of Shah Shuja was greatly concerned to hear of the designs of Fateh Khan who was a cruel man and had desperately sought the Shah's life. Shah Shuja's wife, Wafa Begam, approached two of Ranjit Singh's trusted courtiers, Diwan Mohkam Chand and Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, and told them that she would present their master with the famous diamond Koh-i-Nur if he rescued her husband from Kashmir. Ranjit Singh, who had already set his heart on the valley, arranged an expedition, with Diwan Mohkam Chand in command. The other leading Sardars sent with him were Desa Singh Majithia, Nihal Singh Attariwala and Jodh Singh Kalsia.

Ranjit Singh crossed the Jhelum and lay in camp near Rohtas, while Fateh Khan came with his army from the other side. The former returned to Lahore, leaving the two armies to jointly continue their march to Kashmir. The Sikhs and the Afghans crossed the Pir Panjal and entered the valley of Kashmir towards the close of 1812.

Reaching Lahore, Ranjit Singh conveyed to Wafa Begam the assurance that he had asked his generals to secure release of her husband and bring him to Lahore. The Begam was pleased to hear this and reaffirmed her promise to make a present of the Koh-i-Nur to the Sikh sovereign if her husband was rescued from captivity.

The Afghans were better used to the hills and soon stole a march over the Lahore army. But the Sikhs reached the valley ahead of Fateh Khan, striking a shorter, though more hazardous, route.

Atta Mohammad Khan planned to stop the advance of the invading armies near the fort of Shergarh. He fortified the place and blocked the paths and passes with stones and trees. Nature was on his side, too ; it was snowing heavily and the cold was unbearable. Two hundred of Mohkam Chand's men succumbed to the rigours of the weather. The armies, however, kept up their advance and besieged the fort. Atta Mohammad was overcome and dislodged from his position.

As the victorious armies entered the fort, an Afghan servant told Nihal Singh Attariwala where Shah Shuja was kept. They searched for him and found him lying in chains in an underground dungeon. The royal prisoner was in a most rueful state, his feet bleeding in the heavy chains and his clothes torn. The Sikhs broke his fetters and escorted him to Diwan Mohkam Chand's camp.

Fateh Khan was greatly upset when he discovered that his enemy had escaped him. He asked Diwan Mohkam Chand to make over to him the captive who had been tracked down after such a perilous adventure. Instead of giving up the luckless exile to his sworn enemy, Mohkam Chand brought him to Lahore where he was received with dignity by Ranjit Singh.

After he had been in Lahore for some time, Shah Shuja was reminded by Faqir Aziz-ud-Din and Diwan Mohkam Chand of his Begam's promise to present their master with the Koh-i-Nur. The Shah was not quite willing to part with such a precious treasure and tried to put them off. He made excuses and said the stone was in pawn with a banker at Kandahar for six crores of rupees. But Faqir Aziz-ud-Din and Diwan Mohkam Chand, who were mainly responsible

for persuading Ranjit Singh to undertake the difficult expedition to Kashmir and had a personal stake in the matter. persisted in their efforts. The Begam was at last brought round to abide by her word.

Shah Shuja invited Ranjit Singh to his house. A servant brought in a packet as they settled down in their seats after mutual exchange of courtesies. Ranjit Singh watched eagerly as the stone was slowly unwrapped. He was besides himself with joy when the Koh-i-Nur, the Mountain of Light, was placed on his palm.

The fort of Attock on the banks of the Indus was India's gateway for invaders from the north-west. To capture this strategically important fort, Ranjit Singh despatched an army under Diwan Mohkam Chand, Hari Singh Nalwa and Desa Singh Majithia. His soldiers, who had gauged the Durranis' strength in the Kashmir campaign, did not think it beyond their capacity to wrest the stronghold from their possession.

Vizir Fateh Khan of Kabul sent his brother, Dost Mohammad Khan, to defend the Afghan citadel. But before the latter could reach Attock, the fort had fallen to the Sikhs. The Kabul army assailed it from outside. In the conflict which lasted three months, Dost Mohammad Khan was wounded. His armies fled, leaving the Sikhs masters of one of the strongest forts on the north-west frontier. This was one of Ranjit Singh's most significant military successes. The boundary of his kingdom now extended right up to the river Attock. What is even more important, he had decisively defeated the Afghans who had ravaged India for so many centuries.

Early in 1817, Ranjit Singh sent a body of troops to Multan under the command of Diwan Bhiwani Dass to receive from Nawab Muzaffar Khan the tribute he owed to the Sikh Durbar. The Nawab evaded Ranjit Singh's men. Bhiwani Dass laid siege to the city, but showed little vigour in pursuing it. He made a secret pact with the Nawab which led Ranjit Singh at once to recall him and deprive him of his office.

Ranjit Singh planned the expedition afresh and sent a strong force in Prince Kharak Singh's charge. He arranged for supplies to be sent by boats down the Ravi, Chenab and

Jhelum. One of the Ranis, Mehtab Kaur, supervised the flow of supplies at Kot Kamalia, midway between Lahore and Multan. He himself directed the details of the battle from Lahore. The system of passing letters was organized in such a manner that he received news from Multan by relays of messengers several times a day.

The fort of Multan was one of the strongest in the country and Nawab Muzaffar Khan defended it with an equally strong heart. Kharak Singh's armies lay around it without making much headway. Ranjit Singh, who did not consider the situation very hopeful, went to Amritsar to pray at the Durbar Sahib for the success of his campaign. He sent the big gun Zamzama to Multan. Phula Singh, leader of the Akali Sikhs, arrived with his band of reckless warriors. The Zamzama was fired with effect and the gates of the fort were blown in. Akali Phula Singh made a sudden rush and took the garrison by surprise. The grey-bearded Nawab stood in his way, sword in hand, resolved to fight to the death. But he fell before the Akalis' resistless onslaught. Five of his sons also died fighting and a sixth one was wounded severely in the face. The two surviving sons were given *jagirs* by Ranjit Singh. Their descendants are still in possession of those lands in Pakistan.

Kharak Singh entered the city in state. A sum of thirty thousand rupees was set apart for the repair of the fort and Jodh Singh Kalsia was left behind with six hundred men to guard it. Ranjit Singh sent officers from Lahore to settle the land revenue of the province. Those who took part in the campaign were rewarded generously. Misar Diwan Chand was given the title of *Zafar-Jang*, Victor in War.

Ranjit Singh's next expedition was towards Peshawar. He started from Lahore in the winter of 1818. Passing through Rohtas, Rawalpindi and Hasan Abdal, he reached Hazara. A small batch was sent across the Attock to mark the position of the enemy. The Afghans ambushed the party in the hills of Khairabad and decimated it.

Ranjit Singh at once made preparations to cross the Attock. He had brought with him skilful sailors to find out where the river could be easily forded. He himself rushed into the torrent and stood in the middle on the back of his elephant showing to his soldiers how to make light of danger.

They followed his example and were soon on the other side of the river. Hearing of the victorious march of the Sikhs, Dost Mohammad Khan, the ruler of Peshawar, vacated the city and fled. Ranjit Singh took possession of the Afghan stronghold without a fight. He appointed Jahandad Khan as his governor and returned to Attock. Jahandad Khan was subsequently replaced by Dost Mohammad Khan who submitted himself to the authority of the Lahore Durbar.

The Sikh conquest of Peshawar ended the long sequence of invasions from the north-west. Since Raja Anang Pal's defeat at the hands of Mahmood of Ghazni in the beginning of the eleventh century, an unending procession of invaders had followed, looting and plundering the country at will. The Sikhs rolled back the wave for ever and carried battle into the very home of the invaders.

In the beginning of 1819, Ranjit Singh collected his choice cavalry and infantry troops at Wazirabad and made up an elaborate plan to attack Kashmir which was still under Afghan control. His general, Misar Diwan Chand, took Rajauri and Poonch and descended into the valley, over the mountainous passes, with a number of light guns dragged along by his men. Jabbar Khan, the ruler of Kashmir, took the field against him near Supin and fought heroically. He gained an initial advantage over Misar Diwan Chand and captured two of his guns. A second attack from the Sikh army completely overwhelmed him and he fled across the mountains. There was no further opposition to the Sikhs and Prince Kharak Singh entered the city of Srinagar without firing a shot.

Ranjit Singh was very happy at this victory and went to Amritsar to make offerings at the Durbar Sahib. Large sums of money were given away to the poor. The cities of Lahore and Amritsar were illuminated for three days.

Diwan Moti Ram was appointed governor of Kashmir, with Sham Singh Attariwala, Jawala Singh Padhania and Misar Diwan Chand to assist him restore order in the valley. Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was sent from Lahore to make a report on the climate of Kashmir and Diwan Devi Dass was charged with organizing the revenue system. Ranjit Singh took keen interest in the progress of the province and encouraged trade and the shawl-making industry.

Ten successive governors administered Kashmir during the Sikh regime. One of them was Prince Sher Singh, the second son of Ranjit Singh, who carried the Sikh standard across the high mountains into Ladakh. The conquest of the Ladakh valley, which was strategically very important, made the frontier secure against the expanding influence of China. It was during Sher Singh's rule as the Maharaja of the Punjab that a Sikh expedition, under Zorawar Singh, marched towards Tibet. Garo and Skardu were occupied and the Lhasa armies attacked. But owing to a premature snowfall and difficult and unfamiliar terrain, the campaign ended in disaster, though not without securing the Khalsa kingdom the cession by treaty,* ratified by the Chinese and Tibetan governments, of Ladakh and its surroundings.

Ranjit Singh sent two thousand horsemen under the command of Prince Sher Singh to recapture Peshawar. Sher Singh was followed at short intervals by Hari Singh Nalwa and by Ranjit Singh himself. The Maharaja was accompanied by Akali Phula Singh, Desa Singh Majithia and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia.

Prince Sher Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa had crossed the Attock by means of a bridge of boats before the arrival of Ranjit Singh. They captured the fort of Jahangira on the

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* An English version of the Treaty, between the Khalsa Durbar on the one hand and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa on the other is given below :

As on this auspicious day, the 2nd of Assuj, Sambat 1899 (16th September, 1842 A.D.), we, the officers of the Lhasa (Government), Kalon of Sokan and Bakshi Shajpuh, Commander of the Forces, and two officers on behalf of the most resplendent Sri Khalsaji Sahib, the asylum of the world, King Sher Singhji and Sri Maharaj Sahib Raja-i-Rajagan Raja Sahib Bahadur Raja Gulab Singhji, i.e., the Muqtar-ud-Daula Diwan Hari Chand and the asylum of vizirs, Vizir Ratnun, in a meeting called together for the promotion of peace and unity, and by professions and vows of friendship, unity and sincerity of heart and by taking oaths like those of Kunjak Sahib, have arranged and agreed that relations of peace, friendship and unity between Sri Khalsaji and Sri Maharaj Sahib Bahadur Raja Gulab Singhji, and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa will henceforward remain firmly established for ever; and we declare in the presence of the Kunjak Sahib that on no account whatsoever will there be any deviation, difference or departure (from this agreement). We shall neither at present nor in future have anything to do or interfere at all with the boundaries of Ladakh and its surroundings as fixed from ancient times and will allow the annual export of wool, shawls and tea by way of Ladakh according to the old established custom.

Should any of the opponents of Sri Sarkar Khalsaji and Sri Raja Sahib Bahadur at any time enter our territories, we shall not pay any heed to his words or allow him to remain in our country.

We shall offer no hindrance to traders of Ladakh who visit our territories. We shall not even to the extent of a hair's breadth act in contravention of the terms that we have agreed to above regarding firm friendship, unity, the fixed boundaries of Ladakh and the keeping open of the route for wool, shawls and tea. We call Kunjak Sahib, Kairi, Lassi, Zhoh Mahan, and Khushal Choh as witnesses to this treaty.

The treaty was concluded on the 2nd of the month of Assuj, Sambat 1899 (16th September, 1842 A.D.).

other side of the river, beating off the Afghans.

This sudden success of Prince Sher Singh surprised Azim Khan who was still at Peshawar. He sent his brother, Dost Mohammad Khan, who engaged Sher Singh's troops near the fort of Jahangira and had the Attock bridge destroyed to prevent any help reaching the Sikhs.

Ranjit Singh, who never minded such obstacles, encamped on the left bank of the river and started building a new bridge. But an informer brought the news that Sher Singh's force was completely at the mercy of the enemy and needed immediate relief.

Such was this river Attock, remarked one of the Sardars, that it made everyone stop and wait for it. "No," said Ranjit Singh, "the Attock (*atack*, in Punjabi, means obstacle) offers obstacle only to those who lack the will to go forward. It stops not those whose hearts are free from hesitation." Saying these words, the Lion of the Punjab, threw his horse into the river. The river was in spate, but the animal swam across the swollen stream and bore its royal rider steadily along. Ranjit Singh's shining sword left a trail of light on the breast of the river. What heart was there that was not filled with valour ? In a flash, man and horse plunged into the rushing water and, riding upon the waves, they pushed manfully forward. On the other bank stood their leader proudly waiting for them and giving them word of cheer.

The legend in the Punjab and the neighbouring frontier is that the river Attock made way for Ranjit Singh.

Hearing of Ranjit Singh's arrival, the Afghans lost heart and sought safety in flight. They joined the main body of their army at Nowshera and prepared for a final contest. Ranjit Singh fortified the forts of Jahangira and Khairabad and sent his men secretly to Peshawar and Nowshera to gauge the strength of the enemy.

Ranjit Singh was now ready with his plans for the offensive. Akali Phula Singh, with eight hundred horse and seven hundred foot, was to attack from one direction, and Desa Singh Majithia and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia with one thousand horse and three foot battalions from the other. Prince Kharak Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa, General Ventura and General Allard were to keep Azim Khan from joining the Durranis from across the river Lunda. Ranjit Singh kept

with himself reserves to rush aid where needed.

Both armies grappled with each other furiously. Akali Phula Singh made a desperate charge and soon found himself in the thick of the battle. Suddenly his horse was struck by a bullet and died. Akali Phula Singh was also hurt, but he shifted on to an elephant and pushed forward. The Durranis made him their chief target and poured incessant fire on him. A well directed shower of bullets tore through his body and the brave hero of many a great battle fell to the ground dead.

This only spurred Ranjit Singh to fiercer action. He sent his Gurkha battalion under the command of Bal Bahadur to attack the Afghans from behind the hills. He himself fell on the enemy with all his might and made havoc in their ranks. The Afghans could no longer resist the attack. Their hopes of getting relief from Azim Khan were defeated by Prince Kharak Singh who stoutly barred his way. Pressed hard, the Afghans broke up and fled into the hills. Peshawar fell into Ranjit Singh's hands once again. The people came out in their thousands to welcome him. A few days later Yar Mohammad Khan and Dost Mohammad Khan presented themselves at Peshawar. They made their submission to the Sikh ruler who appointed the former governor of the city.

CHAPTER XI

FOREIGNERS AT THE SIKH COURT

TWO Europeans, Ventura, an Italian by birth, and Allard, a Frenchman, came to Lahore in 1822 to seek service in the Sikh army. Both of them had served under Napoleon in the imperial army of France. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, they lost their occupation and left Europe to try their fortunes in the East. They had heard many a tale of the grandeur of Ranjit Singh's court and were much taken up with the idea of visiting Lahore.

Travelling through Afghanistan, they reached Peshawar dressed as Persian traders and stayed in a mosque. Ventura had to sell his rosary studded with precious stones to a Jewish trader with a view to obtaining money for their journey to the Sikh metropolis.

As soon as Ranjit Singh learnt of the arrival of two foreigners in his capital, he ordered them to be presented to him. He received them kindly and asked them questions about their health, journeys, previous employment and future plans. He showed them his troops on parade and provided amenities for their entertainment. But about their request for employment he would say nothing until he had satisfied himself in respect of their antecedents and the real object of their visit to Lahore.

The visitors were anxious for a definite assurance from the Maharaja and, after waiting for some time, addressed to him the following letter seeking his orders on their request :

1st April, 1822

TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF LAHORE

SIRE,

The favours showered on us by Your Majesty since our arrival at this capital are innumerable, and correspond to the high idea we have formed of Your Benevolence. Everything about Your Majesty is great, and worthy of a Sovereign who aspires to immortality. Sire, when we first had the honour of being presented to Your Majesty we disclosed to You the motive of our journey. The reply vouchsafed to us sets us at ease, but leaves us uncertain of our future.

... We have therefore at the advice of Fakir Nur-ud-

> Din renewed our request in the French language, which we have been given to understand is familiar to one of your court ... We again supplicate Your Majesty to be good enough to give definite orders, which we shall always follow with the utmost respect and obedience.
>
> We have the honour to be, with the deepest respect, the very humble, very obedient, and very devoted servants of Your Majesty.
>
> CH. VENTURA. CH. ALLARD.

How Ranjit Singh kept the two occupied for several days is recorded in detail in the diaries of the Sikh Durbar. Here are quoted two typical entries :

> "*Lahore Akhbar, 17th & 18th May, 1822.*—A long conversation upon commonplace topics took place between the French officers, Messrs Allar and Wuntoora. The Maharaja informed them that Mr Ross had treated his vakil (carrying the letter) with great kindness. The Maharaja begged the French officers to be of good cheer, and he would soon find employment for them, and 500 horsemen were ordered from the camp of Dewan Misur Chand, to be placed with Messrs Allar and Wuntoora for the purpose of teaching them the European exercises.
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> "*Lahore Akhbar, 21st & 23rd May, 1822.*—The Maharaja informed the French officers that the battalion of Shaikh Basawan composed of Sikhs and Poorbiahs, with muskets and flints, should be placed under their charge for instruction, and the Shaikh should be ordered to obey the European officers. The Maharaja sent Mr Allar to inspect the horse artillery, and Mr Wuntoora to inspect the battalion of Shaikh Basawan. The battalion guns and two companies of Poorbians formed into a square and fired for two ghurrees (forty minutes) and the Maharaja viewed them on horseback, galloping from flank to flank."

To make sure that they were not Englishmen come to Lahore as spies, the Maharaja had desired the foreigners to write out their applications in French. The petitions as drafted by them were sent to Ludhiana to be translated for him by his agent there. He also had a letter written to Ventura and Allard in English by one of his courtiers. It was sent to them by a special messenger who pretended that he had brought the letter from William Moorcroft, the English traveller, then in Kashmir. Neither Ventura nor Allard knew Moorcroft. They showed utter surprise and returned the letter to the messenger.

On obtaining this satisfaction, Ranjit Singh gave them employment. They were both set to instruct his troops in the European method of drill. Ventura was placed in command of the Fauj-i-Khas, and Allard was asked to raise a cavalry corps.

Before taking up their duties, Ventura and Allard had to sign an agreement that, in the event of a clash between the Maharaja and a European power, they would remain loyal to their master and fight for him. They were to wear their beards long and abstain from cow's flesh and tobacco. Thus all foreigners who entered the Sikh service contracted "to domesticate themselves in the country by marriage, not to eat beef, nor smoke tobacco in public, to permit their beards to grow, to take care not to offend against the Sikh religion, and, if required, to fight against their own country."

Ranjit Singh provided houses for Ventura and Allard and gave them handsome salaries. He bestowed on them generous gifts from time to time. To Ventura he made a present of forty thousand rupees at the time of his wedding which took place at Ludhiana. Two villages were subsequently given in *jagir* to his little daughter, Victorine. Besides his own regular *jagir*, Ventura also received land and a sum of thirty-five thousand rupees to build for himself a house after his own heart. On this site, near Anarkali, he built a beautiful *chateau* in the French style. In British days, the building accommodated part of the Punjab Government secretariat.

Allard, like Ventura, enjoyed his master's confidence and received from him ample bounty. But two unfortunate events overshadowed his Indian career. One was the death of his daughter by his Indian wife, and the other the failure of a Calcutta bank in which he lost eight lakhs of rupees. He was very fond of his daughter and buried her in the garden of the house he had built in Lahore. The place came to be known as *Kuri Bagh* in memory of his daughter, Marie Charllote. The house and the garden were later purchased by the Maharaja of Kapurthala and were his property until the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

Once Allard, returning to Lahore after a spell of leave in France, brought Ranjit Singh a message of goodwill and presents from Louis Philippe. Among the presents was a picture of the French King. The letter, couched in gracious French style, expressed sentiments of deep regard for the King of the Punjab. A portion of the letter read : "Although long distances and oceans part the kingdom of the Punjab from that of France, this is no bar to the love that

binds our hearts together. As the sun confers light on the distant parts of the world, the true love unites hearts, physically separated, in a common rhythm of friendship and harmony."

Louis Philippe also named Allard as his ambassador to the Khalsa Durbar.

Another European at the court of Ranjit Singh was Dr Honigberger who was a native of Hungary. He was a personal physician to the Maharaja and used the homoeopathic method of medical treatment in India for the first time.

Honigberger combined with his medical knowledge an ardent spirit of enquiry and adventure that took him away from his home while still young. He had a great fascination for the East, which, he thought, was the cradle of mankind and the birthplace of religion and science. He left his native town—Kronstadt—for Constantinople when he was twenty. He travelled widely in the Middle Eastern countries, practising the healing art and enlarging his knowledge by his researches and experience. He stayed in Palestine and in Syria where he introduced vaccination. He was at Baghdad when, hearing of Ranjit Singh's generosity and the welcome the Europeans met with at his court, he made up his mind to visit Lahore.

He started in the winter of 1829 and, passing through Basra and Muscat, arrived at Karachi. From there he journeyed to Hyderabad with a camel caravan. On the way from Hyderabad to Multan, he was taken seriously ill. One day he felt so bad that he thought his end was near and made his will. But a remedy that he tried as a last resort did him unexpected good and he was soon well again.

This part of his journey in India he completed disguised as an Arab. He spoke Arabic, stayed in mosques, and ate his food using his fingers instead of a knife and fork. Europeans were then not known in Sind, although the British dominions were not far off.

The journey from Multan to Lahore was made on horseback. It took him four months in all from Baghdad to Lahore, two by sea and two by land.

Ranjit Singh was out on a military expedition when Honigberger arrived at Lahore, and did not return before the rainy season. Honigberger took advantage of this

interval, making contacts and establishing his reputation as a physician. The first patient he attended was Achilles, adopted son of General Allard, who had long been suffering from a fistula on his spine. Honigberger made a successful operation and cured the boy. He also cured several patients of hydrophobia.

One of Honigberger's early regrets was the death of Ranjit Singh's favourite riding horse while under treatment by him. The horse was one of the five presented to the Maharaja by the King of England.

During this period Honigberger availed himself of an opportunity to visit Kashmir at the invitation of Suchet Singh Dogra, brother of Dhian Singh, then a minister at Lahore, and Gulab Singh, the founder of the ruling family of Kashmir.

Ranjit Singh made Honigberger welcome when he met him at Lahore and at once gave him employment as physician to the court. His salary was fixed at Rs. 800 a month and later raised to Rs. 3000. Ranjit Singh came to trust him so much that one day he offered him the choice of a governorship of a province or command of the Artillery Department. Honigberger was so much the man of his profession that he declined the honour, but on the Maharaja's insistence he accepted management of the gunpowder and gunstock manufactory.

Honigberger left Lahore for his native land after a stay of four years. Travelling overland he passed through Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Kabul, Bokhara and Russian towns such as Novograd and St. Petersburg. He at last reached Kronstadt from where he took a trip to Paris. There he met Hahnemann, the father of homœopathy. Honigberger was deeply interested in the new system and obtained some medicines for experiments.

Home could not hold Honigberger for long and he set out once again for his travels to the East. He stopped at Constantinople for a while and then returned to Lahore. Here his old offices were restored to him. He married a Kashmiri woman by whom he had two daughters who were sent to school at Mussoorie.

Many more foreigners came and found employment at the court of Ranjit Singh. Among them were Avitabile,

an Italian, who was appointed governor of Peshawar; General Court, a Frenchman, who organized the artillery and Dr Harlan, an American, who became governor of Jasrota, and later of Gujrat. Henry Steinbach, a German, was a battalion commander; Hurbons, a Spaniard, was an engineer; Dr Benet, a Frenchman, was Surgeon-General to the Khalsa army, and Vieskenawitch, a Russian, held a rank in the infantry. There were a number of Englishmen—Fitzroy Gillmore, Leslie, Harvey and Foulkes, to mention a few—who were employed on various civil and military duties. With men of such diverse races, nationalities and faiths to serve him, Ranjit Singh maintained a most picturesque and cosmopolitan court.

He was very kind to these foreigners. He trusted them and gave them positions of responsibility and rewarded them generously for their services. But he always kept a watchful eye on them and never let them have an influence over him. They willingly submitted to his natural dignity and served him faithfully.

Such was the magnificence of Ranjit Singh's court and so great his hospitality that travellers and visitors came from all parts of the world to satisfy their curiosity about this most remarkable ruler in the East. Not a few were drawn by his personal charm and geniality and his rare gifts of intellectual curiosity and shrewdness. He received his guests with easy grace and made them feel at home in his presence. He was always courteous and considerate towards them and studiously looked after their comfort. The slightest detail was surpervised by him and nothing was ever overlooked. He dispensed lavish entertainment and the standard of his hospitality was nowhere surpassed. What attracted his visitors most was his unquenchable spirit of enquiry and interrogation. He asked them the most searching questions and his keenness of mind and range of interest surprised everyone. Many travellers have written in their books of his generosity, refined manner and mental alertness. He was always cheerful and vivacious and transmitted the same spirit of heartiness to his audience.

In the summer of 1821, William Moorcroft, the Superintendent of the East India Company's studs in India, came to visit Ranjit Singh's court. He was going to Bokhara to

purchase horses and stopped at Lahore on the way. Ranjit Singh received him with much civility and attention. A daily allowance of one hundred rupees was fixed for his entertainment and he was put up in the Baradari in Shalamar Garden as a royal guest.

Ranjit Singh received Moorcroft in audience several times during his stay in Lahore and took him out for a review of his troops. Moorcroft was greatly impressed by the turn-out and discipline of the Sikh army. He also visited the royal stables and remarked that some of Ranjit Singh's horses were the finest in the world.

Moorcroft had brought Ranjit Singh a letter from Prince Nesselrode of Russia which contained greetings and good wishes from the ruler of that country. It also expressed Russia's desire to have trade relations with the country of Ranjit Singh. The traders from the Punjab were assured welcome and security in Russia.

With Ranjit Singh's permission, Moorcroft left for Ladakh on his way to Bokhara. He made good his route across the northern mountains into Kashmir, but unfortunately met his death by fever in an attempt to pass a tract of unhealthy country.

Another famous traveller to visit Ranjit Singh was Baron Charles Hugel. He was a German scientist who travelled about freely in the Punjab and Kashmir. In his book he wrote that the Punjab under Ranjit Singh was safer than the parts of India ruled by the British. He also recorded his conversations with Ranjit Singh, who, as usual, plied him with questions. He asked him what he thought of his army and whether it could hold its own against a European force. He asked him questions about Kashmir which he had visited, and his governor there.

Victor Jacquemont, a French traveller, also praised Ranjit Singh's gift of conversation and his shrewd judgement. He wrote in his book: "Ranjit Singh is almost the first inquisitive Indian I have seen, but his curiosity makes up for the apathy of his whole nation. He asked me a hundred thousand questions about India, the English, Europe, Bonaparte, this world in general and the other one, hell and Paradise, the soul, God, the devil, and a thousand things besides."

Dr Murray, a surgeon in the British Indian army, was

sent in 1826 by the Governor-General to attend upon Ranjit Singh who had been taken ill. Ranjit Singh saw him several times during his stay in Lahore. He asked his advice about his health, but trusted more to time and abstinence than his medicine. The Governor-General, Lord Amherst, was then travelling upcountry from Calcutta. Ranjit Singh asked Murray about the object of the Governor-General's journey and, every time he met him, he began by asking him how the Governor-General was and how far he had come. He asked about the Burmese War, the qualities of the Burmese soldiers and the amount of money obtained by the English at the end of the war. Another event in British India that had aroused his interest was the mutiny at Barrackpore. He asked Murray minutely about its causes and effects and whether Indian troops had been employed in suppressing it. He also showed him his horses, describing their names and qualities as they passed before them. Murray was sometimes invited to attend military parades and reviews and he was greatly impressed by the fine bearing and steadiness of the Sikh troops.

In spite of his fondness for lengthy discourses with his guests, Ranjit Singh was not unconscious of the virtues of restraint. He would not breathe one word beyond what he really intended to say. During his long conversations with Dr Murray, for example, he did not so much as mention an incident of insubordination which had occurred in an army camp near Lahore during his visit. Murray learnt about it from his servants and was surprised at his royal host's reserve in matters of State.

CHAPTER XII

PAGEANTRY

LORD WILLIAM BENTINCK'S meeting with Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Rupar, on the banks of the Sutlej, was a most spectacular occasion in the history of Anglo-Indian relations. Song and legend in the countryside still enshrine its memory and attempt to recapture that atmosphere of colour and pageantry.

The display on both sides submerged, for a while, the political significance, and an exhibition of regal pomp seemed the only purpose. The lavishness of the proceedings was, however, relieved by warm and spontaneous friendliness shown by the two potentates towards each other. This human aspect is no less important than the political and spectacular.

Since the Amritsar Treaty of 1809, relations between the English and Ranjit Singh had been very cordial. Regular exchange of embassies and presents was a common feature. When, in 1827, Lord Amherst came to Simla for the first time, Ranjit Singh sent a complimentary mission to bid him welcome. The mission consisted of his foreign minister, Faqir Aziz-ud-Din and Diwan Moti Ram, who took with them a canopy made of Kashmir pashmina, an elephant, five horses and a large number of other presents for the Governor-General. Amherst sent a return mission to the court of Ranjit Singh with presents of two English horses, an elephant, two pearl necklaces, a double-barrelled rifle and a few pieces of brocade.

King William IV of England also sent Ranjit Singh a friendly letter and presents. The letter, under royal seal, and five horses were sent to Bombay from where they were forwarded to Lahore under the charge of Lieutenant Alexander Burnes.

Burnes reached Lahore on July 17, 1831. Sham Singh Attariwala, one of Ranjit Singh's chief noblemen, took him out on a gaily-decorated elephant through the streets of the city. When they reached the Fort, Burnes paid his homage to the Maharaja and presented the letter and horses sent

by the English King. Faqir Aziz-ud-Din read out a Persian rendering of the letter. Ranjit Singh and his courtiers were pleased at the tone of the King's message. One of the horses brought by Alexander Burnes was so huge in size that it came to be known in the royal stables as Hathi-sa-Ghora, or Elephant-horse.

The English ambassador stayed in Lahore for a month. Lavish hospitality was extended to him. He was taken to military reviews and shown the royal jewellery and stables. On his way back, he made an offering of two hundred and fifty rupees at the Durbar Sahib at Amritsar and prayed for everlasting friendship between the Sikhs and the English.

Earlier, in April, a mission consisting of Lehna Singh Majithia, Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, Hari Singh Nalwa, Dhanna Singh Malwai, Diwan Moti Ram and Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia had visited Lord William Bentinck at Simla. It was received by the Governor-General with much ceremony. A ball, which was attended by the famous Loła Montez among others, was held at Government House in honour of the guests.

Lord William Bentinck was so much impressed by the embassy sent by Ranjit Singh that he wanted to have a personal interview with him. His object was also to give the world an idea of the complete friendship between the British Government and the Sikh Durbar. He charged Captain Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiana, to carry a letter of thanks to Ranjit Singh and find out privately if he would be agreeable to the idea of a meeting with the Governor-General.

Captain Wade arrived at Adeenanagar, at the foot of the hills, where Ranjit Singh was passing the hot season. Suchet Singh Dogra, Jamadar Khushhal Singh and Jawala Singh Padhania received him on the first day with a *zeeafut* of five thousand rupees and 101 jars of sweetmeat. Next morning he was informed that Desa Singh Majithia and Dhanna Singh Malwai would come and conduct him to the presence of the Maharaja. Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, as usual, read out to the audience the Governor-General's letter.

Captain Wade was subsequently received in audience on many occasions. Ranjit Singh welcomed the suggestion of a meeting with the Governor-General. Rupar, on the river

Sutlej, which marked the boundary between the two States, was fixed as a convenient place for the interview. Great preparations were made on both sides to give *éclat* to the occasion.

A beautiful spot on the right bank of the river was chosen for Ranjit Singh's camp. An area of about eight acres of sand was marked out and the space between the intended pavilions was sown with a quick-growing herb and kept constantly watered. When the pavilions and tents were ready they looked splendid amid patches of bright green. Nothing could exceed the grandeur of these tents. They were supported on gilt pillars and gleamed with the richest hangings of crimson, purple and gold. The roofs were embroidered and fringed in the most costly manner. A wall of Kanats with a lining of yellow satin enclosed the tents on three sides.

In front ran the river reflecting the gorgeous scene upon its glassy surface. This spectacle of colour and magnificence in a setting of hills and woody valleys presented an enchanting view. The tents of the soldiers in the distance formed a fine finish to the landscape.

Ranjit Singh left Lahore on October 15. His entrance into his camp was marked by impressive ceremony and display. He was received by his troops and courtiers, superbly arrayed. A squadron of lancers wore handsome dress in the European style. The artillery consisting of forty guns was similarly well appointed. In the centre stood officers decked out in gold and gems. As the guns announced the arrival of Ranjit Singh, a swarm of elephants appeared upon the scene. They were surrounded on all sides by cavalry. Seated in the gold *howdah* on a stately elephant came the hero of the brilliant cavalcade. The guns boomed on both sides of the river to bid him welcome.

Bentinck had been waiting for Ranjit Singh on the left bank of the Sutlej. He had brought out a large escort of two squadrons of the 16th Lancers, 31st Foot, Colonel Skinner's Irregular Horse and eight guns of horse artillery. As soon as the Maharaja arrived in his camp, the Governor-General sent Major-General Ramsay and his own Principal Secretary to wait upon him. They were received with a salute of fifteen guns. The visit was returned by Ranjit Singh's eldest son and heir-apparent, Prince Kharak Singh.

who, accompanied by Hari Singh Nalwa, Sangat Singh of Jind, Attar Singh Sandhanwalia, Sham Singh Attariwala and Gulab Singh, went to the Governor-General's camp to convey to him the Maharaja's greetings. A 17-gun salute was fired in the Prince's honour. After this exchange of courtesies, October 26 was fixed for the meeting between the two rulers.

A party of Englishmen came to conduct Ranjit Singh to the Governor-General's camp. The Maharaja had sent in advance 3,000 picked horsemen, dressed in splendid yellow silk. They went across the river and formed themselves into two rows for their king to pass through. Ranjit Singh, who as a rule dressed in a simple manner, had put on the royal robes. His pearls and jewels were of the rarest description. His train of hundred elephants, richly decorated, and a large number of nobles and courtiers in their glittering brocades and diamonds, rolled on in stately form.

At the other end, the British troops formed a street in the middle of which Ranjit Singh was met by the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. The two chiefs shook hands and greeted each other cordially. Ranjit Singh crossed into the Governor-General's *howdah* and they proceeded together to the tents of audience which had been specially prepared for the occasion. An outer tent was occupied by important European gentlemen some of whom were presented to Ranjit Singh who talked to them in his usual easy and vivacious manner. After a brief stay in this tent he was taken to the inner one for a more private conference with the Governor-General. The Maharaja and the Governor-General sat in gold chairs. On one side sat the English officers, on the other the Sikh Sardars and courtiers. The latter were dressed, like the Maharaja, in Basanti yellow, the colour of spring. Ranjit Singh, with his natural grace and ready wit, gave the atmosphere a liveliness which transcended the formality of the occasion.

Presently, two hundred trays laden with presents were brought in. Dresses of honour were laid out for Prince Kharak Singh and the ministers. At 10 o'clock, after nearly an hour's stay, the Maharaja left for his camp. At the door he paraded before the Governor-General his favourite horses. As he passed through the lines of British troops, he stopped to examine the different corps and asked minute questions

about their arms and equipment. Twenty-one guns were fired in the British camp at his departure: fifty guns saluted him in his own.

On the following day, the Governor-General returned the visit. Prince Kharak Singh and Prince Sher Singh received him across the river to bring him to the royal camp. The Governor-General was escorted by the lancers with their mounted band. Ranjit Singh's troops formed a line from the bridge to the tents. The Maharaja, riding his famous elephant Indargaj, met the Governor-General outside the tents. They shook hands and the Governor-General shifted from his elephant to that of the Maharaja. Slowly they moved towards the main camp.

Twenty-one guns saluted the Governor-General as he alighted from the elephant. He was led into the tent the inside of which presented a scene of unique magnificence. The furnishings were in keeping with the display outside. The ground was spread with gorgeous shawls and carpets. In the centre was the royal throne on which were placed two gold chairs. The canopy above was inlaid with gems and jewels.

The Maharaja and the Governor-General took their seats on the throne. The officers and Sardars formed themselves into rows on either side. Nearly a hundred Sardars were introduced to the Governor-General. The Governor-General, who had closely watched Ranjit Singh's troops as he came to the camp, was further impressed by the fine-looking knights, elegantly arrayed in their polished armour and costly silks and diamonds.

The two rulers talked in a friendly manner. The Governor-General admired the rich style of the furnishings of the tent. The Koh-i-Nur shone on Ranjit Singh's left arm and added to the brilliance of the scene. The presents for the Governor-General were brought forth. Handsomely-worked shawls and jewels were laid out in trays. The Maharaja put a pearl necklace round Bentinck's neck and presented him with two horses and an elephant with a silver *howdah*. After staying for nearly four hours, the Governor-General took his leave.

Next day, Ranjit Singh invited the Governor-General to dinner. Hundreds of dainty dishes were prepared. General

Hari Singh Nalwa, Jamadar Khushhal Singh and other Sardars went to conduct the Governor-General to Ranjit Singh's camp. The Governor-General was accompanied by a large number of officers and ladies. Ranjit Singh received them at the door of the tent. The party went on till midnight. The choicest wines were served and the Maharaja's Indian and French bands were in attendance.

The Governor-General held an entertainment in honour of the Maharaja on the following day. The English camp was beautifully decorated. The Governor-General came out to receive Ranjit Singh and conducted him into the tent where the guests, including a large number of ladies, had been awaiting his arrival. The British band played fine music and Ranjit Singh's joviality and friendliness enlivened the spirit of the party.

On the fifth day, Ranjit Singh witnessed a parade of English troops and also saw artillery practice. Then the English officers showed their skill in the use of arms. Ranjit Singh's officers, General Hari Singh Nalwa, General Ventura, Raja Suchet Singh and General Ilahi Bakhsh, also joined in the sports. Ranjit Singh himself came forward and, riding his famous horse Laili at great speed, made three cuts with his sword on a brass vessel in such a manner that they took the form of a flower.

On the last day, Lord William Bentinck was present at a parade of the Sikh troops. He was struck by the exercises of the infantry and the precision of the artillery. A farewell Durbar was held after which the camps broke up and started their march home.

The Rupar interview has been described as a meeting on "the field of cloth of gold." Such was the ceremony and splendour that attended it !

CHAPTER XIII

A ROYAL WEDDING

TO HAVE established such precise standards of regal usage and hospitality was remarkable for one born to a small worldly heritage. Ranjit Singh's inheritance did not amount to more than a few villages precariously held in those turbulent days and his authority scarcely coincided with any recognizable or settled geographical demarcation. He carved out sovereignty for himself in his own lifetime after a protracted and bitter struggle, but the tradition of noble pomp and splendour he set up was unmatched by royalties of much older origin. There could be no better example of his love of magnificence and *éclat* than the wedding of his grandson Prince Nau Nihal Singh which was one of the most lavish celebrations in the history of the country. Ranjit Singh had nearly half a million people as his guests for the occasion and gave away in one day twenty lakhs of rupees in charity.

Prince Nau Nihal Singh was then sixteen years old. He had already shown his ability as a soldier, having taken part in several warlike campaigns. It was during one such campaign that Sham Singh Attariwala, a leading Sikh courtier, pledged the hand of his daughter to him.

Ranjit Singh sent invitations to the British Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, his old friend, Sir Charles Metcalfe, then Governor of Agra, and the chiefs of a number of Indian states. The rulers of Patiala, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Naraingarh, Nabha, Jind, Malerkotla, Kalsia, Mandi and Suket responded to the invitation. Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief, with Lady Fane and staff, attended on behalf of the Governor-General. Ranjit Singh received the guests at Amritsar with usual ceremony and attention.

As Sir Henry Fane crossed the Sutlej at Harike on March 3, 1837, he was met by Prince Sher Singh. The Prince, in his elegant turban decorated with diamonds, emeralds and rubies and followed by a large number of attendants, looked very handsome. The guests were impressed by his good nature and quiet and gentlemanly manners. He at once made

friends with Sir Henry Fane who came to see him in his tent on the following day. The Prince had with him an artist, who, standing in front of the two chiefs, made a likeness of Sir Henry Fane. The guests admired the furnishings of the Prince's camp, especially his dressing room which was filled with French scent bottles and other European luxuries of toilet.

The Commander-in-Chief, accompanied by Prince Sher Singh and his train, left for Amritsar. Two miles from the city, they were met by Prince Kharak Singh, the heir-apparent and father of the bridegroom. Sir Henry Fane was presented with a *zeeafut* of five thousand rupees. He entered the city under a salute of guns fired from the fort of Gobindgarh. Upon reaching his camp, he also fired a salute of twenty-one guns in honour of the Sikh ruler. Then he came to pay his visit to the Maharaja who was staying at his garden-house, the Ram Bagh. Ranjit Singh wore a green turban and had a row of pearls round his neck. The canopy under which he sat was made of beautiful Kashmiri shawls, inlaid with silver. It had silver poles to support it. The dresses and jewels of the Maharaja's court were of the richest quality. Hira Singh, son of Dhian Singh, the prime minister, looked one mass of jewels. Ranjit Singh received Sir Henry Fane cordially. Some of the many questions he asked him were about the size of the East India Company's army, the number of battles he had been in and the way the English cast their guns.

In the evening was held the ceremony of presenting offerings to the bridegroom. Sir Henry presented eleven thousand rupees, Dhian Singh one lakh and twenty-five thousand and Gulab Singh, Suchet Singh, Misar Rup Lal and other Sardars fifty-one thousand each. Other chiefs and guests made offerings according to their rank and position. The presents were altogether valued at fifty lakhs of rupees.

The wedding party started for the bride's place on elephants richly equipped and decorated. Passing through the streets of the city, the procession reached the Durbar Sahib where blessings were sought for the bridegroom. The Maharaja put the bridal crown of the rarest pearls, hung on gold threads, on the forehead of Prince Nau Nihal Singh.

The party formed a gorgeous procession composed of superb-looking men, mounted upon stately elephants. Unique

was the splendour and bustle of the occasion. Hundreds of thousands of spectators, who had come from all parts of the country, lined up on both sides of the road from Amritsar to Attari, the bride's village. For miles around there were crowds of men cheering the wedding-party. Ranjit Singh had ordered bags, each containing coins worth two thousand rupees, to be placed at the disposal of the guests. The money was being showered to the people. Ranjit Singh, the members of the royal family and the more prominent guests cast handfuls of gold mohurs instead of silver coins. At the head of the cavalcade was a moving throne, decked out in a most splendid style, on which dancing and music continued all the way.

Sham Singh Attariwala, the host, had made equally elaborate arrangements for the reception of the guests. The passage to his mansion was spread with velvet and brocade. The guns and fireworks were let off as the party arrived. The Maharaja was received with an offering of one hundred and one gold mohurs and five horses, Prince Kharak Singh with fifty-one mohurs and one horse and the other princes with eleven mohurs and a horse each. The guests were then conducted to the top floor of Sardar Sham Singh's castle. The bridegroom sat between the Maharaja and the British Commander-in-Chief under a canopy embroidered with silver and gold. Ranjit Singh wore on his arm the diamond Koh-i-Nur.

After nine o'clock began the religious ceremony. The air became thick with the holy chants and the felicitations to the Maharaja from all sides. A display of fireworks was subsequently held in the centre of the large enclosure where camps had been laid out for the Maharaja, Sir Henry Fane and other guests. The entertainment and gaiety went on far into the night.

Next day, Ranjit Singh surpassed himself for bounty. The multitude of poor people who had come for alms and other spectators were gathered into a space of about five miles in circumference, surrounded by soldiers. No one was allowed to stir out except at the eighty exits where officers were stationed to distribute the money. Each one was given a *Butki*, worth five rupees. As a person received his *Butki*, he was sent out of the circle and not allowed to come in

again. A sum of twenty lakhs of rupees was distributed in this manner.

The Maharaja and the guests witnessed the sports which comprised wrestling bouts, elephant-fighting and contests in lancing and swordsmanship. In the afternoon the bride's dowry was displayed. It consisted of eleven elephants, 101 horses, 101 cows, 101 buffaloes, 101 camels, all fully equipped, hundreds of gold and silver utensils, five hundred pairs of shawls, and ornaments, jewels and silk and brocade dresses worth lakhs of rupees. Sham Singh Attariwala also made presents to the Maharaja and the guests.

After two days' feasting and merriment, the party left for Lahore. The festival of Holi being near, the Maharaja did not let his guests depart. In the evening, he wanted to give a banquet at the Shalamar Gardens, but, since the water required for the fountains had not yet come from the Ravi sufficiently far down the canal which brought it to the garden, the entertainment was postponed until the following evening.

The Shalamar Gardens were brilliantly illuminated with rows of small earthen lamps, placed at regular intervals on the building and down the sides of the walks and tanks. At every ten or twelve yards were placed coloured lamps. The fountains playing in the light of these lamps produced a charming effect. The English ladies were allowed to see the fireworks and a special tent was erected for them on the top of a house. The Maharaja looked after the guests personally. The festive eve was prolonged to the small hours of the morning.

On the third day, Ranjit Singh visited Sir Henry in his camp. While passing through the troops which had been drawn up in his honour, he stopped to see the King's 16th Lancers. He had met these troops at Rupar at the time of Lord William Bentinck's visit.

Ranjit Singh turned the formal occasion into a pleasant function by his natural and easy manner and his well informed questions and conversations. He asked the Commander-in-Chief if the Russian interest was doing the English much harm in Persia and whether Persia could give Russia any useful aid in the event of their advancing towards India. Sir Henry took him into another camp and showed him the presents he had brought for him. Among these were an elephant,

eight horses, a double-barrelled gun and a brace of pistols. The Commander-in-Chief apologized that the presents had been collected in a hurry as he had not had sufficient warning of the visit.

Sir Henry Fane saw a review of Ranjit Singh's troops on the banks of the river Ravi. They were all very well turned out and armed in the European fashion. The Commander-in-Chief praised their skill and discipline. Ranjit Singh was present at a similar review of the Commander-in-Chief's escort.

One day the guests were invited to see the court jewels. It was a most magnificent collection with a vast variety of stones, armlets, bangles and necklaces. one costlier than the other. The Koh-i-Nur. of course. was the centre of attraction. Then the guests went to a grand entertainment given by Ranjit Singh at his palace in honour of the English ladies. The ladies were also taken inside to see the Maharaja's wives. Mai Nakain, mother of the heir-apparent. received them. Mrs Ventura. wife of General Ventura. and Mrs Allard. wife of General Allard. acted as interpreters.

At last the festival of Holi for which the guests had been detained arrived. The Maharaja invited them all to his camp. They were provided with baskets full of red powder balls. large bowls of yellow saffron and gold squirts. As soon as the guests were seated, the Maharaja poured colour on Sir Henry's bald head. while Dhian Singh rubbed him all over with red powder. This was a signal for general colour splashing and ball throwing. The worst sufferer in the rejoicing was an Afghan ambassador who had come from Kandahar.

After a fortnight's stay in Lahore, Sir Henry Fane asked leave to depart. A farewell Durbar was held and presents were brought for him and his party. Ranjit Singh shook each of the guests by the hand and wished him goodbye. Prince Sher Singh came as far as the Sutlej to see off the guests. On the banks of the river, Sir Henry Fane held a Durbar in honour of Prince Sher Singh and presented him with a buggy horse.

In honour of Prince Nau Nihal Singh's wedding, Ranjit Singh started an Order of Merit, which was known as *Kaukab-i-Iqbal-i-Punjab*, Star of the Prosperity of the Punjab. The

order had three grades, each having its own medal. The medals bore the effigy of Ranjit Singh on one side and had silk ribands of gold and scarlet colour. They were in the shape of a star and were meant to be worn round the neck. The first grade medal was ornamented with one diamond. It was meant for the members of the royal family and those chiefs who showed exceptional devotion to the person of the Maharaja and his family. The second grade medal, with a diamond and an emerald set in it, was bestowed on loyal courtiers and Sardars. The third contained a single emerald and was open to the civil and military officers who had rendered some special service to the country.

CHAPTER XIV

KING-KILLING IN LAHORE

THE SPIRIT of stern religious discipline and sacrifice which had supported Sikhs through a critical period of their history and led them to power and glory was dimmed in the pomp and grandeur of sovereignty. Ranjit Singh's death, in 1839, left a deep hiatus. The Khalsa lost the leader who had by his commanding personality, foresight and tact provided a central point for their national aspirations and secured them the status of a sovereign people. The British had by then taken practically the whole of India except the Punjab and Sind and their empire bordered on the southern confines of the Sikh State. The process of British expansion, which had temporarily been halted by the Sikhs who had built up a strong bulwark in the Punjab, was, after the death of Ranjit Singh, again set on its inexorable course.

All these factors combined to weaken the Sikh kingdom. Intrigue and murder became rampant and a tragic fate overtook the country of Ranjit Singh. The *dénouement* of this pathetic drama was provided by the Anglo-Sikh wars which resulted in the annexation of the Punjab to the British dominions.

The Dogra trio of Jammu—Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh—played a very subtle role and put into motion a chain of proceedings which brought about the demolition of the Sikh power. These three brothers had joined Ranjit Singh's service as soldiers of fortune and gradually came to occupy positions of great influence at his court. At the time of the Sikh ruler's death, Dhian Singh was the most powerful man in the Punjab. He was Prime Minister to Ranjit Singh's son and successor, Kharak Singh, and had cleverly laid out his net inside the palace as well as outside to maintain himself in power. Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh also held high offices under Kharak Singh.

But the Dogra brothers were not content with this. They had their eyes on the throne itself and the main object of their grand strategy was to crown Dhian Singh's son, Hira Singh, king of the Punjab. During Ranjit Singh's lifetime

they had vied with each other in showing their devotion and loyalty towards him and his family. It is said that once Dhian Singh, who had fallen under suspicion, vowed himself to ascetical self-denial and would not sleep in bed until he had obtained the Maharaja's pardon by inviting him to Jammu and holding, in expiation, an elaborate religious ceremonial. But no sooner had Ranjit Singh died than the Dogras touched the springs of a plot which engulfed the palace, the court and the army and brought disaster and chaos to the country.

The first shot in this murderous campaign was fired by the youngest Dogra, Suchet Singh. In the small hours of the morning of October 9, 1839, barely three months after Ranjit Singh's death, Dhian Singh intruded upon the privacy of the royal chambers, leading into Kharak Singh's bedroom a party of conspirators. He had been secretly plotting against the Maharaja and given currency to false stories that the latter was surreptitiously planning to make over the Punjab to the British and surrender to them six annas in every rupee of the State revenue. To lend credence to these rumours some fake letters were prepared and discreetly intercepted. Gulab Singh was charged to work upon Kharak Singh's son, Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, who was then travelling in his company from Peshawar to Lahore. Misled by these fictitious tales, the young prince was estranged from his father.

On the fateful eve, Dhian Singh sent out orders to the army to keep quiet in spite of any nightly alarm. Colonel Alexander Gardner, an American in the Sikh service, was commanded to station his troops at the gates of the royal Fort.

At midnight, Dhian Singh entered the Fort with his party. Answering the sentry's who-goes-there cry, he said, "The Maharaja Sahib is going to Amritsar for ablutions in the *Sarovar* (the sacred tank) and we have come to escort him." As they came close to the royal chamber, they saw the Maharaja's *Gudwai,* or bearer, returning after laying bath for his master, who, like a true Sikh, rose early in the morning to recite the sacred hymns. Suchet Singh fired upon the *Gudwai* with his small English rifle killing him on the spot. For his indiscretion in raising a premature alarm, he was

reproved by his eldest brother, Gulab Singh, who slapped him angrily on the face.

The party then burst upon the Maharaja's room. Chet Singh Bajwa, a trusted courtier who had also been the prince's tutor, slept in the same room. Hearing the rifle shot, he ran inside to hide himself. Dhian Singh arrogantly questioned the Maharaja where his favourite Chet Singh was. The Dogras carried out a thorough search of the apartments and, as they were returning from their fruitless quest, one of them saw a glint of light in the corner of a dark corridor. This was the reflection from the ill-fated Chet Singh's sword. His enemies immediately turned back. Gulab Singh and Dhian Singh strove with each other as to who should first strike the victim. The latter's envious nature was so aroused at the sight of Chet Singh that he, disregarding the cautionary advice of his elder brother, fell on him with the fierceness of a wolf and pierced his chest with a mighty thrust of his spear.

This foul crime inside the Fort of Ranjit Singh, a mention of whose name struck terror in the hearts of the evil-minded, was the prologue to a long-drawn drama of intrigue and slaughter.

Kharak Singh was removed from the Fort and he remained virtually a prisoner in the hands of the Dogras. Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh ruled in his place, but he was helpless against the machinations of his Prime Minister, Dhian Singh, who contrived his schemes with such consummate artfulness that father and son were not allowed to see each other. Dhian Singh subjected Kharak Singh to strict restraint upon the pretext that he might not escape to the British dominions. Doses of slow poison were administered to the Maharaja who was at last delivered by death on November 5, 1840, from a lonely and disgraceful existence.

The same day was chosen for enacting another foul crime. As Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh was walking back after the cremation of his father, a gateway was brought down upon him at the entrance of the palace through the Hazuri Garden. He fell to the ground, but escaped serious injury. Dhian Singh who had kept a *palki* ready at hand at once ordered that the prince be taken inside the Fort. One of the palki-bearers, who were from Colonel Gardner's regiment, later

told his officer that the prince had sustained a minor injury above his right ear and that the mark of blood on the pillow was no bigger than the size of a silver rupee. But this was a lucky bearer who escaped with his life to tell the story. His colleagues were murdered by the Dogras to smother the secret.

Dhian Singh had the gates of the Fort locked up, reserving to himself the authority to allow or refuse admittance as he desired. None of the Sardars were allowed to go inside and see Nau Nihal Singh. Lehna Singh Majithia was rudely pushed away by Dhian Singh as he was entering the Fort with the Kanwar Sahib's *palki*. The Sardar took the insult to heart and went back to his village, never returning to Lahore again. While Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh's mother and wife smote their heads against the Fort gates, wailing and tearing off their hair in helpless anguish, Dhian Singh and his men were busy inside beating in the young prince's head with bricks and stones. To tell the crowds outside that he was being well looked after, Dhian Singh loudly asked Dr Honigberger if they might give Kanwar Sahib some *Shorba* (soup). The doctor in his Autobiography meaningly remarks that he knew what *Shorba* the Kanwar Sahib needed.

For three days the news of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh's death was kept secret.

Dhian Singh now openly suggested to Maharani Chand Kaur, the widow of Kharak Singh, to adopt his son, Hira Singh, and proclaim him Maharaja of the Punjab. On her refusal to do so, Dhian Singh became her sworn enemy. His brother, Gulab Singh, who looked after the Maharani's property, absconded from the Fort with several cartloads of gold and silver. Mohammad Latif thus describes Gulab Singh's flight from Lahore in his *History of the Punjab* :

> Raja Gulab Singh carried away all the money and valuables belonging to the Maharani Chand Kaur under pretence of keeping it safely for her ... He carried off the accumulated treasures of Ranjit Singh which were in the Fort. Sixteen carts were filled with rupees and other silver coins, while 500 horsemen were each entrusted with a bag of gold mohurs, and his orderlies were also entrusted with jewellery and other valuable articles. The costly *pashminas*, and rich wardrobes, and the best horses in Ranjit Singh's stables, were all purloined by Gulab Singh on the occasion of his evacuating Lahore.

It was with this money that Gulab Singh later purchased Kashmir from the British.

The next step for the Dogras was to get Maharani Chand Kaur out of their way. She was staying alone in Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh's palace inside the city. Dhian Singh replaced her old maidservants by hill-women from his own part of the country. The latter, who were in the pay of the Dogras, poisoned the Maharani's food and eventually killed her, smashing her head with wooden pikes from the kitchen.

Ranjit Singh's second son, Sher Singh, who came to the throne after the death of Kharak Singh, was opposed by the Sandhanwalia Sardars. Two of them—Attar Singh and Ajit Singh—crossed over to the British territory and went to stay in Calcutta waiting for a more favourable opportunity to come back to the Punjab. Dhian Singh made friends with the Sandhanwalias and encouraged them in their secret designs against Sher Singh. The British also supported their cause and twice sent Mr Clarke, one of their senior political officers, to Lahore to intercede on behalf of Attar Singh Sandhanwalia and Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia and persuade the Maharaja to let them return to the Punjab. Sher Singh at last gave them their pardon and both of them arrived at Lahore on May 12, 1843.

The Sandhanwalias showed little gratitude for the favour done to them. In collusion with the Dogra Prime Minister, they resumed their malicious plans as soon as they were back in the Punjab. On September 15, 1843, when Sher Singh was out in the morning to see wrestling bouts near the Shalamar Gardens, outside Lahore, he was requested by the Sandhanwalia Sardars to inspect their troops. At the parade, Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia sought permission to show the Maharaja a carbine he had obtained from an Englishman in Calcutta. As the Maharaja put forth his hand to take hold of the weapon, Ajit Singh pressed the triggers and the loaded barrels emptied into his broad chest. "Oh ! What treachery !" This was all the Maharaja could say as he dropped dead to the ground.

For the fourth time in four years the Punjab was plunged in mourning.

How thoroughly submissive to the authority and prestige of Ranjit Singh this Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia, who had now

assassinated his son Sher Singh, was would be illustrated by an incident which took place in 1838. He was on a visit to Simla with a Sikh embassy. The Governor-General, Lord Auckland, gave a ball in honour of the guests. He had been planning to have a beautiful boat made in the shape of a snake and make a present of it to Ranjit Singh. While talking to Ajit Singh, the Governor-General happened to ask what colours and decorations his sovereign would prefer. So great was Ajit Singh's perplexity at this simple question that, in the words of the Governor-General's sister, Emily Eden, recorded in her Diary, one could hear his heart beat. Ajit Singh was afraid to make a categorical answer for his sovereign even on such a minor point as this.

The shots that killed Sher Singh were a signal for the elder Sandhanwalia—Lehna Singh—to pounce upon Kanwar Partap Singh, the twelve-year-old son of the Maharaja. That being the day of the full moon, the young prince was being weighed in a garden near by against grain and silver to be given away in charity. Lehna Singh, who was in a grandfather's relationship to the prince, seized him by the hair and cut him to pieces. "Don't kill me grandfather ! I renounce all claim to my father's throne. I will go to the forests and become a Sadhu. I will no more return to Lahore." These pathetic cries of Partap Singh were for ever choked with a cruel blow of the sword.

With the heads of Maharaja Sher Singh and Kanwar Partap Singh pitched on the spears, the Sandhanwalias marched towards the city. They were met, on the way, by Dhian Singh who joined the party. The Prime Minister had made sure that the guards or other troops in the city would offer them no challenge. Reaching the Fort, the Sandhanwalias and Dogras held a mutual conference to divide the spoils amongst themselves. But during these negotiations, Ajit Singh settled argument with Dhian Singh by killing him with a bullet from his rifle. The Sandhanwalias' next target was Dhian Singh's son, Hira Singh, who was well known in the Sikh armies and could easily arouse them in the name of his deceased patron, Ranjit Singh. They invited him to the Fort and, in support of their *bona fides*, sent him a ring removed from the finger of his dead father. A premonition on the part of Suchet Singh, who then happened to be with

him. saved him from falling into the trap. The elder Dogra suspected foul play and told the messengers to bring a note signed by Dhian Singh before Hira Singh could accompany them.

The news of Dhian Singh's death soon became known outside the Fort. Hira Singh started crying like a child and bewailed before the troops how the Sandhanwalias had murdered their sovereign, Sher Singh, and his Prime Minister, Dhian Singh. Pledged to revenge, the soldiers marched upon the Fort and laid siege to it. The Sandhanwalias offered strong resistance, but Lehna Singh and Ajit Singh were both killed.

On September 18, 1843, Ranjit Singh's five-year-old son, Duleep Singh, was proclaimed Maharaja of the Punjab and Hira Singh assumed the position of Prime Minister. The latter announced an increase of two rupees and a half in the pay of the troops. He appointed one Pandit Jallha as his deputy and confiscated the Sandhanwalias' fiefs and *jagirs*. Their houses in their ancestral village of Raja Sansi were razed to the ground. Attar Singh Sandhanwalia once again left the Punjab to seek shelter with the British. Hira Singh also had Bhai Gurmukh Singh, a revered Sikh divine, and Misar Beli Ram murdered for having opposed his father's proposal to crown him Maharaja after the death of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh.

But this was not the end of the melancholy drama. The conspirators had gone so far in their guilt that there could neither be retraction nor peace for them. Tormented by the apparitions of their own misdeeds, they saw dangers lurking in all corners and desperately went on from one crime to another. In this mad orgy of blood no one came forward to defend the Khalsa heritage which had been built up by the unparalleled valour and sacrifices of the Sikhs.

Hira Singh saw in Jawahar Singh, brother of the Queen Mother, a rival to his position and put him in gaol. He also disgraced and exiled from Lahore his own uncle, Suchet Singh. At the instance of Gulab Singh, who concocted some false letters, he confiscated the lands of Kanwar Kashmira Singh and Kanwar Pishaura Singh, two of the surviving sons of Ranjit Singh. The Dogras also sent a force against them under Gulab Singh. But the Sikh troops refused to fight

against the princes. Gulab Singh had recourse to the usual Dogra stratagem of tempting the army with promises of raising their pay. With this bait, Dhian Singh, Hira Singh and other Dogra leaders had frequently attempted to subvert the morale of Sikh soldiery. The attack on Kashmira Singh and Pishaura Singh had caused great resentment among the troops who turned against the Dogra Prime Minister. Hira Singh was obliged to restore the princes' *jagirs* and release Jawahar Singh from captivity.

Suchet Singh, who had been living in Jammu since his exile, considered this a favourable opportunity for returning to Lahore. He reached Shahdara with a small body of troops on March 26, 1844, and tried to win over the armies with offers of rewards and prizes. Hira Singh now used the second favourite weapon in the Dogra armoury and told the troops that Suchet Singh was a friend of the British and that he had 18 lakhs of rupees in deposit with them in their bank at Ferozepore. This had the desired effect and the Sikh soldiers forsook Suchet Singh who was killed in the clash that followed.

Hira Singh's intrigue reached its culminating point in his designs against Baba Vir Singh, a venerated old Sikh, who lived in a small village secluded from courtly machinations. He was a true well-wisher of the dynasty of Ranjit Singh and was deeply grieved at the disaster which had overtaken it through the envy of the courtiers. His personal influence was a source of great perturbation to Hira Singh who sent an army to attack his citadel in the village where Prince Kashmira Singh and Attar Singh Sandhanwalia had taken asylum. Baba Vir Singh forbade his Sikhs to fight back saying, "How can we attack our own brethren ?" He was in meditation with the Holy Book in front of him when he was killed with a shell from enemy fire. Prince Kashmira Singh and Attar Singh Sandhanwalia also lost their lives in this conflict.

This attack upon Baba Vir Singh and a subsequent attempt by Hira Singh's favourite Pandit Jallha to poison Mai Jind Kaur, the Queen Mother, aroused the ire of the Sikh armies. Finding himself in a desperate situation, Hira Singh abandoned Lahore with 4,000 of his trusted troops and several cartloads of gold and silver stolen from the treasury. But a Sikh force led by Jawahar Singh and Sham Singh Attariwala

overtook him on the way. Hira Singh and his favourite Pandit Jallha were killed and the Sikh Sardars returned to Lahore with the treasures which were being carted away to Jammu. This occurred on December 21, 1844.

Jawahar Singh became Prime Minister in place of Hira Singh. Gulab Singh. now the sole survivor of the Dogra trinity, had fallen in arrears with the tribute in lieu of the lands in his possession. The new Prime Minister despatched Sham Singh Attariwala with an armed force to Jammu for the realization of the dues. Gulab Singh made his peace offering to pay the tribute regularly in addition to a fine of thirty-five lakhs of rupees. But some Dogras ambushed one of the Sardars, Fateh Singh Maan, as he was returning to his camp, and killed him. This enraged the Khalsa army and they set upon the city. After three days' fighting, Gulab Singh surrendered and was brought back to Lahore in custody. He secured his release with a promise to discharge the arrears.

In Lahore, Gulab Singh had opportunities of indulging in his favourite pastime of intrigue and he succeeded in creating a breach between Jawahar Singh and Prince Pishaura Singh. He also started negotiations with the British with the object of helping them in taking Lahore, provided they gave him the north-eastern parts of the Punjab to rule.

Marching from Sialkot, Kanwar Pishaura Singh occupied the fort of Attock. Jawahar Singh ordered Fateh Khan Tiwana and Chattar Singh of Attari to proceed towards Attock and recover the fort from Pishaura Singh. Seeing that the armies were in sympathy with the prince, Chattar Singh forbore to assault the fort and started parleys for peace. The Kanwar agreed to vacate the fort and the next day he set out for Lahore with Chattar Singh and Fateh Khan. On their way, they made halt for the evening at the Sikh shrine of Panja Sahib. Pishaura Singh was captured as he lay asleep and taken back to Attock where he was kept a prisoner before being cruelly put to the sword on the night of August 30, 1845.

It was now Jawahar Singh's turn to pay the penalty for his crime. The army became hostile to him. He and his sister, the Queen Mother, endeavoured to pacify the soldiers, but without avail. A Dogra Sardar, Prithvi Singh, was

actively engaged in inciting them to avenge Pishaura Singh's death. On September 12, 1845, he posted himself at the Delhi Gate of Lahore. Riding an elephant, Jawahar Singh, with the infant-king Duleep Singh, Ranjit Singh's youngest son, on his lap, came out to appeal to the soldiers. His sister, Mai Jind Kaur, riding another elephant was also by his side. Jawahar Singh's elephant was surrounded by the troops, the Maharaja was taken away from his lap and he was fired upon and dragged down to the ground dead.

There were now three candidates for the office of Prime Minister—Gulab Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh. Like the Dogras, these last two had come to Ranjit Singh's court in search of employment and succeeded in winning his favour. In the lot drawn by Maharaja Duleep Singh in November, 1844, to decide who should be his Prime Minister, Lal Singh proved Fortune's favourite. Tej Singh became the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh army.

CHAPTER XV

WARS WITH BRITAIN

THE English were watching the happenings in the Sikh State with more than a neighbour's interest. They saw their opportunity in the confusion and disorder that prevailed, and, disregarding their treaties of friendship with the Sikhs, they started implementing their plans of subjugating their country. Even when Ranjit Singh was alive, symbolizing in his person the unity and glory of the Sikhs' kingdom and their desire to live in peace with their neighbours to the south of the Sutlej, the English had secretly coveted his territories.

Lieutenant Alexander Burnes, who was deputed to the Sikh capital in 1831 with a friendly letter from the King of England and a present of five horses and a coach, was asked to travel by the Indus and the Sutlej, for "the authorities both in England and India contemplated that much information of a political and geographical nature might be acquired in such a journey." He had been instructed at Bombay that "the depth of water in the Indus, the direction and breadth of the stream, its facilities for steam navigation, the supply of fuel on its banks and the conditions of the princes and people who possess the country bordering it, are all points of the highest interest to Government."

Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India, who, at the invitation of Ranjit Singh, had attended the wedding of his grandson, Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, was, in the words of Cunningham, "ever a careful observer of military means and of soldierly qualities; he formed an estimate of the force which would be required for the complete subjugation of the Punjab." That was in 1838.

Similarly, Colonel Claude Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiana, and other British officers while returning through the Punjab after the Afghanistan expedition which was undertaken jointly with the Sikhs, collected political and geographical information relating to the Sikh territories and prepared memoranda for the civil and military authorities. In fact, the English were in 1841 resolved to conquer the Punjab. Mrs. Henry Lawrence, wife of Henry Lawrence who later

took the Punjab from the Sikhs, writing to one of her friends, Mrs. Cameron, in her letter of May 26, 1841, said :

> Wars, and rumours of wars, are on every side and there seems no doubt that next cold weather will decide the long suspended question of occupying the Punjab ; Henry both in his civil and military capacity will probably be called to take a part in whatever goes on.

This letter is quoted in Henry Lawrence's Biography by Edwardes and Merivale.

The Afghan insurrection in Kabul on November 2, 1841, which resulted in a complete rout of the British force there, upset the plans for the occupation of the Punjab. The English were obliged to seek help from Maharaja Sher Singh who immediately ordered Gulab Singh to render all possible assistance to General Pollock and Captain Mackeson in their expedition against Afghanistan. This occasion was used by the British officers to detach some of the Maharaja's courtiers from their allegiance to him. Henry Lawrence considered Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh and Avitabile the most likely instruments of British policy and plans so far as the Sikh dominions were concerned. His biographer, Major-General Sir Herbert Edwardes, quotes him as saying, "We need such men as the Raja [Gulab Singh] and General Avitabile, and should bind them to us, by the only tie they recognize—self-interest."

Gulab Singh did not need much temptation to be thrown in his way, for he was already determined on the ruination of the Punjab kingdom and had constantly been plotting towards that end. Other Punjab officers who readily fell in with the English were Lal Singh and Tej Singh, two mercenaries from the British dominions in India, who rose to be the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, respectively, of the Sikh State. The Sandhanwalia Sardars had fled Lahore and taken refuge with the British. George Russel Clerk, the Political Agent at Ludhiana, had pleaded hard on their behalf, persuading Maharaja Sher Singh to forgive them and let them return to the Punjab. They had carried on with their treasonable designs which culminated in the murder of the Maharaja and his son, Partap Singh. The *British Friend of India*, published in London, wrote in December, 1843, of these murders in this wise : "We have no proof that

Company instigated all the King-Killing in the Punjab since Ranjit Singh died ... We must say we smell a rat."

Lord Ellenborough, who in 1842 replaced Lord Auckland as the Governor-General of India, subscribed to the forward policy of his predecessor and his regime witnessed the invasion of Gwalior and annexation of Sindh, Kaithal and Jytpur. The Punjab figured prominently in his plans, but he thought he was not well provided for a conflict with the Sikhs and wanted some more time to prepare himself. Writing to the Secret Committee of the East India Company on February 11, 1844, he said, "I must frankly confess that when I look at the whole condition of our army I had rather, if the contest cannot be further postponed, that it were at least postponed to November 1845."

How truly this schedule was borne in mind is apparent from the fact that the actual declaration of war was made by the British on December 13, 1845.

Apart from the military preparations, Lord Ellenborough also relied on the network of spies and *agents provocateur* which was being laid out in the Sikh capital. He had this in mind when he assured the Duke of Wellington, "Depend on it, I will not engage in such an operation hastily or unnecessarily, and I will do all I can beforehand to secure certain success if ever I should be obliged to undertake it."

With the arrival of Sir Henry Hardinge, a Peninsula veteran, as Governor-General, the British preparations received a further fillip and the situation was provoked in a manner which left no doubt in the minds of the Sikhs about the intentions of the English. Sir Henry was related to Lord Ellenborough and such was the latter's confidence in him that before laying down the office he wrote to Major George Broadfoot, "You will have heard that the Court of Directors have thought fit to recall me. My successor will carry out all my views. He is my most confidential friend, with whom I have communicated upon all public subjects for thirty years."

Up to 1838, the British troops on the Sikh frontier had amounted to one regiment at Sabathu in the hills, and two at Ludhiana, with six pieces of artillery, equalling in all about 2,500 men. The total rose to 8,000 during the time of Lord Auckland who increased the number of troops at Ludhiana

and created a new military post at Ferozepore, which was actually part of the Sikh dominions on the south of the Sutlej. Lord Ellenborough formed further new stations at Ambala, Kasauli and Simla, and placed in all about 14,000 men and 48 field guns on the frontier. Lord Hardinge increased the aggregate force to about 32,000 men, with 68 field guns, besides having 10,000 men with artillery at Meerut.

This continuous movement of troops towards the border aroused the suspicion of the Sikhs and they were persuaded that the ultimate ambition of the English was to conquer the Punjab. To confirm their fears and to further estrange them, there arrived upon the scene Major George Broadfoot with the declared object of exciting hostilities. He took over charge of Anglo-Sikh affairs from Colonel Richmond who was the Political Agent on the Punjab frontier. Major Broadfoot was of a warlike temperament and had, out of sheer boredom, applied to the Governor-General for transfer from Burma to a more active station. He also bore the Sikhs a personal grudge, having had differences with them at the time of the Afghanistan campaign.

"One of Major Broadfoot's first acts," says Cunningham, "was to declare the Cis-Sutlej possessions of the Sikhs to be under British protection." He started giving effect to this policy in an aggressive manner and attacked a party of Sikhs who had crossed over the Sutlej into their own territory on a routine visit. The Sikhs exhibited a spirit of restraint and conciliation and their desire to avoid a collision alone saved the situation. But the shot fired upon this party of Sikhs by Major Broadfoot was really the first shot of the Anglo-Sikh war. Major Broadfoot occupied two Sikh villages, near Ludhiana, on the plea that some fugitives from justice had taken shelter in them. He had also openly advocated that if something happened to Maharaja Duleep Singh, who was then ill with smallpox, the British troops would march upon Lahore.

In addition to the concentration of troops on the border, an elaborate supply depot was set up by the British at Bassian, near Raikot. Under instructions from the Duke of Wellington, fifty-six pontoons were brought to Ferozepore to be used as a bridge for the troops to cross the Sutlej. The Sikhs were deeply wrought upon by these war preparations across

the border, especially Broadfoot's open acts of hostility. The rapid march in November, 1845, of the Governor-General towards the frontier and a report of Sir Charles Napier's speech in the *Delhi Gazette* that the English were going to war with the Sikhs filled Lahore with rumours of invasion.

On December 12, the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej. They landed on their own territory to the south of the river, scrupulously avoiding any encroachment upon the British possessions or the dominions under their protection. That the Sikhs remained true to the treaties of friendship with the British to the last in spite of grave provocation is borne out by British officials and observers of those times.

Writing on January 23, 1845, to Lord Ellenborough in England, Sir Henry Hardinge said:

> Even if we had a case for devouring our ally in adversity, we are not ready and could not be ready until the hot winds set in, and the Sutlej became a torrent. Moderation will do us no harm, if in the interval the hills and the plains weaken each other; but on what plea could we attack the Punjab, if this were the month of October and we had our army in readiness?
>
> Self-preservation may require the dispersion of this Sikh army, the baneful influence of such an example is the evil most to be dreaded, but exclusive of this case, how are we to justify the seizure of our friend's territory who in our adversity assisted us to retrieve our affairs?

G. Carmichael Smyth in his *Reigning Family of Lahore* says:

> Regarding the Punjab war; I am neither of the opinion that the Seiks made an unprovoked attack, nor that we have acted towards them with great forbearance ... if the Seiks were to be considered entirely an independent State in no way answerable to us, we should not have provoked them!—for to assert that the bridge of boats brought from Bombay, was not a *causa belli*, but merely a defensive measure, is absurd; besides the Seiks had translations of Sir Charles Napier's speech (as it appeared in the Delhi Gazette) that we were going to war with them; and as all European powers would have done under the circumstances, the Seiks thought it as well to be first in the field. Moreover, they were not encamped in our territory, but their own.
>
> . . . and I only ask, had *we* not departed from the rules of friendship first? The year before the war broke out, we kept the island between Ferozepore and the Punjab, though it belonged to the Seiks, owing to the deep water between us and the island.
>
> ... But if on the other hand the treaty of 1809 is said to have been binding between the two Governments then

> the simple question is, who first departed from the rules of friendship? I am decidedly of the opinion we did.

On December 13, 1845, the Governor-General, Lord Hardinge, issued a proclamation, announcing war on the Sikhs and declaring all their possessions below the Sutlej forfeit. and hurried his armies from Ambala and Ludhiana. The obvious target for the Sikh forces was the important British post of Ferozepore, commanded by Sir John Littler with his seven thousand men. But Lal Singh, the Prime Minister of the Sikhs, was in treasonable communication with Captain Peter Nicholson, the Assistant Political Agent. He asked the latter's advice and was told not to attack Ferozepore. This instruction he observed, seducing the Sikhs with an ingenious excuse that, instead of falling upon an easy prey, the Khalsa should exalt their fame by the captivity or death of L'at Sahib (the Governor-General) himself.

On December 18, the Sikhs came in touch with the British army which arrived under Sir Hugh Gough from Ludhiana. A battle took place at Mudki, twenty miles from Ferozepore. Lal Singh, who headed the Sikh attack, deserted his army and precipitantly fled the field when the Sikhs stood firm in their order, fighting in a resolute and determined manner. The commander's action disturbed the ranks and the Sikhs retired with a loss of seventeen guns. The British suffered heavy casualties, amounting to 872 killed and wounded. Among the dead was General Robert Sale, the defender of Jalalabad.

The second action was fought three days later at Ferozshahr, ten miles both from Mudki and Ferozepore. The Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, assisted by reinforcements from Ferozepore, made an attack upon the Sikhs who were awaiting them behind strong entrenchments. The assault was stubbornly resisted. The Sikhs' batteries fired with rapidity and precision. There was confusion in the ranks of the English and their position became increasingly critical. The growing darkness of the winter night reduced them to desperate straits. For the moment, history lay poised on the edge of a sharp precipice. The dreams of conquering the Punjab seemed to be fading from the weary, but sleepless, eyes of the Englishmen huddled on that faraway sandy stretch of land.

During that "night of horrors," the Commander-in-Chief acknowledged, "we were in a critical and perilous state." Counsels of retreat and surrender were raised and despair brooded over the British camp. In the words of General Hope Grant, Sir Henry Hardinge thought it was all up and gave his sword—a present from the Duke of Wellington and which once belonged to Napoleon—and his Star of the Bath to his son, with directions to proceed to Ferozepore remarking that "if the day were lost, he must fall."

Lal Singh and Tej Singh again came to the rescue of the English, committing as cold a piece of treachery as history can boast. The former suddenly deserted the Khalsa army during the night and the latter the next morning (December 22) which enabled the British to turn defeat into victory. The British loss was again heavy, 694 killed and 1,721 wounded. The number of casualties among officers was high. Major Broadfoot, the Political Agent, who had done so much to bring about this war, was killed in the battle of Ferozshahr. The Sikhs lost about 2,000 men and seventy-three pieces of artillery.

A temporary cessation of hostilities followed the battle of Ferozshahr. The English were not in a position to assume the offensive and waited for heavy guns and reinforcements to be brought from Delhi. Lal Singh and Tej Singh allowed them the much needed respite inasmuch as they kept the Sikhs from recrossing the Sutlej. On Christmas Day, the English issued a proclamation assuring rewards and pensions to those non-commissioned Poorbia officers and soldiers of the Sikh Government who presented themselves before the Governor-General.

A Sikh Sardar, Ranjodh Singh Majithia, crossed the Sutlej in force and was joined by Ajit Singh of Ladwa from the other side of the river. They marched towards Ludhiana, taking on the way the town of Jagraon. Reaching Ludhiana, they burnt a portion of the cantonment. Sir Henry Smith (afterwards, Governor of Cape Colony), who was sent to intercept them, suffered a severe reverse at Baddowal (January 21), but retrieved his position at the battle of Aliwal a week later.

The last battle of this campaign took place at Sobhraon. Early in February, the British received ample stores of

ammunition from Delhi and attacked the Sikh position. Lal Singh had already provided to the English officers the required information for an effective assault. Tej Singh fled as soon as the contest started and damaged the bridge of boats upon the Sutlej making reinforcement or return of Sikh soldiers impossible. Gulab Singh stopped sending supplies and rations from Lahore. In the midst of these treacheries, a Sikh warrior, Sham Singh Attariwala, symbol of the unflinching will and valiant spirit of the Khalsa, vowed before the Holy Book to fight unto the last and fall in battle rather than return in defeat. Clad in white silks and riding a white steed, the grey-bearded Sardar went out into the field of action pledged to victory or death. He rallied the ranks depleted by traitorous desertions. His courage inspired the Sikhs to make a determined bid to save the day, but the odds were against them. Sham Singh fell fighting heroically in the foremost ranks. So did his devoted comrades. Cunningham, who was present as an additional aide-de-camp to the Governor-General, describes the last scenes of the battle in a vivid manner in his *History of the Sikhs*:

> . . . although assailed on either side by squadrons of horse and battalions of foot, no Sikh offered to submit and no disciple of [Guru] Gobind [Singh] asked for quarter. They everywhere showed a front to the victors, and stalked slowly and sullenly away, while many rushed singly forth to meet assured death by contending with a multitude. The victors looked with stolid wonderment upon the indomitable courage of the vanquished . . .

The English crossed the Sutlej and occupied the fort of Kasur. Here the Sikh Sardars along with Maharaja Duleep Singh met the Governor-General. An army of 20,000 Sikhs stood ready at Amritsar and another 15,000 strong near Lahore. The Governor-General realizing that the Sikhs were far from vanquished, forbore from immediate occupation of the country. He told the Sardars that Maharaja Duleep Singh would continue to be regarded as a friendly sovereign. The Sardars were, of course, dismayed to hear that the English contemplated forfeiture of the Sikh territories between the rivers Beas and Sutlej and the imposition of a war indemnity amounting to a million and a half sterling.

On February 20, the Governor-General entered the Sikh capital and on March 9 a treaty of peace was concluded

between the English and the Khalsa Durbar. All Sikh territories below the Sutlej and those between the Beas and the Sutlej were annexed. In lieu of part payment of the expenses of war, Kashmir was taken possession of. The strength of the Sikh army was limited to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. All guns used by Sikhs in the war were to be surrendered and the British troops were to be allowed free passage through the Punjab when necessary. Kashmir was sold to Gulab Singh who had throughout remained friendly to the English. The payments due from him were cut down by one-fourth and he was allowed to take away the money which his brother, Suchet Singh, had kept buried in Ferozepore. At the ceremony held at Amritsar on March 15, 1846, to formally invest him with the title of Maharaja, Gulab Singh expressed his gratitude to the Governor-General saying that he was his *zarkharid,* or gold-boughten slave. But his ambition was still not satisfied. In one of his letters addressed to Henry Lawrence he said: "If I am to have only the Kohistan [the hill territory], then I shall have nothing but stones and trees." Henry Lawrence wrote back: "... it seemed to me and to all India, and will doubtless appear to all in England, that your Highness had cause only of thankfulness, in that you had received much in return for very little."

According to the March Agreement, the British force in Lahore was to be withdrawn at the end of the year, but a severer treaty was imposed on the Sikhs before the expiry of that date. Sir Henry Hardinge desired his Agent, Frederick Currie, to persuade the Durbar to request the British for the continuation of their troops in Lahore. The new treaty was signed at Bharowal on December 16, 1846. Henry Lawrence was appointed Resident with "full authority to direct and control all matters in every department of the State." A Council of Regency, consisting of the nominees of the Resident and headed by Tej Singh was appointed. The power to make changes in its personnel vested in the Resident and the British could maintain as many troops in the Punjab as they thought necessary for the preservation of peace and order in the country. This treaty was to remain in operation until Maharaja Duleep Singh attained the age of 16. By a proclamation in July, 1847, the Governor-

General further enhanced the powers of the Resident. The Punjab was thus reduced to complete thraldom.

On October 23, 1847, Sir Henry Hardinge wrote to Henry Lawrence :

> In all our measures taken during the minority we must bear in mind that by the treaty of Lahore, March 1846, the Punjab never was intended to be an independent State. By the clause I added the chief of the State can neither make war or peace, or exchange or sell an acre of territory, or admit of a European officer, or refuse us a thoroughfare through his territories, or, in fact, perform any act without our permission. In fact the native Prince is in fetters and under our protection, and must do our bidding.

The Sikh Sardars resented this gradual liquidation of the sovereignty of the Punjab. In the Queen Mother, Mai Jind Kaur, who was described by Lord Dalhousie as the only woman in the Punjab with manly understanding, the British Resident foresaw a rallying point for the well-wishers of the Sikh dynasty. She was kept under close surveillance and Henry Lawrence wrote to her that she could not receive in audience more than five or six Sardars in a month and that she should remain in purdah like the ladies of the royal families of Nepal, Jodhpur and Jaipur. Even her charities were restricted. Maharaja Duleep Singh's refusal to anoint Tej Singh, who was invested by the Resident with the title of Raja, gave him an excuse to take stern action against the Queen Mother. On August 19, 1847, she was taken away under a strong military escort from Lahore to Sheikhupura where she was interned in the fort.

Henry Lawrence took leave of absence and travelled back home with Lord Hardinge who had completed his term in India. The former was replaced by Frederick Currie and the latter by the Earl of Dalhousie.

The new regime confronted a rebellion in the Sikh province of Multan which served as an excuse for the annexation of the Punjab. The British Resident at Lahore increased the levy payable by the Governor, Diwan Moolraj, who, finding himself unable to comply, resigned his office. Frederick Currie appointed Sardar Kahn Singh in his place and sent him to Multan along with two British officers, P. A. Vans Agnew and W. A. Anderson, to take charge from Diwan Moolraj. The party arrived at Multan on April 18,

1848, and the Diwan vacated the fort and made over the keys to the representatives of the Lahore Durbar. But his soldiers rebelled and the British officers were set upon in their camp and killed. This was the beginning of the Multan outbreak. Some soldiers of the Lahore escort deserted their officers and joined Diwan Moolraj's army. Currie received the news at Lahore on April 21, but delayed action. The British troops were maintained at the capital with the specific object of preserving law and order in the State. This Multan challenge was deliberately ignored by the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief and the Resident who all contended that the troops could not be despatched before the hot season was over. The British had never allowed weather to interfere with their plans when faced with an emergency. In this case the real reason for inaction was the desire of the British to let the insurrection spread so that they could finally resort to a large-scale offensive and abrogate the sovereignty of the Sikhs.

The interval was utilized by the British to further provoke the Sikh opinion. The Queen Mother, Mai Jind Kaur, then under detention in the fort of Sheikhupura, was exiled from the Punjab. She was taken to Ferozepore and from there to Banaras, in the British dominions. Her annual allowance, which according to the Treaty of Bharowal had been fixed at one and a half lakh of rupees, was reduced to twelve thousand. Her jewellery worth fifty thousand of rupees was forfeited; so was her cash amounting to a lakh and a half. This humiliating treatment of the Maharani caused deep resentment among the people of the Punjab. Even the Muslim ruler of Afghanistan, Amir Dost Mohammad, protested to the British saying that "such treatment is objectionable to all creeds."

Captain James Abbott, who was adviser, on behalf of the Resident, to Chattar Singh Attariwala, the Governor of Hazara, started instigating the Muslim population of the province against their Sikh ruler. He caused him personal annoyance by encroaching upon his authority. Chattar Singh's daughter was engaged to the Sikh sovereign, Maharaja Duleep Singh, and he enjoyed a unique prestige among the Sardars of the State. Captain Abbott's conduct gave rise to misgivings in the Sardar's mind, and, alarmed

by the general state of uncertainty created by the Multan incident and the deliberateness of British policy, he requested the Resident at Lahore to fix a date for the royal wedding. The British did not regard the project with favour, for they foresaw in it a powerful alliance between the throne and an influential house in the Punjab. The Resident took no notice of the Sardar's request. Chattar Singh then asked his son, Raja Sher Singh, to seek the good offices of his friend, Herbert Edwardes with whom he had taken part in the Multan campaign on behalf of the Lahore Durbar. Edwardes conveyed the request to the higher authorities, but received a severe reprimand from the Governor-General who declared his conduct "indiscreet and unbecoming."

Captain Abbott's constant instigations led up to a crisis in Hazara. The Muslims attacked Chattar Singh and his troops. Commandant Canora, an American officer in the Sikh artillery, refused to obey the Sardar, saying that he would take his orders from Captain Abbott. He ordered one of his havildars to fire upon the infantry as it was moving into position. The latter refused to do so and was attacked and killed by Canora. Canora also shot down two Sikh officers with his pistol. He was in turn attacked by the infantry and killed. Captain Abbott blamed Chattar Singh for this incident, and, although the Resident, Frederick Currie, did not agree with his conclusions on this matter, he forced the Sardar to relinquish the governorship of Hazara and deprived him of his *jagir*. Chattar Singh's son, Raja Sher Singh, who had steadfastly fought on the side of Herbert Edwardes against Diwan Moolraj, was greatly exercised over this news. He now decided to take his father's part and joined Diwan Moolraj's armies on September 14, 1848.

Raja Sher Singh made a passionate appeal to his countrymen warning them of the fate that awaited the Punjab and inviting them to join his standard in a final bid to preserve their freedom. Many old soldiers of the Khalsa army responded to the call and left their homes to join Diwan Moolraj, Raja Sher Singh and Chattar Singh Attariwala. The Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, rejoiced in the situation which he had studiously laboured to bring about. At a public banquet on October 5, 1848, at Barrackpore (Calcutta), he announced in his ecstatic rhetoric :

Unwarned by precedents, uninfluenced by example, the Sikh nation has called for war, and on my word, Sirs, they shall have it with a vengeance.

The rebellion of Raja Sher Singh, followed by his army, the rebellion of S. Chattar Singh with Durbar army under his command, the state of the troops and of the Sikh population everywhere, have brought matters to that crisis I have for months been looking for, and we are now not on the eve but in the midst of war with the Sikh nation and the kingdom of the Punjab.

The result of this mad movement to the people and the dynasty of the Sikhs can be no longer matter of discussion or of doubt.

> . . . I have drawn the sword, and have thrown away the scabbard, both in relation to the war immediately before us, and to the stern policy which that war must precede and establish.

The Resident at Lahore found this position legally indefensible and practically untenable. He and his staff were there to superintend and aid the administration of the Sikh State and to look after the interests of the ruler, Maharaja Duleep Singh, during the period of his minority. The Lahore Durbar and the Maharaja had supported the Resident in all his efforts to deal with the crisis in Multan and Hazara. How could the latter justify the proclamation made by Lord Dalhousie ? He suggested to the Governor-General to pursue his policies quietly and unobtrusively. The British armies were, therefore, marched upon the Punjab without an open declaration of war. Lord Hugh Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, left his headquarters at Simla towards the end of October and a huge army was assembled at Ferozepore in the beginning of November.

The Commander-in-Chief crossed the Sutlej on November 9, and reached Lahore on November 13. Three days later he marched towards the river Chenab to join battle with Raja Sher Singh. An action was fought at Ramnagar on November 22. Lord Hugh Gough suffered a heavy reverse and lost a number of his officers, including Brigadier-General Cureton and Lieutenant-Colonel Havelock. The shock incapacitated him for further action for several weeks. The next battle took place on January 13, 1849, at Chelianwala, on the Jhelum. Here Raja Sher Singh's victory was even more decisive. British losses in killed and wounded amounted to over two thousand men and eighty-nine officers. "When the news of Chelianwala reached England," writes

Adams, "the nation was stricken with profound emotion. A long series of military successes had ill fitted it to hear with composure of British guns and British standards taken, of British Cavalry flying before the enemy ..." England's leading newspaper, *The Times*, criticized the leadership of Lord Hugh Gough, and Sir John Hobhouse, President of the Board of Directors, decided to send Sir Charles Napier to supersede him. The eighty-year-old Duke of Wellington offered to come out to India to fight against the Sikhs.

Lord Gough repaired his reputation in the battle of Gujrat (February 21, 1849), in which the Attariwala Sardars, Chattar Singh and Sher Singh, were finally defeated. On March 14, the Sikh soldiers surrendered at Rawalpindi. "Today is Ranjit Singh dead," sighed the soldiers, as they kissed their swords and laid them down on the ever-growing pile of steel. Their half-choked words summed up the anguish of their hearts.

Lord Dalhousie proclaimed annexation of the Punjab on March 29, 1849. His Foreign Secretary, Henry M. Elliot, arrived at Lahore to obtain the signatures of the members of the Council of Regency and of the minor king, Maharaja Duleep Singh. A Durbar was held at the palace inside the Fort, and, with the British troops lined up on his right and his helpless Sardars on his left, the young Duleep Singh affixed his signature to the fatal document which deprived him of his crown and kingdom.

John Sullivan in his *Are We Bound by Our Treaties* makes an unreserved and significant comment on the whole transaction. He says :

> This is perhaps the first instance on record in which a guardian has visited his own misdeeds upon his ward. The British Government was the self-constituted guardian of the Rajah [Maharaja Duleep Singh], and the regent of his kingdom; a rebellion was provoked by the agents of the guardian, it was acknowledged by the guardian to be a rebellion against the government of his ward, and the guardian punished that ward by confiscating his dominions and his diamonds to his own use!

CHAPTER XVI

RECLAMATION

THE Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the English to the chance of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Gulab Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh, they had fought the Ferringhi squarely, and maintained their manly demeanour even in defeat. In this mood it was easier for them to be reconciled with the English after normalcy was restored. The peaceful spell which followed, however, produced an attitude of unwariness. Conventional and superstitious ritual which, forbidden by the Gurus, had become acceptable as an adjunct of regal pomp and ceremony during the days of Sikh sovereignty, gained an increasing hold on the Sikh mind. The true teachings of the Gurus which had supplied Sikhism its potent principle of reform and regeneration were obscured by this rising tide of conservatism. The Sikh religion was losing its characteristic vigour and its votaries were relapsing into beliefs and dogmas from which their new faith had extricated them. Absorption into ceremonial Hinduism seemed the course inevitably set for them.

Two factors reclaimed the Sikhs from this fate—their adherence to the outward marks of their faith, especially the *Kesas*, and a series of protestant currents which arose among them to purify the prevalent religious usage and rekindle the Sikh spirit. The first of these movements, known by the name of Nirankari, originated during the Sikh period. Its founder, Baba Dayal, was a contemporary of Ranjit Singh. A man of humble origin, he cavilled at the shortcomings of the mighty, and assailed the rites and observances which had corrupted the Sikh way of life. His main target was the worship of images against which he preached vigorously. He re-emphasized the Sikh belief in Nirankar—the Formless One. From this the movement he started came to be known as the Nirankari movement.

Baba Dayal's missionary activity was confined to the

north-west districts of the Punjab. In 1851, he founded at Rawalpindi the Nirankari Durbar and gave this body the form of a sect. On his death, four years later, he was succeeded in the leadership of the community by his son, Baba Darbara Singh. The latter continued to propagate his father's teachings, prohibiting idolatrous worship, the use of liquor and extravagant ceremonial on weddings and other social occasions. Baba Darbara Singh, for the first time, introduced in the Rawalpindi area the Anand form of wedding ritual enjoined by Guru Gobind Singh. The Anand—an austerely simple and inexpensive, yet dignified, marriage ceremony—became a cardinal doctrine with leaders of subsequent Sikh reformation movements.

Like the Nirankari, the second reform movement known as the Namdhari, or Kuka, movement also had its origin in the north-west corner of the Sikh kingdom, away from the places of royal magnificence such as Lahore and Amritsar. It harked back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual tradition of the community. Its principal concern was to spread the true spirit of Sikhism shorn of tawdry customs and mannerism which had grown on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy. In the midst of national pride born of military glory and political power, this movement extolled the religious duty of pious and simple living.

The founder, Bhai Balak Singh of Hazro, now in North-West Frontier province of Pakistan, was a devoted soul whose noble example and sweet persuasive manner won him a number of followers. The most prominent among them was Baba Ram Singh who undertook the direction of the movement after Bhai Balak Singh, giving it a more positive shape and trend.

Baba Ram Singh, born at Bhaini (Ludhiana district) in 1815, was a soldier in the Sikh army. With his regiment he once happened to visit Hazro where he fell under the influence of Bhai Balak Singh. He became his disciple and dedicated himself to his mission. For his religious pursuits he had ample time in the army which, towards the end of Ranjit Singh's days, was comparatively free from its more arduous tasks. In the 1845 Anglo-Sikh war, Baba Ram Singh fought against the English at Mudki. He gave up service after the occupation of Lahore.

He returned to his village, Bhaini, which became another important centre of the Namdhari faith. After Baba Balak Singh's death, in 1862, the chief responsibility passed on to Baba Ram Singh whose growing influence helped in widening the scope of the movement in the central and eastern Punjab. An elaborate agency for missionary work was set up. The name of the head in a district—*Suba*, meaning governor,—had a significant, though remote, political implication. There were altogether twenty-two such *Subas*, besides two *Jathedars* for each Tehsil and a *Granthi*, or priest, for each village.

In the government papers of that period Baba Ram Singh's mission is thus described :

> He abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs ; advocates indiscriminate marriage of all classes ; enjoins the marriages of widows : enjoins abstinence from liquor and drugs . . . exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth-telling. One of his maxims says : it is well that every man carries his staff, and they all do.

To the points mentioned could be added a few more such as reverence for the cow, simpler wedding ceremonies and abolition of infanticide which were expounded with equal emphasis. Baba Ram Singh was never reconciled to the rule of the British. His prediction about its early recession was implicitly believed by his followers who were forbidden to join government service, to go to courts of law or learn the English language. The movement thus gained a political bias. Its chief inspiration was, in fact, derived from opposition to the foreign rule and everything tending to remind one of it was shunned. English education, mill-made cloth and other imported goods were boycotted. In its advocacy of the use of the Swadeshi, the Kuka movement forestalled, in the sixties of the last century, an important feature of the nationalist struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Kukas even avoided use of the post offices established by the British and depended upon their own system of postal communication. Messages from their leader were conveyed with special despatch and alacrity. A fast-riding follower would carry the letter to the next village where another devotee, setting all other work aside, would at once ride off

with it. People left off their meals unfinished to reach forward a message.

A spirit of fanatical national fervour and religious enthusiasm grew among the Kukas and the personality of Baba Ram Singh became the focal point of a close and well organized order. The prospect was not looked upon with equanimity by the Government, who, after the incidents of 1857. had become extra watchful. When, in 1863, Baba Ram Singh wanted to go to Amritsar for Baisakhi celebrations to which he had invited his followers from all over the Punjab, the civil authority in the State was alarmed. The Lieutenant-Governor charged the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar to ascertain the real intentions of Baba Ram Singh and his companions. The officials were not in favour of imposing any restrictions, especially on the occasion of a religious fair. But two months later when Kukas announced a meeting to be held at village Khote, in Ferozepore district, prohibitory orders were issued banning all Kuka meetings.

The Kuka organization was subjected to strict secret vigilance. and intelligence officers in the districts sent in alarming reports about its aims and activities. It was bruited about that Baba Ram Singh was raising an army to fight the English. Bhaini and Hazro were kept under constant watch, and, by orders of the Punjab Government, Baba Ram Singh was detained in his village. The Kuka congregations were stopped all over the Punjab.

These measures seemed to succeed for a while in their object of restraining Kuka activity. But a legend grew around Bhaini and the captive Baba Ram Singh because of the distance placed between them and their devotees, creating in the minds of the faithful strangely romantic and miraculous visions. Some of them gave vent to their enthusiasm by demolishing graves and tombs which they had been forbidden by their faith to worship or honour. Incidents took place in various parts of the province and a number of Kukas suffered sentences of imprisonment and fine.

Early in 1867, Baba Ram Singh's request to go and visit Muktsar on the sacred day of Maghi was refused by the Government as a result of which he sought permission to hold a fair in his own village on the occasion of Holi. Major

Perkins, Superintendent of Police at Ludhiana, was willing to allow, but the Inspector-General wanted to restrict the number of those who might visit Bhaini on that day. Meanwhile, Baba Ram Singh decided to celebrate the festival at Anandpur Sahib where Sikhs forgathered for this purpose from all over the province. The Lieutenant-Governor gave him the permission. High-ranking police and civil officers were appointed to watch over the movements of the pilgrims.

Baba Ram Singh set out in great state. He was accompanied by twenty-one of his *Subas* on horseback and more than two thousand of his followers on foot, with a large number of drums and banners. The visit went off peacefully and the Government were led to shedding much of their suspicion. All restrictions upon Baba Ram Singh's freedom were withdrawn.

But the truce did not last long. The Government showed excessive concern whenever Kukas assembled to convene a *Diwan*, or religious meeting. The report that a *lambardar* of a village in Ferozepore had turned a Kuka burning away in his new zeal his plough, bullockcart, a bedstead and the spinningwheel alarmed the district authorities who saw in such accretions the signs of the growing influence of the new movement. More than forty Kukas trying to hold a *Diwan* at Tharajwala were arrested and seven of them were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment by the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepore.

The Government found further grounds of suspicion in some of the Kukas joining the armies of the Indian princes. It was feared that the object of such recruits was to get military training and then return to the Punjab to organize a revolt against the British. Since the Kukas were averse to seeking service with the English, some of them had visited Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir in 1869 and offered to join the state forces. The Maharaja agreed to raise a new regiment and enlisted about 150 Kukas. But the force was disbanded two years later under pressure of the British Government.

In the early seventies of the last century, events moved at a catastrophic pace bringing the career of the Kuka revolution to a dramatic climax.

The Kukas, who had a deep sentiment for the cow,

strongly resented the opening of beef shops in the sacred city of Amritsar. After the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, Henry Lawrence, the British Resident in the Punjab, had issued the following notice:

> The priests of Amritsar having complained of annoyances, this is to make known to all concerned that, by order of the Governor-General, British subjects are forbidden to enter the temple (called the Darbar) or its precincts. at Amritsar, or indeed any temple, with their shoes on. Kine are not to be killed at Amritsar, nor are the Seikhs to be molested or in any way to be interfered with.
>
> Shoes are to be taken off at the Bhoonga at the corner of the tank and no person is to walk round the tank with his shoes on.
>
> (Sd.) Henry M. Lawrence
> Resident
>
> Lahore :
> March 24th. 1847

These orders were strictly observed, but, after Punjab's annexation in 1849, nobody minded the restrictions and butchers' shops were opened by Muslims outside the Lahori Gate in Amritsar. This caused a great deal of agitation, especially among Kukas. On the night of June 14, 1870. a fiery band of them attacked the butchers, killing four and injuring another three. A similar incident took place at Raikot, in Ludhiana district, where three persons were killed. For the incident at Amritsar, four Kukas were awarded death sentence and two were transported for life. Five, including Giani Rattan Singh, an influential Kuka scholar, paid the extreme penalty of law for killing butchers at Raikot.

The Kukas felt greatly incensed over these executions, especially that of Giani Rattan Singh who had been wrongly implicated in the Raikot murders. Their temper became defiant and some of them openly preached revenge. The Government was vigilant and the Commissioner of Ambala prepared a report charging Kukas with sedition and recommending severe official measures against them, including deportation of their leader Baba Ram Singh.

Towards the end of 1871, the Punjab Government placed a ban on Kukas assembling for any festival or fair outside Bhaini. Baba Ram Singh, who was refused permission to go to Muktsar for the Maghi fair, issued messages to his followers to come to Bhaini for celebrating the day. Kukas

were in a state of great excitement and the atmosphere in Bhaini was tense. The storm that had been gathering burst. A batch of Kukas, while returning from the fair, resolved to attack the state armoury at Malerkotla and loot the arms. On their way, they passed through Malaud. The Sikh Sardar of the village being away, they stopped to rob the fort and equip themselves with arms and horses. They met with opposition from the Sardar's servants and other villagers, but managed to get away with four horses and a double-barrelled rifle. Two of the villagers and two Kukas lost their lives in this encounter.

On the morning of January 15, Kukas, numbering more than a hundred, reached Malerkotla and suddenly made an attack upon the Treasury. A police party challenged them and in the fracas that followed eight policemen, including an officer, lost their lives. The Kukas' loss amounted to seven killed.

The Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, Mr L. Cowan, asked for military aid and Lord Napier of Magdala, the Commander-in-Chief, at once ordered two companies of 54th Regiment from Jullundur and a battery of Royal Artillery to proceed to Ludhiana. The Deputy Commissioner also sent messages to the Sikh rulers of Patiala, Nabha and Jind asking for troops.

Meanwhile, the party of Kukas had been arrested by a Naib Nazim of Patiala state, Syed Niaz Ali. Sixty-eight of them, including two women, were presented before Mr Cowan at Malerkotla. He made over the women prisoners to the commander of the Patiala troops and ordered the rest to be immediately executed. In his enthusiasm to punish them, he transgressed his powers and did not wait for the formality of a trial. In fact, he had already written to the Commissioner of Ambala division: "I am in hourly expectation of the arrival of the prisoners from Rur. I propose to execute at once all who were engaged in the attack on Malaud and Kotla. I am sensible of the great responsibility I incur in exercising an authority which is not vested in me, but the case is an exceptional one."

The Commissioner, Mr Forsyth, was in favour of a trial and wrote to Mr Cowan to leave temporarily "all men caught by Patiala authorities in their charge." The latter,

however, ignored the direction. Guns were mounted in the Malerkotla parade-ground on the afternoon of January 17 and fifty Kukas were made over to the soldiers to be executed. As the prisoners were being brought forward batch by batch to be blown off the guns, a Kuka breaking loose from the guard made a dash for Mr Cowan and held him by the neck. He was a strong man, physically, and it was with some difficulty that Mr Cowan was relieved from his grip. The Kuka was hacked to pieces on the spot.

As the last batch was being led out, Mr Cowan received another communication from the Commissioner who had again suggested : "But with reference to your expressed desire for promptitude, the case is not sufficiently urgent to justify the abandonment of the very simple form of procedure we have at hand." This did not alter the fate of the remaining Kukas, who, like those who had gone before, were torn to shreds by fiery powder.

Mr Forsyth, who reached Malerkotla the following day, agreed with Mr Cowan's findings with regard to the remaining sixteen prisoners and confirmed the death sentence passed by his deputy. Those sixteen were also blown away at gunmouth. Baba Ram Singh was exiled from the Punjab with ten of his *Subas* by orders of Mr Forsyth and taken to Allahabad. The Kuka headquarters at Bhaini passed into police control. A police post continued there till as late as 1921.

The Viceroy, Earl of Mayo, did not appreciate the precipitate actions of Mr Forsyth and Mr Cowan. He ordered an enquiry as a result of which Mr Cowan was dismissed from the service and Mr Forsyth was removed from his Ambala post.

From Allahabad, Baba Ram Singh was taken to Rangoon where he was detained under the Bengal Act of 1818. He lived in the same place where the last Mughal Emperor had been kept, charged with identical offence.

For thirteen weary years, Baba Ram Singh suffered confinement. His deep faith in the Almighty and the ever-growing love of his followers sustained him in that solitary state. Every now and then some bold spirits, braving many a hazard, succeeded in circumventing the guards and seeing their leader, even though for a short while. A regular

system of correspondence was maintained in this manner. Many of Baba Ram Singh's letters have been preserved and a representative selection was published by Dr Ganda Singh a few years ago. The letters reveal Baba Ram Singh's undying faith, his strength of character and his love for his followers. An occasional note of loneliness appears in these letters, but his spirit of patient fortitude always triumphed.

In 1885, Baba Ram Singh passed away. But many of his followers did not believe it. Long after it, they reverentially hoped that he would one day come and free India from the rule of the English.

The Kuka movement marked a significant stage in the development of national awareness in the country. In the seventies of the last century when the English were reinstalling themselves in India, it gave them another rude jolt.

Like the Nirankaris, Namdharis also formed themselves into a separate sect. Today, they form a distinctly cohesive group among the Sikhs. Two things immediately mark them off from the latter—the style of their head-gear and their adherence to the personality of their leader, Baba Jagjit Singh. Apparelled in immaculate, white home-spun, they wind round their heads mull or longcloth without any semblance of embellishment and without giving it any sharp, emphatic lines.

While chanting the sacred hymns, they work themselves up to such ecstatic frenzy that they begin dancing and shouting. From these shouts and shrieks—*Kuk* in Punjabi —some humorously inclined youth in a Ludhiana village called them Kukas, little knowing that they were conferring upon the newly developing order a name which would be widely accepted and which would outlive the more carefully chosen appellations adopted by its authors.

CHAPTER XVII

REORIENTATION

BECAUSE of their rather restricted scope and because of the schismatic character they acquired, both the Nirankari and Namdhari movements failed to stir the Sikh people as a whole. The Singh Sabha which followed them had a deeper influence. It penetrated the entire community and reoriented its outlook and spirit. Since the days of the Gurus nothing so vital had transpired to fertilize the consciousness of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha by leavening the intellectual and cultural processes brought a new dimension to the inner life of the community and enlarged its heritage. Starting in the seventies of the last century, it marked a turning-point in the history of the Sikhs. The stimulus it provided has shaped their attitude and aspiration over the past several decades.

In a general way, the Singh Sabha was an expression of the impulse of the Sikh community to rid itself of the base adulterations and accretions which were draining away its energy and to rediscover the sources of its original inspiration. A concrete incentive was provided by the annoyances caused by the conversion of some Sikhs to Christianity and by the *odium theologicum* of some over-enthusiastic missionaries of other persuasions. The Christian missionary activity had started in the Punjab with the influx of the English. Sir John Lawrence, who was one of the triumvirate which ruled the Punjab after it was annexed to Britain, was a zealous patron of Christian missions and contributed to them annually a sum of Rs. 500 out of his own pocket. He wished to follow the conquest of the Sikh dominions with large-scale conversions to Christianity.

A Mission School was established at Amritsar in 1853. Government schools were also opened in various parts of the province. The Bible was freely taught at these institutions. Slowly the proselytizing activity thus started began to show results. One Daud Singh is recorded to be the first convert to Christianity in the Punjab. This conversion took place in 1853. The same year Maharaja Duleep Singh, the

last Sikh sovereign of the Punjub. who had come under British tutelage at the tender age of eight. renounced the faith of his forefathers and embraced Christianity.* He was also induced to give Rs. 500 annually from his allowance to the Christian Mission at Amritsar. A Sikh aristocrat. Dyal Singh Majithia, was persuaded to donate to the mission a site in Amritsar and to build a church in his native village. Majitha.

In the beginning of 1873. four Sikh students of the Amritsar Mission School—Aya Singh. Attar Singh. Sadhu Singh and Santokh Singh—proclaimed their intention of turning Christians. This shocked Sikh feeling. Another incident which gave umbrage to the Sikhs was a vulgar attack on their Gurus and Scriptures made in a series of lectures in Guru-ka-Bagh. at Amritsar. by Shardha Ram Phillauri who was engaged by the British to write a history of the community. To consider these matters some prominent Sikhs convened in 1873 a meeting in Majitha Bunga at Amritsar. Among those who attended were Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak, who enjoyed much prestige in those days. Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala. Giani Sardul Singh and Giani Gian Singh of Amritsar. As a result of their deliberations. a society, under the name of Singh Sabha, was formed, with Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia as President and Giani Gian Singh as Secretary. Among other things, the Singh Sabha undertook to

(i) restore Sikhism to its pristine purity ;

(ii) edit and publish historical and religious books ;

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* Maharaja Duleep Singh later made amends for his apostasy and re-entered the fold of the Khalsa. From England he was coming to India in 1886 to undergo the rites of reinitiation as a Sikh, but was detained by the British at Aden. He, however, fulfilled his wish of rejoining Sikhism Arrangements were made at Aden for the Sikh ceremony of **Pahul**. Before this formal conversion, Maharaja Duleep Singh had written a letter to one of his relatives in the Punjab which is quoted below :

ELVEDEN HALL
THETFORD
SUFFOLK

My dear Sirdar Sant Singh,

I am very pleased to receive your letter. I thank you very much for offering me your kind services but there is nothing that I require. As the British Government refuse to do me justice, therefore, I shall leave England on the 16th of December next and take up my residence quietly at Delhi for I am poor now.

I am very pleased to find in you a relative of my dear late mother.

As you are aware by this time that I have rejoined the faith of my ancestors, I salute you with Wah Gooroo jee dee Futteh and remain,

Your affectionate relative,
DULEEP SINGH.

Oct. 7th, 1885.

(iii) propagate current knowledge, using Punjabi as the medium, and to start magazines and newspaper in Punjabi ;

(iv) reform and bring back into the Sikh fold the apostates ; and

(v) interest the highly placed Englishmen in, and ensure their association with, the educational programme of the Sikhs.

The Singh Sabha gained quick support of the literate sections of the community and many Sikh scholars and preachers were drawn into its orbit. A vigorous campaign was set afoot. Two of its major points were the depreciation of un-Sikh customs and social evils, and the encouragement of Western education. On the former count the supporters of the Singh Sabha initially met with strong opposition from entrenched conservatism especially in the villages. They were scorned and ridiculed for their so-called novel ideas. An epigrammatic couplet satirizing their new-fangled enthusiasm is still current in the countryside :

When the barn is emptied of grain
What better can you do than turn a Singh Sabhia ?

The Singh Sabha ideology percolated to the Sikh peasantry primarily through soldiers serving in the army or those who had retired from the service. One of the regiments had constituted a choir of reciters to go round the villages and sing the sacred hymns in Singh Sabha congregations. The old prejudices were gradually overcome and the Singh Sabha crusade for enlightenment reached its culminating point in the huge Sikh convention held on June 14, 1903, at the village of Bakapur, in Jullundur district, when a Muslim was converted to Sikhism and accepted as a full member of the Khalsa brotherhood under the Sikh name of Sant Lakhbir Singh.

The response to the Singh Sabha's work in the field of education was more enthusiastic, though a sustained effort had to be made to enlist the support of Sikh rulers of the Princely states in the Punjab and other influential elements. The scheme received a special fillip from the association with the Singh Sabha of an educated young man, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who soon became one of the most dynamic figures of

the reformation. The Panjab University did not then exist, but, at the Oriental College at Lahore which had just started, Bhai Gurmukh Singh had Punjabi recognized as a subject of study. The same year, i.e., 1877, he became an assistant professor in that college. He also founded a Singh Sabha at Lahore in 1879 with an initial membership of 26 and sponsored journals in Punjabi—the first of their kind—in pursuance of the aims of the movement.

To co-ordinate the work of the Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabhas a joint board called the General Sabha was formed. The General Sabha was subsequently replaced by the Khalsa Diwan which was set up at Amritsar in 1883. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab and Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot were its patrons. Baba Khem Singh Bedi was made President and Bhai Gurmukh Singh Chief Secretary. Singh Sabhas were now springing up in all parts of the Punjab, those at Rawalpindi, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Faridkot. Ferozepore, Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala and Simla being particularly active. The Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar became the affiliating centre of all these Singh Sabhas. Owing to differences between the Singh Sabhas of Amritsar and Lahore, especially over the way the Amritsar leader, Baba Sir Khem Singh, was apotheosized by his followers, a schism occurred. Bhai Gurmukh Singh and his colleagues established a separate Khalsa Diwan at Lahore in 1886. The mutual recrimination between the two Diwans hampered temporarily the progress of the Singh Sabha.

Dedication to common purposes and a keen reaction aroused by the polemic against Sikhism of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, supplied the motive for united endeavour. The establishment of the D.A.V. College at Lahore by the Arya Samaj, in 1886, spurred Sikhs to re-double their own efforts for starting a Khalsa College. They attributed their general backwardness to lack of education and to the ignorance of the masses of their traditions and inheritance, and set out to redeem the deficiency. In the farewell address presented to Lord Ripon, the outgoing Viceroy of India on behalf of the Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar at the Durbar Sahib on November 13, 1884, Kanwar Partap Singh of Kapurthala said :

> Our efforts are now directed to secure the march of that

> [intellectual] progress permanently by setting up such institutions as colleges, schools, etc., which will become unceasing sources of benefit to our posterity.

The Singh Sabha of Amritsar had already adopted a resolution for the establishment of a Sikh college. The motion was ratified at a big convention of the Sikhs in the Lawrence Hall at Lahore. Those present on the occasion included Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi, Bikram Singh, Capt. Gulab Singh of Attari, Sardar Bhagwant Singh of Bhadaur. Sardar Sujan Singh of Rawalpindi and Lala Daulat Ram of Faridkot state. The meeting resolved to submit a memorial to Sir Charles Aitchison, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, to secure his support for the proposal.

At a meeting of the Khalsa Diwan, Lahore, in February, 1890, the Khalsa College Establishment Committee was constituted. Colonel W. R. M. Holroyd, Director of Public Instruction, was President of the Committee, with Sir Attar Singh of Bhadaur and Sardar Dharam Singh as Vice-Presidents, and Mr W. Bell, as Secretary. The Englishmen were in full sympathy with this aspect of the Singh Sabha's programme and some of them had signed membership forms of its Educational Committee. Mr W. Bell, the Principal of the Government College, Lahore, was also one of the trustees of the College Fund. To collect donations, a subscription list was opened. The Sikhs were invited to subscribe their year's *Daswandh*, or one-tenth of the income which they are enjoined to give away for Panthic or charitable purposes. Committees for collecting funds were formed at Ferozepore, Ludhiana, Patiala, Lahore, Amritsar, Jullundur, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi. Mr Frederick Pincott, an eminent orientalist of London, undertook to help the college movement in England.

A committee was nominated to wait upon the Sikh ruling chiefs. The Rulers of Patiala, Faridkot, Nabha, Jind and Kapurthala gave liberal endowments. The officers and other citizens of their states made separate donations. But an unexpected hitch arose over the location of the college. The two places proposed were Amritsar and Lahore. Representations were made to the Khalsa College Establishment Committee, one supporting Amritsar being some two thousand feet long bearing 46.698 signatures. The Establishment

Committee entrusted the problem to the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir James Lyall, who gave his verdict in favour of Amritsar. His reasons were conveyed in the following words :

> In arriving at this conclusion that the site should be near Amritsar, the Lieutenant-Governor had before him the broad fact that this is, without doubt, the wish of the great majority of the Sikh people. The particular site selected has the advantage of being near enough the city to be convenient as regards the obtaining of supplies, and of medical aid when required and it is yet far enough to be beyond the dangerous influence of city life. It also appeared to His Honour to be of importance that the site selected should be near enough to Amritsar to secure to it the occasional visits of the Sikh Princes and of gentlemen interested in the important objects in view, and this had been clearly attained, the Lieutenant-Governor believes, in the locality chosen.

The foundation-stone of the Khalsa College was laid by Sir James Lyall on March 5, 1892. The Establishment Committee was replaced by the Khalsa College Council of which the Hon'ble Dr William H. Rattigan, the Chief Justice of the Punjab, became President. Mahamahopadhyaya Sardar Sir Attar Singh assumed the office of Vice-President and Sardar Jawahar Singh, one of the leading lights of the Lahore Khalsa Diwan, was chosen Secretary. Dr J. C. Oman was appointed the first Principal. Thus the Khalsa College which became a source of intellectual ferment for Sikh revival was started. To begin with, the British had a controlling hand in the management. In the Sikhs' efforts a few years later to liberate the college from this influence lay seeds of a powerful and radical movement which overtook the Punjab in the early twenties.

Some new Sikh societies arose in consequence of the stimulus produced by the Singh Sabha. On October 30, 1902, was formed the Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar which brought into the field of Panthic activity such distinguished and selfless men as Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, Sardar Harbans Singh of Attari, Bhai Jodh Singh and Bhai Arjan Singh of Bagrian. A splinter group constituted itself into the Panch Khalsa Diwan which was established by Babu Teja Singh at the village of Bhasaur in April, 1906. The sponsors of the Chief Khalsa Diwan founded in 1908 the Sikh Educational Conference to assist the cause of Sikh education. The Con-

ference gained wide support in the community. Its annual sessions were occasions of great public enthusiasm and of expert discussion of educational problems. A Khalsa school was normally its gift to the town where the yearly assemblage took place. The Sikh Educational Conference gave special attention to furthering the study of Punjabi language and literature and consistently endeavoured to have Punjabi introduced in government schools and offices. With its work have been associated some very eminent Sikhs such as Sir Jogendra Singh, Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, Raja Sir Daljit Singh, Sant Attar Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh, Baba Kharak Singh, Professor Puran Singh, Sardar Amar Singh of the *Sher-i-Punjab*, Bhagat Lakhshman Singh, Sardar Ujjal Singh and Malik Hardit Singh.

The Singh Sabha's eagerness for the promotion of education and Punjabi studies led to unprecedented activity in the fields of literature and Sikh learning. Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi was the first to start Gurmukhi schools in the Punjab. Before the British, mosques and temples served as centres of education. With the opening of secular schools under the Punjab Education Department, which was inaugurated in 1856, education was gradually withdrawn from those religious places of worship. The schools opened by Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi in the districts of Rawalpindi, Jhelum and Gujrat fostered the study of Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script. Schools were also opened in Amritsar, Lahore and Ferozepore and in some villages such as Kairon, Gharjakh, Chuhar Chak and Bhasaur. Those at Ferozepore (Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala, founded by Bhai Takht Singh). Kairon (Khalsa Bhujangan School, founded by Sardar Nihal Singh) and Bhasaur (Vidya Bhandar, founded by Babu Teja Singh) served the cause of women's education and were among the first schools of their kind in the Punjab. The Anjuman-i-Punjab which was founded in 1865 to advance education and enlightenment in the province had a section for translating English books into Punjabi.

With a donation from Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha, the Khalsa Printing Press was set up at Lahore. Kanwar Jagjot Singh, a grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, started in his estate in Oudh the Guru Nanak Prakash Press. He employed several scholars with whose help he published a

number of works in Punjabi. Newspaper and tractarian writing stimulated by the Singh Sabha movement established the form of Punjabi prose disinheriting it of the more pretentious and conventional elements. The pioneer in the line was the weekly *Khalsa Akhbar* of Giani Jhanda Singh Faridkoti. This paper rose to its full stature under Giani Dit Singh who was one of the leading figures of the Singh Sabha. He was a great scholar and a considerable poet and especially excelled at argument never yielding to anybody a point in polemics. He sometimes wrote the newspaper leaders and comments in Punjabi verse.

Another important newspaper of this period was the *Khalsa Samachar*, founded by Dr Charan Singh in 1899. It had the benefit of the association with it of Dr Charan Singh's son, Bhai Vir Singh, who was the greatest Sikh poet and philosopher of his day. In their hands *Khalsa Samachar* set up a high standard of Punjabi prose writing and of religious discussion. Under the same patronage, the Khalsa Tract Society of Amritsar produced a series of books and tracts on Sikh lore and piety. Besides Punjabi, there were also papers started in Urdu. Among these two well-known ones were Bhai Mayya Singh's *Khalsa Gazette* and Sardar Amar Singh's *Loyal Gazette* which later turned into the formidable *Sher-i-Punjab*.

Weightier works of learning on Sikh history and philosophy began to appear. Pandit Tara Singh Narotam, a renowned Nirmala scholar, prepared a lexicon of the Sikh scriptural texts. His celebrated disciple, Giani Gian Singh, published his classical volumes on the history of the Sikhs, namely *Panth Prakash* and *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*. Giani Hazara Singh, Giani Sardul Singh, Baba Sumer Singh of Patna Sahib, Dr Charan Singh and Bhai Dit Singh were other eminent men of letters who enriched the tradition of Sikh scholarship. After them came Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha and Bhai Vir Singh. The former enjoyed unequalled celebrity for his impeccable taste and wide learning and wrote a number of books such as *Gurmat Prabhakar*, *Gurmat Sudhakar*, and *Ham Hindu Nahin*, besides a comprehensive encyclopaedia of Sikh literature, the *Gurshabdratnakar Mahankosh*. Bhai Vir Singh presented the exemplary nobility and glory of Sikh character in his histori-

cal romances which have thrilled and influenced generations of Sikh readers. The *Puratan Janam Sakhi,* which is one of the oldest biographies of Guru Nanak and which preserves the earliest style of Punjabi prose, was, with the help of the Government. resurrected from the British Museum and published. Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot, who was one of the chief protagonists of the Singh Sabha, had a commentary of the Holy Granth prepared by a distinguished synod of Sikh schoolmen of the period. This work, popularly known as the *Faridkot Teeka,* is the first authentic record of the traditional interpretation of the sacred texts coming down from the days of the Gurus, and occupies for this reason a unique position in Sikh religious literature.

Some foreigners also took to the study of the Sikh religion. The India Office commissioned a German missionary, Dr Trumpp, to render the Sikh Scripture into English. To make up for the imperfections of Dr Trumpp's work and to assuage the Sikh sentiment hurt by the offensive tone of some of his comments, Max Arthur Macauliffe, a member of the Indian Civil Service, resigned his post to undertake a fresh exposition of the Holy Granth. His translations of the Sikh hymns, along with a detailed history of the period covered by the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, were published in six volumes by the Oxford University Press in 1909. Among the Sikhs who first wrote of their religion in English were Sardar Nihal Singh Suri, who published translations of the sacred hymns, and Bhagat Lakhshman Singh who wrote two admirable books, *Life of Guru Gobind Singh* and *Sikh Martyrs.* Sardar Sewaram Singh published his book on the life and teaching of Guru Nanak in 1904, and Sardar Khazan Singh his *History and Philosophy of Sikh Religion* in 1914. Sant Teja Singh, who had taken his degree at Harvard, carried on missionary work among the Sikh immigrants in the United States and in Canada. Finest work in English came from the pen of Professor Teja Singh whose exposition of Sikhism and renderings of the holy texts such as *Japji, Asa-di-Var* and *Sukhmani* (The Psalm of Peace) created a new intellectual trend in the community.

For the Sikhs the Singh Sabha was a great regenerating force. It articulated the inner urge of Sikhism for reform and gave it a decisive direction at a crucial moment of its

history quickening its latent sources of energy. A comparison between the state of Sikhism before the Singh Sabha and since will reveal the extent of its moral effect. The Sikh faith had waned incredibly before the first stirrings of the movement were felt. A sense of lassitude pervaded Sikh society which had sunk back into the priest-ridden debilitating cults antithetical to Sikh monotheism. The teaching of the Gurus had been forgotten and the Holy Granth, confined to the Gurdwara and the Dharamsala, had become the concern only of the Bhai and the Granthi. From this condition the Singh Sabha rescued the Sikhs, awakening in them a new awareness of their past and of the excellence of their faith. The Singh Sabha touched the very base, the mainsprings of Sikh life and resuscitated the essential content of Sikh belief and exercise. It enhanced the intellectual capacity of the Sikhs and restored to them their creedal unity and their religious conscience. It opened for them the doors of modern progress and endowed them with the strength and adaptability to match the pressures created by new trends in man's thinking. The momentum which the Singh Sabha gave to the Sikh renaissance still continues.

CHAPTER XVIII

RENEWAL OF HERITAGE OF SUFFERING

THE motivation for reform born of the Singh Sabha created in turn a mass upsurge in the shape of the Akali movement. An immediate provocation was afforded by the clergy who had come into control of the Sikh holy places from the time the Sikhs were driven by Mughal oppression to seek safety in remote hills and deserts. A kind of professional coenobitism, contrary to the character of Sikhism, had since developed. Some of the sinister aspects of the new system became apparent soon after the reign of Ranjit Singh. Most of the clergy had fallen from the path of religious duty. They had converted ecclesiastical assets into private property and their lives were not free from the taint of licentiousness and luxury. The simple form of Sikh service was supplanted in the shrines by extravagant ceremonial. This was repugnant to Sikhs freshly affranchised by the preachings of the Singh Sabha. The puritan reaction through which they had passed led them to revolt against this retrogression and maladministration of the Sikh church.

While attempting to free the Gurdwaras from clerical control, they came into clash with the Government. For five years they carried on their peaceful, but extremely trying, battle with Authority to establish their title to managing their own sacred shrines. During this period they underwent endless tribulation and suppression and added glory to their annals by renewing their heritage of patient suffering for their faith. The black turban of the Akalis, or the reformers, had become in the eyes of Government a symbol of sedition. Apart from bearing the trial manfully, the Sikhs by their valiant and persistent resistance forced the Government to surrender on every issue that arose. The Akalis' victories against the Government were complete and they marked the first tangible dents in the prestige of India's foreign masters. When the Sikhs compelled the Punjab Government to return to them the keys of the Golden Temple which had been seized under the orders of the British Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Mahatma Gandhi sent

the following wire to Sardar Kharak Singh, President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee :

> First decisive battle for India's freedom won
> Congratulations
>
> M. K. Gandhi

Before the Akali movement started, the Sikhs' patriotic fervour had found expression in a series of conflicts with the Government. The first of these occurred in the Khalsa College at Amritsar. A remark made by Major John Hill, one of the British members of the Managing Council, denouncing as nonsense the honorary service the Sikh engineer, Dharam Singh, was rendering to the college, sparked off a violent reaction. Such service in the cause of the community or commonweal, which they call *sewa*, is greatly esteemed by the Sikhs and carries the highest religious sanction in their system. The derogatory words of Major Hill created a sensation in the community. As many as 75 Sikh associations registered their protest by passing resolutions. The students of the college wore black badges and kept a fast on February 10, 1907, when the British engineer came to take over the post vacated by Dharam Singh. The Government retaliated by changing the constitution of the college and taking over the management into its own hands. The Sikh Princely states withheld their annuities to make the community realize how the college was financially dependent on them. A few Sikh professors, including Bhai Jodh Singh who held the chair of Divinity, had to leave the college. The Sikhs were resolved to have the official control abrogated. This became a point at issue between them and the Government and the latter had to yield in the end.

The demolition by the Government of India in 1914 of the compound wall of Gurdwara Rikab Ganj in Delhi where the Ninth Sikh prophet, Guru Tegh Bahadur, martyred at the behest of Emperor Aurangzeb, had been cremated gave further umbrage to the Sikhs. The Government thought the hexagonal wall around the temple an eyesore in the midst of New Delhi buildings such as the Viceregal Lodge and the Secretariat which were then being constructed. The pulling down of this enclosure provoked a spontaneous outburst of feeling against the Government. Sardul Singh Caveeshar,

one of the leaders of the agitation, asked through the newspaper for 100 Sikhs to volunteer to go to Delhi with him and repair the demolished portion of the wall, or, if the Government obstructed them, to lay down their lives. Seven hundred Sikhs offered themselves. But before they could be assembled for the march to Delhi, Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha intervened and helped the Government out of the awkward situation by offering to have the Rikab Ganj wall rebuilt at his own expense.

Another episode which created further excitement among the Sikhs related to the S. S. *Komagata Maru,* or the *Guru Nanak Jahaz,* launched from Hong Kong by Baba Gurdit Singh, an adventurous Sikh business man, to take a batch of Indian emigrants to Canada. This was done to circumvent the new Canadian Immigration Ordinances which, aiming to stop the influx of Indians, prohibited entry into Canada of persons of every nationality except by a "continuous journey on through tickets from the country of their birth or citizenship." There was no direct shipping service from India to Canada and the object of the Canadian Government in passing the Ordinances was to specifically debar the Indians. Sikhs had gone to Canada and to many other foreign lands in large numbers and they resented the restrictions imposed by the Canadian authorities. Of the 376 passengers on board the S. S. *Komagata Maru,* 351 were Sikhs. On May 23, 1914, the ship reached Vancouver, and, although the condition of a through journey to Canada had been fulfilled, the passengers were not allowed to land. After having been stalled in the sea for two months—a period of grave hardship for the passengers—the ship was turned back. Baba Gurdit Singh's Sikhs became rebels in the eyes of the Indian Government and, at Budge Budge, near Calcutta, his ship was searched for any arms he might be smuggling into India. At Calcutta a special train was kept ready for the passengers to be transported back to their homes in the Punjab. Seventeen Muslim passengers obeyed Government orders and boarded the train. The Sikh passengers refused and, forming themselves into a procession with their Holy Book at the head of it, wended their way towards the town. British troops and police turned out and forced them back to the railway station where, owing to the

highhandedness of some European sergeants who interfered with the religious assembly the passengers were holding on the platform, a clash took place. Nineteen of the Sikhs and two European officers and two men of the Punjab police were killed. All the rest of the passengers the police could lay their hands on were taken into custody. Baba Gurdit Singh, however, escaped and for seven years, packed with adventure and drama, he baulked the police. On Guru Nanak's birthday anniversary in 1921, he made a sudden public appearance at Nankana Sahib and offered himself for arrest. The heroic deeds of the *Komagata Maru* men and their trials aroused the admiration and sympathy of the entire Indian nation.

The Sikhs who had adventured abroad organized and led associations to work for India's freedom in countries like Canada and the United States of America. At a time when political ambition of Indian parties was moderate, these patriotic organizations in foreign lands preached a revolutionary creed aiming at the overthrow of British rule. Sikhs were the leaders of this movement and even their Gurdwaras and religious associations like the Khalsa Diwan Society served as instruments of a forceful campaign against the English. Secret missives and tracts used to be sent into the country, especially to subvert the Indian armies and incite them to mutiny. Punjabi was the most popular vehicle of this inflammatory literature. On April 21, 1913, the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, popularly called the Ghadr Party, was established in America with the object of bringing about an armed rebellion in India. Gyanee Bhagwan Singh Preetam, who had been trained as a Sikh missionary at the Gurmat Vidyala of Gharjakh, and Lala Hardyal were the founders of the Ghadr Party of which Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, a Sikh farmer from Amritsar district, became the first President. The *Ghadr*, the weekly organ of the Party which was printed in San Francisco in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and several other Indian languages, carried its message of violence and sedition to wherever Indians were. Upon the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, it published in its issue of August 5, 1914, a declaration of war against the British. Many Indians, most of them Sikhs, settled in America, Canada, Singapore, Malaya and other foreign lands, hurried-

ly wound up their affairs in their eagerness for desperate action and, staking their all on the venture, departed for India to make mutiny in the country. A network of secret association was laid out and sympathies of Indian soldiers enlisted. February 21, 1915, was fixed for a general rising, but the plan was divulged prematurely by a police spy who had cleverly gained admission to the Ghadr Party. A reign of terror was unleashed by the Government. The conspirators were hunted out and given severe punishments. In what is known as the first Lahore Conspiracy Case, seven were sentenced to death and the rest transported for life or committed to varying terms of imprisonmen. Among the seven who kissed the hangman's noose were six Sikhs, namely Kartar Singh of Sarabha (Ludhiana), Bakhshish Singh of Gilwali (Amritsar), Jagat Singh of Sursingh (Lahore), Surain Singh (I) of Gilwali (Amritsar), Surain Singh (II) of Gilwali (Amritsar) and Bhai Harnam Singh of Bhatti Gurraya (Gurdaspur). Several other similar trials were held in India, Burma and San Francisco.

The Sikhs by their instinctive passion for freedom and by virtue of their qualities of adventure and determination thus added a noble chapter to the history of India. To a people passing through such a ferment, the stilted ritual followed in their places of worship looked disgracefully anachronistic. The Sikh Gurdwaras were tenanted by priests who were unfamiliar with the fundamental tenets of Sikhism. The Sikhs' central shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, was controlled by the British Deputy Commissioner through a Sikh manager whom he appointed. There were idols installed within the temple precincts. Pandits and astrologers sat on the premises plying their trade unchecked. Pilgrims from the backward classes were not allowed inside the Durbar Sahib before 9 o'clock in the morning. This was sheer defilement of Sikhism which countenanced neither caste nor image-worship.

On October 12, 1920, a meeting of Sikh backward castes, chiefly guided by professors and students of the Khalsa College, was held in Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. The following morning some of them were taken to the Durbar Sahib, but the priests refused to accept the *Karah Prashad* they had brought as an offering and to say the

prayer on their behalf. The pilgrims and their supporters protested against this attitude of the clergy. A compromise was at last reached and it was decided that the Guru's word be sought. The Holy Granth was, as is the custom, opened at random and the first verse on the page to be read was :

> He receives the lowly into grace
> And puts them in the path of righteous service.
> Guru Amar Das in *Sorath*

The hymn had a miraculous effect on the assembly. The Guru's verdict was clearly in favour of those whom the priests had refused to accept as full members of the Khalsa community. This was a triumph for reformist Sikhs. The *Karah Prashad* of the Mazhabi Sikhs was accepted. The congregation then marched towards Akal Takht, Guru Hargobind's shrine in front of the Golden Temple. The priests deserted the Takht and the visiting pilgrims appointed a representative committee of twenty-five Sikhs for its management. The following day the Deputy Commissioner nominated a separate committee of management consisting of nine members, all reformers, with the manager of the Golden Temple as President.

This was the beginning of the movement for the liberation of the Gurdwaras. The Akalis set afoot their enterprise of taking over their holy places from the priests, or Mahants. With a view to establishing a central committee of administration, a representative assembly of Sikhs from all walks of life was called by the new *Jathedar* (Provost) of Akal Takht on November 15, 1920. Each delegate was required to satisfy five conditions, namely (a) that he had received Amrit, or the Sikh baptism ; (b) that he was regular in reading the daily hymns ; (c) that he subscribed to the Sikh forms ; (d) that he was an early riser ; and (e) that he gave regularly one-tenth of his earnings for the Panthic cause.

Two days before the proposed conference, the Government set up its own committee consisting of thirty-six Sikhs to manage the Gurdwaras. The Sikhs held their scheduled meeting on November 15 and formed a committee of 175 which was called the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. In order to avoid conflict with the official committee and to render it ineffectual they included its thirty-six

members in the newly-formed organization.

The first session of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was held at Akal Takht on December 12, 1920. To ensure that all members were good practising Sikhs, *Panj Payare*, or the Five Beloved Ones symbolizing the mystic entity of the Guru-Khalsa, were chosen to question each one of them on how faithfully he carried out the religious and social injunctions of the Sikh Panth. The *Panj Payare* chosen for the occasion were Bhai Teja Singh, a Harvard graduate, who was then running a Sikh school in the village of Mastuana; Bhai Jodh Singh, Principal, Guru Nanak College, Gujranwala; Bawa Harkishan Singh, a professor at the Khalsa College at Amritsar; Bhai Teja Singh of the Central Majha Diwan and Balwant Singh of Kulla, a wealthy landlord. The members were taken to the first floor of Akal Takht where the enquiry was held. Each member had to satisfy the catechizers that he observed the Sikh discipline and that in his private or public conduct he had never diverged from standards laid down for the Sikhs. Confessions were made and lapses admitted, with prompt undertaking to endure, in expiation, any punishment the *Sangat*, or the congregation, might prescribe. When the turn came of Sardar (later, Sir) Sunder Singh Majithia, a leading Sikh of the day who had incurred the opposition of certain elements in the community owing to his moderate policies, the interrogation probed the motive of his public activities. He was asked to say in the presence of the Holy Granth and before Akal Takht (His Throne) whether as Secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and as a representative of the Panth he had been prompted in all he had done by the sole consideration of subserving the interests of the Sikhs. With perfect poise and dignity, Sardar Sunder Singh solemnly affirmed that the welfare of the community had always been the object nearest his heart and that he had never perjured his loyalty to the cause of the Panth by any thought of personal advantage. And yet with the humility characteristic of a true Sikh, he implored the indulgence of the liberal-hearted Khalsa reciting the following hymn from the Holy Book:

> Full of fault am I: there is not a single merit I possess.
> Forsaking the nectar of virtue, I quaff the poison of sin.
> Enticed by attachment, illusion and anxiousness,

I am fettered in bonds of love for wife and son.
But I have heard of a Panth that is noble and of a Sangat that is divine.
Meeting them, all one's misgiving ceases.
I Kirat, the bard, have only one supplication to make:
Keep me in thy protection, Lord Ram Das!

Then all of them, led by the Five Elect, clad in black with swords thrown across their shoulders, came down singing hymns. The confessions of those who had erred on some detail of religious observance were recounted before the assembled *Sangat*. The proceedings acquired the touch of drama when the words nobly spoken by Sardar Majithia and the hymn he had recited were quoted. The whole audience was moved to tears.

Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia was elected the first President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, though he had to resign later to join the Punjab Government as a member of the Governor's Executive Council. On April 30, 1921, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee obtained legal sanction as a public body and elections were held in the month of July. The new Committee at its first meeting at Akal Takht elected Sardar Kharak Singh as President. Sardar Kharak Singh, who had a following among extremist sections of the community, also became President of the Punjab Congress. On his arrest owing to his political affiliation, Amar Singh Jhabal replaced him as head of the Shiromani Committee.

The formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee provided a focal point for the new movement and gave direction to the enthusiasm it had aroused for the reformation of Sikh religious institutions and endowments. Gurdwaras began passing under its control one by one. But troubles arose where the priests were strongly entrenched or where the Government actively helped them to resist the process of mass pressure. At Tarn Taran, near Amritsar, a batch of priests, drunk and bent on murder, attacked an unwary delegation of reformers who had been invited to the shrine for negotiations. One of them, Hazara Singh of Aladinpur who was a descendant of Baghel Singh, one of the Sikh Misaldars, fell a victim to priestly violence. He was the first martyr to the cause of Gurdwara reform. Another Akali, Hukam Singh, succumbed to his injuries a few days later.

Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of the founder of the Sikh religion. was the scene of an outrage unparalleled for its calculated barbarity and heinous wickedness. Narain Das, the wealthiest of the Mahants. had a most unsavoury reputation among Sikhs. His stewardship of the Nankana shrine had started many scandals. There were charges of immorality and malversation against him. But he cared little for public opinion and sought to immunize himself against it by accumulating means of an armed showdown. He laid in a large amount of weapons and ammunition and hired nearly 400 assassins and desperadoes who were kept in the Gurdwara premises. On the morning of February 20, 1921, as a Jatha of 150 Sikhs came to make obeisance at the Gurdwara, the private army of Narain Das fell upon them. The Sikhs were chanting the sacred hymns when the attack started. Bullets were mercilessly rained on them from the roofs of an adjoining building. Their leader, Bhai Lachhman Singh, a tall and handsome Sikh from Dharowal, who was sitting before the Holy Book, was struck down on the spot.

Outside the main gate, the Mahant, with a pistol in hand and face muffled up, paced up and down on horseback directing the operations and constantly shouting, "Let not a single long-haired Sikh go out alive." Bhai Dalip Singh, a much respected Sikh who was well known to the Mahant, came to intercede with him to stop the bloody carnage. But the Mahant answered him with a shot from his pistol, killing him instantaneously. Six other Sikhs coming from outside were butchered by Narain Das's men and thrown into a potter's kiln. Firewood and kerosene oil which had been stored in the Gurdwara were brought out and a fire lighted within the holy precincts. All the dead and injured were piled up on it and consumed by the flames. A few Sikhs were fastened to a tree near by and burnt alive.

The news of the Nankana massacres shocked the country and excited great sympathy and admiration for the Sikhs. Sir Edward Maclagan, the Governor of the Punjab, visited the place and was overwhelmed by emotion at the sight of the ghastly scene inside the temple. Mahatma Gandhi, along with the Muslim leaders, Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali, came a few days later. So did several other Congressmen. Princess Bamba Duleep Singh, daughter of Maharaja Duleep

Singh, came accompanied by Sir Jogendra Singh to offer her homage to the memory of the martyrs.

The Mahant and some of his hirelings were arrested and the possession of the Gurdwara was made over by Government to a committee of seven Sikhs headed by Sardar Harbans Singh of Attari, Vice-President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

The Sikhs were deeply agonized to hear of the desecration of the holiest of their holy places and the cruel and cold-blooded slaughter of so many of their brethren. Railway booking for Nankana Sahib was stopped at all stations within twenty miles of the town: yet thousands of Sikhs poured in from all sides. Their hearts bled to see the Holy Book torn with rifle shots and the sacred sanctuary reeking of blood and smouldering flesh. Relations and friends pathetically looked over the charred figures to recognize their kith and kin. One old woman sat by a heap of ashes pressing the hand of a half-burnt body. This was one of her five brave sons who had fallen martyrs on the fateful morning of February 20.

February 23 was fixed for the cremation ceremony. Charred, mutilated bodies were collected and torn limbs and pieces of flesh picked from wherever they lay in the blood-stained chambers. A huge funeral pyre was erected. Bhai Jodh Singh, in a measured oration, advised the Sikhs to remain cool and patient and endure the calamity with the fortitude with which their ancestors had faced similar situations. The Sikhs, he said, had cleansed by their blood the holy precincts so long exposed to the vicious influence of a corrupt and impious regime.

By the atrocity they suffered at Nankana Sahib, the Sikhs added permanently a new passage to their *Ardas*, or prayer, which contains an ennobling recital of their countless deeds of sacrifice and chivalry from the beginning of their history. Morning and evening and, indeed at any time of the day, when, after their prayers or at a ceremony, the Sikhs say *Ardas* to invoke God's blessing, the martyrs of Nankana are remembered in the following terms:

> ... those who, to reform the Gurdwaras and purge them of long-standing malpractices, suffered themselves to be shot, cut up, or burnt alive with kerosene oil, but did not

> make any resistance or utter a sigh of complaint—think of their patient faith and proclaim the name of God ...

Sir Edward's visit to the Gurdwara was symbolic of the Punjab Government's immediate reaction to the brutal crime committed by the Mahant. But it soon became apparent that the bureaucracy in general had a sneaking sympathy with him and his accomplices. The police assembled the evidence for prosecution indifferently. A strictly legalistic interpretation of the priests' rights over Gurdwara estates in their control became prevalent, disregarding the fundamental fact that they held these properties as trustees on behalf of the Panth. The Government seemed determined to prevent Sikhs from taking over any more Gurdwaras and took into custody a large number of the reformers. Jathedar Kartar Singh of Jhabbar who had got many Gurdwaras released from the control of the Mahants was arrested and condemned to 18 years' imprisonment. Another leader, Bhai Teja Singh of Bhuchar, was imprisoned for a term of nine years.

A grave offence to Sikh sentiment was caused by the Government taking away forcibly on November 7, 1921, the keys of the Golden Temple treasury. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee protested strongly against this encroachment and asked the Sikhs to hold meetings to condemn the action of the Government. Further means of recording resentment included a decision to observe hartal on the day the Prince of Wales, who was coming out on a tour, landed on the Indian shores. The Sikhs were forbidden to participate in any function connected with the Prince's visit. To counteract the rising tide of indignation, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar convened meetings at his own house and in the villages to tell the people that the keys had been taken over only temporarily to institute a friendly case and obtain a legal verdict in favour of the reformers. At a rival meeting the Sikhs held at Ajnala, the Deputy Commissioner arrested some Sikh leaders, one of them, Harnam Singh Zaildar, for being "clad from head to foot in Khaddar." Many more arrests were made, but the Sikhs came forth in still larger numbers. To fill the British gaols batches of them marched in, draped in black and singing hymns, exhibiting standards of restraint and discipline hardly ever surpassed in a mass movement. Ex-servicemen threw

up their pensions and joined the Akali ranks. Under pressure of growing agitation the Government gave way. Their efforts to spot a Sikh who would agree to become manager of the Golden Temple and take hold of the keys having failed, the leaders of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee were released unconditionally. Great was the Sikhs' joy when at a huge gathering at Akal Takht on January 19, 1922, a court official, representing the Government, surrendered the bunch of keys, wrapped in a piece of red cloth, to Sardar Kharak Singh, President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. The air became thick with shouts of Satsriakal. Throats were choked with the emotion of humble gratitude as the Thanksgiving Prayer was offered for the triumphant end of the issue.

At Guru-ka-Bagh, 12 miles distant from Amritsar, Sikhs' capacity for suffering and resistance was put to further trial. Sundar Das, the Mahant, had by mutual negotiation made over the Gurdwara to the Shiromani Committee, taken the Sikh baptism and parted with his mistresses except one whom he honourably married. But ambition stirred in his heart when he saw how Government backed the Mahants in their fight with the Sikhs. He repudiated part of the agreement and said that, though he had surrendered the Gurdwara to the Shiromani Committee, the piece of land known as Guru-ka-Bagh attached to it was still his property. He objected to Sikhs cutting wood for the Gurdwara kitchen from trees on that land. The police, readily willing to oblige him, arrested on August 9, 1922, five Sikhs on charges of trespass. These arrests were made not on the Mahant's complaint, but on a confidential report received by the police. The following day the arrested Sikhs were hurriedly tried and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

Undeterred by this action of the Government, Sikhs continued the old practice of cutting down wood from Guru-ka-Bagh for the daily requirements of the temple kitchen. The process of arrests and convictions proving of little avail, the police tried a new technique to terrorize the reformers. Those who came to cut fuel-wood from Guru-ka-Bagh were beaten up in a merciless manner until they lay senseless on the ground. They were dragged about by their long hair and left contemptuously off when the police thought they

had been served well enough. The Sikhs suffered all this stoically and went in larger numbers day by day to submit themselves to the beating. From August 31, the number was raised to 100. Every day a batch of one hundred volunteers would start from Akal Takht pledged to non-violence and silent suffering. The police would stop the Sikhs on the way and smite them with heavy brass-bound sticks and rifle-butts. The belabouring continued until the whole batch lay prostrate to a man. The Sikhs displayed a unique power of self-control and resolution and bore the bodily torment in a spirit of complete resignation. None of them ever winced or raised his hand. The Rev. C. F Andrews, who visited Amritsar to watch the events himself, gave a graphic description of the passive resistance of the Akalis in the account he wrote. He said, "... When I reached the Gurdwara (at Guru-ka-Bagh) itself, I was struck at once by the absence of excitement such as I had expected to find among so great a crowd of people.

"Close to the entrance there was a reader of the Scriptures who was holding a very large congregation of worshippers silent as they were seated on the ground before him. In another quarter there were attendants who were preparing the simple evening meal for the Gurdwara guests by grinding the flour between two large stones. There was no sign that the actual beating had just begun and that the sufferers had already endured the shower of blows. But when I asked one of the passersby, he told me that the beating was now taking place. On hearing this news, I at once went forward. There were some hundreds present seated on an open piece of ground watching what was going on in front, their faces strained with agony. I watched their faces first of all, before I turned the corner of a building and reached a spot where I could see the beating itself. There was not a cry raised from the spectators, but the lips of very many of them were moving in prayer.

"... There were four Akali Sikhs with their black turbans facing a band of about a dozen police, including two English officers. They had walked slowly up to the line of the police just before I had arrived and they were standing silently in front of them at about a yard's distance. They were perfectly still and did not move further forward. Their hands were

placed together in prayer and it was clear that they were praying. Then, without the slightest provocation on their part, an Englishman lunged forward the head of his *lathi* which was bound with brass. He lunged forward in such a way that his fist which held the staff struck the Akali Sikh, who was praying, just at the collar bone with great force. It looked the most cowardly blow as I saw it struck ...

"... The blow which I saw was sufficient to fell the Akali Sikh and send him to the ground. He rolled over, and slowly got up once more, and faced the same punishment over again. Time after time one of the four who had gone forward was laid prostrate by repeated blows, now from the English officer and now from the police who were under his control. On this and on subsequent occasions the police committed certain acts which were brutal in the extreme. I saw with my own eyes one of these police kick in the stomach of a Sikh who stood helplessly before him. It was a blow so foul that I could hardly restrain myself from crying out aloud and rushing forward. But later on I was to see another act which was, if anything, even fouler. For, as one of the Akali Sikhs had been hurled to the ground and was lying prostrate, a police sepoy stamped with his foot upon him, using his full weight; the foot struck the prostrate man between the neck and the shoulder ...

"The brutality and inhumanity of the whole scene was indescribably increased by the fact that the men who were hit were praying to God and had already taken a vow that they would remain silent and peaceful in word and deed...

"There has been something far greater in this event than a mere dispute about land and property. It has gone far beyond the technical questions of legal possession or distraint. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world...

"One thing I have not mentioned which was significant of all that I have written concerning the spirit of the suffering endured. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akali Singh, who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow when it was struck. Apart from the instinctive and of a slight shrinking back, there was nothing, so far as I can remember, that could be called a deliberate avoidance of the blows

struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance and without a sign of fear."

The Governor of the Punjab visited Amritsar on September 13, 1922, and stopped the beating of the Sikh volunteers. Arrests began to be made instead. At the Government announcement that preparations were being made to accommodate ten thousand Akalis in gaols, the Sikhs stepped up their campaign. *Jathas* became larger in size. The Government at last gave in. The good offices of Sir Ganga Ram, a rich and influential citizen of Lahore, were secured. On November 17, he obtained the Guru-ka-Bagh land on lease from the Mahant and wrote to Government that he required no police protection. The Government had the excuse not to interfere with the Sikhs who could now go unmolested to Guru-ka-Bagh to cut wood in the jungle for their community kitchen. The Sikhs' gain was not confined merely to the immediate point involved. The moral implication of the issue was far more important.

But the Sikhs' trials were not yet ended. For protesting against the deposition of the Sikh Maharaja of Nabha, known for his sympathy with the Akalis and other nationalist elements, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was, on October 13, 1923, declared an unlawful association by Government. All its leaders and active members were arrested and tried on charges of sedition against the King. But the agitation for the restoration of the Nabha Ruler continued with redoubled zeal. The small town of Jaitu, in Nabha state, became the scene of another prolonged and dramatic struggle. Here in a Gurdwara a whole batch of Akali worshippers was arrested and the *Akhand Path*, or continuous reading of the Holy Book, they had inaugurated was interrupted. This aggravated the situation. To vindicate their right to worship in the Gurdwara and to redeem the impiety committed by the police, batches of twenty-five Akalis began to issue from Akal Takht to march on foot to Jaitu, which was 120 miles from Amritsar. Before they reached Jaitu, these *Jathas* were held by the police, beaten and taken to a remote desert some 300 miles away, there to be abandoned to their fate, without food or money.

After some time, larger *Jathas*, each 500 strong, began to be sent from Amritsar. The first of these left Akal Takht

on February 19, 1924. The news of the *Jatha* marching on foot from Amritsar to Jaitu caused much excitement in the countryside. Two Congress leaders, Dr Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew and Professor A. T. Gidwani, and a foreign journalist, Mr S. Zimand of the *New York Times*, accompanied as observers. At Jaitu the *Jatha* was fired upon, but the Sikhs marched on in face of the shower of bullets. Several of them fell under fire. Yet they went on undeterred by casualties and the danger ahead, and reached Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib. Here the Jatha was beaten by the police and taken into custody.

Fifteen more *Jathas* went to Jaitu. The authorities finally gave in and the last *Jatha* arrived in town. The Punjab Government had made up its mind to let the Sikhs take over management of their shrines. Passing of legislation to this effect had been under contemplation for some time. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act was placed on the Statute Book on July 25, 1925. A central Gurdwara Board, elected by the Sikhs, was to be the custodian of all important Sikh places of worship. The first Gurdwara Board passed a resolution that its designation be changed to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. This was accepted by Government.

In the Akali agitation for Gurdwara reform nearly forty thousand went to gaol and four hundred lost their lives. Sums to the tune of sixteen lakhs of rupees were paid by way of fines and forfeitures and about seven hundred Sikh government functionaries in the villages were deprived of their positions.

The constitution of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has undergone a few changes since the passing of the Gurdwaras Act. By an amendment carried in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1944, provision was made for the representation of Sikh backward classes who had 12 seats reserved for them. The total strength of the house was raised from 151 to 166. One of the amendments provided for greater centralization of power and removed some of the restrictions on the use of funds for educational and missionary purposes. It gave the Shiromani Committee direct control of such Gurdwaras as Nankana Sahib, Tarn Taran, Anandpur Sahib and Muktsar. Formerly every Sikh adult, man

or woman, had the right of vote. Certain conditions demanding fulfilment of religious duties were now imposed. Further amendments were necessitated in 1956 by the merger with the Punjab of the State of PEPSU. The jurisdiction of the Shiromani Committee was extended to the territories of former ruling chiefs of the Punjab.

With the statutory sanction it has and the provision of periodical elections, with all the adjuncts of democratic processes, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee is a unique ecclesiastical institution. Although it is meant for purely religious purposes, the electoral procedure governing its structure, imparts to its affairs a permanent political interest and makes it liable to factional antagonisms.

CHAPTER XIX

JUGGERNAUT OF RISING COMMUNALISM

THE Singh Sabha and the Akali movement fixed trends which became the permanent characteristics of the Sikh people and directed the course of their subsequent history. The former led to the modernization of their faith and emancipation of their outlook, while the latter produced an active spirit of resistance and hostility towards foreign rule and an overwhelming impulse for freedom. Under the impact of the Singh Sabha, Sikhism finally broke away from the extrinsic influences which had gained ascendancy in the preceding hundred years or so, and recovered its original simplicity and dynamism. Norms of religious belief and custom then established have since prevailed and are subscribed to by majority of the Sikh community today. They are basically so liberal and so true to the essentials of the Sikh teaching that no revision or recension seems likely to be called for for a long time to come.

The reformation of the Sikh church which began with the Singh Sabha was completed by the Akali movement. But in the process of gaining liberation of the Gurdwaras, the latter turned into a mass campaign against the Government in which political feeling became as strong as religious. A new consciousness grew among the Sikhs. Affinities with other advanced sections in the country were established. A natural alliance with the Indian National Congress developed which withstood the test of many a crisis, especially on the eve of the withdrawal of the British rulers from India. The attitudes formed in the days of the Akali struggle have been the dominant factors in conditioning the political behaviour of the Sikhs. Men who had their first experience of public affairs as leaders of the Gurdwara reform movement continue to hold the sway, some in the native sphere of Sikh politics and others in the larger political organizations such as the Congress and the Communist Party which they subsequently joined. The general awakening brought about by the Akali movement put the Sikhs once for all on the side of the progressive elements in the country. In concert with

them, they fought for India's freedom and played in this national struggle a role characteristically daring and large-hearted. Their contribution was reckoned as truly magnificent, especially in view of their small percentage in the Indian population.

Reaction in Indian politics which started with the Mulsims' demand for the recognition of their separate communal entity was a severe challenge to the Sikhs' spirit of nationalism. The Muslims had deliberately been set on this path to provide a counterpoise to Congress policies. In Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which later developed into the Muslim University, the British had an ally who lent his commanding influence to preaching the gospel of loyalty among his co-religionists. He was initially a believer in the common nationality of all Indians irrespective of religion and creed and had once walked out of a Government Durbar at Agra as a protest against the discriminatory treatment offered to Indians. But he subsequently swung over to an aggressively communal approach and opened a campaign against the Congress with a speech at Lucknow on December 18, 1887. His one aim was to win the Muslims reprieve for their part in the mutiny of 1857 and to secure them preference in the matter of Government posts. At the instance of Mr Beck, who was the Principal of the Aligarh College, Sir Syed set up in 1888 the United Patriotic Association with the purpose of opposing the Congress. A branch of this Association functioned in London in the home of Mr Morrison who became the Principal of the Aligarh College after Mr Beck. In 1893, Sir Syed established the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association of Upper India with its membership open to Muslims and Englishmen.

Another European Principal of the Aligarh College, Mr Archbold, arranged for a delegation of Muslims to wait upon Lord Minto, the Governor-General, to urge the special claims of their community and to demand separate electoral representation for it in institutions of self-government. Conscious of his proficiency in "the art of drawing up petitions in good language," Mr Archbold offered to prepare and draft the address to be presented to the Governor-General on behalf of the Muslims. He had made sure through Colonel Dunlop

Smith, Private Secretary to Lord Minto, that such a deputation would be welcomed by the Governor-General. On October 1, 1906, spokesmen of the Muslim community, led by His Highness the Aga Khan, met Lord Minto at Simla. In his reply to the deputationists' address, the latter fully endorsed their views and said, "Your address, as I understand it, is a claim that, in any system of representation, whether it affects a Municipality, a District Board, or Legislative Council, in which it is proposed to introduce or increase an electoral organization, the Mohammadan community should be represented as a community ... I am entirely in accord with you ... I am as firmly convinced as I believe you to be, that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement, regardless of the beliefs and traditions of communities composing the population of this continent."

This unequivocal statement by the British Governor-General was an open incitement to Muslim separatism. The seeds of Hindu-Muslim dichotomy were thus thoughtfully sown and Lady Minto, wife of the Governor-General, called the eventful day "an epoch in Indian history." To consolidate the communal opinion, the All-India Muslim Conference was founded in the year of the Deputation. This organization was subsequently converted into the All-India Muslim League which had the country cut in twain on a religious basis.

The Government set its seal on Muslim communalism by introducing separate electorates under the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 and by giving weighted representation to Muslims in the provinces in which they were in a minority. The adoption of this divisive principle created a permanent cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims. In 1916, the Congress attempted to appease the Muslim League by conceding its communal claims and contracting with it an agreement which is known as the Lucknow Pact. By this covenant, the Muslims had their representation in the various legislative councils specified. In the Punjab, they were to have through their own exclusive electorate 50 per cent of the Council seats. The Sikhs, who were an influential community in the State and had important interests at stake, were completely ignored in this League-Congress compact.

The Punjab was the only province in India where they had a sizable population. Here in their own homeland they were condemned to perpetual subordination to the Muslims who, under the patronage of the British, gradually came to have a position of vantage in the administration of the State.

The Sikhs' representation in the legislative bodies had been negligible since the introduction of Reforms under the Minto-Morley scheme. In 1909, for instance, all the three seats for the Imperial Legislative Council open to election were carried by Muslims. In 1912, Sikhs gained one seat out of 6; in 1916, none out of 11.

By virtue of their comparatively high educational level and economic position, they had proportionately the largest share in the franchise, but this advantage was neutralized by the statutory provision giving the Muslims exclusive representation by reserving seats for them in the Council. The provision made for the Muslims was denied to the Sikhs who were practically excluded from the legislative and executive set-up in the Punjab. To be left out of the arrangements devised at Lucknow in 1916 was a further setback to their interests and an injury to their self-respect.

Finding themselves reduced to a state of political inferiority, the Sikhs began to press for their own rights. They demanded to be treated in the Punjab the same way as Muslims were treated in the provinces where they were in a minority. The Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar made strenuous efforts to ventilate the Sikh viewpoint.

Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, the Secretary of the Diwan, wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Punjab Government on December 26, 1916, setting out the claims of the Sikh community for representation in the Imperial and Provincial councils. He said, "In order that such representation be adequate and effective and consistent with their position and importance, the Sikhs claim that a one-third share in all seats and appointments in the Punjab is their just share and should be secured to them as their absolute minimum." In 1917, when Mr Edwin Samuel Montagu succeeded Sir Austen Chamberlain as the Secretary of State for India, the realization of responsible government in India was declared to be the goal of British policy. Montagu visited India soon after. He and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, prepared a

report which they jointly signed. The Joint Report, published in July, 1918, proposed to extend to the Sikhs the system adopted in the case of Muslims in the provinces where they formed a minority. To consider the Report, the Chief Khalsa Diwan convened a representative conclave of the Sikhs at Amritsar on September 18, 1918. In the memorandum, which was prepared on behalf of the community, Government was urged to fully carry out the pledge given to the Sikhs.

The question of Sikh representation was raised in the Punjab Legislative Council when the Joint Report came up for discussion before it. To baulk the Sikhs, the Muslim leader, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, moved a resolution proposing that the proportion of Muslims in the Punjab Legislative Council as laid down in the Congress-League scheme be maintained. To this the Sikh representative, Sardar Gajjan Singh of Ludhiana, moved an amendment recommending the addition of the words, "subject to the just claims of the Sikhs." The amendment was opposed by Muslims as well as Hindus. This unreasonable attitude of the Hindu and Muslim members evoked a sharp rebuke from the Speaker of the House who said :

> I am going to make a sort of an appeal to you. I want you to remember one of the charges brought against Indian public men. One of the reasons which has always been advanced for not giving them the management of their own affairs is that whenever sectarian questions are raised they find it impossible to be reasonable, or to agree in any way, and therefore it is necessary for us impartial people to step in and decide questions which the people have shown themselves incapable of deciding for themselves. Now if you are willing on this important occasion which necessarily goes to form part of the history of this country, if you are willing to leave on the minds of all the impression that you have shown yourselves unable to come to any agreement on this question, then you will have condemned yourselves, and you will have justified those among ourselves who contend that Indians are really not fit to manage their own affairs because they cannot consider sectarian questions in an unbiased spirit. I appeal to you, therefore, in your own interest not to allow such an impression as this to gain ground. It is perfectly obvious that if this amendment of Sardar Gajjan Singh is laid before this Council, simply because there are only two Sikhs, it will be lost. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that, whatever it may be in form, it is in substance and spirit a perfectly just and fair claim. I ask you what will be the impression if a claim just and fair in substance but not in form has been rejected by a majority of the Indian members.

The Speaker's advice was rejected and the amendment thrown out with only Sikh members voting for it.

The publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was followed by the appointment of the Franchise Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough, to go into the matter of the composition of the new legislatures. It contained three Indian members, but none of them was a Sikh. When the Sikhs protested, Sir Sunder Singh Majithia was taken as a co-opted member in the Punjab, but their demand for one-third of the total number of non-official seats held by Indians in the Punjab, 7 out of 67 non-official seats in the Assembly of India and 4 seats in the Council of State remained largely unfulfilled. The Franchise Committee recommended 15 per cent Council seats for the Sikhs. In Bihar and Orissa where they formed no more than 10 per cent of the total population, the Muslims were given 25 per cent seats under the Congress-League compact, and 27 per cent by the Franchise Committee. In the Punjab where they constituted 12 per cent of the population and were otherwise an important factor in the life of the province, Sikhs' share was fixed at a bare 15 per cent. To get this invidious distinction rectified, the Sikhs made representations to the Government. A deputation, consisting of Sardar Sewaram Singh, Sardar Shivdev Singh Uberoi, Sardar Sohan Singh of Rawalpindi and Sardar Ujjal Singh, was sent to England in 1920 to place the Sikhs' case before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Reforms, but nothing availed. Meanwhile, the Akali movement for the reform of Sikh religious places had started and the Sikhs began taking a leading part in the national struggle for freedom. To keep them from joining the mass non-cooperation launched by the National Congress in 1920, 33 per cent share of legislative seats and a Sikh University were offered by the Government, with the further concession of release of the Sikhs arrested in connection with the Ghadr movement of 1914-15. But the Sikhs refused to be carried away by these blandishments and the Sikh League adopted at its Lahore session the Non-cooperation resolution.

Though they were the smallest minority in the Punjab, the Sikhs were generally averse to the principle of communal representation. The Muslims, in spite of being in majority,

had been given statutory protection and weightage in the form of separate electorates and reservation of seats. This created among the Sikhs a sense of grievance and they demanded to be treated on the same footing as the Muslims in the matter of political rights. They, otherwise, stood for a united Indian nationhood and were willing to compete with others on merit rather than depend on any concessions and privileges statutorily guaranteed. In its memorandum to the Royal Indian Statutory Commission of 1928, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which was representative of conservative Sikh opinion, observed:

> While anxious to maintain their individuality as a separate community, they [Sikhs] are always ready to co-operate with their sister communities for the development of a united nation. They would, therefore, be the first to welcome a declaration that no considerations of caste or religion shall affect the matter of organization of a national government in the country. They are prepared to stand on merit alone, provided they, in common with others, are permitted to grow, unhampered by any impediments in the way of reservations for any other community. Some other communities, however, still seem to persist, in one form or other, for the recognition of religious factions in the constitution of the country, and, if their claims are recognized and creed forms an integral part of the basis of representation in the administration of the country, the Sikhs apprehend danger to their very existence, unless adequate safeguards are provided for them. The tyranny of majority is an expression not wholly unknown in the political history of the world, and when such majority is based on religion, the extent to which such tyranny might go is unlimited ...
>
> It has already been mentioned that the Sikhs, in spite of being the smallest of the three communities in the Punjab, are prepared to forgo all communal representation if this can be knocked out of the constitution of the country.

Among the reforms suggested by the Chief Khalsa Diwan were the abolition of communal representation, entrusting the legislature with full control over finance and subordinating the executive and bureaucracy to its will.

Advanced by a party known to be moderate in politics and claiming to speak on behalf of a minority religious group, these were highly enlightened proposals. They also revealed the trend of Sikh thinking at that time. But affairs in the country had acquired an irredeemable communal bias. With the Muslims fanatically attached to the notion of a separate political destiny, the cleavage between the two major com-

munities widened. Attempts at bringing about Hindu-Muslim concord produced only contrary results.

Accepting the challenge of Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, to work out a scheme of government acceptable to all. a conference of different parties called by the Congress appointed an influential committee under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Committee prepared an exhaustive report which was published in August, 1928. But Muslim opinion reacted strongly against the proposals made in the Nehru Report. When the Conference met again at Calcutta on December 22, 1928, to discuss it. Mr Mohammad Ali Jinnah suggested a number of amendments on behalf of the Muslims. Upon these proposals being voted down, the Muslims held a meeting in Delhi under the chairmanship of the Aga Khan and drew up a number of demands the acceptance of which was made a condition for their agreeing to any new constitution for the country.

These demands were the basis of the Muslim leader's platform which, after President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, came to be known as Jinnah's Fourteen Points. Muslim exclusiveness was intensified by Jinnah's calculated and relentless reiteration of his demands for sectarian electorates and reservations. Uncompromising stubbornness and the desire to dictate terms were apparent in his attitude towards the National Congress. All efforts at inter-communal settlement failed because of the Muslim League's ever-stiffening, supercilious attitude. The Hindu-Muslim *detente* took a serious turn and violence broke out between the two communities on the slightest provocation. Incidents occurred at Bombay, Kanpur, and other places. Wherever they could intervene effectively, the Sikhs exercised their influence on the side of restraint and harmony. Their peaceable role at the time of the communal outbreak in Amritsar in 1922 was widely appreciated in those days of severe tension.

Parties in India failing to produce a commonly agreed solution, the British Government invited representatives of different groups and interests to meet at a Round Table Conference in London. The first of a series of such conferences was held in 1930. Like the Congress, the Sikhs

boycotted the first Round Table Conference for want of assurance from the Governor-General regarding the final objective of giving India self-government. A Sikh, Sardar Tara Singh, a judge of the Patiala High Court, attended the Conference as a Government nominee. To prevent him from proceeding to London, Giani Sher Singh and other leaders of the Central Akali Dal tried to abduct him at the Rajpura railway station, *en route* to Bombay, from where he was to sail for England. But he forestalled the move and did reach London as scheduled. At the Conference, however, he supported the nationalist view and sided with Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on all political and constitutional issues.

To the second Round Table Conference which was attended by Mahatma Gandhi as the sole representative of the Congress, the Sikhs sent two delegates—Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh. The Government set up a Minorities Committee to deal with the question of communal representation. But agreement eluded the leaders and the proceedings were deadlocked owing, once again, to the Muslims' refusal to accept joint citizenship with the rest of the nation. Edward Thompson, in his book *Enlist India For Freedom*, said: "During the Round Table Conference there was rather an obvious understanding and alliance between the more intransigent Muslims and certain particularly undemocratic British political circles. That alliance is constantly asserted in India to be the real block to progress. I believe I could prove that this is largely true. And there is no question that in former times we frankly practised 'divide and rule' method in India. From Warren Hastings' time onwards, men made no bones of the pleasure the Hindu-Muslim conflict gave them; even such men as Elphinstone and Malcolm and Metcalfe admitted its value to the British."

In the absence of a mutually agreed inter-communal formula, the British Government undertook to settle the question for India. On April 16, 1932, the Prime Minister, Mr Ramsay Macdonald, made his announcement which came to be known as the Communal Award. In this award the communal demands of the Muslims as embodied in Jinnah's Fourteen Points were fully conceded. They were accorded separate electorates and reservation of seats in the provincial

legislatures. The proposed autonomy for the provinces envisaged a weak central set-up which was precisely what the Muslims wanted. Separate electorates were also provided for Sikhs, Europeans, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. But the Sikhs' position in the Punjab remained insecure. As a minority, they were not given the weightage commensurate with their importance in the State or with the proportion allowed to the Muslims in other provinces. They were in consequence left helpless against the tyranny of a communal majority statutorily vested with permanent authority in the Punjab. The Sikhs opposed the Communal Award to a man and at a convention held at Lahore on July 24, 1932, they pledged themselves to resist its enforcement at all costs.

To minimize communal antagonisms and to produce a formula in substitution of the Award given by the British, a Unity Conference was called at Allahabad on November 3, 1932. The Conference, which was attended by 63 Hindus, 11 Sikhs, 39 Muslims and 8 Indian Christians, was making good progress when Sir Samuel Hoare made a sudden announcement declaring that His Majesty's Government had decided to reserve for Muslims a $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent share in the Central Legislature. This was slightly in excess of what was mutually agreed upon by the Indian leaders then deliberating at Allahabad. But the concession was enough to wean the Muslims away from the Unity Conference which broke up infructuously like several of its predecessors.

The Communal Award became once again the central theme of Indian politics. The Muslims felt reassured by the special rights and concessions it afforded them. The Hindus were naturally hostile but the Congress, in view of the divergence of opinion between the two communities, adopted an attitude of neutrality. In a meeting at Bombay in October, 1934, it declared that it neither accepted nor rejected the Award. The Sikhs, who felt gravely slighted and considered the Communal Award a menace to their existence, were its bitterest opponents and they never slackened the vigorous campaign they had started against it. But they were numerically too few to have their protest fully heeded. The British Parliament set its seal to the Communal Award by passing the Government of India Act of 1935.

The Federal part of the reforms being held over till a

greater measure of unanimity in Indian opinion was achieved, elections to the provincial assemblies took place under the new Act in the winter of 1936-37. The Congress secured majorities in seven of the eleven provinces. The Muslim League fared badly. It was routed even in the provinces which were predominantly Muslim. In Sind and the North-West Frontier Province not a single seat went to the League; in the Punjab its share was a solitary one.

The Sikhs, whose interests were principally indentified with the Punjab, came to be divided into two groups. The Shiromani Akali Dal, which represented the common masses, collaborated with the Congress. But it encountered unexpectedly tough opposition from the moderate elements which were joined into a forceful alliance by two knighted Sardars, Sunder Singh Majithia and Jogendra Singh. The new organization, called the Khalsa National Party, supported by such veteran fighters as Giani Sher Singh, Sardar Amar Singh of the *Sher-i-Punjab* and Sardar Mangal Singh, won more than half of the Sikh seats from the Akalis. The Muslim-dominated Unionist Party which formed the Government in the Punjab gained the co-operation of the Khalsa National Party whose leader, Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, joined the State cabinet as a minister. The compact group of the Akalis, under the leadership of Sardar Sampuran Singh, merged itself with the Congress party which constituted the Opposition.

Instead of the Communal Award, the Unionist Government which was subtly implanting Muslim influence in the Punjab administration, became now the target of Sikh criticism. Since the time of the Gurdwara reform movement, the Sikhs had never been so deeply stirred. They unleashed a relentless campaign against the Unionist Government and its communal policies. The Sikh platform gained strength and integrity in the process and political schemes for the realignment of Punjab boundaries with a view to securing a more balancing proportion of communal populations began to be propounded. The elder Sikh statesman, Sir Jogendra Singh, carried on a lonely battle in favour of the Federation. He repeatedly contributed articles to *The Statesman*, *The Tribune* and other Indian journals recommending to his countrymen that the Federal part of the Government of India

Act be tried. If his advice had been accepted, India probably would not have been confronted with the problems she subsequently had to face.

The autonomy which the provinces enjoyed under the 1935 India Act, with the Federal part of the Constitution shelved, was an encouragement to Muslim chauvinism. In the provinces where they had a majority, the Muslims established their communal sway gradually disengaging themselves from the concept of a united Indian Government. This rising tide of Muslim political fanaticism was a matter of grave concern for the Sikhs. Their population was almost wholly restricted to the Punjab and their history as well as their future was inalienably linked with it. For sheer survival they had to struggle hard. But the pace of events had been too rapid for them and the juggernaut of Muslim communalism too powerful. The British Parliament's enactments of 1935 had installed the Muslims securely in authority in the Punjab.

CHAPTER XX

ADDING NEW LINES TO ARDAS

THE Muslims took dual advantage of the situation. They built in a strong political base in the provinces in which they were able to form their own governments. Where the administration was in the hands of the Congress, they raised the cry of Islam being in jeopardy at the hands of the Hindu majority. A tirade of hate and slander was started. Stories of Congress high-handedness against the Muslim minority were concocted and a committee was appointed by the Muslim League, in 1938, with the Raja of Pirpur as President, to collect information in support of the charge. When, as a protest against the British Government's failure to give assurances with regard to India's future after World War II, the Congress ministries in the provinces resigned in November, 1939, the Muslim League celebrated the event as a "day of deliverance and thanksgiving." This tactical propaganda produced the desired effect. The Muslim League, which had come off rather poorly in the 1937 provincial elections, was able to rehabilitate itself and rally the Muslims round its banner. The Muslim mind was poisoned against the Congress and an irreparable rift carved between the two Indian communities.

The war, which involved the British in a grim struggle for survival, gave the Indian Muslims chances of manœuvre for political advantage. In 1940, at the annual conference of the Muslim League at Lahore, they declared themselves to be a separate nation and demanded portions of India where they were numerically in a majority to be sliced off and constituted into a sovereign Muslim State. The idea was first propounded by the philosopher-poet of Islam, Allama Mohammad Iqbal, in his presidential address at the annual session of the Muslim League held at Allahabad in 1930. The philosophical speculations of the poet were given the shape of concrete political formulæ by a Muslim student at Cambridge, Chaudhri Rahmat Ali. In a pamphlet entitled *Now or Never*, published in 1933, he advocated the division of India into two spheres—Muslim and Hindu. He wrote,

"We do not inter-dine, we do not inter-marry. Our national customs and calendars, even our diet and dress, are different. Hence the Muslims demand the recognition of a separate national status." In the hands of a politician of Mr Mohammad Ali Jinnah's cold, unyielding logic, will and subtlety, this doctrine of separatism was charged with an ominously practical meaning. Pakistan—the word was coined by Chaudhri Rahmat Ali—became the accepted creed of the Muslims of India. Mr Jinnah once said:

> Let the British, before they quit, make an award giving the Muslims their bit of the country, however small it might be, and they would live there, if necessary on one meal a day.

These words truly reflected the temper of Muslim India. The Pakistan Resolution of the League, the culmination of the process which had started with the Anglo-Muslim parleys at Simla in 1906, had dealt a final blow to Indian unity. The solicitous prophecies of the community's British friends such as John Bright, William Hunter and Wilfred Scawen Blunt were fulfilled. John Bright had, nearly a century before, pointed out the impossibility of one Central government for the country. In 1883, Blunt had remarked in Calcutta that "the subcontinent should have two separate governments. a Muslim one in the north, a Hindu one in the south." British sympathy for the Muslim cause had found equally strong support in William Hunter's book entitled *The Wrongs of the Mohammadans under British Rule* which was published in 1871. The trend thus imparted to the course of history now achieved a decisive consummation.

To the Sikhs, the League Resolution came as a violent shock. Dismemberment of India, and their homeland, the Punjab, forming part of a sovereign theocratic Muslim State were proposals utterly unacceptable to them. They unanimously disapproved of the Muslim scheme of Pakistan. But the vehemence with which it was propagated by the League and the visible willingness of the British to yield ground to it made the Sikhs increasingly apprehensive of their own future. Lord Linlithgow, the Governor-General, whose regime in India was marked for repression of the nationalist movement, gave the Muslims the following assurance in his

well-known pronouncement of August, 1940:

> It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such Governments.

The possibility of a Muslim State coming into being was more specifically recognized in the British War Cabinet's formula presented to India by Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942. The Cripps proposal offered to give Indian provinces the right to choose whether they would join any union that might be formed at the end of the war or would stay out and form their own State, separately or in collaboration with other provinces similarly willing to stay out. Pakistan was thus clearly promised.

The Sikhs turned down the scheme enunciated by Sir Stafford Cripps. In a representation to him, the Sikh All-Parties Committee declared that the proposals were unacceptable to them because "instead of maintaining and strengthening the integrity of India, specific provision has been made for separation of provinces and the constitution of Pakistan and the cause of the Sikh community has been lamentably betrayed."

The representation further said:

> Why should a province that fails to secure three-fifths majority of its legislature in which a religious community enjoys statutory majority, be allowed to hold a plebiscite and given the benefit of a bare majority. In fairness, this right should have been conceded to communities who are in permanent minority in the legislature.
>
> Further, why could not the population of any area opposed to separation be given the right to record its verdict and to form an autonomous unit? We are sure you know that the Punjab proper extended up to the banks of the Jhelum, excluding Jhelum and Multan districts, and the trans-Jhelum area was added by the conquests of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and retained by the British for administrative convenience. It would be altogether unjust to allow extraneous trans-Jhelum population which only accidentally came into the province to dominate the future of the Punjab proper.
>
> We give below the figures which abundantly prove our contention:
>
> From the boundary of Delhi to the banks of the Ravi

river the population is divided as follows: Muslims, 4.505.000; Sikhs and other non-Muslims, 7,064,600. To this may be added the population of the Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala and Faridkot, which is about 2,600,000. Of this the Muslims constitute barely 20 per cent and this reduces the ratio of Muslim population still further.

We do not wish to labour the point any further. We have lost all hope of receiving any consideration. We shall resist, however, by all possible means separation of the Punjab from the all-India Union. We shall never permit our motherland to be at the mercy of those who disown it.

There was logic in the Sikh argument as well as deep anguish of the heart. Out of this argument were evolved certain formulations calculated to subtract non-Muslim areas of the Punjab from the orbit of the proposed Muslim State. One of these schemes known as Azad Punjab was advocated with some earnestness. It aimed at consolidating the territories of the Punjab where Hindus and Sikhs predominated into a unit separate from the Muslim Punjab. But all such proposals which were conceived as antidotes to Pakistan failed to halt the inexorable course of affairs leading up to the division of the country.

Mr Jinnah, who outwardly maintained an attitude of sullen and studious disregard towards the Sikhs, tried to cajole them privately. He knew in his heart of hearts that Sikh opposition to Pakistan was one real obstacle in his way and made several secret overtures to the leaders of the community. He chided them for being too subservient to Congress influence and held out all kinds of allurements, including the formation of an autonomous Sikh area inside Pakistan, if they would make up to him. Some British officers also conveyed similar offers to Sikh leaders to seduce them away from the Congress and, as it was said, "to enable them to have political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of world history." But the Sikhs refused to revoke their opposition to the Muslim League scheme of Pakistan or diverge from the path of nationalism. Though alarmed at the turn events were taking in the country, they never lost their balance nor missed the direction of their history.

Further shocks came. Evidence piled up to confirm the Sikhs' suspicions that Muslim exclusivism would be pampered endangering their own position in the Punjab. The offer

made by Shri C. Rajagopalachari in 1944 to the Muslim League caused deep perplexity among them. Conceding of the Muslim demand for Pakistan was the basis of the scheme devised by Shri Rajagopalachari. It completely ignored the interests of the Sikhs and drew a line, anyhow, across the Punjab splitting the community into two almost equal halves, one to remain in India and the other to become part of the Muslim State of Pakistan. The Sikhs considered these proposals an affront to themselves and called a special convention representing all sections of opinion to record their protest.

In the Simla Conference convened at the end of the European War by the Governor-General, Lord Wavell, to ease the political situation in the country, the Sikhs were given representation along with other communities. Their spokesman, Master Tara Singh, was among the twenty-one Indian leaders invited. The British Government's proposal for the establishment of an interim government representing Indian political parties was considered. Though Muslims were less than 25 per cent of the Indian population, they were offered an equal proportion of seats with the Hindus. The Governor-General invited the leaders assembled at Simla to make nominations on behalf of their parties for the new Government which was to replace his Executive Council. Congress and the Sikhs complied, but Jinnah refused. He insisted on all Muslim members of the Government being the nominees of the League and objected to any Muslim name coming from the Congress. Congress could not submit to this unreasonable condition. It was an inter-communal party with sizable Muslim membership. Its President at that time was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the renowned Muslim scholar and statesman, who was among the leaders participating in the Conference. But Mr Jinnah would not let it impinge on his exclusive right of making the nominations for Muslim seats. The Conference was deadlocked on this point, and, on July 14, 1945, Lord Wavell reluctantly announced the failure of his efforts. By wrecking the Simla conference, Mr Jinnah demonstrated that he alone had the authority to speak on behalf of the Muslim community. This dissipated the morale of the Muslims who belonged to other political parties and had kept out of the communal politics of the

Muslim League.

The Labour Government which took office in Britain in consequence of a national election in the summer of 1945, displacing the Conservative leader, Winston Churchill, promised an "early realization of full self-government in India." It sent out a special mission consisting of three cabinet ministers, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr A. V. Alexander, to negotiate with Indian leaders and settle the basis of an interim government and a constitution-making body for the country. Talks with various Indian parties dragged on for three months, but no arrangement acceptable to all of them could be evolved owing, primarily, to the intransigent attitude of the Muslim League. The Cabinet Mission thereupon worked out a plan of its own which was announced on May 16, 1946. Retaining the semblance of a central structure, the substance of the Muslim claim for autonomy was conceded. Three separate zones were proposed, two of which were to consist of Muslim majority provinces. Each provincial group was to have its own constituent assembly to draw up its constitution. A transitional government wholly Indian in composition, except for the Governor-General, was to be set up immediately at Delhi.

The Cabinet Mission proposals contained hardly anything for the Sikhs beyond a rather solicitous reference to them. They were recognized as an important minority like the Muslims and one of the three main Indian parties, yet they were not accorded the communal veto such as the Muslims had in determining the future constitution, nor were they guaranteed any protection against the Muslim majority rule. In the Constituent Assembly of Section B to which Punjab had been assigned, they were to have four seats, Hindus 9 and Muslims 23. The Muslims outnumbering Sikhs and Hindus together, could have established in the region unfettered communal authority. The Sikhs could not regard such an outlook with equanimity. The scheme was subjected to bitter censure at a widely representative Sikh assembly at Amritsar on June 9 and 10. Over a thousand Sikhs drawn from the various organizations attended the meeting. Among them were the Congress Sikhs, Akalis, Nirmalas, Namdharis, and Nihangs.

The Sikhs' sense of injury and anxiety found expression

in many a scathing speech. Most pungent and eloquent was Jathedar Udham Singh Nagoke, a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, who said that their enemy was neither Jinnah nor the Muslims, but the British who had badly let them down. To make sacrifices for their own preservation, he called for a volunteer corps of two lakhs of Sikhs, the same number as the community had given to the Indian army during World War II. Another member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, with tears in his eyes, said that the only way to right the wrong done to the Sikhs by the British was to be prepared for making sacrifices for the sake of the community. Among others, who spoke at the Conference, were Bhai Jodh Singh, Principal of Khalsa College, Amritsar, Bawa Harkishan Singh, Principal of Khalsa College, Gujranwala, Sardar Amar Singh of the Sikh Students' Federation, Bawa Bachittar Singh, a wealthy business man of Delhi, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Master Tara Singh and Jathedar Mohan Singh of the Akal Takht who conducted the proceedings of the meeting. On the second day, the main resolution condemning the British Cabinet Mission's proposals was moved by Sardar Bahadur Ujjal Singh and seconded by Giani Kartar Singh. The resolution which was passed unanimously read as under:

> This representative gathering of Sikhs assembled in Amritsar has given anxious and earnest consideration to the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission read with subsequent elucidation and is of the opinion that these recommendations will perpetuate the slavery of the country rather than promote the independence of India.
>
> The recommendations are particularly unjust to Sikhs regard being had *inter alia* to matters specified hereunder:
>
> (a) That the Cabinet Mission while recognizing that the establishment of Pakistan would in particular affect adversely the position of Sikhs have yet by compulsory grouping of provinces made recommendations which in the words of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, "make it possible for Muslims to secure all the advantages of Pakistan without incurring the danger inherent in it."
>
> (b) That the Cabinet Mission while admitting that the cultural, political and social life of Muslims might become submerged in a purely unitary India in which Hindus with their greatly superior numbers must be a dominant element—and this in spite of the fact that Muslims are 9 crores in population and constitute a majority in several provinces of India—have deliberately blinded themselves to the same danger to a greater degree

to Sikhs under Muslim domination which is thought to be aggravated by the proposed constitution. Needless to add that even under the existing constitution, Sikhs have been reduced to a position of complete helplessness which had already exasperated them to the verge of revolt.

(c) That while admitting that the Punjab is the "homeland" of Sikhs, the Cabinet Mission has by its recommendations liquidated the position of Sikhs in their homeland.

(d) That the Advisory Committee set up in Paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission's statement is wholly ineffective to safeguard the just rights of Sikhs.

(e) That while the Cabinet Mission made provisions for the protection of the rights and interests of Hindus and Muslims on major communal issues they have made no such provision for the protection of the rights and interests of Sikhs in the Union or the provincial sphere.

Therefore this Panthic gathering expresses strong condemnation of the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission and declares that they are wholly unacceptable to Sikhs. This gathering further affirms that no constitution will be acceptable to Sikhs which does not meet their just demands and is settled without their consent.

Another resolution to signify the Sikhs' resolve to resist the implementation of the British Cabinet Mission's plan, a Council of Action, with Colonel Narinjan Singh Gill of the Indian National Army as President, was formed and a representative association called the Pratinidhi Panthic Board to guide the affairs of the community during that crucial period in the history of the country was constituted. The Board consisted of Master Tara Singh; Colonel Narinjan Singh Gill; Bhai Jodh Singh; Sardar Baldev Singh, Development Minister, Punjab; Jathedar Udham Singh Nagoke, M.L.A.; Sardar Sarmukh Singh Chamak, President, Ramgarhia Federation; Sant Nidhan Singh Alam of the Namdhari Darbar; Giani Kartar Singh, M.L.A.; Bawa Harkishan Singh, Principal, Khalsa College, Gujranwala; Babu Labh Singh, President, Shiromani Akali Dal; Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Member, Working Committee, Punjab Congress; Sardar Basant Singh of Moga; Colonel Raghbir Singh, an ex-Minister of Patiala state; a representative of the Chief Khalsa Diwan; a representative of Nirmala Sikhs and a representative of Nihang Singhs.

Soon after the Sikhs' conference at Amritsar, Master Tara Singh wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "Since the British Cabinet Mission's recommendations for the future constitution of India have been published, a wave of dejection,

resentment and indignation has run throughout the Sikh community. The reasons are quite obvious.

"The Sikhs have been entirely thrown at the mercy of the Muslims. Group B comprises the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan, and the representation given to each community will be—Muslims twenty-three, Hindus nine and Sikhs four. Can anybody expect from the assembly, constituted as it is, any consideration or justice for the Sikhs? The Cabinet Mission recognizes 'the very genuine and acute anxiety among the Sikhs lest they should find themselves subjected to a perpetual Muslim majority rule! If the British Government are not aware of Sikh feeling, the Sikhs will have to resort to some measures in order to convince everybody concerned of the Sikh anxiety in case they are subjected to a perpetual Muslim domination. The Cabinet Mission has not only put under Muslim domination the non-Muslim areas of the Punjab and Bengal but the whole province of Assam where the non-Muslims are in overwhelming majority. This is evidently done to placate the Muslims."

While the Sikhs had unreservedly repudiated both the long-term as well as short-term proposals made by the Cabinet Mission, the Congress and the Muslim League received them with mixed feelings. For the Congress the criterion was how far they satisfied the Indian aspiration for deliverance from British rule. The League judged them from the scope they provided the Muslims for secession from India. The principle of grouping was a clear concession in the direction of Muslim autonomy. But Mr Jinnah resented the retention of any central authority. Assured that the British had decided to free India and take their departure, he resolved to make a final bid for having the country split to secure the Muslims their separate State. To create a new sanction in favour of the Muslim claim, a scheme of violence was prepared. Its dual object was to irreparably deepen the cleavage between the two communities and to intimidate both Government and the Congress into submission.

The Council of the Muslim League meeting in Bombay adopted on July 27, 1946, the famous Direct Action resolution. It was a declaration of war against non-Muslim India. The resolution of the League Council ran as follows:

> Whereas the League has today resolved to reject the proposals embodied in the Statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy of May 16, 1946. due to the intransigence of Congress on the one hand and the breach of faith with the Muslims by the British Government on the other ; and whereas Muslim India has exhausted without success all efforts to find a peaceful solution of the Indian problem by compromise and constitutional means ; whereas the Congress is bent upon setting up a Caste Hindu Raj in India with the connivance of the British, and whereas recent events have shown that power politics and not justice and fairplay are the deciding factors in Indian affairs ; whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest content with anything less than the immediate establishment of an independent and fully sovereign state of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any constitution, long-term or short-term, or setting up of any Interim Government at the Centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League, the Council of the All-India Muslim League is convinced that the time has now come for the Muslim nation to resort to direct action to vindicate their honour and to get rid of the present slavery under the British and contemplated future of Caste Hindu domination.
>
> This Council calls upon the Muslim nation to stand to a man behind their sole representative organization, the All-India Muslim League, and be ready for every sacrifice.
>
> The Council directs the Working Committee to prepare forthwith a programme of direct action to carry out the policy enunciated above and to organize the Muslims for the coming struggle to be launched as and when necessary.

The passing of the resolution was accompanied by scenes of wild excitement and outbursts of unrestrained incendiarism. Highly provocative speeches were made. Mr Jinnah defiantly declared, "What we have done today is the most historic act in our history. Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods and by constitutionalism. But now we are obliged and forced into this position. This day we bid goodbye to constitutional methods ... Today, we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it." Explaining the implications of the Direct Action threat, Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, General Secretary of the League, said, "Direct Action means resort to non-constitutional methods that can take any form which may suit the conditions under which we live. We cannot eliminate any methods. Direct Action means any action against the law." Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar spoke in more forthright terms : "Pakistan can only be achieved through shedding blood of others. Muslims are

no believers in Ahimsa."

This decree of violence and jingoism was enthusiastically embraced by the Muslim masses. The Working Committee of the League called upon them to observe August 16 as the Direct Action Day. Preparations for the occasion were solemnly put in hand. It was a time of anxious suspense and foreboding for the country. The League was gathering a private army of its own called the Muslim National Guards. Arms were being secretly amassed, petrol stored up and lethal weapons such as swords, daggers and knives laid by. Muslim League volunteers were especially trained in the skills of stabbing and fire-raising. Along with this a chorus of hate and inflammatory exhortation flowed from the League pulpiteers and newspaper. Communal frenzy was worked up to a dangerous pitch. On the appointed day the storm burst.

In Calcutta, the Muslim League gave a foretaste of the civil war with which it had been threatening the country. Conditions there were particularly favourable with a League ministry, under Mr H. S. Suhrawardy, holding charge of the provincial administration. Premier Suhrawardy, extremely impetuous and volatile, made intemperate pronouncements and gave a free rein to trouble-makers. He declared the League Direct Action Day a public holiday in Bengal. To ensure that the League did not lack means of arson, he issued to his Cabinet colleagues special coupons for 700 gallons of petrol which was in short supply in those days and was strictly rationed. These coupons were passed on to League volunteers who let loose horror on the Hindu population of Calcutta on the morning of August 16. Stabbing, looting and burning were the order of the day. For four days the League desperadoes had the city at their mercy, rioting and killing at will. The police watched on without trying to interfere. It acted only where there was any chance of the Hindus retaliating. According to a rough estimate at the time, nearly 5,000 lives were lost in the Calcutta killing, over 15,000 persons were injured and about one hundred thousand were rendered homeless.

A week before the League's Direct Action Day, Congress had accepted the invitation extended by the Viceroy to form an interim government. The Muslim League, bent on

making a show of its secret strength, had declined the offer. The third important Indian party, the Sikhs, though sorely resentful of the British proposals, joined hands with the Congress in forming a Government at the Centre. On Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's appeal, the Panthic Board at their meeting on August 14, while reiterating that the Cabinet Mission scheme was unjust to the Sikhs, retracted their boycott of it. Sardar Baldev Singh was nominated as the Sikh representative for the Interim Government which was sworn in on September 2, 1946. The Muslim League's attitude towards Pandit Nehru's Government was summed up in the words of Mr Suhrawardy who had said that if the Congress were put into power, the result would be "the declaration of complete independence by Bengal and the setting up of a permanent government." "We will see," he added, "that no revenue is received by such central government from Bengal and consider ourselves as a separate State having no connection with the centre." A little later, however, the Muslim League agreed to enter the Interim Government, reserving its decision with regard to the Constituent Assembly. Its sole purpose in joining the Interim Government was to disrupt it from within so that no central authority could strike root in the country prejudicing the Muslim claim for a separate State.

The Constituent Assembly was scheduled to convene on December 9 and yet another attempt was made to bring about a settlement between the major parties and secure the League's co-operation. Representatives of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Sikhs were invited for discussions with Prime Minister Attlee and his colleagues. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Baldev Singh, Mr Jinnah and Mr Liaqat Ali, together with the Viceroy, flew to London on December 2. The Sikh representative supported the Congress standpoint on all major issues. But the negotiations broke down owing to Mr Jinnah's stubbornness. Mr Nehru and Sardar Baldev Singh returned to India on the fifth day, while Mr Jinnah stayed back to canvass his claim for a sovereign Muslim State. The main argument in his speeches was that India's choice lay between Pakistan and civil war. In a broadcast to the United States of America from London, he observed, "The sooner Britain declared its intention of giving effect to Pakistan, the greater the chance of avoiding

a terrific disaster."

The threat was being vindicated by a calculated programme of violence. The assumption of office by the Interim Government was received by the Muslims of Bombay with an attack on the Hindus. Three days later there was another outbreak of trouble in Calcutta. But what happened in October in the remoter, overwhelmingly Muslim districts of Noakhali and Tippera was unsurpassed for the outrages committed. Hundreds of Hindus were cruelly done to death, their womenfolk abducted and compelled to marry Muslims and their property looted. Large masses of people were forcibly converted to Islam. The Muslim League Government of Bengal did not let the news of the carnage go out for many days, but, when it did trickle through. there were reprisals in Bihar where Muslims suffered terror and atrocity. Mahatma Gandhi reproved the Hindus for what they were doing in Bihar and said that he would fast unto death unless they called a halt to that madness. This quickly restored peace in the troubled areas. Mahatma Gandhi visited Noakhali and walking barefoot toured dozens of riot-affected villages to heal the prevailing discords. The Sikhs of Calcutta did a notable humanitarian job at the time of the Great Killing saving many innocent lives in Hindu as well as Muslim localities.

The rioting became fiercer as it spread northwards. The Muslim populations of these regions were more easily excitable and, when they chose Sikhs to be their main target, their malevolence knew no limits. In the eyes of the Muslim League, the Sikhs were the only real obstruction to Pakistan. As Justice G. D. Khosla, Chairman of the Fact Finding Organization, set up by the Government of India, observed, "The Sikhs had opposed the partition of India with even greater vigour than the Hindus, because they felt that as a community they could only expect disaster in Pakistan ; it was, therefore, against the Sikhs that the spear-point of the Muslim League attack was first aimed. In the March riots, the Sikhs of Rawalpindi faced annihilation and large numbers of them left the district. Within a few weeks almost the entire Sikh population had migrated from the district."

The anti-Sikh pogrom was started from the district of Hazara in the North-West Frontier Province in the first week

of December, 1946. The Muslim masses had been ceaselessly fed on fanatical invective against Hindus and Sikhs. Highly coloured and exaggerated accounts of the happenings in Bihar were circulated to excite their wrath. Another point of attack was the Congress ministry which had assumed administration of the North-West Frontier Province after defeating the Muslim League in the provincial legislature. The district of Hazara, dominated by Punjabi-speaking Muslims, was particularly susceptible to the League propaganda. A "holy war" was declared on Hindus and Sikhs who were in a microscopic minority in the district. Local Muslims were joined by tribal marauders in an orgy of slaughter and plunder. Sikh habitations were wiped out, Gurdwaras were desecrated and evacuees from places of danger ambushed and massacred. Large numbers of despoiled, helpless refugees immigrated to the Punjab seeking asylum, especially, in the Sikh states of Patiala and Faridkot. Most sorrowful among them were those who had been forcibly shorn of their sacred locks.

By its policy of lawlessness and bloodshed the Muslim League had forced the issue of Pakistan and extracted acquiescence from the British as well as the people of India except, of course, the Sikhs. In the Interim Cabinet its nominees acted with the motive of obstructing its functioning as a composite responsible government and of subverting the whole process. For the Congress leaders this was an utterly frustrating experience. With the temper that the Muslims had developed, the division of India seemed inevitable.

On February 20, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee announced in the House of Commons the Government's definite intention of transferring power to India without waiting for a settlement of the communal problem. Administration was to be handed over on a date not later than June, 1948, to "some form of Central Government for British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments..." Pakistan now seemed nearer than ever before and the League directed its energies towards capturing power in the provinces in which Muslims were in a majority so that it could inherit authority in those areas upon the withdrawal of the British.

Against Sir Khizar Hayat Khan's Government in the province of the Punjab, which represented a coalition of the

Unionist Party, Congress and the Sikhs under a Muslim Premier, the League had already launched a direct action campaign. In view of Mr Attlee's statement, it became even more important for it to oust Sir Khizar and take the reins of government into its own hands. Sir Khizar at last gave way before the mounting anger of the Muslim masses and the vile obloquy and billingsgate hurled on him. He laid down office on March 2 making room for the Muslim League to set up its own government. Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor, invited the Khan of Mamdot, the leader of the Muslim League Party in the provincial assembly, to form a ministry. The Muslim League had a strength of 79 in a house of 175 and needed the support of a few more members to gain a majority.

The Muslim League made desperate efforts to win over the Sikh group in the legislature. Messages were sent to Panthic leaders who were holding a meeting at the residence of Sardar Swaran Singh, a former colleague of Sir Khizar's in the Coalition Ministry. Tempting offers were made. Since the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, the Sikhs had never had more than one seat in the Punjab cabinet. Now the Muslim League proposed three seats for them in a cabinet of eight, with four Muslims and one agriculturist Hindu. Assurances of a fair share for the Sikhs at all levels of the administration were given. Sir Evan Jenkins, who had at the time of the League agitation deputed a British official to meet the Sikh leaders and mooted the possibility of a Sikh State within Pakistan if they would give up their opposition to it, also tried to get the Muslim League the help of the Panthic legislators. But the Sikhs turned down all such overtures. They were not willing to place the Punjab at the mercy of the Muslims and thus make a gift of it to the Muslim State of Pakistan which then appeared a certainty.

The Sikh leaders had viewed the Muslim civil disobedience movement against the Coalition Government of Sir Khizar Hayat Khan with particular concern and correctly judged its real character. To quote from the official report of the Muslim Chief Secretary of the Punjab Government, "Among Hindus and Sikhs resentment at the agitation is growing and, particularly in the case of the latter in an ominous degree. On the 12th of February, in the second statement he has issued against the agitation since it started, Master Tara Singh

declared that it was communal in its essentials and had as its purpose the domination of the Punjab by Muslims. He called on the Sikhs to prepare themselves to face the Muslim League onslaught and towards this end to reorganize the Akal Fauj."

Master Tara Singh now dramatically announced Sikhs' disassociation from ministry-making in the Punjab. Coming out of the assembly chamber at the head of a small group of twenty-two Panthic members of the legislature, he started shouting anti-Pakistan slogans. "Down with Pakistan," chimed in other members of the party. A vast concourse of Muslims stood outside anxious for the news of the formation of a League ministry. The crowds went wild with rage to hear the slogans. They would have cut the Sikhs to shreds and muffled their voice of protest but for the intervention of Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, a Congressman turned Muslim Leaguer, who was able to persuade them to let the Sikhs pass unmolested. The Sikh leaders had taken a grave risk, but this decisive action of theirs caught history by the forelock. It unmasked the real intentions of the Muslim League in the Punjab and gave a timely warning to the Hindus and Sikhs whose spirit and morale gained fresh strength from it. A substantial step had been taken towards saving at least part of the Punjab from being thrown into Pakistan.

Chagrined at their failure to seize power in the Punjab, the Muslims wilfully laid a spark to the highly combustible situation which they had wrought by their relentless campaign of hate and bellicosity and their secret warlike preparations. Stabbing assaults on Hindus and Sikhs began in Lahore on March 4. These were followed by large-scale arson and murder. Non-Muslim business campuses and residential localities were looted and set on fire. The following day the trouble spread to Amritsar. March 5 is the annual Convocation Day at the Sikhs' famed seat of learning—the Khalsa College. Taking his University degree at the ceremony, an unsuspecting Sikh youth, Mohan Singh, with the exultation of the event still in his heart, came out into town. In the centre of the main shopping street, called Hall Bazaar, he was pounced upon by a Muslim crowd and gored to death on the spot. This was the signal for a general massacre and incendiarism. Minutes after the murder in Hall Bazaar, a

party of leading Sikh citizens of Amritsar, including Bhai Vir Singh, the famous poet and philosopher, were caught up in the Muslim crowd while returning from a meeting of the Punjab and Sind Bank. One of the mob leaders recognized the Sikh savant and dissuaded his comrades from attacking the dignitaries.

Maddened with the desire to kill, Muslim mobs milled the streets of the city of Golden Temple killing whoever they could lay their hands on and setting ablaze whole blocks of houses and shops belonging to Hindus and Sikhs. They set out in a huge mass the following evening to attack the Golden Temple, but were beaten back in a pitched street-fight by a handful of Sikhs under the leadership of Jathedar Udham Singh Nagoke. The same day a train coming into the city was held up by the Muslims of Sharifpura, a suburb of Amritsar, and its Hindu and Sikh passengers singled out for slaughter. In Amritsar, Hindus and Sikhs were evenly matched with the Muslims in numbers and they could have given back to the latter as good as they got, but the police, predominantly Muslim, while taking no chances where there was any possibility of retaliation, gave the aggressors a completely free hand.

Odds against the Sikhs were heavier in Multan and Rawalpindi which, simultaneously with Amritsar, witnessed the outbreak of disorder on the same day (March 5). In Multan, it started with an attack on a peaceful procession of Hindu and Sikh students protesting against the firing on students in Lahore. Soon the whole city was in the hands of the assassins. For three days stabbing and looting continued unchecked. Of the first eight persons killed, seven were Sikhs. Dr Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew, a leading Muslim Congressman, who happened to be on a visit to Multan barely escaped with his life. His host, Seth Kalyan Das, was murdered. His palatial house was sprayed with petrol and set to fire.

The sledge-hammer of Muslim violence fell most disastrously on the Sikhs in Rawalpindi division. In the rural areas of the Western districts where they were severely outnumbered, they faced total annihilation. Frenzied Muslim mobs would assemble from all over, beating drums and shouting their religious war-cries. They would trap the scanty Sikh populations in their villages and start making short work of

them. Sikhs were hunted down in their homes, in Gurdwaras and in the shelters offered them by friendly local Muslims. Indiscriminate murder was the fate of those who fell into the hands of the raiders. Neither woman nor child was spared. The holocausts Sikhs had suffered at the hands of Ahmad Shah Durrani were thrown into the shade by this organized butchery. What the Sikhs were suddenly confronted with is described by General Sir Frank Messervey, G.O.C.-in-C Northern Command, who wrote :

> The main attack, if you can call it that, took place on a night—I think March 7th—when unfortunately I had a sort of "coming-out" party for my daughter in Command House. There had been little warning, though some small preliminary rioting had led us to have the British battalion in 'Pindi at short notice. It was a concerted attack, and very widespread throughout the rural areas, which suggested that it had been planned, and made it very difficult to deal with—entirely different from the normal communal riots in large cities. I flew in a small plane low over villages in the 'Pindi district, where there was a mixture of Muslim and Sikh population. It was a horrible sight. You could see corpses laid out in the fields just outside a village, like rabbits after a shoot. As many reliable people said, the attacks seemed to be almost entirely anti-Sikh. I remember one of my staff, a G.2, who went down to 'Pindi station to get a ticket on a warrant, coming back very white-faced, to say that while he was at the ticket-office he had felt a weight against his back, and turned to find it was a Sikh stabbed in the back and dead, but not a soul would say they had seen anybody do it. Also, I remember an officer's wife arriving by train. The train had been stopped outside Chaklala and she heard shrieks and groans (the time was just about dawn). She lowered a shutter, and looked out, to find Sikhs being dragged out of the carriages and hacked to pieces by the side of the line. She was horrified and screamed, whereupon one of the band came up to her carriage and said. "Don't be frightened, Memsahib, nobody will harm you. We've just got this job to do, and then the train will go on."

In face of this ruthless onslaught, the Sikhs did not fail to reproduce their inheritance of courageous and heroic action. They fought back the invading crowds bravely, at places single-handed, holding them at bay. Many won laurels of martyrdom while trying to protect their Gurdwaras from desecration. The womenfolk jumped into wells to save themselves the dishonour of being captured by the marauders. In the village of Thoha Khalsa alone, 93 Sikh women immo-

lated themselves thus. To their *Ardas*, or daily prayer, which recounts deeds of Sikh heroism and martyrdom, the Sikhs now added new stirring lines as indeed they had done at all difficult periods of their history.

CHAPTER XXI

MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT

FROM Rawalpindi division the flames fanned out to North-West Frontier Province. Here again the Sikhs were the first objective of attack.

With the change of Viceroyalty in March, 1947, there arrived upon the scene Lord Mountbatten, resolved to give a further momentum to the march of history. He accelerated the date of British withdrawal from June, 1948, to August 14. 1947, and set feverishly to working out the details of the procedure. Caught in this whirlwind of events, the Sikhs were again outpaced and they lost that decisive influence in the affairs of the Punjab to which they thought they were entitled by virtue of their spiritual and economic involvement in the region.

Though Lord Mountbatten's brief was to work for a unitary government for India on the basis of the Cabinet Mission plan, he soon realized that the communal chasm in India had deepened beyond repair. The eastern and north-western parts of the country were engulfed in a civil war. The functioning of the central government at Delhi had been petrified by the intractability of the League ministers who had joined the Interim Cabinet "not to bless it, but to curse it." Slicing the country into two sovereign States seemed the only way out of the impasse.

A Sikh lawyer, Sardar Narotam Singh, made a lone and, apparently, belated and profitless attempt, to halt the chaotic procession of events and prevent the division of the country. He made a petition to the Governor-General in Council that, since the Muslim League was an association which encouraged and aided persons to commit acts of violence and intimidation and interfered with the administration of the land, it should be declared an unlawful association under Section 16(2) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.

The Sikhs' concern now was to save for India and for themselves as much of the Punjab as they could from going into the Muslim State of Pakistan which was in process of formation. The old Sikh leader, Baba Kharak Singh, in a

press statement on April 14 said, "I am a staunch advocate of Akhand (undivided) Hindustan ... Should, however, partition become inevitable and be unfortunately thrust upon us, I would plead for adequate safeguards and legitimate protection for the non-Muslim minorities living in the territories proposed to be partitioned."

The Shiromani Akali Dal at a meeting at Amritsar made a concrete proposal and said, in a resolution, that partition of the Punjab was the only remedy to end communal strife in the Punjab. For purposes of determining the boundaries, the Akali Dal suggested the appointment of a Boundary Commission. On April 18, Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, Defence Member in the Interim Government, met Lord Mountbatten and put forward a plea for the division of the Punjab. To ensure, as far as possible, the solidarity of the Sikhs and to protect their special interests in the farmlands in the irrigation colonies and their religious shrines such as Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, they proposed the Chenab as the boundary line. The idea received influential support from Congress leaders. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in a public speech on April 20 declared, "The Muslim League can have Pakistan if they wish to have it, but on the condition that they do not take away other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan." When the Constituent Assembly met on April 28, the President, Dr Rajendra Prasad said, "While we have accepted the Cabinet Mission's Statement of May 16, 1946, which contemplated a Union of the different provinces and states within the country, it may be that the Union may not comprise all provinces. If that unfortunately comes to pass, we shall have to be content with a constitution for a part of it. In that case, we can and should insist that one principle will apply to all parts of the country and no constitution will be forced upon any unwilling part of it. This may mean not only the division of India, but a division of some provinces. For this we must be prepared and the Assembly may have to draw up a constitution based on such a division."

Sardar Swaran Singh, who was the Sikhs' representative in the Khizar Ministry in the Punjab before it fell in the commotion created by the Muslim League, said on May 10 that the Sikhs were determined not to remain under Muslim sub-

jugation. He reiterated the Sikh demand for the division of the Punjab along the natural boundary of the Chenab to secure a fair distribution of the population, property and provincial assets.

The prospect of the Punjab being parcelled out into two parts repelled the Muslims. This, in their eyes, amounted to the erosion of their demand for Pakistan. Mr Jinnah spoke out acidly on April 30 and denounced the proposal for the partition of the provinces as "a sinister move, actuated by spite and bitterness." Efforts were also made to win over the Sikhs and bring them round to giving up their demand for apportioning the Punjab between India and Pakistan. One of the League leaders, Shaukat Hayat Khan, said in a statement that, under a Muslim League government, the Sikhs' legitimate rights would be fully considered and "justice meted out to all freely and equally." But the Sikhs knew well enough what these assurances were worth. They were still nursing their injury for the indiscriminate death and indignity heaped on them by the Muslims in their giant murderous assault in the name of Pakistan.

Some British officers also explored the chances of a last-minute *rapprochement* to prevent the vivisection of the Punjab and of the Sikh population. A plan which was pursued with some assiduity emanated from the Muslim Princely state of Bahawalpur. Mr Penderel Moon of the Indian Civil Service, who was then Revenue and Public Works Minister at Bahawalpur, had some friends among the Sikhs. Through Sardar Sant Singh, who was Prime Minister of the Sikh Princely state of Nabha, he made approaches to the Sikh leaders including Sardar Baldev Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Master Tara Singh. Taking into confidence Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani, who was his Prime Minister at Bahawalpur, Mr Moon offered to secure the Sikhs (i) a separate unit of Eastern Punjab with a position in Pakistan equal to that of any other unit such as Sind or Western Punjab; (ii) special privileges for the Sikh minority in Western Punjab; and (iii) special privileges for the Sikhs in Pakistan as a whole.

The Sikhs were not prepared to consider any proposals for a settlement with the League and to abrogate their commitment to the nationalist cause. As Mr Moon says in his book,*

* *Divide and Quit*: Chatto and Windus.

the Sikh leader he was scheduled to meet at Lahore failed to turn up at the appointed rendezvous. "It was obvious that he was not interested and had other policies in mind."

At the instance of the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, two of the Sikh Princes of the Punjab held separate talks with Mr Jinnah. The League leader repeated his usual assurances for the protection of the rights of their community but the Sikh rulers were too well trained in the art of statecraft to put their trust in the vague guarantees offered. The negotiations started by the Viceroy were foredoomed to failure.

Meanwhile, Lord Mountbatten, who had given up all hope of being able to keep India united, evolved a new plan based on the principle of partition. To secure the approval of His Majesty's Government, he made a hurried trip to London accompanied by his Reforms Secretary, Mr V. P. Menon, who had supplied the initial draft of the scheme. The British Cabinet approved the plan, and the statement to be issued on behalf of His Majesty's Government was finalized. June 2 was fixed for the plan to be presented to the Indian leaders.

The Mountbatten plan envisaged the division of the country into two dominions. India and Pakistan, and the establishment of a second and separate Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives of those areas which decided not to participate in the existing Constituent Assembly. Procedure was outlined to ascertain the will of the minorities in both Bengal and the Punjab whether they wished to join the new Constituent Assembly or the old one. The Legislative Assemblies of these provinces (excluding the European members) were each to meet in two parts, one representing the Muslim majority districts according to the 1941 census figures and the other the rest of the province. The members of the two parts of each Legislative Assembly sitting separately were to vote whether or not the province should be partitioned. If either part by a simple majority decided in favour of partition, the province was to be divided. In the event of a decision involving partition of a province being taken, a Boundary Commission was to be set up. Apparently as a sop to the Sikhs, it was laid down that in demarcating the boundaries, the Commission would be "instructed to take into account other factors" besides that of the population.

Lord Mountbatten returned to Delhi on May 31 and, at

the meeting of the Indian leaders on June 2, he said that "he was most distressed about the position of the Sikhs. He did not think that any other single question had been discussed in London at such great length as this. He had repeatedly asked the Sikh leaders whether they desired the partition of the Punjab. The Sikhs were so spread out over the Punjab that any partition would necessarily divide their community. For the purpose of 'notional partition' different formulæ had been examined, but no solution had been found to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs. It had not been possible to adopt any principle other than division between Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority areas. The notional partition would be entirely provisional. The Boundary Commission, on which Sikh interests would of course be represented, would have to work out the best permanent solution."

Sardar Baldev Singh, representing the Sikhs, conveyed acceptance of the principle of partition as enunciated in the plan, but urged that the problems of the Sikhs and their demands be kept in view while framing the terms of reference for the Boundary Commission. Shri J. B. Kripalani, the Congress President, wrote to the Viceroy the same evening a lengthy letter in which he made a reference to the Sikhs. He said that His Majesty's plan would result in injury to them unless great care was taken and their peculiar position in the Punjab was fully protected.

The next morning (June 3), when the Viceroy resumed his conference with the leaders to acquaint them with the replies he had received from the three political parties, Sardar Baldev Singh proposed that instructions to the Boundary Commission should be included in the statement to be issued by Government. The Viceroy did not wish to risk a discussion on details and persuaded him not to press the point.

In the evening, the Viceroy broadcast over the All-India Radio. He declared that, much as he wished, it had not been possible to obtain agreement on the Cabinet Mission plan or on any other plan that would preserve the unity of India. He outlined the main features of the scheme. Referring to the Sikhs, he said that they were so distributed that any partition of the Punjab would inevitably divide them. It was, the Viceroy added, sad to think that the partition of the Punjab, which the Sikhs themselves desired, could not

avoid splitting them to a greater or lesser degree. The exact degree of split would be left to the Boundary Commission on which they were to be represented.

After the Viceroy had spoken, His Majesty's Government's statement was broadcast and released to the press. Then the three Indian leaders, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr M. A. Jinnah and Sardar Baldev Singh, representing the three major political parties, made their broadcasts one after the other. The Mountbatten formula was accepted. The Indian parties agreed to divide the country. Why the Sikhs had proposed partition of the Punjab was still not quite clear to Lord Mountbatten who, at a press conference on June 4, said. "I found that it was mainly at the request of the Sikh community that the Congress had put forward the resolution on the partition of the Punjab. I was not aware of all the details. and, when I sent for the map and studied the distribution of the Sikh population, I was astounded to find that the plan which they had produced divided this community into two almost equal parts. I have spent a great deal of time seeing whether there was any solution which would keep the Sikh community more together. I am not a miracle worker and I have not found that solution." For the Sikhs this momentous decision of their history was easily made once the principle of future political development in the country had become perceptible.

The Congress, after having worked for a while with Liaqat Ali Khan and his colleagues in the Interim Government, had realized how futile it was chasing the mirage of a united India in face of the fanaticism of the Muslim League. So Pandit Nehru gave his acceptance. Talking thirteen years later to a British journalist, Leonard Mosley, he said, "The truth is that we were tired men, and we were getting on in years too ... We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard every day of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it." Mr Jinnah, an ill man and anxious to secure within his own lifetime whatever he could, swallowed the bitter pill and accepted a "truncated" Pakistan. The Sikhs acquiesced in the arrangement approved by nationalist India. For the protection of their interests, they now trusted to the Boundary Commission which was to be set up to draw the dividing line on the map of the Punjab.

While, perhaps, each of the three parties accepted the

June 3 proposals as being, from its own viewpoint, the best obtainable in the prevailing political moods, there was wide acclaim for the earnestness and boldness of policy displayed by the British Government. Typical of the general reaction were the enthusiastic comments of Walter Lippmann who wrote in *The Washington Post* :

> Perhaps Britain's finest hour is not in the past. Certainly this performance is not the work of a decadent people. This on the contrary is the work of political genius requiring the ripest wisdom and the freshest vigour and it is done with an elegance and a style that will compel and will receive an instinctive respect throughout the civilized world. Attlee and Mountbatten have done a service to all mankind by showing what statesmen can do not with force and money but with lucidity, resolution and sincerity.

When the Punjab Legislative Assembly met to vote whether to join the Constituent Assembly at Delhi or a new one, the Muslim majority, as expected, turned the scales in favour of the latter course. Members from the Muslim majority areas of West Punjab, sitting separately, decided by sixty-nine votes to twenty-seven against the partition of the province. But the members from the non-Muslim majority areas of East Punjab decided in their meeting, by fifty votes to twenty-two, to secede and join the existing Constituent Assembly at Delhi.

To split the provinces of Punjab and Bengal, two separate Boundary Commissions were constituted. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, an expert on arbitration, who had been called out from England, was appointed chairman of both. He had not been to India before. His absolute neutrality between the Indian political parties and communities was cited, especially to the Sikhs, as his strongest credential for the momentous task entrusted to him. Sir Cyril arrived in Delhi on July 8 and Independence day, fixed for August 15, was a bare five weeks away. During this short time he had to complete his incredibly complicated and delicate assignment. Besides the Chairman, the Punjab Boundary Commission had four other members, all judges of the Punjab High Court. One of them was a Hindu, Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan, and two were Muslims, Justices Din Mohammad and Mohammad Munir. Justice Teja Singh was the Sikh member. He had lost a large

number of his relations in a Muslim riot in Rawalpindi. But people's hearts had turned so bloodless in those days of communal madness that a suggestion to the Muslim League Committee by the Governor of Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, for a condolence visit to the bereaved Sardar was unceremoniously rejected.

The Sikhs' attention was now directed to securing from the Boundary Commission a favourable demarcation in the Punjab. They started collecting figures and data in support of their claim. Petitions were drafted and maps drawn. The ablest of Sikh lawyers at the Punjab High Court, Sardar Harnam Singh, took charge of the legal aspect of the case. The leaders tried to build up political pressure. July 8 was observed as a pledge-taking day when the Sikhs renewed their resolve to spare no effort or sacrifice in pursuit of their object. A week later, Giani Kartar Singh, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, made a press statement in which he said :

> The Sikhs will not rest content till the boundary line is demarcated in such a way that it leaves at least 85 per cent Sikhs in India ... The Panth, in general, and the Sikh political workers, in particular, may well be proud of the completeness with which the prayer of pledge-taking day of July 18 was observed all over the province. It is clear that stark realities of the distressing situation have gone home to every Sikh, howsoever cut off from the usual sources of political knowledge he may have been.
>
> Some Muslim League leaders have taken offence at this harmless expression of Sikh agony and have issued extravagant statements calculated to embitter feelings between the two communities. They have demanded the Sutlej as the dividing line in the Punjab. Only a few weeks back they proposed to fight for every inch of the Punjab, and now they have retreated to the Sutlej. There are some more weeks to August 15 and their pace of retreat is not slow either.
>
> Everyone knows that the Boundary Commission in the Punjab is charged through June 3 statement of the Viceroy with the task of determining the extent to which the Sikh community is to be divided. The points for consideration before this Commission are contiguous majority and "other factors." Obviously the factor of contiguous majority is only one of the several factors which will claim the attention of the Boundary Commission. If application of the contiguous majority principle does not yield equitable results, any other factor will naturally overrule it in order that justice may be done.
>
> In the districts of Sheikhupura, Lyallpur and Gujranwala there are large non-Muslim majority tracts. This area is also hallowed by the situation in it of a number of historic Gurdwaras like Nankana Sahib and Khara Sauda. How can the Sikhs live away from these

springs of their religion? ... A full share in the canal colonies belongs to the Sikhs because it was their sweat and toil which has made these areas so coveted ... When Ireland was partitioned were not two counties with Roman Catholic majorities attached with Protestant Ulster for purely economic considerations? ... The Sikhs will not rest content till—

(1) The boundary line is demarcated in such a way that it leaves at least 85% Sikhs in India.
(2) Both the States of Pakistan and India are committed to facilitate the transfer of the remaining 15% from Pakistan to India.

Sympathizing with the Sikhs, Arthur Henderson, Under-Secretary of State for India, said in Parliament that, though the function of the Boundary Commission was to demarcate boundaries between the two countries on the basis of ascertained contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims, it would also take account of other factors. These other factors, he added, would embrace the special circumstances of the Sikh community, the location of its shrines, and so on.

In an interview with the Punjab Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins. Giani Kartar Singh stressed how essential it was to pay regard to Sikh unity in carrying out the plan of partition. It could not be done just on the basis of population. The Sikhs' rich farmlands in the irrigation colonies of Lyallpur, Sheikhupura and Montgomery which they had developed with their lifeblood, their Gurdwaras, such as the Holy Nankana, and other stakes in the region should be the deciding factors in solving the boundary problem. As Sir Evan subsequently wrote to the Viceroy, Giani Kartar Singh was cool and matter of fact in his argument, but wept when he made his final appeal to him to help the Sikhs in that crucial hour.

This was symbolic of the tension and anxiety which afflicted the Sikhs.

On August 15, India became a free country. Pakistan was born an independent State.

The same day, Sir Cyril Radcliffe left for home. The award he had written was announced two days later. From the Chenab on which the Sikhs had pinned their hopes, the Indian frontier shrank back to the river Sutlej. Only thirteen districts comprising the whole of Jullundur and Ambala divisions, Amritsar district of Lahore division and three tahsils (Pathankot, Gurdaspur and Batala) of Gurdaspur district were

allocated to Indian Punjab. Lyallpur, Sheikhupura and Montgomery were drawn across the border. So were Lahore and the Holy Nankana. Even an innocent suggestion made to the Viceroy by V. P. Menon for the latter to be treated as "a sort of Vatican" to assuage Sikh feeling did not prove acceptable.

The ominous storm which had been gathering since June 3 broke with the Radcliffe proclamation. The brief spell of temporary truce, loaded with apprehension, gave way to a period of violent and sanguinary fratricide. To carry its two-nation theory to its logical conclusion, the Muslim League vowed upon the expulsion of Hindus and Sikhs from their newly-constituted State. Assaults on Hindu and Sikh population in Sheikhupura, Montgomery and other districts started on August 18—a day after the Boundary award was made known. Sikhs who predominated in the rural areas and were the more resistant were especially singled out by Muslim mobs bent on murder and plunder. Mass slaughter, arson and looting spread over vast areas and soon the whole countryside in West Punjab was ablaze.

Although, Mr Jinnah, in his address to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, gave assurance of protection to the minorities, the Muslims were determined to liquidate or banish the Hindus and Sikhs. They made no secret of their intention, either. On September 5, an influential Urdu newspaper of Lahore, the *Zamindar*, published on its front page a highly inflammatory poem against the Sikhs the burden of which was :

Koi Sikh Rehne na pae Maghribi Punjab Men

(Let no Sikh be allowed to remain in West Punjab)

A mere coincidence, but on the same day the West Punjab Governor, Sir Francis Mudie, wrote to his Governor-General, Mr Jinnah, a letter which showed how anxious the Pakistan Government was to secure mass migration of the Sikhs and how it abetted all the horrible crimes against them. Sir Francis, in his letter, said, "The refugee problem is assuming gigantic proportions. The only limit that I can see to it is that set by the census reports. According to reports, the movement across the border runs into a lakh or so a day. At Chuharkana, in the Sheikhupura district, I saw between one lakh and a lakh and half of Sikhs collected in the town and

round it, in the houses, on roofs and everywhere. It was exactly like the Magh Mela in Allahabad. It will take 45 trains to move them, even at 4.000 people per train : or, if they are to stay there, they will have to be given 50 tons of *ata* a day ... I am telling everyone that I do not care how the Sikhs are got rid of as soon as possible. There is still little sign of the 3 lakh Sikhs in Lyallpur moving, but in the end they too will have to go."

As the tempo of Muslim violence grew, it became apparent that Hindus and Sikhs would have to quit what had now become Pakistan. The idea was inherent in the two-nation theory of the Muslim League and the grand strategy it had adopted to coerce non-Muslims into acquiescence. Elimination of Hindus and Sikhs was essential for converting Pakistan into a homogeneous Muslim State. To achieve this consummation, pressure on the non-Muslim population was stepped up.

The Sikhs had been nursing a deep grudge against the Muslims since the Hazara riots of the winter of 1946. They had been prevented from any counteraction by the dominantly Muslim bureaucracy and police in the Punjab. In East Punjab which had been released from Muslim hegemony, Hindus and Sikhs broke out of their stance and took heavy reprisals. Muslims suffered the full fury of Hindu-Sikh revengefulness. The atrocities they had committed in Rawalpindi division in March and, subsequently, in West Punjab districts, were visited on their co-religionists in East Punjab and much innocent blood was spilt. What the Hindus and Sikhs did in East Punjab was, of course, a reaction to the events in West Punjab. The Muslims raised the slogan of partition. They had resorted to violence as an argument in the realization of their political ambition and were the first to start communal killing. Retaliation was a natural consequence of this policy of intimidation and bloodshed.

This communal bloodbath could perhaps have been avoided if Mr Jinnah had not held out assurances of protection to the minorities in Pakistan and if the leaders of different political parties had spoken out freely what they had in their minds and insisted on a transfer of populations before installing the new Governments in office. One man who perceived the logic of the situation correctly and had

the courage of his conviction was the well-known Sikh educationist, Bhai Jodh Singh. Writing to the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore immediately after the June 3 announcement, he said, "... rough and ready method of dividing the army on communal basis has been finalized. This means that the Pakistan army will consist mainly of Muslims ... Now according to the so-called "notional division" seventeen lakhs of Sikhs are assigned to the Western Punjab. The Sikhs are given to soldiering by nature and tradition. Besides, an army career is one of their economic stays. In Pakistan they will be baulked of this ... frustration leads to embitterment. Will it be politic for the Government of Pakistan to have seventeen lakhs of embittered and determined people on their eastern border ? If not, what is the remedy ?

"One may think of eliminating the Sikhs by pogroms such as were enacted in some districts of the Rawalpindi division. Such pogroms were possible when things were in a state of uncertainty and flux. Now the division has actually taken place and even the Governor-General for Pakistan has been appointed. The Muslim League leaders are assuring the world that their treatment of minorities would be ideal. Pogroms at this stage will cast a slur on the political honesty of the Muslim League ...

"Besides, pogroms would not be an easy affair in the eastern-most districts of Pakistan. These districts are inhabited by the Sikhs who provide the best soldiery for the Indian army. In the Rawalpindi division, the Sikhs were not even 5 per cent of the total population. In spite of that wherever they were concentrated in considerable numbers, they successfully resisted the attacks of large mobs and retaliated. In the eastern districts they are not a small minority and their population is not widely diffused. They are concentrated in compact areas, where in most cases taken together with other non-Muslims and, sometimes even without them, they form a majority. If some hot-headed Muslims plan pogroms in those districts, losses on both sides will be appalling. In addition to this, retaliation in the Eastern Punjab may cause such bloodshed as will weaken both the communities very materially. The only sane and just course for the Muslims is to arrange for the transfer of populations on a large scale. There is no use for a Government to keep under it a popula-

tion which it cannot use to the best advantage. The Sikhs bereft of their chief occupation of soldiering will never reconcile themselves to a Government which deprives them of it.

"To provide for an equitable transfer some colony lands must be included in the Eastern Punjab. There are compact areas in these lands wherein the Sikhs form a majority. The Sikhs by their pioneer work in the colonies have made them what they are. It will be advantageous for the Muslim League to agree to a line that will easily induce the Sikhs to migrate to the Eastern Punjab without harbouring any ill-will for the Muslim Government.

"The second party to the division are the British Government. They may wash their hands of the affair in the eyes of the world but the division has been the inevitable result of the communal electorates which they introduced. Now that they are quitting India they have, I admit, no use for the Sikhs. But are the politicians to have no moral sense? They should remember that since the annexation of the Punjab the members of this valiant community have been fighting their battles not only on the Indian frontiers but throughout the world. The colony lands were given to the Sikhs mostly for their military services ... The British have a duty to perform and, as has been admitted by Lord Mountbatten, they must see to it that the splitting up of the Sikhs by the division of the Punjab is reduced to its smallest limits.

"... the Sikhs have not willingly asked for the division of the Punjab. The division of India and the treatment meted out to them in the would-be Pakistan State during March last compelled the Sikhs to ask for it. Even now they would fain see the Punjab united if they can live lives of honour and self-respect in their homeland. They wish all the communities could live peacefully in a united India. Now that the Mohammadans have got what they wanted they should be just and even generous towards another nation ... In a family partition the elder brothers are expected to behave generously ..."

Subsequent events had proved how prophetic this warning was.

Completely overwhelmed by the rising of the Muslim population against them in the wake of Pakistan, the Sikhs sought safety in evacuation. Leaving their homes and lands

and their possessions behind, they issued out of their villages in batches to join the ever-expanding columns in their grim and dangerous trek out of Pakistan. Unparalleled in the history of mankind was this migration for its size and for the suffering and deprivation it involved. Besides the tragic uprooting from their homes and hearths and condemnation to an uncertain future, the emigrants faced the hazards of starvation, epidemics and raids from hostile Muslim crowds. These moving convoys were frequently set upon, their ranks depleted by cold-blooded murder. The womenfolk were abducted and whatever property they were carrying plundered.

What hazards and treacheries these columns of refugees were exposed to will be evident from the fate which overtook 2,000 Sikhs being evacuated from the Muslim state of Bahawalpur. The Prime Minister of the state, Mr Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani, and Revenue Minister, Mr Moon, were anxious for their safe passage across to India. They gave them army escort, supplemented by a civilian officer of the rank of Assistant Commissioner. The column set off from Rahim Yar Khan on September 26. On the first evening of the march, the escorting body of troop began to search the Sikhs and robbed them of their belongings. One of the *Jatha,* Karnail Singh, resisted. He was shot dead along with some others.

To reassure the Sikhs and persuade them to resume the journey, the Commanding Officer became very conciliatory towards them and promised that there would be no recurrence of the trouble that had taken place. But another search was ordered the following evening and the Sikhs were deprived of whatever they had, including the camels and horses carrying their womenfolk and children. Any kind of protest was useless. Assurances of no further harassment were again held out and the Sikhs could do little except continue the rueful journey. At their next halt, two of their leaders, Bakhtawar Singh and Bhag Singh, were roused from their slumbers at midnight and asked to get the column ready to start the journey immediately. Suspecting mischief, they protested and were bayoneted to death on the spot.

The *Jatha* started moving. Then some firing was heard from ahead. The Sikhs were told that the firing was coming from a band of Hurs who were waiting to fall upon them.

This was only a ruse played upon the hapless refugees. Some of the escorting soldiers had gone forward and hidden themselves behind sand-hills to raise a false alarm. To protect them from the attack of the fanatical "Hurs" the women were forcibly separated from the column. The younger women were distributed among the soldiers and taken back to Rahim Yar Khan. The rest of the *Jatha* fleeing in confusion towards the Indian frontier, a bare two miles away, was finished almost to a man between the bullets of their "protectors" from behind and of the "Hurs" from the front.

Returning to Rahim Yar Khan, the escort presented to the state authorities a report, signed by the Commanding Officer and countersigned by the Assistant Commissioner, that "the whole column had reached the border in safety and good order and that the refugees had departed with many professions of gratitude for the excellent manner in which they had been looked after and protected from all dangers by the escort of Bahawalpur troops."

Mr Moon, whose intuition inclined him to distrust, probed the officers further and secured from the Assistant Commissioner a confession of the true facts. This gruesome tale of treachery and bloodthirstiness he has described with a painful feeling in his book.

Such despoilation and destruction faced the Sikhs everywhere in Pakistan.

Streams of dazed and dispossessed refugees poured into India from across the border. This mass migration affected more than 40 per cent of the total Sikh population in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Besides the casualties suffered, the loss in terms of lands, property and business was immense. This was a tremendous blow to such a small community as the Sikhs. On top of it was the humiliation involved in what they had suffered at the hands of the Muslims and in their severance from the sacred Gurdwaras, including Nankana Sahib. This traumatic experience could have thrown them into utter moral disarray. But the qualities of faith, courage and resilience their history had bestowed on them were again their chief assets in the tragic situation. Their religious and political morale was intact. From this latest crisis they derived fresh stimulus just as they had done from the Bloody Carnages in the eighteenth century and were soon launched

on the process of recovery. Gradually, they resettled themselves in the economy of the State to which they now belonged. By their hard work and enterprise they re-established their leadership in the fields of agriculture and industry. Migrations from Pakistan and the accession to the Punjab of Patiala and East Punjab States Union led to the consolidation of their position in the State and gave them an advantage in its political set-up.

Forgotten is the rancour of the days of inter-communal conflict. The injury caused by partition has healed. Proud of their past, the Sikhs look to the future with optimism and confidence. Of course, their thoughts turn so often to Nankana Sahib and other shrines across the border. In the new lines they have lately added to their *Ardas*, they daily pray :

> O, True Lord !
> Restore unto us
> The privilege of
> Unrestricted pilgrimage
> To Nankana Sahib
> And other Gurdwaras
> From which
> The Panth has been parted.

Dearer than homes and lands left behind is the Holy Nankana. The moral and evangelical motive of the Sikh inspiration remains unimpaired.

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