

THE SIKH SWORD TO POWER



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Preface

This is the story of the Sikh Struggle after Guru Gobind Singh left his mortal coil in 1708. This was the most critical period in the history of the Sikhs. During the period they had to make many sacrifices and were ultimately able to retain the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Though the Sikhs had to pass through the difficult period they produced such dynamic and dashing men of courage like Banda Bahadur, Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Baghel Singh, Baba Deep Singh and Ranjit Singh. They were fearless people who had only welfare of the *Panth* in their minds and they laid down their lives for a noble cause.

I have spent ten long years to complete this momentous work, and now I hope that the present generation will learn lesson from the deeds of these brave and courageous people. This is the time when our new generation should be told about the heroic deeds of Sikh generals of this period whose only aim was to save Sikhism from extinction. Sikh history would have been different if these dashing and fearless people did not appear on the scene.

Sikhism is once again faced with the crisis of identity; its very existence is threatened and unless such noble souls appear on the scene, the Sikh individuality will grow astray and the great religion will only remain in the pages of history.

Let the new generation learn from the heroic deeds of these heroes to remain united like a brave nation and work for the service of mankind. Sikhism can only survive if genuine efforts are made by the present Sikh leadership

which has betrayed us; let some new leader like Maharaja Ranjit Singh born from the fertile land of the truncated Punjab. The Sikh leaders have to play a glorious role in maintaining the dignity of the Sikhs so that the people should remember that there was a Man of Destiny—Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was able to carve out a Sikh Empire out of the ashes.

My hard work and labour will only be rewarded, if the present generation do not forget their past. In fine, I have no words to express how deeply grateful I feel to Dr. M.K. Pal who spent much of his precious time to revise and edit the manuscript of the book. I am also grateful to Shri V. Bhanumurti for initial proof-reading.

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ONE

Banda Bahadur—Life and Martyrdom

Banda, the brave, was a man of indomitable spirit and courage. He was the first person to realise that the only way to save people from the tyranny and oppression of the Mughal rulers was to finish the Mughal rule itself. He was not a ruthless blood sucker. He organised a revolutionary movement and gave a fore-taste of freedom to his countrymen, but for which the course of history would have been quite different from what it had been. Banda Bahadur aroused the spirit of the Sikhs and enabled them to give a death blow to the Mughal rule in Punjab. "They blunted the edge of Abdali's invasion and rolled them across the Indus, which otherwise undoubtedly have swept all over India and probably destroyed even the memory of what had in the ancient times been the glory of Hindu culture and civilisation."¹

Banda Bahadur was regarded by the people as their saviour. They rallied round him and offered him full support and co-operation. The people who were groaning under the oppressive rule of the Mughals found in him the protector of their rights.

Banda Bahadur whose original name was Lachhman Das was born on October 27, 1670 at Rajauri, district Poonch in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. However, according to Hari Ram Gupta, Banda was born in Sirmur State as during the battles, he traversed the hill states like one born in them.² This view does not seem to be correct as fighters always get help from their own followers and sympathisers from the areas unknown to them. They invariably show them the routes of escape and adventure.

1. Chabra, G.S., *Advanced History of the Punjab*, Vol. 1, p. 342.

2. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 6.

Banda's father, Ram Dev, was a Rajput who was a farmer by profession. He had a small holding, the income from which could not meet even his daily needs. Banda could not be sent to school. When he was a little grown up, he assisted his father in farming. He took interest in hunting and shooting. He very often carried his bow and arrows and chased wild animals, which were found in abundance in the nearby jungles. It seems, he would have passed his entire life in hunting and wandering but for a small incident that took place one day.

It happened like this, that while out on hunting expedition, Banda shot a dove. It was his prized gain that day. When he was cutting the dove into pieces and opened her belly, he found two young ones inside it. They shook terribly and died in minutes before the eyes of Banda. He was stunned and was so upset at the tragic sight that he left the dove on the spot and hurried back to his house. He did not take his food that day. The incident transformed him. He left his home and lost all interest in worldly life. He took very little food, which was just sufficient for his sustenance. He could not even sleep for days together. One day a group of *Sadhus* who were wandering in the jungle, stayed at Rajauri. Banda went to their *Dera* and listened to the sermons of the *Sadhus*. One learned *Sadhu*, Janki Das by name, impressed Banda to such an extent that he became his devout follower and became Bairagi. His name was changed to Madho Das. He left his home and wandered with Janaki Das. The *Sadhu* visited many places in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab and in due course of time reached Ram Thaman, which was a historical place in Tehsil Kasur of Lahore district. Here, there was a *samadhi* of Ram Thaman, a distant relation of Guru Nanak. Every year a big fair was held on the festival of *Baisakhi*.

When Banda along with other *Sadhus* reached Ram Thaman, the fair was being held. There was a great rush of people. Many *Sadhus* and Saints had gathered there and religious discourses were going on. "It was here that Banda met another recluse, Ram Das Bairagi."

Banda stayed at Ram Thaman for sometime and then left on a pilgrimage of the holy places. He roamed from place to place. Banda reached Panj Wati near Nasik. The place enthralled him and he enjoyed the scenic beauty of the place. He built his hut there and started meditation.

When one day Banda was deeply engrossed in his meditation,

a Saint Aghar Nath happened to visit his hut. The Saint was so much impressed by the religious discourses of Banda that he became his devotee. He served Banda with devotion. The Saint was perfect in *Tantra* and had its deep knowledge. Banda learnt *Yoga* from Aghar Nath, who before his death handed over his book of *Mantras* to Banda.

Banda stayed at Panj Wati for sometime and practised *Tantra* and *Mantra*. He became proficient in the art and to gain more experience proceeded further.

In 1692, Banda reached Nanded and constructed his Ashram on the bank of river Godawari. He was a perfect *Yogi* now. His following increased day by day and in a short span of time, many people came to him for his *Darshan* and to seek his blessings. The peoples' wishes were fulfilled and they surrounded him all the time and were blessed by him. Banda became famous in blessing and cursing people. He extended his Ashram where many stayed during their visits there. A garden was attached to the Ashram. His large following made him proud and he started cursing people instead of blessing them. His haughtiness caused some resentment among the people but they were afraid of Banda's curses. However, they did not talk against him openly.

Banda got made a big cot of a particular type and always asked the visitors including the *Sadhus* and Saints to sit on it. He used to shower blessings on them, but later with the help of his Yogic power, he would turn the cot and threw away the visitors. He took pleasure in such acts, clapped his hands and laughed loudly. Thus, in insulting the *Sadhus*, he got a peculiar satisfaction. He spent 16 years in this way in the Ashram till he met Guru Gobind Singh in 1708.

"Banda was slim, had a middle height with a rosy face. He was full of energy and courage."¹ He was a great general and a conqueror. "It is of course undeniable that the man who brought about a revolution in the character of the Sikhs and breathed a new life into them was Gobind Singh. But it may be said without any fear of contradiction that it was Banda who taught them how to fight and conquer. Without the least disparagement to the extraordinary genius and military ability of the Tenth Guru, it may be pointed out that his activities were mainly confined to desultory

1. Karam Singh, *Banda Bahadur*, p.193.

warfare with the petty chiefs of hill states and when for the first time he came into serious collision with the Imperial troops he found the shock too great for him. His warfare may without any irreverence be called the rehearsal of the great drama which the Sikhs were to enact under the guidance of Banda. The plot was of Guru's conception, some actors were prepared and trained by him, but it was Banda who brought them out and made them play as it were before the full House¹''.

Banda was daring and brave in the field, even to the extent of recklessness. He was harsh to the people who were cruel. He instilled in his followers a will for emancipation and a confidence for success. The confidence with which he wielded his sword elicited a praise from his enemies.

He was a zealous and devout Sikh. Whenever he launched an attack, he performed *Ardas*. He told his followers to repeat *Nam* and reminded them that they were just puppets in the hands of the Almighty. "The fact that not a single Sikh out of thousands captured and executed by the Mughal Government, renounced his faith to save his life was no less due to the exemplary piety and lofty character of Banda, than the inspiration of his predecessor. Guru Gobind Singh had diverted the attention of his followers from the plough to the sword and had set the seal of his sanction on war and bloodshed if the cause of justice and righteousness could not be otherwise indicated. He had sown the seed, Banda reaped the harvest. The Guru had enunciated principles, Banda carried them into practice. Gobind had destroyed the awe inspired by the Mughal-despotism. Banda completely broke the charm of its invincibility. The Hindus, after centuries of subjection, realised under Banda that they could still fight and conquer and when he fell, the dreams of Khalsa supremacy inspired by Gobind were considerably nearer the point of realisation."²

Guru Gobind Singh reached Nanded in September 1708. He selected a beautiful and serene spot on the bank of river Godawari and pitched his tent there. Immediately after his arrival at Nanded, thousands of people thronged to him to seek spiritual light and *Namdan*.

One day, it so happened that Guru Gobind Singh went to the

1. Narang, Gokul Chand, *Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 111.

2. Narang, Gokul Chand, *Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 112.

hut of Banda Bahadur, which was also situated on the bank of the same river. He had learnt a lot about the magic powers of Banda Bahadur, as earlier when he was passing by the *Samadhi* of Dadu, a Saint of eminence, he was told about the magic powers of Banda Bairagi who had constructed his hut at Nanded. Bairagi Jit Ram told the Guru that he should not go near the hut of Banda as by his magic powers, he always humiliated sadhus and saints. But as the Guru felt that Banda had great courage and determination, he decided to meet him to exploit his power for the welfare of the people.

When the Guru entered the *Ashram* of Banda, he was not there. The *Guru* quietly sat on his bed and felt a great relief. He asked the *Sadhus* of the *Ashram* to give him food. They refused to oblige him as they said that it was not possible to serve food unless touched by the holy hands of the *Bairagi* and first taken by him. The *Guru* did not wait till the arrival of Banda and ordered his own men to prepare the langar. His orders were complied with. This was considered an act of sacrilege and the disciples of the *Bairagi* rushed to inform Banda about all that had happened. The *Bairagi* was very much annoyed and reached his *Ashram* to see who the bold intruder was and punish him for his audacity. The *Bairagi* tried to perform the miracle of over-turning the bed by his supernatural power. He concentrated his mind, and murmured some words. Banda remained in this state of meditation for quite sometime, but nothing happened. Then Banda shook off his head and became restless. He came in front of the *Guru*, furious and perturbed.

In a thunderous voice he asked:

Banda : "Who are you?"

Guru : "He whom you know."

Banda : "What do I know?"

Guru : "Think it over in your mind."

Banda : (after a pause) "So you are *Guru Gobind Singh*."

Guru : "Yes."

Banda : "Why have you come here?"

Guru : I have come to convert you as my disciple."

Banda : "I submit my Lord, I am Banda (slave) of yours."

Saying this, Banda fell on *Guru's* feet. The *Guru* lifted him up, embraced him and kissed his forehead. The *Guru*, then, baptised him and renamed him *Gurbaksh Singh* but he continued to be called as *Banda Singh*.

In the meanwhile, Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed by a Pathan. On September 18, 1708, a young and well built Pathan, Jasmid Khan, sent by Nawab Wazir Khan, Viceroy of Sirhind, came to the Guru, when he was bestowing *Namdan* to the people. The Pathan gave a piece of paper to the Guru, which it seems was a letter of introduction from some Muslim friend of prominence in his *Darbar*. The Pathan delighted at this treatment bowed his head before the Guru. The Guru gave him five gold coins and some cash to meet his expenditure during his stay at Nanded. Nobody had any suspicion about the real intentions of the Pathan. As the Guru had given him the special treatment, other Sikhs also began to show respect to him, and he was allowed to move freely in the vicinity of the Guru's *Darbar* and camp.

The Pathan came again the next day and was allowed to go straight near the Guru, who gave him *parshad* which the Pathan took without any hesitation. His bonafides were thus established. He sat in the *Darbar* for sometime. He was looking for an opportunity to stab the Guru. He could not get a chance. Another Pathan was waiting for him outside with a horse and some weapons. He bowed before the Guru, got his blessings and went away. No suspicion was aroused. The Guru retired to his tent as usual.

On September 20, 1708 Jasmid Khan once again visited the Guru's *Darbar* and remained there for a much longer time, than before. He made out that he was a devotee of the Guru and came all the way from Punjab to seek Guru's blessings. As the congregation was over, the Guru went to his tent as before and relaxed. The Sikhs present in the congregation also retired. Guru's attendants also slept. When the Guru was about to sleep, the Pathan entered the tent and reverently bowed before the Guru and behaved in a most courteous manner. The Guru raised his head to bless him. The Pathan took out his dagger and stabbed the Guru who parried the attack with his *Dhal*. The Guru had only a *Kripan* with him but by the time he unsheathed it, the Pathan gave him another blow. The Guru thrust his *Kirpan* into the abdomen of the Pathan and killed him on the spot. However, the Guru had been seriously injured and bled profusely. On hearing the noise, the body-guards of the Guru, chased the companion of the Pathan, caught him and killed him.

The Guru still stood undisturbed and unmoved. Bhai Santokh Singh, a devotee of the Guru entered his tent. He saw a stream of blood flowing and realised the gravity of the situation. Immediately

Guru's wounds were bandaged and Bahadur Shah, when informed sent his European Surgeon, Cole, to dress Guru's wounds. The wounds were stitched by him with great skill.

Now, the Guru commissioned Banda to go to Punjab. The Guru armed Banda with five arrows from his quiver and gave him his own standard and battle drum. The Guru also issued *Hukamnamas* to the Sikhs, urging them to volunteer for service. According to *Prachin Panth Prakash*, "The Guru had specifically given orders to Banda to invest Sirhind and kill Wazir Khan, and then to attack the Punjab Hill Chiefs who had been inimical to him."¹

"Banda was not acknowledged as the Guru's successor in the apostleship yet the Guru declared that, after himself the Sikhs would look upon him as their leader and protector".²

The Guru reposed confidence in Banda "and to whom he (Guru Gobind Singh) became so much attached that he nominated him his successor not as Guru but as Commander of the forces of the Khalsa"³. There is no doubt that Banda was baptised by the Guru. Banda received *Pahool* and became a Sikh."³

Banda was directed by the Guru not to approach a woman, if he was his true disciple. He should keep five arrows with him. So long as he followed his instructions, no misfortune would befall on him. If he forgot them, or disregarded them, he would answer them for the non-performance with his life. Banda promised to obey Guru's commands. The Guru then assured Banda that whenever he was in need or distress, he should assemble five Sikhs and offer prayers along with them and his desires would be fulfilled.

Gyani Gyan Singh in his *Panth Prakash*, said that Banda was given the following mission by the Guru as claimed by Banda:

"To wreck vengeance on the Turks hath the Guru sent me who am his slave. I will kill and ruin Wazir's household. I will plunder and rob Sirhind. I will revenge the murders of the Guru's sons, then destroy the Chieftains of the hills when all these I have accomplished, then know me as Banda the slave of the Guru."⁴

1. *Prachin Panth Prakash*, p. 82.

2. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 274.

3. Payne, C.H., *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 43.

4. M., Gregor, W.L., *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, p. 106.

At last, Guru Gobind Singh blessed Banda for the arduous task that lay ahead. Five Sikhs namely Bhai Baj Singh, Binod Singh, Daya Singh, Ram Singh and Kahan Singh were asked to accompany Banda to Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh told them not to forget the objective of their mission, to hold consultations with their companions and help the oppressed and downtrodden without any distinction of caste or creed. If they followed these instructions honestly, they would be able to surmount all impediments that came in their way.

With these instructions Banda and his five companions and 25 followers marched towards Punjab. Banda Bahadur left for Punjab in September-October, 1708. On his way he came to know about the atrocities committed on the Sikhs in Punjab. He was also told that a Pathan had stabbed Guru Gobind Singh, who succumbed to his injuries. However, before Pathan's dagger could achieve its end, Banda planted the Guru's standard in a village Sher Khanda about 53 km from Delhi and sent the Guru's letter to Sikhs to join him. As soon as the devout Sikhs received the edicts of the Guru, they abandoned their hearths and homes and marched to join Banda's forces. Hundreds flocked to him especially from Majha, Malwa and Doaba. When Banda left Nanded he did not have any money or weapons. But on the way he met some Sikhs who honoured the Guru's word and money came in abundance. As Banda was a good hearted man, he offered gold *Mohar* as a gift even to petty workers who came to work for him. This created a very good impression on the poor but some robbers and thieves also joined him.

Although, Guru Gobind Singh had restricted his role to that of an army commander, Banda extended his sphere to spiritualism. Crowds thronged to him. Women came to him to seek his blessings. "He preached sermons and gave benedictions. Those who asked for sons, he blessed them with sons; and those who asked for milk he gave milch cattle. If any one came stricken with pain, he prayed for him and removed his suffering."¹

Banda had, however, contempt for worldly goods, so he used to distribute offerings made to him to the poor. As stories of his generosity spread among the people, more men and money began to pour in. Banda was encouraged and his spirit rose high. He issued a proclamation offering protection to any one "threatened by thieves, dacoits or highway robbers, troubled by Mohammadan

1. Gyan Singh Gyani, *Panth Prakash* XXV.

bigots, or in any way subjected to injustice and ill-treatment".¹

The news of Guru Gobind Singh's assassination set the Sikhs on fire. The bricking alive of the two younger sons of the Guru at Sirhind was still rankling in their minds. Therefore, the people gathered around Banda from all sides, irrespective of the difficulties put in their way by the local officials. It was known to them that they would have to fight a formidable Mughal force. On the death of Aurangzeb, Mughal army's strength was 1,70,000 men with ten times that number as non-combatants. The Mughal resources were vast. "Banda opened the flood gates to a sea of pent-up hatred, and all he could do was to ride on the crest of the wave of violence that he had let loose. He could not, nor did he try to direct its course, knowing full well that he who rides a tiger cannot afford a dismount."²

It seems that the main objective of Banda was first to attack Sirhind to punish the Nawab for his dastardly acts. He would have also established contact with his people. If this objective would have been achieved, it would have been made known that the Sikhs would not tolerate further humiliation, tyranny and aggression any more. However, it was the most difficult objective to achieve. Sirhind was the capital of the province; its Nawab was the most powerful of all the Governors of the Mughal Empire. He had a huge army under his command, had accumulated considerable wealth and commanded great respect among his people. Therefore, Banda took a decision to attack the nearby citadels of power, as he wanted to create general disorder and hatred against the Mughal Empire and also put his own forces to test their ability and capacity to fight against such mighty force. Were his men able to make sacrifice for the cause of the Panth, hardships and pass through trials and tribulations for a cause so dear to them? He expected that a large force would join him from the Central Punjab for fighting the long drawn out war for the capture of Sirhind. It was an arduous task and well knit organisation was needed to achieve the objective.

In the meanwhile, Bhai Fateh Singh, a descendant of Bhai Bhagtu, joined Banda with large number of his companions. Ram Singh and Tilok Singh of the Phulkian family, though themselves not joining hands with Banda, contributed their resources liberally.

1. Rattan Singh Bhangu: *Prachin Panth Prakash*, p. 87.

2. Gyan Singh Gyani, *Shamsher Khalsa*, p. 9.

First of all, Banda decided to attack certain places on the right and left of the main Grand Trunk Road. He reached Kaithal and attacked an army contingent which was carrying the cash to the Imperial treasury at Delhi. The scuffle ensued. Banda captured a large number of horses and a cash which were badly needed by him.

He added a cavalry unit to his army. The booty was distributed among his soldiers who were so far fighting a religious war. This proved beyond doubt that Banda had no love for money. The incident was reported to the Administrator of Kaithal.

He attacked the Sikhs with his four hundred cavalry. By this time, Banda marched towards the nearby jungle. Administrator's forces followed him. The horses could not pass through the thick jungles. He ordered his men to walk on foot. The Sikhs unsheathed their swords. Confusion prevailed for sometime. Many Mughal soldiers were slain. Some were arrested. Some fled. The captured soldiers were released on the condition that all the horses should be handed over to the Sikhs and in future revenue collected in the Kaithal area should be passed on to the Sikhs. It was Banda's first victory. Though by all standards it was a small one, it encouraged the Sikhs and raised their morale who were groaning under pain and agony.

Next came the turn of Sarmana. On November 26, 1709, Banda attacked Sarmana with his full force. Jalal-ud-Din, the executioner of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Shashal Beg and Bashal Beg, the killers of two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh belonged to Sarmana. It was a prosperous town and many rich people lived there. It was built like a fortress. The town was attacked from all sides. The *Faujdar* and other nobles offered some resistance. Firing was resorted to from the ramparts of the fortress and the roof-tops. Banda and his men cut through all the resistance, set fire to the house and put to death whosoever came in their way. Ten thousand people were killed. The *Faujdar* and the three executioners were also slain. It was a decisive victory for Banda. It gave relief to the hearts of the Sikhs who were itching to take revenge upon the killers of innocent lives.

Banda appointed Fateh Singh as the *Faujdar* of Sarmana and nine surrounding Parganas. The victory at Sarmana was much more rewarding. His men received a substantial share of the booty. Some money was kept in reserve for the warfare. The *Subedar* of Sirhind, Wazir Khan became nervous and started fortifying his fortresses

and alerted his army. "New recruits were added. He became apprehensive that his turn was fast approaching. But Banda's strategy was not to attack Sirhind for the time being or till the time more forces joined him from Majha and Doaba who were being detained on the other side of the Sutlej by the Pathans of Malerkotla and Rupur."¹

At this time, Banda's army consisted of three categories of men. First, the devout Sikhs who were fighting a religious war, secondly, the mercenaries sent by the Phulkian chief Ram Singh and Tilok Singh and thirdly, robbers and dacoits who were merely interested in looting. According to Khafi Khan, Banda's army consisted of four hundred cavalry and eight thousand infantry. After some time, the strength of Banda's army increased to about forty thousand.

Now, Banda changing his route attacked Ghuram, Thaska and Mustafabad. No resistance was offered to the Banda's force at Ghuram and Thaska and they were taken over very easily. However, at Mustafabad a fierce battle took place as stout resistance was offered by the 2000 strong army of the local Faujdar. There were some desertions in Banda's army but he carried the day and captured the town.

Next came the turn of Sadhura. Sadhura made history when Budhu Shah, the local resident helped Guru Gobind Singh in the battle of Bhangani along with his five sons. The chief of Sadhura, Usman Khan tortured Buddu Shah to death. Usman was a tyrant ruler who let loose a reign of terror on his subjects, especially Hindus. He was a dread for the people as he made their life miserable. Hindus were not even allowed to cremate their dead bodies, but he allowed the butchering of cows publicly. This irritated the Hindus but they were helpless and could not offer any resistance. Many deserted the towns for fear of their lives. Those who were left behind made a request to Banda Bahadur to save them from the clutches of death. The tyranny of the rulers had to be finished.

Before launching an attack on Sadhura, Banda was told by the Lubana Sikhs about the atrocities committed on them by the ruler of Kapuri, Qudam-ud-Din. His father, Amir Ullah was the Governor of Gujarat Kathiawar at the time of Aurangzeb. He had amassed wealth which made him proud and haughty. He created

2. Rattan Singh Bhangu: *Prachin Panth Prakash*, p. 87.

terror in the area. Women were molested openly. They were captured by the soliders and then raped. Banda was enraged and attacked Kapuri. His Haveli was burnt to ashes, the city was plundered and the people responsible for committing atrocities on the innocent people were put to death.

Banda entered Sadhura. Many people joined his ranks to take revenge on the ruler. Many were killed, and many more were injured. The town was plundered and a huge booty collected. The place where most of the killings took place is known as *Katal-garhi*. Sadhura fell, Usman Khan was murdered and his dead body was hung on the tree outside his Haveli.

Banda stayed in the fort of Sadhura for sometime and sent one contingent of troops to Mukhlisgarh. The fort was captured and renamed Lohgarh.

When the news of Banda's successes reached Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind, he became nervous. He daily prayed to God that the war with Banda be put off. He sent a contingent of one thousand strong under the command of Sucha Nand's nephew so that Banda could be finished secretly. They reached Sadhura, met Banda Bahadur and played a ruse with him that he himself was against the Nawab and desired to take revenge. The Sikhs should protect him. Banda believed their commander and allowed him to stay in his Dera. However, he could not succeed in his mission as Banda was given protection by some of his devout Sikhs including Baj Singh.

From Sadhura, Banda reached Ambala. The town was looted as no resistance was offered. From Ambala the Sikh forces reached Banur. Little resistance was offered and the local *Faujdar* surrendered. "Some people left the town and all those who remained behind were either killed or surrendered. Peace loving citizens were helped by the Sikh soldiers. Many were converted to the Sikh faith and joined the rank of Banda's forces"¹.

Meanwhile, the Sikhs detained on other side of the Sutlej found an opportunity to cross the river but before they could join Banda's army they had to contend with a large, highly disciplined and a trained force of Sher Mohammad Khan of Malerkotla who was asked by the Nawab of Sirhind to halt the march of Banda's reinforcement. The force was in strength, well-equipped with artillery and a large

1. Gyan Singh Gyani, *Shamsher Khalsa*, p. 9.

quantity of ammunition. On the other hand the Sikhs who were farmers turned soldiers for the cause of serving the *Panth* had to fight with swords, arrows and small fire-arms. But the fire of revenge was smouldering in their hearts. They had an undying faith in the Will of the Almighty. These factors led to their ultimate victory. Sher Mohammad Khan was badly wounded, his valiant brother and nephew fell in the battlefield. Many others were killed and the Sikhs were able to join hands with Banda at a place midway between Banur and Kharar where they were welcomed by Banda personally and congratulated, for the success they had achieved. Then came the turn of Sirhind which was an eyesore in the eyes of the Sikhs. It was here that the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh were bricked alive. It was here that the mother of Guru Gobind Singh died of shock of her grandsons' martyrdom. It is obvious that the Sikhs desired to take revenge on Nawab Wazir Khan who had committed the crime.

By now Banda's forces were reinforced and were prepared for the final assault on Sirhind. The Nawab was expecting the attack and had made preparations to meet the situation. According to Ganda Singh and Teja Singh, "Wazir Khan's force combined with those of his collaborators from Hissar and its neighbourhood and of Lahore and Eminabad comprised not less than 20,000 men."¹ First the Nawab played a ruse and deputed a nephew of his Hindu Wazir, Sucha Nand along with his one thousand trained men to penetrate into Banda's camp. Though he pretended loyalty to Banda, he entered his camp to murder him. Banda believed his word and allowed him entry. But before he could take any action, the Nawab raised a cry of Jihad and mustered all the forces at his command. The Nawab's army included seven to eight thousand musketeers and five to six thousand horses. Banda's force was not more than 15,000. He did not have any artillery or elephants. Another negative point for Banda was that a large number of looters had joined his ranks, who could be a source of menace as the later events proved. However, there were a few men of dynamic personality tried and devoted like Baj Singh, Fateh Singh, Karam Singh, Dharam Singh and Sham Singh.

Wazir Khan personally commanded the force and marched towards Chapper-Chiri, about 16 Km from Sirhind. The battle fought on May 12, 1710 was the fiercest of all the battles fought by Banda

1. Ganda Singh and Teja Singh : *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 83.

so far. Initially the attack was so furious by Nawab's army that the booty lovers and all those who had penetrated into Banda's army fled. Noticing the demoralisation in his force, Banda himself led the attack. Says Khafi Khan, "when the battle began, great bravery was shown on both sides but especially by the confederate sectarians. They advanced, swords in hand against the elephants and brought two of them down. Many Musalmans obtained martyrdom and many of the 'infidels' went to the sink of pre-dilection. The Musalman force was hardly able to endure the repeated attacks of the 'infidels' when a musket ball made a martyr of Wazir Khan and they were put to flight."¹ However, Latif says, "that Wazir Khan was killed by an arrow which pierced his breast."² Wazir Khan's entire army was destroyed by the Sikhs. It was a complete victory for Banda. Thus victorious, Banda marched towards Sirhind. "He entered the city and punished the city in a vindictive and barbarous manner," says Mohammad Latif. "He commanded it to be fired and all the inhabitants to be put to death. While the city was in flames, the followers of this fanatic carried on the work of carnage in the most diabolical spirit. They slaughtered the inhabitants indiscriminately without regard of age or sex. They butchered, bayoneted, strangled, hanged, shot down, hacked to pieces, and burnt alive, every Mohamedan in the place. Nor was this all. The dead too were made to contribute their share towards gratifying the rage of these voracious vampires. The corpse of Wazir Khan was hanged on a tree and left to the tender mercies of the crows and vultures. The sanctity of the graveyard was violated and corpses were exhumed, hewn to pieces, and exposed carrion for the wolves, jackals, and other nocturnal visitants to these abodes of the dead. The mosques were polluted and burnt down and the *Mullas*, *Moulvis* and *Hafizes* subjected to the greatest indignities and tortures."³

But the account seems to be exaggerated and biased. Narang writes, "The *Mausaleum* of Ahmad Shah, the most magnificent of such buildings still stands as it did before the battle, and is, I think sufficient evidence of the exaggeration in Latif's account."⁴ Strong statements by Muslim writers highly biased against Sikhs can only be taken reservedly.

1. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (vii) p. 415).

2. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 274.

3. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, pp. 274-275.

4. Narang G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism.

However, there is no doubt that the hearts of Sikhs were burning with revenge against the Sirhind ruler. The Sikhs were determined to punish the accursed city. For three full days, the city was plundered. The abandoned treasures were dug and a booty of over twenty to thirty million rupees, besides vast army stores and equipment were taken out. The city was saved from complete destruction only as a result of intervention by the Hindus of the place.¹

It is also said that many Muslims too were saved. Out of fear, many converted themselves to Sikhism, but Banda did not put any pressure on anybody to convert himself. There were no forcible conversions as is clear from the letter of the official newswriter to Bahadur Shah. It seems that during Banda's stay at Kalanaur in April 1711, he had assured the Muslims that they would not be interfered with in any way, and all those who came to join his ranks would enjoy full religious liberty, including that of saying *Namaz* and *Azan*. As a result of this liberal policy five thousand Muslims joined his army.

Peace was restored for sometime. Banda thought of administering the territory under his control. This was a wise step as otherwise there would have been chaos. Baj Singh was appointed the Governor of Sirhind. Samana was placed under Fateh Singh and Thanesar under Ram Singh with Binod Singh as his deputy. With the capture of Sirhind, the territory between Karnal and Ludhiana with an annual revenue of Rs. 36,00,000/- lay at his feet.

With his feet well entrenched, Banda created an awe among the people. Irvine says, "it led to a complete and striking reversal of previous customs, a low scavenger or a leather dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda) when in a short time he would return to his birth place as its ruler with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his order. Not a soul dared to disobey an order and the men who had often risked themselves in battlefields, became so cowed down that they were afraid even to remonstrate."²

1. Karam Singh, *Banda Bahadur*, p. 103.

2. Irvine, W. : *Later Mughals*, pp. 98-99.

Many other steps were taken to strengthen the administration. An age old system of *Zamindari* was abolished. The land was distributed to the cultivators. Banda became a defender of the faith. Many people came to him daily with complaints against the officials and Banda removed their grievances.

Banda chose Mukhlispur, a hilly resort near Sadhura as his capital. He rebuilt the old fort there and renamed it Lohgarh. He assumed royal authority and minted coins in the name of the Guru. The inscription on one side of the coin read:

Sikka Zad har do alam
Tegh-i-Nanak Sahib Ast
Fateh Gobind Singh Sahisahan
sfoz-i-saca
Sahib ast.

(This coin struck by the grace of the True Master, and also the victory that (Guru) Gobind Singh, the king of Kings) on the reverse of the coin was inscribed.

Zarab ba Amanvddahar Masavarat.
sahar zinat ul takht-mubarak bakht

(Struck in the city of peace signifying the good fortune of man and the magnificence of the blessed throne). His official seal was also dedicated to the eternal glory of the Guru. It read:

“Deg O-Teg-o-Fateh-o-Nusrat bedrang yaft Az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.”

(The sword, the worldly treasures, victory and power, I have found from Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh).

Banda was not a man to rest on his victories. He received complaints from the village Unarsa in Jalalabad that the Hindus were being persecuted by Jalal Khan, the *Faujdar* of Jalalabad. Banda marched towards Jalalabad, captured on the way Saharanpur. Message was sent to Jalal Khan to release some Sikhs who had been imprisoned. But no action was taken and Banda was enraged. Jalalabad was seized but it had to be lifted as he received an urgent call from Jullundur Doab. The retreat was ordered.

There was revolt in Jullundur Doab. The people thought that their redeemer would soon come and liberate them. Muslim officials were removed and Sikhs appointed in their places. A *parwana* was sent to Shamas Khan, the *Faujdar* of Jullundur Doab asking him to

hand over his treasures to the Sikhs. The *Faujdar* got panicky and raised cry of *Jehad*. According to Khafi Khan, "more than hundred thousand Muslims collected and marched towards Sultanpur, the capital of Jullundur Doab, where about seventy five thousand Sikhs had collected."¹ Banda reached there but seeing the large army of the Muslims, the Sikhs retired to Rahon. The Muslims pursued them and the Sikhs were besieged. However, they escaped at night, getting beneficial cover of the darkness. Noting that Shamas Khan had retired to his capital, the Sikhs attacked the Muslims in the fort and took them by surprise. A bloody battle was fought on October 12, 1710. The Muslims were driven out. Jullundur and Hoshiarpur were taken by the Sikhs. The Sikhs were now the masters of Jullundur Doab.

Meanwhile, the Sikhs of Majha revolted and with an army of eight thousand marched on Batala and Kalanaur and removing the Government officials, they appointed their own. *Paraganah* of Pathankot was also occupied. Lahore was threatened. The *Faujdar* of Lahore, Aslam Khan was so panic stricken that he did not venture out of the city. Finding the *Faujdar* too cowardly to protect the city, some *Mullas* raised a green banner, called Haidri flag. A call was given to the Muslims to collect under the flag and join the *Jehad* against the *Kafirs*. Then, a large number of Muslims besieged the Sikhs in the Bhagwant Rai fort, near Lahore. The Sikhs gave a good fight and pierced through the enemy ranks and escaped. The *Mullas* again pursued the Sikhs and caught them near Kotla Begam but the Muslims were defeated badly and they returned to Lahore. The Sikhs followed them and brought about a general destruction and utter devastation in Muslim's ranks. The Sikhs carried the day. The Sikhs were now masters of the entire Punjab, east of Lahore. "And if Bahadur Shah had not quitted the Deccan in 1710, there is every reason that the whole of Hindustan would have been subdued by these invaders."²

Emperor Bahadur Shah was greatly perturbed over these developments. There was such an awe of Banda in Muslims' minds that they believed that he possessed some supernatural powers. Says Khafi Khan, "with jugglery, charms and sorcery, he pretended to perform miracles before credulous people and gave himself the name of *Sacha Padsha*."³

1. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (vii) pp. 416-419.

2. Malcolm, Sir John : *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 99.

3. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (vii) p. 651.

Bahadur Shah suddenly left Ajmer on June 27, 1710 and hastily marched towards the North. Orders were issued to the Governor of Oudh and Delhi and the Nizams and the *Faujdar* of Allahabad and Moradabad to join him with their men. On September 8, 1710, "Bahadur Shah issued a royal edict on all Hindus employed in the imperial offices to shave their beards so that they were not mistaken for Sikhs."¹ "Though this insurrection was not of such importance as to disturb the general repose of the Empire, yet His Majesty, Defender of the Faith, hearing that the malice of the rebels was directed against the religion, thought it his duty to engage them in person."²

The Emperor gave a call for *Jehad* against the Sikhs. He also persuaded the Bundela Rajputs to join in the campaign. His four sons also joined him. Feroz Khan was made the incharge of the campaign. Feroz Khan had defeated the Sikh army at Amingarh, Thanesar, Karnal and Shahabad were captured and Mughal rule was re-established in the region.

The victory was achieved as the Sikhs had evacuated most of these territories and returned into the fort of Lohgarh at Mukhlisgarh, near Sadhaura. The Mughal army followed the Sikhs. The Sikhs fell on the Mughal army. The name of Banda had become a terror for the royal soldiers. The Sikhs muskets and arrows created such a devastation that, they in their *fakir's* dresses, says Khafi Khan, "Struck terrors into the royal troops. The number of the dead and the dying was so large that for a time it appeared as if they were going to lose."³ The Mughal army did not dare attack the Sikhs in their stronghold and decided instead to lay a siege of the fort and starve the Sikhs to death. The fort was eventually surrounded. Banda and a small band of his comrades made a sortie one night and breaking the imperial cordon, left the place and made for the Nahan hills.

On December 11, 1710, the Mughals stormed the fort and captured a few men who had remained inside. One Gulab Singh, who resembled Banda impersonated for him, was there and the Mughals found that the promised prize had escaped without leaving a trace behind him. "The hawk has flown and they had trapped an owl instead."

1. *Bahadur Shah Nama*.

2. Latif Mohd. : *History of the Punjab*, p. 277.

3. Khafi Khan : *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (vii) pp. 669-70.

Bahadur Shah was infuriated. His wrath knew no bounds and he let loose a reign of terror on the few prisoners who were captured in the Raja of Nahan's territory where Banda had taken shelter. Raja Bhup Prakash was arrested and along with Gulab Singh was put in iron cages and taken to Delhi. Other prisoners were put to death. However, "two million coins were dug out of Lohgarh besides the capture of three cannons and seventeen light pieces."¹

Within fifteen days of his escape, Banda issued *Hukamnama* to Sikhs all over the country asking them to join him to fight the holy war. The Sikhs responded to the call and gathered in large numbers at Kiratpur. Banda now marched upon the Rajas of Mandi, Kehlur, Kulu and Chamba. They all submitted to Banda without firing a shot. The Raja of Bilaspur offered some resistance but his force was destroyed. Raja Ude Singh of Chamba offered and married the girl from the royal family. Later a son, Ajay Singh was born from her.

In the spring of 1711, Banda left his abode in the hills and came down into the plains. In June 1711, a battle was fought at Bahrapur, near Jammu, in which the Mughal forces were badly mauled. Banda captured Bahrapur and then took over Rajpur, Kalanaur and Batala.

The Emperor pursued Banda and he once again retreated into the hills. This was a strategic withdrawal. Bahadur Shah wrecked vengeance on innocent men, women and children. He issued an order for large scale massacre of Sikhs.

Bahadur Shah returned to Lahore in August 1711, a completely deranged man. For the next few months, he was told about the Mughal victories. However, later, the Emperor came to know that Banda was still alive and defiant. The shock was too great for the Emperor to bear. Mentally disturbed he died on February 28, 1712.

The battle for succession was won by Jahandar Shah. The confusion that was created after Bahadur Shah's death offered a golden opportunity to Banda and the siege was dragged on for eight months. However, Banda had some relief in the end of 1712, when Farrukh Siyar revolted against Jahandar Shah. Farrukh Siyar became the king in early 1713. He ordered Abus Samad Khan and Zakariya Khan to kill Banda at any cost.

1. *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, p. 323.

In October 1713, Banda was forced to evacuate Lohgarh and Sadhaura and to retreat further into the hills and in due course, he reached Jammu. Here, Banda married again which resulted in the birth of another son, Ranjit Singh to him. The Mughals thought that Banda had run away from the field. Abdus Samad Khan and Zakariya Khan were summoned to Delhi by the Emperor and were presented with robes of honour.

Banda remained away from the Punjab scene till the end of 1714. In February 1715, Banda was back in Punjab plains. Farrukh Siyar sent Abdus Samad Khan and Zakariya Khan back to chastise "That sect of mean and detestable Sikhs."¹

Abdus Samad Khan gathered an army including the hill forces of Kangra and Jasrota. Banda was attacked. In a desperate action Banda showed great valour and he was almost near giving a complete defeat to the Imperial forces, when having no strong position for defence he had to give way to the strong Mughal army. Banda "although vigorously pursued, he retired from post to post, and like a savage of the wilderness from thicket to thicket, losing an endless number of men and occasioning losses to his pursuers."²

Banda ultimately reached Gurdas Nangal near Gurdaspur where he had improvised a fort. He dug up a moat around the fort and flooded it with water by cutting the bank of a nearby canal. Banda was prepared for a determined fight with Imperial forces. But by now the fort was surrounded from all sides. The Sikhs did not lose heart and would come out in small groups and loot the provisions from the enemy stores, bullets and arrows. Many Sikhs died in the process. But at long last, the provisions were exhausted in the fort and the Sikhs started dying of starvation. They had to eat horses and other animals without cooking as no fuel was available. Some Sikhs even had to cut flesh from their own thighs and ate it. Theirs was the miserable plight. Even then, "such was the terror," writes Mohammad Kasim, "that commander of the royal army prayed that God might so ordain things that Banda should seek his safety in flight from the garhi."³

As the condition worsened, differences arose between Banda and his commander, Binod Singh. Binod Singh advised that all the

1. Kamwar Khan : *Tazkira-us-Saladin Chughtiya*, p. 176.

2. Ghulam Hussain Khan : *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, p. 77.

3. Mohd Kasim : *Ibratnama*.

Sikhs should cut through enemy lines and escape to save their lives, but Banda insisted that they should remain in the fort and fight back. Binod Singh did not agree even after hot discussion and had an altercation with Banda. Ultimately Binod Singh dashed out and cutting through the enemy lines, he escaped. This was a big blow to Banda and his soldiers.

“This fort of Gurdaspur,” says Khafi Khan, “was capable of holding fifty to sixty thousand horse and foot soldiers and though trapped in the fort with little means of escape, the infidels fought so fiercely that the army of Islam was overpowered. Over and over again they showed the greatest boldness and daring and made nocturnal attacks on the imperial forces. Abdus Samad Daler Jang, was lying in front of their poor fortress was obliged to throw up an entrenchment for the defence of his fort. He raised batteries and pushed forward his approaches. The siege lasted a long time and the enemy frequently made sorties into the trenches and killed many of the besiegers. To relate all the struggles and exertions of Abdus Samad and his companions in arms would exceed our bounds. Suffice it to say that the royal army in course of time succeeded in cutting off from the enemy his supplies of corn and fodder and the stores in the fort were exhausted.”¹

The siege continued for nine months. Eight thousand Sikh soldiers were killed. Many more were on the verge of collapse.

Finally on December 7, 1715, the imperial force marched on the fort. No resistance was offered. Banda and his brave men who survived were captured. There was no sign of regret. They bowed before the Will of God. Banda and his 740 companions were put in chains and sent to Lahore. About two to three hundred Sikhs were bound hand and foot and made over to the imperial forces, who under the orders of the Nawab, carried them to the banks of the Ravi, and there having beheaded them, threw their bodies into the river.”²

Banda including his wife and son, Ajay Singh and his comrades were put on saddleless camels and yet such was Banda's dread that the Mughal Officer was tied to Banda to plunge his dagger into his body if he tried to escape.

1. Khafi Khan : *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (ii) p. 76.

2. Latif Mohd : *History of the Punjab*, p. 279.

Having been brought to Lahore, Banda and his men were paraded in the streets. They were jeered and taunted by the people. Then the procession was formed of both alive and dead Sikhs and many of them were rounded up in the way, killed and put in seven hundred bullock carts full of their severed heads. They were mounted upon lame, worn out hungry asses and camels, each of them having a paper cap on his head. In this condition they were led into the streets of Lahore, followed by a mob which jeered and cursed them.

The caravan started from Lahore under the charge of Zakariya Khan. Muslim soldiers, "maintained that Banda was a magician and would make his escape on the road. One of the Mughals rose and said, Tie up together on the same elephant and if he attempts to escape, I will plunge this dagger into his body. Banda was accordingly tied to this man."¹

In the month of Moharram, February 29, 1716, Banda and 740 prisoners and the stuffed heads arrived at Delhi. Bakshi, Iltimadud-Daula Mohd. Amin Khan received orders to go out of the city to blacken their faces and put wooden caps on the heads of the prisoners.² However, the Sikhs did not show any sign of dejection.

They remained happy and cheerful and sang hymns from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

"Those unfortunate Sikhs, who had been reduced to this last extremity, were quite happy and contented with their fate, not the slightest sign of dejection or humility was to be seen on their faces. In fact most of them, as they passed along on their camels, seemed happy and cheerful, joyfully singing the sacred hymns of their scripture. And if any one from among those in the lanes and *bazars* called out to them that their excesses had reduced them to that condition, they quickly retorted saying that it had been so willed by the Almighty and that their capture and misfortune was in accordance with His will. And, if any one said, Now you will be killed; they shouted: Kill us, when were we afraid of death?"³

C.R. Wilson, a Bengal civilian, writes. "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

1. M. Gregor. W. L., *History of the Sikhs*, p. 10.

2. Khafi Khan : *Muntakhiba-ul-Lubabe*.

3. *Ibid*.

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 a 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 mail-clad 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 full cap of sheep skin and had one hand pinned to his two pieces of wood. Many were also dressed in sheep skin with woolly side turned upwards. At the end of the procession rode three great nobles. Mohammad Amin Khan, sent by the Emperor to bring in prisoners, Qamr-ud-Din, his son, and Zakariya Khan his son-in-law who being also the son of Abdus 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 scorn at the poor wretched as they passed, *Hu: Hu:* infidel dong worshippers, your day has come. Truly, retribution follows on transgression, as wheat springs from wheat, and barley from barley: let 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 prove false to their Guru, and at the place of suffering their constancy was wonderful to look at. My deliverer, kill me first was the prayer which constantly rang in the ears of the executioner. Once there was a youngman, an only son, whose widowed mother had made many applications to the Mughal officers, declaring that her son was not 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 headles bodies were loaded into carts, taken out of the city and hung upon trees. It was not till June 9, 1716 that Banda himself was led to the excution, 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 Qutab 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 had him dismount, placed his child in his arms and bade him kill it. Then, as he shrank with horror from the act, they ripped upon the child before the father's eyes, thrust its quivering flesh into his mouth and hacked him to pieces limb by limb."

According to Khafi Khan: "Mohd. Amin Khan, one of the Tribunal, struck by Banda's extraordinary appearance asked him why a man show so much acuteness in his countenance and has displayed so much ability in his conduct should have been guilty of such horrible crimes." Banda replied: "whenever men became so corrupt and wicked as to relinquish the path of equity and to abandon themselves to all kind of excesses, then the Divine Avenger never fails to raise up a scourge like me to chastise the race become so depraved; but when the measure of punishment has filled, then he raises such a man as you to punish him in turn."

The ambassadors of the East India Company, Johan Suramn and Edward Stephenson, who were in Delhi and had witnessed some of these massacres wrote a letter to the Governor of Fort William on March 10, 1716 saying :

"The great rebel Gooroo (Banda Bahadur) who has been for these 20 years so troublesome in the Subaship of Lahore is at length taken with all his family and attendance by Abdus-Samed Cawn, the *Suba* 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 eight, all severely 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 *Mutuddis* 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."

Thus, Banda Bahadur was executed on June 9, 1716. He was given a choice between Islam and death, out of which, of course, Banda accepted latter. The fateful day came. Banda's son was put

in his hand and was asked to kill him, which according to Cunningham, "he did so, silent and unmoved." (1) However, according to Elphinstone Banda refused to do so". (2) The boy was taken and dashed to the ground and his quivering heart was taken out and thrust into Banda's mouth. After this Banda's right and left hand, his right and left eyes were cut off and removed. His feet were likewise cut off. His body was then torn off to pieces with red hot irons, and "thus did the man of undaunted valour and bravery meet his death with exemplary coolness of mind."¹

"Thus died Banda Bahadur—a man who first chose to renounce the world to live in the peaceful seclusion of a sylvan hermitage, then renounced both pacificism and the life of solitude to rouse a downtrodden peasantry to take up arms; a man who shook one of the most powerful empires in the world to its very foundations with such violence that it was never again able to re-establish its authority."³

Banda entered the history leaving his foot-prints of courage, bravery and fearlessness for the posterity to follow. However, different opinions have been expressed regarding the deeds of Banda. Muslim and British historians have painted his picture in the darkest colours. They have shown him as a savage and blood thirsty. Latif writes: "Though bravery is a qualification which is highly meritorious and in all cases one which is handed down to posterity, yet the audacious achievements of this master are an exception to the rule. His triumphs are not remembered as heroic acts, but as malicious and cold blooded atrocities. His ruling and insatiable passion was that of pouring out Mohammadan blood. At the present day his name is never mentioned in any part of India unaccompanied with maledictions on his savagery and blood thirsty propensities."³ However, Thorburn, points out that, "a Mohammandan writer is not to be implicitly trusted upon such a point."⁴

Cunningham writes: "The memory of Banda is not held in much esteem by the Sikhs, he appears to have been of a gloomy disposition, and he was obeyed as an energetic and daring leader, "without being able to engage the personal sympathies of his followers. He did not perhaps comprehend the general nature of Nanak's and Gobind's reforms; the spirit of sectarianism possessed

1. Cunningham J.D. *History of the Sikhs*, p. 79.

2. Elphinstone : *An Account of the Kingdom of Cabul*.

3. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 279.

4. Thorburn, *Punjab in peace of war*.

him, and he endeavoured to introduce changes into the moves and practices enjoined by these teachers, which should be more in accordance with his own ascetic and Hindu notions. These unwise innovations and restrictions were resisted by the more zealous Sikhs, and they may have caused the memory of an able and enterprising leader to be generally neglected."¹

These assertions have no basis. As regards Banda's shedding innocent blood and his general hatred against the Muslims, we may refer to the letter written from Kalanaur by the official newswriter to the Emperor of Bahadur Shah. He wrote: He had assured the Muslims that they would not be interfered with in any way, and all those who came to join his ranks would enjoy full religious liberty including that of saying *Namaz* and *Azan*. Because of liberal policy of Banda about 5000 Muslims joined his army and fought against their co-religionists. As far as atrocities committed on the innocent people, it is pointed out that the Muslim barbarism had already crossed the limits. The bricking alive of Guru Gobind Singh's two younger sons was not less barbaric than the worst atrocities committed by Banda Bahadur.

In fact, Banda Bahadur had realised that the only way to get rid of the Mughal atrocities and persecution was to destroy the Mughal empire itself. It was he who, for the first time after Guru Gobind Singh, made his people taste the fruits of political freedom. He is credited with the forbearance, the patience and the religious zeal of a true Sikh. If he had deviated as alleged, in any material respect from the chosen path of the Gurus, he would not have been able to join victories even initially. According to Rattan Singh Bhunga, when finally surrounded on all sides in the fort of Gurdas Nangal, Banda spared himself no hardship, thus inspiring the rank and file with his utter devotion to the cause. No one knew when did Banda drink water or eat food. Whenever asked, he replied that he was on fast. Some thought Banda had spirits in his possession, others felt that he had disciplined his body through *Yoga*."² When Banda surrendered to the Mughal army, all his soldiers laid down their arms quietly without any resistance. Everybody sang the Guru's hymns and said that the Mughal rule would soon end, and the Khalsa would arise one day.

1. Cunningham, J.D. *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 79-80.

2. Rattan Singh Bhunga, *Prachin Panth Prakash*, p. 113.

Not only did Banda arouse the latent energies of his long suffering people to bid finally for total sovereignty, he also tried even within the brief period allotted to him by fate to the people to strike against an oppressive minority rule, by concerted action, daring and sacrifice.

In short, Banda was a great general and a conqueror. No doubt, Guru Gobind Singh put a new spirit in the Sikhs but says Narang, his great successes gave Sikhism a prestige and a power which had never yet been associated with it. Those who had never heard the names of the Gurus were impressed with his grandeur by the victories of Banda and joined his ranks in thousands. His personal magnetism was great, and his undaunted courage and extraordinary valour knit his followers closely to him. The fact that not a single Sikh out of thousands captured and executed by the Mughal Government renounced his faith to save his life was no less due to the exemplary piety and lofty character of Banda than to the inspiration of his predecessor. Guru Gobind Singh had diverted the attention of his followers from the plough to the sword and had set the seal of his sanction on war and blood-shed if the cause of justice and righteousness could not be otherwise vindicated. He had sown the seeds, Banda reaped the harvest. The Gurus had enunciated principles, Banda carried them into practice. Gobind had destroyed the awe inspired by the Mughal despotism. Banda completely broke the charm of its invincibility. The Hindus after centuries of subjection, realised under Banda that they could still fight and conquer, and when he fell, the dreams of Khalsa supremacy inspired by Gobind were considerably nearer the point of realisation.

Then why Banda failed in his mission? The causes are numerous. Firstly, only poor, destitutes and people from the so-called lower classes joined his army. No help was given to him by the rich and well-to-do. Hindus kept themselves aloof from his company. Not only that, the Shivalik Hill *Rajas* opposed him tooth and nail. Secondly, Farrukh Siyar was an oppressive and aggressive ruler. He adopted the policy of kill: kill: kill: and the Governors had to carry his orders otherwise they would have lost their jobs. Thirdly, Banda had deviated to some extent from the path shown by Guru Gobind Singh. He substituted *Fateh Darshan* instead of *Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh* and though after sometime, the slogan was withdrawn, many Sikhs were estranged. Fourthly, Banda was a *Vaishnav*, while the Sikhs were meat eaters. It is also said that he founded a new sect of Banda's, but this does not seem to be

correct. They never became to sect distinct from other Sikhs so long as Banda lived.”¹

Whatever the cause of his failures may be, Banda was a deeply religious man. Whenever he launched any campaign, he performed *Ardas*. He was humble and honest. He never called himself a Guru. He minted coins in Guru's name and made his seal too in the name of the Guru. He was a strong lover of justice, who heard people's complaints and punished the tyrants and oppressors. He strengthened the people to resist tyranny. Banda was executed but the mission of Gobind Singh had not failed. Scattered and disorganised though they were without a leader, without a square yard of land they could call their own, the Sikhs were nearer to nationality at this time than they had ever been. Hardship and persecution had served only to strengthen their attachment to their faith, and to draw them into yet closer unity. They now regarded themselves as distinct people. They believed in their destiny as foretold by Gobind Singh, and on determination from which they never swerved was a struggle unceasingly for the triumph of the Khalsa.

Before execution Banda was offered pardon if he renounced his faith and accepted Islam. On his refusal to do so, his son Ajay Singh was hacked before his eyes. A Mughal Nobleman said to Banda : “It is surprising that one, who shows so much acuteness in his features and so much nobility in his conduct, should have been guilty of such horrible crimes”. Banda replied : “I will tell you. Whenever men become so corrupt and wicked as to relinquish the path of equity and abandon themselves to all kinds of excesses, then providence never fails to raise up a scourge like me to chastise a race so depraved; but when the measure of punishment is full then he raises up men like you to bring him to punishment”

After Banda's right eye was dug out with a sharp pointed dagger, the left eye was removed in a similar manner. With a pause his left foot was chopped off. A little while afterwards both of his arms were chopped off. Then with red hot pincers his flesh was cut off bit by bit. Later his legs, ears and nose were removed from his body. His brain was blown out with a hammer. Last of all his remaining body was hacked to pieces.

This harried savagery lasted the whole day. Banda displayed

1. Narang, Gokul Chand, *Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 113.

heavenly calm, no tears, no cries, no groaning, no expression of grief, no jerk in the body, and no sign of pain. Throughout he remained composed and collected, serene and steady, unruffled and unstirred. A curious creature was he, this Banda Bahadur. He had a power of concentrating his mind on something away from his body and his surroundings with such intensity as if he were in a trance.

This abominable scene was staged before the very eyes of Banda's officials who included among themselves Fateh Singh, Ali Singh and Gulab Singh Bakshi who had remained in the Lohgarh fort after Banda's escape. They were beheaded on June 10, 1716, at the same place.

Banda did not die in vain. This tragic event changed the course of not only Sikh history but also of the history of Punjab. Banda has shown to the Sikhs the difference between those who were in power and the commoners.

Banda's Place in History

Banda was a Rajput. The blood of a true Kashatriya flowed in his veins, as he inherited the spirit of bravery, heroism, love of independence and self-sacrifice from his race. This spirit was further strengthened by his long residence in Maharashtra where he had seen with his own eyes how Shambhuji, son of Shivaji, his step-brother Rajaram and his widow, Tara Bai, had carried on a life and death struggle against Aurangzeb who was personally leading a campaign of annihilation against the Marathas. His dormant spirit of nationalism was awakened and put into its practical application by Guru Gobind Singh. His national and patriotic enthusiasm was further aroused by the Guru's sufferings and sacrifices and ultimately by his death as a result of the Mughal trickery.

Curiously Banda had great resemblance in looks with Guru Gobind Singh. He possessed the same medium height and bulk of the body and colour of the face. Under his bushy beard and moustache and long hair on head, the facial features also looked alike. Further both spoke the same language which was a mixture of Hindi and Punjabi. Both were fond of covering themselves with arms cape-a-pie. Both were in possession of a commanding voice and manner which resulted in implicit obedience from their followers. Both could arouse the zeal for supreme sacrifice in their devotees.

Banda aimed at national awakening and liberation of the country from the oppressive government of the Mughals. Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh had transformed the Sikhs from a peaceful people into a class of warriors. They fought against the government in self-defence. They never took any offensive. They did not acquire territory, did not take prisoners, and did not seize enemy's property and wealth. The two Gurus never tried to establish their own rule in their own territory. They believed it belonged to the Government. The rules were obeyed, and government coins were used.

Banda, on the other hand, always took offensive. He fought battles, took prisoners and killed them, seized the enemy's property and lands, and set up his own government. He issued his own coins, had his own official seal and gave orders which had the force of *farmans* of the Mughal Emperors. He did not want to weaken the Mughal power, but to destroy its root and branch, and to establish in its place national rule or self-government.

Banda was the first man who laid down the foundation of political sovereignty of the Sikhs. He made Sikhism popular with the people of Punjab, not by force or persuasion, but by his exemplary bravery and generosity. In about a year, more than one lakh persons embraced Sikhism and became the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. Those who had not even heard the names of the Gurus, were attracted towards Sikhism by Banda's victories. Banda had shown what self-government meant. After his fall, the lesson was not lost on the Sikhs. He had brought about a revolution in the minds of the people. A will was created in the masses. Heads could be cut off, but the ideas remained leading ultimately to success.

Banda was a great reformer. He broke down the barriers of caste, creed and region. He appointed sweepers and cobblers as big officers before whom high caste Hindus, Brahmins and Kshatriyas stood with folded hands awaiting their orders. He believed in socialism. He distributed all his riches among his followers. He abolished the *zamindari* system and established peasant-proprietorship making the actual tillers of the soil its masters. He was opposed to the use of intoxicant drugs. He prohibited drinking of *bhong* and wine, and smoking of tobacco or *charas*.

He knew the real cause for the weakness of the Hindus. The spirit of mercy, compassion, sympathy, tenderness, forbearance

and their melting mood inculcated in them by religion (*Daya Dharam ka mal hai*), had been responsible for the slavery of the Hindus by people from north-west. He showed that the only way to meet the eternal foe was to adopt the policy of paying them in their own coin. A tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye, and to settle old scores. The Sikhs learnt this lesson from Banda and admirably succeeded in establishing their own rule in their homeland.

Banda possessed the high ideals of life, sincerity, honesty, indomitable spirit, unbounded enthusiasm, rare daring, single-minded devotion to his cause, up paralied dare-devilry and nobility of character of the highest type. It was for this reason that none of his 740 followers renounced his faith to save his life. Even a young lad who had been pardoned by the Prime Minister refused to leave Banda in the face of death.

Banda seems to have destroyed about half a lakh of Muslims. This brutality cannot be approved in any age by any people. But some justification can be offered from the condition of the times. Banda was a contemporary of Aurangzeb. He had killed all the *Satnamis* even to a man, woman or child, numbering about 50,000. The same number if not more of the *Jats* of Bharatpur-Agra-Delhi region were destroyed. *Rajputs* and *Marathas* must share between themselves a loss of about 50,000 men each. The total number was in no case less than two lakhs. Forcible conversion and on refusal death was in addition. There was almost wholesale destruction of Hindu temples and other religious institutions in northern India.

Banda had travelled from north to south and back again and he had seen all this destruction, rape and rapine with his own eyes. The *Rajput* spirit was throbbing in him. It was lying dormant under an ash-smeared skin. This spirit was aroused by *Guru Gobind Singh*, and retaliation was a natural consequence. *Latif* says that *Guru Gobind Singh* had selected Banda for avenging the death of his father and two sons, for which purpose he could not have singled out a better instrument than this ruthless blood-sucker."¹

After his conquest of *Sirhind* Banda considerably mellowed down in his fury against the Muslim population. He placed no restrictions on their *Azan* and *Namaz*. At *Kalanaur* in April 1711 he recruited 5,000 Muslim in his army.

1. Mahd. Latif : *History of the Punjab*, p. 239.

To sum up, Banda was a demon in the eyes of Muslims, a great national hero for the Hindus, and for the Sikhs their first empire builder. In Indian history he occupies the place of a genius, spiritual, political and military, consecrated or perverted as one might think. In world history he should rank no less than Alexander the Great, Halaku, Chingiz Khan, Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali or Napoleon Bonaparte.

TWO

The Darkest Period

Banda Bahadur was martyred in 1716. The Sikhs were left without any leader. There was nobody to take care of their destiny. Although the Mughal Empire was disintegrating. Marathas and Sikhs had raised their heads in the Northern, Western and Central India. What Shivaji achieved there, Banda made some spectacular inroads into the citadel of the Mughal Empire. Their achievements encouraged the Rohillas, Rajputs and Jats who also raised a banner of revolt against the Mughal Emperor. However, the basic cause of disruption was of course the bigotry and repression of non-Muslims started by Emperor Aurangzeb. He realised the folly of trying to rule by tyranny and prophesied that after him only turmoil would remain.¹

Inspite of the fact that the Mughal Empire was fast disintegrating, the ruler, Farrakh Siyar adopted the policy of repression against the Sikhs. Abdus Samad Khan, the Punjab Governor was determined to annihilate the Sikhs as it suited his interests. After the execution of Banda, says Forester, an edict was issued by Farrakh Siyar directing that every Sikh falling into the hands of his officers, should on refusing to embrace the Mohamedan faith, be put to sword. A valuable reward was also given by the Emperor, for the head of every Sikh, and such was the keen spirit that animated the persecution, such the success of executions, that the name of the Sikh no longer existed in the Mughal dominion. Those who still adhered to the tenets of Nanak, either fled into the mountains at the head of the Punjab, or cut off their hair and exteriorly renounced the profession of their religion.²

1. Edwards and Garret, *Mughal Rule in India*, p. 166.

2. Forester, William, *Travels (i)* pp. 312-313.

Such was the state of affairs; the persecution of Sikhs was started on a large scale which continued at a stretch till 1733 when there was respite for some time. Thus, the period between 1716 to 1733 is said to be the darkest in Sikh History.

Abdus Samed Khan carried the orders of the Emperor to please him. He filled that extensive plain with blood as if, it had been a dish."¹ He was given the title of the sword of the state. In 1726; he was transferred to Multan in the same capacity and his son Zakariya Khan took over as the Governor of Punjab. He ordered the Sikh persecution more vigorously and a moving column was established to look after the Sikhs and prevent them from gathering anywhere in large numbers. The flying column acted energetically, chasing the Sikhs whenever they appeared at a particular place.

On the other hand, the Sikhs were awfully divided among themselves. Two main groups existed. There were the Bandais, the followers of Banda Bahadur who posed a serious challenge to the main body of the Sikhs, Tat Khalsa. After Banda's death, there developed serious differences between them and the Khalsa. The former believed that Banda was their eleventh Guru after Guru Gobind Singh. They wore red clothes against the blue of the Sikhs and were strictly vegetarian. Dispute also arose among them regarding the control of Harimandir. Bandais claimed one half of the offerings of the shrine. They had actually occupied the shrine and *Tat Khalsa* took possession of *Akal Takht*. Their leader was the Mahant Singh and that of *Tat Khalsa*, Kahan Singh.

The dispute took an ugly turn on the *Baisakhi* of 1721. Some Sikhs approached Mata Sundari at Delhi to mediate between the two groups so that the matter was settled once for all.

She deputed Bhai Mani Singh, the most respected Sikh of the time to go to Amritsar and sort out the differences. When Bhai Mani Singh arrived at Amritsar, the situation had taken turn for the worst. Both the groups were adamant and stuck to their view point. At last, Bhai Mani Singh decided to settle the matter by putting two pieces of paper, in the holy tank one bearing the words *Fateh Darshan* and the other carrying *Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*. One piece bearing *Wahe-Guru Ji Ki Fateh* rose to the surface and amidst shouts of *Sat Sri Akal*, the *Tat Khalsa* was victorious. But the matter did not end here. Then it was decided that a wrestling bout be held

1. Khafi Khan. *Muntkhib-ul-Luhab*, VIII-P. 457.

between Miri Singh, son of Kahan Singh and Sangat Singh, son of Lohara Singh, another leader of Bandais and whosoever won would be considered to have scored the point. Miri Singh threw Sangat Singh on his back, the Bandais did not acknowledge their defeat. The atmosphere was tense and charged with emotions. Ultimately, some of the Bandais withdrew and left Harimandir but some of them raised a great hue and cry and did not reconcile to the situation.

In this state of confusion, many Sikhs were back to farming and some entered state service. However, the true followers of Guru Gobind Singh gathered under the flag of *Tat Khalsa*, carried the arms and lived either on plunder or income from the shrine. Some of them were helped secretly by the people sympathetic to their cause.

In such a state of affairs, the Government had made life difficult for the Sikhs. They had to take shelter in the thick jungles of Malwa, Himalayas, where they had to live on wild fruits and vegetables and even had to eat flesh of the animals. However, the Sikhs bore all privations cheerfully. The constant fear of death made them bold and fearless. They had learnt to live in misery and suffering.

The Sikhs, though suffering the utmost, always remembered the sacrifices made by their Gurus, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh and his four sons. "The tenets of Nanak and Gobind Singh had, nevertheless, taken root in the hearts of the people, the peasant and the machnic nursed their faith in secret, and the more ardent clung to the hope of ample revenge and speedy victory. The departed Guru had declared himself the last of the prophets, the believers were without a temporal guide and rude untutored men accustomed to defer to their teacher as divine, were left to work their way to greatness without an ordained method, and without any other band of union than the sincerity of their common faith. The progress of the new religion, and the ascendancy of its votaries, had thus been trusted to the pregnancy of the truths announced, and to the fitness of the Indian mind for their reception."¹

The Sikhs got inspiration from the mention of the sacrifices made by their ancestors, in their daily prayers. They were educated in the school of Guru Gobind Singh, they were perfect in self sacrifice and always remembered the words of Guru Gobind Singh.

1. Cunningham, J.D. *History of the Sikhs*. p. 83.

"O, great Lord, Grant me this boon only
That from the noble deeds I may never turn away.
I may fear not him, whom I face in fight
certain be my victory.
And this be instilled in my mind
My desire be to sing Thy praises
When the period of my life draws to an end

I may fight my foes valiantly
And die a heroic death.

Epilogue Chandi
Chariter-I

The Sikhs had before them, *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. They sought spiritual guidance from its words and once they took a decision before its presence, they obeyed it, even if they had to sacrifice their life.

When, the Delhi Emperor Farrakh Siyar was deposed in 1719 a young grandson of Bahadur Shah, *Rafi-ul-Daragat* was proclaimed the Emperor, the real power remaining in the hands of the Sayeed brothers. Rafi-ul-Daragat died within three months after occupying the throne and his younger brother, Rafi-ul-Daula became the king and assumed the title of Shah Jahan-II. He too remained a captive in the hands of the Sayeed brothers and was not allowed to move out. He died soon afterwards and a grand son of Aurangzeb *Nehosera* proclaimed himself the Emperor, but Sayeed brothers gave him a crushing defeat, made him prisoner and a huge treasure fell into the hands of Sayeeds. In October 1719, the Sayeeds called 18 years old grandson of Bahadur Shah to assume emperorship under the name of Mohammad Shafi, who got murdered one of the Sayeed brothers and took the other into prison and he became the real sovereign.

Thus, under the circumstances, no large-scale slaughter could be made on the Sikhs as the Emperor needed time to consolidate his position. Moreover, the emperor asked the Punjab Governor to attack the Pathans of Kasur, who had rebelled against the Mughals under Hussain Khan. He had expelled all State officials and levied contribution on the neighbouring territories. The General, Kutab-ud-Din who launched a campaign was killed in action, his cavalry was dispersed and his goods were looted. The Governor, then marched personally against Kasur and subdued the ruler.

Then, came the turn of the Sikhs, according to M. Gregor,

"Strict orders were issued to every one bearing the name of Sikhs and rewards offered for their heads. In order to distinguish the Sikhs from the other inhabitants of the Punjab, all Muslims and Hindus were strictly enjoined to cut off their hair and beards. The emperor's edict applicable to all parts of India, was to arrest every Sikh, wherever found, and if he did not accept Islam to kill him. For every Sikh's head, a reward of Rs. 25/- was to be given and if captured alive, a sum of Rs. 100/-. Their pretty girls were to be reduced to concubines and the others to be made servants. When a Muslim died, his grave was to be dug by a Sikh or his Hindu sympathiser. For beggar in place of cobblers Sikhs were to be employed."¹

Bhai Mani Singh also wrote a letter to Mata Sundari. It said: "The Sikhs have retired to woods and waste lands. The *Malechhas* dominate the country. In all habitations no young woman is safe, the Guru's enemies have also joined hands with them."²

Zakariya Khan issued strict orders that the Sikhs be hounded out wherever they be found. A price was put on the head of each Sikh, and whosoever was captured was put to death, in the horse market of Lahore, later known as Shahid Ganj. Their severed heads were exhibited in pyramids to create terror into the minds of passers by. The Sikhs had no option but to leave their hearths and homes and retire to the Jungles. It was during these days that the couplet, *Raj Karega Khalsa, B Aki Rehe Na Koe, Khuar Hoi Sabmienge, bache Sharan jo hoe* was coined. This is still being recited in all the Sikh shrines and homes. The custom of reciting *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* continuously, was also started during the period. During the same period a new vocabulary was developed by the Sikhs in exile which depicted their courage and determination to fight against the aggressors. *Chhole* (Gram) were called almonds, onions, *rupa*, to give punishment to a man *Tankhah Lagani*, a single person, *Sawa Lakh* etc. etc.

The life of extreme helplessness in the deserts and Jungles taught the Sikhs a new way of living. They took to adventures which helped them in plundering the royal camps and treasures whenever an opportunity was available to them. Then came the martyrdom of Bhai Tara Singh.

Bhai Tara Singh belonged to Dhilwan in the district of Amritsar.

1. M-Gregor W.L., *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 113.

2. Trumpp. E. *Adi Granth*.

He was a farmer by profession and pursued it peacefully. He had no ill-will against any body and no villager had any complaint against him. A man of strong will and determination, somehow or other he incurred the enmity of one Sahib Rai Nambardar of village Nowshera in the same district. Sahib Rai let loose his horses to graze in the fields of peasants but no one could dare to drive them out. This resulted in a great loss to the farmers, who were very sore. Those peasants who were Sikhs were hated by others to win official favour. Tired and dejected, some of the Sikh peasants made a complaint to the *Nambardar*, who became furious and charged the complainants with ingratitude. He said that they were thieves and dacoits. Instead of being grateful for providing them subsistence and shelter, they were accusing him of trespassing. This was height of their misbehavior. He would report about them to the authorities and get them punished. The Sikh peasants disappointed and dejected were unable to get justice. They left the village to save their lives. When the tales of Sikhs' woes were told to Bhai Tara Singh, a highly religious man, he assured the sufferers that he would provide them with board and lodging. This showed generosity of the man.

After a couple of days, the horses and mares of Sahib Rai were stolen, while they were grazing in the fields as before. Sahib Rai thought that they must have been stolen by the Sikh peasants. Bhai Tara Singh was told to return the horses and produce the culprits. But Bhai Tara Singh firmly believed that they were innocent and therefore refused to oblige him. The *Nambardar* went to patti and made a complaint to the local Hakim Mirza Zafar Beg, against Bhai Tara Singh, who he said was a rebel and whose home was a shelter house for criminals. These people committed robberies and had made the life and property of people insecure. They must be punished severely so that the people were taught a lesson. The *Hakim* marched towards the village with a cavalry under the command of his nephew. The detachment was encountered by one Baghel Singh in the early hours of the morning who was out in the field for ablutions. With a water pot in one hand, and another in the other, he was going in a jungle when he noticed soldiers advancing towards the village. Baghel Singh blocked their way so that the other Sikhs might not be taken by surprise. He challenged the soldiers and fell upon them and with one stroke cut the head of the *Hakim's* nephew. Then *Hakim* attacked Baghel Singh and pierced him through with his spear. Baghel Singh fell on the ground. The noise of the fray awakened the people. They marched, armed

towards the enemy's troops. However, the attacking army retreated as the *Hakim* had lost his two nephews.

The *Hakim* of Patti, then approached the Governor, Zakariya Khan and convinced him of the high handedness of the local peasants. Zakariya Khan agreed to send an expedition consisting of 4000 soldiers under the command of General Moman Khan. In the first instance, he killed several innocent Sikh men, women and children outside the Lahore Fort. There was a well, which was provided with wheels at every turn of which the limbs of the Sikhs bound to them were crushed. This was done to create terror among the Sikhs, who now approached Bhai Tara Singh, with the request either to surrender or to flee to the Jungles. Bhai Tara Singh told them that the Khalsa was created to oppose the evil and thus they should raise the standard of revolt and lay down their lives in the struggle. Bhai Tara Singh knew fully well that it was certain death for him to oppose the royal forces but he had to walk on the path shown by Guru Gobind Singh to fight against the tyranny and injustice with dauntless determination, prepared to make supreme sacrifice, if needed.

Thus, about four hundred sikhs marched out of their places to check the advance of the invading army, whose strength was much larger and they were fully equipped. On the other hand the few Sikhs who were going to fight were a determined lot resolved to give their lives for the sake of a cause. When attacked, the Sikhs' swords and arrows wrought havoc in the ranks of the enemy. The heads of many Mughals were chopped off and strewn on the ground. Bhai Tara Singh's men also fell, performing feats of valour. At last, when Bhai Tara Singh was left alone, he sprang into the enemy ranks, roared like a lion and cleared his passage with his sword upto the spot where the commander was standing riding on an elephant. But Tara Singh fell on the ground and died. A glorious death indeed. This event had a far reaching effect on the morale of the Sikhs. It changed the entire atmosphere. The Sikhs burnt with the spirit of revenge. They vowed to avenge the death of Bhai Tara Singh. Many, willing to sacrifice their lives joined the *Jatha* of Diwan Darbara Singh. The Sikhs gathered at Amritsar and passed a Mata, to loot the royal arms and money whenever they got an opportunity. Shortly afterwards the opportunity came in 1730 when the Sikhs received the information that the revenue amounting to rupees four lakhs was being sent under heavy escort from Multan to Delhi. Four hundred Sikhs collected and fell on the Treasury. near Kaidiyan,

Lahore. The entire amount was looted. Many people were killed. The Sikhs took away all their horses and weapons and disappeared into the thick jungle in the vicinity of Ravi.

This emboldened the Sikhs. They looted altogether one lakh rupees from the treasury going from Kasur to Lahore. Then in 1731 Murtza Khan who dealt in horses, was taking some horses to Delhi was plundered by the Sikhs near Jandiala. They made a surprise attack, and disappeared with the horses meant for use by the imperial army. These incidents continued, which encouraged the Sikhs. One day, Jaffar Khan, a royal official who was going from Peshawar to Delhi was robbed off all the gold and silver he was carrying.

THREE

Sikhs under Nawab Kapur Singh

Zakariya Khan, the Punjab Governor when failed in his efforts to finish the Sikhs' root and branch, realized that it was not possible to totally annihilate the Sikhs, decided to play a policy of conciliation by offering them a *jagir* with an annual revenue of a lakh of rupees and a title of *Nawab* for their leader. "The policy bore its desired fruit. The Sikhs being tired of their long and tedious life accepted the *jagir* and title. They now took to peaceful pursuits and most of them settled at Amritsar."¹ This happened in 1733 and thus ended the darkest period of the Sikh persecutions and their misery. Although the Sikhs had to face yet worse persecutions in the years to come, any period of their subsequent history was comparatively less onerous and less potent of the factors which should have led to the complete annihilation of the Sikhs.

Nawab Kapur Singh was founder of Fyzulpuria (Singh Puria) *Misal*. A jat by caste, he occupied the village Fyzullah in the district of Amritsar after fighting a battle with its landlord, Fyzullah and re-named the village as Singhpuria. He also conquered some more villages in the vicinity of Fyzullah.

Kapur Singh was born in 1697 at village Kaloke in the district of Sheikupura. His father Ch. Dalip Singh Virk was a well-known figure in the area and commanded great respect among the people. Kapur Singh had a religious bent of mind from the very beginning and took active interest in battles. His mother recited hymns from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* for the benefit of the child who in due course of time learnt them by heart. He would very often, divide the boys of his age into groups and organize mock fighting among them. Sometimes he would get injured by the swords used in the

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 54.

fighting but he would never dither and continue taking part in fighting. By the time he was young, he was well versed in the marshal art of warfare and the use of weapons.

Thus, Kapur Singh became Nawab Kapur Singh. But he never lost his humility and requested the Sikhs to allow him to continue serving in the *langer*. The conferring of the title on Nawab Kapur Singh, gave the Sikhs a chance to go back to their homes and settle down in agriculture or trade. The first job of Nawab Kapur Singh was to send an information to the Sikhs hiding in jungles about the new development of far reaching importance, and asked them to gather at Amritsar. The Sikhs assembled and decided to utilize the opportunity provided to them. In 1734 they organized themselves under Nawab Kapur Singh into an army of elderly veterans called the *Buddha Dal*. The young Sikhs, however, were organized under the banner of *Taruna Dal*. After that, they were further divided into five bands which were led by Deep Singh Shaid, Prem Singh and Dharam Singh, Daswandha Singh, Babas Kahan Singh and Banda Singh, Bir Singh and Amar Singh. Their headquarters were in Amritsar at Ramsar, Bibeksar, Lakshmansar, Kaulsar and Santokhsar. Each had its own drum and flag and consisted of about 2000 men. Anyone could join any of these bands and also leave it at will and join another. No one was paid for.

In 1733, Zakariya Khan suggested to the Delhi authorities to withdraw repressive measures against the Sikhs, who were later allowed to assemble at Amritsar to celebrate the festival of *Baisakhi*. Subeg Singh, a resident of Janhar, Lahore who had been a Kotwal for sometime under the Mughal Government and now a government contractor was deputed by the Governor to negotiate with the Sikhs. He brought the offer of the title of Nawab and a *Jagir* with a lakh of rupees of annual revenue, consisting of Jhubal, Kanganwal and Dipal Pur. Deliberations were held between the Sikhs and, after a long discussion, they agreed to accept the offer. Kapur Singh who was waving a hand fan over the *Sangat* gathered there was chosen for the honour. The role of honour, consisting of a *shawl*, turban, a pair of gold bangles, a necklace, a garland of pearls, a sword, a brocade, garments and a jeweled plume, was presented to Kapur Singh but showing humility he placed all the royal gifts at the feet of *Panj Payaras* who, however, handed back the articles to him.

They dined in the common kitchens. Strict discipline was maintained. Whatever was collected was to be kept at common

place and to be utilized for all the people. Nawab Kapur Singh was made the over-all incharge of both *Buddha Dal* and *Taruna Dal*. The *Buddha Dal* was entrusted with the job of looking after the holy places and propagating of Sikh religion. *Taruna Dal* was to defend the Sikhs in case of an attack by the enemy.

In the year, 1734, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was to play an important role later in the life of the Sikh nation and who had been brought up under the care of Mata Sundari at Delhi, joined the Nawab. He was well trained in the use of arms and art of warfare.

However, the granting of *jagir* by Zakariya Khan did not prove of any advantage. The peace did not last long. Soon the excuse was found to confiscate the *Jagir*. It was alleged that the Sikhs had broken their promise of remaining peaceful. The Sikhs too could not control their ambitions with such small reward. Thus, in 1735 Zakariya Khan sent his troops and occupied the *Jagir* granted to the Sikhs. His Minister, Lakhpat Rai, drove the *Buddha Dal* out of Amritsar and into the Bari Doab and then across the Sutlej. Ala Singh of Patiala joined the forces of *Buddha Dal* and captured a large portion of Malwa. However, when *Buddha Dal* re-crossed the Sutlej, Lakhpat Rai intercepted them on their way to Amritsar. A battle ensued and many officers of the royal army were killed. Zakariya Khan himself jumped into the fray and established once again his authority over the area.

Now Zakariya Khan, reverted to his original policy of persecution of the Sikhs. The forces were ordered to capture them. A proclamation was issued declaring that whosoever produced Sikhs' heads would be rewarded Rs. 50. Hundreds of Sikhs were captured and killed. For presenting an alive Sikh, again the reward was Rs. 50, for giving an information regarding the Sikhs the reward offered was Rs. 10, for helping in an arrest Rs. 15, and anybody could loot a Sikh home without any fear of punishment. Thus many Sikhs were crushed under the wheels. They were buried alive waist deep in the ground, and the upper half was blown away by firing bullets from cannon's mouth.

The Sikhs once again fled to the jungles, and the life of hopeless misery started. However, during this period they remained in high spirits and suffered depression with patience. They had to face economic squeeze with no means of livelihood. Nobody dared help them due to the fear created by the rulers. "But their nascent religious spirit, the strong enthusiasm for gaining freedom and the close

unity of brotherhood, maintained by common grievances, a common subject and utter poverty, kept them in cheerful frame of mind under these desperate circumstances.”¹

In October 1736, Nawab Kapur Singh made up his mind to come back from Malwa and celebrate *Diwali* there. As he reached near Amritsar, the imperial force under the command of Habit Khan, Dewan Lakhat Rai, Salabat Khan and Kutub-ud-Din attacked him at Bir Basarka. Nawab Kapur Singh and his men fought valiantly. There was no outcome as it was the first solvimeish.

Next day, when Nawab Kapur Singh reached near Khem Karan, he was joined by *Tarana Dal*. Imperialists were also strengthened by the arrival of reinforcement under Samad Khan. Nawab Kapur Singh moved to Hujra Shah where the Sikhs were attacked. The imperial army was routed and the royal soldiers fled in whatever direction they could. The Sikhs carried the day. Many royal soldiers lost their lives. “About two years more were passed in this desultory warfare which gradually strengthened the hands of Khalsa and weakened the power of the Mughal government. In the meantime circumstances had arisen which forebode the ruin of the Mughals and paved the way for the ascendancy of the Khalsa.”²

The circumstances which inspired new life into the Sikhs were the weakening of the government at Delhi, because of luxurious life of the Emperor Muhammad Shah and the dissensions raging between the vassals and the rising power of the Marathas. The Maratha Peshwas had surprised the Muslim rulers by suddenly appearing at Delhi. In 1737 when Baji Rao made an incursion from Agra towards Delhi, the Rohillas of Rohilkhand and the Jats in Bharatpur had also established independent kingdoms, while the Rajputs had practically thrown off the Mughal yoke.

Then in 1738, came the gruesome martyrdom of the most respected personality among the Sikhs, Bhai Mani Singh who was born at village Kobewal in the Malwa area. When he was hardly seven years old, his parents paid a visit to Anandpur along with the child to pay obeisance to Guru Tegh Bahadur. Here Bhai Mani Singh became attached with (Guru) Gobind who was of his own age that he would not leave him now. At the request of the Guru, his parents left Bhai Mani Singh in the care of Mata Gujri. From

1. Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II.

2. Narang, Gokul Chand *Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 119.

that day onwards he remained with Guru Gobind Singh. The teachers who gave education to Guru Gobind Singh, also educated Bhai Mani Singh. Being sharp, Bhai Mani Singh rose to distinction. Mata Gujri nourished him as her own child. When Bhai Mani Singh grew up, he preached the Name of God to the people who came to Anandpur.

At last, when Guru Gobind Singh was forced to leave Anandpur, Bhai Mani Singh helped the Guru's wives Mata Sundari and Sahib Devan and escorted them to Delhi. He next brought them to Damdama Sahib.

At Damdama Sahib the Guru dictated *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* to Bhai Mani Singh and then he accompanied the Guru to the South, and when the Guru saw his end approaching he sent him back along with Mata Sahib Devan. When the dispute arose between *Bandais* and *Tat Khalsa* at Amritsar he was sent by Mata Sundari there in 1721 to bring about the settlement. Later, when the dispute was resolved, Bhai Mani Singh took over the charge of administering the Harimandir. His learning and intellect, his scholarly exposition of the holy scriptures and his saintly life and general disposition commanded unstinted admiration from one and all.

When the Harimandir was blocked for entry of the Sikhs by the rulers, Bhai Mani Singh played a commendable role. It occurred to him to celebrate the festival of *Diwali* at Amritsar. He applied to the *Hakim* of Amritsar for permission to hold the fair. Permission was granted by Zakariya Khan, to whom the matter was referred on the specific condition that Bhai Mani Singh would pay Rs. 5000/- to the state. Bhai Mani Singh promised to pay the amount to the authorities and announced the celebration and the Sikhs started coming. Zakariya Khan sent a company of troops on the pretext of maintaining law and order.

This created panic and fear among the people and the fair could not be held. Bhai Mani Singh did not pay the amount due from him. The authorities were enraged. Bhai Sahib was arrested and taken to Lahore where he was asked either to pay the promised amount or to embrace Islam. Bhai Mani Singh did not accept any of the conditions. His body was cut into pieces bit by bit. Bhai's remains were cremated at the spot near the fort called Shahid Ganj.

The News of the cruel death infuriated the Sikhs. They retaliated by committing raids from their abode in jungles. Government outposts were attacked and the treasures were looted.

After the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh in 1734 Zakariya Khan on the advice of his commandos deputed Qazi Abdul Rehman to capture the holy city of Amritsar as Harimandir was the main source of inspiration to the Sikhs. The army surrounded the temple and prevented Sikhs from entering it.

Nawab Kapur Singh very often sent the Sikhs in disguise from jungles to assert their right to have a dip in the holy tank. One day, Bhai Sukha Singh and Braj Singh came, had a dip in the holy tank and fled on their horses and joined many Sikhs waiting outside. Abdul Rehman attacked them but suffered a heavy loss both in men and material, losing even his own life in the battle.

Zakariya Khan was enraged and vowed to revenge. He sent Samad Khan to capture Nawab Kapur Singh. An attack was made. Kapur Singh divided his army into two, one of which was sent to face the enemy. A fierce battle followed. Samad Khan was attacked and captured by Kapur Singh; he was tied behind four horses and dragged. He died on the spot and had to pay the price for the execution of Bhai Mani Singh.

Nawab Kapur Singh's fury was still unabated. One day when Zakariya Khan was to pray in Shahi Mosque at Lahore, Kapur Singh along with his two thousand men disguised as Muslims, entered the city raising shouts of Allah-hu-Akbar. However, Zakariya Khan did not turn up and Nawab Kapur Singh left the city shouting *Sat Siri Akal*.

Now Kapur Singh marched towards Malwa. Crossing Sutlej he proceeded towards Delhi but returned after a short while. On the way, he realised tribute from the chieftains of Jhajjar, Dadri and Patandi and overran the territories of Faridabad, Ballabgarh and Gurgaon.

Nawab Kapur Singh lifted the Sikhs from the leaderless state to a glorious future of national pride. He was handsome and possessed a strong personality. There was not a part of the Nawab's body which did not bear a two inches wide scar or a wound. He was a organiser par excellence, who organised the Sikhs first into *Buddha* and *Taruna Dals* and then into *Dal Khalsa*. It was an honour to be baptised at his hands, and thousands were brought to the Sikh faith by him. It was he who brought the Sikhs out of the state of confusion and disorganisation. Latif says: "The *Dal* of the Khalsa or the army of the Theocracy of Singhs reached the height

of their power under the leadership of Kapur Singh who really organised this dal. He was undoubtedly the most distinguished of the Sikhs who paved the way for the greatness of the nation as an independent ruling power. He converted a large number of people including Jats, Carpenters, Weavers, *Jhiwers*, *Chhatries* and others to the persuasion of Govind, and the religious respect in which he was held was so great that their initiation into the *Pahul* of the Guru with his hands was considered a great distinction. He was certainly the most illustrious and the most dreaded of the Sikh Sardars before the days of Jassa Singh Ahluwalja and Ala Singh of Patiala.”¹

Nawab Kapur Singh died at Amritsar in 1753. He entrusted the leadership of the Khalsa to Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

1. Mohd. Latif, *History of Punjab*, pp. 322-323.

FOUR

Nadir Shah's Invasion and After

From January to May 1739, complete confusion and chaos prevailed in Delhi and Lahore. Nadir Shah invaded India. There was civil government in the country only in name, Delhi rulers having virtually lost their authority. The forces of disorder were conspicuous. The Sikhs took advantage of the situation under the leadership of Nawab Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They fell upon the inhabitants of Punjab in the first instance, who sought shelter in the hills. Their properties were plundered. The warriors scattered in the plains of Punjab carrying their swards. They entrenched themselves in the fort of Dallewal as it was conveniently situated in the centre of dense forest in the North-West of Amritsar on the bank of the Ravi and had a rich and fertile land. It served them as a place of retreat and shelter. They made it their resting place and launched their depredations from there. "The Sikhs, says Browne, blocked the miscellaneous ways of wayfarers and finding that the officers of Mahammad Shah had suspended their duties and that the administration in cities had fallen into disorder, they took advantage of the time and plundered large parts of the country and carried off booty."¹

The Sikhs continued committing highway robberies and were practically the masters of upper Bari Doab. They established themselves, says Munshi Sohan Lal, "in the Bari Doab under the leadership of Bagh Singh Ahluwalia. They stopped the traffic, plundered and raided a large number of villages and towns and extracted tribute from the neighbouring *Zamindars*. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the son of Bagh Singh's sister, a handsome and courageous youth was his uncle's deputy and exercised full authority over matters concerning Bagh Singh. The other Sikh chiefs also

1. Browne Tracts (11) p. 13.

accepted the leadership of the Ahluwalia Sardar and willingly worked under him. Thus the administration of the whole Doab seemed, at the time, to be passing into the hands of the Sikhs."¹

Nadir Shah who attacked India in January, 1739 was born in 1688, in a castle fifty miles North of Mashhad, the Capital of Khorasan. Earlier he was a petty free booter but later became king of Persia in 1736 and soon conquered Kandhar, Balkha and Bakhara. On the invitation of Nizam-ul-Mulk and Sadat Khan, the nobles of Mughal court Nadir Shah invaded India with a force of 1,25,000. He captured Jalalabad and Peshawar and crossing Jehlum and Chenab proceeded towards Lahore. Zakariya Khan was completely routed. On the payment of a tribute of Rs. 25 lakhs Lahore was saved. Zakariya Khan was confirmed Governor of Lahore and Nadir Shah proceeded towards Delhi. He took with him the major portion of the Punjab troops.

In May, 1739, the Sikhs attacked the rear of Nadir's army on its way back from Delhi, and captured a part of his treasury. Nadir's forces overloaded with booty and oppressed by the scorching May heat could not pursue them successfully.

As peace and amity was promised by the Muslim rulers, Nawab Kapur Singh sent messages to the Sikhs hiding in jungles to come to Amritsar. However, the peace did not last long and soon the policy of persecution was adopted by the rulers. The army was directed to capture the Sikhs. Price was fixed for Sikhs' heads. The Sikhs once again fled to jungles and a life of poverty and starvation started. However, they were always in high spirits and bore every ordeal cheerfully.

Now, the Nawab decided to celebrate the *Diwali* at Amritsar. As he approached Amritsar with his *Buddha Dal*, the Imperial army under Nabat Khan and Dewan Lakhpat Rai fell on the Sikhs at Basarka Bir. The Sikhs fought valiantly and protected their lives. Next morning *Buddha Dal* was joined by *Taruna Dal* at Khem Karan. The Imperial army was also reinforced by sending Samad Khan. Nawab Kapur Singh moved to Hujra Shah. The Sikh army was attacked, the battle ensued and the Imperial army was completely routed. The Khalsa became victorious. Many were killed and injured. Nadir Shah marched towards Delhi on 14 February, 1739. At Karnal he defeated the strong Mughal army consisting of 1,50,000 horse,

1. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ur-Twarikh*, Vol. 1.

500 pieces of artillery and a huge elephant corps. The Mughal Commander-in-Chief Khan-i-Dauran Khan was killed in the battle. The Governor of Oudh, Sadat Khan was taken prisoner. Many notable personalities also died. Then Nadir Shah reached Delhi triumphantly. The hopeless Emperor Muhammad Shah submitted and opened negotiations for peace and agreed to pay a heavy war indemnity. As long as the King did not make the payment, he was to be kept in confinement in his *Harem*.

Nadir Shah's army seized the jewels, ordnance pieces and the famous *Koh-i-Noor* and the peacock throne (*Takhat-i-Taoos*). The keys of the Red Fort were also demanded and taken, and thus putting themselves in control of the Mughal king including his many wives.

The Emperor laid at Nadir Shah's feet all that the Mughals had accumulated in Gold, Silver jewels and precious stones. Nadir also paid the soldiers their salary and satisfied them. The *Id* festival came and the *Khutba* was read in the grand mosque of Delhi in the name of Nadir Shah. All would have gone well but a tragedy occurred which upset all the arrangements. The people of Delhi murdered some of the Nadir Shah's soldiers. Even Nadir Shah himself was fired upon. He was infuriated and ordered the general massacre of the entire population of Delhi. Then in half a day, Delhi roads and streets were flowing with blood and the city littered all over with corpses. Many buildings and houses were burnt. About 1,50,000 people including many women and children were killed. Many Hindus killed themselves to save their honour. It was only after that some of the Mughal courtiers bowed before Nadir Shah, begging mercy that Nadir Shah stopped the massacre. "The bloody scene extended" writes Latif, "from Sarafa Ardui, in front of the fort of Idgah, which is three km distance, and from Chitli Kabur as far as the Tabacoo market and Pul Mithai. The whole of the Dariba Bazar ran red with the blood of bankers and merchants. Neither sex nor age was spared. Before two O'clock in the afternoon, it is computed between 1,20,000 and 1,50,000 were slaughtered though not third part of the population were visited by the sword of the avengers. So great was the dread of the Persians that the wretched Indians bent down their heads before them like sheep to be slaughtered and one Persian soldier is said to have butchered a whole family of ten men, women and children without encountering any opposition whatever."¹

After the massacre ceased, Nadir Shah returned to the Capital,

where, under his orders several of the *omerahs*, who were suspected of being accomplices were murdered. Then six thousand people of Mughalpura and surrounding villages were beheaded. In the royal market, he had the noses and ears of 700 persons who were seized, cut off.

Now, Nadir Shah took possession of all the movable treasures in the city. He seized upon the regalia of the Mughal Emperor, and the public treasure nobles and wealthy citizens were plundered and by threats and torture, they were told to produce their hidden wealth. Contributions were also levied on the citizens. The gates of the city were closed and the citizens tortured with a view to making them diagoerge their wealth. "Large contributions were also levied on the Governor of Provinces and the total wealth carried away by Nadir is described by historians as being between eighty *karor* and thirty *Karor* (80,000,000 and 30,000,000) of money exclusive of jewels, rich stuffs and other valuable property, among which was included the famous *Kohinoor* diamond, now forming part of the British Regalia. He also carried away a large number of elephants, horses, camels and valuable furniture and the most skilful workers and artisans, numbering several hundred. He married his son Nasrullah, to the daughter of Aziz-ul-Din, the son of Kam Baksh and a grandson of Aurangzeb."²

The last act of Nadir was to convene an assembly of all *Omerhs* and Chiefs of State in which he replaced the imperial diadem on the head of Mohammed Shah with his own hands and helped him to ascend the throne of his ancestors. A treaty was drawn up ceding all the territories North-West of the Indus together with Sindh and Tatta, to the King of Persia."³

Nadir Shah moved back from Delhi in May, 1739. Writing about the incident Forester says, "The Sicque forces appeared in arms at the period of Nadir Shah's return from Delhi, when the Persian army, encumbered with spoil and regardless of order, was attacked in the rear by detached predatory parties of Sicque cavalry, who occasionally fell upon the baggage guards, and acquired a large plunder."⁴

When Nadir Shah reached Lahore, he was informed of the

1. Latif Mohd., *History of Punjab*, p. 205.

2. Latif Mohd., *History of Punjab*, p. 206.

3. *Ibid*, p. 206.

4. Forester, *Travels*, (i), P. 323.

losses sustained by his troops. He was enraged and asked Zakariya Khan as to who these people were who dared to attack his forces. Zakariya Khan replied that there were only a few *fakirs* who assembled twice in a year at Amritsar for taking a bath in the holy tank. Nadir Shah paused for a while and again questioned Zakariya Khan as to where they lived and where were their hearths and homes. Zakariya Khan who was non-plussed by the strange questions of Nadir Shah replied that their hearths and homes were on the saddles of their horses. Nadir Shah was taken aback and told Zakariya Khan that these rebels would be the rulers of this land after some time."¹ And his prophecy came true. Zakariya Khan accompanied Nadir Shah upto the river Chenab. Here they parted and many precious gifts were bestowed on Zakariya Khan. It is also said that Zakariya Khan secured from Nadir Shah the liberation of thousands of prisoners, both Hindus and Muslims.

Zakariya Khan was facing a difficult situation. At the moment, the Government machinery had collapsed, there was no government in existence, complete confusion and chaos prevailed, cities and towns looked deserted and their inhabitants had fled to jungles due to increasing menace of marauders.

Zakariya Khan took up the task of restoring peace and putting the economy in gear. "Zakariya Khan took active measures for the repopulation of the towns and villages which had been divested by the savages of the Sikhs and made *Takavi* advances to the agricultural classes to induce them to resume the cultivation of the land."² He established several new markets and abolished *octroi* to give a boost to trade.

He was convinced that the Sikhs were the main source of trouble and were the persons who were disturbing peace. If they were controlled, the entire situation would change. To achieve this objective, he reorganised his army and sent his troops in various directions in pursuit of the Sikhs.

The fort of Dallewal, which the Sikhs had built earlier was razed to the ground. A large number of Sikhs were shot dead and hundreds of them were brought to Lahore in chains, where they were executed at a place which afterwards came to be known as Shahid Ganj.

1. Gordon, C.H., *The Sikhs*, p. 36.

2. Latif Mohd., *History of Punjab*, p. 193.

Zakariya Khan issued strict order to officials and village headmen not to give refuge to the Sikhs. Adina Beg was specially appointed to exterminate the Jullunder Doab area. The persecution of Sikhs was at its height in Jullunder Doab. He, however, did not take any harsh measures to crush the Sikhs, deliberately ignored some of their activities, and permitted them to carry on their pursuits as long as they refrained from creating serious disturbances. Adina Beg was a greedy man. He did not crush the Sikhs. If he had intended to do so, it was not a difficult task. But he had this idea in his mind that if he quelled the Sikhs, some other contractor might be entrusted with the government.

The Doab gave higher sum of revenue and he might be dismissed. He, therefore, treated the Sikhs well and settled terms with them. For this reason the Sikhs grew stronger and they gradually occupied many villages as *Jagir*.¹

However, Zakariya Khan did not allow this weak policy to be pursued. "He could not rest in peace till he had turned out all the Sikhs from the Jullunder Doab and he issued strict orders to Adina Beg to take necessary steps in this direction. Adina Beg avoided for some time but ultimately had to yield to pressure. He ordered the Sikhs to evacuate the territory. A reign of terror was let loose. Every village, every town and every hamlet served as a slaughter house where God's innocent creatures were butchered. Every tree served as gibbet and every dark neglected well became a drug into which people, professing the Khalsa faith, or men, suspected or being in sympathy with them were thrown indiscriminately, and more than left to die of hunger, or be stifled by the foul and poisonous stench. In a surprisingly brief period, the whole land was cleared of the Khalsa."²

As the pressure was mounting on them from all sides, the Sikhs, therefore, had no alternative but to flee to whatever direction they could. Those giving information about whereabouts of the Sikhs were rewarded. Any person who cut off the hair of a Sikh and presented before the local *Hakim* was presented with a blanket. Such was the state of affairs in which the Sikhs lived. A person who killed Sikhs was given Rs. 50/-. Sikh homes were ransacked and burnt. Giving shelter to a Sikh was made a crime amounting to death sentence.

1. Bhakat Mal, *Khalsa Nama* (MSS) p. 58.

2. Lachhman Singh Bhagat, *Sikh Martyrs*, pp. 125-126.

“A proclamation was issued by the Lahore Viceroy ordering a general massacre of the long haired Sikhs wherever found. They were haunted like wild beasts, a price being placed on their heads, thousands were put to death, giving pardon on condition of renouncing their religion.”¹

The sufferings of the Sikhs increased. Many of them died of starvation and wounds inflicted on them. A large number of them took shelter in the hills of Jammu and Kangra to escape persecution.

Here mention may be made of a few brave Sikhs who laid down their lives for the sake of a cause. One such person was Bhai Bota Singh, who belonged to Amritsar district. He wandered about in jungles to avoid persecution. Once he came out of his hide out and occupied a dilapidated house near Tarn Taran. He repaired it and began to work as an inn keeper. The way-farers were supplied with food and water by Bota Singh and his companion. They levied tax of one anna for every carriage and pie for every donkey load that passed by. At night they attacked the Muslims, punished the miscreants and restored the Hindu children to their parents who were taken away by them. This practice continued for some time but ultimately a contingent of army was sent to arrest them. The house was besieged; they fought valiantly and killed many soldiers before they fell fighting.

Two other brave Sikhs were Mehtab Singh and Sukha Singh. Massa Ranger, the Kotwal of Amritsar, along with other Muslim officers used to hold *Mujras* in the Golden Temple. In 1740, these two stalwarts came from Bikaner in the garb of peasants with bags full of coins and appeared before Massa Ranger. Their swords fell on him and he was slain. They rode back brandishing their swords and left behind a mass of terror stricken people.

However, shortly afterwards when Mehtab Singh visited Jandiala to meet his son, information reached the authorities and he was arrested. His son was struck against the ground and his dead body was let to be torn away by vultures. Mehtab Singh was taken to Lahore where he was crushed under the wheels. Sukha Singh was also arrested and mercilessly done to death.

Another brave Sikh was Bhai Taru Singh, a young Sikh of 25 years, of village Poohla in Amritsar district. He used to assist the Sikhs hiding in the jungles. He was arrested and brought to Lahore

1. Gordon J.H., *History of Sikhs*, p. 50.

where he was given the choice of embracing Islam or accepting death. He obviously accepted death. He was tied to the *Sheeks*, his ribs were broken, wrists were strained, joints grew loose, blood gushed out at many places and bones cracked. His hair was scraped off his head. He was required to cut his hair and to renounce his faith. But the old companion of Guru Gobind would yield neither his conscience nor the symbol of his conviction and his real or pretended answer is preserved to the present day. "The hair, the scalp, and the skull are said to have a mutual connection. The head of the man is linked with life, and he was prepared to yield his breath with cheerfulness."¹ Taru Singh's half dead body was handed over to the Sikhs who took him to the Dharamsala where he died after lingering for a few days. His remains were cremated in Shahid Ganj. His martyrdom took place on June 25, 1743.

The Sikhs lived in exile but never lost their faith in the Will of God. During this period their destiny was guided by Nawab Kapur Singh and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. These brave Generals took their command and guided their destiny. With indomitable will, high spirit and courage, they passed through the ordeals and trials.

The Sikhs continued visiting Amritsar and taking a dip in the holy tank. They made it a regular feature to pay a visit to the holy shrine twice a year on the occasions of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi*. "The Sikh horsemen were seen riding at full gallop towards their favourite shrine of devotion. They were often slain in making this attempt, and sometimes taken prisoners, but they used, on such occasions to seek, instead of avoiding the crown of martyrdom; and that an instance was never known of a Sikh, taken on his way to Amritsar, come ending to abjure his faith."²

Every six months crowds of the Sikhs resorted to the Holy Tank at Amritsar says Mc'Gregor and there held council among themselves, they afterwards dispersed, and returned to the jungles. Many of them, *Zamindars* in the Maja tract of country where two or three horsemen gartered, and sported by the *Zamindars*, unless when they chose to provide for themselves by robbery and pillage. Thus protected, their apprehension became impracticable."³

The Sikhs had almost been driven out of the plains of Punjab

1. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 84.

2. Malcolm, John, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 88.

3. Mc Gregor, W.L., *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 114-115.

when the peace was restored to some extent, the army asked for their dues. That treasury was empty. Zakariya Khan put Diwan Lakhpat Rai into prison for not clearing the army dues. Jaspat Rai secured the release of Lakhpat Rai by promising to pay the troops their dues. In the meantime, the Sikhs again appeared in the plains and reached Amritsar, whenever they got the opportunity. Revenue was being lost, therefore a policy of relaxation was adopted. They were given opportunity to collect in large numbers in April and October at Amritsar.

Zakariya Khan's policy of persecution, had an adverse effect since the peasants sympathised with the Sikhs. They thwarted the administration by giving shelter to the fugitives and many joined the Sikhs to ambush the state police. Even though the Sikhs suffered the most during Zakariya Khan's stern and harsh rule, they remained defiant and developed a spirit which enabled them to face adversity.

Zakariya Khan died on July 1, 1745. Of the three sons of Zakariya Khan, Yahiya Khan the eldest was married to the daughter of Delhi Prime Minister, Qamar-ud-Din. The *Wazir* was anxious that Yahiya Khan should succeed his father as the Lahore Governor. On January 3, 1746 Yahiya Khan was appointed the Governor of Lahore. His ambitious younger brother Shah Nawaz, was made Governor of Multan. He attacked his brother but finally withdrew; made yet another effort on November 21, 1746 to secure division of his father's property and withdrew when he got six lakhs of rupees. Another battle was fought near Lahore on March 17, 1747 and Shah Nawaz became the Lahore Governor. Yahiya Khan was captured. Kaura Mal was appointed the Dewan in place of Lakhpat Rai.

During the 1745-1747 of civil strife, when Yahiya Khan was the incharge of Punjab Government, the peace and prosperity of the province had been almost destroyed. There were disturbances all-round. Raja of Jammu revolted and stopped paying tribute. The Sikhs also became active and created serious trouble. "The spirit of the revived sect displayed itself at first in secret association and isolated act of depredation. Bodies of armed men in tens and twenties, called *Dharwee* in the dialect of the province, that is, highway men, infested the routes of communication, attacked villages or plundered in towns, according as their local connections invited

to either mode of seeking wealth or the means of support. The early neglect of the ruling authority enabled the association to prosper, and the most successful chiefs purchased horses with the proceeds of their spoil and mounted and armed their followers."¹

Describing the condition of the province, Anand Ram writes, "Lawless men, plunders and adventurers who had so long kept themselves in hiding now peeped out of their hideouts."²

Meanwhile, the Sikhs organised themselves into small bands to fight against the repressive government. "They had to defend their person and property against a tyrannical Government. In order to popularize their faith, the needs of the individuals who were daily joining them had to be attended to. Their relations and friends leading peaceful lives in the villages had to be protected, and those who opposed them had to be silenced. To follow a systematized course of plunder a plan of action had to be prepared, weapons and provisions had to be got ready. In a word organisation was needed."³

The Sikhs gathered at Amritsar on the occasion of the first *Diwali* after the death of Zakariya Khan on October 14, 1745. A *Gurmatta* was passed. The Sikhs divided themselves into 25 groups, each consisting of about 100 persons. The leaders of these groups were Shyam Singh of Naroka, Gurbaksh Singh of Kalsia, Karam Singh of Pajgarh, Korora Singh, Gurdayal Singh of Dallewal, Chanda Singh, Nodh Singh of Shukarchakia, Kala Singh and Khiyala Singh of Kang, Dharam Singh, Bagh Singh, Jassa Singh, Hari Singh, Chajja Singh of Panjwar, Deep Singh, Bhuma Singh, Nawab Kapur Singh, Jit Singh of Kansh, Sada Singh, Hira Singh Nakai, Agar Singh, Sikha Singh, Madan Singh, Dhir Singh Mazahabi, and Karam Singh of Amritsar.

This was the first *Gurmatta* passed by the Sikhs. These bands were linked together not only by religion but also by the common interest they had, they organised into regular bands writes Malcolm, may be taken as a significant starting point in the military career of the Sikhs. They had to carry on the war in guerilla bands, because they had realised that this form of warfare was the most effective and the least dangerous, and that success depended upon their

1. Princep H.T. *Origin of the Sikh Power*, p. 2.

2. Anand Ram, *Tazakra-i-Anand Ram*, pp. 50-51.

3. Gupta Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*. Vol. I, pp. 20-21.

comrades. This changed the character of the Sikh resistance. Not only did it make them a power to face their foes and to practice plunder, but it also gave them an idea of organising a multitude of plunders into some sort of rude cavalry regiment which ultimately proved of immense value. It was enlarged and further developed and formed the basis of the first regularly organised national army of the community popularly known as the Dal Khalsa."¹

FIVE

1. Malcolm, John, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 89.

The Holocaust

Disturbed conditions continued in this strain for some time. The Sikhs gained some victories during 1745-47 which encouraged them for further battles. They very often visited Amritsar, had a dip in the holy tank which renewed their determination to fight against aggression and repression. They were bent upon striking the enemy. Raids on villages especially those which had rendered active assistance to the Government against the Sikhs became very common. The villages of Nowshehra and Majitha in Amritsar District were attacked and many persons including some Chaudhries were killed. This further emboldened them. Now the Sikhs raided besides the villages of Bijwara and Talwara, the towns of Batala, Jullunder and Phagwara and ransacked them. They created fear among the people. Encouraged by the exploits some daring youths entered the capital of Lahore disguised as Mughals. It was the cold month of January and most of the people had shut themselves in their houses because of severe cold and ghastly winds. There was very dim light in the streets to establish the identity of the Sikhs. The looted property was loaded on horses and under the cover of darkness the youths disappeared. According to Giani Gyan Singh, some Qazis were also put to death. The Sikhs had conjectured that these Qazis had helped the Government and supported the punishment awarded to the Sikhs. Full revenge was taken and whatever was possible under the circumstances was done.

The city of Lahore was plundered. These Sikhs now went into the jungles on the bank of Ravi to join others who were hiding there. The Mughal soldiers followed them, "but it was a dreary and arduous task," Says Hari Ram Gupta¹, "for pursuing the Mughal troops with their loose trousers to pass through the thorny bushes over a marshy soil where the legs of the horses sank in the mud."¹

1. Gupta. Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 16.

These depredations created ripples in the Government circles. The Viceroy of Lahore, Yahia Khan was perturbed and enraged and ordered his Diwan Lakhpat Rai to deal with the Sikhs sternly. He ordered him to inflict severest punishment on the desperadoes. Lakhpat Rai accordingly sent a strong contingent of army to turn out the Sikhs from the jungles around Ravi. The Sikhs now moved towards Eminabad, paid a visit to Gurdwara Rori Sahib and paid homage. A message was sent to the Sikhs to vacate the territory immediately as their acts of depredations were intolerable. Taking the message not so seriously the Sikhs replied that they would automatically leave the place after taking their food. They had no enmity with Jaspat Rai. On this Jaspat Rai became furious and declared that he was determined to destroy the Sikhs' seeds as they were his staunch enemies. The Sikhs intentionally delayed their departure making Jaspat Rai fall upon them with his soldiers. The Sikhs left their food uncooked and took up positions. The fighting ensued. One daring Sikh Nibahu Singh climbed up the tail of the elephant on which Jaspat Rai was riding, administered him blow with his sword and cut his head from his body. This dare devil act of the Sikh won him many laurels from his comrades. The severed head of Jaspat Rai was sold to one Baba Kirpa Ram for Rs. 500/- . Jaspat Rai's men were disheartened and fled from the field. The Sikhs carried the day. This incident took place in March, 1746.

When Lakhpat Rai received the news of his brother's death at the hands of the Sikhs, he was infuriated and vowed to take revenge. He said that he would not rest till the last Sikh lived on the land. Viceroy Yahiya Khan, blessed him in his mission. An army was sent, all the Sikhs in Lahore were arrested and slaughtered at Shahid Ganj. Some of the noted personalities went to Lakhpat Rai in a deputation and requested him not to shed blood of innocent persons, particularly on the sacred *Amavas* day but Lakhpat Rai did not pay any heed to their persuasions and burnt the holy books of the Sikhs and demolished their holy places of worship. The Sikhs who had taken shelter in the jungles around the Ravi were attacked by Yahiya Khan and Lakhpat Rai personally. The Sikhs moved upto the right bank of Ravi. Skirmishes took place and the Sikhs were badly mauled and light artillery was extensively used by the enemy forces. Running and playing hide and seek the Sikhs reached Khanuwan in the present district of Gurdaspur and hid themselves in the thick forest

1 Ibid, Gupta, Hari Ram

abounding in wild animals. Here they had some respite.

The plight of the Sikhs was not pitiable. There was suffering and misery around. The provisions with them had exhausted. Ammunition had run short. Some of them were wounded. There was shortage of food articles which made them to starve. Lakhpat Rai's relentless attacks created havoc and fear gripped the rank and file of the Sikhs. Some deserted their ranks. What was left was the Dal Khalsa, ready to sacrifice their lives for the *Panth*. The whole Government machinery was geared against them and their ordeals were unbearable.

The Sikhs were extremely hardpressed and were in a tight corner. Ready to sacrifice their lives for their cause, the Sikhs one night under the cover of darkness attacked the forces of Lakhpat Rai amidst shouts of *Wah-i-Guru Ji-Ka-Khalsa, Wah-i-Guru-Ji-Ki-Fateh* and recklessly entered the enemy ranks.

Lakhpat Rai gathered his entire force and attacked the Sikhs fiercely. Skirmishes took place and the Sikhs fled to Kathua, near Pathankot. Lakhpat Rai followed them. All *Chaudhries* and *Nambardars* were directed by the Viceroy to co-operate with Lakhpat Rai. The hill people were pushing the Sikhs back into the plains and the people of plains were cutting off all the routes so that the Sikhs could not escape.

The Sikhs, with pursuit from all the sides were compelled to take shelter in Basoli hills on the bank of the river Ravi. The enemy was still pursuing them. The entire population of the area had been hostile. The river also could not be crossed because of its swift current. Two young Sikhs determined to sacrifice their lives jumped into the river to know if the river could be crossed but they were drowned. Clouds of death hovered on their heads. There was no alternative for them, even running away was not possible, so they hid themselves in all possible hideouts they could find.

Meanwhile the Sikhs were attacked, many were killed, many were taken into custody, some fell into the river, many more jumped into the wells so that they were not tortured if made captives. The captives were tortured, their hair were pulled and they were crushed under the wheels. Some, however, escaped towards Beas.

According to Khushwat Rai, royal troops entered into every cave, frightened the Sikhs and drove them into the plains towards Batala. All openings were blocked and there was no route to escape.

Here Yahiya Khan and Lakhpat Rai attacked the Sikhs, four hundred were slain and another four hundred were taken captives. Scouts and army men roamed about in search of Sikhs, killing every Sikh they came across. Lakhpat Rai fixed five rupees as the price for every Sikh head. The Sikh population thinned. Many abandoned their faith.

The Sikhs who had escaped death went towards Beas. Their resistance continued and they gave full account of their strength by fighting against the enemy against heavy odds. However, they had to face terrible situation while crossing the Beas. They were overtaken by the forces of Lakhpat Rai. The river was in spate and the enemy was pursuing the Sikhs. Only their faith in God and will to fight against the enemies of the *panth*, made them to face ordeals from all quarters. At Hargobindpur *Ardas* was performed and thousands of Sikhs jumped into the river. Many crossed over to the other side of the river, but found to their dismay a deep bed of sand miles long. The sand was burning in the hottest months of May-June adding to the woes of already starving Sikhs. Their wounds were bleeding. Their plight was miserable. They tore their turbans and tied them to their feet to escape from the burns of hot sand. They walked briskly as the enemy could again overtake them any time. Ultimately walking several miles they entered Jullundur Doab. The Sikhs camped in a village and started cooking their food but when the forces of Adina Beg fell upon them it was the most disastrous scene. By this time, Lakhpat Rai had also crossed the Beas. They were surrounded from all sides and there was no route to escape. Leaving their food uncooked the Sikhs took up arms and started fighting piercing through the mighty force of Adina Beg, they reached Suttlej. It was a miracle indeed. They crossed the river at Aliwal and reached the Malwa territory. Lakhpat Rai did not pursue them and returned to Lahore.

This massacre, known as the small holocaust, continued during the months of May-June, 1746. In the entire campaign about 10,000 Sikhs were killed. According to Rattan Singh Bhangu 40,000 Sikhs were killed which, however, does not seem to be correct.

The Malwa Sikhs sympathized with their *Majha* brethren and offered them shelter. They nursed their wounds and provided them all attention and care.

The captives were brought to Lahore in chains. They were mounted on camels and taken to a place later on called Shahidganj.

It was the most tragic event in Sikh history. A proclamation was issued that if anybody took the name of the Guru his belly would be ripped open. It is also said that Lakhpat Rai ordered that *Gur* should henceforth be called *Rori* so that it does not sound like Guru.

Such strong repressive measures halted the spread of Sikhism to some extent. Lakhpat Rai avenged his brother's death. Only pure Khalsa remained, looters left the Khalsa ranks.

Throughout this period Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Sikh Sardars played a notable part. They had a strong will and determination to fight against evil and aggression. Ahluwalia organised the Sikhs during this darkest period. Now he halted with his comrades at Kotkapura. Other Sikh leaders of the time stayed at different places. Sukha Singh at Jaitut, Nawab Kapur Singh at Ding Wanjhahe, Hari Singh at Dayalpur, Charat Singh at Pathrala while Deep Singh stayed in Lakhi jungle.

The period of crisis again began for the Sikhs when Lakhpat Rai reached Lahore. He demolished many Sikh shrines and many more were ordered to be closed. *Guru Granth Sahib* was burnt at several places. Some volumes were thrown into wells. Lakhpat Rai declared that the Sikhs had been finished by him who was a Khatri, like the founder of the Sikh faith. One founded the faith and the other had destroyed it. Survivors had been turned out. Nobody could remember Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, he ordered.

Soon the situation changed. The civil war started between Zakariya Khan's sons; after about six months Yahiya's younger brother, Shahnawaz Khan, raised a banner of revolt against him. He visited Lahore on November 21, 1746 and sent a message of Yahiya Khan through Diwan Surat Singh that their father's property should be divided. He was joined by Hashmatullah Khan, Kaura Mal and Adina Beg.

Yahiya Khan was in favour of avoiding fighting but also did not want to distribute his father's property. There were skirmishes between the forces of two brothers very often; at last Yahiya Khan marched out of Lahore and engaged the forces of Shahnawaz Khan. However, they came to terms and Yahiya Khan paid Rs. 6,00,000 to his brother as his share from their father's property. Shahnawaz proceeded towards Batala where he captured some areas under Yahiya Khan and bought some of the chiefs of the surrounding areas under his charge.

Yahiya Khan was upset and annoyed. He prepared for attack on the forces of Shahnawaz Khan but the information leaked out

and Shahnawaz Khan personally came to Lahore and encamped near Hazrat Ishan's tomb. Fierce battle was fought on March 17, 1747. The attack was led by Adina Beg and Mumin Khan was forced to come out from his hideout. He was defeated and taken into custody. When Shahnawaz Khan personally assaulted Mir Mumin. Even the army of Yahiya Khan revolted against him and asked for their dues which had not been paid to them for a long time. On March 21, 1747 a victorious Shahnawaz entered the city of Lahore.

He now became the Viceroy of Punjab. He was firm in his saddle. Kaura Mal was appointed the Diwan and Adina Beg Khan was allowed to continue as Governor of Jullunder Doab.

The dispute between Yahiya Khan and Shahnawaz Khan had far-reaching effect on the Sikhs., Chaos and anarchy continued between November, 1746 to March 1747. The Sikhs utilised this opportunity as best as they could. During the period of respite from repression they regrouped themselves, increased their strength and were ready to face any further eventuality. When the war broke out between Yahiya Khan and Shahnawaz Khan, the Sikhs left their hideouts and started visiting Amritsar to pay their respect to the holy shrine. They would take a dip in the tank and pray there for strength and victory.

The Sikhs rallied under their leaders Nawab Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and were now ready to fight for the Panth's cause. The Mughal *Faujdar* of Amritsar did not relish the idea of the Sikhs uniting, and erected four towers in all the four corners of the sacred tank at Amritsar so that his army men could watch the Sikhs coming and going out of *Harimandir*. The army men had orders to shoot the Sikhs entering the holy shrine. A bold Sikh Sukha Singh resolved to take bath in the holy tank. He dressed himself in the Turkish style, came at mid day, took a dip in the holy tank and escaped.

This encouraged other Sikhs to repeat the feat. The Sikhs were exhorted to collect at Amritsar. In the meanwhile, the *Faujdar* had to withdraw to Lahore. The Sikhs who had gathered at Amritsar now attacked Rachna and Bari Doabs. They looted and plundered whatever came in their way. Those who had earlier persecuted them were taken to task. They replenished their exhausted stocks of arms, ammunition and other articles of use, including horses.

Diwan Kaura Mal and Adina Beg did not touch the Sikhs for

some time as they too needed some respite to regroup their forces. Moreover, the *Baisakhi* festival on March 30, 1747 was fast approaching and the Sikhs were desirous of assembling at Amritsar to celebrate the festival in a grand way after a very long time of about 12 years.

On March 30, 1747, the Sikhs called the *Sarbat Khalsa* and passed a *Gurmatta* that for the defence of the holy city of Amritsar, a fort should be constructed there. The fort would provide not only for defence of the city but also give shelter to Sikh soldiers who had left their hearths and homes. The fort could also serve as a safe retreat in times of emergency. It being close to Lahore, the Sikhs could also keep a watch on the happenings there.

The work of construction of the fort was started soon after the *Baisakhi* celebrations. Its two feet wide foundation was laid near Ramsar Tank, 3 km away from *Harimandir*, gates and towers were also made and a deep and wide ditch surrounded the fort. After the construction was over, the occasion was celebrated with great joy and festivity. It was named *Ram Rauni*. It was a small mud fortress which could accommodate just 500 soldiers. The Sikhs then beautified *Harimandir* and cleared the holy tank.

Shahnawaz Khan, who was now well entrenched, was a man of intemperate habits and blood thirsty character. He was said to be more cruel than even Nadir Shah. He let loose a reign of terror against the Sikhs and resorted to all sorts of repressive measures. According to Khushwat Rai, "Shahnawaz Khan would often inflict very severe and inhuman punishments for trivial faults. The punishment of amputation of limbs and pulling out the eyes was not uncommon."¹

Events were taking place swiftly. Yahiya Khan escaped from Shahnawaz's custody in July 1747. Shahnawaz himself was frustrated as he was denied the post of a Deputy Viceroy under the *Wazir* by the Delhi Emperor. Shahnawaz Khan, therefore, tried to secure support from all directions. In the words of Hari Ram Gupta, "at this juncture the political horizon of India was suddenly overcast with clouds, and once more was the kaleidoscope to re-arrange its disc and glasses."²

1. Khushwat Rai: *Kitab-i-Tawariki Punjab*

2. Gupta, Hari Ram. *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 39

SIX

Ahmed Shah Abdali's Invasions

Nadir Shah was murdered in June 1747. He was succeeded by Ahmed Shah Abdali, an Afghan of the *Saddozai* clan and Nadir Shah's trusted lieutenant. When Nadir Shah was murdered, he took possession of his wealth, which was earlier looted by him from India. It also included the world famous *Koh-i-Noor*. He declared himself the ruler of Afghanistan and assumed the title of *Durrani*.

The moment Ahmed Shah assumed power, he was invited by Shahnawaz, the Lahore Governor to invade India. This provided an opportunity to Ahmed Shah to strike immediately. Thus in December, 1747, Ahmed Shah left Peshawar as the head of a strong and powerful army comprising of 18,000 men. Meanwhile Shahnawaz's conscience revolted against him and a sense of patriotism was aroused in his heart. He changed his mind to provide any assistance to Ahmed Shah. The Afghans now were not prepared to return and entered Lahore on January 12, 1748. Many areas were plundered, but most parts of the city were spared on payment of huge sum of money. Abdali stayed in Lahore for about a month and then marched towards Delhi.

When Abdali reached Sirhind, he was encountered by the army of about 70,000 men of Qamaruddin. A battle was fought near Sirhind at Manipur on March 11, 1748. Qamaruddin was killed in action and his son Mir Mannu took over the command of the Mughal army. In the battle, the Afghans were forced to leave the field and retire to Afghanistan. Mir Mannu was made the Subedar of Lahore and Multan on March 15, 1748.

The Sikhs got a golden opportunity and followed the retreating Afghans upto the river Indus, looting their horses and stores.

On March 29, 1748, a development of far reaching importance

took place. The Sikhs were divided into 65 *Jathas*. Each under their respective leader. These *Jathas* operated separately, uniting together only rarely." At this stage writes Hari Ram Gupta, "Luckily for the Sikhs, a very capable leader who commanded high respect from all the Sikhs and who possessed remarkable power of organisation had appeared among them. This was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who had received his training under the famous leader Nawab Kapur Singh. The Nawab was the most venerable Sikh leader. Owing to the constant help and guidance of the Nawab and his own sterling virtues, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had come to occupy a very prominent position among the Sikh leaders. The Nawab was growing old and he wanted to give the leadership of the war like Khalsa to somebody else. He had his eye on the promising Jassa Singh and he was on the look-out for an opportunity to do so."¹

On March 29, 1748, the Sikhs gathered at Amritsar to celebrate *Baisakhi*. They demonstrated their strength and unity by coming in large numbers. Nawab Kapur Singh addressed the Sikhs and made a passionate appeal to them to unite and fight for the Panth. He stressed the need of solidarity among the Sikhs and declared that henceforth Jassa Singh Ahluwalia would be the leader of the *Panth*. He would be the supreme Commander of the Sikhs Forces.

The 65 *Jathas* were amalgamated in groups under 11 reputed leaders each with a different title and banner. The strength of different groups varied. They were the Ahluwalias under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who was also the Commander of the 'Dal Khalsa' the combined force of the Sikhs, the *Fazulpurias* under Nawab Kapur Singh, the *Shukarchakias* under Nodh Singh, the *Nishanwalas* under Dasaundha Singh, the *Bhangis* under Hari Singh Bhangi, the *Kanahiyas* under Jai Singh of Kanaha village in Lahore district, the *Nakias* under Hira Singh Nakai of Baharwal village in Lahore district, the *Dallewalas* under Gulab Singh of Dallewal village in Gurdaspur district, the *Shaidis* under Baba Deep Singh, the *Karora Singhias* under Karora Singh of Paijgarh and the *Ramgarhias* under Nand Singh Sanghania.

Every Sikh, who followed the tenets of Sikhism could be the member of any unit if he was a good horseman and proficient in the use of arms. There was no discrimination on the basis of caste.

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II., p. 51.

To maintain unity at this critical juncture in their history, the gatherings of the entire body of the Sikhs called *Sarbat Khalsa* were held twice a year on the occasion of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi*. The Sikhs held meetings under the chairmanship of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and *Gurmattas* were passed on the matter concerning them. It laid down a general policy to be followed by the Sikhs. Disobedience to the rules of the *dal* was punished by *Sarbat Khalsa*. The entire *Dal* had to fight as one body. All the booty was equally distributed among the 11 units. The chief of each unit then distributed the booty further among his men.

“The foundation of the *Dal Khalsa*, was a step of the greatest significance in a compact body after a period of 32 years”, says Hari Ram Gupta. It served the most useful purpose of giving the Sikhs an ideal of unity and power, and keeping them bound together by the common tie of faith in the teeth of the severest persecution, and in making them a disciplined body. They had realized that obedience to their Guru, imposed upon them by the *Panth*, in whose body the Guru had merged his personality, and every sacrifice made for the *Panth* was the real service to the Guru. This singleness of purpose and harmony made them the strongest military body of the day and prepared the way for their establishment as a political power.”¹

With the formation of *Dal Khalsa* ended the career of the great Sikh hero, Nawab Kapur Singh. He was smart, handsome, tall and a well-built personality. His entire body bore several marks and wounds. He was an organiser par excellence, who at first organised the Sikhs in *Buddha* and *Taruna Dals* and then into the mighty organisation, *Dal Khalsa*. He brought all the Sikhs under one banner and but for his effort, the Sikhs would have scattered like the broken garland beads. National glory attained by the Sikhs would have otherwise been a dream. People felt privileged to be baptised by Nawab Kapur Singh and he brought thousands of persons into Sikh Faith.

Nawab Kapur Singh ruled over the destiny of the Sikhs for a long time but did not make leadership his personal property or hereditary. In his life time, he bestowed the leadership of the *Panth* on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who proved his mettle and brought glory to the *Panth*. “The foundation laid in the times of Farrukhseer”

1. Gupta, Hari Ram. *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 57.

writes Latif, "reached the height of their power under the leadership of Kapur Singh, who really organised this *Dal* or multitude of soldiers. He was undoubtedly the most distinguished of the Sikh leaders who paved the way for the greatness of the nation as an independent ruling power. His followers who numbered thousands, gave him the title of Nawab, as a compliment to his genius."¹

Nawab Kapur Singh died at Amritsar in 1753. He called Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, lying on his death bed, and handed over to him the steel mace of Guru Gobind Singh, which he got from Mata Sundari, the wife of Guru Gobind Singh and which is still lying intact in the *Akal Bunga* at Amritsar, and declared him as future leader of the Khalsa and also his successor.

In April, 1748 Muin-ul-Mulk, also known as Mir Mannu, the son of Wazir Qamar-ud-Din Khan took charge of the Governor of Punjab. Emperor, Mohammad Shah appointed him to this high post to create awe among the invaders from the north-west as well as Sikhs in Punjab.

After taking over the charge, Mir Mannu strengthened his army, made new recruitment and equipped it with latest weapons. Having done this Mir Mannu diverted his attention towards the Sikhs, whom he considered as his staunch enemies. He immediately started sending punitive expeditions in pursuit of the Sikhs. The Sikhs made a tactical move and retreated towards Jullunder Doab.

The local *Faujdar* made friendly gestures towards the Sikhs, but when Mir Mannu was informed about the happening, he became furious and ordered him to suppress them. Adina Beg had no alternative but to send an expedition against the Sikhs. The Sikhs left 600 dead bodies in the field. However, Adina Beg found Sikhs superior in fighting and in numbers. He gave up pursuit and requested Mir Mannu to send him more army contingents.

Peace was restored for some time. As a matter of faith, the Sikhs gathered at Amritsar to celebrate the festival of *Diwali* in October, 1748. They took a holy dip in the tank and offered prayers in the temple and illuminated the holy shrine.

However, Mir Mannu who did not want to lose any opportunity to settle his scores with the Sikhs, marched towards Amritsar. Adina Beg also joined him. For four months, skirmishes took place daily.

1. Latif, Mohd: *History of Punjab*, p. 322.

The Sikhs now sent a message to Jassa Singh Thoka who was then serving Adina Beg and entered the fort. He appealed to Kaura Mal, who was a believer in the tenets of Sikhism.

Kaura Mal requested Mir Mannu that as the Sikhs would pay one fourth of the revenue of the *parganah* of *Patti* he returned to Lahore. The Sikhs got some respite and settled peacefully in their vocations for a while. Some joined the service of Diwan Kaura Mal. The Sikhs strengthened their ranks.

However, Mir Mannu could not take any risk. He too reorganised his army.

Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked for the second time in December, 1748, ravaged the place on his way and reached Kapra on the right bank of river Chenab. Mir Mannu moved from Lahore and camped at Shahdara about 6 km from Wazirabad. Abdali sent a message to Mir Mannu demanding the assignment of the *parganahs* of four *Mahals* to him and claimed arrears of land revenue. Mir Mannu sent the letter to the Emperor of Delhi for decision and he himself prepared to meet the challenge. But the Emperor agreed to the demands made by Abdali. Mir Mannu yielded too and paid Abdali the revenue valued at Rs. 14 lakhs. Abdali returned home. The Sikhs gathered at Amritsar in large numbers and decided to attack Lahore. They entered the town and took seat on the platform of the Kotwali. Izzat Khan, the deputy of Mannu attacked Nawab Kapur Singh's forces but he left the city in a haste.

Muin hastened back to Lahore. He became red with anger when he found the town devastated by the Sikhs. He immediately ordered the confiscation of their *Jagir* and directed his soldiers to follow the Sikhs wherever they were and kill them. In obedience of the orders they pursued the Sikhs sometime walking a distance of 28 kms a day. Whosoever brought a Sikh's head was paid Rs. 10/- as a reward. Mannu took revenge by executing thousands of Sikhs.

Meanwhile, Nasir Khan, the Governor of the Four *Mahals* revolted against Muin. His attention having been diverted, the Sikhs heaved a sigh of relief. Muin marched against Nasir Khan, gave him a crushing defeat near Sialkot and removed him from Governorship.

Now, Shah Nawaz Khan revolted against Muin. Shah Nawaz's position was strengthened when he was given an independent charge of Delhi. He increased his force to 15,000. He requested Muin to

allow him to meet his father. Muin gave Shah nawaz permission on the condition that he would come to Lahore without his army. This was not acceptable to Shah nawaz Khan who used insulting language against the Muin. This enraged him and he ordered the war-preparations to be made.

Muin was faced with a dilemma. If he left Lahore with his force towards Multan, the Sikhs would take advantage of his absence and surely devastate the town. On the advice of Diwan Kaura Mal, the Sikhs were allowed to join the Muin's army.

Multan was attacked. Shah nawaz offered stout resistance but was defeated and killed in action. His head was cut off and sent to Muin who was extremely happy at the action of Diwan Kaura and made him the Governor of Multan.

Kaura Mal rewarded Sikhs liberally. A Jagir worth a lakh and a quarter rupees a year was gifted to them in Chunia and Jhuabal in Lahore district. The Sikhs celebrated *Diwali* at Amritsar. But the situation changed as soon as Muin renewed his policy of repression against the Sikhs. He once again issued orders to his soldiers for arresting the Sikhs. District and village officials were instructed to catch hold of the Sikhs and whosoever gave shelter to a Sikh in his house was severely dealt with. The Sikhs took shelter on the banks of Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. They moved in the vicinity of Amritsar so that they would take a bath in the holy tank on the occasions of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi*. The Sikhs wherever found were slain and their property was confiscated. The latter, however, did not sit idle and created trouble whenever they got an opportunity. On October 3, 1751 Muin ordered Mumin Khan to pursue the Sikhs. The policy of repression was pursued vigorously and the Sikhs took shelter in the lower Himalayas. Repression was nothing new to the Sikhs and could not demoralize them. "The Sikh's endurance and rapidity of movement were quite commensurate with his capacity, enabling him to battle, if not defy superior number writes G.R.C. Williams in Calcutta Review 1875. At a pinch, he could march some twenty or thirty miles a day on no better fare than a little parched gram washed down with pure cold water. Besides his weapons, his whole kit consisted of horse-gear, a few of the simplest cooking utensils and two blankets, one for himself and another for his faithful steed. Although his tactics mainly resolved into a prolonged series of skirmishes conducted somewhat after the parthian fashion, yet in the strife of men contending hand to hand he was terrible though

helpless against good artillery."

The reign of terror let loose by Muin failed to extinguish Sikhs' spirits. They became more bold and fearless. Jats of Punjab joined the Khalsa fold in large numbers. Many were converted to Sikhism. Their number increased even in exile.

In November 1751, Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked India for the third time as Muin had not remitted him a promised land revenue. First Abdali sent his agent Narun Khan to collect it but before he returned, Abdali sent his two generals Abdul Khan and Jahan Khan to attack when they were directed to construct the bridge over the river. Ahmed arrived at Peshawar and sent a message to Muin to send him three years arrears of revenue amounting to twenty four lakhs on the plea that the four *Mahals* had remained under his control only for a year for which he was remitting the revenue. Abdali accepted the amount but did not retire and marched further.

Muin made preparations for the war. Sending his family to Jammu, he crossed the Ravi with his 50,000 strong army and forty guns. He took up his position at Shah Daula Bridge about 32 miles from Lahore. By that time, Abdali had also come and skirmishes took place. Abdali, cutting the rear of Muin's forces, reached Lahore. He encamped at the Dera of Shah Bilawal and plundered the surrounding areas. Muin hastened back to Lahore. He was besieged and the siege continued for four months. The Abdali soldiers laid waste the entire countryside. Food supplies were exhausted and cost of eatables soared high. At the request of Diwan Kaura Mai, 30,000 Sikhs marched to help Muin's forces but they could not be of any help due to acute difference of opinion between them, and 10,000 returned back. The Sikhs' ill-planned strategy failed miserably. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia remained aloof and did not take side with Muin.

Short of rations, Muin came out of trenches and a battle was fought with Abdali forces on March 5, 1752. The battle was fought in village Mahmud Buti near Lahore. Diwan Kaura Mai was slain and Muin surrendered to the forces of Abdali.

Muin was produced before Abdali who pardoned him, conferred on him the title of *Rustam-i-Hind* and appointed him the Lahore Governor. Lahore and Multan thus came under the control of Ahmed Shah Abdali on April 13, 1757.

Now, Abdali attacked Kashmir. Delhi's representative was

removed and Sukhjiwan Mal was appointed the Governor. Abdali went back.

Abdali's invasion proved a blessing for the Sikhs. They sacked Bari Doab. The people who had played part against them were slain. The Sikhs then entered Jullunder Doab plundered the country as far as Thanesar.

However, this state of affairs did not continue for a long time. A price was fixed for Sikhs' heads, strict instructions were issued to the people not to give shelter to the Sikhs and when they assembled at Anandpur to celebrate the *Baisakhi*, were murdered. Mir Muin was asked to drive out the Sikhs from the Lakhi Jungle. He utterly failed. Another force was sent under the command of Hussain Khan. The Sikhs fought his forces bravely but were ultimately defeated as they were small in numbers.

However, the Sikhs remained determined to fight the aggression. As Muin's forces could not force them to come out of their hide-outs, orders were issued for the capture of their women and children. Many were taken into custody and tortured. Young women were molested. At one time 300 women were imprisoned in a house outside Delhi Gate, Lahore. Here they were appealed to convert themselves to Islam. Not a single woman yielded. Muin ordered that these women should now be given one and quarter maunds of grain to grind everyday. Their children were snatched away from their breasts and thrown away. It was a ghastly scene. They were cut into pieces before their mothers' eyes and their flesh was pushed into their mothers' mouths forcibly opening their lips.

These barbaric deeds aroused hatred in the minds and hearts of the people. Many more joined into the fold of *Dal Khalsa* under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The Sikhs generally repeated the couplet.

"Mir Munnu is our sickle,
we the fodder for him to mow
the more he reaps, the more we grow."

Commending the role played by Sikh women during the period. George Thomas writes, "Instances indeed have not infrequently occurred, in which they (Sikh women) have actually taken up arms

1 Thomas George. *Memoirs*. p. 75

to defend their habitations from the desultory attacks of the enemy, and throughout the contest behaved themselves with intrepidity of spirit, highly praiseworthy."¹

Muin died on November 3, 1753. When the news of his death spread, the Sikhs came out of their hide-outs and appeared in Lahore. "The Khalsa ladies were rescued and escorted to their homes," says Bhagat Lakshman Singh "the informers, officials and *Jagirdars* who had helped in the arrest of the ladies, were caught hold of, and were all put to the sword."²

The Sikhs thus avenged the humiliation and molestation of their women folk.

Muin utterly failed in his policy of persecution and annihilation of the Sikhs. The Sikhs' faith in their valiant traditions induced many more who joined in their ranks.

The death of Muin-ul-Mulk removed the main hurdle in the way of the Sikhs. Confusion and anarchy prevailed in Punjab for about 3 years from November 1753 to April 1757.

Emperor Ahmed Shah appointed his three year old son, Mahmud Khan as Viceroy of the two provinces of Lahore and Multan on November 13. He was provided with a two year old Deputy Muhammad Amin Khan, son of Muin-ul-Mulk. However, the actual administration of the province was entrusted to Momin Khan. The Punjab since 1752 had formed part of the Abdali Empire and hence its *Subedar* derived powers not from Delhi Emperor but from the king of Afghanistan. Muglani Begum, widow of Muin was not satisfied on the appointment from Delhi alone. She opened negotiations with Abdali and in January, 1754, Abdali confirmed the appointment. There were rejoicings all round. Bhakari Khan, the most trusted lieutenant of Muin revolted against Muglani Begum. The revolt was easily crushed as Muhammad Amin Khan died in May, 1754. Alamgir II, the new Emperor appointed Mumin Khan the Punjab Governor on October 25, 1754 but the real authority vested in Muglani Begum. The moment she became powerful she sunk herself completely into moral degradation. Her immoral relations with eunuchs Shahaz and Ghazi Beg Khan Bakshi are well-known which made her notorious in history.

1. Thomas George, *Memoirs*, p. 75.

2. Lachman Singh Bhagat, *Sikh Martyrs*, p. 176.

Muglani Begum could hardly run the administration. Begum conducted the affairs of the state through eunuchs. The Diwan, Bakshi and other officials could hardly get time to see the Begum. Eunuchs took part in the discussions and conveyed the orders of officials. The Sikhs were posing great threat.

The misrule of Begum emholdened the Turki Generals who desired to carve independent principalities for them. They opined that they could rule more efficiently. Now Qasim Khan, who had worked as a soldier under Muin and rose to the position of a Jamadar and helped the Begum against Bhikari Khan was awarded.

Qasim Khan with his army left Lahore and encamped at the ground of Lakhpat Rai. In the evening the Sikhs came nearby but soon returned. The next day Qasim Khan marched towards Patti and encamped at Demomadaran village. The village head and others paid their respects to Qasim. The village and the fort were plundered. They remained there for about a month. The Sikhs would attack them daily morning and evening, fight and go away.

After a few days, Qasim appointed his brother, Alim Beg Khan, the head of 1000 horses and directed him to attack the Sikhs, who had already prepared themselves for any eventuality. In the fight that took place Alim fled leaving his soldiers behind on their feet. On hearing this, Qasim marched towards the place of fighting. On the way, while he found his men running, only three Sikh cavaliers chasing away the troops.

After a few days Qasim marched back without achieving any objective and suffering extreme hardships, He halted at the bank of Ravi. Qasim, convinced of the Sikhs' heroic deeds, decided to recruit them into his army so that he could march towards Lahore and later could attack Delhi and become emperor. He recruited 8000 Sikh soldiers but failed to fulfil his ambition. The Sikhs got weapons of war from him and left him. Qasim's own soldiers captured him and brought him to Lahore where he was put in custody and left under strict guard.

Soon afterwards, the Begum fell into another trap. Her nobles and soliders were perturbed. The administration had crumbled. Getting benefit of the situation, Khawaja Mirza Khan reached Lahore and with the help of the courtries captured power. In December, 1754 he put the Begum in custody and became the Viceroy.

The Begum, shrewed as she was, played a game and sent for

her maternal uncle, Khawaja Abdullah Khan to Ahmed Shah Abdali seeking his help. Thus, in April, 1755, Abdali's troops came and restored Begum her position. However, after a while, Khawaja Abdullah himself revolted against the Begum and put her in confinement and became the Viceroy. Finding turmoil in Lahore, Adina Beg, the *Faujdar* of Jullundur Doab marched with a strong army and took possession of the city. Khawaja Abdullah was driven out and Sadiq Beg Khan was appointed to administer the city.

The Begum sent another appeal to Abdali who this time sent his general Jahan Khan, and restored the Begum once again her authority. Khawaja Abdullah was appointed Deputy to the Begum. Delhi was perturbed on the development and Imad-ul-Mulk, the Delhi Wazir came to Lahore. Begum was arrested and Adina Beg was appointed the Governor of Lahore and Multan with Jamil-ul-Din as his Deputy. Khawaja Abdullah once again approached Abdali and with his help drove away Ismail-ul-Din, and he himself became the governor and appointed Khawaja Mirza as the deputy in October, 1756.

Chaos and anarchy prevailed. The whole of Punjab was divided into small principalities. Multan came under a separate *Subedar* directly who was appointed by Emperor Ahmed Shah. Jullunder and Sirhind were under Adina Beg Khan. Only Eminabad and Shahdara were under the control of Lahore. The Local *Zamindars* gathered troops and assumed independent attitude.

Thus, during the period, Punjab was in a turmoil. There was no single authority to administer the province and complete confusion prevailed. There was no rule of law, and forces of disintegration had raised their head.

SEVEN

The Rakhi System and After

The Sikhs got an opportunity to get out of the chaos and anarchy that prevailed in Punjab during the period. At that time the Sikhs were the only organised and powerful group in Punjab.

Their presence created fear and panic in the minds of the people. The Government of the day was afraid of them too.

There was no Government worth the name. Governors changed hands every month. Whole of Punjab was divided into small principalities, *Zamindaris* and *Jagirs*. The peasants were squeezed of their money but were not provided any security.

It was the time when *Dal Khalsa* under the leadership of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia provided security and justice to the people. Thus, the *Rakhi* system came into existence. *Rakhi* means protection. The Sikhs roamed about in the villages. The villages which required protection was provided on payment of one-fifth of one's income, twice a year, after each harvest. Under the system, protection was given to the needy against exploitation by the landlords and the Government officials, desperadoes and to the Sikhs plundering bands themselves. In the words of Major Browne. "Whenever a *Zamindar* has agreed to pay this tribute to any Sikh Chief, that Chief not only himself refrains from plundering him, but will protect him from all others, and this protection is by general consent held so far sacred that even if the grand army passed through *Zamindari* where the safeguards of the lowest Sikh Chief are stationed, it will not violate them."¹

To the helpless villagers, the *Rakhi* system was a boon. Many people availed themselves of the opportunity. As a result a large

1. Browne, Major. *India Tracts*.

part of the province came under protection of *Dal Khalsa*. Although the overall leader was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, to make the system work, one or more *Jathas* of the *Dal* combined to take charge of the territory, which came under their protection. Some force was stationed at Amritsar to meet any eventuality. Amritsar was guarded by *Dallewalas* and *Nishanwalas*. The Area south of Lahore was protected by *Nakais*. Chaj and Rachna Doab came under Hari Singh Bhangi and Charat Singh Sukarchakia and some area under Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Jai Singh *Kanahiya*, including the territory to the north of Amritsar. Southern bank of the Sutlej came under Baba Deep Singh and Karora Singhia, while Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and *Singhpurias* occupied some territories on both the banks of the Sutlej.

The *Rakhi* System not only offered peace, security and justice to the people and saved them from the corrupt Government officials, but also gave the Sikhs a regular source of income. It helped in raising the morale of the Sikhs. They did not plunder the Muslim families now merely for the sake of money. "This step secured for the Sikhs a strong economic position for the time being and created for the Sikh Chief principalities, which they were soon to rule over as absolute masters. Thus, this step supplied them with the idea of raising themselves into territorial Chieftains."¹

In November 1756, Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked India for the fourth time putting the entire country into confusion. It afforded the Sikhs an opportunity to carry on their activities unhampered.

Again, this time Abdali was invited by Muglani Begum. She wrote to him that crores worth of cash and goods were hidden in her late father-in-law's house. There were serious differences between Emperor Alamgir II, his Wazirs and Courtiers. If he invaded India at that time, he would be able to conquer the whole of Indian Empire, with all its richness, without much difficulty. The idea appealed to Abdali. He reached Lahore with his large force on November 26, 1756. No resistance was offered to him. He marched on towards Delhi. Again not a single soldier came into the streets of Delhi to oppose him. Everybody was at the mercy of Abdali. With the assistance of Muglani Begum, the houses of the nobles were plundered. The Delhi Wazir, Imad-ul-Mulk was relieved of all his movables and was disgraced publicly. After Delhi, Mathura and Brindaban were sacked by Abdali General Jahan Khan. No

1. Gupta, Hari Ram . *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II. p. 99.

distinction was made between Hindu and Muslim. Many were put to death. The waters of the Yamuna turned red. Nature helped the people and now an epidemic cholera broke out in Abdali's camp in which about 150 soldiers died daily. Ahmed Shah returned home without any further delay. He reached Delhi on January 28, 1757 and forcibly married Hazrat Begum, a 16 years old daughter of Mohammed Shah. He also dragged away 17 more women into his *harem* and 400 maid servants into his camp. Abdali also married his son Timur to the daughter of Alamgir II. He appointed Imad-ul-Mulk as the Delhi Wazir. Najib-ud-Daulah was vested with the real authority as the Mir Bakshi. Abdali annexed the Sirhind province and appointed Abdus Samad Khan as its Governor.

The city of Delhi was plundered once again. Abdali left Delhi on April 2, 1757 with huge wealth. The Sikhs got full benefit of the situation. They plundered those people who had not taken protection under them under the *Rakhi* System. Jamil-ud-Din fled from Lahore to Delhi. His treasure was looted. The Jullundur Doab remained unprotected as Adina Beg had also ran away to Hansi and Hissar. The Doab was looted.

Ahmed Shah on his way back to Afghanistan was attacked by the Sikhs between Delhi and Chenab many times and succeeded in collecting a large booty. However, this time he massacred a number of Sikhs, plundered Amritsar, the Golden Temple was razed to the ground and the tank was filled with dirt and refuse. The Sikhs took shelter in Sandal Bar and Jammu Hills. Ahmed Shah appointed his son Timur Shah, as the Punjab *Subedar* with his Commander-in-Chief Jahan Khan as his Assistant. Ten thousand troops were provided to him.

Baba Deep Singh, could not tolerate the desecration of the Golden Temple and decided to celebrate *Diwali* at Amritsar and to carry out the repairs of the temple. He was firm in his plan although it could lead to dangerous consequences. At his call a number of Sikhs joined him and resolved to illuminate the sacred Shrine. They marched towards Amritsar and on their way halted at Tarn Taran. Here they tied ribbons around their wrists and sprinkled saffron on their turbans in order to be ready for any sacrifice. Jahan Khan came to know of their intention and marching at the head of a strong army had reached Golewal, about 8 km from Amritsar, when the Sikhs fell upon him and gave him a crushing defeat. The Afghans fled to Ramsar in the city. Here, a fierce battle was fought. Jamal

Shah, one of the commanders challenged Baba Deep Singh to fight a dual. This was accepted and both fought valiantly till both were fatally wounded. Baba Deep Singh was almost beheaded and when about to collapse, he was reminded of his vow to reach the holy precinct. Hearing this, he gripped and supported his almost severed head with his left hand and with the right he went on mowing down the enemy. At long last he reached the temples. His pledge fulfilled, he let drop his head. On that very spot, a monument called Shahid Bunga Baba Deep Singh was raised in the memory of the martyr. This happened in November 1757.

After his victory, Jahan Khan destroyed all the places of Worship of the Sikhs. All of them retired to the Shivalik hills where they were joined by Adina Beg. During Abdali's invasion, Adina Beg had fled to Hansi from where he reached Shivalik. After taking over Punjab, Jahan Khan requested Adina Beg to take over the administration of the Jullundur Doab and reach Lahore. Jahan Khan plundered the Jullundur Doab. Now Adina Beg agreed. He was presented a *Khillat* for an annual amount of rupees 36 lakhs. Adina Beg was called to Lahore after sometime which he refused. Jahan Khan was outraged and sent an army under Murad Khan. Many others joined him. Adina Beg, noticing the strength of the army won over Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Sodhi Wadbhag Singh after paying them a heavy amount. A share in the loot was also promised. Murad Khan, crossing Beas, engaged Adina Beg's forces. Afghans were defeated and their equipment fell into the hands of Adina Beg. The Sikhs under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia ravaged all the districts of the Doab and collected a large booty. Adina Beg, however, took refuge in Nalagarh hills and Jahan Khan was a complete failure in administration of the province. The Afghan kingdom in India was ruined and a great disorder prevailed. The Sikhs were responsible for creating this disorder and upsetting Abdali's rule. They plundered the Jullundur Doab and under the orders of the *Subedar* Khawaja Obeid Khan came from Lahore with 20,000 strong force to fight against the Sikhs but was defeated. Many of his men were slain and his goods were plundered. "They all assembled at Lahore and not only attempted to cut off the communication between the fort and country, but collected and divided the revenues of the towns and villages around it."¹

In due course of time, the Sikhs got an opportunity to take

1. Malcolm. *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 92.

revenge against the Afghans. Adina Beg requested the Raghunath Rao, the Maratha General to extend his dominions upto the Indus. A good loot was ensured to him. Adina Beg also promised him to pay a lakh of rupees a day Rao marched and was paid rupees fifty thousand for halting.

The Marathas jumped on the suggestion. One Division of the Maratha troops under the command of Malhar Rao crossed the Yamuna in the end of December, 1757 and sieged the fort of Kunjapura. Abdus Samad Khan, the Sirhind Governor was engaged in fighting with Ala Singh of Patiala. He had besieged a fort of Sunam and imposed a fine on him. On hearing the news of Maratha arrival, he settled terms with Ala Singh and hastened back to Sirhind on January 12, 1758.

The Maratha General Raghunath Rao reached Mughal-Ki-Sarai near Ambala on March 5. Rajpura on 6th and Sarai Banjara on the 7th. Sirhind was sieged on March 9, 1758. Adina Beg along with the Sikhs plundered Sirhind. The news of the Maratha siege of Sirhind had reached Jahan Khan. He came out of Lahore with his force but did not face the enemy. Jahan Khan fled to Afghanistan. Thereafter, the Marathas returned to Delhi after confirming the title of *Nawab* on Adina Beg and leasing out the province to him for rupees seventy five lakhs a year.

After the Afghans had left, Adina Beg became Supreme in Punjab. Delhi was too weak to challenge his authority. He wanted peace to be restored in Punjab so that he could collect rupees seventy five lakhs for paying to the Marathas. He advised the Sikhs to stop their activities but the latter did not oblige him. Adina Beg could not remain quiet. He enlisted more troops beside the 10,000 he already had. He called upon the *Zamindars* in crushing the Sikhs menace who joined him in large numbers. The Sikhs regrouped their forces too. They gathered at Adinanagar. Adina Beg sent Diwan Hira Mal and Aqil Das of Jandiala against them. In a battle that took place at Qadian, the Diwan was put to death and his army routed. The precious equipment fell into Sikhs hands. Adina Beg was enraged with anger. He made another appeal to the *Zamindars* to help him in driving the Sikhs out. He ordered that wherever a Sikh was found he should be put to death or captured. The Punjab *Zamindars* submitted to Adina Beg though unwillingly. Adina Beg appointed Mir Aziz Bakshi to the job of finishing the Sikhs as the head of many thousand troops. Some Sikhs fled but many reached Amritsar to sacrifice their lives at the Guru's feet. They took shelter

in Ram Rauni fort. Nand Singh Sanghania was the leader of this body. Jassa Singh Rāmgarhia with his two brothers accompanied them. Jai Singh Kanahiya and Karam Singh Kingra with their followers were also in the fort. Mir Aziz laid siege of the fort. The Sikhs fought bravely. Jai Singh Kanahiya and Jassa Singh Rāmgarhia killed many with matchlocks and arrows. But at last, Mir Aziz was successful in making a hole in the wall of the fort. The Sikhs sallied out. Many were killed and more were taken prisoners. It was a difficult time for them. They had to flee towards the Malwa region in the Sirhind Division which was governed by Sadiq Beg Khan who immediately let loose a reign of terror against the Sikhs. A battle was fought at village Sanghuian. Heavy fire was opened on the Sikhs which created havoc. They were made to run away, leaving behind their equipment which was captured by the forces of Sadiq Beg. The Sikhs were pursued for about 8 km. Then they returned to collect their baggage. Fire was opened on the Sikhs who left the field and arrived at Drolī where some other Sikhs had also collected.

The Sikhs' misfortune ended for the time being as Adina Beg died on September 15, 1758. After his death, Punjab was again in turmoil. Imad-ul-Mulk, the Wazir of Delhi sent Jamil-ud-Din Khan to Punjab. When the Marathas heard the news of Adina Beg's death, Raghunath and Malhar sent Antaji Manakeshwar and some other Chiefs with a strong army. The army reached Delhi in November, 1758. Antaji remained at Delhi and other Chiefs marched towards Punjab. Jamail-ud-Din had gone upto Sonapat and noticing the Maratha march towards Lahore, returned back to Delhi.

In Lahore, Khawaja Mirza Khan tried to settle the affairs of the State, but the Sikhs created problems for them. The Marathas reached Lahore. The Peshwa also sent a strong force under Dattaji Sindhia. He reached the banks of Sutlej in April, 1759 and encamped at Machhiwara for about 20 days. Adina Beg's son visited Maratha camp and paid them the tribute. Dattaji appointed Sabaji Sindhia to take over the charge of Lahore where the Sikhs were holding a predominant position and it was difficult to capture Punjab. Dattaji returned to Delhi.

Sabaji was successful in maintaining peace for some time. With the Sikhs' help he beat back Jahan Khan who had led an expedition from Peshawar. He suffered heavily, lost his son and many casualties were inflicted on his troops.

Once again the Afghan troops moved towards India. Their

advancing troops under the command of Jahan Khan crossed the Indus. At this time Dattaji Scindia was engaged in the siege of Shukartal. He could hardly spare any troops for Punjab. Jahan Khan arrived at Wazirabad. He sent his troops to attack Lahore. He sent his personal emissaries to Surat Singh Khatri of Lahore with a letter to strike coins in name of Taimur Shah Abdali. He also asked him to issue a proclamation warning all the people not to fight against each other. Sabaji came to Julundur. Sirhind was in the grip of fear. Adina Beg's widow and son Sadiq Beg, the Maratha Governor of Sirhind, fled away to Delhi. A Maratha General and several soldiers were cut into pieces by Jahan Khan's troops. A Maratha force from Multan was also plundered.

The Sikhs, however, fared better. Even in the face of difficulties they did not allow Jahan Khan to pass through their country without striking a blow on him. Two thousand Aghan troops were slain and Jahan Khan was injured.

The Sikhs celebrated *Diwali* with great enthusiasm and rejoiced. They were supreme in Punjab now. There was nobody to challenge them for the time being. Rather, they were the only ones who could defy the tyrannical and oppressive rule of the Lahore Governor and also offer resistance to Abdali.

The death of Adina Beg proved a blessing for the Sikhs as their main constraint was removed. They spread themselves all over the province under the overall command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and *Jathedars* of other small *Jathas*. The *Rakhi* System was further extended and they became a force to be reckoned with. They were assuming the form of territorial chiefs.

The local Chiefs who represented the Lahore Governor, submitted to the Sikhs and promised to pay the Sikhs a share in the revenue. Those who failed to surrender were wiped out. In the Jullundur Doab, the Sikhs were challenged by Diwan Bishambar Das who attacked them with his 25,000 strong army and engaged them in a battle at Tanda, but his army fled leaving behind their entire luggage in the battlefield, which fell into the hands of the Sikhs.

The followers of a particular *Jathedar*, considered themselves as their colleagues and the territorial acquisition was regarded as the property belonging to all. Each was entitled to a share of his own. These *Jathas* now came to be called *Misals*. According to Jullundur District Settlement Report 1892, the leaders of the

confederacies had under them minor Chiefs, and their subordinates, till the common soldiers were reached. The country conquered by the confederacy was parcelled out among the chiefs for the support of themselves and their armed retainers, principally troopers. The great chief divided their lands among their subordinate chiefs and these again assigned villages to their dependents for their support. Although each confederacy was independent of the other, yet all of them were looked upon as forming one commonwealth."¹

This step greatly enhanced their prestige and increased their power, says Hari Ram Gupta, "No sooner was it found how profitable was the profession of an outlaw, then every Jat Sikh village of the *Majha* sent forth its contingent of hardy youngmen to set themselves up as landed proprietors and to pay off old score to their oppressors. Thus there arose a new self-formed aristocracy who were destined to play the role of rulers in the Punjab for about half a century."²

1. *Jullundar District Settlement Report*, pp. 29-30.

2. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 135-136.

EIGHT

The Great Holocaust

The great holocaust of 1762 was the major event in the history of Punjab. It turned the tide of history. After consolidating their position at Lahore, the Sikhs expanded themselves and with the spirit of revenge marched towards Jandiala to settle their old scores with Guru Aqil Das who had always taken sides with the Muslim rulers against the Sikhs. He had submitted to Ahmed Shah Abdali when the Sikhs decided to march against Aqil Das; the news leaked out and he sent an urgent message to Ahmed Shah Abdali to attack India once again for the sixth time. Ahmed Shah had already marched towards Lahore when he came to know that the Sikhs had captured the capital of Punjab. The messengers of Aqil Das met Abdali at Rohtas who now hastened to Lahore and reached there in just four days on February 3, 1762.

However, before Abdali's arrival at Jandiala, the Sikhs had already besieged the town and laid waste the entire territory of Aqil Das. The Sikhs would have captured the town but it is said that Shanks of beef were thrown from the fort walls and it touched the Sikhs sentiment. They raised the seige and marched towards Sirhind, where Zain Khan was the Governor. When Abdali reached Jandiala, he found that the Sikhs had already left the place. He returned to Lahore and was later on informed that the Sikhs were engaged in a battle with Zain Khan near Malarkotla.

Abdali was enraged and, in anger, marched towards Malarkotla with his cavalry at a lightning speed. Abdali reached Malarkotla on February 5, 1762 covering a distance of 225 Km in about two days. It was indeed a miracle during those days. When Zain Khan came to know about Abdali's arrival, he became bold and fought bravely against the Sikhs. Abdali divided his army in two parts, one was put under his personal charge and the other under the command

of his Wazir, Shah Vali Khan. They planned to surround the Sikhs from all sides. The Sikhs numbering about 50,000 were camping at village Kup Rihara, 10 Km away when the Sikhs heard of Abdali's arrival at Malarkotla, they hastened to Garma. Zain Khan with his strong force fell upon the Sikhs to prevent them from reaching Garma. They were pursued for about 2 Km but the Sikhs inflicted a crushing defeat on Zain Khan and again marched towards village Garma. When they were about to enter the village, the Sikhs were intercepted by the Afghans. Now, the Sikhs were surrounded from all sides and had no alternative but to fight the Afghans in a pitched battle, they used only to attack and flee methods as *Dha Phat*. It was a grim situation for the Sikhs. They sent some *Sardars* to guide the baggage train towards Barnala. It was terrible. They had to fight from all sides, separated from their women, children, arms, ammunition and other provisions. The roaring cannons of the enemy wrought havoc in their ranks but such was the fortitude and courage of the Sikhs that they answered the cannons with their swords and small matchlocks and only 50,000 fighting against the mighty army of the Afghans consisting of not less than 1,50,000 men. It was an unequal fight, but a determined one. The armies clashed.

As the Sikhs' baggage train was separated from them, some Afghans fell on it and a large number of women and children were butchered. Off the main body, a large number of Sikhs were massacred and by evening the Sikhs reached the village Qutab. Here the Afghans rushed towards a pond to drink water. Meanwhile the Sikhs' baggage train was completely destroyed. All their women and children were killed. The Sikhs now slipped to Barnala. Abdali continued pursuing them right upto Barnala, inflicting minor casualties on them. Then Abdali returned.

It was a major set back for the Sikhs. It is said that on single day the Sikhs lost 24,000 of their men. It was a big blow.

In the bloody battle, the Sikh *Sardars* fought valiantly. It is said that 22 wounds were inflicted on the body of *Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia*. In the action two volumes of *Guru Granth Sahib* were also lost which injured badly the religious feelings of the Sikhs. The battle is known as *Wadda Ghallughara*, the great holocaust in Sikh history.

When the Sikhs reached Barnala, they expected help and assistance from *Ala Singh* of *Patiala*. However, *Ala Singh* maintained his old policy of neutrality. He left his headquarters at *Patiala* and encamped at *Dhandhoota* about 26 Km away.

Ahmed Shah, on the other hand, desired that Ala Singh should pay him homage. He was camping in his territory. But Ala Singh was double minded. If he paid homage, the Sikhs would be annoyed with him as they had suffered a lot at Abdali's hands. On the other hand if he did not pay the homage, he would be annoying Abdali. He ultimately decided not to pay the homage. Ala Singh's enemies took advantage of the situation and poisoned Abdali. They included Nawab of Malerkotla, Lachmi Narain, Diwan of Zain Khan and the Rai of Raikot. Consequently, Abdali stormed the Barnala fort, set it on fire and laid waste the entire neighbouring area.

Then he marched towards the Dhandhoola fort but Ala Singh escaped and sought the intervention of Najib-ud-Daulah who advised him to present himself before Abdali. He was taken into custody. It was ordered that his hair be cut. Ala Singh purchased his hair for rupees one lakh and twenty five thousand. An additional rupees five lakhs were realised as annual tribute; only then he was released. Ahmed Shah left for Lahore on February 15, 1762. He carried with him fifty cartloads of Sikh's heads killed in the battle and also a large number of prisoners.

Abdali reached Amritsar where he ordered the Harimandir be blown away by gun powder. A missile from the blow up edifice struck Abdali's nose upon which he retreated hastily. Before leaving, he filled up the holy tank with refuse and polluted it with the entrails and blood of cows.

At Lahore, many pyramids of the Sikhs's heads were made and walls of the mosques in the city were smeared with the Sikhs' blood. Abdali reached Lahore on March 3, 1762 and stayed there upto December 1762 so that there was no further uprising of the Sikhs. He reorganized his finances and asked all the Indian potentates to send him their envoys. The Maratha ambassadors at Delhi Bapu and Purshottam Mahadev Hingane were addressed many letters. Bapu and Purshottam joined Abdali in March and May respectively. Negotiations were opened with the Peshwa to recognise his authority. Peshwa paid him homage and the Shah established friendly relations with him.

Abdali now called Chiefs and *Zamindars* of Punjab to come to Lahore. When they gathered, their assistance was sought in crushing the remaining Sikhs. When Abdali was free after settling most of the affairs of Punjab, he turned his eyes towards Kashmir where his Governor Sukhjiwan Mal had revolted against him. Abdali invited

Raja Ranjit Deo of Jammu to lead the expedition to Kashmir under his own command. About four thousand soldiers were placed at his disposal. Ranjit Deo marched towards Kashmir but found that all passes were closed to the valley by the Governor. He had to return back.

Another effort to capture Kashmir was made in September. This time the expedition was led by Nur-ud-Din who with the help of Ranjit Deo was able to put into custody Sukhjiwan Mal. Kashmir was annexed to the Abdali empire and Sarbuland Khan was appointed its Governor.

The Sikhs who were badly mauled at Kup Rihara in February, 1762 escaped to Rohi and formed themselves into groups and took shelter at Jaito, Bhagtu, Faridkot, Kangar etc. Many of them were seriously wounded. Not a single Sikh remained unhurt and each one of them had deep wounds on his body. Their horses and camels were captured by the enemy. No Sikh knew about the whereabouts of his family members who had run away to whatever direction they could. It was the darkest period for them.

The Sikhs who had taken shelter at various places were convinced that the local Brar Jats would give them protection but they were disappointed very much. They were afraid of hostility from Abdali whose wrath might have finished them too. The Sikhs were driven out of their villages by the Brar Jats.

After running from these villages, the Sikhs sought protection at Bhatinda, Kot Kapura and Faridkot. They did not submit to tyranny, injustice and repression. Rather Abdali's repression emboldened them and they were thinking of ways and means to take revenge. They felt that the impure had left their ranks and only the Khalsa had remained with them. They would now be able to complete the Guru's work and preach his ideas with more vigour and enthusiasm.

The Sikhs were defeated only physically but moral victory was theirs. They had lost in the battlefield not because they were bad soldiers or that they could not fight but because the strength of enemy was much large; they were superior in artillery and well-trained. Moreover, the Sikhs were taken unaware and their women and children were also with them. They had also to take care of them.

"Their disasters" says Hari Ram Gupta. "did not lower their

spirits but each success or failure brought them new life, renewed vigour and fresh enthusiasm."¹ The Sikhs were not deterred by Abdali to fight the evil. In the words of Malcolm. "The Sikh nation, who have, throughout their early history, always appeared like a suppressed flame, to rise into higher splendor from every attempt to crush them, had become, while they were oppressed, as formidable for their union, as for their determined courage and unconquerable spirit of resistance."²

By May, 1762, the Sikhs had regrouped themselves to fight against the aggressor. They were once again in high spirit forgetting their past repression. They had the Name of God and Guru on their lips and determination in their hearts. They now marched in strength against Zain Khan, the Governor of Sirhind. Zain Khan was defeated in the battle and was forced to pay a heavy tribute amounting to Rs. 50,000 to the Sikhs. After getting the tribute, the Sikhs marched further when Zain Khan looted their baggage in the rear. The Sikhs then plundered Zain Khan's baggage. Then another battle was fought. Zain Khan was defeated. The Sikhs spread havoc in the villages. Ahmed Shah's forces were not able to pursue the Sikhs. Many local *Zamindars* were made to suffer.

Their small successes made them to visit Amritsar to take a dip in the holy tank in small groups of 1000 or 2000. This became a regular feature now as by taking a dip in the sacred tank, the Sikhs got inspiration and strength to fight the aggressor. Neighborhood of Lahore was also plundered as and when they got an opportunity. There was now no fear in their hearts.

The Sikhs' exploits puzzled Ahmed Shah Abdali so much that he himself led expeditions against them. The Sikhs disappeared in the thick jungles near Amritsar. Abdali, embarrassed, sent troops in pursuit of the Sikhs but they failed to subdue them.

After achieving success in raids the Sikhs now reorganised their forces once again under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and decided to attack Jullundur Doab. They fell upon the villages which had shown hostility towards them. The villages were plundered and the houses were set on fire. They acquired immense wealth in the form of horses, cash and grain. Then they returned to the Malwa territory.

1. Gupta Hari Ram, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 81.

2. Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, pp. 102-103.

After August, Punjab was again in chaos and confusion. The roads were closed. As there was no traffic, disorder prevailed everywhere.

Crossing the Sutlej, the Sikhs marched towards Malwa and ultimately reached the vicinity of Karnal. They encamped there for about a month from August 25 to September 24, 1762. After that they marched backward and reached the neighbourhood of Lahore. They now harassed Abdali's troops which were sent out to subdue them. They had become so bold and fearless that they hovered round the flanks of Abdali's troops within a distance of 6-8 Km.

In October, 1762 the Sikhs started reaching Amritsar to celebrate the *Diwali* Festival. They could not get better opportunity of fighting with the enemy in order to retrieve the honour of their national character and of laying down their lives in the service of the Panth could be expected, says Hari Ram Gupta. "The debris of their sacred temple and the sight of the defiled tank roused them to make the highest exertion and to stake their existence in our national cause. The noblest as well as the purest passions of the human soul were closely mingled on this occasion. The recovery of honour and the wreaking of vengeance and above all their recent experience in fighting a pitched battle for the first time had made them conscious of their dormant faculties."¹

In October, 1762 many thousand Sikhs gathered at Amritsar and passed a *Gurmatta* to make an all out effort to cut off Abdali's troops in case he attacked them. They resolved to avenge the insults he had hurled both to their religion and their sense of dignity as people. The Shah found himself cornered not only because of the lack of sufficient armed strength but more because of the resilience and the undying determination of the followers of the new faith.

By this time, Ahmed Shah had returned to Lahore. He did not have a large army at his command. But suddenly he had to face a strong force of the Sikhs and was caught unprepared. Abdali was fully aware of his weakness and played a diplomatic game. He sent his emissary to the Sikhs to negotiate the terms of peace. But the Sikhs understood the game and when the emissary reached their camp, he was manhandled, plundered and driven out of the camp. There was no chance of settlement. Abdali had no alternative but to attack the Sikhs gathered at Amritsar. He marched towards

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 184-185.

Amritsar on October 16, 1762. The collected body of the Siquenation, amounting to sixty thousand cavalry had formed a junction at the ruins of Amritsar for the purpose of performing appointed ceremony and where they resolved expecting the attack, to pledge their national existence, in the event of the battle, "writes Froster, Ahmed Shah encamped at Lahore, marched with a strong force to Amritsar, and immediately engaged the Siques, who roused by the fury of a desperate revenge, in sight also of the ground sacred to the founders of their religion, whose monuments had been destroyed by the enemy. During a bloody contest, which lasted from the morning until night, the Siques ultimately forced Ahmed Shah to draw off his army and retire with precipitation to Lahore."¹

The Sikhs achieved their limited objective at Amritsar. They regained their prestige. They had driven Abdali back to escape any further attack by Abdali.

Abdali did not sit idle as the spirit of revenge reigned in his heart. He mustered all his forces at Lahore in November, 1762. His army had also come back from Kashmir victorious. He thus led an expedition against the Sikhs, who were considered the enemies of both his religion and empire.

Abdali marched towards the Lakhi Jungle and ordered that every Sikh be slain. The Sikhs had to hide themselves deep into the Jungles. The Abdali troops persued them. One day, a few Sikhs appeared and a force was sent to capture them. Another body of Sikhs joined them and all of them attacked Abdali's army. Abdali was relaxing after a hunting expedition. A Sikh with his horse galloped the Shah who hit him with his arms. Some more Sikhs were also killed. They fled to the rear by thick jungles.

In December, 1762, Najib-ud-Daulah, Yaqub Ali Khan, Munir-ud-Daulah, Agha Raza and Abdul Ahad Khan, from Delhi joined Ahmed Shah Abdali. This strengthened his position. Abdali also recognised Shah Alam as the Emperor of Delhi and promised in return for a tribute of rupees forty lakhs a year to be paid by Najib and Munir-ud-Daulah on behalf of the Emperor.

When the amicable settlement was reached. Ahmed Shah left Lahore for Afghanistan on December 12, 1762. According to the Delhi Chronicle, Ahmed Shah's forces were attacked by the Sikhs

1. Forester, *Travels*. Vol. I, pp. 321-22.

which surprised him. Abdali had hardly gone a few kilometers when the Sikhs established their army post at Lahore. The Governor of Lahore Kabali Mal was frightened.

The severer chastisement inflicted by the Shah on the Sikhs, "writes Mohd. Latif for the indignities to which they had subjected the Mohammedan Mosques and shrines was not of a nature to be easily forgotten, thirst for revenge rankle in their breasts, and now that an opportunity occurred for carrying their cherished desire into effect. They convened a *Gurumatta* or cabinet council and determined their future plan of operations."¹

In January, 1763, the Sikhs came out of their hide outs and created disturbances all round. The *Dal Khalsa* was divided into two groups one of which known as *Buddha Dal* was under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Dallewalia, Singhpuria, Nishanwala, Shahids and Karor Singhia. They toured the countryside in order to teach a lesson to the people who had opposed them in the past. Their job also included the plunder and accumulation of the stock of foodgrains and other articles. The second group known as *Taruna Dal* included five *Misals* : *Kanahiya*, *Sukarchakia*, *Bhangi*, *Nakai* and *Ramgarhia*. They were located at Amritsar and looked after the repairs of the Harimandir and cleansing of the sacred tank.

The *Buddha Dal* was under the supreme command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was at the height of his glory. He was respected by all and his word was a law for the constituents. In the words of Froster, "The Siques were seen descending from their various holds on the Punjab, which they rapidly laid waste and after several desulatory action, in which the Afghans were defeated, they besieged and what seems extraordinary, they took the city of Lahore, were wildly indulging the enmity that had never ceased to inflame them against these severe scourges of their nation, they committed violent outrages. The mosques that had been ever rebuilt or restored to use by the Mohomedans, were demolished with every mark of contempt and indignation; and the Afghans, in chains, washed the foundations with the blood of hogs. They were also compelled to excavate the reservoir at Amritsar, which in the preceding year they had filled up. The Siques, however, keenly attacked by resentment, set bound to the impulse of revenge, and though the Afghan massacre and persecution must have been

1. Latif, Mohd.. *History of the Punjab*. p. 285.

deeply imprinted on their minds, they did not, it is said, destroy one prisoner in cold blood."¹

The Sikhs were in high spirits these days. They gathered at Amritsar in the month of April, 1763 to celebrate *Baisakhi*, the festival of joy. Here some Brahmins met Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and complained against the Afghans of Kasur, who were harassing the Hindus. One Usman Khan seized the wife of one of the Hindus and converted her to Islam. This molestation of a women was intolerable for the Sikhs. On the suggestion of Hari Singh Bhangi, it was agreed to render all help to the Hindus although it amounts to taking a big risk.

As the Afghans were still very powerful, they had built and fortified several forts. Then, it was suggested that a *Vak* be taken from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and whatever was ordained in it should be followed. The *Vak* said that word must be kept. This emboldened the Sikhs and the *Taruna Dal* marched towards Kasur. Many joined them on the way and their number rose to 24,000. The town was attacked and the people were taken by a surprise. The means of communications were cut and the gates of the town were closed. The Hindu girl was restored to her husband. A large quantity of silver, gold, jewels and pearls fell into the hands of the Sikhs. The Pathan Chief, Ghulam Muhiya-ud-Din died while fighting. The Sikhs' prestige increased and they earned the gratitude of one and all.

On the other hand the *Buddha Dal* under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia crossed the Beas river and entered the Jullundur Doab which was then under Saadat Yar Khan. The Governor hid himself and the Sikhs had a free hand; many areas were plundered. The Sikhs seized their old possession and consolidated their position.

In December 1763, a *Gurmatta* was passed at Amritsar to attack Malerkotla and punish the wrong doers. The Sikhs marched towards Malerkotla under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and laid siege of the town. Bhikhan Khan fell upon the Sikhs with his small force. A Sikh hitting the Khan in his chest killed him instantaneously. The town was plundered and razed to the ground. A large booty fell into the hands of the Sikhs.

After the destruction of Malerkotla, the Sikhs decided to attack

1. Forster, *Travels*, Vol. I, p. 321.

Kheri and punish Gangu Brahmin for his treachery in handing over Mata Gujari and two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh to the rulers. The Sikhs marched towards Kheri, besieged the village and killed Gangu and his family members. The Sikhs then reached Morinda. The *Ranghars* of the town shut the gates and took shelter behind the wall. The Sikhs entered the town after opening the gates. The houses of Jani Khan and Mani Khan who had proved treacherous to Guru Gobind Singh were razed. They along with their family members were put to death. Nobody was spared except the women and the children of the Hindus.

Then, the Sikhs attacked Kurali, robbed the treasure of Diwan Lachmi Narayan, the Diwan of Zain Khan who was on a tour of the village. Later, Zain Khan tried to open negotiations with the Sikhs in connivance of Ala Singh of Patiala, but the Sikhs refused to enter into any treaty with the aggressor.

One victory followed the other. The Sikhs could now launch a massive offensive for the sake of their honour.

NINE

Fall of Sirhind

Sirhind was an important rich Suba in Punjab. It was then governed by Zain Khan. By 1763 many people had embraced Sikhism in the Suba. Zain Khan's position had been weakened as he had stopped paying salaries to his officials and soldiers. He plundered the villages indiscriminately and many of his soldiers had left his army to join the forces of Najib-ud-Daulah in the Gangetic Doab.

Zain Khan knew fully well that the time had come when he would have to fight against the Sikhs who had increased their strength to 50,000 active soldiers in the field. No help could be available to Zain Khan in the face of the stiff opposition from the bold, courageous and fearless Sikhs.

At that time, the Sikhs were divided into three groups. The Six *Misals of Buddha Dal* under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia were encamping at Bhaganpur, while the five *Misals of Taruna Dal* were stationed at Punjab. The *Phulkian Misal* was at Patiala. When Zain Khan came to know of the scattered position of the Sikhs, he attacked them at village Pir Zain Khan near Sirhind. But the Sikhs had already moved towards Sirhind to invest the town. Zain Khan was surrounded from all sides by the Sikhs. No way was left for him to escape. Zain Khan had no alternative but to fight. He sent his detachments towards the Sikhs in order to get an opportunity to escape. Meanwhile *Taruna Dal* plundered his baggage but the *Buddha Dal* under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia besieged him. He had an abortive attempt to escape but in his bid he was shot dead. His forces fled in whatever direction they could. They were pursued and slain. This happened on January 14, 1764.

Now the Sikhs marched towards Sirhind. The town was

captured as a very little resistance was offered by the locals. Each house was captured and plundered, depriving the people of their valuables. Then the houses were set on fire. All the males in the town except the Hindus, women and children were killed.

They reached the fort and visited the place where Guru Gobind Singh's sons were bricked alive. A platform was erected and *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* was put on it. A Gurdwara was also built which was named Fatehgarh.

After the death of Zain Khan, Governor of Sirhind, and capture of his territory, Sirhind, a vast area with an annual income of rupees sixty lakhs fell into Sikhs' hands. This emboldened them. They dispersed in various directions and seized anything they could. After collecting *Gur* or money from the village headman as a token of village's submission the Sikhs would leave for another village.

The territory conquered by the Sikhs was now partitioned among themselves. It was divided among eight *Misals*. Ahluwalia whose leader Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was also the leader of the entire body of the Sikhs comprising *Bhangi*, *Karor Singhia*, *Singh-Puria*, *Dallewalia* and *Nishanwala*.

Sukarchakia did not get the share of territory occupied by the Sikhs recently. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who at this time commanded contingent of 10,000 horse men got the territories of Jagraon, Bharog, Fatehgarh and Naraingarh with an annual income of rupees two lakhs. Mirza Singh of Sultanwind, Amritsar who was in the service of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, and his two uncles, Hakumat Singh and Dasaundha Singh, who were Ahluwalia's horsemen were rewarded. Jassa Singh had appointed Hakumat Singh as his Thanedar in Bharog, Mirza Singh in Fatehgarh and Dasundha Singh in Naraingarh.

After the capture of Sirhind, the Sikhs did not sit idle. They were dreaming of an empire now. They regrouped their forces and in February, 1764 entered the Gangetic Doab by crossing the Jamuna river. This was attempted by *Buddha Dal*, whose leader Jassa Singh Ahluwalia marched ahead. Other Sardars, namely, Baghel Singh, Khushal Singh, Sham Singh, Karora Singh, Tara Singh, Ghabia, Bhanga Singh, Karan Singh, Rai Singh and Gurbaksh Singh with a strong army of 40,000 plundered Sahranpur, Shamli and many other places in the vicinity. This was for the first time that the Sikhs crossed the Yamuna and plundered the village

of Barah. A large booty fell into their hands. Najib-ud-Daulah offered resistance to the Sikhs but feeling himself weak, he paid the Sikhs eleven lakh rupees. The Sikhs returned in March, 1764.

On the other hand, *Taruna Dal* turned back to Punjab. The Afghan Governor of Jullunder fled. The Sikhs plundered the villages and then marched towards Lahore. After seizing the territory in the neighbourhood of Lahore, they attacked the city of Lahore and cut off the lines of communication. They also ordered that all the butchers, killing cows be put to death. The Governor of Lahore, Kabuli Mal wanted to be excused being the servant of the Muslims. He shut all the city gates except two. The Sikhs entered the city through Delhi Gate and plundered it. Kabuli Mal surrendered and ordered the cutting of noses, ears and hands of the butchers and paid a large sum of money to the Sikhs and saved Lahore. *Bhangis* left their representative Tek Chand as a resident in Lahore court.

In December 1763, Suraj Mal, the Jat Raja of Bharatpur died in a battle with Najib-ud-Daulah. The jats under Jawahar Singh, son of Suraj Mal vowed to take revenge on Najib-ud-Daulah. He made preparations and was ready to fight Najib-ud-Daulah. Najib sent his emissary Meghraj to Ahmed Shah Abdali to seek his help and protection. Najib tried to enter into a compromise with Jawahar Singh but without any result. He marched towards Delhi in November, 1764 and besieged the Naib in city. The Sikhs got an opportunity to plunder Saharanpur, Meerut and Bijnor under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They crossed the Yamuna and entered the Gangetic Doab. A resistance was offered by Rahmat Khan but later retreated quickly.

Jawahar Singh concluded a negotiation with the Sikhs and promised to give a large sum of money, and to take 12000-15000 Sikhs in his army. It was decided that the Sikhs would fight on the side of Jawahar Singh. The battle continued for about twenty days. Another great battle was fought between Najib and the Sikhs. On January 25, 1765 on the hills near horse market and Sabzi mandi a large number of men were slain.

Meanwhile the Sikhs received the news that Ahmed Shah Abdali had attacked India once again and was marching towards Lahore. The Sikhs returned to Punjab immediately. Abdali marched at the head of 18,000 strong army and reached Eminabad where Nasir Khan Balauch with a strong army of 12,000 joined him. The Sikhs went towards the Lakhi Jungle. Ahmed Shah decided to pursue

them but the Afghans were attacked by the Sikhs. The fight went on till night and fell when both retired.

The Sikhs then reached Amritsar. The Shah marched towards Amritsar but when he reached there he did not find any Sikh except a few who were protecting Ramgarh fort at the cost of their lives. Their number was only thirty. Abdali destroyed many of their buildings. He then returned to Lahore.

Abdali marched towards Jandiala. The Sikhs avoided pitched battles but opposed the Afghans. In the battle that ensued, the Sikhs became victorious. Rahim Khan Bakshi was killed in action.

Ahmed Shah then marched to Batala. In the battle with the Sikhs Sarbuland Khan was injured and Abdali was defeated. He then marched towards Adinanagar. Here too, he was attacked by the Sikhs and it was with great effort that they were driven out. The countryside was ravaged by Abdali men.

Abdali's troops then crossed the Beas and entered the Jullundur Doab. The people of the area fled to whatever direction they could. One day the Sikhs faced the Afghans. Sardar Jahan Khan was the commander of the army. The Sikhs created havoc. Abdali's horsemen were attacked. After the days' battle the Afghans marched further and reached the Sutlej and crossed the river. They were attacked by the Sikhs. Stiff resistance was offered and the Sikhs returned. Abdali then marched towards Punjab and later reached Kunjpura in about two month's time. Then he decided to return.

From Kunjpura, Abdali reached Sirhind when Ala Singh presented him costly gifts. Ala Singh was conferred with the title, *Khilat* and was made an independent Chief of Sirhind for an annual subsidy of three and half lakhs of rupees.

Staying at Sirhind for a couple of days, Abdali crossed the Sutlej. His advance party was attacked by the Sikhs. The Afghans offered stout resistance. The Sikhs also organised themselves. In the centre was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who fearlessly stood like a rock. Close by him was Jassa Singh Ramgarhia who looked like a lion. Besides there were many other Sikh *Sardars* who held their proper places.

Ahmed Shah became furious. He issued instructions to his soldiers not to move from their places. There was a fierce battle and the right flank was overpowered by the Sikhs. Nasir Khan proceeded towards the right side but he was attacked by a Sikh

Sardar. Nasir Khan stuck to the ground but the Sikhs adopting an old tactic, left the field. Nasir Khan was taken on and he ran to pursue the Sikhs. The Sikhs attacked them fiercely. The Afghans after struggling had joined their main body. They were again attacked by the Sikhs. A fierce battle ensued which continued till midnight, when both the forces withdrew for rest.

Early next morning Abdali troops marched further. The Sikhs attacked them from all the three sides. Abdali called a halt and reorganised his forces and when they were about to attack the Sikhs, they left the field. When the Abdali troops marched, the Sikhs were seen in his rear. Abdali then ordered his troops that nobody should leave his place. They should wait till the enemy came to them. They should not step outside their ranks. When the enemy soldiers approached them, they should fall on their heads. When the battle ensued, many Sikhs were slain.

On the third day, the Afghan troops marched forward and had reached only a distance of 10 Km when they were faced by the Sikhs. They attacked violently the Afghans and disappeared. The Sikhs after some time again appeared, attacked and left the field.

On the seventh day the Afghans marched further and reached the Beas Ghat. Abdali ordered that at first the loaded camels should cross the river. He received the information that the Sikhs numbering 30,000 had gathered on the Southern bank of the river and were ready to meet the Abdali challenge. He ordered that the commanders should take up positions and be ready for fighting. Meanwhile, the Sikhs attacked Abdali's forces from all sides. The Abdali pushed his horse into the Sikhs' ranks and as usual the Sikhs left the field. They were pursued by the Afghans for about 10 Km when they ultimately left the battlefield. Many were killed. When the Sikhs were out of sight, the Afghans returned to the bank of the river.

Abdali troops crossed the river. This was the last battle. "The faith protecting king in all his grandeur glory and victory marched from this place and after some stages arrived on the Ravi, and crossing over it with all the troops and baggage he came to the river Chenab by easy marches."¹

The Sikhs left the field not because they were defeated or

1. *Jang Nama* as quoted by Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 235-236.

mauled but because they had to celebrate *Baisakhi* at Amritsar which was nearing.

Now Abdali allowed his troops a good rest and marched only about 10 Km a day. Crossing Jhelum the Afghans reached Rohtas. Nasir Khan was granted the Quetta territory besides offering him Dera Jats, Multan, and Jhang but Nasir Khan refused the latter territories.

During this period Jassa Singh Ahluwalia possessed the territory of Kalanaur and also ruled over Jullunder Doab. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia jointly held Batala. Thus from Sirhind to Lahore, Multan and Derajats all areas were under the Sikhs where they reigned supreme without fear from anybody.

During the seventh invasion of Ahmed Shah, Sikh Sardars played a leading role. Nur Mohammed who has abused the Sikhs in his *Jang Nama* has also paid them tribute as men of high moral character. He writes, "they came like the lion and fled like a fox. It was the same hit and run for full seven days and nights. If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in battle. The body of everyone of them is like a piece of rock, and in physical grandeur everyone of them is equal to more than fifty. If their army take to flight, do not think, they are running away. It is only a war tactic." He writes further, "In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of fugitive, they don't plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid servant—whether a woman is young or old, they call her a *buriya* and ask her to get out of the way."¹

1. *Jang Nama* as Quoted by Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 235-236.

TEN

Conquest of Lahore

Ahmed Shah Abdali did not turn his eyes from India. He had a dream to establish his Empire on the Indian soil, come what may. In October 1789, Abdali himself, at the head of a large number of troops, reached Lahore without any resistance. Both the rulers of the land of five rivers and the people deserted Punjab in a haste to save their lives and property. Only the Sikhs offered him resistance and inflicted casualties on his soldiers. About 2,000 Abdali's men were killed during his exploits in Punjab.

Abdali was always in a hurry to attack and then to return to his native land. This was his fifth attack. In his keenness to settle the affairs, Abdali appointed Jarchi Karim Dad Khan to take charge of Lahore. He also appointed Raja Ghumand Chand of Kangra as the Governor of Jullundur Doab. Abdali crossed the Sutlej. No resistance was offered to him till he reached Taraori. There the Marathas faced his formidable army but were badly mauled and routed in the battle. Four hundred Marathas were killed on December 24, 1759. Many fled from the battlefield. It was a singular victory for Abdali. He reached the vicinity of Delhi where some Rohilla Chiefs joined hands with him. Abdali continued his march from there on January 9, 1760. Dattaji Sindhia faced him at Barari Ghat on the banks of Yamuna. He was killed in action and many of his soldiers fled. Then Malhar Holkar faced him at Sikandarabad on March 4, 1760, but was defeated. Abdali occupied Delhi but did not remain there. He reached Anup Shahar on the border of Oudh. Here Shuja-ud-Daulah of Oudh joined him with his 40,000 strong army.

The Marathas had suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Abdali. This created havoc in their ranks who now mustered their forces. The Peshwa sent his army under the command of Sadashiv Bhau, a youngman of 30 years. Bhau marched towards Delhi and

captured the city on July 22, 1760. He advanced further. Abdali's forces gathered at Panipat. Both the armies faced each other. Bhau's forces numbering 3,00,000 had 300 cannons with them. Abdali army's strength was about 91,000 with 70 cannons.

The third battle of Panipat was fought on January 14, 1761. Both the armies faced each other and tried to cut off the supply lines. The Marathas under Govind Rao Bundela blocked all the Afghan's supply lines. It was going to prove disastrous for the Afghans when Atai Khan Popalzie attacked Govind Rao's camp and destroyed it completely. The Afghan's lines of communication were restored. For about three months the armies of the Afghans and the Marathas faced each other. Then the Maratha army men began to die of starvation. There were no provisions and they were in a precarious condition. In the words of Mohd. Latif. The Bhau and Wiswas Rao both mounted, were encouraging their people and stimulating them to action. The war cries of Maratha warriors—Har Jai Mahadeo were borne on the breeze, and the greatest fervours prevailed through out their ranks. Everything was apparently favourable to the Marathas. Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula, whose division was near, was unable to see on account of the clouds of dust with which he was enveloped. The grand *Wazir* then, in full armour, galloped into the midst of his flying forces, and, in extreme range and despair reproached them for deserting him, saying, "Our country is far off, my friends, whither do you fly? Shuja kept his ground well, but desisted from advancing to help the *Wazir*."¹

Now, the Shah gave signal for a general charge and made a furious attack. The Marathas fought desperately hand to hand but Abdali's troops denoted them so much that they left the field with a large number of casualties. They were pursued in all directions by the Afghans. Wiswas Rao and Bhau were killed in action. Many other Maratha Chiefs were also killed or wounded. It is estimated that about 2,00,000 Maratha soldiers died while 22,000 were taken prisoners, 50,000 horses and an immense booty fell into the hands of the Afghans.

"This Great Battle" says Mohammad Latif, "which has been surpassed by few in carnage with its disastrous issue for the Marathas sealed the fate of that aspiring nation. Dismay and despondency preyed on the whole people, and Balaji, their Peshwa or King, died

1. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 237.

soon after of grief and disappointment. They evacuated their acquisitions in Hindustan and retired beyond the Narmada, never to recover their power."¹

After the victory at Panipat, the whole of India remained at the mercy of Abdali, but he had no wish to occupy the throne of the Mughals at Delhi, so after remaining at Delhi for a few days, he returned to Punjab.

During Abdali's absence from Punjab, the Sikhs got an opportunity to strengthen themselves. Jarchi Karim Dad Khan who had been given charge of Lahore by Abdali, but soon afterwards, his services were needed in the battlefield and was recalled, appointing Sarbuland Khan incharge in Lahore because of fear of the Sikhs. He sent Sadat Yar Khan to take charge of the Capital. Rustam Khan, the Governor of Chahar Mahal, proceeded to chastise the Sikhs, but he was captured and detained by them and was released only on the payment of ransom money of Rs. 22,000/-. When Sadat Khan came to know about Rustam Khan, he was so much terrified that he resigned from his office. Ultimately Mir Mohammad Khan took charge at Lahore. He hardly consolidated his position when the Sikhs assembled in very large numbers at Amritsar in November 1760 to celebrate the festival of *Diwali*. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the leader of the Dal, Chet Singh Kanahiya, Hari Singh Bhangi and Lehna Singh held a conference and decided to march towards Lahore on November 7; a *Gurmatta* was passed that Lahore should be captured without any further delay.

The *Gurmatta* was implemented and numbering 10,000 Sikhs under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked Lahore. Mir Mohhammad Khan shut the city gates and hid himself in a fort. The Sikhs cut off all the means of communication, plundered some areas and laid waste the crops in the field outside the city of Lahore. Many houses were set on fire. The city was in the grip of fear. Some permanent citizens requested the Governor to pay rupees 30,000 to the Sikhs for the preparation of *Karah Prashad*. Their request was considered, the amount was paid and the Sikhs left the city.

In April, 1761, when Ahmed Shah Abdali was returning to Afghanistan after crossing the Sutlej, his troops were harassed and molested. The Sikhs relieved Abdali of a number of captives including

1. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 237.

2000 women and sent them safely to their homes. This gesture of the Sikhs was greatly appreciated by the people who considered them as their saviours.

Abdali remained at Lahore for some time and sent expeditions against the Sikhs to subdue them, but the Sikhs remained adamant and continued the molestation of Abdali troops. Some Sikhs were captured and put to death after torture but they did not care for their lives and continued their pursuits.

Ultimately, Abdali left Punjab for his home. Before leaving he appointed Sarbuland Khan as the Subedar of Lahore and Khawaja Obeid as that of Multan. Besides these two appointments, Raja Ghamand Chand Katoch of Kangra was appointed to look after the Jullundur Doab. He was given two deputies, Sadat Khan and Sadiq Ali Khan. Afridi Zain Khan was given charge of the Sirhind province. They were ordered to chase the Sikhs, torture and punish them. But the Sikhs were made of a different clay. They continued harassment of the Abdali troops and damaged their equipment. On their return from India, the Sikhs numbering about 40,000 plundered the countryside all round on this side of Chenab. Khawaji Mirza Khan, the Governor of four *Mahals* attacked the Sikhs but he was killed and his army was routed.

The Sikhs now entered the Jullundur Doab. The *Faujdar* was given a crushing defeat and he fled. One victory came after another. The Sikhs' target was now Sirhind which they attacked subsequently. Zain Khan reached back his headquarters from tour. The countryside was devastated. The town too was not spared. However, inside the town, the Sikhs were opposed by Bhikhan Khan, the Malerkotla ruler. The Sikhs had to leave the place, but they soon attacked Malerkotla to inflict punishment on Bhikhan Khan. The people were taken aback. The town was besieged and the supply lines were cut. Some areas were put to arson and plundered. The fort was captured.

Abdali deputed his General, Nur-ud-Din Khan to lead an expedition against the Sikhs. He entered India in August 1761, and marched upto the left bank of the river. Important towns were devastated. Then he arrived on the bank of Chenab where Charat Singh Sukarchakia challenged him. He arrested the progress of Nur-ud-Din. A battle ensued in which Nur-ud-Din was repulsed. The fleeing army was pursued by Charat Singh, which numbering about 12,000 took refuge in Sialkot and cut off the supplies. Nur-ud-Din left his starving and demoralised men to their fate. He fled in the

disguise of a beggar. After him, his army surrendered. This was another victory for the Sikhs. Charat Singh made a triumphant entry into Gujranwala. These victories emboldened them.

The Sikhs became more violent and offensive. They put all sorts of hurdles in the way of the officials collecting land revenue. The Government was in a difficult position. Land revenue was not coming and administration was not functioning. Khawaja Obeid recruited a large army to fight against the Sikhs and turned his attention against Charat Singh Shukarchakia who had already built a fort.

Khawaja Obeid was not taking any risk. He enrolled 1000 Sikhs also in his army and marched towards Gujranwala where he faced the strong army of Charat Singh. Obeid's army could not stand against the valour of the Sikhs and was driven away by them. Meanwhile, other Sikh Sardars had come to know about the siege of Gujranwala and they mustered their forces under Jassa Singh, Gujar Singh, Jai Singh Kanahiya, Lehna Singh and Sobha Singh. The combined forces of all of them reached Gujranwala and camped at a distance of about 6 Km from the town.

Khawaja Obeid got panicky. The Sikhs who had joined his army deserted him and joined the combined forces of the *Sardars*. When the Khawaja came to know of the Sikh plan to attack the town, he fled away with the fall of the night. The Sikh forces pursued him and fell upon Obeid's troops. They ran away in all the directions leaving their equipment and baggage. The Sikhs were enriched with a huge booty.

Khawaja Obeid reached Jankalian and with the help of some of his loyalists ultimately landed in Lahore. The victory enhanced the Sikhs' prestige. Their glory was at its highest now. The whole Punjab was at their feet. On October 22, 1761, on the auspicious occasion of *Diwali*, the Sikhs collected at Amritsar and offered *Ardas* at *Harimandir*. They thanked the Almighty for bestowing glory on them.

The occasion was also utilised for passing *Gurmatta* that their staunch enemy, Guru Aqil Das of Jandiala must be punished. It was also agreed that Lahore be attacked and captured at all costs. Lahore was the heart of Punjab and without its possession the Sikhs could not be a supreme power in the land of five rivers.

In view of the *Gurmatta*, the *Dal Khalsa* gathered all its forces

under the command of its acknowledged leader, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The Sikh troops marched towards Lahore. The city was besieged. All lines of communication to the city were disconnected. No body was allowed to come out of or enter the city. It was a grim situation for the Governor Obeid Khan who shut himself in the fort and did not dare to come out. The leading citizens became frightened and in their fear they threw open the gates to the invading Sikh army. They had negotiations with Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who assured them of their safety. The Sikhs were in control of the city. Khawaja Obeid remained inside the fort, where he died in due course of time. The Sikhs were the Masters of Lahore. Their cherished goal had been achieved. It was the glorious day in the history of the Sikhs.

The Sikhs declared Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as the Padshah and was given the title of *Sultan-e-Quam*. The prophecy of Nawab Kapur Singh was fulfilled. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia occupied the throne. A treasure and mint was captured and the coin was struck. The capture of Lahore marked the highest point in the evolution of the Sikh empire. The people were convinced that soon the Sikhs would be the masters of Punjab. But "as the irony of fate would have it", says Hari Ram Gupta, "This greatest glory of the Sikhs was to be followed only within three months and they had to face the hardest blow they had ever sustained after the death of Banda."¹

The coin was minted in November 1761. It did not bear any inscription, other than that of Guru's name as the Sikh would never claim any credit to himself, but to their Guru. Even *Maharaja* Ranjit Singh did not issue coins in his own name when he became the ruler of Punjab. Moreover, the coin mentioning the name of Jassa Singh had not been seen by anybody and Jassa Singh could not issue coin in his own name because it would have meant the loss of confidence of other Sardars.

It is possible that the coins bearing the inscription of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia were minted by the enemies of the Sikhs and sent to Ahmed Shah Abdali, to instigate him to attack Lahore.

In short, the Sikh capture of Lahore was their greatest achievement during the century. They were very much excited and their zeal was at its highest. They attained this glory after the hardest struggle of more than half a century and were bubbling over their victory.

1. Gupta Hari Ram, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 163

ELEVEN

The Triumph

Then came the *Baisakhi*—April, 1765. The Sikhs gathered in the holy city of Amritsar, the source of their inspiration. The more the Abdali tried to destroy their temple and the holy tank, the more revengeful they became. Amritsar to the Sikhs, in fact, was a symbol of their national unity and independence. Here they would regale themselves with the stories of their Gurus and exploits of their forefathers. Many a Sikh rather sought ardently an opportunity to have the privilege of laying down his life in the *Guru Ki Nagri*, Amritsar. The Abdali committed a blunder in trying to destroy their shrine and holy tank. In so doing he rather aroused their dormant energies into a most vigorous action. In the words of Hari Ram Gupta, "In the recent Durrani campaign, the Sikhs had the upper hand uniformly in their battles with the invader, and they were now convinced that either Ahmad Shah Abadali would not venture on any other invasion or that he would leave them undisturbed in their possessions. In case he waged war with them they were prepared to meet him on more than an equal footing and to assert themselves at any cost. The consciousness of their superiority now made them openly declare their independence and assume the sovereign power."¹

The Sikhs celebrated the *Baisakhi* with gaiety and enthusiasm. The holy tank was cleaned and the shrine rebuilt. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was responsible for preserving and consolidating the Sikh religious tradition amidst their struggle for existence. Among other deeds that go to his credit was the re-building of *Harimandir*. He laid the foundation stone of the shrine on April 10, 1765 and the building was completed in 1776. It was at the initiative of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 238.

Nodh Singh joined the *Fyzulpuria Misal* of Nawab Kapur Singh. Nodh Singh, when Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the first time plundered his goods and became very rich and powerful. In 1747, Nodh Singh fought against the Afghans and received a serious gunshot wound on his head which did not heal and incapacitated him for life. He almost remained on bed for five years and died in 1752. It was a great blow to Sukerchakias. Nodh Singh left behind four sons, Charat Singh, Dal Singh, Chet Singh and Mang Singh.

Charat Singh was born in 1721. He kept himself aloof from the *Fyzulpuria Misal* and his two brothers joined him. In 1751, he shifted his headquarters to Raja Sansi, and in 1752 collected a large number of persons, organised them on plundering expeditions. He succeeded in his mission and the people were afraid of him. The neighbouring chiefs were convinced of the power of the Sikhs. He was a brave Jat Sardar, who repeatedly distinguished himself in the early struggles with Ahmad Shah.¹ Seeing Charat Singh's strength, Mohammed Yar, head of *Kialis* joined Charat Singh too with his 15 horsemen. Thus, originally a small gang, it increased to 150 horsemen. Now Charat Singh became irresistible and forcibly took possession of some villages, united with another successful leader like himself, and formed a *Misal* of which he became the active Chief.²

Another Sardar, who joined hands with Charat Singh was Amir Singh of Gujranwala. He belonged to the *Fyzulpuria Misal* but severed his connections with it and became a notorious robber.

His depredations extended from the banks of Jhelum to the outskirts of Delhi. He acquired a large estate at Gujranwala and became the chiefman of the area. In 1756, he married his daughter to Charat Singh. The matrimonial alliance increased their strength much more and they jointly launched several expeditions. Eminabad was under the Mughal *Faujdar*, who was a strong headed ruler and let loose a reign of terror on his subjects. They requested Charat Singh to come to their rescue and in 1761, Charat Singh marched towards Eminabad and surrounded the fortress of the *Faujdar*, and in moments *Faujdar's* body was cut into pieces. A huge booty fell into Charat Singh's hands. This increased his power further and Charat Singh's name now spread far and wide and it became a household word.

1. Payne, C.H. *A Short History of the Sikhs*, pp. 66-67.

2. Gordon, J.H., *The Sikhs*, p. 81

In 1757, both Charat Singh and Amir Singh jointly constructed a mud fort at Gujranwala to defend themselves from outside invasions. This was not relished by the Muslim Chiefs of Lahore as it posed danger to their stability. The Governor of Lahore, Khawaja Obeid, became furious and ordered his strong force of 2000 to march towards Gujranwala. The army was led by Bahadur Khan and Afzal Khan. Gujranwala town was invaded and fierce battle was fought. "The Sikhs united together and defended their property against the Mohemmedans—the invading army was completely routed, and its Chiefs narrowly escaped with their lives, leaving behind their military stores and ammunition in the hands of the enemy. From that time the audacity of the Sikhs increased, and they began to organise themselves into a still more compact and formidable body under Charat Singh, who as his fame increased, established his power as the head of the *Sukerchakia Misal*."¹

The liquidation of the royal forces emboldened Charat Singh and he organised series of campaigns against the Afghans. "On the appearance of Ahmed Shah Abdali, with his Afghan troops in 1762, Charat Singh, conscious of his own inability to oppose the disciplined army of the Shah in the open field, and afraid of a direct conflict with the main body of the invaders, sent his family to Jammu, where he concealed all his property, he was never quiet himself. At the head of a band of chosen men, he harassed the march of the Afghans, cut off the stragglers of their arm, and plundered their baggage. The Afghans, on their side levelled to the ground the mud fort which the Sikhs were building at Gujranwala."²

When Ahmed Shah Abdali left Punjab, Charat Singh again became active and joined hands with his brother-in-law, Gurbaksh Singh. They attacked Wazirabad with full force and captured it. Mughal officials and their men were driven out and the town was put under the charge of Gurbaksh Singh. Then, Ahmedabad was taken into possession and handed over to Dal Singh, a brave Sardar of Charat Singh.

While still at Ahmedabad, Charat Singh came to know that Nur-ud-Din, the General of Ahmed Shah Abdali had let loose a reign of terror on his non-Muslim subjects at Rohtas. He was harassing the people. This infuriated Charat Singh who marched towards Rohtas. The town was plundered. Nur-ud-Din was defeated

1. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 339.

2. Ibid.

and badly mauled in the battlefield. Charat Singh encouraged by the victory, proceeded further towards Dhani area without much resistance. Chakwal and Jalalpur were captured but were allowed to retain their positions on the payment of a huge sum of money as *Nazrana*. The Muslim power was considerably weakened. Charat Singh then subdued Sahib Khan, the Governor of Pind Dadan Khan, whose life was only spared when he agreed to pay heavy fine. Pind Dadan Khan was not left in its original form, but was handed over to his Sardars, Budh Singh and Gor Singh by Charat Singh. A fort was ordered to be built at the place for the defence of the town from any future invasions. Charat Singh did not stop here and marched further and captured Kot Sahib Khan and Raja Ka Kot. These victories swollen his head and he became most powerful of all the *Misal* Chiefs. "The successive victories won by Charat Singh, and the power and resources at his command made him an object of jealousy to the rival *Misaldars*, who all looked upon him with great suspicion, and though (not without ground) their own positions were not safe before his vast schemes of conquest and aggrandizement. None, however, became more apprehensive than the *Sardars* of the *Bhangi Misal*, who had from the first entertained hostile feelings towards the rising *Sukerchakias*".¹

When in 1762, at the time of the Abdali invasion on India, Charat Singh had retreated to Jammu hills, he had an occasion to form links with the *Rajas* of Jammu. Ranjit Deo, the *Raja* had some misunderstanding with his son Brij Raj Deo. The *Raja* desired to deprive Brij Raj Deo of the Gaddi and bestow it on his younger son. This was not tolerated by Brij Raj Deo and he did not sit idle. He sought an interview with Charat Singh and begged for his help in getting him the right to rule. He promised to pay him a large annual tribute in case he succeeded. Charat Singh readily agreed as he had an old score to settle with the ruler. He would have a chance not only to bestow Jammu Gaddi on its rightful successor but also to teach a lesson to Ranjit Deo. He immediately sought the help of Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh of the *Kanahiya Misal* and planned attack on Jammu in 1774. They had collected a large force. Ranjit Deo also did not want to leave anything to chance and secured the help of Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh of *Bhangi Misal*. He was also helped and assisted with resources by auxiliaries from the hill States of Chamba, Bushair, Nurpur and Kangra. The two armies

1. Latif Mohd. . *History of the Punjab*, p. 339.

collected on the banks of the river Besanti. The forces were of equal strength and several skirmishes took place. Nothing could be decided in the battlefield. In one of the fights, Charat Singh was stuck by one of the matchlocks of his own men and he died instantaneously. It was a great blow to Charat Singh's forces, who were completely demoralised and withdrew from the battlefield. The next day the *Bhangi* Chief Jhanda Singh also died. "This left Ranjit Deo and his son to settle their quarrel as best as they could."¹

Charat Singh, who consolidated the *Sukerchakias*, died in 1774. It was a great blow to *Sukerchakias*. The *Sukerchakia Misal* under Charat Singh had a force of over 10,000 horses."² He succeeded to the patrimony of three ploughs and a well representing thirty acres of land.³ Charat Singh had a great influence and power and held a considerable force and territories in the neighborhood of Gujaranwala.

"Charat Singh was a man of high aims, and far more advanced ideas than his contemporaries of the *Misal*. It was he who laid the foundation of the greatness of the family. By his industry, economy and perserverance, he extended his estates and throve upon the disorder which followed on the overthrow of the Lahore Governor, Khwaja Obeid. He appeared early in the field as an enterprising leader, and soon rose from a common Dharwi, or highway robber to the *Sardari* of a Confederacy, and contributed materially to the strength of the Sikhs as a nation. The territory left by him on his death is comuted to have yielded about three lakhs of rupees annually."⁴

Charat Singh was 45 years old when he died. He left behind two sons, Mahan Singh and Sahaj Singh and a daughter Raj Kaur. Mahan Singh was only ten years old. He was too young to shoulder the heavy responsibility let on his shoulders. It was an uphill task. His principality included Gujaranwala, Eminabad, Chakwal, Jalalpur, Pind Dadan Khan and Rohtas. His mother Mai Dessan, immediately assumed the charge of administrating the territory. Mai Dessan played a remarkable part in Mahan Singh's life. "She ruled with vigour and diplomacy as Sikh ladies played an important part in the

1. Payne, C.H., *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 67.

2. Court Henry, *Sikhan de Raj di Vithiya*, p. 64.

3. Gordon, J.H., *The Sikhs*, p. 87.

4. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 340.

5. Gordon, J.H., *The Sikhs*, p. 89.

history of these war like families. She was a shrewd and courageous woman, who ruled the *Misal* with tact and ability."¹ She took the lead and rebuilt the Gujranwala fort which was earlier destroyed by Ahmed Shah Abdali. She was assisted in her task by both her brothers, Dal Singh and Gurbaksh Singh. Mai Dessan was an experienced, intelligent and capable woman. It is said that the army was very happy with her and she ruled with dignity and pride.

However, many prominent *Sardars* revolted against the authority of Mai Dessan. The discontented *Sardars* were confident that *Bhangi* Chiefs would help them in their efforts to overthrow Mahan Singh but they were sadly mistaken. No assistance was given to them. The revolt was crushed and the *Sardars* were punished and humiliated. Their dream was shattered. Now seeing Mahan Singh's strength, the smaller *Sardars* accepted his suzerainty and offered him *Nazrana*.

In 1775, Mahan Singh married Raj Kaur, daughter of Gajpat Singh of Jind. The marital relationship proved very useful and it strengthened the position of Mahan Singh. The Rani was popularly known as *Mai Malwain*. The marriage was solemnised with grandeur and gaiety it deserved.

In 1779, Mahan Singh took charge of Government into his own hands. Immediately he attacked the territory of *Bhatias* and took possession of Issa Khel and Mussa Khel. Then, he marched towards Kotli near Sialkot and accepted the tribute from its ruler. Returning from Kotli, Mahan Singh entered into an alliance with the *Kanahaiya* Chief, Jai Singh. Shortly after this alliance Mahan Singh became more ambitious and engaged himself in an undertaking which gained for him great celebrity as a warrior and a conqueror. At that time Rasulnagar situated on the bank of Chenab was ruled by a powerful tribe, *Chattas* and their head was Pir Mohammad. Rasulnagar was attacked by an army of 6000, the combined forces of Jai Singh and Mahan Singh. The excuse for the battle was readily available when the *Chattas* refused to hand over to the Sikhs the famous *Zamzama* gun, left by Ahmed Shah as it was too heavy to be taken across the river Chenab. The Khalsa claimed it to be its own. The town of Rasulnagar was besieged, which continued for four months. The surrounding areas were plundered and not a grain was left in anybody's house. *Chattas* sought

1. Payne, C.H., *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 67.

the help of *Bhangis* but in vain. They were humbled and sought peace treaty with Mahan Singh. Mahan Singh agreed on his terms but bound himself not to humiliate *Chattas'* Chief Pir Mohammad. However, when the Chief came out of the fort unarmed, he was treacherously arrested. His sons were tied on to the mouth of a cannon and were blown to pieces.

"The *Sukerchakia* victory at Rasalnagar struck a heavy blow on the winning power of the *Bhangis*. For Pir Mohammad was their nominal tributary, it also resounded far and wide among the territories of the warring confederacies. Mahan Singh's fame as a warrior spread, small *Sardars* in the region began to show him deference and came with offers of allegiance."¹ The famous gun *Zamzama* fell into Mahan Singh's hands.

The fame of Mahan Singh now increased tremendously. Jammu was a rich and wealthy town. It was a safer place where many Punjab merchants had taken shelter. They had flourishing business where the effect of prevailing conditions of chaos and confusion in Punjab had no effect. The traders thrived on trade with Kashmir on the one hand and the plains of Punjab on the other. Raja Brij Raj Deo, the new Raja of Jammu, whose estate was constantly ravaged by the *Bhangis*, approached *Kanahiyas* for help. The *Kanahiyas* under the command of Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh reached Jammu with their forces but on reaching there they deserted the Raja and joined the *Bhangis*. They did not restore any territory to the Jammu Raja and the Raja agreed to pay them an annual tribute of Rs. 3,00,000. But later the Raja failed to fulfil his promise. The *Kanahiyas* vowed to take the money by force. The Raja made a request to Mahan Singh to come to his rescue. Although Mahan Singh had earlier exchanged turbans with the Raja of Jammu, he agreed to help *Kanahiyas* on the condition that the booty would be shared equally among the *Kanahiyas* and the *Sukerchakias*.

Mahan Singh marched towards Jammu and reached the vicinity of the town. On the other hand the *Kanahiyas*, under the command of Haqiqat Singh proceeded through Zaffarwal but could not join Mahan Singh's forces. The Jammu Raja fled. The capital was left undefended. Mahan Singh entered the town, plundered it and collected a large sum of money from its residents. He looted the palace and the treasury. The palace was burnt. They laid waste the

1. Hasrat Bikramjit, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, p. 23.

whole country and shortly afterwards a famine broke out. Haqiqat Singh demanded share in the loot which was bluntly refused by Mahan Singh, who played the double treachery. He betrayed the Raja of Jammu and also the *Kanahiyas*. Haqiqat Singh was so much disillusioned that he left for the hills where he died shortly afterwards. His spirit of revenge died with him.

The treacherous act of Mahan Singh greatly annoyed the *Kanahiya* Chief Jai Singh who vowed in the name of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* to take a revenge on Mahan Singh. The *Sukarchakia* Chief was threatened with vengeance. *Kanahiyas* attacked Jandiala in 1783 and Rasulnagar and Mandiala thereafter. Later, a pitched battle was fought between *Sukarchakias* and the *Kanahiyas* near Majitha. Jai Singh's troops were routed, he was forced to flee and take refuge beyond the Beas. He made preparation on a very large scale in the Doaba, to wage a war against the *Sukarchakias* but Mahan Singh invited Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand of Katoh for help.

On the occasion of the festival of *Diwali*, Mahan Singh went to Amritsar to pay his respects to the holy shrine. Mahan Singh decided to meet Jai Singh but the latter scornfully rejected the offer of reconciliation. Mahan Singh, to satisfy the old man, Jai Singh *Kanahiya* approached him with a tray of sweets but "the old Chief received him with marked coolness and displeasure, so much so that Mahan Singh assuming the demeanour of an inferior approached with a tray of sweetmeats in his hands, and begged to be acquainted with the cause he had given for offence professing his sense of filial obligation and attachment to Jai Singh and offering any atonement in his power. Jai Singh was stretched at length on his couch, and drawing his sheet over him called out loudly and readily that he desired to hear no more of the *Bhagtias* (dancing boys') conversation."¹ "This was too much to be borne in silence by so haughty and imperious a young Chief, as Mahan Singh was. He withdrew in great indignation at the rude treatment shown to him by the *Kanahiya* Chief, and resolved upon revenge, but he knew that Amritsar, where the *Kanahiya*'s power reigned supreme, would not be a appropriate place for the accomplishment of his objective. He accordingly managed to effect his escape from the sacred city, attended by a few sawars and having returned home in safety, sent his agents to Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, who had fled across the Sutlej

i. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 343.

after his defeat by the allied forces of the *Kanahiya* and *Ahluwalia Misal*.”¹

Mahan Singh now made up his mind to strike at Jai Singh with vengeance. Having joined hands with Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katoch Chief, he marched towards Batala. They reached Achal Sahib, near Batala and were ready to strike Jai Singh and his son Gurbaksh Singh who were there along with their forces to give them a good fight. A bloody battle was fought. Many were slain on both sides. Gurbaksh Singh too was killed. This incident disheartened Jai Singh and he was broken to pieces. He immediately surrendered and ran away towards Pathankot.

The town was taken into possession by Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. It was a great victory of the joint forces of Jai Singh and Jassa Singh. This encouraged them and they were bent upon to finish the *Kanahiyas* at any cost. Another battle ensued in the hills. Sansar Chand fought for the fort of Kangra. He captured Hajipur and Mukerian, invaded Alipur and pursued Jai Singh's forces deep into the hills. At last, peace was restored. Jai Singh surrendered Kot Kangra to Sansar Chand and the latter vacated Hajipur and Mukerian.

Jai Singh was humbled and humiliated. He did not lose his high spirit and determination. He had the burning desire in his heart to take revenge on Mahan Singh's forces at Naushera but his forces were no match for Mahan Singh's army. Jai Singh's troops were totally routed and the remaining retired to Nurpur. Jai Singh shut himself inside the house.

Sada Kaur continued to manage the affairs of her estate at Batala. She nourished her only daughter, Mehtab Kaur as best as she could. In due course of time, she proposed the betrothal of her daughter to Ranjit Singh the young son of Mahan Singh knowing full well that this union would strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two most powerful *Misals*, namely *Kanahiyas* and *Sukerchakias*. She herself dreamt of obtaining the *Sardari* of *Kanahiya Misal* after the death of her father-in-law.

Mahan Singh readily agreed to the proposal and the betrothal ceremony of Ranjit Singh took place in 1785. It was a grand gala occasion. Sweets were distributed and there were rejoicings all round. It was a happy union of two families. In 1786, the marriage was performed. The matrimonial alliance proved very lucky for the

1. Prinsep, Henry. *The Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, pp. 34-35.

country as peace was restored between the two warring factions. This led to Ranjit Singh's rise to power in Punjab and establishment of the Sikh empire. The combined forces of Jai Singh Kanahiya, Mahan Singh and Sansar Chand Katoch jointly marched towards Batala and tried to put the *Kanahiyas* incharge of the estate, but Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was so well entrenched that he could not be dislodged from his stronghold. The town was besieged by the marching army, but Jassa Singh Ramgarhia foiled their attempt to capture the town.

Mahan Singh was now free to settle there things in order. He settled scores with his old adversaries. Gujar Singh Bhangi had died in 1788. A dispute arose between his two sons, Sahib Singh and Fateh Singh for the possession of their late father. Mahan Singh supported the younger one. Fateh Singh, as a result of which hostilities broke out between Mahan Singh and Sahib Singh. No regard was paid to their relationship and a recourse to arms was inevitable. Bitterness continued and Mahan Singh asserting his own authority over Gujarat demanded tribute from Sahib Singh which was of course refused. Thus, in 1792, a fierce battle was fought at Sodhra to settle the dispute through arms. A fortress was besieged in which Sahib Singh had shut himself. The siege continued for three months. Mahan Singh fell seriously ill and was moved to Gujaranwala, where he died in 1792. And thus ended the fateful career of a man, who consolidated his position by virtue of his ability, power and strength which enabled his son, Ranjit Singh to build up a Sikh empire in Punjab.

"Mahan Singh was brave, enterprising and prudent beyond his years, and the age in which he lived highly favoured his ambitious schemes. So distracted was the state of the country, so small the influence of the *Gurmatta* or National Sikh Assembly, and so rife was intrigue among the ambitious Chiefs, that everything favoured the adventurous spirit and ambitious designs of the young Mahan Singh. Such being the case, it may well be surmised that he would not allow so favourable an opportunity to slip by unprofitable to himself. His early feats in arms had undaunted for him so great a reputation that many influential independent *Sardars* joined under his banner. His rapid successes gave him an ascendancy over all the Sikh Chiefs. His military genius, undaunted courage, stern temper and rigid observance of the rules of delicacy and honour, at times involved him in serious trouble, but he honourably acquitted himself

on all such occasions. At an early age, he shook off the trammels of his mother's guardianship, to pave the way for his own greatness."¹

Mahan Singh was hardly 27, when he died. He was valiant, ambitious and courageous warrior who was able to establish the supremacy of *Sukerchakia Misal* over all the other *Misals*. He was the first head of *Misal* who thought of running the administration on sound lines. A *Dewan* was appointed who looked after the day-to-day affairs from the top. He had also built up a small force of 2500 horses. He had no equal in the *Sukerchakia Misal*. All conquests were made by him and tributes were taken in his name who was free to do with it what pleased him.

Ranjit Singh was born on November 13, 1780 at Gujranwala. He was initially named Budh Singh. His father Mahan Singh was a chieftain and was in full control of his estate. At the time of Ranjit Singh's birth his father was away on estate affairs. A messenger was sent to Mahan Singh to convey this happy news. He was overjoyed on hearing the news and named the child Ranjit Singh, the victor of battles. Mahan Singh was prophetic enough to know the destiny of the child. Ranjit Singh never lost any battle. Ranjit Singh's birth was celebrated with great rejoicings and festivities to which many noble men were invited. Thousands of rupees were distributed among the poor and the destitutes. Alms were distributed and illuminations were held. Festivities continued for several days and the bards sang of rejoicings.

Ranjit Singh had his first taste of battle, when he was hardly ten years old. It was when Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujarat refused to pay tribute to Mahan Singh and his estate was attacked by him. Sahib Singh shut himself in the fort of Sodhran and the siege of the fort was laid. Ranjit Singh accompanied Mahan Singh. The siege continued for several months.

Mahan Singh fell grievously ill. Apprehending his approaching end he invested Ranjit Singh as the Chief of the *Sukerchakia Misal* by putting on Ranjit's forehead saffron paste. It was a great occasion of joy. Mahan Singh returned to Gujranwala, when the other Bhangi Sardars came to know about the illness of Mahan Singh at Sodhran. But Ranjit Singh ambushed them and routed their forces. Ranjit Singh's victory opened the eyes of many Chieftains. When the news of victory was conveyed to Mahan Singh, he distributed

1. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, pp. 344-45.

sweets and perhaps it was the last news given to Mahan Singh before he breathed his last.

Mahan Singh died in 1792. Ranjit Singh was then 12 years old. He was too young to manage the affairs of the estate. His mother, Raj kaur became his natural guardian. He was helped by Dewan Lakhpat Rai. She had full confidence in his integrity but her brother Dal Singh did not like his interference in the administration of the territory. He joined hands with Sada Kaur, Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law who exercised considerable influence over him. Thus, two clear-cut groups were formed and intrigues started to the detriment of the estate. On the one hand were Raj Kaur and Dewan Lakhpat Rai and on the other Dal Singh and Sada Kaur. The intrigues and counter-intrigues made Ranjit Singh sick of all of them. He started spending most of his time outside the house on hunting expeditions in the company of the servants who influenced his life-style to the maximum extent possible. Ranjit Singh also became suspicious of people around him and disliked some of them.

Ranjit Singh had already been engaged to Mehtab Kaur, Grand-daughter of Jai Singh, the Kanahiya Chief. Thus in 1786, at the age of 16, Ranjit Singh was married to Mehtab Kaur. The marriage party went from Gujranwala to Batala and the marriage was solemnised with great pomp and show. Many Sardars attended the ceremony and it became a major event in the history of Punjab. The alliance between the *Misals* of *Sukarchakias* and *Kanahiyas* proved a landmark in Sikh history. It turned the tide and in due course of time all the smaller *Misals* were liquidated. While going to Batala, Ranjit halted at Lahore for a couple of days. There he held discussion with Sardar Chet Singh and Sardar Mehar Singh. He was received with honour and Ranjit got an opportunity to see the Lahore fort. That very moment a desire arose in his heart to capture the fort as early as possible.

The families were united but the marriage was an utter failure. It may be due to the fact that Mehtab Kaur did not give affection to the man whose father had murdered her father and Ranjit Singh's reaction to her reserved attitude was aversion to her which developed into an unhappy event. Moreover, Ranjit would not have liked to stick to one woman who came from a family of *Kanahiyas* who were earlier staunch opponents of *Sukerchakias*. It became a marriage in name only. Sada Kaur had realised that it was sufficient that her daughter was occasionally sharing a bed with a person for

whom she had little use. Such things were common during those days. The only important matter was that the wife of a noble man should produce a son who could be the heir-apparent to the estate of his father. Sada wanted her daughter to bear a child who could be a heir to the *Sukerchakia* Chief. She worked for strengthening the *Kanahiyas* and advanced their interests. "A curious love-hate relationship developed between Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh. Both of them were ambitious and respected each other's ambition; they could be unscrupulous and consequently willing to overlook the other's lack of scruples in short, being very much alike they began to understand each other perfectly."¹

Now Ranjit Singh desired to strengthen his position further and negotiated with the *Nakai Sardars* and this resulted in Ranjit's another marriage with Raj Kaur, daughter of Khazan Singh Nakai and a sister of Sardar Gian Singh in 1798. The marriage party left Gujranwala and reached Satghara via Sheikhupura where they were lavishly treated and a big dowry was offered. Raj Kaur came to be known as *Mai Nakain*.

This second marriage annoyed Sada Kaur and Mehtab Kaur. Mehtab kaur returned to Batala and after that visited Gujranwala only occasionally. Sada Kaur, though little upset, reconciled to the idea of Ranjit's marrying for the second time because she had other ambitious plans and was bent upon to see that her plans were given practical shape.

Upto this time, Diwan Lakhpat Rai was managing the affairs of the estate. He was the confidant of Sardar Mahan Singh. He kept accounts of the income and expenditure of the *Sukerchakia* estate. When Mahan Singh was about to die, he put Ranjit Singh's hand into Lakhpat's and asked his uncle Dal Singh to take special care of Ranjit. The affairs continued to be managed well but soon the relations between Dewan and Dal Singh became strained and they started looking each other with suspicion and disdain. Dal Singh instigated Ranjit Singh against the Diwan. On the other hand Sada Kaur too desired that the affairs of the 18 years old and he realised the gravity of the situation. In the meantime, the *Diwan* was murdered while away in the Dhanni area for collecting land revenue. This gave an opportunity to Ranjit Singh to take the management of the affairs of the estate into his own hands. Before assuming the direct responsibilities of the administration, Ranjit spent his days in hunting.

1. Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 26.

indulging in every kind of excesses and "gratifying his youthful passions and desires."

Thus at the age of 18, Ranjit assumed the powers directly. Sada Kaur exploited Ranjit's position and she was the ladder by which Ranjit Singh reached the climax of his power.

Mahan Singh had left to his minor son an estate, sufficient in size but with many problems. Although the battle of Batala had established *Sukerchakia* supremacy over the *Kanahiyas*, but the *Bhangis* were still active and were a constant source of trouble for the young Ranjit Singh. They were still the masters of Lahore, Amritsar and Gujarat. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was not lagging behind and he had considerably increased his strength. Wazirabad was held by Jodh Singh and Kasur by the Afghan, Nizam-ud-Din. All the *Sikh Misals* were jealous of the rise of *Sukerchakias*. Sada Kaur had become almost a guardian of Ranjit Singh. After the death of Jai Singh she had assumed the charge of *Kanahiyas Misal*. She did not give any share in the domain of Jai Singh to his other sons. She was a woman with a difference, determined, ambitious and tactful. "The wisdom and energy of this extraordinary woman, Sada Kaur, one of the most artful and ambitious of her sex that ever figured in the Sikh history, conduced materially to the success of Ranjit Singh in his early exploits."¹

Thus, combining the affairs of the two *Misals*, Sada Kaur, contributed her might to the rise of power of Ranjit Singh. Immediately after the death of Mahan Singh, the estates was managed by Diwan Lakhpat Rai, Dal Singh and Ranjit's mother, Raj Kaur. But unfortunately, they could not pull on together. Intrigues reigned supreme and dissensions in their ranks spread. Raj Kaur tried to reduce Sada kaur's influence by marrying Ranjit to Rai Kaur, daughter of Khazan Singh Nakai.

Under these circumstances, Ranjit Singh assumed all power in 1795 and with the active help and assistance of Sada Kaur, he consolidated his position which could not be challenged then. Ranjit Singh was destined to carve out an empire and rule over it, fulfilling his dream of establishing a sovereign State of Punjab.

Punjab presented a picture of chaos and confusion when Ranjit

1. Latif Mohd., *History of Punjab*, p. 346.

Singh took reins of *Sukerchakia Misal*. The edifice of Ahmed Shah Abdali's empire in India had crumbled. Afghanistan was dismembered. Peshwar and Kashmir, though under the suzerainty of Afghanistan, had attained de-facto independence. *Barakzais* were the master of these places. Attock was ruled by Wazirkhels and Jhang lay at the feet of Sials. Pathans were ruling over Kasur. Multan had thrown the Afghan yoke and Nawab Muzaffar Khan had taken its charge.

Both Punjab and Sind were under Afghan rule since 1757. Ahmed Shah Abdali was granted suzerainty over these two provinces. They were confronted with the rising power of the Sikhs in Punjab. Taimur Khan, a local Governor was able to turn away the Sikhs from Amritsar. He razed to the ground the fort of Ram Rauni. But this state of affairs did not last long. The Afghans were forced to retreat and Lahore was occupied by the Sikhs in 1758. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia proclaimed Sikhs' sovereignty and became its head. He struck coins to commemorate his victory.

When Ahmed Shah Abdali was engaged in his campaign against the Marathas at Panipat in 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia plundered Sirhind and Dipalpur, seized some places in Ferozepur district and took under his possession Jagraon and Kot Isa Khan on the other bank of Sutlej. He captured Hoshiarpur and Naraingarh in Ambala and levied tribute from the Chief of Kapurthala. He then marched towards Jhang. Sial Chief offered stout resistance. When Ahmed Shah left in February 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia again attacked Sirhind and extended his territory as far as Taran Taran. He crossed the Beas and captured Sultanpur. In February 1762, Ahmed Shah again appeared and a fierce battle took place at Barnala. It is called *Gullughara*, a great holocaust. Jassa Singh fled to Kangra hills after the Sikh forces were totally routed.

After the departure of Ahmed Shah, Jassa Singh joined hands with both *Bhangis*, *Kanahiyas* and *Ramgarhias* and sacked Kasur by defeating Alif Khan. The territory was handed over to *Bhangis* who retained hold over it till 1774. Then, they made an expedition to Sirhind, it was razed to the ground, and the Afghan Governor, Zain Khan was killed. This victory was a great significance for the Sikhs who were now masters of the entire area around Sirhind. Jassa Singh hastily paid a visit to Amritsar to pay his respects at Harimandir. He made amends and restored it to its original shape as it was earlier defiled by Ahmed Shah by slaughtering cow in its precincts.

He also constructed the Ahluwalia bazar, the commercial centre. Jassa Singh had immense wealth and he pursued a liberal policy in administration.

Ahmed Shah died in June 1773. After his death, Afghan power declined in Punjab. Taimur Shah ascended the throne at Kabul. By then, the *Misals* had established themselves in Punjab. They had under their control of the area as far as Shaharanpur in the East, Attock in the West, Kangra and Jammu in the North and Multan in South. Efforts were made by the Afghan ruler to dislodge the Sikhs from their citadels. Taimur Shah attacked Multan in 1779 and defeated the *Bhangis*. The *Bhangi Sardars*, Lehna Singh and Sobha Singh, who were driven out of Lahore in 1767 by Abdali, soon reoccupied it. They remained in power at Lahore till 1793 the year when Shah Zaman succeeded to the throne of Kabul.

Another menace to the Sikhs was the Pathan ruler of Kasur who was loyal to Kabul. During the Abdali attacks, he took side with him and plundered the Sikh territory. Now again assistance was promised to Shah by the Kasur ruler, Nizam-ud-Din Khan.

The first attempt to annex Punjab made by Shah Zaman was in 1793. He came upto Hassan Abdal from where he sent an army of 7000 strong cavalry under Ahmed Shah Nachi but the Sikhs completely routed them. It was great setback for Shah Zaman but again in 1795, he reorganised his forces, attacked and captured Hassan Abdal, and snatched Rohtas from *Sukerchakias* whose leader was Ranjit Singh, who suffered at Shah Zaman's hand but did not lose courage. However, the Shah had to be back in Kabul as an invasion was apprehended on his own country from the west. After he went back, Ranjit dislodged the afghans from Rohtas.

Shah Zaman could not sit idle. In 1796 he moved, crossed the Indus for the third time and dreamt of capturing Delhi. His ambition knew no bounds. Now he had collected a 3000 strong Afghan army. He was confident that a large number of Indians would join him. Nawab of Kasur had already assured him help. Sahib Singh of Patiala betrayed his countrymen and declared his intention of helping Shah Zaman. He had the family traditions. Following this tactic they were able to dislodge Afghans at several places.

In January 1797, Shah Zaman suddenly left for Afghanistan. An intelligent report was received that Zaman's brother, Mahmud

had revolted. Zaman left Lahore under the charge of Shahanchi Khan with considerable force under his command. The Sikhs, however, followed the Shah upto Jhelum and snatched many goods from him. The Sikhs returned and in the way they were attacked by the troops of Shahanchi Khan near Ram Nagar. The Sikhs routed his army. It was the first major achievement of Ranjit Singh. He became the hero of the land of five rivers and his reputation spread far and wide.

The Afghans were humiliated and a fire of revenge burnt in their hearts. Shah Zaman once again attacked in October 1798. People again took refuge in the hills. The same old story was repeated. Cowards fled and all the big towns wore a deserted appearance. The cities looked like graveyards. Shah Zaman issued a proclamation to his countrymen and assured them that they would be allowed to plunder India as much as they desired. Several thousand joined his ranks. Zaman's troops were commanded by the sons of the defeated general Shahanchi Khan who were keen to revenge the crushing defeat of their father. Their blood was boiling and with the fire of revenge burning in their hearts they marched forward. Sahib Singh Bhangi left Gujarat. The Afghans plundered the town. Even Muslims were not spared. Ranjit Singh left Gujranwala and came to Amritsar and as before he called the congregation of *Sarbat Khalsa*. Very few Sikhs were left at Amritsar even to protect the holy shrine. Many suggested fleeing to the hills. Sada Kaur aroused their sense of national honour and reminded the Sardars of their duty towards the people who had all along been paying them *Rakhi* tax. She threatened the *Sardars* that if they left the place, she herself would take command of the forces who were willing to follow her. Courageous and daring as she was, she appealed to the Sikhs at large not to leave the holy city at the mercy of the invaders who had earlier desecrated the sacred tank. Their national honour, their pride and their liberty were at stake. Ranjit Singh declared his intentions to support her. Dal Singh, Ranjit's uncle supported Ranjit Singh and Sada Kaur, and told everybody assembled that as a soldier an Aghan was no match to a Sikh. They would be given befitting reply and by the grace of *Sat Guru*, they would be successful. Victory was in the hands of God but fight they must otherwise the posterity would curse them. The *Sardars* hanged their heads in shame for a while, and then gathered courage and with one voice said: "We will fight till the end to save the honour of our motherland." "Ranjit Singh was chosen the leader. It was the final call of 'do or die' given

to the Sikhs and amidst the shouts of *Sat-Sri-Akal*, the Sikhs decided to meet the Afghan challenge.

The Afghans started plundering the towns and villages as they had vowed and declared openly that they would exterminate the Sikhs; but in the process, the Muslims suffered the most as the Hindus and Sikhs had already left their hearths and homes to safer places. The Muslims thought that they would not be touched but their hopes were belied and the provisions were forcibly taken away by the Afghans.

Shah Zaman sought the help of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra and the Jammu Raja and exhorted them not to give any food and shelter to the Sikhs who had taken refuge in the hills. They agreed to their request as they were afraid of their territories being occupied by the Afghans. The Sikhs were surrounded from all sides and they had to fight a grim battle. The Afghans occupied Lahore on November 27, 1798. The Shah entered the city triumphantly, but strict orders were issued by him to his troops not to plunder the town so that the Muslims were not harmed. He succeeded in his nefarious plan.

Nizam-ud-Din Khan of Kasur desired that Afghan power should be established in Punjab and he should be made the Subedar of Lahore. He was ambitious and welcomed the Shah. Sansar Chand of Kangra too assured him help and in return asked for the retention of his territory. The Sikhs too were not united, they were still divided and some of the *Sardars* were jealous of the rising power of Ranjit Singh. Sahib Singh of Patiala declared his loyalty to the Shah as he did earlier to Ahmed Shah Abdali. The mutual bickerings and ill-will created a precarious situation for the Punjab, and it was Ranjit Singh, a daring lad of 18 years who could courageously fight the Shah.

Shah planned to attack Amritsar and ordered his troops to march. Ranjit Singh collected his men and faced the Shah's forces about 8 Km from Amritsar. It was a well-matched encounter but at last the Afghans were forced to retire. They were humiliated and fled towards Lahore. Ranjit Singh pursued them and surrounded Lahore. Afghan supply lines were cut. The crops were burnt and other provisions plundered so that they did not fall into Afghans' hands. The Afghans never expected such a crushing defeat at the hands of the Sikhs, and tried to reorganise their forces. Nizam-ud-Din Khan of Kasur attacked the Sikhs near Shahadra on the banks of Ravi but his forces were no match to the Sikhs. Many were slain

and many fled. Here too, the Muslims suffered the most. The retreating Afghans and Khans plundered the town which antagonized the local people.

The Afghans struggled hard to dislodge the Sikhs but in vain. The Sikhs' cordon was so strong that they made impossible for the Afghans to break it and proceed towards Delhi. Ranjit Singh became a terror for them. Sikh soldiers made sorties at night and the Afghans were so afraid of them that they shut themselves into their tents.

The Shah's tactics did not succeed and he became so frustrated that he stopped talking of liquidation of the Sikhs. He now adopted a new strategy and sent messages to the Sikh *Sardars* to come to terms with him. If they would compromise their estates would not be disturbed. Some of the *Sardars* fell to his ploy and sent their men to Lahore to meet the Shah. The Shah overwhelmed with joy offered several other baits to these *Sardars*. They were told that they could continue to live and pursue their vocations in peace. The territory belonged to them. He would be only their benefactor. It is said that Ranjit Singh too sent his emissary to negotiate with the Shah, unity was broken into pieces and their internal dissensions encouraged the Shah. But at this very moment Sahib Singh Bedi aroused the national fervour of the *Sardars*, and he openly condemned the *Sardars* who were negotiating their national honour. He pleaded with them not to fall prey to the designs of foreign invaders who had no love for this country and was simply interested in loot and plunder. The Gurus made sacrifices for the sake of *Dharma* and these should not go waste because of the vested interests of the few. It was betrayal of the *Panth* and everybody must rise to the occasion otherwise posterity would not forgive them. History would be different if they enter into a treaty with the Shah whose forefathers had desecrated the holy shrine. Better sense prevailed and the *Sardars* withdrew their men negotiating peace.

The Shah was disappointed and swore by the holy Quran that he would exterminate the Sikhs once for all. But this was a cry in wilderness. His soldiers were so timid and were so afraid of the Sikhs that they dared not attack them.

By that time, Zaman's brother Mahmud had revolted and his throne at Kabul was in danger. More trouble was apprehended and the Shah had tended back to Kabul. Moreover, the Shah was unable to pay his troops who refused to fight.

The Shah returned home declaring that after settling the family

dispute he would again attack India and be its conqueror.

The moment the Shah left, Ranjit Singh pursued his forces and caught them by surprise near Gujranwala. They were chased further up to Jhelum. Many Afghans were put to death, their war equipment was taken into possession and they were made to run for their lives. Ranjit did not halt there but marched further upon Indus, annihilating the Afghan forces. Shah Zaman was overthrown by his brother and was blinded. He became a helpless creature and 12 years later came to Punjab to seek refuge in Ranjit Singh's darbar. Destiny wished it like that.

Ultimately, the Shah's withdrawal gave a choice to the Sikhs to obliterate all semblance of Afghan authority between the Ravi and the Jhelum. Ranjit Singh combined with Sahib Singh of Gujarat and Milkha Singh Pindiwala and a large Sikh force, swelled by the Sikhs who had come out of their hiding, fell upon the Afghan garrison while Shah Zaman was still in the vicinity of the Khyber Pass. The Afghan forces fled towards north after having been routed by the Sikhs leaving behind at Gujarat their dead including the Afghan Deputy.

Lahore was the most important and biggest city of Punjab. After Amritsar, it was next in importance to the Sikhs, as it was not only the capital of the province but also the birth-place of the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Ram Das. It was the central place from where the entire province could be ruled. Its capture would have certainly meant increase in Ranjit Singh's strength and would have made him the ruler of the land of five rivers. It would also have invested him with the semblance of a title to the rest of Punjab. Ranjit Singh turned his eyes towards Lahore.

Lahore at that time was ruled by the *Bhangi Sardars*. It was captured earlier by them and remained under their control till it was reoccupied by Shah Zaman in 1797. Shah Zaman had to leave for Afghanistan and the *Bhangi Sardars* Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh who had fled were back in their possession. They had no talent and ability to rule. These incapable *Sardars* did not take any interest on the welfare of rule. They also did not take any interest in the welfare of the people, they were inept and imbecile. They had no control over the people. They were "unscrupulous, drunken, profligate and tyrannical."

The Muslims too had a considerable influence in the town. Mian Ashak Mohammad and Mian Mukkam Din were very powerful

and exercised a lot of hold on the people. They were called the *Chaudharies* and were often consulted in most of the affairs of the city. Mian Ashak Mohammad's daughter was married to Badar-ud-Din. He was also a very influential man. Due to some unknown reason, he had some dispute with the *Khatris* of the town. They quarreled and the *Khatris* reported the matter to Chet Singh. It was said that Badar-ud-Din had secret links with Shah Zaman of Afghanistan and was in correspondence with him. Some forged papers were also reported to have been shown to Chet Singh which corroborated the charge. Chet Singh was convinced of the allegation and he arrested Badar-ud-Din and imprisoned him.

A wave of resentment followed the arrest among the supporters of Badar-ud-Din, and Mian Ashak Mohammad and Mukkam Din were awfully distressed and perturbed. They formed a deputation of some leading *Chaudharies* including Kukka and Ashraf Khan, waited upon Chet Singh and pleaded on behalf of Badar-ud-Din. They desired his release but they failed even to get a hearing and were not allowed to see the *Sardar*. The *Chaudharies* were humiliated and were made to lick the ground. They returned disappointed and incensed at the haughty attitude adopted by the *Sardar*. They swore vengeance against Chet Singh and his supporters, the *Khatris* who were the main source of trouble.

By this time the people of the country had become aware of the rising strength of Ranjit Singh, the rising star on the horizon. He was the most popular leader of Punjab and was already daring to enter Lahore. In the words of Resident Collins: "At present this Chief is regarded throughout Hindustan as the protector of the Sikh nation, it being generally believed that were it not for the fortitude and excellent conduct of Ranjit Singh, the whole of Punjab would have become a desert waste since it is the boast of these northern savages (the Afghans) that the grass never grows where their horses have once trodden."

The people of Lahore being extremely oppressed, raised their voice of wailing to the skies and were looking towards their liberator. Nawab Nizam-ud-Din of Kasur had also an eye on Lahore and he sent his emissaries to the *Chaudharies* of Lahore seeking their help in case he attacked Lahore but his offer was rejected and the Muslims joined the Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore in making an appeal to Ranjit Singh to free them from the tyrannical rule.

A petition was written and was signed by Mian Ashak

Mohammad. Mian Mukkam Din, Mohammand Tahir, Mohammad Bakar, Hakim Rain and Bhai Gurbaksh. It was addressed to Ranjit Singh and read: "We are being oppressed. There is no rule of law. The people are ill treated. The *Sardars* are drunkards and do not take interest in the welfare of the people. The few troops are insufficient for the defence of the town. The suburbs of the town have been completely devastated. The houses have been burnt and property looted. The city presents a deserted look. Many people have fled to safer places. The life and honour of the people are not safe and the *Sardars* are habitually carousing and are plundering the residents for their own personal ends."

Ranjit Singh was invited to liberate Lahore as early as possible. He was told that his mere presence in the town would create terror and the rest of the things would be done by the citizens themselves in achieving their objective. A special messenger was sent to Ranjit Singh who was at Rasulnagar when the citizens of Lahore approached him with a request. Ranjit Singh patiently listened to the pathetic tale of the residents of Lahore, but remained calm. He was shrewed enough to judge the whole situation. He deputed his confident, Abdul Rehman to Lahore to start negotiations with the people of Lahore headed by their leaders who had sent the representation. Ranjit Singh went to Amritsar on the plea of taking a dip in the holy tank. From Amritsar, Ranjit Singh proceeded to Batala to consult his mother-in-law, Rani Sada Kaur. Abdul Rehman met Ranjit Singh at Batala and informed him that the people of Lahore were really tired of the misrule of *Bhangi sardars* and wanted Ranjit Singh to liberate them. He further informed Ranjit Singh that the *Sardars* were busy with wine and women and he would meet with nominal resistance. The time to strike had come. Sada Kaur advised him not to loose any time. Ranjit Singh mobilised a 25,000 strong army and marched towards Lahore on July 6, 1799.

The time for any major campaign was most important. The plains were burning with scorching heat. Rainy season was about to set in and the campaign was a prolonged one. The plains would be a big lake, the roads would become inaccessible. Even then Ranjit Singh decided to proceed and took the *Sardars* by surprise. He was received by the petitioners at the Shalimar Gardens. It was the last day of the Muslim festival of *Muharram* when a big procession was to be taken out in the town in the memory of the two grandsons of Prophet Mohammad who were martyred in the battlefield without having a drop of water. The procession started with the people

beating their breasts with hands and chains and chanting – Hassan! Hussain! Hassan! Hussain!’’ The procession passed through the main streets of the town. They carried with them the effigies of the martyrs’ tombs for burying them with reverence. Although, the occasion was celebrated only by the *Shia* section of the Muslims, yet it was watched by several hundred people of all religions. It was expected that the *Bhangi Sardars* would also participate in the festival and mourn with their *Shia* brethren. By the time the procession was over, Ranjit Singh had already reached the outskirts of the town.

TWELVE

The Last Phase

The Sikhs now reigned supreme in the land of five rivers. By 1769 most of the areas of the central Punjab had already been occupied by the Sikhs. There were few independent Muslim principalities.

India had totally disintegrated. The central government had virtually collapsed. The provinces had become independent. There was no rule of law.

Ahmed Shah Abdali held Kashmir, the territories to the west of river Indus, Sind, Bahawalpur and Multan. The Sikhs were the Masters of Punjab. Their dominions were bounded on the west by the river Indus, in the east by the Yamuna, close to the neighborhood of Delhi, on the north by the lower ranges of the Himalayas and in the South by Multan and Bhawalpur.

The Mughal empire had shrunk. It was bounded on the north and north-west by the Sikh territory; to the north-east were Rohilas. To the east was the territory of the Nawab of Oudh. In the south was the country of the Bharatpur jats and in the west the dominion of the Rajput princes. No doubt, these territories recognised the title of the Emperor but in actual practice they considered themselves independent. Shah Alam II, the Mughal king of Delhi was living at Allahabad. He had a keen desire to come back to Delhi but was unable to do so. He sought British aid but without any success. However, the Emperor returned to Delhi on January 6, 1772. He had no power or wealth. He just sat in his palace at Delhi and the people were awfully depressed. With a great effort, the Emperor could just manage Rs. 17,000 monthly to support himself, the royal family and his dependents which came to only Rs. 15/- per head per month.

Even the city of Delhi was not under the complete control of Emperor Shah Alam II. There were bloody fights between the royal nobles. Everybody claimed control over the State. There were fights in the Hazars among the soldiers. The Emperor was coward and imbecile and intrigues plagued the palace.

Delhi was in fact, under the control of Najib-ud-Daulah. Shah Alam's step-mother, Zinat Mahal and his son Jawan Bakht were also staying there. His glory and grandeur had disappeared. They were living in a depressed state and poverty.

“Delhi's history during those forty years is a sickening and monotonous tale of sack by Afghans and Marathas, Sikhs and Jats, Gujaras and Pindaris, frequent panic among the citizens, and such attack was expected, the flight of the rich, the closing of the shops, the looting of the unprotected houses by the raffines of the city population which took advantage of the public alarm and confusion, the utter spoliation of the peasantry and the ruin of the surrounding villages by organised hands of brigands or soldiers outraging, and subsequent famine prices in the capital, the incurable intrigue, inefficiency and moral decay of the imperial court, culminating in the growing agony of Ghulam Qadir's capture of the palace, outrage on the Emperor's family and blinding of Shah Alam II himself.”¹

The Marathas had broken up in 1811 in the third battle of Panipat. Scindia of Gwalior, Gaekwar of Baroda and Holkar of Indore owed allegiance to Peshwa while the Bhonsle of Nagpur had declared his independence and ruled over most of the territories which comprised the Central Provinces and Orissa.

The Peshwa was trying to regain his influence in the north and to attain his objective Madho Rao Peshwa sent in 1769, his three men, Ram Chandra Ganesh, Mahadji Scindia and Tukoji Holkar. At first, the affairs of Malwa were settled and then they dispersed in different directions. Ram Chandra went to Bundelkhand and Scindia to Udaipur and Holkar to Kotah and Bundi. They realised the tribute at these places and opened dialogue with Shah Alam II, the Nawab of Oudh and Najib-ud-Daulah.

The Marathas, in fact, had lost their power and strength. The Jats were supreme in the neighbourhood of Delhi, their territory lay between Agra and Jaipur and capital at Bharatpur. They had an

1. Sarkar, Jadu Nath, *Indian Historical Records Commission*, Vol. III, 1921, pp.4-5

annual revenue of 20 lakh sterling and had an army of sixty thousand men. The Rajputs had their territory to the south-west of the Jats. There Raja Madho Singh of Jainagar was a strong man and kept an army of forty thousand men. He had an annual revenue of about rupees eighty lakhs.

The Rohillas' territory was located between Delhi and the Himalayas with Bareilly as their capital. They had an army of 100,000 horsemen and 100,000 infantry. Their power had declined. Nazib-ud-Daulah died in 1770. This territory in the Gangetic Doab was seized by the Marathas. His son, Zabita Khan was defeated by the Marathas in 1771. In 1774, the Rohillas in the north of Ganga were defeated by the Nawab of Oudh and their territory was occupied. Zabita Khan's power was broken into pieces by the Mughal Emperor in 1777, and he was forced to seek shelter with the Sikhs. He embraced Sikhism under the name of Dharam Singh. He died in 1785.

The territory of Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Oudh, was situated to the north-east of the Ganges. In the South it bordered Bihar divided by the river Ganga and on the north bounded by mountains. His annual income was rupees two crores. He was an ally of the British.

In 1777, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jhanda Singh Bhangi were staying at Amritsar. A complaint was lodged with them by the Brahmins of Kasur that the Afghans were acting violently against them and the cows were to be given protection. The Sikh Sardars immediately decided to attack Kasur and crush the offenders. They left Amritsar and halted at Tarn Taran. After that they spent two days at Khem Karan, where large number of Sikhs joined them. Kasur was attacked, despite stiff resistance, the Sikhs entered the city. The Sikhs destroyed Garhi Abdur Rahim Khan. The city was plundered and a huge booty fell into Sikhs' hands. Battles continued for some more days. The Afghans begged for peace as their resistance had collapsed. A promise was made that the cows would not be slaughtered and the Hindus would not be ill treated. They also agreed to pay a tribute and a fine of rupees four lakhs. The Sikh Sardars accepted the terms and granted the Afghans the robes of honour. Victorious, the Sikhs returned to Amritsar.

On the way Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jhanda Singh Bhangi stayed at Nauri on the bank of river Ravi. Then they reached Saurian near Amritsar. Here two pathans Ahamed Khan and Umar Khan

surrendered to them. They offered them money and horses as *Nazar*. Next they halted at Jassarwal. Here also the Muslims of the area presented them horses and two thousand rupees. Later the Rajputs presented them with horses and five thousand rupees. At Ramdas in Amritsar district, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia visited the palace of Shah Bahram, a Muslim *fakir*, where he was bestowed with a robe of honour.

Therefrom, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jhanda Singh Bhangi proceeded to Pakho Thather, which was the abode of *Randhawas*. They surrendered to them and secured their safety.

In 1773, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked Sultanpur, the headquarters of Rai Ibrahim of Kapurthala. He was assisted by Kanwars Mohan Singh and Bhag Singh. Some resistance was offered but soon the Nawab surrendered and begged for peace which was settled. The Nawab was given twenty seven villages for the payment of an annual tribute while the rest of the territory was taken possession of by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Kanwar Bhag Singh was given the charge of the territory for administration.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was attaining glory after glory. Later in 1780, Rai Ibrahim revolted and Kapurthala and the surrounding villages were taken possession of. A mercy was taken on Rai and he was allowed to take his family and personal belongings to a safer place. He was granted pension for life. Kapurthala became the headquarters of Kanwar Bhag Singh, grandson of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, while Jassa Singh Ahluwalia maintained the seat of his government at Fathabad, near the western bank of the river Beas. Here, it will be appropriate to mention the Sikh exploits in and around Delhi, the country's capital. After plundering the Doab in 1773, the Sikhs entered Delhi in 1774. The Mughals could not muster strength to oppose them. The Sikhs advanced to the suburbs of the capital. On January 18, 1774, the Sikhs ravaged Shahdara till midnight and took away fifty boys with them. When the situation became grim, the Emperor invited the Sikhs to enter his service with 10,000 horsemen. He also offered to give them the district of Sahabazpur. *Khilats* were also offered to the Sikh *Sardars*. This proposal had not yet materialised, when Abdul Ahmed Khan, a Chieftain of Emperor's confidence obtained the *faujdari* of Sirhind in the name of Prince Farkhunda Bakht and appointed Samru as his deputy.

Samru took charge in July, 1774 and camped at Gharaunda.

The Sikhs, who were stationed at Karnal roamed about Samru's camp and created much trouble for him. An open engagement took place in which he was badly defeated. In September Samru left his post.

In October, Abdul Ahad Khan negotiated with the Sikh *Sardars* with a view to securing immunity for the royal Kingdom from their depredations. An imperial service was offered to them. Each Chief was to have 10,000 horsemen and 500 infantry under his command. The negotiations broke down and the Sikh army encamped in the vicinity of Delhi.

Rahimadad Khan Rohilla was in the service of Najib-ud-Daulah. On Najib's death he remained with Zalita Khan for sometime, then he joined Najaf Khan. After remaining in service of Ranjit Singh, he came to Delhi and was won over by Abdul Ahad Khan. He was appointed Governor of Panipat. He left Delhi and attacked on the way Mohammad Bashir Khan, the *Faujdar* of Rohtak. Bashir fled.

Then he attacked Gajpat Singh of Jind who sought assistance from Amar Singh of Patiala. He despatched Dewan Nanumal with a strong force. Hamir Singh of Nahha and several other Sikh *Sardars* joined him. In the battle that ensued Rahim Dad Khan was killed.

Gajpat Singh also conquered Gohan, Hissar, Hansi and Rohtak.

Najaf Khan appointed Najif Quli as Rahimadad's successor. He attacked and captured Karnal and Rohtak. Keeping in view the activities of Najaf Quli, Gajpat Singh of Jind and Amar Singh of Patiala joined hands but they made peace with Najaf Quli according to which Amar Singh surrendered Hisar, Hansi and Rohtak, but retained Sirsa, Rania and Fatahabad. Amar Singh promised to pay tribute. Gajpath Singh retained seven villages.

At this time, though the entire community of the Sikh people was termed *Sarbat Khalsa*, it was divided into twelve *Misals* or confederacies. In the words of Hari Ram Gupta: "The Sikh religion, a pure theocracy permitted no distinction of rank and position among the members of the Khalsa brotherhood. The Sikh commonwealth was thus founded on perfectly democratic principles. These confederacies, therefore, possessed ample material for the formation of a mighty republic which might have been the pride of the east as the one in the west that was founded about this time in the United States of America. But there was probably one Washington to

convert this idea into a reality. This hero and his comrades were inspired by feelings of law, liberty and love of their countrymen."¹

"The Sikhs on the other hand were impelled by motives of self-assertion, self-conceit and self-aggrandizement. The Punjab consequently possessed neither such a man nor such a spirit. The principle of equality inculcated by Guru Gobind Singh was misused by the Sikhs. They degraded the noble teachings of the Guru, and instead of merging their personality in the community they considered that the community existed to serve their own selfish ends. This made each Sikh Chief haughty, arrogant and egoistic. Hence each Sikh *Misal* became a centre of rivalry, jealousy and controversy, and a bone of contention, conflict and collusion. Thus the Sikh democracy resulted in a provincial anarchy, which let loose the forces of disruption, dissipation and dissolution."²

Therefore, this period was not one of conflict between the Sikhs and the Muslims as the Muslims had already been subdued, but a Sikh against a Sikh, Chief against a Chief and *Misal* against a *Misal*. Every Sikh had become an enemy of another.

Whenever they got an opportunity, they plundered the villages and drove away the cattle. Only might was right. There was no central authority. Rival Chiefs struggled for supremacy. In the words of George Thomas : internal commotions and civil strife have of late years generated a spirit of revenge among the Chiefs, which it will take a time to overcome. War among the Sikh Chiefs continued. In 1774, a serious dispute arose between Raja Ranjit Deo of Jammu and his elder son Brij Raj Deo. Ranjit Deo desired that his younger son Dalel Singh should succeed him. He sought help from Charat Singh Sukarchakia and Jai Singh Kanahiya. On the other hand Ranjit Deo sought the assistance from Jhanda Singh Bhangi.

The joint army of Sukarchakias and Kanahiyas marched towards Jammu and encamped on the banks of the river Basanter. Ranjit Deo collected his own large army and also the armies of Rajas of Chamba, Nurpur and Basohli in addition to the army of Jhanda Singh. Skirmishes continued for several days and in one of such Skirmishes Charat Singh was killed. It was too big a loss to bear. Jai Singh Kanahiya bribed a Sikh in the service of Jhanda Singh, who shot him dead.

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. III, P. 33.

2. *Military Memoirs of George Thomas*, p. 102.

Ganda Singh, brother of Jhanda Singh, now became leader of the *Bhangi Misal*. He did not like the futile fighting to continue and returned from Jammu. Before leaving Jammu, Mohan Singh, son of Charat Singh changed turbans with Brij Raj Deo in token of love and affection which made them brothers for life.

The killing of Jhanda Singh was troubling his brother, Ganda Singh, who looked for an opportunity to avenge it. He declared war upon Jai Singh Kanahiya. Pathankot was given by Jhanda Singh to Nand Singh, the *Bhangi Chief*. He died after the Jammu episode leaving behind a widow and a daughter. Nand Singh's widow offered her daughter and her estate to Gurbaksh Singh, son of Jai Singh Kanahiya. The proposal was declined but he referred the widow to Harighat who persuaded his brother Tara Singh to accept it. Tara Singh married the girl and was given Pathankot in dowry. But soon afterwards Tara Singh murdered both his wife and mother-in-law.

Ganda Singh was greatly annoyed and asked back Pathankot, but it was refused. Ganda Singh met Jassa Singh Ramgarhia at Amritsar who favoured war against the *Kanahiyas*. Upon this Ganda Singh, Gujar Singh, Lahna Singh, Bhag Singh of Chamyari, Pir Muhammad Khan Chatta, Ranjit Deo of Jammu and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia marched against the army of *Kanahiyas*, *Sukarchakias* and *Ahluwalias* under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

The two forces met at Dinanagar and the battle continued for several days. Ganda Singh died. His son Desa Singh, who was a minor was superseded by Charat Singh, Ganda Singh's nephew. However, he was also killed in one of the battles. Desa Singh became head of *Bhangi Misal*, but he was unable to control the *Sardars* and in dismay, the fighting stopped and the forces returned to Amritsar.

The rivalry between Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia continued. They had fought on opposite sides at Pathankot and this ill will against each other did not vanish. They were looking for an opportunity to fight against each other. In 1775 the armies of both the *Sardars* fought at Zahura on the banks of Beas. It was a bloody battle between the two Sikh chiefs and in the battle Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was dangerously wounded by a gunshot and he had to withdraw. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia came out victorious.

However, after some time Ahluwalia handed over the possession of Zahura to Baghel Singh Karrora Singhia.

The rivalry did not end here. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia nourished jealousy against Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who once fell into the hands of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in 1776, but the Ramgarhia Sardar showed generosity and freed Ahluwalia. It happened like this. One day when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was going towards village Nangal on a hunting expedition he was faced by Mali Singh, brother of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, who was coming riding on a horse along with his force. Mali Singh flared up and attacked Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the fight ensued in which many men of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia were slain. Ahluwalia chief himself was wounded. He fell down from his horse unconscious. He was taken to Sri Hargobindpur. When Jassa Singh Ramgarhia came to know of the incident, he was greatly annoyed as he always believed that even the worst enemy should be fought in the open field and not stabbed on the back.

He met the Ahluwalia Sardar and expressed his regrets. He was apologetic and wanted him to excuse Mali Singh for his fault. Jassa Singh did not utter a single word but appreciated the large heartedness of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. He stayed there for a couple of days and then was sent to Fathabad under protection.

At Fathabad, when the incident spread, Sikh Sardar Jai Singh Kanahiya and Gujar Singh Bhangi came to meet Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They instigated him to take action against the Ramgarhia Sardar but the Ahluwalia chief said that now he would fight Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in the battlefield when fully prepared and equipped.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia made full preparations to attack the Ramgarhias. He was joined by Jai Singh Kanahiya and in the words of Sir Lepli Griffin, "they swore a mighty oath that he would never loose his turban till he had seized all the Ramgarhia estates."¹ Meanwhile dispute also arose between *Kanahiyas* and *Ramgarhias* over the distribution of income as their territories lay in between. Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh Kanahiya supported by the strong force of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked Sri Hargobindpur. The Ramgarhia Sardar put up stiff resistance but could not stand against the strong army of *Kanahiyas* and *Ahluwalias*. Batala was besieged by Gurbaksh Singh son of Jai Singh Kanahiya. Mali Singh came into the battlefield but he was not supported by his own people as he was not popular among them. The gates of the fort, which were under the charge of Tara Chand. Deva Singh and Raja Singh were opened and *Kanahiyas* were welcomed inside.

The victory lay at the feet of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The

1. *Punjab Chiefs*, p. 172

victorious troops marched towards Kalanaur which was in the possession of Tara Singh, a brother of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. The fort was occupied and he was removed. The *Ramgarhias* were completely routed and they fled to Julunder Doab. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia issued strict instructions to Kanwar Bhag Singh Ahluwalia who was holding Mathabkot, not to molest *Ramgarhias* and assist them to cross the river Sutlej. Their families were allowed to stay at Lekhpur while Jassa Singh Ramgarhia with some of his men reached Hissar where he stayed afterwards.

On the other hand, Abdul Ahad Khan received a petition from Raja Amar Singh of Patiala for help to fight against the Sikhs. He was told that he could conquer not only the Sutlej territory but also Lahore and Multan. He was emboldened and decided to help Amar Singh of Patiala.

Thus, on June 18, 1779, Abdul Ahad at the head of 50,000 strong army, 200 cannons and supported by Mirza Jahan Shah marched from Delhi. Marching on the western bank of the Yamuna, they halted at Barari Ghat and on June 26 reached Bakhatawarpur. On July 29, the forces reached Panipat, the march was slow due to severe heat.

At Karnal many more *Sikh Sardars*, notably Sahib Singh Khandah, Diwan Singh, Baghel Singh and Kanwar Singh offered their services to the Nawab but the offer was not accepted. The Nawab spent the rainy season at Karnal. Here many *Sikh Sardars* who were against Raja Amar Singh of Patiala met him. The tables were turned. The Nawab who had come to help Amar Singh became hostile to him. Abdul Ahad was assured of a good booty and tribute in case of conquests. The Nawab became active opponent of the Patiala Maharaja.

On September 9, 1779, Desu Singh of Kaithal appeared before the Nawab at Thanesar. He begged the Nawab to restore him his territory which had been taken into possession by Raja Amar Singh. He offered five gold coins, twenty five cotton bed-sheets and two horses as *Nazar*. The Nawab accepted the *Nazar* and offered Desu Singh a *Khilat*.

Then, the Nawab became greedy and asked rupees three lakhs from Desu Singh. When the latter agreed to pay only two lakhs the Nawab got annoyed. He flared up and increased his demand to five lakhs. Desu Singh refused to comply with this unreasonable demand and he was arrested. Negotiations again started and Diwan of Desu

Singh offered five lakhs as tribute and 1/4 lakhs as expenses. It was promised to make the payment in a month's time, provided that Desu Singh's territory was confirmed to him and he was protected against any attack from Raja Amar Singh of Patiala. After sometime a tribute of four lakhs was paid as agreed upon by Desu Singh out of which three lakhs was paid in cash and for the balance, his son, Lal Singh was taken as a hostage.

At Thanesar, Rai Singh of Buriya, Bhanga Singh and Bhag Singh joined the Nawab's camp on September 12. The Sikh Chiefs of Shahabad and Ambala were also called at Nawab's camp by Rai Singh, Bhanga Singh and Bhag Singh.

They refused to oblige. However, on September 14, Mehar Singh accompanied by some other Chiefs at the head of 400 horses called upon the Nawab and some bows, cotton bed-sheets and three horses were offered. They were presented with *Khilats*. These Chiefs joined the Nawab's camp to ravage the Patiala territory.

Raja Shambhu Nath and Raja Daya Ram were sent to Patiala to bring Nanumal, the Diwan of Raja Amar Singh, to the Nawab's camp. He brought rupees five lakhs with him and was accompanied by 1000 horses on foot. Nanumal and Maha Singh, brother of the Patiala Raja met the prince and presented eleven gold coins and a horse and to the Nawab seven gold coins. A *Khilat* was presented to them. Then they were to negotiate the amount of tribute. Diwan Nanumal offered five lakhs and extra Rs. 25,000 as *Nazrana* for the prince on the condition that he should retreat immediately. Abdul Ahad refused and was in rage. He ordered his troops to keep a watch on Nanumal.

Meanwhile, Abdul Ahad insisted that Raja of Patiala should pay his respects to the Prince by presenting him *Nazar* personally. Amar Singh was not willing to meet him. In fact, he was hesitant in view of the treatment meted to Gajpat Singh and Desu Singh. Amar Singh sought the assistance of Trans-Sutlej Sikhs. The *Sardars* decided to help him and Tara Singh Gheba, Karam Singh and some other *Sardars* encamped near Patiala. Information to the effect was received by Abdul Ahad Khan, therefore, he moved to a place near Pehowa where a letter was delivered to the Nawab which said that he had been invited by Raja Amar Singh to punish Desu Singh, but he became friendly to Desu Singh and accepted tribute from him. It was because of this reason that the Raja of Patiala was not willing to meet him.

Dewan Nanumal suggested that the Nawab should not insist

the personal presence of the Raja and accept tribute and retire.

Meanwhile, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Khushal Singh and Tara Singh Ghaba reached the bank of Sutlej along with their 15,000 strong forces. Amar Singh fled from Patiala and the town was evacuated by its inhabitants, only Raja's wife remained there.

On September 20, the prince marched towards Hatiara near Karnal. Now, Dewan Nanumal offered rupees seven lakhs on behalf of the Patiala Raja but Abdul Ahad still insisted the presence of Amar Singh. He marched towards Patiala and encamped at Siyana Sayyidan. The nearby Patiala territory was plundered. Five villages were completely ravaged. The fort of Saifabad was besieged. The powder-magazine caught fire in the fort and 300 soldiers were burnt alive. Many were wounded.

On September 27, Abdul Ahad moved further under the guidance of Raja Shiv Nath. Amar Singh Bhakshi informed the Nawab that the Patiala Raja would call on them shortly.

Then, the Nawab marched on the Ghuram. They still insisted on Amar Singh's presence. A letter was received from Gajpat Singh that Amar Singh would present himself before the prince on October 3. The Prince was gladdened and ordered his troops not to attack Patiala village now and harass its people.

But the appointed meeting never took place and now only the war could decide the issue. On October 7, Patiala was attacked. A battle ensued between the combined forces of Amar Singh and Tara Singh on the one hand and the Imperial army on the other. In the evening the Patiala army was routed. Amar Singh and Tara Singh Gheba shut themselves in the fort. The town was seized. The fighting continued the next two days. The Imperial army failed to capture the fort. There was revolt in its ranks.

Amar Singh invited Jassa Singh Ahluwalia along with his army. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was at Batala when he got the news. He immediately sent a letter to the Sikh Chiefs that they should come immediately as Abdul Ahad Khan had entered the Patiala territory. Jai Singh, Haqiqat Singh and some other *Kanahiya Sardars* came and joined Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The combined forces marched towards Patiala and when the news reached the Nawab, he was frightened. By this time Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had reached Malerkotla. The Nawab at once retreated. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia utilised the opportunity of Nawab's flight. Abdul Ahad retreated on

October 4, 1779. The Sikhs followed them, plundered their goods and horses. Abdul Ahad sitting on the elephant tried to raise the morale of his forces. His artillery was able to repulse many Sikh attacks but the Sikhs made violent attacks from all sides and threw the Nawab's troops into confusion. The Nawab's troops were forced to retire and on the fifth day reached Panipat and encamped there in the walled city. The Sikhs did not pursue them further. In the words of Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar: "The Prince's presence undoubtedly proved the salvation of the Mughal army. The glamour of the imperial name had not yet totally disappeared and the Sikhs shrank from going to the extreme in their attack on Padshah's son contenting themselves with loot only. If Abdul Ahad had been alone, he would not have returned alive from this ill-judged and ill-conducted invasion."¹

The defeat of Abdul Ahad on October 1779, raised the morale of the Sikhs. They were prepared now for any adventure and on their way back from Panipat they divided themselves into separate columns and crossed the Yamuna scattered in the upper parts of Doab committing destruction, killing and ravaging. However, the Sikhs had no idea of capturing Delhi. In Delhi Najaf Khan appointed his grand nephew, Mirza Shafi in charge of a campaign against the Sikhs. He was given a strong force of 10,000 men with heavy artillery. He established his headquarters at Meerut and launched expeditions against the Sikhs but they gave him a hard time. On February 15, 1780 Shafi marched from Meerut to Kandhla, where a large number of Sikhs had gathered but Shafi, on the advice of Najaf Khan, did not attack the Sikhs.

On February 12, the vakil of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attended the Delhi Court and was granted a *doshala* while a *Sanad* of *Jagir* was issued for the Ahluwalia Sardar under the Seal of Jabur-ul-Nisa Begum.

At this time, complete chaos and anarchy prevailed in the CIS-Sutlej territory and rivalries continued among the Sikhs. Each Sikh Sardar was fighting against another and was trying to grab his territory. In February 1780, Amar Singh of Patiala went to Nabha to attend the marriage of the daughter of Hamir Singh. His baggage was following him. Karam Singh Nirmala with his eight thousand horsemen looted the baggage. Sahib Singh crossed the Sutlej for Lahore and Raga Shambhu Nath laid waste Muhammadpur. The

1. Sarkar, Jadu Nath, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, p. 182

Raja retired to Kot. On February 17, Desu Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked Patiala. Raja Amar Singh came into the field to oppose them. In the battle that ensued many soldiers were slain and injured. Amar Singh shut himself in the fort. The town was plundered and besieged and on February 29, 1780, the Sikhs retired towards Sirhind.

The anarchy continued. Raja Amar Singh offered help to Shafi against the Sikhs and on March 17, 1781, a Patiala representative Chain Singh waited on Sahfi at Delhi. He was granted a *doshala* and ornaments for the *turhara*. A *Khilat* was sent to Raja Amar Singh. On March 25, the Patiala forces left their camps for Ambala to join Shafi at Delhi. But Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked the Patiala territory on March 28, while Karam Singh and Tara Singh Gheba checked the progress of Amar Singh's forces and their way was blocked at Ambala. Raja Amar Singh withdrew his troops. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and his men continued ravaging the Patiala territory. The wakil of Raja Amar Singh offered him money and he marched towards Malerkotla and then to Khanna where Raja Amar Singh agreed to call on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to negotiate peace.

During this period (1782) the grouping and regrouping of the Sikh *Misals* continued. The *Kanahiyas* and the *Bhangis* compromised and sorted out their differences, they seized the territory which had been restored to the Raja of Jammu. Brij Raj Deo sought the help from the Sukarchakia Chief Mahan Singh. The joint forces of *Bhangis* and *Kanahiyas* under the leadership of Jai Singh, Haqiqat Singh. Gujar Singh and Karam Singh attacked the Jammu territory and laid siege of Dinapur Fort. The combined forces then sought the assistance of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They requested him to come immediately with his troops to help them. They said that they had taken a hasty step in attacking the Jammu Territory but the Raja had a large army and Mohan Singh was also helping him. If they could conquer Jammu, their prestige could be enhanced.

At the same time, the agents of Brij Raj Deo called on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and said that as he was the Chief leader of the *Khalsa Panth*, help was expected from him by one and all. They were fighting against the *Kanahiyas* and the *Bhangis*. They should be helped. But Jassa Singh Ahluwalia decided to help the *Bhangis* and the *Kanahiyas*. He sent Kanwar Bhan Singh with a large force to march towards Dinapur while he himself advanced via Dera Baba Nanak where he was joined by Gurbaksh Singh, son of Jai Singh

Kanahiya, near Dinapur, The leaders of the two *Misals* waited upon him. Then the fighting took place often in which the Jammu force was forced to retreat. Jiwan Singh, the Commander offered to surrender if he was provided a security but Jassa Singh Ahluwalia negotiated peace for both the parties. The fort was to be retained by the Jammu Raja while the neighbouring territory was handed over to Haqiqat Singh.

On the other hand, in March 1783, a large body of Sikhs marched towards Delhi. They encamped on the bank of the Yamuna. They attacked Malka Ganj and Sabzi Mandi and set them on fire. Many people were killed at Mughalpura. The city was in the grip of fear. Fazal Ali Khan came in the field to oppose the Sikhs. Many more were recruited in the army. On March 10, Nawab Najib-ud-Daulah rode through the streets of Delhi to raise the morale of the people but the latter were so panicky that they shut themselves in the fort. Mirza Shafi and his brother were summoned and negotiations for peace were opened with the Sikhs. Settlement was reached before the arrival of Shafi. The Sikhs left Delhi on March 15. They received a cash payment of rupees three lakhs. Baghel Singh stayed at Delhi with 4000 strong force. He took charge of the control post and the city Kotwali and encamped in Sabzi Mandi. He built a Gurdwara in Teliwara in the sacred memory of Mata Sundri Ji and Mata Sahib Kaur Ji, wives of Guru Gobind Singh. Gurdwara Bangla Sahib was also constructed, then Rakab Ganj, where the body of Guru Tegh Bahadur was cremated. Sis Ganj was also built.

However, according to Gyan Sigh, "the Sikhs from Khurja arrived at Delhi and created a tumult in the city by entering through the Ajmeri Gate. Their number was 30,000. Other robbers also joined them. They plundered the city to their heart's content. The Sikhs made their way into the fort. The king shut himself in a room. The Sikhs penetrated into the woman's apartment. They placed Jassa Singh Ahluwalia on the throne. Peacock feathers were swung over his head. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was very much annoyed. Several other Sikh *Sardars* also resented."¹

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia realizing the danger of a civil war among the Sikhs resigned his kingship. Mutual fight was prevented. The Sikhs seized whatever they could. Cannons were taken into

1. *Panth Prakash*, pp. 912-13.

possession and then the Sikhs loaded their goods in carts and on camels and returned to Punjab.

When the Sikhs retired, their *wakil*, Lakhpat Rai stayed back in the Imperial capital. Soon afterwards, he opened diplomatic negotiations with James Browne, the British Agent who was staying at Agra. Lakhpat Rai wrote him that notable Sikh chiefs such as Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who was the highest and greatest in that country called *Badshah*, and Baghel Singh including many others were willing to establish friendly relations with the British Government.

Browne replied on April 27, 1783 and informed Lakhpat Rai that he stood for sincere friendship provided the Sikhs assured obedience to Shah Alam II and stopped plundering the Gangetic Doab. Lakhpat Rai was surprised and wrote back to him, what was commanded concerning the Sikhs, that they have habituated their hearts to plunder and devastation produced excess of astonishment. He asserted that the protection and tranquillity of the people and arrangement of the affairs of the empire were the chief desires of the Sikhs. He declared that their presence in the Gangetic Doab was due to the fact that the *Sardars* of Hindustan do not abide by their engagements. He suggested that their friendship with the British Government would result in an amicable settlement of such affairs.

Lakhpat Rai wrote more letters with the epistles from Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Lehna Singh, Baghel Singh and Sahib Singh of Patiala and some by Mangal Sein.

THIRTEEN

Sikh Misals

Nawab Kapur Singh played a great part in organising the Sikhs in 1733. After Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the last time, the Sikhs found the opportunity to organise themselves and divided the entire Punjab and each group started ruling his own territory. Earlier, there were 65 groups but later, they merged into one another and their number was reduced to twelve. They came to be known as *Misals*. One of these *Misals*, the Phulkian, was established on the east of the Sutlej.

Ahmad Shah Abadali failed to subdue the Sikhs. He realised his limitations to deal with them effectively. He, therefore, left Punjab in the Sikhs' hands. The Sikhs, thus, became victorious after a long struggle. "For the successful termination of the Sikh war of independence we should give the credit to the entire nation, not to any individual. That would be against the spirit of the whole enterprise."¹ "The war of independence brought out the internal strength of the community. Sikh democracy was put to a severe test and it was not found wanting. The community not only survived half a century of persecution and war, it created a state."²

In due course of time the Sikh groups began to be called *Misals*. A brief account of the development of these *Misals* is necessary.

THE AHLUWALIA MISAL

This *Misal* was founded by one who was a *Kalal*, a distiller by caste, named Sadao Singh. He lived about eleven kilometres from

1. Sinha, N.K., *Rise of the Sikh Power*, p. 68.

2. Banerjee, A.C., *Anglo Sikh Relations (IX VII)*.

Lahore in a village named as Ahlu, from which the *Misal* derived its name. Sadawa, the younger brother of Sadao Singh fell in love with a girl of the *Kalal*. They married. Four sons were born to Sadawa. Dewa Singh was born to Gopal, one of the sons of Sadawa. Dewa Singh had three sons namely, Badar Singh, Sadar Singh and Gurbaksh Singh. Badar Singh was married to the sister of Bagh Singh, a petty *Jamindar* of Lahore district.

Jassa Singh was born on May 3, 1718. When he was only five years old, his father died. Badar Singh's wife went to Delhi with her child and placed him in the care of Mata Sundari, the widow of Guru Gobind Singh. They started living in Delhi. When Jassa Singh was seven years old his maternal uncle Bagh Singh, who had no issue of his own, requested Mata Sundari to spare the child to succeed him. Mata Sundari agreed. Bagh Singh captured many villages and collected tribute from the *Jamindars*.

After their return from Delhi, they stayed at Jalandhar when Kapur Singh Faizulpuria met them. He was impressed by Jassa Singh's mother singing *gurbani*. He demanded the custody of her son, Jassa Singh. They agreed. Jassa Singh was baptised by Kapur Singh. Kapur Singh treated Jassa Singh very well, like his own son.

Soon after, Bhag Singh died fighting against the Imperial forces at Haryana. Shortly afterwards, Jassa Singh soon grew to be an enterprising and intrepid youngman. And his "political talents, religious zeal and lofty inspiration combined, rendered him one of the most powerful federal Chiefs of the Punjab."¹ Jassa Singh founded the reigning family of Kapurthala. The Sikhs boasted of having baptised at the hands of Jassa Singh.

Nadir Shah attacked India in 1739, and when, on his return he was carrying away a big amount of money as booty, he was attacked by the Sikhs and was dispossessed of his plunder. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia played an important role in the adventure. Later, he built a fort of Dallewal on the bank of Ravi. In 1743, he attacked and carried away a big government treasure which was being taken from Eminabad to Lahore. Jaspal Rai, the brother of Dewan Lakhpat Rai, was killed by the Sikhs under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Zakaria Khan, the viceroy of Lahore was shocked when he received this news, and he ordered Adina Begh,

1. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 314.

the *Faujdar* of the Jallandhar Doab to march against the Sikhs and punish Jassa Singh, but he fled to the Sutlej, while the persecution of the Sikhs continued. Many of them were captured, brought to Lahore and tortured to death, where *Shahidganj* was built. Luckily for the Sikhs, a very capable leader, who commanded high respect from all the Sikhs and possessed remarkable power of organization, had appeared among them. This was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who had received his training under the famous leader, Nawab Kapur Singh. The Nawab was the most venerable Sikh leader. Owing to the constant help and guidance of the Nawab and his own sterling virtues Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had come to occupy a very prominent position among the Sikh leaders. "The Nawab was growing old and he wanted to give the leadership of the war like Khalsa to somebody else. He had his eye on the promising Jassa Singh and he was on a look out for an opportunity to do so."¹

After Ahmad Shah Abdali's return from Punjab, after the first invasion of India, the Sikhs met at Amritsar on the *Baisakhi* day, March 29, 1748 when it was proposed by Nawab Kapur Singh that the *Panth* needed solidarity; the entire body of the Sikhs was named *Dal Khalsa* and placed under the supreme command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

In 1749, Jassa Singh, who had gained reputation for his bravery and ability was invited by Diwan Kaura Mal to help him expelling Shah Nawaz Khan, the former governor of Lahore. Jassa Singh willingly offered help to Kaura Mal in reducing Multan to Mir Manu's submission. Shah Nawaz was killed in the battle and Jassa Singh received a rich share of booty and honours for himself from Muin-ul-Mulh (Mir Mannu).²

The Lahore government again began to follow the policy of persecution against the Sikhs. In 1753, a large army under Aziz Khan was sent against the Sikhs and the government forces were utterly routed by Jassa Singh. In 1755, Jassa Singh defeated Adina Beg at Kadar and wrested from him the territory of Fatehabad. Shortly afterwards Jassa Singh defeated Aziz Khan who had been sent by Adina Beg to have a trial of strength with the Ahluwalia Sardar.

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Punjab*, Vol. III, p. 51

2. Graffin, Lepe, *The Rajas of the Punjab*, p. 457

In October 1759, Ahmad Shah Abdali appointed Raja Ghamand Chand of Kangra as Governor of Jallandhar Doab. Jassa Singh attacked his territory and routed him in the battle of Mahilpur and he was forced to pay the tribute.

During the third battle of Panipat in 1761 when Ahmad Shah Abdali was engaged with the Marathas, Jassa Singh got an opportunity to plunder all over the province. Many more territories were occupied. Sirhind was sacked and Dogar and Nypal in Ferozpur area were occupied. Jassa Singh also seized Jagraon, Hoshiarpur and Naringarh. A contribution was levied from Rai Ibrahim Bhati, the Kapurthala ruler. In March 1763, Nalagarh and Bilaspur were made tributaries.

When the news of the Sikhs depredations all over the Punjab reached Ahmad Shal Abdali, he attacked India again on February 10, 1762 and engaged a large number of Sikhs near Barnala in which thousands of Sikhs were killed. This holocaust is known as *Vada Ghalughara*. Jassa Singh could not be captured and he escaped to the Kangra hills. However, he soon came back to the plains and reorganised his forces. When Abdali left, Jassa Singh pillaged Kasur and handed over the territory to the *Bhangis*. The combined forces of the Khalsa then fell upon Sirhind once again and slaying Zain Khan, the Afghan Governor, sacked the cursed city and razed it to the ground. Jassa Singh now marched to Amritsar where he contributed towards rebuilding the Harimandir Sahib, which was defiled by Abdali. He also built the Ahluwalia Bazar.

Jassa Singh passed away on October 22, 1783 when he was 65 years old. He was cremated at Amritsar and a monument to his memory was raised in the *derah* of Baba Atal, near that of Nawab Kapur Singh. Jassa Singh was a man of great ability and was very much respected by the Sikhs. He was a great warrior, a valiant general and a splendid organiser. He had nearly three dozen scars of sword cuts and ballet marks in front of his body and none on the back which he never turned to the enemy.

Besides, a most powerful and successful general in the battle-field, he was a man of saintly disposition. Sikhs felt pride in getting baptised by him. Jassa Singh did more than any other Chief to consolidate the Sikh power except Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Since Jassa Singh remained the undisputed leader of the Sikh community they had begun to call him *Sultane Qaum* or the *Badshah*.

Jassa Singh had no male child. He had two daughters of whom one was married to Mehar Singh and the other to Mahar Singh. Jassa Singh's wife Raj Kaur had impressed upon him to nominate one of his son-in-law or her brother to succeed him, but he did not agree. Bhag Singh, a close relative of Jassa Singh, born in 1747 was appointed the new leader of the *Misal*, but he died in 1801. Bhag Singh was succeeded by his only son, Fateh Singh, born in 1784. He hurried to Lahore, when Ranjit Singh conquered Lahore. In 1802, he exchanged turbans with Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a mark of perpetual friendship between the two. Fateh Singh died in 1836 and was succeeded by his eldest son Nihal Singh on March 10, 1817. Then came Randhir Singh, Kharak Singh and Jagjit Singh who continued to rule the Kapurthala State till 1948. When PEPSU was formed he was made its *up-Rajpurmukh*.

History produces only few greatmen who leave their marks for the posterity to follow. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was one of them. He was born at a time when the Sikhs were faced with the greatest crisis in their history. Through our history and particularly, the darkest period of history, great personalities were born to rekindle the light of civilisation and give hope to the oppressed. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was a man of great strength and army prowess. Though he began his career as a trooper under the able command of Nawab Kapur Singh, he became a general and headed the *Dal Khalsa*, the body of all the Sikhs. He was called *Sultane Quam* and *Badshah* by his followers.

Jassa Singh was an embodiment of timeless values, cast in heroic mould. The 18th century witnessed a period of disintegration of the mighty Mughal empire. There were regular invasions from the east and the west. Ahmad Shah Abdali attacked India nine times, looted its wealth, killed its inhabitants, and returned to his native land. It resulted in chaos and desolation. In this atmosphere of despair and frustration, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia shone like a beacon.

It is said that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia distilled the best that was in Indian tradition of tolerance and compassion into the very ethos of his conduct. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, all irrespective of their religions, caste or creed served him with devotion and carried out his orders willingly. All respected him equally.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was not only a great warrior and hero but was held in great esteem as a spiritual leader. He consolidated

the Sikh religious tradition amidst their struggle for existence. Among other great deeds, that go to his credit, was the reconstruction of the Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar.

Harimandir Sahib was destroyed by the Afghan invaders thrice in 1757, 1762 and 1764 and was finally built in 1765. After the conquest of Sirhind on January 14, 1764, the Khalsa spread a sheet and collected offerings amounting to rupees nine lakhs. The amount was deposited with the bankers of Amritsar. Bhai Des Raj of Sur Singh village in Amritsar district, known for his honesty, was put in charge.

The building of *Harimandir Sahib* could not be completed on time on account of the Afghan invasion in December, 1764. After the departure of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Sikhs collected at Amritsar and undertook the reconstruction of *Harimandir Sahib*.

According to Sir Lepel Griffen, Ahluwalia was the most saintly and orthodox of their leaders that the Sikhs respected him and most powerful Sardars received *Pahul* from his hands. Baba Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala State and two of his successors Raja Amar Singh and Sahib Singh also received *Pahul* from his hand. It was a great privilege for them.

The deeds of heroism and bravery of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia are very well known. His most heroic act was rescuing of 2200 captive Indian women from the clutches of the invader. The captives were being taken to Kabul after Abdali's historic victory over the *Marathas* in the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

"Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's career is a romantic alternation of victories and escapes," says N.K. Sinha in his book, "Rise of the Sikh Power", his courage and patriotism of them of admiration and emulation his moral qualities and most conspicuously his piety a support and consolation even in the darkest hour he was like a legendary British knight, who could say the language of the poet--

"My good blade carves the casques of men.
My tought lance thrusteth sure,
My strength's as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

Ahluwalia played a decisive role in the Sikhs' war of independence and in liberating the Punjab from the Mughals and the Turks at a critical juncture. The Mughal power disintegrating and the Abdali

invasions may have contributed to the success of Ahluwalia, but independent Sikhs state could be established only due to the excellent leadership provided by Jassa Singh in the earlier stages of the movement.

The Sikhs were left leaderless after the death of Banda Bahadur and were like Hindus subjected to great tyranny and oppression by the Mughals. Thus, Jassa Singh was a symbol of lifelong struggle against the tyranny, exploitation and persecution. The Hindus and the Sikhs were subjected to by the Mughals on one hand and the invasions of Ahmed Shah Abdali on the other which added manifold to the woes and miseries of the people. It was mainly due to the prolonged and stubborn resistance put up under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia that Abdali ultimately decided to retreat to Afghanistan. It is worth noting that in the last quarter of the 18th century the Punjab was under the Sikh *Misals*, who had set up practically an independent state in the Punjab. A way was, thus, paved for the establishment of a vast empire which was later on carved out by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. We conclude in the words of Sir Gokul Chand Narang: "He was a man of very generous habit enriching his followers with liberal gifts. He was a great patriot and always ready to risk his life and liberty for the sake of his country men and for his own faith".

THE BHANGI MISAL

The *Bhangi Misal* was one of the most important *Misals* of the Sikhs. It was this *Misal* which ruled over the territories of Chiniot and a part of the Lahore city. They were the first to establish an independent government of their own over the territories conquered by them.

The *Misal* was founded by Chajju Singh, a native of Panjwar village in Amritsar district. The *Misal* derived its name from its founder's addiction to *Bhang*.

Even while young, Chajju Singh, jumped into the fray and harassed tyrannical government officials. Later Chajju Singh was joined by Gulab Singh, Mahan Singh, Karora Singh, Gurbaksh Singh and Sawan Singh Randhawa. They were inspired to pursue the activities against the tyrannical rulers.

After the death of Chajju Singh, Bhima Singh Dhillon of village Hung near Moga, succeeded him. He was a great organiser.

who infused a new life into the *Misal* and a large number of Sikhs rallied under his command. When Nadir Shah invaded India in 1739, the country was in turmoil. Bhima Singh took advantage of the situation and became a head of the powerful confederacy. He died in a small holocaust in 1746.

Bhima Singh had no children. He adopted Hari Singh as his son, who became the next Chief of the *Misal*. Hari Singh belonged to Panjwar and was brave and fearless. He organised a large band of his followers. His fighting force increased to 20,000.¹ Hari Singh fought many a time against Ahmad Shah Abdali. He had many horses of different breeds. He set up his headquarters at Gilwali village in Amritsar district. He captured Sialkot and Mirowal. In 1762, he attacked Kot Khwaja Ubaid, the Afghan *Subedar* of Lahore. He had a big arsenal with him which was captured by Hari Singh including the well-known gun *Bhangian Di Top*. The fort of Kehlwar and surrounding areas of Bhawalpur were also captured.

Hari Singh next attacked the territories of Indus and Derajat. Rawalpindi was also conquered, after subduing the Majha and Malwa areas. Then he marched towards Jammu at the head of 12,000 horsemen and made the ruler Ranjit Deo to pay him tribute. On the Jamuna, Rai Singh Bhangi, Baghel Singh, Karora Singhia and Hari Singh harassed Najib-ul-Daula who desired to check the progress of the Sikh Chiefs with the help of Rohillas and Marathas. In 1763, Hari Singh joined the *Kanahiyas* and *Ramgarhias*. They attacked Kasur. In 1764, Hari Singh fought Amar Singh of Patiala but was killed in action.

Hari Singh had two wives, one the daughter of the Chandri of Panjwar near Tarn Taran. He had two sons, Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh from this wife, and Charat Singh, Diwan Singh and Desu Singh from his second wife.

After the death of Hari Singh, his son Jhanda Singh became the head of the *Misal*. Jhanda Singh reorganised his army and strengthened it.

Gurbaksh Singh was a close associate of Hari Singh. He was a great warrior and had forty villages under him. He was childless too. Later, he adopted as his son Lehna Singh of Sandhawala in Amritsar. When Gurbaksh Singh passed away, Lehna Singh suc-

1. Latif Mohd., *History of the Punjab*, p. 296.

ceeded him. Gujjar Singh, son of Gurbaksh Singh's brother, raised a banner of revolt and wanted his share in Gurbaksh Singh's property. The estate was divided.

When Ahmad Shah Abdali left, he appointed Kabuli Mal as the *Subedar* of Lahore. Gujjar Singh and Lehna Singh along with Sobha Singh attacked Lahore and besieged Lahore. Kabuli Mal protected the city but was not able to offer much resistance. He escaped from Lahore and the city fell under the feet of three *Bhangi* Sardars in April, 1765.

In 1766, Jhanda Singh marched towards Multan and attacked Shujah Khan, the Governor of Bahawalpur. A battle ensued on the banks of the Sutlej river but it resulted in the victory of none. A treaty was signed between the *Bhangi* Chief and Mubarak Khan, the Governor of Multan. Jhanda Singh was acknowledged as the head of the areas upto Pakpattan. In 1769, he built a fort in Amritsar which was known as *Qila Bhangian*.

Jhanda Singh, after this victory, marched towards Kasur, which he subdued. In 1771, he again attacked Multan but it was repulsed by the forces of Multan.

In 1772, a dispute arose between the Governors of Multan, Shujah Khan, Shrif Khan Suddozai and Sharif Beg Tahlui of Multan. When Timur Shah ascended to the throne of Kabul, he demanded the revenue of Multan from Sharif Beg. He sought the help of Jhanda Singh and promised him to pay a *nazrana* of rupees one lakh. Jhanda Singh agreed and marched at the head of a strong army and became victorious. Multan was divided between Jhanda Singh and Lehna Singh. Diwan Singh Chachowalia was appointed the *Qilidar* of Multan. Sharif Beg fled to Talamba and then to Khairpur where he died. On his return from Multan, Jhanda Singh subdued the Baloch territory, captured Jhang, Mankera and Kala Begh. He recovered the *Zamzama* gun from the chathas of Ramnagar.

The last action that Jhanda Singh took was against the combined forces of Jai Singh Kanahiya, Hakikat Singh Kanahiya and Charat Singh Sukerchakia. In 1774, Ranjit Deo of Jammu decided to dispossess his eldest son Brij Raj from succeeding after his death. Charat Singh and Jai Singh supported Brij Raj Deo while Ranjit Deo took the help of Rajas of Chamba, Kangra, Nurpur and Busher. Jhanda Singh also declared his support to them. The forces faced

each other on the Basanti river, but before any result, Charat Singh was injured by the bursting of a matchlock from one of his own soldiers. Next day Charat Singh died by one of his own men, who was liked by Jai Singh Kanahiya. The issue of the succession of Jammu ruler was left undecided.

Ganda Singh succeeded Jhanda Singh. He wanted to take revenge of Jhanda Singh's death. The opportunity came when the widow of Nand Singh, a *Bhangi Misaldar* gave away Pathankot as *jagir* to her son-in-law, Tara Singh, the brother of Hakikat Singh Kanahiya. Ganda Singh asked the return of Pathankot. The *Kanahiyas* refused and decided to attack Pathankot. Gurbaksh Singh, Tara Singh and Hakikat Singh joined hands who were joined by Amar Singh Bhugga. *Ramgarhias* helped Ganda Singh. They marched towards Pathankot. The battle ensued near Dinanagar, but after a few days, Ganda Singh fell ill and died. As Desa Singh, his son was a minor, he was succeeded by his nephew Charat Singh. However, he was killed in action and the *Bhangis* fled from the battlefield.

Now, Desa Singh became the *Bhangi* Chief. Many *Bhangi* Sardars including Bhag Singh declared independence. The tribute from Jhang was stopped. In 1779, Timur Shah marched from Kabul to free Multan. In the battle 3000 Sikhs were killed. Timur occupied Multan and bestowed its governorship on Shuja Khan, the brother of Muzaffar Khan. *Bhangi* Misal weakened day by day. Desa Singh was killed in 1782, while fighting against Maha Singh Sukerchakia.

In December, 1795 Shah Zaman marched once again towards Punjab. He reached Hassan Ahdal and sent a large force under Ahmad Khan to capture Rohtas. After the fall of Rohtas, *Ghakhars* joined the invaders. His victory was in sight, when he received the news of attack of Agha Mohammed Khan on Khorasan and Zaman returned to Afghanistan. *Wazir* of Oudh, Asif-ud-Daula reached Afghanistan in 1796 and requested the Shah to attack India. The Shah agreed and marched towards India in 1796 at the head of 30,000 soldiers. He reached Shahdara, on the banks of the Ravi. From here he sent out his *Wazir* Hafiz Sher Mohamed to capture Lahore, but before he could reach Lahore, the Governor handed over the keys of the citadel to Mian Shah Charag, a prominent citizen. The Governor left the place and the capital of Lahore fell into Shah's hands in January, 1797. The Shah declared that all

those who would pay homage to him would be pardoned. He also established contacts with Tipu Sultan, Scindias and the Rohillas. But due to disturbance in Afghanistan, Shah had to return. He left behind Ahmad Khan Barakzai in the charge of the areas between Jhelum and Sind.

Soon after the departure of the Durani Chief, the Governor re-occupied the city. In 1797, Lehna Singh died. Chet Singh succeeded him. The citizens of Lahore held a meeting and thought of ways and means to finish the tyrannical rule of the Governor. They sent an application to Ranjit Singh inviting him to occupy the city. Another application was sent to Sada Kaur. Ranjit Singh marched towards Lahore and occupied it in July, 1799, who soon afterwards became the *Maharaja* of Punjab.

Gulab Singh had succeeded Desa Singh. He remained in Amritsar and enlarged the city. He subjected Kasur but it was re-captured by its Chiefs. Gulab Singh proved inefficient. However, he joined hands with Sahib Singh Bhangi, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Nizam-ud-Din of Kasur. The forces of these allies marched towards the village Bhasin. Ranjit Singh faced these forces. The forces lay encamped before each other for two months but no battle took place. Gulab Singh died and his allies returned yielding a bloodless victory to Ranjit Singh in 1800.

Gurdit Singh, a ten year old son of Gulab Singh succeeded him to the chieftain of the *Bhangi Misal*. His mother Mai Sukhan conducted his affairs. In 1805, Ranjit Singh invaded and occupied the city of Amritsar and thus the *Bhangi Misal* was eclipsed once and for all.

THE RAMGARHIA MISAL

Ramgarhia *Misal* was founded by Khushal Singh who belonged to village Guga in Amritsar district. He was baptised by Banda Bahadur. He participated in Banda's adventures. After Khushal Singh, Nand Singh of village Sanghani near Amritsar succeeded him. He expanded his activities. When he died, Jassa Singh succeeded him. It was he who developed a *Misal* and increased his exploits.

Jassa Singh was the grandson of Hardas Singh, a carpenter who belonged to village Sur Sis in Amritsar district. He was initiated

into the Khalsa faith by Guru Gobind Singh. Hardas Singh joined the army of Guru Gobind Singh. He took part in many battles fought by Guru Gobind Singh. He retired from the Guru's army, when the latter proceeded towards the South. Bhagwan Singh who was son of Hardas Singh preached the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. He shifted his headquarters to Ichogil, about 18 kilometres from Lahore. Bhagwan Singh had five sons namely Jassa Singh, Jai Singh, Khushal Singh, Mali Singh and Tara Singh. Jassa Singh was the eldest. He was born in 1723. In his early days, he showed great interest in the profession of his forefathers : carpentry.

When Nadir Shah attacked India in 1739, Bhagwan Singh was in the service of Zakriya Khan, commanding one hundred horse-men. In the battle of Wazirabad, Bhagwan Singh showed his worth but was killed in action. Jassa Singh also took part in the action and was given the rank of a *risaldar*. His sons were granted a *Jagir* consisting of five villages namely, Valla, Verka, Verha, Sultanwind, Tung and Chaka. Valla fell to the share of Jassa Singh.

Soon afterwards Jassa Singh along with his two brothers, Mali Singh and Tara Singh joined the band of Nand Singh under the *Dal Khalsa* and within a short span, he gained the reputation of being the most daring and intrepid among its members. After the death of Nand Singh, Jassa Singh took over as the head of the *Misal*.

Jassa Singh joined service under Adina Beg, the *Faujdar* of the Jullundur Doab. "Jassa Singh with his two brothers fought on the side of Adina Beg when that chief entered into hostilities with the Abdali King, Ahmad Shah, and his gallantry was so conspicuous that Adina Beg gave him the command of his own troops, which at that time was chiefly Sikhs."¹ Adina Beg was very much pleased at the capability of Jassa Singh and appointed him also to take charge after the civil administration of some of his territory. Under Adina Beg, Jassa Singh was able to develop his relations with high government officials such as Kaura Mal.

In October, 1748, when the Sikhs gathered at Amritsar to celebrate the *Diwali* festival, Adina Beg was ordered by Muin-ul-Mulak, the Governor of Lahore to march against them. Jassa Singh accompanied Adina Beg when the fort of Ram Rauni at Amritsar was besieged. In the battle two hundred Sikhs died out of five hundred entrenched in the fort. The Sikhs who survived were in a hope-

1. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 306.

less condition. All the supplies to the fort were stopped and the provisions were exhausted, the Sikhs faced starvation. They became desperate and decided to fight in the battlefield. When Jassa Singh, who was in the camp of Adina Beg, decided to come to their rescue and saved himself from excommunication from the Khalsa faith, he deserted Adina Beg and secretly entered the fort from where he wrote a letter to Kaura Mal at Lahore and requested him to save three hundred Sikhs. Kaura Mal prevailed upon Muin to agree to raise the siege and grant the Sikhs a *Jagir*.

It was commendable service rendered to the Sikhs by Jassa Singh. He saved three hundred lives and also the Ram Rauni fort from destruction. The Sikhs, marched to assist Kaura Mal against Shahnawaz at Multan. Jassa Singh remained in charge of the fort. The fort was developed further and the *Misal* took its name from Ram Rauni at Amritsar. It was renamed Ramgarh and the *Misal* came to be known as *Ramgarhia*. When the relations between Adina Beg and the Sikhs deteriorated, Adina Beg and Sadiq Beg were sent to besiege the fort of Ram Rauni. Jassa Singh was then inside the fort but he rushed out fighting and escaped the enemy ranks. When Muin-ul-Mulk died in 1753, the Punjab was thrown into chaos and anarchy. Jassa Singh took an advantage of the prevailing situation and rebuilt the fort. Under Timur, the Governor of Lahore, the fort was demolished again but when Timur was expelled from Punjab by the Sikhs, *Marathas* and Adina Beg, the fort was constructed again by the Sikhs under the supervision of Jassa Singh.

After the death of Muin, Jassa Singh got the opportunity to increase his acquisitions. Jassa Singh joined Jai Singh Kanahiya and subjected the territories of the north of Amritsar and neighbourhood of Batala to his rule. He could not continue his activities for long when Adina Beg became the Governor of Punjab under the *Marathas*, he sent Mir Aziz Bakshi who butchered many Sikhs mercilessly.

Ram Rauni was besieged. Jassa Singh escaped unhurt once again. "Those who escaped this slaughter were styled *Ramgarhias* by their fellow countrymen, as a compliment to the sowed place where they had sought shelter, and this, more appropriately, gave the *Misal* the designation which it bears."¹

Adina Beg died in 1758. The Sikhs came out of their hide-

1. Latif, Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 307

outs. Jassa Singh with the help of *Kanahiyas*, occupied several places in the districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur i.e Kalanaur, Batala, Sri Hargobindpur, Qadian and Ghamman. These territories gave them the revenue of rupees six to ten lakhs. Jassa Singh constructed the Katra Bazar at Amritsar.

Ramgarhia Chief now diverted his attention towards the hills. He made Raja Ghumand Chand, the Kangra ruler his tributary. The rulers of Nurpur, Prithvi Singh and Chamba, Raj Singh accepted his overlordship. Jassa Singh occupied Dipalpur, Anarpur, Haripur and Jaswan and now his possessions included almost whole of the hilly tract between the Ravi and the Beas and vast territories of the Jullundur Doab. Sri Hargobindpur was converted by Jassa Singh as his capital. When Jassa Singh became all powerful, he was challenged by the *Kanahiyas*. In 1774, Jai Singh Kanahiya occupied the fort of Kangra. This was a direct blow to Jassa Singh. He was in search of an opportunity against the *Kanahiyas*. It came when the widow of Nand Singh, a *Bhangi Misaldar*, gave away Pathankot as *Jagir* to her son-in-law Tara Singh and brother of Hakikat Singh Kanahiya. Ganda Singh, the *Bhangi* Chief asked the *Kanahiyas* to return him Pathankot. The *Kanahiyas* refused and assisted by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, made the war preparations. Jassa Singh helped Ganda Singh. The enemies met at Dinanagar, but after a few days of indecisive battle, Ganda Singh fell ill and died. The *Bhangis* fled.

Till 1766, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia had friendly relations with Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. In 1764, they co-operated against Ahmad Shah Abdali, but in 1767, they failed to join hands against Abdali and on the question of Pathankot the two found themselves in enemy camps. After Ramgarhia's defeat here, he assisted the Rani of Kapurthala against Ahluwalia. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was wounded by a gun shot of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in a battle of Lahura. The former retaliated when he had gone a hunting near Batala. He was wounded. The Ahluwalia Chief was taken prisoner but was later released.

As the Ahluwalia Sardar was very much respected by the Sikhs, the *Bhangis*, the *Sukerchakias* and the *Kanahiyas* decided to join him and expell the *Ramgarhias* from Punjab.

In 1776, Gurbaksh Singh Kanahiya, son of Jai Singh attacked Batala which was under the occupation of Malla Singh, brother of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. Gurbaksh Singh was welcomed even by

the local residents and Malla Singh fled. Then the *Kanahiyas* took possession of Kalanaur from Tara Singh. Later, Jassa Singh recovered Batala but failed to recover Kalanaur. In the battle that ensued, *Ramgarhias* were driven on the other side of the Sutlej. *Kanahiyas* occupied a major chunk of the area.

The *Ramgarhias* soon collected a large number of horsemen and assisted by Amar Singh, the Phulkian Chief he established himself in the Hissar area. He extended his area of operation upto the boundaries of Delhi. Once he reached Delhi and took away four guns from the Mughal arsenal. The Meerut Nawab agreed to pay him a sum of rupees 10,000 a year as he agreed to leave Meerut without any action.

Then, differences arose between Maha Singh Sukerchakia and Jai Singh Kanahiya. Maha Singh invited the *Ramgarhias* to assist him. Both of them fought against the *Kanahiyas* and the majority of the *Ramgarhias'* possessions being restored to them. Jassa Singh started living peacefully. But after the death of Maha Singh, his son Ranjit Singh succeeded him. Differences between *Ramgarhias* and *Sukerchakias* developed. In 1799, Ranjit Singh captured Lahore and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia joined the *Bhangis* and Nizam-ud-Dun of Kasur. The two forces met at Bhasin. No battle was fought.

Jassa Singh Ramgarhia died in 1803. He was a great instrument in increasing the Sikh power. After his death, his son Jodh Singh succeeded him. Ranjit Singh did not attack his territories but after his death in 1814, Ranjit Singh occupied Jodh Singh's territories but offered a *jagir* to the descendents of Jodh Singh.

THE KANAHIYA MISAL

The founder of the *Misal* Jai Singh belonged to Kanha, 25 Km from Lahore. Jai Singh was the son of Khushali and had two brothers. Jai Singh was a brave and fearless man. He was baptised by Nawab Kapur Singh and joined the *Dal Khalsa*.

When after the death of Munin-ul-Mulk in 1753, India was attacked repeatedly by Duranis. Jai Singh took advantage of the situation and took possession of Riarki. Soon afterwards he occupied Mukerian, Hajipur, Pathankot and Gurdaspur. Abdali attacked Punjab for the sixth time in 1762 when *Bara Ghallughara* took

place and thousands of Sikhs were killed. When Abdali had hardly left the Punjab, the Sikhs gathered in a large number at Amritsar and once again became active. Jai Singh attacked Kasur in 1763 and carried off a rich booty.

When the differences developed between the *Kanahiyas* and the *Ramgarhias*, an open clash took place between them. In 1774, Jai Singh occupied the fort of Kangra. Shortly afterwards the *Kanahiyas* developed closer relations with the *Ahluwalias* and in 1776 Gurbaksh Singh Kanahiya attacked Batala which was under the occupation of Mallu Singh, a brother of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and took possession of it.

Jai Singh became very powerful. Hill states became his tributaries but soon his ambitions were dashed to the ground. Jai Singh had taken Maha Singh, the son of Charat Singh. When Jammu failed to pay its tribute to Jai Singh, he decided to march against it and sought the assistance of Maha Singh. He secretly marched on Jammu, sacked it and looted it. This infuriated Jai Singh and he insulted Maha Singh. He resented it and called Sansar Chand Katoch of Kangra to assist him. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was also called from the other side of the Sutlej. When Jai Singh came to know of the developments, he sent Gurbaksh Singh Duia to check the advance of the *Ramgarhias*. Engagement took place near Patiala, Gurbaksh Singh was defeated and killed in action. Jassa Singh continued his march to join Maha Singh. After several skirmishes a battle was fought at Batala between the *Kanahiyas* led by Gurbaksh Singh and Maha Singh joined by the *Ramgarhias* on the other side. *Kanahiyas* were defeated. Gurbaksh Singh Kanahiya died. At his son's death Jai Singh "burst into tears, emptied his quiver of its arrows, and dismounting from his horse, exposed himself to the enemy's fire. Such was the respect for the old *veteran* that none dared approach him in his grief, and all quietly withdrew. The victorious troops then advanced to Riarki and seized it."¹

After his defeat, Jai Singh Kanahiya fled to Pathankot, while his daughter-in-law Sada Kaur escaped to Saiyars. The loss of Batala was a big loss to the *Kanahiyas* from which they never recovered. The city was in the occupation of Jassa Singh.

On the other hand a war between Sansar Chand of Kangra

1 Latif, Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 311.

and Jai Singh continued. Sansar Chand had occupied a large chunk of territory of Jai Singh which included Hajipur and Mukerian. Sansar Chand also attacked the Akalgark fort but it was defended by the *Kanahiyas* and Sansar Chand had to raise the siege. The war continued unless Sada Kaur approached Maha Singh and sought his help. Sada Kaur's daughter, Mehtab Kaur was betrothed to Maha Singh's son, Ranjit Singh. Now Sansar Chand approached the *Kanahiyas* for settlement. Kot Kangra was restored to Sansar Chand and Jai Singh got Mukerian and Hajipur.

Than Jai Singh attacked Batala with the help of Maha Singh and Sansar Chand. The town was besieged but their effort failed to reduce the city. Jai Singh had to lift the siege and Batala remained in the possession of the *Ramgarhias*. Jai Singh died in 1798.

Jai Singh was survived by his two sons, Nidhan Singh and Bhag Singh. None was capable to lead the *Misal*. Sada Kaur took over the control of the *Misal* which had now 8000 soldiers. Sada Kaur died in 1832.

THE FYZULPURIA MISAL

The Fyzulpuria *Misal* was founded by Kapur Singh. The *Misal* got its name from Fyzulpur, the village which Kapur Singh had snatched from Fuzullah, the local Chief. The village was renamed Singhpura. Kapur Singh was, dare-devil, but humble. In 1833 he was bestowed with the title of Nawab. He organised the Sikhs into *Dal Khalsa*. Till 1748, Kapur Singh remained the Supreme Leader of both *Buddha Dal* and *Taruna Dal*. Kapur was acknowledged the indisputable leader of the Khalsa who led the Sikhs through the darkest period in the Sikh history. In 1748, when Kapur Singh grew old, he handed over the leadership of the Khalsa to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He died in 1753.

The territories of Kapur Singh lay on the east and west of the river Sutlej. As he had no son, Khushal Singh became the head of the *Misal*. Khushal Singh occupied Patti, Bharatgarh, Nurpur, Bahrampur and Jullundur.

In 1763, Khushal Singh's follower killed Nawab Zain Khan and Sirhind was captured. Khushal Singh occupied Ludhiana. He

died in 1785. He was succeeded by his son Budh Singh but under his leadership, the *Misal* declined and all his possessions were annexed by Ranjit Singh.

THE NISHANWALA MISAL

The founders of the Nishanwala *Misal* were the standard bearers of the *Dal Khalsa*. The *Misal* was organised by Sangat Singh and Mohar Singh. When the Mughal authority in the Punjab ended and when Durrani invasions were turned out by the Sikhs, they carried out their exploits across the river Sutlej. They attacked Meerut and looted the town. The number of soldiers under their command was 12,000. They had also occupied Ambala.

After Sangat Singh's death, Mohar Singh succeeded him. Ranjit Singh sent Dewan Mohkam Chand across the river Sutlej to occupy their territory. A large booty fell into the hands of the Dewan. The *Misal* collapsed when a treaty was signed by Ranjit Singh and the British.

THE SHAHIDI MISAL

The founders of this *Misal* were rather, "religious people than a military body, though the priests fought in those days as well as the laymen. The *Khalsa* was the true embodiment of the church militant. The founder of the *Shadihi Misal* was Sudda Singh, the *Mahant* or head of the shrine at Talwandi, where Guru Gobind Singh had made his resting place (Damdama). He was killed fighting the Muhammedan Governor of Jullundur and his head even been struck off, he is reported to have ridden some distance and killed several of the enemy before he fell from his horse. Hence he was known as the Martyr (*Shahid*) and his followers took his name."¹

The leaders of this *Misal* were Karam Singh and Gurbaksh and their possessions lay about Rania, Khari and Jaroli.

¹ Latif Mohd, *History of the Punjab*, p. 337

THE MISAL DALEWALA

The founder of the *Misal* was Galab, who after receiving the *Pahul* became Gulab Singh. As he belonged to Dalewal, hence the name of the *Misal*. It held a great portion of the upper Jullundar Doab and the northern portions of Ambala and Ludhiana and some estates of Ferozpur too. When Gulab Singh died, Tara Singh Gheba succeeded him. He had cordial relations with Ranjit Singh and helped him in many of his expeditions. He accompanied Ranjit Singh's troops when he attacked Naraingarh in 1807, but Tara Singh Gheba died in action. Later, Ranjit Singh annexed the Dalewala territories.

THE NAKAI MISAL

The founder of the *Misal* was Hira Singh, who belonged to Bharwal in Lahore district. In due course of time, the number of his followers increased to 20,000 horsemen. The *Nakais* inhabited the areas known as Nakhas which lay between Lahore and Gogaira. Their territory included Gogaira, Kasur and Shakarpur. They had an annual revenue of rupees nine lakhs. Hira Singh was killed during his attack on Pakpattan. He was succeeded by Nahar Singh but he too died in 1763 during a battle fought at Kot Kamalia.

Ram Singh succeeded Nahar Singh, who was his younger brother. Kumar Singh of Sayadwala was subdued by Ram Singh, and he died in 1781 to be succeeded by his elder son Bhagwan Singh who married his sister Raj Kaur to Ranjit Singh and thus became powerful. But he was soon killed in action with Wazir Singh, brother of Kumar Singh, who recovered Sayadwala from the *Nakais*.

Bhagwan Singh was succeeded by his brother Gian Singh who died in 1807. He was succeeded by his son Kahan Singh. Later Ranjit Singh acquired his territories.

THE KAROR SINGHI MISAL

The founder of the *Misal* was Karora singh of village Panjarhia. The possessions of the *Misal* lay between the Jamuna

and the Markanda rivers. When Karora Singh died without leaving a son, he was succeeded by Bhaghel Singh who made Chiloundi, 30 Km from Karnal, as his headquarters. After the fall of Sirhind and the assassination of its Governor, Zain Khan, he expanded his territories on the east of the Sutlej. He raised the number of soldiers to 12,000. He was the most daring and fearless *Misal* Chief.

In 1778, the Sikhs sacked Sirhind and the Malwa territory, when the Delhi Emperor Shah Alam sent a strong army under the command of Prince Jeewan Bakht to punish the Sikhs. The *Karora Singhis* joined the imperial forces and fought against the Sikhs. In 1788, when the Maratha Chief Amba Rao joined by the Rohilla Chief Gholam Kadar marched into the Punjab, Baghel Singh made submission to him.

After Baghel Singh's death, Jodh Singh succeeded him. He was a capable leader, who expanded his territory and added to it Bassi, Dera and Lotali. Jodh Singh had cordial relations with Ranjit Singh and rendered him useful service in his siege of Naraingarh in 1807. He also assisted him at the time of annexation of Multan but after this conquest Jodh Singh died and the territories of the *Karor Singhi Misal* were absorbed by the Kalsia family.

MISAL SUKERCHAKIAS

The most important of the Sikh *Misals* was that of the *Sukerchakias*. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's ancestors belonged to this *Misal*. They were humble and hard-working farmers and cattle-grazers settled in several villages around Gujranwala. The first man to rise into prominence was one *Buddha*. He was only 9 years old when his father died. His father while dying advised him to receive *Pahul*. He remembered the dying injunction of his father and on attaining the age of discretion, proceeded to Anandpur along with several of his friends to the holy city in 1692, where they were initiated into the *Pahul* by Guru Gobind Singh himself. This was a matter of great significance as *Buddha* was the first in the family to become a Sikh. He was named Budh Singh and thus he became a lion, a matchless man who excelled in many things. "He was, however, not a man of peaceful disposition, as his father and grandfather had been, but was courageous, enterprising and sagacious. He associated himself with the plundering gang of Sikhs and Sansis

and accompanied them in their predatory excursions which, however, were confined to carrying away herds of cattle from distant districts of the South. The daring adventure performed by Buddh Singh, and the success which attended his exploits, soon won for him the reputation of being the boldest and the most resolute of the Sikh freebooters in the country. He built a large house for himself at Sukerchak, which he made his headquarters, and where he was respected by the people, who gave him the title of *Chaudhari*, or headman of their village. The cattle which he carried away, he either appropriated to himself or sold near Amritsar and Lahore. He thus became possessed of wealth and was looked upon as a man of some importance."¹

Budh Singh had a mare, called Desi. He crossed Jhelum, Ravi and Chenab several times riding on Desi. Thus Budh Singh acquired the nickname of Desu. Budh Singh and Desi were the two names that resounded in the area. They were terror for the people. Budh Singh carried on his exploits as long as he lived and there were forty scars of swords on his body. He was a dare devil, but was very considerate and merciful to the poor. He generally looted the rich. It is said that once he returned the cattle to a destitute widow, which he had caught without knowing that the herd belonged to her and the woman even did not know the name of her benefactor. Budh Singh passed away in 1716. His wife was overwhelmed with grief, committed suicide and the bodies of both husband and wife were cremated together at one place.

Budh Singh had two sons, Nodh Singh and Chanda Singh. Nodh Singh made family fortunes. He firstly constructed a small fort at Sukerchak and raised a small force to guard the same from the Afghan invaders, and secondly married a daughter of Gulab Singh, a powerful *Sansi* Jat of Majitha. This marital relationship increased his strength and he became a force to be reckoned with. By the time he grew, cattle lifting was considered a low and less profitable vocation. Nodh Singh became a highway robber, as this profession was considered honourable and lucrative. Nodh Singh soon amassed wealth by looting people and became in fact a terror to the people. His name resounded from Rawalpindi to the banks of Sutlej and in due course of time, Nodh Singh joined the *Fyzulpuria Misal* of Nawab Kapur Singh. When Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the first time, Nodh Singh plundered his goods

¹ Latif Mohd, *History of the Punjab*, p. 337.

and became very rich and powerful. In 1747, Nodh Singh fought against the Afghans and received a serious gunshot wound on his head which did not heal and incapacitated him for life. He almost remained on bed for five years and died in 1752. It was a great blow to *Sukerchakias*. Nodh Singh left behind four sons, Charat Singh, Dal Singh, Chet Singh and Mangi Singh.

Charat Singh was born in 1721. He kept himself aloof from the Fyzulpuria *Misal* and his two brothers joined him. In 1751, he shifted his headquarters to Raja Sansi and in 1752 collected a large number of persons, organised them on plundering expeditions. He succeeded in his mission and people were afraid of him. The neighbouring Chiefs were convinced of the power of the Sikhs. He was "a brave Jat Sardar, who repeatedly distinguished himself in the early struggles with Ahmad Shah."¹ Seeing Charat Singh's strength, Milka Singh of Marliawala joined him with 20 mounted horsemen. Mohammad Yar, head of *Kialis* joined Charat Singh too with his 15 horsemen. Thus, originally a small gang, it increased to 150 horsemen. Now Charat Singh became irresistible and "forcibly took possession of some villages, united with another successful leader like himself, and formed a *Misal* of which he became the active Chief."²

Another Sardar, who joined hands with Charat Singh was Amir Singh of Gujaranwala. He belonged to the Fyzulpuria *Misal* but severed his connections with it and became a notorious robber. His expeditions extended from the banks of Jhelum to the outskirts of Delhi. He acquired a large estate at Gujaranwala and became the chiefman of the area. In 1756, he married his daughter to Charat Singh. This matrimonial alliance increased their strength much more and they jointly launched several expeditions. Eminabad was under the Mughal *Faujdar*, who was a strong headed ruler and let loose a reign of terror on his subjects. They requested Charat Singh to come to their rescue and in 1761, Charat Singh marched towards Eminabad and surrounded the fortress of the *Faujdar*, and in a matter of moments his body was cut into pieces. A huge booty fell into Charat Singh's hands. This increased his power further and Charat Singh's name now spread far and wide and it became a household word.

1 Payne C.H. *A Short History of the Sikhs*, pp. 66-67.

2 Gordon J.H. *The Sikhs*, p. 81

In 1757, both Charat Singh and Amir Singh jointly constructed a mud fort at Gujaranwala to defend themselves from outside invasions. This was not relished by the Muslim Chiefs of Lahore as it posed danger to their stability. The Governor of Lahore, Khwaja Obeid, became furious and ordered his strong force of 2000 to march towards Gujaranwala. The army was led by Bahadur Khan and Afzal Khan. Gujaranwala town was invaded and a fierce battle was fought. "The Sikhs united together and defended their property against the Muhammedans, the invading army was completely routed, and its Chiefs narrowly escaped with their lives, leaving behind their military stores and ammunition in the hands of the enemy. From that time the audacity of the Sikhs increased, and they began to organise themselves into a still more compact and formidable body under Charat Singh, who as his fame increased, established his power as the head of the *Sukerchakia misal*."¹

The liquidation of the royal forces emboldened Charat Singh and he organised series of campaigns against the Afghans. "On the appearance of Ahmad Shah Abdali with his Afghan troops in 1762, Charat Singh, conscious of his own inability to oppose the disciplined army of the Shah in the open field, and afraid of a direct conflict with the main body of the invaders, sent his family to Jammu, where he concealed all his property, but he was never quiet himself. At the head of a band of chosen men, he harassed the march of the Afghans, cut off the stragglers of their army, and plundered their baggage. The Afghans, on their side levelled to the ground the mud fort which the Sikhs were building at Gujaranwala."²

When Ahmad Shah Abdali left Punjab, Charat Singh again became active and joined hands with his brother-in-law, Gurbaksh Singh. They attacked Wazirabad with full force and captured it. Mughal officials and their men were driven out and the town was put under the charge of Gurbaksh Singh. Then, Ahemdabad was taken into possession and handed over to Dal Singh, a brave Sardar of Charat Singh.

While still at Ahemdabad, Charat Singh came to know that Nur-ud-Din, the General of Ahmad Shah Abdali had let loose a reign of terror on his non-Muslim subjects at Rohtas. He had allowed the cows to be slaughtered and with the help of his army was harassing the people. This infuriated Charat Singh who marched

1 Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 339

2 Ibid. p. 339

towards Rohtas. The town was plundered. Nur-ud-Din was defeated and badly mauled in the battlefield. Charat Singh encouraged by the victory, proceeded further towards *Dhanni area* without much resistance. Chakwal and Jalalpur were captured but were allowed to retain their positions on the payment of a huge sum of money as *Nazranas*. The Muslim power was considerably weakened. Charat Singh then subdued Sahib Khan, the Governor of Pind Dadan Khan, whose life was only spared when he agreed to pay heavy fine. Pind Dadan Khan was not left in its original form, but was handed over to his Sardars, Budh Singh and Gor Singh by Charat Singh. A fort was ordered to be built at the place for the defence of the town from any future invasions. Charat Singh did not stop here and marched further and captured Kot Sahib Khan and Raja Ka Kot. These victories swollen his head and he became most powerful of all the *Misal* Chiefs. "The successive victories won by Charat Singh, and the power and resources at his command made him an object of jealousy to the rival *misaldars*, who all looked upon him with great suspicion, and thought (not without ground) that their own positions were not safe before his vast schemes of conquest and aggrandizement. None, however, became more apprehensive than the Sardars of the *Bhangi Misal*, who had from the first entertained hostile feelings towards the rising *Sukerchakias*."¹

When in 1762, at the time of the Abdali invasion Charat Singh had retreated to the Jammu hills, he had an occasion to form links with the Raja of Jammu. Ranjit Deo, the Raja had some misunderstanding with his son Brij Raj Deo. The Raja desired to deprive Brij Raj Deo of the *Gaddi* and bestow it on his younger son. This was not tolerated by Brij Raj Deo and he did not sit idle. He sought an interview with Charat Singh and begged for his help in getting him the right to rule. He promised to pay him a large annual tribute in case he succeeded. Charat Singh readily agreed as he had an old score to settle with the ruler. He would have a chance not only to bestow Jammu *Gaddi* on its rightful successor but also to teach a lesson to Ranjit Deo. He immediately sought the help of Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh of the *Kanahiya Misal* and planned an attack on Jammu in 1774. They had collected a large force. Ranjit Deo also did not want to leave anything to chance and secured the help of Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh of *Bhangi Misal*. He was also helped and assisted with resources by auxiliaries from the hills States of

1. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 339

Chamba, Bushiar, Nurpur and Kangra. The two armies collected on the banks of river Besanti. The forces were of equal strength and several skirmishes took place. Nothing could be decided in the battlefield. In one of the fights, Charat Singh was struck by one of the matchlocks of his own men and he died instantaneously. It was a great blow to Charat Singh's forces, who were completely demoralised and withdrew from the battlefield. The next day the *Bhangi* Chief Jhanda Singh also died. "This left Ranjit Deo and his son to settle their quarrel as best as they could."¹

Charat Singh who consolidated the *Sukerchakias*, died in 1774. It was a great blow to the *Sukerchakias*. "The *Sukerchakia misal* under Charat Singh had a force of over 10,000 horses."² He succeeded to the patrimony of three ploughs and a well—representing thirty acres of land.³ Charat Singh had a great influence and power and held a considerable force and territories in the neighbourhood of Gujranwala.

"Charat Singh was a man of high aims, and far more advanced ideas than his contemporaries of the *misal*. It was he who laid the foundation of the greatness of the family. By his industry, economy and perseverance, he extended his estates and throve upon the disorder which followed on the overthrow of the Lahore Governor, Khwaja Obeid. He appeared early in the field as an enterprising leader, and soon rose from a common *Dharwi*, or highway robber to the *Sardari* of a Confederacy, and contributed materially to the strength of the Sikhs as a nation. The territory left by him on his death is computed to have yielded about three lakhs of rupees annually".⁴

Charat Singh was 45 years old when he died. He left behind two sons, Mahan Singh and Sahaj Singh and a daughter Raj Kaur. Mahan Singh was only ten years old. He was too young to shoulder the heavy responsibility left on his shoulders. It was an uphill task. His principality included Gujranwala, Eminabad, Chakwal, Jalalpur, Pindi Dadan Khan and Rohtas. His mother Mai Dessan, immediately assumed the charge of administering the territory. Mai Dessan played a remarkable part in Mahan Singh's life. "She ruled with vigour and diplomacy as Sikh ladies played an important part

1. Payne C.H., *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 67

2. Court Henry, *Sikhan De Raj Di Vithiya*, p. 64

3. Gordon J.H., *The Sikhs*, p. 87.

4. Latif Mohd *History of the Punjab*, p. 340.

in the history of these warlike families."¹ She was a shrewd and courageous woman, who ruled the *misal* with tact and ability."² She took the lead and rebuilt the Gujranwala fort which was earlier destroyed by Ahmad Shah Abdali. She was assisted in her task by both her brothers, Dal Singh and Gurbaksh Singh. Mai Dissan was an experienced, intelligent and capable woman. It is said that the army was very happy with her and she ruled with dignity and pride.

However, many prominent *Sardars* revolted against the authority of Mai Dissan. The discontented *Sardars* were confident that *Bhangi Chiefs* would help them in their efforts to overthrow Mahan Singh but they were sadly mistaken. No assistance was given to them, the revolt was crushed and the *Sardars* were punished and humiliated. The dream was shattered. Now seeing Mahan Singh's strength, the smaller *Sardars* accepted his suzerainty and offered him *nazrana*.

In 1775, Mahan Singh married Raj Kaur, daughter of Gajpat Singh of Jind. The marital relationship proved very useful and it strengthened the position of Mahan Singh. The *Rani* was popularly known as Mai Malwain. The marriage was solemnised with grandeur and gaiety it deserved.

In 1779, Mahan Singh took charge of the Government in his own hands. Immediately he attacked the territory of the *Bhangis* and took possession of Issa Khel and Mussa Khel. Then, he marched towards Kotli near Sialkot and accepted the tribute from its ruler. Returning from Kotli, Mahan Singh entered into an alliance with the *Kanahiya Chief*, Jai Singh. Shortly after this alliance, Mahan Singh became more ambitious and engaged himself in an undertaking which gained for him great celebrity as a warrior and a conqueror. At that time, Rasulnagar, situated on the bank of the Chenab, was ruled by a powerful tribe, *Chattas*, and their head was Pir Mohammad. Rasulnagar was attacked by an army of 6000, the combined forces of Jai Singh and Mahan Singh. The excuse for the battle was readily available when the *Chattas* refused to hand over to the Sikhs the famous *Zamzama* gun, left by Ahmad Shah as it was too heavy to be taken across the river Chenab. The Khalsa claimed it to be its own. The town of Rasulnagar was besieged, which continued for four months. The surrounding areas were plun-

1. Gordon, J.H. *The Sikhs*, p. 89.

2. Payne, C.H. *A short History of the Sikhs*, p. 68.

dered and not a grain was left in anybody's house. *Chattas* sought the help of the *Bhangis* but in vain. They were humbled and sought peace treaty with Mahan Singh. Mahan Singh agreed on his terms but bound himself not to humiliate *Chattas'* Chief Pir Mohammad. However, when the Chief came out of the fort unarmed, he was treacherously arrested. His sons were tied on the mouth of a cannon and were blown to pieces.

"The *Sukerchakia* victory at Rasulnagar struck a heavy blow on the waning power of the *Bhangis*, for Pir Mohammad was their nominal tributary; it also resounded far and wide among the territories of the warring confederacies. Mahan Singh's fame as a warrior spread, smaller sardars in the region began to show him deference and came with offers of allegiance."¹ The famous gun *Zamzama* fell into Mahan Singh's hands.

The fame of Mahan Singh now increased tremendously. Jammu was a rich and wealthy town. It was a safer place where many Punjab merchants had taken shelter. They had flourishing business where the effect of prevailing conditions of chaos and confusion in Punjab had no effect. The traders thrived on trade with Kashmir on the one hand and the plains of Punjab on the other. Raja Brij Raj Deo, the new Raja of Jammu, whose estate was constantly ravaged by the *Bhangis*, approached *Kanahiyas* for help. The *Kanahiyas* got an opportunity to take revenge on the *Bhangis*. The *Kanahiyas*, under Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh reached Jammu with their forces but on reaching there they deserted the Raja and joined the *Bhangis*. They did not restore any territory to the Jammu ruler by dislodging the *Bhangis*. The *Kanahiyas* invaded Jammu and the Raja agreed to pay them an annual tribute of Rs. 30,000. But later the Raja failed to fulfil his promise. The *Kanahiyas* vowed to take the money by force. The Raja made a request to Mahan Singh to come to his rescue. Although Mahan Singh had earlier exchanged turbans with the Raja of Jammu, he agreed to help the *Kanahiyas* on the condition that the booty would be shared equally among the *Kanahiyas* and the *Sukerchakias*.

Mahan Singh marched towards Jammu and reached the vicinity of the town. On the other hand the *Kanahiyas*, under the command of Haqiqat Singh proceeded through Zaffarwal but could not join Mahan Singh's forces. The Jammu Raja fled. The capital was

1 Hasrat, *Bikramjit, Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, p. 339.

left undefended. Mahan Singh entered the town, plundered it and collected a large sum of money from its residents. He looted the palace and the treasury. The palace was burnt. They laid waste the whole country and shortly afterwards a famine broke out. Haqiqat Singh demanded share in the loot which was bluntly refused by Mahan Singh, who played the double treachery. He betrayed the Raja of Jammu and also the *Kanahiyas*. Haqiqat Singh was so much disillusioned that he left for the hills where he died shortly afterwards. His spirit of revenge died with him.

The treacherous act of Mahan Singh greatly annoyed the *Kanahiyas* Chief Jai Singh who vowed in the name of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* to take a revenge on Mahan Singh. Jai Singh directed Jaimal Singh, son of Haqiqat Singh not to proceed to Gujranwala, where he was called by Mahan Singh. The *Sukarchakia* Chief was threatened with vengeance. *Kanahiyas* attacked Jandiala in 1783, and Rasulpur and Mandiala thereafter. Later, a pitched battle was fought between the *Sukarchakias* and the *Kanahiyas* near Majitha. Jai Singh's troops were routed, he was forced to flee and take refuge beyond the Beas. He made preparation on a very large scale in the Doab to wage a war against the *Sukarchakias* but Mahan Singh invited Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand of Katoch for help.

On the occasion of the festival of *Diwali*, Mahan Singh went to Amritsar to pay his respects to the holy shrine. Mahan Singh decided to meet Jai Singh but the latter scornfully rejected the offer of reconciliation. Mahan Singh, to satisfy the old man, Jai Singh Kanahayia, approached him with a tray of sweets but "the old Chief received him with marked coolness and displeasure, so much so that Mahan Singh assuming the demeanour of an inferior approached with a tray of sweetmeat in his hands, and begged to be acquainted with the cause he had given for offence professing his sense of filial obligation and attachment to Jai Singh and offering any atonement in his power. Jai Singh was stretched at length on his couch, and drawing his sheet over him called out loudly and rudely, that he desired to hear no more of the *Bhagtias* (dancing boys') conversation."¹ "This was too much to be borne in silence by so haughty and imperious a young Chief, as Mahan Singh was. He withdrew in great indignation at the rude treatment shown to him by the *Kanahiya* Chief, and resolved upon revenge, but he knew

1. Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p. 343.

that Amritsar, where the *Kanahiyas*' power reigned supreme, would be not an appropriate place for the accomplishment of his objectives. He accordingly managed to effect his escape from the sacred city, attended by a few *sawars* and having returned home in safety, sent his agents to Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, who had fled across the Sutlej after his defeat by the allied forces of the *Kanahiya* and *Ahluwalia Misal*.¹

Mahan Singh now made up his mind to strike at Jai Singh with vengeance. Having joined hands with Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katoch Chief, he marched towards Batala. They reached Achal Sahib, near Batala and were ready to strike Jai Singh and his son Gurbaksh Singh who were there along with their forces to give them a good fight. A bloody battle was fought. Many were slain on both sides. Gurbaksh Singh too was killed. This incident disheartened Jai Singh and he was broken to pieces. He immediately surrendered and ran away towards Pathankot.

The town was taken into possession by Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. It was a great victory of the joint forces of Jai Singh and Jassa Singh. This encouraged them and they were bent upon to finish the *Kanahiyas* at any cost. Another battle ensued in the hills. Sansar Chand fought for the fort of Kangra. He captured Hajipur and Mukerian, invaded Alikpur and pursued Jai Singh's forces deep into the hills. At last, peace was restored. Jai Singh surrendered Kot Kangra to Sansar Chand and the latter vacated Hajipur and Mukerian.

Jai Singh was humbled and humiliated. He did not lose his high spirit and determination. He had the burning desire in his heart to take revenge on Mahan Singh and was burning with indignation. He regrouped his forces and attacked Mahan Singh's forces at Naushera but his forces were no match for Mahan Singh's army. Jai Singh's troops were totally routed and the remaining retired to Nurpur. Jai Singh shut himself inside the house.

Sada Kaur continued to manage the affairs of her estate at Batala. She nourished her only daughter Mehtab Kaur as best as she could. In due course of time, she proposed the betrothal of her daughter to Ranjit Singh, the young son of Mahan Singh, knowing full well that this union would strengthen the hands of friendship between the two most powerful *Misals*, namely *Kanahiyas*

1. Prinsep, Henry T. *The Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, pp. 34-35.

and *Sukerchakias*. She herself dreamt of obtaining the *Sardari* of *Kanahiyas Misal* after the death of her father-in-law.

Mahan Singh readily agreed to the proposal and the betrothal ceremony of Ranjit Singh took place in 1785. It was a grand gala occasion. Sweets were distributed and there were rejoicings all round. It was a happy union of two families. In 1786, the marriage was performed. The matrimonial alliance proved very lucky for the country as peace was restored between the two warring factions. This led to Ranjit Singh's rise to power in Punjab and establishment of the Sikh empire. The combined forces of Jai Singh Kanahayia, Mahan Singh and Sansar Chand Katoch jointly marched towards Batala and tried to put the *Kanahiyas* in charge of the estate, but Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was so well entrenched that he could not be dislodged from his stronghold. The town was besieged by the marching army, but Jassa Singh Ramgarhia foiled their attempt to capture the town.

Mahan Singh was now free to settle the things in order. He settled scores with his old adversaries. Gujar Singh Bhangi had died in 1788. A dispute arose between his two sons, Sahib Singh and Fateh Singh for the possessions of their late father. Mahan Singh supported the younger one, Fateh Singh, as a result of which hostilities broke out between Mahan Singh and Sahib Singh. No regard was paid to their relationship and a recourse to arms was inevitable. Bitterness continued and Mahan Singh asserting his own authority over Gujarat demanded tribute from Sahib Singh which was of course refused. Thus, in 1792, a fierce battle was fought at Sodhra to settle the dispute through arms. A fortress was besieged in which Sahib Singh had shut himself. The siege continued for three months. Mahan Singh fell seriously ill and was moved to Gujranwala, where he died in 1792. And thus ended the fateful career of a man, who consolidated his position by virtue of his ability, power and strength which enabled his son, Ranjit Singh to build up a Sikh empire in Punjab.

"Mahan Singh was brave, enterprising and prudent beyond his years, and the age in which he lived highly favoured his ambitious schemes. So distracted was the state of the country, so small the influence of the *Gurumata*, or national Sikh assembly, and so rife was intrigue among the ambitious Chiefs, that everything favoured the adventurous spirit and ambitious designs of the young Mahan Singh. Such being the case, it may well be surmised that he

would not allow so favourable an opportunity to slip by unprofitable to himself. His early feats in arms had acquired for him so great a reputation that many influential independent sardars joined under his banner. His rapid successes gave him an ascendancy over all the Sikh Chiefs. His military genius, undaunted courage, stern temper and rigid observance of the rules of delicacy and honour, at times involved him in serious trouble but he honourably acquitted himself on all such occasions. At an early age, he shook off the trammels of his mother's guardianship, to pave the way for his own greatness."¹

Mahan Singh was hardly 27, when he died. He was valiant, ambitious and courageous warrior who was able to establish the supremacy of *Sukerchakia Misal* over all the other *Misals*. He was the first head of *Misal* who thought of running the administration on sound lines. A *Dewan* was appointed who looked after the day-to-day affairs of the estate. He was the superior authority who controlled the affairs from the top. He had also built up a small force of 2500 horses. He had no equal in the *Sukerchakia Misal*. All conquests were made by him and tributes were taken in his name who was free to do with it what pleased him. Thus, he sowed the seeds which later on paved the way for the establishment of a State.

This was the legacy which Ranjit Singh inherited : a sizeable estate, well managed, a good number of horsemen and matchlock to fight against the adversaries and of course a boundless ambition. With this legacy Ranjit Singh was able to establish a true secular State in north India.

1 Latif Mohd. *History of the Punjab*, p 344 45

FOURTEEN

Shah Zaman's Invasions

Punjab presented a picture of chaos and anarchy when Ranjit Singh took reins of *Sukerchakia Misal*. The edifice of Ahmad Shah Abadali's empire in India had crumbled. Afghanistan was dismembered. Peshawar and Kashmir though under the suzerainty of Aghanistan, had attained *de facto* independence. Barakzais were the masters of these places. Attock was ruled by Wazirkhels and Jhang lay at the feet of Sials. Pathans were ruling over Kasur. Multan had thrown the Afghan yoke and Nawab Muzaffar Khan had taken its charge.

Both Punjab and Sind were under Afghan rule since 1757 after Ahmad Shah Abdali was granted suzerainty over these two provinces. They were confronted with the rising power of the Sikhs in Punjab. Taimur Khan, a local Governor was able to turn away the Sikhs from Amritsar. He razed to the ground the fort of Ram Rauni. But this state of affairs did not last long and the Sikh *Misals* joined hands and defeated Taimur Shah and his Chief Minister Jalal Khan. The Afghans were forced to retreat and Lahore was occupied by the Sikhs in 1758. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia proclaimed Sikh's sovereignty and became its head. He struck coins to commemorate his victory.

When Ahmad Shah Abdali was engaged in his campaign against the Marathas at Panipat in 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia plundered Sirhind and Dialpur, seized some places in Ferozepur district and took under his possession Jagraon and Kot Isa Khan on the other bank of the Sutlej. He captured Hoshiarpur and Naraingarh in Ambala and levied tribute from the Chief of Kapurthala. He then marched towards Jhang. Sial Chief offered stout resistance. When Ahmad Shah left in February 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia again attacked Sirhind and extended his territory as far as Tarn Taran. He crossed the Beas and captured Sultanpur. In February 1762, Ahmad

Shah again appeared and a fierce battle took place at Barnala. It is called *Gullughara*, a great holocaust. Jassa Singh fled to Kangra hills after the Sikh forces were totally routed.

After the departure of Ahmad Shah, Jassa Singh joined hands with *Bhngis*, *Kanahiyas* and *Ramgarhias* and sacked Kasur by defeating Alif Khari. The territory was handed over to *Bhngis* who retained hold over it till 1774. Then, they made an expedition to Sirhind. It was razed to the ground, and the Afghan Governor, Zen Khan was killed. This victory was of great significance for the Sikhs who were now masters of the entire area around Sirhind. Jassa Singh hastily paid a visit to Amritsar to pay his respects at *Hari Mandir*. He made amends and restored it to its original shape as it was earlier defiled by Ahmad Shah by slaughtering cows in its precincts.

He also constructed the Ahluwalia bazar—the commercial centre. Jassa Singh had immense wealth and he pursued a liberal policy in administration.

Ahmad Shah died in June 1773. After his death, Afghan power declined in Punjab. Taimur Shah ascended the throne at Kabul. By then, the *Misals* had established themselves in Punjab. They had under their control the area as far as Saharanpur in the East, Attock in the West, Kangra and Jammu in the North and Multan in South. Efforts were made by the Afghan ruler to dislodge the Sikhs from their citadels. Taimur Shah attacked Multan in 1779 and defeated the *Bhngis*. The *Bhangi Sardars*, Lehna Singh and Sobha Singh who were driven out of Lahore in 1767 by the Abdali, soon reoccupied it. They remained in power at Lahore till 1793—the year when Shah Zaman succeeded to the throne of Kabul.

Another menace to the Sikhs was the Pathan ruler of Kasur who was loyal to Kabul. During the Abdali attacks, he took side with him and plundered the Sikh territory. Now again assistance was promised to Shah by the Kasur ruler, Nizam-ud-Din Khan.

The first attempt to annex Punjab was made by Shah Zaman in 1793. He came upto Hassan Abdal from where he sent an army of 7000 strong cavalry under Ahmad Shah Shahnachi but the Sikhs completely routed them. It was a great setback for Shah Zaman but again in 1795, he reorganised his forces, attacked and captured Hassan Abdal, snatched Rohtas from *Sukerchakias* whose leader was Ranjit Singh, who suffered at Shah Zaman's hand but did not lose courage. However, the Shah had to be back in Kabul as an invasion was apprehended on his own country from the west. After he went back, Ranjit dislodged the Afghans from Rohtas.

Shah Zaman could not sit idle. In 1796 he moved, crossed the Indus for the third time and dreamt of capturing Delhi. His ambition knew no bounds. By now he had collected a 3000 strong Afghan army. He was confident that a large number of Indians would join him. Nawab of Kasur had already assured him help. Sahib Singh of Patiala betrayed his countrymen and declared his intentions of helping Shah Zaman. He had the family traditions of loyalty to all the invaders who attacked India. Shah Zaman was also assured help by the Rohillas, Wazir of Oudh and the Tipu Sultan of Mysore. The Shah was bent upon to finish the infidels.

The news of Shah Zaman's invasion spread like wild fire. Chicken-hearted people started fleeing to the hills for safety. Heads of *Misals*, though bound to give protection to the people as they were collecting *Rakhi tax* from them, were the first to leave the people in lurch. In December, Shah Zaman occupied the territory upto Jhelum. When he reached Gujarat, Sahib Singh Bhangi became nervous and left the place. He could not offer any resistance.

Next was the territory of Ranjit Singh. He was alert and raised an army of 5000 horsemen. But they were inadequately armed with only spears and muskets. The Afghans were equipped with heavy artillery. Ranjit Singh decided to give a stiff united fight against the invaders. He came to Amritsar. A congregation of *Sarbat Khalsa* was called and many Sikh *Sardars* answered the call. A gathering was held in which almost the unanimous opinion prevailed that Sikhs should flee to the hills and Shah Zaman's army should be allowed to enter the territory and afterwards his army should be harassed. Sahib Singh Bhangi mooted out the idea and he was supported by many. Most of the Sikh *Sardars* had already sent their families to safer places.

However, Sada Kaur thought otherwise and exhorted the Sikhs to fight to the last. She persuaded Ranjit Singh to be bold enough to face the Afghan army and offer stiff resistance. Ranjit Singh agreed and his bold stand made everybody to follow suit. Forces were reorganised under the command of Ranjit Singh and they marched towards Lahore. They were able to give Afghans a crushing defeat in several villages and ultimately surrounded the city of Lahore. Sorties were made at night in which they would kill a few Afghan soldiers and then leave the city in the thick of darkness. Following this tactics they were able to dislodge the Afghans at several places.

In January 1797, Shah Zaman suddenly left for Afghanistan. An intelligence report was received that Zaman's brother, Mahmud, had revolted. Zaman left Lahore under the charge of *Shahanchi*

Shah who with considerable force under his command attacked the Sikhs. The Sikhs, however, followed the Shah upto Jhelum and snatched many goods from him. The Sikhs returned and in the way were attacked by the troops of Shahanchi Khan near Ram Nagar. The Sikhs routed his army. It was the first major achievement of Ranjit Singh. He became the hero of the land of five rivers and his reputation spread far and wide.

The Afghans were humiliated and a fire of revenge burnt in their hearts. Shah Zaman once again attacked in October, 1798. People again took refuge in the hills. The same old story was repeated. Cowards fled and all the big towns wore a deserted appearance. The cities looked like graveyards. Shah Zaman issued a proclamation to his countrymen and assured them that they would be allowed to plunder India as much as they desired. Several thousand joined his ranks. Zaman's troops were commanded by the sons of the defeated general Shahanchi Khan who were keen to avenge the crushing defeat of their father. Their blood was boiling and with the fire of revenge burning in their hearts they marched forward. Sahib Singh Bhangi left Gujarat. The Afghans plundered the town. Even Muslims were not spared. Ranjit Singh left Gujranwala and came to Amritsar and as before he called the congregation of *Sarbat Khalsa*. Very few Sikhs were left at Amritsar even to protect the holy shrine. Many suggested fleeing to the hills. Sada Kaur aroused their sense of national honour and reminded the *Sardars* of their duty towards the people who had all along been paying them *Rakhi* tax. She threatened the *Sardars* that if they left the place, she herself would take command of the forces who were willing to follow her. Courageous and daring as she was, she appealed to the Sikhs at large not to leave the holy city at the mercy of the invaders who had earlier desecrated the sacred tank. Their national honour, their pride and their liberty were at stake. Ranjit Singh declared his intentions to support her. Dal Singh, Ranjit's uncle supported Ranjit Singh and Sada Kaur and told everybody assembled that as a soldier an Afghan was no match to a Sikh. They would be given befitting reply and by the grace of *Sat Guru*, Sikhs would be successful. Victory was in the hands of God but fight they must; otherwise, the posterity would curse them. The *Sardars* hanged their heads in shame for a while, and then gathered courage and with one voice said: "We will fight till the end to save the honour of our motherland." Ranjit Singh was chosen the leader. It was the final call of 'do or die' given to the Sikhs and amidst the shouts of *Sat-Sri-Akal*, the Sikhs decided to meet the Afghan challenge.

The Afghans started plundering the towns and villages as they had vowed and declared openly that they would exterminate the Sikhs; but in the process, the Muslims suffered the most as the Hindus and Sikhs had already left their hearths and homes to safer places. The Muslims thought that they would not be touched but their hopes were belied and their provisions were forcibly taken away by the Afghans.

Shah Zaman sought the help of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra and the Jammu Raja and exhorted them not to give any food and shelter to the Sikhs who had taken refuge in the hills. They agreed to his request as they were afraid of their territories being occupied by the Afghans. The Sikhs were surrounded from all sides and they had to fight a grim battle. The Afghans occupied Lahore on November 27, 1798. The Shah entered the city triumphantly, but strict orders were issued by him to his troops not to plunder the town so that the Muslims were not harmed. He tried to create a barrier between various communities and instigated the Muslim population to welcome him, he being their co-religionist. He succeeded in his nefarious plan.

Nizam-ud-Din Khan of Kasur desired that Afghan power should be established in Punjab and he should be made the *Subedar* of Lahore. He was ambitious and welcomed the Shah. Sansar Chand of Kangra too assured him help and in return asked for the retention of his territory. The Sikhs too were not united; they were still divided and some of the *Sardars* were jealous of the rising power of Ranjit Singh. Sahib Singh of Patiala declared his loyalty to the Shah as he did earlier to Ahmad Shah Abdali. The mutual bickerings and ill-will created a precarious situation for the Punjabis and it was Ranjit Singh, a daring lad of 18 years, who could courageously fight the Shah.

Shah planned to attack Amritsar and ordered his troops to march. Ranjit Singh collected his men and faced the Shah's forces about 8 Km from Amritsar. It was a well-matched encounter but at last the Afghans were forced to retire. They were humiliated and fled towards Lahore. Ranjit Singh pursued them and surrounded Lahore. Afghan supply lines were cut. The crops were burnt and other provisions plundered so that they did not fall into Afghans' hands. The Afghans never expected such a crushing defeat at the hands of the Sikhs, and tried to reorganise their forces. Nizam-ud-Din Khan of Kasur attacked the Sikhs near Shahdara on the banks of Ravi but his forces were no match to the Sikhs. Many were slain and many fled. Here, too, the Muslims suffered the most. The

retreating Afghans and Khan's forces plundered the town which antagonized the local people.

The Afghans struggled hard to dislodge the Sikhs but in vain. The Sikhs' cordon was so strong that they made impossible for the Afghans to break it and proceed towards Delhi. Ranjit Singh became a terror for them. Sikh soldiers made sorties at night and the Afghans were so afraid of them that they shut themselves into their tents.

The Shah's tactics did not succeed and he became so frustrated that he stopped talking of liquidating the Sikhs. He now adopted a new strategy and sent messages to the Sikh *Sardars* to come to terms with him. If they would compromise their estates would not be disturbed. Some of the *Sardars* fell to his ploy and sent their men to Lahore to meet the Shah. The Shah was overwhelmed with joy and offered several other baits to these *Sardars*. They were told that they could continue to live and pursue their vocations in peace. The territory belonged to them. He would be only their benefactor. It is said that Ranjit Singh too sent his emissary to negotiate with the Shah. The Sikhs' unity was broken into pieces and their internal dissensions encouraged the Shah. But at this very moment Sahib Singh Bedi aroused the national fervour of the *Sardars*, and he openly condemned the *Sardars* who were negotiating their national honour. He pleaded with them not to fall prey to the designs of foreign invaders who had no love for this country and were simply interested in loot and plunder. The Gurus made sacrifices for the sake of *Dharma* and these should not go waste because of the vested interests of the few. It was betrayal of the *Panth* and everybody must rise to the occasion otherwise posterity would not forgive them. History would be different if they enter into a treaty with the Shah whose forefathers had desecrated the holy shrine. Better sense prevailed and the *Sardars* withdrew their men negotiating peace.

The Shah was disappointed and swore by the holy *Quran* that he would exterminate the Sikhs once for all. But this was a cry in wilderness. His soldiers were so timid and were so afraid of the Sikhs that they dared not attack them.

But that time, Zaman's brother Mahmud had revolted and his throne at Kabul was in danger. More trouble was apprehended and the Shah hastened back to Kabul. Moreover, the Shah was unable to pay his troops who refused to fight.

The Shah returned home declaring that after settling the family dispute he would again attack India and be its conqueror.

The moment the Shah left, Ranjit Singh pursued his forces and caught them unaware near Gujranwala. They were chased

further up to Jhelum. Many Afghans were put to death, their war equipment was taken into possession and they were made to run for their lives. Ranjit Singh did not halt there but marched further upto the Indus, annihilating the Afghan forces. Shah Zaman was overthrown by his brother and was blinded. He became a helpless creature and 12 years later came to Punjab to seek refuge in Ranjit Singh's *darbar*, who was now the ruler of the land. Destiny wished it like that.

"The character of Ranjit Singh," says Cunningham, "seems to have impressed itself, not only on other Sikh leaders, but also on the Durrani Shah. He coveted Lahore, which was associated in the minds of men with the passion of power, and as the king was unable to cross his heavy artillery over the flooded Jhelum, he made it known to the aspiring Chief that their transmission would be an acceptable service. As many pieces of cannon as could be readily extricated were sent after the Shah, and Ranjit Singh procured what he wanted, a royal investiture of the capital of Punjab."¹ However, "while crossing the Jhelum in flood," says Griffen, "the Afghan monarch lost twelve of his guns, and not being able to wait for the extrication, he promised Ranjit Singh, then master of that part of the country, the grant of the city and district of Lahore with the Title of *Raja*, if he would send them to him. This task Ranjit Singh readily undertook and partly performed, rescuing eight guns and sending them to Peshawar; and Zaman Shah kept his promise. It was but a barren grant, and the Sikh Chief was left to obtain possession as he best could."²

These conclusions have no relevance which are neither feasible nor supported by facts. Zaman Shah did lose his guns in the Jhelum river while crossing it; even Ranjit Singh might have taken them out too but there is no evidence to prove that they were sent to the Shah. Nor is there any concrete proof that Ranjit Singh had made any overture to the Afghan king prior to his occupation of Lahore, although it is said that the Shah tried to win over Ranjit Singh by sending him a *khillat*. There is also no truth in the report that Ranjit Singh sent one of his men to pay homage to the Shah along with some of the *Sardars* when the Shah occupied Lahore. No friendly contacts were established between the two. On the other hand, Ranjit Singh treated the Shah's demands for submission with contempt and challenged him that he would acquire the capital with

1 Cunningham, J.D. *History of the Sikhs*, p. 108

2 Griffen, Lepel, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 161

sword. Ranjit Singh challenged the Shah for a hand to hand fight. When the Shah was holding his court in *Musumum Burj* Ranjit Singh appeared there surreptitiously and challenged the Shah: "O grandson of Abdali, come down and measure swords with the grandson of Charat Singh."¹

Ultimately, the Shah's withdrawal gave a choice to the Sikhs to "obliterate all semblance of Afghan authority between the Ravi and Jhelum. Ranjit Singh combined with Sahib Singh of Gujarat and Milkha Singh Pindiwala and a large Sikh force, swelled by the Sikhs who had come out of their hiding, fell upon the Afghan garrison while Shah Zaman was still in the vicinity of the Khyber Pass. The Afghan forces fled towards the north after having been routed by the Sikhs leaving behind at Gujarat their dead including the Afghan Deputy."

Thus, although guns were dug and returned to the Shah by Ranjit Singh he could never appoint Ranjit Singh as a Governor of Lahore, in lieu of this favour. A document dated April 1800 says: "Ranjit Singh has lately delivered to Zaman Shah's *vakil* 15 pieces of cannon which the Durrani Prince lost last year in the retreat."²

1. Suri, Sohan Lal, *Umdat-ut-Twarikh II*, p. 39.

2. Hasrat, Bikramjit, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, p. 39.

FIFTEEN

The Sikh Empire

Lahore was the most important and biggest city of Punjab. After Amritsar, it was next in importance to the Sikhs, as it was not only the capital of the province but also the birth-place of the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Ram Das. It was the central place from where the entire province could be ruled. Its capture would have certainly meant increase in Ranjit Singh's strength and would have made him the ruler of the land of five rivers. It would also have invested him with the semblance of a title to the rest of Punjab. Ranjit Singh turned his eyes towards Lahore.

Lahore at that time was ruled by *Bhangi Sardars*. It was captured earlier by them and remained under their control till it was reoccupied by Shah Zaman in 1797. Shah Zaman had to leave for Afghanistan and the *Bhangi Sardars* Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh who had fled were back in their possession. They had no talent and ability to rule. These incapable *Sardars* did not take any interest in the welfare of the people and were inept and imbecile. They had no control over the people. They were "unscrupulous, drunken, profligate and tyrannical."

The Muslims too had a considerable influence in the town. Mian Ashak Mohammad and Mian Mukkam Din were very powerful and exercised a lot of hold on the people. They were called the *Chaudharies* and were often consulted in most of the affairs of the city. Mian Ashak Mohammad's daughter was married to Badar-ud-Din. He was also a very influential man. Due to some unknown reason, he had some dispute with the *Khatris* of the town. They quarrelled and the *Khatris* reported the matter to Chet Singh. It was said that Badar-ud-Din had secret links with Shah Zaman of Afghans and was in correspondence with him. Some forged papers were also reported to have been shown to Chet Singh which

corroborated the charge. Chet Singh was convinced of the allegation and he arrested Badar-ud-Din and imprisoned him.

A wave of resentment followed the arrest among the supporters of Badar-ud-Din; and Mian Ashak Mohammad and Mukkam Din were awfully distressed and perturbed. They formed a deputation of some leading *Chaudharies* including Kukka and Ashraff Khan, waited upon Chet Singh and pleaded on behalf of Badar-ud-Din. They desired his release but they failed even to get a hearing and were not allowed to see the *Sardar*. The *Chaudharies* were humiliated and were made to lick the ground. They returned disappointed and incensed at the haughty attitude adopted by the *Sardar*. They swore vengeance against Chet Singh and his supporters, the *Khatris* who were the main source of trouble.

By this time the people of the country had become aware of the rising strength of Ranjit Singh, the rising star on the horizon. He was the most popular leader of Punjab and was already yearning to enter Lahore. In the words of Resident Collins: "At present this Chief is regarded throughout Hindustan as the protector of the Sikh nation, it being generally believed that were it not for the fortitude and excellent conduct of Ranjit Singh, the whole of Punjab would have become a desert waste since it is the boast of these northern savages (the Afghans) that the grass never grows where their horses have once trodden."¹

The people of Lahore being extremely oppressed, raised their voices of wailing to the skies and were looking towards their liberator. Nawab Nizam-ud-Din of Kasur had also an eye on Lahore and he sent his emissaries to the *Chaudharies* of Lahore seeking their help in case he attacked Lahore but his offer was rejected and the Muslims joined the Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore in making an appeal to Ranjit Singh to free them from the tyrannical rule.

A petition was written and was signed by Mian Ashak Mohammad, Mian Mukkam Din, Mohammad Tahir, Mohammad Bakar, Hakim Rai and Bhai Gurbaksh Singh. It was addressed to Ranjit Singh and read: "We are being oppressed. There is no rule of law. The people are ill treated. The *Sardars* are drunkards and do not take interest in the welfare of the people. The few troops are insufficient for the defence of the town. The suburbs of the town have been completely devastated. The houses have been burnt and property looted. The city presents a deserted look. Many people

1. Collins S C., June 24, 1800.

have fled to safer places. The life and honour of the people are not safe and the *Sardars* are habitually carousing and are plundering the residents for their own personal ends."

Ranjit Singh was invited to liberate Lahore. He was told that his mere presence in the town would create terror and the rest of the things would be done by the citizens themselves in achieving their objective. A special messenger was sent to Ranjit Singh to deliver the petition.

Ranjit Singh was at Rasulnagar when the citizens of Lahore approached him with the request. Ranjit Singh patiently listened to the pathetic tale of the residents of Lahore, but remained non-committal. He was shrewd enough to judge the whole situation. He deputed his confidant, Abdul Rehman to Lahore to start negotiations with the people of Lahore headed by their leaders who had sent the representation. Ranjit Singh went to Amritsar on the plea of taking a dip in the holy tank. From Amritsar, Ranjit Singh proceeded to Batala to consult his mother-in-law, Rani Sada Kaur. Abdul Rehman met Ranjit Singh at Batala and informed him that the people of Lahore were really tired of the misrule of *Bhangi* leaders and wanted Ranjit Singh to liberate them. He further informed Ranjit Singh that the *Sardars* were busy with wine and women and he would meet with nominal resistance. The time to strike had come. Sada Kaur advised him not to lose any time. Ranjit Singh mobilised a 25,000 strong army and marched towards Lahore on July 6, 1799.

The time for any major campaign was most inopportune. The plains were burning with scorching heat and the *loo* pierced into the veins. Rainy season was about to set in and in case the campaign was a prolonged one, the plains would look like a big lake. The roads would become inaccessible. But Ranjit Singh decided to proceed and took the *Sardars* by surprise. Ranjit Singh was received at the Shalimar Gardens by the petitioners who promised to open the gates of the city as and when required.

It was the last day of the Muslim festival of *Muharram* when a big procession was to be taken out in the town in the memory of the two grandsons of Prophet Mohammad who were martyred in the battlefield without having a drop of water. The procession started with the people beating their breasts with hands and chains and chanting, Hassan! Hussain! Hassan! Hussain! The procession passed through the main streets of the town. They carried with them the effigies of the martyrs' tombs for burying them with reverence. Although, the occasion was celebrated only by the *Shia* section of the Muslims, yet it was watched by several hundred people of all

religions. It was expected that the *Bhangi Sardars* would also participate in the festival and mourn with their *Shia* brethren. By the time the procession was over, Ranjit Singh had already reached the outskirts of the town.

Early next morning on July 7, 1799, at the time of sunrise, Ranjit Singh's men had taken their positions. Guns glistened and the bugles were sounded. Rani Sada Kaur stood outside the Delhi Gate and Ranjit proceeded towards Anarkali. Ranjit Singh rode along the walls of the city and got the wall mined. A breach was blown. It created panic and confusion. Mukkam Din, who was one of the signatories to the petition made a proclamation with the beat of the drum that the administration of the town had been taken over by him and he was now the head. He ordered all the city gates to be opened. Ranjit Singh entered the city with his troops through the Lahori Gate. Sada Kaur with a detachment of cavalry entered through Delhi Gate. Before the *Bhangi Sardars* had any inkling of it, a part of the citadel was occupied without any resistance. The news spread and the two *Bhangi Sardars* Mohar Singh and Sahib Singh left the town and sought shelter at some safer place. Only Chet Singh was left either to fight, defend the town or to flee as he liked. Chet Singh shut himself in Hazuri Bagh. Ranjit Singh camped in Wazir Khan's *Baradari*. Chet Singh had only 500 men with him who obviously could not offer any resistance. Ranjit Singh's cavalry surrounded Hazuri Bagh, but after some desultory firing, the fort was captured and Chet Singh was given permission to leave it along with his family. Orders were issued to the army not to plunder the town or molest women. Whosoever disobeyed these orders would be given death penalty.

Ranjit Singh was well entrenched in the town now. Immediately after taking possession of the town, he paid a visit to Badshahi mosque, built by Emperor Aurangzeb. This gesture increased his prestige and his status was raised in the eyes of the people. He won the hearts of the subjects, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike. It was July 7, 1799 when victorious Ranjit Singh entered Lahore. Guns fired the royal salute and "trumpets of happiness were blown and kettle drums of victory beaten in every direction."¹

The occupation of Lahore by Ranjit Singh is a landmark in the history of the Sikhs. It wiped out the remnants of the powerful *Bhangi Misal* and created panic in the minds of other *Sardars*. Ranjit Singh got the historic capital which paved the way for

1. Sohan Lal. *Udmat-ut-Twarikh*, Daftar II, p. 43.

the sovereign Sikh State in the land of five rivers.

By this time, Shah Zaman was back in Afghanistan, but he still nourished the idea of capturing India. His heart throbbed with the very idea of laying Hindustan under his feet, but his dream remained unfulfilled because Ranjit Singh stood like a rock between Shah Zaman and the throne of Delhi. Ranjit Singh's power and prestige had increased tremendously by now and he had become a force to be reckoned with. Shah Zaman sent Ranjit Singh feelers along with presents of horses of good breed and *Khillats*. Ranjit Singh reciprocated but forgot that once the Shah was his arch adversary.

The jealousy of the leading *Sardars* surfaced with increase in Ranjit Singh's fame. Shah Zaman no longer posed any threat. Earlier, the Sikh Chiefs joined hands and collaborated to meet the Afghan menace. The bonds of unity were cut into pieces now and the potential Sikh Chiefs Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujarat, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Jodh Singh of Wazirabad and Gulab Singh Bhangi of Amritsar joined hands to wrest Lahore from Ranjit Singh. They sought the help of Nizam-ud-Din of Kasur, who was an aspirant to the *Subedari* of Lahore. They combined their forces and early in 1800 marched towards Lahore. They camped at Bhasin, about 16 kilometres from Lahore where Ranjit Singh faced them with his troops reinforced by the *Kanahiyas*. The attackers lacked unity and could not launch a combined onslaught. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia fell ill at the last moment and could not join the combined forces. Gulab Singh Bhangi spent his time in enjoying wine and women and was incapable of taking any action. The forces faced each other without firing a shot for two months. Gulab Singh Bhangi breathed his last while drinking excessively. The presence of Nawab of Kasur created suspicion in the minds of the forces and the allies broke away without taking any action. They started dispersing as they were demoralised and lost all hopes of conquering Lahore of which Ranjit Singh was the ruler now. Meanwhile, Rani Sada Kaur with a detachment of *Kanahiyas* routed the *Ramgarhias* in a lightening action at Batala. These *Misal Sardars* were unable to dislodge Ranjit Singh from his citadel.

Ranjit Singh hastened back to Lahore triumphantly. He was given a royal reception by the citizens. Flowers were showered on him and he was taken in a procession. However, Ranjit Singh had to incur a lot of expenditure on the battle without action. His army remained inactive but he had to pay them. His treasure was almost empty but once again luck favoured him. He had planned to take a loan from the town's money-lenders but suddenly he got a chest

containing 20,000 gold *mohars* from an old ruin of *Budhu-Ka-Ava*, outside the walls of Lahore, which replenished his treasury.

Ranjit Singh's expansionist designs now knew no bounds. He marched on to Jammu. On the way he annexed Narowal and Verowal. *Nazrana* worth Rs. 8000 was presented to him. Then the fort of Jassowal was attacked and seized. His forces marched further and came 6 km. away from Jammu. The Raja of Jammu had neither any intention nor was capable of fighting. He along with his courtiers came and presented Ranjit Singh elephants worth Rs. 20,000. Ranjit Singh presented him a *Khillat* too. Now Ranjit Singh marched towards Sialkot, accepted *Nazrana* and captured Dilawargarh. On the way he accepted *Nazranas* from several petty chiefs and returned to Lahore.

Bhangi Sardars nourished a revengeful spirit in their hearts, after losing Lahore. They were intriguing to drive out Ranjit Singh from his citadel. By that time Ranjit Singh had fortified Lahore further to meet any eventuality. The forces stationed at Gujranwala were also recalled to Lahore. Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujarat got the opportunity, joined hands with Dal Singh of Akalgarh and made preparations to attack Gujranwala. Ranjit Singh's father, Charat Singh had bestowed a *Jagir* of Akalgarh to Dal Singh. Ranjit Singh was informed of the conspiracy and in a spate of anger, he attacked Gujarat with his 20,000 strong army and 20 guns. Sahib Singh closed the gates of the fort and started firing on Ranjit Singh's army from the ramparts of the fort. Ranjit Singh's artillery fired back. Sahib Singh Bhangi could not face the strong army of Ranjit Singh and sent his emissaries to Sahib Singh Bedi to mediate a compromise with Ranjit Singh. A treaty was made and the city was saved from devastation.

Ranjit Singh marched towards Akalgarh. Dal Singh was arrested and imprisoned in the Lahore fort but later on he was released at the instance of Sodhi Kesra Singh but was reprimanded for betrayal. Dal Singh apologised and Ranjit Singh restored him his estate. Soon afterwards Dal Singh died. Ranjit Singh personally went to Akalgarh for offering condolence and bestowed *Jagir* on his widow after annexing Akalgarh.

However, the open rift between Sahib Singh Bhangi and Ranjit Singh and some of the other *Sardars* invited interference from other powers. Shah Zaman of Afghanistan did not remain inactive and sent feelers to various *Sardars*. Ranjit Singh was told that some of the *Sardars* had openly promised support to the Afghan ruler. They wanted to let down Ranjit Singh and put him in trouble at any

cost. They were even prepared to accept the foreign yoke in order to teach Ranjit Singh a lesson. However, Ranjit Singh made a diplomatic move and accepted, gracefully, the gifts sent by the Afghan ruler and in turn sent valuable gifts to him. This mutual trust and faith soothed the pent-up feelings and when the *Sardars* came to know of this, they became disheartened. They had lost the game. The Shah's men did not negotiate with them at all and returned to their capital. It was a diplomatic victory of Ranjit Singh. In the meanwhile, the British Government was also much perturbed. Their concern was the rising power of Ranjit Singh who could pose danger to them one day. In April 1800, the Governor General made up his mind to show Ranjit Singh his place and counteract Shah's influence on Ranjit Singh. He issued instructions that Mir Yusuf Ali be sent to Lahore to hold negotiations with Ranjit Singh and he should impress upon the young ruler that it would be detrimental to enter into any treaty with the Shah and Shah's proposals, if any, could not be accepted. Ranjit Singh should have no link with the Shah.

Yusaf Ali called on Rani Sada Kaur at Amritsar. Ranjit Singh was sent for. The city was in the hands of the *Bhangis* and Ranjit Singh's life could also be threatened. Ranjit Singh had to take a chance as he had a great desire to apprise himself of the feelings of the Britishers on the subject of dealing with the Afghans.

This historic meeting was held at the residence of Rani Sada Kaur on October 22, 1800. Present in the meeting were Ranjit Singh, Rani Sada Kaur, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Mir Ram Dayal. Yusaf Ali gave a long sermon on the treachery of the Afghans and how Abdali was cruel to the Sikhs; how he did not spare even the holy places of worship of the Sikhs including the holy shrine at Amritsar. The Afghans could never be faithful; treachery was in their blood. Ranjit Singh, a great diplomat as he was, remained silent throughout and listened to the sermon patiently without even winking his eyes. Finally he broke the silence by retorting that the Afghans could not be relied upon as they never adhere to their promises and he had no faith in the Durrani. However, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia did not agree with Ranjit Singh and felt that the Shah seemed to be sincere in his efforts to remain friendly with Ranjit Singh and that he had already sent valuable gifts to him. If he had any evil intention, he would not have sent any emissary to Lahore. Ranjit Singh was advised to hold the hand of friendship raised by the Shah. The meeting remained indecisive. Ranjit Singh invited Yusaf Ali to Lahore.

Yusaf Ali had no alternative but to visit Lahore immediately.

He met Ranjit Singh and once again expressed the fears of the British Government, that Ranjit Singh was trying to be friendly with the Afghans and it could pose a danger to the British Government. Ranjit Singh again listened to Yusuf Ali patiently and did not give him any reply. He thought it proper only to send a communication to the British Government, stating that he had fought the Afghans during their last invasion of Punjab with full vigour and strength; he had challenged Shah Zaman personally for a hand to hand fight and the Afghans were forced to leave Lahore. Shah hurried back to Kabul leaving his cannons while crossing the Jhelum river. This explanation pacified the British Government for the time being.

Ranjit Singh was now considered a great force. His reputation spread far and wide. Many youngmen, sons of the chieftains offered their services to Ranjit Singh in the army. Many scholars and physicians sought services under him. Poets, artists and artisans begged for royal patronage. Ranjit Singh held regular *darbars* and received visitors. He appointed Mir Ram Dayal to look after the day-to-day affairs of the State. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia guided him on army matters.

During the same period the *darbar* attracted the *Fakir* brothers who held high offices under Ranjit Singh. *Fakir* Aziz-ud-Din was the most prominent among them. He came along with his father, Ghulam Mohiuddin, when he was summoned for treatment of the *Maharaja* for an eye ailment. Then came Nur-ud-Din and last of all Imam-ud-Din. The family originally belonged to Arabia and their elder *Fakir* Jalal-ud-Din was a holyman of religious disposition. It was he who had converted Halaku Khan of Bokhara to Islam, married one of his daughters and travelled with her to Punjab, where he finally settled down. From Jalal-ud-Din's residence in Bokhara the family acquired the name of Bokhari but since Ranjit Singh's time that name had yielded place to the title of *Fakir*. The title was first assumed by Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din by popular acclaim because of his piety and large-heartedness but it was Aziz-ud-Din who was given an official recognition. He later became the Foreign Minister of the *Maharaja*. In the beginning, Ranjit Singh used to address Aziz-ud-Din as Shahji. One day, when the *Maharaja* was particularly pleased with Aziz-ud-Din, he said to the latter, "Shahji, I wish to give you some new title. Please suggest one." "*Maharaja*, if it is your highness's pleasure to do so, then be gracious enough to grant me a title which will not sound too big for future generations of my family should they become poor and will have an added grace if they should remain rich or become richer still." "What about *Fakir*?"

asked the *Maharaja*. "Your father has this title already." "There could be no better title than that for me and my family," agreed Aziz-ud-Din. So the title was formally confirmed. A gift of two shawls was presented to *Fakir*.

Aziz-ud-Din had a place of his own in *Maharaja's* esteem and enjoyed his confidence. The *Maharaja* never undertook any important operation without consulting him or against his advice. "It was due to his wise counsel that the *Maharaja* maintained friendly relations with the British Government; and the fact that these relations were on a footing of equality and mutual respect was largely an outcome of his ardent loyalty to Ranjit Singh, his inborn tact and his great skill in negotiation."¹

Then there was *Fakir* Nur-ud-Din, who did host of duties as the *Maharaja's* Home Minister. He was a Physician, Director of the Royal Palace and Gardens, one of the custodians of the keys of the royal treasury, commandant of the arsenal of the fort and a Judge. These multifarious duties brought him into constant personal contact with the *Maharaja*, who respected him for his integrity and sincerity.

The third of the *Fakir* brothers, Imam-ud-Din held many important administrative and military posts. He was the custodian of the Gobindgarh fort at Amritsar.

By now, Ranjit Singh had become the leader of the people of Punjab but he had not taken, as yet, the title of the *Maharaja* because he did not want to give any chance to other *Sardars* to conspire against him on this account.

But the time had now come that Ranjit Singh should declare himself as the *Maharaja* of Punjab and treat all his subjects Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs equally. The semblance of a title would have certainly enhanced his status. So on April 12, 1801, on the auspicious day of the *Baisakhi*, when the Khalsa was founded by Guru Gobind Singh to fight against tyranny and injustice and to uplift the down-trodden, Ranjit Singh was crowned as the *Maharaja* of Punjab. The coronation took place amidst great festivities and public rejoicings, proclaiming the investiture of sovereignty in the *Sarkar Khalsa*. A commemorative coin, *Nanakshahi* was issued. The inscription on it read:

Dego-o-Tegh-o-Fateh-o-Nusrat be-darang
Yaft az Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh.

The investiture ceremony was performed by revered Sahib

¹ Syed Waheduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, p. 40

Singh Bedi who put saffron paste on Ranjit Singh's forehead and proclaimed him the *Maharaja* of Punjab. A royal salute was fired from the fort. In the evening, the *Maharaja* rode on the elephant and passed through the streets of Lahore. It was a grand gala occasion. People showered flowers on him and in turn Ranjit Singh showered gold and silver coins on his subjects. He won popular acclaim and earned a lasting place in the hearts of the people. At night the town was illuminated with oil lamps and there was display of fire works.

Many Chiefs and *Sardars* offered *Nazranas* and in return received *Khillats*. Immediately afterwards, important Offices of the Government were assigned to various persons. The fort was garrisoned. The city which had suffered for 30 years under the *Bhangi* misrule, needed peace and rule of law. Normal life had to be restored. The *Maharaja* ordered that no interference be made with the personal and public law of the Muslims. They were given the equal rights with other subjects. No discrimination was made on the basis of caste or creed. Courts presided over by the *Qazis* and *Muftis* were confirmed. Imambaksh was appointed the City *Kotwal*. Prominent citizens were designated as the *chaudharis* of the *mohallas*. They were made responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the town. A sense of security was given to the people. Trade and business were established on a sound basis.

Meanwhile, reports were received from Batala that Rani Sada Kaur's territory had been attacked by the Kangra Raja, Sansar Chand who had descended into the plains of Punjab and plundered some of the villages under the Rani's control. Ranjit Singh ordered his troops to march to Batala. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia was requested to join the main body of troops at Batala. The *Maharaja* himself followed them. Raja of Kangra's men fled in fear and all territory of the Rani was restored to her. The *Maharaja* occupied Noushera, part of Sansar Chand's dominion and put it under Sada Kaur with the power to collect all its revenue. The *Maharaja* then marched towards Nurpur. Sansar Chand fled to the Kangra hills on hearing the arrival of the *Maharaja*.

The *Maharaja's* power went on increasing. On return from the hills, he razed to the ground the Sujanpur fort near Pathankot where two Sikh *Sardars*, Budh Singh and Sangat Singh had resorted to aggressive activities. The *Sardars* were made to hand over the ammunition to Ranjit Singh and a Police Post was established at Sujanpur. The *Maharaja* also occupied the neighbouring territory of Dharmkot, Sukalgarh and Bahrapur. He then, proceeded to

Pindi Bhatian, occupied it and handed it over to Fateh Singh Ahluwalia.

The *Maharaja* marched further, crossed the Jhelum river and annexed *Dhanni-Pothohar illaqa*. It was made the *Maharaja's* tributary. *Maharaja* returned to Lahore with 400 horses of good breed.

When the *Maharaja* was at Lahore, he received the news of the rebellion of Uttam Singh Majitha, Officer-in-Charge of Sitapur fort. The *Maharaja* sent troops to quell the rebellion, the fort was seized and the *Sardar* was arrested, put in chains and brought to Lahore. He was fined heavily, reprimanded and forgiven.

The *Maharaja* now went to Tarn Taran to take bath in the holy tank built by Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Master. It was usual with the *Maharaja* to take dip in the holy tanks at Anritsar and Tarn Taran whenever he could get time and was free from campaigns.

The shrewd *Maharaja* had already entered into alliances with the powerful *Kanahiya* and *Nakai Misals*. Another powerful *Misal* was Ahluwalia, whose founder Jassa Singh had once formed the *Dal Khalsa*. His son, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, was the head of the *Misal* now. The *Maharaja* thought it proper to befriend him and when he reached Tarn Tarn in 1802, he sent a message of goodwill to Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and expressed desire to meet him. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia gladly came and in the presence of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, both of them exchanged turbans and swore to become *dharimbhais*. An agreement of perpetual friendship was signed and it was declared that the enemy of one would be the enemy of the other. No *nazrana* would be charged while passing from each other's territory and Fateh Singh would assist Ranjit Singh in all his campaigns and whenever any new territory was occupied, a *Jagir* would be bestowed on the Ahluwalia *Sardar*. Thus the *Maharaja* made a powerful *Sardar* as his friend who stood by him in all his adversities. It was a grand alliance which proved very useful in building up of the Sikh empire.

The year, 1802 proved to be an auspicious year for the *Maharaja*. His Rani, Raj Kaur, daughter of the Nakai *Sardar* Khazan Singh gave birth to a son. He was named Kharak Singh. The happy event was celebrated with great rejoicings. Valuable *Khillats* were bestowed on the *Sardars* of the *darbar* and each soldier in the army was presented with a gold necklace. A large amount was distributed among the poor and the needy and the capital witnessed the festive merriment for many days. The *Maharaja* was over-joyous in getting the heir-apparent.

When the celebrations were over, the *Maharaja* along with

his ally. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia marched on to Daska. The fort was seized, the incharge fled in fear and it was plundered. A Police Post was set up and the victorious *Maharaja* returned to Lahore. Now a message was received from Pindi Bhatian, that Jassa Singh Bhanga was committing excesses on the local *Zamindars*. He held the Chiniot fort. The *Maharaja* reached there with his army. Jassa Singh hid himself in the fort which was seized by the *Maharaja's* army. Some resistance was offered before the fort fell to Ranjit Singh's army. Some money was provided for the subsistence of the *Sardar*.

However, all was not quiet. The Pathan Chief of Kasur, Nizam-ud-Din created fresh trouble. He had collected a large force of Afghans and plundered few villages under the *Maharaja* and was, making further preparations to create more trouble. The *Maharaja* was enraged. He directed Fateh Singh Ahluwalia to proceed to Kasur as the Nawab had broken the terms of the treaty. He should be severely punished. Ranjit Singh himself followed along with his troops. The Nawab offered stout resistance as he was well prepared. A fierce battle ensued. The Sikhs showed their valour under the command of their able Generals. The *Pathans* entered the fort as they were unable to fight the Sikh army in the open. Many were slain. At last the fort was seized and remaining soldiers were put to death. The town was plundered. A large number of people were made prisoners. The Nawab surrendered with humility. He was forgiven, reinstated and he promised to remain submissive. He paid a huge sum of money as *nazrana* and was made to pay war reparations. The victorious *Maharaja* returned to Lahore. Money was distributed among the poor and the needy to celebrate the victory.

Then, after a brief spell, the *Maharaja* marched into Jullundur Doab. He annexed several places on the way. A rich widow of a Khatri Chuhan Mal was in possession of the Phagwara town. Ranjit Singh attacked Phagwara, seized the town and forced the widow to retire to Hardwar. Her property was confiscated and handed over to Fateh Singh Ahluwalia along with the town.

The *Maharaja* visited Kapurthala and there he came to know that Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra had entered Bijwara and Hoshiarpur. The *Maharaja* hastened back, turned out Raja Sansar Chand and established his army posts at these two places. Sansar Chand fled to Kangra and Ranjit Singh captured many villages in the foot of the hills.

By this time Ranjit Singh had become a great force. While returning from the hills, the *Maharaja* subdued old Sikh Chiefs and

Sardars, Tara Singh Gheba, Dharm Singh of Amritsar and Budh Singh of Fyzulapur.

And now came the engagement of his son Kharak Singh to Chand Kaur, daughter of Jaimal Singh of *Kanahiya Misal*. There were rejoicings throughout the kingdom. Celebrations continued for several days. *Nauch* parties were arranged and money was spent lavishly. In one of such parties, the *Maharaja* fell in love with a very beautiful Muslim dancing girl, Moran, whom he ultimately married. The marriage was celebrated with great splendour and gaiety. She had great influence over the *Maharaja* and money was coined with the inscription of *Mor*; (Peacock) on it in commemoration of the marriage. The *Maharaja* performed a pilgrimage to Hardwar, accompanied by Moran. The Chiefs presented him *Nazranas* and at Hardwar, the *Maharaja* distributed a lakh of rupees to the poor.

However, this marriage with Moran raised a storm in the kingdom. Sikh public opinion received a rude shock. The *Maharaja* was summoned to the *Akal Takht*. The *Maharaja* sought forgiveness with all humility. He offered gifts to the *Panj Payaras*, under whose orders he was called. They pronounced punishment which the *Maharaja* gladly accepted. He was to be flogged publicly. *Panj Payaras* were gratified at the submission of the *Maharaja* and took a lenient view and accepted a fine of Rs. 1.25.000 from the *Maharaja*.

The *Maharaja* established a secular state in which all the subjects, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were treated alike. Many talented Hindus and Muslims joined his service and the *Maharaja* gladly participated in the religious festivals of all the communities. Festivals like *Dussehra*, *Diwali*, *Holi* and *Basant* were celebrated with splendour and gaiety. The *Maharaja* participated in them along with his subjects and on the occasions of *Amavus* and *Baisakhi* took a dip into the holy tank at Amritsar. By his secular outlook, the *Maharaja* earned great respect from his subjects.

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