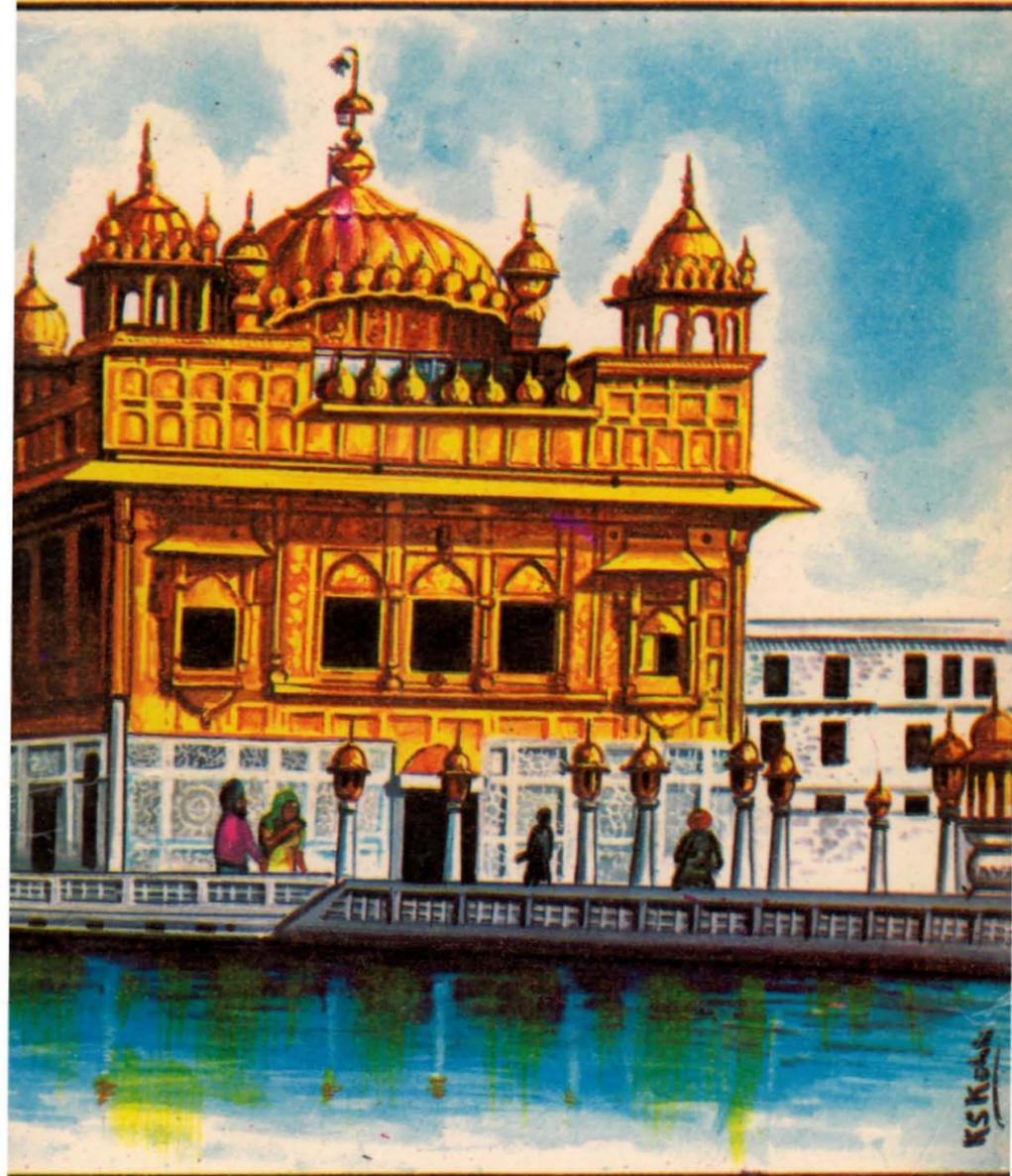


# Stories from SIKH HISTORY

Book-VII



Hemkunt



STORIES FROM  
**SIKH HISTORY**

BOOK —VII  
(Maharaja Ranjit Singh & thereafter)

Kartar Singh  
Gurdial Singh Dhillon

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### **IN THIS SERIES**

- Book I (Guru Nanak Dev)**
- Book II (Guru Angad to Guru Arjan Dev)**
- Book III (Guru Hargobind to Guru Tegh Bahadur)**
- Book IV (Guru Gobind Singh )**
- Book V (Sikh Martyrs)**
- Book VI (Banda Singh Bahadur)**
- Book VII (Maharaja Ranjit Singh and thereafter)**

## Foreword

Moral and religious instruction, I am glad to find, is now being rehabilitated in our schools. Our country is secular, it is true, but there is no denying the fact that religious and moral education has a very useful function to serve.

Modern psychology has emphasized that, if the child is given proper guidance at his formative stages, it will greatly help integrate his personality. The example of the teacher and his relations with students leave a deep impression on the minds of students. Moral instruction, I feel, is better given by example than by precept.

The great figures of the past, specially the heroes of history, have shown mankind how to fight successfully against evil and face the challenges, from time to time.

In this book are told stories about Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab. He did for India and Indians in general, and for the Punjab and Punjabis in particular, something unique. He freed his country-men from centuries old slavery of fierce, fanatic, foreign rule. Thereby, he enabled his countrymen to hold their heads high with pride and self-respect. He established a secular and national state in which all communities were equal partners. He did something by virtue of which he endeared himself to all sections of the people, and came to be regarded by all Punjabis as their friend, liberator and protector.

From the status of a petty chieftain, he rose to the position of the most powerful Indian ruler of his time, whose kingdom extended from Kashmir in the north to Sindh in the south and from river Sutlej in the east to Khaibar in the north west. For centuries the Afghans and Pathans had become a terror to Indians, particularly to Punjabis who had to be the first vic-

tims of their raids and invasions. But Maharaja Ranjit Singh turned the tables on them, so that the Punjabis became a source of dread and terror to the erstwhile Afghans and Pathans.

He made all Punjabis feel the urge of Punjabi nationalism, and regard themselves as Punjabis first, and Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs afterwards. As a result, his Sikh and Hindu troops subdued the Sikh and Hindu chieftains of the Punjab. His Muslim soldiers rejected the appeals to their Indian, Pathan, and Afghan co-religionists to crusade against the 'infidel', as they called the Maharaja of the Punjab. Instead of crusading against him, they helped him to liquidate the crusaders. All Punjabis were happy and prosperous under him.

After the death of Ranjit Singh the story of the Sikhs have been retold briefly in a very simple style covering the period up to 1989.

It is hoped that this series of Sikh history books will go a long way in moulding the lives of the young Indian students.

Gurdial Singh Dhillon

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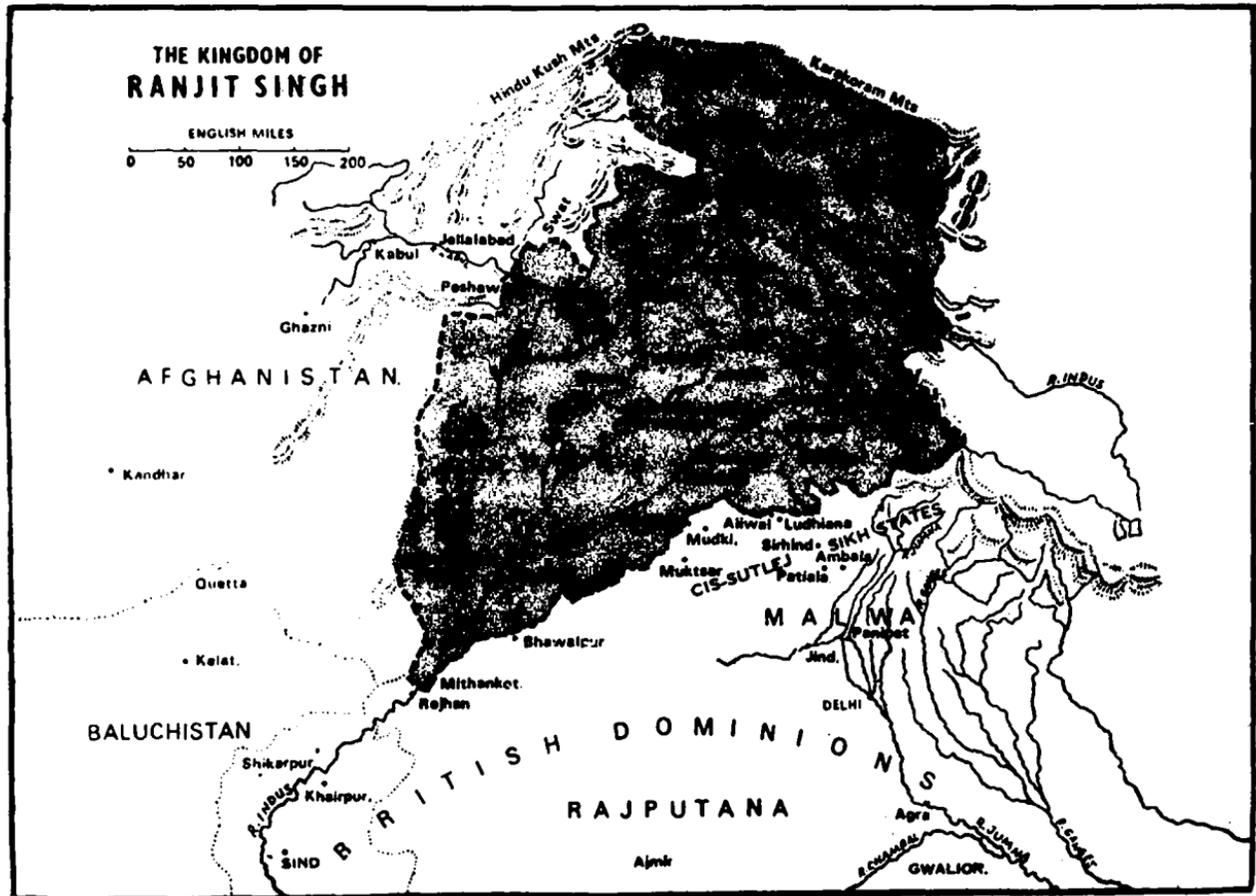
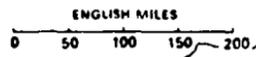
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# THE KINGDOM OF RANJIT SINGH



## Section - I

# Maharaja Ranjit Singh

### 1

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### FOREIGN INVASION

India had been subjected to foreign invasions from the earliest known times. The invaders came mainly from the north-west. They knew that India was rich. They also knew that it was disunited and weak; that its rulers were torn by mutual jealousies and enmities. Its people had no trace of nationalism or patriotism. It was, therefore, easy to conquer, subdue, and plunder this rich, unlucky land. Drawn by India's riches and beauty, and encouraged by prospects of easy victory, invader after invader came, and went back laden with untold booty.

The Punjab was the first Indian province in the invaders way. It was a sort of door-mat at India's gate. It was here that the invaders set foot first of all. These Muslim invaders from the North-west considered themselves to be soldiers of Islam, whose religious duty was to loot, dishonour and massacre the infidels. Another set of these invaders came as crusaders who forced their religion on the conquered people. They founded kingdoms and began to rule over conquered land in accordance with the law of Islam. The Punjabis suffered far more than any others at the invaders' hands. Their rich lands

were laid waste. Their villages, towns, and cities were looted and burnt. The inhabitants were massacred most mercilessly. The women were dishonoured, raped and enslaved.

But the Punjabis went through all this hell and havoc as mute, helpless, impotent victims. They never thought of offering united opposition or resistance to the foreign invaders. They had no leader to inspire and prepare them for such a joint endeavour for the common good.

### ADVENT OF GURU NANAK

Such was the state of things in the Punjab when Guru Nanak made his debut there towards the end of the fifteenth century. He preached a new philosophy, a new way of life. He sought to totally transform the people's outlook and attitude towards life, society, and the world. He exhorted them to realize that God of the Muslims and the Hindus was one and the same God; that human beings were His children and, hence, members of one family. He tried to plant in the hearts of the Muslims and Hindus, love and regard for each other, so that they could learn to live together in peace and amity.

He wanted the people to realize that all who lived in the Punjab were one people, Punjabis ; that they did not become aliens or enemies by a mere change of or a difference in religion. He wanted them to realize that their interests were common. He aroused in them a strong sentiment of Punjabi nationalism.

In the community kitchens, run by Guru Nanak and his devotees, Hindus and Muslims, high-castes and low-castes and social out-castes, touchables and untouchables, all sat together, to partake of the food served free and freely to all. This made

them feel that they were one people.

In this way, they learnt a new lesson, that of co-existence, of unity amidst diversity. They came to realize that, though having different religious beliefs and rites, they were Punjabis all the same.

Thus Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was also the founder of Punjabi nationalism. The sapling planted by him was watered, nourished, and shielded by his successors.

When Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru Nanak, decided to build the house of God, the Hari Mandar at Amritsar, he invited a prominent Muslim divine of Lahore, Hazrat Mian Mir, to lay its foundation stone. In the anthology of sacred writings the Granth Sahib-which he compiled side by side with the compositions of the Sikh Gurus-he included the works of both Muslim and Hindu saints. This was a great step towards making the people realize their oneness and common destiny.

Guru Arjan Dev was marvellously successful in bringing the two communities together. Both Hindus and Muslims in large numbers accepted his faith. This enraged Emperor Jahangir, who did not like Muslims to be drawn away to another religion. He ordered that Guru Arjan be arrested and 'killed with torture.' His orders were carried out most mercilessly as has been already told in Book II.

Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru Nanak, raised an army to protect the infant community and to set it on the path which was to lead to its ultimate destiny. But he did not ignore secular legacy inherited by him. He continued to water, shield, and nourish the sapling of Punjabi nationalism, which Guru Nanak had planted in the Punjabis' hearts. He recruited his

soldiers without any distinction of creed or community. He had a large number of Muslims among his trusted soldiers and friends. He built mosques for them. They enjoyed full freedom of worship and prayer. Thus they were practising the art of co-existence, of maintaining unity amidst diversity.

Guru Hargobind had to fight three defensive battles against Mughal armies. His Muslim soldiers fought zealously against their co-religionists. That was a practical demonstration of their having imbibed the spirit of the Sikh Gurus' teachings.

When some time later, Jahangir, the murderer of Guru Hargobind's father, offered him his hand of friendship, he accepted it quite readily. He did so because he would not miss any chance or opportunity of weeding out enmity and hatred, and fostering love and amity among all.

Acting most vigorously on Jahangir's religious policy, Aurangzeb ordered the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Teg Bahadur's son and successor, continued to follow his predecessors' policy of love and friendship for all and hate or enmity for none. He did not let the Sikh movement become anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim. He continued to lay emphasis on the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. He had a large number of Muslim admirers, followers, and friends. He had a large number of Muslim soldiers in his army. They never showed even the slightest hesitation in fighting his battles against their co-religionists. They came to his help in all crises, and never left him in the lurch.

He continued to act as the friend to men and foe to all tyrants. He continued to water, shield, and nourish the sapling of Punjabi nationalism planted in the Punjabis' hearts by Guru

Nanak. He toiled all his life to forge a united front against the fanatic foreign oppressors and to make the land equally safe for the followers of all faiths and creeds.

Under Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs had become a distinct and separate community. They had their own script, scripture, traditions, aspirations, and places of worship and gathering. Spurred on by their Guru's inspiring teachings and example, they continued to resist and fight the Mughal tyranny. They became the spearhead of a resistance movement against the fanatic foreign Mughals' tyrannical rule. For many years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, a strong storm of religious hate and intolerance blew across the Punjab. The two main communities of the Punjab were actually at daggers drawn towards each other. Yet the spark of nationalism that had been lit by Guru Nanak and fed by his successors, was not extinguished.

### THE ARMED STRUGGLE

The armed struggle against the Muslims' tyranny initiated and actively conducted by Guru Gobind Singh, was carried on by his followers. The first success won by Sikh arms occurred in 1709 A.D. With an army of untrained and ill-equipped Punjabi peasants, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur defeated the well-trained, well-equipped and far stronger Mughal armies. He occupied a large portion of the eastern Punjab. He became the first Sikh ruler with his own capital, fort, and coin. He upheld and followed his Gurus' secular policy. All sections of the people got equal justice and protection. They felt that they were being ruled by sons of their own soil and not by foreigners, as before.

But his success was short lived. He was martyred in

Delhi in 1716 A.D. Still, he virtually succeeded in destroying the Muslim ruling class. What is worth remembering is, that though he fought against the tyrannical Muslim rulers and was treated by them with ferocious cruelty, yet he entertained no hate against the Muslims as such. His last words, when his flesh was being torn with red-hot pincers, were - 'God sent me to punish the corrupt and wicked people who had strayed away from the path of equity and were committing all kinds of excesses. Now that the task has been done, He has given power to men like my tormentors here to put an end to my life. I am being recalled by Him who sent me hither. All happens as He wills. I have no regrets. I bow to His Will.'

### PERSECUTION OF THE SIKHS

The fall of Baba Banda Singh and the destruction of his army was followed by a period of ruthless repression of the Sikhs. The Mughal governors of the Punjab boasted that they would destroy and finish off the Sikhs. Thousands and thousands of them were murdered most mercilessly. Prices were put on their heads. The governor of the Punjab made massacre of the Sikhs a pastime.

For a time, the Sikhs disappeared as a political force from the Punjab. They fled to the hills, jungles, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. For eight years (from 1716 to 1724 A.D.), the Sikhs suffered silently. They took no active, effective step against their persecutors. But then they began to make their appearance again in the plains of the Punjab. They organised themselves in small bands and began, once more, to harass the government by their plundering expeditions and guerilla war-fare. They punished the traitors who had betrayed their brethren to the government. They also punished the petty tyrants who had, like mean cowards, harmed their unprotected

women and children. They also punished such corrupt officials and *zamindars* who oppressed the people. In particular, they fell upon and looted government parties carrying government treasure. They inflicted defeats on the Mughal armies sent against them from Lahore. Indeed, they made it very hot for the government of the Punjab and its supporters. It has to be remembered that all their activities were directed against the Mughal authorities. The people in general were not touched. They were even helped against their corrupt officials and powerful, troublesome neighbours. This made them popular with the people-Hindus as well as Muslims. The people began to look upon the Sikhs as brother-Punjabis, towards whom they could look for effective help in times of trouble and need.

This story of persecution, on the one side, and revenge, on the other, went on for some years. By then the government felt tired of this method of dealing with the Sikhs. It decided to try the method of conciliation. They were given a handsome *jagir* -rent free property- and the title of '*Nawab*' was conferred on their leader Kapur Singh. This was in 1738 A.D.

There was thus a sort of peace between the government and the Sikhs. The later utilized this time for strengthening their organization. In 1734 they re-organized their forces into (1) the Buddha Dal, the Army of Elders, and (2) the Taruna Dal, the Army of the Young. Both the Dals were supervised and kept together by Nawab Kapur Singh, who was highly respected, both as a secular and a spiritual leader. This reorganization helped them to carry on their struggle against the cruel fanatic Mughal tyrants with greater effect and success. They organized fresh campaigns. They spread themselves into the Bari Doab and went up to Hansi and Hissar.

Consequently the government stopped the *jagir*. It began once more to persecute the Sikhs. It occupied the Temple of Amritsar. Moving columns were sent to capture and kill the Sikhs. It was made criminal for anyone to give shelter to Sikhs or to help them in any way.

Thousands and thousands were killed in this way. There were also a number of cold-blooded executions so memorable that they entered the Sikhs' daily prayer. One such was the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, the most learned and respected leader of the time. This occurred in 1738 A.D.

As a result of these renewed persecutions, most of the Sikhs again left the plains, and sought shelter in the Shivalik hills, the Lakhi jungle, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. But, on occasions, they would come out of their hiding places and make their presence felt. One such occasion was Nadir Shah's invasion of India.

Nadir Shah invaded India in 1739. To reach Delhi he passed through the Punjab. He laid waste the whole countryside. He plundered Delhi. There he massacred in cold blood over one lakh (100000) men, women, and children. On his return journey he rounded up thousands of men and women, Hindus as well as Muslims. He meant to carry them off as slaves. The Sikhs came to know of this. They came out of their hide-outs and fell upon the rear of Nadir's Army. They carried away a good part of the booty which he had got by plundering Delhi. They also released a large number of their countrymen from Nadir's captivity. Their conduct during Nadir Shah's invasion made them very popular with the Punjabi people. Even the Muslim peasantry of the Punjab began once again to look upon them as their friends and brother Punjabis. On reaching Lahore, Nadir Shah questioned the

Governor, Zakriya Khan, about the 'mischief-makers' who had dared to attack his army's rear. He was told, 'They are a group of *fakirs* who visit their Guru's tank twice a year, and after bathing in it, disappear.' 'Where do they live?' asked Nadir Shah. 'Their homes are their saddles', he was told. Thereupon, Nadir Shah said, 'Take care, the day is not distant when these rebels will take possession of your country.'

This remark of the foreign invader hinted at Zakriya Khan's incapacity to deal with the Sikhs. It cut him to the quick. He decided to launch an all-out campaign against them.

Stricter orders were issued to local officials to finish off the Sikhs. Prices were again fixed on their heads. Rewards were offered for their capture and destruction. The whole machinery of the government was put into motion to crush them. Even the non-official *zamindars* were made to lend a hand in this genocidal campaign.

This relentless, all out campaign against the Sikhs went on for about eight years. Most of the Sikhs again took shelter in the hills, jungles, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. During this period occurred the martyrdoms of some of the noblest, holiest, and most revered Sikh leaders, like Bhai Mehtab Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Baba Bota Singh, Sardar Subeg Singh, and Sardar Shahbaz Singh. During this period occurred also the whole-sale massacre of the Sikhs in cold blood called the *Chhota Ghalughara*, the first or lesser holocaust. More than ten thousand Sikhs-men, women, and children-were killed.

The opportunity to redress the wrongs they had suffered was offered to them by the invasions of Ahmed Shah Durrani (or Abdali). The first of his nine invasions occurred in 1748.

His invasions disorganized the administrative machinery of the Punjab. This gave the Sikhs a chance to come out of their hide-outs. It was during the period of these invasions that the Sikhs rose to power. Each time the Durrani came, they retreated into the jungles, hills and deserts. But as soon as he turned back homewards, they fell upon him and harassed and harried him all the way up to the Indus. They took away most of the loot he was carrying home. They also released the thousands of men and women whom he was carrying off as slaves. He did his worst to finish off the Sikhs. In what is called *Waddha Ghalughara* or the Great Holocaust, he killed ten to twelve thousand Sikh warriors and eighteen to twenty thousand Sikh women and children. But all this destruction failed to curb, demoralize or suppress the Sikhs. They continued their struggles with still greater zeal and vigour.

## RISE OF THE SIKHS

By organizing resistance against the Durrani invader, the Sikhs were able to seize power. In 1748 Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was chosen the supreme commander of the Dal Khalsa. The Dal Khalsa was, at the same time, re-organized and declared to be a state. It was divided into eleven *misals* each with its own leader. (There was also the twelfth *misal* called the Phulkia. But it was not a part of the Dal Khalsa and did not participate in their struggle against the Durrani or the Mughals). All the eleven *misals* were to be under the over-all command of the supreme commander. The *misals* occupied more and more territory. Lahore was occupied in 1765. They divided most of the Punjab among themselves. They also developed a system called *Rakhi*. They undertook to defend the people in their respective zones on payment of protection tax called *Rakhi*. In due course the *misaldars* became petty barons, and their *misals* became their private armies.

Of the eleven *misals* four deserve notice. The most powerful were the Bhangis. They were in possession of Lahore, Amritsar, and most of the Western Punjab. The next in importance were the Kanhayas who held the Himalayan foothills. The Ahluwalias were masters of the land between the Ravi and the Beas. The Sukarchakias were among the lesser important *misals*. They were in possession of only the town of Gujranwala and the neighbouring villages.

The system of *misals* was a make-shift arrangement. It was suited to the challenge of the foreign invasions. But it did not provide a well organized or efficient administration of the Punjab as a whole. If the Punjab was to survive and prosper as a province, it was essential that it should be united and made strong. This could be done only if one of the *misals* could subdue and absorb the others. The contest for supremacy was therefore between the above said four main *misals*.

So, the need of the time was a strong and wise *misaldar* who could subdue the other *misals* and absorb them into his own. Such a one appeared in the person of Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia. Of him we shall read in the following pages.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh

## 2

# BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Most Muslim rulers and officials of those days were cruel despots. To oppress their non-Muslim subjects was considered by them to be their right as rulers, and their duty as followers of the Prophet of Islam. Their treatment of the people, as a whole, was despotic, oppressive, and cruel.

Pir Muhammad Khan Chattha, head of the Chattha tribe living along the Jehlam, and chief of Rasulnagar, was no exception. He treated his subjects, specially the Hindus, with utmost cruelty. No woman's honour was safe in his territory. Life and property were equally unsafe under him. His agents and subordinates vied with one another in exhibiting their daring and power in maltreating the people.

Complaints against the Chatthas' excesses and atrocities reached Mahan Singh Sukarchakia. He was pained to hear these harrowing complaints. He said to himself, 'As a Sikh of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, it is my duty to punish the wicked and to rescue the victims of the Chatthas' brutality.'

He consulted his friends and associates. They all concurred

with him. They expressed their readiness to risk their lives in this noble adventure. Preparations for the campaign were begun at once. In due course he set off towards Rasulnagar with an army of six thousand horsemen. All of them were determined to win or die, but never to run away. Pir Muhammad Khan Chattha and his associates heard of Mahan Singh's coming attack. They shut themselves in the fort. Mahan Singh besieged the fort and the city. After a few months' struggle, the fort and the city were conquered. They became Mahan Singh's possessions. The Chatthas were adequately punished. Rasulnagar was renamed Ram Nagar.

After his victories against the Chatthas, Mahan Singh started homewards. Soon a despatch-rider arrived from Gujranwala. Jumping down from his horse, he bowed and said to Mahan Singh, 'Congratulations Sir! God has blessed you with a son. He has been named Budh Singh, after your great ancestor.'

On hearing the good news, Mahan Singh called a halt. Joyous cries of *Sat Sri Akal* were raised by the whole victorious army. Mahan Singh thanked God and said, 'The two boons- a great victory and a son have been granted to me at the same time. The new born comes as a bringer of victory. He shall be called Ranjit Singh -which means Victor of Battles. I am sure more victories will come to me. He, too, will be a

great victor. He will win many battles.'

So Ranjit Singh, was born in Gujranwala on November 2, 1780. He was the only son of Mahan Singh Sukarchakia. His mother's name was Raj Kaur. During his early childhood he had a virulent attack of small-pox. He survived the attack; but it deprived him of his left eye and deeply pitted his otherwise handsome face. He was thus somewhat disfigured. No one, not even the wildest day dreamer, could have then dreamt that this frail, disfigured child was destined to be a great man; that he would, one day, become master of the Punjab and of the Punjabis' hearts; that he would inspire terror in the hearts of those terrible people who had so often invaded, plundered and layed waste this rich and beautiful land of five rivers; that he would be universally acclaimed the 'Lion of the Punjab'.

Mahan Singh made due arrangement for his only son's education and training. He knew quite well the nature of the task which the child would have to undertake in the years to come. He wanted to prepare him for that task. A learned, pious Sikh, named Bhai Bhag Singh, was chosen to be his teacher. He was to teach him Gurmukhi, to impart him instructions in the principles of the Sikh faith, and to acquaint him with the history of the Punjab and the Sikhs. The teacher did his task very well, indeed. As a result of his instructions, Ranjit Singh developed deep and abiding reverence for the Sikh Gurus and their teachings. He acquired the habit of beginning his day with prayers before Guru Granth Sahib and hearing recitations therefrom. He was imbued with the spirit of Punjabi nationalism, which had been founded by Guru Nanak, fostered by his nine successors, and exemplified in life by the great Sikh heroes. Even at that early age, he began to cherish a longing to be a friend and helper of Punjabis, to toil, and even die, if need be for the Punjab.

His military training was entrusted to a capable Sikh scholar-soldier, named Pandit Amir Singh. He trained him in the art of using weapons of offence and defence, particularly in wielding the sword. He would usually take him out into the neighbouring jungle and engage him in riding and hunting. As much of his time was spent in chase, he learned to ride and shoot well. He became an excellent horseman and unmatched swordsman. In fact, later on, he came to be probably the best rider and swordsman of his time in India. Even at that early age he became a tireless rider. He could remain the whole day in the saddle, without showing any signs of fatigue. He exhibited this quality many a time in later life. Indeed, he needed it and used it quite often. For example, when he heard of General Hari Singh Nalwa's death in action at Peshawar, he hastened to that place on horse back. He rode in one day from Lahore to Jehlam, a distance of over one hundred and sixty kilometres.

He also exhibited his excellence as a swordsman a number of times. For example, when he met the British Governor General, Bentinck, at Ropar in 1831, he personally competed with the best of the English horsemen in tent-pegging and swordsmanship. None could equal him. All acknowledged his superiority. He exhibited also a rare feat of his skill as a swordsman. A trooper of his held a lemon on his outstretched palm. Ranjit Singh came riding at full gallop, and, cut the lemon with his sword, without injuring the trooper. No one else was able to perform this feat.

He had to make use of his skill many a time on the battlefield. With a swift stroke of his sword, he would sever the head of his adversary and make it roll in dust. All this was a result of the excellent training that he received in his early days.

## 3

### HIS ANCESTORS

From his very early life Ranjit Singh had an insatiable hunger for information and knowledge. He asked all sorts of questions from his teachers and others whom he met.

One day he said to his teacher, Bhai Bhag Singh, 'You have told me much about our Gurus, their teachings, their activities, and so on. You have given me a good deal of inspiring information about the great Sikh martyrs and the sublime manner in which they bore unheard of, unbearable tortures, and resolutely refused to give up their faith. I have learnt much about the great heroes of our race, like Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, Nawab Kapur Singh, and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But I have yet to hear about my own immediate ancestors, whose blood runs in my veins. Do please enlighten me about them. Will you, dear Bhaiji?'

'Most readily and gladly,' replied Bhai Bhag Singh. 'I am delighted to hear what you have said. Well, listen. As, of course, you know, your family is called the Sukarchakia family, and your father is now the head of the Sukarchakia Misal.'

Ranjit Singh Asked 'Why are we called Sukarchakias? How did we acquire that name? We live in Gujranwala and should be called Gujranwalias, I deem.'

Bhai Bhag Singh continued 'I shall tell you that presently. Your ancestors were humble peasants livings in vil-

lages around Gujranwala. One of those villages was named Sukarchak. How your family came to be named after that village will be told later.'

'Well, as I said, your ancestors were humble peasants. They were sturdy, strong, and industrious workers. They earned a meagre living as farmers and raisers of cattle. The first in your family to win prominence was one named Sardar Budh Singh.'

'How? What did he do to achieve prominence?' Asked Ranjit Singh

'I shall tell you that presently. Sardar Budh Singh was your father's grandfather, that is, your great grandfather. He had the honour and privilege of having been baptized by Guru Gobind Singh himself.

Ranjit Singh exclaimed, "How lucky he was! what would not I give to drink the Amrit from the tenth Master's own hands! But go on."

'He heard from the Guru's own lips what qualities of mind and heart his saint - soldiers, the Khalsa, should possess; how they should live and act as friends of men, foes of all tyrants.'

'That means that he explained the Khalsa *Rehat* or rules of conduct for his Khalsa. You have told me so well and so often what the Rules are. But to have heard them from the Guru's own lips! But please go on.'

Bhag Singh continued, 'Sardar Budh Singh had a strong, swift-limbed, and beautiful piebald mare named Desan. It be-

came as well-known as its rider. Their feats of endurance became the talk of the people far and near. They travelled the plains of the Punjab and swam its broad rivers in flood as many as fifty times. Being inseparable, the mare and its master came to be known jointly as Desan Budh Singh. Sardar Budh Singh died in 1718, two years after Baba Banda Singh's martyrdom. It is believed that he took a worthy part in some of Baba Banda Singh's battles. He left his sons a few villages which they could call their own, and many others in the neighbourhood which paid them protection tax or *Rakhi*.'

The following day the teacher and his knowledge hungry pupil met again. The former continued his story of Ranjit Singh's ancestors as under:

'As I said, one of the villages inhabited by your ancestors was Sukarchak. Sardar Budh Singh's son, Sardar Naudh Singh, fortified that village. He engaged a body of Sikh horsemen to help him in his adventures. Together they came to be called Sukarchakias. They formed the Sukarchakia Misal. With this small band of warriors, Sardar Naudh Singh performed such noble and daring deeds that he came to be known and respected throughout the land, from the river Satluj to Rawalpindi. The Sukarchakias joined forces with other misals and fought several engagements with Ahmad Shah Abdali. Sardar Naudh Singh was able to win the regard and approbation of Nawab Kapur Singh, under whom he fought against the invader. As the Abdali retreated, the Sukarchakias took possession of parts of the land lying between the rivers Ravi and the Jehlam. Sardar Naudh Singh was killed in 1752, while fighting against the Afghans near Majitha, near Amritsar.

Declared Ranjit Singh : 'When I grow up, I shall avenge his death, I shall wreak vengeance on these damned

foreigners.’

‘That is a mighty good resolve !’ agreed Bhag Singh. ‘May God grant you the strength to act up to it! You will be rendering a great and memorable service to your country and countrymen. But let me go on with my story’.

‘To resume the story, your grandfather, Sardar Charat Singh, was the eldest of Sardar Naudh Singh’s four sons. He became the head of the Sukarchakia family. He added to the number of his horsemen and, thereby, added to his strength. He made it a rule that all who would join his *misal*, must first be baptized.

‘A good rule, no doubt’ said Ranjit Singh’. ‘I, too, shall adopt it.’

‘That will be fine, indeed, and proper’ Bhag Singh said approvingly’. Sardar Charat Singh then moved his headquarters from the village Sukarchak to Gujranwala. He erected battlements round the town. At that time he heard that the Imperial Faujdar of Eminabad was very cruel and fanatic; that he mercilessly oppressed and maltreated the people, particularly the Sikhs and Hindus. Sardar Charat Singh decided to punish the wicked evil-doer, and to rescue his victims. With a body of one hundred and fifty of his select horsemen, he raided Eminabad. He besieged the Faujdar’s palace. He killed the cruel official in a hand-to-hand fight.’

‘I am proud of his noble undertaking and his great soldierly feat’. Ranjit Singh said ‘well, go on!’

‘Your grandfather plundered the Faujdar’s treasury and the imperial arsenal. He acquired large funds and hundreds of

good horses. This adventure won him much fame and popularity’.

‘The Afghan Governor of Lahore heard of all these doings of Sardar Charat Singh. He came with a force to apprehend the brave Sukarchakia Sardar. But he was compelled by your grandfather to fly back to the capital. He left behind him his guns and stores of grain, to be appropriated by your grandfather?’

‘So my grandfather killed two birds with one stone’ said Ranjit Singh. ‘He routed the attacker and got ample rewards there of. He got victory and wealth’.

‘Yes. But let me finish. Emboldened by this success, Sardar Charat Singh extended his domains by capturing the towns of Wazirabad, Ahmedabad, and Rohtas. Soon thereafter, Ahmad Shah Abdali once again came down from Afghanistan. Sardar Charat Singh adopted the usual tactics employed by the Sikhs in those days. He retreated to the jungles. Ahmad Shah plundered his estates. He also razed Gujranwala’s fortifications to the ground. Soon, however, Sardar Charat Singh more than settled his account with the Afghans. He chased them on their return journey and plundered their baggage. He also freed a large number of women and girls who were being carried away as slaves. He rebuilt the battlements round Gujranwala and reoccupied the neighbouring country. He rehabilitated those who had been plundered and uprooted by the Afghans.

‘Sardar Charat Singh’s last action was at Jammu. He went there to help the rightful claimant to the *gaddi* (throne) of Jammu. There he fell mortally wounded by the bursting of his own matchlock or gun. That was in 1782.’

Ranjit Singh Said : 'That was, indeed, a very sad end of that mighty hero'.

Bhag Singh continued: 'True, but God's ways are strange and inscrutable. We have to bow before His Will. So did your father. But we shall talk about him tomorrow, if you please.'

On the following day, Bhai Bhag Singh continued his account.

'Well, dear, your father was only ten when your grandfather breathed his last. He inherited his father's daring and ambition. He married a daughter of Sardar Gajpat Singh, Chief of Jind. Thereby he strengthened his own position among the *misaldars*. He built a fort within the walled town of Gujranwala. He named it "Garhi Mahan Singh". He increased the number of his horsemen to six thousand. Thus strengthened, he resumed the ancestral occupation of capturing territory and extending his domain.'

'Soon complaints began to reach your father against the Afghan Governor of Rasulnagar, Pir Muhammad Khan. The latter was cruel, haughty, and bigoted. He oppressed and maltreated his subjects more mercilessly. Your father responded to the appeals of the oppressed people. He fell upon Rasulnagar and conquered it without much difficulty. He renamed it Ramnagar. Then he conquered Alipur, which was another stronghold of the haughty and much hated Chatthas. He renamed it Akal Garh'

'Now I come to a most important event in your family's history. Do you know, can you guess, what it was? No I shall

tell you. It was your birth. You were born when your father had gone westwards to chastise the Chatthas. You were named Budh Singh. A despatch rider was sent post-haste to inform your father. He was just returning from his victories against the Chatthas, when the despatch rider met him. Of course, not only your father, but also all his companions were filled with joy. Your father was told that you had been named Budh Singh. He said, "The boy is a bringer of victories. He shall be called Ranjit Singh which means Lion Victor of Battles. He will win many victories and great renown."

'That is how you got your name, my dear Ranjit Singh!'

'God permitting, I shall justify my father's choice of my name' declared Ranjit Singh. I shall try to act in such a manner as to prove his prophetic words to be true to the letter.'

Bhag Singh continued: 'After taking and renaming the Chattha strongholds of Rasulnagar and Alipur, your father took Pindi, Bhattian, Sahiwal, Isakhel and Sialkot. Then he proceeded to Jammu. He had an old score to settle with its Hindu Dogra ruler. The latter fled from the city. With the loot of Jammu, your father raised the Sukarchakias from a position of comparative obscurity to that of being one of the leading *misals*.'

'This angered Sardar Jai Singh Kanhaya. The Kanhayas were then the most powerful of the *misals*. Your father had to fight them. In one of the many battles between them and us, Sardar Jai Singh's son, Sardar Gurubakhsh Singh, was killed. The Kanhaya Chief's pride was humbled. At the suggestion of Sardarni Sada Kaur, Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh's widow, he agreed to engage his grand-daughter to you, our precious dear Lion Victor of Battles! Two powerful *misals* have been united thereby. The union is sure to produce good results.'

‘This brings the story of your brave illustrious ancestors to the present day. You now know as much as you need to know about those noble ones whose blood runs in your veins.’

‘You have told the story well’ said Ranjit Singh. I am grateful for it. I am sure God will permit me to follow their example. I have many ideas and dreams about what I would do. May God be my guide and helper!”

‘I join you in that prayer’. Said Bhag Singh , May He permit me to witness your glorious achievements !’

## 4

### BOLD ADVENTURES OF A LAD

In 1791, Mahan Singh called up Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat to pay the tribute due from him. On his refusal to comply, Mahan Singh decided to proceed to Gujrat for the purpose of realizing the tribute. Ranjit Singh, who was then a little over ten years of age, heard of his father's decision. He made up his mind to accompany his father in that campaign. So determined, he met his father, and said 'Dear father, I should like very much to go with you on this military campaign. Do please allow me to do so. I am eager to see and learn how such campaigns are conducted. I must get used to the demands that such campaigns make on one's body, mind and heart. I want so to equip myself that I may be fit to be helpful to you. I long to be initiated in the art of war as early as possible. Shall I go with you ?'

Mahan Singh said in reply, 'I like your idea. I agree with you that it is time for you to become experienced in military campaigns. Who knows how soon you may suddenly be called upon to step into my shoes. It is best to be prepared in time for all eventualities. You will go with me. Get ready. Choose the horse that you will ride. Select a band of best horsemen who will attend upon you as your bodyguards.'

Ranjit Singh was beside himself with joy. He thanked his father and said, 'When do we start?'

Mahan Singh said, As you know, an *akhandpath*

(continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib) has been started this morning. On its completion, we shall offer prayers to the Almighty for success of our campaign. We shall start the next day, which is Wednesday.'

Mahan Singh started towards Gujrat as planned. Ranjit Singh accompanied him, riding his favourite horse, and followed by his bodyguards. He was going to have his first experience of a military campaign. Little did he know that he was accompanying his father not only for the first but also for the last time.

Sahib Singh Bhangi could not stand against Mahan Singh's mighty force. He left Gujrat and took refuge in the fort of Sodhran. At the same time, he sent an urgent appeal to his kinsmen at Lahore. He appealed to them to come to his help against the Sukarchakias.

Mahan Singh besieged the fort. The siege dragged on through the winter months. Now, as ill luck would have it, Mahan Singh was suddenly taken very ill. He had a severe attack of dysentery. The attack was so severe that he feared that he might not recover. Hence he formally invested Ranjit Singh as the head of the Sukarchakia misal. He did this by daubing the boy's forehead with saffron paste. Then he exhorted his followers to obey their young chief and always be faithful to him. Bidding farewell to his son and followers, Mahan Singh returned to Gujranwala, for rest and treatment.

The Bhangi Sardars of Lahore soon learnt of Mahan Singh's illness and his return from the siege. They also learnt that the Sukarchakias were in a precarious predicament. They were under the command of a ten year old lad. They felt confident that 'the lad of ten,' as they called Ranjit Singh, would not

be able to withstand them. They boastfully declared, 'We shall depatch the lad or bring him to Lahore, bound hand and foot. We shall crush and finish off the Sukarchakias and be masters of their lands.'

They hurried to the relief of Sodhran. Ranjit Singh soon learnt that the Bhangi force from Lahore was on its way to the besieged fort. Though a lad of less than eleven, he acted like a seasoned general. He went out to waylay that force lying in ambush in the jungle near Kot Maharaja, he waited for the Bhangis from Lahore as they were to pass that way. As they approached, Ranjit Singh fell upon them suddenly. They were taken completely by surprise. They were soon routed and put to flight. They left behind a large number of guns and cannon, besides a good deal of other war-materials. All this fell into Ranjit Singh's hands. He sent all of it to Gujjanwala.

Needless to say that Mahan Singh was immensely pleased to see the guns, cannon, and other war materials captured by his son. He was glad to hear that his Ranjit had proved a victor in the very first battle that he had fought. This, he thought, augured well for the future.

But on the following day, Mahan Singh breathed his last. The sad event occurred in March 1792. Ranjit Singh heard the sad, heart-breaking news while at Kot Maharaja. Weighed down with sorrow, he hurried to Gujjanwala. He was just able to get back in time for his father's funeral.

Ranjit Singh was a lad of less than eleven when his father died. He was too young to bother about the day-to-day management of his estate. That work was left to his father's manager, Lakhpat Rai. His mother, Raj Kaur, and his mother-in-law to be, Sada Kaur, jointly supervised and guided Lakhpat

Rai in managing the affairs of the Sukarchakias' estate.

Ranjit Singh spent much of his time in the chase. Engaged in that pastime, he had ample practice in riding and shooting. Thus he learnt to ride and shoot well. In these years he also developed a love for horses. This love, in later life, turned into a master passion.

As already said, his favourite pastime was hunting. One day, while hunting in the thick forest near Ramnagar, he rode off alone in pursuit of game. On that account, he became separated from his companions. A lad hardly yet in his teens, he was thus all alone in that dense forest.

It so happened that a Chattha chief named Hashmat Khan, was also hunting in the same forest. Now, this Chattha chief had suffered many humiliating defeats at the hands of Ranjit Singh's father. His estate had been taken possession of by that Sukarchakia Sardar. When he met with Ranjit Singh in that jungle, he decided to take revenge. He was confident that he would kill that 'lad of thirteen.' So determined, he fell upon Ranjit Singh. He made a sharp, sudden cut with his sword. Just when he did so, Ranjit Singh's horse took fright and reared. Thereby Hashmat Khan's first move failed. Before he could make a second move, Ranjit Singh pierced and transfixed him with his lance. He then cut off Hashmat Khan's head, impaled it on his spear, and rode back to his companions with that gory trophy.

His companions hailed him with joyous shouts of Sat Sri Akal, praised his power and daring, congratulated him on his wonderful bold achievement, but gently protested against his having risked his life in that manner. They ended by saying, 'In future we shall never leave you alone. If that villain had

succeeded, what would have been our fate !

Ranjit Singh spent another two years hunting in the dense jungle around Gujranwala. He took no interest in his estate. His mother became anxious for his future. She felt that marriage might bring him round to the responsibilities of life. She conferred with Sada Kaur. The two ladies fixed a date for his marriage. He was just over fifteen when he left Gujranwala for Batala, the chief town of the Kanhayas, to wed Sada Kaur's daughter, Mehtab Kaur. This alliance between the two important Sikh families was major event for the Punjab. All the leading Sikh chiefs were present at the wedding, which took place in 1796 A .D

## TOWARDS A FREE PUNJAB

### DANGERS

In the 1790s the condition of the Punjab was far from happy and secure. A greater part of it was ruled by the Sikh *misals*. The *misaldars* were generally at daggers drawn with one another. The *misal* organization was, in fact, no longer the united fraternity that it used to be some fifty years before. When Ahmad Shah Abdali had begun his invasions of India, the Sikh *misals* had fought as one under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But now they were woefully disunited. This disunity of the Sikhs rendered the Punjab weak and vulnerable. An invader from the north-west could easily have defeated the *misals*, one by one, and made the Punjab a part of his empire. If the Punjab was to be made free and powerful, this problem of disunity of the Sikhs had to be solved before it became too late.

Ranjit Singh was shrewd enough to realize the gravity and urgency of this problem. He was alive to the dangers to which this state of things exposed his dear Punjab, the land of the Sikh Gurus and of the innumerable Sikh martyrs. It was clear to him that the *misals* needed to be brought together under one strong and capable person. He felt that, God willing, he should be the one to do it. He decided to work towards achieving that goal.

But there was also another menace to the Punjab. There were some aliens, non-Punjabis, in the very heart of the Punjab, who wanted to take advantage of this disunity. There was the ruling Pathan family of Kasur. These Pathans had not become Punjabis at heart. Their loyalties were more to the land of their ancestors than to the Punjab. The rise of the Sikh *misals* had filled them with fears about their own safety. They felt that the rising Sikh power was a mortal menace to them. Each time that Ahmad Shah Abdali or his son, Taimur, had invaded India, the Pathans of Kasur had joined him in plundering their own neighbours. They wished, therefore, that the Afghans should invade the Punjab and make it a part of their empire. Their Chief, Nizamuddin Khan, hoped that by helping the invaders, he could secure *Subedari* (Governorship) of Lahore.

A still bigger menace to a free and powerful Punjab was the Afghans. Ever since the conquests of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghans had looked upon northern India as a part of their empire. Abdali's attempts to treat and use it as a part of his empire had been largely foiled and frustrated by the Sikhs. His son and successor, Taimur, had kept up pretensions to northern India. But the best that he could do was to retain his hold on Kashmir and turn out the Bhangis from Multan. Taimur's son, Shah Zaman, was full of inordinate ambition. As soon as he succeeded his father, he announced his intention of re-establishing the Afghan Empire in India. Among the first to offer him all assistance and full co-operation was Nizamuddin of Kasur.

### TO FIGHT OR FLEE?

Shah Zaman soon proved as good as his word. He invaded India in 1793. In this first invasion he came as far as

Hassan Abdal and then went back. In 1795 he came again. This time he re-took Hassan Abdal and captured Rohtas from the Sukarchakias. Ranjit Singh was thus the first Sikh Chief to suffer at Shah Zaman's hands.

The invader had, however, to hasten home in order to save his own country from an invasion from the west. As soon as he turned his back, Ranjit Singh expelled the Afghans from Rohtas.

Shah Zaman had not abandoned his ambitious intention. He came for the third time in November, 1796. He intended, as before to proceed to Delhi. He had a well-equipped army of over thirty thousand Afghans. He expected that a large number of Indians would join him. Among them was to be Nizamuddin of Kasur, who had been promised *Subedari* of Lahore. Shah Zaman also expected that Sahib Singh of Patiala would help him, in keeping with his family's tradition of loyalty to the Durranis.

As the news of Shah Zaman's invasion spread, people began to flee to the hills for safety. Most of the *misaldars* were among the first to decamp. By December, 1796, Shah Zaman had occupied the Punjab as far as the Jehlam. He was, of course, heading for Lahore. The territories of two Sikh Chiefs, namely Sahib Singh Bhangi at Gujarat and Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia, lay across the invader's route to Lahore. The former made an attempt to halt the invaders. But the odds against him were too heavy. The invaders were too many and too strongly armed for him and his horsemen. He had to give up the attempt and flee eastwards.

Ranjit Singh's turn was to come next. He could raise, at the most, five thousand undisciplined horsemen, armed with

only muskets and spears. The Afghans, on the other hand were over thirty thousand strong. They were equipped with heavy artillery and swivelguns mounted on camels. Evidently, the odds were too heavy against Ranjit Singh and his ill-equipped five thousand horsemen. Under the circumstances, he felt it would be suicidal for him to meet the invaders, all by himself.

He saw clearly that if the Afghans were to be checked, the Sikhs had to unite and face the invaders as one force. Otherwise they would be annihilated piecemeal, one by one. So concerted action was necessary. In order to come to a joint decision, Ranjit Singh decided to call a meeting of all the Sikh Chiefs or *Sarbat Khalsa* at Amritsar. That was the traditional Sikh way of meeting a common danger. So determined, he collected his family, and proceeded to Amritsar.

In compliance with the summons of the *Sarbat Khalsa*, many Sikh Chiefs assembled at Amritsar. The matter was discussed. Most of the chiefs were in favour of abandoning the plains and going into the hills for the time being. It was added, 'Let us advise and assist the people to do the same. No doubt, the Afghans will plunder our cities and towns. We shall settle accounts with them later. We shall harass them continually with our traditional hit-and-run-tactics. We shall thus make it too hot for them. They shall be forced to go back. We can follow them in order to see them off in our traditional way.'

The elderly Sahib Singh Bhangi was the chief spokesman for this point of view. He had an experience of the military might of the invaders. He pleaded that it would be impossible for them to fight and defeat the Afghans in pitched battles. Guerilla tactics, he added, would be more effective. Most of those present agreed with him.

## SADA KAUR'S BOLD STAND

The celebrated woman-warrior, Sada Kaur, was present in that meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa*. She was there as the Chief of the *Kanhya misal*. She was strongly opposed to this point of view. She had given vent to her feelings by uttering words of protest, now and then. When she saw that most of the Sikh Chiefs were inclined to show the white feather, she was deeply hurt and bitterly sad. She went up to her son-in-law, Ranjit Singh, and said to him, 'Do you see which way the wind blows here? It is a matter of shame for us all to run away in this cowardly manner. Remember the great heroes of our race. Their souls as well as souls of our immediate heroic ancestors must be feeling sad and humiliated at our cowardice being manifested here. Let us not sully their names. Let us fight the invaders with all our might and wisdom, leaving the outcome in the hands of the Almighty. We should trust in Him and do the right. I want you not to flee but to stay behind and fight. I shall be with you. What have you to say to this, my dear Ranjit? I hope you will not forget what blood runs in your veins. Speak up, my son!'

Sada Kaur's words went straight to the brave young heart of Ranjit Singh, and stirred it to its utmost depths. He stood up and thus addressed the assembly, 'Brave Khalsa warriors, let us not be overcome by fear and despair. This brave respected lady by my side has shown me the right way, the right way for all of us. It is, no doubt, hard and beset with dangers, very great dangers. But what dangers can make Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa swerve from the path of honour and glory? Let us not forget what lessons he taught us, and what spirit he infused in us. When creating the Khalsa, he declared that a single Sikh of his would boldly and fearlessly face and

fight one and a quarter lakh (125000) and never show his back to the enemy. He also declared that he would make humble little sparrows chase and pluck mighty hawks. Shall we prove unworthy of the Guru's trust? Shall we run away from the invaders, without giving them a taste of our steel? The tenth Master will turn his back on us, if we do so. Don't forget what treatment our brave ancestors, not long ago, gave to this invader's father and grandfather. Let us follow their example, come what may. I for one, weak and ill-equipped though I be, shall stay and fight, unmindful of the consequences. I, too, was wavering and slipping like most of you here, but this brave respected lady has saved and supported me. I thank her. All of you should thank her. She has saved me from going wrong. She wants to save you all from behaving in a manner unworthy of you. Wake up, Khalsaji. Let us unite to face the invaders. The wonderful Lord's is the Khalsa, and His the victory.'

Sada Kaur's and Ranjit Singh's stand turned the majority in their favour. They all agreed to back up Ranjit Singh. They chose him as the commander of the Khalsa forces. They all, including some grey-headed veterans of many battles, agreed to follow and obey this bold young man, who was hardly sixteen years of age, at that time.

So Ranjit Singh took command of the combined Sikh forces. At their head, he advanced towards Lahore. It had been occupied by Shah Zaman on January, 1, 1797. The advancing Sikh forces drove the Afghans and their Indian supporters out of the countryside. Later they, took shelter in the city. Every night the Sikh would attack some quarter of the city. After killing a number of Afghans, they would disappear into the darkness. The Afghans dared not come out and pursue the Sikhs. In fact, they were always full of fear and alarm, and longed to go back home. Shah Zaman was disillusioned and in

despair. He began to look for a face-saving excuse for giving up the campaign and going back to his country.

That excuse came at the end of January 1797. He heard that his brother, Mahmud, was organizing a rebellion in Afghanistan. He started homewards at once. He left General Shahanchi Khan with twelve thousand soldiers in Lahore. The Sikhs followed the retreating Shah all the way across the Jehlam, and relieved him of much of his baggage.

As the Sikhs were returning after having seen off Shah Zaman and his Afghans, Shahanchi Khan decided to take them by surprise and deal them a crushing blow. He fell upon them suddenly near Ramnagar. But he was speedily and completely defeated by the Khalsa forces led by Ranjit Singh.

Till then Ranjit Singh had been an obscure Sikh chieftain. But in that winter he came to be known as the hero of the Punjab.

Shah Zaman heard of his general Shahanchi Khan's defeat at Ramnagar. He felt humiliated. This sense of humiliation aroused his anger. He vowed vengeance against the Sikhs. As soon as he had settled his domestic problem, he once more started towards India. This was his fourth invasion. It occurred in the autumn of 1798.

As the news of the invasion spread, the people of the Punjab, mostly Hindus and Sikhs, began to leave their homes and seek safety in far off places. Most of them fled to the mountains. Indeed, there was panic in the whole Punjab. By October, 1798, all the big cities of the Punjab were deserted.

The Sikhs' sacred city of Amritsar was no exception. Even the sacred shrine there was left with only a handful of guards to protect it. Sahib Singh Bhangi evacuated Gujrat. The Afghans plundered the town and massacred its inhabitants. As the Hindus and Sikhs had left the city earlier, the victims were all Punjabi Muslims. The latter had hoped that the invaders, being their co-religionists, would do them no harm. Likewise Gujranwala was evacuated by Ranjit Singh. The town and its inhabitants, mostly Muslims, met the same fate.

Again a meeting of the Sarbat Khalsa was called at Amritsar to decide what course of action should be adopted. Again, the majority of those present were for fleeing to the hills. They felt that the odds against them were too heavy, for regular pitched battles. They again advocated employment of their traditional hit-and-run tactics in order to harass and tire out the Afghans.

Again it was Sada Kaur, the lion-hearted woman warrior, who spiritedly opposed the majority's talk of 'too heavy odds and the traditional hit-and-run tactics.' She said, 'Khalsaji, you are again for adopting a course of action most unworthy of you. All these specious arguments are mere excuses. They are dictated by cowardice which has gripped your hearts. They are intended to camouflage your chicken-heartedness and lack of honour. As Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa, it behoves you to dare and bear all dangers, and challenges, boldly and fearlessly, unmindful of what the outcome might be. To fly would be the height of timidity and lack of confidence in the Guru, God, and yourselves. Moreover, honour bids you to stay and fight the invaders. You have been taking protection tax or *rakhi* from the people. You are honourbound to protect them. To run away, leaving the people to the invaders' mercy, would be most dishonourable for you, my dear Khalsaji.'

'If all of you decide to show the white feather and run away, I will not join or follow you. I will stay back to brave all dangers. I am sure that a large number of the Guru's Sikhs will be ready to join me. I will lead them against the foreign invaders. Guru Gobind Singh's *Amrit* impels me to follow that course. I appeal to you, in the name of Guru Gobind Singh, in the name of our glorious heroes and martyrs and in the name of your brave ancestors to shake off all fear and weakness. Let us face and defeat the invaders. The Guru and God will be with us!'

At this Ranjit Singh stood up and said, 'I, for one, will stay and, with the help of such of my brethren as agree to cast their lots with me, fight the invaders, and protect the sacred city and shrine to my last breath.'

At this stage, Ranjit Singh's uncle, Dal Singh, stood up and said, 'Believe me, dear Khalsaji, the Afghans are not such good and formidable soldiers as they are taken to be. I say this from a little bit of experience. An armed Afghan caravan was carrying loads of fruit for Shah Zaman. I came to know of this. I made up my mind to have that fruit for myself. With only a handful of my brave companions, I fell upon the caravan, scattered them and took away the fruit as well as a lot of other useful materials. Shake off all fear. We can fight, frighten and put to flight the foreign invaders. The Guru and God will help us.'

After hearing Dal Singh's speech, all the assembled Sardars decided to stay and fight, and they said, 'Victory is the gift of God. Let us make a united effort to oppose and drive away the haughty Afghans.'

Ranjit Singh was again chosen to be the leader. He was

just eighteen years of age at that time.

### SHAH ZAMAN IN A FIX

Shah Zaman entered Lahore on November 27, 1798. Soon thereafter, he sent a strong detachment of select Afghan soldiers to attack Amritsar. Ranjit Singh was ready to receive them. He came eight kilometres out of the city to meet them. A severe battle ensued. It lasted over three hours. The Afghans were routed. They fled to Lahore. Ranjit Singh pursued the fleeing foreigners to the very gates of that city. Then he encircled the capital. He cut off the Afghan's supply-lines. He burnt the crops in the countryside around Lahore. The Afghans began to suffer for want of supplies.

The situation became very serious for them. They felt that unless they drove away the Sikhs, they would face want and starvation. So, they were forced to take the offensive. A stronger and bigger detachment of select Afghan soldiers under Nizamuddin of Kasur, was sent against the Sikhs. They attacked the latter at Shahdara on the other side of the Ravi near Lahore. The Sikhs proved too strong for the Afghans. They repulsed and routed the invaders. The Afghans suffered a heavy slaughter.

Another detachment of Afghans came from Lahore to help Nizamuddin. But by the time they had arrived, the Sikhs had disappeared. The Afghans wreaked vengeance for their defeat by attacking and plundering the local population which was entirely Muslim. The Sikhs had not molested them in any way whatsoever. But the foreigners did not show any sympathy or tenderness for their Punjabi co-religionists. Thus the Punjabi Muslims learnt a much needed lesson. They realised that their

co-Punjabi Sikh brethren were better worthy of their loyalty than their foreign co-religionists. This realization was a valuable step towards the making of a free, united and powerful Punjab.

The Afghans were in great terror. They dared not move out of the city to face the Sikhs in open battle. This made Ranjit Singh more daring. One day, accompanied by a small band of horsemen, he rode up to the Samman Burj of the Lahore fort. Shah Zaman was holding court there. Ranjit Singh fired a number of shots which killed some Afghans waiting upon the Shah. Then he shouted out, at the top of his voice, 'O grandson of Ahmad Shah, Charat Singh's grandson has come. Come out, and I challenge you for a duel.'

Shah Zaman heard the challenging shouts; but he dared not move. No Afghan had the courage to go out and meet Ranjit Singh and his small band of horsemen. After waiting for a short time, Ranjit Singh galloped away, shouting, '*Akal ! Akal!*'

Shah Zaman was in a terrible fix. He had come with the intention of proceeding to Delhi. But he found himself confined in Lahore. It seemed impossible to pierce through the Sikh barricade and move on towards Delhi. He taunted his Afghan soldiers. He exhausted his eloquence in exhorting them to go out and boldly face and finish off the 'infidels.' But so great was the terror that Ranjit Singh and his companions had created in the Afghans' minds, that they merely shook their heads and refused to stir from their barracks.

### SHAH ZAMAN'S DIPLOMACY

It was not long before Shah Zaman came to the disheart-

ening, dismal conclusion that it was impossible for him to exterminate the Sikhs. The *jihad* or holy war against the 'infidels' was proving a failure. He decided to give up fighting against them and instead to use diplomacy. Where the sword had failed, clever diplomacy might succeed. He concluded that if he could divide the Sikhs, break up their unity, he would be able, one day, to liquidate them, one by one. He thought, 'If they could be persuaded to regard me as their overlord or emperor, even in name, I can count them among those subservient to me. I can then say that their estates are a part of my empire.'

So thinking he sent his agents to Amritsar. They assured the Sikh Sardars that Shah Zaman had formed a very good opinion about them; that he had a great regard for them. 'He has decided', added they, 'to give up fighting against you. He wants to make friends with you. He says that he will not disturb your possessions. Keep what you have acquired. Give up fighting. Make peace. He wants to proceed to Delhi. He cannot do that so long as you are arrayed against him. So give up fighting. Tell us what you want. He will grant it, in order to win your goodwill and friendship.'

The Sikhs at once replied, 'We want nothing that the Shah can give us. All we want him to do is to return to his own country and leave us in peace in our land. Go and tell him that.'

The Shah's agents returned to Lahore. They informed him of their failure to rope in the Sikhs. But he was determined not to give up efforts at diplomacy. He said to his agents, 'Let us try another trick. Go and try to sow discord among the Sikh Sardars. Go to them, one by one. Make generous offers to every one of them, and hint that others are accepting the offers.'

With soft, sweet and clever words, persuade them to agree to my proposal. Ask them to send their agents to me in order to acquaint me with what they want. Assure them, at the same time, that they will be given what they want. If we succeed in dividing these troublesome infidels, we can rule over them thereafter.'

This trick of his was more successful. Many Sardars were taken in. They sent their agents to Lahore. They were received with flattering attention and talked to in soft, honeyed words, Shah Zaman met each of them separately and said, 'Tell your master that I bestow on him the territory that he owns. He need pay me no tribute. Let him keep the land and use it as he likes. I shall not disturb him. I attach no conditions to this offer. He should not hesitate to accept it.'

So great was the Shah's success that even Ranjit Singh was persuaded to send his representative to the Shah. He was instructed to negotiate with him for the *Subedari* (governorship) of Lahore.

The Afghan diplomacy was thus successful in breaking up the Sikh unity. Each Sardar was eager to acquire from the Afghan invader as much as possible. So the Shah's policy of 'divide and rule' was going to succeed.

The hour, they say, produces the man to tackle it. Just when the Shah was exulting over his diplomatic success, a saviour appeared in the person of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. He was an elderly man of great learning and piety. He was also a brave and dauntless warrior. Moreover, he was a descendant of Guru Nanak. Because of all this, he was highly respected by all Sikhs. He enjoyed the status of 'father of the Sikhs'. He was deeply pained to see this discord among the Sikh

Sardars. He felt that it would be ruinous for them, as well as for the whole Sikh community. He pleaded with the Sardars to stop all negotiations with the foreign invader. He exhorted them to bear in mind what havoc Shah Zaman's father and grandfather had caused in the country, to their community, to their sacred places and to their ancestors. He concluded by saying, 'It will be a matter of lasting shame for us to beg for gifts and favours from the Afghans. Our ancestors spurned the offers made by the foreign invaders. They refused to accept *subedari* of Lahore, when it was offered to them by Shah Zaman's grandfather, Ahmad Shah Abdali. Let us beware of the foreigner's tricks. Let us not be duped by him any further.'

The Sikh Sardars agreed to be guided by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. They said, 'You are authorized to speak on our behalf. Give to the Shah's agents whatever reply you like and think proper. We shall stand by what you say'.

Shah Zaman's agents came again to continue and conclude the negotiations. Every Sardar told them to meet and talk to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, 'He will speak for us,' they said 'We will accept what he agrees to accept.' The agents met the grand old man, stated their mission and urged him to advise the Sikhs to accept the Shah's generous offer.

He replied, 'We took the country with the sword and with sword shall we keep it. We need no gifts or grants from your master. The Khalsa will rule in their own right. Tell your master to clear off and leave us in peace. Or let him come out into the battlefield and taste a bit more of our steel.'

The Shah was sorely disappointed at the failure of his diplomatic move. He gave up his plan to win over the Sikhs. He yelled out, 'So, they don't want peace. They want war.'

They shall have it. I shall soon teach them such a lesson in war as they will never forget. They will rue the day when they rejected my generous offer.'

But it was an empty boast, as we find from a newswriter's report of the same day. It says, 'The Shah's camp is always in alarm on account of the Sikhs, who at night approach Lahore and keep up a fire of musketry. None dares to go out against them.'

Shah Zaman now heard that his brother, Mahmud, was again stirring up trouble in Afghanistan. The news offered a good, face-saving excuse to the Shah to return home. Before leaving, he proclaimed that, after setting matters with Mahmud, he would return, give the promised unforgettable lesson to the Sikhs, and conquer not only Punjab but also whole of India.

When the news of the Shah's departure reached Amritsar, the Sikh Sardars broke camp and hurried to their estates. Instead of hurrying to his estate Ranjit Singh set out in pursuit of the retreating invader. He caught up with the Afghan army's rear not far from Gujranwala. From there to the banks of the Jehlam he kept up a running fight. He took a heavy toll of the invaders' life and equipment. This pursuit led him to the banks of Indus.

All this made Ranjit Singh popular not only in the Punjab, but throughout India. He came to be regarded as the protector of the Sikh nation and saviour of the Punjab. It was generally believed that were it not for the fortitude and excellent conduct of Ranjit Singh, the whole of the Punjab would have become a desert waste.

Before leaving Shah Zaman had threatened to come again

as an invader and conqueror of India. He could not carry out that threat. He was deposed and blinded by his brother. In fact, his last invasion was the last invasion of India from the north-west. Thus the Punjab was cleared of the Afghans for ever. This was a very important step towards the making of a free and powerful Punjab.

## 6

### AMBITIOUS DREAMS

In due course, Ranjit Singh returned home, after having 'seen off' the invader, Shah Zaman beyond the Indus. His mother and mother-in-law were waiting for him with pride and affectionate eagerness. As he came in, each moved round his head a bag full of gold *Mohars* or coins, kissed him on the forehead, and called to her attendant, 'Take this bag, go out, and distribute its contents among the poor. Our Ranjit has come home after winning name, fame and glory. Tell them all to pray for him. Let all pray that his star may rise higher and brighter, day by day'.

Thanksgiving services were held in gurdwaras, temples and mosques. Gifts and food were given to the poor at large.

One day, Sada Kaur called him for confidential talk and said, 'My dear Ranjit, I have been indulging in charming dreams and making ambitious plans about you and the Punjab. As you see, the *Misals* are ever quarrelling among themselves. In this way they weaken one another. We are thus a house divided against itself. Shah Zaman has been driven out, no doubt. But before leaving, he threatened to come again with a stronger force. We, too, should make ourselves stronger, lest he should prove too strong. Moreover, the *misaldars*' mutual quarrels cause intense suffering to the people. This sad and saddening state of things must end, it must be ended?

"I agree with you fully and whole heartedly. But what should be done and by whom?" Ranjit Singh replied.

"The first thing to be done is to unite the mutually hostile and warring *misals* under one leadership" Sada Kaur said, 'By the way, we may leave out the Phulkias. They have, all along, held aloof and have even collaborated against the Khalsa Dal. If our *misals* should unite, no foreigner would dare attack us, and none could defeat us. Shah Zaman was taught the lesson of his life by our forces fighting under you, their matchless leader. We can likewise do the same to all our future foes from across the frontiers. Then we can, and shall, turn our attention to aliens holding parts of our Punjab and liquidate them, swiftly and completely."

"Fine dreams they are, to be sure," rejoined Ranjit Singh. "The idea is good, grand and noble. The scheme is splendid and charming. But how can we achieve all this? How can the mutually jealous and ever-warring *misaldars* be persuaded to unite under one leadership? Will they agree to sacrifice their individual powers and independence at the altar of unity? And who is to be the leader?"

Sada Kaur said "Who but you, my dear Ranjit. They chose you to lead the combined Khalsa force against the Durrani. And you amply justified their choice, and proved your worthiness. That should make them inclined to entrust you with more powers, in peace as well as in war. I say with confidence that a high, very high destiny awaits you. Heights of glory and greatness are beckoning you. Gird up your loins and get ready."

Ranjit Singh said, "Your dreams are charming, no doubt." "But they are, all the same, mere dreams rather too wild

dreams. In your eagerness for me, you are forgetting the stern realities before us. Will the *misaldars* give up their identities, and hand over all their powers and possessions to me? I very much doubt it. They will not readily accept me as their leader."

But Sada Kaur replied, "They did so on two recent occasions. They made you their leader to command their united forces against Shah Zaman. They agreed to be led and commanded by you. And you acquitted yourself most splendidly. They must do that again for the sake of the good of the community and the country."

"Surely they will do so, if Shah Zaman turns up again."

'No' said Sada Kaur, 'they shall do that much earlier and for good. They shall accept you as their leader, in peace and war, in order to make our community united and strong, and to make our Punjab free and powerful. We shall appeal to them. Those who choose to ignore our appeal, shall have to taste and bow before our steel. They should be assured that by agreeing to our proposals, they would not be loser but gainers in the long run. We shall not liquidate the *misaldars* or their families. Their *misals* will go, no doubt, but they themselves will be well provided for.'

"That is quite good and wise." Agreed Ranjit Singh. "They will act on the adage that says, 'If we feel that the whole is going to be lost, we should, of our own accord, part with half of it.'"

Sada Kaur continued "Let us hope that they will realize that in time, and for their own sake, too. I have my plans for you and for our Punjab. I plan to make you the master of a

great and liberated Punjab. I would see you become a maharaja, the Maharaja of the Punjab, whose name, fame and glory will live and shine in history, whose friendship and favour will be eagerly sought by rulers far and near.

“Splendid, very splendid dreams!” Said Ranjit Singh.  
“But go on.”

“I am serious.” said Sada Kaur. “I am not dreaming but disclosing my plans. I want you to be the creator of a united, free, powerful, and prosperous Punjab. Let us plan, strive and achieve, heart within and God overhead. Victory and glory shall wait on our banners. We shall give peace, happiness and prosperity to the people. We shall show them how much better it is to be ruled by Punjabis in the Punjab than by foreigners. Isn't it a grand ideal, a noble task?”

“Indeed yes”, agreed Ranjit Singh “But perhaps too high to be achieved. I eagerly desire to make my motherland forever free from foreign invasions. They come too often and too freely. They go about unchecked. They behave like wild beasts let loose on a flock of sheep. They spread panic and misery all round. They plunder and destroy our villages, towns and cities. They massacre the people. They carry away women and girls as their slaves. These Ghaznavis, Durranis, and their ilk must be made to give up doing such brutal and wicked deeds. They must be taught a bitter, unforgettable lesson. They have been visiting us too often. I should like to pay some return visits to their land in due time.”

“That is well thought and well put,” Said Sada Kaur.”  
Be sure you will do all that and more.’

On hearing this Ranjit Singh said, “However, all this seems to be no better than a wild dream. In my ambitious and

uncontrolled enthusiasm I start building castles in the air. I am getting too prone to day-dreaming.”

“There is nothing wrong or unworthy in building castles in the air,” continued Sada Kaur. “All castles are first built in the air. Only afterwards they are built on the earth. We have to begin with building castles in the air, and then end with castles on the earth. What is wrong and undesirable is to begin and end with castles in the air alone. We should guard against that failing. Sure and complete success will be ours. Let us ever trust in God and do the right. All the same, we should not be proud, boastful, or overbearing. Let us ever remember that sweetness and humility forms the essence of all virtues and good qualities.’

“I shall ever try to keep my behaviour modest and my projects high, declared Ranjit Singh.” May He be my guide and helper at all times and in all places!”

‘Amen ! May He accept your prayer!’

## LAHORE LIBERATED

### CITIZENS' DECISION

Lahore had been liberated from the Afghans by the Sikhs in 1765. Three Bhangi Sardars—Lehna Singh, Gujjar Singh, and Sobha Singh—had captured it and divided it among themselves. At the time of Shah Zaman's last invasion, the city was in the possession of the above-said Sardars' sons, namely, Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh. They paid little heed to the administration of the city or the welfare of its people. They were given to loose and luxurious living. Very often, they indulged in mutual quarrels. Quite often, they used to raid and plunder one another's parts of the city. These quarrels and raids brought much misery to the people in every part of the city. Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, all suffered alike. 'The people of Lahore, says a contemporary writer, 'being extremely oppressed, raised their voices in wailing to the skies.'

### CITIZENS' JUBILATIONS

In accordance with the unanimous decision made in a meeting of the Lahore citizens, a letter was addressed to Ranjit Singh. It was signed by the topmost leader of each community. It was sent to him through special, trustworthy messengers. It was speedily delivered to him.

By nature, Ranjit Singh was cautious and sagacious in

such matters. He was averse to acting in haste, without fully weighing the pros and cons. Therefore, before committing himself on this matter or embarking on any action concerning it, he thought it prudent to make sure that the invitation was genuine. For who knows it might be some mischief-mongers' clever device to involve him in a conflict with the Bhangi Sardars.

Accordingly, he deputed a trusted servant of his, Abdur Rahman, to go with the citizens' envoys, study the state of affairs in the city, and advise him what to do. Abdur Rahman went to Lahore. He held talks with the leading Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh citizens of the city. Having studied the situation to his satisfaction, he returned to his master.

After despatching Abdur Rahman to study the situation at Lahore, Ranjit Singh had gone to consult with Sada Kaur at Batala. Abdur Rahman met him there and submitted his report. He assured Ranjit Singh that the invitation was genuine, that it expressed the true feelings of the Lahore citizens. 'Moreover,' added he, 'of the three Lahore Sardars, only one, Sahib Singh, could have offered some effective resistance. He is away from the city. The other two are altogether incapable of offering any such resistance as may cause us any worry or difficulty.'

Ranjit Singh sought Sada Kaur's advice. She was much delighted. She said, 'So our dreams are on their way to realization! You will be master of the Punjab's capital. Who controls the capital controls the country. Soon you will become master of the Punjab. We should accept the invitation and take immediate action. By helping them we shall be helping ourselves.'

Preparations were made for the attack. When all was

ready, Sada Kaur said to her son-in-law, 'We shall tell our soldiers not to do any harm whatsoever to the people or their property. Victorious armies, as you of course know, are wont to reward themselves by plundering the conquered city. In the process they inflict much suffering and shed much innocent blood. Our soldiers should do nothing of that sort. They should remember that we and they are going to Lahore not to conquer but to deliver. We are not to behave as enemies and conquerors but as friends and deliverers. We ourselves will give them ample rewards.'

Ranjit Singh was of the same view. He concurred with his mother-in-law readily and wholeheartedly. Accordingly strict instructions were given to all the soldiers who were to take part in the coming campaign.

With an army of twenty-five thousand select soldiers, Ranjit Singh started towards Lahore on June 26, 1799. It was the worst part of the year for a military campaign in that part of the Punjab. The summer's heat was intense and scorching. The monsoons might break at any moment and convert the Punjab plains into a vast marsh. Perhaps Ranjit Singh chose this time for the expedition for that very reason. He was sure that the Lahore Sardars had no thought that any attack could or would be made on their city in that hot scorching season. They would be caught napping, taken unawares and ill-prepared for offering any resistance.

Marching at leisure, Ranjit Singh's army arrived close to Lahore in the evening. During the night the entire city was encircled. By sunrise everyone of the twenty-five thousand soldiers was in his place and every gun was in its position. Sada Kaur chose to attack the Delhi Gate. Ranjit Singh went to attack the Anarkali. There he was given a secret message of

welcome from the citizens of Lahore. He rode round the city walls, which he mined in several places. When a breach was blown in the wall, the leader of the Lahore Muslims caused a proclamation to be made with the beat of drums, that he had taken the city's administration into his own hands. He ordered all the gates of the city to be thrown open, so that the deliverers might enter the city.

Ranjit Singh entered the city through the Lohari Gate. Sada Kaur led in her horsemen through the Delhi Gate. Thousands of citizens standing on house tops, raised loud shouts of welcome to their deliverers and showered flowers on them.

Lahore was thus taken with very little bloodshed or loss of life.

#### AN ENEMY MADE A FRIEND

As Abdur Rahman had reported, Sahib Singh Bhangi was away from Lahore when the city was attacked and taken by Ranjit Singh. When Ranjit Singh's forces entered the city, Sahib Singh's family as well as Mohar Singh with his family and retainers fled through other gates. They were not chased and not molested in any way. However, Chet Singh shut himself in the fort.

Ranjit Singh had a mind to attack the fort. Guns were placed in position. But before firing had begun Sada Kaur advised him to hold back orders for the attack on the fort. She said to him, 'Let no shot be fired at the fort. We shall not waste any time and effort in forcing entry into the fort. Let Sardar Chet Singh remain in it as long as he likes. We need have no worry concerning him. Let us attend to other more important and urgent matters.'

Accordingly Ranjit Singh now addressed himself to the essential task of establishing peace and calm in the city.

He pitched his camp under the walls of the fort alongside the Royal Mosque. Deputations of leading citizens from each of three parts of the city waited upon him. They thanked him for his having delivered them from the Bhangi Sardars' misrule, offered him their fullest loyalty, and expressed the hope that an era of peace and plenty would begin for Lahore and the people of Lahore. Ranjit Singh reassured them in every way.

Chet Singh had shut himself in the fort. Ranjit Singh had in no way, disturbed him. Chet Singh did not take long to realize that yield he must, so why should he prolong the suspense and anxiety ? He decided to deliver himself to the victor. The very next day, he sent his envoys to Ranjit Singh. The latter received them with courtesy and kindness. He asked them what their mission was. They said, 'Sardar Chet Singh sent his greetings to you. He says that he is ready to hand over the fort. All he prays for is that his life be spared. He will leave his all here for you.'

Sada Kaur was then by Ranjit Singh's side. She said to him, 'As I have often suggested, you should treat magnanimously all whom you subdue. Don't take away their all from them. Don't make them paupers. Don't earn their lasting enmity and hearty curses. Provide for them handsomely, so that they may pass their lives comfortably and in peace. If you do that, your fallen adversaries will become your friends'

Ranjit Singh accepted her advice. He said to Chet Singh's envoys, 'Go back and tell your master that no harm shall be done to him. He may take away all his belongings. He

may depart in peace, at his pleasure.'

Soon Chet Singh came out of the fort, sad and crest-fallen. With bowed head, he approached Ranjit Singh. The latter rose from his seat and stepped forward to receive him. Then, in the presence of all, he embraced his fallen adversary. Then he announced the grant to him of a handsome *jagir* for his life-time. Thus was a bitter enemy turned into a grateful friend.

The eighteen-year-old conqueror of Lahore entered the fort on July 7, 1799. Guns fired a royal salute. 'Trumpets of happiness were blown and kettledrums of victory were beaten in every direction' There were hearty rejoicings everywhere in the city. The occupation of Lahore by Ranjit Singh marked the beginning of a just and peaceful government after decades of unrest, chaos and misrule.

# 8

## MAHARAJA OF LAHORE

### DISSIDENTS' CONSPIRACY

Before Ranjit Singh's debut on the political stage of the Punjab, Bhangis had been the most important of the Sikh *misals*. They were in possession of Lahore, Amritsar, and most of the Western Punjab. But by ejecting them from Lahore, Ranjit Singh had dealt them a big blow. Erosion of their position had started with their expulsion from that city. They could not but feel perturbed and angry. It was but natural for them to plan to take vengeance on Ranjit Singh.

At the time when Lahore was occupied by Ranjit Singh, Sahib Singh Bhangi, one of the three Sardars who had been in possession of the city was away. He was at Gujrat. When he heard of what had taken place at Lahore, he vowed vengeance against Ranjit Singh. He hurried to Amritsar, where a branch of the Bhangi family was in power. He consulted with his kinsmen and friends there. All shared the fear that after having taken Lahore, Ranjit Singh would take Amritsar and other parts of the Punjab. They were all unanimously of the view that effective steps should be taken to curb Ranjit Singh's power before he became too strong. It was decided that all Sikh Sardars, and even the Pathans of Kasur, should be brought together to oppose him.

Ranjit Singh had twice led the combined forces of the

Sikhs against Shah Zaman, and chased him out of the country. Thereby, he had become the hero of the Punjab. By ejecting the Bhangis from Lahore, he had taken a long leap on the road to ultimate supremacy. As his power and fame increased, the attitude of the other *misaldars* underwent a radical change. They had chosen him as their leader in the campaign against their common enemy, the Afghan invader. But his latest adventure and success had made them burn with hatred and jealousy. His former colleagues turned against him. They met to conspire against him. They allied themselves with the Bhangi Chiefs who had been turned out of Lahore.

Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur was also approached and informed of the intended campaign against Ranjit Singh. He readily joined their ranks. In fact, he had instigated some of the Sikh Sardars to conspire and rise against Ranjit Singh. His grievance against Ranjit Singh was that the latter had been chiefly instrumental in shattering his dreams of becoming the *Subedar* (Governor) of Lahore. Moreover, he had his fears about his own future, too. Ranjit Singh might, in time, decide to liquidate him.

All who were opposed to Ranjit Singh met at Amritsar. It was decided that he should be attacked and driven out of Lahore. Gulab Singh Bhangi was chosen to lead the combined forces of the dissident Sikh Chiefs. These forces under Gulab Singh Bhangi, and the Pathan forces under Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur, advanced towards Lahore in the spring of 1800. Ranjit Singh went out to meet them. He stopped their progress at Bhasin, a village about fifteen kilometres from Lahore.

Skirmishes took place now and then. There was no major or pitched battle. Gulab Singh Bhangi was not very eager to force a decision. He gave himself up to drinking country

liquor and watching dances of nautch girls. One of his drinking bouts caused a haemorrhage which proved fatal. His death broke the spirit of the army which he had led. Dejected and disheartened, the soldiers melted away quietly. Ranjit Singh returned to Lahore, after a sort of two months' spring-time outing in the countryside.

A short time, thereafter a chest containing twenty thousand gold *mohars* was unearthed in an old ruin named *Budhuda Ava*. His enemies having been scattered, and his treasury having been replenished Ranjit Singh was fully established as the master of Lahore. He could now think of acquiring the rest of the Punjab.

### A HOLY PEACE-MAKER

“Ranjit Singh had captured the capital of the Punjab, no doubt, but he was yet far from being the ruler of the Punjab. As a matter of fact, the capture of Lahore had created for him more enemies than allies. The experience of dissident Sikh Chiefs had made him alert and cautious. He was sure that his enemies would sooner or later, come against him again. So, he decided not to give them time to gang up for that purpose. He made up his mind to deal with them, one by one.

The first among his enemies to receive his attention was the Raja of Jammu. He had collaborated with Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur against him. Ranjit Singh decided to punish the Raja. He marched towards Jammu. In lightning marches he soon came within six kilometres of the city. The Raja was in panic. He had no guts to stand the attack. He made his submission at once. He readily paid a penalty in the form of an elephant and twenty thousand rupees. At the same time, he promised to be loyal in future. In this campaign Ranjit Singh

added to his domains the towns of Vairawal, Narowal and Sarsowal.

Since their expulsion from Lahore and their dismal failure at Bhasin, the Bhangi Sardars had been busy in conspiring against Ranjit Singh. Sahib Singh Bhangi, in particular, had been secretly increasing his army and fighting strength. Then he approached Dal Singh, the Chief of Akalgrah. The two plotted to attack Gujranwala.

Ranjit Singh learnt of their plans and preparations. He decided to fall on them before they were completely ready to attack his city. With a body of ten thousand soldiers and twenty cannons, he marched towards Sahib Singh Bhangi's city of Gujrat, to which he laid siege. The attack was so sudden that the Bhangi Sardar was taken by surprise. He shut himself up in his fort. From the fort's walls he directed gunfire against the besiegers. The fire was returned by the besiegers with great force and precision.

Soon the Bhangi Sardar realized that he would not be able to hold out very long. So he sent his men to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una. They were told to inform the venerable Bedi Sahib about the situation at Gujrat and to pray for his immediate intervention.

On learning of the open rift between the two leading Sardars Baba Sahib Singh Bedi hurried to Gujrat. In the name of the Guru, he ordered the parties to lay down their arms. Such was the prestige of this saint-soldier descendant of Guru Nanak Dev, that the Sardars at once obeyed him without demur. Ranjit Singh was the first to act. He untied his sword from his waist, and placed it on the ground before Baba Sahib. The other Sardars followed suit. For a whole hour the swords

lay on the ground. All the time the Sardars stood with hands folded and heads bowed. Then Baba Sahib Singh Bedi took up Ranjit Singh's sword, tied it round Ranjit Singh's waist, and said to him, 'Cheer up. Within a short time, all your opponents will be destroyed and your rule will be established throughout the country. I wish you to leave Gujrat alone, and be friends with the Bhangi Sardars.'

Ranjit Singh obeyed and departed, leaving the town of Gujrat in the possession of Sahib Singh Bhangi. Then he proceeded towards Akalgarh in order to punish its chief, Dal Singh, who had plotted against him. Ranjit Singh captured the fort and took Dal Singh with him to Lahore. The Chief admitted his fault and prayed to be forgiven. Ranjit Singh readily pardoned his repentant enemy and left him in possession of his estate.

## CORONATION

Ranjit Singh was now the acclaimed leader of the Punjab and was in possession of the Punjab's capital town. He was thus, in all but name, the Maharaja of the Punjab. But he hesitated to assume the formal title of Maharaja. He had cogent reasons for this hesitation. He feared that his assumption of that title might antagonize the other Chiefs. They might again conspire against him. That would be bad and even harmful ; for their strength was not inconsiderable. In addition, they could secure the co-operation of persons like Nizamuddin Khan.

But things were moving in his favour. In February 1809 the leaders of the chief cities of the Punjab, Ranjit Singh's prominent Sardars, and his whole army through its officers submitted a joint petition to him. In it they prayed that a large

gathering be called at Lahore to which all Sikh Sardars should be invited. In that gathering, it was suggested, the title of Maharaja of the Punjab be given to him by the people

Ranjit Singh was still hesitant but Sada Kaur persuaded him to accept the title. She said to him, 'Your assumption of the title will mark the full realization of our dreams. I, for one, have been yearning and praying for this, all these years. By taking on the title of "Maharaja of the Punjab," you will assume rights of sovereignty not only over all Sikhs, but also over the people who live within the geographical limits of the Punjab. It will give you a legal right to demand that the territories which have previously paid revenue to Lahore, should now pay tribute and owe allegiance to you. As you know, such territories are Jammu, Kashmir, the Rajput hill states, Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Gazi Khan, Mankera etc. The assumption of the title will open up endless possibilities. So you must agree, my dear Lion Victor of Battles.'

At last Ranjit Singh agreed to a formal investiture. The Baisakhi day of 1801 A.D. (April 12) was fixed for the ceremony. On that day, prayers were said in the mosques, temples, and gurdwaras, all over his domain. A large gathering was held in the fort. It was attended, among others by all Sikh Sardars and important leaders of all towns and cities. When all was ready, prayers were said before Guru Granth Sahib by Bhai Gurmukh Singh, leader of the Lahore Sikhs. Then Baba Sahib Singh Bedi applied a saffron mark to Ranjit Singh's forehead, and proclaimed him 'Maharaja of the Punjab.' A royal salute was fired from the fort. In the afternoon, the Maharaja rode on the back of richly decorated elephant and paraded through the city's main streets. The streets were crowded by his jubilant subjects, on whom were showered gold and silver coins. In the evening, there was *deepmala* in

the city, that is, the city was illuminated with *oil-lamps*. There was also a rich display of fire-works. The popular rejoicing continued throughout the night.

## A PUNJABI STATE

Even after assuming the title of 'Maharaja of the Punjab', Ranjit Singh fully avoided any display of his royal status, and tried to be known more as a peasant leader than as a king. He had been crowned king but he still refused to wear an emblem of royalty on his simple turban. He refused to sit on a throne. He continued to hold *darbars* seated cross-legged in his chair. More often, he liked to recline on cushions on a carpet, in the oriental fashion.

He ordered new coins to be struck. But the coins did not bear his effigy or his name. They bore, instead, the name and effigy of Guru Nanak. They were called Nanak Shahi coins, coins of the Emperor Nanak. Some coins had the same inscription in Persian as had appeared on the coins struck by Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, namely:-

*'Deg o tegh o fateh o nusrat bedirang*

*Yaft az' Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

(The Kettle and the Sword -symbols of Charity and Power, victory, and ready patronage have been obtained from Guru Nanak, Gobind Singh.)

Similarly, the seal of government did not bear his name, but the same Persian inscription. His government he called not his own but Sarkar Khalsaji, that is, of the people who had brought it into being. His court was called Darbar Khalsaji. He himself liked to be addressed by the simple title of Singh

Sahib. By the people in general he was called *Sarkar*.

Soon after his coronation, Ranjit Singh directed his attention to re-organizing the administration and improving the condition and appearance of Lahore. The city walls and gates were all repaired. He found that under the Bhangi misrule, crime had increased a great deal. To check it, he posted pickets at all strategic points. The city was divided into wards. Each ward had its *Chaudhri* or Headman, who was responsible for peace in his locality. He could call out the police whenever there was a disturbance. The first Head of Police (Kotwal) of Lahore was a Muslim named Imam Bakhsh.

He also reorganized the administration of justice, in such a way that cheap and ready justice was made available to all. The majority of the population was Muslim. They wanted their affairs to be regulated in accordance with the law of *Shariat*. Hence, he appointed special courts for the Muslims. Nizam Din was appointed Chief Quazi (Judge). Two other well-qualified and trusted Muslims were appointed *muftis*.



Hakim Nuruddin



**Raja Dina Nath Finance Minister**

A chain of dispensaries was opened in different parts of the city. In them Unani medicine was dispensed free of charge. Hakim Nuruddin, younger brother of Foreign Minister Fakir Azizuddin, was appointed the Chief Medical Officer. Schools were opened in all parts of the city where free education was imparted to children of all communities. His Finance Minister was a Hindu-Raja Dina Nath. Raja Dhian Singh, also a Hindu, was his Prime Minister.

Within a short time, Ranjit Singh convinced the people that he did not intend to set up a Sikh Kingdom. He wanted, rather, to set up a Punjabi State in which all Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, would be equal before the law, and would have the same rights and duties. He invited talented Muslims and Hindus to join his service thus establishing a truly secular Punjabi government.

## 9

### TAKING OF AMRITSAR

Amritsar was the Punjab's second largest city. But commercially, it was more important than the largest city, Lahore. It was the chief trading centre for northern India. Goods were brought here from Central Asia by caravans, and exchanged for products of India. It was therefore, a rich and prosperous city. For the Sikhs, it was their most sacred place. Indeed, as far as the Sikhs were concerned, Amritsar was the most important place in the world. Therefore, for anyone who aspired to be the leader of the Sikhs and the Maharaja of the Punjab, it was necessary to take Amritsar in order to justify his aspiration and title.

At that time, Amritsar was divided among about a dozen Bhangi families. They owned different parts of the city. Each family had built its own tiny fortress in the part which they owned. They had in employment a number of armed tax-collectors. These tax collectors were hard-hearted. They made heavy collections at the point of the sword. Moreover, there was frequently friction between the tax-collectors of different families. Quite often, this led to street fights. Consequently, the citizens were tired of this state of things. They made secret approaches to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and requested him to come to their deliverance.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had already learnt that the Bhangi Sardars of Amritsar were preparing to fight against him. They

were conspiring with Ramgarhias for that purpose. Mai Sukhan, the widow of the Bhangi Chief Gulab Singh, was said to be the most active participant in this conspiracy. It was she who enlisted the Ramgarhias' support. Her's was the only family of importance in Amritsar. She was in occupation of the Gobindgarh fort.

The Amritsar citizens' request reached the Maharaja in the autumn of 1802. Preparations for marching upon Amritsar were started at once. After a short time, the combined forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sada Kaur, and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia reached Amritsar. The city was encircled. The Ramgarhias who had promised to join the Amritsar Sardars, did not turn up. Their non-arrival was a great damper for the Sardars. They did not have the guts to come out to oppose the forces from Lahore. They shut up the city's gates. They mounted guns on their fortress within the city and began to fire on the besiegers.

Ranjit Singh was anxious to respect and preserve the sanctity of the Sikhs' most sacred city. After taking counsel with Sada Kaur, he ordered that guns with only blank powder charges were to be fired. Their noise would, he thought, help the Sardars to realize that resistance was useless. Loud war-cries of *Sat Sri Akal* were repeatedly raised aloud by the besieging Sikh forces. War-drums were beaten most energetically.

The booming of guns, the loud war-cries of *Sat Sri Akal*, and the thundering noise of the war drums, filled the people with fear and made them very nervous. They were all eager to end the struggle.

At that time there was, in Amritsar, a remarkable person

who was highly respected by the citizens, and who was destined to play a most significant part in Maharaja's battles, and to become a most important general in his armies of conquest. That person was Akali Phula Singh.

Born in 1791 in village Shinh, Amritsar district, he had joined the Nihang order in early life. He had dedicated his life to the care of the Sikh shrines. He was most devout and sincere, and loved to serve the people in accordance with Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's teachings. Consequently, he was highly respected not only by the citizens of Amritsar but also by all others who knew or heard of him.

He was deeply distressed to find Sikh forces engaged in fighting among themselves. The spectacle of Sikhs, firing on Sikhs was very painful to him. He consulted with the leading citizens. Then, accompanied by leaders of the Amritsar citizens, he marched out and stood between the opposing forces. He succeeded in persuading them to stop fighting. The Sardars surrendered one by one. Mai Sukhan was the last to agree to surrender. She gave up the fort. She was given a handsome pension for herself and her son, Gurdit Singh.

Thus the fort of Amritsar passed into the Maharaja's hands. It was a valuable acquisition. He also acquired five cannons. One of them was Ahmad Shah Abdali's large Zam Zam, which had caused havoc among the Maratha ranks at Panipat. It had been taken from the Afghans by the Bhangi Sardars. Since then it has been named the *Bhangidan di tope*.

Akali Phula Singh was largely responsible for Maharaja Ranjit Singh's easy and bloodless victory at Amritsar. The Maharaja invited him to join his army. He agreed. He brought with him between two to three thousand Nihangs or Akalis to

join the State Army. This acquisition of Baba Phula Singh and his Akalis, was, for the Maharaja, far more important than the acquisition of the Amritsar fort and its five cannons. The Maharaja owed many of his celebrated victories to the desperate bravery of Baba Phula Singh and his Akalis.

The holy city of Amritsar, thus became a part of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's domain in December 1802. He was given a rousing, tumultuous reception in the sacred city. He rode through its narrow streets mounted on a decorated elephant. He was every where cheered most lustily by the jubilant crowds.

He and his Sardars then went to pay homage at the sacred shrine, the Darbar Sahib. They bathed in the sacred pool and made large offerings at the temple. The Maharaja donated a large sum with which the temple was to be built in marble and gold leaf.

# 10

## TOWARDS A UNITED PUNJAB

### JHANG

A number of independent principalities still existed in the Punjab. Some of them still continued to declare their allegiance to Afghanistan. The Maharaja's ambition to create a united Punjab could not be fulfilled until these independent principalities were made to declare allegiance to the government of the Punjab. Accordingly, he sent invitations to these principalities to do so. Many of them complied. But some of them contemptuously turned down the Maharaja's invitation. Among those who did so was Ahmad Khan Sial, who owned the territories of Jhang. He was very very rich and the best horse-breeder of the Punjab.

As was but natural, the Maharaja decided to humble the pride of Ahmad Khan. In the beginning of 1803, he led his troops against Jhang. Ahmad Khan declared *Jihad* and enlisted thousands of Sial and Kharl tribesmen to help him in his 'holy war' against the infidel Sikhs. So he appeared in the field at the head of a formidable host. On the arrival of the Lahore forces, the battle started with a cannonade from both sides. When Ahmad Khan's *Ghazis* (Muslim crusaders) had exhausted their gunpowder, their horsemen made a fierce charge. The Maharaja's troops successfully withstood the fierce attack. Then they made the counterattack. The Sials galloped away and took shelter in their fortress town. The Maharaja's ele-

phants crashed through one of the gates. His forces rushed in and compelled the Sials to lay down their arms.

In the commotion of the hand to hand fighting in the fortress, Ahmad Khan managed to slip away to Multan. But after some time, he came to realize that the Maharaja did not want to deprive him of his territory; that what he wanted was to induce the Sials and other tribesmen of the region to throw in their lot with their Punjabi brethren.

So persuaded, he sent a deputation to the Maharaja. He admitted his mistake, prayed to be forgiven and agreed to make his submission. The Maharaja was ever ready to forget and forgive. He reinstated Ahmad Khan at Jhang. Ahmad Khan undertook to pay six thousand rupees as annual revenue to the Punjab government. He also gave the Maharaja a number of his best-bred horses.

## KASUR

Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur was a sworn and long-standing foe of the Sikhs and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As we know, he had invited Shah Zaman to attack Punjab. Then he had joined his own forces with those of the invaders and fought against the Sikhs who were led by Ranjit Singh. Then he tried to persuade the Muslims of Lahore to invite and help him to assume *Subedari* of Lahore. Then he joined the dissident Sikh Sardars and fought against Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Bhasin. Still later, he conspired with Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat against the Maharaja.

On account of all this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was convinced that, unless Nizamuddin Khan's power was completely broken, he would continue to conspire and create trouble.

Hence, after settling the affairs of Lahore, he turned his attention to the Pathans of Kasur. Towards the end of 1801, he sent Fateh Singh Kalianwala to chastise Nizamuddin. The Pathans came out to meet the advancing Lahore troops. They fought with desperate bravery. But they soon had to retreat behind the walls of the town. The siege did not last long. The Lahore troops blew up one of the gates. They entered the town and began mowing down the Pathans. The latter laid down their arms. Nizamuddin agreed to pay a heavy penalty and to recognize Maharaja Ranjit Singh as his sovereign. The Maharaja accepted this.

But Nizamuddin did not keep the peace for long. Soon, he forgot his oath of allegiance to the Lahore Darbar. When the Maharaja was engaged in dealing with the small Muslim principalities in the south, Nizamuddin took advantage of his absence. He plundered some villages near Lahore. On hearing this, the Maharaja returned hurriedly and made straight for Kasur. Nizamuddin withdrew his troops into the town. He made preparations to stand a long siege. Ranjit Singh ordered heavy guns to be brought from Lahore. They soon pounded the walls of the fort. Nizamuddin surrendered. The ever generous Maharaja pardoned him once again, and allowed him to keep his territory as before. Nizamuddin swore once more to be loyal to the Lahore Darbar.

After Nizamuddin's death his place was taken by his brother Kutubuddin Khan. He began to make preparations to aim another blow at Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He enlisted a large number of fanatic Muslims for *jihad* or holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs. He fortified Kasur and stocked the fort with provisions that would be sufficient to outlast a long siege. He persuaded Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan to supply him with trained soldiers and war-material.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh learnt of what Kutubuddin Khan

was doing. He sent his minister Fakir Azizuddin to Kasur in order to persuade Kutubuddin to give up his planned disloyal action against the Maharaja. Fakir Azizuddin used all his arts of persuasion. At the end of his long talk, he said, 'Khan Sahib, the days of religious wars are gone. The Maharaja commands the affection and loyalty of thousands of Muslims. It is wrong to say that to fight him and his troops is to engage in a *jihad*. You will be fighting not against Sikhs but Punjabis-Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. You should not think of engaging in such a fight. I would advise you to continue to be faithful to the Maharaja and the government of the Punjab'

But Kutubuddin Khan refused to give in. He Said, 'Be gone. I refuse to listen to one who eats the salt of an infidel. You are not much better than an infidel yourself. Tell your master to come. I am ready to receive him.'

On hearing Fakir Azizuddin's report the Maharaja made ready to deal with Kutubuddin Khan. He led his army himself. Akali Phula Singh, with his band of Nihangs, also accompanied the Maharaja.

The battle began on the morning of February 10, 1807. In the beginning, Akali Phula Singh and his Nihangs led the attack on the *Ghazis* or Muslim crusaders. The latter were driven behind their stockades. Then the artillery went into action. For full one month the Sikh guns continued firing on the walls of the Kasur fort. They failed to make any impression. At last, one night, Sikh miners made a tunnel up to the base of the western bastion. A heavy charge of gunpowder was put under it. It was fired early in the morning. It tore a large gap in the wall. Akali Phula Singh and his Nihangs charged through the breach. After a fierce hand-to-hand fight, the Akalis succeeded in vanquishing the Pathans and the Ghazis.

The fort was thus captured. Kutubuddin Khan tried to run away. He was, however, caught and brought before the Maharaja who not only forgave Kutubuddin Khan and spared his life, but also granted him a handsome *jagir* at Mamdot. Kasur was made a part of the Punjab under the Lahore Darbar.

## MULTAN

Multan was a district of the Punjab. It had been taken by the Bhangi Sardars more than once. But they had been ejected from there. Since the Afghan invasions, Multan began to have closer administrative ties with Kabul than with Lahore. Its ruling family, being Muslim, considered an allegiance with the Afghans more convenient than one with Lahore. Ranjit Singh was determined to reclaim Multan and bring it with in the country to which it belonged, that is to make its ruler owe allegiance to Lahore instead of to Kabul.

Early in 1808, he announced his intention to proceed to Multan. Almost all his Sardars advised him against undertaking the expedition. They thought that Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan would prove too strong for, the Lahore forces. But Maharaja Ranjit Singh stuck to his resolve. He marched out of Lahore at the head of his troops.

Nawab Muzaffar Khan; on his part, was fully prepared to meet Ranjit Singh's attack. Raising the familiar cry of *Jihad* or holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs, he had roused the Muslims of the neighbouring districts to come to his aid. They came in their thousands. But they could not stop the advance of the Lahore forces. The latter entered the suburbs of Multan without any difficulty. They directed their gunfire on the mud fort which was in the heart of the city. Muzaffar Khan soon real-

ized that he could not hold out for long. So, he made his submission. He agreed to pay indemnity, send his quota of revenue to Lahore instead of sending it to Kabul, and remain faithful to the Lahore Darbar. Thus Multan became a part of the Punjab.

But Muzaffar Khan soon forgot his oath of allegiance to the Lahore Darbar. In 1807, he helped Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur against the Maharaja by sending troops and war material. After dealing with Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur, Maharaja Ranjit Singh decided to punish Muzaffar Khan for his share in Kutubuddin's defiance of the Lahore Darbar's authority. He ordered his army to proceed from Kasur to Multan. As before, Muzaffar Khan began to rouse his Muslim neighbours to come to his aid against the 'infidel' Sikhs; but this time none was willing to share his adventure. The Lahore forces entered the city unchecked. Muzaffar Khan found that resistance was useless. He made his submission and prayed for forgiveness. The ever generous Maharaja forgave him again. The Nawab paid twenty thousand rupees as penalty for his assistance to Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur.

But Muzaffar Khan was incorrigible. He again began to hold back payment of the promised revenue. Even otherwise, his conduct was obstructive and far from desirable. Influenced by his example, other southern Nawabs also became tardy in paying the revenues due to the Lahore Darbar.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was convinced that Muzaffar Khan was untrustworthy and that he would always pose a grave danger to the government of the Punjab. He decided that for the creation of a united Punjab, it was necessary to liquidate the Nawab. Hence, early in 1818, he decided to make an all-out effort to capture Multan. A force of twenty thousand, under the

command of Prince Kharak Singh and Minister Dewan Chand, was ordered to Multan. Artillery, under the command of Ilahi Bakhsh, was also ordered to proceed thither.

Nawab Muzaffar became aware of the Lahore Darbar's preparations against him. He realized that this time he would not be able to bribe or buy off the Darbar. As before, he roused the Muslim population of the countryside to fight a holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs. He got a good response this time. He also prepared the city and the fort for a long siege.

In due course, the Darbar forces reached Multan. The first engagement was in the open. Here the *Ghazis* -Muslim crusaders-did most of the fighting. The battle lasted one day. The *Ghazis* gained the martyrdom that they sought. Muzaffar Khan withdrew his regular forces behind the city walls. The Lahore troops surrounded the city and began to bombard its walls. For about two weeks, the defenders held their own in the city. But by then the city wall was blown up at several points. The Lahore army entered the city. The defenders retreated into the fort

For a whole month, Ilahi Bakhsh's batteries pounded the fort walls, without making any impression. The Bhangi cannon, Zam Zama, was brought up. With each shot it sent eighty pounds of solid metal into the wall and tore huge holes in it. The other cannons also went on doing their work. The gunners worked with wonderful enthusiasm. But the besieged with equally dauntless bravery plugged up the holes in the fort-walls and the fort was held for a long time.

Then, one night, a party of Akalis or Nihangs, under the cover of darkness, managed to lay a mine under the fort-wall. Next morning, a huge portion of the fort-wall was blown out.

Thereupon Nawab Muzaffar Khan decided to surrender. He sent his envoys to discuss and settle terms of surrender. He accepted the terms and asked for a treaty to be drawn up accordingly. A draft was prepared. When, however, it was presented to him for signature, he was dissuaded by his soldiers from signing it. 'It is better' said the brave soldiers, 'to die in honour than to live in shame. We will not surrender, but fight the enemy to the last.'

The Nawab, accordingly, refused to sign the treaty. He got ready to fight. The breaches in the fort-wall were plugged-up during the night. The besieged then hurled defiance at the besiegers.

So the attack was renewed. The gunners did their work with greater enthusiasm and precision. Many daring deeds of matchless bravery were performed, and many soul-stirring incidents occurred, during that historic siege of Multan.

One such soul-stirring incident is recorded by a Muslim eyewitness, named Ghulam Jilani, in his book Jang-i-Multan (Battle of Multan). He says:-

'While the bombardment of the fort-walls was going on, one of the Sikh guns lost one of its wheels. The Sardar in charge of the gun was of the opinion that if he could fire a few more shots, he would certainly succeed in making a breach in the wall. But that could not be done unless the lost wheel was replaced. There was no time for repairs. The delay was very dangerous. But from where to get the wheel or a substitute? He had a brain wave, inspired, no doubt, by his unlimited, irrepressible enthusiasm for the cause. He said to his gunner, "There is only one way to achieve our purpose. We should

come forward to serve as a wheel. We should lay our shoulders, one by one under the axle on the broken side. The gun should go on firing shots till a breach is made in the fort-wall. Our lives will be lost no doubt; but it will be a worthy contribution towards the victory of the Panth. We should gladly sacrifice our lives for the honour of the Khalsa. What is your opinion, brother? Be quick. No time for deliberation ”

‘All his gunners jumped at the idea. Every one of them wanted to be the first to make the supreme sacrifice. There was wrangling amongst them for priority. But they were soon silenced by the Sardar. He said that they should come in only on the order of their ranks. “As I am the senior-most,” added he, ‘I shall go in first of all. Others should follow in the order of their seniority.’” He did accordingly. He supported the axle on his shoulder. The gun was fired. He fell down dead under the pressure of the gun.

‘One by one the brave gunners went forward to lay down their lives as their leader had done. It was after the tenth or eleventh shot that a breach was made in the wall. By then as many of the brave, patriotic gunners had sacrificed their lives under the pressure of the gun. As soon as the breach was made, Akali Sadhu Singh and his Akalis rushed to the spot with swords in their hands, shouting “*Sat Sri Akal* ” and made a desperate charge through the breach’.

‘I saw all this happen before my eyes. More than once, even I felt, inspired and moved by this spirit of self-sacrifice to follow the brave gunners under the axle. But if there was anything that kept me back, it was nothing but the desire in my mind to narrate to the world the story of this unique spirit of self-sacrifice of these Sikhs in the cause of their nation.’

As said above, Akāli Sadhu Singh and his Akalis made a desperate charge through the breach which the brave, self-sacrificing Sikh gunners had helped to make at the cost of their lives. The *Nihangs* under their leader closed upon the defenders and drove them back till they came to the steps of Muzaffar Khan's palace. The old Nawab and his sons donned the green dress of their faith, perfumed their beards, and, with drawn swords, 'came out to answer the call of the angel of death.' They fought like heroes. But the odds were too heavy against them. Nawab Muzaffar Khan, his two sons, and a nephew were killed. His two younger sons were captured alive

The fort was captured on June 2, 1818. A few days later, one of Muzaffar Khan's younger sons was brought into the Maharaja's court. The Maharaja had heard with admiration of the bravery displayed by the old Nawab. He admired bravery above all manly virtues. He got up from his seat and took up the young Nawab in his arms and hugged him. That was how he treated a brave adversary's son.

A few days later, Nawab Muzaffar Khan's second captive son was brought to Lahore and taken to the Maharaja's court. The Maharaja got up from his seat, embraced the boy, and made him sit by his side. The lad said a lot of things against the Darbar troops and accused them of treachery. The Maharaja heard it all without feeling angry or annoyed even in the least. He only smiled and patted the lad in admiration.

That was how the lion-hearted, generous Maharaja received the sons of a fallen brave though troublesome adversary. Later, he granted the boys handsome *jagirs* for their maintenance.

Here one is tempted to recall the treatment which Nawab

Wazir Khan of Sarhind had accorded to the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh who were bricked alive. Their only fault was that they were sons of a brave adversary. Here a devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh acting in a truly Sikh spirit spared the lives of his brave adversary's sons, treated them with affection, and gave them handsome *jagirs*. He forgot all the wrong actions of their father.

The conquest of Multan ended the Afghan influence in the Punjab, and broke up the solid group of Muslim states in the South. It subdued the chiefs of Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Mankera. Moreover, Multan by itself was a valuable acquisition. It yielded an annual revenue of seven lakhs.

# 11

## KOH-I-NOOR

### THE ROYAL AFGHAN REFUGEES

How the world-famous Koh-i-Noor (the Mount of Light) came into Maharaja Ranjit Singh's hands is an interesting story. This priceless jewel, the most brilliant of all diamonds in the world, was taken from the famous mines of Golconda in very ancient times. It is earliest recorded as being in the possession of the Pandavas. Then it went 'underground'. It remained concealed or buried somewhere. In February 1621, it came into the hands of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. In January 1739, the Persian invader, Nadir Shah took it, along with the Peacock Throne, from the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. On Nadir Shah's assassination in June, 1749, this priceless jewel came into the hands of Ahmed Shah Abdali. After the latter's death it became the possession of his son, Taimur. After Taimur's death it was taken over by Shah Zaman. From him it came into the possession of Shah Shuja and his wife, Wafa Begum. It was from these two that the Koh-i-Noor came into Maharaja Ranjit Singh's hands on June 1, 1813.

In order to understand how and why Shah Shuja and his wife, Wafa Begum, parted with this precious possession of theirs, we shall have to peep a little into Afghanistan's history. After Taimur's death, Shah Zaman ascended the throne of Kabul. He was soon overthrown and replaced by his brother Mahmud. The latter put out his brother Shah Zaman's eyes, in

order to put him out of the picture for ever. But soon Shah Shuja, one of his brothers ousted Mahmud from Kabul and occupied the throne. Soon, however Shah Shuja was expelled and Mahmud re-occupied the throne of Kabul. Shah Shuja was able, once again, to capture the throne, but was deprived of it again by his brother Mahmud after four months. All this drama of seating and unseating this or that son of Taimur was done by one Wazir Fateh Khan, leader of the Barakazai tribe.

Driven from the throne, Shah Shuja fled to Attock. There he found asylum with its governor, Jahan Dad Khan. But, while at Attock Shah Shuja began to try to win over the king-maker, Wazir Fateh Khan. Jahan Dad Khan was bitterly opposed to the Wazir. When therefore he came to know of Shah Shuja's move, he had him put in chains and sent for safe custody to his brother, Ata Muhammad, governor of Kashmir.

In February 1810, the six hundred odd wives of Shah Shuja, and the blinded Shah Zaman, with his concourse of wives, came to the Punjab and prayed for asylum. Maharaja Ranjit Singh granted them a liberal pension and made arrangements for their residence at Rawalpindi. But Shah Zaman would not sit idle even in exile. He began to send envoys to foreign powers. They were to persuade those foreign powers to help him in recovering the throne of Kabul. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not like this. To put an end to Shah Zaman's intercourse with foreign powers, he suggested that the royal families would be more comfortable and secure in the capital.

In November 1811, Shah Zaman, the one-time conqueror of Lahore, and his wives and relations came back to that city as beggars. While leaving for home after his fourth invasion, Shah Zaman had proclaimed that he would return soon and conquer India. He had come back now but not as an invader or



**Fakir Azizuddin**  
**Foreign Ministe**

would-be conqueror but as a beggar to seek asylum from Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

On arrival at Lahore, Shah Zaman was treated with honour. He was escorted by State troops to the spacious house, *Mubarak Haveli*, set apart for him in the city. The Maharaja, dressed in ceremonial saffron, welcomed him with an embrace. He then presented to him a sum of one thousand rupees.

### DELIVERERS

Thus sheltered and provided for, the royal refugees from Afghanistan began to live a life of peace in Lahore. Fakir Azizuddin was deputed to look after their comforts. But after some time, there arrived in Lahore an agent of Wazir Fateh Khan. His object was to solicit the Maharaja's help for conquest of Kashmir. On behalf of Wazir Fateh Khan, the agent offered to the Maharaja an equal division of the loot acquired during the campaign, and thereafter, nine lakh rupees every year.

Shah Zaman and his relations learnt of the agent's arrival and mission. Shah Zaman, Shah Shuja's senior wife, Wafa Begum, and her sons were terrified. They feared that if Wazir Fateh Khan and Mahmud captured Kashmir, Shah Shuja, who was imprisoned there, would fall into their hands. Who could say what they would do to him? Wafa Begum was stricken with deep grief and anxiety. She sent a message to the Maharaja, through Fakir Azizuddin, saying, 'If the Maharaja puts forth good efforts and brings about the occasion when the honourable Shah may come to Lahore, an invaluable piece of diamond would be offered in compensation.' That 'invaluable piece of diamond' was no other than the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

The Maharaja took counsel with his courtiers. They expressed themselves in favour of making all efforts to get Shah Shuja released from captivity and restored to his grief-stricken family. It was a humane task which, as Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhs, it was their duty to perform. They also felt that this task would become easier if the Darbar forces were to work in conjunction with those of Wazir Fateh Khan. It would, thereby be possible to fulfil the objective of the Wazir as well as that of Shah Shuja's family.

Accordingly, early in the spring of 1812, the pick of the Darbar's troops were ordered to Kashmir. They were under the command of the Maharaja's best generals, Diwan Mohkam Chand and Dal Singh. They reached Jehlam where they were joined by Wazir Fateh Khan and his army.

The two armies left Jehlam in the first week of December 1812. The shrewd Diwan Mohkam Chand soon realized that the Wazir was not sincere and that he was not likely to keep his promises given to the Darbar. He warned the Maharaja and told him, 'Wazir Fateh Khan has taken two big forts with their treasuries. He has kept the whole loot. He should have given half of it to the Darbar as promised.'

The Maharaja instructed Diwan Mohkam Chand to give no sign of any dissatisfaction or doubt. He added, 'Go on conforming with his wishes. Remember that our main object is not loot or territory, but release of the unlucky Shah. We have to concentrate on that humane task'.

It was learnt that Shah Shuja was imprisoned in the fort of Shergarh. The Afghans pressed on at frantic speed. They wanted to reach Shergarh before the Darbar forces should do

so. They were soon two marches ahead of the Lahore army. Diwan Mohkam Chand felt sure that if the Afghans managed to reach there first, they would do violence to Shah Shuja. So, he made a short cut and reached Shergarh before the Afghans. He lost no time in assaulting the fort. Meanwhile the Afghans had also reached the fort and they also joined in the assault. The fort was forced to surrender. The Afghans rushed in and busied themselves in discovering and looting the treasury. But Diwan Mohkam Chand's soldiers rushed about searching for the royal prisoner. They found him in a damp, dark dungeon. He was chained hand and foot, dressed in dirty rags, and famished from want of adequate food. They brought him away and took him to their camp. Wazir Fateh Khan demanded that Shah Shuja be handed over to him. But Diwan Mohkam Chand firmly refused to do so. Thereupon the Wazir tried to take the Shah by force. But he failed in his attempt. Then he accused Diwan Mohkam Chand of breaking his word and said, 'I will not give you any share in the booty.'

Shah Shuja's chains were broken. He was dressed in new clothes and properly fed. Then he was taken to Lahore with due honour and safety

### KOH-I-NOOR CHANGES HANDS

In due course Shah Shuja reached Lahore with the Darbar army. The Maharaja received him with the same pomp and ceremony as that with which he had received his blinded brother, Shah Zaman, a year earlier. The Shah was delivered safely to Wafa Begum at *Mubarak Haveli*, the spacious mansion which had been placed at the disposal of the royal Afghan refugees.

On the following day, a message was sent to Shah Shuja and his wife, Wafa begum, asking them to deliver the Koh-i-

Noor. Neither the Shah nor his wife made any reply to the note. It was but natural for them to feel unwilling to part with so precious an object. But it had been solemnly promised to be handed over on the Shah's deliverance and return to his family. In the venture, over one thousand soldiers had been sacrificed and a huge expenditure had been incurred. Moreover, Wazir Fateh Khan had taken possession of Kashmir without sharing the loot. He had clearly no intention of paying nine lakh rupees a year as promised. All this was due to the Darbar's forces having rescued Shah Shuja and not having handed him over to his bitter enemy Wazir Fateh Khan. In view of all this, how could the Darbar let the Shah and his wife break her promise?

A reminder was sent to the Begum after a few days. Again there was no response. Then Fakir Azizuddin met her and urged her to honour her word. He told her how much the venture undertaken to release her husband had cost the Darbar. He added, 'It was on account of my strong persuasion that the Maharaja undertook the difficult, costly, campaign. I assured him that you would most readily honour your word. Please realize my awkward position. I feel very awkward, even ashamed. The Maharaja has good reason to be angry with me. He might cease to trust me in future. Honour your word and let the Maharaja have the promised priceless precious stone.'

The Begum replied, 'The diamond is not with me. I pawned it with a moneylender in Kandhar.'

Fakir Azizuddin said, 'Then why did you promise to give something which you did not possess?' The Begum kept mum.

On hearing the Begum's reply, the Maharaja shook his head, and said, 'I have not the least doubt that the diamond is

with the Begum. She is telling a lie. She is a liar and promise-breaker. But I don't want to employ any hard measures at present. I would make her a fair offer. Go and tell her that I shall make a token payment of three lakh rupees now and assign a *jagir* of fifteen thousand rupees a year to the family in lieu of the Koh-i-Noor.' But even this liberal offer failed to bring round the Begum and her husband. Fakir Azizuddin's urgent appeals had no effect on them.

The Maharaja's patience was exhausted. He could have taken possession of the diamond by force. Seeing the way in which it had been taken away from India, such a course would have been quite excusable. But the Maharaja decided to avoid violence. The course followed by him was an honourable one.

The Maharaja sent word to the Shah and his wife that the diamond should be delivered without any further fuss or delay. He decided to give an indication of what the consequences of the Begum's persistent refusal to honour her word would be. He placed a heavy guard round *Mubarak Haveli*. In this way, Shah Shuja, who had till then been a royal guest, became a virtual prisoner.

But for many days, the Shah made no move. The Maharaja then ordered that the rations supplied to the Shah's household be reduced. The *Kotwal* was instructed that the Shah and his family were to be treated as being under arrest. Soon the Shah realized that he had no alternative to handing over the Koh-i-Noor. So at last, he agreed to honour his wife's word. A date was fixed for the delivery of the coveted jewel.

On the appointed day, June 1, 1813, the Maharaja rode to Mubarak Haveli to take over the Koh-i-Noor. He was accom-

panied by six hundred horsemen. Shah Shuja received him cordially, embraced him, and conducted him to his room. Seated there, they inquired about each other's health. Then they fell silent. Shah Shuja made no move to deliver the diamond. The prolonged silence irritated the Maharaja. He whispered to one of his courtiers, 'Remind the Shah of the object of our visit. He seems to be lost in the thought.'

On being reminded, the Shah beckoned one of his servants and ordered him to bring the diamond. The servant went into the ladies' apartment. He came back with a bundle. He gave it to the Maharaja. The Maharaja unwrapped the bundle revealing, the Koh-i-Noor. He examined it keenly with his single right eye. He then rewrapped it in the same cloth and rode away.

The Maharaja was delighted to be in possession of the Koh-i-Noor. A week later he brought it out for examination. He showed it to some select jewellers. They declared that it was priceless, for no other similar jewel existed anywhere else. It was three and a half *tolas* or about forty one grammes in weight and equal to a hen's egg in size.

# 12

## TOWARDS A GREATER PUNJAB

### END OF THE GURKHA MENACE

In 1809 the Gurkhas under Amar Singh Thapa subdued the hill chieftains along the Himalayan range. They were now trying hard to capture Kangra. Sansar Chand, ruler of Kangra, appealed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to help him against the Gurkhas. On the other hand the Gurkha leader sent word to the Maharaja, 'If you stay away and let me take Kangra, I shall pay tribute to you according to your pleasure.'

But the Maharaja considered Kangra to be a part of the Punjab. He would not let it be captured by the Nepalese. So he replied that he would defend Kangra against all outsiders. Sansar Chand's request was considered favourably. It was agreed to help him against the Gurkhas but on one condition, namely that he must declare Kangra to be a part of Punjab, and surrender the Kangra fort to the Lahore forces. Sansar Chand accepted these terms.

To begin with, the Maharaja ordered all the chiefs of the Kangra region to stop selling provisions to the Gurkha army. He ordered his own troops to cut the Gurkha supply lines with Nepal. The Maharaja arrived in Kangra and demanded admission to the fort. Sansar Chand hesitated and made evasive replies. He said, 'I shall hand over the fort as soon as the Gurkhas are made to withdraw.'

The Maharaja knew that Sansar Chand was not a man of his word. Moreover, the Maharaja was too shrewd to be taken in by Sansar Chand's ruse. Now, it so happened that one of Sansar Chand's sons was the Maharaja's hostage. The Maharaja put him under arrest. This step opened Sansar Chand's eyes. He surrendered the fort. On August 14, 1809, a detachment of the Punjab troops took possession of the Kangra fort.

The Gurkhas were soon short of rations, and hence, in great difficulties. Still they held on stubbornly. The Maharaja waited till they ran out of rations. Then they began to retreat. Thereupon the Maharaja attacked them with full force. Amar Singh Thapa turned back to face the attack. But having been short of rations for many days, the Gurkhas could not stand the strain of hand-to-hand fight against the Punjab infantry. The tall Sikhs, with their long curved swords, fell upon the short-statured Gurkhas, who were armed with their short *khukris*. The Maharaja had been watching the fight from a mound. He mounted his horse and plunged into the fight. The Gurkhas took to their heels.

The Maharaja was greatly impressed by the stubborn resistance offered by the Gurkhas. To honour brave men and reward their deeds of bravery was a major attribute of the Maharaja's character. When the fight with the Gurkhas was over, the Maharaja ordered his men not to chase the defeated brave adversaries. He allowed Amar Singh Thapa time to retire without further molestation and he ordered his own Sardars to help the brave Gurkhas to collect their equipment. Some hill rajas utilized the occasion to plunder the vanquished foe. They were severely rebuked by the Maharaja and made to restore the loot. The Gurkhas returned to their homes. The Gurkha menace to the Punjab was thus ended for ever.

The Maharaja entered the fort of Kangra on December 24, 1809. Among the chiefs who paid homage to him were the rulers of Kangra, Chamba, Noorpur, Kulu and Datarpur, Kotla Jsrata, Basohli, Jaswan, Mandi and Suket.

## END OF THE AFGHAN MENACE

The fort of Attock was in the possession of Jahan Dad Khan. His brother, Ata Muhammad Khan was the governor of Kashmir. Ata Muhammad had been ejected from Kashmir by Wazir Fateh Khan. The Wazir's next victim was to be Jahan Dad Khan. The Maharaja came to know of the Wazir's design. The Maharaja's plan was to make Attock and its neighbourhood a part of the Punjab. If the fort of Attock were to pass into Wazir Fateh Khan's hands, the plan would become difficult of execution. So, in order to prevent the fort from passing into the Wazir's hands, the Maharaja decided to take it into his own possession. He sent his minister Fakir Azizuddin to negotiate with Jahan Dad Khan. Fakir Azizuddin said to him, "You know or should know that Wazir Fateh Khan is after you. If he comes, you will not be able to withstand him. He will turn you out of the fort. You will have nowhere to go. I come with a generous offer from the Maharaja. He will give you a handsome *jagir* in return for the fort".

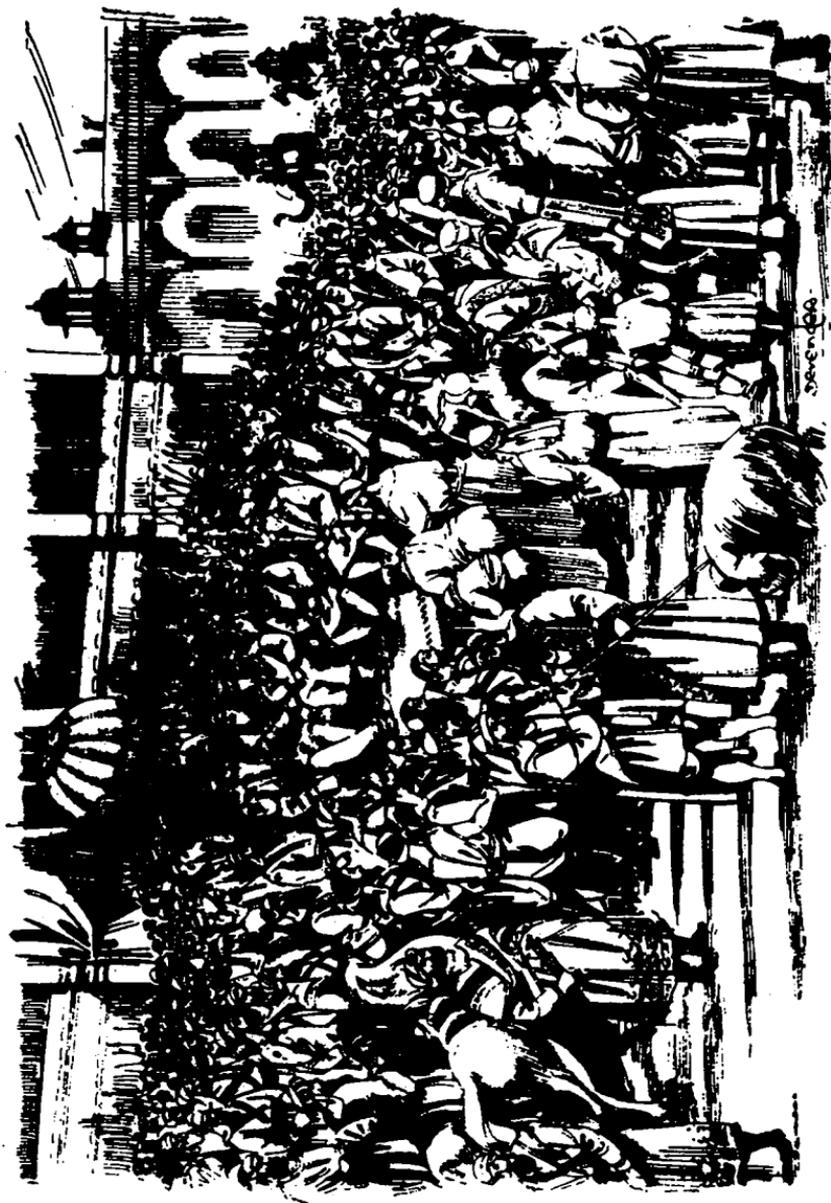
Jahan Dad Khan accepted the offer and handed over the fort to Fakir Azizuddin.

The Attock fort was considered to be gateway of India. When Wazir Fateh Khan heard that the fort had passed into the Maharaja's hands, he was mad with anger and disappointment. He wrote to the Maharaja asking him to evacuate the fort or face the consequences.

The Maharaja had no intention of obliging the Wazir. He sent more troops to garrison the fort. Wazir Fateh Khan began to incite the tribes in the neighbourhood of Attock and to exhort them to expel the 'infidels' from their midst. He himself came up at the head of his troops and surrounded the fort. The Maharaja sent a strong force under the charge of Diwan Mohkam Chand to meet the Wazir. The Punjab forces crossed the river Attock. They came face to face with Wazir Fateh Khan and his Afghan troops. The two armies faced each other without going into action. By then the summer season had set in. Diwan Mohkam Chand then made a clever move. He placed his troops between the Afghans and the river. Finding themselves thus cut off from their supply of water, the Afghans took the initiative. They made repeated charges on the Punjabi forces in their bid to break through to the river. Diwan Mohkam Chand chained his elephant's legs. This he did to prevent it from running back. The Punjabi lines remained unbroken and the Punjabi infantry repulsed the Afghan assault with their steady fire.

The Punjabis could slake their thirst from the river and come back to the battle. The Afghans, on the other hand, had to fight in the intense heat of July without a drop of water to drink. Hence they turned their attention from the fort to the river. They wanted to reach the banks of the Attock. The Punjabis repulsed the Afghans and kept them away from the river banks. At last, the Afghans were exhausted with thirst and exertion. They broke their ranks and fled. They left their heavy guns and equipments to the victors. One thousand Afghans lay dead on the field.

This was the first victory of the Punjabis against the Afghans. The fort of Attock had been regarded as the sentinel



A Darbar Scene

of India. It had been taken from the Hindu Raja Jaipal by Mahmud Ghaznavi in 1000 A.D. Since then it had remained in the hands of the invaders. Its recapture meant the liberation of Northern India from the Afghan menace.

### CONQUEST OF THE PATHAN CITADEL

The Maharaja was eager to extend his kingdom in the northwest by capturing Peshawar and its neighbourhood. He was waiting for a favourable opportunity to do so. He got it in the summer of 1818. At that time Wazir Fateh Khan of Afghanistan was murdered by Prince Kamran, son of Shah Shuja's brother Mahmud. The Wazir's numerous brothers, who were spread out in different parts of Afghanistan, Peshawar and Kashmir, called for vengeance. So a civil war started in Afghanistan. Each party to the war was anxious to occupy Kabul. Hence the Afghan frontier with the Punjab was left undefended.

The Maharaja sent for Akali Phula Singh to whom the north-western frontier was well known. He questioned him about Attock and its surroundings. Akali Phula Singh replied, 'Attock is like a small island in the midst of a sea of turbulent tribesmen. If the north-western region is to be made secure against the Pathans and Afghans, the frontier will have to be extended to Peshawar. It will be better still to push up the frontier to the entrance of the Khyber Pass. If we should succeed in doing that the close alliance between the Afghans and the Pathan tribesmen will be broken. Then the most important gate way into India will be slammed in the face of the invaders from that direction.'

The Maharaja was much impressed by Akali Phula Singh's words. His resolve to capture Peshawar was

strengthened. He felt that there was no time to lose. The Afghans were then engaged in a civil war. Their south-eastern frontier with the Punjab was left practically undefended. This fact would make his task much easier.

On October 15, 1818, the Maharaja marched out of Lahore at the head of his troops. Among the generals that he had with him were two who knew these lands and the people, and whose names were a terror among the tribes. They were General Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phula Singh.

Passing through Rawalpindi and Hassan Abdal, the Darbar troops arrived in the plains of Hazara. From there a survey party was sent across the river Attock, by boat. The main army halted on the eastern bank. It was to cross when a suitable ford could be located by the scouts.

The western side of the river was inhabited by Khattak tribesmen. They ambushed the survey party. When it was still within the Darbar's territory, destroying it completely. The Khattak tribesmen had already paid tribute to the Maharaja, hence, their brutal attack on the Darbar army's survey party was not an act of war. It was an act of treachery and rebellion. Those who had done it had to be punished.

The Maharaja was infuriated on hearing the news. He ordered his troops to get ready to cross the river but it was in high flood. It was seemingly impossible to cross it. The troops were lined up near the bank. The Maharaja shouted aloud 'Khalsaji, let us all pray to God. He can abate the flood; He can tame the river in no time. Let all fix their minds on the Almighty Father and pray,' The Maharaja then prayed to God and Satguru. The troops also prayed. Then he threw a tray full of gold coins into the river as an offering. Then he rode his

elephant into the fast flowing flooded river. According to legend current in the Punjab and the North Western Frontier, as soon as the Maharaja's elephant stepped into the river, the flood subsided. The horsemen plunged their horses into the river and reached the other bank while others swam across.

The Darbar army now fell upon the Khattaks. The latter did not put up much resistance. Their strongholds at Khairabad and Jahangiria were occupied. The Maharaja then pressed on to Naushera.

On hearing the defeat of the Khattaks, Muhammad Khan, the Afghan Governor of Peshawar, lost his heart. He ran away, leaving behind big guns and other war materials in good condition.

The Maharaja entered the famous stronghold of the Pathans on November 19, 1818. He gave strict orders to his soldiers that none was to lay his hand on any person or property.

The next morning, the Maharaja rode on his elephant through the bazars of Peshawar. He was cheered all along the route. It was the first time in seven hundred years that the citizens of Peshawar had seen an Indian conqueror ride through the streets.

The Maharaja stayed in Peshawar for four days. During that time, envoys came from Dost Muhammad Khan and Yar Muhammad Khan, brothers of Wazir Fateh Khan. The envoys made a present of fifty thousand rupees, fifty loads of dry fruit, one hundred good horses, etc. They also delivered a letter from the two brothers. In it they prayed that they be entrusted with the administration of Peshawar. They agreed to

pay a revenue of one lakh rupees a year. They added that they would abide by all orders of the Lahore Darbar, and accept the Darbar's title over the city. The Maharaja accepted the offer. Yar Muhammad Khan was made the Governor of Peshawar.

## TO THE BORDERS OF CHINA AND TIBET

Very soon after returning from Peshawar, the Maharaja began to make plans for an all-out campaign to take Kashmir from the Afghans. Jabbar Khan, the governor of Kashmir, had ruled with an iron hand. He treated the non-Muslims with the utmost cruelty.

Many Hindus were compelled to leave the valley. One such person was Jabbar Khan's own Revenue Minister, Pandit Birbal Dhar. He came to Lahore and advised the Maharaja that it was a good moment to attack and take Kashmir.

Preparations were made for the attack. By April 1819, the Darbar forces assembled at Wazirabad. That place was to serve as the main base of operations and the Maharaja's headquarters.

A column of the Darbar army, under Prince Kharak Singh, advanced up to Baramulla without much resistance, then reached Shupaiyan. Another column of the Darbar army under Misr Diwan Chand, also came up. The two columns were within view of each other. They also came within view of Jabbar Khan with twelve thousand Afghans on the plain of Shupaiyan.

After allowing his troops a few day's rest Misr Diwan Chand quietly surrounded the Afghan host. Next morning, the Darbar's artillery opened fire on the Afghans. Jabbar Khan did

not possess an adequate number of guns. He ordered his cavalry to charge. The Afghan horsemen captured a number of the Darbar army's guns. At this time, Akali Phula Singh and his Akalis fell upon the Afghan horsemen and infantry. The Afghans could not stand the *Nihangs'* charge. They turned and fled to the hills. Jabbar Khan was severely wounded. He barely escaped with his life.

Prince Kharak Singh and Misr Diwan Chand entered Srinagar the next day. The Prince issued strict orders that none was to loot or molest the citizens in any way.

The Maharaja returned to the plains. He first went to Amritsar for thanksgiving then he returned to Lahore on September 22, 1819.

Kashmir was an important acquisition for the Punjab. It fetched seventy lakh rupees a year as revenue. Moreover, it extended the state's frontiers to the borders of China and Tibet.

# 13

## TWO IRREPARABLE LOSSES

AKALI PHULA SINGH

Kashmir was taken by the Maharaja in 1819. Its administration was entrusted to Yar Muhammad Khan. But the Pathan tribesmen did not like to be under the government of Punjabis or their nominees. They rose in open revolt against Yar Muhammad Khan. They began to raise cries of *Jihad*. The chief instigator was Yar Muhammad Khan's elder brother Azim Khan. He aroused the religious sentiments of the Pathans. He proclaimed his intention of liberating the Pathans from the Punjabi infidels' yoke. The result of his campaign was that the whole tribal area began to resound with cries of *Jihad*. In a short time, over twentyfive thousand *Ghazis* (Muslim crusaders) volunteered to fight as the Prophet's soldiers. They were determined to achieve victory or martyrdom.

With these thousands of *Ghazis* Azim Khan advanced towards Peshawar in January 1823. Yar Muhammad Khan left Peshawar and hid himself in the neighbouring hills. Evidently, he was not unwilling to hand over the city to his brother Azim Khan. Azim Khan occupied Peshawar without any difficulty whatsoever.

The Maharaja ordered his army to proceed northwards. Prince Sher Singh and General Hari Singh Nalwa led the advance columns. They crossed the river Attock by means of boat-bridge. They came up to Jahangiria and occupied the fort



Akali Phula Singh  
General

there. The *Ghazis* came up and besieged the fort. Thus Prince Sher Singh and his companions found themselves surrounded on all sides by people thirsting for their blood. The siege operations were conducted by Azim Khan's brother, Dost Muhammad Khan, and Jabbar Khan. This Dost Muhammad Khan was the same man who, along with his brother Yar Muhammad Khan, had been entrusted with the administration of Peshawar. He had vowed to be loyal to the Maharaja.

The Maharaja arrived on the eastern bank of the river Attock. He found that the boat-bridge across the river had been destroyed by the Pathans. The river was in flood. It was impassable. The Pathan snipers made it impossible to make a fresh boat-bridge across the river.

Soon the Maharaja was informed that the Pathans planned to destroy Sher Singh and his men the next day. Something had to be done at once. The river seemed impassable. But nothing daunted the Maharaja. He ordered his soldiers to cross the flooded Attock as best as they could. He himself was the first to plunge his horse into the river. His army followed. The Maharaja and his army were soon in control of the western bank. The *Ghazis* were taken by surprise. They took to their heels. Jahangiria and its garrison were saved.

After retreating from Jahangiria, the Pathans retrenched themselves in the plain outside Naushera. Between Naushera and Peshawar flowed the river Lunda. The army of Azim Khan could join the *Ghazis* at Naushera only after crossing that stream. That army was now approaching the Lunda.

The Maharaja consulted his generals. They advised him to attack and finish off the *Ghazis* in Naushera before Azim Khan's army could come to their aid. He concurred.

Early next morning, a religious gathering was held with Guru Granth Sahib in the midst of the assembly. After the morning service, prayers were offered for the success of the campaign to be started that day. All present took vows to fight to the last and prayed for God's and the Guru's help in fulfilling their vows.

Soon the army was on the march. The Maharaja rode to a mound and took the salute from the troops going into action. As each group passed, raising shouts of *Sat Sari Akal*, the Maharaja acknowledged the salutation by raising his naked sword to his forehead and then he waved it in the direction in which the army was to march.

As this march past was in progress, news was brought to the Maharaja that Azim Khan was approaching the Lunda stream with a huge Afghan army and forty big guns. On hearing this news, the Maharaja proposed that the offensive should be postponed till his General Ventura came up with the Darbar's artillery. He was expected to arrive that very day.

But Akali Phula Singh would not agree to this postponement. He said, "How can we break our word given to the Guru this morning? Having expressed his resolve before the Guru Granth Sahib to go and fight to the last, no Sikh can turn back. I and my companions will keep our vow. We go into the fight, come what may."

So saying Akali Phula Singh and his *Nihangs* raised shouts of *Sat Sri Akal*, and fell upon the *Ghazis*. The latter came down from the hill where they had taken up their position. They far outnumbered the *Nihangs*, and expected to finish them off in no time. Seeing this, the Maharaja ordered the

rest of his army to advance and fall upon the *Ghazis*.

Akali Phula Singh was in the midst of the severest fighting. A deadly hand-to-hand fight was going on between *Nihangs* and the *Ghazis*. Akali Phula Singh was wounded in the thigh. He could not stand. He bandaged his wound and rode back into the thick of the battle on horseback. Then he was wounded which made him still less capable of wielding any weapon. His horse was shot from under him. He got into a *howdah* and drove an elephant into the midst of the enemy. The *Ghazis* could now see the man who had humbled them so often. They fired at him from all sides. His body was riddled with bullets, but he went on roaring like a lion, till he collapsed on his elephant. The news of his death further infuriated the *Nihangs*. They gave no quarter to the enemy. The *Ghazis* could not stand the *Nihangs'* charge. They became disorganised. At the critical moment, the Darbar cavalry rode into the disorganized masses of the *Ghazis* and transfixed them with their lances.

In the meantime, Azim Khan had come up to the river Lunda on the west. Facing him on the eastern bank was the Darbar artillery under General Ventura. He could not cross the river. He helplessly watched the massacre of the *Ghazis* from the other side of the river. He could not come to their aid. By sunset the *Ghazis* were finished off or made to fly. Azim Khan was too ashamed to show his face to the people of Peshawar. He ran away to Afghanistan.

Three days later, the Maharaja entered Peshawar at the head of his victorious army. The citizens gave him a warm welcome. The city was illuminated at night

A few days thereafter, Yar Muhammad Khan and Dost

Muhammad Khan presented themselves before the Maharaja. They craved his pardon. He forgave them readily. Yar Muhammad Khan was again appointed Governor of Peshawar. The Maharaja then returned to his capital

## GENERAL HARI SINGH NALWA

Peshawar was now in the possession of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Its control and administration had been entrusted to the Afghan chiefs. They paid a stipulated tribute or revenue to the Maharaja. These chiefs had, a number of times, given proof that they were not sincere and trustworthy. The Maharaja felt that, in order to make the North-west Frontier really secure, Peshawar should be brought under his direct control. Accordingly he instructed Hari Singh Nalwa to take over the governorship of Peshawar from the Afghan Governor, Sultan Muhammad. This was done and the city was garrisoned by Punjabi soldiers.

On assuming the new charge, Nalwa directed his attention to taming the semi-savage Pathan tribesmen who inhabited the country surrounding Peshawar. These Pathans had for centuries, persecuted and frighened the Punjabis. They held the Punjabis in utter contempt. Hari Singh Nalwa decided to compel them to change their attitude towards his people. He decided to teach them that the Punjabis were superior to them, and had to be regarded with respect and awe.

He felt that soft or half-hearted measures would be out of place when dealing with the semi-savage Pathan tribesmen. Hence he decided to be ruthless. Whenever the Pathans ambushed any Punjabis or shot at them from hidden places, Hari Singh Nalwa raided the Pathans' villages and destroyed their homes. Within a short time, the name of Hari Singh Nalwa



S. Hari Singh Nalwa  
General

became a terror in the tribal territory. So much so that, to this day, the Pathan women, when they want to frighten their children, say, 'Hush child, Nalwa is coming.'

Another step he took to make the land secure was to build a chain of forts. They were to be within sight of each other. Two of them stood on the entrance of the Khyber Pass: They were Shabkadar and Jamrud. They were fortified with special care. They were placed under the command of the Maharaja's ablest officers. Shabkadar was placed under the command of Lehna Singh Sandhwalia. It had a garrison of one thousand nine hundred. Jamrud, with a garrison of six hundred, was placed under the command of Mohan Singh.

On account of the measures taken by General Hari Singh Nalwa, Dost Muhammad of Kabul became agitated and angry. He concluded that the Maharaja was contemplating an attack on Afghanistan. He hurried towards Peshawar. He addressed insolent letters to the Maharaja. He told him to evacuate Peshawar or be prepared to taste the Afghan sword. The Maharaja wrote back in the same tone. He said that he would welcome a trial of strength between the Afghans and the Punjabis.

Dost Muhammad then applied to the English for help against the Maharaja. But they bluntly refused to help him. Then he raised a cry of *Jihad* or holy war against the 'infidels from the Punjab'. He exhorted Muslims to rise to a man to destroy the Punjabis. He then learnt that the Maharaja was preoccupied with Prince Nau Nihal Singh's marriage and that Hari Singh Nalwa was ill and confined to bed at Peshawar. He thought that this was a good time for him to start operations against the hated Punjabis.

So thinking, he started his campaign. His plan was to isolate the Punjabi garrisons at Shabkadar, Jamrud and Peshawar, so that they would be unable to come to each other's relief. After such isolation, he planned, he would reduce them, one by one.

The first to receive his attention was Jamrud. It was the most advanced outpost, nearest to Afghanistan. It was also the weakest link in the chain of the fortresses built by Hari Singh Nalwa.

Dost Muhammad's first move was to send one detachment of his army to Shabkadar. It was intended to prevent Lehna Singh from going out to aid Mohan Singh. His main army, numbering twentyfive thousand with fifty heavy guns, went and besieged Jamrud. To oppose this huge host, Mohan Singh had only six hundred soldiers and few light guns. The odds against him were very heavy.

With a few hours, the Afghans's heavy guns firing brought down the walls of the fort in many places. Mohan Singh's men dug trenches. They used their muskets with deadly precision and remarkable effect. They were able to hold the Afghans at bay for four days. Then Mohan Singh sent word to Hari Singh Nalwa that he would be unable to hold out much longer. This message was taken to Peshawar by a Sikh woman. Disguised as an Afghan, she stole through the Afghan army and reached Peshawar in a wonderfully short time. As soon as Hari Singh Nalwa got the message, he got up from his sick bed and hurried to Jamrud.

When the Afghans learnt that the terrible Nalwa had risen they were very afraid, at once they raised their siege of Jamrud and took up a position in the valley of Khyber, so as to have a

safe route of escape in case of defeat.

Hari Singh Nalwa drew up his forces in battle formation and waited for the Afghans to attack him. The Afghans were thrice as many as his troops. But he was fully confident of victory. He knew that the Afghan did not possess the guts to withstand his Punjabi soldiers. He waited for seven days. All this time the two armies faced each other without going into action. Hari Singh Nalwa realized that the Afghans were too afraid to attack or engage in battle. Hence, on April 30, 1837, he ordered his troops to advance. The Punjabis drove the Afghans before them as the wind drives dry leaves. They captured eleven Afghan guns.

The Punjabi army then started chasing the retreating Afghans. In the heat of the chase, Hari Singh Nalwa's, column was separated from the main army. Hari Singh Nalwa, riding an elephant, was ahead of his men, leading the attack on the fugitives. Dost Muhammad's son, Muhammad Akbar Khan, was watching the battle from an encampment on a hill. He saw that Hari Singh Nalwa and his men were far ahead of the main army. He swooped down on Nalwa's column. He and his men directed their attack against Hari Singh Nalwa.

In the attack Hari Singh Nalwa was grievously wounded. He was taken back to Jamrud. He knew that his end was approaching. He gave orders to his officers that his death was to be kept a secret until the Afghans were driven beyond the Khyber Pass. This feat was accomplished soon.

An Englishman, Dr. Wood, wrote an account of the battle and General Hari Singh's death. In it he wrote, 'Hari Singh received four wounds: two sabre cuts across his chest, one arrow was fixed in his breast which he deliberately pulled out

himself, and continued to issue orders as before, until he received a gunshot wound in the side, from which he gradually sank and was carried off the field to the fort, where he expired, requesting that his death should not be made known until the arrival of the Maharaja's relief.'

Hari Singh had sent to the Maharaja post haste reports about the hostilities which had broken out in the Peshawar province. In a letter accompanying the earliest of them, he had requested that his soldiers who had been sent for Nau Nihal Singh's marriage be sent back immediately. This report had been sent when the fighting had not yet actually begun.

As a matter of routine, these reports and the letter had been delivered to Dhian Singh. It was his duty to place them before the Maharaja. But out of motives not difficult to guess, he did not put them up before the Maharaja.

Then the news of Nalwa's death arrived. The Maharaja broke down with grief. He shed bitter silent tears; he could not utter a word for some minutes. Then he controlled himself. He enquired from Dhian Singh whether any earlier reports had been received. Dhian Singh told him of the reports and the letter in which Hari Singh had asked for the immediate return of his soldiers. Dhian Singh added that he had not thought it fit to show the reports and the letter to the Maharaja until he was free from his engagements concerning the prince's marriage.

Hearing this, the Maharaja was filled with rage. He rebuked Dhian Singh in stern words. He said, "you acted very wrongly. Peshawar and Hari Singh were more important to me than anything else. If I had been informed in time, I would have sent at once not only his soldiers, but also a large army to suppress the rising there. If you had shown me the reports and

the letter immediately on their receipt, the life of my brave and seasoned general could have been saved. You have done a terrible wrong and a very damaging disservice to the Punjab Darbar. You are responsible for causing us an irreparable loss."

Then he started towards Jamrud. In one day he rode from Lahore to Jehlam, a distance of one hundred and sixty five kilometres. By the time he reached Jamrud, all the Afghans had been driven beyond the Khyber pass.

The Afghans had failed to capture Shabkadar and Peshawar. They had been made to retreat from Jamrud. They had been driven beyond the Khyber Pass. Still, they were in high spirits, for they said, 'What if the battle is lost? We have killed Nalwa who was worth a hundred and twenty five thousand men.'

## SOME ANECDOTES

## EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL

Once a person from Gujranwala came to the Maharaja and made the following complaint.

‘Your general, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, has a *haveli* which adjoins mine in Gujranwala. Recently he has windened it by encroaching upon my land. He has high-handedly and wrongfully walled in, and added to his *haveli* a few hundred square yards of my land. I pleaded with him and his men. Puffed up with power, they have paid no heed to my entreaties. I have come to my benevolent *Sarkar*, who is known to be just and a protector of the weak. I crave for justice.’

The Maharaja acted at once. He visited the place and made enquiries. He found that the complaint was genuine, that his general had, in fact, forcibly occupied that man’s land. He ordered the wall to be demolished and shifted back to where it justly should have been.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had given strict instructions to all his officers that full and equal justice must be given to all people, high or low that no leniency should be shown to an offender on account of his belonging to a high family or holding a high rank. His officers, with rare exceptions, obeyed the in-

structions in letter and spirit. Here is an instance which is one out of hundreds.

Diwan Sawan Mal was the Governor of Multan. Once, a poor peasant came to him with a complaint. He said, 'One of your sardars has used up my green crops to feed horses. He has paid me nothing by way of a price. I am a poor man. Help me, dear venerable Diwan Sahib.'

Diwan sawan Mal called up all his courtiers and sardars. He told the peasant to recognize out of them the one who had wronged him. The peasant pointed at one of them. The man thus pointed out was the Diwan's eldest son, Ram Das. The Diwan ordered him to be put in prison. The orders were promptly carried out as desired by the Diwan.

The peasant later learnt that the person punished was Diwan Sawan Mal's son. He went to the Diwan and prayed that Ram Das be pardoned. But the Diwan did not accept his appeal. He said, 'If I don't punish a son of mine who has committed a crime, with what face can I punish other people's sons. Ram Das must remain in prison as ordered. "Equal justice for all" is our *Sarkar's* motto for us all.'

The Maharaja heard of this incident. He was immensely pleased with Diwan Sawan Mal's conduct. He conferred further honours and *Jagir* on him.

### LOOKED UPON ALL 'WITH ONE EYE'

(1)

Once the Muslim residents of a village came to the Maharaja with a complaint against their Hindu and Sikh fellow-

villagers. They said, 'The Hindu and Sikh residents of our village don't let us say our *Azan* or Muslim call to prayer. They are thus acting against your declared policy of full religious freedom to followers of all religions. We have come to our dear *Sarkar* for justice. They are depriving us of our religious freedom. They should be made to desist from doing that.'

The Maharaja summoned some leading Hindu and Sikh residents of that village. He told them of the complaint brought against them. He desired them to let him know what they had to say in that connection. They replied, 'Gracious Singh Sahib, may the Guru be still more kind to you ! If these good men look back in history a little, they will realize that they have no justification for their hue and cry against us. Under the rule of these people's co-religionists, we, Hindus and Sikhs, were denied religious freedom altogether. We could not perform our religious worship and rites. We were forbidden to ring bells, blow conch-shells or trumpets, and to sing our hymns even in our temples. Now, with the grace of our Gurus, we have Sikh rule in the Punjab. These people must get the same treatment under the Sikh rule as we got under the Muslim rule. It is just a case of tit for tat, our gracious Singh Sahib.'

The Maharaja said, 'You are labouring under a grievous misconception. What you have here in the Punjab now is not Sikh rule but Punjabi rule. You should all regard yourself as Punjabi first, and Sikhs, Hindus, or Muslims, afterwards. Far more than being a Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, is the fact of being a Punjabi. All should have equal rights, equal freedom, equal opportunity, and equal justice. But by the way, what is your objection to their *Azan* ?'

The Hindu and Sikh leaders said, 'The same as they and

their coreligionist rulers had against our conch-shells, trumpets, and bells. We hate to hear the very sound of their *Azan*. We have to shut our ears with our fingers when their *mullah* cries aloud at the top of his shrill sharp voice, from the top of his building. Our religious sentiments are hurt by the *Azan*. He says it not once or twice, but five times a day, beginning with one early in the morning, and ending with one quite late in the evening. We cannot tolerate it.'

The Maharaja said, 'I don't like anyone's religious sentiments to be hurt.'

Then he turned to the Muslim complainants and said, 'Why does your *mullah* cry aloud at the top of his voice from the top of his building.'

They replied, 'The *Azan* is a call to us for prayers. By crying aloud as he does, the *mullah* tells us that it is the time for *namaz* or prayer, and that all Muslims should assemble in the mosque, or say their prayers wherever they be at the time.'

The Maharaja said, 'But suppose we could devise another method of telling the Muslims of your village that it is the time for *Namaz*. Will that serve the purpose?'

The Muslims replied, 'If such be our just and gracious *Sarkar's* pleasure, and if it satisfies our friends here, it will serve our purpose all right.'

The Maharaja turned to the Sikhs and Hindus before him and said, 'I hereby forbid the *Azan* in your village; but on one condition. You must take upon yourselves the responsibility of informing every Muslim of your village, wherever he be at home or in the fields, that it is the time for *Namaz*. You will

have to do that five times a day as the *mullah* does with his *Azan*. You must be punctual at all times. You must never fail to inform all Muslims of your village in time, that it is the time for *Namaz*. Do you agree?’

The Hindus and Sikhs cried out. ‘That is an impossible task for us. How can we run about, five times a day to the houses and fields of these people, informing them that it is the time for *Namaz*? We cannot take up that responsibility.’

The Maharaja said, ‘Then let their *mullah* continue to inform them in his own way. More, you must all live as brothers, as sons of the same soil, as Punjabis.’

The Hindus and Sikhs had to yield. The Muslims expressed their gratitude to the Maharaja. They all-Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims-promised to live in peace and friendship, and respect each other’s religious sentiments.

(2)

Once a Muslim calligrapher came to Lahore. He had spent many years in making a copy of the holy Quran. He had taken it to all Muslim princes of India, one after the other. All of them admired the work. But none of them came forward to give him an adequate price for his labours. He then came to Lahore, intending to sell it to Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Foreign Minister, Fakir Azizuddin. He presented it to the said Minister. The latter praised the work, but expressed his inability to pay for it. It was beyond his means, he said.

The Maharaja overheard what passed between them. He summoned the calligrapher to his presence. He asked him to give the book to him. The calligrapher presented the Quran to

the Maharaja who respectfully pressed the Holy Book against his forehead. Then he scrutinized the writing with his single right eye. He was impressed with the excellence of the calligrapher's work. He bought it for his private collection.

Some time afterwards Fakir Azizuddin asked the Maharaja why he had paid such a high price for a book for which he, as a Sikh, could have no use. The Maharaja replied, 'God intended me to look upon all religions with one eye. That is why He took away the light from the other.'

## KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY

(1)

It was the Maharaja's practice that, when famine occurred in any part of his kingdom, he made arrangements for free distribution of foodgrains among the affected people. Each family got its quota according to the number of its members. It was his custom to visit the distribution centres without informing any body, in order to see that all was going on well and properly.

Once, famine occurred in Lahore and its suburbs. Centres were started for free distribution of foodgrains. The Maharaja, disguised as a rustic, went to see one of such centres. At a little distance from the centre, he saw a blind old man and a young child. A load of foodgrains lay between them on the ground. The Maharaja approached them and said, 'What is the matter, brother?'

The old man said, 'As you see, brother, I am old and blind. This boy here is my grandson. His father is dead. I have another grandson and three grand-daughters. Then there

are their mother and grandmother. Thus we are a family of eight. We are *dhobis* (washermen) living at Muzang. We came here to get foodgrains being distributed free by our generous and kind *Sarkar*. His man gave us our quota for eight persons. The load is too heavy for us. We have a long distance to go. How to carry this load there, is my problem. I wait and pray to God to send some strong kind-hearted man to help me.'

The Maharaja said, 'Then God has answered your prayer. I am going to Muzang myself. I shall carry the load to your house. Dear child, lead your grandfather and me to your house. Will you ? Little boy.'

The old man blessed the kind-hearted stranger and thanked God for his having heard and answered his prayer. The Maharaja lifted the load and placed it on his head. Thus loaded, he followed the blind old man and his little grandson. He carried the load all the way from near the fort to Muzang.

He put down the load at the *dhobi's* door and turned to go. The old man thanked and blessed him sincerely and profusely. The Maharaja told him, 'Elder brother', I have only done my duty. Farewell,'

Just then a soldier in uniform came that way. He recognized the Maharaja in spite of the disguise. He saluted him and said, '*Jai Sarkar*,'

The Maharaja placed his finger on his lips as a sign to the soldier to keep mum. Then he quickly walked away to visit some other similar centre.

Because of his open-handed generosity, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was generally called *paras* or Philosopher's stone.

Poor men of no consequence, on coming in touch with him, became rich and important, just as base metals, on touching *paras* , were believed to become gold.

Once he was riding on horseback through the streets of Lahore. Crowds of people cheered him as he went along showering gold and silver coins this way and that. An old woman pushed through the crowd of spectators until she got close to the Maharaja's horse. She held an iron pan (*tawa*), in her hand. Its bottom was coated with soot. She wanted to go up to the Maharaja. His bodyguard stopped her. She began to beseech and cry. The Maharaja heard her cry. He told the guard to let her come up. She was soon by his side, with iron *tawa* in her hand.

Then he said, 'Grandma, what do you want ? Tell me, quickly'.

The old woman said, 'I want to do this.' So saying, she began to rub his foot with the black, soot-covered iron pan. Some soot stuck to his foot. The guard took this action of hers as an insult to the Maharaja. He was about to push her away. The old woman cried, 'Let me finish, my child!' The Maharaja told the guard not to molest her. Then he said, 'Grandma what have you done? What do you want to finish ? And why ?'

She replied, 'Gracious Sarkar, people say that our Maharaja is *paras*. It is also said that if iron touches *paras* , it turns into gold. I am an old woman, with none to support me. I heard of your approach. I wanted to avail myself of this opportunity. I took up the only piece of iron I had in my house. I wanted to get it changed into gold, so that I may have enough for my needs. Hence it was that I tried to rub your feet with

this iron pan. But your guard does not let me finish this process, and achieve my objective. O *Paras*, permit me to touch your foot with the iron pan, so that it may become gold.'

The Maharaja was much amused. He burst into a hearty laugh. 'Grandma, I did not know it.' Then he ordered his treasurer to give her gold equal in weight to the weight of her iron plate. His orders were carried out at once. The poor old woman became rich and went home, blessing the *Paras* Maharaja.

### SWEET HUMILITY

Once the Maharaja happened to commit some lapse which constituted a breach of *Khalsa Rehat* or Rules of Conduct for the *Khalsa*. Some time thereafter, he came to Amritsar to pay homage at the sacred shrine. Akali Phula Singh used to stay at Amritsar and look after the gurdwara. He learnt of the Maharaja's intended visit to the sacred temple. With a drawn sword in his hand, he ran to the entrance of the temple called the *Darshni Deohri*. He reached it before the Maharaja could do so. He stood in the Maharaja's way and said, 'Stop. A Sikh who has broken the *Khalsa Rehat* as you have done, cannot be allowed to enter the sacred temple.'

The Maharaja stepped back a few paces, folded his hands and said in a humble tone. 'I admit my lapse, I beg the Guru's *Sangat* (congregation) to pardon me. I am prepared to suffer gladly any penalty that the *Sangat* may impose upon me for this lapse'

After consultation with the Sikh congregation, Akali Phula Singh announced the following penalty. 'The Maharaja's arms should be bound behind his back to the trunk

of a tamarind (*Imli*) tree that grows in front of the Akal Takht, and he should receive twenty one whip-strokes to his body.'

The Maharaja, on hearing the *Sangat's* verdict, bowed his head, went up to the tamarind tree and stood near it with his arms behind him, ready to be bound to the tree and whipped. A sturdy young *Akali* stood nearby, with a whip in his uplifted hand. He was looking at Akali Phula Singh and waiting for a signal from him. The Lion of the Punjab was standing with his arms bound behind him to the tree. His head was bowed in respectful acceptance of the verdict given by the Guru's *Sangat*. He was thus waiting for the whipman's strokes, watched by a crowd of people who were his subjects. The sight was most touching, indeed. Tears filled the eyes of all spectators.

Then Akali Phula Singh said aloud, 'O *Guru Khalsa* the Maharaja is willing to bear the penalty imposed on him. See, there he stands, ready to receive the strokes. He is repentant. This is enough. I appeal to the *Guru Khalsa* to pardon him. If all present agree, let them shout *Sat Sri Akal*.'

Loud shouts of *Sat Sri Akal* were raised from all sides. The Maharaja was unbound. He was administered baptism afresh at the *Akal Takht*. Then he was allowed to enter the sacred temple.

## FAITH AND DEVOTION

(1)

In 1826, the Nizam of Hyderabad, Deccan, sent to Maharaja Ranjit Singh an extremely beautiful and costly canopy as a present. Supported on silver poles it was put up on a plot in the Shalimar Gardens. At that time, the Maharaja was cele-

brating the annual Vasant festival there. A big darbar was to be held there. Accompanied by his courtiers and Sardars, the Maharaja came to that place. Stepping under it, he looked up at the beautiful, costly canopy overhead. At once he stepped back from under it. So did also the courtiers and Sardars who had gone under it along with him. He said, "This canopy is too grand for me. It is fit to adorn the *darbar* of the *Sachcha Patshah*, the true king. I am not fit to sit under it. It is fit only for the Guru's *Sangat* (Sikh congregation) that gathers at the sacred temple in the city founded by Guru Ram Das. Let it be presented to that holy temple. Take it down and send it there."

His orders were obeyed. The canopy till 1984 was placed in the *Toshakhana* of the Golden Temple, Amritsar and used to be spread over the Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, on Great religious occasions. The canopy was destroyed in the Indian Army Action on 8.6.1984 at the time of "Operation Blue Star".

The Maharaja yearned to meet someone who had seen Guru Gobind Singh 'with his own eyes.' He was eager that such a one should describe to him the Guru's person and personal appearance. 'It will be a blessing and great pleasure,' said he, to meet and talk to such a blessed grand old person.

He sent instructions to all his officers in all places to try to find out some such person. The search was successful at last. An old Muslim, aged well over a hundred years, was found who had seen Guru Gobind Singh. He was brought to Lahore by means of special comfortable conveyance. He was brought before the Maharaja. The very sight of the aged blessed man sent a thrill of joy through the Maharaja's heart and frame. He got up from his seat, ran to meet him, hugged him, and planted several kisses on his eyes, saying, 'Blessed are these eyes of yours with which you saw my Master, Guru Gobind Singh. Blessed are you who saw him with these very eyes.'

The Maharaja touched the old man's feet most reverentially, wiped off dust from those feet, and applied it to his eyes and forehead. Then he went round the grand old man a number of times, as one goes round a sacred person or place. He kept the man as his honoured guest in his palace for several days.

Whenever the Maharaja desired the old man to describe the Guru's person and personal appearance, the latter would go into a trance, with eyes closed and head bowed. Then coming to himself he would say, 'The Guru's face shone with such glorious light that it dazzled the beholders' eyes. All I can recollect is that his arms reached well below his knees. I have seen none other with arms so long. Have you seen one, Gracious Sarkar?'

After several weeks, the old man was bidden respectful farewell. He was given a large sum in cash and a number of rich presents. He was then seated on a well decorated elephant and sent home. The Maharaja and his courtiers walked by his side beyond the gates of the fort.

The great Maratha leader, Hulkar, was defeated by the British Commander, Lord Lake. Hulkar and his Rohilla confederate, Amir Khan, fled to Amritsar. They intended to seek help from the Sikhs. Hulkar visited the sacred temple and made rich offerings. This he did in order to earn the Sikhs' good opinion.

Lord Lake pursued them and came up to the Beas with his army. Both Hulkar and Lake sent messengers to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was then at Multan. Hulkar prayed for help against the English. Lord Lake requested the Maharaja not to give any help to his enemy.

The Maharaja was faced with a complex problem. He realized the gravity of the situation. He sent word to all his principal Sardars to join him at Amritsar. He wanted to seek their advice.

A meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa* was called at the Akal Takht. It was attended by the leading Sikh chiefs and dignitaries. Both sides of the case were presented. On the one side were the refugees, Hulkar and Amir Khan. They had sought shelter and protection. It was a matter of honour for the Khalsa to protect them, not to send them away disappointed. On the other side were the English who demanded that the Maharaja should expel Hulkar from the Punjab. 'If he is not expelled', they added, 'we shall attack him wherever he may be. The Anglo-Maratha conflict will then be extended to the Maharaja's domains. The consequences will be serious for the Punjab and Punjabis'

The problem was knotty in the extreme. No unanimous decision could be arrived at. At last the Maharaja decided to have resort to the Guru. 'Let the Guru decide for us,' said he. He went to the sacred temple and prayed for guidance. Then he took two slips of paper. He had the name of Lord Lake written on one of them and that of Hulkar on the other. He folded them several times and placed them before Guru Granth Sahib. Then he prayed, 'O Satguru, guide me. Give me your orders. Whose request should I accept? Which side should I support?' Then he picked up one of the slips. It bore the name of Lord Lake.

So the Guru had decided for him. He refused to become involved in the Anglo-Maratha conflict. He decided to mediate for a settlement between the two. He was successful. Hulkar

departed in peace and in high spirits.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had so thoroughly imbibed the Sikh spirit of democracy, that he never claimed any superiority for himself. He used to say that the kingdom really belonged to the Guru; that he was only its watchman. He ever remembered Guru Nanak's words- '*bhullan ander sabh ko, abhulla Guru Kartar*'- Everyone is liable to err, only the Creator is infallible. Consequently, he was ever ready and willing to admit his error. He was ever open to correction and conviction

# 15

## LAST DAYS

In August 1835, the Maharaja fell seriously ill. He caught a chill and had a stroke from which he recovered gradually.

Early in 1837, he had a second and more serious stroke. His whole right side was affected. Its effects lasted for nearly six months.

The third stroke, from which he could not recover, was brought about by the strain of festivities at Ferozepur in honour of Lord Auckland's visit. On the eve of the Christmas of 1838, the Maharaja was taken violently ill. For the next five days he hovered between life and death. But by the New Year, he was a bit better and was taken to Lahore. The stroke completely deprived him of his power of speech. He had to communicate by signs.

By February 1839, his health had improved a bit. He went to Amritsar to pray for his health. He gave away large sums for charity. He made rich offerings at the shrines of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There was a little improvement, but his condition continued to cause anxiety.

The winter passed into summer. The summer's heat made the Maharaja more restless than ever before. By the end of May, he had no doubt in his mind that his days were numbered. Prayers for his recovery were held in mosques, temples

and gurdwaras.

The Maharaja's condition went on getting worse and worse. He was now sure he was dying. His last act was that of a dying soldier. He summoned his courtiers to his bed-side. He gave away to them swords, shields, lances, pistols, and matchlocks with his own hands. The courtiers wept bitterly and loudly as they took the gifts. The Maharaja tried to console them, but he himself broke down many times.

On June 26, he became unconscious. All hopes of his recovery were given up. The end came on the evening of June 27, 1839 corresponding to Asar 15, 1896. By a curious coincidence, it was just on this day (Asar 15) exactly forty years earlier, that he had entered Lahore as a victor.

Although Maharaja Ranjit Singh is no more, and his dust returned to dust over a century ago, yet he lives in the memory of the people, and in the songs of the youths and maidens of the country as a maker of the Punjab and as a National Hero of the Land of Five Rivers.

## Section - II

### 1

# END OF SIKH EMPIRE (1839 - 1849)

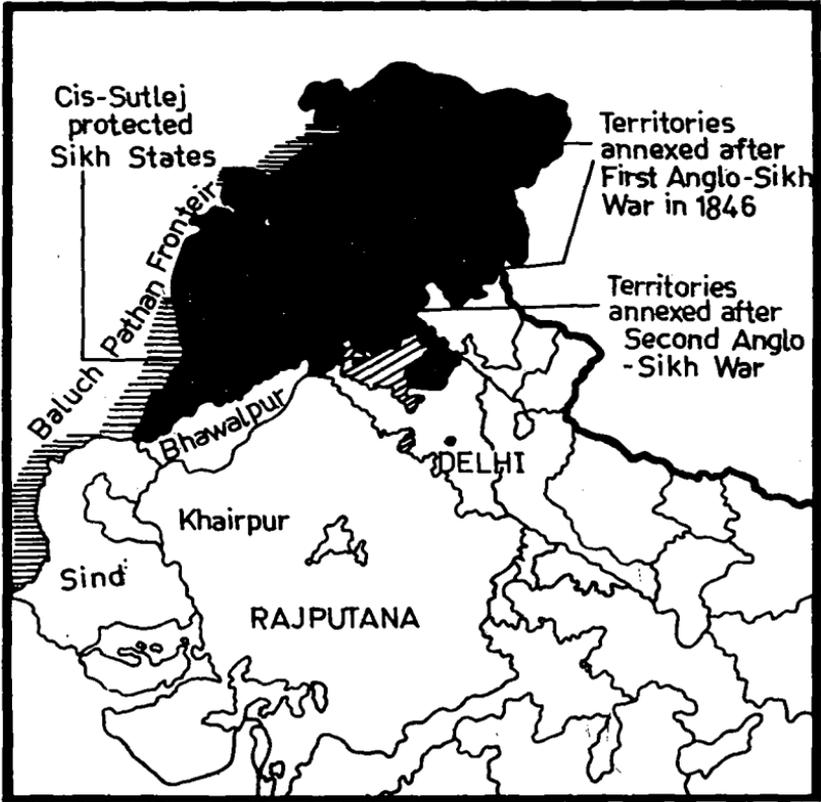
Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on 27th June, 1839 and almost immediately the cherished ideal of a strong Sikh state began to dissolve. Ranjit Singh's peaceful tactics lapsed and almost at once the Sikhs resorted to political killings. His son Kharak Singh succeeded him. However, within a short period of ten years, the Sikhs lost their empire because of treachery and killings, one by one, of the five Sikh princes—Kharak Singh, Nau Nihal Singh, Sher Singh, Kashmira Singh, Pashaura Singh—all sons of Ranjit Singh. Infant prince Dalip Singh was made Maharaja in December 1844 under the regency of his mother Rani Jindan. Because of intrigues in the Lahore Darbar, the army became restive and indisciplined. Soon the Sikhs were at war with the British which they lost.

After the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1845-46, the British curtailed the Sikh empire by annexing Sikh territories east of river Beas, rupees one crore was levied as indemnity and Kashmir, taken by Ranjit Singh in 1819, was annexed by the British which was later sold to Gulab Singh Dogra for Rs. 75 lakh. Sikh independence, was preserved. Infant prince Dalip Singh was maintained as Maharaja, but a British resident was stationed at Lahore and British troops were posted in Punjab as an insurance against anarchy.

Because of continued intrigue and restlessness, the British deprived Rani Jindan of all power in Dec. 1846 and set up a regency council of eight Ministers and Chiefs and this regency

council was to be directed by the British resident.

Because of arrogance of British resident and the replacement of Rani Jindan by the Regency Council it appeared a calculated insult to Sikh monarchy. It was also rumoured that further attacks on the Sikh way of life were on the way. This led to revolt by Sikh troops which resulted into second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848-49. The Sikhs lost the war again. After the Second Anglo-Sikh war the remaining portion of the Sikh empire was formally annexed on 21st March, 1849. The regency council was disbanded and infant Dalip Singh was put under a British guardian. He remained



■ Territories of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

in Lahore till 1850 and was then removed to Allahabad. There he grew up as a young British gentleman and in 1854 was taken to England where he bought a country estate and married a British girl. The British took charge of the Sikh kingdom, absorbed Sikhs in the British army, restored order and thereafter British and Sikhs lived side by side for about a century.

The princely Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot and Jind which did not form part of Ranjit Singh's empire because in 1809 they had sought and obtained British protection against Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Kapurthala, having all helped the British in conquering the Sikh empire during the Anglo-Sikh wars remained in existence under British protection till the end of the British rule in India in 1947.

The Sikhs suffered defeat from the British because their army was led by traitors and Maharani Jindan, mother and regent of infant prince Dalip Singh, was surrounded by insincere advisors who were in league with the cunning Britishers.

The lesson we learn from this chapter of Sikh history is that disunity, jealousy and greed ruin a brave and respectable community, and illustrates the old proverb : "United we stand, divided we fall".

## SIKHS UNDER THE BRITISH (1849 - 1947)

From 1849 to 1947 is a long period of nearly a hundred years. During this period there were several religious reforms and political movements undertaken by the Sikhs. The religious reform laid emphasis on the purity of the Sikh way of life and rendering service to the community. To meet the educational and cultural needs of the community they established Chief Khalsa Dewan. Its main achievement was opening of several Khalsa High Schools in rural areas and establishment of premier institution of higher learning called Khalsa College of Amritsar. On political front the Sikhs played a very prominent role in the freedom struggle for liberation of India from the British rule.

### **Contribution of the Sikhs in the Freedom Movement**

The Sikh immigrants in U.S.A. started a Ghadar Party in 1913 with the purpose of ending British rule in India. They started a paper named *Ghadar* in the same year. Several of them sailed to India to stir up rebellion in every corner of India. This movement however failed and after trial in the court, several were hanged or sentenced to life imprisonment and few to shorter terms of imprisonments. This happened in 1915.

The first world war (1914-18) also brought more strain and suffering. At the end of the war, it had been expected that prices and cost of living would come down, but that hope also proved false. With a view to promptly suppressing disorders in war-time, the government armed itself with drastic powers to deal with trouble makers.

The general wave of anger against the foreign government helped to create communal harmony. In the past there were Hindu-Muslim clashes at the time of *Ram Naumi* festival. This time on 9th April, 1919 in Amritsar, Muslims joined Hindu procession and Hindu leaders were allowed to speak from the pulpit of mosques. All this was a matter of concern to British as it offered an enormous challenge to their policy of "Divide and Rule". The government took speedy action and arrested a Hindu leader Satyapal and a Muslim leader Saifuddin Kitchlew next day. This led to demonstrations and a crowd of people were fired upon by police killing 10 persons. The crowd became violent and in retaliation killed five Englishmen.

On the other hand the local congress leaders had already announced that a meeting will be held on Baisakhi day, 13th April, 1919 at *Jallianwala Bagh* in Amritsar at 4 P.M. Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lt. Governor of Punjab, decided to take quick and effective action to crush the fast growing turmoil. Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer was ordered to proceed to Amritsar and restore order. On 13th April a proclamation was issued prohibiting all meetings. In spite of that there was a gathering of about 20,000 people at *Jallianwala Bagh*. General Dyer ordered firing on un-armed people. 1300 people died and about the same number were wounded. Out of those killed, 799 were Sikhs. Martial law was proclaimed in parts of Punjab on 15th April. In the seven weeks that the Punjab remained under Martial Law, nearly 1200 were killed and at least 3600 wounded, the greater number of them being Sikhs. The effects of *Jallianwala Bagh* massacre was that the gulf between the ruler and the ruled was widened.

Udham Singh was present in the *Jallianwala Bagh* on that historic Baisakhi day where he received a bullet wound in his right arm. He was so deeply moved by that event that he took a



Udham Singh

solemn oath to punish the main culprit. This tragedy became the turning point of his life. Soon after he left for Africa and from there to USA where he became interested in revolutionary activities. On receiving an invitation from Bhagat Singh, he returned to India with 25 companions and arms. On reaching

Lahore, he was arrested for being in possession of arms. He was tried and sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment.

In 1932 he was released and the following year he went to Germany and from there he proceeded to London where he joined an engineering course. His real object was very different. He purchased a revolver. For a long time he waited for a suitable opportunity to punish Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who was responsible for killing so many Indians at Amritsar.

At last the long-awaited opportunity came on 13th March, 1940. On that day, he confronted his victim in the Caxton Hall and fired at him. Sir Michael O'Dwyer was hit twice and died instantaneously. Udham Singh did not move from his place and shouted "I have achieved my long cherished objective." He was sentenced to death on 11th June, 1940 and hanged on 13th June, 1940. He was then 41 years old.

### **Gurdwara Reform Movement / Akali Movement**

Following the *Jallianwala Bagh* massacre, there was the *Nankana Sahib* holocaust in February 1921. This was as a sequel to Gurdwara reform movement which was started to remove the proprietary control of the Gurdwaras by the priests, to bring them under democratic administration, and to conduct worship and missionary work according to Sikh traditions. The Gurdwara Reform Movement more popularly known as the Akali Movement, reached its zenith in the period from 1920 to 1925.

The *Mahant* (Priest) in retaliation butchered 130 Sikhs in the precincts of the Gurdwara with full support of the government. Ultimately the government had to give in. As a result of the Sikh struggle for the management and control of the Gurdwaras by Sikh-Sangat, SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee) was formed in April 30, 1921.

Next the government passed *Seditious Activity Act* and put a ban on wearing of *Kirpan* (sword) and black turban which the



### Nankana Sahib

sikhs were doing as a protest. Those doing so were badly beaten and women were molested by police.

Some time later in the year 1922, the Sikhs had to start *Guru-Ka-Bagh Morcha* because they were prevented from cutting wood from land surrounding the Gurdwara which they claimed to be their right. The Sikhs started sending jathas every day who were mercilessly beaten by the police. However, government had to accede to their demand at the end.

Then there was *Jaito Morcha* in 1923, because the government arrested Maharaja of Nabha who supported Akalis to free Gurdwaras from corrupt priests of the Gurdwaras in his princely state of Nabha. The S.G.P.C. sent a jatha of 25 Sikhs to start *Akhand Path* in the Gurdwara. The government arrested all of them. Thereafter Sikhs started the *morcha* by courting peaceful arrests to assert their right to prayer and holding religious gatherings. Here also the government ordered the army to fire and

100 sikhs died on the spot and 200 were injured. Ultimately government relented and allowed the Sikhs to hold the *Akhand Path* in the Gurdwara.

### **Babbar Akalis**

The callous indifference exhibited by the government towards the Sikhs while dealing with the above most inhuman incidences, made them realise that the non-violence policy had failed. This resulted in the emergence of *Babbar Akali* movement in 1921, who wanted to avenge the killings.

For the Babbars, the creed of non-violence was discarded and that of armed resistance and attack was pursued relentlessly. They were taught how to evade and resist, to carry on active propaganda against the government, to single out and liquidate informers. For them to die fighting for a righteous cause, was far more honourable than being hanged.

Special mention may be made of *Sardar Bhagat Singh* - the greatest Indian revolutionary and martyr.

He was born on September 27, 1907. He received his early education in his village primary school. After passing the fifth-class examination of that school, he joined the DAV School, Lahore, in 1916. This institution was a centre for seditious activity. In response to Mahatma Gandhi's call for non-cooperation and a boycott of all educational institutions in 1921, Bhagat Singh left his school, and joined the newly started National College, Lahore. Subsequently he refused to marry or be tied down by the need to earn a living. In early 1924 he went to Kanpur where he met other Bengali revolutionaries like B.K. Dutt and Chandar Shekhar Azad. At his father's request he returned to the Punjab in 1925. He organised revolutionary activities in the Punjab, Delhi and U.P.

In October 1927, Bhagat Singh was arrested for his subversive activities and bound in the sum of rupees 60,000, which did

not deter him from continuing his revolutionary programme. In July 1928, prominent revolutionaries of India decided to accentuate their activities. They held a meeting on September 28, at Kotla Ferozeshah in Delhi. Bhagat Singh was one of the meeting's key figures.

In October 1928, the country was in the grip of 'British out, Simon out' agitation. Lajpat Rai, one of the Chief exponents of extremism then organised a procession to register the protest of people of Lahore against the Simon Commission. Bhagat Singh and his co-workers were in the front of the procession.

The police used force to disperse the marchers. A brutal police attack on Lajpat Rai caused his death on the 17th November, 1928. The blows struck at Lajpat Rai infuriated Bhagat Singh against the high handed attitude of the authorities. Bhagat Singh determined to avenge Lajpat Rai's death by shooting Scott, supdt. of Police, Lahore and other British-officials responsible for the deed. On December 17, 1928, he shot down J.P. Saunders, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Lahore, just outside the police station near the DAV College. Bhagat Singh had mistaken him for Scott.

After that Bhagat Singh went into the DAV College Hostel, cut his hair and shaved his beard and made a dramatic escape from Lahore travelling to Calcutta in the guise of a rich Hindu accompanied by his wife and servant.

In 1928 Bhagat Singh attended a Congress session in Calcutta. There he joined Jatinder Nath Dass, who agreed to train him in bomb-making. After learning this, he left Calcutta and started a bomb factory at Agra where he and his associates planned further agitation against British rule in India. Having no faith in Mahatma Gandhi's programme of non-violence, the revolutionaries decided to attract the attention of the people by throwing bombs in the Central Assembly Hall, Delhi. Accordingly, on April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw two bombs in

the floor of the House while the Assembly was in session. The explosion created an enormous blast but no one was hurt. There was utter confusion in the Assembly. Later, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt surrendered themselves to the police.

Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were then tried by the Sessions Judge who commented that 'these persons used to enter the court with the cries of "Long live revolution"'. In fact, the slogan Inquilab Zindabad (Long live Revolution) was coined by Bhagat Singh. On June 12, 1929, the Judge gave a judgement sentencing them to transportation for life. Bhagat Singh was sent to the Mianwali Jail and B.K. Dutt to the Lahore Central Jail. Later Bhagat Singh was brought to Lahore, where he was tried in another case called Lahore Conspiracy Case.

What was this Conspiracy case about? We have said already that, on December 17, 1928, Saunders was shot dead at Lahore. The police investigation had gone on for several months. Several young men had been arrested and a case for murder of Saunders and for a conspiracy against the Government had been made out against them. On July 10, 1929 Bhagat Singh and others were charged in the case and accordingly Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev were sentenced to death and hanged on 23 March, 1931. Bhagat Singh was 23 years old at that time, but had lived long enough to become a legend and source of inspiration to all future Indian freedom fighters.

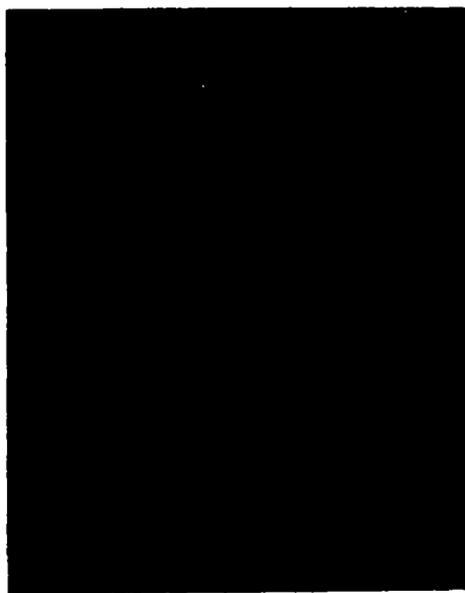
Mahatma Gandhi stated thus, "There has never been within living memory, so much romance round any life as had surrounded that of Bhagat Singh. None of the age of Bhagat Singh



**Sardar Bhagat Singh**  
(27-9-1907 to 23-3-1931)



**In disguise after shooting Saunders, DSP, Lahore on 17 Dec. 1928. He was in this form only for a short period.**



**Some time before execution in jail.**

ever earned so much fame and affection from his countrymen as he did.”

It should also be stressed that Bhagat Singh came of a staunch Sikh family and was a *Keshadhari* Sikh until to the day he shot Saunders down. Only after the shooting incident, to disguise himself did he have to cut his hair and shave off his beard. While in jail, he again kept his hair uncut like all Sikhs.

### **Sikhs Enter Politics**

Soon after Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the nationalist Sikhs formed a political organisation of their own in 1919 and called it the *Central Sikh League*. Having thus entered into the political arena they joined hands with the Indian National Congress in the cause of their country's liberation. Baba Kharak Singh, President of Central Sikh League, invited Mahatma Gandhi to attend their second meeting in Lahore on 20th October, 1920. Members of Central Sikh League also became members of the Congress. All began to work together to achieve their objective. Lala Lajpat Rai, the then President of the Punjab Provincial Congress was imprisoned in February, 1922. Baba Kharak Singh then took his place as President who was also arrested for delivering a seditious speech and sentenced to five years imprisonment. In December, 1922 the government banned wearing of black turbans and Gandhi caps by the prisoners. As a protest Baba Kharak Singh refused to wear anything except his underwear as long as he was in prison.

However, during this period *Nehru Committee Report* was released by the Congress and it recommended reservation of seats for Muslims in state assemblies in seven states in which they were a minority community. But no such reservation was recom-

mended for Sikhs in Punjab. Nehru Committee completely ignored the right of Sikhs as a distinct and important minority. Hence Central Sikh League rejected the report and demanded 30% reservation for Sikhs in Punjab.

An all party convention was then called in Calcutta in December, 1928. The plea of the Central Sikh League that communalism should not be made basis for any future policy in India was rejected by the President of the convention and hence the Sikhs walked out of the meeting. The Sikh confidence was lost and never fully restored. Sikhs and Congress continued to drift apart. It was only towards the close of the British period in the events leading to independence, that Sikhs and Congress were again to work in close association with each other.

In March 1940, the Muslim League for the first time, passed a resolution demanding a sovereign Muslim state. The Sikhs got greatly disturbed by this because they were for a united free India.

In 1946, the British government sent a cabinet mission to India to discuss the next step towards India's independence. The Sikh spokesman of the delegation to meet the cabinet mission was Master Tara Singh who said that he was for a united free India, but if Pakistan was to be conceded, then he was for a separate Sikh state from *Chenab* to *Jamuna*, with the right to federate either with India or Pakistan.

Although the British had accepted Sikhs beside Hindus and Muslims, to be the third party to the dispute, but the Sikh spokesman worded their demand for a Sikh state, not as something desirable by itself but simply a point in an argument against Pakistan. Hence no serious consideration was given to this demand by the Cabinet Mission and the Sikh case was lost by default.

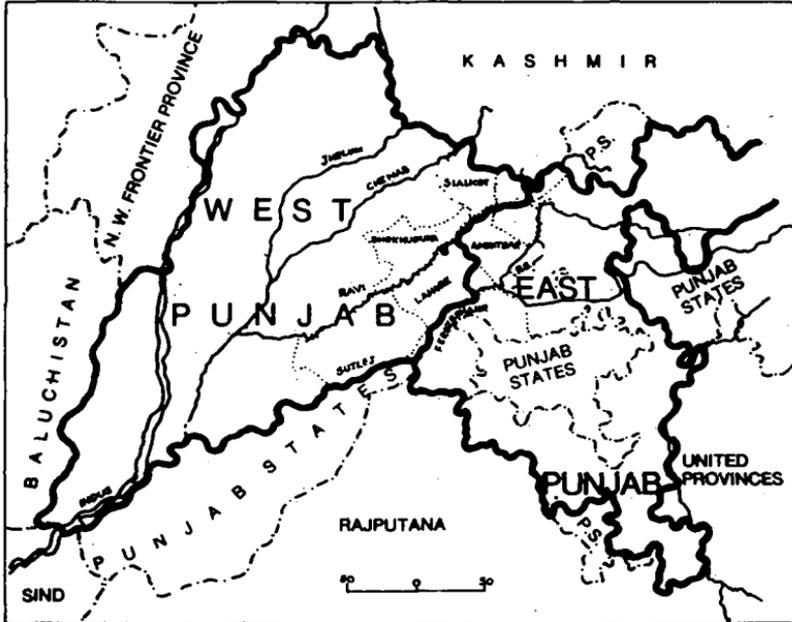
The emergence of *All India Sikh Student Federation* just before independence bears testimony to the vitality of the Sikh

youth. With the idea of “catching them young” some leaders of the Sikh community started this organisation in 1944. The main objective of the federation was to give the Sikh youth a knowledge of its rich heritage, to create a sense of pride and appreciation of the Sikh identity, and to produce future Sikh leadership. It was decided to build up the organisation from the grass roots. Apart from study circles and discussion groups of Sikh boys and girls, the federation organised training camps to inculcate the qualities of discipline, punctuality, self-reliance, leadership and appreciation of Sikh history, culture and religion. The study of *Gurbani* and the performance of *Kirtan* were encouraged.

The Federation adopted the idea of Sikh nationalism and tried to bring the intelligentsia closer to the Akali Dal and to establish an independent political entity of the Sikhs.

The British left India on 14th August, 1947 with the formation of two countries. Muslim majority areas formed Pakistan and Hindu majority areas formed India. Punjab and Bengal were partitioned on the same principle. The princely states were left free to join either India or Pakistan or none. The Sikhs had cast their lot with their Hindu brethren and hence had to leave their homes in Punjab (now Pakistan) and migrate to this side of the border in Punjab (India). The Sikhs suffered most in this process as more than half of their population had to migrate and about 2,50,000 Sikhs and Hindus were killed during riots that followed. A sizable number of Muslims were also killed as well in the disturbances.

## PARTITION OF INDIA & PAKISTAN



The map, issued with the Boundary Commission's report, shows the division of the Punjab between India and Pakistan.

In the freedom struggle, out of a total number of 4771 people who were either hanged, killed or transported for life by the British, 3697 were Sikhs. This means 77.5% sacrifices were made by the Sikhs for getting freedom for India from the British government as against their population ratio in India to a little less than 2%.

### 3

## SIKHS AFTER PARTITION (1947-1989)

### **Partition and its Effects**

The partition of the country made many Sikhs as refugees. They settled in East Punjab and quite a few in the neighbouring states of U.P. and Rajasthan. Delhi also attracted large number of Sikhs. They tried to resettle and rehabilitate themselves in the shortest possible time. Seldom was a Sikh man, woman or child seen begging in the streets. In this way, the Sikhs earned the respect of their countrymen as people of courage and fortitude. The partition had again tested and proved their mettle.

### **Green Revolution**

A sizeable percentage of refugees who migrated to East Punjab were farmers. The new province of East Punjab was deficit in foodgrains. Therefore the most urgent problem was how to increase the production of foodgrains to feed the growing population. The solution was provided by Green Revolution which means rapid increase in the cereal production. The enormous amount of food grains in the sixties and seventies was largely due to the hard work of the refugee farmers as well as import and use of Mexican seeds and the application of modern methods of farming. The refugee farmers, mainly Sikhs, put in their best efforts to get the maximum out of the limited area allotted to them. The Punjab Agricultural University also contributed a great deal for the success of Green Revolution.

As a result of the above efforts the yield of wheat and rice in Punjab became the highest in India. Punjab contributes around

75% of total wheat procurement and about 65% of total rice procurement by the Central Government throughout India. Even yield of cotton per hectare became the highest in India. Punjab also became one of the leading states in the production per hectare of sugarcane and potatoes. The per capita daily availability of milk is more than double the all India figure of milk production. Obviously Punjab is rightly called the "bread basket" of India.

On the industrial front, Punjab is not in a very happy state. This is because Central Government has not set up any major industries in Punjab and there is also shortage of power. The Central Government should allocate some major industries to Punjab and also set up an atomic power plant to tide over the chronic power shortage so as to put Punjab on a firm industrial base.

### **Demand for Punjabi State**

However, the chief cause of uneasiness of Sikhs in free India was the resurgence of Hinduism which threatened to engulf the minorities, especially the Punjabi Hindus who even disowned their mother tongue and instead declared Hindi to be their mother tongue. The system of proportional representation based on religion was also discontinued and the rule of majority came into being, thereby putting Sikhs into disadvantage.

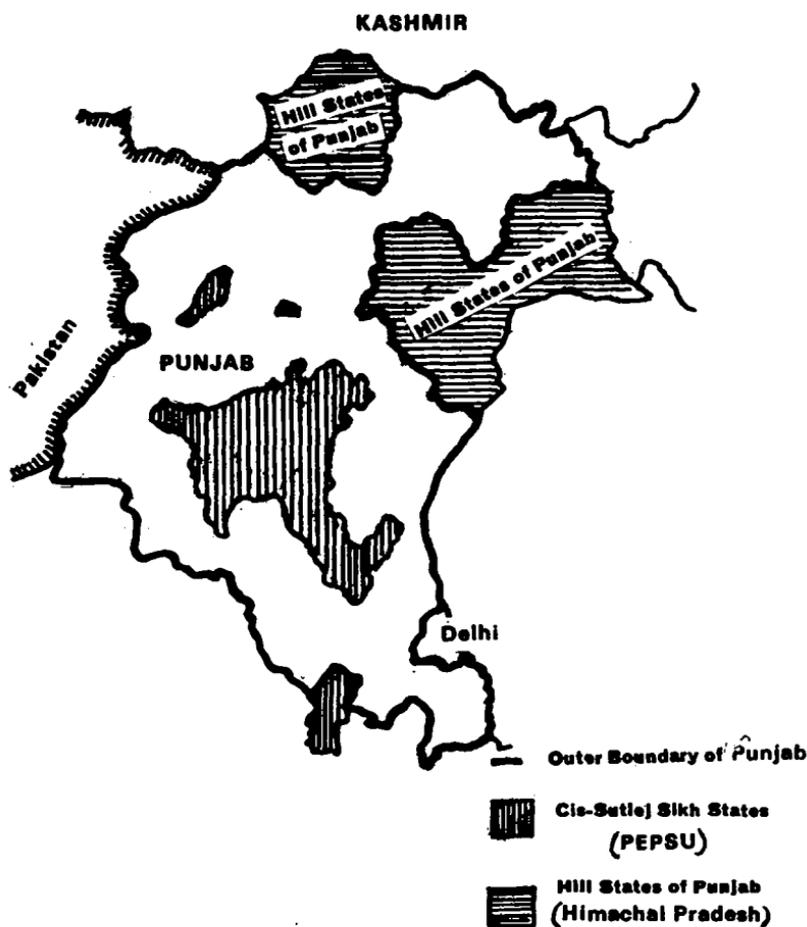
Though Sikhism is based on the concept of a classless and casteless society, in actual life a feeling of caste consciousness does exist among Sikhs. Partition and mass migration which resulted in mixing of population has not lessened this class-consciousness. This has led to social-stratification by marrying within their own social groups. This is against the basic teachings of the Sikh Gurus—that all men are equal and must be treated with equal dignity and respect. Some other Hindu customs and practices have also infiltrated into the Sikhs. For example dowry

and its exhibition continue in spite of Gurus' prohibition, similarly *Jaimala*, mixed dancing and liquor consumption are common during marriage celebrations among respectable Sikh families. The evils of smoking, drug addiction and trimming of hairs are also prevalent among some Sikhs. The propaganda of the reformists Sikh societies for the removal of these evils has not yet made any discernible impact.

The mass migration due to partition resulted in Sikhs being in majority for the first time in some districts of East Punjab. There were also some Sikh princely states in Punjab which were earlier known as cis-sutlej Sikh states. The government of India decided to absorb the princely states of Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot, Kapurthala and Jind as well as Malerkotla which were merged into one entity in May 1948 and was called Patiala and East Punjab state union-PEPSU for short.

The Sikhs formed 48% of the population of PEPSU. Even in East Punjab Sikhs were in a minority. Hence Sikhs could not have any political power either in Punjab or in PEPSU as the voting was done by and large on the basis of religion.

In 1949, Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader pressed for the formation of Punjabi-speaking state. No serious consideration was given to the demand although the congress party in a resolution before partition, had declared that after achieving independence, they will reorganise the states on linguistic basis. Hence the Sikhs under the leadership of Master Tara Singh launched in 1955 an agitation for the formation of a Punjabi speaking state at the earliest. The State government imposed a ban on the mere shouting of the slogan "Punjabi Suba Zindabad"—long live Punjabi state as the Sikh volunteers raised the slogan while courting arrest. This was most undemocratic on the part of the government. More than 12000 Sikhs courted arrest during this agitation. Ultimately government realising its mis-



Punjab as on 15th August 1947

take, withdrew the ban on the above slogan, and as such the morcha was withdrawn. Thereafter the government set up the states reorganisation commission and in 1956, it recommended the creation of linguistic states in India. However, it did not concede the demand for Punjabi speaking state. Instead it merged PEPSU with East Punjab and this resulted in reduction of Sikh population in PEPSU from 48% to 35% of the total population of

bigger Punjab formed in 1956. Moreover, it was made a bilingual state with both Hindi and Punjabi being the state languages, because Punjabi Hindus declared Hindi as their mother tongue. This was the only example of a bilingual state except Maharashtra and Gujrat which were also clubbed together to justify government's decision on Punjab. But Maharashtra and Gujrat were separated within a years time, because of stiff resistance of the people there. The Sikhs rightly felt discriminated by government in not conceding to their rightful demand for a unilingual Punjabi state.

Hence for the achievement of a unilingual Punjabi state another peaceful agitation was launched in 1956 under the leadership of Master Tara Singh as a result of which the government only conceded in demarcating Punjab into two regions-Punjabi speaking and Hindi speaking and giving some advisory powers to regional committees formed thereof.

This half hearted attempt did not satisfy the Sikhs. Again the Sikhs started an agitation under the leadership of Master Tara Singh which was later taken over by Sant Fateh Singh after his arrest. Over 57000 Sikhs courted arrest and about a dozen died during this agitation, but there was no move from the government side. So Sant Fateh Singh started a fast unto death. The government got panicky and released Master Tara Singh and invited him for talks with Pandit Nehru. However, the talks failed as Nehru refused to accede the demand for a Punjabi state. The agitation was resumed and the government passed a special Printers (Press) Act in 1961 banning the publication of any news items about Punjabi Suba or the agitation connected with it. Ultimately the agitation was withdrawn on the assurance of the government that a high-powered commission will be appointed, to go into the demands of the Sikhs. Nothing came out of it as the government was not sincere to settle the issue without any communal considerations.

Sant Fateh Singh became President of Akali Dal in 1965 and an agitation for achieving Punjabi state was intensified. However, in September 1965 war started with Pakistan and in the interest of the country, the Akali's suspended their agitation and put their full might to defend the country

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who became Prime Minister in 1966, after the war, instituted a parliamentary committee to consider the Sikh demand. The committee decided for the formation of Punjabi state. Hence on 1st November, 1966 a unilingual state of Punjab was formed, ten years later than the formation of other unilingual states of India. However, Una, enclaves of Dalhousie, Bakloh and Kharar tehsil which included Chandigarh and which were in Punjabi region as demarcated earlier, were given to Himachal Pradesh and Haryana respectively on Communal basis as non-Sikh Punjabis were in majority in these areas. But due to threat of fast unto death by Sant Fateh Singh on this issue, Kharar tehsil was immediately restored to Punjab minus the city of Chandigarh which was made a union territory and common capital of Punjab and Haryana—the only example of this type in India. The Sikhs were not happy as the government took away Chandigarh which rightly belonged to Punjab, took control of Bhakra and Beas Dams, made common Governor, High Court, Financial Corporation, Electricity and Housing Board with Haryana.

### **Punjabi Suba Conceded**

Again Sant Fateh Singh started an agitation in December, 1966 for the inclusion of left over Punjabi-speaking areas in Punjab, restoration of Chandigarh to Punjab as its capital, the return of control of Bhakra Dam to Punjab and the abolition of the common links with Haryana. He also declared his intention of going on fast and then to immolate himself on 27th December, 1966 if his demands were not conceded by then. He, however, broke his fast on the appointed day on the assurance of the then



**Punjab from 1st November 1966**

speaker of Lok Sabha Mr. Hukam Singh, who was specially flown to Amritsar by the government in an Air Force plane, who declared that the "Chandigarh will go to Punjab". He gave this assurance facing the Akal Takhat. This assurance was not implemented by the government. Sardar Darshan Singh Pheruman, a sincere and devout Sikh, took a religious vow at Akal Takht, Amritsar, that from 15th August, 1969 he would fast unto death to secure the inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab. He accused the Akali Dal of

weakness and insincerity in not making serious efforts for obtaining Chandigarh for Punjab. As his fast posed serious problems to the United Front Ministry, Pheruman was arrested and jailed, but, subsequently, on account of his deteriorating health, he was transferred under police guard to the Government hospital, Amritsar. After 74 days of fasting, he passed away on 27th October, 1969. His body was cremated in his village. In his testament he affirmed the solemnity of the vow taken in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. He exhorted the Sikhs to continue his mission of securing the Sikh Homeland after his death. Later on, another political group called, Pheruman Akali Dal was formed in his memory. To retrieve his status, Sant Fateh Singh again decided to start another fast in January, 1970 for achieving the above demands. Because of the surcharged situation, Mrs. Indira Gandhi after three days of his fast, announced the decision of the government by way of an award that Chandigarh will go to Punjab within 5 years time and Haryana will be given compensation of Rs. 10 crores for building a new capital which government hoped they will start constructing soon. However, the award was not implemented by the government.

### **Emergency and Anandpur Sahib Resolution**

In 1975 emergency was declared in India. The Sikhs started an agitation by courting arrest every day against the emergency. Over 45000 Sikhs courted arrest during emergency and it continued till it was withdrawn in 1977. Indira Gandhi lost elections in 1977 and Janta government took over.

There were only two short spells of Akali ministry in Punjab in 1970 and 1977. The centre's desire to topple non-congress governments led to their fall inspite of their assembly members being in majority in Punjab and they could not retain political power. The government also interfered in the religious affairs of the Sikhs with the idea of capturing control of Shiromani Gurd-

-wara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar and Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi. All the above factors being major irritants.

In 1973 the Akali Dal passed *Anandpur Sahib* resolution asking for an autonomous status for Punjab within the Indian union. This is the substance of the Anandpur Sahib resolution passed by the Akali Dal in 1973 which was reaffirmed in 1979 with minor modification. The Anandpur Sahib resolution wants that the constitution be made truly federal and it envisages the retention of only four subjects—Defence, Foreign Affairs, Communication and Currency by the centre, leaving the rest to the states.

No serious attempt was made by the government to settle the demands of Sikhs and to find a just and equitable solution without any communal considerations. The settlements arrived at, assurances given and awards announced by the government were not implemented or implemented only half heartedly by the government.

### **Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala**

The Sikh demands were not given any serious consideration for so many years after partition in spite of many peaceful agitations during the course of which thousands of Sikhs courted arrest. It may be noted that all their agitations since partition were peaceful. However, a stage came when the situation gradually started deteriorating and caused the emergence of militancy among some sections of the Sikhs. This is where the Sikhs can be faulted in their otherwise peaceful struggle. But their justification is that they tried peaceful means long enough and found the govt. wanting while they have a mandate from the tenth Guru : "When all other avenues of redress are exhausted, it is just to take to arms". Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala came on the scene at this time. It is alleged that initially he was promoted by the Congress government to break and weaken the Akalis but later he distanced himself from them.

The first violent incident was a clash between the Nirankaris and Akalis in Amritsar on 13th April, 1978 where 12 Sikhs and 3 Nirankaris were killed. The Nirankaris believe in a living Guru who is in a Sikh form. They used to install Guru Granth Sahib alongwith their living Guru at their congregations. The Sikhs objected to it and that caused the clash in 1979. This led to the murder of Baba Gurbachan Singh, Guru of Nirankaris. They have since discontinued this practice, but still make the Sikh scripture their main source of inspiration. Of late they have started misinterpreting and even computing its composition to fit in their own doctrines. Their Gurus still keep a Sikh form, but instead of Sikh baptism, they give foot wash (Charnamrit) to their followers.

It may be pointed out that the Sikh demands and grievances were magnified and distorted due to the hostile attitude of the Hindu press and media.

#### **Dharam Yudh Morcha and Operation Blue Star**

In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power. As the Sikh demands were still not redressed, the Akalis started a *Dharam Yudh Morcha* on 4th May, 1982 for the implementation of Anandpur Sahib Resolution and other Sikh demands. Scores of Akali volunteers started courting arrest. The same year in October Asian Games were held in Delhi and because of the Akali morcha, government became extra-cautious and hence every Sikh entering Delhi was singled out and thoroughly searched and humiliated. This created a sense of alienation in the minds of the Sikhs who underwent this ordeal. The *Dharam Yudh Morcha* continued till the launching of the "*Operation Blue Star*" on 2nd June, 1984 by which time it is claimed by the Akalis that more than 200,000 Sikh volunteers courted peaceful arrest for the achievement of their demands. For almost two years while

the Morcha was going on, the government did not make any honest move to settle the issues involved and hence the faith of some people in peaceful protest started eroding. That is why Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala assumed more and more importance during the currency of this morcha. The angry Sikh youth lost patience and wrested the initiative from their elders. 'You have been at it long enough,' they said, 'Let us try our hand now. And they picked up the gun. In frustration a small section of the Sikhs even started raising the demand for Khalistan, although this demand was raised a few years earlier also by some foreign based Sikhs but the Sikhs did not take much notice of the same at that time.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala, who was gradually assuming more and more control, declared that nothing will be achieved by peaceful means and advocated militancy and moved into Akal Takhat. It was alleged by the government that with him, many militants had also taken shelter there alongwith arms inside the Golden Temple complex.

It was further alleged that fortifications had also been built and isolated cases of killings which had started of late were being master-minded from inside the Golden Temple complex. To flush out these militants from the Golden Temple complex, Indira Gandhi's government launched army action code named "Operation Blue Star" on 2nd June, 1984 on the eve of Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom day, who was the builder of Golden Temple, and fifth Guru of the Sikhs. A 36 hours curfew was declared from 9 A.M. on 3rd June which was extended later. All communication systems in Punjab and Chandigarh were cut off from the outside world, not even a bullock cart moved on the roads. All newspaper reporters were ordered out, and total curfew was imposed in Punjab and Chandigarh. Army was moved in and temple complex was attacked from all sides

Simultaneously 37 other Gurdwaras in Punjab were also attacked. Fire arms of all sorts were used including machine-guns, rockets and tanks. Helicoptors of Air Force were also pressed into service including divers of the navy. After fierce and grim battle which lasted three days causing heavy casualties on both sides, the Army entered Golden Temple on 6th June, 1984.

Among the casualties, besides the alleged militants or terrorists—Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala, Major Gen. Shahbeg Singh and AISSF President Bhai Amrik Singh, —were innocent pilgrims including women and children. As per government estimate there were 554 dead and 121 wounded and on the army side 92 dead and 300 wounded although the un-official reports contend that they were much higher on both sides. The Golden Temple for Sikhs is what Mecca is to Muslims and Vatican to Roman catholics. It bore hundreds of bullet marks while the Akal Takhat, the second most holy building in the 72 acre complex was blasted by artillery and cannon fire from battle tanks brought into the *Parikarma* and was severely damaged beyond repair.

All the surviving inmates which included women and children and numbering about 5000 were arrested including the top Akali leaders. The peaceful *Dharam Yudh Morcha* came to an automatic end and a new chapter in the history of the Sikhs opened with the launching and completion of the “Operation Blue Star”.

### **Indira Gandhi's Assassination**

As the Akal Thakat was severely damaged beyond repair, Indira Gandhi ordered its rebuilding and repairing of other buildings of the complex including Golden Temple before it could be handed over by the army to the SGPC. The Sikhs objected because they wanted to rebuild it themselves by ‘Kar Sewa’—voluntary labour as per their tradition. But the government went ahead with its plans of rebuilding. However, the militants, afterwards when they had again taken control of the

complex, demolished the new structure so that it could be rebuilt again by the Sikhs through voluntary labour.

The entire Sikh community was aflame with anger and a call for revenge was given by the militants for the humiliation as well as loss of pride on account of assault and grievous damage done to the shrine. Even British had dared not touch the shrine in the days of the martial law in 1919 at the time of "Jalianwala Bagh" episode, when the British authorities were bent upon teaching the Sikhs a lesson.

The Sikhs in the army were also highly agitated and around 3000 of them from different stations deserted their barracks and marched towards Amritsar. About 35 were killed on the way and the rest were arrested, tried and punished.

The Sikhs all over the world held protest meetings and demonstrations and even attacked Indian embassies and consulates abroad. As a consequence a militant organisation was founded abroad with the aim of achieving 'Khalistan'

The Punjab newspapers and correspondents were put under strict censorship and no foreigner was allowed to visit Punjab.

In such a surcharged atmosphere created by 'Operation Blue Star', two of the trusted Sikh body guards of Indira Gandhi—Satwant Singh and Beant Singh—assassinated her on the morning of 31st October, 1984 at her official residence in New Delhi. The whole country was plunged into deep shock. Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son, was sworn in as Prime Minister the same evening. However, for the next five days the Sikhs were secure nowhere—whether on the roads, in their homes, shops, Gurdwaras, Railway trains, buses, cars, as a matter of fact nowhere.

It will be pertinent to add here that when Mahatama Gandhi was assassinated shortly after partition by a Maratha Hindu youth Nathu Ram Godse, no body touched a single Marathi at that time. The Sikhs fail to understand as to why, when

two Sikh guards committed the crime, the entire Sikh community was made a target of genocide in an organised manner.

According to government estimate 2733 Sikhs were killed in most heinous circumstances—tortured, burnt alive or cut into pieces. Their women folk were gang raped, their property looted or burnt. Mostly it happened in New Delhi—the capital city of India, Kanpur and Bokaro. The police became inactive and looked the other way. All the Sikh policemen in Delhi were disarmed and confined to barracks or put on office duties. The Sikhs outside Punjab were shaken to their very roots. For the first time in the history of free India they realised that they have become vulnerable. It was not the fear but the anxiety and uncertainty about their future which filled their mind and heart.

### **Rajiv-Longowal Accord**

General elections were held in December, 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi returned to power with thumping majority on sympathy wave. He had set Punjab as number one problem to be solved on his agenda. He ordered release of all top Akali leaders from detention for negotiations and as a result thereof on 24th July, 1985 Rajiv-Longowal accord was signed. Soon after the elections were held in Punjab and Akalis got 73 out of 117 seats in the state assembly and they formed the government under Surjeet Singh Barnala. Julio Francis Ribeiro was appointed police chief of Punjab. He started with the set task of finishing all the terrorists in Punjab which he estimated to be about one hundred. Within a month of the signing of the accord, Sant Longowal was shot dead on 20th August, 1985.

Rajiv-Longowal accord consisted of eleven clauses covering different demands of the Sikhs. Under it, Chandigarh was awarded to Punjab and was to be transferred on 26th January, 1986 alongwith transfer to Haryana some contiguous Hindi

speaking villages as per the desire of late Indira Gandhi. To determine the Hindi speaking villages on the above criteria, a Commission under Justice Mathur was set up by the government. The commission could not find any Hindi speaking villages in Punjab contiguous to Haryana. Hence another commission under Justice Venkataramiah was appointed for the same objective and he gave the verdict that 75,000 acres of adjacent land of Punjab be given to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh though he did not identify as to which areas except for 45,000 acres of 30 Hindu majority villages (though Punjabi speaking) which Punjab offered on its own. Since this fell short of his total figure of 75,000 acres, he stipulated that 25,000 more of Punjabi speaking acres be given to Haryana without identifying any such contiguous area. To determine this area a third commission under Justice Desai was set up on 20th June, 1986 to find out specific area within 24 hours!

Justice Desai threw up his hands in despair. The Akalis were willing to part with 45,000 acres of Hindu majority (though Punjabi speaking) acres but rightly refused to give another 25000 Punjabi speaking Sikh majority acres. The government did not implement this clause of transferring Chandigarh to Punjab and hence the accord fell through without implementing any of its clauses.

A "Sarbat Khalsa" was called and a Panthic Committee of five was appointed on 26th January, 1986 by the militants as Chandigarh was not transferred to Punjab on this day as per Rajiv-Longowal accord. A resolution for the formation for "Khalistan" was also passed on this day. A year later on 26th January, 1987 another "Sarbat Khalsa" was called and a resolution for Khalistan was repeated. The resolution for Khalistan was again passed on 29th April, 1988 by the Panthic Committee. The violence had, in the meantime, escalated and the centre

therefore dismissed the elected Barnala Government on 11th May, 1987 and the State was put under President's rule under S.S. Ray as the Governor.

Surjeet Singh Barnala blamed non-implementation of the accord by centre as one of the main factors for his failure to contain violence. The people of Punjab and Sikhs in particular became sullen and suspicious as centre was setting one commission after another which gave very unreasonable and unjustified awards on acres of land to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. As a matter of fact Chandigarh being a Punjabi town should have, in the very first place, given to Punjab just as Bombay was given to Maharashtra, Madras to Tamil Nadu, Shillong to Meghalaya, Simla to Himachal Pradesh and Haryana should have built its own new capital just as Gujrat built Gandhinagar, Assam built Dispur and Arunachal Pradesh built Itanagar as their state capitals.

From May 12 to 18, 1988 another police operation code named "Operation Black thunder" was launched by the government to flush out militants from the Golden Temple which the government claimed to have again been occupied by them inspite of a strict police vigil all around the complex. The golden Temple was again surrounded by the police and para military forces. This time they cut off the water, electric and food supplies thereby starving the inmates to come out. About 150 extremists were arrested this time. Shortly afterward another police operation in "*Mand*" area of Punjab was also launched with the same purpose.

During the years from 1984 to 1989 violence went on unabated in Punjab inspite of President's rule. There were daily killings on both sides. Akali leaders charged that there are many false encounters by police to kill innocent Sikhs. Forgetting that violence is no answer to violence, govt. tried their

“bullet for bullet” policy. Fake encounters became order of the day. Provoked, militants started indulging in killing sprees. More blood was shed. More innocent people lost their lives. Even police chief Julio Francis Riberio admitted that there were some police hit squads to liquidate terrorists which could have also killed some innocent Sikhs. During these five years Punjab was reeling under police atrocities and the draconian laws passed by the Rajiv Government like National Security Act and Anti Terrorists Act, thereby empowering the government to arrest anyone without warrant and keeping him under custody without trial. Even constitution was amended empowering the government to impose emergency in Punjab only and to take away right to life and property.

Out of the nearly 5000 Sikh prisoners taken at Golden Temple at the time of “Operation Blue Star”, about 400 of them were considered hardcore terrorists and were hence sent to Jodhpur jail where they remained without trial for over 4 years when around 300 were released and the remainig about 100 were transferred to various Punjab jails.

Hundreds and thousands of Sikhs were arrested on flimsy grounds and put behind bars without any trial for years together including Akali leaders like Parkash Singh Badal, Surjeet Singh Barnala, Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Simaranjit Singh Mann who was also tortured by police.

Simaranjit Singh Mann, an ex-I.P.S. officer who resigned from service as a protest against Operation Blue Star, Atinderpal Singh and two other professors of the Bombay colleges were charged with conspiracy to murder Indira Gandhi under a second charge sheet for the same offence. To file a second charge sheet for the same offence was done for the first time in the legal history, of India.

### **Defeat of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party**

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi called for general elections which were

held in the last week of November, 1989. The congress party lost the elections and a United Front government led by V.P. Singh took office on 2nd December 1989. On the eve of laying down his office, Rajiv Gandhi announced withdrawal of cases against some top Sikh leaders. The conspiracy to murder case as per second charge sheet was also withdrawn. Simaranjit Singh Mann was released after 5 years of detention without trial including some other Akali leaders who were also under detention for different periods of time. Simaranjit Singh Mann's Akali Dal swept the elections in Punjab by capturing 10 seats out of total 13 seats (6 by his Akali Dal, 3 independents and 1 BSP supported by his party). One Janta Dal candidate also won on their support and balance 2 seats by Congress. Mann himself won the seat by a huge margin of over 4 lakh votes over his nearest rival, the second highest in India. The election results showed that the people of Punjab have shown their anger against the repressive, unfair and unprincipled policies of the central government. Simaranjit Singh Mann emerged as the leader of Punjab and Sikhs in particular.

### **Demands of the Sikhs**

The Sikhs want to live in India peacefully as respectable and equal citizens. They only want that their just demands be accepted without any communal considerations. The main demands of the Sikhs are:—

1. Inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab without any conditions.
2. Transfer of left-over adjoining Punjabi speaking areas of Haryana, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh to Punjab.
3. Restoration of the control of Bhakra Dam to the Punjab state.
4. Implementation of Anandpur Sahib Resolution so as to

make India truly federal by giving more powers to states and centre retaining only Defence, Foreign Affairs, Currency and Communications.

5. Non-interference of government in the management of Gurdwaras.
6. Enactment of an All-India Gurdwara Bill.
7. Establishment of a powerful radio station/transmitter at the Golden Temple, Amritsar to relay Kirtan/Gurbani to be financed by the Sikh community.
8. Location of an atomic power plant in Punjab.
9. Making Amritsar an International airport. It may be noted that about 50% passengers arriving/departing at Delhi Airport are from Punjab.
10. Higher share of water of rivers-Sutlej, Beas and Ravi. Presently Punjab gets only 24% as against 76% allotted to adjoining states although Punjab is a riparian state and only surplus water should go to other states.
11. Location of major industrial projects in Punjab by the central government to generate more employment.
12. Higher allocation of central funds to Punjab.
13. To invest deposits with the banks of Punjab in the industries located in Punjab rather than investing only about one third in Punjab and rest in other states.

The Sikhs have been agitating for the achievement of the above demands for the last many years and the government is fully aware of the same. All the above demands are within the framework of Indian constitution and government, should have no hesitation in conceding them to win over the bruised psyche of the Sikhs who form a very important and inseparable segment of Indian society.



