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Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Ranjit Singh was born on Nov. 13, 1780 at Gujranwala. He was named Ranjit Singh by his father Mahan Singh. Ranjit Singh had his first taste of battle, when he was hardly ten years old. It was Sahib Singh Bhangi (they were called Bhangis as they use to drink 'Bhang' all the time) of Gujarat (a town in Punjab, now in Pakistan) refused to pay tribute to Mahan Singh and his estate was attacked by him. Sahib Singh shut himself at the fort of Sodhran and the siege of the fort was laid. Ranjit Singh accompanied Mahan Singh. The siege continued for several months.



Mahan Singh fell grievously ill. Apprehending his approaching end he invested Ranjit Singh chief of the Sukerchakia Misl by putting Ranjit's forehead saffron paste. It was a great occasion of joy. Mahan Singh returned to Gujrawala. When the other Bhangi sardars came to know about the illness of Mahan Singh and the army of Sukerchakia's was commanded by a child of ten years they came to rescue the Sahib Singh Bhangi at Sodhran. Ranjit Singh ambushed them and routed their forces. Ranjit Singh's victory opened the eyes of many chieftains. When the news of victory was conveyed to Mahan Singh, he distributed sweets and perhaps it was the last news given to Mahan Singh before he breathed his last. Mahan Singh died in 1792. Ranjit Singh was then 12 years old. He was too young to manage the affairs of the estate. His mother Raj Kaur became his natural guardian. He was also helped by Diwan Lakhpat Rai. She had full confidence in his integrity but her brother Dal Singh did not like his interference in the administration of the territory. So, Dal Singh joined hands with Sada Kaur, Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law who exercised a lot of control over him. Thus two clear cut groups were formed, Diwan and Raj Kaur on one hand, Sada Kaur and Dal Singh on the other side. The intrigues and counter intrigues made Ranjit sick of all of them. He started spending most of this time outside the house on hunting expeditions. Ranjit Singh also became suspicious of people around him and disliked some of them.

Ranjit grew up without any formal education and remained totally illiterate. Fond of swimming and excursions, Ranjit had more traits to become a soldier later in life.

At the age of 16 Ranjit Singh was married to Mehtab Kaur of Kanhaiya misal, thus this marriage brought two great misals together. Then in 1798 he again married to the daughter of Khazan Singh Nakai thus also adding his strength. The second marriage annoyed Sada Kaur and Mehtab Kaur. Mehtab Kaur returned to Batala and only returned to Gujrawala occasionally. At the age of 18 Ranjit Singh assumed the powers directly. Sada Kaur exploited the position of Ranjit Singh and she was the ladder by which Ranjit Singh reached the climax of his power.

Punjab presented a picture of chaos and confusion when Ranjit Singh took reins of Sukerchakia's misal. The edifice of Ahmad Shah Abdali's empire in India had crumbled. Afghanistan was dismembered. Peshawar and Kashmir though under the suzerainty of Afghanistan had attained de facto independence. Barakzais were the masters of these places. Attock was ruled by Wazirihels and Jhang lay at the feet of Sials. Pathans were ruling Kasur. Multan had thrown yoke and Nawab Muzaffar Khan had taken its charge.

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

When Ahmad Shah Abdali was engaged in his campaign against the Marathas at Panipat in 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia plundered Sirhind and Dialpur, seized some places in Ferozepur district and took under his possession Jagraon and Kot Isa Khan on the other bank of Sutlej. He captured Hoshiarpur and Narainpur in Ambala and levied tribute from the chief of Kapurthala. He then marched towards Jhang. Sial chief offered stout resistance. When Ahmad Shah left in Feb. 1761, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia again attacked Sirhind and extended his territory as far as Tarn Taran. He crossed Bias and capture Sultanpur. In 1762, Ahmad Shah again appeared and a fierce battle took place. It is called Ghalughara, a great holocaust. Jassa Singh fled to Kangra hills after Sikh forces were totally routed. After the departure of Ahmad Shah Abdali, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia attacked Sirhind, it was razed to ground and the Afghan Governor Zen Khan was killed. This was a great victory to Sikhs who were rulers of all the area around the Sirhind. Jassa Singh hastily paid visit to Hari Mandir at Amritsar, and he made amends and restored it to original shape as it was defiled by Ahmad Shah by slaughtering cows in its precincts. Ahmad Shah died in June 1773. After his death power of Afghans declined in Punjab. Taimur Shah ascended the throne at Kabul. By then misals, had established themselves in Punjab. They had under their control the area as far as Saharnpur in east, Attock in west, Kangra Jammu in north and Multan in south. Efforts were made by Afghan rulers to dislodge Sikhs from their citadels. Taimur Shah attacked Multan and defeated the Bhangis. The Bhangi sardars, Lehna Singh, and Sobha Singh were driven out of Lahore in 1767 by the Abdali but soon reoccupied it.

They remained in power in Lahore till 1793—the year when Shah Zaman succeeded to the throne of Kabul.

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

The first attempt by Shah Zaman was made in 1793. He came upto Hassan Abdal from where he sent an army of 7000 strong cavalry under Ahmad Shahnachi but the Sikhs totally routed them. It was a great setback to Shah Zaman but again in 1795 he reorganized forces and attacked Hassan Abdal, snatched Rohtas from Sukerchikias, whose leader was Ranjit Singh. However, Shah had to be back in Kabul as an invasion was apprehended on his own country from the west. After he went back, Ranjit dislodged the Afghans from Rohtas.

Shah Zaman could not sit idle. In 1796 he moved, crossed Indus for the third time and dreamt of capturing Delhi. His ambition knew no bounds. By now he had collected 3000 strong afghan army. He was confident a large number of Indians will join with him. Nawab of Kasur had already assured him help. Sahib Singh of Patiala betrayed his countrymen and declared his intentions of helping Shah Zaman. He had family traditions of loyalty to all the invaders who attacked India. Shah Zaman was also assured help by the Rohillas, Wazir of Oudh, and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Shah was bent upon to finish the infidels. The news of Shah Zaman invasion spread like wild fire. Chicken hearted people started fleeing to hills for safety. Heads of Misals, though bound to give protection to the people as they were collecting Rakhi tax from them were the first to leave the people in lurch. In December, Shah occupied territory upto Jhelum. When he reached Gujarat Sahib Singh bhangi panicked and left the place. He could not offer any resistance.

Next was the territory of Ranjit Singh. He was alert and raised an army of 5000 horsemen. But they were inadequately armed with only spears and muskets. The Afghans were equipped with heavy artillery. Ranjit Singh thought of a stiff united fight against the invaders. He came to Amritsar. A congregation of Sarbat Khalasa was called and many Sikh sardars answered the call. An almost unanimous opinion prevailed that Shah Zaman's army should be allowed to enter the Punjab, and they all should retire to hills.

However, Sada Kaur thought otherwise and exhorted the Sikhs to fight to the last. She persuaded Ranjit Singh to be bold enough to face the Afghan army and offer stiff resistance. Forces were reorganized under the command of Ranjit Singh and they marched towards Lahore. They were able to give Afghans a crushing defeat in several villages and ultimately surrounded the city of Lahore. Sorties were made in night in which they would kill a few Afghan soldiers and then leave the city in the thick of darkness. Following this tactic they were able to dislodge Afghans at several places.

In 1797, Shah Zaman, suddenly left for Afghanistan as his brother Mahmud had revolted. Shahanchi khan with considerable force was left at Lahore. The Sikhs however followed Shah upto Jhelum and snatched many goods from him. The Sikhs returned and in the way were attacked by the army of Shahnachi khan near Ram Nagar. The Sikhs routed his army. It was the first major achievement of Ranjit Singh. He became the hero of the land of Five Rivers and his reputation spread far and wide.

Again in 1798 Shah Zaman attacked Punjab to avenge his defeat in 1797, people took refuge in hills. Sarbat Khalsa was again called and Sada Kaur again persuaded Sikhs to fight till the last man. This time even Muslims were not spared by Shah Zaman forces and he won Gujarat very easily. Sada Kaur aroused the sense of Sikhs of national honor and if they had left Amritsar then she will command the forces against Afghans. She said an Afghani soldier was no match to a Sikh soldier. They should give a befitting reply and by the grace of Sat Guru they would be successful.



Shah Zaman sought help of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, that he will not give any food or shelter to Sikhs. He agreed. Shah Zaman attacked Lahore and Sikhs were surrounded from all sides, they had to fight a grim battle. The Afghans occupied Lahore on November, 1798, and planned to attack Amritsar. Ranjit Singh collected his Men and faced forces about 8 Km from Amritsar. It was a well-matched encounter which forced Afghans at last to retire. They were humiliated and fled towards Lahore. Ranjit Singh pursued them and surrounded Lahore. Afghan supply lines were cut. Crops were burnt and other provisions plundered so that they did not fall into Afghan's hands. The Afghans never expected such a humiliating defeat at the hands of Sikhs. Nizam-ud-din of Kasur attacked Sikhs near Shahdara on the banks of Ravi, but his forces were no match to Sikhs. Here too, Muslims suffered the most. The retreating Afghans and Nizam-ud-din forces plundered the town which antagonized the local people. The Afghans struggled hard to dislodge Sikhs but in vain. Sikh cordon was so strong that they made impossible for the Afghans to break it and proceed towards Delhi. Ranjit Singh became terror to them.

Lahore was the most important and biggest city of Punjab. After Amritsar, it was next in importance to Sikhs, as it was not only the capital of the province but also the birthplace of the fourth Guru Ram Das. Lahore at that time was ruled by the Bhangi sardars.(they were called bhangi because they use to drink Bhang all the time). It was captured earlier by them and remained under their control till it was reoccupied by Shah Zaman in 1797. After Shah Zaman left, Bhangi Sardars, Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh reoccupied it. They had no talent and ability to rule. These incapable sardars did not take any interest in the welfare of the people and were inept and imbecile. They had no control over the people. They were "unscrupulous, drunken, profligate and tyrannical." The Muslims had a considerable influence in the town. Mian Ashak mohammad and Mian Mukkan Din were very powerful and exercised a lot of hold on the people. They were called chaudhries and were often consulted in most of the affairs of the city. Some forged papers that Badr-ud-din had links with Zaman Shah were also shown to Chet Singh. Chet Singh was convinced of matter and arrested Badr-ud-din.

A wave of resentment followed the arrest among the supporters of Badr-Ud-Din and Mian Ashak Mohammad. They formed a deputation of some leading chaudhries and pleaded on behalf of Badr-ud-din but they were humiliated and were made to lick ground.

By this time the people of the country had become aware of the rising strength of Ranjit Singh, the rising star on the horizon. He was the most popular leader of the Punjab and was already yearning to enter Lahore. The people of Lahore being extremely oppressed raised their voices of wailing to the skies and were looking towards their liberator. Muslims joined Hindus and Sikh residents of Lahore in making an appeal to Ranjit Singh to free them from the tyrannical rule. A petition was written and was signed by Mian Ashak Mohammad, Mian Mukkam Din, Mohammad Tahir, Mohammad Bakar, Hakim Rai, and Bhai Gurbaksh Singh. It was addressed to Ranjit Singh to free them from Bhangi sardars. Ranjit Singh was invited to liberate Lahore as early as possible. He mobilized a 25000 Army and marched towards Lahore on July 6, 1799.

It was a last day of Muharram when a big procession was to be taken out in the town in the memory of the two grandsons of Prophet Mohammad who were martyred in the battlefield without having a drop of water. It was expected that Bhangi sardars will also participate in procession and mourn with their Shia brethren. By the time procession was over Ranjit Singh had reached outskirts of city. Early morning on July 7 1799, Ranjit Singh's men had taken their positions. Guns glistened and the bugles were sounded. Rani Sada kaur stood outside Delhi gate and Ranjit Singh proceeded towards Anarkali. Ranjit Singh rode along the walls of the city and got the wall mined. A breach was blown. It created panic and confusion. Mukkam Din, who was one of the signatories to the petition made a proclamation with the beat of drum that town had been taken over by him and he was now head. He ordered all the city gates to be opened. Ranjit Singh entered the city with his troops through the Lahori gate. Sada kaur with a detachment of cavalry entered through Delhi gate. Before Bhangi sardars had any inkling of it, a part of the citadel was occupied without any resistance. Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh left the city and sought shelter at some safer place. Chet Singh was left either to fight, defend the town or flee as he like. He shut himself in Hazuri Bagh with only 500 men. Ranjit Singh's cavalry surrounded Hazuri Bagh and Chet Singh surrendered and he was given permission to leave the city along with his family.

Ranjit Singh was well entrenched in the town now. Immediately after taking possession of the city, he paid visit to Badashahi mosque. This gesture increased his prestige and his status was in the eyes of people. He won the hearts of the subjects, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike. Ranjit Singh was now considered a great force. He appointed misr Ramdayal for his day to day affairs with people. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia guided on army matters. During the same periods darbar attracted the Fakir brothers who held high offices under Ranjit Singh. Fakir Aziz-ud-Din was the most prominent among them. He came along with his father Ghulam Mohiud-ud-Din who was a royal doctor. Nur-Ud-Din and Imam-Ud-Din the other brother of Zaiz were also given different post in Ranjit Singh's darbar. Aziz-Ud-Din was made the in charge of Foreign affairs. "It was due to his wise counsel that the Maharaja maintained friendly relations with the British government; and the fact that these relations were on a footing of equality and mutual respect was largely an outcome of his ardent loyalty to Ranjit Singh." By this time the day had come that Ranjit Singh should declare himself the Maharaja of Punjab and treats all his subjects Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs equally. On April 12 1801, Ranjit Singh declared himself Maharaja of Punjab on the same auspicious day of Baisakhi when Khalsa was made by Guru Gobind Singh.

The investiture ceremony was performed by Sahib Singh Bedi, who was the direct descendant of Guru Nanak. A commemorative coin was issued, Nanakshahi rupee as it was called. People showered flowers on him and in turn Ranjit Singh showered gold and silver coins on his subjects. It was a grand gala occasion. Ranjit Singh rode on the elephant and passed through the streets of Lahore. He won popular acclaim and earned a lasting place in the hearts of the people. At night the town was illuminated with oil lamps and there was display of fire works. Many chiefs and sardars offered nazrana and in return receive khillats. The fort was garrisoned. The city which had suffered 30 years of Bhangi misrule needed peace and rule of law. The Maharaja ordered that no interference be made with the personal and public law of Muslims. They were given equal rights with other subjects. Courts presided over by the Qazis and Muftis were confirmed. Prominent citizens were designated as chaudhries and mohallas. The sense of security was given to the people. Trade and Business were established on a sound basis.

The maharaja established a secular state in which all the subjects, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were treated alike. Many talented Hindus and Muslims joined his service and the Maharaja gladly participated in the religious festivals of all the communities. Festivals like Dussehra, Diwali, Holi, Basant were celebrated with splendor and gaiety. The Maharaja participated in them along with his subjects and on the occasions of Amavas and Baisakhi took a dip into the holy tank at Amritsar. By his secular outlook, the Maharaja earned great respect from his subjects and also their loyalty.

Amritsar is the spiritual capital of the Sikhs. A holy tank was dug by Guru Ram Das and the temple was built by Guru Arjan Dev, who installed Guru Granth Sahib in it. Akal Takht was built by Guru Hargobind. It was the seat of temporal authority. The Guru himself sat there and held a court of justice. Many Sikhs used to gather there for the redress of their grievances. Gurmattas were passed which were binding on the Sikhs. It was must for every true Sikh to take a dip in the holy tank. Moreover, Amritsar was the biggest trade centre of Punjab. Goods from central Asia were exchanged here for the local goods. Silk, Muslin, Spices, tea, hides, and several other articles were bought and sold here. For the Sikhs Amritsar was the Mecca.

Amritsar was divided among a dozen families manning different parts of the city. In each of these parts they had built for themselves small fortresses and maintained a task force of tax collectors who sometimes forcibly collected money from the trading community. These tax collectors very often quarreled among themselves and sometimes even created scenes in the streets to the amazement of the residents. The citizens could not stand such a situation for long and secretly approached Maharaja Ranjit Singh to invite him to attack the city. The only formidable family was that of Mai Sukhan, widow of the Bhangi chief, Gulab Singh. She was in possession of the Gobindgarh fort.

Thus in 1802, Maharaja Ranjit Singh marched towards, Amritsar at the head of the force consisting of Kanahaiya, Nakkai and Ahluwalia troops in addition to his own force in strength. When the troops reached Amritsar, the Rani closed the gates of the town, mounted the ramparts of the city with arms and ammunition in considerable quantity. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, commenced his operations in front of the Bridge gate and the Maharaja on the other end of the Lohgarh fort. A fierce fighting took place but in the end the gates could not stand the heavy cannonade and the marching army entered city in triumph, with the Maharaja at the head. Ranjit Singh ordered that the city should not be plundered as the place was too sacred with the memory of the Gurus. The fort of Lohgarh was besieged without any difficulty. Ranjit Singh occupied the fort and captured considerable war material, including the Zamzama and the area which yielded a handsome revenue.

The capture of the Amritsar brought fame and honour to Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh was such a devoted Sikh that instead of putting his name on the coin issued by his government he put the word "akal Sahai", means the great God, as seen in this coin. Ranjit Singh appointed Misar Chajju Mal as the collector of Customs at Amritsar. The Misar was extremely loyal to Maharaja and rendered him useful service. Ranjit Singh took keen interest in the management of the holy shrine. He appointed Surat Singh as its Manager. He gave shrine its marble face and its golden look from which the name Golden Temple or Swarn Mandir is derived. Marble and fresco paintings were also added. The Sikh army then marched towards Peshawar and no resistance was offered. Most of the Ghazis fled and Peshawar was occupied by the Sikh army on November 18, 1818. The Governor of Peshawar, Yar Mohammad Khan left the territory and crossed the Khyber Pass to Yusufzai land.

By 1823, Abdali's Indian empire was sinking. In the same year, the Maharaja summoned Hari Singh to Lahore for urgent consultations as intelligence reports had been received that Mohammad Azim Barakzai was mustering his forces to fight against the Khalsa. It was a challenge for the Maharaja who thought it fit to nip the evil in the bud.

The Maharaja gathered his troops at Rohtas and marched towards Rawalpindi. Having halted there for a couple of days, he sent Fakir Aziz-ud-Din to Peshawar to realize tribute from the Governor Yar Mohammad Khan who owed allegiance to him. Yar Mohammad Khan gave right royal reception to the Fakir. The town was illuminated and parades were held in the honor of the visiting dignitary. The Fakir was duly impressed. Yar Mohammad Khan cleared his dues and presented to the Lahore darbar a gift of few horses. It is said that Yar Mohammad Khan sent to the darbar Rs. 40,000 as tribute with a promise of further annual tribute of Rs 20 000.

Fakir Aziz-ud-Din returned satisfied and reported the matter to the Maharaja. But the conduct of Yar Mohammad Khan irritated the tribesmen. Pathans flared up in an open revolt and raised the cry of Jihad against the infidels. Their chief instigator was Azim Khan, Yar Mohammad's elder brother. He aroused the religious feelings of tribesmen and declared that he would liberate the Pathans from foreign yoke. Cries of Jihad resounded in the Khyber Pass and shouts of Allah-o-Akbar were heard from the top of the hills.

Mohammad Azim Khan marched with a strong army of both regulars and irregulars from Kabul to Peshawar. Thousands more joined him on the way spurred by their greed to loot and plunder. When Mohammad Azim Khan reached Peshawar on January 27, 1823, Yar Mohammad Khan fled into Yusufzai territory. The news was received by the Lahore darbar with surprise. Immediate action was ordered. Prince Sher Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa led the advance columns. They crossed the Attock by means of a pantoon bridge and reached the fort of Jahangiria. A light skirmish took place, Afghans left the fort and fled in whatever direction they could. When Azim Khan, who was encamping at Peshawar, came to know the fate of his comrades at Jahangiria, he gathered more tribesmen by raising the cry of Jihad. The religious sentiments of Afghans were inflamed and their enthusiasm reached its peak, raised the slogan of "do or die" for the green banner, which was to be kept aloft at all costs. Yusufzais and Khattacks-gathered like a swarm of locusts to lay down their lives in Jihad against the infidels.

The Maharaja, on the other hand, mobilized all his resources, gathered arms and ammunition, marched in stages and reached the eastern bank of the river. To his great disappointment he found that the Afghans had already destroyed the bridge. Sher Singh, who had earlier captured Jahangiria, was besieged by Afghans. Azim Khan was being assisted by his brothers Dost Mohammad and Jabbar Khan. All the hills were surrounded by hostile forces. It was almost impossible for the Khalsa army to cross the river and was not allowed to make a boat bridge for the purpose. The blood-thirsty Afghans were hovering all around and Sher Singh and his troops were put in the most awkward position. There was no escape for the Khalsa. The Maharaja had to take a quick decision, for there was no time for consultations. The time to strike had come. The Maharaja took a bold decision at the spur of the moment and ordered his troops to cross the river. The Maharaja was the first to plunge his horse into the river. He recited Japji and prayed to the Lord for success. The troops followed him. All types of animals- camels, elephants, horses and mules were used to cross the river. Many were carried away by the strong current of the river. Some war equipment was lost too. But most of the troops were able to cross the river and were able to control its western bank. Before the Afghans could take any action, Khalsa army was fully entrenched and had the upper hand. The Afghans retreated in dismay. The gates of Jahangiria fort were opened. The triumphant Maharaja entered the fort and was received with great honor. Gun shots were fired and Prince Sher Singh welcomed his father with loud shouts of Sat Sri Akal. The first round was over. The Khalsa carried the day.

The Afghans now encamped in the open fields at Naushera, between Attock and Peshawar. In between was Landi stream and on its western bank were stationed the Afghans. The Maharaja held consultations with his generals and decided that Afghans on the western banks of Indus should not be allowed to cross it and join the Afghans at Naushera. If the Afghans on both sides of the stream somehow joined, the situation for the Khalsa would be beyond control. So they had to strike without any loss of time.

The Khalsa army surrounded Naushera and encamped on the bank of the river Landi. The artillery was put into action. Guns were fired opposite the Afghans. The Afghans were entrenched on the Pir Sabad hillock. The army of the Sikhs was estimated to be around 25,000 strong while the Afghans, strength was not less than 40,000. The Ghazis were asked to wage a holy war against the infidels and were instigated in the name of Jihad. They were told to 'do or die' for the sake of their religion. Khatak chief's son Feroz Khan with a considerable number of Mujahids had joined the Afghan regulars. On the other side, the contingent of the Khalsa army were commanded by its dashing and dynamic general Phula Singh. He had a suicide squad at his command which was imbued with the desire to fight and die for the sake of the Panth.

However, Akali Phula Singh's courage and bravery at Naushera surpassed his earlier achievements. Attempts were made to dislodge the Afghans from the hillock but nothing substantial could be achieved. Ultimately, Akali Phula Singh with his band of desperadoes moved along the foot of the hill. A musket ball struck him down his horse but not caring for his life he rode an elephant and dashed into the enemy ranks. The Afghans fell on the Akalis and hand-to-hand fight ensued. The Akalis were surrounded by 1500 Afghan horsemen amidst shouts of Sat Sri Akal and Allah-o-Akbar. Many Afghans lost their lives but in the encounter another musket ball hit the brave general who in the thick of firing captured the hillock. But the general lost his life along with a number of his devoted soldiers. He was the hero of Multan and Kashmir and had proved his mettle in earlier battles also. But his courage and bravery at Naushera surpassed all his

earlier achievements. The loss of Akali Phula Singh was unbearable for Ranjit Singh who informed of the death of his brave general, became remorseful but bowed before the Will of God. He ordered a Samadh to be constructed at the place where the gallant general had lost his life.

Then the Sikh troops advanced under Prince Kharak Singh but Afghans did not budge an inch. Half the Afghans were slain but the remaining could not be dislodged from their position on the high ground. More Sikh forces were rushed. The battle lasted the whole day. Some 2,000 Sikh soldiers laid down their lives. Then by the evening many Afghans were dislodged from their positions. The remaining Ghazis fought their way out of the Sikh posts and fled in the hills to save their lives. The victory was of the Khalsa. The Ghazis made a desperate effort to dislodge the Sikhs from their vantage position but all in vain. The Sikh cavalry rode into the ranks of the Ghazis. Azim Khan watched from a distance the slaughter of his Mujahids. In between was the stream, which he was not allowed to cross. When he saw his Ghazis fleeing and attempting to cross the river and some of them drowning, his head hung in shame. The shock was too great for him to bear. He was broken hearted and died some time afterwards. The battle of Naushera sounded the death knell of the Afghans. Three days later, the victorious Maharaja entered Peshawar. The citizens gave him a rousing reception, presenting the Maharaja many gifts. At night the bazaars and streets of the town were illuminated and fireworks were displayed. Shouts of Sat Sri Akal resounded in the sky in this far-flung area inhabited by the Pathans, who had no respect for the law.

After the Treaty of Amritsar with British which simply stated that the International boundary of line between the Sarkar Khalsa and British India is Satluj. Ranjit Singh was virtually made master of all the territory to the west of Satluj. But, there were several small kingdoms, like Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Kashmir, Multan, Sialkot which were ruled by Afghani or local chiefs. Thus, Ranjit Singh first turned towards North towards Kangra valley which was taken over from Raja Sansar Chand by Gurkhas. Ranjit Singh's forces fought with Gurkhas in Kangra Valley in the end the Gurkha leader Amar Singh thapa fled leaving the field to the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh entered the fort of Kangra and held a royal Darbar which was attended by the hill chiefs of Chamba, nurpur, Kotla, Shahpur, Guler, Kahlur, Mandi, Suket and Kulu. Desa Singh Majithia was appointed governor of Kangra.

Then Ranjit Singh sent a force under the command of Hukma Singh Chimmi to Jammu and himself marched on to Khushab. The fort of Khushab was held by Jaffar Khan, a Baluch chief. He gave up the city and defended the fort stoutly. Ranjit Singh invited him to vacate the fort and accept a jagir. In few months, Jaffar Khan accepted Ranjit Singh's terms and gave up the fort. He was given a jagir and allowed to remain in Khushab with his family.

Meanwhile, Shah Shuja was arrested by a Afghani Ata Mohammad Khan who was governor of Kashmir. Shah Shuja's wife Wafa Begum approached Ranjit Singh to get her husband out of Kashmir. Ranjit Singh wanted Kohinoor diamond and he agreed. Hari Singh Nalwa and other forces were dispatched along with the Afghani forces of Wafa Begum. The Sikhs and Afghans crossed the Pir Panjal and entered the valley of Kashmir towards the close of 1812. Shah Shuja was rescued from an underground dungeon by Sardar Nihal Singh Attariwala. Hari Singh Nalwa was made a new governor of Kashmir by Ranjit Singh. Shah Shuja was set free. Shah Shuja invited Ranjit Singh to his house. A servant brought in a packet as they settled down in their seats after mutual exchange of courtesies. Ranjit Singh watched eagerly as the stone was being slowly unwrapped. He was beside himself with joy when the Koh-i-nor, Mountain of Light was placed on his palm. The price of this stone at that time was 6 crore rupees which comes to about

Two Europeans, Ventura, an Italian by birth, and Allard, a Frenchman, came to Lahore in 1822 to seek service in the Sikh army. Both of them had served under Napoleon in the imperial army of France. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo they lost their occupation and left Europe to try their fortune in the East. They had heard many a tale of the grandeur of Ranjit Singh's court and were taken up with the idea of visiting Lahore. Ranjit Singh, although not educated but was very wise and intelligent, he knew about the exploits of Napoleon. Punjabi historians had compared them and Ranjit Singh was even called Napoleon of the East. Ranjit Singh met these two Europeans and he received them kindly asked them about their health and journey, previous employment, future plans. He showed them his troops on parade and provided amenities for their entertainment. In April of 1822, they sent a letter to Maharaja asking for an employment with his troops. The communication between these soldiers and Maharaja was in French through the trusted aide Faqir Nur-ud-din, who knew French, English, Persian as many other languages. Maharaja wanted to make sure that these people did not had any contacts with British and only when he was cent percent sure, he gave them command of 500 horsemen each. This command had few Purbias (Bihari) and other Hindus of Central provinces, employed with Ranjit Singh. They were also to train all forces of Sikhs in the western method of drill. Ventura's army was called Fauj-e-Khas while little bit later Allard was asked to raise a cavalry of fresh recruits. Then Ranjit Singh also made them sign an agreement that in the event of a clash between Maharaja and European power, they would remain loyal to Sarkar Khalsa and fight for him. They were to wear their beards long and abstain from beef and tobacco.

Ranjit Singh provided houses for Ventura and Allard and gave them handsome salaries. To Ventura he gave 40,000 rupees when he married a Muslim girl from Ludhiana. Two villages were subsequently given to the daughter of Ventura as jagir. Ranjit Singh selectively employed several more Europeans, such as Dr. Honigberger, a native of Hungary. Avitable an Italian later appointed Governor of Peshawar. General Court, a Frenchman who organized the artillery. Dr. Harlan an American, who became governor of Jaserata and later Gujrat. Henry Steinbach, a German was made a battalion commander. Hurbon, a Spainard was an engineer. Dr. Benet, a Frenchman was a surgeon-general of Khalsa Army. Viewkenawitch, a Russian held a high rank in the artillery. There were a number of Englishmen too- Fitzroy, Gillmore, Leslie, Harvey, and Foulkes, to mention but a few- who were employed on various civil and military duties. With men of such diverse races, nationalities and faiths to serve him, Ranjit Singh maintained a most picturesque and cosmopolitan court. He was very kind to these foreigners. He trusted them and gave them positions of responsibility and rewarded them generously for their services. But he always kept a watchful eye on them and never let them have an influence over him. They willingly submitted to his natural dignity and served him faithfully.

Ranjit Singh's Lahore also attracted many visitors and travellers. Like his foreign counriers, they came from all parts of the world. They were drawn by the reports of the Maharaja's hospitality and his personal charm and joi de vivre. What fascinated his visitors most was his unquenchable curiosity. He asked them the most searching questions and his keenness of mind and range of interest surprised everyone. Many travellers have written in their books of his generosity, refined manner and mental alertness. He was always cheerful

and vivacious and transmitted the same spirit of heartiness to his visitors. In the summer of 1821, William Moorcroft, the Superintendent of East India Company's horses came to visit Ranjit Singh's court. A daily allowance of 100 rupees was fixed for his entertainment. Moorcroft was also shown Sikh army, he was greatly impressed by the turnout and discipline of the Sikh army. He also visited the royal stables and remarked that some of Ranjit Singh's horses were the finest in the world. On the way back from Bukhara, Moorcroft brought a letter from Prince Nesselrode of Russia which contained greetings and good wishes from the ruler of that country. It also expressed Russia's desire to have trade relations with the country of Ranjit Singh. They traders from Punjab were assured welcome and security in Russia.

Another famous traveller to visit Ranjit Singh was Baron Charles Hugel. He was a German Scientist, who travelled extensively in the Punjab and Kashmir. In his book, he wrote that Punjab under Ranjit Singh was safer than territories ruled by the British. He also recorded his conversations with Ranjit Singh, who, as usual, asked him many questions. He asked him if he had served as a soldier and questioned him about the German armies and their wars with France. He asked him what he thought of the Sikh army and whether it was in a fit state to confront a European force.

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

He was a benevolent king. Even though the Government of Punjab was called Sarkar Khalsa but no laws were imposed on any of the minority or majority. Sikhs at his time were about 15% of whole population, Hindus around 25%, rest were Muslims. He governed the forty years of his rule from Lahore with secular ideals. He would fast with Muslims during Ramadan and play Holi with Hindus, yet he would be at Amritsar almost every Month to take bath. A poor muslim from Lahore had written a Quran which he was going to take to Delhi to sell at the Mughals court. Ranjit Singh asked him how much he wanted and paid him twice. There is another story about Ranjit Singh. One year, crops totally die and due to a massive famine, people were starving. So being a king, he opened up all the state stores for people. Ranjit Singh would often roam in streets of Lahore in disguise to check his rule, whether people are happy or not. That night he saw an old woman who could not carry a bag of wheat to her house where her children were starving. He carried that bag to her house on his back. Although he was a devout Sikh but he cannot be called a strict Khalsa Sikh adhering to all the principles of Sikhism. He was a very well disciplined soldier of Khalsa who was also a secular as well as enjoying his life, like drinking, etc. The spirit of stern religious discipline and sacrifice which had supported Sikhs through a critical period of their history and led them to power and glory was dimmed in the pomp and splendour of sovereignty. Ranjit Singh's death on June 27, 1839, left a deep hiatus. The Khalsa lost a leader who had, by commanding personality, foresight and skill, become their beau ideal and secured them the status of sovereign people. The British had by then taken practically the whole of India, except the Punjab and Sind.



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