

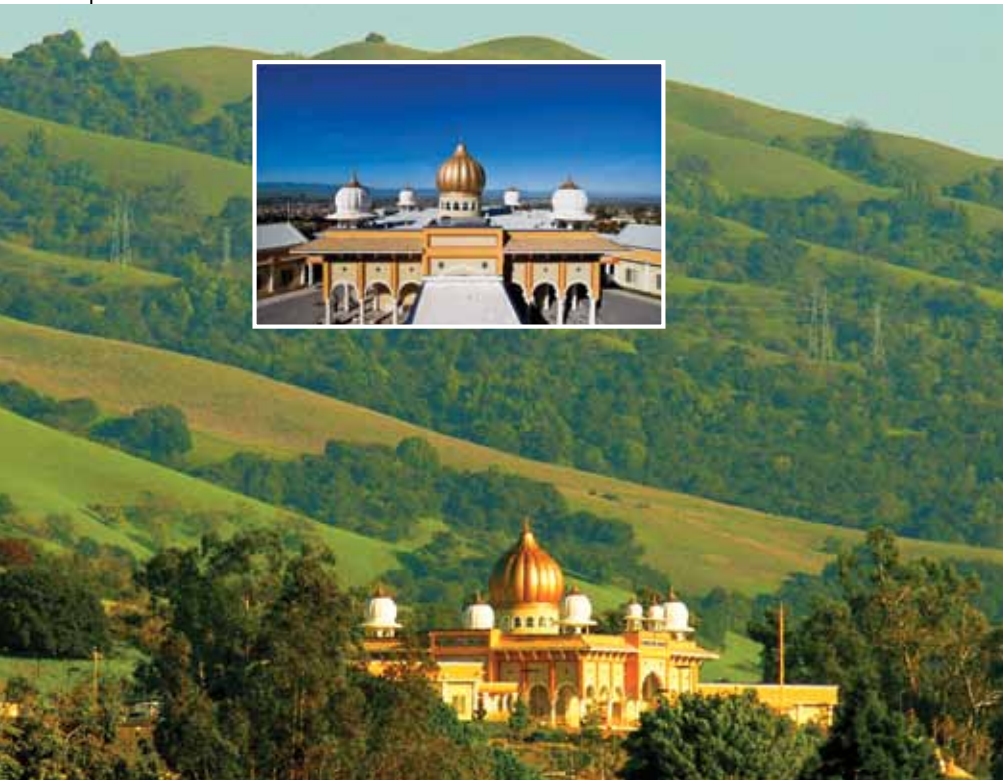
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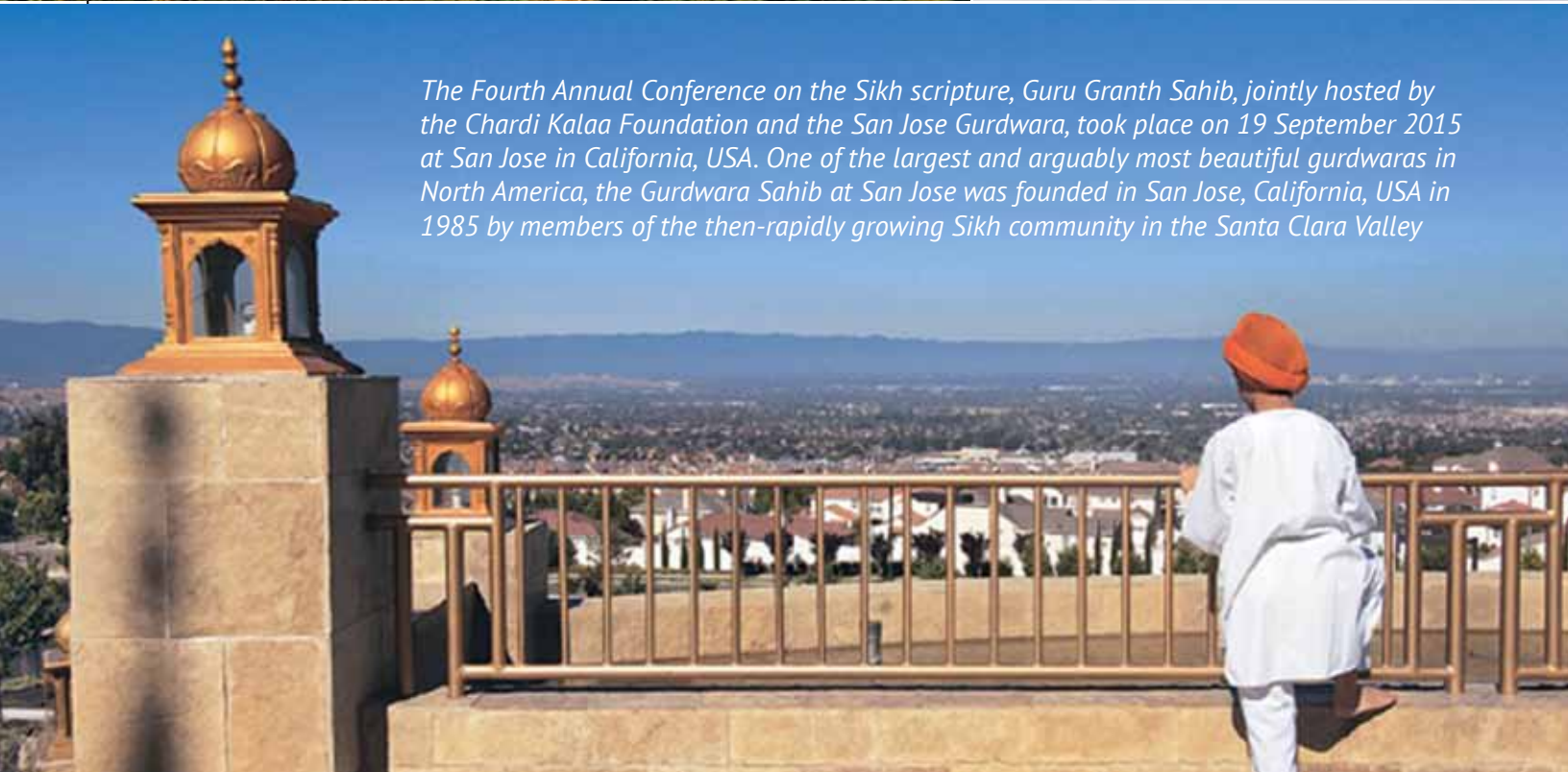
NAGAARA

**The Lost Heritage:
Sikh Legacy in Pakistan
Sikhs in Pakistan Today**





The Fourth Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 19 September 2015 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley



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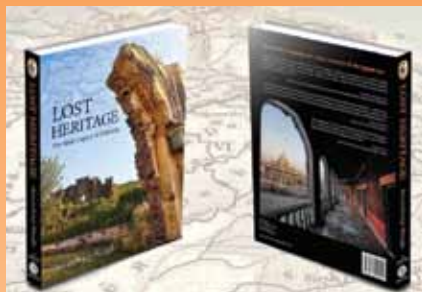
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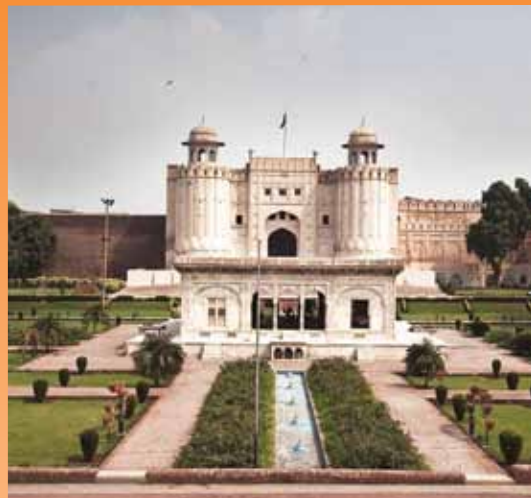
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Cover: Panja Sahib Gurdwara at Hasan Abdal, Pakistan
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Managing Editor
Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
Bhayee Sikander Singh

Editor for the Americas
Dr. I.J. Singh at New York

Editorial Board
Inni Kaur
Monica Arora

Distributors
Himalayan Books, New Delhi
17 L, Connaught Circus,
New Delhi - 110001

Editorial Office
D-43, Sujjan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615
e-mail : nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com

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Touching History

Every day the past beckons anew. In this Issue, we revisit the life and times of Banda Singh Bahadur, an iconic figure from the 18th century. He strode on the Sikh stage for only a decade.

History determines where we are at any moment and which way we may be headed. Now, 300 years later, distance in both time and space help us explore Banda Bahadur's life meaningfully and dispassionately. His achievements continue to shape us, even as contrary accounts by the adversaries are not unnatural.

First some reflections on the nature and purpose of history before we visit Banda Bahadur's eventful life. History interlinks the three beads of time - past, present, and future. If that linkage breaks, the chain collapses, and life loses its continuity and purpose. So, history is not just a random collection of dates and events, pestilence and war; birth and death; cruel or stupid acts of egomaniacs; moments of inhumanity that that are better forgotten. History is often a personal, familial or tribal narrative, some notable, some horrendous.

Why should we rummage through the records of the past for lessons to the future? Because there is nowhere else to look. History is written by victors, proclaims a common truism. Given human bias and our eel-like slippery memory, no history is entirely true or always verifiable.

History is society's collective memory, of our social conventions and their lessons, of skills for life and work. History is full of imagination, pleasures, dreams, or demons. Not a narrow specialty, history addresses the larger concerns of humanity - its needs, wants, fears and hopes, our existential imperatives. Events that transcend time and space that demand versatile skills or dumb luck. Politics and business look to history to build a future, much as a cook revisits history for a successful recipe. Generals and scientists need it, as do artists and poets. Without history, there would be no empathy. And that would be a poorer world, if there were to be a world at all.

By connecting us to others, history shapes human development. We see life (history) through our eyes and that of so many others. The foundation of Renaissance rests on a history of failed and successful lives. History talks about matters that we do not want to know about but might need to know about. History stops us from making narrow interpretations about our lives. It is the

only textbook of human nature that we have, one that is constantly updated.

George Santayana reminds us that "those who do not remember their history are condemned to repeat it." *We connect with our past through stories and traditions, for this is the only way to touch history.*

Let us now turn to the life and contributions of Banda Singh Bahadur, without a doubt one of the premier iconic figures in Sikhism, after the Gurus. At age 15, he was so moved by the suffering of a dying doe that he had shot while hunting, that he abandoned his home and became an ascetic. He became a yogi and established a monastery (*mutth*) in Nander near the bank of the river Godavri.

On 3 September 1708, Madho Das met Guru Gobind Singh. His one brief encounter with Guru Gobind Singh was completely transformational, indeed magical, and he became a totally devoted Sikh, hence the name **Banda** as in "man or slave of the Guru". I see no comparable phenomenon in human history; indeed, and no other parallel in Sikhi like him. The Guru escorted Banda to his nearby camp, where he was initiated into the Order of the Khalsa.

The Guru awarded him a battle drum, a banner and five arrows as emblems of authority, along with directives to the people of Punjab to cooperate with Banda. He deputed five prominent Sikhs - Dya Singh, Binod Singh, Kahn Singh, Baaj Singh and Ram Singh - to accompany Banda Singh and dispatched them to Punjab on a mission for justice. And to lead the Sikhs and wage war, if necessary, in the name of the Guru.

Moments like these are rare in human annals but they have a claim on us. The renunciate, Banda Bahadur, became a phenomenally successful warrior and leader. Banda Singh Bahadur lived and died for Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs; no hyperbole intended.

In the face of unchallenged Islamic political power, driven by passionate frenzy to convert the Hindu multitudes, what was Banda and his small but growing band to do? Banda Bahadur appealed to the Hindu satraps and local rulers to join him in the cause for justice and religious freedom. *None stepped forward.* This would be a disheartening moment in Banda's mission but he remained undeterred.

But as he reached the borders of Sirhind where the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh were martyred, this Banda-led people's crusade had become a raging storm. History also tells us that the nearby Muslim principality of Malerkotla was spared, protected by Sikhs then, and again in 1947 which claimed millions of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus during the large-scale rioting during the conditions leading to India's independence. Why such kindness towards Malerkotla, a Muslim base then and now? Simply because the then ruling Nawab had refused to endorse the sentence of death for two sons, 6 and 7 years old, of Guru Gobind Singh.

Banda won his first set battle at Chappar Chiri (aka Chappar Jhiri) on 12 May 1710; a memorial to this historic site was established recently. Two days later Sirhind belonged to the Sikhs with Baaj Singh as its governor.

Banda Singh Bahadur established the **very first** Sikh ruled territory in 1716; he was a wise ruler not only to the Sikhs but to his Hindu and Muslim subjects as well. He deserves recognition for the first ever land reforms in India, which granted rights of ownership to those that tilled the land, not merely to those that owned it. He issued a silver coin, but in the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, not his own.

Today we remember Banda Singh Bahadur three centuries after he burst on the scene and electrified it. It is way past the time to recognise his footprints which revolutionised India, and particularly Punjab for the future.

On 21 June 2016, the Government of India honoured Banda Singh Bahadur with a silver coin in his name. A magnificent memorial, 17-foot-tall statue standing on a 23-foot pedestal, was unveiled on 18 December 2016 in New Delhi, the capital city of India. A rare, well deserved honour. But remember that Sikhs do not approve of statues of Gurus or other religious idols; lest these iconoclastic leaders be transformed into icons that people might worship. Yet, it is a human need is to celebrate them because they are markers of high purpose, enviable achievement and supreme sacrifice.

Unfortunately, Banda's life knew little peace. He and his Sikhs endured a siege that lasted eight months. Finally, he was taken prisoner along with 740 Sikhs and his own four-year-old son. History records the spectre of 700 cartloads of heads of Sikhs and another 2000 stuck upon spikes.

Banda was offered the choice of converting to Islam or death. His response was that of a Sikh warrior. His infant son was hacked to pieces before his eyes. His hands and feet were chopped off; his flesh torn with red hot pincers. On 9 June 1716, the warrior met his maker. Not a Punjabi, but one that we are proud to own. *There is also another side to the coin.*

History speaks of controversies about Banda Bahadur that remain largely unresolved. What circumstances dictated the razing of Sirhind? What would Sikh values and history say? Some documents speak of a rift between him and Mata Sundri, the widow of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh community apparently split between the loyalists of Banda (*Bandayee Khalsa*), and those who were not (*Tat Khalsa*). The reigning monarch was reputed to have advanced a formula for peace. Was that the root of the rift between Banda and other Sikhs? Mata Sundri reputedly appointed Bhai Mani Singh as the arbiter; however, history remains unclear on the details. A more substantial question: Did Banda issue any Hukumnamas, as was the wont of the Gurus? Then there are minor issues like, who did he marry, when and where? What happened to her?

These and other gaps in history demand a good faith effort to resolve them.

But Banda's ascendance was followed by almost a century when Sikhs were a hunted people; their survival was on the line. Also, from times immemorial India has not valued written history that tries to hew faithfully to facts as we unearth them. This cultural shortcoming that persists today is well recognised as the bane of historians.

Also, let us recall the reminder by TS Eliot of the "cunning passages and contrived corridors of history that deceive us by vanities."

With a gap of some years another period of Sikh self-governance dawned during Nawab Kapur Singh's time and 92 years after Banda emerged Ranjit Singh, who ruled wisely over greater Punjab for almost half a century.

By any measure of a life, Banda Singh Bahadur was a man larger than life.

In my introduction to this priceless issue of *Nishaan*, my first instinct was to pick some choice citations from the articles within it and whet your appetite by a short patched narrative around them. I let that tempting path slip away simply because the possibilities were too many and overwhelming. I hope that this introduction to a complex man and his trying times would send you running to the contents within.

In penning this Editorial I must concede that I learned a lot, as I am sure so will you, of Sikh history and its intricacies from the erudite writings that you will accost within this issue.

Remember that the past is a prologue to the future. Exploring and connecting with the past takes us forward ("*Babaaniya kahaaniya puty saputh karein*" Guru Granth p. 951).

I. J. Singh

Banda Singh Bahadar: The Revolutionary Warrior



Every time I enter Delhi Gate - one of the 13 historical Gates of the ancient walled city of Lahore, Punjab - my thoughts are not on the splendid job done to conserve the Shahi Hamam, or even to the dilapidated mosque of Wazir Khan, but the mind's eye goes back 270 years when the main gateway and beyond were witness to a slaughter of thousands. If you go through the historical descriptions of the 'Chhotta Ghallughara' - the First Holocaust - that took place in Lahore, one is amazed at the sheer scale of barbarity that took place. But this happening on the 10th of March, 1746 needs to be put in its historical context.

The span between the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and the founding of the Lahore Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799 has a 92 years of bloody history. For purely communal reasons this time period has been ignored, more so because the subcontinent has fragmented with amazing continuity over a 3,000 - year cyclic pattern, only to come together from time to time because of some uniting catalyst, mostly in the form of a foreign invader.

Perhaps, the major reason the entire sub-continent has imploded again and again is because of the way the downtrodden of this huge landmass have been treated by successive rulers. In a way, this process continues even today on both sides of the communal 'line of hate' that divides the sub-continent between the 1947 creations of India and Pakistan.

Divided They Rule - More Easily

Communal hatred created the Hindu caste system 3,500 years ago in India's cities and villages. That wretched way of thinking remains part and parcel of our allegedly 'pious' way of life. No one is able today to lump the fact that our historic 'foreign liberators' were in fact child slave traders. The sub-continental leaders remain, essentially, traders of our products, our wealth, be it gold, children, women, spices, indigo, cotton, forced labour and cheap soldiers, and now the easily-convertible dollar. This wealth of our land has been taken to faraway places of 'relative safety' and 'ease'.

That is why what happened in March 1746 inside the

ancient walled city, in and around the Delhi Gate area needs to be remembered as a communal outrage. In the 92-year time period in the 18th century referred to above, a new religion had distinctly emerged, one that did not believe in castes or idols or superstitions or dogma, but rather rationalised the Almighty within each one of us.

Sikhism, a very simple concept that liberated the poor, had emerged over the course of the 15th to 18th centuries, and it was now being attacked by the rulers, who happened to be foreigners - and Muslims.

After the creation, for a seven-year period, of the first 'Sikh State' in the Punjab east of Lahore by the revolutionary Banda Singh Bahadar, the 'zamindari' (fiefdom) system was abolished and tillers given their lands. True freedom had finally been given to the poor tillers of the land.

The Mughals, landowners that they had actually become, amassed armies from all over the subcontinent to tackle this freedom-loving revolutionary, and finally captured him. He was brought to Lahore and outside the Delhi Gate he was chained and put in an iron cage, which was then mounted on an elephant. A procession started out, heading for the city of Delhi with 700 Sikh heads impaled on spikes carried by Mughal troops on both sides of the procession.

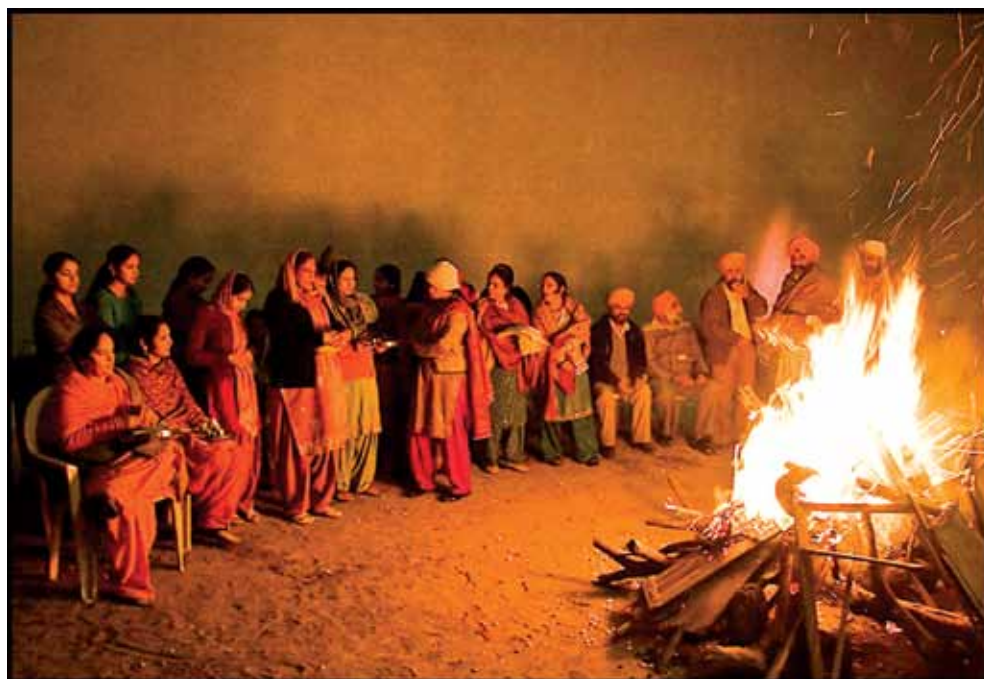
Once in Delhi, in the fort he was publicly skinned alive, and during the torture, forced to watch the slow death of his five-year old son, after which the latter's heart and liver were stuffed in Banda Singh's mouth.

*Not a cry from him came forth.
Another Punjabi hero was born.*

Before him at the same place outside Delhi Gate, less than two centuries earlier, the great folk hero, Dullah Bhatti, had been skinned alive centuries earlier for daring to challenge the Mughal, Akbar.

The issue then too was unfair taxation of peasants. [His memory is honoured in Punjab even today during the end-of-winter festival of Lohri.] Thus, over time, one cruelty followed another.

Banda Singh Bahadar was succeeded not long after by the founder of the second Sikh State, a leader by the name of Nawab Kapur Singh, who



Lohri in the Punjab



Nawab Kapur Singh

made a daring plan to capture the Mughal Governor of Lahore, Nawab Zakarya Khan. Inside the walled city trickled in a force of 2,000 men, all of whom were in disguise. On that eventful Friday, they all went to pray at the Shahi Mosque. Their spies had informed them that Zakarya Khan always offered his Friday prayers at this huge mosque.

But then, it was a lucky day for Zakarya Khan as he did not visit the mosque. Kapur Singh threw off his disguise, and brandishing his sword and with the full-throated war-cry of 'Sat Sri Akal', marched out of Lahore and vanished in the jungle beyond Mahmood Buti on the

River Ravi. This incident was one of several others that set the stage for Zakarya Khan and his chief minister, Lakhpat Rai, to launch a campaign to exterminate Sikhs, for as the 'farmans' now tell us they had been declared as 'kafirs' and it was declared that it was the Islamic duty to exterminate them. From the bush country and forests as far away as Kahnuwan, began the wholesale massacre of Sikhs.

Again, a Procession In Lahore

According to the historian SM Latif, over 7,000 men, women and children were massacred within a short period and another 3,000 brought in chains to Lahore and parked in the horse market outside Delhi Gate. The scene outside Delhi Gate has been described by Latif thus: "Lakhpat Rai separated over 1,000 Sikh men from the 3,000 prisoners. These men were bare-backed, faces blackened, sitting two astride, facing outwards, on donkeys.

A huge procession went

all the way through the bazaars of Lahore, returning to Delhi Gate."

Along the way, frenzied mobs threw whatever they could at them. This was orchestrated communal hatred at its worst. When the bloody procession returned to Delhi Gate on that fateful day, all the butchers and the scavengers of the city were engaged to behead them, one at a time.

By late in the evening the entire area around the Delhi Gate and in the horse market outside, was littered with bodies in the thousands. The women and children of Sikh families were also not spared, with many managing



(Image Courtesy: SikhMuseum.com)

a less painful death by jumping into the ‘Shaheedi Khoo’ – the Well of Martyrs – outside the city, now known as Landa Bazaar. This holocaust was the catalyst that led the ‘Misls’ (territories ruled by Sikh chieftains) to attack Afghans, ultimately expelling them from the Punjab.

The Bhangi Misl took power in Lahore and set up the ‘Second Sikh State’. But then the Afghans returned, only to be taken on by the Sukerchakia Misl, leading to the establishment of the third Sikh State by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799, which quickly became an empire whose frontiers westwards were with Afghanistan and north eastwards with Tibet.

Within 92 years of Aurangzeb’s passing away, power had passed on to the oppressed. Aurangzeb is said to have muttered on his deathbed: “I do not know who I am, why I am here, and what has happened.” That is why

Lahore’s Delhi Gate is not merely about old, decaying and neglected monuments. It is, I believe, more about the people of this neglected city and the way they have been treated by our rulers through history. Pious words mean nothing for communal hatred still rules our minds and ways.

Ironically, 250 years after this very massacre, the Afghans have trickled back into the old city, where they now form a substantial portion of the local population. In most ‘mohallas’ (neighbourhoods), Pushto has replaced Lahori Punjabi. A lot of the newcomers are now traders, and their workers too are Afghan.

Majid Sheikh

(The author is pursuing his PhD on the Ancient History of the Punjab at Cambridge University)

Banda Singh Bahadar: The Man and His Achievements



The character of Banda Singh, full of ever-readiness for the emancipation of his oppressed and persecuted countrymen and an unflinching devotion to the Guru and his religion, appears so interesting for the student of history that we cannot conclude this sketch without allowing it a sufficient portion of the canvas available for the picture. Apart from this, so many misunderstandings have gathered round his person as a result of the fruitful imagination of some writers, Giani Gian Singh in particular, that we cannot, in justice to our subject, quietly pass over them leaving our readers to be led astray by prejudiced writers. The accounts given by Muslim historians are mostly influenced by their pro-Islamic prejudice against the non-Muslims, and Banda Singh has been painted by them in the blackest colours. Every act of cruelty, which their fertile imagination could invent, has been ascribed to him. The Sikh writers on the other hand, have unreservedly condemned him for his introduction of the *Fateh Darshan* which he was never guilty. But he was a far different man from what he has been represented to be.

In personal appearance Banda Singh, according to the *Mirat-i-Waridat* of Muhammad Shafi Warid, resembled Guru Gobind Singh. Thin of physique and of medium stature, he was of light brown complexion. The nobleness of his features, with

sharp and shining eyes, impressed his greatness even on the mind of his enemies. Men like Itmad-ud-Daul Muhammad Amin found an opportunity to come close to him, at the time of his cruel death, and praise him for 'so much of acuteness in his features and so much of nobility in his conduct.' He may not be said to have been a giant in physique, but he was very active, and would keep at bay stronger men in the field of battle. He was a good marksman, *banduq* or *Ramjanga*, as they called a matchlock, being a favourite weapon of the Sikhs, but he was excessively fond of his sword and bow. He was a good horseman and would ride on for days without being fatigued. The scanty records of the contemporary Muslim histories - there being literally no contemporary Sikh records available on the subject - give little information as to many qualities that he possessed 'but he is allowed, on all hands, to have been a man of undoubted valour and bravery, and the coolness, with which he met his death', has elicited praise even from men like Khafi Khan.

It would seem how sagacious Guru Gobind Singh was in selecting such a man for carrying on his struggle for the independence of his people. Indeed Banda Singh's conversion from an inert ascetic into 'a Commander of the forces of the Khalsa' was nothing short of the Guru's miracle. Nor did Banda Singh betray the trust reposed in him by his Holy Master. Drinking the baptismal 'Nectar of the Khalsa', putting on the consecrated steel and adopting the dress and manners of the Sikhs, he had become a full-fledged Singh, and to the last, even under the severest pain of a terrible death, he stuck on to his dedications to the mission of Guru Gobind Singh. 'Bunda was a fanatic and so resolved was he to fulfil the orders of Gobind Singh' for the chastisement of persecutor, writes M'Gregor in his History of the Sikhs, 'that he became the terror of the whole Punjab as well as the districts on this side of the Punjab.' He was not exclusively devoted to the military command of the Khalsa. His zeal for the propagation of Sikhism was second to none. He offered *Ardas* or prayer for all who appealed to him for assistance or joined his forces, and inculcated the *Simran* or *Jap* of *Waheguru* or the repetition of the Sacred Name. In spite of all the power that he commanded, he is not recorded to have used force in his missionary work., 'He captivated the hearts of all towards his inclinations, wrote Amin-ud-Daula in his third Ruqqa of June 1710, and whether a Hindu or a Muhammadan, whosoever came in contact with him, he addressed him by the title of Singh [baptised him into the Sikh faith]'. According to Dindar Khan, a ruler of the neighbourhood of Sirhind, Mir Nasir-ud-Din, a news-writer of that place, and Chhajju, a Jat of

Panjwar near Amritsar, were converted into Dindar Singh, Mir Nasir Singh and Chhajja Singh, and a large number of Muhammadans and Hindu adopted the faith and manners of the Sikhs, 'and took solemn oaths and firm pledges to stand by him. He even offered to forget and forgive and to spare the lives and territories of the worst of his enemies of Sirhind and the Shivaliks, if they conformed to his behests.

In his zeal for the emancipation of the persecuted and down-trodden, he earned the blessings of the poor and the destitute whose cries had not been heard by anyone for centuries past. He raised the lowest of the low to the highest positions under his government. The untouchables and the un-approachables, the so-called sweepers and pariahs, were raised to the position of rulers. 'A low scavenger or leather-dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, says Irvine, 'had only to leave home and join the Guru [referring to Banda Singh], when in a short time he would return to his birth-place as its ruler with his order of appointment in his hand. The well-born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined hands, awaiting his orders. Not a soul dared to disobey and order, and men, who had often risked themselves in battle-fields, became so cowed down that they were afraid even to remonstrate.'

In matters of Government, he introduced one of the greatest fiscal reforms in the country by abolishing the *Zamindari* System of the Mughals which had reduced the cultivators to the position of slaves. With the establishment of Banda Singh's Raj, the actual cultivators of the soil became the proprietors of their holdings, and the oppression resulting from the old system was forever eradicated from the Punjab.

In his personal conduct as a Sikh, he was, throughout, a devoted follower of Sikhism, and his faith in the Gurus remained unshaken. At the zenith of his power, the inscription on his seal and his coins is an everlasting monument of his over-flowing devotion to Gurus Nanak - Gobind Singh whom he proclaimed to be the fountains of his *Deg* and *Tegh* or Plenty and Power. At the last and the most trying moments of his live, under the pain of death, when life was promised to him if he would renounce his faith, 'his constancy was wonderful to look at,' writes a contemporary. With the exception of his innovation of *Fateh Darshan* and the celebration of his marriage, there is nothing in the whole history of his life to warrant the allegations leveled against him by some of the recent writers, Sikhs and others, who have prejudiced the people against him. He had a spotless morality and led a very pure life, and true to

the Rahit of the Khalsa which he himself inculcated in his *hukamnamahs*, he enjoined upon his men never to attack 'the honour of women' of the conquered enemy. He had no doubt married, wherein he is said to have transgressed the parting injunction of the Gurus, but in this he committed no moral or social sin even according to Sikhism. In issuing this injunction of the Guru, probably, meant that he should devote himself exclusively to his new mission of life. He remained *pacca* in his *Rahit* throughout. Banda Singh committed none of the four cardinal sins, called the Four *Kurahits* in the *Rahit Namas* or the Books of Conduct. He had his Keshas or hair intact, to which the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* bears witness in the words: 'He was a Syc by profession, that is one of those attached to the tenets of Guru Gobind [Singh] and who from their birth, or from the moment of their admission, never cut or shave either their beard or whiskers, or any hair whatever of their body.' He never used tobacco or the *Halal* meat, nor was the guilty of immoral intercourse with a woman, not formally and legally married to him. As such, there was nothing in his life which could be taken as his dissidence from the tenets of Sikhism.

It is not intended to claim that he was always beyond criticism. He was not a 'Guru' to be infallible, and to err is the ordinary lot of mortal men. But it is unfair to exaggerate his minor shortcomings and multiply them to such an extent as to overshadow all his virtues. It is true that he introduced a new war-cry, called *Fateh Darshan*; but it was not intended to replace the ordinary salutation, which was *Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh*. But in practice, slowly and gradually, it came to be used for and replace it. This was condemned by the Khalsa. There is no truth, however, in the other allegations against him. There is nothing in the contemporary or the earliest available records to show that he ever proclaimed himself to be a Guru in succession to Guru Gobind Singh or that he ever used a cushion, like the Gurus, in the sacred precincts of the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. The most conclusive evidence on this point may be found in his own letter dated the 12th Poh Sammat, I, around the 26th December 1710, wherein the personality of the Guru is mentioned quite distinct from his own. He issues the order in the name of the Guru and not in the capacity of a Guru. He clearly enjoins that the *Guru*, and not *himself*, is the Saviour of the Khalsa. "The Guru shall save the entire Khalsa of Jaunpur. Repeat Guru, Guru....I enjoin that he who lives according to the Rahit of the Khalsa, shall be saved by the Guru."

No regular schism appears to have come into existence during the lifetime of Banda Singh, nor was there any active cleavage caused between those who

were inclined to believe in everything he said as all-truth (and who were later on, after his death, called the *Bandeis*), and the other Khalsas. A feeling of belonging based on honest differences of opinion is not improbable in such cases, but in this case the magnetic personality of the leader kept them all together upto the last moment of their annihilation at Delhi. Only one solitary exception to this was in the case of Baba Binod Singh who left the *ihata* of Gurdas Nangal, as mentioned before, on account of a difference of opinion in a council of war. The differences of opinion about *Fateh Datshan* does not appear to have taken any critical turn. It was soon forgiven and forgotten by the Khalsa after its rejection. Had it not been so, or had there been any insistence on the part of Banda Singh in respect of his innovation, there would certainly have been some feud on this account between the unbending Khalsa and the innovators. But we do not find the slightest cleavage on this account, and, to the last, it has not been found that even one man deserted his standard. Not only this. There was none even from amongst those who were captured on the way from Lahore to Delhi to desert him. They could say that they were only the followers of Guru Gobind Singh and not the adherents and accomplices of Banda Singh, the innovator, who had carried on the struggle against the Mughals in contravention of Mata Sundri's instructions. But no such thing happened. On the other hand, we find the Khalsa cheerfully sacrificing themselves, along with him, to the last man at Delhi. The so-called feud that is alleged, by Bhangu Rattan Singh in the *Prachin Panth Prakash*, to have taken place between the *Bandeis* and the other Khalsas is said to have occurred at the instigation of Mata Sundri as the result of Emperor Farrukh Siyar's negotiations with her, the genuineness of which we will presently look into.

We have thoroughly searched all available records for Emperor Farrukh Siyar's so-called negotiations with Mata Sundri, but we have not been able to find anything, not even the slightest hint or a cursory allusion, to support the account of the *Prachin Panth Prakash*. The official *Roznamchas*, the *Tazkirat-uz-Salatin* of Kamwar Khan, the *Farrukh Siyar Namah* of Muhammed Ahsan Ijad, the *Farrukh Siyar Namah* and the *Manavovar-ul-Kalam* of Siva Das, the *Chahar Gulshan* of Rai Chatarman, the *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* of Khafi Khan, the *Ibrat Namah* and the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* of Mirza Muhammad Harisi, the *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* of Yahiya Khan, and the other works of the contemporary writers, the biographies of the contemporary Amirs and private persons, the later works like the *Siyar-ut-Mutakherin* of Ghulam Hussain Khan, the *Umdat-ul-Tawarikh* of Sohan Lal, the *Tarikh-i-Punjab* of Buite Shah, the *Tarikh-i-Sikhan* of Khushwaqt

Rai, the histories of the Punjab and the Sikhs by M'Gregor, Thornton, Kanhiyalal, Muhammad Latif and others and the works of the Sikh writers like the *Mahma Prakash* of Sarup Das, and the *Suraj Prakash* of Santokh Singh are all silent on this point. It is impossible to believe that so important a subject as the Emperor's negotiations with the wife of Guru Gobind Singh, for the subjugation of so formidable a foe as 'Banda' was then considered to be, could have escaped the notice of one and all writers on the subject, from official diarists and chroniclers down to the writers of private histories, personal Tazkirahs and biographical sketches of Amirs and other notable persons. The Tazkirat-us-Salatin gives almost the daily details of news received from the front against Banda Singh and the orders issued and the reinforcements dispatched, but there is no mention therein of these negotiations. On the other hand, in those very days, when the so-called negotiations are said to have been in progress, 'a sharp reproof was administered to Abd-us-Samad Khan on the 15th Rabi-ul-Awwal, 1127 (20 March 1715), and at the same time Qamr-ud-Din Khan, son of Muhammad Amin Khan, Afrasyab Khan the third Bakshi, Muzaffar Khan, Raja Udet Singh Bundela, Raja Gopal Singh Bhadauriya and some other nobles were sent to reinforce him.' The *Mahma Prakash*, the *Suraj Prakash*, the *Chahar Gulshan*, the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* of Harisi and some other works contain the details of Mata Sundri's life at Delhi, of the activities of her adopted son Ajit Singh, the Mata's disclaimer in respect of him, the murder of a *benawa darvoesh* or a religious mendicant, the arrest and murder of Ajit Singh, the removal of his son Hatthi Singh to Mathura, etc, but there is no trace in them of any negotiations with Farrukh Siyar, In the absence of any historical evidence, therefore, these negotiations cannot but be dismissed as incredible. The same thing may be said Muhammad Aslam Khan's negotiations with the Khalsa and Banda Singh, Aslam Khan having died during the reign of Bahadar Shah. The accounts of these negotiations in the *Prachin Panth Prakash* of Ratan Singh are apparently based on wrong information.

Similarly the claim of some of the Bandeis that Banda Singh had been nominated by Guru Gobind Singh as his successor to Guruship does not stand the test of historical scrutiny. No schism, as we know, came into existence during the life-time of Banda Singh and if at all there was anything hidden in the inmost recesses of his heart, of which history has no knowledge, it perished with him on 19 June 1716. According to all account Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, and the vast volume of historical evidence denies the authority of anyone who came after him. On his death, the Guru entrusted the Khalsa to the care of

God the never-dying, and 'He who wishes to behold the Guru,' let him search the Granth,' 'there is no difference whatever between the Granth and Guru,' said he.

There can be no successor to Guru Gobind Singh as Guru. In the face of his clear commands and historical evidence; so the claim of any one, in this respect, be he Banda Singh or any of his descendants or a descendant of the adopted Ajit Singh, or any of the from amongst the Sodhis or Bedis, or from amongst the founders of the more recently sprung up schismatic Sikh sects must be dismissed as opposed to the Sikh tenets and traditions.

Banda Singh was impelled by the purest of motives in consecrating himself for the liberation and independence of his people and was embodiment of selflessness. He always lived up to the principles: 'Wishing the advancement of the Panth, walking in the path of dharma, fearing sin, living up to truth as enjoined by Guru Gobind Singh, who never considered lying, intrigue and treachery as part and parcel of politics.'

His justice was expeditious and he sometimes went to the extent of relentlessness in his punishment of tyrannical officials. The rank and position of the offender never influenced his spirit of justice and his summary method of dealing with criminal cases made him a terror to the tribe of petty functionaries. He used to tell his men, says the author of the Pothi:

"The best worship for a king is to be just is written in the Holy Granth. Those who do not administer justice are cast into hell. A king should practice justice. Thus spoke to me the Great Man (Guru Gobind Singh). If you call yourselves the Sikhs of the Great Man, do not practice sin, *adharm*a and injustice. Raise up true Sikhs and smite those who do un-Sikh-like acts. Bear the sayings of the Great Man in your hearts."

In the field of battle, he was one of the bravest and the most daring, sometimes to the extent of recklessness. And although he was waging his wars under the gravest of provocations, he never gave himself to any of those excesses which characterised his enemies. He has been painted by Muslim historians as perhaps the cruelest of men, 'but a Muhammadan writer'; stated Thornton, 'is not to be implicitly trusted upon such a point.'

He was not an aggressor at all. Rather when we consider the circumstances under which he had taken up the sword, we find him not wantonly cruel but an enemy of the cruel, sent out for the punishment of crimes over which the justice of heaven had seemed to slumber. He had taken to war purely from patriotic motives, springing from a disinterested love of country which was instilled in his mind by Guru Gobind Singh. And 'to

take up the sword when all other means have failed is lawful.' Writes the Guru. When war was once declared, he was of course, not to be left behind but was ever ready to take the offensive when opportunity offered or required – always considering the All-Steel as his last resource. But he never shed human blood unnecessarily or committed himself irrevocably without making sure of his ground. Like a sagacious statesman he would stand out boldly or withdraw as the occasion demanded. The secret of his success lay in his indomitable courage and unsurpassable activity, coupled with the invincible spirit and dogged tenacity of the Sikhs, which made up for the scantiness of his resources. These were, of course, backed by that strength and consistency which religious zeal alone can supply and which purity of motives and disinterested patriotism only can nourish. Even when reduced to greatest extremities, no sorrow and no disappointment could weigh him down, and he was always in *Charhdian Kalan* (or an exalted spirit) as a Sikh would put it.

If he failed in his temporal achievement of maintaining the principality that he had carved out at the commencement of his warlike career, it is because the Great Mughal was yet too strong for him with the inexhaustible temporal resources of the then greatest Empire of the world at his disposal. Whether at Sadhaura, or at Gurdas Nangal, it was the overwhelming numbers and the extremes of hunger, want of food and fodder, that reduced him. About the implements and ammunition of war, the less said the better. Not only this. The Khalsa had to stand the brunt of the struggle single-handed. Not one prominent man from amongst the Hindus, whose cause the Khalsa had championed, came out to render them any help whatever. On the other hand, their leading chiefs like Raja Chatarsal Bundela, Chauraman Jat, Gopal Singh Bhadauriya, Udet Singh Bundela, Badan Singh Bundela, Bachan Singh Kachhwahya and the Rajahs of the Shivalik Hills and others were all arrayed against them. The career of Banda Singh had greater promise in it than what was effected, but it was soon cut short. Externally he may not appear to have succeeded in the emancipation of his people, but the fire of independence ignited by Guru Gobind Singh and fanned by Banda Singh was not to be extinguished.

Although, after the death of Banda Singh, the Sikhs were subjected to the severest persecution, and a 'royal edict was issued, ordering all who professed the religion of Nanak to be taken and put to death wherever found,' the mission of Guru Gobind Singh desired to be served through Banda Singh's instrumentality, cannot be said to have failed. 'But the mission of Gobind Singh had not failed', writes Payne, 'Scattered and disorganised

though they were without a leader, without a square yard of land they could call their own, the Sikhs were nearer to nationality at this time than they had ever been. Hardship and persecution had served only to strengthen their attachment to their faith, and to draw them into yet closer unity. They now regarded themselves as a distinct people. They believed in their destiny as foretold by Gobind Singh and the one determination from which they never swerved was to struggle unceasingly for the triumph of the Khalsa. Next to the Guru, Banda Singh was the first person to place before the Sikhs practical demonstration of staunch nationalism, and to teach them to sacrifice themselves smilingly at the altar of the Khalsa. The very thought of the noble example of the great martyr who have, in turn, supplied the pages of history with still nobler examples. It was through him that the path to conquest was discovered by the Khalsa. He was the first man to deal a severe blow to the intolerant rule of the Mughals in the Punjab and to break the first sod in the conquest of that province by the Sikhs. Although it was forty years after his death that the capital of Lahore was occupied by the Khalsa and a regular Sikh Badshahat was declared, with Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as Padshah, it was Banda Singh Bahadar who laid the foundation of the Sikh Empire in 1710'.

It will be seen from what has been said in the foregoing chapters, that, all things considered, Banda Singh was one of the most remarkable men that India has produced in the eighteenth century. The curtain has long since been rung down and the actor has passed away from the scene of his activities, never to appear again, but his spirit has again and again shone in the brave deeds of his co-religionists in the cause of the poor and the helpless. Although he who at one time was hailed as a defender of the faith, a friend of the oppressed and their never-failing fountain of hope, is no more, his dust has returned to dust and his spirit has blended with the spirit of his Saviour, Guru Gobind, his name shall ever remain 'writ large on the roll of immortality' for his selfless sacrifices in the sacred cause of persecuted humanity and for his martyrdom with unflinching devotion of God and the Guru.

Professor Ganda Singh

(Celebrated Punjab historian who by his sustained and pioneer work in the field of historical research, initiated new trends in Sikh historiography and who by his critically important work became a vital and pervasive influence in historical learning)

The Sovereign Sikh State : Established by Banda Singh Bahadar



Banda Singh Bahadar, the Sikh general who swept Punjab like a hurricane, defeating the Mughal army under various Governors (Subedars) in different theatres of war, established an independent secular and pro-people, if not strictly a socialist, Sikh government over a large part of Punjab, East Lahore in 1710. It was when India, under the

Mughals, was considered to be the most prosperous and mightiest empire in the world. Banda Singh Bahadar not only proved to be an exceptionally brave, daring and competent army leader but an equally enlightened, just and fair administrator. But unfortunately he has been painted as one of the most controversial leader of Punjab history by some of our own historians.

After being accepted in the brotherhood of the Khalsa and administered Amrit by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh in Nander in 1708, Banda Singh Bahadar was chosen by the great Guru to be his political heir and for continuing Khalsa struggle and campaign in Punjab to establish peace, rule of law and assuring the well-being of all the people by defeating the barbaric forces of cruelty, injustice and oppression.

The first meeting between Guru Gobind Singh and Bairagi Madho Das took place at Nanded, on the Banks of the river Godavri, on 3rd September 1708. According to historian Ahmed Shah Butalia, the following dialogue took place between angry Madho Das - in whose absence



Sketch by Mehak Kaur Sodhi

Guru Gobind Singh, along with his Sikhs; had come into his Ashram, occupying his official Sette, Gaddi and had ordered meals to be prepared.

Madho Das - "Who are you?"

Guru Gobind Singh - "He whom you know."

Madho Das - "What do I know?"

Guru Gobind Singh - "Think it over"

Madho Das - After a while "So you are Guru Gobind Singh".

Guru ji - "Yes".

Madho Das - "What have you come here for?"

Guru Ji - "To make you my disciple."

Madho Das - "I submit. I am your Banda."

Bairagi Madho Das was baptised by the Guru and given the name of Gurbaksh Singh, but popularly he was known as Banda Singh since had told the Guru that he was Guru's Banda (slave). He was bestowed the title of Bahadar by the Tenth Guru. As such he came to be known as Banda Singh Bahadar. After his conversion to Khalsa fold, before he was asked to proceed to Punjab to fulfill Tenth Guru's mission of liberating Punjab from the oppressive rule of the Mughals, he is reported to have had a detailed discussion with the Guru and not just a casual meeting for a few minutes as mentioned by some historians.

The Sikh tradition believes, though there is no tangible proof that the main clause of his mission was to teach a lesson to Wazir Khan, the Subedar of Sirhind, who was responsible for bricking alive the innocent two young grandsons had been done to death.

Before Banda's departure for Punjab, Guru Gobind Singh gave him a war drum (Nagaara) and a banner as emblems of his temporal authority, and also bestowed on him five arrows from his own quiver as a pledge of victory. To impress upon the value of his arrows, Guru ji told Banda that whenever he would fire an arrow, it would be as if Guru had himself fired it and not Banda. The Tenth Guru had enjoined on Banda to remain pure in conduct and never to touch another man's wife, to be true in word and deed; to look upon himself as a servant of the Khalsa who would be the Guru in future; and to act always upon the advice of the Five Sikhs (Panj Pyaras) Baj Singh, Binod Singh, Kahan Singh, and others, who accompanied him on this pious mission.

The tenth Guru had sent messages to Sikh Jathedars and warriors in Punjab that Banda would be carrying on the Guru's mission so all should extend maximum cooperation and render all help to Banda Bahadar in his campaign.

Baba Banda Singh had entered Punjab at Kharkhoda, a place in between Rohtak and Sonapat. He collected his followers from Malwa region of Punjab and began his crusade at Sonapat. His next targets were Thanesar, Mustafabad, Sadhaur, Ghuram, Samana and Chhat-Banu. The Sikh crusaders under Baba Banda Singh Bahadar's leadership occupied areas of Punjab lying between the rivers Jamuna and Sutlej. The Muslim chieftains of these areas were devastated and their land holdings were distributed by the new dispensation to the peasant - cultivators of their land.

This was a revolutionary step in the history of India when the feudal system (Jagirdari and Zamindar system) was abolished in Punjab and land made over to the actual tillers of the soil who were duly issued the Pattas (documents) to this effect.

The Sikh army under Banda Singh was not a regular army but ordinary Punjabis – peasants, artisans and rural youth who were highly motivated to defeat and destroy the oppressive regime of the Mughals. After winning some battles, they were itching to attack Sirhind.

The major first battle was fought on the plain of Chappar-Chirri on 12 May 1710. Sirhind Subedar, Wazir Khan confronted Baba Banda Singh at Chappar Chirri near Landran village near today's Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar. Being an experienced commander, Wazir Khan brought his elephants, artillery, cavalry and infantry to the battle ground. He was supported by the Nawab of Malerkotla and other chieftains in the battlefield. In the first shock of battle, army of Banda Singh was uprooted in this attack. Then Banda Singh himself jumped into the fray and led the Sikh army from the front. The booty-loving irregulars in the ranks of Banda took to their heels.

They were followed by a thousand men who had been smuggled in by a nephew of Sucha Nand, the notorious Diwan of Sirhind. To stem the tide of desertion Banda Singh himself rushed to the front of his army and badly led them on to the attack.

“The Sikhs,” wrote the author of the *Ahwal-i-Salatin-i-Hind*, “came face to face with the Mohammedans, [Wazir Khan] and some of his men fought so bravely that heaps of the bodies of the infidels (Sikhs) fell to the ground, piled one upon another, and there was did on all sides like that of doomsday.”

A ferocious battle took place in which Wazir Khan was killed and his army defeated. Chappar Chirri was historical battle in which mighty Mughal army was defeated by the ill-equipped Khalsa army.

Conquest of Sirhind

In the end, the entire Mohammedan army was destroyed. Wazir Khan then came face to face with Baj Singh, shouting “be careful, you dirty dog”, and rushed upon him with a lance. Baj Singh snatched the weapons from Wazir Khan and struck it on the head of his horse and wounded it. After a while, Wazir Khan pulled out an arrow from his quiver and thrust it at the arm of Baj Singh. Then drawing his sword he sprang forward to make an end of him.

But Fateh Singh, who was nearby, struck Wazir Khan with his sword so strongly that it passed through his shoulder down to his waist and his head fell to the ground. Confusion spread in the Mohammedan ranks, and the Sikhs fiercely fell upon them. “Not a man of the army of Islam,” noted historian Khafi Khan, “escaped with more than his life and the clothes he stood in.

Horsemen and footmen fell under the swords of the infidels [Sikhs], who pursued them, as far as Sarhind.”

To the Sikhs, Sirhind represented everything that was abominable. It was here that the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh had been done to death on the orders of Wazir Khan. It was this man who had been harassing the Guru at Anandpur, had attacked him at Muktsar, where forty (Muktas), he ‘Liberated Ones’ met their death. Again it was the same Wazir Khan whose emissaries had assassinated the Guru himself at Nander. The Sikh burning with rage to wreak their vengeance on the hateful ruler of this wretched city, which was then called ‘Guru-ki-Marhi’, or the accursed one. It was looked upon as a sacred duty to take part in the coming crusade.

Banda Singh was following an easterly circuitous route, in order to give time to the Sikhs of the Doaba and the Majha to cut their way through the opposition of the Malerkotla Afghans who were blocking the passage of the Sutlej, and to join him before he attacked Sirhind.

Sirhind was occupied on 14 May 1710 by Baba Banda Singh Bahadar. The Khalsa army devastated Sirhind and killed all those courtiers who had voted for the execution of the two younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh. The Persian sources called the Khalsa army as the 'Butchers of Sirhind' as they destroyed the city and killed its entire population. The Khalsa army wanted to avenge the killing of the younger Sahibzadas and Sirhind was thus demolished brick by brick.

Banda Singh set up his police station (*thana*) at Rahon. He recaptured Lohgarh and hoisted the Khalsa flag there. After conquering 'Butchers of Sirhind' Sirhind, Banda Singh occupied Saharanpur, Buria, Ambala, Shahabad Markanda and all areas up to Panipat and beyond. He chose a place called Mukhilisgarh in the Shivalik hills of Nahan state as his capital and gave it a new name of Lohgarh. Khalsa flag was hoisted on the ramparts of Lohgarh Fort and a coin was struck in the name of Guru Nanak – Guru Gobind Singh to commemorate the setting up of first Khalsa Raj in Punjab.

*“Sika Zad Bar Har Do Alam Tegh Nanak Wahib Ust
Fateh Gobind Singh Shaha Shaban Fazal Sacha Sahib Ust”*

(By the grace of the True Lord is struck the coin in two worlds: The sword of Nanak is the granter of all boons, and the victory is of Guru Gobind Singh, the King of kings)

An official seal was also made with the inscription:

*“Deg o Teg o Fateho Nusrat bedirang
Yaft uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh”*

'The kettle and the sword - symbols of Charity and Power.

Victory and ready Patronage have been obtained from Guru Nanak - Guru Gobind Singh.'

Syed Budhu Shah of Sadhaura, was a great admirer of Guru Gobind Singh, had helped him in the battle of Bhangani with hundreds of his own followers. He had been tortured and killed very brutally by Mughals for having been a follower of the Tenth Guru. The Sikhs marched upon Sadhaura, and the aggrieved peasantry waiting for a chance to rise, swelled the numbers of the invaders and rushed into the town. The angry mob got out of hand, and set fire to the mausoleum of Qutbul Aqtab, who was notoriously known to force the Hindu inhabitants to carry their dead. All those who had taken shelter in the mansion of Sayed Budhu Shah were put to sword. The place since then is called the Qatalgarhi or slaughter-house. After the fall of Sadhaura the Sikhs took possession of the neighbouring fort of Mukhlisgarh. The other main battles and victories of the Khalsa army under Banda Singh Bahadar included the victory of Samana on 26 November 1709, the native place of Jallalud-Din, the hangman who had beheaded ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadar on 11 November 1675 in Chandni Chowk Delhi.

Battle of Kapuri whose ruler, Qadamud-Din was notorious for his lustful campaigns. He along with his debaucheries was destroyed and his wealth scattered to the wind or given to the tillers of the soil.

Battle of Sadhuara had a very notorious and fanatic ruler in Usman Khan who would not allow Hindu residents to cremate their dead and would have cows slaughtered in front of their homes, purposefully leaving the obnoxious blood, hides and other left-overs.

The victory of Sirhind was a signal for the general rising of the Sikhs all over the country. On 21 July 1710, Khalsa army under Banda Bahadar had invaded Gangetic Doab and razed Ambehta where they collected considerable booty and reached Nanauta where they subdued the determined Shiekhzadas, who later declared themselves as Nanakprast or followers of Guru Nanak. About 300 Shiekhzadas fell dead in the courtyard of Sheikh Mohammed Afzal alone, says Mohammed Zafarud Din, a contemporary writer. Ambehta was called *Phuta Shaheer*, (the ruined city).

After Sirhind a crusade for Jalandhar Doab and Haidri flag were undertaken. It was followed by a clash with royal Mughal Forces and of course the last stand at Gurdas Nangal.

But this Khalsa glory was short-lived. The Mughal emperor, Bahadar Shah himself led the Mughal army

and attacked the Lohgarh fort. The Khalsa army suffered heavy losses, the fort was destroyed by the artillery. Banda Singh had a narrow escape and survived a bid to capture him alive. The Mughal chronicle writers believed that Banda Singh was a great magician (*tantrik*) who could change his appearance and escape in any garb. There were many rumours in the Mughal army that Banda could escape as an animal, knew black magic and could disappear in no time. The Khalsa army re-assembled to conquer areas of Jalandhar Doab.

Meanwhile, Emperor Bahadar Shah died. Jahandar Shah was killed and Farukhsiyar occupied the Delhi throne. He appointed Abdus Samad Khan, the Subedar of Lahore, to capture Banda Singh alive. Abdus Samad Khan ultimately succeeded in his mission. He surrounded the Khalsa army in a fortress at Gurdas Nangal near Gurdaspur and cut off all food and fodder supplies.

Hindu Rulers Invited to Join

Significantly, Banda Singh Bahadar was conscious that he had waged a war of independence for the country. Accordingly he had written letters to the rulers of Hindu states requesting for cooperation and joining hands with him. Jaipur state records establish that Banda Singh wrote letter to Rajput Maharajas to join his crusade for uprooting the Mughal Empire. He wrote a letter to Mirza Raja Swai Jai Singh on 11 September 1711 but got no moral or physical support or even a reply. The Hindu rulers of states had become so used to a life of slavery of Mughals that they did not have the courage or guts to join in a war of independence against the Mughals, (Teja Singh and Ganda Singh - *A Short History of the Sikhs*).

While they all bitterly hated Banda Singh and his comrades, Khafi Khan is all praise for their courage and bravery. He says, "They died to the last man rejecting all offers of saving their lives by converting to Islam. Their dead bodies were hung from tree tops on all entry points to Delhi to create a fear psychosis among the public".

The Khalsa army was starved to death during this siege of 8 months (7 April 1715 to 7 December 1715) laid by Abdus Samad Khan. Those who survived this ordeal surrendered before Abdus Samad Khan and were made prisoners of war. At last, Banda Singh and 700 Sikh soldiers of his army were brought to Delhi in chains by Zakarya Khan and Kamrudin Khan. To humiliate them, they were made to dress up as clowns and wear sheep skin hats and presented to Mughal Emperor in Red Fort on 1 March 1716, who ordered the execution of 100 captured Sikh per day at Kotwali Chabuttra near Hardinge Library near Chandni Chowk in full public view.

The massacre of Sikhs started on 6 March 1716 and

continued for one week. They were given the option to embrace Islam and save their lives. Persian sources reveal that not a single Sikh opted for conversion to Islam to save his life. So much so that a young Sikh boy whose mother got reprieve for her son by making a false claim that he was not a Sikh, offered his head to the executioner telling him that his mother had told a lie and he was a Sikh and follower of Guru Gobind Singh.

Finally, Banda Singh and comrades-in-arms, like Baj Singh and Fateh Singh, were executed on 9 June, 1716 in Mehrauli. Banda Singh was ordered by Mughal jallaads (executioners) to kill his own son, 5-year old Ajay Singh sitting in his lap. When he refused to do so, saying that his Guru and religion does not allow it, the executioner thrust a dagger into Ajay Singh's stomach, killed him and thrust his quivering heart into the mouth of Banda Singh. After that Banda Singh was subjected to extreme torture like gouging his eyes, cutting him limb by limb into pieces before he was finally beheaded. But Banda Singh Bahadar died as the rue and valiant Khalsa of Sri Guru Gobind Singh.

Lachhman Das was born on 27 October 1670 at Rajouri

in J&K State in the house of Ram Das, a Rajpur farmer. One day while hunting he saw a she deer, injured with his arrow dying and her two young ones faling from her womb and writhing in pain. It changed his heart, he decided to become an ascetic, then a Bairagi Madho Das. Joined Yogi Aughar Nath at Nasik. After Yogi's death, Madho Das moved to Nander in Hyderabad and set up his own Monastery there. Here he would enjoy using his little magical tricks on unwary visitors and humiliating them He had tried the same tricks on Guru Gobind Singh ji, but could not succeed in dislodging the Guru from his *Gaddi* in September 1708. Eventually, he became 'Guru' Banda.

Main Features of Banda Bahadar's Crusade

Baba Banda Singh created the first Khalsa commonwealth of Guru Gobind Singh's dreams in Punjab.

He abolished feudal system and established democracy and Panchayati Raj. He has been wrongly assigned the title of Guru by the Mughal chronicle writers to



Mud Fort of Sitaragarh

There is no fort at Sitaragarh, only remains of a thatched hut with stone walls which Banda Singh Bahadar used to survey the entire area and the position of Mughal troops. The top of Sitaragarh is a kilometre away from the Lohgarh fort, but to this day, words spoken from Sitaragarh can be heard at Lohgarh and vice versa owing to some acoustic phenomenon.



Remnants of Lohgarh Fort

The Sikhs made fifty two defensive entrenchments around the Lohgarh fort. These entrenchments with small supporting walls were made in a manner that each supported the other. Enemy forces moving up the hillock to the fort received deadly fire throughout their advance, from every entrenchment. The fear of Sikhs kept the Mughal commanders and their forces long at bay. Remains of the fort still exist in the forest area. Lohgarh was the Khalsa Raj's headquarters whereas Mukhlispur was the 'capital city'.

create a myth that Guru Gobind Singh's spirit had entered his body. He was mischievously represented by them as Guru-incarnate for the Sikh, and the most derogatory epithets were used for Banda Singh and his comrades. They called him God-cursed, magician, Kafir, characterless and leader of low caste, dogs and pig. Both Hindu and Muslim chroniclers have used the word 'dog' for the Sikhs.

In the campaign of Lohgarh and Gurdas Nangal, Hindu Rajas of Shivalik hill states supported the Mughal army with men and materials. They proved to be traitors to the noble cause of Banda Singh Bahadar. Banda fought for liberation of India but hill Rajas preferred to remain slaves of the Mughals!

No reliable information is available about the fate of Raj Kumari Rattan Kaur, wife of Banda Singh Bahadar. Khushal Chand in *Tarikh-i-Mohammad Shahi* (1740 CE) writes that she was put under the tutelage of Dakhani Begum in Red Fort, she embraced Islam and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. But this does not appear to be

logical for a woman whose husband was such a stalwart Gurusikh, army general and patriot to the core. But according to Dr Teja Singh and Dr Ganda Singh, (*A Short History of Sikhs*) conflicting accounts have been given by many writers and scholars. (Dr Sukhdial Singh, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. XIV. Issue 2, 2012 and Simarjit Singh, editor of *Gurmat Parkash SGPC*), Vol. 56, issue 3, page 156, June 2012). Sikh historians must trace her roots to bring out the truth, they said.

A *dera* where the descendants of Banda Bahadar live is situated on the left bank of river Chenab, 28 miles North West of Jammu, and seven miles south of Riassi. Here Banda stayed for about a year in 1713 and solemnised his second marriage with Sahib Kaur, daughter of a Khatri of Wazirabad and had a son Ranjit Singh from her.

Prof Parmindar Singh

(Chairman, Gurmat Prachar Trust, Delhi)

The Legacy of Banda Singh Bahadar



In most Muslim countries, when a new Muslim ruler ascends the throne, there is a custom that his name along with his father's name or grandfather's name is mentioned in the speech, which is called 'Khutba'. In Iranian history, it is said when Nadir Shah ascended the throne he was asked to intimate his father's name, he said, "*Bin Shamsheer*". When asked for his grandfather's name he again said, "*Bin Shamsheer*". It meant 'son of sword' again he said 'son of sword'. Hence the Persian proverb:

Har ke Sahmsheer zanad, Sikka Be Namish Khandand
'Whosoever strikes the sword, coin is read in his name.'

In Sikh history, especially the history of Banda Singh Bahadar, the case is just the reverse. Banda Singh Bahadar won in an unequal battle, that of Chappar-Chirri. Mughal forces were far greater in number,

well-trained, well-equipped with arsenal, elephants, etc, whereas Banda Singh Bahadar's forces were less in number, untrained and least equipped and had no training in warfare whatsoever. The only factor in their favour was that they were more energised and ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of their Guru and to avenge the murder of innocent sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Banda Singh Bahadar's strategy and bravery of the Sikhs were a formidable combination and victory was achieved! However, in contrast to Nadir Shah of Iran he did not strike coin in his own name rather struck coin in his Guru's name. The inscription of Banda Singh Bahadar's coin was:

Sikah zad bar bar do alam tegh-in-Nanak Wahib ast,
Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-i-Shahan Fazal-i-Sacha Sahib ast.

'Coin struck in the two worlds by the grace of the True Lord;

Victory to Gobind Singh, the king of kings; the sword of Nanak is the granter of desires'.

On the reverse were the words:

*Zarab ba aman-ud-bahar masawwarat shahar
Zubat-ul-takht-i-mubarik bakht.*



'Coined at the model city, the refuge of the world, the ornament of fortunate throne'

Banda Singh Bahadar attributed his victory not to his personal strategy, bravery or Generalship, but attributed his success to the grace of the Guru. He clearly announced that the sword of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism was granter of this success. Reverse of the coin also indicates the character of his capital which was in ideal city, where everybody was living peacefully and happily.

Banda Singh Bahadar also introduced an official seal with the following inscription:

*Dego-o-Tegh-o-Fateh Nusrat-i-bedirang
Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

'Kettle (symbol of the means to feed the poor), sword (symbol of power to protect the weak and helpless), victory an unhesitating patronage have been obtained from Guru Nanak and Gobind Singh.'

Here, 'kettle' represented a means to feed the poor, *Teg* means victory. They go together in Sikh theology, they are enjoined. Guru Gobind Singh had also stated that *Deg* and *Teg* go together.

ਦੇਗ ਤੇਗ ਜਗ ਮੇਂ ਦੋਊ ਚਲਹਿ

Teg (sword) brings victory and *Deg* is for feeding the poor and helpless. This implies that victory is not for self glorification, but it is to serve the poor and helpless.

The Great Legacy

One of the foremost legacies of Banda Singh Bahadar was the introduction of coins, which form of currency

continued in the Punjab for more than a century and half after his passing. It was only discontinued after the coming of the British and annexation of the Punjab in 1849 AD. During the *Misl* period, such coinage introduced by Banda Singh Bahadar continued and with the same inscription. The only differentiation was by the name of mints (where the coins were minted) mentioned on the reverse of the coin. No *misl* issued any coin in his own name, but adopted the Persian inscription on the coin current in the time of Banda Singh Bahadar. Then, Maharaja Ranjit Singh continued with the same coinage upto the end of the free kingdom of the Punjab.

Harbinger of Revolution

The *Manasbdari* System prevailed during the Mughal period, wherein vast tracts of land were distributed to various *Mansabdars*, who would collect land revenues from the cultivators. *Mansadars* were graded in different categories and different types of soldiery under them the numbers of which were fixed by the Emperor.

Mir Bakshi was the military supervisor but many *Mansabdars* committed excesses and extorted more money from the cultivators, although the rate of land revenue had been fixed by the emperor. Although the *Mansabdari* system was to be better than the *Jagirdari* system, in practice it was akin to the older *Zamindari* system.

The countryside was troubled and peasants beseeched Banda Singh Bahadar to help them. In a revolutionary decision, Banda ordered them to discontinue paying land revenue to the *Mansabdars*, but instead to those whom he appointed. This is corroborated in the *Akhbarat Darbare Maula*, where it is clearly stated that in the territory under Banda Bahadar, land revenue was collected by the *Batai* system. This was actually a revolution!

Banda Singh Bahadar can be truly be called the harbinger of revolution, centuries before similar such events took place in other parts of the world.

Elevator of the Lowly

One of the most dramatic features of the Sikh movement was elevation of the lower classes. Guru Nanak wrote:

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨੀਚੀ ਹੁ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ ॥
ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸ ॥
ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ ॥

The lowest among the low castes,

Those still lower and condemned.

Nanak is by their side,

He envies not the great of the world,

Lord: Thy grace falls on the land

Where the poor are cherished.

The Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh fulfilled the mission of Guru Nanak and created an egalitarian society by equalising all castes (ਚਾਰ ਵਰਨ ਕਰ ਇਕ ਕਰਾਇਆ - ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ, ਵਾਰ 1)

He initiated 'Order of the Khalsa' and energised the lower strata of society to battle against socio-political tyranny. After him, Banda Singh Bahadar, working on these ideals of the Sikh Gurus, valiantly fought for those noble causes.

Rattan Singh Bhangu had stated that Guru Gobind Singh had promised sovereignty to the poor classes after counting the names of low castes.

ਜੱਟ ਬੂਟ ਕਹਿ ਜਿਹ ਜਗ ਮਾਂਗੀ, ਬਣੀਏ ਬਕਾਲ ਕਿਰਾੜ ਖੜੀ ਗਦਾਈ ॥20॥
ਲੁਹਾਰ ਤ੍ਰਖਾਣ ਹੁਤ ਜਾਤ ਕਮੀਨੀ, ਛੀਪੇ ਕਲਾਲ ਨੀਚਨ ਪੈ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕੀਨੀ ॥
ਗੁੱਜਰ ਗੁਰ ਹੀਰ ਕਮਜਾਤ, ਕੰਬੋਇ ਸੁਦਨ ਕੋਇ ਪੂਛੇ ਨਾ ਬਾਤ ॥21॥
ਭੀਵਰ ਨਾਹੀ ਰੋੜੇ ਘੁਮਿਆਰ, ਸਾਇਣੀ ਸੁਨਿਆਰ ਚੁੜੇ ਚਮਿਆਰ ॥
ਭੱਟ ਐ ਬਾਹਮਣ ਹੁਤੇ ਮੇਗਵਾਰ, ਬਹੁਰੁਪੀਏ ਲੁਬਾਣੇ ਐ ਘੁਮਿਆਰ ॥22॥
ਇਨ ਗਰੀਬ ਸਿੱਖਨ ਕੋ ਹਮ ਦਯੋ ਪਾਤਿਸ਼ਾਹੀ, ਏ ਯਾਦ ਰਖੋ ਹਮਰੀ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ॥23॥

Jats who are contemptuously known as rustic peasants in the society,

Or known as traders. Small time shopkeepers and petty fighters.

Those who belong to the low castes of blacksmiths and carpenters,

And the lowly placed tailor and wine-venders would receive his benediction.

This fraternity will also include the low caste cattle grazes, rustics and low herds,

And the ignorable vegetable grower (kambojs) and schedule castes.

Water-carriers, barbers, small venders, potters will also join this community.

Sainis, goldsmith, sweepers and cobblers will form a part of this brotherhood.

Ballad-singers, priests and mendicants will also be the alliance partners,

Salt-traders, potters and artisans will also share power.

*I shall confer sovereignty on these poor and needy Gursikh,
So that they may remember my patronage and benediction.*

It was destined that Banda Singh Bahadar accomplish the charter of Guru Gobind Singh and to uplift the lowly.

William Irvine in his book entitled *The Later Mughals* writes:

"In all the parganas occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather dresser, the lowest of the low, had

only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda) when in a short space of time he would return to his birthplace as its ruler, with his order to appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well-born and the wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arrived there, they then stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his orders.

A scavenger, from the nature of his duties, is intimately acquainted with the condition of every household. Thus, the new ruler had no difficulty in extracting from everyone their best and most valuable belongings, which were confiscated for the use of the Guru (Banda) or for the treasury. Not a soul dared to disobey an order, and men, who had often risked themselves in battlefields, became so cowed down that they were afraid even to remonstrate. Hindus who had not joined the sect were not exempt from these oppressions."

Teja Singh and Ganda Singh rightly stated, "It is true that the revolutions which he (Banda) led against Mughal power had been started much earlier by the Sikh Gurus, but it was he, who effectively, organised and used it as a political force to pull down the Mughal edifice and to give foretaste of independence to the people of the land."

Crusader against Socio-Political Tyranny

Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism had condemned the political tyranny, as is stated in his verses.

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ, ਜਾਇਜਗਾ ਇਨਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਸੁਤੇ ॥
ਚਾਕਰ ਨਹਦਾ ਪਾਇਨਿ ਘਾਉ ॥ ਰਤੁ ਪਿਤੁ ਕੁਤਿਹੋ ਚਟਿ ਜਾਹੁ ॥

*Kings are tigers and the courtiers dogs,
They go and harass the sitting and sleeping
The kings' servants inflict wounds with their nails,
The kings lick up the blood and bile of the poor subjects.*

ਕਲਿ ਕਾਤੀ ਰਾਜੇ ਕਾਸਾਈ ਧਰਮੁ ਪੰਖ ਕਰਿ ਉਡਰਿਆ ॥
ਕੂੜੁ ਅਮਾਵਸ ਸਚੁ ਚੰਦ੍ਰਮਾ ਦੀਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਹ ਚੜਿਆ ॥

*This age is knife, kings are butchers;
Justice has taken wings and fled.
In this completely dark night of falsehood.
The moon of truth is never seen to rise.*

Guru Nanak condemned the atrocities committed by Zahir-uddin-Babar and his soldiers on the innocent inhabitants during his third invasion in 1521 AD.

ਪਾਪ ਕੀ ਜੰਵ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੋਗੀ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥
ਸਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦੁਇ ਛਪਿ ਖਲੋਏ ਕੂੜੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਪਰਧਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥
ਕਾਜੀਆ ਬਾਮਣਾ ਕੀ ਗਲ ਥਕੀ ਅਗਦੁ ਪੜੈ ਸੈਤਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥

*Babar with wedding party of sin from Kabul rushed down,
And forcibly demanded surrender of Indian womenhood.*



*Then went modesty and righteousness into hiding.
And falsehood was strutting about in glory,
Set aside were Qazis and Brahmins
And Satan went about solemnising marriages.*

Whatever Guru Nanak had written regarding atrocities on the people, has been confirmed by Babar himself in his Memoirs, where it is stated:

“(Babar) advanced to Sialkot, the inhabitants of which submitted and saved their possessions but the inhabitants of Syedpur who resisted were put to sword, their wives and children carried into captivity and all their property plundered.”

At another place Guru Nanak writes:

ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕਰਲਾਣੇ ਤੈਂ ਕੀ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਆਇਆ ॥
ਕਰਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਸਭਨਾ ਕਾ ਸੋਈ ॥
ਜੇ ਸਕਤਾ ਸਕਤੇ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੇ ਤਾ ਮਨਿ ਰੋਸੁ ਨਾ ਹੋਈ ॥
ਸਕਤਾ ਸੀਹੁ ਮਾਰੇ ਪੈ ਵਗੈ ਖਸਮੈ ਸਾ ਪੁਰਸਾਈ ॥
ਰਤਨ ਵਿਗਾੜਿ ਵਿਗੋਏ ਕੁਤੀਂ ਮੁਇਆ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਕਾਈ ॥

*So much beating was inflicted that people shrieked.
Did not thou O' God feel compassion.
Though O Maker Master of all,
If the powerful duel with the powerful,
I grieve not. But if a ravenous lion falls upon a flock of sheep
Then the master must answer.
The jewel (of my motherland) has been laid waste by curs.
But none shall cherish their memory when they are gone.*

Banda Singh Bahadar punished the tyrants as young innocent sons of Guru Gobind Singh were killed by Wazir Khan, the Faujdar of Sirhind. In doing so he followed the principal of Guru Nanak who had condemned the cruelty towards innocent people.

Banda Singh Bahadar was indeed a great revolutionist, who brought radical changes in different spheres of life. He was also a great strategist, a daring and valiant warrior. With the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh, he was able to achieve decisive victories over the mighty forces of Mughal empire. He had virtually no weapons of war, ammunition, nor trained soldiers, but won the battle with commitment to sacrifice everything for the sake of Guru. It is to the eternal credit of Banda Bahadar and the Khalsa, who won the epochal battle of Chappar Chirri, conquered Sirhind and glorified power of the Khalsa in establishing the Sikh Raj.

The will had been created in the ordinary people so as to resist tyranny and to live or die for the cause. Such example set by Banda Bahadar and his warriors serves forever as a beacon of light in mankind's darker days.

Dr Kirpal Singh

(Eminent Sikh historian and Professor Emeritus)

Turning the Tide

The Seminal Battle at Chapar Chiri, 22 May 1710



The battle of Chappar Jhiri was fought by Banda Singh Bahadar against Nawab Wazir Khan, Subedar of Sirhind who had ordered the bricking alive of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Sahibzada Fateh Singh and Sahibzada Zorawar Singh (aged 6 and 7 years only). Wazir Khan was killed in this battle. Six thousand Sikhs also lost their lives. Sirhind was a significant and strategic seat of Mughal empire. It was also an important religious site of Islam i.e., Roza-Sharif, is second only to Mecca Sharif. It is important to note that no mosque was damaged by Banda Singh Bahadar and his troops. His main target was Wazir Khan and his deputy Sucha Nand.

This battle is noteworthy as it turned the tide of a thousand years of uninterrupted and unresisted attack by foreign invaders and it also laid foundation of the first Sikh Empire. Banda Singh Bahadar also deserves credit for abolishing the mansabdari system in Punjab and instilling a spirit of confidence, social justice and equality among the so-called dregs of society on the command of Guru Gobind Singh. Social and economic factors were turned into reality by handing over land to the tiller.

Banda Singh Bahadar reinforced the Panj Pyara doctrine of Guru Gobind Singh by seeking their guidance at every step. He struck coins in the name of Guru Nanak

ਇਨ ਗਰੀਬ ਸਿਖਨ ਕੇ ਦਿਉਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ
ਯਾਦ ਰਖੋਂ ਹਮਰੀ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ॥

Dev and Guru Gobind Singh. Nowhere did he promote himself. He, along with his nine hundred followers remained steadfast to the Sikh doctrine till the very end.'

It is significant to note that entire Sikh nation from Majha, Doaba and Malwa rallied under Banda Singh Bahadar's flag in the name of Guru Gobind Singh gave a united response inspired by the Khalsa spirit despite the lack of matching weaponry.

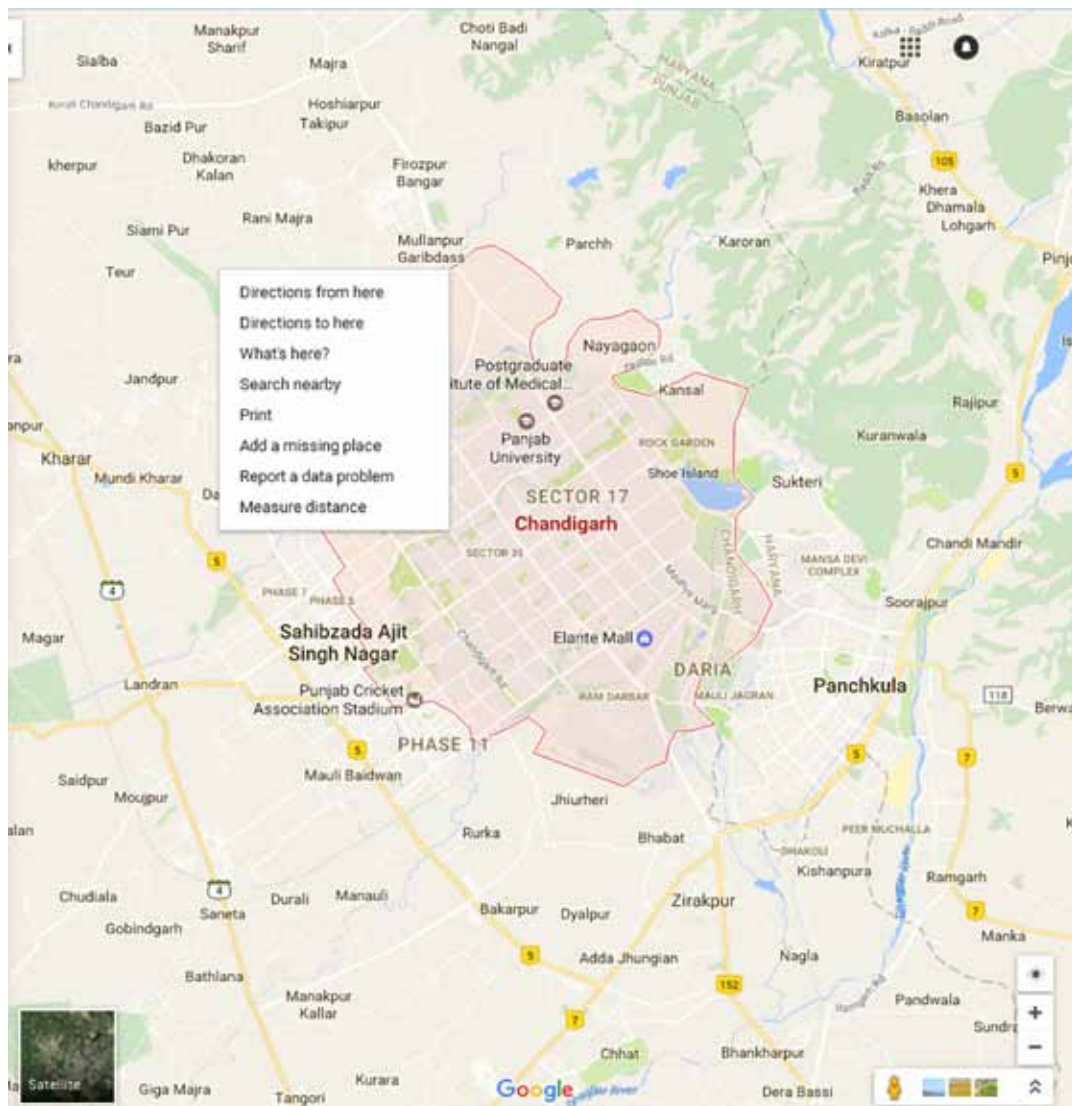
This battle was envisaged as a last resort after failure of Guru Gobind Singh's efforts at procuring justice through dialogue first with Aurangzeb later with Bahadar Shah.

ਚੂੰ ਕਾਰ ਅਜ ਹਮਾ ਹੀਲਤੇ ਦਰ ਗੁਜ਼ਸਤ ॥
ਹਲਾਲ ਅਸਤ ਬੁਰਦਨ ਬ ਸਮਸ਼ੀਰ ਦਸਤ ॥

The Memorial at Chappar Jhiri

The Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh held a meeting at the village Chappar Jhiri on 7 April 2009 at the Convention Hall of Guru Nanak Public School to ascertain the truth of the rumours of establishing a Golf Course by GMADA at the site of the battle field of Chappar Jhiri, which would wipe off this all important historical site of Sikh history. Our findings were submitted to the President of IOSS, S Pritam Singh IAS (Retd), who could not visit Chappar Jhiri owing to unavoidable reasons on that very day, but visited it number of times for follow-up actions.

Rumours could not be confirmed due to lack of clear evidence. The President, IOSS rang up to convey his decision to appoint me as the Chairperson of the Banda Singh Bahadar Memorial Committee. He asked me to constitute my own sub-committee and to handle the matter.



First of all, I procured a copy of a map of GMADA for the development of the entire belt, which clearly showing that the site of the battlefield was to be converted into an elitist Golf Course. This was the most important weapon in my armoury since the Chief Minister of Punjab was also the Chairman of GMADA.

Next step was to procure a dozen copies of the recently published books by Dr Surinder Singh and Dr Sukhdial Singh, the Head of History department of Punjabi University, Patiala on the Chappar Jhiri battle.

I created a high powered committee of 31 members comprising of a cross section of intellectuals, prominent in their respective fields. Several institutions like International Sikh Confederation, Kendriya Singh Sabha, and Sikh Educational Society, etc, were also involved along with IOSS. Members of the Panchayat of Chappar Jhiri were included to make it a formidable team, which worked as a close knit unit. S Gurdarshan Singh Grewal, twice ex-Advocate General of Punjab was made the Legal Adviser, Dr J S Grewal, Ex-Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and the Famous Historian, was appointed as the Historical Adviser.

The main problem was to identify the exact location and area of the Tibbas, Jhiri and Maidan - the essential components of the battle field as per Banda Singh Bahadar's battle strategy. To achieve this object, I brought a copy of the village map showing the khasra numbers. The experts from various disciplines (historian, geographist, army commanders, public administrator, journalists, architects and the local leaders of the concerned Panchayat were taken to the battle site several times. Also, a map was prepared outlining showing the khasra numbers required of the area, it works out to be 35 acres.

I sought help of a 'respectable friend' indicating my keenness to preserve the heritage site. He advised me to build up public opinion through press and individuals in order to persuade the politicians at the helm of affairs and garner support of the local population, step by step to focus on the urgency of the case.

I approached the press by presenting to each journalist the GMADA map and a copy of the book on Baba Banda Singh Bahadar along with the impressive list of the members of our sub-committee. This involved 'Times of





Banda Singh Bahadar Monument at Chappar Chiri, Image courtesy the blog: 'My Malice My Thoughts'

India', 'The Tribune' (English and Punjabi), the 'Ajit' and many other papers. Their correspondents were taken to the site of the battlefield.

As a result, political parties like the Communists, Marxists/Leninists stepped in, Bairagis and many others joined in, e-mails poured in from abroad till the demand was conceded by the Chief Minister on October 1, 2009 at a widely attended ceremony at Rakhra village. We decided it was then the right time to submit our memorandum to him.

I, as Chairperson of the coordination committee, along with eleven members of the team and the Sarpanch and ex-Sarpanch of Chappar Jhiri had a meeting with the Chief Minister on 20 October, 2009. We had requested for grant of 35 acres but he approved 20 acres to which we agreed. In a subsequent meeting, he asked us to spell out details of land-use. Majority view was to erect a Minar-e-Fateh at the site and raise the dune (*tibba*) with the statue of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar at top level. We also made the request for a Light & Sound programme and creation of a theme park where the statues of his generals, namely, Fateh Singh, Baz Singh, Ali Singh, Mali Singh and Nagiah Singh should be installed. We also asked for a convention hall of international standard so that it could generate funds for the upkeep of the park. The CM left the details to be sorted out by a committee headed by S Jaspal Singh, VC of Punjabi University, Patiala.

It must be recorded that the close liaison of S Zora Singh ex-Sarpanch of village Chappar Jhiri with the author, and total commitment of the members of the coordination committee for the Memorial of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar at village Chappar Jhiri has brought the success to this assignment, especially S Pritam Singh, President, IOSS, Lt. General KS Gill, - ISC, and journalist S Sukhdev Singh.

The Press - both English and Punjabi for their earnest reporting and the enthusiasm of the local population. No obstacle came in the way of our mission.

It was an event whose time had come with Waheguru's blessings.

ਮੈਂ ਅਕੋਲਾ ਹੀ ਚਲਾ ਥਾ ਜਾਨਬੇ ਮਨਜ਼ਲ ਮਗਰ
ਲੋਗ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਗਏ ਔਰ ਕਾਰਵਾਂ ਬਨਤਾ ਗਿਆ

'I started on the expedition alone,
Others kept joining to make it a caravan.'

Baljit Kaur

Member, Institute of Sikh Studies at Chandigarh, she was very active in planning for and creation of this iconic memorial, erected on the very site of the seminal battle of Chapar Chiri

(The Editors of Nishaan-Nagaara traversed the battlefield in early 2010, which was the basis of the article 'The Battle of Chapar Chiri, 22 May 1710', supported by photographs of the ground and terrain in Issue II/2010)

The Inspiration

(for India's Struggle for Independence)



Bandi Bir (warrior bound), a poem in Bengali by the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, based primarily on Mc Gregor's *History of the Sikhs* and Cunningham's - *A History of the Sikhs*, was composed by him in October-November 1899. The poem celebrates the heroism of the Sikh warrior Banda Singh Bahadar. The opening stanza of this poem tells how Guru Gobind Singh ji's message had turned the Sikhs into a self-respecting and fearless people. The rest of the poem is devoted to panegyrising the resolute resistance put up by Banda Singh Bahadar and his men against Mughal oppression and to describing how bravely he met his end after he had been arrested at Gurdas Nangal along with his companions. The poem was a source of inspiration to several other Bengali writers as well as to Bengali militant youth engaged in the struggle for India's independence.

Image sourced from Instagram

Banda Bir

(An English Translation of the Poem)

On the banks of the five rivers,
Up rise the Sikhs spontaneous;
With hair coiled above their head
Inspired by the Mantra their Guru spread
Fearless and unyielding...

"Glory to Guru ji" - thousands of them
Resound the horizon;
At the rising sun of the dawn
The Sikhs stare with deep emotion
With new awakening

"Alakha Niranjani!" ('Holy Spotless' = God)
The war cry of the rebellion;
Let loose their chivalry;
On their ribs clank swords luminary;
In wild joy was Punjab's insurrection
"Alakha Niranjani!"

There came a day,
Thousands of hearts were on their way
Without any binding or fear,
Life and death at their feet slaves mere;
There on the banks of those rivers
The tale of that day still shivers

At the tower of the Delhi palace,
Where the Sikhs are apace -
The Badshajada's drowsy spell

Time and again they quell;
Whose voices there, the dark sky tear?
Whose torches set the horizon afire?

On the banks of the rivers five,
For supreme sacrifice was their dive,
Unleashed there was the flood

Of the devotee's blood.
From thousands of hearts torn apart
For destination divine in their lark -
The heroes putting their sacred blood mark
On the forehead of their motherland
There around the five rivers so dear and grand.

In the Mughal and Sikh battle
Their embrace to each other throttle
Like the fight between the eagle and snake,
Deep bruise one to the other did make.

In the fierce fight of that day -
In blood craze "Din Din" the Mughals bay,
"Glory to Guru ji" - was the Sikh's commotion
In their divine devotion.

At Gurdaspur castle
When Banda was captured amidst all bustle
In the hands of the Turani troop,
As if a lion fettered with his group;
To capital Delhi they were taken,
Alas, at Gurdaspur Banda was beaten!

The Mughal soldiers march ahead,
Kicking up the road dust in sneer,
Hoisting the Sikh's chopped head
At the blade of their spear.
Follow them Sikhs seven hundred,
Tinkles their chain,
Throng people on the road widespread,
Windows open - a glimpse they fain,
"Glory to Guru ji", the Sikhs roar,
For fear of life none is sore,
Sikhs with the Mughals to-day,
Stormed the Delhi road all in gay.

Started the scurry,
For lead in the carnage was their hurry;
They line up at the dawn
Defiant till their execution.
"Glory to Guru ji" was their slogan
Until they were done.

Thus, over a week,
The arena turned bleak;

With seven hundred lives gone -
Upon the martyr's immortalisation.
On the last round of cruelty
Banda was ordered by the Kazi...

Silence fell in the court,
Guruji's inspiration still not abort.
Then with tong red hot
Banda's body was pieced apart;
A word of moan he uttered not
And all in calm did he depart.
As stopped his heart throb
Witnesses closed eyes -
Silence choked pin drop

The First Sikh Coins



Shah Alam Bahadar, Lahore Mint. Year AH 1122-AD 1710

The very first Sikh coin was struck by Baba Banda Bahadar in 1710; these silver rupees were unique as neither the ruler's name nor title or portrait appeared on the coin. Instead they were inscribed with couplets which paid tribute to the glory of the Gurus. The verse on the obverse later came to be known as the Nanakshahi couplet and Sikh coinage itself came to be known as Nanakshahis or money of (Guru) Nanak.

Obverse: *Sikka Zad Bar Har Do Alam Fazl Sachcha
Sahib Ast Fath-i-Gur Gobind Singh
Shah-i- Shahan Tegh-i -Nanak Wahib Ast*

Translation: Coin struck in the two worlds [spiritual and secular]

By the grace of the true Lord, Nanak, the provider
Of the sword [power] by which Guru Gobind Singh
King of Kings is victorious.

Reverse: *Zarb Khalsa Mubarak Bakht
Ba-Aman Ud-Dahr
Zinat At-Takht
Mashwarat Shahr
Sanah 2 or 3*

Translation: Struck at the Refuge [presumably Lohgarh] of the world
The Council City,
The Ornament of the Throne,
Of the Blessed Fortune of the Khalsa Year 2 or 3

These coins were minted after Banda Bahadar's victory at Sarhind and a new calendar was established by the Sikhs starting with year 1. These silver rupees carried the regnal years 2 and 3 which pertain to this new era and in all probability, from the honorific names given to cities at the time; these coins were minted at Banda's stronghold at Lohgarh. The new coinage carried a message to all Sikhs; they had the blessings and support of the Gurus. They could take on their Mughal oppressors without fear of defeat or be forced to renounce their faith. Thousands of Sikhs were tortured and executed as they refused to convert; this was Baba Banda Bahadar's fate a few years later in 1716. The Mughals seeing what significance these coins had for the Sikhs, banned them and anyone caught possessing one was executed. A few samples survive today, showing us the spirit of the eighteenth century Sikhs, who believed that with the help of the Gurus they could never be vanquished.



Obverse

*The Banda Bahadar Coin
(from the Saran Singh Collection)*



Reverse



Banda abandoned his siege on Lahore and got back to defend his territories, leaving behind some Mughal coins with a Sikh emblem for posterity.



Jyoti M. Rai

(Jyoti Moolgavkar Rai is a renowned numismatist and specialist on coins of the Sikh period. She co-authored the 'Empire of the Sikhs'-Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with Sardar Patwant Singh.)

Another interesting silver rupee which gives one an insight into the very essence of the Sikh persona is surprisingly a Mughal coin belonging to Emperor Shah Alam Bahadar (1707- 1712). In 1710, Baba Banda Bahadar, along with his forces sought blessings at Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar before marching towards Lahore. Here, on outskirts of the city, a fierce battle with the Mughals raged on for many days. During this time the Sikhs managed to put a Khanda on some of the Shah Alam coins of the Lahore Mint. The sheer audacity of this action was felt all the way to the Mughal capital; the outraged Emperor with his ample resources made preparations to proceed for the Punjab. On hearing this,

The Meteoric Trail of Banda Singh Bahadar



Baba Banda Singh Bahadar appeared in Sikh history for a relatively short moment of time (1708-1716) but (after the Sikh Gurus) influenced it more significantly than any other single individual. He led a historic turn in the Sikh movement, the emergence of Sikh sovereignty.

The idea of Sikh sovereignty originated with Guru Gobind Singh himself, but destiny was for Banda to materialise this. Under Banda's leadership, the Sikh nation took the direct acquisition of political power for the first time in their turbulent history. Banda played his

part dramatically, like a shooting star and the Sikhs were to consolidate such power only by the late 18th century.

The Sikhs swiftly occupied most of the major centres of Mughal power spanning the region from Delhi and Lahore, in a flash. According to Mirza Muhammad, the author of *Ibratnama* (1719), all territory from Thanesar to the banks of the river Sutlej came under the control of Sikhs at one stroke.

What created such a stunning overturn of history? And what led to the rise of Banda Singh Bahadar? That actually is the enigma of the man and his mission.

In 1705, Wazir Khan, subedar of Sarhind and his allies had besieged Anandpur and lured Guru Gobind Singh into leaving his fortress through deception. Then, the Kotwali of Sarhind saw brutal killing of the young sahibzadas and tragic death of Mata Gujri. Wazir Khan and his peshakar Sachidanand saw no blood on their hands and felt no burden on their conscience. Five years passed. They dismissed any reports of appearance of another Guru of the Sikhs as mere rumours. Kaithal, Sonapat, Sadhaura and Samana then quickly passed into Banda's hands. Now Wazir Khan saw him advancing to Sarhind. For him, this was reality now, no more a figment of imagination, nor a faint shadow on the dusty plains of south eastern Punjab. He rushed to stall his advance at Chapar Chiri (May 1710). His alliance faced a crushing defeat and the Sikhs occupied Sarhind, to annihilate it from the face of the earth.

What made this possible? Was revenge the only driving force? But the Sikhs did not take a pause after victory at Sarhind. What inspired them to continue the tide? Perhaps they saw themselves as on the path of righteousness. This sense of being on the right side of justice combined with the lofty legacy of the Khalsa that defined itself through its relationship with the sword, but only as protectors of the weak. Banda had much religious experience before he met Guru Gobind Singh. He had imbibed enormous religiomagical arts from his various teachers. But only from Guru Gobind Singh could he learn that real religion lay in protection of the weak and the harmless, who suffered at the hands

of ruthless powers. Sarup Singh Kaushish, compiler of *Guru ki Sakhian* (1790) based on Bhatt account books recorded the Guru's words thus:

Tumhe bade dere Hind ka pata nahin jahan sainkre hazaran mazloom nirdosh kohe ja rahe hain,

Main kewal tera dhian dilane ke lye jahan dere vich aya han.

Banda Singh Bahadar completely immersed himself in the mission of Guru Gobind Singh.

Protection of the weak required rebellion against brutal rule. The Guru blessed Banda to lead such rebellion (*Dillion lag kar danga machavo/Punjab prabt sab dhur machavo: Prachin Panth Parkash*). He sent him to the Punjab along with five chosen Sikhs, being Bhai Binod Singh, Kahn Singh, Baj Singh, Ran Singh and Daya Singh (*farishtadanash sue Punjab karad/maye panj singhani azad marad: Amarnama of Dhadi Nath Mal*). Banda approached the wider Sikhs diaspora in the Punjab through the mediation of established Sikh leaders like Mohan Ke, Bahlo Ke, Bhagtoo Ke and Bhai Rupe Ke (his letter to Bhai Param Singh, Dharam Singh for joining him at Kharkhauda is still preserved with the family).

In some manner, Banda resembled the Great Guru and some even thought of him as a reincarnate. Persian official accounts mentioned him as 'Goroo'. He was seen as an authentic extension of the Sikh 'mission' in body and spirit (*Bande ko satgur im kahni /aur mayan talwar hai vahi: Prachin Panth Parkash*).

Kesar Singh Chibber, author of *Bansawalinama* (1769) also affirms this:

Bande kahia; tarwar hai uhi, mayan aur hai chadia

While this made him popular among the Sikhs, his mesmerism added to his mystery not only among the masses, but among the Mughals as well. Sikh and Persian sources are in agreement on the portrayal of his 'supernatural' image. In the words of Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan, author of *Tazkiratu's Salatin Chaghata* (1724) 'it was repeatedly represented to the Emperor that "the ill fated wretch was greatly expert in magic and sorcery". (145.eds. J.S.Grewal and Irfan Habib: 2001).

As to why Banda could draw vast mass support may be explained by people's belief in some millenarian dream, the prophecy of *Kalaki Avtar* coming true to destroy the 'rule of Turks'. With faith, they sold their belongings, left their homes and joined Banda who claimed to have established satjug (*Asan satjug vartaya hai: Hukumnama to sangat of Jaunpor*). How Banda saw himself in God's own scheme of things is evident from his last talk with Itimaduddaula Muhammad Amin Khan. Khafi Khan records his response thus:

"In all religions and sects, whenever disobedience and rebellion among mortal men passes all bounds, the great avenger raises up a severe man like me for the punishment of their sins and due reward of their works" (459. Elliot and Dowson. Vol.VII :1964)

While he saw his success as part of some divine scheme, at the same time what is possible was the fact that he drew his power from the support of a wide range of masses be they Jats, Banjaras, Lubanas, Khatris, Gujjars and even many Muslims, all who joined his movement.

Banjaras were first to join. (*Pahlon Singh Banjare rale / far hath barche bail lad bhale: Prachin Panth Parkash*). Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda in the caravan of Bhai Bhagwant Singh Naik who travelled from Nanded to Punjab.

Banjaras supported him in more than one way. Many sold off their properties, abandoned their homes, bought arms and took part in the struggle. Others extended financial and provisional support. Banjaras were always present near army camps. They gave provisions to Sikhs during the siege of Lohgarh (December 1710). They carried weapons along with grain to Sikh hideouts in the hills (162:Muzaffer Alam:1993).

Not surprisingly, Bahahdar Shah thereafter displayed excessive ruthlessness towards them. Many of them were captured and buried alive according to his command (*Chihal nafar banjara Nanak-prastan,*

Az navah Multan vagera-dar chabutra kotwali rasida.

Agar muslman shwand bihatar, vila bikushand.

Barz rasid ki az kufr barghasht namishwand.hukumshud-bikushand.

11 October 1711:Akhbarati- Darbari-Mualla!

Banjaras gave indispensable support to the Sikhs in their struggle against Mughals. Being suppliers to the Mughal army, they always had inside information on official plans, and kept watch on the movement of armies. Possessing information and means of transport, they could communicate with speed. In such manner, they were the lifeline, eyes and ears of Sikhs.

Lubanas were also among the earliest to join the movement. They offered financial and logistic support (*Aye lubane lag gayee lar dayo daswandh un kayee hazar: Prachin Panth Parkash*).

The Jats who formed majority of Khalsa Singhs under Guru Gobind Singh, responded swiftly to the hukumnamas of Banda Bahadar. Jats of Malwa joined him without a second thought.

The Sikhs of Lahore had to avoid the check posts on roads and river passages. They travelled through the Shivalik hills and gathered at Kiratpur Sahib. Here again, trader Sikhs Kishora Singh and Pishora Singh fed them for several days. Jats formed the major contingent of combatants. While in power, Banda made favourable arrangements for the cultivators and is believed to have given lands to them. Banda predominantly led the uprising of Jat zamindars (139. Muzaffer Alam:1993) but they were primarily village level zamindars (145. Muzaffer Alam:1993).

The Khattris supported Banda in more clandestine manner as they had significant presence in the administrative and revenue service of the Mughal political system. At the same time they constituted the earliest membership of the Sikh Panth which was an open fact and known to the state. Majority of them were known as 'Khulasa Sikh' as distinct from Khalsa Sikhs. While they supported Banda with finance and provisions (Divan Hardyal of Royal camp was prominent among them), they did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives too. The case of Gulab Singh Khattri, who passed off as Banda at Lohgarh (Dec 1710), should not be seen as an isolated event. His sacrifice helped Banda to escape.

The Khattris thus faced indiscriminate persecution for their avowed support to Banda Bahadar. Bahadar Shah issued a general proclamation: *ki reeshe Hinduan urdu mualla yaksar trashand* (beards of Hindus in royal camp should be shaven off); Khattris formed majority of them. They faced humility in public when barbers accompanied by officials shaved their beards in the streets. According to Khafi Khan, some men of name and position rather committed suicide to save the honour of their visage (425. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. VII:1964).

While Khattris formed the elite minority of Banda's supporters, mass support came from so-called lowly classes, and this was well reciprocated. Under Banda, the Dalits tasted power for the first time. His association with the so-called lowly classes was a persistent concern in all official reports. Contemporary accounts by Hadi Kamawar Khan, Muhammad Shafi Warid and Khafi Khan confirm that Banda appointed these as revenue collecting officials and encouraged inter-dining among the so called high and low classes.

According to Muhammad Shafi Warid, author of *Mirat-i-Waridat* (1734), if a lowly sweeper or cobbler, "more impure than whom there is no caste (*qaum*) in Hindustan", went to attend on that rebel, he would be appointed to govern his own town and would return

with an order (*sanad*) of office of governance in his hand. The moment he stepped into a town, or village, all the gentry and notables went out to receive him (162:eds.J.S.Grewal and Irfan Habib:2001). The author hints at this social revolution credited to Banda with such examples: a sweeper sat with a raja of great status, and they felt no hostility to each other(161: above quoted). Perhaps it was the *satyug*, that Banda was referring to in his hukumnamas.

Although all Persian accounts vilify him as "a villain of Muslims", there are numerous reports which contradict this. On 28 April 1711, Bhagwati Das wrote to Bahadar Shah that five thousand Muslims had joined "the worshipper of Nanak at Kalanaur" and they are enjoying their religious freedom while with the Sikh Army. (98.Ganda Singh:1990) On 15 February 1711, one Pir Muhammed Bhatti is said to have shouted '*Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru*' at the court. (165. Muzaffer Alam: 1993) This may be an isolated incident, but it surely contradicts what was promoted as Banda's anti-Muslim image.

Banda was also helped by some hill principalities, who had all the time been enemies of Guru Gobind Singh. Probably, they had reconciled themselves to the emergence of Sikh power and a weak centre at Delhi?

The Gujjars of Saharanpur also joined Banda's struggle, claiming themselves to be Nanak Panthis. Besides, Bairagis and mendicants who accompanied royal armies on the move also acted as spies for Banda.

That Banda could mobilise support from such diverse social-religious groups for his struggle against the Mughals is one significant factor for his success. But if his success was sudden, his decline was even faster. What made him strong, made him vulnerable too. He succeeded in shaking the Mughal rule in Punjab, but this action compelled the Emperor and his formidable power to shift their attention towards the Punjab. They immediately sought to fill the political vacuum which had come about as result of their preoccupation with the Deccan since Aurangzeb's time. Banda drew his strength from the appeal of religious sentiment but in the longer run, this confined his support base to Sikhs and provoked more than one attempts of *jehad* against him.

Persian chroniclers portray Banda's eventual downfall as a source of great relief for the Muslims. Among his support groups too, alienation set in fast. The Khattris' alienation was quite visible as the Jats had apportioned the lion's share for themselves, leaving little for others. Anarchy was affecting trade, thereby directly impacting

on Khattri commercial interests which became vulnerable soft targets. They could not sustain their zeal for Banda's radicalism. On the other hand, forces which opposed Banda, consolidated themselves, alliances against him grew larger and broader. Banda was clearly in the sway of historical movements which he interpreted as divine forces.

But these forces acted very fast, presented themselves as an iron hand of armed struggles. All armed struggles suffer from the inevitability of 'schism'. Amongst those who fight against the state, there is always present a microscopic minority which yearns for temporary suspension of the struggle or even compromise with the state. When and ever the state is able to identify and win over such a minority, the movement's days can be numbered. The Sikh movement under Banda Bahadar proved no exception. The Mughal Empire, under Farrukh Siyar (1712), with the help of Abdus Samad Khan, was able to identify this minority which constituted Kahan Singh Trehan and Binod Singh Bhalla who readily accepted Mughal 'patronage' for the sum of Rs. 500 per day. They stationed their troops at Baghbanpora, Lahore and when Banda attacked Lahore, they repulsed him. (*Lahore bachai foot singhan Banda dayo bhajhae: Prachin Panth Parkash*). When Banda extended his hand for reconciliation, they rejected it.

While in Gurdas Nangal (December 1715), Banda made a desperate call for more troops in a letter to Bhai Mani Singh:

*Guru Fateh, man jog bhai jio.
Veri ne bada jabardast ghera ghatyo su.
Anaj pani di koi amad nahin.
Parivar bahut muskal main hain.
Niane roi jat hain.
Sikh sangatan no sitabi hathyar deke bhejna.
Kisi vakat ka bharosa nahin.
Bunge sahib ardas karni.
Khalse di fateh hogue.
Asan antam samay tak joojhne ka nem kitosu.
(Sukhdial Singh:2003)*

When the Sikhs at Amritsar became aware of Banda's sufferings during the siege, they decided to join him immediately, cancelling all differences. But Kahan Singh did not permit them. Giani Gian Singh clearly writes:

*Singh chadan hit the bhaye tayre
Kahan singhadik ne hatkare
Tehan Bhalle Sodhi Bedi
Bat mel ki inhun chedi*

(*Sri Guru Panth Parkash. Vol.IV:1999*)

While the Sikhs were ready to march, Kahan Singh and others (probably Binod Singh) dissuaded them. Tehan (Kahan Singh) and Bhalla (Binod Singh) dismissed the proposal of reconciliation with Banda.

The prevalent theme that both of them were present in Gurdas Nangal and Binod Singh left it because he wanted an open battle against Mughals, is plain fiction created by Bawa Sarup Das Bhalla (Mehma Parkash:1776) and accepted by almost all major historians. The Kahan Singh Binod Singh duo was not with Banda in Gurdas Nangal but, to the contrary, were in the service of Farrukh Siyar.

But how did they make these Sikhs believe that they were right and Banda was wrong? They deserted him, joined the Mughals, secured privileges, acted as agents of state to persecute Bandai Sikhs – they abandoned Sikh movement's fundamental goal, yet could emerge as the leaders of so called *Tatva Khalsa* or "real Khalsa"!

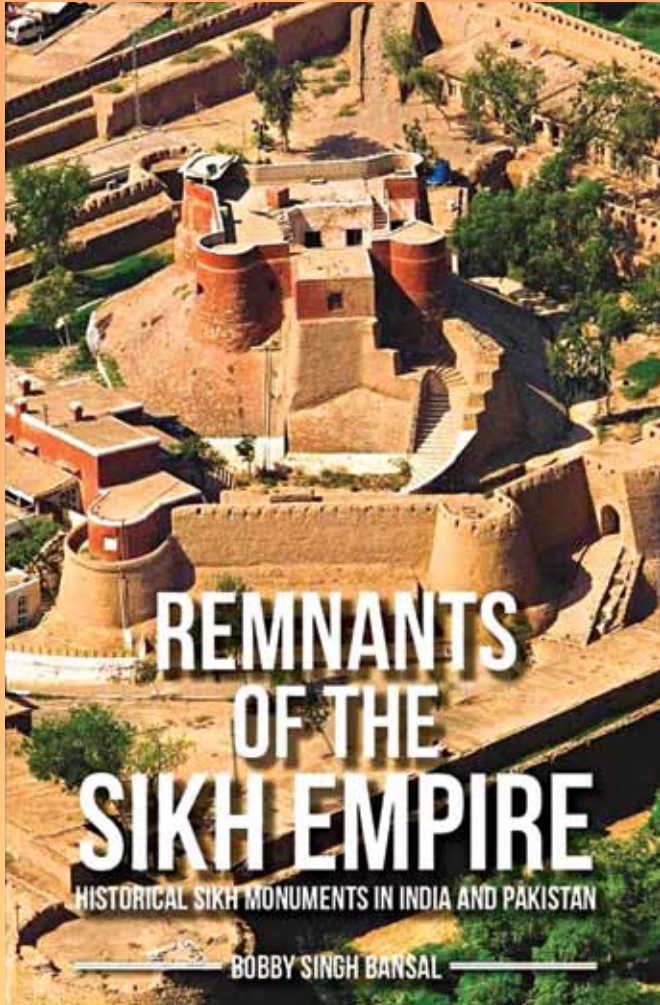
They succeeded because they exploited some fault lines which had existed between Banda Bahadar and the Khalsa panth. Most significant among these was Banda's attempt to introduce ritual innovations (*Fateh Darshan*) and eating taboos. Sikhs saw it as clear departure from Khalsa Rehat. They also became suspicious of two of his real, or imaginary, ambitions: one, to be the sole claimant of political power, two, to be the eleventh Guru of Sikhs. Whether Banda really saw himself as a guru or patshah is not clear, but this surely provided lethal propaganda material in the hands of his opponents.

On the other hand, Bawas propagated their *sahibzada* status, which granted them natural recognition of the Sikhs. For legitimacy of their actions, they used Mata Sundari's name (reference Sarup Das Bhalla). Their real objective was to enjoy patronage of the Mughal state while not losing their status as natural leaders of Khalsa panth. The so-called *Tatva Khalsa* arose out of this dual, but contradictory, agenda. *Tatva Khalsa* thereafter dominated Sikh historical scholarship for a long time. Rattan Singh Bhangu, Giani Gian Singh, Bawa Sarup Das, Kartar Singh Klaswala, Bhai Vir Singh, Ganda Singh, Harinder Singh Mehboob, have all acted as its apologists but Sikh history is waiting for the honest interpretation of both Banda Singh Bahadar and the *Tatva Khalsa*.

Amanpreet Singh Gill

(Assistant Professor (Political Science) at SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi. This work is based on his and Malkiat Singh's forthcoming book '1708: Remembering the Last Journey of Guru Gobind Singh.')

Remnants of the Sikh Empire: Historical Sikh Monuments in India and Pakistan



Whilst the previous issue of *Nishaan* (II/2016) focussed on the lavishly illustrated coffee-table book by Singapore-based author/photographer Amardeep Singh, this work by author Bobby Singh Bansal, *Remnants of the Sikh Empire*, covers not only historical Sikh monuments in Pakistan but also in India. Amardeep Singh's book *The Lost Heritage: Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* explored Sikh heritage on the Pakistan-side of undivided Punjab. Bobby Singh's work sheds light on historical monuments on both the Indian and Pakistan sides of the erstwhile Sikh Empire and in a manner which constitutes a veritable bridge to the enduring legacy of Sikhism in this vibrant area of the sub-continent.

Bobby Singh Bansal is an award-winning writer, historian and documentary filmmaker. He is also author of several books on Sikh history and the diaspora, including *The Lion's Firanghis – Europeans at the Court of Lahore* (2010); *The Sikhs of Kabul – A Forgotten Community* (2012) and *The Road to Mandalay – The Burmese Sikhs* (2014). His latest publication, *Remnants of the Sikh Empire: Historical Sikh Monuments in India and Pakistan* highlights long-forgotten or neglected monuments including forts, havelis, memorials, mansions and palaces on both sides of the Punjab.

Since 1989, the author has spent many years in travelling to "tricky regions of the Pakistan-Afghan border to collect information first hand." This book reflects his passion in tracing Sikh heritage through physical remains and manifestations on both sides of erstwhile undivided Punjab and took four years to complete. His persistence has paid off and we have in our hands an extremely well-researched and intricately historical manuscript which focusses on the magnificent Sikh Empire and records the life and times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early 19th century.

The author believes that "*Remnants of the Sikh Empire* catapults the reader into an unforgettable journey," and adds that his work "will engage people in the subject and help them understand the seminal Sikh contribution in the 19th century."

Remnants of the Sikh Empire: Historical Sikh Monuments in India and Pakistan provides a glimpse of the actual, day-to-day lives of the royalty as well as the people of 19th century undivided Punjab and the socio-political turmoil witnessed as a result of Afghan and British invasions, as also dissensions within, none more insidious than betrayal of the Dogra brothers, who were entrusted with incredible power.

Such, and many more events, which altered the course of history have been documented by Bobby Singh Bansal and indeed, this book makes for extremely competent and interesting reading.

Panorama from the author's lens



Haveli of Sardar Jwala Singh Padhania
(Lahore district - Pakistan)

This dilapidated haveli belonged to Jwala Singh, a powerful courtier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who was married to the elder sister of Rani Jindan. He maintained a huge garden in Lahore, which Ranjit Singh often visited, such was his stature in court. He rose to eminence and built his palatial mansion in the village of Padhana, lying just a few hundred yards on the Pakistan - Indian border. Since partition, most of the families had shifted to India but some members of the family remained in Pakistan and converted to Islam in order to protect and maintain their ancestral properties. Unfortunately, the entire estate has been neglected, the inner walls and ceilings have caved in and the frescoes have long been destroyed.



Haveli of Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala
(Attari, Amritsar District - India)

Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala was not only a loyal and ferocious courtier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, but he was related to him through the marriage of his daughter Bibi Nanki to Kanwar Nau-Nihal Singh, grandson of Ranjit Singh. The village of Attari was a major place during the Sikh reign, several notable soldiers and nobles were employed in the Sikh army and at the Sikh court. The haveli of Sham Singh stands in a shameful manner, the outer walls and turrets have collapsed, the once imposing gates ruined. This image I took in 2008 shows the main entrance of the haveli which led to the fort, it was the site where the marriage rituals (milnia) took place between Sham Singh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1837.



Amritsar by Italian Photographer Felicio Beata, c1860

This rare b/w aerial photograph taken by Felicio Beata of the Golden Temple was included in my book simply to show readers and historians that Amritsar back in the mid-1850s was so different to Amritsar we know today. Long gone are the beautiful decorated 'Bungas' which aligned the 'Parikrama' once built by the powerful nobles of the Lahore Durbar. Today, the area around the Golden Temple is a mere fraction of its original architectural beauty, in this unique image one can clearly view the grand palace to the north of the picture - it was built by Ranjit Singh as a wedding gift for his grandson Prince Nau Nihal Singh in 1837, sadly it no longer exists today.



Fortress of Hari Singh Nalwa
(Katas, Chakwal, Salt Range - Pakistan)

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh seized the territory in the trans-Indus region, the entire area was governed by Hari Singh Nalwa. In order to maintain law and order, he built a series of outposts parallel to the Afghan-Punjab frontier and the fort along with several temples at Katas became a major Hindu pilgrimage site.



Haveli of Rani Nikkain (Sheikhupura Fort - Pakistan)

The majestic royal palace of Mai Nikkain was the wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and mother of Kanwar Kharak Singh, she was the daughter of Sardar Khazan Singh, chief of the Nikkain Misl. This entire structure was built under the guidance of Mai Nikkain in the late 1820s within the Sheikhupura fort. So grand was the entire edifice that it speaks volume of how much money was spent on it back in the early 19th century. Mai Nikkain spent most of her life here till her death in 1838, the frescoes inside the haveli are still visible and the underground chambers are also intact despite their condition. Sadly, this is not the case for its exterior, which has collapsed and the right portion of the grand mansion has subsided which is near to collapse. Again, it is in desperate need of urgent attention by the relevant authorities.



must have been a beautiful mansion when it was constructed, with several wall paintings still intact although they have slightly faded over time. Overall, the monument stands but in a deplorable condition, the imposing archways depict a sense of immeasurable wealth that once existed in the area during the last days of Sikh rule.



Tomb of Akali Phula Singh (Naushera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - Pakistan)

Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala was not only a loyal and ferocious courtier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, but he was related to him through the marriage of his daughter Bibi Nanki to Kanwar Nau-Nihal Singh, grandson of Ranjit Singh. The village of Attari occupied major role during the Sikh reign, several notable soldiers and nobles were employed in the Sikh army and at the Sikh court. The haveli of Sham Singh stands in a shameful manner, the outer walls and turrets have collapsed, the once imposing gates ruined. This image, which I took in 2008 shows the main entrance of the haveli which led to the fort, it was the site where the marriage rituals (*milnia*) took place between Sham Singh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1837.

Haveli of Raja Hira Singh (Jasrota, Jammu District - India)

Raja Hira Singh was the son of Raja Dhyani Singh, the all-powerful wazir of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The family were known as the Dogra brothers, which included Gulab and Suchet Singh. The mountainous region of Jammu and Kashmir was tightly administered by the Dogra brothers on behalf of the Lahore Durrbar. Raja Hira Singh was given in jagir the town of Jasrota and surrounding villages in 1834 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh when he was bestowed with the title of 'Raja' in 1829. In 1844, the Sikh army of Lahore attacked the fort of Jasrota and plundered its treasures. It

Bobby Singh Bansal is a British born Sikh historian, writer and documentary filmmaker who studied Business Management and Economics in England. After completing his studies he joined the family clothing business until 1990. In 2001, he founded a company, which he sold in 2008 to then concentrate on his passion - researching and writing about Sikh History. He is married to an artist from Punjab and has two sons - Aman and Reuban Singh.

His interest in **Sikh Heritage and Culture** has allowed him to interact with the Sikh diaspora all over the world. He has attended major International Sikh and Indian conferences and has given numerous lectures on the theme of *Sikh Heritage and History* in Canada, France, United States, Scotland, Singapore, India, Sweden, Italy, Australia, Norway, Malaysia and Pakistan

Selected extracts from the book 'Remnants of the Sikh Empire'

Gujrat, In the Punjab



This Gujrat, not to be confused with the Gujarat state of India, is a city in north Punjab and now part of Pakistan. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had taken Gujrat from Sardar Sahib Singh Bhangi in 1810. According to the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, the maharaja thereafter renovated the famous Sheeshanwala Gate of Gujrat Fort, which had been built by the third Mughal Emperor Abu'l-Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar, more commonly known as Akbar. One of maharaja's European officers, Colonel John Holmes, had also carried out further fortifications to the boundary wall of the fort in 1835.

Since the Partition in 1947, the only edifice to have survived in Gujrat, which was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was a baradari within the garden of Muqarab Khan, located to the south of the old fort. But it was demolished and replaced by a shopping mall in 2012. Extensive work had been done on the baradari earlier on the order of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and his revenue official Lala Kanhaiya Lal in 1835. Additions were later made by Kanshi Nath Pandit who was the *kardar* - a



revenue official of Raja Gulab Singh. However, there are no relevant details as to when precisely these additions were executed. Interestingly, the former baradari once housed Sikh soldiers captured by the British during the 'Battle of Goojerat' (as they called it) in 1849.

The southern section of what remains of the once mighty Gujrat fort now is occupied by migrant families. The district's six historical Sikh monuments also include a few Sikh shrines built by the Sikh ruler which are crumbling today. A survey carried out by the local Gujrat District Committee in 2010 revealed Sikh monuments and *baolis* (deep wells) attached to the Sikh shrines were built during the reign of Sardar Sahib Singh Bhangt and Sardar Gujjar Singh in 1776.

In the nearby villages of Souk Kalan and Beowali the *baolis* have been destroyed beyond recognition. Though several monuments were built during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Gujrat district, the region is historically associated with the Anglo-Sikh War memorials. 'The most plausible explanation is that these monuments were built by the British long after the Sikh Empire had been dismantled and hastily absorbed into the British Indian Empire.'



Ironically, British graves are perhaps the only monuments of any significance to have survived and represent the only historical evidence linking the city to the Sikh period. Yet, these historical landmarks, although of British origin, are integral to the roots of Sikh history and its continual legacy. All the memorials from the First Anglo-Sikh War are otherwise located in Indian Punjab. The battles of Mudki, Aliwal, Ferozeshah and Sobraon were fought mainly near the Sutlej River, hence, known as part of the Sutlej Campaign.

Raja Gulab Singh



8-year old Prince Duleep Singh along with Dogra Gulab Singh and Sikh Sardars meeting the British representatives in Lahore. (Getty Images)

Gulab Singh was born on 21 October 1792 in the village of Anderwah near Samba in Kashmir province. Along with his two brothers Dhyani Singh and Suchet Singh, he wielded tremendous influence and power over the area. It was during the early 1820s that Gulab Singh was sent on numerous military campaigns in the Jammu hills by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He seized the towns of Bhimber and Rajouri and made it part of the Sikh Empire. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was elated with Gulab Singh's latest territorial acquisitions and decided to place Jammu solely under his charge, Gulab Singh being conferred the title of Raja of Jammu. The maharaja personally travelled to the town of Akhnoor, about twenty-five kilometres west of Jammu to oversee the historical coronation of Gulab Singh on the banks of the Chenab River on 4 May 1822.

Raja Gulab Singh enjoyed continued support from Maharaja Ranjit Singh. While Raja Gulab Singh usually spent most of his time in Jammu governing the vast jagirs of his family, he also led many new expeditions in the adjoining mountain territories. Acting in the name of the Lahore Durbar, Raja Gulab Singh gradually brought under his control the vast areas lying between the Indus River and Kashmir which ultimately also led to the conquest of Ladakh in 1834. Raja Gulab Singh was virtually overlord of the Himalayan region, in the name of the Sikh Empire. Along with the various regions Raja Gulab Singh and his brothers conquered, he was lavishly awarded additional tracts of land by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for his good work.

We need to explain why the Jammu Brothers exercised such extreme power, especially Raja Gulab Singh, that they earned the admiration of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Firstly, by nature Raja Gulab Singh was gracious, mild-mannered and yet a very able leader. Secondly, he had the firm backing of his brother Raja Dhyani Singh, the powerful wazir, whose administrative skills and political acumen were much respected at the Lahore Durbar. Thirdly, although the maharaja overlooked the tyrannical methods of his rule in the hills, he was nonetheless rewarded constantly to the degree in which he extended

the frontier of the empire.

However, in view of the unmitigated loyalty of the Jammu brothers to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, this weakened the position of the maharaja's immediate heirs and other royal claimants to the Sikh throne. In fact, during the final years of the Sikh reign, Raja Gulab Singh, secured himself the title of 'Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir' from the fragments of the disintegrated Sikh Empire. In the vacuum and anarchy that ensued at Lahore after the death of Maharaja Sher Singh, the only legitimate surviving son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the minor Prince Duleep Singh, who was proclaimed the maharaja at Lahore. In order to avoid the bloodshed and prevailing conspiracies, Raja Gulab Singh kept away from Lahore when the restless Sikh army had become agitated. He, again, cautiously remained aloof from the political entanglements, prior to the First Anglo-Sikh War flaring up on its southern border in 1845. After the two wars in which the Sikh army was defeated, he negotiated for peace between the British and the Sikhs. (These are serious allegations, historically recorded, wherein the Dogra brothers actually betrayed the Sikh Kingdom, a fact sheepishly acknowledged by the British, who won by intrigue rather than feat of arms.)

His diplomatic skills not only brought much-needed peace to the region, but also helped him carve out territories that he could rule over. The British Government had imposed a hefty fine of Rupees 1.5 crores for war reparation from the exhausted Lahore treasury, which it was unable to repay. So, by the Treaty

of Amritsar, Raja Gulab Singh was hastily recognized as the independent Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and the entire hill territory was sold to him for the princely sum of seventy-five lakh rupees. Whether Raja Gulab Singh ever paid the said amount is debatable. While several sources have implied that it was a mere hoax and the British never really collected the colossal sum from the Dogra ruler, there is another school of thought that holds a view to the contrary. Historian Bawa Satinder Singh, in his book *The Jammu Fox*, vigorously contradicts the allegations and insists that the payment was honoured in two instalments – one of fifty lakhs, which was paid by May 1846 and the remaining twenty-five lakhs finally remitted in full in March 1850. Apparently, a copy of the final receipt for the purchase of Kashmir, signed by the members of the Board of Administration of Punjab was displayed at an exhibition at Punjab Record Office Museum in Lahore in 1973.

However, one must not ignore the fact that Raja Gulab Singh was extremely rich by himself and had also inherited most of the wealth of his deceased brothers. So, in my opinion Gulab Singh must have paid the amount of seventy-five lakh rupees. It must be mentioned here that a fortune of fifteen lakh rupees, purportedly belonging to his late brother Raja Suchet Singh, was discovered by the British political assistant, Captain Saunders Abbot stationed at Ferozepore. There were various claimants to the huge fortune, but it was eventually assigned to Raja Gulab Singh. In addition to this, during the power struggle between Prince Sher Singh and Rani Chand Kaur in 1841, Raja Gulab Singh looted the treasure stored in the confines of the Lahore Fort, as is clear from the following account:

Raja Gulab Singh carried away all the money and valuables belonging to Rani Chand Kaur under the pretence of safeguarding it on her behalf. He (Gulab Singh) carried off the accumulated treasures of Maharaja Ranjit Singh which were in the fort. Sixteen carts were loaded with rupees and silver coins, while 500 horsemen were each entrusted with a bag of gold seals. His orderlies were then entrusted with the jewellery and other valuable articles that were covered on the top with ammunition to hoodwink the Sikhs.

When Raja Gulab Singh finally abdicated the throne on 1856 owing to ill-health, it went to his third son Mian Ranbir Singh. Gulab Singh passed away on 7 August 1857 in Srinagar. The following day his body was taken from the Sher Garhi

Palace to Ram Bagh for a royal funeral. His last rites were performed by his grandson Mian Pratap Singh, since his son Mian Ranbir Singh was away in Jammu.

The Sher Garhi Palace was originally built by the Afghans during their occupation of Kashmir in the eighteenth century, which later also served as the royal residence for the Sikhs. Not much survives of Sher Garhi Palace, (Tiger Fortress), which sits on the banks of the Jhelum River at Srinagar. Today it is known as the Old Secretariat and houses the administrative offices of the Jammu and Kashmir Government.

The samadhi of Maharaja Gulab Singh in the historic Ram Bagh in Srinagar is surrounded by the samadhis of his descendants, including that of his grandson Maharaja Pratap Singh. Overall the samadhi is square in shape, measuring about twelve metres on all four sides and is the central samadhi. It has a raised plinth with three arched openings on each side, with a high edifice protruding out of the centre. In the inner chamber is a simple marble lattice samadhi with a gold turret of the late maharaja. Its overall design, based on the simplicity of the customary Hindu pattern, was observed throughout its construction and planning.

Although one has sufficient knowledge of the life of Maharaja Gulab Singh, little has been mentioned of the legacy that survives his name. Although many forts situated in Jammu and Kashmir built by the Mughals and Afghans, which were later taken by the Sikhs, were restored by him, nothing new of historical significance was built during his reign.

The Palace of Maharaja Sher Singh



Gurdaspur was home to the very powerful Kanhaiya Misl whose members played a dominant role in the establishment of the Sikh Empire. Its first leader was Jai Singh, whose only son Gurbaksh Singh had married Sada Kaur, the daughter of Dasuanda Singh of Wadhni in Ferozepore district. When Gurbaksh Singh was killed in a battle in 1793 along with Mahan Singh, the father of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, it was Sada Kaur who became leader of the Kanhaiya Misl. She became the mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when she married off her only daughter, Mehtab Kaur to the maharaja in 1796.

Sada Kaur was instrumental in guiding the young maharaja to several victories during the early phase of his career, which led to his meteoric rise to power. Even though Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a good equation with Sada Kaur, his relation with Mehtab Kaur was not as good. Mehtab Kaur, it is reported, spent most of her life at her mother's house in Batala district in Punjab. Despite their cold relations, the couple had two children, the twins Sher Singh and Tara Singh, who were born in 1807. However, if rumours are to be believed, it is said that Mehtab Kaur was barren and couldn't have borne the children. The benevolent maharaja awarded Batala and the surrounding territories in jagir to Prince Sher Singh so as to be able to control the neighbouring hill states.

There are numerous buildings in Batala which have been constructed using Nanak Shahi bricks. The Jal Mahal or the Water Palace which was the royal residence of Prince Sher Singh was built using Nanak Shahi bricks as well. According to some historians at the Barings Christian College, the Jal Mahal was originally constructed by Shamsheer Khan, in the centre of the city in the sixteenth century during the reign of the third Mughal Emperor, Akbar. Shamsheer Khan had been the local ruler of Gurdaspur and owed his allegiance to the Mughal Empire before the Sikhs took over. Later, when Prince Sher Singh became the overlord of Batala, he built the baradari in the centre of the lake as a royal retreat for his wives.

On the north-eastern side of the building there is a large square room with a passage through which the first floor can be accessed. The inner walls were adorned with exquisite mirrorwork and vivid

murals. Major parts of the wall paintings have simply faded or have been damaged and the roof of the building has also collapsed. The periphery of the reservoir, originally lined with Nanak Shahi bricks, has through the years been partially destroyed.

Later, Sher Singh also constructed another palace known as the Anarkali Palace, which became his summer residence. Presently it is known as the Baring Union Christian College.

One must mention here that Batala contributed considerably to the educational needs of the city. In 1868, Reverend Francis Henry Baring, a Christian missionary from England, arrived in Amritsar and set up a school for boys from rich Christian families. Later, he shifted the school to Batala, housing his school at Anarkali Palace, which was renamed Baring Boys Boarding School in 1878. The Jal Mahal baradari and the Anarkali Palace were connected through a tunnel, whose remains are still visible near the college even to this day.

The Baradari of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

About eleven kilometres north of the town of Gurdaspur in northern Punjab stands Dinanagar. However, in the records of the Lahore Durbar that can be accessed, the town of Dinanagar has been mentioned as Adinanagar. The only things of historical significance in the town today are the decaying monuments associated with the maharaja and his French officer, General Jean-Baptiste Ventura.

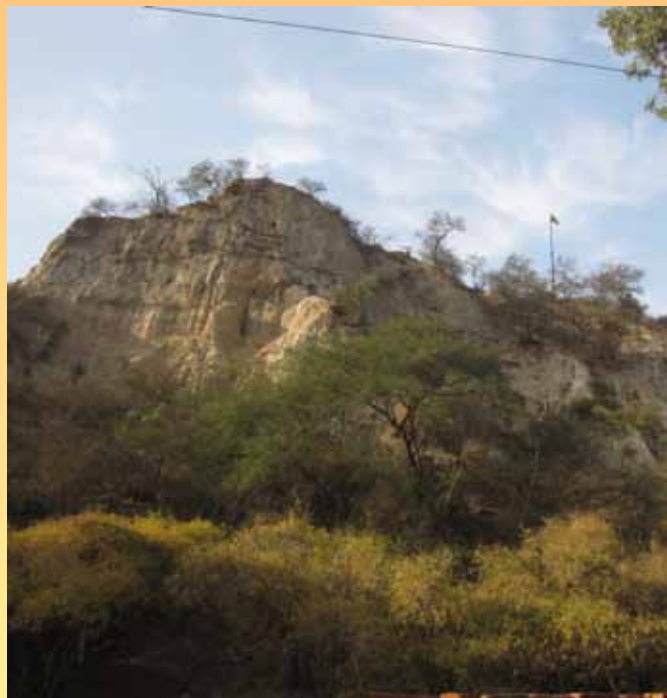


The ruined baradari of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is probably the only structure that links the Lahore Durbar with this region today.

The maharaja used the baradari as a summer palace whenever he would be en-route to Pathankot or the hill-stations during summer months. The baradari's importance has been documented by various British officials in the gazettes of 1838. It is here that the maharaja met the various members of the British Empire, including Sir William H Macnaghten, Claude Martine Wade and William Osborne (the nephew and aide-de-camp to the governor-general, Lord Auckland) on 29 May 1838, when the Tripartite Treaty was signed. William Osborne noted the following about his meeting with the maharaja:

On reaching the veranda, Runjeet's minister Rajah Dhyan Singh came forward and conducted us around the palace to the hall of audience, at the entrance we found the Maharajah himself waiting to receive us. After a friendly embrace he led us to the upper end of the hall and seated us on golden chairs opposite himself. Rajah Sher Singh was seated on his right and Rajah Hira Singh upon his left. The Maharajah is cross legged in a golden chair in simple white, wearing no ornaments but a string of enormous pearls round his waist and the celebrated Koh-i-Noor diamond on his arm.'

The two-storey structure, whose ceilings have long caved in and the wall paintings that once adorned the edifice defaced, has so far survived the vicious onslaught of the real estate vendors who have plans to replace it with a modern, multi-storeyed structure.



The key features of this baradari are the lotus-shaped towers located at the main entrance along with niches that were once richly embellished with colourful designs of birds and other animals. As most of the lime plaster from the outer walls has fallen off, the Nanak Shahi bricks lie exposed.

Not far from the baradari of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is the mansion of General Jean-Baptiste Ventura, which was originally connected by an underground tunnel with the baradari. Although the tunnel has long been filled with concrete and sealed by the local authorities, parts of it are still visible. Only a few monuments

Treaty at Ropar

Towards the eastern side, the territorial limits of the Lahore Durbar extended as far to the Sutlej River in Ropar. Although the town was never under the control of the Durbar, it is historically important since this is the place where Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the fourteenth British Governor-General of India, Lord William Bentinck, met on 26 October 1831. This meeting was a show of power and strength on both the sides, more than anything else. For this meeting the maharaja who was accompanied by Hari Singh Nalwa, Fakir Azizuddin and his French officer General Jean Francois Allard, 10,000 of his best cavalymen and 6,000 members of the regular infantry. It greatly outnumbered the forces brought by the British: a mere two squadrons of the 16th Lancers and two squadrons of irregular cavalry, eight guns of the 31st Regiment and two battalions of the Bengal infantry.



In essence, it was a clandestine mission of Lord Bentinck to hinder the progress Maharaja Ranjit Singh's advance southwards into Sindh province. Furthermore, a member of the Supreme Council of the Governor-General, Charles Metcalfe, objected to the duplicitous nature of the British plan and wrote:

It is a trick in my opinion, unworthy of our government which cannot fail when detected, as most probably it will, to exit the jealousy of the powers on whom we play it.. It is not impossible it will lead to War.

It is reported that the maharaja had been apprehensive during the meeting and desired that negotiations over Sindh be concluded swiftly through a joint Anglo – Sikh venture. However the maharaja's proposal for a joint venture held no value, as Sindh already had a British Resident, Sir Henry Pottinger. The treaty proved to be disadvantageous to the Sikh Empire and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's senior courtiers criticised him for signing the treaty.

The place where the meeting took place has been turned into a memorial. The memorial site is located within the ground of a park named appropriately, Rendezvous or Shahi Mulakat. Park along the Sutlej River. The memorial is only two metres and its height is definitely not in accordance with its historic significance. The memorial is not clearly visible from the bridge over the Sutlej River and is usually overlooked by tourists. Despite the political significance of this memorial, the park, built by Punjab Government remains in a very bad condition.

The Gobindgarh Fort at Amritsar



In historical terms, not much survives in Amritsar from the time of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The city has grown and expanded and this expansion has

led to the systematic demolition of several historical monuments. Of the twenty-three historical gates that had once enclosed the city, not a single one exists today. A pity indeed! The only other monument, associated with the maharaja is the samadhi of Desa Singh Majithia, who served the maharaja in many of his early campaigns and in 1812 was made the nazim (administrator) of the entire hill region extending to Chamba, Nurpur, Mandi, Kullu and beyond. The samadhi is situated close to the famous hundred-year-old Durgiana Temple.

However, to the south-west of Amritsar stands the majestic, over 250-year-old, Gobindgarh Fort. Earlier known as the Gujar Singh Fort or Bhangion-da-Qila, it was built in the 1760s by the Bhangi rulers of Amritsar as a mud fort. Maharaja Ranjit Singh captured the fort as well as the five big cannons of the Bhangi Misl, including the famous Zamzama gun which was known as *Bhangion-di-Tope*.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh then commissioned his commander Shamir Singh Thethar, son of Sardar Prem Singh Thethar, to rebuild the fort in 1805. It took four years to complete it and he was appointed its first Qiladar (commandant). The imposing structure, with a gilded dome at its entrance, was encircled by a huge wall and eight watchtowers. The maharaja further strengthened the fort and renamed it Gobindgarh Fort after the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh. About 12,000 durbar troops were deployed to guard the fort from all possible attacks. It was here that Maharaja Ranjit Singh kept all his treasures and treaties secure in the *Toshakhana* (treasure-house).

The city was then handed over to Fakir Imamuddin, who became the custodian and throughout the thirty years of their association, enjoyed the unalloyed confidence of the canny Maharaja. He held the keys to Gobindgarh Fort where the fabled Sikh treasury and armoury were located and held charge of the arms, arsenals and royal stables within the fort till 1844.

The fort was taken over by the British after the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846. It was then garrisoned by British troops, and a century later housed refugees, during the Partition in 1947.

The British demolished the outer fortifications and built a large cantonment around the fort, where numerous living quarters, including a six-bedroom hospital, were erected. After Indian Independence in 1947, the fort was used as a garrison by the Indian army.

The entire fort was originally built with Nanak Shahi bricks and lime plaster, laid out as a square structure, with four bastions at each corner. It also had four parapets and two huge gates. It is rumoured that within the fort, twenty-five cannons were mounted on the ramparts surrounded by a moat. The main entrance is known as the Nalwa Gate, in memory of the great Sikh warrior, Hari Singh Nalwa, while the Killer Gate guards the rear entrance of the fort.

During the British rule the fort also housed the infamous *phansi ghar* – gallows – from where General Michael Francis O'Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, used to view the hangings of Indian freedom fighters.

The Ferozepur Fort



The war memorial in Ferozepur

The influence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh extended far beyond the Sutlej River until the Treaty of Amritsar was signed on 25 April 1809. Though the Sutlej River formed the official boundary between the British and the Sikhs, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had some talugas or Sikh dependencies well in to the Ferozepore district, which were duly recognised by the British as being part of the Sikh Empire. Ferozepur is located nearly seventy-five kilometres away from Lahore.

Under the British, Ferozepore (as it was then spelt) was of strategic importance when it came to ruling over North India. It was base for much arms and ammunition of the British forces and therefore a place of considerable importance. When the British decided to resuscitate the Sadozai regime in Afghanistan (founded by Sado Khan in the seventeenth century), they needed help from the Sikh Empire. They wanted to overthrow the current king, Dost Muhammad Khan Barakzai and restore the former king Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk on the throne at Kabul, which led to Sir William Macnaghten's mission to Lahore and the signing of the Tripartite Treaty in June 1838. The Tripartite Treaty was signed in order to keep Russia away from invading India through Afghanistan (genesis of 'The Great Game'). The British and Sikh armies co-operated in formation of the 'Army of the Indus'.

Shah Shuja had already signed the treaty in Ludhiana. Therefore the signatures of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland were needed. Towards the end of November 1838, the

British and Sikh troops assembled at Ferozepore. The meeting that took place between the governor – general and the maharaja at the Ferozepore Fort on 30 November 1838, has been described thus by Emily Eden, sister of Lord Auckland:

He is exactly like an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye. Ranjeet had no jewels on whatever, nothing but the commonest red silk dress. He had two stockings on at first, which was considered an unusual circumstance: but he very soon contrived to slip one off that he might sit with one foot in his hands, comfortably. Next to him sat Heera Singh, a very handsome boy, who is Ranjeet's favourite, and was loaded with emeralds and pearls. Dhyyan Singh his father is the prime minister.

It was from here that the Army of the Indus had prepared to embark

on its arduous military campaign in Afghanistan in 1838 (which led to that ignominious defeat for the British). It was in 1842 that a Sikh delegation was again invited to Ferozepore by Lord Ellenborough (Edward Law, the seventeenth governor – general of India between 1842 and 1844) to witness the grand military review organised by him in honour of the return of the Army of the Indus from Afghanistan. Here is an account of the Sikh delegation that had been invited to Ferozepore.

The young prince (Kunwar Partap Singh) more taken up with his fine ornaments and jewels than with what was passing around him, began to get tired, and twice sent a message to Rajah Dhyan Singh, requesting permission to change horse for an elephant; but his request was very positively denied. Lord Ellenborough returned the visit on 2 January, the customary durbar was held in the Sikh camp near the fort, during which presents for Queen Victoria "a perfectly beautiful green Kashmir tent, embroidered with silk" and a portrait of Ranjeet Singh by a local artist were formally handed over along with gifts given to each senior attendee.

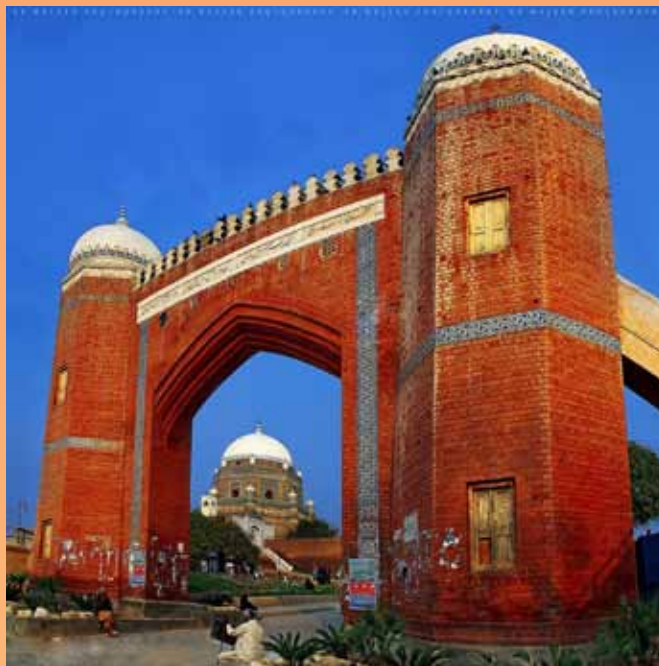
After the presentations, the 5,000 Sikh troops who had accompanied Kunwar Partap Singh were reviewed by Lord Ellenborough who invited the young prince to sit with him in his howdah. The weather had turned suddenly chilly, and Rajah Dhyan Singh, who was sitting behind them, very considerably took off his choga and wrapped it round Prince Partap Singh. Rajah Hira Singh had reached Lahore before the others did. He called on Maharajah Sher Singh and gave him an account of his meeting with the governor – general. Later that afternoon, Kunwar Partap Singh and Rajah Dhyan Singh arrived and during the journey to Shalimar Gardens with the Maharajah narrated the details of their reception at Ferozepore.

Although the Ferozepur Fort is of immense historical significance, yet access to it is denied to the common public, since it is today a major embankment of the Indian army at Ferozepur. Fortunately, I managed to obtain permission to visit it.

The fort is not in good shape, though efforts have been made to restore portions of it. The outer walls are about four metres high and two metres thick. The fort is rectangular in plan and the lower portions of the wall where lime plaster has fallen off, one can identify the Nanak Shahi bricks that were originally used during construction. The Indian Army made its barracks around the fort and in the process made numerous additions which have simply obliterated the original features of the historic fort.

The Dewans of Multan

Multan will forever be associated as the First Battle of the Second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848-49. In April 1848, the city of Multan, under the leadership of Dewan Mulraj defied the rule of the East India Company, whose Commissioner for the Punjab, Frederick Currie, then sent several forces of locally raised troops to help quell the revolt. However, for nearly two centuries (1528-1752) Multan had been ruled by the Mughals, the city in southern Punjab being famed for several Sufi tombs that miraculously survived, such as the octagonal tomb



of Sheik Rukn-i-Alam, constructed of red bricks and ornamented with turquoise and white tiles.

The Afghan king, Ahmad Shah Durrani (also known as Ahmed Khan Abdali), founder of the Durrani Empire, annexed the city when the Mughal Empire was disintegrating. Durrani appointed a governor to the city in order to exact tribute from the local landowners. The situation changed when Maharaja Ranjit Singh infested Multan with his army in 1818. The Sikhs used the famous Zamzama gun (which originally had belonged to the Afghans) during the eighty-four day siege, in which thousands died on both sides and most of the buildings within the fort were destroyed.

Historians claimed that when Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed Dewan Sawan Mal as governor, the city prospered like never before and that the reign was a peaceful one as well. He was succeeded by his son Dewan Mulraj.

The Multan Fort



A dilapidated outer boundary wall of the Multan Fort

The Damdama watchtower is a part of the Multan Fort wall that occupies the north-western corner, the only original part of the wall that survived the onslaught during the siege of Multan by the British in 1848. Its history is therefore intimately connected with the Sikhs, although there is no mention of the Damdama in British records after the annexation of Punjab in 1849.

However, a map prepared during the reign of Nawab Muzaffar Khan (the Durrani Governor of Multan from 1779 to 1818) shows the Damdama near the Sikki Gate, built on a mound of earth. Two of its walls are sloping while the longer sides are vertical with five added rectangular buttresses. Due to the populated settlement, these had to be added to stabilize the structure. Unfortunately, due to poor construction the buttresses separated from the main structure and additional cracks appeared in the restoration works. Today the access to Multan Fort is through the Qasim Gate and the garden in which it stands is not being maintained properly, plus its environs are not impressive. Only a fraction of the historical Multan Fort remains standing today. Huge portions of the fort were destroyed by cannon fire during the two Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Dewan Sawan Mal

Dewan Sawan Mal reinforced his position in the Lahore Durbar by raising the strongest contingent of the Sikh army in southern Punjab. He constructed a deep moat fourteen metres wide and seven metres around the imposing Multan citadel. Dewan Sawan Mal's wise policies of maintaining low taxation generated considerable land revenues for the Lahore Durbar - and for himself. Over a short period of time his popularity grew to such an extent that he increased his domain over most of the province that yielded nearly forty lakh rupees per annum in revenue for the state treasury.

With his firm and energetic administration he raised the prosperity of the province which perhaps had never been achieved by any previous administrator.

His success however was set on a collision course with the Jammu Brothers (Rajas Dhyan Singh, Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh) in the north, who conspired to destroy him after the passing of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when Dewan Sawan Mal simply ceased to pay tribute. Instead, he merely retained an alliance of convenience with selected rulers of the Sikh aristocracy at Lahore. Confrontation with the Jammu Brothers was inevitable in the final contest for supremacy over the Sikh Empire. However, his flamboyant career was cut short when he was assassinated by a rebellious soldier in September 1844. He was cremated at his ancestral haveli besides a huge pond at Akalgarh in Gujranwala district, now in Pakistan.

Dewan Mulraj Chopra

Dewan Mulraj (1814-1851) was the son of Dewan Sawan Mal, and came into limelight during the chaotic period in the Punjab, but he died young at 37. The origins of this illustrious family are in Akalgarh, today known as Alipur Chatha, in Gujranwala district, where their ancestral estates are still located. Some members of the family also maintained other properties in Lahore till the Partition of 1947, with several iconic monuments historically linked to Dewan Mulraj. Numerous accounts of his life have been published, such as in *The Trial of Dewan Mulraj* by author Sita Ram Kohli in 1932. It is beyond doubt that they were one of the few notable families who had acquired immense wealth and influence at the Lahore Durbar during their respective tenures as governors.

However, after Dewan Sawan Mal's passing, Dewan Mulraj got entangled in court intrigues which led to his rapid and humiliating downfall prior to the Second Anglo-Sikh War in 1848. Unfortunately, his was an opposite personality to his gracious father and seen as a despotic ruler by the populace who detested his overbearing governance. During the anarchical period at the Lahore Durbar he had successfully suppressed a mutiny by Sikh troops when they had demanded higher wages. In the winter of 1844, during the brief premiership of Raja Jaivahar Singh, he was ordered to pay a substantial amount of revenue that he owed to the Lahore treasury.

As the governor of Multan, Dewan Mulraj deposited rupees eighteen lakhs to the Lahore treasury, which was somewhat lower than expected by the treasury. However, Raja Jawahar Singh acknowledged the payment without demanding the arrears from Dewan Mulraj. Following



'Storming of the Citadel'

this, Dewan Mulraj actually became a favourite with Raja Jawahar Singh and under his command were eight Muslim and two Sikh battalions stationed at Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan, during the First Anglo-Sikh War. When Sir Henry Lawrence was installed as the British resident at Lahore, he openly interfered in the affairs of the Lahore Durbar, but also kept a keen eye on the local administrations in different areas, removing officers loyal to Dewan Mulraj, and relations between the two became strained. This can be further analysed in the Political Diaries of the Agent to the Governor-General.

After the British introduced additional levies and customs in the Multan province, this led to further altercations between the British resident and Dewan Mulraj. The British resident lodged numerous complaints against the governance of Dewan Mulraj who was then recalled to Lahore in the winter of 1847. In sheer frustration he offered his resignation, which was accepted by Sir Henry Lawrence who duly appointed Sardar Kahn Singh Mann as governor-designate in conjunction with two British officers, Lieutenant Patrick Vans Agnew and Lieutenant William Anderson. On their arrival at the citadel in Multan, troops loyal to Dewan Mulraj rebelled against the two English officers and Sardar Kahn Singh

Mann, and all three were brutally killed. Dewan Mulraj was compelled to support the gruesome action of his troops, with the result being that he was branded a rebel by British who then besieged Multan with an enormous force.

However, Dewan Mulraj was coerced to resist surrender of the citadel to the large British force that had laid siege. On 22 January 1849 when the citadel was stormed, he felt that further resistance was futile and laid down his arms along with his supporters. He was awarded a death penalty, which Lord Dalhousie, the governor-general later commuted to life imprisonment. He was supposed to be banished to Singapore, but was incarcerated at Fort William in Calcutta. Later he was bound in chains to be sent to the holy city of Benaras, but died en route at Buxar in Bihar. His body was cremated by a few of his loyal servants on the banks of the Ganges River.

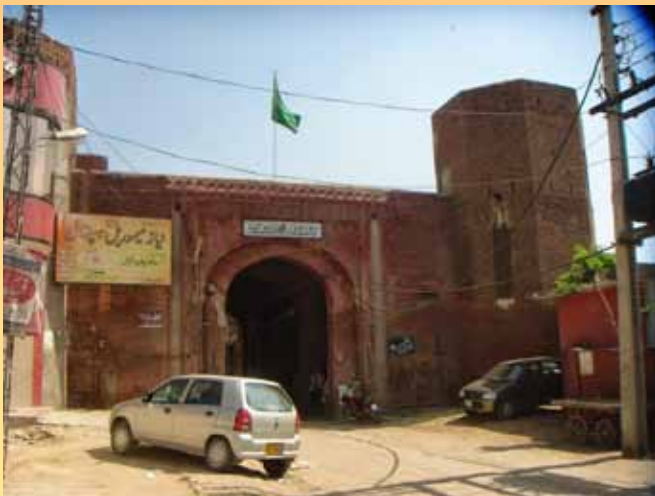
In the early twentieth century, as per *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, a book by W.W. Hunter published in 1908, the Muslims constituted about 78 per cent while the Sikhs were a mere four per cent of Multan's total population in 1878. The Sikh population then grew rapidly, to the extent that by 1901 it constituted nine per cent of the total population of Multan.

The Fort at Akalgarh



Map of present day Pakistan with arrow pointing towards Akalgarh near Gujranwala

The legacy of Dewan Mulraj continues not only in Multan but also in Akalgarh (known today as Alipur Chatha) in Gujranwala district of Punjab where the once formidable fort of the Dewans is located, measuring about one kilometre square in dimension alone, and including many beautiful buildings. The Dewans were indeed influential and powerful at the time to build such grand edifices.



The town of Alipur Chatha now encircles the fort but back in the nineteenth century, the fort would have

been a potent symbol of authority and wealth. The main entrance to the fort is from the west through a huge arched gateway that then leads to various ornate havelis. They are abundantly decorated with carved wooden doors and windows embellished with intricate floral designs on the facades. Entering some of the havelis, one notices that even the balconies are exquisitely carved with bedecked niches. Sadly, these ornate carvings have been damaged, since the facades have been painted over in a brown lacquer. The exterior of the havelis, especially the entrances made of ivory marble, have been defaced and damaged over the decades. Though, its overall architectural symmetry and elegance is still partially intact, yet it is in desperate need of preservation.

Samadhis of the Dewans



To the south-east of the fort are the ancestral samadhis of Dewan Mulraj and his father Dewan Sawan Mal, lying adjacent to a huge water tank. Both hexagonal shaped mausoleums measure about three metres in height, excluding the height of the white dome on the top. In case of both the samadhis the exterior walls had originally been rendered with lime plaster, but over time have been damaged. The lime plaster from the lower portion has visibly separated from the samadhis, revealing the original Nanak Shahi bricks. One can easily make out that when newly built it must have been a very impressive and formidable structure. Today the frescoes on it, though faded, are somewhat still visible on certain sections on the arched panels of the outer walls.

Gurdaspur, in India

Gurdaspur was home to the very powerful Kanhaiya Misl whose members played a big role in establishment of the Sikh Empire. Its first leader was Jai Singh, whose only son Gurbaksh Singh had married Sada Kaur, the



The Palace of Maharaja Sher Singh

daughter of Dasuanda Singh of Wadhni in Ferozepore district. When Gurbaksh Singh was killed in a battle in 1793 along with Mahan Singh, the father of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, it was Sada Kaur who became the leader of the Kanhaiya Misl. She became the mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when she married off her only daughter, Mehtab Kaur to the maharaja in 1796.

Sada Kaur was instrumental in guiding the young maharaja who won several victories during the early phase of his career, which led to his meteoric rise to power. Even though Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a good equation with Sada Kaur, his relation with Mehtab Kaur was not as good. Mehtab Kaur, it is reported, spent most of her life at her mother's house in Batala district in Punjab. Despite their cold relations, the couple had two children, the twins Sher Singh and Tara Singh, who were born in 1807.



There are numerous buildings in Batala which have been constructed using Nanak Shahi bricks. The Jal Mahal or the Water Palace which was the royal residence of Prince Sher Singh was built using Nanak Shahi bricks as well

(see picture). According to some historians at the Barings Christian College, Jal Mahal was originally constructed by Shamsher Khan in centre of the city in the sixteenth century during the reign of the third Mughal Emperor, Akbar. Shamsher Khan was then ruler of Gurdaspur and owed his allegiance to the Mughal Empire before the Sikhs arrived. Later, when Prince Sher Singh became the overlord of Batala, he built the baradari in centre of the lake, a royal retreat for his wives.

On north-eastern side of the building there is a large square room with a passage through which the first floor can be accessed. The inner walls were adorned with exquisite mirror work and vivid murals. Major parts of the wall paintings have simply faded or have been damaged and the roof of the building has also collapsed. The periphery of the reservoir, originally lined with Nanak Shahi bricks, has through the years been partially destroyed.

Later, Sher Singh also constructed another palace known as the Anarkali Palace, which became his summer residence. This is presently used by the Baring Union Christian College.

The Haveli and Samadhis of the Kanhaiya Misldars

Back in the nineteenth century, the city of Fatehgarh Churian in Gurdaspur district was the power base of the Kanhaiya Misl when it was ruled by its chief Sardar Jaimal Singh. In 1808 Maharaja Ranjit Singh occupied the Kanhaiya territory, which included the cities of Pathankot, Kalanaur and Fatehgarh Churian.

Jaimal Singh's only daughter Chand Kaur married Prince Kharak Singh in 1812, but in the same year Jaimal Singh died from poisoning. After Jaimal Singh's death, Maharaja Ranjit Singh confiscated all his treasures stored at Fatehgarh Churian. When Jaimal Singh's widow had a son, who was named Chanda Singh, the Maharaja released a portion of the estate to the infant. However, later Chanda Singh's fate turned around and Fatehgarh Churian was once again supported by Prince Nua Nihal Singh who had despatched most of his private treasures there until the accession of Maharaja Sher Singh to the throne in 1841.

It is rumoured that the haveli at Fatehgarh Churian housed the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond for several months. Apparently, just after the death of Maharaja Kharak Singh, his widow, Rani Chand Kaur, had transferred her jewellery, along with other precious gems including the Koh-i-Noor diamond, to her ancestral haveli at Fatehgarh Churian before staking a claim to the Sikh throne in 1840.



Maharaja Sher Singh



The Koh-i-Noor, Mountain of Light in its original setting

When Maharaja Sher Singh ascended the throne the following spring he ordered Missr Beli Ram, the court treasurer, for an account of all the state jewels. On learning that the Koh-i-Noor was missing from the vaults of the Lahore treasury and happened to be in the possession of Rani Chand Kaur, he immediately despatched forces to get back the prized jewel. It is said that the famous diamond was carelessly kept by Rani Chand Kaur, reportedly left in an ordinary wooden box in a drawer in the bedroom amongst other ordinary items. When durbar troops arrived, Rani Chand Kaur simply handed it over without any ado.

The ancestral haveli of Rani Chand Kaur stands to the east of the town although the elaborate frescoes that

existed on the interior walls have long vanished. The outer walls have been adorned with simple red paint, depicting a peacock and a deer in white.

The Haveli of Arjun Singh

In the historic town of Rangar Nangalia in Gurdaspur district of Punjab are remnants of a fort and a haveli belonging to Sardar Arjun Singh, one of the many powerful nobles who had served the Lahore Durbar. Unlike many historical dwellings that have got ruined due to sheer neglect, it is a miracle that this haveli has survived in good shape.

Most of the historical structures in Rangar Nangal have been demolished or are in a dilapidated condition, but there is no question about the fact that it must have been an important town of the Sikh Empire. Most of the havelis were built by Sardar Karam Singh, the grandfather of Arjun Singh in the 1820s. The original haveli still stands, but in a very bad shape. The inner walls as well as the archways have collapsed. Similar, is the case with the ancestral haveli of Arjun Singh, which stands three storeys high. Its majestic entrance is in desperate need for preservation. The arched entrance stands about seven metres tall.

The most striking feature of these monuments is that at some point an attempt was made to restore them, as is evident from the English bricks that have been used. These are slightly bigger than the Nanak Shahi bricks which were commonly used in Punjab.

Pul Moran (Pul Kunjari)



It is interesting to visit this historical structure, Pul Moran, (popularly known as Pul Kunjari) located located

in the lush fields, virtually on the India-Pakistan border. Pul Kunjari literally means 'the bridge of a nautch girl', the bridge was named after Rani Moran Sarkar, a nautch girl whom the maharaja was besotted with.

Whenever the maharaja halted between Lahore and Amritsar during his various trips, he would stay at the baradari where Moran Sarkar usually performed. She ended up captivating the maharaja, but as it was difficult for Moran and the maharaja to meet openly in Lahore or Amritsar, their surreptitious rendezvous was near near Moran's village of Makhanpur in Amritar district. According to a legend, once, when Moran was coming for a rendezvous with the maharaja, she lost her embroidered Punjabi slipper in the Hansali canal. When she arrived barefoot and narrated the whole incident, the maharaja promptly instructed the construction of a bridge over the Hansali canal. This bridge was named Pul Moran after Moran Sarkar.

Today, the monument has become one of the numerous forgotten relics of the past. Pul Kunjari is a very small bridge built over a canal, which was merely five metres wide when it was originally built in the 1830s. It is constructed with the commonly used Nanak Shahi bricks. It still exists and is used by the locals although the canal has since dried up.

The outer portion of the baradari, built to commemorate this liaison has since collapsed. The central portion of the baradari has survived and has arched balconies built with Nanak Shahi bricks.

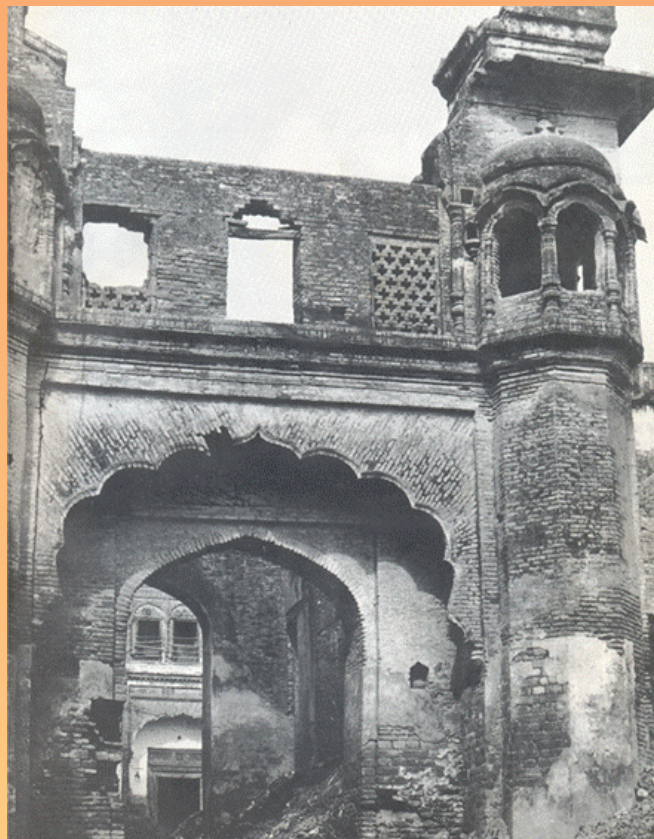
The Haveli of General Gulab Singh Pohovindia

Pohovind is a famous village in Lahore from where the legendary scholar-cum-soldier Shaheed Baba Deep Singh came. He had fought two fierce battles against the Mughals at Amritsar in 1757 and died on the battlefield. General Gulab Singh Pohovindia was another brave soldier who hailed from Pohovind served Maharaja Ranjit Singh in several campaigns. The career of this courageous soldier was a long and illustrious one. Gulab Singh Pohovindia was trusted so much by the maharaja that when Hari Singh Nalwa died suddenly in 1837, the maharaja sent him to sort out confiscating the property of Nalwa, which was being bitterly fought over by the family.

Gulab Singh did not participate in the First Anglo – Sikh War, however. His troops remained firmly at Lahore to protect the minor Duleep Singh from any harm. He was appointed the last Sikh governor of Peshawar in 1847, before retiring from active military duty the following

year. He died in 1854 and his son Colonel Ala Singh succeeded him. Both were buried outside their haveli in Pohovind village, where their samadhis stand. This ancestral haveli, believed to be over two hundred years old is decaying due to neglect and lack of maintenance. Over thirty rooms exist in the haveli, which were once occupied by the descendants of Gulab Singh.

The Attari Fort



The Gateway to the famous haveli of General Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala in village Attari where the Milni ceremony with Maharaj Ranjit Singh took place

Attari, also spelled Atari, is a village of Amritsar District, just short of the India-Pakistan border at Wagah and is synonymous with numerous historic personalities who served at the Lahore Durbar.

Leading the personalities is Nihal Singh who served Maharaja Ranjit Singh from as early as 1801 and in fact, played a crucial role in helping build foundations of the Sikh Empire. However, it was his son General Sham Singh Attariwala, who consolidated the powerful alliance with the Maharaja through the marriage of his daughter, Bibi Nanki, to the maharaja's grandson, Prince Nau Nihal Singh in 1837.

The wedding was celebrated with such pomp and show that it is reported to have cost General Sham Singh an

estimated fifteen lakh rupees. The milni (a wedding ceremony in which men from both the families meet each other) between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and General Sham Singh Attariwala took place at the main entrance to General Sham Singh's vast haveli. "On the actual day of wedding the proud Maharaja had taken Prince Nau Nihal very early in the morning to pay his obeisance at the Golden Temple. Then once the religious ceremony was over the entire royal escort of the bridegroom made their way to Attari to perform the wedding rituals, it is no exaggeration to state that when the front part of the royal escort group had arrived at Attari, the rear part of the escort group was still in Amritsar."

Even after the demise of the maharaja, senior courtiers and military officers from Attari remained loyal to the Lahore Durbar despite the political upheavals that eventually debilitated the Sikh Empire. General Sham Singh Attariwala continued with his military duties but preferred not to involve himself with court politics. In his final years, he served the maharaja's successors, before retiring from military services and settling at Attari. But with incessant intrigues that infested the Sikh court, he was compelled to pursue Raja Hira Singh and his followers who had looted the Lahore treasury. Raja Hira Singh was overtaken by the ferocity of General Sham Singh's men and was killed in action.

Sham Singh was so loyal to the Lahore Durbar that he came out of his retirement when he was asked by Rani Jinda to protect the kingdom from an imminent attack by the British. He died fighting the British at Sobraon in Tarn Taran district of Punjab on 10 February 1846, date that is commemorated annually as 'Sobraon Day' by the Attariwala families in Attari in a grand manner.

Attari is situated between Lahore and Amritsar, somewhat obscurely, despite its strategic location on the

India-Pakistan border. Even though thousands of people visit the Wagah Border to watch the Beating Retreat Ceremony between the Indian and Pakistani troops, yet very few of them take out the time to visit the historical town of Attari (where the Wagah Border is located) in its entirety. At the entrance of the town are the royal samadhis of General Sham Singh and his ancestors. Of the three royal gates that existed in the town, only one remains, and that too is in a ramshackle condition.

The Fort: The Attari Fort is the most important monument of Attari. However, in the midst of the encroachments all around, the historic Attari Fort and the haveli of the Attariwala chiefs stand in a deplorable condition. The fort was originally built in the late eighteenth century on fifty acres of prime land. On the left side of the entrance of the fort was a deep well that provided water to the soldiers and their families stationed within the fort. The well was so deep that elephants were used to pull the water to the surface. Even today the well is functioning as efficiently as it did centuries ago.

The Haveli of Rani Jindan



The beautiful wife of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and mother of Maharaja Dalip Singh



This two storeyed structure was earlier situated within the periphery of the Ram Bagh gate and enclosed by a huge wall. It is clear that the haveli was built during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and not by the British, as stated by some contemporary historians.

The haveli of Rani Jindan must have once been beautiful, but now has lost its grandeur and reduced to an engineering workshop. The people who work in this building are entirely unaware of its historical importance. However, some later additions to the haveli by the British can be clearly figured out, since the British used bricks with dimensions larger than that of Nanak Shahi bricks.

Other Historic Havelis

The historic village of Chinna Karam Singh is located

some eighteen kilometres north-west of Amritsar on the Amritsar – Ajnala Road and is associated with Sardar Karam Singh, a soldier who had initially served the powerful Bhangi Misldars in the eighteenth century. After the death of his father Sardar Tara Singh, Karam Singh served Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the campaigns of Kashmir, Multan and Peshawar. Not much of historical importance relating to the Sikh period survives in the village, except the haveli, and that too is in a deplorable condition. Built using the Nanak Shahi bricks, it stands two storeys high. The overall condition of the haveli is bad, with the first floor having collapsed completely.

The town of Rajasansi is situated about eleven kilometres north of Amritsar, on the Ajnala Road. It was historically associated with the collaterals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, primarily the powerful Sandhanwalia chiefs.

Ramnagar, renamed as Rasul Nagar



Painting depicting the Battle of Ramnagar



The cemetery with residence of Mahraja Ranjit Singh in the background



Plaques in memory of the British Army (The Cavalry Divison, 8th Light Cavalry, 14th Light Dragoons and the King's Royal Hussars) killed on 22 November 1848, during the Battle of Ramnagar

Rasul Nagar is a tiny but famous and historically important town in Gujranwala district, situated near the river Chenab and was a busy ford to cross the Chenab. I visited this town to discover some monument etc. or anything associated with the Battle of Ramnagar, during the Second Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Plaques in memory of the British Army (The Cavalry Divison, 8th Light Cavalry, 14th Light Dragoons and

the King's Royal Hussars) killed on 22 November 1848, during the Battle of Ramnagar

Before moving any further, I want to share an interesting piece of history that the old name of this town was Ramnagar and was changed to Rasulnagar after 1947. This is a well-known fact, but interestingly, when the Sikhs captured this town from Chatthas in 1767, they changed it from Rasulnagar to Ramnagar, perhaps after their fourth Guru Ram Das ji. So actually after 1947 and the creation of Pakistan, the name was not changed, only the original one was restored.

During the second Anglo-Sikh war, the first of the three major battles, was fought here on 22 November 1848. Khalsa army has taken positions on both sides of the river in order to stop the advance of English army. The battle was not decisive and Sikhs retreated towards Chillianwala, where that historic battle was fought. The cemetery is about a kilometre away in the north east of the town. It is located at 32° 20' 12.32" N, 73° 47' 30.10" E.

Excerpted from a blog by Tariq Amir

Marking the Tercentenary

Martyrdom of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar: 1716-2016





Obviously, the tercentenary of the martyrdom of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar has various political parties in India's capital vying for mileage and this was evident when the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government renamed the impressive Barapullah elevated corridor after the great Sikh warrior on 9 June 2016.

A few weeks later, on 21 June 2016, a commemorative silver coin to mark the tercentenary martyrdom anniversary of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar was released by the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in New Delhi at a largely attended ceremony in New Delhi, organised by Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.

The coin was presented to Arun Jaitley by Manjit Singh GK, at which time, India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley referred to Baba Banda Singh Bahadar as a *mahapursh* and said, "Baba Banda Singh Bahadar established the first sovereign rule in Punjab. He showcased how to run a secular Government. Baba Ji was martyred 300 years ago near the Qutab Minar. The coin is the replica of the original coin issued by Baba Banda Singh Bahadar. Along with the coin, if a documentary can be made on Baba Banda Singh Bahadar, that will be great. The Khalsa's history is full of courage and sacrifice. Baba Banda Singh's history has a great place in the Sikh history. I am happy that large scale programmes are being organised in Delhi. A programme is also being organised in Punjab which will be attended by the Prime Minister," he concluded.

DSGMC President Manjit Singh GK said that Baba Banda Singh Bahadar had released the coins on the name of first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Dr. Jaspal Singh



Arun Jaitley released coin on Baba Banda Singh Bahadar



Along with the commemorative silver coin, Jaitley also released a CD of songs paying homage to the Sikh warrior, Baba Banda Singh Bahadar

(Vice Chancellor of Punjabi University), MP Prem Singh Chandumajra (Member Parliament from Sri Anandpur Sahib), S. MPS Chadha (Senior Vice President of DSGMC)

and former Rajya Sabha member Tarlochan Singh also spoke at the occasion.

Shortly thereafter, on 3 July 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the commemorative event to mark 300th martyrdom anniversary of Baba Banda Bahadar saying he was not only a great warrior but was also very sensitive towards common people. “Bahadar ji will remain the source of inspiration for generations to come. Baba Banda Singh Bahadar ji was not just a great warrior but was also very sensitive towards common people. Today, I pay tribute to him, his bravery and sacrifice.”

“Sometimes a single moment in life gives direction to a person. Similar thing happened with Banda Bahadar ji. After getting inspiration from Guru Gobind Singh ji, he imbibed values of a warrior and embarked on a new journey for social development,” he added. Prime Minister Modi also said during his rule poor people and minorities felt secure and his every decision was aimed at development. “During Baba Banda Singh Bahadar ji’s time, for the first time, farmers were given their rights, common man felt empowered, During his time, poor people and minorities felt secured,” he said.

Some months later, on 18 December 2016, Punjab’s chief minister Parkash Singh Badal was to unveil a larger-than-life statue of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar at Nabha House in the centre of New Delhi. The statue, built at a cost of Rs 65 lakh, is 17-ft tall and placed atop a pedestal at a height of 22 feet from the ground (see lead picture during installation).



Ibratnama

Mohammad is Qasim's Account of the Battle of Chapar Chiri In 'Ibratnama'

When the news reached His Highness Wazir Khan, Faujdar of Chakla Sarhind, he rode out with the troops he had with him, to punish this evil rebel force. A great battle occurred twelve kurohs from Sarhind. The young men of the army of Islam, showing exemplary bravery, tasted martyrdom after obtaining repute in the field of valour. Especially was heroism displayed in this battle by Sher Muhammad and Khwaja Ali, Afghans of Kotla Maler, who in this sarkar were masters of a host and commanded trust. After much fighting, they stood firm like the Pole Star within that very circle and surrendered their lives to the Creator. When the chiefs of the army, by the will of God, were sent to their death, Wazir Khan, despite his old age, weakness of hand and foot, and the decline of the strength of the body, strove to shoot arrows and encourage his companions. But once the boat of hope is destroyed by an accident, it cannot thereafter be set to sail by the strength of any of the professional captains of the world of stratagem. At last, the wicked Infidels extended their victorious hand for the plunder of the (Mughal) army and (the seizure) of the commander's elephant. Treating the corpse of that martyred Saiyid (Wazir Khan) with every visible indignity they could devise, they had it suspended from a tree.

With such malevolence, they marched on the city of Sarhind. When the news of this calamity reached the city, all alertness and action deserted the luckless officials and the helpless citizens (ri'aya). Wazir Khan's own eldest son did not bother about (his father's) treasure and hoard, but, taking the young and old of his household with him, took the road to Shahjahanabad (Delhi). Everyone who within that short time abandoned goods and property and took to exile, with every humiliation and dishonour, at least saved his own life. Anyone who got involved in thoughts of gathering his goods, or searching for mounts for carriages, or (other) various designs, fell prisoners at the cruel hands of those wicked Infidels. Troop after troop of unfeeling sweepers surrounded the city, in the manner of a thorn-bush enclosing a flower garden and

laid their insolent hands on people's possessions and proceeded to dishonour both the small and the big.

They specially plundered the goods and houses of Suchadanand (Sucha Nand), Chief Clerk (*Peshkar*) of the late Wazir Khan. You may say, he had gathered and set up these for this day, so that the flower-garden may become the ground for the growth of thorn bushes and Paradise turn into the nursing ground of the vile crow! Praise be to God, in the court of the Divine Avenger, a helpless ant can be the cause of the death of the man-killing snake, and an impotent and powerless gnat can bring about the destruction of a bloodthirsty elephant. What has been heard from trustworthy persons of that area is that this unjust, noxious raw man in the time of government of the martyred Wazir Khan had withheld no cruelties from being inflicted on the poor and had laid every seed of tumult for his own advantage; so he reaped the fruit of it all. Otherwise, persons who were guarded by God's protection, scorned their own large treasures and fled with their honour intact. Some, by changing their clothing, remained concealed in that city and stayed safe from the oppressive hand of that tyrannical crew. The harm that came to persons and places and honour and dignity, without precedent, a feeling of sadness and civility does no permit one to record; it is well known to contemporaries and eyewitnesses. In short, that flood, which overthrew the foundations of the honour of a whole world, left nothing undone in destroying that city and the inhabited places of that neighbourhood. So far as possible, they did not let anyone else retain arms, horses, other goods and chattel of chiefship. They called upon most people to adopt their own disreputable faith; some willingly, and others under compulsion, obeyed. A Jat called Baz Singh, one of the wretches from pargana Haibatpur, belonging to the suba of the Panjab, had the accursed turban-tail of pseudo-chiefship tied on his head to assume the subadari of Sarhind, appoint officers over the parganas, and carry out destructive activities. He waited for the coming of warriors from the void".

'The Most Wonderful Object in the Whole World'



The Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; Image courtesy The Sikh Foundation International

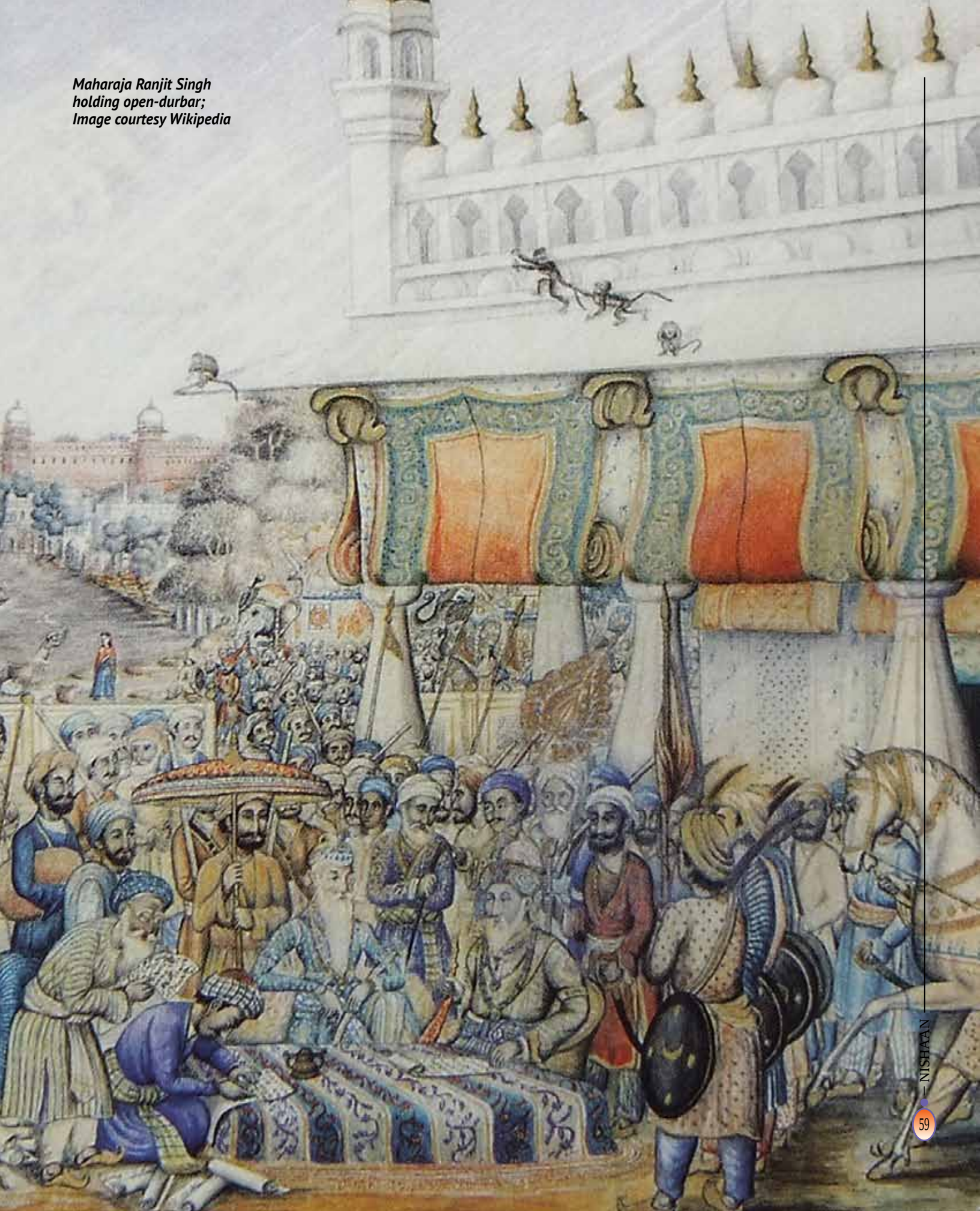
The Austrian traveler Baron Charles Hugel remarked that the state established by Ranjit Singh was 'the most wonderful object in the whole world'. Like a skilful architect the Maharaja raised a 'majestic fabric' with the help of rather insignificant or unpromising fragments. In retrospect, it is possible to see that Ranjit Singh did evolve a structure of power by which he could reconcile all important sections of his subjects to his rule, and he could induct many of them to be enthusiastic in his support. He revived prosperity and minimized oppression. He created opportunities for members of several sections of the society to improve their social position. It is in this context that we can appreciate the position of the Sikh community during the early nineteenth century.

We can form a general idea of the number of Sikhs and their distribution in the dominions of Ranjit Singh. In the areas covered by the former Mughal provinces of Lahore, Multan and Kabul there were about 12 million persons. In this population there were about a million and a half Sikhs who accounted for about 12 per cent of

the total population. Furthermore, the Sikh population in the dominions of Ranjit Singh was concentrated in the upper Bari, Jalandhar and the upper Rachna Doabs. In fact, though this region was much smaller in area than the rest of the dominions of Ranjit Singh in the plains, it contained more than 50 per cent of the total population, and nearly 90 per cent of the total Sikh population. Nearly half of the Sikh population of this core region was concentrated in the area covered by the later districts of Lahore and Amritsar. The impression formed by Alexander Burnes in the 1830s was not off the mark when he observed that the Sikhs formed about one-third of the total population in the area of their greatest concentration. Burnes carried the impression that the number of Sikhs had been increasing year by year.

However, the importance of the Sikhs in the early nineteenth century was not due to their number. Rather, their number was increasing partly due to their importance. Over 50 per cent of the ruling class was formed by the Sikhs. It is true that Ranjit Singh inducted a considerable number of persons on merit, irrespective

Maharaja Ranjit Singh holding open-durbar;
Image courtesy Wikipedia



of their creed or country. Apart from the well-known European officers in the army, there were several important civil functionaries like Diwan Bhawani Das, Diwan Ganga Ram, Diwan Ajudhya Prashad and Diwan Dina Nath, who did not belong to the Punjab. Among them were also persons like Jamadar Khushal Singh and his nephew Tej Singh who accepted the baptism of the double-edged sword to join the Sikh fold. However, the number of Punjabis among the members of the ruling class remained much larger. There were men like Diwan Muhkam Chand, Mir Diwan Chand, Diwan Moti Ram, Diwan Kirpa Ram, Diwan Sawan Mal, Faqir Azizuddin, Faqir Nuruddin, Faqir Imamuddin, Diwan Sukh Dayal and Sarab Dayal who all served the Maharaja as *jagirdars* and vassal chiefs, were matched in importance by the Sikh vassal chief Fateh Singh Ahluwalia who served the Maharaja with great distinction.

Furthermore, since Ranjit Singh gave service *jagirs* to many disposed chiefs, and the number of Sikh chiefs, and the number of Sikh chiefs among them was the largest, they became a part of the ruling class. This was equally true of the *jagirdars* of the former chiefs. In fact men like Hukma Singh Chimni, and the Majithia and Atariwala Sardars, who were among the most important members of the ruling class, belonged to this category. Even the new men, like Hari Singh Nalwa and the Sandhanwalia Sardars, rose to eminent positions. A commoner like Colonel Mihan Singh, or Dhanna Singh Malai, could rise to nearly the highest rung. There is hardly any doubt that the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs of the core region the Sikhs formed the largest component. There were some *khattris*, *kalas*, *nais* and *jhiwars* among the Sikhs nobles. By far the largest bulk, however, consisted of Jats who constituted also the dominant agricultural caste in the core region. Among the hereditary *jagirdars* also the Jat Sikhs formed the largest bulk.

In the army of Ranjit Singh the Sikhs were represented in a large numbers. The Khalsa horsemen had initially established Sikh rule in much of the Punjab. The new rulers depended almost exclusively on cavalry, and their forces consisted very largely of Sikh horsemen. Many of these forces were taken over by Ranjit Singh when he subverted the Sikh principalities. The regular cavalry too was raised mostly by recruiting Sikhs as horsemen. Ranjit Singh encouraged the Punjabis in general and the Singhs in particular to join the infantry and the

artillery raised on European lines. In the 1830s, several commanders of the infantry and artillery units were Sikh; the number of Sikhs increased as the ranks became lower till the foot soldier or the gunner was reached. We have no exact figures, but it may be safe to suggest that more than half of the men in the army of Ranjit Singh were Sikh, which would mean about 50,000. Among these too the representation of the Jats of the core region was the largest.



Taking the salute: the Army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh numbered more than 50,000 men

The share of the Sikhs in revenue-free grants given by Ranjit Singh was the largest. The Sodhis and Bedis, who did not belong strictly to religious classes and who in fact maintained a considerable number of horsemen, got a very large share. Towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign the Sodhis were enjoying *jagirs* worth 500,000 rupees a year, and the Bedis were receiving 400,000 rupees. A descendant of Dhir Mal at Kartarpur, Sodhi Sadhu Singh, was lavishly patronized by Ranjit Singh; several villages were given for the Granth Sahib compiled by Guru Arjan which was in his possession. Eminent among the Bedis was Baba Bikram Singh of Una, son of Baba Sahib Singh. Their importance in the early nineteenth century was no less than that of any courtier of the Maharaja. Bhai Ram Singh and Bhai Gobind Ram, sons of Bhai Wasti Ram, figured prominently at the court of Ranjit Singh and his successors. They were more important than the court *granthi*, Bhai Gurmukh Singh. The revenue-free grants received by Sikh individuals and institutions, apart from the Sodhis and the Bedis, amounted to hundreds of thousands of rupees. Nearly 60 per cent of the total

revenue alienated by the state in favour of religious personages and institutions was enjoyed by the Sikh grantees. The Nirmalas, the Nighans and the Akalis were among them, and they all represented the Singh component of the Sikh community.

The Singh component of the community spread into the countryside more in the early nineteenth century than ever before. During the grim struggle between the Khalsa and the Mughal administrators it was difficult to find a village entirely of the Singh. The number of such villages in the early nineteenth century ran into hundreds. The largest addition to the number of Singhs from the countryside came from amongst the Jats of the core region. The bulk of the Sikh peasantry belonged to the areas which had produced the largest number of Sikh rulers and Sikh *jagirdars*. Agricultural clans other than those of the Jats were represented in the Sikh peasantry by Mahtons, Kambos and Sainis. The gulf between the economic means of the Sikh peasant and the Sikh noble was conspicuously wide, giving support to the observation of a contemporary that the difference between the rich and the poor classes in the Punjab was greater than elsewhere in India. Service in the army of the state mitigated the poverty of a large number of the Sikh peasant families. There was a considerable number of Sikh artisans and service-performing individuals in the villages. The Mazhabi Sikhs were represented in the army.

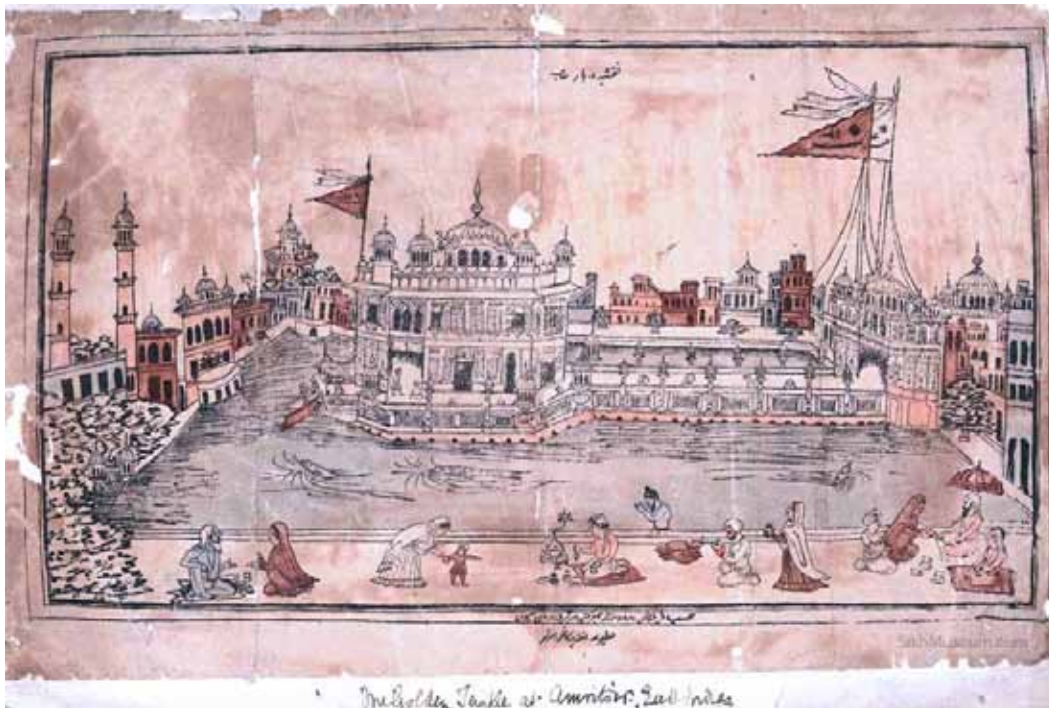
The number of the non-Singh or Sehajdhari Sikhs in the dominions of Ranjit Singh appears to have been pretty large. All the Sikhs had not become Khalsa during the eighteenth century. Those who did not take up arms against the Mughal authorities, or did not openly support the Khalsa, had not been persecuted. They went on living in villages and towns following their ordinary pursuits. In the late eighteenth century the Udasi protagonists of the teachings of Sikhism had been patronized by the Sikh rulers, and their centres began to proliferate more in the early nineteenth century. Before the advent of Sikh rule their centres numbered about a dozen; in the late eighteenth century, this number reached about fifty; and by the end of Ranjit Singh's reign there were nearly 250 Udasi centres in his dominions. Most of them were patronized by the state, and the majority of the patronised centres were in the core region. Though dispersed over the countryside in large numbers, the Udasi dispersed over the countryside in large numbers, the Udasi centres in cities and towns were much larger in size. Presumably, they catered more for the town-dwellers than for the people living in the countryside. They were useful allies of the state which needed a broad

base for the willing acceptance of its authority. Not for nothing did they receive revenues worth 200,000 rupees a year which was nearly to per cent of the state revenues alienated by way of *dharmarth*.

The Udasi version of Sikhism was in some essential ways different from what the Singhs believed in. The Udas traced their origin to Guru Nanak but gave more prominence to Sri Chand as the real founder of the path of renunciation (*udas*). They did not reject the line of succession from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, but they attached greater importance to the chain of succession from Guru Nanak, through Sri Chand and the ADi Udas, to their reigning Mahant of an Udasi establishment. They showed no great respect for the Granth Sahib, and interpreted its essential message in Vedantic terms, shifting the emphasis from a personal God to an impersonal reality. They did not subscribe to the twin doctrine of Guru-Panth and Guru-Granth. The mark of their ideas is left on the literature they produced in the early nineteenth century. They wrote expositions of several important compositions in the Granth Sahib; they wrote original *matras* of their own; they produced new versions of *janamsakhis* and *gurbilases*; they wrote about their own past. In the process they produced an interpretation of Sikhism that made them rather 'unorthodox' from the viewpoint of the Singhs.

New representative of Sehadhari Sikhism were arising towards the close of Sikh rule in the Punjab. They were working outside the core region, addressing themselves to the small number of Hindus traders and shopkeepers in the towns of the Sindh Sagar Doab. They regarded Guru Nanak as the founder of a new faith and paid equal reverence to his nominated successors. They regarded Granth Sahib as the Guru but not as the exclusive Guru, because the founders of the movements were also regarded as *gurus*. They advocated adoption of specifically Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. However, they did not insist on the baptism of the double-edged sword. Both the Singhs and the Sikhs with shorn hair could become their followers.

The Sikh Panth in the early nineteenth century was thus marked by ideological differences. Not exactly a vertical division, the first line of difference was between the Singhs and the Sehajdhari. The Singhs believed in the indistinguishability and the unity of Guruship from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and in the end of personal Guruship after Guru Gobind Singh. The doctrine of Guru-Panth. This is understandable because the doctrine of Guru-Granth was better suited to the situation of the early nineteenth century when social inequalities had to be reconciled to the ideal norm



Sketch of the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar from an early 19th century print

of equality. Every Sikh was equal in the presence of the Granth Sahib, in the *sangat* and the *langar*, but in the life outside social differences were legitimized.

The Sikh community in the early nineteenth century was not a caste-ridden society, but there was enough social differentiation in the community to infringe the idea of equality on which the Sikh Panth was based in theory and which was still espoused by a handful of the Khalsa, like the Akalis and the Nihangs. Between the ruling class and the ordinary peasant there was a wide social gulf. Among the peasant, artisans and the service-performing groups in the Sikh community, there were subsistence *jagirdars*, petty functionaries, *chaudharis* and *muqaddams*, and the well-paid soldiers of the state. In addition to these, there were Sikh traders and shopkeepers in cities and towns, some of whom were *Sehajdharis* but a considerable number of them were Singhs. However, all ideological differences and social stratification in the Sikh community appear to have been overshadowed by an awareness of political power. The Sikhs had a vague feeling that the rulers of the land were their own people.

Identification with the sovereign Sikh rule found clear expression in Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Guru-Panth Prakash* completed at Amritsar in 1841. He refers to the expulsion of the Marathas from Delhi and from the *sarkar* of Hissar in the early years of the nineteenth century, the declaration of British 'protection' over the chiefs of the Satlej-Jamuna Divide, and the establishment of a British

Agency at Ludhiana. A recurrent question which, according to Bhangu, the British were asking was about the 'right' of the Singhs to rule. Men like Ochterloney and Murray were given to understand that the Singhs were the subject people of the Mughals and, during the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali, they had illegitimately occupied Mughal territories. The implication of this view was that these territories could be taken back by the Mughal emperor, or by someone else on his behalf.

In presenting his own view on this issue, Ratan Singh Bhangu presents in fact the Singh view of Sikh history. He looks upon Guru Nanak's mission as transcending all previous dispensation; he sees no difference between the first Guru Gobind Singh; Guruship henceforth is vested in the Khalsa and the Granth; but Rattan Singh Bhangu attaches greater importance to the doctrine of Guru-Panth. In his presentation Mughal oppression is the cause of conflict between the emperors and the Gurus who had no temporal ambition, being the 'true emperors' of the spiritual realm. Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa to put an end to Mughal oppression. From the very beginning the Khalsa was sovereign. Men from all the four varnas were merged into one *varna*, that of the Khalsa. That was why '*khatris, tarkhans, kalals, nais and jhiwars*' laid down their lives for the establishment of the sovereign rule of the Khalsa.

Far from taking undue advantage of the anarchy caused by Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Khalsa in reality wrested from Ahmad Shah Abadali those provinces which the Mughals had lost to him. Obviously, the Khalsa ruled over the Punjab in their own right, justified by the sacrifices they had made and upheld by the sword they had come to wield against oppression. This was how the sovereignty of the Khalsa Panth was made manifest to the world. Ratan Singh Bhangu's assertion of Sikh sovereignty sprang partly from his apprehensions about its continuance.

Extracted from *The Sikhs of the Punjab* by JS Grewal

India-Pakistan Tensions: Why Indian Punjab Is Watching



Residents of the Punjab, on both sides of the border, have long hoped for closer economic ties between their countries, even as tensions continue to keep them apart.

India's media is focusing on the likely winner of the 2017 Assembly elections in Indian Punjab, and whether or not the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will be able to extend its footprint by triumphing in Punjab. The party, which did not perform particularly well in the Lok Sabha Elections in 2014, managed to win five seats in Punjab.

However, what the media overlooks is the fact that tensions with Pakistan are a major matter of concern for the landlocked, northwestern border state, especially within the business community. The fact that Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will not be attending the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) finance ministers meeting in Islamabad, only a few weeks after Home Minister Rajnath Singh attended the interior ministers conference, reiterates the fact that

tensions have only increased and even economic ties with Pakistan have been put on the backburner, at least for the time being.

In the past decade, whenever India and Pakistan made progress, it was in the economic sphere. Both Indian and Pakistani Punjab played a key role in pushing forward economic links, with landlocked East Punjab being especially enthusiastic. The push for economic links comes not just from successive governments, beginning with Captain Amarinder Singh's (former Congress chief minister from 2002-2007, who is leading the party's campaign for the 2017 elections); Chambers of Commerce, such as the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Lahore Chamber of Commerce, have also played a stellar role in creating constituencies for closer economic linkages, though of course the bilateral trade through

the Wagah-Attari land crossing, estimated at \$2.5 Billion remains way below its actual potential. The annual expos held on both sides of the Radcliffe Line, even during times of tension, may not have been able to influence policymakers on either side, but they have ensured that pragmatic minds from both sides of the divide keep at it and continue to explore synergies among numerous obstacles.

One of the wrong notions within sections of the strategic community in Delhi is that the desire to improve ties with Pakistan is driven solely by nostalgia, or what is dubbed as the “*Pappi-Jhappi*” (“hugs and kisses” in Punjabi) sentiment; analysts often forget the economic factors. The desire of a businessman or farmer from Indian Punjab to have cordial relations with West Punjab is not driven solely by the sentimentality and nostalgia visible among immigrants from West Punjab, settled outside Punjab, but the possible economic benefits as well.

This is not to say, that common culture or “Panjabiyat” can be totally obliterated in the relationship. The yearning and desire for a Sikh to visit historic Gurdwaras, including Nankana Sahib, Panja Sahib, and Dera Sahib, is extremely strong.

Pakistan’s PML-N and India’s BJP

There were high hopes with the election of the pro-business Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in Pakistan in 2013. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif favors closer economic ties between the two countries and obviously realizes the benefits accruing to Pakistani Punjab. Within a few months, however, tensions between both countries rose and the scope for any meaningful engagement between both sides virtually disappeared. Even the Most Favored Nation status that was to be granted to India was put on hold, on the pretext that the PML-N would grant this once the new government is elected. This did not happen.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s election in 2014 sent positive signals, with his focus on economic issues followed by his invitation to all SAARC leaders, including Sharif, to attend his swearing-in. Yet in his first few months after being elected, Modi’s BJP government decided to suspend talks after the Pakistan high commissioner in India met with Hurriyat leaders.

Starting in December 2014, there were some significant course corrections. Modi was quick to condemn the dastardly attack at the Army Public School in Peshawar. In February 2015, Indian Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan attended a steering committee meeting for

TAPI (the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline) in Islamabad and Modi also called his Pakistani counterpart on the eve of the Cricket World Cup to wish his team well. The Modi-Sharif meeting in Ufa in July 2015, on the sidelines of the BRICS and SCO summits, rekindled hopes of people-to-people contact along with revitalizing economic ties. Interestingly, one of the issues on the agenda was religious tourism. However, the July 2015 terrorist attack in Dinanagar dashed all hopes of any serious thaw. Modi’s impromptu stopover in Lahore in December 2015 once again was an encouraging step, but this too was followed by a terror attack – this time on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot.

The weakening of the PML-N government vis-a-vis the Pakistani military, rash statements even by the otherwise cautious Pakistani prime minister on Kashmir, and the further strengthening of Pakistan’s ties with China in recent months clearly imply that not just the military but even the civilian leadership is not particularly serious about meaningful engagement with India. The one stakeholder that should but does not have any say in Pakistan’s India policy—the business community—would be interested in strengthening the economic relationship given the fact that the China-Pakistan economic relationship is skewed in favor of China. For example, the Free Trade Agreement between both countries has been far from beneficial for Pakistan.

On the Indian side too, there has been a greater focus on India’s eastern borders in order to bolster the Act East Policy, though business lobbies from Punjab have been urging the central government to address their logistical concerns and ease visa regimes. The India-Iran-Afghanistan trilateral agreement signed in May 2016 also means that New Delhi is less dependent upon Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia and the significance of the Wagah-Attari land crossing clearly has been reduced in this context.

While foreign policy is determined by national governments and driven by national interests, it remains to be seen whether the next government in Indian Punjab will attempt to play a constructive role in giving a boost to economic ties between both countries, or will prefer to be a quiet bystander.

Tridivesh Singh Maini is a New Delhi based Policy Analyst associated with the Jindal School of International Affairs, OP Jindal Global University (Sonapat). His research interests include the role of the two Punjabs in India-Pakistan relations, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

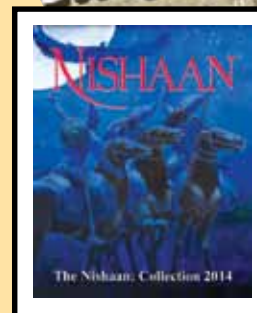
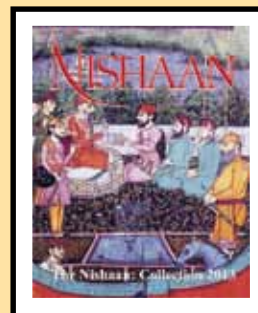
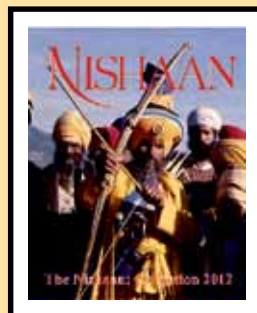
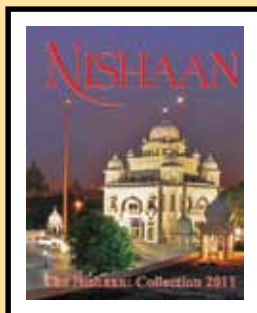
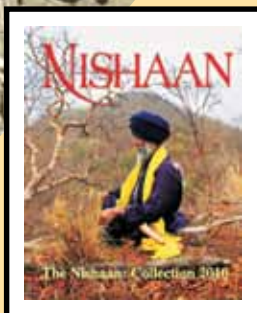
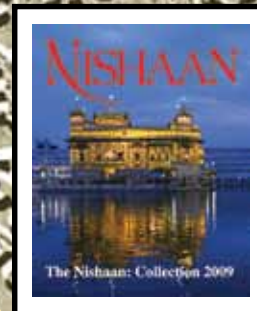
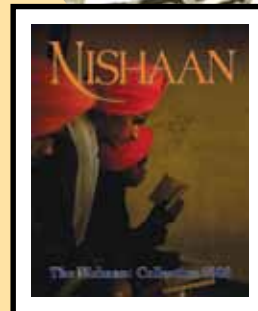
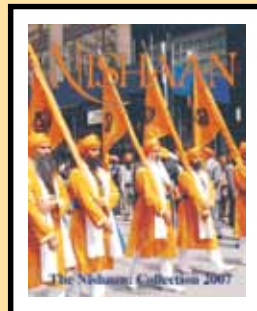
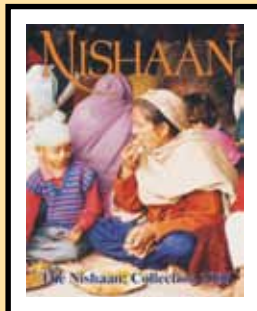
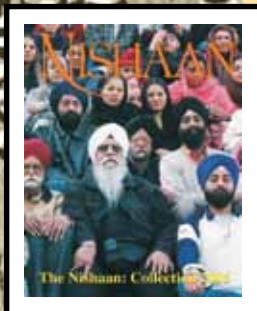
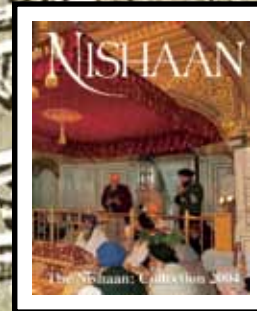
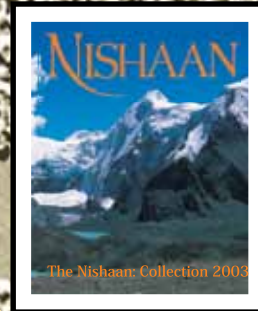
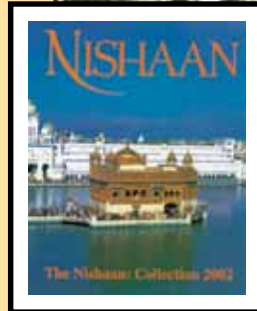
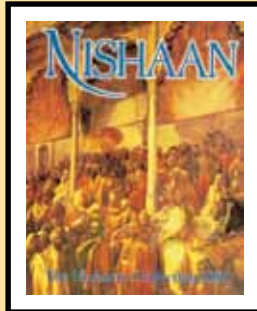
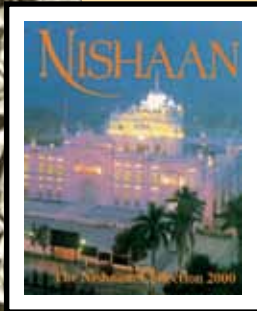


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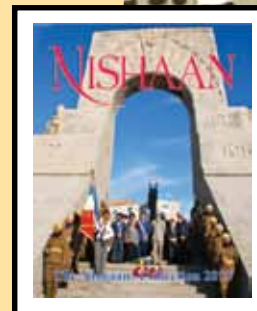


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