MILITARY SYSTEM
OF
THE SIKHS
MILITARY SYSTEM of THE SIKHS

by

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PREFACE

In spite of the importance of and the necessity for the study of military history by professional soldiers, it is regrettable that there is no motivation in India to this most important branch of military subjects.

Not much thought and attention has been given to the study of military history of INDIA. Adequate historical material is available on this aspect which requires research. It is, therefore, felt that the avenue of study in this field is explored and organized.

INDIA has a glorious past. The archaeological discoveries show that the Indian people were properly armed and organized for defence against aggressors. The classical writers have said that INDIA was a strongly defended country, with a well organized army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephants and war chariots, and the fighting qualities of the people were in no way inferior to the aggressors.

Today officers have no impetus to study and few facilities are given to them to increase their professional knowledge. In countries like the United States of America and United Kingdom professional soldiers are given every kind of facilities to increase their knowledge by study and visit to foreign countries at government
expenses, liberal grants of all or part of tuition fees and financial help. Civilian colleges and universities in these countries also afford all types of concessions and facilities to serving officers so that they can acquire professional and general knowledge.

Anything which increases the competence of the officers is desirable and in the long run is a saving of the country's defence expenditure. Moreover, professional soldiers are constantly required to shoulder varying responsibilities like research in war materials and equipment, organization of new formations and units for future war and, finally, training of men for war. All these activities require constant study, inferences and experiences from past wars.

The attempt to write something on the military history of the Sikhs has been made by me with some caution and reservation. Firstly, very few standard works are available in India, and those available are rare; secondly, most of the manuscript are in private custody and not available to the research students for reference; thirdly, available printed materials and books are not found at any central place for study and, finally, there is no financial help from any sources to purchase books and other materials to write on the subject. But in spite of all these difficulties I have made an effort to put something original on a subject which had not yet been tackled by any historian of repute.

It must be conceded that it requires technical military skill to write on military history which the general histo-
rian does not possess. This can best be written by a professional soldier, who, with his basic knowledge of military affairs can study the problems and comment on the various aspects of the battles, plans and orders. Perhaps, for this reason we have very little on the exclusive military history of India. This gap must be filled or else most of our contributions to the art of warfare will be lost to posterity.

Fortunately for us, the Sikhs and the British left behind suitable materials on the military aspect to base our research. Though the Sikhs were not as good chroniclers as the Mughals, yet their documents throw some light on the subject. The British, however, have left behind sufficient written records, though biased, for the historians to think about for generations.

The study of history affords us the opportunity to learn from the variety of experiences of the past-masters of war, how they made mistakes and how they overcame them. It will be seen that no one at any time can experience everything himself at the same time. If he tries to experiment by himself all the time, he will never be able to create such circumstances for himself and thus be a complete failure.

There are other “practical men” who are very scornful of learning things from the past on the grounds that all such learnings are “theoretical”. It must be appreciated that one cannot gain battle experience in time of peace and for that matter, in his life time, there may be
no war at all. Thus Captain Cyril Falls says, "The soldier who is always proclaiming that he is a realist, who despises theory and asserts that he takes into account nothing but the strictly practical, is nevertheless actuated by a theoretical code which he has absorbed, even if it be unconsciously".

I do not at all contend that we study past history only for the sake of theoretical knowledge to take up an enviable position amongst the so-called "educated soldiers", but I do mean that such study be made with a view to avoiding such mistakes in future and creating such conditions as were conducive to the success of military operations. Every soldier has to depend on theory, as the foundation-stone of further increase in his knowledge is based on personal and past experiences. As General Carl Von Clausewitz says, "Theory is instituted that each person in succession may not have to go through the same labour of clearing the ground and toiling through his subject, but may find the thing in order and light admitted on it".

I was fascinated by the history of the Sikhs. Their rise to fame from a purely religious sect, their repeated survival even though almost exterminated by the Mughals, the arrival of Ranjit Singh and the founding of a Sikh kingdom and, finally, their wars with the British and later complete dismemberment is tragic, educative and thought-provoking.
Why did not the Sikh empire last long after Ranjit Singh’s death? Why were Ranjit Singh’s successors all imbeciles, corrupt and inefficient? How the army came about interfering in political affairs of the State? Why did the Sikhs lose their wars against the British? All these are questions of importance to which suitable answers must be found. But we can only analyse all these after we study the military history of the Sikhs.

One of the most important features of the Sikh history is the survival of the Guruship against vehement and concerted Mughal action to liquidate it. It was a very wise policy on the part of the Sikh Gurus to nominate their successor based on efficiency and ability and it did not necessarily pass on hereditary basis. This feature enabled the survival of the Guruship in spite of all odds and difficulties that came in their way.

This is not all. History is a great teacher of mankind. Great men and soldiers in the past have emulated and formed themselves on some such great men and famous soldiers and thus have risen to fame. Napoleon’s injunction was “to read and re-read the campaigns of the great captains”. Another important aim lies in the words of Marshal Foch, “No study is possible on the battle-field, one simply does what one knows. Therefore, in order to do even a little, one has already to know a great deal, and know it well”.

The study of military history should be the stock in trade of every professional officer in the army to-day.
The study may not be so attractive in the beginning but once the interest is roused it will pay a rich dividend to officers in time of a future war. It enlarges the knowledge and broadens the outlook and trains the officers to apply the knowledge gained to future wars, keeping in view the scientific developments that have taken place. "History is universal experience—not of one but of many others under manifold conditions". Field Marshal Sir William Slim says, "Not only do tactics and technique change constantly and rapidly in war, but the whole background against which it is fought may alter almost as quickly. To these, often startling variations at all levels, the commander must be able immediately to attune himself and to readjust his plans".

I have attempted a faithful and unbiased portrayal of events without any personal or private feelings. I also believe that justice must be done to the ability and fighting qualities of the Sikhs. They might have been lacking in finer senses, judgment and other forms of modern refinements, yet they were the only people who stood as guardians of India for the Indians in those fateful years when British power was on the ascendancy. They fought without proper guidance coupled with the treacherous leadership of their selfish, disloyal and incompetent commanders, and yet, they fought gallantly and bravely against heaviest odds. Their government at home who were unfavourably inclined towards them, did not give them money or other help, and, in spite of these they fought the British to a stand-still. It was cold courage which no one else in India would have displayed.
I am sure my readers will agree with me that the Sikhs deserve a special place in our history and "truth; naked, unblushing truth, the first virtue of more serious history" should alone prompt the pen for a historian. I hope my effort has done justice to them.

Present-day officers are inclined to neglect study of military history on the grounds that it is of little value in war and that it has a mere academic value in peace time. But this I consider loose thinking that must be stopped. I find no better words with which to conclude than the warning of General Muir S. Fairchild: "Professional ability, the ultimate goal towards which all training and education, all efforts and experience are directed, has never before been so urgently needed nor so arduously achieved. The future commander or staff officer must have a thorough and intimate knowledge of concepts and doctrines, strategy and tactics, and the weapons of his profession". This can only be achieved by the constant study of military history.

It is ironical but true that in our staff College at Wellington we teach all the known military history of the world except our own. The reason may be that the people at the helm of affairs do not themselves know the value of such a study and also perhaps feel rather ashamed to learn from our own history and ape from other.

Before I conclude I must mention that I owe a great debt of gratitude to Sri Tirath Singh for making the maps and battle plans. Without his willing and active-
help I would never have been able to get such fine reproductions. He is no doubt a man of talent and sincerity.

Lastly, my two daughters Indrani and Lipika, have been a constant source of inspiration, loving and affectionate consideration in my work. To them I humbly dedicate this book.

LUCKNOW

B. N. MAJUMDAR.
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Administration in the Burma Campaign,
Administration in the Middle East Campaign,
Military System of the Mughals,
A Study of Indian Military History,
and numerous articles on logistics, history
and higher direction of War.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is historical marvel to trace the rise and growth of the Sikh army from a purely religious body to a most powerful force that had ever challenged the supremacy of the British in India. As gallant soldiers the British had also paid them eloquent tributes of their tenacity and fighting qualities.

Not much historical material about the Sikh army had seen the light of the day. Many more are still existing perhaps in the cellars of the Punjab where their value and importance to the country had not been realised. Those that are now available to the readers are mostly from the pen of their erstwhile opponents. Some are biased and others frank. But the military historian requires documents which are factual and not tinged by individual opinions. Contemporary records are colourful and portray one-sided views. Others ignore important military details in the mass of political parleys. It therefore becomes difficult for the military historian to sift a mass of material which have no bearing on the military history of the Sikhs. I am sure the readers will appreciate the difficulties under which I had to undertake this formidable task.

History is not made accidentally. The chroniclers should leave things for the future. The Hindus and the Sikhs were never good historians and the Moslems and
the British had left behind rather one-sided views. All these factors add to the already existing difficulty of the paucity of written material. There are some records which are existing, but many more have not yet been traced.

The problem of interpretation is there. Records are in many difficult languages of Persian, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, English and French; many places which had been mentioned are no longer existing, and some records are meagre and fragmentary. It is therefore difficult for the enthusiastic students of military history, to dig out the relevant materials, edit and interpret them. Sir Jadunath Sarkar rightly sums up the predicament of the Sikh historian in these words—"To expect perfection in such a branch of study is hardly more reasonable than to ask a goldsmith to give a proof of his professional skill by prospecting for gold, digging the mine, extracting and refining the ore, and then making the ornament."

The Sikhs were essentially a military nation but ironically they had not left much details for posterity. It seems to me that the Sikhs were poor chroniclers.

On the contrary, the British had left a mass of documents and books on the purely military aspect of Sikh history. At places their portrayal of events had been partial and at others they were faithful; but, generally they had not denied the Sikhs the credit that were their due.

I had obtained most of the details of battles, strength of troops, casualties suffered by both sides, organization
and other relevant military details from the records left behind by the British. In most cases they are adequate but opinions between writers vary. Generally the British had always underestimated own strength to perhaps indicate how they had fought and defeated a numerically superior army. These remarks and estimates have to be accepted cautiously.

The military historian has a tough job in our country to write something of value. It is a specialised study which is dependent on correct facts, maps and battle plans. The records that are known today are woefully lacking in these most essential requirements. Also the narratives are padded, contain much unessential anecdotes and are biased. It is admitted that the modern system of despatches from the field commanders was unknown to the Sikhs but whatever stories are left for posterity are not factual but contain eulogies and exaggerations. Hence the military historian’s job is rendered more difficult.

Written records are also out of print and rare. It is difficult to refer these as these are neither available for reference nor for purchase however much one would like to pay for them. I have repeatedly said in the past, that historical records must be kept centrally at a place by the Government and prospective research scholars should be permitted to consult them either in situ or on loan. Unless this is done, I fear that much valuable historical material would be lost to the nation and to the world.
The militant rise of the Sikhs was primarily due to their persecution by the Moslems, particularly so during the bigoted reign of Aurangzeb. Even though the successors of Aurangzeb were less bigoted, yet the tide of the rise of the Sikhs was set in motion and there was no retraction.

Sikhs passed through many vicissitudes but survived. The Moslems tried to exterminate them but still they thrived and gradually grew stronger and stronger. They now started raiding the rear of the retreating invading armies, became adept in the art of guerilla fighting and later became bolder and faced the Moslems on the open fields of battle.

The Sikhs became militarily strong by the strength of their own arms, genius and ambition of their people. By taking advantage of the prevailing chaos created by the weakness and degeneration of the Mughals, they carved an empire for themselves out of the ashes of the tottering Mughal State.

After 1777 when the Sikhs were left alone by the Moslem rulers, they organized a confederacy and began fighting between themselves. But no sooner they were threatened from outside their differences vanished and they were united by a common bond of giving a united front to the enemy.

Then Ranjit Singh appeared on the scene. His achievements is a story by itself. He is perhaps the most outstanding personality that had ever adorned the pages of Sikh history. He was to the Sikhs what Shivaji was
to the Marathas. He inflamed and roused the martial spirit of a dying sect and eventually made them the most efficient fighting machine that had ever challenged the British bid for supremacy in India.

I must frankly admit that the military history of the Sikh army began with Ranjit Singh and died with him. His successors did not contribute anything worthwhile who lived and prospered and finally went to doom with the weapon and system that he had created, nourished and matured.

History of the Sikh army is essentially the history of Ranjit Singh. "Under his strong and remorseless rule, the Sikhs, trained and disciplined on a military system more perfect than they had before or than has been since employed in the native states of India, were rapidly converted into a formidable fighting machine, which only broke in pieces when the folly and weakness of the great Maharaja's successors persuaded them to use it against the English".*

Ranjit Singh was essentially a product of his times. Though illiterate and uneducated, he ran the affairs of the State as a seasoned politician and administrator, looked into all the minutest details of the State activities and kept rigid centralized control over his far-flung empire. He was a clever opportunist and took advantage of the prevailing chaotic state of the Mughal empire and by his energy, promptitude and genius not only united his warring clans but also founded a strong Sikh monarchy.

* Ranjit Singh, by Griffin.
It was Ranjit Singh who gave his State political guidance, military leadership and an efficient military machine and foundation. But in spite of a stable and sound foundation, his State went to ruins and was completely dismembered soon after his death. "The Sikh monarchy was Napoleonic in the suddenness of its rise, the brilliancy of its success, and the completeness of its overthrow".

Ranjit Singh was a military genius and adventure who founded the monarchy on the personal courage and prowess. It had no backing or sacred sanction of heredity or divine right. "The popular obedience is willingly given to the great caption, the leader of men, who seems in the dazzled eyes of the people to embody the spirit and glory of the country. But the glamour is personal to the man and does not transfigure his heirs and successors. Then the throne founded by genius is seen to be a poor, tawdry thing, on the steps of which stand a crowd of greedy, unscrupulous parasites, who have no thought but of enriching themselves at the expense of the people. Discipline and obedience give place to conspiracy and revolt; enthusiasm is succeeded by contempt."

Similar was the history of Ranjit Singh's successors who were incompetent and imbeciles. No sooner he died the throne, power, tradition and the government fell apart and lost. His dynasty and army might have survived had he been followed by capable and competent successors, of his ability and character. But unfortunately

* Ranjit Singh, by Griffin.
biology is not kind at times, particularly so in the case of kings and emperors. The downfall of the Sikh monarchy was personal and drew no part of its strength from the inherent respect of the people for an ancient house”.*

Politically Sikhs did not contribute much to Indian History. They did not leave much of permanent value to which Indians could look back with pride. Whereas Marathas gave Indians administrative system which is quoted with reverence and gratitude even to-day, the Sikhs gave us something of military value only. They not only gave us the fighting spirit but also military systems of no mean significance and importance. Whatever it is, the rise and growth of the Sikh military power stopped all predatory excursions by the foreign invaders who had been making some frequent sojourns to plunder the rich north.

As a matter of fact, Sikhism grew out of the necessity for suppressing the oppressors. Thousands of simple peasants flocked to the banner of the Khalsa in order to present a united front to the Moslems and wreak vengeance on them for their barbaric, inhuman and intolerant behaviour towards a peace-loving people who were quietly and meekly following their own faith. It may be said that had the Moslems been tolerant to the Hindus there would have been no Sikhism.** Dr. A.C. Banerjee rightly says—“Indeed, the challenge of the Mughal empire was the turning point in the history of the Sikhs. If the mighty Mughal government had left the Sikhs in

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* Ranjit Singh, by Griffin.
** Anglo-Sikh relations, by Dr. Banerjee.
peace, free to sing their hymns and to develop their langars, it is quite probable that Sikhism would have remained a comparatively obscure provincial cult. Persecution brought it to the stage of Indian history. Through blood, sweat and tears it walked to political power; the peaceful sect established by Guru Nanak developed into the invincible Khalsa."

There was a complete void after Ranjit Singh’s death. Anarchy set in, army was uncontrollable by his weak successors, political guidance was marked by its absence and the hot and imperious temper of the Sikhs precipitated a war with the English. Ranjit Singh realised fully the strength of the British and never offended them. He had the best of relations with the British and continued to adhere to it much to the dislike of his sardars and foreign military advisers.

Finally came the war with the English where, though brave and gallant, the Sikhs were badly and treacherously led and lost the war. Eventually the Sikh army was disbanded and the Punjab annexed by the British.

Thus tragically ended the military history of the Sikhs. In spite of their superior fighting qualities, they were defeated by a well-trained numerically inferior British forces.

What does history teach the posterity. For a successful military tradition and efficient fighting force, the country must be politically stable, run on sound democratic lines, industrially and economically sound, and above all well led by efficient and contented officers. Without
able officers no army can be militarily successful however much the rank and file may be brave and tenacious. Leadership of any army must be unprejudiced, educated, efficient and courageous.

Efficiency and loyalty in the armed forces cannot be preached in empty stomachs. However much well trained, experienced and well equipped as the Sikh army, their system of payment was not only irregular but their emoluments were inadequate, and consequently, they plundered and mutinied, which no doubt, made them an unreliable fighting force. The rot was set in during the later stages of Ranjit's reign, and finally, this fact forced the army to take part in making and unmaking kings in favour of those who paid them more. Thus it will be noted that material welfare of servicemen is a very potent factor in the military system of a nation.

The military history of the Sikhs is a fascinating study. It brings home to us the importance of personal leaderships, sound financial arrangements, initiative and drive of the military leaders and, above all, the material and moral welfare of men who comprise the armed forces.

The Sikh state and army was created by the military, political and administrative genius of one man and it passed into oblivion no sooner this strong and guiding hand was removed by destiny. It must be realized that military might alone will not make a nation famous nor leave a permanent historical legacy. Militarism backed by political guidance are needed for any nation to prosper
and survive. The Sikhs no doubt became militarily strong but they had no able political guidance and hence they created trouble with the British, started a war and eventually lost their authority.

Another occasion of lost opportunity for Indian domination of the Indian subcontinent was the failure of the unity of the Sikhs and Marathas. Had this union come about successfully the history of India would have been written differently. Dr. N.K. Sinha says—“But neither among the Marathas nor among the Sikhs was there anyone far-sighted enough to realize that combination was the vital need of the hour. The unbecoming pride and presumption of the Marathas, their failure to grasp the realities of the situation, the proverbial Maratha greed for plunder, the presence of the wily Adin Beg whose interest was to keep these two peoples divided, the prevalent Sikh view that regarded the Marathas as intruders—all combined to make fusion between these two peoples beyond even the domain of possibility.”*

It is a tragic historical fact that the indigenous empire builders of India, though militarily strong, were denied the sober guiding hand of politicians and thus they vanished from the pages of history. It happened with the Marathas, Rajputs and finally, the Sikhs.

* Rise of the Sikh Power, by Dr. N.K. Sinha.
CHAPTER II

THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

The Country

The Punjab, land of the five rivers, is enclosed and watered by the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. It has an area of 133,741 square miles and a population of 24,754,737 (according to 1901 census).

To the north is Kashmir and NWFP which are divided from the Punjab by the Himalayan ranges. The Indus river forms a boundary between Punjab and North West Frontier Province. It joins the Sind and the Rajputana deserts on the Southwest. On the east it is separated by the Jamuna and the Tons from the United Provinces.

The five main physical divisions are the Himalayan region, the Himalayan submontane, the arid plateau, the arid south-western plain and the western portion of the Plain West. Generally it ranges from the most fertile and Indo-Gangetic wealthiest in the submontane region to the infertile tract in the south where the province joins the plain of Sind and Rajputana.

The Punjab comprises five doabs or the land lying between the two rivers. Akbar, the great Mughal, coined these names by combining the first letters of the names of the rivers between which they lie. These are the Bist Jullundur lying between the Beas and the Sutlej, the Bari,
between the old bed of the Beas and the Ravi; the Rachna between the Ravi and the Chenab; the Chinhath between the Chenab and the Bihart (another name for Jhelum); and the Sind Sagar between the Indus and the Jhelum. The southern half between the Indus and the mountains is called the Derajat.

In Punjab there are the alluvial plains in the centre, the salt ranges in the north-west, the Sulaiman and the Aravalli ranges of mountains. Thus there are hills, forests, rivers, plains and deserts in the province, with all their varied influence on the climate, health and character of the inhabitants.

All the rivers rise in the Himalayas, pass through deep gorges in the hills before they debouch in the plains. Their courses are ill-defined and shifting. In winter the rivers are shallow and small but in summer they are deep and wide due to melting snow in the hills.

The doabs which are bounded by the great rivers are covered with low bushes, untilled expanses dotted with a scrub of thorny bushes, grasses, water channels and various other trees and shrubs.

Climatically Punjab has extremes of heat and cold. There are the Himalayan (Simla, Murree), sub-Himalayan (Ambala, Ludhiana, Sialkot, Rawalpindi), the Indo-Gangetic Plain West (Delhi, Lahore) and the south-west dry area (Montgomery, Multan, Sirsa).

The rainfall is heavy in the Himalayan region (126 inches) and in the plains it rapidly decreases having an
average fall of about 24 inches yearly. The foot-hills have about 59 inches yearly.

Floods are not very common. Measures exist to prevent heavy flooding by dykes and escape channels though high floods generally occur during July and August.

The People

The Punjabi is an Aryan though there are traces of aboriginal or foreign blood. He is tall, muscular, broad-shouldered, with dark eyes and a beard. The complexion varies from olive-brown to wheat-coloured. Generally the lower classes are darker than upper, the complexion is fairer in the north-west than in the south-east. The Jats have a splendid physique and the peasants are sturdier and fine people. The urban trading people are physically inferior, though intellectually the comparison is just the opposite.

There had been much discussions on the origin of the Jats and the consensus of opinion is that they are a relic of the Scythians who came into India from Central Asia and made this country their home though the Aryans fought with them on various occasions to stem the tide of their advance.

The Jats have a long tradition of fighting against the Greeks, Macedonians, Tartars and Afghans. "Bred in a locality which has had to bear the brunt of every invasion, and imbued with the traditions of these long centuries of tumult the peasantry were as proficient with
the sword as with the plough, passing to and from the pursuits of war and peace according to the times.* Having braved the many storms and turbulations of the centuries and having been born and bred in the school of adversity, the Jats survived and their tenacious and audacious character made them first-class fighting men. No wonder even the persecution of the Mughals could not eliminate them from the world.

The food and dress habits of the people are simple and practical. They eat the essentials for sustenance and strength and their clothes are similarly tailored for a hardy life. They wear a turban, loin-cloth, a loose wrap round the body, vest or jacket for the cold season. The Hindus wear white, the Muhammedans, green, and the Akalis, blue.

Three principal races of Jats, Rajputs and Afghans or Pathans inhabit this province. The Sikhs come from the Jat stock though they have formed a separate sects of the Hindus.

"The term Sikhs is applied not to a race but to a religious body, though the vast majority of its members belong to one race, the Jats. The Sikh today is not confined to the Punjab, but spread also over Malwa, and the Sikh empire, dominion or organized state built up in the early years of this century by Ranjit Singh did not extend over the Sikhs of Malwa, but did extend over a large non-Sikh population within the Punjab proper, in Kashmir, and to the Afghan border."*

* The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
Early history

The Punjab was the earliest Aryan settlement and Indian epics have frequent references of the rivers and other places of the Punjab. The centre of Aryan civilisation was between Sutlej and Jamuna, in and around the famous battlefield of Kurukshetra and the capital of the empire of the kings of Mahabharata was Indraprastha, now modern Delhi.

Later on, after 500 Before Christ, part of northern Punjab was conquered by Darius and became a Persian province. In 326 Before Christ Alexander the Great appeared on the scene and he conquered the large part of the country upto Jhelum and even up to the Beas. After leaving his conquered territory in the hands of Porus as the governor, Alexander sailed for home.

After Alexander had left India, leaving his conquered territories in the hands of both Indian and Greek governors, there was anarchy as these regents fought between themselves till Chandragupta the Mauryan king made himself master of the Punjab. The Greeks were thrown-out and the Mauryans gave the country a stable government. Thereafter came Asoka the Great and Buddhism became the state religion. His achievements were history.

After Asoka's death, India had again changed history. The Syrians, Bactrians and Greeks all tried to have their sways but these gradually frittered out under the barbarian invasion of the Sakas, Parthians, the Kushans, and the Ephthalites (White Huns).
In the sixth century the kingdom of Thanesar was at its zenith having embraced the regions upto the river Jhelum. After its decline Kanauj rose and established Delhi. The Chauhans came into the scene thereafter, in 1151.

The Muhammadan hordes now descended upon this province from the North at frequent intervals and ravaged the country. They pillaged and ravaged the country without any idea of establishing an Empire till Babar came to India and founded the Mughal Empire by mere accident. He came as a plunderer, but stayed on as an Emperor.

The Muhammadan period of Indian history is varied and interesting. Kingdoms and dynasties rose and fell at frequent intervals and the Punjab had no respite from invasions and plunders. The kings and kingdoms fell due to their personal feuds and it was the Mughals who brought some order out of the prevailing chaos.

It was from Akbar’s reign that the Mughal empire was firmly established and there was peace in the Punjab. But again after Akbar’s death there was upheaval and turmoil. The sons and brothers fought for the vacant throne of Delhi. Later when Aurangzeb came to the throne in 1658 there was persecution and tyranny. There were constant wars and uprisings throughout India and the religious persecution of the Mughals against the Hindus gave signal to the arrival of the militant sect, the Sikhs. Aurangzeb fought incessantly against the Sikhs, but could not subdue them and after his death the Punjab
was under the dominance of the Sikhs till they fought ill-considered and ill-planned wars against the British and finally made an exit from the pages of Indian history like many others who also once upon a time lived and fought.

After the Sikh Wars, the Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849 and was governed by a Board of Administration.

Further historical development of the Punjab will be noted in the narratives of the Sikh Wars and therefore it is not being considered any further. It was only necessary to refresh our minds with the early history as it is generally shrouded in mystery.

As a matter of fact though the Sikhs were only a small minority in the Punjab, yet they were virile, pioneering and turbulent people, who, through physical prowess, founded an empire and very nearly threw the British out of India. They are found all over the province but particularly in and around Bhatinda and Simam the Sikh population is unmixed and that, the priest, mechanic, shopkeeper, the peasant and the soldier are all equally Sikh.

The characteristics of race, religion, manners, and customs, origin and development, all have profound bearings on the subsequent conduct and behaviour of the people who come from a particular stock. Their mental calibre, health and further political and military conduct are influenced by the environment and surroundings of
their upbringing. We will notice how the Sikhs were not-headed, impatient, tactless to the point of rudeness and lacked political and military maturity and sagacity, thereby losing a golden opportunity of founding an Indian empire. There were a few contemporary genius but their influences were rare, an exception and not a general rule.

The Sikh religion was a virile and potent faith which grew out of the decadence of the Hindus and Moslems. "Their enthusiasm is still fresh, and their faith is still active and living principle. They are persuaded that God himself is present with them, that He supports them in all their endeavours, and that sooner or later, He will confound their enemies for His own glory."* They were as fanatics and wildly enthusiastic in their spirit and ation as were the Arabs against the troops of Rome and Persia.

"The Sikhs do not form a numerous sect, yet their strength is not to be estimated by tens of thousands, but by the units and energy of religious fervour and war-like temperament. They will dare much, and they will endure much, for the mystic 'Khalsa' or commonwealth; they are not discouraged by defeat, and they ardently look forward to the day when Indians and Arabs and Persians and Turks shall all acknowledge the double mission of Nanak and Govind Singh."

The majority of the better class Sikhs descended from the Jat stock. They were the most industrious, tillers of

* History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
the soil, hardy and equally ready to take up arms as they were for the plough. The other stock from which the Sikhs came, were also sober and a desirable peasantry but the spirit and ability of the Jats formed the backbone of the Sikh community.

Whatever be it, the characteristics of race are more deep-rooted than religion though plenty of moral force is derived from the latter. In addition to this, birth, breeding, descent and training, all have equally important and far-reaching effects on the people. This is particularly so in modern times where materialism is gradually moulding the surroundings and behaviours of the human beings. “Long years of misrule, impoverishment, grinding oppression and unrelieved misery on the other hand, made the people stone-hearted and tended to increase their selfishness and coldness of manner. The universal anarchy brought the whole society into a state of disintegration. Each man had his own standard of virtue, and whatever a man was able to do with impunity, appeared to him right.”*

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*History of the Sikhs (Vol. I) by H.R. Gupta.*
CHAPTER III

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE SIKHS

A century after the death of Aurangzeb saw the rise of the Sikhs as a power in the Punjab. Theirs was not an accidental rise but a planned growth more prompted by the personality, cult and the prevailing condition in the country. Hinduism was decaying as it could not stand up to the onslaught of a more virile and forceful religion of the Moslems. Also as most of the country was under the bigoted Mughal rulers, the rise of Islam was helped. The inherent defects and faults of Hinduism could not be eradicated and hence many Hindus were being gradually converted to Islam. This was a danger signal for the religion and providentially at this juncture was born Nanak in 1469 in the neighbourhood of Lahore. He was a remarkable man of remarkable character. He preached the unity of God and the equality of men before Him. He was on good terms with both the Hindus and the Muhammedans.

He was a great reformer and did not inspire any animosity in the opposite creed. "The secret of the personal favour in which he was held seems to have laid not merely in the gentleness of his disposition and the charm of his character, but also in the manner in which he put claims, and the total absence of any pretensions for himself which could be interpreted as arrogant or impious."

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars, by Gough and Innes.
Thus Nanak laid the foundation of a new religion whose followers called themselves Sikhs or "disciples", had no political aim, organization or ambition, and which had no distinction between caste and creed. All his teachings were embodied in "Granth". "The mild demeanour, the earnest piety, and persuasive eloquence of Nanak are ever the themes of praise, and he died at the age of seventy, leaving behind him many zealous and admiring disciples."*

Nanak's religion survived because, unlike the many reformers of the past, he created a selective apostleship. By this heredity had no claim to guruship and only the best qualified and efficient disciple could be selected by the living guru before his death.

Guru Nanak was a remarkable man. "He was unquestionably a man of uncommon genius, as may be inferred from the eminence he attained, and the success with which he combated the opposition which encountered him, while he laboured unremittingly to inculcate upon Hindus and Muhammedans, that sublime principles which enjoins devotion to God, and peace towards men."**

After Nanak's death in 1539, Angad became the next guru and he committed to writing much of what had been preached by Nanak. After Angad's death in 1552, Amar Das succeeded him. He was an active preacher and obtained quite a lot of converts. Amar Das died in 1574.

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* History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
** Ranjit Singh, by Osborne.
and was succeeded by Ram Das. He established the temple and reservoir of Amritsar and was the most revered of the gurus. His successor Arjun, completed the temple, lived in pomp and wealth and thus excited the jealousy of the Mughal government. It was Arjun who gave the Sikhs stable and fixed rules of conduct, levied and arranged collection of taxes from his adherents and thus made them accustomed to a regular government. The teachings of Guru Nanak were gradually firmly embedded in the minds of the followers of the faith and also during Arjun’s time germs of political leadership were sown. It was developed during the regime of the sixth Guru Har Govind. It is said that the Guru Arjun had been cruelly put to death by the Mughal governor of Lahore. Dr. Elphinstone writes, "This act of tyranny changed the Sikhs from unoffensive quietists into fanatical warriors. They took up arms under Har Govind, the son of their martyred pontiff, who inspired them with his own spirit of revenge and of hatred to their oppressors.

It is also said that the death of Arjun inflamed the passion of the Sikhs and converted them from a peaceful religious sect into a community of warriors who were ready to defend their religious faith with sword. "This became the turning-point of their history, and developed the struggle which changed the whole character of the reformatory movement."*

It was Har Govind who militarised the Sikhs. He was a military as well as spiritual leader. "Har Govind grasped a sword, and marched with his devoted followers

* The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
among the troops of the empire, or boldly led them to oppose and overcome provincial governors or personal enemies." Also, he and his followers fought on the side of the Mughals and this led to many misunderstandings between him and the Mughal emperor. Har Govind had a stable of 800 match-lock men and his baronial power and temperament were the causes of his eventual clash with the Mughal power. Har Govind was of a robust type, loved active life and dangers of war. Thus he gradually separated the militant Sikh sect from the peace-loving Hindus and there was no danger now of his followers relapsing as monks and mendicants.

During the ministry of Har Govind the Sikhs increased greatly in numbers and had been formed into a separate state within the Mughal empire. They were organized and armed and a spirit of defiance of an alien rule had been set in motion throughout the sect.

The feelings of the peace-loving Sikhs had been roused by the religious persecution of the Mughals. They now laid aside their religious fervour and buckled their swords in defence of their faith. This transformation proved very popular with the Jats as it was in keeping with their fighting spirit of the past.

"This military character of the brotherhood naturally progressed under the successors of Har Govind, and new members were added in great numbers to the band of disciples. The tenth in the guru succession, Govind Singh,

** History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
grandson of Har Govind, set the seal upon the new policy, gave the Sikhs a definite organization, and marked out Mohammedanism as the special object of hostility.”

Tegh Bahadur who accepted the guruship reluctantly was a popular and hospitable man. “He built a fort near the Sutlej, there established his ecclesiastical and military headquarters, and continued the fitful life of struggle with the hated Muhammedans.”

After the tragic death of his Father Tegh Bahadur in 1675, Govind Singh became the tenth guru. Elphinstone says, “This leader first conceived the idea of forming the Sikhs into a religious and military commonwealth, and executed his design with the systematic spirit of a Grecian law-giver.” Govind Singh was the last guru and with him the dispensation ended.

Aurangzeb was now the reigning emperor of Delhi and he caused untold miseries and sufferings and persecution of the Sikhs in order to wipe them out. Little did he realise that his bigotry and fanaticism of the Sikhs, and inspired a spirit of vengeance, which soon broke out into a fury.”

If Nanak was a patron saint, Govind was a military and religious strategist. He raised the morale and stature of the Sikhs from the sinks of oblivion and dismay. “In the heart of a powerful empire he set himself to the task

* The Sikh and the Sikh Wars, by Gough and Innes.
** The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
***The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XX.
of subverting it, and from the midst of social degradation and religious corruption, he called up simplicity of manners, singleness of purpose, and enthusiasm of desire."**

To increase the strength of his community, Govind admitted converts from all tribes and abolished the caste system. "He appealed to the eternal human instinct of equality, liberty, and brotherhood, broke for ever with caste prejudices, and received into the Khalsa people of all classes." He also modified the form of baptism into a simple ceremony. He hailed them as "Singh" and declared them the Khalsa. In addition to this, he codified the outward manifestations of a true Sikh by ordering to be armed at all times and possess the five "K."s. "All was designed to give the Sikhs a distinct national character in opposition to the ways of other people, and to keep alive a sense of duty and profession of faith."**

At this time a wave of nationalism and resentment against the cruelties of the Mughals was passing throughout India. Shivaji had openly revolted against a dominant power, roused the spirit of the Maratha herdsmen and had carved an empire and a place in history for himself. "Govind added religious fervour to warlike temper, and his design of founding a kingdom of Jats upon the waning glories of Aurangzeb's dominion does not appear to have been idly conceived or rashly undertaken."***

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* History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
** The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
*** History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
He now organized his followers into bands and troops, militarised and disciplined them, exercised them with arms and trained them to fight battles, and, finally, built forts along the line of the hills where he could retreat in safety, if necessary.

The role and functions of the Sikhs under Guru Govind Singh differed widely from those enunciated by Guru Nanak. "His disciples were required to devote themselves to arms, they were divided into troops marshalled under trusty leaders, and incited to plunder the country."* The Sikhs grew more and more bold and "were attracted to a standard under which plunder was considered a virtue, and robbery a duty, they soon extended their savages over the greater part of the Punjab."*

It may be aptly said that Guru Govind Singh was the founder of Sikh military power. He died in 1708, and with him came to a close the two hundred years of rule of the gurus. By now Sikhism was firmly established as a religion and a military power to be reckoned with. "In Govind were united the qualities of religious leader, king, warrior, and law-giver."**

More than any other guru, Govind Singh laid the foundation of the Sikh nation which Ranjit Singh firmly established as an empire on the ashes of the Mughal dynasty. He disciplined, organized and trained a peasantry into a formidable fighting machine in a generation to come.

* Ranjit Singh, by Osborne.
** The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
After Govind Singh’s death, anarchy and misrule crept in. There was turmoil in the Punjab due to the invasion of Nadir Shah. Most of the Sikhs were dispersed and outlawed by the Mughals. But in subsequent years after the battle of Panipat in 1761, the Marathas were checked and the Mughal power waned. This again gave the Sikhs an opportunity to rise. Also the Sikhs took the opportunity of reorganizing their Misls and the united army of the Khalsa.

It was during these disorganized periods created by the plunder and invasion of Nadir Shah that the Sikhs tried their hands at military operations. They found enough opportunity to display their military prowess and caused havoc to the force of the invaders. Though they were disorganized and scattered after the death of Banda in 1715, yet when opportunity came after about 20 years, they came out of their hides and displayed their traditional valour, courage, discipline and fighting qualities.
CHAPTER IV
EARLY SIKH RAIDS

From the very early formative years the Sikhs displayed tenacity and hardihood of character and they had amazing patience and forbearance under very adverse circumstances. In spite of the Mughal government’s religious persecution, economic stranglehold, and public apathy through fear, they were not dismayed and they stood up to all these difficulties.

The year 1739 saw the Sikhs organized into a strong body and they now came out of their hiding places, as robbers, freebooters and marauders. They looted and harassed the Mughals and made their life and security miserable. They also fell upon the rear of Nadir Shah’s army and decamped with quite a lot of his loot and plunder which he had been carrying away to his own country. The Sikhs were organized into light cavalry bands and struck in the flanks and rear of the retreating army and took away whatever came in their hands.

Nadir Shah was very much obsessed and harried by the bold and daring nature of the Sikh marauding bands and when enquired about them was told their (Sikh) homes are the saddles on their horses.

The Sikhs were daily persecuted and harried and the Moslem cruelties increased. They gradually withdrew to
the hills of Jammu and Kangra and deserts of Rajasthan and jungles of Lakhi.

In spite of inhuman cruelties inflicted on them by the Mughals, the Sikhs survived due to their humour, enthusiasm, religious fervour and unity of purpose and living.

After the death of the governor of Punjab Zakariya Khan in 1745, the Sikhs took advantage of the disorganized and chaotic state and organized themselves into small raiding or military bands. They held a Gurumata* and divided themselves into 25 groups, each of 100 persons. Thus the idea and organization of a general confederation for purposes of defence and military operations involving multiple efforts, came into being.

"Fighting and riding were the only qualifications required from an individual who came to seek recruitment under a chief, and the possession of a horse and a matchlock was his best recommendation, though in many cases they were assured of these things by the leader from the proceeds of his spoil."** Enthusiasm was running wild during this period and Sikhs in large numbers joined the many bands of the chiefs. They were meted out equal treatment and the plunder collected during any raid or expedition was divided among the chiefs according to the number of followers they had."

* Note—This is a politico-military institution which gave each individual a personal share in the government, and thus enabled every Sikh to attain high rank and influence.

** History of the Sikhs (Vol. I), by H. R. Gupta.
These confederacies or "misl"s were called after the village or personal names of the founders or Sirdars. "It was the aim of the daring Jat youths to qualify for admission to a misl, and considered by them a religious honour to receive the "pahal" of the Singhs at the hands of a renowned leader."* The membership of any particular misl was on a voluntary basis and persons could change their allegiance from one chief to the other.

Though there were occasional inter-misl wars when there were no outside threats yet they had unity and sense of common front against the enemy of their country and religion. The misls were armed with assorted weapons obtained through plunder of the retreating invaders.

The system of confederacy produced many leaders which was a pressing necessity as the Sikhs had more followers than efficient and adequate leaders to guide and lead them. Whatever might be the origin of the person, he became a leader due to his inherent ability to lead men in wars. If a person had the natural quality of daring spirit, ability to lead, quick perception, rapid decision, lion's courage, he collected large following and became recognised as a leader. Thus military qualities and talent was encouraged and recognised.

From the very early stage of development the Sikhs ingrained the democratic traditions amongst own people. "The Sikh chiefs had been followed to the field by relations or volunteers, and not by hired retainers; they con-

* The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
sidered themselves as partners or associates in each separate enterprise, and regarded the lands acquired as common property, in which each had a share according to the degree in which he had contributed to the acquisition; the associations were called Misls, of which twelve were originally enumerated, who could bring into the field about 70,000 horses."*

"This organization into regular bands may be taken as a significant starting point in the military career of the Sikhs. They had decided to carry on the war in guerilla bands, because they had realised that this form of warfare was the most effective and the least dangerous, and that success depended upon having confidence in their leader and reliance upon their comrades. This changed the character of the Sikh resistance. It also gave them an idea of organizing a multitude of plunderers into some sort of rude cavalry regiments which ultimately proved of immense value. It was enlarged and further developed and formed the basis of the first regularly organized national army of the community, popularly known as the Dal Khalsa."**

The total strength of the "misls" or confederacy or "Dal Khalsa" has not been firmly established but it is said that they could muster from 70,000 to 3,00,000 horsemen, about 10,000 infantry and about 40 pieces of field artillery.

* Ranjit Singh, by Osborne.

** History of the Sikhs, by H. R. Gupta.
I would like to point out here that in the establishment of Dal Khalsa was born the military system of the Sikhs which matured into a much more modern system during Ranjit Singh. The Sikhs were prompted by prevailing conditions and circumstances to organize and equip themselves militarily.

The Moslem invasions of Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Duranni and the defeat of the Marathas in the fateful Battle of Panipat in 1761, prompted the Sikhs to be a more closely knit organization so that they are not exterminated by the rising tide of religious persecution by the Mohammedans. "They then showed what a powerful force character is in the formation of a nation—character moulded by religious persecution and the unflinching courage of the true Sikh, instilled by Govind, 'who never fears though oft overcome,' which engendered vitality under all conditions, the more adverse the better, with a determination to struggle for the triumph of the Khalsa at all costs."

The Sikhs knew their weaknesses and they never fought a pitched battle with the Afghans who had artillery and an organized regular army. But they plundered and harassed the rear of such armies and no sooner Duranni retired north the Sikhs captured Lahore and Rohtas.

Their strength lay in their mobility and varied arms which they carried on all occasions. The footmen or infantry held secured bases in the forts and the cavalry

* The Sikhs, by General Gordon.
brought the loot. They also had the Akalis or the Commandos or suicide troops who were employed on occasions when every other method proved useless and all was given up as lost. These Akalis were armed with quoits (discuss), other heavy armaments and wore blue dress.

"The Sikhs though powerful for guerilla fighting, were not the equal of the Afghans in training, armament, and disciplined warfare, and retired on the Shah’s approach, only to return as he departed and attack and cut off the Afghan posts left behind."

The earliest form of Sikh military organisation was known as “Dal Khalsa” and it was established on 29th March, 1748. Amongst the Sikh chiefs were eleven prominent and most important leaders who combined together into eleven divisions of varying strength with own titles and banners.

Amongst the many confederates the Bhangis, Ramgarhias and Ahluwalias were the most prominent and important. They gradually found their military strength in unity and on many occasions met the Afghans on equal terms and gradually extended their sway in the Punjab.

The misls had achieved the end for which it was originally started. With the opening of 19th century, Ranjit Singh had already made his presence felt by diplomacy and military prowess.

On previous occasions the Sikhs had no opportunity to organize and work under one supreme leader except
in small groups known as "Ghallughara." But they had the character and ability of first class guerilla fighters and many chiefs took advantage of these qualities and employed their bands in such a role. Though these small units or bands helped the Sikhs to learn their profession and develop independence, foresight and leadership to a great extent, yet necessity of a bigger and stronger organization was felt to give them a sense of unity, unity of purpose, co-ordination of activities, and, above all, leadership, as the strength and number of Sikh chiefs was increasing.

There was a necessity for binding the whole organization to the Panth also. There was democracy all round as the Sikhs organized the Dal Khalsa, rules for recruitment were framed, each person had a right to select his own chief under whom he wished to serve, and a council of war was formed to select a common leader in an emergency and guide the activities and deliberations of this advisory body. All members of the Dal Khalsa were well looked after by their leaders and were happy and independent-minded.

The Dal Khalsa was a federal union wherein during normal times each division either acted on his own or in co-operation with others. The chiefs led their followers during war and peace, treated and paid them well. This organization was the greatest unifying factor of the Sikhs after a long lapse of about three decades. The various persecutions and tyranny of the Mughals brought home to them the value of unity, co-operation and co-ordinated
action against a common enemy. They obeyed the Panth and their gurus who laid the foundation of their religion.

The Sikhs now were the strongest indigenous body, well armed and organized and the stage was now set for their political ascendancy in the north of India.

Early military tactics

From earliest times the Sikhs displayed that they were better adept in guerilla warfare. They plundered the rear of the retreating columns from the most unexpected direction and vanished no sooner the organized army was deployed to counter their methods.

"Inured from their infancy to the hardships of a military life, the Sikhs are addicted to predatory warfare in a manner peculiar to themselves alone. When determined to invade a neighbouring province they assemble at first in small numbers on the frontier, when having first demanded the rakhi or tribute, if it be complied with, they retired peacefully; but, when this is denied, hostilities commence and the Sikhs in their progress, are accustomed to lay waste the country on all sides, carrying along with them as many of the inhabitants as they can take prisoners, and all the cattle", writes Franklin, in his "Shah Aulum."

They harassed the enemy forts and troops by night attacks. But the Afghans developed and organized a new type of light gun known as Jizairs to combat the Sikh method of warfare. The Sikhs had no artillery for
a long time and therefore they suffered plenty of casualties from these guns.

Many Sikhs were also in the service of the Emperor of Delhi. They were employed by them in their far-flung empire. The daily wages paid to the Sikh troops were 8 annas to a footman, one rupee to a horseman and five rupees to the Chief.

The Sikh method of attacking the enemy was that a party of horsemen would gallop fast towards the enemy and then draw up the horses, discharge a volley of fire upon the enemy and then withdraw. Then they reloaded their guns and repeated the same process. This caused casualties and annoyance to the enemy.

They also used the skirmishing tactics with rapidity and on each occasion a fresh wave of troops took the place of the tired ones. Horses were also replaced and both men and animals returned to fight refreshed.

Another method they used was to draw out detachment of troops from the main body after feigning retreat and then cut them up and annihilate them. Hand to hand fights and individual combats were also fought.

The Sikh horsemen were lightly equipped and they carried all their requirements on their horses. Thus they could march from 50 to 100 miles in a day and ready to fight the following day. They were hardy, disciplined and full of fight.
The Sikhs were excellent cavalry men. They loved and understood their horses, looked after them well and rode them smartly. They wore little of clothing and maximum armour. "The Sikh Uhlan's endurance and rapidity of movement were quite commensurate with his capacity, enabling him to baffle, if not defy, superior numbers. At a pinch, he could march some twenty or thirty miles a day on no better fare than a little parched grain washed down with pure cold water. A tent he despised, baggage in the ordinary sense of the word he had none. Besides his weapons his whole kit consisted of horsegear, a few of the simplest cooking utensils, and two blankets, one for himself and another for his faithful steed. Although his tactics mainly resolved themselves into a prolonged series of skirmishes conducted somewhat after the Pathan fashion, yet in the strife of men contending hand to hand he was terrible, though helpless against good artillery."*

The Rakhi system was evolved by which they afforded protection to those who came under their fold and also maintained a reserve of force for emergency. Forts were built and these were garrisoned by strong forces.

The fortune of the Sikhs was fluctuating. They were incessantly fighting against the Mughals and the Afghans who were trying to exterminate them. In the process they fought many pitched bloody battles and were none the worse for it.

So far the Sikhs were fighting guerilla war but from 1765 they came out in the open and started fighting pitched

* G. R. C. Williams in Calcutta Review.
battles. "Their constant successes during the past two years, however, gave them unbounded enthusiasm, and now they seem to have decided upon fighting pitched battles with their enemies. In such engagements they adopted the regular organization of their troops into centre, right wing and left wing."*

The first pitched engagement was the battle of the Sutlej against the Afghans. Both the armies were formed up in a regular battle array. This is how it has been described in the Jang Namah, "In the centre was Jassa (Singh) Kalal, who fearlessly stood like a mountain. Close by him was the other Jassa (Singh) Thokah, looking like a lion in stature. Besides, there were many other Sikh chiefs who stood at their proper places in the centre. On the right was Charat Singh who might be called the dishonoured Chartu. Jhanda (Singh), Lahna (Singh) and Jai Singh were also with him. Hari Singh Bhanji, Ramdas Gulab (Singh) and Gujar (Singh) were on the left." The battle raged furiously and the Sikhs took heavy toll of the enemy. They boldly struck sometimes on the right and then on the left. "The Sikhs having failed in breaking the lines of the Afghans adopted their old stratagem and fled from the field. Nasir Khan was easily taken in and he ran in pursuit of them. The Sikhs, finding the Khan away from the main body, suddenly called a halt, turned back and fell upon him like a bird of prey."** With great difficulty and after suffering heavy casualties the Afghans managed to return to their main body. But the fight was discontinued at night when both the parties retired to forest.

* History of the Sikhs (Vol. 1) by H. R. Gupta.
** History of the Sikhs by H.R. Gupta.
Again next morning the battle raged with renewed vigour and fury. The Sikhs attacked the Afghans in large numbers by reversing their previous day's tactics on three sides—front, right and left. Here also they left the field of battle and reappeared in the rear of the Afghans in the same manner as they used to during previous guerilla tactics. Still the battle was undecided though the Sikhs suffered some casualties.

On the third day the same thing happened. The Sikhs left the battlefield but reappeared again, discharged volleys from their guns and then left the field. Thus they harassed and took toll of the enemy.

It was quite apparent to the Sikhs that they were in no way inferior to the Afghans and Mughals. They now asserted their superiority and openly came out to assume the sovereign power.

By 1768 the Sikhs were the dominant power in the Punjab. Their only enemies were the Mughal government, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Najile-du-daulah. The Sikh empire now extended from Burija to Karnal, Indus, Multan and Sind and to Bhumbar, Jammu and Kangra.

Thus the Sikhs had consolidated their empire through wars, internal organizations, religious faith and unity. They waged a long struggle against both outside and internal enemies. On more than one occasion they had to flee in face of superior enemies, yet they did not give up and emerged triumphant in the end. "The internal vigour consisting of their dogged faith in themselves and in the prophecy of Guru Govind Singh that they would one day
become a nation, their determined courage and unconquerable spirit of resistance, not only sustained them against the bloody persecution of a great government determined to suppress them, but also raised them up again with greater strength after every attempt to annihilate them. The main causes of their success were tenacity of purpose and resourcefulness of mind which made the chiefs and troopers of that blood capable of protracted endurance and sustained enterprise in the face of difficulties and discouragements before which other Indians were apt to succumb with the feeling that destiny was against them. The other that fighting is an art, consisting of quick observation, skill and a combination of unselfishness and the habit of trusting one’s comrades and leaders, they possessed in a remarkable degree. The most important factor, that fighting is a science requiring study and the power of concentrating high mental faculties, was not realized by the Sikhs till Ranjit Singh’s time, but this deficiency was made up by their unbounded enthusiasm and unlimited faith in themselves.”*

Now the Sikhs emerged as a living faith and embodiment of military strength against the foreign invaders. They founded a state, formed a nation and were the last indigenous empire builders who almost wrested the country from the English.

**Early Military System**

In the early days voluntary recruitment in the Army was open to the Sikhs only. The soldiers were allowed

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*History of the Sikhs by H. R. Gupta.*
to select own masters and were at liberty to change their allegiance if they were not well looked after. There are no exact records of the strength of the Sikh army as no records of the soldier's name, service or pay were ever kept.

The training was not systematically carried out. Only general drill and tactical training were imparted in a haphazard manner. But in spite of the many deficiencies or drawbacks in their training, the Sikhs made up for these by their religious fanaticism. There were no regular organized units or regiments as each chief had his contingent of varying size with different dresses and weapons. In case of expeditions they formed a unified command under one supreme chief. Cases of disobedience were very rare but in case of disobedience, suitable punishment was meted out by a council of war consisting of five prominent leaders of the Dal Khalsa. It is interesting to note here that even in those days there was a system of Board or Council which, today, we consider to be a modern democratic system of command and control, though the political authorities seem to ignore and refuse to implement.

The soldiers were not paid monthly or weekly wages but there were varying modes of payment by cash, kind or by land. Each individual was given fixed quantities of items of daily necessities for himself and his horse.

The arms and accoutrements of the soldiers were both offensive and defensive. They had bows and arrows, lances, shields, coat of arms, daggers, spears, sabre, muskets, guns, scymetar, pikes and blankets, grain bags, ammuni-
pouches, heel ropes, and horns. They had no tentage but rested on the open ground. These equipment made the Sikh soldiers very mobile and they could move or strike camp from one place to the other at a moment’s notice. Here we will notice a striking similarity between the Sikhs, the Marathas and the Mughals of Chengiz Khan. The lack or absence of administrative impediments gave them mobility and speed over their contemporary opponents.

The Sikhs were superb horsemen and they inculcated the love of the animal from the days when they were driven from pillar to post by the Moslems and lived on the animal with all their worldly belongings. Their horses were wonderfully trained and fed on gram, barley and grass (doob). They broke their horses when they were two years old and bred good animals in the country. The prices ranged from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 1,000/-

Soldiers were given the same food as for other civilians and it was about one seer. This was considered sufficient even for the hardest worked man.

By now the Sikh ascendency in the Punjab had been firmly established and recognised. The perpetual warfare, raids and anarchy had been gradually eliminated and the country began to see peace and stable government. Though the Sikh confederacy was in a loose form, each Chief was independent and on his own, yet there was some form of unity and cohesion and there was no mal-administration.
CHAPTER V

THE KHALSA ARMY

At a time when the Sikh Sirdars were fighting between themselves in an effort to find empire for themselves, another Afghan invasion of India by Shah Zaman loomed large. The Sikhs were the strongest community in North India both economically and militarily. But behind all these was their disunity which made them the weakest power to face the foreign invasion.

Amongst the Chiefs Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia was the most powerful in the trans-Sutlej region. Though he himself was only 13 years of age, yet he ruled a large domain with an annual income of 30 lacs of Rupees. His military forces were 1,200 horses and 2,000 infantry, in permanent employ, could raise 11,000 horses and 6,000 infantry in an emergency, the contributions from his feudal chiefs would total 32,000 horses, he had able commanders, and had the services of Afghan infantry and artillery.

Though there are conflicting estimates of the total military strength of the Sikhs which was about 50,000 cavalry and a large body of infantry, yet they had an imposing strength. They were not organized and equipped on modern lines as the Afghans were, but their fighting value was good.
The Afghan invasion petered out near about Hasan Abdal as Shah Zaman had to return home quickly owing to trouble at home. Thereafter he tried diplomacy to win over the Sikh Chiefs by presents, promise of presents and duplicity by playing one against the other. But Ranjit Singh did not fall prey to these attractions. He was definitely determined to face the invader. Whereas the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs were disunited and weak and they had no stomach to fight the invader.

Ranjit Singh had deployed his army along the outposts of his border upto the banks of the Jhelum river. At last a bloody battle was fought by the Sikhs at Amritsar where Shah Zaman’s troops were severely beaten. Thereafter the Afghan troops were chased out of North India.

The political state of affairs was deplorable. No other Hindu ruler or power and even the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs came to the help of Trans-Sutlej Sikhs who fought the Afghan invaders alone. There was no unity or co-operation but on the contrary the foreigners were being invited by the Hindu rulers for help against own compatriots to achieve selfish ends.

Shah Zaman made another bid to invade India. Again there was disunity amongst the Sikhs and the invaders had an easy passage upto Lahore, but the Sikhs again adopted the guerilla method and attacked the rear of the invaders. Thus Shah hesitated to advance on Delhi.

In spite of repeated battles and diplomacy Shah Zaman could not subdue the Sikhs though there was prevailing
discord and disunity. In the end, Shah Zaman returned to his native country in 1799.

Thus ended the last Moslem invasion of India leaving the Sikhs supreme in Northern India.

Ranjit Singh now had a free hand to pursue his aims. He captured Lahore and dominated the scene henceforth. This marks a new epoch in Sikh history as all developments and achievements centre round him.

The Sikh misls had outlived their usefulness. It had become a hot bed of intrigues and caused disunity and discord amongst the Sikhs. There was mutual rivalry and jealousy and consequent anarchy throughout the country.

With the emergence of Ranjit Singh the Sikh system of confederacy and democracy changed. Henceforth his iron and deft hands will guide the destinies of the Sikh state.

It is surprising but true that Ranjit Singh was granted the governorship of Lahore by the Shah of Kabul in 1799 and by diplomacy and force he gradually expanded his domain and became a king. When in 1800 other misls combined to throw him out, "he went out to meet the confederates, broke them up, seized the possessions of the most powerful, and defeated in detail his declared enemies in other parts of the country.

Ranjit Singh had a thorny path to fame and kingship. He had to subdue the independent chieftains and also the
Moslems before he became an absolute master of the Punjab. This he did by force, craft, diplomacy and finally by annexation and absorption of the property of his rivals who died issueless or who lost in a fight. Thus Ranjit Singh "created his own army, giving rank and commands to his partisans, and where any chiefs were left with territory and power instituted 'man-rent' in the form of contingents of irregular troops at his disposal for service."*

Ranjit could not pursue his policy of territorial conquests to the East as the Marathas and the British had sway over the area. After the defeat of Holkar by Lord Lake, the Marathas disappeared from the scene but the British appeared with more strength than before. Therefore he turned his attention to the North and West to find new pastures. He was already recognised as the leader of the Khalsa North of the Sutlej, but other Sikh chiefs were afraid of his territorial designs and began to solicit the help of the British.

"On the 25th April 1809, the new single chief of Lahore signed a treaty which left him the master of the tracts he had originally occupied to the south of Sutlej, but confined his ambition for the future to the North and Westward of the river."

During this period the British had no intention of getting involved in Punjab politics and also did not want to start a fight with Ranjit Singh. This gave a free hand to Ranjit. His sphere of influence was beyond the Sutlej.

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*The Sikhs by General Gordon.*
and the Sikh Chiefs of Malwa were under British protection. Thus having demarcated the respective spheres of influences and activities the Sikhs and British decided to honour each other’s undertakings and not to precipitate any crisis which might lead to a war. Gradually by force and diplomacy, Ranjit Singh had an empire extending from the line of the Indus river to Peshawar and Kashmir. What sort of a man was Ranjit Singh? How was he able to found an empire which was established and lost in his lifetime? There is no doubt that Ranjit Singh was a great soldier and statesman that India had ever produced. His character is worth the study.

Character of Ranjit Singh

There are many facets of Ranjit Singh’s character. He was after all a human being and in the context of the age he was born and subsequently lived and died, he was a great man by that standard. Whatever might have been the personal traits of his character, he was the only man who had the power, authority and above all the capability to unite and control the unruly predatory Sikhs and founded an empire. Ranjit Singh’s education and other training which go to make an efficient ruler were neglected by his parents. But in spite of that, he was a successful soldier and a ruler. “From such a youth, judging from appearance, nothing was to be expected, and therefore it is the more wonderful that he ultimately proved one of the ablest monarchs that ever reigned, united a number of disjointed federations into one compact and powerful kingdom, extended its limits by new conquests, raised it to a height of glory which it possessed.
only while he ruled it, and which it lost as soon as by his death the government passed into other hands.”

Ranjit Singh was no doubt a politically and militarily sagacious ruler. By his political acumen he raised and united the Sikh misls into one of the most powerful states that was ever seen on the Indian subcontinent. It had striking resemblance with the Maratha empire founded by Shivaji and almost perished after his death. The same fate befell the Sikh Empire. We are here concerned with the military side of Ranjit Singh’s character. Though uneducated, Ranjit Singh was a clever and astute leader of soldiers and people.

Ranjit Singh was a unique personality. As a soldier he was reckless with the lives of his men under command to win a battle, but he was quite conscious of economising with their lives. He was generous to the vanquished, respected other people’s achievements and was exacting within limits. He believed in the continuity of administrative arrangements and carried out the duties of the state with an uncanny perception, quickness and keenness.

Ranjit was born to be great. “His was one of that order of minds which seem destined by nature to wind their way to destruction, and achieve greatness”.** He had cool and calculating courage, intuitive perception and comprehensive knowledge of human nature. He had an accurate and sharp memory, was original and fertile

*History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
**Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
in his thinking and invention and was businesslike in his dealings. He had practical commonsense and held sound views on matters both political and military.

Experience of early wars in his boyhood and youth had made him calculating and thoughtful and he never embarked on any rash or hazardous ventures.

Quite early Ranjit Singh realised the necessity for harnessing the turbulent energy of his countrymen and he developed the artillery and the cavalry arms of his army. Sikh cavalry and artillery gave adequate display of their strength and fighting qualities during the Anglo-Sikh wars which came about after the death of Ranjit Singh.

He also realised that to make and organize a strong army he must enlist the help of foreign military experts both for training and organizing his army. Though he did employ foreigners in his army, yet he ensured that the inherent genius of his people were utilised or adopted to modern technique of fighting. This enabled him to get the best of both and at the same time ensured that the national characteristics of his people was not totally changed. New weapons and equipment were given and European method of training was introduced. Strict discipline was enforced. Men and horses and other military equipment were locally produced which were as good as the foreigners possessed. Defence industries of sorts were established and it is interesting to note that even in those days the Sikh army was fully equipped with weapons produced in India. Obviously these sweeping
changes were very much resented by the Sikhs. But through personal examples he won them over. "He had great difficulty in inducing them to abandon their old weapons and mode of fighting, but with tact and patience won them over by good pay and rations, and by personal example in shouldering the musket himself, wearing the red coat, and drilling in the ranks under the instructors."*

Generals Ventura and Allard were employed by Ranjit Singh to train and modernise his army. Under their leadership the Sikh army was disciplined and their infantry and cavalry became a force to be reckoned with.

The British had not been quite kind in their estimate of the Sikhs. They have branded the Sikhs as unmannerly, untrained, and inefficient. But they, on more than one occasion, had good reasons to change their opinion about the fighting qualities of the Sikhs.

Ranjit Singh had acuteness of perception and statesmanlike qualities of a very high order. He knew when to stop and where to begin. He never precipitated any crisis with the British when they afforded protection to the trans-Sutlej Sikhs but withdrew to his own limited sphere waiting for a more opportune moment to expand his empire. He was always on friendly terms with the British and thus established himself as a king in Lahore. "No greater proof can be afforded of his penetration than this through appreciation and comprehension of the character and policy of the British Government."**

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*The Sikhs by General Gordon.
**Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
He had great endurance, would ride long distances to check and inspect his administrative set up in the state. He was himself simply dressed and unimpressive though his court was glittering with brilliant oriental pageantry. Though in physical appearance he was insignificant yet he impressed the foreigners and other visitors by his superior mind, frank and forthright manners and confident and eloquent speech.

Ranjit Singh had a “lively, fanciful and ingenious mind” and also possessed “natural shrewdness, sprightleness and vivacity.” He never neglected religion but ensured that all troops under his command followed the tenets laid down in the “Granth.”

Even when he was in bad health towards the end of his life, he was mentally sound and alert and directed all affairs of the state with coolness and sagacity even to the last day.

He was calm and collected at all times and never took a hasty decision. Once a decision has been given he would always stick to it and never waver. He was no doubt prone to good advice from reliable courtiers.

The daily routine of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was very strenuous and he was neither a drunk nor a debauch as is asserted by many partial writers. He used to spend an hour or two in riding and inspecting his troops, and then took the first meal often without dismounting from his horse. His strongest passion was for horses which were recognised and encouraged good breeding.
Ranjit Singh was an efficient administrator, and was acutely conscious of the status and dignity of all people.

He had insatiable curiosity and evinced interest in all affairs of the State. His questions and enquiries embraced all fields such as artillery, shells, nature and strength of the army, importance of cavalry or infantry, discipline and many more subjects. Whenever any British officer visited his camp he normally welcomed him but also showed him his army at work and asked candid and frank opinions from him. Thus by constant opinion of others and also criticism he considerably improved the fighting capacity of his army.

The rise and growth of the Lahore State is a unique phenomenon in history. More unique still is the character and personality of its founder—Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Few persons could equal his courage, ability and personal charm, He was as ruthless and stern as he was kind. Yet with all the qualities the kingdom which he had founded lasted only nine years after his death.

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh, very early in his career, recognised, with his usual sagacity, that the Sikh system was unsuited to the genius of the people, and that until it was modified he could not hope to win solid victories over regular troops like the English, whose drill and tactics he studied with infinite patience."*

Like all oriental monarchs the rise and fall of kingdoms were closely linked with the personality that founded and

*Ranjit Singh by Griffin.
governed it. The Sikh state was in able and strong hands of Ranjit and after him there was a vacuum and hence due to internal dissensions and faulty foreign affairs the Sikhs fought the British and lost the empire. What Shivaji was to the Marathas, Napoleon to the French, Washington to the Americans, Cromwell to the British, Ranjit Singh was to the Sikhs. "As Nanak woke up the people by reforming their religion, and Govind by stern discipline developed their political independence, so Ranjit Singh, with a wise old head on his young shoulders, siezing the opportunity to found a military monarchy on the fruits of their labours, gave coherence to the Sikh nation."*

Ranjit Singh was an oriental despot and he ruled with an iron hand. But he was just and fair and never needlessly took life except in the field of battle. "His reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilised monarchs."**

"By sheer force of mind, personal energy, and courage, he has established his throne on a firmer foundation than that of any other Eastern sovereign."* Yet many historians have branded him as faithless and deceitful though mild and merciful. Perhaps there had been occasions when Ranjit Singh had used strategies to gain his ends but those are normally accepted principles of political behaviour where only the fit can survive. I do

*The Sikhs by General Gordon,
**Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
not however agree that Ranjit Singh was by nature wicked or untrustworthy. On the contrary, his attitude and behaviour towards the British and his scrupulous regard of the treaty entered with them bears eloquent testimony of his straight-forward, frank and sincere character.

Ranjit Singh was no ordinary military adventurer like Babar or Nadir Shah, he was an empire builder like Akbar, Ashoka and Chandragupta. He kept his patience of empire building within limits and never exceeded his capabilities however much others might have prompted him to do so. He closely knit his loose confederacy and made them a nation. Gradually, he expanded his empire but never hurled his armies in needless conquests and plunder. Every action was done in the name of Khalsa and it was developed into a most efficient fighting machine ever seen on the Indian subcontinent. Thus Ranjit Singh made the Sikhs a nation, founded a monarchy which finally became the staunch British ally during the Mutiny of 1857.

Military System of Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not bring about any startling changes in the character and organization of the Sikh army of the olden days. All he did was to give them discipline and train them in the art of organized warfare. He was fully alive to harness the energies of the turbulent Sikhs into the natural form of guerilla warfare in which they were experts and at the same time also employ them for pitched battles on the European method. He trained his army on modern lines through
European adventurers who came and sought service with him.

"It has been usual to attribute the superiority of the Sikh army to the labours of these two officers (Generals Ventura and Allard), and of their subsequent coadjutors, the Generals Court and Avitabile; but, in truth, the Sikh owes his excellence as a soldier to his own hardihood of character, to that spirit of adaptation which distinguishes every new people, and to that feeling of a common interest and destiny implanted in him by his great preacher."*

Whatever might be the conflicting opinions on this, I consider that the Sikh soldier was a good fighting material which were polished and sharpened by the deft and energetic hand of the French and Italian general. As they were already imbued with religious fervour and impressionable, it was an easy matter for the foreigners to take advantage of these inherent qualities and transform the human material into a formidable fighting machine.

We have seen in the previous chapters how the old Sikh army under the Misls and Dal Khalsa, were organized, trained and fought. These were gradually changed as Ranjit Singh was aware that his people did not like drastic changes from the old to the new systems.

The military policy of Ranjit Singh was well thought out and far-sighted. "But he knew that he merely

*History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
directed into a particular channel a power which he could neither destroy nor control, and that, to prevent the Sikhs turning upon himself or contending with one another, he must regularly engage them in conquest and remote warfare”. He was statesmanlike and tactful in his approach to the changes. All was done in the name of Khalsa which had the sanction of religion and thus people hesitated before they ever thought of objecting to these commands. “The whole wealth and the whole energies of the people were devoted to war, and to the preparation of military means and equipment.”

Unlike the previous indigenous empire builders of the time (Muhammedans, Marathas and the Rajputs), the Sikhs did not despise the European system of warfare. “The early force of the Sikhs was composed of horsemen, but they seem intuitively to have adopted the new and formidable matchlock of recent times, instead of their ancestral bows and the spear common to every nation.”*

There are conflicting estimates of the strength of the Sikh army under Ranjit Singh. But I would place it at 50,000 infantry, 50,000 yeomanry and about 300 field guns.

After the organizational changes instituted by Ranjit Singh, the cavalry became the predominant arm and infantry came next. During the course of Anglo-Sikh Wars it will be noted that Sikh cavalry and artillery played important part in their fights against the British.

*History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
The army of Ranjit Singh was transformed into a well trained, well organized and well-disciplined army with proper equipment and leaders. In 1822, Fauj-i-Khas was raised by the French generals. It consisted of Sikhs and Purabiahhs. This mixing was done to counteract any mutinous disposition which anyone of them might evince. The divide and rule policy was also followed by the British since 1861 whereas Ranjit adopted this in 1827. It shows how far-sighted and sagacious was Ranjit Singh in military matters.

Ranjit Singh was continuously improving the tactics and tactical employment of his army. In the early stages his skirmishers fired together in volleys by words of command so that the fire was brought down regularly. But on advice by visiting British officers, he adopted the system of individual firing after the individuals had taken their aims and were ready to fire. Similarly cavalry tactics was changed by deploying them to protect the guns from the flanks and not in the rear. He was receptive to new ideas and never stood on his false dignity if anything better was pointed out to him.

Cavalry

There were three classes of cavalry:

(a) Regular Cavalry.
(b) Ghorcharah Fauj.
(c) Jagirdari Fauj.
Regular Cavalry

The regular cavalry was the best in men, equipment, dress and discipline. They were efficiently trained under a French General Allard who was engaged by Ranjit Singh in 1822. The men and animals were specially picked for this branch. The strength was about 6,235 in 1845. It seems that due to financial reasons the regular cavalry was small.

The Ghorcharah Fauj (Household Cavalry)

They were the remnants of the old Khalsa horsemen who were irregular troops without any strict discipline, training or organization. They were famous for reckless charges against the enemy without following the organized methods of modern warfare.

These troops were further sub-divided into Khas and Misaldar Sawars. The Ghorcharah Khas had only one regiment and recruited from the nobility of the state. The misaldar Sawars were taken from the old chieftains who were defeated by Ranjit Singh and had lost their territory.

Captain Wade who was in the Court of Ranjit Singh writes about this arm as follows:

"There are altogether about 3,000 of them. Generally they were well mounted and old looking men. Many of them had been in the Raja's father's service. The Corps had peculiar privileges of its own. The men are not paid in money."
“Every man has a jagir varying (in income) from Rs 500/- to Rs. 5,000/- a year and some less. They are chosen by the Maharaja himself from his personal guard and acknowledge no chief but him. The Raja spoke of the Ghorcharahas in high terms of praise as body of men very much attached to his interests.”

On the whole the standard of Ranjit Singh’s cavalry and artillery went down as he devoted more time to make infantry a more popular service. It however seems to me that this slackness was only a temporary phase as is well borne out by the splendid achievements of cavalry and artillery in their wars against the British.

The whole Fauj was paid directly by the Maharaja. Initially they were paid in Jagirs valued from Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/- per annum. But later cash payment was made with a starting salary between Rs. 250/- and Rs. 300/- per year per trooper. The monthly pay thus varied between Rs. 22/- to Rs. 26/-

The recruit had to provide his own horse at the time of enrolment. If he was unable to do so, he was provided with one at government expense and the cost thereof was deducted on monthly instalment at the scale of Rs 100/- for the horse, Rs. 20/- for matchlock and Rs. 10/- for a sword. An unfit and underfed horse was not accepted for service and the trooper was debited Rs. 10/- per month till his horse became fit or a new horse provided. When a horse died the trooper drew the.

*Ranjit Singh by Griffin.
rate of pay of a footsoldier till he provided himself with one.

The sikh cavalry was divided into derahs and misls of varying strengths between 20 to 80, all belonging to the same clan. Strict control was exercised and inspections were carried out to ensure that the horses were kept in a fit condition to fight. “This type of organization kept intact the spirit of clannish union and its old tendency of fighting under the immediate command of a natural leader, while it did not deny to the misaladar the lessons of co-operations.”*

**Jagirdari Fauj**

As the name implies it was the cavalry force maintained by the Jagirdars (Landlords). It was estimated to be about 30,000 men.

“These formed the picturesque element in the Maharaja’s reviews. Many of the men were well-to-do country gentlemen, the sons, relations or clansmen of the chiefs who placed them in the field and maintained them there, and whose personal credit was concerned in their splendid appearance. There was no uniformity in their dress. Some wore a shirt of mail, with a helmet, inlaid with gold and a kalgi or heron’s plume; others wore gay with the many coloured splendours of velvet and silk, with pink or yellow muslin turbans, and gold embroidered belts carrying their sword and powder horn. All wore, at their back, the small round shield of tough buffal-  

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*Ranjit Singh by Griffin.*
hide. These magnificent horsemen were armed, some with bows and arrows, but the majority with matchlocks, with which they made excellent practice.”*

In accordance with the agreement the Jagirdar had to keep and maintain a stipulated quota of horses and men fully equipped and well trained for possible employment by the State whenever it required its services. This cavalry was maintained in good fighting condition throughout as on their efficiency depended the chances of the periodical renewal of the Jagir holders. They were a splendid fighting force who were mostly composed of Akalis for dangerous and desperate missions. It has been said that these Ghorcharahas were a major contributory force in the founding and expanding of the Sikh state under Ranjit Singh.

This cavalry force was for constant service of the State and each horseman was maintained at a fee of Rs. 500/- in the form of grant of land. This proportion left the Jagirdar one-half only of his estate untaxed, as an efficient horseman cost about Rs. 250/- annually.”**

It is well known that the Sikhs were good cavalry-men than infantrymen. The Sikh Cavalry could march forty or fifty miles a day without any difficulty and then fight the enemy. They were very good horsemen, hardy and tough.

These forces had to be brought up every year, on the Dusehra day for review and inspection. The descriptive

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*Ranjit Singh by Griffin.

**History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
roll of all the members of the respective contingents had to be deposited with the Record office by each chief as a safeguard against cheating and corruption. Strong measures were instituted to punish those who did not maintain the requisite strength laid down in the treaty and once Hari Singh Nalwa was fined for not ensuring that adequate strength was maintained by a particular Jagirdar.

The composition and strength of the cavalry units were, grenadier regiment 730 men, dragoon regiment 750 men and a troops of life guards 187 men.

**Infantry**

Initially infantry was not a popular arm for service with the Sikhs. But Ranjit Singh encouraged people to join this service by offering good pay, gaudy dress and good equipment. He paid personal particular attention to this arm.

As Ranjit Singh personally selected his infantry according to strict standards laid down by him, “they were a fine looking body of men, dressed in white jackets and trousers, with black belts and pouches, and wore the yellow Sikh turban. They submit willingly to the same discipline and regulations as our own Sipahis, but have a prejudice against wearing a cap or shave, and previous to their enlistment make an agreement that they shall not be required to do so, or to shave.”*

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*Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
Ranjit Singh personally attended the parades and drills, gave prizes to good infantrymen on the spot and encouraged the Sikh nobility to prompt their sons and relatives to join this service by offers of Jagirs and stipends. Thus through personal efforts he made the infantry the mainstay of his regular army. All were paid in cash from the state treasury thus ensuring regularity and continuity.

Before Ranjit Singh actually decided to popularise and reorganize his infantry he was much impressed by the known exploits of the British escorts and the Gurkhas. Subsequently in 1812 two Sikh infantry regiments were formed. But it was in 1820 that the Sikh infantry was firmly established, expanded and equipped with modern arms and equipment. "By degrees the infantry service came to be preferred, and, before Ranjit Singh died, he saw it regarded as the proper, warlike array of his people."*

The Sikhs were essentially horsemen. "The infantry soldier was considered altogether inferior to the cavalry, and was, in time of war, left behind to garrison forts, to look after the women, or to follow, as best as he could, the fighting force, until he, in his turn, could afford to change his status and buy or steal a horse for his own use."**

Infantry drills were also not liked by the soldiers and they laughed at the funny movements. But here again

*Ranjit Singh by Griffin.
**Ranjit Singh by Griffin,
Ranjit Singh gradually eliminated the orthodoxy of his people by his personal example, drive and monetary benefit.

The Italian General Ventura was in charge of the Sikh infantry. They "gave a moderate degree of precision and completeness to a system already introduced; but their labours are more conspicuous in French words of command, in treble ranks, and in squares salient with guns, than in the ardent courage, the alert obedience, and the long endurance of fatigue which already distinguished the Sikh horsemen, and which pre-eminently characterise the Sikh footmen of the present day among the other soldiers of India."*

Though service in the Infantry was rather unpopular in the beginning yet due to the efforts of Ranjit Singh it became the Corps de elite, attracted the pick of the youth who were accepted into it after rigorous selection tests. The enlistment into the service was entirely voluntary and was also popular. It was officered by Europeans, Muhammedans, Sikhs, Hindus and Rajputs and was an efficient fighting force under all conditions. The recruits were trained by special officers and were finally accepted by the Maharaja after their initial training. Complete descriptive rolls (service documents) were compiled and maintained in respect of each soldier.

The Sikh infantry were tough and could march long distances upto 30 miles a day for several days at a time.

*History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
They had no transport of any description and their travelling bazars contained all their requirements.

The infantry battalion was 900 strong and was commanded by a Commandant (Kumedan) who was assisted by an Adjutant and Major. Each battalion had eight companies of 100 men each and each company had four sections of 25 men each commanded by a Havildar and a Naik as the assistant.

In addition to the normal infantry of the line, Ranjit Singh had inherited from the past, an institution of soldier fanatics known as the Akalis. He could not disband this force who were of the same type as the Ghazis of Afghanistan and the Sudan; but he retained them on a restricted scale as a separate corps of Irregular Cavalry of 3,000 men.

Generally the Akalis always dismounted when charging the enemy with two handed swords. They also used their steel quoits effectively upto 60 to 100 yards.

"The Maharaja was afraid to interfere too closely with these men; for though little better than drunken savages, they were supposed by the Sikhs to possess a semi-sacred character, and were, moreover, useful when desperate deeds were to be done which the rank and file of the army might have declined."*

Perhaps for this reason the English called them "drunken savages" who attacked fearlessly when odds were going against them.

* Ranjit Singh by Griffin.
The composition of the infantry units was of varying strength. The Khas battalion had 820 men, the Gurkha battalion 707 men, Dewa Singh’s battalion 839 men and the Sham Sata battalion had 810 men.

There were also regimental accountant and the granthi (religious teacher). Troops lived in barracks in an organized manner. Tents (seven men per tent), animals and two cooks per company were authorised for each battalion. The names of the various types of officers were as follows:—

(a) Company officers

Subedar, Jamadar, Sarjan, (Serjeant), Havildar, Naik, Phuriya, Buguler, Trumpeter.

(b) Regimental Officers

Kumadan (Commandant), Adjutant, Major Writer, Accountant, Granthi.

(c) Followers Camp

Camel drivers, water carriers, smiths, flagbearers, spadesmen, baildars, masons and cooks.

The unit administration was run by various subordinate officers. The Bakshi (paymaster) paid the men, the Mutasaddis (clerks) checked the rolls and kept the daily attendance register, and the Granthi (Religious teacher). The Granth was deposited near the regimental Jhanda (Flag) which represented the unit headquarters.

Light tents and load carrying animals were provided on fixed proportion to each battalion. Though the cooks
were provided, the men kneaded the cakes and the bakers only baked them. The troops lived in barracks in the cantonments and no separate living huts were provided for them. It is interesting to note here that the system of cantonments and barracks were originally introduced by Ranjit Singh in the Sikh army, subsequently adopted by the British and retained by the Indian Republic even today.

The Sikh officers and men were well paid by the then standards. Ranjit Singh realised quite early that his strength and empire depended on the happiness and steadfastness of his troops and he not only paid them well but rewarded them lavishly. The monthly pay was—General Rs. 400/-, Rs. 460/-, Colonel Rs. 300/- Rs. 350/-, Subedar Rs. 20/- 30/-, Jamadar Rs. 15/- Rs. 22/-, Commandant Rs. 60/- 150/-, Major Rs. 21/- Rs. 25/-, Sepoy Rs 7/- Rs. 8½/- and Generals Ventura and Allard used to get Rs. 25,000/- per annum.

As the strength of infantry increased Ranjit Singh introduced the European system of payment of fixed salaries. The pay of the sepoy was Rs. 8/- per month out of which Rs. 2/- was deducted for cost of rations supplied to them by the State. This system of fixed pay did not work well as they were not paid regularly and in time. There were occasions when troops revolted owing to non-payment of pay in time.

Drilling was done on the beat of drum with precision and rapidity. The words of command were given in French and they were proficient in European tactics.
Ranjit Singh liked military parades and manoeuvres and large numbers of troops accompanied him wherever he went. He took personal interest in the training of his troops. "His sword and shield are always laid by his pillow, and a horse saddled stands constantly ready in front of his tent. At sunrise the next morning he will be found mounted either on horseback or on his elephant, inspecting his troops or superintending the practice of his artillery."

The infantry were steady on parade, could fire with greater precision and regularity both volley and file firing. In spite of all these "they are a finer men, than the Company's Sipahis, have fewer prejudices than most Indians, and are more easily managed, and though, as a nation, the Sikhs are generally supposed to be wanting in courage, it is impossible to deny that Ranjit's troops have occasionally fought well. They are tall, rather slight, but very manly looking men, with great length of limb, and broad, open chests; are excellent marchers both as regards speed and bottom, for they are capable of making very long marches, not only on emergencies, but have done so with cheerfulness and alacrity for days together. They are handy far beyond the generality of Indians, and seem a merry, light hearted race of people. All their movements on parade are very steady, but much too slow, they have but one pace for everything, and the double step is unknown to them."*

*Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
In spite of training, drill, discipline and pay, the officer-man relationship in the Sikh army left much to be desired. They seem to be rather rough and crude in their behaviour. "On parade, they gave utterance to abusive expression, striking freely any of a rank inferior to their own. The Commandant canes the Adjutant, who in turn strikes the officers at the head of the companies, who again vent their ill humour on the non-commissioned and privates."* This was rather a sad state of affairs whose adverse effects would be noticed during the time after Ranjit Singh's death when the army dabbled in politics and became king makers and breakers.

The whole army paraded before Maharaja Ranjit Singh during the Dussehra Day in Amritsar. On this occasion special awards and grants were made. The presence of all was compulsory and absentees were punished.

The total strength of the infantry in 1845 was about 70,721 men.

Fauj-i-Khas

This was a special force on the same lines as the French Legion which was organized by the French Generals Allard and Ventura. It consisted of three cavalry regiments under General Allard and five infantry battalions under General Ventura. Captain Wade spoke very highly of this force in these words:—

*The First and Second Sikh Wars by Burton.
"It appeared to be a remarkably fine body of men. In passing the camp of the Legion I noticed several standards with the Tricoloured flag which the French officers, I find, adopted as the distinguishing ensign of their corps. The Corps was extremely well equipped, and very steady under arms. The battalion performed several manoeuvres, executing them in a style of propriety that surpassed my expectations."

The infantry of the Legion was of a better standard. Each battalion wore distinguishing headgears and was excellent in drill and field manoeuvres. They marched in close column and had achieved high degree of precision in their battle drill.

In 1845 the composition and strength of this force was regular infantry 3,176 men, regular cavalry 1,667 men and artillery with 34 guns, 855 men, bringing up the total to 5,698 men.

Fauj-i-Qilajat (Garrisons)

A system of network of strong forts at strategic places were built and garrisoned by the Sikh army. The important forts were at Attock, Peshawar, Multan, Kanpur and Kashmir. They were self-contained with stores, foodgrains and war material for long sieges. The total strength of the garrisons was about 10,800 men.

The garrison troops were of lower standard than the other regular and irregular forces. Their monthly pay ranged between Rs. 5/- and Rs. 7/- for soldiers and Rs. 10/-
to Rs. 14/- for a Jamadar. The salary was paid by the Thanedar (officer in charge) who had the necessary amount advanced to him by the Kardar (collector) of the district.

The instructions issued to the Thanedar of the forts were:—

(i) Dancing girls and musicians are not to be admitted inside the forts.

(ii) Soldiers and civilians did not clash.

(iii) Ensure that men did not become drunkards and rogues.

(iv) Ensure that men were regularly paid every month.

(v) Ensure that men lived within their means and sent money to their dependants.

(vi) To dismiss any soldier who got drunk and created trouble, and who was a mischief and brought bad name to the army. These forts were on the same principles as those built by the Marathas for retaining hold of the territory in which they were located and were a military institution much in vogue with the oriental monarchs like the Gurkhas and Rajputs also.

The Sikhs thought it prudent to construct forts at Kasur, Mithan Kot and various other important and strategic places so that they were prevented being taken unawares by surprise attacks. They were strengthened with guns (like the British fort at Ferozepore) and
adequate manpower so that they were always protected.

Artillery (Top Khana)

There were four types of artillery in Ranjit Singh's army:

(i) Top Khana Shutri (Camel swivels or Zamlukahs)
(ii) Top Khana Gawi (Bullock batteries)
(iii) Top Khana File (Elephant batteries)
(iv) Top Khana Aspi (Horse batteries)

There is no doubt that artillery was the strong arm of the Sikhs and Ranjit Singh devoted more time and interest to this branch of his army. The artillery were regularly practised and at longer distances of 800 and 1,200 yards they were excellent shots.

The Sikh artillery was the best arm and better than the Marathas. Unlike the Marathas they manufactured their own guns and did not depend on the discarded weapons of the foreigners and they were better and well trained. Under guidance of 8,000 foreign artillery officers they were the finest that India had so far barring of course, the officers, who were their weakest link.

In the early formative years the Sikhs did not use artillery and they were not conversant with its intricacies. But having noticed the efficacy of the artillery used by the British in their wars against the Indians, Ranjit Singh organized and developed artillery as a fighting arm of his army. He realised that the success of the British in India were due to effective artillery fire.
The two foreigners were Generals Court and Gardner who were employed in 1827 and 1832 respectively. They organized and trained Sikh artillery on sound footing.

A regular ordnance department with foundries and other workshops was organized by Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia who was also an original inventor of repute. The foundry at Lahore, cast guns and various workshops and other foundries were distributed over the town. The guns were given distinctive and separate names like the Mughols and they also had Sikh inscriptions engraved on them.

Almost all weapons which the Sikh army used were indigenously manufactured at Lahore in government arsenals and also in Amritsar, Multan, Jammu and Srinagar. They carried out casting, boring, polishing and decorating under the supervision of Indian as well as foreign technicians.

The main Sikh arsenal for the manufacture of weapons and particularly artillery, was at Lahore. It manufactured matchlocks, guns and mortars. On one occasion Ranjit Singh got manufactured 60 ghobaras (mortars) and 100 guns for the war in Kabul. Faqir Nuruddin who was the ordnance officer in charge was an expert in this field and was held in much esteem by Ranjit Singh. He was as good as any foreigner in the manufacture of weapons.

Sardar Lehna Singh was a clever artillery officer and he successfully cast a shrapnel shell which was made of pewter and was a very effective weapon.
Ranjit Singh took pride in his artillery and many foreign travellers were eloquent in their tribute to this arm. The Sikhs were quick in the uptake and they became very proficient in its use in a very short time.

Generally the battery consisted of 53 horse artillery of nine pounder gun cast in brass. The horses that carried these weapons were strong and active though small in size. Grape shots formed of heaten iron, costing Re. 1/- each were extensively used. The majority of the shells were composed of pewter. The ranges varied from 200 yards to 800 yards and 1,200 yards. The Sikh gunners were good marksmen and they were noted for their celerity and precision of their movements.

Men were praised and rewarded lavishly by the Maharaja to be proficient artillerymen and they worked hard and late on this incentive.

The strength of the Sikh artillery varied during the various stages of its development from 1819, 1828 and finally in 1838 the strength was, 188 guns and 280 swivels. It was at its peak in 1845 when the total strength was 386 guns and 300 swivels.

It will be seen from the above details that the Sikhs had the cavalry as the predominant weapon and other arms were there to further their exploits. The artillery though newly instituted gradually came into prominence and finally won them many victories in later wars.

**Other military institutions**

Ranjit Singh recruited his army from all castes and creeds though Sikhs were particularly given preference
and additional facilities. He had Europeans, Hindus, Muhammedans and Gurkhas in his employ. Some of the best officers and men of the Sikh army came from amongst the Khatris and Brahmins.

Like the Marathas, the Sikhs, in the early formative years had fortified each small village. These villages had a small fort in the centre with the minaret standing erect and high in the centre of the group of houses, had loopholes for use of muskets, was surrounded by a dry shallow ditch all round but had no guns in them. Of course these fortified villages were the stronghold of many other feudal chiefs who occasionally resorted to mutual plunder and petty warfare.

There were no well defined rules and regulations for promotion but it was based on merit and meritorious and gallant services were adequately rewarded. Personally courageous, Ranjit Singh was generous to those who displayed great courage in face of an enemy. "It was his custom to go into action with his arms covered with golden bracelets, and to reward with a pair of them any act of personal courage on the part of his soldiers which might happen to meet his observation."*

Discipline in the army was rigidly enforced. Severe exemplary punishments were meted out for dereliction of duty. Once General Avitabile threw down a sepoy from a rock for committing theft and another sepoy was stoned to death for committing a rape.

*Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
Private and public property were carefully respected. Troops on the march or during halts were not allowed to scatter themselves or their animals in the cultivated fields. Crops were not to be damaged and if it so happened, damages were fully paid for on the spot. In fact General Ventura was given strict instructions to prevent injury to cultivation by his troops.

Men of all ages were allowed to serve in the army till the time he was fit irrespective of age. There were no definite age limits either for enlistment or for pension. But generally men between the ages of 28—38 were fit for military duty and they retired at the age of 65 or, in some cases, even more.

The system of pension was not in vogue. The widows of the dead and those wounded were granted a kind of an allowance called "Inglis" which amounted to one third of their pay. This system seems to have been in force in the British Army in India. Jagirs were generally granted for meritorious services, as pension and gratuity and for maintenance of fixed quota of troops. The Jagir granted in lieu of pension was only for the lifetime of the recipient and it reverted to the State on the death of the recipient. But Ranjit Singh unlike Shivaji did not like the Jagir system and seldom granted those as it fostered feudalism and growth of independent chieftains.

The system of monthly payment was copied from the East India Company. But the army was never regularly paid and there were long dues sometimes even for six months. In the early stages the Jagirdari and Faslanadari system of payment were in vogue but their replacement by monthly payment were not satisfactory.
Though the service in the regular army was popular, yet Ranjit Singh kept the pay level almost the same as that existing in the Company’s army and did not take any advantage by lowering the pay scales.

Recruitment in the Army was either done locally or from the families which had previously served in any particular regiment. Thus there was a family bond in units and father and son and later generations took pride in serving in the same regiments in which their ancestors and relatives served before.

Though Ranjit Singh adopted the system of monthly payment to his troops like the Company, yet he was never able to pay them regularly. If the men were regularly paid then there would have been no trouble.

At times Ranjit Singh used to bargain with his troops and paid them for half or quarter of their total entitlements due to them. This was one of the main reasons for which his successors could not effectively control the army who extracted increments by force.

Excessive use of liquor among officers was forbidden as it undermined the discipline and efficiency of the army. General Sultan Mahmood of the artillery was dismissed for confirmed drunkenness, and he was not reinstated till he had been fully reformed.
Ranjit Singh introduced the system of regular review and parade of his troops so that they were fit and ready to take the field. The commanding officers were given instructions to inspect their troops daily and submit reports to their senior officers regularly. Generally daily inspections were carried out and the superior officers were informed every third day.

The Sikhs were by nature a hardy and tough race. They had hardihood of character, spirit of adaptation and feeling of common interest. In other words, they were bound up by ties of community interests and religious traditions. Maharaja Ranjit Singh ensured this common and brotherly qualities and feelings by introducing religious education and training by the Granthis who preached the teachings of the Guru and the Khalsa Panth.

The command and control set up was properly established. Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh was in charge of military affairs and he was located at Peshawar on one occasion, when the forces of the British and the Sikhs were being despatched to Kabul in fulfilment of the Tripartite Treaty with the British.

Financial affairs also were well attended to. Ranjit Singh was able to muster a large force consisting of regular and Jagirdari forces which were maintained at the expense of the landlords who had been allocated Jagirs to maintain forces so that the regular army could be
maintained at economical cost at state expense. Increased military expenditures were met even from balance of alms-money standing to the credit of the Charities Account. On one occasion Rs. 16 lacs were reappropriated for additional military expenditure.

Ranjit Singh instituted the regular system of despatches and mail collection. Akhbar Nawis (News writers) were appointed with military expeditions to keep himself informed of the happenings there. Couriers were stationed at convenient places at a distance of three kos (5 miles) to ensure speedy delivery of messages from the battlefield and other important places. The Jamadar of Hurkarahs (chief of news writers) was detailed to report the happenings at various places.

The Sikh flag was made of Kimkhab (brocaded silk) of red colour and were awarded to the troops during the Dusehra when general review and inspections were carried out at Amritsar. Thus, it seems, that the system of battle honours implanted on the flags were also in vogue in the Sikh army.

The officers of the Sikh army did not wear any distinctive badges of rank due to democratic principles and ideals where all were regarded as equal. But there were some distinguishing features in their dress. Foster says, "The chiefs are distinguished by wearing some heavy gold bracelets on their wrists and sometimes a chain of the same metal bound round their turbans, and by being mounted on better horses. Otherwise no distinction appears amongst them."
It is a fact that the Sikh army had adequate administrative arrangements for the maintenance of the forces both during peace and war. The lines of communication through which the army passed was adequately protected and regular supply of men and material were ensured during military expeditions in distant lands beyond their own frontiers. Storage godowns for grain and flour were established at regular intervals of 30 or 40 kos on the line of march so that the troops could draw their requirements, if necessary. Otherwise in the field of battle they got their requirements from the local bazar by paying for the items purchased and most of their requirements were carried on the saddle. They could live days on end on parched grain and water when necessary. They were tough and lived hard during operations. There is no doubt that the Sikh army was never encumbered with heavy baggage, stores, tents or wives like the Mughal army. On the contrary they fought and lived on their saddle like the Maratha army of Shivaji.

By 1836 the Sikh army was formed into brigades each of three or four infantry battalions and portion of cavalry and artillery. "The chief command of a portion of these troops was given to Ventura with the rank of a general and of another to Sardar Teja Singh, who had hitherto commanded the principal corps of infantry. The sons of the Sardars, trained in the European style of military tactics, were also appointed to each brigade, and were generally speaking very young men, not more than seventeen."*

* The Lahore Durbar by Dr. Sethi.
This shows that Ranjit Singh’s army had experience of the older and tried generals as well as the dash and daring of the younger generation.

There are conflicting estimates of the total strength of the Sikh army. The strength for 1844 obtained from the government records shows that there were 40,000 regular infantry and a total force of 1,25,000 all ranks with 375 field guns. The detailed list of the Lahore army is given in appendix A.

In 1836 a traveller in the Punjab gives a very interesting detail of Ranjit Singh’s army:—“The privates are tall, thin men with good features; they are capable of enduring the fatigue of long marches for several days in succession; so that it has become a byword that the Punjabis have iron legs. The dress of the Sikh infantry consists of a blue turban with one end loose and spread to cover the head, back of the neck, and shoulders, and regulation coat in imitation of the French; trousers in blue linen, tight at the ankles, musket, pouch etc with black leather crossbelt. Their muskets were stated to be of very inferior stamp, incapable of throwing a ball to any distance, and on quick and repeated discharges liable to burst; their firing is bad, as their sole object appears to be to aim at a regular and simultaneous volley, punishment awaiting any, the report of whose piece is a second too late. The consequence is, in their hurry to deliver their fire as one report, they never bring their muskets to the proper level, and their cartridges are all thrown upwards at an angle of 30 degrees. On parade they give utterance to abusive expressions, striking freely any of
a rank inferior to their own. The commandant canes the adjutant, who in turn strikes the officers at the head of companies, who again vent their ill-humour on the non-commissioned and privates. On their marches they encamp very regularly; and I saw 30,000 men, the Army of Peshawar, moved with as much facility as a single regiment on this (the British) side of the Sutlej. No wheeled carriage is allowed, and their own bazars contain all they require. The Sikh cavalry amounts to about 40,000 all irregular with the exception of three regiments under the command of Monsieur Allard.”

**Dress and equipment.**

Before Ranjit Singh’s rule the Sikh army had assorted types of dress and the soldiers were oddly dressed and equipped. They wore a Pagri, Kurta, short drawers and tight fitting chapplis. The cavalryman had two blankets, one for himself and the other for the horse and were armed with spear, matchlock and scimitar.

But things were markedly changed when Ranjit Singh reorganized and re-equipped his army on modern lines. The infantry soldiers were dressed in white jackets and trousers, black belts and pouches and yellow turban. The regular brigades wore red coats. They were armed with locally produced muskets and bayonets.

The Cavalry wore a jacket of dull red, a pair of black belts supporting a pouch and bayonet. They also wore a Kamarbund from which a sabre was hung. The trousers were of dark blue cloth with red stripe, and crimson silk turban. The officers were dressed in bright crimson
silk and carried sabre only. The head dress was a round steel cap with a red plume at the centre and chain-mail hung near the neck and the shoulders.

Irregular troops (cavalry and infantry) wore long blue coats and turbans and were armed with chain-armour, brass plates, shields, spears, and dresses of every colour.

The Ghorcharaha was dressed differently. They had a velvet coat, a shirt of mail, a belt, pistol, steel helmet, and a plume. All these items were ornamented with gold and shining brass and their coloured uniforms looked gaudy and picturesque. The normal arms carried were shields, quiver and bayonet. Powder pouches were also carried.

Officers and men of artillery wore red turbans, white trousers, long boots, black waist belts and scabbards. All these were again ornamented by brass and other shining metals.

The personal bodyguard of Ranjit Singh were dressed in yellow satin, gold scarfs and shawls and their arms were of gold with long hanging beards.

Jagirdari Fauj were dressed in an assorted manner according to their own wishes and clans from which they came.

The Sikh chiefs were exclusively and colourfully dressed. This is how Osborne describes one such chief’s dress—“His dress was magnificent, a helmet or scull cap of bright polished steel inlaid with gold, and a deep fringe of chain mail, of the same material, reaching to his
shoulders, three plumes of black heron’s feathers waving on his crest, and three shawls of lilac, white and scarlet, twisted very round and tight, interlaced with one another and gathered round the age of the helmet, a chelenk of rubies and diamonds on his forehead. Back, breastplates, and guntlets of steel, richly embossed with gold and precious stones, worn over a rich, thick quilted jacket of bright yellow silk, with magnificent armlets of rubies and diamonds on each arm, a shield of the polished hide of the rhinoceros, embossed and ornamented with gold, a jewelled sabre and matchlock, with his long and glossy black beard and moustaches he looked the very beau ideal of a Sikh chief.”* Obviously the above description gives the idea that these were the ceremonial peace time dress of the Sikh chiefs which displayed pomp and splendour of the Court of Ranjit Singh.

It will be seen from the above that the Sikh army was not uniformly dressed. There were different dresses and weapons. Some were armed with modern weapons and other with shields, bows and arrows and spears. Griffin says, “The regular troops were much less picturesque than the Jagirdari horse. Their dress was a close imitation of the scarlet uniforms worn by the British army, singularly ungraceful on native troops.”**

Whatever might have been the dress and equipment of the Sikh army it enabled the troops to fight effectively in comfort.

* Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
** Ranjit Singh by Griffin.
Foreigners in Sikh service

Quite a number of foreigners were employed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to train and organize his army on the European style. Some of them left prominent marks in the history.

All these foreigners were liberally paid and kindly treated. They were also granted other local court privileges and Ranjit Singh trusted them to a great extent.

The European officers had to sign an agreement which bound them "to domesticate themselves in the country by marriage, not to eat beef, nor smoke tobacco in public, to permit their beards to grow, to care not to offend against the Sikh religion, and if required to fight against their own country."*

In the first instance Ranjit Singh distrusted the foreigners who came seeking employment in his court. But a submissive and judicious letter from these foreigners allayed his suspicions and they were employed. Their good conduct and wise management made them popular and it enabled many others to get suitable appointments in the Sikh army.

With advancing age, Ranjit Singh grew distrustful of his foreign generals. "His distrust and jealousy of Europeans is also another reason that his army, with all its advantages over other Indian troops, is not in the state of training its appearance would lead you to expect."**

* The Lahore Durbar by Sethi.
** Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
In the early periods the foreigners were attracted into Sikh Army and they had created a new era in Sikh history. But gradually with the passage of time and as more and more Sikhs were trained and experienced in the art of modern warfare, the foreigners lost their place of importance. From 1831 the foreigners were discontented and were leaving the service because of insecurity of tenure. "Moreover, the Maharaja also was no longer anxious to keep or enlist them in his service, because he now felt that his own Sirdars were equally up to the mark."*

It has also been said that towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign these foreigners were badly and irregularly paid, were treated with little respect or confidence, and were used as an instrument of his vengeance and exactions. Some of them even went to the extent of offering their services to the British.

In fairness to Ranjit Singh it must be conceded that he had already thought of modernising his army and he already had troops trained on European lines as far back as 1807. The many European adventurers were much in demand as technical experts in artillery and ordnance and they mostly attended to the technical details, leaving the general tactical training in the hands of the Sikh generals in Ranjit Singh's employ. "Allard, Ventura and Court thus played the same part in the Punjab under Ranjit as did Gordon and Lefort in Russia under Peter the Great."**

* The Lahore Durbar by Sethi.
** Ranjit Singh by Sinha,
These European officers came from various nationalities and there were Italians, Frenchmen, Americans, Englishmen, Anglo Indians, Spainards, Greeks, Russians, Germans and Austrians. Thus they were a completely heterogeneous crowd who were soldiers of fortune selling their expert knowledge to the highest Indian bidder.

Some of them did the Maharaja well though they were objects of jealousy and sometimes drew strong criticisms from the Sikh Sardars. Ranjit Singh was generally apprehensive of their behaviour, loyalty and alignment. He said, "Firinghees who were single men were apt to think of their own country, grew discontented and applied for their discharge at a time when probably their services could not be dispensed with."*

Gradually the services of the foreigners were dispensed with as and when their task was completed. For this attitude no blame can be given to Ranjit Singh. Again, some historians maintain that he callously dispensed with the foreigners services because he grew suspicious of them and that his Sardars were advocating their removal. This again is not completely true. As long as these foreigners served Ranjit well, he looked after them and paid them well. But in the latter stages of his life when he was in failing health, the foreigners realised the insecurity of their life and career in the hands of his possible weak successors. Thus they sought retirements in due course.

**Famous Sikh Generals**

The famous foreigners who served in Ranjit Singh's army were Generals Allard, Ventura, Avitabile, Cour,

*Political proceedings, 1827 (No. 7).*
Courtlandt, Lt. Col. Steinbach, Capts Ford, LaFont, Foulkes and John Holmes.

The Sikh generals of repute were, Hari Singh Nalwa, Dewan Mokham Chand, Autar Singh Sindhanwalia, Lehma Singh, Ajit Singh, Gulab Singh, Dhyan Singh, Suchet Singh, Fateh Singh Kalianwala, Nihal Singh Attariwala and Jowahir Singh. Of these Hari Singh Nalwa and Raja Dhyan Singh are more prominent. They were equally able and statesmanlike in their work.

The strength of the Sikh army

The army's strength varied at different times. In 1845 it was:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Infantry</td>
<td>53,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Cavalry</td>
<td>6,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular Cavalry</td>
<td>16,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>10,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel swivels</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>88,662 men</strong></td>
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In addition the strength of the artillery weapons was—

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrison guns</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel swivels</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting to note the varying strengths and expenditure of the Sikh army during the regimes of the various Sikh rulers. These were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Regime</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Guns</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Maharaja Ranjit Singh</td>
<td>29,168</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>Rs. 3,82,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Maharaja Sher Singh</td>
<td>50,065</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>Rs. 5,48,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Raja Hira Singh</td>
<td>50,805</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>Rs. 6,82,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Sirdar Jowahir Singh</td>
<td>72,370</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>Rs. 8,52,696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures of cost indicate how the army’s pay and allowances were gradually increasing due to constant demands from the soldiers after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
CHAPTER VI

THE VOID

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on 27 June 1839 at the age of 59. He was perhaps the most able and strong ruler that had ever adorned the throne of Lahore. He not only established an empire and founded a ruling dynasty but also gave it power, honour and prestige. The English respected and feared him. But after his death things did not move on the right path. His successors were imbeciles, inefficient and lacked statesmanlike qualities.

Intrigues and conspiracies commenced no sooner Ranjit Singh died. The Sikh chiefs and ministers fought between themselves to gain power and money in the state and eventually murdered one another. Thus there was chaos and anarchy in the Sikh state. "Neither his wisdom nor masterly spirit was in any measure possessed by his successors. On the loss of his strong hand the State was torn asunder by dissensions between rival princes, ministers, queens and sardars and rapidly declined, until ten years later it fell by conquest to the British, on whom the Sikhs fatuously forced war. The Khalsa, the one united power left, became praetorian in character, selling their services to the highest bidder. Army delegates decided in Council the fate of King and Country, making and unmaking their rulers and officers."*

* The Sikhs by General Gordon.
Soon after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there rose two rival groups in Lahore—one was headed by Raja Dhyan Singh and the second was led by Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh. These two groups conspired to outdo and destroy each other. Eventually Nau Nihal Singh was murdered by Dhyan Singh. But later in 1843 Raja Dhyan Singh was also killed.

The last of the line of the kings was Maharaja Dalip Singh. After the Second Sikh War he was dethroned by the British who annexed the Punjab on 31 March 1849.

Thus ended an empire most ingloriously which was founded on the glory and strength of their religion and also the people.

By the untimely death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the Sikhs were left to political disintegration and ultimate extinction. If he had been still alive and gave the benefit of his leadership, guidance, control and iron rule, the history of Punjab and indeed of India, would have recorded completely different events for posterity.

It is needless to dwell upon the many court intrigues, murders and other desultory affairs which was prevailing in the Sikh State. Rulers after rulers were changed and gradually the Army came into politics. To win over the Sikh army Sher Singh, the new rulér, raised the pay of all soldiers by one rupee per month as a permanent measure in 1841. But the army was uncontrollable. They could not be bribed to silence as the king was unable to command and lead them. The army was not regularly paid
and even the paymasters defrauded them of their emoluments. This enraged the army and they resorted to violence not only to wreak vengeance on those who wronged them but also collect their dues. Thus anarchy prevailed as the soldiers took the law in their own hands to effect control over the machinery of the state. From this time onwards discipline and subordination ceased in the army and the soldiers being conscious of their power and authority in the state dictated and made and unmade kings according to their own whims and to the highest bidders.

The fighting efficiency of the army was not much impaired but their unruly attitude and political tone without correct guidance and lead made them follow a downward path. "The military administration was now conducted by Panchayats, or Councils of five delegates from each company in each regiment elected by their comrades, a democratic mode of self-government common in India."*

These army councils conducted and formulated rules and regulations to govern themselves though they did not obey or implement those which they did not like. The army asserted themselves in the name of the Khalsa and resembled the regimental elders of the Parliamentary army under Cromwell.

There was no respite for anyone in the state against the Army's onrush for control of the affairs and their

*The Sikhs by General Gordon.
dictatorship. Even though the pay of the soldiers was increased by two rupees and a half by Wazir Hira Singh in 1842, yet the army was unsatisfied and they did not like to leave the power of authority they had gradually acquired in the State. They never intended to dismember the Sikh state though they were bent upon to extract additional pay and other advantages from the rulers whom they had appointed. "The army now conscious from the part which they had played in effecting these changes that the whole power was in their hands, began to clamour for increased pay, and never hesitated, whenever their demands were refused, to take summary vengeance on the individuals obnoxious to them."* No troops or units left Lahore without the specific authority of the Panchayat and they seldom agreed to any moves contemplated by the rulers. It was apprehended that it was a design to disperse the army and weaken their authority and power.

There was no doubt that misrule and weakness brought about anarchy in the state. Troops looted and plundered to get their share of pay. The monarchy was tottered and lived in perpetual fear of the soldiers who might liquidate them any moment they so wished. "The soldiers were sufficient in numbers to form a mighty host, and possessed inexhaustible supplies of military stores; but there was no field on which they could display their prowess and enrich themselves with plunder, unless they were to invade the British territories."* In order to divert the attention of the soldiers from internal turmoil

*History of India by Beveridge.
and politics, it became necessary for the rulers to arouse anti-British feelings. A council of Sardars and military delegates decided in 1845 to take action against the British, as, otherwise the Sikh power would collapse due to internal intrigues and dissensions. "The chief sardars had gained affluence and lost moral force; the army was venal; and the arrogant ignorant punches, the military councils ruled the Khalsa, which deprived of the guidance of the European officers whom they had discarded, dashed itself against the British ranks in fierce but unavailing efforts to overcome them."*

The British expedition to Afghanistan was viewed with distrust as it was felt that they were aiming to extend their empire by encircling Punjab. Also the initial British defeat, though later vindicated by the successful conclusion of the campaign, lent credence to the fact that the British were not invincible. All these factors contributed to the rise of morale and fighting qualities of the Sikh Army in their ultimate fight against the British.

The Maharaja and the ministers were thoroughly fed up with the demanding attitude of the Army. The financial position of the Sikh state was verging on ruin and the political status of the state was also degrading. They were willing to let the army attack the British which would either ruin the army only or enhance the reputation of the government if won. Thus they were playing for time and opportunity. "It became, therefore, the policy of the court, which felt itself powerless in the hands of

* The Sikhs by General Gordo
the Panchayats, to devise means of destroying, or else satisfying the army itself. The Khalsa was to be urged to challenge the British. If it were shattered, the court would be rid of its masters, if triumphant, the court would claim the credit."

The military positions on the frontiers between the Sikh and British states were strengthened by the British at Ludhiana and Ferozepore. The prevailing condition and situations were being prompted to make the Sikhs believe that the British were poised to attack the Sikh dominion by crossing the Sutlej. But somehow this high feeling was staved off by diverting the attention of the Sikh army towards the state of Jammu. But there again the crisis was averted by the Raja of Jammu who bribed the troops.

The situation was most complex and intriguing during this period. There were so many claims and counter claims to power in the Sikh state. But the army was still supreme and dictated the affairs of the State. The state treasury was empty and the troops were not in a healthy state. The Panchayats assumed reigns of government, their attitude was menacing and it was quite apparent that there will be a war between the Sikhs and the British. The die was cast when on 11 December 1855 a body of Sikh troops crossed the Sutlej.

Had Maharaja Ranjit Singh been alive today such a situation would never have arisen. He knew the limits of his power and had the interest and security of his dynasty always in his mind. He never disturbed his.

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough & Innes.
friendly relations with the British. "Unlike Hyder Ali or Tipu Sultan, he knew the depth of the English power and the comparative limitations of his own resources, and the futility of measuring swords with the English. It was not timidity, but a true realisation of the whole situation, which led him to accept the Treaty of Amritsar (1809) and so forfeit forever his right of expansion in the Cis-Sutlej area, or later in 1827, to suffer the British refusal to admit his claim to Ferozepore, or to forego the enforcement of his demands upon the Amirs of Sind in 1836, or to become an unwilling ally to the Tripartite Treaty of 1838."*

The British were equally anxious to maintain good neighbourly relations with the Sikhs because of Russophobia. But unfortunately the sagacious and able hands who formulated and pursued such a policy, particularly amongst the Sikhs were no longer alive on the scene and hence the Sikh state went headlong into a war which was their own choosing.

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* The Lahore Durbar by Sethi.
CHAPTER VII
THE FIRST SIKH WAR—1845-46

The causes of the War

With the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh all sanity, sobriety and sagacity disappeared from the policy pursued by the Sikhs. Cohesion, wisdom and a master-mind that guided the destiny of the young Sikh nation was no longer there to arrest their headlong rush to a catastrophe. Internal dissensions, factions, party politics and court intrigues were in the forefront and the people and the feudal chiefs did not enjoy peace and security of life and property. It was prophetically said—“The whole country between the Sutlej and the Indus must become the scene of a protracted and bloody war, only to be terminated by the interference of a third and stronger power, with an army and resources sufficiently strong to bid defiance to all hope of resistance, and that that army must be the British army, and that power the British government, there can be little doubt.”*

Anti-British feelings were inculcated and running high in the Sikh army and all of them were imbued with loyalty and self-confidence to the Khalsa. “But this turbulent and insubordinate body, recklessly democratic in its political treatment of the Government, was fully alive to the impossibility of democratic methods in the field, and the Panchayats now laid aside their assumed control,

* The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
formally accepting the purely military organisation for purely military purposes.”* Thus the generals and their subordinate military commanders deployed their military forces without the interference or questioning by the Panchayats. Every Sikh contributed his share in men and money, guns and stores for their fight against the British. Against a common enemy they displayed complete unity of action and purpose and presented a bold front. All obeyed orders and worked for the benefit and safety of the Khalsa.

From the very early days Ranjit Singh pursued a “go slow” policy with the British as he realised full well their military and economic power. But this was not much liked by other countries and chiefs who advocated a much stiffer policy. Only Ranjit Singh’s personality and other political circumstances kept them under check. Now this check was non-existent and hence their ideas and policies came to be recognised and pursued.

As soon as the Sikh army took control of their government and made and unmade kings, the British appreciated that sooner or later there will be a crisis between them and that they took early steps to strengthen the frontier posts. But while doing so they never gave any impression or indication that war was imminent or did not give any cause to Sikhs that they were going to be the aggressors. “From the moment the Sikh army became predominant in the state, the English authorities had been persuaded that the machinery of government would be broken up,

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
that bands of plunderers would everywhere arise, and that the duty of a civilised people to society generally and of a governing power to its own subjects, would all combine to bring a collision; and thus measures which seemed sufficient were adopted for strengthening the frontier posts, and for having a force at hand which might prevent aggression, or which would at least exact retribution and vindicate the supremacy of the English name."

The Sikhs however thought that the British were going or contemplating the extension of their dominion upto the NWFP in order to subjugate Afghanistan later. Anyway both parties were suspicious of each other and feared aggression of their respective territories.

The political turmoil in the Sikh state quite rightly forced the British to take necessary precautionary measures. In a letter to the C-in-C the Governor General said—"On or before the 12th November arrangements will have been made by which the commissariat department will be prepared to equip nearly two-thirds of the force at, and in advance of Meerut, with the necessary means of marching at the shortest notice. In the present state of our relations with the Lahore Government, I do not anticipate the probability of any emergencies arising which can require the army to take the field this autumn. Nevertheless, having to deal with a mutinous Sikh army, which has usurped the functions of the government, and whose caprice may at any time force on a rupture with our forces on the frontier, I have deemed it advisable to be prepared with the means of movement to the extent

* History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
noted, and as it is desirable that the arrangement should be made on the most economical scale, the whole will be hired at the halting rates.”

The British garrisons at various places on the frontier and in the rear were strengthened. Upto 1838 the troops on the frontier were one regiment at Sabathu, two at Ludhiana with six artillery pieces bringing the total strength to 25,000 men. But these were gradually strengthened till it reached the total strength of 32,000 men and 68 field guns during the regime of Lord Hardinge.

A sort of war psychosis was prevailing in the whole country. The Sikh army was all powerful with no one capable to either control or guide them through the right path. The courtiers had no authority over the army who were by now guided and controlled by a system of committees. “These men considered that their only chance of retaining power was to have the army removed by inducing it to engage in a contest which they believed would end in its dispersion, and pang the way for their recognition as ministers more surely than if they did their duty by the people, and earnestly deprecated a war which must destroy the independence of the Punjab.”*

After Jawahir Singh’s death, the two nobles Lal Singh and Tej Singh came to the forefront with the aim of destroying the army who were all powerful in the state. They were scheming either to destroy the army’s power themselves or else throw them on the English guns for

* History of the Sikhs, by Cunningham.
destruction. "The army, thus became the arbiter of the fate of the rulers of the country, was new more than ever master. To men like Lal Singh, Tej Singh, and others who had a stake in the country, the situation had become intolerable. Earnest secret efforts were then made by these men to arouse in the ranks of the army a spirit of hostility to the English."*

The Sikh plan of operations against the British, as intimated by Maj Broadfoot to the C-in-C on 20th November was as follows:—

"The Army was to be divided into divisions, one to remain at Lahore, and the rest to proceed against Rupar, Ludhiana, Hariki, Ferozepore and Sind, while one was to proceed to Peshawar; and a force under Raja Gulab Singh was to be sent to Attock. Each division was to be of 8,000 to 12,000 men; against Ferozepore under Sham Singh Atariwala; against Hariki, Raja Lal Singh; against Ludhiana, Sardar Tej Singh, the new C-in-C. and against Rupar, a brother of Sena Singh Mujitia. The force under Sham Singh was to be 4,000 horses, and two brigades of infantry, with guns; under Raja Lal Singh 4,500 horses and two infantry brigades; under Sirdar Tej Singh, four brigades of infantry (one of them irregulars and one new levies) and 1,000 horses."

It has been said that the Sikh first started the war. They were the first to cross the Sutlej and invest Ferozepore on 11 December 1845. Whereas it is argued from the Sikh angle that the British first started the war prepara-

* The Decisive Battles of India by Col Malleson.
tions on their frontiers and hence the Sikhs took the initiative so that they would not be surprised. It is rather difficult to agree to any one of the above points of view and place the responsibility on any one's shoulders. Whatever it be, I consider that the First Sikh War was set off due to the Sikh Army having first crossed the Sutlej the inter-state boundary.

On 11 December 1845 the Khalsa army of 60,000 men with 100 guns crossed the Sutlej and invested Ferozepore by cutting off the lines of communication with the British Headquarters. This information was received by Lord Hardinge on 13 December who issued this proclamation—"The Sikh army has now, without a shadow of provocation, invaded the British territories. The Governor General must therefore take measures for effectively protecting the British provinces, for vindicating the authority of the British government, and for punishing the violaters of treaties and the disturbers of public peace. The Governor-General hereby declares the possessions of Maharaja Duleep Singh on the left of British banks of the Sutlej confiscated or annexed to the British territories."

As I have said before that by nefarious designs the Sikh Sirdars who wanted to crush the power of the Sikh army had aroused anti-British feelings in them and the Sikh army eventually took the precipitious action of starting the war against the British. "The soldiers, roused to a determination to conquer India, selected as prime minister and as commander-in-chief Lal Singh and Tej Singh, the two nobles who had most openly declared in
tavour of the new aggression, and, on the 11th December 1845, tumultuously crossed the Sutlej some twelve miles before Ferozepore."* Thus the Anglo-Sikh War broke out in a fury.

The Anglo-Sikh Wars had started which eventually lost the Sikhs their empire and prestige and removed from the pages of history the last Indian bid for founding own empire. Gradually all the country became "red" as prophesied by Ranjit Singh.

A study of the military leaders of the Sikh side would reveal that they were brave but did not possess morale, courage and confidence. Many of them had no honesty of purpose and their integrity and loyalty were questionable. On the British side there were veterans of many wars in Europe, they were brave and fine leaders of men enjoying their confidence and loyalty. We will see more details of the command ability in both the opposing armies as we go through the battles.

On the eve of battle the Sikh army was quite strong and large. They had about 200 guns; 35 foot regiments of 1,000 men each, 15,000 Ghorcharas and other levies. Captain Cunningham has said that their strength was only between 30,000 to 40,000 during the Sutlej Campaign. Thus we see the views of historians are rather conflicting on the strength of the Sikh army.

The British on the other hand had the following troops—Ferozepore 7,000 Ludhiana 5,000; Ambala with

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* The Decisive Battles of India by Col Malleson.
Kasauli and Sabathu 10,000; Meerut 9,000 and two Gurkha battalions. They also had adequate commissariat cover for such operations. About weapons and artillery, the old Brown Bess with a range of 300 yards and artillery from 300 to 800 yards was all that they possessed. The performance of the Sikh weapons was also similar to the British.

On the whole the command set up in the British army was efficient and they were ready to meet a sudden emergency and all troops on the frontiers from Ferozepore to Ambala were ready to move to threatened areas, at a moment-notice.

The strength and deployment of British Army on the eve of the First Sikh War were as follows:—

**Ferozepore**
(General Littler)  
2 Troops Horse Artillery  
2 Light Field batteries  
2 Native Cavalry Regiments  
1 European and 2 Brigades and  
7 Native battalions 2 battalions of the garrison

**Ludhiana**
(Brig Wheeler)  
2 Troops Horse Artillery  
1 European and 5 Native battalions  
1 Regiment Irregular Cavalry

**Ambala**
(Maj Gen Gilbert)  
2 Troops Horse Artillery  
1 European and 3 Native Cavalry regiment  
3 European and 5 Native Battalions
Simla Hills
  2 European Battalions
  1 Gurkha Battalion

Meerut
  2 Troops Horse Artillery
  2 European and 1 Indian Cavalry Regiment
  1 European and 4 Native battalions

Dehra Dun
  1 Gurka Battalion

Cawnpore
  1 Troop Horse Artillery
  4 Companies of Foot Artillery
  4 Native Cavalry and 5 Native Infantry, Corps.

All these forces were grouped into three cavalry brigades and four infantry divisions with ad hoc staff being collected together when the threat of war was felt.

The Battle of Moodkee—18 December 1845

After crossing the Sutlej the Sikh army did not follow a concerted plan of action. They were of divided opinion. Some advocated an attack on Ferozepore and others wanted to push on beyond. The English garrison at Ferozepore was weak and the Sikhs could have easily captured this place with their strong large force. But they did not do so.

General Littler, commander of the garrison at Ferozepore acted daringly with his small force of 7,000 men, marched out and offered battle to the Sikhs. Thus the Sikh plan of action was thrown out of gear.
In the meanwhile additional British armies from Ambala, Meerut, and Ludhiana arrived on the scene. On 18th December the British forces reached Moodkee and hardly they had taken up their positions that a detachment of the Sikh army threatened them.

After crossing the Sutlej the Sikh army took no action for a few days. Their leaders Lal Singh and Tej Singh were sabotaging their efforts by misguiding, misleading, and confusing their plans of action. Their intelligence was faulty as they had no clear news of the movements of the British army. At last after losing six precious days on the south bank of the river they gained information on 17th December that the British army was reaching Moodkee. It was rather late. 30,000 strong whereas the English had only 11,000 men and they could have easily surprised and over-whelmed them but nothing happened. "The Sikh army, under the harmful influence of the leaders who were bent on its destruction, had no regard for such counsels. Instead of marching en masse to overwhelm the enemy, they were persuaded to detach only a brigade consisting of less than 2,000 infantry supported by 22 guns and 8,000 or 10,000 cavalry."

When the Sikh army was contacted on 18th December at about 3 P.M., the British formed up their tired force rather hurriedly. As the alarm was sounded, men left their meals and cooking and took up their battle positions and advanced towards the enemy. "The frontline was formed of the three arms, the artillery being in the centre;

* The Decisive Battles of India by Col Malleson:
flanked on both sides by infantry, and the infantry again by cavalry. Behind this line came the main body of the infantry in contiguous columns; and in rear of all a small reserve."*

The country near Moodkee was open and flat, and interspersed with some trees and shrubs. The Sikhs took up positions in bush jungle, low sand hills and their snipers were perched on the trees. "The British horse artillery and cavalry vigorously assailed them in flank, and sweeping along their rear routed their cavalry, while they were attacked in front by the field guns supporting the infantry, which, charging with the bayonet, drove them from position after position with great slaughter, and captured 17 guns. The Sikhs fought fiercely and retired suddenly in good order, seizing every opportunity to turn on their foes."**

The battle of Moodkee has been very ably described by General Gough in his despatch in these words—

"The country is a dead flat, covered at short intervals with a low, but in some places thick jhow jungle, and dotted with sandy hillocks. The enemy screened their infantry and artillery behind this jungle, and such undulations as the ground afforded, and whilst our twelve battalions formed from echelon of brigade into line, opened a very severe cannonade upon our advancing troops, which was vigorously replied to by the battery of horse-

* The Decisive Battles of India by Col Malleson.  
** The Sikhs by Gen Gordon.
artillery under Brigadier Brooke, which was soon joined by the two light field batteries. The rapid and well-directed fire of our artillery appear soon to paralyse that of the enemy, and, as it was necessary to complete our infantry dispositions without advancing the artillery too near to the jungle, I directed the cavalry, under Brigadiers White and Gough, to make a flank movement on the enemy's left, with a view to threatening and turning that flank if possible. With praiseworthy gallantry the 3rd Light Dragoons, with the 2nd Brigade of Cavalry, consisting of the bodyguard and 5th Light Cavalry, with a portion of the 4th Lancers, turned the left of the Sikh Army, and sweeping along the whole rear of its infantry and guns, silenced for a time the latter, and put their numerous cavalry to flight. Whilst this movement was taking place on the enemy's left, I directed the remainder of the 4th Lancers, the 9th Irregular Cavalry under Brigadier Mactier, with a light field battery, to threaten their right. This manoeuvre was also successful. Had not the infantry and guns of the enemy been screened by the jungle, these brilliant charges of the cavalry would have been productive of greater effect. When the infantry advanced to the attack, Brigadier Brooke rapidly pushed on his horse artillery close to the jungle, and the cannonade was resumed on both sides. The infantry, under Major Generals Sir Harry Smith, Gilbert and Sir John M'Caskill, attacked in echelon of lines the enemy's infantry, almost invisible amongst wood and the approaching darkness of night.

The opposition of the enemy was such as might have been expected from troops who had everything at stack,
and who had long vaunted of being irresistible. Their ample and extended line, from their great superiority of numbers, far outflanked our, but this was counteracted by the flank movements of our cavalry. The attack of the infantry now commenced, and the roll of fire from this powerful arm soon convinced the Sikh army that they had met with a foe they little expected; and their whole force was driven from position after position with great slaughter, and the loss of 17 pieces of artillery, some of them of heavy calibre; our infantry using that never failing weapon, the bayonet, wherever the enemy stood. Night only saved them from worst disaster, for this stout conflict was maintained during an hour and a half of dim starlight, amidst a cloud of dust from the sandy plain, which yet more obscured every object."

Thus the first battle of the First Anglo-Sikh War was fought between two contestants for the rich prize of the Indian Empire.

As the British came upon the Sikh guns the Sikhs opened heavy fire on them and then threatened the British flanks by their cavalry. The threat was retrieved by the charge of the British Cavalry and then the infantry columns were sent against the Sikhs. In the end the flanks of the Sikhs were uncovered and their cavalry retreated. The Sikhs then conducted a fighting withdrawal contesting every inch of the ground. At last when the night fell the battle ceased.

This is how the British army went into battle—"Accordingly sixty rounds of balled ammunition was
served out to each man, and two days cooked rations ordered to be carried with the troops, each man carrying all he could in his haversack, besides a bottle covered with leather slung over his shoulders for water. They were clothed in their ordinary scarlet uniform and blue trousers, and wore forage caps covered with white cloth, and a curtain hanging down behind for the protection of the head and neck; great coats were not carried."

Though the battle ceased and the Sikhs retreated yet the British could not continue their pursuit of the beaten enemy because the sick and the wounded had to be securely left behind and for this troops had to be detached for their protection and assistance.

Though the Sikh army retreated in face of the British attack, the British victory was by no means decisive. The Sikh army fought a steady and hard battle and truly lived up to the reputation of the Khalsa.

Generally the Sikh plan of action was to divide their army into seven divisions deployed as follows—one at Lahore, one to Peshawar and five to invade the British territory beyond the Sutlej. Each division had from 8,000 to 12,000 men. Also, the Sikhs made efforts to undermine the morale of the sepoys in the British army by offering them more pay.

The operational plan of the Sikh army was quite sensible but their execution was half-hearted and faulty for the reasons already brought out earlier. Their plan

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
was to cut off the British forces at Ferozepore after crossing the Sutlej, crush the force coming out from Ludhiana before any of these joined up and then capture other garrisons along the border and further inland, one by one, before they could reach help to one another. But we have seen how the daring of the British forces at Ferozepore had upset the Sikh plan.

During the battle some important features were noticed. The British troops carried out some long distance marches of 150 miles in seven days over very hard tracks and bad climate without much rest, food and water. In spite of being fatigued, the troops marched bravely.

There was complete cooperation and understanding on the British side between their commanders in the field and the civilian authorities. But in the Sikh side there was no such understanding and their commanders were treacherous to the troops whom they wished to destroy.

Though there was a clever operational plan of the Sikh army yet it was not properly executed with the result that the British by their initiative and calculated risk defeated a larger Sikh army by a smaller force. The troops on both the sides displayed dogged perseverance, indomitable will, toughness and bravery. Yet the Sikh army was badly and treacherously led and hence the British succeeded.

It was noticed that the Sikh Cavalry and infantry had acquitted well, and were as good as any other Indian
power though, by comparison, the Maratha artillery was decidedly better than the Sikhs.

There was a common belief in the British army that the Sikhs will not fight hard and that they will win battles by marching and firing few shots, without skilful dispositions, and hard fighting. This complacency and overconfidence cost the British quite heavy casualties which they could have avoided.

The Sikh army was gallant and disciplined but they savagely and barbarously treated the wounded which caused considerable resentment in the British army. This had bad repercussions during the later wars.

There was no mobilization schemes those days, yet the army was put in the field from all over the country in the shortest possible time. Foresight and forward planning was done to the credit of all.

It will be noted from the narrative of the campaign that not much information was available when the Sikhs came upon the British forces at rest near Moodkee. It has been said that not much use of cavalry was made to make an effective long distance reconnaissance so that information about the enemy’s movements could be available early. The art of mounted reconnaissance does not seem to be much practised at this time.

The importance and necessity for timely and correct information about the opposing forces was not much appreciated. If the British had early and correct information of the Sikh troop movements they would not have
been taken by surprise. Similarly the Sikhs would have put up a better fight against the British if they had known that the British forces from further afield had effected junction at Moodkee, 20 miles from Ferozepore on 18th December.
CHAPTER VIII

BATTLE OF FEROZESHAH—21 & 22 DECEMBER 1845

After withdrawal from the battle of Moodkee, the Sikhs now fell back upon Ferozeshah to put up another bold front to the victorious and advancing British. This village is only ten miles from Moodkee and is about midway between Ferozepore and this place. By the time the British forces were ready to move to follow up the victory, reinforcements had arrived and Littler was also ready to move out of Ferozepore to join the main forces now on the march towards Ferozeshah. All heavy baggage and camp equipment were left behind at Moodkee and after rearranging the forces at his disposal, General Gough marched off on 21 December.

Initially the British advanced in a line of columns but later, when no enemy was encountered, they moved in a column of route. The march of the army was necessarily slow due to broad front, nature of the terrain, and darkness. As the troops were resting, Littler’s force from Ferozepore had not yet joined the main body. The Sikh position at this stage was about 2 miles or so. But later the junction was effected at about 1 P.M. about 3,000 yards South-West of the Sikh position at Ferozeshah. Thus the mounting of the attack was delayed from 10 A.M. to about 4 P.M. because the British awaited the actual arrival of Littler’s force. There was strong controversy on this subject which I will discuss later.
The Sikh army was deployed in two divisions—one under Tej Singh, North of Ferozepore and the other under Lal Singh facing the main body of the British troops at Ferozeshah. The position was—"a parallelogram of about a mile in length and half a mile in breadth, including within its area the strong village of Firozshahpur the shorter sides looking towards the Sutlej and Mudki, and the longer towards Firuzpur and the open country."** Strong defensive works have been put up in and around the village.

The British troop dispositions were as follows:—
"The army was then drawn up fronting the southern and western faces of the Sikh position, with Littler's division on the left, Wallace's in the centre, and Gilberts on the right, Sir Harry Smith's forming the reserve. A powerful battery, including the heavy guns, was placed between the divisions of Gilbert and Wallace and batteries of horse artillery on the flanks."*** The reserve along with the cavalry was placed centrally and a cavalry brigade was placed forward in support of each wing of the force.

Generally the British plan of attack was, Littler to attack western side towards Ferozepore, Wallace to attack west and the southern portion and Gilbert the balance of the southern portion and the eastern sector. Littler was facing the best Sikh infantry and heavy artillery as they had been concentrated on that side.

After reconnaissance the commander-in-chief decided to attack immediately even though Littler had not yet

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* Despatches by Gough.
** The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
arrived and joined the main force. The main reasons for this plan of action was the following—"Knowing definitely that Littler's force was on the way, and was secure of effecting the junction, he resolved to leave it the duty of acting as a reserve, and to himself at once attack the position at Ferozeshah with the whole of his three divisions, without waiting for Sir John. The arguments in favour of this plan of action were strong. By making the attack early in the day the troops would be able to do their work while fairly fresh; and in Sir Hugh's judgment, supported by the event, they might then be relied on to carry the entrenchments and drive the Sikhs back. Meantime, if Tej Singh advanced from Ferozepore, Littler would hold him in check, or if he did not advance would be able to fall on Lal Singh's engaged army and effect a complete rout. On the other hand, delay would mean that the day might close before the engagement was decisively at an end, and would be accompanied by the rest of Tej Singh's arrival at a critical time."*

This was a sound reasoning for a very sound plan. But unfortunately the Governor-General who was, though serving as the 2nd in Command of the C-in-C, overruled him on the ground, that it was not safe enough to attack till the arrival of Littler's force from Ferozepore. Sir Henry Hardinge, as Governor General of India, responsible for the British dominion of India, overruled the plan of military operations of a C-in-C in the field of battle. As events proved this was an unsound action which almost jeopardised the military operations in the battle.

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
However, in the end Littler's forces joined the main body of British troops and the troops launched the attack at 4 P.M. same day. The attack was delayed by about six hours. Tired troops had been launched into battle on a shortest day of the year (21 December 1845). Thus valuable time and opportunity had been lost.

As the British troops advanced towards the Sikh position they met with heavy artillery fire and could not advance further. The Sikhs had artillery superiority both in the number of guns and fire power. The Sikh position on the right or Westerly front was attacked by Littler's force. "The advance was conducted with perfect steadiness, notwithstanding that the nature of the country made occasional breaks in the line. As they approached the entrenchments the ground became more open and the enemy's fire increased to a storm of grape. The line approached the enemy's battery to within about 150 yards, when the prize seemed to be within their grasp; but it chanced to be the strongest part of the position, defended by numerous guns of heavy calibre, although the entrenchments were no stronger than elsewhere."*

But in spite of the gallant charge of the British, the Sikhs halted and broke up their attack and the troops fled the field of battle. The European and Indian troops were both exhausted and lacked stamina and could not keep up to the pressure of shots of the Sikh artillery.

Gen. Gough in his despatch describes this engagement thus:

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* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
“A very heavy cannonade was opened by the enemy, who had dispersed over the position upwards of 100 guns, more than 40 of which were of battering calibre. These kept up a heavy and well-directed fire, which the practice from our far less numerous artillery of much lighter metal checked in some degree, but could not silence; finally in the face of a storm of a shot and shell our infantry advanced and carried these formidable entrenchments; they threw themselves upon the guns with matchless gallantry, and wrested them from the enemy; but when the batteries were partially within our grasp our soldiers had to face such a fire of musketry from the Sikh infantry arrayed behind their guns, that in spite of the most heroic efforts a portion only of the entrenchments could be carried. Night fell while the conflict was everywhere raging.”

The next stage of the attack from the centre and right were launched and on these occasions the Sikhs put up terrific artillery fire and their infantry stood unsubdued behind barricades and entrenchments. The Sikh gunners and infantry were bayonetted to men before they gave up their position. Wave after wave of Sikh troops stubbornly attacked the British and hand to hand fights took place before they were finally overrun. In the end the position may be summarised as follows—“The British attack on the left was repulsed, but a firm foothold was secured in the centre and right, despite fierce hand to hand fighting, when again and again the Sikh batteries were charged and the gunners bayonetted.”

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
On the right the Sikhs put up a still more stubborn fight and eventually the British reserve was ordered up. It was also met with heavy fire from Sikh artillery. But the British charged with indomitable will and vigour, entered the Sikh Camp and captured the village of Ferozeshah eventually. But with darkness approaching, there was confusion all round and enemy could not be recognised from friends. The night fall did not give complete victory to the British. The Sikhs were still gallantly holding on to their position though the British were almost in the middle. The infantry never gave way and stubbornly fought every yard of the ground.

There was confusion all round. Both the warring sides were mixed up and none knew about each other's position. Capt. Cunningham ably sums up the situation in these words:—

"Darkness and the obstinacy of the contest, threw the English into confusion; men of all regiments and arms were mixed together; generals were doubtful of the extent of their own success, and colonels knew not what had become of the regiment they commanded, or of the army of which they formed a part—the position of the English was one of real danger and great perplexity; their mercenaries had proved themselves good soldiers in foreign countries as well as in India itself, when discipline was little known, or while success was continuous; but in a few hours the five thousand children of a distant land found that their art had been learnt, and that an emergency had arisen which would tax their energies to the utmost. On that memorable night the English were
hardly masters of the ground on which they stood, they had no reserve at hand, while the enemy had fallen back upon a second army, and could renew the fight with increased numbers.”*

“Darkness was now rapidly increasing, and with it confusion. The Sikh camp was on fire, and frequent explosions were taking place; there became a danger of the troops firing into each other. The C-in-C therefore decided to withdraw the scattered troops from the Sikh camp, and to form a bivouac in the open space about 300 yards from the entrenchment.”**

The British troops were in a precarious position. They were holding a salient in the midst of a very stubborn and gallant enemy, they had no rest or food and had been fighting or marching throughout the whole day, there was confusion all round, morale was at a low ebb due to casualties and uncollected wounded lying all over and though they held on to the position throughout the night, they were harassed continuously by Sikh fire and raiding parties. The C-in-C was going round the troops in such a state and was trying to boost up the morale.

The very precarious position of the British had been further expressed in these words:—

“This was a fearful position to be in, and from the intervals between the European infantry regiments and the native brigades with them being left vacant, there was

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* The History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
** The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
no possibility of forming a line, or acting in concert, portions of one regiment got mixed up with more of another in the entrenchment, and in the darkness of the night could not regain their respective positions. If a regiment had attempted to move right or left in search of another, the Sikh guns were sure to be directed to the spot, with admirable prudence, forbade a shot to be fired in return for any that might be directed against his position. The white covers were taken off the caps which served as marks for the enemy, and every means adopted for keeping the men out of the hostile fire. The gallant soldiers who had, at the point of the bayonet, captured the batteries of the Sikhs, were thus glad to actually conceal themselves under the darkness of night. It was not flight, but as near an approach to it as can well be conceived; and no wonder if, at this time, the Governor General of India felt the precarious position of the troops. Never in the annals of warfare in India had matters attained such a threatening crisis.”

Now let us have a look into the Sikh Camp. They were in a worse predicament even though they had not been militarily disgraced. “They had repulsed the British attack. They had driven back Littler, forced Smith to retire, compelled even Gilbert to evacuate the position he had gained, and thrown the whole British army into disorder. They had still 10,000 men under Tej Singh watching Ferozepore. Had a guiding mind directed the movements of the Sikh army nothing could have saved the exhausted British. But the Sikhs, as we know, possessed no guiding mind. The honest men amongst them either did not recognise the advantage they had gained, or were powerless

* History of the Sikhs by MacGregor.
in the presence of those who saw, in the attitude of Gilbert’s division, the certainty of a renewal of the attack on the morrow. To these divided counsels were added the fatal suggestions of the traitors who desired nothing less than the victory of the Khalsa. The result was stormy counsels, bitter words, plunder, desertion. All cohesion vanished; the morale, which alone could have insured victory, disappeared.”*

In direct contrast to the above attitude of the Sikhs, the British displayed indomitable will to fight and decided to fight it out in the next morning. In spite of hardships and privations they clung to the position they had occupied only to renew the fight next morning with renewed vigour. The British held on to the village of Ferozeshah which was the centre of the Sikh position.

Next morning on 22 December, the British again launched their attack with artillery and infantry advancing in line. At last the infantry charged, swept the Sikh position from the left and bayonetting the Sikhs as they charged along. Thus the whole camp was cleared and the Sikhs were put into headlong flight across the Sutlej.

In the meanwhile it was learnt that a fresh Sikh force under Tej Singh was approaching from the direction of Ferozepore. The force consisting of 30,000 cavalry and infantry with a large artillery now seemed to have arrived at the help of Lall Singh when the Sikhs had already started retreating.

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
Immediately Tej Singh opened heavy artillery fire on the British but after a few skirmishes he began to fall back. It is believed that Tej Singh took alarm due to sudden movement of British cavalry and artillery towards Ferozepore which was erroneously ordered by a British Staff Officer. He concluded that the British were attacking him in the rear. As the Sikhs were falling back they were energetically charged by the British and they soon vanished from the scene of battle.

The attributes of motives to Tej Singh who, it was thought, was bent upon the destruction of the Khalsa army are borne out by many facts. "Even at the last moment he rather skirmished and made feints than led his men to a resolute attack, and after a time he precipitately fled, leaving his subordinates without orders and without an object, at a moment when the artillery ammunition of the English had failed, when a portion of their force was retiring upon Ferozepore and when exertions could have prevented the remainder from retreating likewise if the Sikhs had boldly pressed forward."*

The British position was quite precarious at this stage of the battle. The men were tired and exhausted and they had no ammunition to fire back at the Sikhs. It was rather curious and suspicious how Tej Singh could have left the battlefield when victory was within his grasp. It seems that Tej Singh was a traitor with the avowed intention of seeing the Khalsa army completely destroyed. He not only left the battlefield without much

* History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
fight when he could have easily won but he even came up to help Lall Singh when all was lost and by this deliberate delay turned the conditions in his favour of getting the Khalsa army destroyed in British hands.

If the Sikhs had been efficiently commanded, a British withdrawal to Ferozepore would have been the right action. This was almost implemented by a British Staff Officer but the orders were later countermanded. But the British stayed on and fought out the final battle next day. It seems to me that the British also had no idea that the Sikhs would be so badly led by traitors. Otherwise they would have forced the issue earlier by attempting to play upon the psychology of the defeated enemy, the previous night.

There is however another side to this question. Tej Singh did not know how fatigued were the British troops nor did he know about the shortage of ammunition with them. But he was fully aware of the recent feat of the British troops in thrashing the best Sikh army while he had mainly irregulars with him. But whatever be the many explanations for or against his attitude of turning away from the British, I consider that he played foul with his comrades at this dark hour.

It has been further alluded to by Sir Edwards in these words—"To what the army of the Sutlej are indebted for this deliverance; whether to cowardice or treachery, or ignorance on the enemy's part of the British numbers, or whether, after all, Tej Singh's whole object was a chivalrous wish to cover his friends retreat—remains to be
guessed and wondered at, but we fear not to be satisfactorily decided.” The question of chivalrous wish can be discounted as the British were not yet pursuing the retreating Sikh army. “Cowardice can scarcely have been seriously suggested; nor can ignorance of the British numbers be pleaded with better grace. The object of Tej Singh was to destroy the Khalsa army and then to claim credit with the British for having destroyed it. He succeeded in both objects.”*

Thus ended the battle of Ferozeshah on 22 December 1845 with the Sikhs in full flight across the Sutlej. They had put in the field against the British about 30,000 men (Tej Singh’s force of 30,000 did not come up to fight till all was over) and a large force of artillery. But they had lost 73 guns and about 2,000 men. The losses in men cannot be accurately known as no definite figures of either the whole force or their losses have been kept. Also they had lost their baggage and camp equipment which was considerable.

The British had about 16,000 troops in the field. Gen. Gough says that their strength was 10,000 Indians and about 5,000 Europeans. The total losses were 2,415 all ranks.

The battle of Ferozeshah was the hardest ever fought so far by the British in India. The Sikhs had almost shaken the edifice of the British Indian Empire. Col. Malleson rightly sums up the situation in these

* Decisive battles of India by Malleson.
words—'Such was the battle of Firozshahr—a battle gained after it had been lost, and then regained after its success had once more been imperilled—a battle which shook the edifice of British dominion in India to its very basis, which impressed our native soldiers with the conviction that the English were not invincible. More, far more, than the Kabul disaster of 1841 did the battle of Firuzshahr give birth in the minds of the sipahis to the conviction that great numbers might prevail even over their foreign masters.'

The administrative arrangements of the British were criticised as they fell short of ammunition, at the crucial stage of the battle. Also it took six weeks to arrange supplies by the Commissariat Department whereas the political officer obtained these in six days. But it may be said in defence of the Commissariat Department that they looked the power of requisitioning and commandeering which the political officer exercised in obtaining supplies and other requirements from the protected Sikh chiefs on pain of punishment and forfeiture. I feel that had similar powers been given to this department there would have been no delay or shortage of stores.

There were some revelations from this two day hard battle. The conflict of opinion between the Governor General and the Commander-in-Chief at the crucial moment of the impending battle not only lost valuable time but resulted in heavy losses and extension of battle to another day. Had the fight been started at the time the C-in-C recommended I consider that the battle would

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
have been won the same day by dusk without any prolonging. It was only by sheer luck and treachery of the Sikh generals that the British survived and won the battle of Ferozeshah. Had the circumstances been otherwise, the history of India would have been differently written today.

It would be recalled that when the British troops marched off from Moodkee, Littler's force was still at Ferozepore and he was being closely watched by the Sikh division led by Tej Singh. But in spite of this Littler's force left Ferozepore unseen till he joined up later with Gough's forces just before the battle of Ferozeshah. It was a grand feat of concealment and deception.

It is doubtful if Tej Singh would have allowed Littler, to move out unseen and undetected, had it not been for Littler's courageous dash and deception. Otherwise, I feel that Littler would not have been able to influence the battle in the British favour.

It is vitally important that troops are launched into battle fresh and fit. If they are tired and fatigued it is needless to immediately launch them into battle. They cannot survive for long hours against stiff enemy resistance. If the British and Indian troops were fresh and rested at the commencement of the battle or if Littler's force was rested before being launched into attack, the British could have occupied and held the village of Ferozshah even at night. The Sikhs would not have been able to harass them by the various means they had adopted.
Similarly if all the troops were trained in night fighting there would not have been any necessity to withdraw them into a bivouac as was done by the C-in-C. Training in night fighting is a vital necessity in all forms of warfare.

There was political repercussion all round. Even though the British had won, the stiff fight put up by the Sikhs against a better equipped, disciplined and better led army opened the eyes of the many rulers of the Punjab States about the invincibility of the British. They felt that their days of deliverance from a foreign rule was approaching. The local people and the British protected Punjab States lost their confidence in the strength of the British arms.

At the time of the start of the battle, the British did not have information about the Sikh position and their strength, nor did they try to obtain this information by reconnaissance.

Similarly, I consider that the British tactics of attacking in line was faulty. If they had attacked in column and exploited the exposed Sikh flanks, perhaps the battle would not have been so costly and stubborn.

Logistics was also faulty, as, the British army ran out of ammunition, troops were not properly fed and watered and they had a heavy baggage train following all over. Capt. Cunningham rightly says:—

"Had the English been better led and better equipped, the fame of the Sikhs would not have been so great as it
is, and the British chronicler would have been spared the ungracious task of declaring unpleasing truths."

There were much more glaring faults on the Sikh side. They had no unity of command, they fought and argued and they were misled by their treacherous leaders who were bent upon destroying them to gain their selfish political ends. Both had their faults but the Sikh army was badly and treacherously led.

The late arrival of Tej Singh is not understood. He seems to have deliberately arrived late when Lall Singh had already lost the battle.

Sikh soldiers displayed admirable courage and gallantry, they practised good tactics in meeting English attacks but they were inflexible in their design of battle. They did not exploit the many fleeting opportunities that came in their way during the many phases of the battle. Had they exploited Littler’s failure to pierce their line by flanking cavalry attacks on either of the flanks, but preferably from the left, they would have won the battle that day.

The Sikh artillery displayed better marksmanship and speed in delivery of shells at the targets than the British. After the battle it was found that there were no shell hits on the Sikh guns, whereas one third of British guns were disabled.

Even after having been pushed back into their own camp that night, if they had attacked the same night they

* History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
would have easily routed the British who were almost at the end of their patience and energy. The stop over for the night gave the British some breathing time and rest and when they launched the attack next morning, the Sikhs could not put up a strong and bold front and thereby lost the battle.

The Sikhs had all the advantages of short distance entrenched position, well prepared artillery position and adequate artillery. Their firing was rapid and effective, they had numerical superiority and yet they could not win the battle. What were the reasons? In addition to the facts brought out earlier, their very system of command and control and finally quality of leadership was faulty and treacherous.

Another fact that emerged was that, “the Sikhs, brave and stubborn as they showed themselves in defence, never displayed equal capacity in the attack, owing, no doubt, in part, to want of training and ability in their leaders.”*

In sum, the Sikhs were badly led, their morale was low and they lacked unity of command. Hence in spite of a good and well prepared defensive position and weapon-power, they had lost the battle of Ferozeshah.

After the battle of Ferozeshah, there was uneasy peace and both the parties busied themselves in re-equipping and redeploying respective forces along the border. The Sikh army was not totally annihilated but they just had fled across the river to be ready to fight later as the

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough & Innes.
opportunity occurred. Defensive positions were established on the right bank of the river by the Sikhs. Similarly the British also had put up posts along the opposite bank of the river line facing the Sikh positions. These posts extended from Ferozepore to Harike.

The Sikh army was not quiet. They were also building up their strength in manpower and artillery. Fresh guns were brought up from Lahore, and the army had reinforcements of well trained soldiers. After the build-up they started their raids on the British territory across the Sutlej for gaining information about the British build up as well as interfere with their build up as much as possible.

In the end, the Sikh army crossed the Sutlej, near Ludhiana to reinforce and supply their small garrison at Dharmkot which was halfway between Ferozeshah and Ludhiana. Though they were twice before defeated yet they were not subdued.

In the meanwhile a small British force under Sir H. Smith was detached from the main body by the C-in-C to proceed to Dharmkot to protect the flanks and the lines of communication of the reinforcements that were on the way for the British. But these troops, though trying to avoid a fight, were forced to a fight by the Sikhs under Sardar Ranjur Singh at Budowal. The whole baggage was captured and the English suffered heavy casualties.
The Sikh cavalry cut off the rearguard of the British forces but avoided an open pitched battle. As usual, the Sikhs adopted the hit and run tactics to harass the British without getting into firm grips. The morale and confidence of the Sikh army was considerably increased after their success in this short skirmish. They became bolder and moved about as if to find battle.

But as Ludhiana was threatened by the Sikh army under Ranjur Singh, the C-in-C reinforced Smith’s army by additional troops so that he could meet the Sikhs more confidently. The arrival of British reinforcements put fear into Ranjoor Singh who apprehended British attack from Ludhiana and Dharamkot and consequently fell back upon Aliwal on the banks of the Sutlej.

On the eve of the battle of Aliwal, the British had a total of 10,000 men, 28 field guns and two 8 inch howitzers.

The Sikhs had a total force of 20,000 mostly irregular levies and seventy field guns.

“With large bodies of well trained old soldiers who joined them, and a fresh supply of guns from their arsenals, they became almost as strong as before. Under the direction of a Spanish Officer they threw up batteries and extensive earthworks on both banks in a skilfully chosen position at a loop of the river, connected by a bridge of boats and a ford. Having lost all their great store of food—supplies their army delegates were sent to Lahore to demand more from the Durbar.”*

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
CHAPTER IX

BATTLE OF ALIWAL—28 JANUARY[1846]

After receiving reinforcements, the British Forces advanced with the cavalry in column with two troops of horse artillery leading, infantry and artillery followed. The cavalry receded the whole front as the force advanced.

In the meanwhile information about the enemy occupying the village of Aliwal in full force with strong entrenchments, was received through the spies. The Sikh position rested on the bank of the Sutlej on the left, Aliwal in front and the village of Bundri on the right. The guns were deployed all along the front.

As the British forces reached the proximity of the Sikh position, the cavalry and artillery were deployed on the right and left of the Sikh position and the infantry advanced in line to attack. Thus the battle began.

The British plan of attack was to bring up the right and capture the village of Aliwal. Thus the battle could then be swung on the left and centre and finally cut off the Sikh line of retreat through the ford. The battle developed on these lines. The operations were pursued both from the right and the left. “The enemy opened artillery fire from his whole line upon the advancing British, who, throwing forward their right, captured at the point of bayonet the village of Aliwal on the left of
the position. The whole line then advanced and the battle became general; the British cavalry on the right flank charging that of the Sikhs, driving them on to their infantry, while the British infantry attacking in front drove every thing before it, capturing battery after battery. The enemy driven back on his left and centre, held on to a village on his right covering the passage of the river."

The British cavalry put up a very grand fight by charging the Sikh position. Though the Sikhs hurriedly formed into squares to meet the on-rushing British cavalry charge, yet they could not stop this charge and were thoroughly run over. "There the Khalsa regiments behaved in a manner worthy of their renown. They knelt to receive, the dash- ing charge of the Lancers, and their Indian comrades; but, as these approached, they instinctively rose and delivered their fire. Beneath the charge that followed they did not yield, nor was it till they had been three times ridden over that they gave way. After the battle it was found that the ground was more thickly strewn with the bodies of the victorious horsemen than of the beaten enemy. An attempt made to rally behind Bundri was ineffective."

In this battle the Sikh cavalry always put up a good fight. The artillery equally did well. But their infantry was generally ineffective. Though on occasions the Sikh infantry fought well, but they did not seem to stand their grounds in face of cavalry charge and bayonet fights.

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* The Sikhs by Gordon.
** Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
Eventually, the British won the battle of Aliwal. "The whole Sikh force was now driven in utter rout and confusion to the ford. Pursued by the Cavalry, who made repeated charges, and pressed by the infantry, they were unable to make any attempt to rally, and flinging themselves into the river, fled to the right bank, leaving all their guns, camp equipage, baggage and stores to fall into the hands of the victors; 67 guns were among the captured trophies, and many camel-guns."* The casualties suffered by the Sikhs were about 3,000 killed, drowned and wounded.

During this battle the logistical arrangements of the British were efficient and adequate. They had adequate supply of men and material and medical cover was well provided for. The sick and the wounded were well cared for.

All the territories on the left bank of the river came under British rule and the Sikhs completely cleared out from this area. "Aliwal proved the utter inability of the Sikh army, even with double the number of men and guns, to make more than an honourable stand against the British troops on a fair field. It showed also that the native troops, when not exhausted by hunger and fatigues, as they had been at Ferozeshah, could render invaluable support to the English regiments."*

It will be recalled that the British had been preparing, reinforcing and resupplying their forces with all their requirements since the battle of Ferozeshah. It was quite

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
apparent to them that a decisive battle had to be fought on the banks of the Sutlej so that the supremacy of one or the other for the control of the Punjab could be decided sooner or later.

The English preparation was slightly delayed as they had to await the arrival of their siege train and reserve ammunition for 100 field guns. "The heavy guns, drawn by huge elephants, numbered 19, 5 being 18 pounders, the remainder 8 inch howitzers, and behind them an immense train of ammunition of all kind."*

The British forces were deployed in the following manner—"Littler held Ferozepore and watched crossing there; Grey covered the communications with that place, and Gough had his original three divisions to hand, the 3rd that of Dick who had taken McCaskill’s place, having a third brigade of four battalions, and one unattached brigade under Campbell was in reserve."*

The British camp which was 2½ miles away from the Sikh position was along the dry bed of the Sutlej; had strong out-posts and had good approaches to the Sikh position.

Only on arrival of their supplies and equipment the British finally decided on their plan to attack the Sikh positions.

Behind the scene political activities were going on by Raja Gulab Singh but he could not enforce or guarantee

* The Lure of the Indus by MacMunn.
the disbandment of the Sikh army as the British wanted. Hence this matter ended there.

The Sikhs on the other hand were also strengthening their position. Deep entrenchments were dug, bridge of boats were laid, defences were established in depth. "The position was throughout armed with heavy guns, whilst batteries were placed on the North side of the river, more effectually to sweep the front, especially of their right, against an attack in that direction. The strongest part of the enemy's position was the centre, the weakest on their right, where the earthworks were less formidable."* It has been remarked by many historians that the Sikh fortifications were made haphazardly without any plan or cohesion and that there was no all-round strength in the defences. Some portions were weak and some strong. Regiments worked independently on their own and put up entrenchments as they liked. Similarly deployment of artillery was weak on the right with only 200 Zambarkaks but the left and centre were comparatively strong with 57 pieces. "Instead of being a position possessing defensive works regular in design, the entrenchment of Sobraon presented the most glaring anomalies. Whilst on the left and centre, where the regular battalions were mainly posted, batteries and salient points had been constructed as high as the statue of a man, defended by ditches which an armed soldier could not leap without exertion; on the right flanks the parapets were thrown up at intervals, and constructed in

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* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
a very slipshod fashion. As some compensation, however, this flank derived support from a salient battery, and from heavy guns on the right bank of the river."*

There were about 20,000 Sikh troops inside entrenchments commanded by Tej Singh. Whereas outside, further up the river there were about 10,000 cavalry under Lal Singh. Another view places the strength of Sikh troops at 30,000. But I do not agree to this view because the Sikhs had less regular troops and more irregular troops. Hence it can be safely placed at about 20,000 which the British had to face at any one time. Capt. Cunningham rightly sums up the prevailing situation in these words—"The entrenchment likewise showed a fatal want of unity of command and of design; and at Sobraon, as in the other battles of the campaign, the soldiers did everything and the leaders nothing. Hearts to dare and hands to execute were numerous; but there was no mind to guide and animate the whole, each inferior commander defended his front according to his skill and his means, and the centre and left, where the disciplined battalions were mainly stationed, had batteries and salient points as high as the stature of a man, and ditches which an armed soldier could not leap without exertion."** The Sikh position including the defensive works covered an area of 4,000 yards from one end to the other.

* The Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
** History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
CHAPTER X

BATTLE OF SOBRAON—10 FEBRUARY 1846

There is no doubt that both the sides prepared fully for a final showdown for supremacy in the Punjab. But the Sikhs took the initiative as on previous occasions. The troops were still commanded by Tej Singh and Lal Singh, the two traitorous commanders. They carried out military exercises vauntingly very near the British outposts.

The British plan of attack “was to force the right or weaker end of the entrenchment close to the point where it rested on the river, and thus take the guns on the outer face in reverse.”* The attack was to start off with the fine from the heavy guns and then to attack the right first. The attacks on the centre and left would be feints and the British cavalry to divert the attention of the Sikh cavalry who were on the other side of the river. It was also planned that preliminary heavy bombardment should be directed at the weakest portion of the Sikh defences, and when they were saturated, the strongest British division to attack the right of the Sikh position which was the weakest.

On the day the British attack was to be launched; the river had risen the previous night and the ford was unusable. Thus the escape routes as the routes for bringing

* The Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
up the reinforcements were cut without much hope of improvement later.

The battle of Sobraon began on 10 February 1846 at daybreak when the British artillery poured heavy shots and shells on the Sikh defences. Before the artillery opened fire at sunrise the British to achieve this surprise. The Sikhs had the bad practice of occupying a position strongly by day but abandon it by night. This practice helped the British to occupy some nodal points and important out posts like the village of Little Sobraon.

As on previous occasions, the Sikh artillery was efficient and they replied round for round. They were in well dug positions and could not be silenced. The English had to depend on their infantry with the bayonet to gain the day which they eventually did. The British advance continued through the help of horsed artillery who preceded the infantry. They took up positions stage by stage till they reached some 300 yards from the entrenchments. Subsequently the left attacked the Sikh position with infantry which was temporarily halted. Sir Herbert Edwards described this battle in these words—

"The artillery galloped up and delivered their fire within 300 yards of the enemy's batteries, and the infantry charged home with the bayonet, and carried the outworks without firing a single shot. As it was the finest attack, so also did it meet with the most determined hand-to-hand resistance which the Khalsa soldiers had yet opposed to the British. Like lightning the real plan of the attack seemed to flash on the minds of all the desperate men in the entrenchment; and disregarding the distant feints..."
of Gilberths and Smith's divisions on their left and centre, they rushed to the right to repel the real danger that was upon them."

The Sikhs fought gallantly and desperately and halted the British advance on their weak right. At this moment the British C-in-C changed his plan by ordering the centre and left to make the feints the real attack when he saw all the Sikh forces now concentrated on the right to stop and contain the attack. But the Sikhs reacted violently to the new British plan. They rallied all their artillery and other troops and put up a bold front. In the meanwhile the British left "taking advantage of the slackening of opposition to them, caused by the rush of the defenders to oppose the centre and right divisions, had again pushed forward, and had penetrated with the entrenchment sufficiently far to give a hand to the extreme left of the British centre."

On a few occasions during the course of this battle the Sikh Akalis had made desperate charges and fought stubbornly. They had dug large pits containing 30 men and fought like devils from these defensive positions. But they could not manoeuvre from such dug in positions and were caught in traps and eliminated.

The surrounding area of the battlefield was interspersed with water courses and this made the deployment of troops in regular lines and formations rather difficult. Coupled with the Sikh fire and strong positions, the British found it difficult to annihilate them easily.

* The Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
At last their position was broken by determined British fire and infantry charges and the Sikhs fled headlong towards the river to cross over to the other side by the bridge and the ford.

"In their efforts to reach the right bank through the deepened water, they suffered from our horse-artillery a terrible carnage. Hundreds fell under this cannonade; hundreds upon hundreds were drowned in attempting the perilous passage. Their awful slaughter, confusion and dismay were such as would have excited compassion in the hearts of their generous conquerors, if the Khalsa troops had not, in the early part of the action, sullied their gallantry by slaughtering and barbarously mutilating every wounded soldier whom, in the vicissitudes of attack, the fortune of war left at their mercy."*

As on previous occasions, the Sikhs were let down by their officers. Tej Singh, their C-in-C fled the field of battle and accidentally or deliberately damaged the bridge of boats. This prevented their safe escape and as the English advanced, the Sikhs fought with backs to the wall and perished heavily. "No Sikh offered to submit, no disciple of Govind asked quarter.

"They everywhere showed a front to the victors, and stalked slowly and sullenly away, whilst many rushed singly forth to meet assured death by contending with a multitude. The victors looked with solid wonderment:

* History of India (Vol III) by Beveridge.
upon the indomitable courage of the vanquished, and forbore to strike when the helpless and dying frowned: unavailing hatred. But the warlike rage or the calculating policy of the leaders had yet to be satisfied, and standing with the slain heaped all around them, they urged troops of artillery almost in the waters of the Sutlej; to more thoroughly destroy the army which had so long scorned their power.

The battle of Sobraon was ferociously and bitterly fought by both the warring parties. No quarter was shown and the Sikhs fought to death, often against very heavy odds. All guns were either destroyed or captured and Sikhs died more by drowning as they tried to cross the flooded river. The British casualties were about 2,000 in killed and wounded whereas the Sikhs suffered between 5,000 to 8,000 casualties of all types.

There is no doubt that the battle of Sobraon was the decisive battle so far fought between the Sikhs and the British and it stemmed the rise of the Sikhs as a national power on the Indian sub-continent.

The Sikhs and the English almost fought on equal terms. Their strength was almost equal—20,000 as against 15,000—both well equipped with cavalry and artillery. But their worst comparison was leadership. The English were led by able generals and other junior leaders. The Sikhs on the other hand, were not only badly led but they were led by traitors who were bent upon selling their people and country away for purely selfish personal gains. Their leaders fled the field.

* History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
-of battle no sooner they found that all was not going well and also they halfheartedly guided and led the troops. It is surprising to me how the Sikh army, which was so powerful in the state, acceded to have Tej Singh and Lall Singh as their leaders when they noticed ample evidence about their treacherous deeds during the previous campaigns against the British. Anyway they paid amply for their follies.

In the battle of Sobraon "the Sikhs fought stubbornly and desperately hand to hand, till at last the assailants, swarming through the breaches, mounted the ramparts with cheers of victory and took the whole line of entrenchments; but not till the weight of all the three divisions, all the cavalry and the fire of every gun was felt did the Sikhs give way."*

Individual bravery and superb fighting qualities of the Sikhs were in vain. The primary necessity was that of a dashing and clever leader. This the Sikh army lacked. "The quality of the Sikh troops was such that they showed themselves behind entrenchments hardly, if at all, inferior to average European soldiers. Insubordinate as they had been politically, their discipline and steadiness on the field were admirable. Their muskets were the same as ours, their artillery usually superior, and their fire directed with precision. Such a foe could not be beaten without heavy loss on our part. It would even seem that if they had shown the same capacity for attack as for defence, if Tej Singh had known what to do with his

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
fresh army at Ferozeshah, the frontier force with the Governor General and the C-in-C might have been crushed on 22 December.”*

There is no doubt that the Sikh army put up a very gallant fight against the British, against very heavy odds. They were disowned by their government and leaders who contrived for their destruction, the general people were apathetic to their fate as they feared their power, the other neighbouring princes made no efforts to help them either openly or unobtrusively and finally they created political enemies amongst themselves by allowing the British to be the godfather of many princes.

Good, loyal and efficient military leadership is a vital factor in a war. The Sikhs had no good leaders. They were adequately armed and equipped, they were numerically superior to the British but these alone do not make a good army. Good generals and good leaders make a successful army. It had been aptly remarked by an old Sikh soldier—“If we only had your sahibs (Officers) to lead and direct us in the way they did your soldiers, there would have been another story to tell.”

But in spite of all these handicaps they rallied their forces and fought the superior led and equipped British army to a standstill. General Gough pays eloquent tribute to their fighting ability in these words:—“Polley prevented my publicly recording my sentiments of the splendid gallantry of a fallen foe, and I declare, were it

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
not from a conviction that my country’s good required the sacrifice, I could have wept to have witnessed the fearful slaughter of so devoted a body.”

Tactically the Sikh army and their leaders displayed some weaknesses during the many battles they had fought with the British. “It was indeed fortunate for us that the leaders were not worthy of the men, that Tej Singh was faint hearted, and Lall Singh incompetent and only half-trusted; that, while the chiefs were not unskilful in disposing their troops behind entrenchments, none of them had the training or the skill in manoeuvring large bodies of men which would have enabled them to reap the full benefit of a temporary advantage. That is no doubt the reason why the Sikhs, in face of the British troops, invariably adopted the defensive attitude, retiring under Tej Singh before Ferozeshah, and failing to make a real attack even at Budhowal, where the consequences might have been very serious.”

There is no doubt that the Anglo-Sikh wars opened the eyes of the British to the fact that the Indians could not be taken lightly and they shared their complacent attitude. They will, no doubt, require fit and disciplined troops with strong fighting qualities to match the Sikh army in future battlefields.

At every stage the British faced a numerically superior Sikh army who had better artillery both in numbers and fire power. But “the keynote of his (British C-in-C) tactics was bold intrepid charge—close quarters and the bayonet—to impress.

* Sikhs and Sikh Wars by Gough and Innes.
the enemy by audacity and daring. He clung with bull
dog tenacity to the Sikhs after Ferozuhah, rejecting
proposals to harry their rear over the river, waiting to
deal a final knock out blow when his force was refreshed,
so as to leave further advance unopposed.”* The British
had fighting, daring and hard-hitting generals, whereas
the Sikhs were served by generals who were only in name
and had no qualities of generalship.

On the British side both Indian and British troops
displayed admirable discipline and fighting qualities
against heavy odds. Their leadership was of the highest
order and calculated risks and daring decisions were
taken by the higher commanders.

So ended the battle of Sobraon in a resounding vic-
tory for the British. The Lahore Durbar sued for peace
and the Treaty of Lahore was signed between the warring
parties in March 1846. The power of the Khalsa was
gone, and all concerned readily agreed to lend a helping
hand in the conclusion of a treaty between the Lahore
State and the British. The Sikh army was paid up and
disbanded. It was however authorised that the Sikh army
would not exceed 25 infantry battalions of 800 men each
and 12,000 cavalry but with no guns. All artillery pieces
except a few in their arsenals, were taken away by the
British.

Of the other punishments imposed by the British were:
that “Kashmir and the hill states from the Beas to the
Indus were cut off from the Punjab proper, and transfer-

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
red to Gulab Singh as a separate sovereign for a million pounds sterling.”

Even after the end of the war and the virtual disbandment of the Sikh army, the Lahore state still clamoured for British help and that 20,000 British troops stayed in Lahore. The feudal chiefs were still apprehensive of the Sikh army and they agreed to the continued stay of the British army and their occupation of the Lahore State though in a truncated state.

Though historically the Punjab was annexed by the British after the Second Sikh war, yet practically the British established their hold on the Punjab on 16 December 1846 when they were invited by the Sikhs themselves to assume the responsibility of the government.

The Interlude

It is a long story from the Treaty of Lahore in 1846 to the actual outbreak of the Second Sikh War in 1848-49. There was constant trouble, intrigues and political turmoil during this period. The Sikhs, turbulent by nature, could not remain at rest. If they had no external enemies to fight and thereby dissipate their energies, they fought and intrigued between themselves. These internal squabbles gave the British more opportunity to continue their stay and thereby consolidate their hold on the Lahore State. As a matter of fact, it was the Sikhs

* History of the Sikhs by Cunningham.
themselves who invited the British to continue their stay till the young Maharaja came of age. It Col. Lawrence was appointed as the British Resident in Lahore and the State government was run under his guidance and direction. Thus virtually the Sikhs invited the British to control and take possession of their own territory. Who would miss such a golden opportunity to and lustre to own empire.

On the surface the Punjab State seemed to be quiet and peaceful. No one could judge or see as to what was happening beneath the surface. Even the British Resident at Lahore prophesied that not a shot will be fired on the Indian subcontinent for the next ten years.

But all was not well with the Sikhs. Though the Sikh army had been twice decisively beaten, yet the people never felt subdued and they nurtured a grievance against their leaders, who, they felt, had betrayed them to the foreigners to gain personal ends. It was also noticed by the Sikh people, how their chiefs reigned from the Lahore throne with the help of the British army. They and their country had been sacrificed for the personal benefit of the chiefs who were intriguers and cowards. The people had seen ample demonstration of the faithlessness of their rulers and leaders.

The people were thoroughly disgusted and discontented and they harboured a feeling of rising in force against their own rulers and also the protecting power, the British. There were many other Sikh leaders still alive who were true to their own country and the people.
They were waiting for an opportunity to regain lost independence which was founded by Guru Nanak and firmly secured by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Soon the opportunity came in the way of the Sikhs. Moolraj, the Governor of Multan did not remit the agreed amount yearly to the Lahore Durbar. On the contrary he refused compliance of any orders and defeated the Durbar troops at Jhang when they had proceeded to impose the will of the Maharaja. At last the British intervened and brought about an agreed settlement of the dispute. But in spite of this, Moolraj resigned from his post as he could not agree to continue further.

To relieve Moolraj, two British officers were deputed by the Resident at Lahore. Unfortunately these two officers were murdered rather in cold blood by Moolraj’s trickery inside the fort. The escort who were detailed along with those officers also deflected and went over to Moolraj.

In the meanwhile the British had been warned of the happenings and their forces moved from various stations to put down the revolt. The Khalsa army, who were also directed to subdue this revolt of one of their governors, signified their inability to stop the rebellion.

The British forces now appeared on the scene. A few minor engagements, were fought between the British and Moolraj’s force in which Moolraj was defeated. He had lost much of his territories. Eventually the British forces from all directions besieged the Multan Fort.
There was rebellion all over the country. The Sikhs had risen in Hazara also and many avowed friends of the British had even gone over to the rebel camp. All these defections on the part of the Sikhs had delayed the mounting of the British offensive. The Multan Fort could not be invested or scaled as the siege train had not yet arrived. The whole situation was confused and alarming. "The rising of Chattar Singh, the defection of Sher Singh, the consequent raising of the siege of Multan, brought matters in the Punjab to a crisis. There could no longer be any doubt. The Khalsa had resolved to strike a great blow for independence."

The British reacted to the Sikh uprising with a vengeance. They formed the Army of the Punjab under the personal command of the C-in-C at Ferozepore. The British field force consisted of 7 infantry brigades, four cavalry and much artillery. The total strength was about 17,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. In addition the C-in-C had some more irregular troops who could be brought to battle if need be.

The army of the Punjab consisted of the following:

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* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
Cavalry Division (Brig Cureton)

1st Cavalry Brigade (Brig White)
2nd Cavalry Brigade (Brig Pope)
Each brigade had also two Indian regiments.

Infantry
1st Division — Multan
2nd Division —

1st Brigade  
2nd Brigade  } Two Indian and one
            } British battalion in each.
3rd Division —

1st Brigade
2nd Brigade
3rd Brigade.

Artillery
Horse artillery
3 Field Batteries
2 Heavy Batteries

In addition to the above forces, there were other troops in the Maujha district and Jullundur Doab. There were Irregulars also.

Gradually the whole of the Sikh state of Punjab rose in rebellion. Many Sikh troops who were sent to Multan to help restore the situation with Moolraj went over to the rebels and thus the British were up against the Sikh
rulers of Multan and Hazara who had put up a strong front to the British. The British could not launch an offensive against the rebels in front of Multan and were awaiting the arrival of reinforcements of men and guns.

The Sikh army occupied a defensive position near the town of Ramnagar near the bank of the Chenab. Though this ground was ideally suited from the Sikh point of view for denying the British many tactical advantages, yet the Sikh army did not fight for it. The Sikh troops under Sher Singh decided to cross the river to the right bank. Even though the Sikh army were withdrawing after seeing the British army, yet General Gough, the British C-in-C decided to give them battle and defeat them. As a result of the ensuing battle British suffered heavy losses without any adverse effect on the Sikh army. The Sikh artillery and infantry played havoc on the British, they stood their ground against repeated British cavalry charges and eventually captured a British artillery piece. "The Sikh infantry, cool and resolute, maintained on the cavalry a galling fire, and then, as the charges ceased, advanced to capture the abandoned gun."

General Gough’s action against the Sikh army when he found them retreating, had been adversely commented upon by many military historians. It has been said that he should never have precipitated a battle when he found the Sikh army retreating across the river on the mere show of force by the British and thus suffered heavy casualties in men and equipment. But I do not agree with this view. I

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
consider that as a soldier General Gough took the right step of seeking out the enemy, engage him and then destroy him. Whatever might have been the subsequent consequences, the plan followed was militarily correct. Though politically it had an adverse effect in that the Sikhs were strongly inclined to attack the British come what may after their temporary success during the engagement at Ramnagar.

The British now prepared to cross the Chenab and dislodge the Sikhs from the right bank. Quite a number of suitable fords were available from where the crossing could be effected, but General Gough was impatient to effect the crossing quickly and hence he did not spare even one day for reconnaissance to properly check the suitability or otherwise of the ferries. As a result of this hurry, some time was wasted as the forces could not cross at ford Ramban. Eventually, through luck the troops could cross over at Wazirabad. The Sikh army were quite alert and well deployed to guard the suitable crossing sites.

The crossing over the ford at Wazirabad had considerable elements of luck for the British. The local political officer had obtained boats and the services of the local Pathan troops. But the greatest help came from the darkness and tactical negligence of the Sikh army. "It was one great fault of the Sikh army as apparent in this campaign as in that which was concluded at Sobraon, that they trusted too much to the darkness of the night. Not accustomed to attempt night surprises themselves, they posted no guards. The darkness of the night and
the neglect of the Sikhs, however, greatly befriended them."* Thus the British army again secured a footing on the right bank.

On the far bank the troops started marching towards an unknown destination to find the Sikh army over an unknown ground. The commanders did not have any idea as to where they were. But they just marched towards the direction of the Sikhs.

General Thackwell’s crossing of the river was kept secret for some time by the British having kept the Sikh army diverted and busy across their front near Ramnagar. But when the Sikh army realised the movement of the British army towards them, that they could effect a junction. Anyway the Sikh army kept some force behind to keep General Gough busy and took the bulk of the army to engage General Thackwell.

Now, Thackwell was at Sadolapur where he had taken up a suitable position. The British were, no doubt, surprised when the Sikh army opened fire on them. They soon hurriedly took up a suitable position and, even though the Sikh artillery was firing well, the British casualties were much less as they made their infantry throw themselves on the ground no sooner artillery shells landed.

At night-fall the artillery duel ceased and the Sikh army under Sher Singh withdrew fearing that General Gough might now be aware of his absence and effect a

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
crossing at Ramnagar. There was no infantry or
cavalry action except artillery duel. The Sikh leader
did not display audacious courage and good judgment.
Had he brought up all his forces without leaving any at
Ramnagar to watch General Gough and also attacked the
British at Sadulapur, the story of the Second Sikh War
would have been different.

In the meanwhile events developed rapidly. General
Gough crossed over to the right bank and marched
towards Thackwell’s troops. The other political situation
deteriorated rapidly and at last the British army launched
a general attack on the Sikh army.

The Sikh army was now commanded by an able general
Sher Singh who showed good generalship in handling a
large army consisting of 23,000 men and over 60 guns.

The Sikh strength and dispositions of troops were as
follows:

Lakhniwalla (Sikh right)
Bannu regulars, one regiment of cavalry, four batta-
lions of infantry and 11 guns;

Fatah Khan Ki Chak
Two cavalry corps, six infantry battalions and 22
guns;

Lalian Wallah
Commanded by Sher Singh with one cavalry regiment,
eleven infantry battalions and 20 guns;
Rasul (left)

Two infantry corps and 5 guns;

Mung

Minor force and 3 guns.*

The whole British force consisted of about 15,000/16,000 men and 66 guns.

General Gough delayed the launching of the attack for about a month because he was awaiting the arrival of reinforcements which were on their way, and he had the plan of delivering a concentrated crushing blow on the Sikhs so that it would be a decisive action. But as the Sikhs also expected reinforcements for the attack, the advance to and the battle of Chillianwalla was hurried and it was indecisive and expensive.

* The Lure of the Indus by MacMunn.
CHAPTER XI

BATTLE OF CHILLIANWALLA
4 DECEMBER 1848—13 JANUARY, 1849

The country between Ramnagar and Rasul was flat, covered with thick jungle, with open spaces and clearings at intervals. The roads from the ford at Ramnagar lay via, Helan to Dinghi, then to Khori in the hills and also to Rasul.

Between Dinghi and Chillianwalla the area was covered with thick shrubs and thorny bushes. Generally, at places the jungle country was almost impassable and it was with great difficulty that the troops could approach the Sikh defences.

On 13 January the British troops under General Gough advanced towards the Sikh position of Chillianwalla. As they advanced they got some information about the Sikh army through deserters and spies that they were occupying the position in some strength.

The Sikh position was as follows—the river Jhelum behind, a group of villages protected by jungle and belt of hills on the left upto the village of Rasul and outposts forward of Chillianwalla. The line extended for about 6 miles and it was covered by thick jungle on all sides.

Here is another detailed description of the Sikh position. "The Sikh position was amidst precipitous and frightful ravines, strengthened by rude field-works, distant
about a mile from the river Jhelum. The village of Russol was in the middle of the Khalsa camp, separated from the front chain of Sikh batteries by one ravine of extraordinary depth—several hundred feet. The only means of communication with this village was by a narrow wooden bridge, which would not admit of the transit of a horse. Had our army directed its attacks against this naturally formidable entrenchment, the enemy, in the event of their being driven from their front batteries would have retreated across this ravine and destroyed the bridge. A broad dense belt of jungle or brushwool filled the interval between Dinghee and Russoul.”*

After the Sikh outposts had been driven in by the advancing British, a commanding viewpoint fell into British hands wherefrom they could overlook the whole Sikh position. It was noticed that the Sikh position extended from 500 yards in front of the village of Chillianwalla, with the left resting on Rasul. There were big gaps between the right wing and centre of the position. The right flank was inclined back towards Mung and the whole position was too extended for the number of troops to hold it in strength.

The British on the other hand, deployed their army with the solid and compact line of infantry facing the Sikh centre and the gaps in the Sikh line were faced by a brigade of British troops.

When the British troops reached the Sikh position in the afternoon, they had been under arms since morning.

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* Narrative of the Second Sikh War by Thackwell.
and the C-in-C decided not to give battle but encamp for the time being till next morning.

The British C-in-C had two choices before him, either to attack immediately without adequate reconnaissance or rest for the night and attack next morning after complete preparation. General Gough chose the last course and prepared for encamping for the night.

Sher Singh, the Sikh commander wanted to force the battle on the British the same night. Therefore he moved forward his guns and opened fire on the British camp. This action prompted the British to retaliate and their heavy guns were brought into action. The enemy gun positions were some 1,500 to 1,700 yards in front but the British could not locate either the Sikh gun positions or silence them because of thick jungle in front. There was heavy artillery duel between the Sikhs and the British without much effect on each other.

The attitude and decision of General Gough to attack at this period have come up under severe criticism from the various military historians. There is no doubt that General Gough was a fighting soldier who would never tolerate such imperious action or audacity on the part of the Sikhs. But in this case the detailed information about the deployment of the Sikh army and their artillery were not known till they opened fire whereby they betrayed their position. Also by moving forward they had made British encampment almost impossible. Therefore, quite rightly and prudently General Gough ordered immediate engagement of the Sikh army at that
time. Tactically it was an opportune moment to attack the Sikh position as their troops had come out of their entrenched position and were more vulnerable than they would have been had they remained located and in occupation of their well entrenched and prepared position. I therefore consider that General Gough’s decision to attack at this crucial period was well thought out and not hasty or impetuous.

During the attack, the British dispositions were as follows—Right, infantry flanked by cavalry and three troops of artillery; Centre—heavy guns; Left, infantry division flanked by cavalry brigade and three troops of horse artillery. In between brigades were deployed the field batteries. The reserve was about a brigade and the baggage guard consisted of irregular cavalry. Thus the British had between 15,000 and 16,000 troops against the Sikh army at Chillianwala.

After intensive artillery duel, the British C-in-C ordered the infantry to charge with bayonets the Sikh guns through one mile of dense jungle. On the left the enemy centre was strong with many guns. In spite of heavy shelling the British charged but this petered out by the time the troops came up to the Sikh position. Due to thick forest and some unknown swamps, the brigade fell into disorder and confusion. Though they reached the Sikh position and occupied it, yet the Sikhs rallied and by their cavalry and infantry charge drove back the brigade to its original position. This was a bad shock to the British.
“The dense patches of thorny bush which screened the Sikhs broke the ordered advance of brigades, and the battle developed into a series of detached combats—regiments singly forcing their way through the jungle to the open spaces, where they suddenly found them selves face to face with the enemy’s guns and infantry massed by them.”

After fierce hand-to-hand fighting and sword fight of the fanatical Khalsa army, the bayonet triumphed over the sword. Success was claimed by both the sides on various parts of the battlefield in varying degrees.

Now to the right flank. Here again the opposition was stiff, batteries were stormed through thick jungle and at the same time had to protect the open and uncovered flanks. Heavy losses were inflicted by the Sikhs, and they had taken advantage of the gap created in the British line and invested on front, rear and flanks. But individual and unit gallantry saved the day for the British and also “save a rash and head-strong general from the defeat he deserved.”

Some fateful mistakes were committed during this engagement. The cavalry on the right was commanded by Brigadier Pope and his troops were by misunderstanding deployed in front of artillery who could not bring down fire on the Sikhs. In the meanwhile the Sikhs attacked from the flanks through the jungle and thus surprised the brigade. “The brigade, taken by surprise,

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
had halted, waiting for orders. In consequence of the severe wound of the commander no orders came, and the brigade, left to itself, and threatened by another body of horsemen, dashed, panic stricken, to the rear, rushing over and upsetting guns, gunners and gun—waggons in their headlong rout."* The enemy Ghurcharras also came in pursuit of the retreating British cavalry and caused considerable damage and casualties. Thus up to this point, the British had fared badly on all sides.

The left brigade of the left division was fighting desperately though surrounded on three sides, the right brigade of this division was driven back to the starting point, the two brigades of the right division were separate desperate battle, cavalry retreated badly and artillery fought ineffectively losing some guns.

At last the reserve was moved up and committed. Infantry was finally committed to charged and retrieve the lost position. These were successful and the Sikhs gave up some ground. "On both flanks these successes were followed by a final charge, and the British cheer, sounding exultingly even over the roar of artillery and the battle of musketry, borne by the breeze to the ears of the C-in-C, was the first announcement to that gallant soldier that he might cease his anxiety, for that day, if not won, was saved."*

Gradually darkness fell and the British could not follow up the retreat of the Sikhs. The Sikhs had gone

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
on to Tupai and the British came back to Chillianwalla. Thus the engagement was over indecisively leaving the Sikhs to fight another day.

"The Sikhs fought gallantly and doggedly, as they did on the Sutlej. When their regular infantry retired they did so in good order, loading, halting, and turning to fire as if on parade. They belonged to the old well trained Khalsa brigades, big, long bearded men, clad in red coats. Darkness alone put an end to the deadly hurly-burly—to another soldier's battle fought under the most adverse circumstances."*

Both sides suffered heavy losses. The British losses were about 16% of the total forces engaged in the battle. It is difficult to estimate the Sikh losses as they never kept any record nor did they leave behind any trace of dead or wounded on the battlefield. But it is presumed that they had lost about 30% of their total strength of the forces engaged in this battle.

General Gough was willing to continue his pursuit of the retreating Sikhs even in darkness but he was prevailed upon by his field commanders to fall back. "Campbell and other influential commanders then urged him to fall back, pointing out to him that the enemy, though repulsed, had not been broken, and that it was absolutely necessary to retire on a position where water could be procured, and where the baggage would be ensured protection. The nearest approach to such a position was Chillianwalla, where, too,

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* The Sikhs by Gordon.
the ammunition was stored and food would be obtainable.

The British army then retired from the well fought field, to win which had cost them, in killed and wounded, 89 officers and 2,375 fighting men, leaving on the field many standards—lost, not captured—six guns, and all their dead."*

Lessons

There can be no doubt that General Gough had displayed some lack of generalship, though not to the extent alleged by many other historians. The main lapses which I could bring out are his orders for withdrawal from the positions which he had captured from the Sikhs at Chillianwalla. Here he should have displayed his strength of character and guts by staying on the captured ground with infantry supported by artillery. At daybreak he could have secured the wounded and the captured guns, and even resumed his attack if he had so planned.

Another case in point is the retreat of Pope's cavalry under confused circumstances. This officer, commanding an important element of the British force, was physically infirm and should not have been allowed to command troops in the field. How was he tolerated by General Gough was not known. In addition, the deployment of his troops were faulty and against all trends of recognised tactics. "This disaster, however, must in great measure be attributed to the astonishing disregard of all recognised

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
rules displayed by the Brigadier in the manner of his advance. It is essential that cavalry in attacking should form with due supports to follow upon advantage or retrieve a check. No arm of the service is so liable to be disorganised, even in a successful charge, and a point to rally on is a vital necessity. When the advance had to be made through jungle, which of itself broke up the lines, and inevitably caused confusion, the need of supports was all the more imperative. Yet Pope led the advance absolutely without supports, in one line. Bad handling produced disorganization; with no point to rally on, disorganisation developed into panic; and the flight of some of the finest troops in the service left the right flank of the advancing infantry division open for the enemy to turn.”*

The faulty handling and control of the brigade by Pope was primarily the cause of British upset throughout the period of battle. I consider that General Gough should never have allowed this officer to command the troops in the field in such poor state of health, and even it had been so generous to suffer him, he should have kept a particular eye on this brigade to ensure that it did not cause any panic or catastrophe.

General Gough changed his original plan of attack and adopted the difficult plan of frontal attack. Had he attacked the long line of Sikhs from the flank and rolled it up from the ends, he would have avoided the jungles and other obstacles.

* Sikhs and the Sikh War by Gough and Innes.
The difficult nature of the terrain had contributed much to the lack of control and other mistakes on the part of the British. "Here a well deliberated scheme of operations and mutual concentration of energies were rendered the more absolutely indispensable by the difficult nature of the ground, which was everywhere covered with thick, high brushwood; and there was every likelihood that the most carefully concocted combinations would miscarry—that regiments would lose their distance, that a wrong direction, and even mistake friends and foes."

"The British army was small when compared with the forces of Sirdar Sher Singh, and the inestimable advantage of a superior discipline enjoyed by our troops was rendered of no avail by the impervious brushwood, in which regiments could not debouch nor preserve a formation of any kind. The veriest rabble of the enemy, as long as their hearts were firm was equal to the best disciplined troops in this wilderness of bush; and the knowledge of the ground possessed by the enemy gave them an immeasurable advantage. They posted their guns in a declivity, which served the purpose of concealment."*

Similarly the infantry should not have been blindly hurled against Sikh entrenchments and gun positions only to suffer heavy casualties. He did not take advantage of faulty disposition of Sikh troops. "The long gap between the Sikh right and the Sikh centre was the most conspicuous of those faults. A real general might have

* Narrative of the Second Sikh War by Thackell.
** Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
so thrust his army into that gap as to sever the two wings of the enemy and roll them up in opposite directions. It must be admitted that this would have been a very delicate operation, requiring very skilful handling, and quite beyond the powers of the actual British commander."

The administrative arrangements in the British army was far from satisfactory. On occasions there was shortage of water and ammunition, and large number of pack and artillery animals due to want of forage, hard work and exposure. Arrangements were not made for the protection of animals grazing in the area from falling into Sikh hands. Everyone was roaming about the countryside in search of food and water and other necessaries.

The British commissariat department was not above board. Their Indian subordinates stole government animals and again sold them to the army at high prices. The agents made money at the expense of the troops and the army.

It has been caustically remarked by many others that General Gough’s employment of infantry was displayed in a manner which could have been improved even by an amateur. They should not have been employed or ordered to charge in a dense jungle against prepared enemy positions without proper reconnaissance and artillery fire support. Sir Henry Durand has said—“Our attack, fell upon the centre of the enemy, gave the latter the full advantage of his very extended position; and as his centre was covered
by thickish, bushy jungle, which dislocated all formation in line, and inevitably produced confusion in the brigades, besides offering difficulties to the movements of the guns and to bringing them into action, the troops were sure to come in contact with the Sikh infantry and guns in the most unfavourable position, their organization disturbed, and nothing but their own courage and the example of their officers to compensate for every conceivable disadvantage. Verily, British infantry, British officers, and British bayonets are of such a character, so entirely to be relied upon, that it is now wonder that British generals will dare and risk much. The dauntless valour of the infantry rectifies the errors of its commanders, and carried them through what would otherwise be inevitable defeat and disgrace. But it redeems their errors with its blood; and seldom has there been more devotion, but, alas! more courage, than on the hard fought field of Chillianwalla, a field fairly won, though bravely contested by the Sikhs of all arms.”

It has been aptly remarked that “no British general ever fought a battle so badly as Lord Gough fought Chillianwalla. It was, throughout, a day of blunders.”

Another important lesson of this battle was the suitability of equipment for officers. The infantry regulation sword was useless as it broke into bits when hit by a Sikh Talwar. “It may answer the purpose of saluting, but it is insufficient as a means of protection.” Considerable officer casualties were suffered due to this inadequacy of

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* Calcutta Review, Vol XI.
** Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
a suitable personal weapon in the hands of the officers.
"The Talwar or sword of the enemy has a broader back, thicker blade, and keener edge than ours; and the enemy are in the habit of delivering the drawing-out, a most cutting kind of blow."

It was found on many occasions that the English steel was inferior to the Sikh. "Moreover, the enemy were almost in vulnerable from the shields, armour, and wadded clothes they wore."

The Sikhs were by no means faultless. Their generalship left much to be desired. They no doubt took some advantage of the omissions done by the British but they could not exploit the major lapses of the British.

The Sikh troops fought valiantly and stubbornly but they fought more with brawn than brains. At no time did they ever exploit the British setbacks. When the British left flank was halted and routed, they never pursued the beaten British. Similarly their artillery were rather trigger happy. Had it not prematurely opened up in front of Chillianwalla on the first day of the engagement, the British would not have found out their position and located their guns.

Neither party, particularly the Sikhs, took full advantage of night fall or darkness to attack the British. While there may be reasons for the British not to attack at

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* Narrative of the Second Sikh War by Thackwell.
night over unknown terrain but the Sikhs had no excuse for not taking full advantage of darkness over known ground. If they had done so, they would have won many battles so far fought against the British.

The Sikh army was a good fighting material, capable and tough but their valour went in vain against poor leadership. Their leaders were uneducated, slack, lacked initiative and were self-centred. Even though generally they were better led in this campaign, yet there was much that could have been better accomplished.

The performance of the Sikh artillery left much to be desired. They fired at random and wide of their marks. They were good gunners, stood up against heavy odds and British charges, but they could not shoot straight.

Unfortunately, the position that Gough occupied after the battle next morning was not tactically and strategically sound. It felt all the roads open for use by the Sikh army and they could forage at will. "When Gough recognised this error it was too late to repair it for the Sikhs, intellectually quicker than he, had occupied the points which dominated the plain."*

Again Sir Henry Durand comments—"Much was thrown away of the fruits of the victory by withdrawing from the ground which the infantry had so nobly won at Chillianwalla; but when this had been done much more was lost and thrown away, in our opinion, by failing to

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
perceive the strategical importance of the position, which for several days after the battle, the enemy left optional to Lord Gough to take up or not, as he pleased. Afterwards, when our own timidity had restored their confidence, the Sikhs saw the momentous importance of what we had neglected. They became exceedingly jealous of the hill-top looking down on Kotri, and any demonstration on the part of Gough to seize it would have been stoutly contested.”

**Subsequent events**

On 21 January Multan felle in the hands of the British and about 9,000 additional men became available to General Gough. But before these troops could join the main force the C-in-C was on the move again.

The Sikhs had retired to the impregnable position of Rasul. The British could not pursue them as nature helped their retreat by a heavy downpour. In the meanwhile reinforcements reached the Sikhs from the Amir of Kabul and Chattar Singh. Though the Sikh morale was very low after the last battle but the arrival of the various reinforcement once more raised their spirits and they were again ready to give battle to the British. The strength of the Sikh army now totalled about 34,000 fighting men.

The arrival of additional men created administrative problems for the Sikh army. Now they had to cater for additional feeding mouths. “Provisions had for some time been scarce, even for the Sikhs, and it was now

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*Calcutta Review, Vol XI.*
found impossible to provide for many days longer for the greatly augmented army. On the 3rd February, then, in pursuance of a resolution arrived at the previous day, the Sikh leader, without quitting his position, thrust, as a tentative measure, his cavalry through the Khuri pass, thus threatening the road to Dinghi, a place in rear of the British army, and commanding a passage across the Chenab.*

Having studied and known the character and mind of the British commander, the Sikhs tried to pull him out for a fight by various means of offering him baits, insinuations and temptations. But General Gough kept an amazing and unusual self-control and he did not play the role of an impetuous commander as he was wont to do on past occasions. He accepted and implemented the advice tendered to him. He felt that in his present position—"the centre of the circle of which the enemy would have to traverse the arc—he could fall upon the Sikhs at a disadvantage should they attempt to cross the river, he kept a vigilant lookout and remained motionless."**

Two temptations to draw out General Gough were move of the Sikh cavalry through the Khuri pass and also sending them to Dinghi later, but on both these occasions the British C-in-C stood firm without moving and taking any false step.

On 11th February the best attempt of the Sikh army to draw out the British was demonstrated. "Advancing

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
their cavalry in some force to Barra Amra, they formed a line of battle in front of Khuri, their right resting on the strong hill ground, a prolongation of their position of Rasul—their left refused, and the Khuri pass and road in their rear."* If General Gough had taken the opportunity of attacking the Sikhs he would have exposed his flank and rear and the Sikh army would have given him a severe blow. But again Gough refused to be drawn in such a venture.

At last the Sikh army stole a march over the British towards Chenab. The British C-in-C did not act hurriedly but after due deliberations he ordered troops to watch the Wazirabad crossing. General Gough was quite well located and in a position to harass the Sikhs, even though they gained one day’s march over the British.

But the Sikh army later moved to Gujrat and took up and prepared positions there. All their efforts to bring the British to battle were in vain. In the meanwhile the British received reinforcements and they now became stronger than before.

On the 15th Gough started to move. In five days march, he was joined by three additional brigades which were his additional reinforcements and finally he marched in battle array to Shadiwalla and came face to face with the enemy.

Even though the Sikh troops under Sher Singh skilfully avoided the British by a night flank march, but they

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*Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
were soon forestalled and caught up and they could not cross the Chenab to go to Lahore. Therefore they took up their position round the town of Gujrat with the finest force of 61,000 men and 60 guns that had ever been assembled against British so far.

The last of the Anglo-Sikh wars which had commenced from the Sutlej Campaign was gradually drawing to a close. The Sikhs had held the strongest foreign power in the East at bay singlehanded for such a long time but at last they could not fight it out any more. Additional troops and superior British artillery had stopped and defeated the Sikhs finally in the final battle for supremacy in India.
CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF GUJRAT—21 FEBRUARY 1849

On the eve of this final and fateful battle, the Sikh position was in the form of a crescent. Their left rested on the Katalah a small rivulet full of water which flowed South into the Chenab; their centre was formed and positioned behind the village of Kalra in a fortified and loophold position; the right flank was covered by the Dwarah, a dry nullah which bends away eastward. The Cavalry—Afghan horsemen—extended beyond the nullahs on the left and the right, the villages of Barra Kalra and chota Kalra were strongly fortified. The town of Gujrat was in the rear of the Sikh position.

The British deployment, facing the Sikh army was—"on the extreme left was Dundas, Bombay Column, covered by Blood’s troop of Horse Artillery and supported by Thackwell, with Whites Cavalry brigade, the Sikh Horse, and Duncan’s and Huishe’s troops of Horse Artillery. On its right was Campbell’s division, covered by Ludlow’s and Robertson’s light field batteries; in reserve, Hoggan’s infantry brigade."

In the Centre were the heavy guns, eighteen in number, drawn by elephants. Next to the heavy guns, on their immediate right, was Gilbert’s division; and on his right, Whish’s division, covered by, Fordyce’s, Macenzies and Anderson’s troops of Horse Artillery, with
Dawes’s—Dawes of Chillianwalla renown—light field battery; Lane’s and Kinleside’s troops of Horse Artillery being in a second line in reserve, under Brind. The right flank was protected by Halsey’s and Lockwood’s cavalry, and by Warner’s troop of Horse Artillery.”

It will be seen from the British positions that they had infantry in the forward areas flanked by cavalry, artillery deployed in the centre, and the reserves consisted of cavalry, infantry and horse and field artillery.

It was appreciated by General Gough that the Sikh position was not strong particularly their left which afforded no protection against attack. Therefore the British plan was to launch an attack on the Sikh left and centre and then drive them back on their right. It was as follows:—“To carry out this plan he directed an advance of the heavy artillery, placed in his centre, and of the right wing, composed of the divisions of Whish and Gilbert, and supported by the greater part of the field artillery. When these should have doubled on the Sikh right, its left and centre, the British left wing, composed of Cambell’s and Dundas’s divisions, was to complete the work of destruction. The cavalry would then render the defeat one from which there should be no rallying. The Dwarah, upto the enemy’s position, was to be the regulator of the advance of the British line. The British being very superior to the enemy, alike in the weight of metal and in the number of their guns, it was decided that

* Lawrence Archer (P. 94),
the infantry should not advance to close quarters until the artillery had made itself felt."

On the morning of 21 February, opened the battle of Gujrat with Sikh artillery opening fire on the British advancing troops. Both sides had no encumbrances having left their baggage behind in secure conditions and they formed a magnificent battle array.

A fierce artillery duel had started and the British fire was correct and heavy. The Sikh defences were thoroughly knocked out although the British artillery suffered some casualties from Sikh fire.

The premature fire from the Sikh guns had disclosed their gun positions and range. This was utilised to great advantage by the British who soon moved their heavy guns forward and poured shell after shell on the Sikh positions from a shorter range. The British horse artillery moved from the flanks and came up to the front and disrupted the Sikh infantry.

In spite of the continuing British advance with their artillery which was inflicting heavy casualties on the Sikhs, the Sikhs fought gallantly and they also returned the fire with equal accuracy and weight. The Sikh cavalry tried to out-flank the British but they were thwarted in their attempt by the British cavalry with heavy casualties. In the meanwhile, the British guns were brought up and heavy fire was brought down upon the Sikhs and they also turned the Sikh flank. Eventually the Sikhs gave up by

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
some ground and retired behind the Kalra villages where they held on stubbornly and fought valiantly. Now the British infantry was pressed into the attack on the fortified Sikh villages. "Step by step did the British troops make good their footing, until at last they forced the enemy, still fronting them, to fall back on the second line. The gallant nature of the defence may be gathered from the loss inflicted by the Sikhs on their assailants."*

Under cover of artillery the British advanced the infantry lying down when Sikhs fired on them and thus reduced their casualties, and finally the Sikhs showed signs of breaking up. But array of hope came in the way of the Sikhs. When the British took Dwarah, there was a large gap between their left and the centre. The Sikhs took advantage of this weakness in the English line and sent their right division to make a final bid to stem the rot. But the English also quickly reacted to this threat and sent in their horse artillery to plug in the gap. Unfortunately the British artillery had no ammunition left and they had not yet received fresh supplies from the rear. As the Sikh threat became pronounced, the British divisional commander, Campbell realising the threat to the position at once diverted some of the fire of his artillery upon the advancing Sikhs and broke them up. Thus the Sikhs, unwilling to advance with an uncovered flank left the advance and fell back in good order. "The English right was rapidly advancing, and the Sikh left and centre were retiring fast, in heavy columns, covered

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
ty cavalry, over the open country, passing to the east of Gujrat.”

The battle started at about 7-30 A.M. and by 12-30 P.M. the whole Sikh army was in full retreat. In about another half hour the British captured the whole of the Sikh camp and baggage at Gujrat and pursued the retreating cavalry till darkness fell. Durand says—"Gough had overthrown the Sikh army, and had craded it in heavy masses upon a line of retreat which offered no hope of support, provision, or escape for the disheartened soldiery, if properly followed up."

Cavalry and Horse Artillery relentlessly pursued the defeated Sikhs, many of whom quitted their ranks and threw away their uniform. Next morning the British followed up the pursuit with much vigour and eventually the Sikh army unconditionally surrendered on 14 March 1849 and this virtually ended the second Sikh War in a resounding victory for the British.

After relentless pursuit by the British cavalry the Sikhs surrendered due to shortage of supplies and fear of the Afghans who were their arch enemies. The spirit of their military leaders had sunk into a very low ebb and their heavy casualties in the hands of the British did not leave much fighting spirit with them, however much they would have liked to make another stand.

At last the whole Sikh army laid down their arms and passed away into oblivion. "With the crushing defeat

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
** Calcutta Review, Vol XI.
of Gujrat perished the last hopes of resuscitating the Sikh Kingdom. It was the final act of the tragedy which commenced on the banks of the Sutlej."* The British followed a rather ruthless policy of abolishing the Sikh dynasty and completely eliminating them from the political and military life of the country. The Sikh kingdom which was so great and vast during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was annexed to the British Empire and it became one of those old historical episodes where empires come and go and vanish in the sand of time without leaving any footprints.

Lessons

There is no doubt that on the British side this Campaign was fought most soundly than on previous occasions. General Gough committed very few tactical or strategical mistakes in the conduct of this battle.

However, there are a few points which need comments and attention. Lawrence—Archer had said, "At the very outset orders and counter-orders succeeded each other so rapidly, that a state of feverish excitement, prejudicial to the public interests, was unnecessarily kept up; and regiments showed the effect of varying and harassing rumours in their hospital returns."** Another historian has said—"Never was a campaign ushered in by so much vacillation."** Gough's committal of forces by detachig Thackwell and sending him across the Chenab was a grave error as he did not keep in view the superior

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
** Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
strength of the Sikhs who were then facing him. Had the Sikhs then taken advantage of Gough’s reduced strength due to this diversion of forces, they would have put the British in a very serious situation.

Perhaps the outstanding lesson from this campaign was the control exercised by the political officers in the conduct of a war. Lord Gough could not function freely and all his movements and actions were shackled by political requirements. There was a change from the former setup wherein, the C-in-C was vested with political powers and political officers took their orders from the general. It was due to political interference that Lord Napier refused to accept the appointment of C-in-C unless he was exempted from the political control in the field.

Another tactical error was Gough’s abandonment of the better plan of marching on Rasul. He was too cautious and his intention of holding on to his present position lost him touch with the Sikh activity. Though it goes to his credit for not falling a prey to the various temptations offered by Sher Singh, yet he should have displayed some aggressive attitude rather than sit quiet on the positions he was occupying. It evidenced the fact that Gough was cautiously awaiting the arrival of his reinforcements. When his artillery came in full strength, he used it to the full advantage and it was for the first time that the British had both numerical and fire superiority over the Sikhs.

The battle of Chillianwala was a severe lesson from which Gough learnt useful lessons never to be repeated.
As a matter of fact both the British and the Sikhs derived useful lessons from the last two battles of the Second Sikh War. “If the English won the field, the Sikhs carried off all the trophies of the fight, it is yet true that morally, Chillianwala decided the issue of the Campaign.”

“The Sikh leaders never recovered from the impression produced upon them by the splendid daring of the British infantry. It was that impression which induced vacillation in the Sikh camp at Rasul, which prevented Sher Singh from attacking Gough before he had been reinforced, which hindered a bold strategic movement across the Chenab. Whatever, then, the faults of the English general, Chillianwala was not fought in vain. Gujrat was to it what Sobraon had been to Ferozeshah.”*

Now let us see the Sikh side of the story. It has to be accepted that the Sikh army was better led then before and that their leaders had displayed higher and better qualities of leadership than hitherto. But their political direction was faulty to the extent of impotency. Their national leaders were inefficient and inept. “Sher Singh’s leadership was a leadership of lost opportunities. A great general—a general even of the average run of intellectual men—would have massed his whole army against Thackwell at Sadulapur and have crushed him. Such a general would have attacked the British army in its position on the morrow of Chillianwala; such a general would not have waited at Rasul till the British reinforcements from Multan were within easy hail, but, turning Gough’s

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
position, or fighting him if he had placed himself in his path, would have recrossed the Sutlej and fallen upon Whish's army wherever he could have found it. All these things having been neglected, such a general, emerging at the eleventh hour as Sher Singh emerged, from Rasul, would have forced the English general to fight, even at the risk of attacking him. Gough had not been reinforced, and to fight him then would have been better policy than to wait for him at Gujerat."

The Sikh leaders, as on previous occasions, had shown lack of courage and determination. They fled from the field of battle very early and left the men to their fate.

Individual and unit braveries were of no use. "In this action, as well as at Chillianwalla, the Sikhs caught hold of the bayonets of their assailants with their left hands, and closing with their adversary dealt furious sword-blows with their right. This circumstance alone will suffice to demonstrate the rare species of courage possessed by these men."

The crushing victory of Gujerat cost the Sikhs their final bid for establishing an empire. The Sikh generals and their men finally laid down their arms and trotted out of the pages of history.

There is no doubt that the Sikh wars were frequent with many useful lessons even for posterity. They should

* Decisive Battles of India by Malleson.
** Narrative of the Second Sikh War by Thackwell.
still be of value to those who study and profit from the know ledge of military history.

The reasons for the start of the series of Anglo-Sikh Wars are well known to all of us. Since the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikhs fought between themselves, dabbled in politics and eventually precipitated a crisis with the British resulting in their downfall. "Ranjit Singh, whose penetrating vision and cool brain had enabled him to direct his policy and control his ambition in a very precise relation to his strength, had gauged the possibilities of the situation with an astuteness denied to his successors."* Maharaja Ranjit Singh was clever, shrewd, statesman like, discreet and tactful. He knew that in his formative years of the establishment of an empire he could not be drawn into a war with the British however much he disliked them. From time to time he fought other, established and increased his sway over the Punjab, but on occasions he accepted limitations imposed by the British as a necessary political game. But at no time he ever brought about a crisis of war.

After his death the situation took a turn for the lead and the resultant effects we have seen. However much the Sikh army valiantly fought, they had no secure and wise political direction at home. As a result they lost the wars both politically and militarily.

Severe and sanguninary pitched battles were fought, heavy casualties in men and equipment were suffered by

* The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars by Gough and Jones.
both the sides, tactical and strategical mistakes were committed by both, yet the Sikhs lost and the British won. Why?

Whatever might have been the other reasons for Sikh defeat, I must say, that the Sikh army was militarily a match for the British. Their artillery was efficient, their cavalry dashing and infantry a good fighter. They were experts in the art of preparing rapid entrenchments, these defences were well sited in the jungles, rivers or other natural obstacles. The Sikhs fought gallantly against heavy odds of guns and leadership and only the British bayonet could dislodge them from their positions. Casualties were heavy on both the sides.

At times the Sikh artillery was impatient by firing prematurely thereby divulging their position and range. Otherwise they displayed efficient handling of artillery, infantry and cavalry. The Sikh generals could lead large armies in the field with confidence though they were not so expert to outgeneral their opponents. Generalship was not practised as a fine art. Only weight of numbers of men and guns enabled them to bring the armies to battle. On most occasions when fleeting opportunities came in their way during the many battles, they could not exploit it nor did they show much daring when once they took advantage of any such opportunity. The bravery of the Sikh soldiers, generally, pulled out the generalship of the generals out of the prevailing rut.
CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

The Sikhs made a very important contribution to the general as well as the military history of India. After the Marathas, they contributed the most to the strategical and military system in India which started long before the arrival of the British and lasted long after they had vanished from the pages of history.

Sikhism, originally propagated by Guru Nanak, was essentially a religion of brotherhood, love and piety. He had no intention of teaching violence and his teaching and message of goodwill, patience, contentment, forbearance, clemency and devotion were preached far and wide by the many other Gurus that followed after his death. Gradually many people were converted and they all followed the path of religion.

It was during the regime of Guru Amar Das that the Moslems started harassing and tyrannising the followers of this sect. But all the followers followed strictly the advice thus tendered by him—"Bear them all your life, for to take revenge is not the religion of the good; moreover, remember that there is no penance equal to patience, and there is no happiness equal to forbearance, and no sin greater than covetousness, and no duty greater than mercy and no weapon better than clemency."
Sikhs thus mutually suffered the merciless and tyrannical behaviour of the Moslems.

From the time Guru Har Govind assumed leadership the Sikhs came more and more in for trouble with the Moslems. Though started with a private quarrel, yet it gradually fanned and embraced the whole sect. It all started with a personal quarrel between Guru Har Govind and Chandu Shah a minister of Delhi Government. After the tortuous death of Chandu Shah the Moslems hated Guru Har Govind. Subsequently the Sikhs fought the first pitched battle against the Moslems in which the Moslems were defeated. Thus started the animosity between the Sikhs and the Moslems.

At last the relationship between the Sikhs and the Moslems further deteriorated when Guru Tegh Bahadur was killed by the Moslems. It was now left to Guru Govind Singh to militarise the Sikhs from a purely religious body, give them government, unity and finally a semblance of a Khalsa army to fight the Moslems.

Guru Govind Singh was a born leader and a fighter. He learnt the use of weapons (archery) from a very early age. He was bent upon taking revenge on the Moslems and prophetically said—"The disposition of all these assemblies from the time of Guru Nanak has been like that of Fakirs, and they do not know the ways of battle and war; it behoves me to make a new sect in my own name and having taught them the use of arms and the
mode of government, get them to fight with the Turks.” He also gave the Sikhs a code of honour of five Ks.

To rouse the fighting spirit of the Sikhs he composed a separate Granth which would lay down the science of government, teach use of weapons and other military tactics and thus make the Sikhs fit for fighting. Gradually the Sikhs were converted as fighters from feeble minded religious mendicants. They plundered and robbed all over the country and the neighbouring people became concerned. He ralled the Sikhs from the surrounding country and prompt them to fight. They showed their fighting qualities and bravery in the field of battle. Govind preached that the Khalsa should assemble and destroy the Turks.

After the death of Aurangzeb when the Moslem policy towards the Sikhs was toned down, the Sikh army went to help of Bahadur Shah and got him the throne of Delhi. Thus the Sikhs began to see better days.

With the death of Guru Govind Singh, Guruship ceased to exist and the Granth became to be recognized as the Guru.

The reign of [Guru Govind Singh was the turning point in Sikh history. He was the first man who transformed the Sikhs from a purely religious sect to a fighting body, encouraged military art and began fighting against the tyranny of the Moslems.
After the death of Guru Govind Singh the Sikhs flourished under the twelve Misls. It was Banda who collected all the Sikhs and organized them into one body. Though they were hunted and chased throughout the country by the Moslems, yet they fought hard even from jungles and the hills and survived extermination in their hands.

At last the twelve misls came into being when one Kapur Singh collected about 3,000 Sikhs and started organized raids on neighbouring villages and had his power felt. These twelve misls were the following:

(i) **The Bhangis**:—Held Lahore, Amritsar, had conquered Multan but had lost it to Timur Shah, son and successor of Ahmad Shah Abdali. A Bhangi Sardar also held Gujrat. The Bhangi possessions extended from Lahore and Amritsar northwards to the Jhelum and down the Jhelum.

(ii) **The Ramgaris**:—Their possessions lay on both sides of the Beas. Sri Hargobindpura was the capital of the principality.

(iii) **The Ghanis** :—The Kanheya territories extended beyond Amritsar northwards to the hills.

(iv) **Ahluwalias** :—This confederacy had its headquarters in Kapurthala. This was the greatest confederacy of the Jalandhar Doab.
(v) **The Sukarchakkiyas**:—This misl came to the forefront under Ranjit’s grandfather Chharat Singh and his father Maha Singh. The home territories of this misl were adjacent to Bhangi possessions in the Rechna Doab, Gujranwala being one of their most important places.

(vi) **The Fajullapurias**.—Their great leader Kapur Singh established his power in Jalandhar Doab. Their possessions included Jalandhar, Mauja Dehat, Katrae Kapur Singh, Fatehpur and Patti.

(vii) **The Sahids and Nihangs**.—Were in the cis-Sutlej region.

(viii) **The Phulkias**.—Also a cis-Sutlej misl—Patiala, Nabha and Jind, being important Phulkia states. Some of the trans-Sutlej misls had some share of the cis-Sutlej territory from Ferozapore to Karnal and the Phulkias had their possessions between Sirhind and Delhi.

(ix) **The Nagrias**.—The Nakkai country lay southwest of Lahore and extended southwards.

(x) **The Dalalias**.—This confederacy was founded in the extreme south-west of Jalandhar, near the junction of the Beas and the Sutlej.

(xi) **The Karoias**.—Their headquarters was at Chiloundhi, 20 miles from Karnal. Their posses-
sions extended to the banks of the Sutlej and the Jalandhar Doab.

(xii) The Nisahwalias:—Their chief town was Ambala.

Of these misls the most important was that of the Sukarchakkias, who had about 10,000 troops and from which house Ranjit Singh was born.

These twelve misls were continually fighting between themselves until Ranjit Singh appeared on the scene, defeated them all and himself became the leader and the creator of the kingdom of Lahore.

After Ranjit Singh came to power, the Sikhs fought a bitter battle against the Pathans at Ramnagar. From that day the Sikhs were never afraid of them. Later Ranjit Singh plundered many places and the rear of the Pathan Army and thus they kept themselves busy and practised in the art of fighting. Gradually Ranjit Singh entered into diplomacy and treaties with the Afghans and the British and thuses established his power and a Sikh Kingdom. Those other chiefs who opposed him were defeated and eliminated. He had employed foreigners in his service and remodelled and trained his army on European model. He was also quite impressed by the smartness and drilling of the British troops and took much out of their methods of training and organization.

Essentially the history of the Sikh army commences from the time of Ranjit Singh. Before his advent on the scene
the Sikhs were mere plunderers and robbers with no semblance of discipline, organization or proper system. But Ranjit Singh gave the Sikhs such an army which eventually challenged the authority and supremacy of the British power in India.

The Sikhs were the finest fighting material then existing in the country. It was up to a deft hand to transform this material into an efficient and formidable fighting machine. "As military materials they are admirable. Possessing a strong individuality, inured to hard labour and exposure from their early youth—leading a healthy open air life in their hamlets and villages, for they do not affect towns—their home training is one to develop physical powers and to fit them for the hardest service in the field as soldiers. They combine a fine physique with energy, due to climate, occupation, and the Northern strain in their character, the legacy of the old stock from which they sprang. Freedom from the trammels of superstitious caste ceremonies as inculcated by their spiritual guides, the stern and warlike nature of the iron creed of Guru Govind, the baptism of fire through which the nation passed in its early days, and the coherent rule of Ranjit Singh have undoubtedly stamped them with a national character, a marked trait in which is their reserved and self-respecting pride. Like Britons, the fighting spirit is built into them, and they do not lose it by years of peace. They still stand pre-eminent for military spirit and enterprise, proud of their order."*

* The Sikhs by Gordon.
Such was the fighting potential which Maharaja Ranjit Singh moulded into an efficient war-making machine.

The seed of militarism was sown amongst the Sikhs by Guru Govind Singh, enjoined upon his kinsmen the necessity for a devotion to bearing arms, organized into troops, were given good leadership and finally were incited and prompted to plunder the country. Subsequently the institution of Guru Mata or State Council gave the Sikhs a democratic institution wherein all had a voice to decide and after a decision has been arrived at all obeyed without any question. It was a powerful system though absolutely used later by the chiefs in authority.

Ranjit Singh ushered the Sikhs into a career of conquests, expansion, consolidation of power and finally, unity. The warring misls were united by him and he established completely his authority in the Punjab. He indirectly received help to further his cause of conquests by the turmoil and insecurity created by the foreign invaders across the Northern border. He further cemented his relationship with the English, who, though curbed his powers by limiting Ranjit’s spheres of influence and conquests, yet gave him sufficient latitude to expand his dominion to the North. Around 1809, Ranjit Singh remodelled his army. Osborne says—“It was about this time that Ranjit commenced the formation of battalions of troops on the British model, influenced probably in great measure by the efficiency and discipline of the British sepoys who were with Metcalfe, and of which he had himself had an opportunity of witnessing a very striking example.”

* Ranjit Singh by Osborne
Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a great military leader. Unlike Shivaji, he did not lead his troops personally into battle, but he organized, equipped and trained them on the most modern lines and ensured that troopers of the right type were selected for enlistment. Of the many other traits of his character, he was brave, humane, and a born leader of men in peace as in war. "He knew many strategems and manoeuvres of warfare and used to beat his enemies principally by these strategems and manoeuvres."*

The military efficiency of the Sikhs owe a great debt to him because he established a proper military system, gave rules and regulations and finally rules for the conduct of warfare.

After Ranjit Singh's death, a strong, sagacious and guiding hand was removed. Consequently the Sikh Army was uncontrollable and precipitated a war with the British. His successors were decrepit, involved in mutual warfare and prone to indulge in luxuries and enjoyment. There was constant civil war between the rival claimants to the throne, all nourished a hatred for the British and finally crossed the frontier and started the war against the English. During the lifetime of Ranjit Singh such a crisis was never allowed to be thought of and his political and military sagacity overruled such irresponsible talks and hasty measures. Osborne had rightly prophesied the situation in these words—"The whole country between the Sutlej and Indus must become the scene of a protracted and bloody war, only to be terminated by the

* History of the Sikhs by Henry Court.
interference of a third and stronger power, with an army and resources sufficiently strong to bid defiance to all hope of resistance, and that army must be the British army, and that power the British government, there can be little doubt. During the lifetime of Ranjit, who, whatever may have been his real feelings towards us, has preserved all the appearances of friendship the invasion and conquest of the Punjab would be indefensible; but at his death the case will be altered."*

It was a historical process and a fact, that the monarchy founded in the House of Lahore could not last for long. The successors of Ranjit Singh were neither efficient nor powerful, as rulers of a state which they had inherited. "Their rule is not sacred by antiquity. Whatever the origin of the race to which they belong, the Sikh chiefs are nevertheless Autochthones, earth-born and their ancestors, but a few generations ago, were themselves driving the plough over the very lands which they today rule as independent chiefs. But their history is a most important part of the general history of India. Their fierce enthusiasm, in the days when Sikhism was a living faith, enabled them to conquer the Punjab and defy the enmity of the Muhammedan Empire. It was their faith that made them strong, as it was the absence of all religious enthusiasm in the Muhammedans of India which proved their weakness, and ultimately their ruin."**

*Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
**The Rajas of the Punjab by Griffin.
Whatever might be the reasons for the rise and fall of the Sikhs, they had a properly organized and trained army of all arms, their artillery was as good as the British, their cavalry was brave and dashing, their administration was mere plunder and lived on the land, and their leadership left much to be desired to be talked about. Though laws, rules and regulations were formulated to govern the State and its various departments including the Army yet it was not so sound as the Marathas had. Griffin says—"The Punjab proper, during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was certainly a favourable specimen of a native state. Yet the revenue system of Ranjit Singh was but an organized system of pillage, and the country was farmed to contractors, who were bound to pay a certain sum into the state treasury, and were permitted to collect as much more as possible for themselves,"*. This perhaps speaks for irregular monthly payment to the Army who were in arrears of pay for six to eight months in a year and were never paid regularly though their rates of pay very favourably compared with the pay the Company's soldiers received.

On more than one occasion Ranjit Singh used his army to collect revenues "whose march down the frontier could be traced by the smoke of burning villages." In spite of all the many defects in the system, Ranjit Singh's military machine was efficient as testified by Osborne—"The Sikh army can be easily

*The Rajas of the Punjab by Griffin.
moved. No wheel carriages are allowed on a march. Their own bazars carry all they require and 30,000 of their troops could be moved with more facility and less expense and loss of time than three Company’s regiments on this side of the Sutlej”.*

There was a complete void in military developments after Ranjit Singh’s death. Monarchy was weak, soldiers dabbled in politics and made and unmade kings according to the advantages in pay and allowances that were given to them, there was no political or military guidance, anarchy prevailed all over the State, military leadership was non-existant and all high generals were interested in personal matters to benefit themselves and disloyalty and treachery was rampant. Such was the state of the Sikh dominion when Anglo-Sikh Wars broke out with a vengeance and fury.

The fighting quality and stubbornness of the Sikhs cannot be questioned. In every field of battle they were more than a match to the British. But they were badly led, treacherously betrayed by the Sardars who were worse than useless and in spite of this they acquitted themselves to the degree that Ranjit Singh had expected of them when during his lifetime he trained and organized them.

One Subedar Sita Ram serving in the Company’s army describes a battle with the Sikhs in these words—“This was fighting indeed, I had not seen anything like it before. Volleys of musketry were delivered by

*Ranjit Singh by Osborne.
us at close quarters and returned as steadily by the enemy. In all former actions I had been in, one or two volleys at close distance were all the Sarkar’s enemies would stand, but these Sikhs returned volley for volley and never gave way until nearly decimated. They had their regiments placed between their guns and behind them, their fire was terrible, such as no sepoy had ever been under. The Sarkar’s guns were almost silenced, and the ammunition waggons blew up. I saw two or three European regiments driven back by the weight of the artillery fire, it was like the bursat (rains) they fell into confusion; several sepoy regiments did the same. One European regiment was kafoor hoga (evaporated). I now thought the Sarkar’s army would be overpowered and fear filled the minds of many of us......it was a dreadful night, the English had not left the ground and the Sikhs had not been driven from their breast works, it was a boerd (a drawn game).”

Similarly the battle of Sobraon was fought under “circumstances of discreet policy and shameless treason” but in spite of wrong guidance and treasonable leadership the Sikh army fought doggedly with indomitable courage and determination. Not a single Sikh soldier either surrendered or asked for quarter.

Again during the battles of the Chillianwalla and Gujrat they lost due to bad generalship, and treachery of those in power.

*From Sepoy to Subedar by Sita Ram.
There is a school of thought which believes that had Ranjit Singh not changed the character and mode of fighting by the Sikhs and developed more their guerilla method of warfare, they would not have lost the battles and the empire to the British. It is contended that the Sikh guerilla tactics and their hit and run raids were singularly successful against Ahmad Shah Abdali and various other Mughal and Afghan chiefs who came and invaded India.

I do not agree to the above views. I think Ranjit Singh was right in remodelling his army on European lines to combat the growing power of the British. He had knowledge and experience of the advantages of the training methods of the British which had enabled the British-Indian army win against the formidable Marathas and other local powers in India. There was no mistaken policy and Ranjit Singh moved with the times and the development of various weapons of war particularly muskets and artillery. He also paid particular attention to infantry which was his weakest arm and then took advantage of the natural genius of the Sikhs as good cavalrymen. It was also surprising how the Sikhs adopted artillery and became experts in its manufacture and tactical employment.

Lawrence has remarked—"The Maharaja would have shown more foresight if he had devoted the same attention that he did to the European tactics to rendering his troops really efficient after their own
fashion, if he had erected fortifications around Lahore and Amritsar on European models and there planted his guns encumbering his troops in the field with but a few, perfectly equipped light artillery.*

There is no doubt that Ranjit Singh’s policy of modernising his army on the European model more than indicated his sagacity and farsightedness during the Anglo-Sikh wars. It is a marvel of military history that plunderers and rabbles had been transformed into a most efficient fighting machine by the ability of one man—Ranjit Singh.

I think Maharaja Ranjit Singh deserves a place of eternal gratitude in the military annals of India. No other Indian had ever achieved so much with so little and insignificant. All honour to Nanak the Saint, Govind the reformer and Ranjit the Lion.

Some historians have adversely commented upon Ranjit Singh’s policy of adopting the European method of training and tactics in the Sikh Army. They argue that the Sikh army would have been a better fighting machine had he kept alive their traditional method of fighting and tactics. In support of their arguments they quote the example of the Marathas who degenerated no sooner they adopted the organized method of warfare, sacrificing their traditional guerilla method. Similarly, the denationalisation of the Maratha army was another cause for their downfall because good

*Adventures of an officer-Lawrence.
and bad races were intermixed and consequent low morality.

I consider that the analogy of the Maratha system does not apply to the Sikhs. The Sikh army consisted primarily of the Khalsa and they had splendid esprit de corps and always presented a united front. Also, intermixture of all castes and creeds did not hamper the fighting ability of the Sikh army. Ranjit Singh ensured that communalism and localism did not hamper the growth of the fighting spirit of his army.

While Marathas had failed against the mughals and the British by discarding their traditional method of warfare with speed, but the Sikhs had come out well. The trained battalions were undoubtedly intended by Ranjit Singh against the British and the reformed Sikh army more than sufficiently justified itself during the first and second Sikh Wars.”

Though the Sikh troops were well disciplined and trained yet their battlefield discipline, on occasions, left much to be desired. In spite of early lapses, defeats and retreats, they fought well and stood their grounds against Afghans and the British. It only requires good officers with good pay to make a strong and efficient army.

Leadership is a vital factor in any war. It has been more than enough demonstrated during the Anglo-Sikh

*Ranjit Singh by Sinha.
Wars that given efficient and able leadership the Sikhs might have won the contest. The men were a good fighting material, they were well equipped and trained but badly and poorly led. Hence their defeat in spite of tenacious and stubborn fighting by the men.

Similarly on the British side they had their weaknesses. On many occasions there was faulty leadership and conduct of battle. Of course, on many occasions, General Gough retrieved the hopeless situations by personal bravery and the courage and tenacity of his men, yet on the whole the conduct of the Sikh wars left much to be desired.

There was constant interference in the higher direction as well as tactical conduct of the battles. The Governor General interfered with the Commander-in-Chief even from a subordinate capacity. Thus there was dual control, orders were not correctly and timely given and changes were ordered frequently even in the heat of battle. These are not happy forebodings for the future and the political head must not play at soldiers and try to conduct a battle in the field which is the job of the professional soldier. Though the Governor Generals employed by the Company had military training background and experience, yet they should not interfere with the conduct of war which is the responsibility of the commander in the field.

Mistakes are bound to occur but if the plans are well thought out and carried out with vigour and
energy then such lapses might be recovered. It so happened with the British but these must not be frequent or else troops lose confidence in their commanders and suffer heavy casualties.

Fighting troops must be maintained with all their requirements in the field of battle whatever might be the system in vogue. On many occasions the British had no ammunition left to fire upon the Sikhs and as a result they lost good opportunity to achieve victory, prolonged the battle and suffered heavy casualties.

It has again been historically proved that men, the rank and file, are never bad. It is the officers who make or mar a good army. Therefore any army must be officered by the finest material available in the country and paid well and regularly. Otherwise, however big the army might be, it will not survive the test of battle under severe stresses and strains which modern wars impose on men and material.

The Sikhs had adequate expert military knowledge. Their fortifications at Rasul bear eloquent testimony to their ability in this field. "Continuous line of batteries, entrenched externally and internally, protected the faces of the camp. The ground in front of the guns was closely planted with thick, strong bushes, which would have thrown any body of troops into disorder. They were also calculated to conceal the enemy from view. A strong battery was erected in the rear of the position, near the ravine alluded to
in the sketch of Chillianwala. This commanded a
greater part of the encampment. The rear face was
closed by an abrupt descent of rock of immense depth,
formed by nature.”

*Narrative of the Second Sikh War by Thackwell.
# APPENDIX 'A'

## THE ARMY OF LAHORE IN 1844

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandant</th>
<th>Inf batts</th>
<th>Cav regts</th>
<th>Artillery</th>
<th>Total strength</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Brigade: Gen. Ventura</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Belonging to Illahi Baksh</td>
<td>4,415</td>
<td>Rs 83,609 8 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diwan Jodha Ram</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 guns, 294 men</td>
<td>4,374</td>
<td>58,952 12 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Gulab Singh, acting for Gen. Court</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>54,751 4 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Dhaukal Singh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>23,159 15 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Jawala Singh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>22,285 12 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. S. Tej Singh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 field guns, 293 men, light artillery</td>
<td>3,602</td>
<td>45,171 13 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Kanh Singh Man</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26½</td>
<td>4,154</td>
<td>61,248 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Mahtab Singh Majithia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>3,879</td>
<td>59,582 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Pertab Singh of Punach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2,690</td>
<td>32,743 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Gurdit Singh Majithia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>2,872</td>
<td>35,679 7 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,698</td>
<td>14,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Courtlandt</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>3,467</td>
<td>43,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Gulab Singh Puhuvindha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,581</td>
<td>19,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Bishan Singh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>1,381</td>
<td>20,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Kishan Singh</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>29,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raja Hira Singh under Col.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>20,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagat Singh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai Kesari Singh of</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1,258</td>
<td>11,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naulakha Cantt, formerly nr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway Station Lahore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardar Lahna Singh Majithia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1,258</td>
<td>11,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Companies</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,577</td>
<td>18,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and soldiers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Battalions:</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round No. 40,000 men.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Regiments:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx No. 6,000 men.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Artillery:</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126=230.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A number of mortars and Camel Swivels are not included in these computations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Plus 8th Company of Ramghoal Battalion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%It seems that Lal Singh had to pay these soldiers quartered on his farms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He farmed out certain districts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## ARTILLERY CORPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandant</th>
<th>Guns</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Jagir assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lal Jawahir Mal in charge of Mistri Khana</td>
<td>Rs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. A</td>
<td>Rs. per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. M. Muzihr Ali Beg.</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10,284</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. B. Ishwar Singh, Col</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Meva Singh, Gen.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sultan Muhd., Gen Commanding heavy guns. | | | | |
| 1. Bakhtawar khan. | 165 | 13* | 9,000 |
| 2. Muhammad Baksh, Col | 205 | 12 | 1,980 |
| 3. ........... | | | 1,140 |

| Illahi Baksh khan, Gen | | | | |
| 1. M. Illahi Baksh. | 510 | 18* | 4,120 |
| 2. Sikandar Khan, son of Illahi Baksh. | | | |
### Total Number of Guns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Guns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fateh Khan</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahora Singh</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir Chand, Col</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir Chand, Col</td>
<td>-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fateh Singh and Mubarak Khan</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Number of Guns: 126**

### Infantry Monthly Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infantry (monthly expenditure)</td>
<td>4,43,892</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>1,62,811</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>67,030</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRAND TOTAL:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual land assignment to military officers</td>
<td>2,02,439</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash disbursement</td>
<td>8,69,109</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total for the Year:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of men</td>
<td>15,22,627</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of guns, 230, not including mortars and swivels</td>
<td>1,00,94,076</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DECLARATION OF WAR OF 1845

PROCLAMATION BY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

OF INDIA

Camp, Lashkari Khan ki Sarai,
December 13th, 1845.

The British Government has ever been on terms of friendship with that of the Punjab.

In the year 1809, a treaty of amity and concord was concluded between the British Government and the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the conditions of which have always been faithfully observed by the British Government, and were scrupulously fulfilled by the late Maharaja.

The same friendly relations have been maintained with the successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by the British Government up to the present time.

Since the death of the late Maharaja Sher Singh, the disorganized state of the Lahore Government has made it incumbent on the Governor-General in Council to adopt precautionary measures for the protection of the British frontier: the nature of these measures, and the cause of their adoption, were, at the time, fully explained to the Lahore Durbar.
Notwithstanding the disorganized state of the Lahore Government during the last two years, and many most unfriendly proceedings on the part of the Durbar, the Governor-General in Council has continued to evince his desire to maintain the relations of amity and concord which had so long existed between the two States, for the mutual interests and happiness of both. He has shown, on every occasion, the utmost forbearance, and consideration to the helpless state of the infant Maharaja Dalip Singh, whom the British Government had recognized as the successor to the late Maharaja Sher Singh.

The Governor-General in Council sincerely desired to see a strong Sikh Government re-established in the Punjab, able to control its army, and to protect its subjects; he had not, up to the present moment, abandoned the hope of seeing that important object effected by the patriotic efforts of the chiefs and people of that country.

The Sikh army recently marched from Lahore towards the British frontier, as it was alleged, by the orders of the Durbar, for the purpose of invading the British territory.

The Governor-General’s agent, by direction of the Governor-General, demanded an explanation of this movement, and no reply being returned within a reasonable time, the demand was repeated. The Governor-General, unwilling to believe in the hostile intentions of the Sikh Government, to which no provocation had been given,
restrained from taking any measures which might have a tendency to embarrass the Government of the Maharaja, or to induce collision between the two States.

When no reply was given to the repeated demand for explanation, while active military preparations were continued at Lahore, the Governor-General considered it necessary to order the advance of troops towards the frontier, to reinforce the frontier posts.

The Sikh army has now, without a shadow of provocation, invaded the British territories.

The Governor-General must therefore take measures for effectually protecting the British provinces, for vindicating the authority of the British Government, and for punishing the violators of treaties and the disturbers of the public peace.

The Governor-General hereby declares the possessions of Maharaja Delip Singh, on the left or British bank of the Sutlej, confiscated and annexed to the British territories.

The Governor-General will respect the existing rights of all Jagirdars, Zamindars and tenants in the said possessions, who, by the course they now pursue, evince their fidelity to the British Government.

The Governor-General hereby calls all the Chiefs and Sardars in the protected territories to cooperate cordially with the British Government for the punishment
of the common enemy, and for the maintenance
of order in these States. Those of the Chiefs who
show alacrity and fidelity in the discharge of this duty,
which they owe to the protecting power, will find their
interests promoted thereby; and those who take a
contrary course will be treated as enemies to the British
Government, and will be punished accordingly.

The inhabitants of all the territories on the left
bank of the Sutlej are hereby directed to abide peaceably
in their respective villages, where they will receive
efficient protection by the Government. All parties of
men found in armed bands, who can give no satisfactory
account of their proceedings, will be treated as disturbers
of the public peace.

All subjects of the British Government, and those
who possess estates on both sides of the river Sutlej, who,
by their faithful adherence to the British Government,
may be liable to sustain loss, shall be indemnified and
secured in all their just rights and privileges.

On the other hand, all subjects of the British Government
who shall continue in the service of the Lahore State,
and who disobey the proclamation by not immediately
returning to their allegiance, will be liable to have their
property on this side of the Sutlej confiscated, and
themselves declared to be aliens and enemies of the
British Government.
FIRST TREATY WITH LAHORE OF 1846

TREATY BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE STATE OF LAHORE, CONCLUDED AT LAHORE, ON MARCH 9th 1846

Whereas the treaty of amity and concord, which was concluded between the British Government and the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Lahore, in 1809, was broken by the unprovoked aggression on the British provinces of the Sikh army, in December last. And whereas, on that occasion, by the proclamation dated the 13th of December, the territories then in the occupation of the Maharaja of Lahore, on the left or British bank of the river Sutlej, were confiscated and annexed to the British provinces; and since that time, hostile operations have been prosecuted by the two Govts., the one against the other, which have resulted in the occupation of Lahore by the British troops. And whereas it has been determined that, upon certain conditions, peace shall be re-established between the two Governments, the following treaty of peace between the Honourable English East India Company, and Maharaja Dalip Singh Bahadur, and his children, heirs and successors, has been concluded, on the part of the Honourable Company, by Frederick Currie, Esq.,
and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence, by virtue of full powers to that effect vested in them by the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G. C. B., one of Her Britannic Majesty's most Honourable privy Council, Governor-General, appointed by the Honourable Company to direct and control all their affairs in the East Indies; and, on the part of his Highness the Maharaja Dalip Singh, by Bhai Ram Singh, Raja Lal Singh, Sardar Tej Singh, Sardar Chattar Singh Atariwala, Sardar Ranjor Singh Majithia, Diwan Dina Nath, and Fakir Nur-ud-din, vested with full powers and authority on the part of his Highness.

Article 1. There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the British Government, on the one part, and Maharaja Dalip Singh, his heirs and successors, on the other.

Article 2. The Maharaja of Lahore renounces for himself, his heirs and successors, all claim to, or connexion with, the territories lying to the river Sutlej, and engages never to have any concern with those territories, or the inhabitants thereof.

Article 3. The Maharaja cedes to the Honourable Company, in perpetual sovereignty, all his forts, territories, and rights, in the Doab, or country hill and plain, situated between the rivers Beas and Sutlej.

Article 4. The British Government having demanded from the Lahore State, as indemnification for the expenses of the war, in addition to the cession of territory described in
Article 3, payment of one and a half crores of rupees; and the Lahore Government being unable to pay the whole of this sum at this time, or to give security satisfactory to the British Government for its eventual payment; the Maharaja cedes to the Honourable Company, in perpetual sovereignty, as equivalent for one crore of rupees, all his forts, territories, rights, and interests, in the hill countries which are situated between the rivers Beas and Indus, including the provinces of Kashmere and Hazara.

Article 5. The Maharaja will pay to the British Government the sum of fifty lacs of rupees, on or before the ratification of this treaty.

Article 6. The Maharaja engages to disband the mutinous troops of the Lahore army, taking from them their arms; and his Highness agrees to reorganize the regular, or Ain, regiments of infantry, upon the system, and according to the regulations as to pay and allowances, observed in the time of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Maharaja further engages to pay up all arrears to the soldiers that are discharged under the provisions of this article.

Article 7. The regular army of the Lahore State shall henceforth be limited to 25 battalions of infantry, consisting of 800 bayonets each, with 12,000 cavalry: this number at no time to be exceeded without the concurrence of the British Government. Should it be necessary at any time, for any special cause, that this force should be increased, the cause—
shall be fully explained to the British Government; and, when the special necessity shall have passed, the regular troops shall be again reduced to the standard specified in the former clause of this article.

Article 8. The Maharaja will surrender to the British Government all the guns, thirty-six in number, which have been pointed against the British troops, and which, having been placed on the right bank of the river Sutlej, were not captured at the battle of Sobraon.

Article 9. The control of the rivers Beas and Sutlej, with the continuations of the latter river, commonly called the Ghara and Panjnad, to the confluence of the Indus at Mithankot, and the control of the Indus from Mithankot to the borders of Baluchistan, shall, in respect to tolls and ferries, rest with the British Government. The provisions of this article shall not interfere with the passage of boats belonging to the Lahore Government on the said rivers, for the purposes of traffic, or the conveyance of passengers up and down their course. Regarding the ferries between the two countries respectively, at the several ghats of the said rivers, it is agreed that the British Government, after defraying all the expenses of management and establishments, shall account to the Lahore Government for one-half of the net profits of the ferry collections. The provisions of this part of the river Sutlej which forms the boundary of Bahawalpur and Lahore respectively.
Article 10. If the British Government should, at any time, desire to pass troops through the territories of his Highness the Maharaja for the protection of the British territories, or those of their allies, the British troops shall, on such special occasions, due notice being given, be allowed to pass through the Lahore territories. In such case, the officers of the Lahore State will afford facilities in providing supplies and boats for the passage of rivers; and the British Govt. will pay the full price of all such provisions and boats, and will make fair compensation for all private property that may be damaged. The British Government will moreover observe all due consideration to the religious feelings of the inhabitants of those tracts through which the army may pass.

Article 11. The Maharaja engages never to take, or retain, in his service, any British subject, nor the subject of any European or American State, without the consent of the British Government.

Article 12. In consideration of the services rendered by Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu to the Lahore State towards procuring the restoration of the relations of amity between the Lahore and British Governments, the Maharaja hereby agrees to recognize the independent sovereignty of Raja Gulab Singh, in such territories and districts in the hills as may be made over to the said Raja Gulab Singh by separate agreement between himself and the British Government, with the dependencies thereof, which may have been in
the Raja’s possession since the time of the late Maharaja Kharak Singh and the British Government, in consideration of the good conduct of Raja Gulab Singh, also agrees to recognize his independence in such territories, and to admit him to the privileges of a separate treaty with the British Government.

Article 13. In the event of any dispute or difference arising between the Lahore State and Raja Gulab Singh, the same shall be referred to the arbitration of the British Government; and by its decision the Maharaja engages to abide.

Article 14. The limits of the Lahore territories shall not be, at any time, changed without the concurrence of the British Government.

Article 15. The British Government will not exercise any interference in the internal administration of the Lahore State; but in all cases or questions which may be referred to the British Government, the Governor-General will give the aid of his advice and good offices for the furtherance of the interests of the Lahore Government.

Article 16. The subjects of either State shall, on visiting the territories of the other, be on the footing of the subjects of the most favoured nation.

This treaty, consisting of sixteen articles, has been this day settled by Frederick Currie, Esq., and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence, acting under the directions of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G. C. B., Governor-General, on the part of the British Government;
and by Bhai Ram Singh, Raja Lal Singh, Sardar Tej Singh, Sardar Chattar Singh Atariwala, Sardar Ranjor Singh Majithia, Diwan Dina Nath, and Fakir Nur-ud din, on the part of the Maharaja Dalip Singh; and the said treaty has been this day ratified by the seal of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G. C. B., Governor-General, and by that of his Highness Maharaja Dalip Singh.

Done at Lahore, this 9th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1846, corresponding with the 10th day of Rabi-ul-awal 1262, Hijri, and ratified on the same day.
SUPPLEMENTARY ARTICLES TO FIRST TREATY WITH LAHORE OF 1846.

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT CONCLUDED BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE LAHORE DURBAR, ON THE 11th OF MARCH 1846

Whereas the Lahore Government has solicited the Governor-General to leave a British force at Lahore, for the protection of the Maharaja's person and of the capital, till the reorganization of the Lahore army according to the provisions of Article 6 of the treaty of Lahore, dated the 9th instant: And whereas the Governor-General has, on certain conditions, consented to the measure: And whereas it is expedient that certain matters concerning the territories ceded by Articles 3 and 4 of the aforesaid treaty should be specifically determined; the following eight articles of agreement have this day been concluded between the aforementioned contracting parties.

Article 1. The British Government shall leave at Lahore, till the close of the current year, A.D. 1846, such force as shall seem to the Governor-General adequate for the purpose of protecting the person of the Maharaja, and inhabitants of the city of Lahore,
during the reorganization of the Sikh army, in accordance with the provisions of Article 6 of the treaty of Lahore; that force to be withdrawn at any convenient time before the expiration of the year, if the object to be fulfilled shall, in the opinion of the Durbar, have been obtained; but the force shall not be detained at Lahore beyond the expiration of the current year.

Article 2. The Lahore Government agrees that the force left at Lahore, for the purpose specified in the foregoing article, shall be placed in full possession of the fort and the city of Lahore, and that the Lahore troops shall be removed from within the city. The Lahore Government engages to furnish convenient quarters for officers and men of the said force, and to pay the British Government all the extra expenses, in regard to the said force, which may be incurred by the British Government, in consequence of their troops being employed away from their own cantonments, and in a foreign territory.

Article 3. The Lahore Government engages to apply itself immediately and earnestly to the reorganization of its army, according to the prescribed condition, and to communicate fully with the British authorities left at Lahore, as to the progress of such reorganisation, and as to the location of the troops.

Article 4. If the Lahore Government fails in the performance of the conditions of the foregoing article, the British Government shall be at liberty to withdraw the force from Lahore, at any time before the expiration of the period specified in Article 1.
Article 5. The British Government agrees to respect the bonafide rights of those Jagirdars within the territories ceded by Articles 3 and 4 of the treaty of Lahore, dated 9th instant, who were attached to the families of the Late Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Kharak Singh, and the British Government will maintain those Jagirdars in their bonafide possessions, during their lives.

Article 6. The Lahore Government shall receive the assistance of the British local authorities in recovering the arrears of revenue justly due to the Lahore Government from their Kardars and managers in the territories ceded by the provisions of Articles 3 and 4 of the treaty of Lahore, to the close of the Kharif harvest of the current year, viz, 1902 of the Sambat Bikarmajit.

Article 7. The Lahore Government shall be at liberty to remove from the forts in the territories specified in the foregoing article, all treasure and state property, with the exception of guns. Should, however, the British Government desire to retain any part of the said property, they shall be at liberty to do so, paying for the same at a fair valuation; and the British officers shall give their assistance to the Lahore Government, in disposing on the spot of such part of the aforesaid property as the Lahore Government may not wish to remove, and the British officers may not desire to retain.
Article 8. Commissioners shall be immediately appointed by the two Governments, to settle and lay down the boundary between the two States, as defined by Article 4 of the treaty of Lahore, dated 9th March, 1846.
TREATY WITH GULAB SINGH OF 1846
TREATY BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND MAHARAJA GULAB SINGH,
CONCLUDED AT AMRITSAR,
ON 16TH MARCH 1846

Treaty between the British Government on the one part, and Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu on the other, concluded, on the part of the British Government, by Frederick Currie, Esq., and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence, acting under the orders of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G.C.B., one of Her Britannic Majesty’s most Honourable Privy Council, Governor-General, appointed by the Honourable Company to direct and control all their affairs in the East Indies, and by Maharaja Gulab Singh in person.

Article 1. The British Government transfers and makes over, for ever, in independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and the heirs male of his body, all the hilly or mountainous country, with its dependencies, situated to the eastward of the river Indus, and westward of the river Ravi, including Chamba and excluding Lahul, being part of the territory ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State, according to the provisions of Article 4 of the Treaty of Lahore, dated 9th March 1846.
Article 2. The eastern boundary of the tract transferred by the foregoing article to Maharaja Gulab Singh shall be laid down by commissioners appointed by the British Government and Maharaja Gulab Singh respectively, for that purpose, and shall be defined in a separate engagement, after survey.

Article 3. In consideration of the transfer made to him and his heirs by the provisions of the foregoing articles, Maharaja Gulab Singh will pay to the British Government the sum of seventy-five lacs of rupees (Nanakshahi), fifty lacs to be paid on ratification of this treaty, and twenty-five lacs on or before the 1st of October of the current year, A.D. 1846.

Article 4. The limits of the territories of Maharaja Gulab Singh shall not be at any time changed without the concurrence of the British Government.

Article 5. Maharaja Gulab Singh will refer to the arbitration of the British Government any disputes or questions that may arise between himself and the Government of Lahore, or any other neighbouring State, and will abide by the decision of the British Government.

Article 6. Maharaja Gulab Singh engages for himself and heirs, to join, with the whole of his military force, the British troops, when employed within the hills, or in the territories adjoining his possessions.

Article 7. Maharaja Gulab Singh engages never to take, or retain, in his service any British Subject, nor the subject of any European or American State, without the consent of the British Government.
Article 8. Maharaja Gulab Singh engages to respect, in regard to the territory transferred to him, the provisions of Articles 5, 6 and 7 of the separate engagement between the British Government and the Lahore Durbar, dated 11th March 1846.

Article 9. The British Government will give its aid to Maharaja Gulab Singh, in protecting his territories from external enemies.

Article 10. Maharaja Gulab Singh acknowledges the supremacy of the British Government, and will, in token of such supremacy, present annually to the British Government one horse, twelve perfect shawl goats of approved breed (six male and six female), and three pairs of Kashmir shawls.

This treaty consisting of ten articles, has been this day settled by Frederick Currie, Esq., and Brevet-Major Henry Montgomery Lawrence, acting under the directions of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G.C.B., Governor-General, on the part of the British Government, and by Maharaja Gulab Singh in person; and the said treaty has been this day ratified by the seal of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, G.C.B., Governor-General.

Done at Amritsār, this 16th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1846, corresponding with the 17th day of Rabi-ul-awal, 1262, Hijri.
SECOND TREATY WITH LAHORE OF 1846
FOREIGN DEPARTMENT, CAMP, BHYROVAL,
GHAT, ON THE LEFT BANK OF THE BEAS,
THE 22nd DECEMBER 1846

The late Governor of Kashmir, on the part of the Lahore State, Shaikh Imam-ud-din, having resisted by force of arms the occupation of the province of Kashmir by Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Lahore Government was called upon to coerce their subject, and to make over the province to the representative of the British Government, in fulfillment of the conditions of the Treaty of Lahore, dated 9th March 1846.

A British force was employed to support and aid, if necessary, the combined forces of the Lahore State and Maharaja Gulab Singh in the above operations.

Shaikh Imam-ud-din intimated to the British Government that he was acting under orders received from the Lahore Durbar in the course he was pursuing, and stated that the insurrection had been instigated by written instructions received by him from the Wazir Raja Lal Singh.

Shaikh Imam-ud-din surrendered to the British agent on a guarantee from that officer, that if the Shaikh could, as he asserted, prove that his acts were in accordance with his instructions, and that the opposition was instigated by the Lahore minister, the Durbar should not be
permitted to inflict upon him, either in his person or his property, any penalty on account of his conduct on this occasion. The British agent pledged his Government to a full and impartial investigation of the matter.

A public inquiry was instituted into the facts adduced by Shaikh Imam-ud-din, and it was fully established that Raja Lal Singh did secretly instigate the Shaikh to oppose the occupation by Maharaja Gulab Singh of the province of Kashmir.

The Governor-General immediately demanded that the Ministers and Chiefs of the Lahore State should depose and exile to the British provinces the Wazir Raja Lal Singh.

His Lordship consented to account the deposition of Raja Lal Singh as an atonement for the attempt to infringe the treaty by the secret intrigues and machinations of the Wazir. It was not proved that the other members of the Durbar had cognizance of the Wazir's proceedings; and the conduct of the Sardars, and of the Sikh army in the late operations for quelling the Kashmir insurrection, and removing the obstacles to the fulfilment of the treaty, proved that the criminality of the Wazir was not participated in by the Sikh nation.

The Ministers and Chiefs unanimously decreed, and carried into immediate effect, the deposition of the Wazir.

After a few days' deliberations, relative to the means of forming a government at Lahore, the remaining members of the Durbar, in concert with all the Sardars
and Chiefs of the State, solicited the interference and aid of the British Government for the maintenance of an administration, and the protection of the Maharaja Dalip Singh during the minority of his Highness.

This solicitation by the Durbar and Chiefs has led to the temporary modification of the relations between the British Government and that of Lahore, established by the treaty of the 9th March of the present year.

The terms and conditions of this modification are set forth in the following articles of agreement.
ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT CONCLUDED BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE LAHORE DURBAR ON 16th DECEMBER 1846

Whereas the Lahore Durbar and the principal Chiefs and Sardars of the State have, in express terms, communicated to the British Government their anxious desire that the Governor-General should give his aid and his assistance to maintain the administration of the Lahore State during the minority of Maharaja Dalip Singh, and have declared this measure to be indispensable for the maintenance of the government: And whereas the Governor-General has, under certain conditions, consented to give the aid and assistance solicited, the following articles of agreement, in modification of the articles of agreement executed at Lahore on the 11th March last, have been concluded, on the part of the British Government, by Frederick Currie, Esq., Secretary to the Government of India, and Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Montgomery Lawrence, C.B., Agent to the Governor-General, North-West Frontier, by virtue of full powers to that effect vested in them by the Right Honourable Viscount Highness Maharaja Dalip Singh, by Sardar Tej Singh, Sardar Sher Singh, Diwan Dina Nath, Fakir Nur-ud-din, Rai Kishan Chand, Sardar Ranjor Singh Majithia, Sardar
Atar Singh Kaliwala, Bhai Nidhan Singh, Sardar Khan Singh Majithia, Sardar Shamsher Singh, Sardar Lal Singh Muraria, Sardar Kehar Singh Sindhianwala, Sardar Arjun Singh Rangranglia, acting with the unanimous consent and concurrence of the Chiefs and Sardars of the State assembled at Lahore.

Article 1. All and every part of the treaty of peace between the British Government and the State of Lahore, bearing date the 9th day of March 1846, except in so far as it may be temporarily modified in respect to clause 15 of the said treaty by this engagement, shall remain binding upon the two Governments.

Article 2. A British officer, with an efficient establishment of assistants, shall be appointed by the Governor-General to remain at Lahore, which officer shall have full authority to direct and control all matters in every department of the State.

Article 3. Every attention shall be paid, in conducting the administration, to the feelings of the people, to preserving the national institutions and customs, and to maintaining the just rights of all classes.

Article 4. Changes in the mode and details of administration shall not be made, except when found necessary for effecting the objects set forth in the foregoing clause, and for securing the just dues of the Lahore Government. These details shall be conducted by native officers as at.
present, who shall be appointed and superintended by a Council of Regency, composed of leading Chiefs and Sardars, acting under the control and guidance of the British Resident.

Article 5. The following persons shall in the first instance constitute the Council of Regency, namely, Sardar Tej Singh, Sardar Sher Singh Atariwala, Diwan Dina Nath, Fakir Nur-ud-din, Sardar Ranjor Singh Majithia, Bhai Nidhan Singh, Sardar Atar Singh Kaliwala, Sardar Shamsher Singh Sindhianwala; and no change shall be made in the persons thus nominated, without the consent of the British Resident, acting under the orders of the Governor-General.

Article 6. The administration of the country shall be conducted by this Council of Regency in such manner as may be determined on by themselves in consultation with the British Resident, who shall have full authority to direct and control the duties of every department.

Article 7. A British force, of such strength and numbers, and in such positions, as the Governor-General may think fit, shall remain at Lahore for the protection of the Maharaja, and the preservation of the peace of the country.

Article 8. The Governor-General shall be at liberty to occupy with British soldiers any fort or military post in the Lahore territories, the occupation of which may be deemed necessary by the British Government for the
security of the capital, or for maintaining the peace of the country.

Article 9. The Lahore State shall pay to the British Government twenty-two lacs of new Nanakshahi rupees of full tale and weight per annum, for the maintenance of this force, and to meet the expenses incurred by the British Government; such sum to be paid by two instalments, or 13 lacs and 20,000 in May or June, and 8 lacs and 80,000 in November or December of each year.

Article 10. Inasmuch as it is fitting that Her Highness the Maharani, the mother of Maharaja Dalip Singh, should have a proper provision made for the maintenance of herself and dependents, the sum of 1 lac and 50,000 rupees shall be set apart annually for that purpose, and shall be at her Highness's disposal.

Article 11. The provisions of this engagement shall have effect during the minority of his Highness Maharaja Dalip Singh, and shall cease and terminate on his Highness attaining the full age of 16 years, or on the 4th September of the year 1854; but it shall be competent to the Governor-General to cause the arrangement to cease, at any period prior to the coming of age of his Highness, at which the Governor-General and the Lahore Durbar may be satisfied that the inter-position of the British
Government is no longer necessary for maintaining the government of his Highness the Mahara

This agreement, consisting of eleven articles, was settled and executed at Lahore, by the officers and Chiefs and Sardars above named, on the 16th day of December 1846.
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