

**EMERGENCE OF A REGIONAL STATE
IN PUNJAB IN THE 18TH CENTURY**

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Certified that the dissertation entitled, "THE EMERGENCE OF A REGIONAL STATE IN PUNJAB IN THE 18th CENTURY" submitted by Ms. SONIA GAUBA, in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of this University, is her original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or of any other University.

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INTRODUCTION

The historiography of Punjab has moved a long way from the time the colonial administrators began to write the history of Punjab.

For the colonial administrators, the Sikhs had become relevant because of their newly acquired power in Punjab and unsettling influence of their incursions in the adjoining areas.¹ Thus, knowledge of this sect, their strength and the nature of their governance were very important for the Bengal administrators. So they touched upon every aspect of contemporary Sikh society, their religious beliefs, social and political structure, diet, dress, military system. But

¹ A.L.H. Polier, *The Siques*, Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1962.

George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, 2 Vols., London, 1798.

James Browne, *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*, London, 1788, Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1962.

Letter from Major Polier to Col. Ironside at Belgram, Delhi, May 22, 1776, Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1962.

J.D. Cunningham, *A History of Sikhs*, London, 1849.

H.T. Prinsep, *Origin of Sikh Power in the Punjab and the Political life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1834)* Second impression Patiala, 1970.

W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, 1840.

even though these authors did traverse through these religious, political and institutional aspects of Sikh history, their approach had a grave shortcoming. They treated each aspect whether it was high politics or popular religion, in complete isolation without any sustained attempts to trace the interplay of social, economic, political and religious factors. Professor Mcleod's work provided a major break from this kind of history. His was a brief approximation to 'total history' based upon rigorous testing of primary material.² He revived the 'organising question' that was raised initially by Malcom in his *Sketch of the Sikhs*, and tried to pinpoint the cohesive ideal and institution that counteracted the tendency to fission inherent in the anarchic institution and mixed composition of the Sikh community. On the issue of 'caste', he pointed out that the Guru opposed vertical distinction of caste rather than horizontal linkages as reflected in the marriage customs. He also traced the changing caste composition of Sikh society—a community dominated by Khatri in the 16th century and by Jats, by the 18th century.

Another noted contribution is that of Dr. J.S. Grewal, who has given a fresh orientation to the entire subject by

² W.H. Mcleod, *The Evolution of Sikh Community: Five Essays*, Oxford, 1976. His other book is *Guru Nanak and Sikh Religion*, Delhi, 1976.

breaking the tradition, where there was an unconscious identification of Sikh history with regional history. His endeavour, coupled with that of B.N. Goswamy, has brought to the forefront new pieces of evidence in the form of *The Mughals and Jogis of Jakhbar*, Simla, 1967 and *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori*, Simla, 1969. Apart from revealing the continued relevance of madad-i-mash grants in the form of *dharmarth* and *bhet*, it throws light on the Sikh polity of 18th and 19th centuries. Grewal, through articles in *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh-Essay in Sikh History*, Amritsar, 1972 and *Miscellaneous Articles*, Amritsar, 1974, has highlighted the features that give further thrust to the continuity aspect of the 'continuity-change syndrome'. As we see that apart from minor changes, the Mughal traditions were imitated by the Sikh Sardars to a large extent and continued into the first half of the 19th century, under the aegis of centralised monarchy of Ranjit Singh. Dr. Grewal's latest book *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge, 1990, is a comprehensive piece, which does help a reader to locate the developments in the 18th century within a wider historical ambit.

The agrarian system of the Sikhs during the late 18th and the early 19th century has been rigorously studied by Indu Banga in *The Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, New Delhi,

1978. It deals not only with the question of establishment of the Sikh rule, but also with the nature and character of that rule. The relationship of vassal chiefs of all creeds to their Sikh suzerain has been studied for the first time. The administrative framework, land tenures, land revenue, the system of revenue grants and jagirs have been studied in great detail. The fiscal aspect has provided a new dimension to Sikh history.

Veena Sachdeva's work *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the late 18th century*, New Delhi, 1993, is the latest addition to the Punjab historiography. The study deals with all the new rulers-the Sikhs and the non-Sikh chiefs that encapsulated the area between Sutlej and Indus during the late 18th century. The work emphasizes that the Sikh chief was in no way different from the other chiefs of Punjab. He was a monarch in the complete sense and held individual authority over the territories under his control. Keeping this perspective in mind, she looks at the polity, administrative arrangements, land revenue, pattern of state patronage and urban and agrarian economy in territories of these chiefs.

From the 1980's the historian began to view the 18th century in a different light. C.A. Bayly argued that the 18th century was not a century of 'anarchy'. On the

contrary major economic and social realignments were taking place at the level of the region which was being extended to meet the needs of misl organisation and growing bureaucratization of the numerous small polities that succeeded the Mughals. Elucidating this view point further Dr. Muzaffar Alam pointed out that there was a shift from control of peripheries by centre in the 17th century, to control of centre by provinces in the 18th century. To exemplify his argument he takes Punjab as one of his case studies and highlights the changing position of the governor and his attempts to appropriate the Diwani and Faujdari's power. This over the period of time, began to pose a political threat to the Mughal centre.

DR. Chetan Singh's work, *Region and Empire: Punjab in the 17th Century*, Delhi, 1991, further enriched this historiography of the 18th century. His work establishes a linkage between agriculture, manufacturing processes on one hand and social change on the other hand and elucidates the adjustments made in both tribal and settled societies to certain economic forces at work within the region. Thus he locates the disassociation in the economic and material conditions of the period.

This work attempts to add to the historiography of regional state formation in the 18th century. Here the

process of state formation is attempted to be understood in the context of power politics and significant power realignments that were going on ever since the period of Banda Bahadur (1707). This political realignment gave the impression of political turmoil and instability on the surface, but the work attempts to show that this was far from true. For not only the Khalsa was undergoing change but even in the period of absolute turmoil after Banda's execution major political and social reorganisation was taking place in the far flung region of Punjab. For instance the Sikhs from the new power base established in the periphery where the Mughal army had relegated them were emerging as a more militant group. Alongside significant changes were taking place at Amritsar-a nodal centre for spiritual affairs assumed a political status. Finally the new political military organisation-the misl-was rapidly developing. This misl formation had significant bearing on the economy of the region. It is argued that these important social and political development lead to a change in position of certain social groups such as Khattris and Jats. Finally, the work situates Ranjit Singh's success as a ruler in context of these significant development in the 18th century.

The first chapter tries to locate Banda Bahadur's assumption of political leadership within the socio-

economic set up of the period. It focusses on the impact of economy on the prevalent social classes and its repercussions on the social base of the movement. It is argued that the Jats who began to predominate the Khalsa had not only helped in moulding the form and philosophy of the infant Panth but had also provided a militant fervour to the movement. Banda tapped this very militancy and expanded his base to encompass a variety of structures of authority. The establishment of Lohgarh heralded a sovereign rule where features like formal choice of capital, striking of new coins, the use of new seals, adopting of new calender, and displacement of Mughal officials by Sikh Governors and other subordinate officers, point to an attempt to supplant the existing Government. The chapter, thus attempts to understand whether Banda assumed Kingship for himself. Did he personally weild power and if he did was it in his own name or in the name of Khalsa? Were there any areas of tension between Banda and Khalsa? Did Banda vacillate between secular and religious authority structure? In answering these questions the chapter attempts to understand the formation of a Sikh identity in 18th century.

The second chapter throws light on the potential mass base of Banda's movement which became more discernible and articulate during the period following Bandas's death in

1714. Even though the Sikhs were outnumbered and outgunned by Mughal forces it did not seem to deter them. The Sikhs were pushed to the remote areas such as Jammu-Kangra hills, Lakhi Jungle and Kahnuwan swamps and Malwa desert. This chapter concentrates on these areas to understand their reorganisation and activities in the periphery. It delves into the power politics that governed these areas. It seems that in the absence of any generally recognised leader, the Khalsa assumed a political role, made Amritsar its nodal centre and attempted to provide cohesiveness through institution like Gurmattas. Along with this the focus is also on the organisational changes unfurled by Khalsa to accomodate the rising number of followers. While trying to break through the traditional approach which has sought reasons for the growing number of followers in the political milieu of the period, this section provides a fresh orientation by searching for answers in the very dynamics of the economy.

The third chapter tries to bring out the distinction that was prevalent between the normative beliefs which were instrumental in bringing consolidation in the form of misls and the operative practices which show that consolidation and fragmentation went hand in hand. Since land was a key constituent for misl formation, in the period under review one notices that the Sardars treated

conquest of land as their top priority as far as self aggrandisement was concerned. The history of this period is dotted with innumerable military alliances that cut across traditional parameter of misl and kinship loyalties. Yet in this period of apparant political turmoil significant political, social and economic realignments were take place. The chapter also studies the military build up of the misls. The significant impact that the large army of the misls had in giving a further boost to the economy of the region is highlighted.

As a result of internecine conflicts which had become endemic in the last quarter of the 18th century, the fourth chapter would make an attempt to highlight Ranjit Singh's effort to provide social cohesion. A necessary prerequisite for the establishment of territorial and administrative organisation, this was a logical culmination of the effort that commenced as early as 1765. Could Ranjit Singh balance the different conflicting forces? -is the moot question at stake and the chapter attempts to elucidate the answer by discussing his relationship vis-vis the vassals; the social groups especially the Khattris and the structures of temporal power.

CHAPTER I

JATISATION OF THE KHALSA: RISE OF BANDA BAHADUR

With the dawn of the 18th century, the Sikh religion, which was more or less pacifist in nature, assumed a new role for itself. It became a symbol of armed resistance and gradually got converted into a military organisation. The study would try to focus on the social base of the movement, whose contribution cannot be limited alone to successful achievement of the assigned military targets, as its very 'being' revolutionized and ushered militancy into the movement. Another important area that would be delved at, is how far could Banda amass support from this social base to achieve his political objectives successfully?

The inauguration of Khalsa on the Baishaki of 1699 by Guru Govind Singh at Anandpur was a significant development in the evolution of Sikh identity. It gave a new meaning to the relation between the Sikh Gurus and his followers. He had, on the day, merged his personality as a Guru in the Khalsa; to make the corporate brotherhood and the Guru interchangeable institutions. A formal discipline was enunciated, which required an explicit act of allegiance from all who accepted Khalsa initiation. But was this institutional development fostered in the wake of Mughal tyrannical oppressions, the threat of persecution

coupled with the fact that the Sikhs had had a stint of experience in direct combat with Imperial forces or should this inauguration be viewed in a wider socio-economic perspective.¹ Had political repressions alone motivated its induction, then it should have been logically introduced when the Sikhs faced the first brunt of attack from the Imperial authorities as early as 1606, when Guru Hargobind Singh came into direct confrontation with Imperial regime; or if not so early, then at least by 1675 when Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed. The reasons for such social unrest which was getting channelised and articulated into a cohesive unit under the aegis of an evolving ideology has to be traced in the functional dynamics of the socio economic set up. The commercialisation of agriculture, the manufacture of artisinal goods for sale in the market and the development of trade and commerce had bolstered the economy of the region. In the case of Suba Lahore it seems that from the end of 16th century till the mid-seventeenth 17th century, there was 67.6 percent

¹ Ghulam Muhiyyuddin alias Bute Shah, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*. He ascribes the following speech to Guru Gobind Singh "you should remember that Musalmans have maltreated us. They have killed our ancestors and having been uprooted from our home, we have taken refuge from their tyranny in the mountains. Now in accordance with the mandatory wish of my father Guru Tegh Bahadur, I cherish the desire of avenging myself upon my father's murder." At another point he says, 'Guru Gobind Singh is said to have proclaimed, "so long as I live, I shall mediate revenge to the point of risking my life in pursuit of this purpose."'

growth in Jama.² Though the infaltion that occured during this period reduced the growth rate in real terms, it is obvious that the Jama of these Suba continued to increase until the mid 17th century.³ The trade links of Punjab and Sind with the Indus provided an integrated life line as much with trans Indian territories via Kabul and Kandhar as with the hinterland.⁴ "During the Mughal Empire, the principal westward going trade routes were the upper or Lumghanat Road between Kabul and Lahore passing through Peshawar and crossing the Indus at Attock. The upper Bungushat road, crossing the Indus at Deenkote and leading to Kabul by Bunno and Nughz and to Lahore by Bheerah and the lower Bunghust Road crossing the Indus to Chowpareh pass. This route led to Lahore through Bheerah to Ghazni and Kabul by Fermul and to Kandhar by desert."⁵ The major passes of the Sulamain range-Mulla pass in Khelati Hills, Bolan pass leading through Shikarpur to Sakkur on the

² . Ain-i-Akbari (1595-96) states the Jama as 55, 94,58,423 dams and Dastur al Amal-i-Navisindagi (1656) the Jama records as 93,78,00,000 dams. Statistics been taken from Irfan Habib, *Agarian system of Mughal India, 1556-1707*, Bombay, 1963, Appendix D. For the Suba Multan, Delhi, the growth during the period was 22.6% and 30.1% respectively.

³ Irfan Habib and Tapan Ray chaudhari, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol.1, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 375-76.

⁴ Ibid, p.330.

⁵ James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindustan*, reprint Patna, 1975, p.114.

Indus, Guleri pass opposite Dera Ismail Khan and Tatara and Abkhana passes, led from Kabul to Peshawar. From Kabul northward an overland route went through Balkh to Bukhara and Samargand, while southward, it went from Kandhar to Hormuz. A major land route, lay northward from Hormuz to Isfahan,⁶ to Kashan Tibrez on the Black Sea and upto river Dnieper.⁷ As far as the 10th century, a trade route via the river Volga and the Caspian sea joined Russia with Central Asia and North India.⁸ Persia was the single most important area to which trade of Punjab was directly linked. The market town of Punjab acted as centres where traders, carrying the merchandise to Persia, could obtain not only the manufactures of Punjab but also the products of other parts of India. These goods were either consumed in Persian towns or transported further west to Levant and Eastern Europe.⁹ The Janam Sakhis are replete with evidence indicating the nature of contacts, that the Punjab of 17th and 18th centuries had, with different contiguous areas.

⁶ H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India : Baghdad to Delhi*, Calcutta, 1978.

⁷ C. Bongard Levin and A. Vigasin, *The Images of India*, Moscow, 1984, pp.26-27.

⁸ Ibid, p.23.

⁹ Thomas Munn "A discourse of Trade from England into East Indies", *East Indian Trade : Selected works, 17th Century*, Anonymous (ed.), pp.8-9. Thomas refers to Turkish traders engaged in this trade from Persia Westward. Cited from Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire; Punjab in the 17th century*, Delhi, 1991, p.242.

They provided information on the geographical area in which the Punjab traders and travellers operated. Various Sakhis mention the trips of Guru Nanak to Rome, Turkey, Baghdad, Shikarpur, Chiniot and Multan.¹⁰ There are also references to trips undertaken by Guru Nanak to Ladakh, Kashmir, Jhelem, Sultanpur and Peshawar.¹¹ There are references to Sikh Sangats at Sumer and influential Khattris like Mani Chand Khatri, who came from Begumpura and settled at Kabul¹² The story 'Khara Sauda' is a piece of evidence of Kandhar providing a market for purchasing horses and this seemed to be a lucrative trade for the Pathans.¹³ The major towns like Lahore and Multan functioned both as centres for the product of hinterland as well as bases for traffic with Central Asia and Afganistan. Lahore was a major centre for inter and Intra regional trade. Mannuci remarked, that Lahore was inhabited by great rich merchants

¹⁰ Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Janam Sakhi paramapara*, Patiala, 1969, pp.380,382, 383. Cited from, Dr. Kiran Datar, *The Traders of Punjab and Asian Trade*, PPP, April 1986.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.107,112,116,135.

¹² Chatar Singh and Jeevan Singh, *Bhai Bale Vali Janam Sakhi*, Amritsar, pp.184 and 823. Cited from Dr. Kiran Datar, *The Traders of Punjab and Asian Trade*, PPP, April, 1986.

¹³ *Bala Janam Sakhi* (Hafaz Qutub Din 1871 edition) Saki 6; W.H. Mcleod, "Trade and Investment in 16th and 17th Century Punjab: The Testimony of Sikh Devotional Literature"; Cited from Harbans Singh and N.G. Barrier (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh*, Patiala, 1976, p.89.

who dealt with the whole of India and it was the key to the kingdom of Kabul Balkh, Kashmir Persia, Baloches, Multan, Bhakkar and Thatta¹⁴. Henry Bornford in the mid 17th century commented that Lahore is the prime city of traffic in India, all commodities of adjacent places being brought hither and exported to Muscat, Congo and Bursora.¹⁵ Sujan Rai Bhandari pointed out that commodities of seven climates and things of sea and land are bought and sold here.¹⁶ The various linkages that were knit around Lahore as the epicentre gave boost to innumerable towns, such as Narela, Ganaur, Panipat, Thaneswar, Shahbad, Ambala, Sirhind, Doraha, Phillor, Nakador, Shahdra, Eminabad, Wazirabad; which were on the highway from Delhi to Attock through Lahore.¹⁷ Similarly the principle marts of Multan were Amritsar, Bahawalpur, Kherpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Shujabad, Mitankot which had commercial links with merchants of Shikarpur, Kandhar, Herat, Bokhara, Kabul,

¹⁴ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol.2, Translated by William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, p. 179.

¹⁵ W. Foster, *English Factories in India: 1637-41*, Oxford, 1912, p.134.

¹⁶ Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, translated by J.N. Sarkar, *The India of Aurangzeb compared with the India of Akbar*, Calcutta, 1901, p.

¹⁷ Ganesh Das Vadehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, English Translation by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga as *Punjab in the early 19th century*, Amritsar, 1975. An account of these towns is given here. Tavernier J. Baptiste, *Travels in India 1640-1667*, Vol.2, translated by V. Ball, edited by William Crook, New Delhi, 1977, p.77

Peshawar, Sindh, Hindusthan.¹⁸ Multan's trade with Lahore was not confined alone to overland transportation, as much merchandise was brought by water, from Lahore to Multan. Riverine transportation, which significantly linked remote and land-locked area of the Indian subcontinent to the sea, were instrumental in giving rise to a number of towns upon the river bank, which acted as commercial depots and repository of 'mercantile wealth'.¹⁹ For example, Ludhiana on Sutlej, Goindwal on Beas, Lahore on the Ravi, Wazirabad on the Chenab, Jhelum on the river Jhelum itself. Till the early 17th century, there was considerable navigation and traffic on India from Thatta to Multan and Lahore, for vessels of about two hundred tons navigated on the river.²⁰ But by the end of the century, Thevenot observed that the river which led to Multan was partly choked in its channel²¹.

From these towns came the extraordinary participation of the Khattris, who soon attained the position of principle carriers of India's trade with countries beyond

¹⁸. Mohan lal, *Travels in Punjab, Afghanisthan and Turkisthan to Balkh, Bokhara and Herat*, reprint Patiala, 1971, p.396.

¹⁹ Mannucci, *Storio Do Mogor*, Vol.I, op.cit., p. 306.

²⁰ James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindustan*, op.cit., p.178.

²¹ Ibid, p.93.

its north western borders. Alexander Burnes noticed that the 'Baba Nanak Seikhs' were scattered all over Asia at Muscat, Bunder Abbas, Kerman, Yezd, Meshid, Astrakhan, Balkh, Samarqand, Yarkund, Kandooz, Khandar, Ghazni and Kabul.²² There are references to Khattris who assumed a varied role in Afghanistan. They worked as brokers, bankers, merchants, goldsmiths and grainsellers.²³ George Forster who journeyed from Bengal to England through the northern part of India, commented that the cities and towns of Afghanistan were chiefly inhabited by Hindus and Mahommedans of Punjab.²⁴ At Herat, Forster observed in two caravan serais, about a hundred Hindu merchants, chiefly natives of Multan, who by brisk commerce and by extending a long change of credit had become valuable subjects.²⁵ Evidence from Janam Sakhi literature documents that in the 17th and the 18th Centuries, they were a

²² Alexander Burnes, *Reports and Papers submitted to Government by A. Burnes, Lt. Leech, Dr. Lord and Lt. Wood 1835, 1836, 1837*; Calcutta, 1939 p.24.

²³ W. Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindustan and Adjacent countries*, Vol.II, Delhi, 1971, p. 544.

²⁴ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England through Northern part of India, Kashmere, Afghanistan and Persia and into Russia by the Caspian Sea*, Vol.2, Punjab language Dept; Vol.II, 1970, p.115.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.52.

prosperous community in Punjab.²⁶ Along with economic prosperity, the Khattris seemed to have enjoyed a high social position. In one of the Janam Sakhis, Nanak's mother, in advice to him, is supposed to have said, "Though the sons of Khattris have money, yet they do some work." At another place she reprimands her daughter-in-law, "But daughter if thou hast all this why art thou giving a bad name to the son of a Khatri?"²⁷.

A major impact of this trade was perhaps the emergence in Punjab of an ideology, which evolved within a community, which in its early phase was conspicuous of its Khatri leadership. The ten Gurus were all Khattris. Within the community, Khattris were otherwise prominent, and the early geographical extension of Sikh faith beyond Punjab is essentially a testimony to Khatri trading enterprise. The ideology in measure represented the traders' world view. One such indication is Guru Nanak's usage of merchantile imagery,

²⁶ Janam Sakhi Parampara; In Puratam Janam Sakhi there is a story of the rich man, where the central figure Duni chand is described as a khatri of substantial wealth. The story mentions that seven strings hung on the wall of his house and each string indicated one lakh; pp 100-101. Cited from Dr Kiran Datar, "The Traders of Punjab and Asian Trade: 17th to early 19th century," PPP, April 1986, p:84.

²⁷ *Janam Sakhis incorporated in The Adi Granth*, translated by E. Trumpp, New Delhi, 1970, pp. IX, LXVII.

"Let the increase of your years be a shop, stocked with merchandise of Divinine name,

Let the faculty wherewith you comprehend the Divinine world be your warehouse and store therein (Your stock of Divinine name) Deal with (other) traders (in the Divinine name) and harvest a profit of truth within your heart.

Let the hearing of sacred scriptures be your commerce; load (your wares on) the horse of truth and be on your way.

Let good deeds be (the payment of your)travel expenses (and) do not suppose (that this business can be put off until) the morrow.

Proceed (forwith) to the realm of the Formless one (there) you shall dwell in peace²⁸.

Impact of Trade on Agriculture

It was trade alone that changed the trend in agricultural production.²⁹ Much of the commodities in demand in Central Asia then began to be produced in Punjab. One such obvious dependence was of cotton textile

²⁸ *Adi Granth*, p.595; *Shabad Sorath 2*.

²⁹ Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire : Punjab during the 17th Century*, op.cit., p.258.

goods upon the cultivation of cotton. Thevenot refers to the self-sufficiency of Multan in this respect when he remarks "the province yields plenty of cotton of which vast number of clothes are made".³⁰ The same was probably true of Suba Lahore, where there were numerous urban centres producing large quantity of cotton cloth. Moorcraft and Trebeck pointed out that in Hoshiarpur district, the cotton raised, furnishes the material from which the finer cloth from Hoshiarpur are manufactured for the supply of the north western parts of Asia to a very great extent.³¹ Sugar was another crop that was influenced by market trends. Palesart informs us that 'very much sugar is produced'³² and Thevenot points out that 'Suba Lahore yields the best sugar of all Indostan'³³. The increasing importance of sugarcane is visible from one of the verses of Guru Granth:

"See thou how they cut up the sugar cane and bind its feet
And then men strong to the limb crush it in an crusher

³⁰ Surendernath Sen (ed.), *The Indian Thevenot and Careri*, New Delhi, 1949, p.77.

³¹ W. Moorcraft and C. Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab in Ladakh and Kashmir, in Peshawar and Kabul, Kundur and Bokhara*, reprint Patiala, 1970, p.85.

³² Fransico Pelsaert, *The Remonstrant of Fransico Pelsaert as Jahangir's India*, translated by W.H.Moreland and Geyl, Delhi, 1972, p.32.

³³ Surendranath Sen (ed.), *The Indian Thevenot and Careri*, op.cit., p.85.

And then its juice to be heated in an iron pan and it wails
And its froth too is burnt in fire
See thou now the useful state of this leafy sweet."³⁴

Indigo and Tobacco were two other commercial crops which the peasants preferred to cultivate.

Jatisation of the Khalsa : Quest for Upward Mobility

TH-4752
The section would focus on the Jats who rose to the helm of affairs. They not only became affluent as a result of commercialisation of agriculture, but socially got elevated by entering into the Khalsa. And one notices that in the process, while the Jats adopted the tenets of Sikhism in the thrust for upward mobility, the Khalsa too borrowed heavily from the pastoralist community. And in the wake of this exchange, a new tradition was invented, which could aptly be referred to as 'Jatisation of the Khalsa'.

Many of the social changes in Punjab are traceable to this process of commercialization. Though the encroachment of the market and the cash nexus created possibilities of greater social mobility in rural community, custom

³⁴ Guru Granth Sahib, Vol.I, translated by Dr. Gopal Singh, Delhi, 1972, p.134.



permitted only a marginal change in the social status³⁵. One such section of society, which became a victim to this kind of contradiction, was that of the Jats³⁶. The four Centuries between the 11th and the 16th, not only saw a great expansion of Jat population, but also apparently witnessed a great transformation in their economic base as there was a remarkable conversion from pastoralism to agriculture³⁷. The pace of conversion can be gauged from the fact that a number of Jats are recorded as Zamindars in the Ain-i-Akbari.

Sarkars where Jatts are recorded as Zamindars in the Ain-i-Akbari³⁸

SARKAR	Total number of Pargana	Total number of zamindars	Number of parganas where Jatts are entered among zamindars
<u>Multan</u>			
Beth Jalandhar	9	9	2
Bari Doab	11	11	2
Rechna Doab	6	6	2
Sind sagar	4	2	1
Birun Panjread	17	10	nil

³⁵ Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire : Punjab in the 17th Century*, op.cit., p.258.

³⁶ Ibid, The others who faced similar situation were Ghakkars, Khokkars, Giyars and Bhattis, p.265.

³⁷ Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind", Harbans Singh and N.G. Barrier, *Eassy in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh*, op.cit., p.96.

³⁸ Ibid, p.96.

SARKAR	Total number of Pargana	Total number of zamindars	Number of parganas where Jatts are entered among zamindars
<u>Dipalpur</u>			
Beth Jalander	10	9	5
Bari Doab	6	6	1
Rechna Doab	7	6	2
Birun Panjread	6	5	2
<u>Lahore</u>			
Beth Jallander	60	42	4
Bari Doab	52	29	12
Rechna Doab	57	40	17
Chanhat	21	15	5
<u>Delhi</u>			
Delhi	48	45	18
Sambhal	47	39	6
Saharanpur	36	35	6
Rewari	12	11	4
Hisar Firuza	27	27	18
Sirhind	33	33	13

It has been pointed out that inspite of this transformation, the older caste stigma persisted. The other castes, did not allow the Jatts the status of Kshyatriya, to which they lay a claim. The traditional view recorded by Skinner, at Hansi in 1825, was that they arose out of the wedlock, between a Kshyatria and Vaishya woman³⁹. The author of Dabistan-i-Mazhaib, in his account of Sikhism, describes the Jatts as a lower caste of the

³⁹ James Skinner, "Tashrihul, Aqwan, Cited from Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind", op.cit., p.53.

Vaishyas⁴⁰. Thus naturally in the tussle in which the Jats asserted themselves against a social status, which no longer corresponded to their economic position, they were lured by what Sikhism had to offer them. Their egalitarian or semi egalitarian social structure found in Sikhism a respite from the dominant rigidities of caste system. An important indication of cultivators becoming constituent of the Panth is from Guru Ram Das's verses, where he shows concern about drought and is gratified about timely rainfall; he is also aware of wells with Persian wheel to irrigate the field⁴¹. The author of *Dabistan-i-Mazhiab*, written during the period of Guru Har Gobind, indicates that by early 17th century, Jat comprised a significant section of the Panth. He noted that although the Gurus had been Khattris " they have made the Khattris subservient to the Jats, who are the lowest caste among Vaisyas.⁴².

The first instance of militancy is noticed in this

⁴⁰ *Dabistan-i-Mazhaib*, p.286. Cited from Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind", op.cit., p.53.

⁴¹ *Adi Granth*, 304,368,1250,1318,1329.

⁴² *Dabistan-i-Mazhaib*, p.286. Cited from Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind", op.cit., p.98. The increasing predominance was confirmed by 1881 census where of 1,706,909 Sikhs 66% proved to be Jatts and Khattris with a mere 2.2% (census of India 1881 vol 1 Book 1, Lahore, 1883, p.188), Cited by S.H. Mcleod, *Evolution of Sikh community*, Delhi, 1975, p.93.

period when Guru Har Gobind Singh came into direct confrontation with the imperial authorities. Thus, this militancy did not coincide with a period of economic hardship; but was one that witnessed economic prosperity. The unrest was not as a result of repression or economic exploitation, but the need to overhaul and restructure the hitherto accepted social relations. In the process land became or coveted target of attack since this would not only bolster their economic position but become a strong prop for enhancing their social status. Thus, in 1621, Guru Har Gobind, led by Sikhs forcibly occupied some land in village Rohilla, which lay on the right bank of Bias. This resulted in clash with Bhagwan Das, the Chaudhari of the village⁴³. Another instance where possession of land became the object of dispute, is traceable during the time of Guru Har Rai (1645-61), who helped the Marjha tribe to forcibly occupy land of the Kauras (the landowning tribe).⁴⁴ The destabilization of the hierarchy of landed interest that would lead to social restructuring and thereby social enhancement of the status, helped Sikhism to fan the aspiration of those who were at moment in a transitory phase but striving to achieve economic boost as well as social standing.

⁴³ M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol.IV, New Delhi, 1963, pp. 102,105,120,138

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.293.

In the following years the strength of religious following kept increasing. This is evident from the fact that specific orders were issued by imperial authorities to local officials commanding them to prevent gathering of Guru's followers. Mcleod points out that if and when a distinctive social group secures a dominant status within a particular society it would inevitably exercise upon that society an influence, which reflects its own mode (custom, usage and covention)⁴⁵. Thus the question arises whether the Jat observances had began to reflect and mould the Sikh ideology.

KHALSA INCORPORATE JAT CUSTOMS

The *masnad* system, which the Khalsa replaced, is the first indication of trends of adopting Jat cultural patterns. The rapid proliferation of the Guru's followers loosened the bonds of personal contact and this adversely affected the cohesion of the Panth. To ward off this threat, Guru Amar Das introduced the *Manjis* system by which began the appointment of leaders (*MASNADS*) for local congregation. Once a year the authorised representatives brought offering to the Gurus which was collected from the Sikhs under their supervision. Gradually the Guru's

⁴⁵ W.H. Mcleod, *Evolution of Sikh community*, op.cit., pp.50-53.

dependence on the masnads had increased and some of them started appointing their own deputies or agents for collection of offering as well as for initiating others to Sikh faith. Some of the masnads did not have their own source of income, they lived on part of the collection made⁴⁶. Thus the administrative and temporal powers were been enrolled into these local leaders, who over the period of time, must have become ambitious to covet authority⁴⁷. It has been pointed out that as dissent over the year had become rampant within the Sikh Panth⁴⁸, these *masnads* became lukewarm or indifferent to the nominated Gurus or actually changed sides.⁴⁹ So by initiating the

⁴⁶ Dabistan-i-Mazahab, Makhiz-i-Tawarikh-i-Sikhan, p. 35. Cited from J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab, The Cambridge History of India*, Cambridge, 1990, p.66.

⁴⁷ However over the period of time, the masnads had picked up various vices. They used to go to the houses of the Sikhs to take intoxicants and frequent the society of courtesans. They used to boast that the Guru was of their own making and if they did not serve him, no one would even look at him. They practised oppression in every form, they embezzled, offering made to the Guru and committed many other enormities. Cited from M.A. Maculiffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. VI, op.cit., p.23.

⁴⁸ Prithi chand had put forth his claim to be the successor of Guru Arjun after his martyrdom becoming thus the rival of Guru Hargobind. Dhir Mal, Ram Rai formed the other rival dissent groups. Udasai and Hindals also tried to hijack the Sikh movement.

⁴⁹ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab, The New Cambridge History of India*, op.cit., p. 63. When the masnads were reprimanded by Guru Govind, they threatened that if Guru disowned the masnad the Sikhs would go in body to Dhir Mal.

institution of Khalsa, the Guru reverted back to the system by which the Sikhs were initiated into the Sikh faith by the Gurus themselves and not by *masnads* and thereby removing the mediacy of *masnads*. And since the Khalsa and the Guru were interchangeable institutions, any five Khalsa Sikhs (Singhs) could initiate others to the new order. Here the impact of the social system inherited from the tribal pastoralist can be discerned, as one sees they made efforts to revert to an egalitarian order. So instead of concentration of power in the hands of few, the principle of unity and equality were reintroduced in the Sikh Panth.

It is important here to bring out the fact that the abolition of *masnads* also meant a setback to the authority of the Khatri whose control over the *masnads* was unquestionable. Already by the inauguration of Khalsa, the Khatri had begun to get alienated from the mainstream as they refused to accept the *pahlul* (i.e. water used for initiation) offered by Govind Singh and thereby showed their disinclination to wear arms and fight against the armies of the Mughals⁵⁰. However, relegation of the Khatri's status did not stop short here. The dominant culture incorporated in the *Rahit Nama* a code formulated in a manner that attempted to completely annihilate the

⁵⁰. Ganesh Das Vadera, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, op.cit., p.124.

Khatris. Thus the *Rahit maryada* attributed the association with *masnads* as an offence and it warranted a penance⁵¹. A Guru Sikh was asked not to observe the custom of wearing a scared thread or a frontal sect mark.⁵² He was also expected to reject caste distinction and untouchability, magical amuletes, mantras spells, auspicious omens, planets and astrological signs, the ritual feeding of Brahmans and all the other tradition which where so closely related to the Hindu Khatris.⁵³

The proceedings of the Baisakhi day of 1699 had promulgated a code of discipline. The five 'K's, it has been pointed out, which every baptised Khalsa Sikh had to wear, also reflect the impact of Jat cultural patterns. Uncut hair was a Jat custom, which during and prior to this period, was evidently observed by Hindu and Muslim Jats as well as Sikh Jats. The bearing of arms represented by the dagger, was also a Jat practice, and one which received ample encouragement from the events of 18th century. Guru Gobind's proclamation that every male member of the Khalsa would thenceforth be a Singh also shows the nature of social status that the Jats as a rising landed class

⁵¹ *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, Edited and Translated by W.H. McLeod; Textual sources for the study of Sikhism, Manchester, 1984, p.85.

⁵² *Rahit Nama of Chaupa Singh*, Ibid, p.75.

⁵³ *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, op.cit., p.81.

sought. Till then, only the Rajputs, the community of rulers and rural landed magnates and in some cases, the Khattris, the dominant moneyed class of the merchants and intermediaries in the Punjab; had this right ⁵⁴.

The Jatisation process was not only influencing and moulding the form and philosophy of the developing Panth, but was also providing militancy to the movement. The targets of attack were the two power bloc-the Imperial edifice and the landed beneficiaries. It was in continuation of this policy that Banda Bahadur's attempt to destabilise the existing power structure needs to be viewed.⁵⁵ A *bairagi* who was metamorphised into a Khalsa Sikh was equipped with the Guru's hukamnamas to the leading Sikhs to join him to strike at the Imperial edifice. After his investiture by Guru Gobind Singh at Nander, he came to Punjab to complete the political task which the Guru had assigned to him. Thus for the next seven years, i.e. upto

⁵⁴ The argument that the pastoral Jat custom into the Sikh fold to invent a Sikh Khalsa tradition is distinct from Richard G. Fox, who talks about the Sikh tradition and identity as a colonial construct. He points out that the 'Singhs' was purposefully constituted out of the range of Sikh identities by British colonialism in pursuit of its vested interest. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab : Culture in the Making*, London, 1985.

⁵⁵ William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, reprint Delhi, 1971. M.A. Maculiffe, *The Sikh Religion*, op.cit., S.M. Latif, *History of Punjab: From the Remotest Antiquity to Present Time*, New Delhi, 1964. G.S.Deol, *Banda Bahadur*, Jullunder, 1972.

the end of 1715, he ceaselessly fought against the Mughal imperialist. And there the most plausible reason as to why Sirhind was chosen as the first target of confrontation, was because Wazir Khan the faujdar and amin of Chakla Sirhind, let alone being condemned for his act for putting to death Guru Govind Singh's sons, was instead rewarded with a Khillat and an additional rank of 2500 zat and 2500 swar to his mansabdari status. This must have aggravated the animosity which the Sikhs nursed against the Mughals.

It also strikes that according to the Ain table in Sirhind, out of the total of forty six zamindars, only thirteen were Jat zamindars.⁵⁶ Given the fact that zamindar column in the Ain noted the intermediaries (Khidmatguzar) and the big zamindars alone, it is obvious that the rest of non-Jat zamindars in this region who enjoyed a dominant position would naturally face the wrath of Banda's militancy. When Banda's forces attacked the parganas of Buria and Sadhura, the Wamla Afghans, who enjoyed position of high status, were levelled to the ground.⁵⁷ The Afghans of village Dehrana upto the village of Mukad assembled for the purpose of fighting a crusade

⁵⁶. Cited from Irfan Habib, "Jatts of Punjab and Sind", op.cit., pp.100-101.

⁵⁷ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Muamlla*, p.25, Jan.31, 1709 to Jan 20, 1710.

against the Sikhs.⁵⁸ Jalal Khan Rohilla, Sayid Taj-ud-din, great grandson of Sayid Shahmat Khan, and the nobles and zamindars of Barah, in collaboration with one another went against the forces of rioting Guru.⁵⁹ When the zamindars of Jwalpur was asked by Banda for accomodation, he refused to submit to the demands.⁶⁰ In the Ain-i-Akbari, the Ranghars appear as zamindars in a large Mahal of Sarkar Sirhind.⁶¹ This was where their conflict with the Sikhs occured. In areas reputed to be Sikh stronghold, the Ranghars were noted in the Ain-i-Akhbari as zamindars to the exclusion of Jats. In the south-eastern parts of Sirhind ie. Ambala, Thaneswar and Karnal too, the zamindars were not amicable. Farmans were issued in the names of zamindars in the neighbourhood of Karnal that they should

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 28, July 1, 1710, Saturday.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 31, July, 10, 1710, Monday.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 37, Sep. 21, 1710, Thursday.

⁶¹ *Ain-i-Akbari*, pp. 300-1. These mahals were Banur Dadrala, Sadhauwra, Sultanpur, Ludhiana and Mustafabad. Chetan Singh points out that the conflict possibly arose due to the Jat cultivators challenging the authority of their Ranghar zamindars. The Jats had become zamindars in many other parts of Sarkar Sirhind but in the specific areas of conflict, this was apparently not the case. He also points out that a later source says about the Ranghars that most of them live in Chakla Sirhind and therefore carry on agriculture and are landholders. Chetan Singh, *Religion and Empire: Punjab in the 17th Century*, op.cit., p.305.

punish the Sikhs.⁶² Around 1710 the zamindars of Ambala, Kharkauda and Karnal had all begun to assist the Mughal in their hunt.⁶³

But on the other hand, the entire issue cannot be dismissed off easily by accepting that the zamindar's status and Banda's militancy made them antipode to each other, because there are instances in Sirhind itself where the zamindars have extended their support to Banda. The zamindars of Kharkauda had promptly put their trust in Banda and accepted him as their leader. At their instance, hundred of others collected around Banda and in all directions, the Sikhs were apprised of his appearance.⁶⁴ The zamindars of paragona of Samana and Kaithal has joined the rebels.⁶⁵ At places Banda struck deals with zamindars and assured them their existing status or that they may be promoted to higher status on the condition that they helped him in subjugating others. A vivid illustration of this

⁶². *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.40, Oct 21, 1710, Saturday.

⁶³ *Akhbarat BS 4th R.Y.* pp. 307-308, 345,357 and 372. J.S. p.122. Cited from Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748*, New Delhi, 1986, p.154.

⁶⁴ Muhammad Shafi Warid, *Mirat-i-Waridat or Tarikh-i-Chaghtai*, p. 282. Cited from Muzaffar Alam, *op.cit.*, p.136.

⁶⁵ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.30, July 6 to July 10, 1710.

front is given in one of the Akhbarat where Guru tells Jan Muhammad, the zamindar of Gulab Nagar, that he had been appointed the zamindar of the whole pargana and his lapses were excused. He was ordered to go along with his contingent to bring Sardar Khan, the zamindar of Chondla and then to accompany Banda's followers to punish Jalal Khan, the Afghan.⁶⁶ It has been pointed out that following of Banda was primarily amongst the village level zamindars. The higher zamindars who joined him did so because of their caste and religious affinity and certainly with the hope of expanding their zamindaris.⁶⁷

However the support was not limited to the primary zamindars. The wayfarers and and qanungos had also entered into collaboration with the rebel leader.⁶⁸ It was with the help of qanungos and rebellious Gujjars that Banda could secure money.⁶⁹ And with the help of these local constituents, Banda was able to establish his force in the thana of Rampur, Nanota, Jhiyana Bakaur, Barsadu, Sadhaura, Karana, Budhana, Kandhala and Buria. Banda's control over

⁶⁶ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.28, June 23, 1710, Friday.

⁶⁷ Muzaffar Alam, *op.cit.*, p.145.

⁶⁸ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.28, July 1, 1710, Saturday.

⁶⁹ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Maulla*, p.78, July 1, 1710, Saturday.

the region had gradually become so overwhelming that the residents of Chakla Sirhind made an appeal to, Emperor Jahandar Shah to allow them to accompany the royal retinue.⁷⁰ At this juncture one can assume that Banda's aspirations were not limited to vengeance alone. The Mughals following the policy of appeasement had awarded Ajit Singh, the adopted son of Guru Govind Singh with mohars swords and khillats. But this is no way deterred Banda and his followers.⁷¹ Along with pursuing a confrontationist policy, Banda began to fan his power building aspirations. The renaming of paragana of Buria and Sahranpur as Gulabnagar and Bhagnagar can be attributed to manifestations of his desire to make an impact on the people that a new bloc was soon going to subsume authority.⁷² The awarding of title 'Singh' to Dindar Khan, a powerful ruler of neighbourhood, and Muhammad Nasir, an Imperial news writer of Sirhind, may be viewed in this context.⁷³ His description as illustrated in the Akhbarat as riding a horse, wearing a brocade dress and carrying in his hand a gun and spear, all give a picture of Banda's

⁷⁰ *Akhabarat-i-Darbar-i-Mulla*, pp. 112-113, May 20, 1712, Tuesday.

⁷¹ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.37, Sep 26, 1710, Tuesday.

⁷² *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.28, June 23, 1710, Friday.

⁷³ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.32, July 23, 1710, Sunday.

endeavour to subsume the role of monarch in the make.⁷⁴ To match his attire and the regality that he aspired, he established the fort Lohgarh at Muklispur as his capital⁷⁵ These aspirations reached its high water mark when the erstwhile bairagi assumed the title of 'Sacha Sahib' and henceforth his *hukamnamas* carried this title.⁷⁶ He also introduced an official seal for his *hukamnamas* and farmans. It bore the inscription

'Degh-o-Tegh-o fateh Nusrat-i-bedirang,

Yaft-az Nanak Guru Govind Singh'

i.e., "Kettle (the means to feed the poor) and sword (the power to protect the weak and helpless).

Victory and unhesitating patronage (are) obtained from Nanak and Guru Govind Singh.⁷⁷

Like the *Sann-i-Jalus* or regnal year of the Mughul Emperor, Banda Bahadur introduced his own *sammvat* or year

⁷⁴ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.27, June 22, 1710, Thursday.

⁷⁵ It was situated among the steep hills of Himalayas on an elevated place which could only be approached through rocky hills and ravine. Besides there were two revulets the Pamwali and Daskawali Khol or Khuds which made its location advantageous from the military point of view. G.S. Deol, *Banda Bahadur*, op.cit., p. 57.

⁷⁶ *Hukam namah* of Banda Singh to the Sikh of Jaunpur Dec. 12, 1710. Cited from Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Bombay, 1950, p. 89.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 89.

commencing with his victory at Sirhind.⁷⁸ He adopted a new royal insignia⁷⁹ and also changed the Sikh's salutation from *Wah Guru Ji Ka Fateh, Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa* to which had been enjoined by Govind, to *Fateh Dahram Fateh Darshan* which meant success to piety success to the sect.⁸⁰ Coins were struck in the name of Guru Nanak - Gobind Singh with the Persian inscription:

Sikka Zad bar har do alam Tegh-i-Nanak Wahib ast.

Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-i-Shahan Fazal-i-Sacha Sahib ast.

ie. 'Struck coins in the two world by grace of the true Lord;

Victory to Gobind Singh the King of Kings:

The Sword of Nanak the granter of desire.

On the reverse scde were the words

Zarb ba aman-ud-dahar, masawwarat shaha zinat-u-takhi-i-mubarak bakht

i.e. Coined at the refuge of the world, model, painting of city, the ornament of the fortunate throne.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 89.

⁷⁹ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, Oct 20, 1710, Friday. A red flag with golden impression on it, green apron, images of lion and monkey was seiged and presented to the Emperor.

⁸⁰ Hukamnamah of Banda Singh to the Sikh of Jaunpur.

⁸¹ Ijad, Farruk Siyar Namah. Cited by Ganda Singh, "Banda Singh Bahadur: His Life and Place of Execution," PPP, Vol. IX-II, Oct 1975, p.449.

These were the titles and epithets assigned by him to Lohgarh, just as each imperial city had its appropriate honorific name. Assumption of sovereign status synchronised with administrative efficiency. Once the whole of the province of Sirhind fell into the hands of Banda, he appointed subehdar to various points. Baj Singh, his companion from Nander was appointed the subehadar of Sirhind with Ali Singh as Naib; Fateh Singh was confirmed in his appointment at Saman and Ram Singh and Binod Singh were given the joint charge of Thanesar and surrounding territory.⁸² Nothing much is known about the constitution of government set up by Banda and his deputies except that he appointed his own police officers *Thanedars* and collectors of revenue *tahsildar-e-mal*.⁸³ He issued orders to Imperial officers and agents and big jagirdars to submit and give up their business.⁸⁴ In the villages the batai system was followed. They gave two parts of the produce to the peasants and one part was retained by the

82 Muhammad Qasim Ibarat Namah, 20-21; Yar Muhammad. Dastur-al-Insha, Ruqa No.3, Khafi Khan Muntakhib-ul-lubab, II, 653-654, Cited by Ganda Singh, "Banda Singh Bahadur : His Life and Place of Execution", op.cit., p.448.

83 Khafi Khan Muntakhab-ul-lubab, II 652, Cited from H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs: Evolution of Sikh Confederacy*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1978, p.10.

84 Ibid, p.10.

government.⁸⁵ Thus, by giving the land to the peasant and thereby establishing peasant proprietorship, he won the approbation and support of an overwhelming majority.

And it was not a particular section of Banda's clique that dominated the functioning of entire administrative governance, because it has been pointed out that in all the parganas occupied by Sikhs, the reversal of previous custom was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (referring to Banda) and in a short time he would return to his birth place as its ruler with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundary, the well born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined palms awaiting his orders, Not a soul dared to disobey an order and men who had often risked themselves in the battlefield, became so demoralised that they were afraid even to remonstrate.⁸⁶

The swelling numbers in the army also reaffirms the fact that Banda's social base was expanding over a period of time. In two or three months, four to five thousand pony

⁸⁵ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.31, Jan 9, 1711, Tuesday.

⁸⁶ Irvin William, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, reprint Delhi, 1971, pp. 98-99.

riders and seven to eight thousand war, like footmen joined him and their number soon reached to eighteen to nineteen thousand men in arms.⁸⁷ Apart from a group of loyalist that rallied around Banda in spirit of dedication and self sacrifice, there were a group of mercenaries and irregulars⁸⁸. The Phulkian Chiefs who were not quite hopeful about the success of the movement did not like to run the risk of losing the Mughal court favour. So instead of participating in the movement they sent mercenaries and secretly paid for the arms and accoutrements. The class of irregulars were professional robbers and dacoits, men of reckless daring, who joined the Sikh movement with the object of looting cities. Indulgence into plundering activities had become so rampant that in few of the Akhbarats, they are labelled as 'Sikh theives'⁸⁹

As compared to the Mughal hordes, his forces were never superior to them numerically, nor had he the ammunition of war in plenty. While the Mughal forces were armed with *zamburaks*, *raihakalas* and light and heavy gun; Banda's arms and ammunition were limited to few big guns

⁸⁷ Khafi Khan Muntakhab-ul-lubab, II, 652, op.cit., p.10.

⁸⁸ Gokul Chand Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, 5th edition, New Delhi, 1960, pp. 100-101.

⁸⁹ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p. 57, March 26, 1711, and p.58, March 31, 1711.

and matchlocks, handful of *ramjanges* and sword and arrows.⁹⁰ Their scantiness is judgeable from the fact that when Banda was captured finally in 1715, the following articles were recovered from the enclosure.⁹¹

Swords	1,000
Shields	278
Small Kirpans	217
Matchlocks	180
Bows & Arrow cases	173
Daggers	114

As regard to the material wealth at the time of seizure in 1715; only 600 rupees, 223 Gold mohars and few gold ornaments were discovered. Thus, shortage of both equipment and money must have induced Banda to innovate the 'Dhai Phut' (two and a half stroke) type of warfare in which the 'hit and run' strategy must have proved to be less expensive and less cumbersome than positional warfare.

Lack of warfare accoutrements was compensated by strong plebian base, which Banda had build over the period of time. "The authority of that sect extended to such an

⁹⁰ Kanwar Khan, *Tazkirat-ul-salatin*, 1796. Cited from H.R. Gupta, *A History of Sikh: Evolution of sikh, Confederacies*, Vol.II, op.cit., p. 29.

⁹¹ Ibid, p.29.

extent", wrote Yar Muhammad Qalandar, the then subedar of Shahjahanabad in June 1710 "that many Hindus and Muhammedan finding no alternative other than obedience and submission to them adopted their faith and manner and their Chief Banda captured the heart of all towards his inclination and whether a Hindu or a Muhammadan whosoever came into contact with him, he (Banda) conferred upon him the title of Singh and baptized him into the Sikh faith."⁹² He promised and proclaimed. "I do not oppress the Muslims". Accordingly for any Muslim, who approached him, he fixed a daily allowance and wages and looked after him. He permitted them to read khutba and namaz.⁹³ As a result of his secular policy, Banda had about five thousand, Muslims in the army.

The rise of Banda Bahadur : Khalsa Asserts itself

The fusion of temporal and religious authority in the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh coupled with the Jatization of the Khalsa had helped to boost the Khalsa's political image. A predominantly Jat institution it had become sceptical toward any threat to its supreme political position. So after Banda defeated the Mughal faujdar of

⁹² Yar Muhammad Dastur-ul-Insha, 6 b.

⁹³ Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla, p.63, April 28, 1711, 20th May, 1711.

Sirhind, a sovereign rule was established in the conquered territories which Dr. Ganda Singh labels as regal state which may have posed a threat to Khalsa political position. This section would, therefore, delve into the conflict that ensued and the variety of ways Khalsa reasserted itself and sources from which Banda tried to revive its support.

Thus the first question that strikes a reader is, did Banda assume the role of kingship for himself Was the power of this Sikh state vested in Banda and did he personally wield the power? The questions become significantly important as in this period, the Khalsa was already creating a niche for itself. If tradition is to be believed, Banda's first encounter with Khalsa's assertiveness was during the initiation ceremony. The Guru, after conferring the title of Bahadur on Banda gifted his own sword to Banda, which in his presence was snatched from him by Guru's followers with the remark that they were undergoing and experiencing so much hardship for that very sword that they would not allow anybody else to have and use it. On hearing these remarks the Guru exclaimed that the Khalsa had grown quite competent to wield the sword and conduct the field independently.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Khazan Singh, *History and Philosophy of Sikh Religion*, Lahore, 1914, p. 206. Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin panth Prakash*, Amritsar, 1962, pp.80-81. Cited from G.S. Deol, *Banda Bahadur*, op.cit., pp. 25.

The territories which had the tradition to provide military support to the Sikhs in the time of need were the Manjha Doab⁹⁵ and Malwa region,⁹⁶ with Manjha areas functioning as the core territories of Sikh dissent.⁹⁷ Hence the people of Manjhas must have played crucial role in the formative stage of the Khalsa. As also it is noticed that it was these very areas that responded immediately to the *hukamnamas* of Guru Govind Singh and provided the required support to Banda. In fact, Banda Bahadur had followed a circuitous route (i.e. Samana, Kurham Thaska, Shahbad, Mustafabad, Kapuri, Sadhaura) so that the Sikhs from Doab and Manjha, whose passage across the Sutlej had been blocked by Sher Muhammad Khan of Malerkotla, could join his forces before he attacked Sirhind. While he

⁹⁵ Imperial Gazetteer (Punjab), 1908, II, p.18, The Manjha is defined here as the area in the Lahore region that was plateau of 1,600 sq. miles bounded north and south by high banks, which look down on the valley of the Ravi to the north and the bed of Beas to the south. The Sikhs were known by the territories they inhabited. Those living in cis sutlej region were called Malwais. In the Jalandar Doab the Doabis, of Majha as Majhails, South of Lahore as Nakais, between Ravi and Jehlam the Dharapi Sikhs and between the Jhelum and Indus Pothohar Sikhs. Cited from H.R. Gupta, *A History of Sikh : The Sikh Commonwealth or Rise and Fall of Sikh Misls*, Delhi, 1982, p.15.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 224, According to the Imperial Gazetteer, it was supposed to be constituted by the districts of Ferozpur and Ludhiana, native states of Patiala, Jind, Nabha and Malerkotla.

⁹⁷ M.A. Maculiffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V, op.cit., pp. 133,165. The reference is here to one Duni Chand, who had brought the reinforcement of Manjha troops.

occupied Sirhind, the Sikhs from the north defeated the Malerkotla contingent near Ropar and joined him between Kharur and Banur on the Ambala-Ropar road.⁹⁸ At this juncture, it is important to bring to the limelight, that out of five of Banda's advisory council, which were appointed by Guru Govind Singh, four of them were descendants of the family of Gurus and belonged to the Manjha region.⁹⁹ And it were these advisors, who had in the infant state of Banda, held moot positions and thereby relegating the representatives of Malwa to secondary status.¹⁰⁰ So undoubtedly the Manjha Sikhs had enjoyed the benefits accrued through allocation of power. and ironically it was these very power pockets that backed out

⁹⁸ Khafi Khan Muntakhab-ul-lubab, II, 658, Cited from, H.R. Gupta, *A History of Sikh: Evolution of Sikh Confederacy*, Vol.II, op.cit., p.12.
H.M. Elliot and J.Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol.VII, Delhi, 1964, p.414.

⁹⁹ The advisory council consisted of Baj Singh who was a descendant of the family of Guru Amar Das; his brother Ram Singh, Binod Singh who descended from Guru Angad, his son Kahn Singh and Fatah Singh. Baj Singh was a Bal Jat of Village Mirpur in Parganna Patti of Amritsar district. Cited from H.R. Gupta, *A History of Sikh: The Sikh Commonwelath or Rise and Fall of Sikh Misl*, op.cit., pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Baj Singh was appointed subehdar of Sirhind, Fateh Singh was confirmed in his appointment at Samana and Ram Singh and Binod Singh were given the joint charge of Thanesar and surrounding territories. It was Ali Singh who belonged to Saludi near Sirhind (the Malwa region) who was appointed as Naib to Baj Singh. Cited from Ibid, pp.6-11.

M.A. Maculiffe, *The Sikh religion*, op.cit., p. 250.

when Mata Sundri (widow of Guru Gobind Singh) created a schism leading to the formation of two groups- Tatva Khalsa and Bandai Sikhs and thereby secluding Banda from the Sikhs of the mainstream.¹⁰¹ Thus the two striking aspects that emerge out of the above discussion is that Manjha Sikhs enjoyed a dominant position in the period under review, and the assertion of their dominance in the Khalsa, in particular, was the root cause of the schism. Can one trace a similar trait of assertiveness and dominance of the Manjha Sikhs in course of Banda's rebellious outburst.

One notices that while Banda was engaged in the Gangetic Doab in defeating the faujdar of Jalalabad, the entire Khalsa from Manjha and other sides numbering about 8,000 collected at Amritsar and having consulted and counselled together, overran the territories of Punjab.¹⁰² Leaving the strong parganas of Lahore and Kasur for the present, they turned their attention to Batala and Kalanaur first and then turning out the government officials, established their own Thanas and Tehsils. Some of the Sikh leaders, particularly those of Sithala and Batala moved on further north and occupied the

¹⁰¹ H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs : Evolution of Sikh Confederacies*, Vol.II, op.cit., pp.24-26.

¹⁰² Ganesh Das, *Risalah-i-Sahib Nama*, 189-190, Cited from Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikh*, Bombay, 1950, p. 87.

pargana of Pathankot.¹⁰³ And gradually excepting Lahore proper, practically the whole of Manjha and Riarki tracts fell into their hands.¹⁰⁴ Taking cue from the Manjhas, even the Sikhs of Doaba Bist Jallandar rose to revolt. Encouraged by the success, they addressed a letter to Faujdar Shams Khan and called upon him to submit.¹⁰⁵

It is obvious that the victory at Sirhind must have served as a signal for a general Sikh uprising. But the fact remains that inspite of urgent calls been sent to Banda to aid them in this uprising,¹⁰⁶ the Manjha Sikhs drew their strength from within, which they felt was sufficient to strike at the Imperial edifice. Can the Khalsa's outburst be viewed as an endeavour to establish an alternate source of authority so as to neutralise the rising prospects of Banda assuming a sovereign status? In this context the *hukamnama* addressed to Khalsa of Jaunpur becomes, significant.¹⁰⁷ Though Banda attributes his

¹⁰³ Mohd. Qasim Ibratnama 22; Khafi Khan Muntakab-ul-lubab, II, 660; Cited from Ibid p. 87.

¹⁰⁴ Ganesh Das Vadehra, *Risala-i-Sahibnama*, pp. 190-92; Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*. Cited from, Ibid; pp.79-80.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.86.

¹⁰⁶ Khafi Khan Muntakhab-ul-Lubab II, 657, Cited from Gand Singh, "Banda Bahadur, His Life and Place of Execution," PPP, Oct. 1975, p.451.

¹⁰⁷ The format of the Hukamnamas was as follow.
seal
Deg-o-teg-o-fateh-o-nusrat bedirang
Yaftzaz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.

political success to the grace of Guru Nanak and Gobind Singh and power to have been derived ultimately from God, the picture forthcoming is that of a sovereign's order to the Khalsa. Could the Khalsa, that was harnessing power at this juncture, accept these order without any grievance? A tinge of tension was already discernible when he wrote 'love one another. This is my wish'

Apart from this the hukamnama also reveals that Banda is limiting himself to amass political control, but is continuously vacillating between religious and secular structure. Here too, when he demands a rigid enforcement of the code of conduct, he does not stop short at rules laid down by Khalsa. The injunction 'do not eat meat, fish or onion,' for which it has been pointed out, there was no sanction in Sikhism, was an old *bairagi* predilection which

One God! victory to the presence.
Ganda Singh points out the words in original are Fateh Darshan.

This is order of Sri Sachha Sahib to the entire Khalsa of Jaunpur. The Guru will protect you, call upon the Guru's name. Your lives will be fruitful. you are the Khalsa of the great immortal God. On seeing this letter, repair to the presence wearing five arms, observe the rule of conduct laid down by Khalsa. Do not use bhang, tobacco, poppy, wine or any other intoxicant. Do not eat meat, fish or onion. Commit no theft or adultery. We have brought about the Golden Age (Satya Yug). Love one another. This is my wish. He who lives according to the rules of Khalsa, shall be saved by the Guru.

Poh. 12 Sammat, Taken from Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Bombay, 1950, p.89.

was still lurking in Banda's mind, which he expected the Khalsa to follow, since it was his order.

Another interesting dimension of this aspect is that Banda has been mentioned in Akhbars as Guru, Guru Gobind and Guru Gobind Singh, and strangely enough, the mistake persisted throughout the period of political activities for seven years.¹⁰⁸ It is a known fact that Banda Singh was not a Guru of the Sikhs but only their political leader, nominated by Guru Gobind Singh and therefore is an obvious reflection of the psyche of the people, which may have been influenced by the overtures made by Banda to draw on religious authority. This must have become an added area of tension, since for many of his important associates, he was not a Guru. Thus appropriation and hegemonisation of power under a single authority might have led to tussle between the Khalsa and Banda who aspired for a political order with monarchy as its key institution.

Banda in the Hills.

Banda's flight to the Shiwalik hills, after he lost his fort at Lohgarh to the Mughals¹⁰⁹, may also be seen in the same perspective. Undoubtedly the height and

¹⁰⁸ Cited almost in all the Akhbarat-i- Darbar-i-Mualla of the period corresponding to Banda Bahadur's rebellion.

¹⁰⁹ Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla, p. 846, Nov.30, 1710, Thursday.

impregnability of the hills, the thickness of the jungles and difficulties of communication made this an ideal hide out for Banda. But more than the geographical inaccessibility, it was the support of the hill chiefs that enabled Banda to take shelter in the hills ¹¹⁰. The first piece of information that the Emperor received about his whereabouts was that he was in the vicinity of Nahan and that he had bought the support of zamindar of Nahan by giving forty camels loaded with gold coins. Bhup chand's attitude towards the Sikhs¹¹¹ on one hand, and the Mughal on the other hand, was a true representation of the vacillating attitude of the hill chiefs, that was in accordance to the magnitude of threat they faced from the Mughal.¹¹²

The zamindar of Kehlur had also invariably rendered

¹¹⁰ J. Hutchison and J.Ph.Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol.II, Lahore, 1933. "Till comparatively recent years, these hills were almost entirely isolated from the plain. The rugged character of the country, made invasion difficult and conquest practically impossible." p.10.

¹¹¹ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.847, Dec 1, 1710, Friday.

¹¹² When Bhup Prakash was asked to come to court, he made an offering of 100 mohars, four dast baz, five dast jurra and few other things. This means obviously that Bhup Prakash did not want to rebel outrightly. *Akhbarat* Dec. 14 1710, Thursday, p. 5. However he was taken captive. *Akhbarat*, Jan. 4, 1716, Thursday. In order to prove their loyalty to the Emperor, Bhup Prakash's mother captured many Sikhs and sent them to Delhi for execution. *Akhbarat*, Feb. 8; 1711; March 4, 1711.

help to the Sikhs whenever they needed it. According to a news letter, an agreement was concluded between the Sikhs and ruler of Kehlur; that at the time of need the latter would provide asylum in his territory to the rebel Sikhs and block the passage of the royal forces¹¹³. They set up few chowkis in the Kehlur hills, so that during their fleeing nobody was able to obstruct their way¹¹⁴. It is with the help of the chiefs of Kehlur, that he established his base at Kiratpur¹¹⁵, from where he directed *hukamnamas* to the leading Sikhs ordering them to repair to his presence. This is obviously a pointer to the fact that a large chunk of the Sikhs were maintaining a low profile at the time when Banda was expelled from his fortress and was forced to take shelter in the hills. It is in this very period that Banda made pilgrimage to Anandpur and performed reverent visits at the shrine of Guru Tegh Bahadur and to places hallowed by visit of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak.¹¹⁶ This may be viewed in the context that Banda, in his desperate bid to recuperate from his losses and rebuild his mass base, found it necessary to tap on the

¹¹³ *Akhbarat*, April 15, 1711, p. 60. Rahim Jamadar approached the zamindar of Kehlur on behalf of the Sikhs at the head of 50 sawars and 250 pyadas. He delivered the letter and clothes sent by the Sikhs to said zamindar.

¹¹⁴ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.58, April 7, 1711.

¹¹⁵ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.83, Sep. 15, 1711.

¹¹⁶ M.A. Maculiffe, *The Sikh Religion*, op.cit., p.248-249.

religious sentiments of the community. His flirtations with religion were stemming out of the political expediency of the period and it was this interaction between politics and religion that was shaping the Sikh identity.

The fact, that many a time Banda escaped from a territory before the imperial retainer could reach the hill, shows that chiefs connived at his escape and turned an indifferent ear to imperial farmans urging them to capture the Sikh leader or to drive him out of the domain. Farmans were issued in the name of Zamindar of Srinagar and Sirmur regarding administering of punishment to Nanak worshipp¹¹⁷. On the contrary the Sirmur chieftain had readily agreed to keep Banda's two crore of rupees as deposit ¹¹⁸. Similarly inspite of all arrangements made by Zaminder of Jammu and Sayed Azmat-ullah Khan, zamindar of Rajuari, in collaboration with one another, to seal the valley;¹¹⁹ the rebel horders no less than sixty thousand horsemen corssed River Ravi from the ferry at Seoli in the talluqa of Muravej Pal. It was reported that zamindars of that district were collaborating with the rebels¹²⁰. This happened inspite of the fact the Mughals in their desperate attempt to conciliate the hill forces had

¹¹⁷ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.36, Aug 28, 1710.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.41, Nov.6, 1710.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.876, July 8, 1711.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.77, Aug 11, 1711.

conferred Khillats on sixteen zamindars of that district¹²¹. Hari Singh, the Zamindar of Guler, gave shelter in talluqa of his zamindari, to ten thousand rebels¹²². The people of Guler and Belaur, apparently under the protection of their chiefs, often carried horses and arms from the plains to the hill of the Sikhs¹²³.

However this doesnot imply that there were no opposition from the zamindars in totality. Muhammad Murad, zamindar of Kahana, was awarded a Khillat for providing information about the route and camping stages in the mountains¹²⁴. Hoshdar Khan wanted to enroll Raja Ram Singh Jaswal into Mughal service, as he was familiar with border areas of Behdoor and Kehlur and was acquainted with the condition of the zamindars of the hills and forest area¹²⁵. The faujdar of Doab, Hoshadar Khan invariably received help from Ram Singh, zamindar of Kulu¹²⁶.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 62, April 23, 1711, Monday. Some of which were Kirpal Dev, zamindar of Jammu; Daya Dhamman, zamindar of Nurpur; Udat Singh, zamindar of chamba; Saadat Yar, zamindar of Kotla.

¹²² *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.127, August 2, 1713, Sunday.

¹²³ *Akhbarat 5th and 6th BS Regnal Year II*, pp 427-8. Cited from Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India : Awadh and the Punjab 1707-1748*, op.cit., p.157.

¹²⁴ *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, p.60, Dec 13, 1710, Wednesday.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.92, Nov.16, 1711, Friday.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.101, Feb.11, 1712, Monday.

Banjaras Support Banda

The discussion on the support that the hills rendered to Banda would however be incomplete, if one does not take into account the banjaras, a class of grain carriers, who moved about in all parts of the country in connection with their trading activities. Most of them professed Sikhism and had devout faith in their religion. According to a newsletter, forty banjaras who were Nanak worshippers, were brought to Delhi from the areas surrounding Multan. Sarbrah Khan Kotwal was ordered that if banjaras did not accept Islam they should be killed. These banjaras always tried to maintain the supply to provision to the Sikh even when they were besieged in a fort. The besieged threw off pieces of cloth from the top of fort wall and the banjaras packed the grain, fired them up, and then through the ropes same were drawn and taken inside the fort. According to the news in the third year of Farruksiyar's reign; when Banda along with his companion went in direction of Bairelly and Moradabad, passing through the hills he was supplied with the needed provision by the banjaras. The banjaras staying in the taluqas of Heer Chand and Daya Dhamma and the Zamindar of Khalsa Mahal acted as spies for the Sikh rebels. At later stage it was reported that banjaras had ravaged a number of villages there. In the fifth regnal year of Bahadur Shah a report was presented

to him by Jagjivan Das, a harkara, "some people purchased horses and ammunition to be delivered to the Sikh rebels and they carry the same through Kohistan. If somebody obstructed them, they pretended that they were taking the same for the zamindar of the district".

One another news, it was reported to the Emperor that Hindu faqirs, yogis, sanyasis and bairagi conveyed the imperial news to rebel Guru and the Emperor ordered if that was proved in any case, the alleged spy be murdered. He further ordered that Sarbah Khan Kotwal should turn out the Hindu faqirs from the imperial camp.

Though it was a meteoric rise and fall for Banda Bahadur, this short span of time had infused in the Sikhs a kind of confidence, which thrust the movement forward even when it was leaderless. Banda's attempt to build a power structure and operate a parallel government was a significant step in itself as one would notice in the next chapter that it instilled in the Khalsa a spirit of sovereignty, which was manifested in the institutional reorganisation of the movement. The era that followed Banda's death was to become the high point for the process of Jatisation, because it completely unfolded itself to encompass varied aspect of Sikh religion and dominate and direct the Khalsa operations.

CHAPTER II

PUNJAB IN POST BANDA PERIOD: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REORGANIZATION

Tactics of Warfare - Creation of Power Base

In this period, the tactics of warfare adopted by the Sikhs, to a large extent were instrumental in providing the required strength to hit at the imperial edifice. The areas from which they launched this practice, became their natural fortresses. The 'hit and run' strategy made these areas militarily important but how far could the Sikhs turn this military base into a power base, is the moot point of discussion in this section.

During the insurgent phase that followed Banda's death, the Sikhs began to assert with the aim of carving out a niche for themselves. But could insurgency, which took the nature of popular resistance,¹ alone help in amassing the required

1. Bhai Tara Singh humbled the faujdar of Patti and died fighting against the contingents sent by Zakariya Khan; Mehtab Singh of Mirankot and Sukka Singh of Mari Kambo killed faujdar Massa Ranghar; Bota Singh rose in revolt and collected a toll at the rate of 1 anna from the carts on the route between Amritsar and Taran cited from (J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, pg. 89-90. Khuswaqat

strength for building a power bloc? There is no doubt that at the local level the Sikhs were able to tap the potentialities that the peasants offered, which gave a boost to their mass mobilisation activities. Polier points out that the Sikhs were a "A Nation and a power well calculated for mischief, encouraged a rebellion in the zamindars or cultivators, who (zamindars) often followed steps at first with a view to save themselves and afterwards from the pleasure of independence². The Zamindar's support not only synchronized with the insurgent mood of the Sikhs, but the movement also found their compliance by providing the Sikhs the much needed shelter from the Mughal troops³. Thus while on

 Rai Kitabe-e-Tarikh-e-Punjab, p. 72; Sohan Lal Suri Umdat-ut- Tawarikh Daftar I, pp. 108-109; quoted from H.R. Gupta, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 59, New Delhi, 1978.

2. A.L.H. Polier, *Early European Account of Sikhs*, edited by Ganda Singh, Calcutta, 1962, p. 64.

J. Browne, *History of Origin and Progress of Sicks*, cited from Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of Sikhs*, Reprint, Delhi, 1974, p. 31.

3. Hkikati-i-Bina-Wa Uruj-i-Firka-i-Sikhan 1783 A.D. Tr. by Indu Bhushan Banerjee, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1942 quoted from A.D. Malik *An Indian Guierlla War*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 51.

Many of the Zamindars in the Manja tracts were related to the Sikhs and concealed the latter when pursued by the Musalmans and in every village of this jungle tract there were two or three Sikh horsemen quartered and supported by Zamindar W.L.M.' Gregor, *History of Sikh*, Vol. 1, Reprint, Patiala, 1970, pp. 114-115.

the plains, their make shift operational base area was a village settlement. The permanent base area lay in few marked areas such as Jammu-Kangra Hills, Lakhi Jungle, the Malwa desert and Kahnuwan swamps. Such base areas were an essential requirement and were in accordance with the kind of warfare tactics that they gradually adopted for themselves. The Sikh tactic of warfare was unique. "A party of forty to fifty, advanced in a quick pace to a distance of carbine shot from the enemy, so that the fire may be given with greatest certainty. The horses were drawn up and their pieces discharged. They speedily retired about 100 paces, loaded and repeated the same mode of annoying the enemy⁴". So instead of a positional warfare the battles were converted into series of skirmishes. Under

H. Prinsep, *Origin of Sikh Power in Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh*, Calcutta, 1834, p.4.

According to Ahmad Shah Batalia the Sikhs were helped by zamindars in four different ways. They provided them with protection, supplied them with means of living, hid them in their houses in small batches and joined their ranks Ahmad Shah Batalia Appendix to Sohan Lal's Suri's *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh Daftar 1*, p. 13. Cited from "The Sikh liberation under Zakariya Khan" by Miss Harpreet Kaur, *Punjab Past and Present*, October 1985, p. 373..

4. G. Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol. 1, London, 1848, R,eprint Patiala, 1970, p. 332.

the ambit of this kind of harassment raids on vanguard, rearguard, right flank, left flank, convoys of supply or treasure carrying parties also formed a part of their mobile warfare. Thus, element of surprise and mobility formed the two keynotes of the Sikh military warfare. And for 'retreat junctions', these base areas formed natural fortress. Could these natural fortress turn into power domain for the Sikhs? What kind of power politics governed these areas? The hill chieftaincies acceptancy to insurmountable military might of the Mughals vacillate in accordance with the magnitude of threat demonstrated by imperial forces. They were aware that they were important pawns in the ensuing strife between the imperial forces and the Sikhs. The menace the Mughals were facing, could only be succumbed with their help as they alone could detect the impregnable base areas of the Sikhs. Taking advantage of this situation they buttressed their position by using their own strength and that of the Mughals for their own personal gains. In most of their internal dissension in the period under review, the hills chieftains used the Mughal troops to their advantage. Banghal state which was at close proximity from the three powerful neighbours - Kangra, Mandi and

Kulu; had become a lucrative territory for encroachment. The chiefs of Banghal, at many an occasion, demanded help from the Imperial Viceroy⁵. When Jai Singh of Kulu State was faced with a revolt in 1731, he fled to Lahore accompanied by 500 men, probably with the purpose for an appeal to Mughal Viceroy⁶. Dalel Singh's appointment as the Raja of Chamba was supported by the Mughal troops⁷. By expressing their allegiance to the Mughal Emperor the chiefs only sought a respite and reinforced their position. Jammu along with Basholi and Bhadu had, in the early 18th century, begun to extend supremacy over the neighbouring States, most of them being between Chenab and Ravi. Under the aegis of Ranjit Dev, it had reached its high water mark. But inspite of his notable position, when he was arrested by the Mughal Viceroy Zulifiqar Khan, he did not protest and remained in captivity for twelve years⁸. Devi Chand of Bilaspur State made attempts to recover State territory that had been annexed by the Mughals. But when Nawab of

5. J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol. 2, Lahore, 1933, pp. 492-493.

6. Ibid, p. 465.

7. Ibid, p. 312.

8. Ibid, pp. 540-541.

Jallander, Adina Beg Khan showed displeasure; instead of revolting, the Raja sent his Wazir to arrange the matters, in which he was successful⁹. Thus, inspite of the fact that States like Nurpur and Jammu began to act as independent units, took possessions of paraganas adjoining the mountain valley, built strong thanas, mobilized other zamindars of the hills against the Mughal faujdars; they still drew legitimacy from the Mughal edifice and continued till the Afghan invasion stormed the country.

As already mentioned, Jammu was emerging as a strong power bloc with aid offered from Basholi and Bhadu. The Mughals, following a policy of reconciliation, tried to gain Basholi's goodwill by the possession of two paraganas of Jundh and Bhalai which belonged to Chamba. This invasion finds confirmation in a document in Chamba Archives under the seal of Adina Beg Khan in the reign of Alamgir (1754-59)¹⁰. The Basholi Vansavali also points out that Bhadu was under Basholi¹¹. Thus it leaves no doubt that Bhadu too

9. Ibid, p. 504.

10. Chamba State Museum Catalogue, pg. 67, Cited from J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol. 2, Lahore, 1933, p. 606.

11. It has been pointed that Amrit Pal of Basholi obtained Bhadu by favour of Ranjit, Ibid, p. 634.

cooperated with the Mughal when required. Jammu's chief Raja Ranjit Dev was also released on the intervention of Adina Beg Khan, then the Governor of Jallander, on the promise to pay a ransom of two lakh of rupees¹². The Mughals who were aiming to establish a strong hold over these areas which formed a crucial retreat junction for the Sikhs, could only do so by putting a check on the vascillating nature of hill chiefs - and therefore, they lured them by offering a range of allowances. And so effective were these inducements that Jammu became, in the course of time, a repository of their wealth¹³. Several political refugees in troublesome moments also found an asylum in Jammu¹⁴.

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12. J. Hutchinson and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Lahore, 1933, Vol. 2, p. 541.
 13. Tahmas Khan, *Tahmas Namoo: The Autobiography of a Slave*, tr. P. Setu Madhava Rao, Bombay, 1967, p. 29. During Abdali's 3rd invasion December 1751 to March 1752 Muin-ul-Mulk the Viceroy of Punjab sent his family and treasures to care of Ranjit Dev of Jammu.
 14. Such as Malika Zamani, a Delhi Queen; and also one of the widows of Mir Mannu, Viceroy of Lahore in the reign of Mohammad Shah and Ahmed Shah; Hari Singh, the son, with other members of the family of Raja Kaura Mal, the Diwan to Mir Mannu; Dalpat Rai the son of Lakhpat Rai, the Diwan of Mughal viceroy Yahya Khan. J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Lahore, 1933, Vol. 2, p. 543.pg. 543.

In October 1758 Mir Mannu's widow Mughani Begum again sought asylum at Jammu. Ranjit Singh received her 8 kms. from Jammu - and provided her

Another factor that bolstered Jammu's political image was the economic boost it got as a result of diversion of trade routes. Previous to Nadir Shah's invasion, the common road from Delhi to Kashmir lay through Sirhind, Lahore and Heerpur (in Kashmir)¹⁵. As these routes of travel through the plains had become unsafe, merchants and other travellers proceeding to Kashmir and North West Frontier adopted a route which entered the outer range of hills near Nahan, passing through Bilaspur, Nadaun, Haripur (Guler) and Nurpur to Basholi on the Ravi and thence to Jammu¹⁶. Thus Jammu became the emporium of trade, both of the plains and hills, including Kashmir. The additional income must have probably become its source of strength. So imposing was its power edifice that even in 1781, when Sikhs made their incursions into this chieftaincy, a small sum was exacted by them, much less in proportion than that levied in the adjacent

a residential allowance, house and some cash allowance.

15. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London, 1798, Reprint Patiala, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 282-283.
16. J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol. 2, Lahore, 1933, p. 542.

territories. The Sikhs, indeed aware of the respectable State of Jammu's armed force and the ability of the chief, were contented with a tribute¹⁷. If this was the kind of respectability they commanded in 1780, then it leaves no room for doubt that in the period under review the Sikhs, without any strong military force at their disposal, could have meted any challenge against Jammu and its adjoining States with success.

In the Kangra group of hill States, the Mughals had an access to the Kangra fort and some portion of the Kangra territory¹⁸. This fort was regarded as a place of great importance and the popular belief found expression in saying "He who holds the fort holds the hill"¹⁹. Thus could the Jammu-Kangra Hill having already so strong a power base become an effective launching pad for the Sikhs, is the moot question that needs to be raised at this juncture. Its

17. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London, 1798, Reprint Patiala 1970, Vol 1, pg. 287.

18. Maathir-ul-Umara, English Tr. Shahnawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *Maathir-ul-Umara: being biographies of the Muhammedan and Hindu Officers from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.*, by H. Beveridge and revised by Baini Prashad, Patna, 1979, Vol. 1, pp. 414-415. Tr. 1, *The Fort of Kangra* was occupied by Jahangir in 1620.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-415.

declining utility for the Sikhs is easily discernible from the fact that when Lakhpat Rai ordered for the extirpation of the Sikh in 1746; the Sikhs, about 1500 in number, had taken refuge in the reedy marshes of Kahnuwan. They were pushed towards Parol and Kathua and the only course left for them was to take to the hills of Basholi, where they hoped they would be given shelter. But they were soon disillusioned to find that imperial orders had already reached the hill Chieftaincy from Lahore, not to give any quarters to them. So in helplessness they had to take refuge in the Malwa desert²⁰.

The long tradition of Suzerain-Vassal relationship that was shared by the Mughal Emperor and the hill Chieftains, had enabled these chieftaincies to retain the substance of power and bulk of their resources by acknowledging a powerful ruler as their Suzerain. This patron - client relationship was even more strong among the hill chiefs. Ranjit Dev of Jammu is said to have successfully asserted such claims over a large number of hill principalities - Mankhot,

20. This incident is called the first ghallughara or holocaust. Rattan Singh Bhangu 'Prachin Panth Prakash', pp. 296-308 Ali-ud-din Mufti, Ibratnama, pp. 229-231 quoted from Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Patiala, 1989, p. 126.

Basholi, Chenini, Kirmchi, Bandralata, Bhadrawah, Bhadu, Bhau, Dalpatpur, Samba, Tirikot, Jasrot, Kiasi Aknur, Bhimber Khari and Khariali²¹. During a portion of the year they would be present at Jammu itself, attending the court of the ruler and having separate ones themselves²². At his court the vassal chieftains used to sit on the left in order of their importance²³. It was this very patriarchal cum feudal constitution of their polity that had made a common Rajput soldier lean heavily on his Thakur, as the Thakur drew legitimacy from his chief, and the chief from his overlord. Lepel Griffin points out "Princes, good and bad, beneficent or tyrannical; have ruled these States, but the people have accepted them one and all; without a thought of revolt or resistance"²⁴.

21. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London, 1798, Reprint Patiala 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 272-73 and 344.

22. Frederic Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*, London, 1875, p. 9.

23. Ganesh Das Rajdarshni (Eng. tr., pp. 12-13 cited from Veena Sacheva, *Polity and Economy of Punjab During the Late 18th Century*, New Delhi, 1993.

24. Lepel Griffin, *Rulers of India: Ranjit Singh*, Delhi, 1957, p. 13.

Thus we observe that, on one hand, ties of interdependence between hill suzerain and their vassals were very strong, and on the other hand, the guerilla tactics which the Sikhs had adopted for themselves, needed for its success the people's support. Guerilla warfare is essentially a form of people's war; in which a revolutionary vanguard, relying upon the support of the people, initiates limited armed action to gradually weaken the enemy and to bring about a situation of mass involvement culminating in the final defeat of the enemy and the attainment of people's political objective²⁵. However one observes that the dynamics of these hill chieftaincy, which functioned as miniature kingdom, was unique in itself. They were well knit autonomous units, with ties of kinship intricately weaved into the patrimonial polity. To provide the required support for attacking the imperial edifice seemed, at the moment, a far fetched desire, especially when the hill chieftaincies were keen to maintain diplomatic ties with Mughal State apparatus. Thus for the Sikhs, Jammu and Kangra hill were undoubtedly an important base area from the military point of view, as it provided the required seclusion at the time of

25. Arjan Dass Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War: The Sikh Peoples War 1699-1768*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 4.

attack and counter attack. But it would not have served as strategic domain to initiate the process of power building²⁶.

As regards to Lakhi Jungle, Sujan Rai Bhandhari gives an apt description of the nature of terrain. "In the rainy season the river Biah (Beas) and Sutlej reaches the Mahal (revenue estates) of this Sarkar and extend broad and deep for leagues together over the surface of land and all parts of this territory are submerged When the water subsides, so many jungles spring up all over this land, owing to great moisture and dampness that a pedestrian has great difficulty in travelling. For this reason this country is called the Lakhi Jungle"²⁷. He also remarks, "The wicked men of this plain owing to the assistance of the river (which flows in many streams by the dwelling of the inhabitants of these tracts), and the shelter afforded by an impassable jungle (which is leagues in

26. This base area of Sikhs furnishes an example of guerilla base in a territory where population is neither friendly nor inimical and the guerillas rely entirely on the nature of terrain for their safety and requirement', Arjan Dass Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War: The Sikh Peoples War 1699-1768*, New Delhi, 1975, p. 98.

27. Sujan Rai Bhandari, 'Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh', Translation in J.N. Sarkar's, *India of Aurangzeb, Compared with the India of Akbar*, Calcutta, 1901, p. 77.

length and breadth), become ambuscaders, highwaymen and thieves. The hand of the commanders cannot reach the chastisement and destruction of these people²⁸. Thus to identify these maruding tribes, becomes very important. Few among these were the Bhattis,²⁹ the Dogras³⁰, the Wattus³¹, the Gujjar³². These maruders, raided on the sedantarisised population with the intention of meeting their non pastrol requirement had often placed them in direct confrontation with the powerful Mughal state

28. Ibid, p. 77.

29. Bhattis of Lakhi Jungle can place in the field six thousand cavalry and much infantry... These men are great thieves and plunderers of the roads and village, Manucci, *Storio Do Mogor*, William Irvine (tr), Calcutta, 1965, pp. 428 and 430.

30. D. Ibbetson, *The Punjab Castes*, Reprint Patiala, 1970, - p. 178. "The Dogras of Lahore and Ferozpur are essentially a riverside tribe being found only in the river bank and they bear worse reputation"; H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Caste of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, Reprint Pariala, 1970, Vol. II, p. 245, "Like Gujars and Naipaul they are great thieves and prefer pasturing cattle to cultivating".

31. Ibid, p. 145. "They hold both banks of Sutlej in Sirsa District and the adjoining parts of Montogomery and Bahawalpur. Above them are the Dogras and below them, the Joya". H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Caste of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, Vol. III, Reprint Patiala 1970, p. 491.

32. Denizel Ibbetson *The Punjab Castes*, Reprint Patiala 1970, p. 183. The Ferozpur Gujjars say that they came from Daranagar in the South of India and they moved thence to Rania in Sirsa and thence to Ferozpur via Kasrur.

apparatus. The Mughal rule favoured the agricultural sedentarised society as it formed the base of its entire revenue structure. Thus they were left with no option but incorporate themselves into the Mughal economic system³³. Increasing monetization and commercialisation had further facilitated the process of incorporation³⁴. It is however pointed out that this process in the wake of agricultural or trade recession or an economic crisis of retrogressive nature would lead to tensions and unrest³⁵. This kind of friction became evident in the second half of the 17th Century and early years of the 18th Century which witnessed a marked increase of the fissiparous tendencies among rebellious activities of the tribal people. Aurangzeb, while appointing his grandson to the faujdari of Lakhi Jungle, exhorted him to pay great attention to conquering kingdoms and extirpating the rebels from the district³⁶.

33. Chetan Singh "Conformity and Conflict: Tribes and Agrarian System of Mughal India", IESHAR, Vol. 25, 1988, p. 339.

34. Chetan Singh, "Conformity and Conflict: Tribes and Agrarian System of Mughal India", IESHR, vol. 25, 1988, p. 339.

35. Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Punjab in the Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1991, pp. 270-279.

36. Ruqa-at-i-Alamgir or letters of Aurganzeb, J.H. Bilimoria (Tr) Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, Delhi, 1972, p. 75 quoted from Chetan Singh "Interaction between Divergent Social Formations: A Possible

Could the Sikhs take advantage of the unrest in this area and turn these Jungles from a mere military base to one of political control by encompassing these rebellious tribals within their folds? What kind of nexus they shared with this section of society? The earliest reference can be located in the Sikh tradition preserved in the Sikh literature. It brings out the constant strife between the land owning and the nomadic tribes. Macauliffe relates the struggle between the Kaura and the Marhaj tribe over five plough of land. However this tribe, Macauliffe points out, becomes a progenitor of the Phulkian family³⁷. The Marhaj tribe obviously refers to the Bhatti Rajputs³⁸.

Explanation for some Instances of Unrest in 17th Century", PHC, March, 1980, p. 137.

37. M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, New Delhi, 1963, Vol. 3-4, pp. 293-294.

38. Bhatti the leader under whom the Bhattis recrossed the Indus had two sons Dusal and Jaisal, of whom the latter founded Jaisalmer, while the former settled in Bhattian. From Dusal sprung Sidhu and Brar Jat tribes while his grandson Rajpal was ancestor of Wattu. Denizel Ibbetson, *The Punjab Caste*, Reprint Patiala, 1970, p. 144.

The Siddhu and Brar is the largest and most important Jat tribes of the Punjab, for from it have sprung the Phulkian families of Patiala, Nabha, Jind and Brar family of Faridkot. Denizel Ibbetson, *The Punjab Caste*, Reprint Patiala, 1970, p. 122.

The fact that inspite of strong kinship ties that the Bhatti Rajputs and Phulkian families (refer to footnote 36) shared, we see that Maharaja Ala Singh and later Amar Singh of Patiala were in constant conflict with these tribes³⁹. Thus subordination of these tribes seemed to be, at this moment, beyond the ambit of the Sikh strength; especially when they were known to have possessed a huge army⁴⁰.

The Wattu's strength is assessable from the fact that they spoke with exultation, of the Kardars they killed during the Sikh rule and the years in which they paid no revenue⁴¹. Similarly it is pointed out that the Dogra's turbulence had rendered them almost independent of the Sikh Government⁴². Thus if under the aegis of Sikh rule they had been trouble makers, then any effort of subordinating these tribes at this point would have been a futile endeavour.

39. Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab, Being the history of the Principal States in Punjab and their Relation with the British Government*, New Delhi, 1977.

40. The Bhatti who can place in the field 6000 cavalry and much infantry, p. 430. Manucci, *Storio Do Mogor* (tr), William Irvine, Calcutta, 1965, p. 430.

41. D. Ibbetson, *The Punjab Caste*, Reprint Patiala, 1970, p. 492.

42. *Ibid*, p. 178.

Inspite of an hostile population that inhabited the area, Lakhi Jungle proved to be a strategic point for the Sikh from where a range of depredation could be made. It was situated in the heart of Punjab at the trijunction of province of Multan, Lahore and Sarkar Sirhind. Thus all trade routes catering to these Sarkars had to cross the vicinity of Lakhi Jungle. The trade route from Delhi to Kabul which was divided into 75 stages, had to pass through Ludhiana, Phillor, Nur Mahal, Nakodar Sarai, Tuti Serai, Sultanpur, Candwal; which were all in the suburbs of Lakhi Jungle.⁴³ If one observes the population at these points one notices that the zamindars were proselyte Musalmans formerly of the Rajput tribe⁴⁴. Thus the seclusion that these Jungles must have offered during attacks must have increased manifold its usage, considering the nature of population that these trade serais supported. Another important trade route was from Lahore to Multan and Bawalpoor, from where it was directed to Dera Ghazi

43. Maulavi Abdul Kadi" Khan, "Memorandum of the Route between Delhi and Kabul 1797 A.D.", Asiatic Annual Register 1806 (taken from vol. XII-1, *The Punjab Past and Present*, April, 1978, pp. 19-20)

44. Ibid, pp. 19-20.

Khan and Dera Ismail Khan to Kabul. The principal set of traders who vociferously carried out the trade were Lohani Afghans⁴⁵. Many of these were men of great opulence and proceeded in person to make their purchase in Indian market⁴⁶. These merchants proved to be a lucrative prey for these raiders. One of important item of traffic, which must have further tempted the Sikhs, was the export of horses to Lahore and Amrtisar⁴⁷. Horse seemed to be an essential requirement for the maruder George Forster gives a befitting picture of a Sikh solidier for whom the horse alone was a valuable possession. In their excursions they carry no tents and baggage shelter themselves under blankets they have commonly two and some of them three horses; each of the middle size, strong, active mild tempered. The province of Lahore and Multan noted for a breed of the best horses in Hindustan afford them an ample supply and indeed they take the greatest care to increase it by all means in their power. Though they make merry on the demise of any of their brethren, they

45. Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara with a Narrative of a Voyage on Indus*, Oxford, 1973, Vol. III, p. 415.

46. *Ibid*, Vol. III, p. 415.

47. Alexander Burnes, Lt. Leech and Lt. Wood, "Political, Geographical and Commercial Report and Papers 1835-1837", *The Punjab Past and Present*, April, 1978, Vol. XII(1), p. 90.

mourn for the death of a horse; thus showing their love of an animal so necessary to them in their professional capacity'⁴⁸.

Thus these Jungles proved to be an excellent natural fortress; but the nature of terrain coupled with the hostility of population must have probably been a retarding force, that must have checked the desires to spread the tentacles of authority over so effective a military base.

It was the Malwa base area alone which not only met the requirement of a military base area but it was eventually metamorphosised into a powerful state edifice by the Phulkian families⁴⁹. It formed a part of the Sirhind Sarkar of Delhi province and was thus outside the direct jurisdiction of the Governors of

48. GeorgeForsters, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London 1798, Reprint Patiala, 1970, Vol. 1, p. 334.

49. Phul's Son Sardar Ram, seeing the Delhi Empire decay and its inability to maintain the outlying district beyond Jammuna, thought it a good opportunity to increase his own authority. He managed through his cousin chain to secure the grant of chauthariyat of the Jungle illaqa from the faujdar of Sirhind - cited from Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, p. 12. To increase his control he founded more villages in the deserted jungle area. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "Phulkian Chiefs", *The Punjab Past and Present*, April 1985.

Punjab. The Sikhs took much advantage of the rivalry between the Governor of Punjab and those of Delhi and with the support of a host of local population i.e. the Malwa Jats, they turned the entire area into a military cum power base, on which lay the entire state apparatus of the Phulkian ruling family.⁵⁰

However the Malwa desert could have only catered to the Cis Sutlej requirement and the Manjha Sikhs had to look forth for various other methods of systematically enlarging their power domain. One such attempt was made by the introduction of the *Rakhi* system i.e. the protectorate system. The system required construction of fortresses and an adequate garrison. Thus in the process, they were pushed from their 'natural fortress' into artificial ones and an adequate garrison obviously implied an overhauling of the entire military set up. Instead of an haywire maraudering characteristic, the Sikhs channelised their efforts to bring it under a more coherent organisational apparatus.

50. When Rai of Kalha decided to attack Ala Singh, he obtained help from both Manja and Malwa Sikhs to fight the confederacy of Mohammedan Chiefs - Mehrajian Sardars, Shahzada Singh, Kehar Singh and Lakhna Dogra from Malwa joined with their contingent - Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 15.

Increasing Political Role of the Khalsa - The Emergence of Amritsar as a Significant Political Centre

In the absence of a leader, Amritsar provided the required cohesiveness to the movement. Apart from its religious connotations, the politically activated Khalsa made Amritsar a nodal centre of Sikh polity - the status it enjoyed throughout 18th Century.

For an effective military establishment, it was necessary to possess organisational skills. Following the death of Banda, the absence of a generally recognised leader coupled with the incessant onslaught of the Mughals, had scattered the warring Sikhs who hitherto had acquired a loose semblance under Banda. Thus they were relegated to the position from where they had begun originally. The Khalsa became the Guru and the Guru, the Khalsa, i.e., the corporate brotherhood and the Guru became interchangeable institutions⁵¹. The leadership of the movement was devolved on the Khalsa Panth as a whole and it became an article of living faith with the Sikhs. However, its ultimate goal had undergone a rapid change. The first taste of sovereignty that Banda provided them with,

51. J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*, Amritsar, 1972, p. 104.

induced them to switch roles from merely defending themselves against external interference to make self rule as their motivating factor. Thus the Khalsa assumed the task of capturing political power and strengthen its plebian base. So the first step in this direction was the control of Amritsar, the Sikh pilgrimage centre⁵², which was inter alia to control or influence Sikh opinion. Its importance as a political nucleus was felt as early as the 17th century. As we see the control of Amritsar was contested by the collaterals of Guru Hargobind, Sodhi Miharban and his son Harji⁵³. They were rival claimants to the Guruship of the Sikh Panth. Similarly ensueing Banda's death in 1714, it became a bone of contention between the Khalsa and Bandais. The Bandais were eventually ousted and the Khalsa made it their stronghold by bolstering their ties with crucial section of its population. This contributed in no small measure to the Sikhs who were surviving the onslaught of the Mughals on Amrtisar throughout the 1730s and 1740s. These rapid onslaughts are also indicative of the fact that Amritsar was rising to a political centre of immense magnitude. So

52. J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*, Amritsar 1972, pp. 97-98.

53. J.S. Grewal, *Sikhs of Punjab*, New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge, 1990, p. 66.

much so that it must have threatened Lahore court of its potentiality as parallel nucleus of power. Here the Khalsa devised a confederation by meeting on the occasions of Baishaki and Diwali festivals every year. This expressed the continuing concern for solidarity and need for cohesiveness required at this juncture, as we see the Sikhs reverted to this place at all difficult moments, to reaffirm and revitalize their identity. Since the desired 'state of being and action' required the participation of the entire community, this gathering was coined *Sarbat Khalsa*. It is pointed out that the entire community was never present at any particular time at Amritsar, but those who deliberated on the name of Sarbat Khalsa were regarded as doing so on behalf of the entire body of Khalsa and the resolution called *GURMATTAS* was morally binding on every member of the Khalsa, since the Guru was assumed to be present among the Khalsa. Thus during the large part of the 18th Century, it was the corporate aspect of the Sikh doctrine which underlined the political strength and imparted a measure of cohesion to the community.

The Evolution of Sikh Organisational Structure: The Creation of Misl

The Khalsa unfurled a process of organisational changes and thereby channelised the militant fervour into various institutions. However, this phase is to be viewed keeping in mind the background of economic fluctuations, that happened to be the main reason for the institutional reorganisation.

The resolutions or *Gurumattas* taken by the corporate body, were related generally to political activities, matter of defence and offences and to the gratification of religious sentiments. Thus the decision did not stop at matters concerning 'the striking power' alone. They embraced at times issues concerning 'territorial occupation' too. To put these resolutions into effect, it was necessary to have a concerted action. So in one of the important *Sarbat Khalsa* conventions in 1748 a *Gurmatta* was passed to propound a *Dal Khalsa*. Before an attempt is made to delve into its nature and its functional aspect it would be necessary to understand its prototype, which was operational before this came into being.

1716 onwards the marauder's military organisation were limited to a group of forty to fifty men, which were called 'Jathas'. In 1733 the disintegrated fabric was given some sort of semblance by integrating them under two Dals, the Buddh Dal and the Tarun Dal. The former looked after the Sikh holy places and the latter was entrusted with the responsibility of the defence of the community. Each Dal was further divided into five *derahs* or *jathas*, each led by a separate *jathedar*. However one notices that the *jathas* kept increasing in number. From five in 1733, it rose to twenty five in 1745 and sixty five in 1748. The momentum of the Sikh movement, undoubtedly, was picking up pace, its major thrust being the rising number of its followers.

However, the answer for its swelling numbers have to be found in the dynamics of the economy. The economy seemed to have suffered a setback in the early part of the century. If compared to the *jama* figures of the 17th Century, the Suba Lahore, which was progressing in leaps and bounds, soon experienced an economic retardation⁵⁴. One such area was trade and

54. The increase in *jama* in the first half of the Century was spectacular, rising steadily from 55,94,58,423 *dams* at the time of compilation of 'Ain' 1595 to 108,97,59,776 in 1658. On the contrary, in the second half of the Century, the

commerce. The expanding circle of trade and commerce till the second half of the 17th century had ushered in changes in the nature of agriculture and accelerated the momentum of artisinal manufacture⁵⁵ but its retardation meant misfortune to all those who initially had accrued benefit from it. Thus two areas which needed to be delved into are: Why did trade and commerce, which had brought prosperity to the region, soon become regressive in nature; and secondly, which sections of the population were most seriously affected by this down trend?

So much so that Mohan Lal wrote in 1836 that Diwan Sawan Mal an official of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh was ardently desirous that the merchants of Multan should first send their articles by the channel of Indus, but as they were inexperienced in nature of voyage, they feared to convey their merchandise by a new water course until other traders showed them an example and let them know the benefit gained by it⁵⁶.

jama fell to 89,30,39,039 dams in 41st reign of Aurangzeb. Cited from N.A. Siddiqii, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals 1700-1750*, New York, 1970. Appendix E, p. 167 and Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, Bombay, 1963, Appendix D.

55. ChetanSingh, *'Region and Empire'*, Punjab in the Seventeenth Century Delhi, 1991, p. 270.

56. Mohan Lal, *Travel in the Punjab, Afghanistan and*

The bulk of merchandise transported in the 17th Century depended entirely on overland routes. The predominant areas, with which north and north-west Punjab had intimate trading connections, was Persia. The goods sent were either consumed in Persian towns or transported further west to Levant and Eastern Europe. Till the second half the 17th century, all important centres in Punjab on the land route linking the Mughal Empire with the land of Safavids and Central Asian Khanatis, prospered - for example Gujarat, Wazirabad, Sialkot, Eminabad, Lahore, Sultanpur, Nakodar and Phillour⁵⁷. This was inspite of the fact that the price of goods had increased tremendously due to high rates of transportation and limited supply of goods.

However the death of the Emperor of the Safavid dynasty of Persia Shah Abbas in 1629, unfolded a set of events which ultimately became responsible for the disruption of trade links that had an adverse

Turkistan to Balk, Bokhara and Herat, Patiala, 1971, p. 401.

57. *Sujan Rai Bhhandari Kulasat-ut-Tawarikh* cited from J.N. Sarkar's *India of Aurgangzeb, Compared with India of Akbar*, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 66, 79.

effect on Punjab economy. Shah Abbas II, who had managed to keep the frontier of empire intact, recaptured Qandhar from Mughals in 1648⁵⁸. The fall of Qandhar to Shah of Iran and Mughals attempt to recover it virtually brought the overland traffic to standstill. It was perhaps only intermittently opened during period of calm between 1648 and 1656⁵⁹. In 1709 Qandar passed into the hands of Ghilzay Afghan under their leader Mir Vais. Mir Vais took aid from the Baluchi tribes to retaliate the attacks from the Safavid empire and soon became the undisputed possessor of Qandhar till 1715⁶⁰.

The internal weakness, the court intrigues, the rise to political power of mujtahids and the other fissiparous ruptures soon became known to the neighbouring countries and they became major contenders to dismember Persia. In 1648 Sultan Ibrahim, the ruler of Ottoman Empire, was deposed and imprisoned. The next eight years witnessed the removal and appointment of

58. Roger Savory, *Iran under Safavids*, Cambridge, 1980, p. 232.

59. J.N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb*, New Delhi, 1973, Vol. III, pp. 75-91, The Mughals laid three successful seige to Qandhar.

60. Roger Savory, *Iran under Safavids*, Cambridge, 1980, p. 232.

thirteen grand wazirs. Some of them were in office for only a few months or less, only to be dismissed, exiled or executed⁶¹.

These developments coincided with Yusufzai uprising in 1667, which was marked by plunder of territory lying north west of Punjab. After a few years in peace, Afrides rebelled in 1672, the result of which was disastrous defeat for Muhammad Ali Khan, the Governor of Suba Kabul. Compounding these uprisings were the rebellious characters of Khatak, who lived in the same region and inflicted defeat upon Mughal Empire in 1674. However, in 1675 the Khyber pass was cleared of its tribals⁶².

This political unrest became a retarding factor that adversely affected trade and commerce, which in turn, prevailed strongly upon social and economic structure. Agriculture, manufacturing and even activities of pastoral societies had been brought into its ambit. Agriculture was strongly integrated with transit trade, then carried by Armenian merchants through Syria and Turkey, to Russian territory⁶³. Thus

61. John Stoye, *Europe Unfolding 1648-88*, pp. 65-66.

62. J.N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb*, New Delhi, 1973, Vol. III, pp. 142-162.

if the Safavid Empire had maintained its political reputation, Punjab would have indirectly enjoyed the commercial advantages accruing from its stability.

In 1722, Mahmud, the leader of the Ghilzai Afghans, marched with 20,000 Afghans and captured Isafhan and became the nominal master of the whole country. However, in 1729, Nadir Khan, along with Tahmasp's troops had defeated and routed out the Afghans. Nadir Khan was also instrumental in checking the Russian imperialistic designs and the Turkish encroachment on Iran. But Nadir did not stop short here. After temporarily bringing the house in order, he crowned himself as Nadir Shah, the first ruler of Afshar in 1736⁶⁴.

Long drawn out disturbances in Turkey were equally likely to have disrupted the overland traffic of goods, which were carried from Punjab in large quantities by Armenian merchants both for internal and foreign trade. This linkage was instrumental in providing venues of employment. The growing demand for

63. Roger Savory, *Iran Under Safavids*, Cambridge, 1980, p. 246.

64. L. Lockhart - *Nadir Shah*, London, 1938, pp. 35-45.

goods like cotton had generated employment facilities and the impact of increasing monetization could be felt among the peasants and artisans. Thus fall in the demand of these commodities adversely affected the economy of the countryside. The immediate pressure fell on the peasants and rural artisans; who, unlike the merchants and urban artisans could not migrate to profitable regions⁶⁵ and thus had to bear the brunt of economic retardation. It is perhaps no coincidence that areas which were most closely associated with the Sikh rebellion were those that were also amongst the most commercialised and therefore, most easily affected by this kind of economic regression⁶⁶. Thus one sees a change in the nature of Sikh movement from one of relatively strong peasantry from raising themselves socially in the 17th and early 18th Centuries, to the one of impoverished zamindars and peasants struggling for survival and maintenance of their existing position in the 18th Century⁶⁷.

65. Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire, Punjab in the Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1991, pp. 275-276.

66. Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire, Punjab in the Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, 1991, p. 279.

67. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire, in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707-1748*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 180-181.

The Sikh movement in the 18th century seems to have lived on these pauperized section of society. At this point of time another trend that came in vogue was the jagirdars in Punjab who began to farm out their jagirs to the mahajans. This widespread practice of 'ijara' indicated an atmosphere of uncertainty and apprehensions that compelled the jagirdars to give up their cherished right of collecting revenue from his jagir mahals directly through his agents. The Mahajan ijaradars, however, were no boon to the society. They had some inherent conflicts with the different categories of landed element, which seem to have sharpened when the mahajan as ijaradars exploited the zamindar and peasant (riaya). In 1717, two mahajan ijaradar; who had taken the jagir of three jagirdars in Pargana. Wan on ijara, were reported to have arrogated the customary prerequisite of zamindar and qanungo; ravaged the village and carried off the goods and animals of riaya⁶⁸. The ijaradar had to be oppressive because ijara of the province was normally fixed at much inflated rate⁶⁹. But the brunt of exploitation was felt by the lowest rung of the society.

68. Akhbarat FS, 6th Ry, I, p. 147.

69. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, in *Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707-1748*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 199.

However, it was not only the ones who were hit by economic regression alone who embraced the movement but the Dals enveloped even the most despised caste, gave them coequal status, dined and fraternized without discrimination⁷⁰. When the Tarun Dal was re-organised into five divisions one of these was under the leadership of Bir Singh Rangretta⁷¹. It was bestowed a standard flag from the Akal Takht in the same manner as was done in the case of other four divisions. When Ala Singh, the Phulkian chief defeated the army of Malerkotla with the help of Dal Khalsa the first to receive honour was Bir Singh Rangretta. Tarkhans (the carpenter caste) and chamars were the other two low caste whose preponderance in the Khalsa Panth was obvious.

70. Entry to the Panth was open to all and within it caste was certainly discounted. It was however by no means obliterated. It survived in terms of commensality and marriage patterns, W.H. Mcleod, *Evolution of Sikh Community*, Delhi, 1975, p. 84.

71. These were the Chuhars who were considered a 'caste out' Punjab and whose name is popularly supposed to be or corruption of Sudra Caste', On conversion to Sikhism, persons from this caste were given the honorific title of Rangretta.

The sixty five Jathas which enveloped this discontended population was given a more centralised framework by reducing them into twelve units which were put under the jurisdiction of twelve important chiefs or 'Misls'. It was under the purview of the chief's responsibility to bring the Gurmattas into operation. The misls combined together acted in concert under the command of a chosen leader for specific purpose and this concerted army was coined as 'Dal Khalsa'. However this concerted army was never a standing army or a single unit. It was more or less an ad-hoc deliberation for a specific purpose.

**Towards a More Stable Political System:
Rakhi exactions**

The organisational system led to territorial occupation thereby providing them with a revenue base that must have further fostered stability to the infant power structure. Rakhi exactions was one case in point.

The Rakhi exaction or the so called protectorate system had its roots in the political flux of the period. Following the death of the iron willed Governor Mir Mannu in 1753, Punjab witnessed in the ensuing three years the rule of nine governors⁷². The

72. Tahmas Khan *Tahmas Nama, The Autobiography of a Slave*, tr. by P. Setu Madhava Rao, Bombay, 1967,

intrigues involved in succession which created imbalance in the upper echelon were now not limited to factions which had linkages with the Mughal court but also involved those who owed allegiance to the Afghan Emperor Ahmed Shah Durrani⁷³. The crisis was not limited alone to the State's political apparatus but it also infiltrated to the lower rungs of society. Abdali's invasion had created terrible scarcity of grain in the city (Lahore) and people had suffered greatly⁷⁴. The merchants taking advantage of the situation had become insolent so much so that when the

pp. 20-21. Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth* Prakash; 435-436. Cited from Dr. Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani*, Bombay, 1959, p. 136.

73. By the 3rd invasion of Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1753 a treaty was concluded between Miun-ul-Mulk and Ahmed Shah and it was stipulated that Lahore and Multan were to be considered annexed to Afghan empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani. Miun-ul-Mulk was to remain the governor of provinces on behalf of Shah - This led to two factions the Mughali and Afghani faction who were always bidding for an opportunity to usurp the Governorship of these provinces, Munshi Ghulam Husain, *Siyar-ul-Muta- akhkhirin*, tr. by M. Raymonds, Calcutta, 1902, Vol. 3, pp. 326-327.

74. Tah,mas Khan *Tahmas Nama, The Autobiography of a Slave*, tr. by P. Setu Madhava Rao, Bombay, 1967, pp. 17. Munshi Ghulam Husain *Siyar-ul-Muta akhkhirin*, tr. by M. Raymonds, Calcutta, 1902, Vol. 3, p. 341.

Governor took bonds from them and instructed them to sell grain at low price it did not have any effect on them⁷⁵. The Sikhs who were till now a coveted target⁷⁶ for the imperial troopers were gradually attaining the position of coveted ally. Their assertions and depredations at strategic points helped them to build a reputation for themselves. In 1752, nine hundred of them gathered in the fort of Ram Rauni (Amritsar) close to Chak Guru and declared their independence -- the seige of the mud enclosure had engaged some of Mannu's best officers⁷⁷. Nawab Kapur Singh the leader of the theocratic army of the Sikhs, 'the Dal Khalsa', availed himself of the confusion at Lahore during the second invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali and with the consent of

75. Tahmas Khan, *Tahmas Nama, The Autobiography of a Slave*, op. cit., p. 38.

76. The persons who brought Sikhs alive or their heads of their horses received prizes. Every Mughal who lost his own horse in the battle was provided with another of a better quality at expense of the Government, Tahmas Khan, *Tahmas Nama, the Autobiography of a Slave*, tr. by P. Setu Madhava Rao, Bombay, 1967, p. 19.

77. Muin-ul-Mulk (Mir Mannu) was at Batala when the news was received that the Sikhs were creating trouble at Amritsar. Muin-ul-Mulk sent Syed Jaimal-ud-din Bakshi, Qazi Beg Khan against them. In the desperate fight Sikhs were killed. Ibid, p. 18.

citizen entered it with a small band of twenty horsemen and established himself at the chabutra at Kotwali till Mir Mannu's deputies marched against him⁷⁸. After the death of Muin ul Mulk his carrot and stick policy⁷⁹ was abandoned and the Sikhs became the most sought after soldiers to figure in these factional disputes. Their participation in these provincial intrigues brought to the fore front the first strands of their mercenary character and attribute. One such instance was during Qasim Khan's rebellion, who belonged to Mughalani Begum's (wife of the deceased Governor Muin-ul-Mulk) coterie but had started nursing ambitious designs to seize Lahore and Delhi. Eighty thousand Sikhs entered into alliance with him and received thousands of rupees worth muskets, bows, arrows and other arms⁸⁰. At another instance Adina Beg Khan employed the Sikhs to

78. Khuswaqat Rai's *Tarikh-1-Sikhan*, pg. 66-67. Cited from Ganda Singh *Ahmad Shah Durrani*, Bombay, 1959, pg. 76.

79. George Forst *In A Journey from Bengal to England*, London 1798, Reprint Patiala, 1970, Vol. 1, pg. 273 writes "The Sikh nation might have destroyed but for the intervention of Mir Mannu's minister Kaura Mal himself a member of Khalsa sect... the Sikhs were left to strengthen themselves and enlarge their territory"....

80. Qasim Khan's rebellion however terminated in a failure as his own troop who clamoured for their pay, revolted. *Tahmas Khan, Tahmas Nama, The Autobiography of a Slave*, tr. P. Setu Madhava Rao, Bombay, 1967.

repel the Afghan troops who were sent by Abdali General Jahan Khan under Murad Khan and Sarfaraz Khan. The Sikhs ruined and desolated the whole province of Doab chiefly at the instigation of Adina Beg Khan⁸¹. It was at this prime time that the Sikhs instead of becoming a pawn in these court factionalism decided to redefine their existing course of attack. From plundering randomly they shifted to a system of exactions by which they promised to provide protection. If one looks at the amount of money exacted it is estimated that it was not more than 1/5th.⁸² Thus it was even less than the

81. The district of Doab had been leased out to Adina Beg Khan for an annual sum of thirty six lacs of rupees. He had been exempted attendance at court. He was to deposit the amount according to fixed installments. His agent Duaran was stationed in Lahore to look after the transactions. However Jahan Khan despatched a few sazawals to Adina Beg Khan demanding the latter's attendance at Timur Shah's court. He mistrusted their offers and retired to the hills - Ibid, p. 69, Munshi Ghulam Husain, *Siyar-ul-Muta-akhkhirin*, tr. M. Raymond, Calcutta, 1902, Vol. 3, p. 376.

82. Polier calls this tribute 'in general trifle' and it range from two to five per cent on the revenues. A.L.H. Polier, *The Siques*; Ganda Singh (ed), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1962.

James Browne says that the rakhi was a fifth of the annual rent. H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Delhi, 1978, II, 127. "The Sikhs offered a plan to the villages individually. The villagers were to place themselves under the protection of Dal Khalsa on a promise to pay a fifth of their income twice a year in May and October, at the end of each harvest Asarhi and Saoni known as Rabi and Kharif. The Sikhs in return were to afford them full protection against plunder, theft,

amount exacted by the Marathas through the system of Chauth. But it was the first step in the direction of building a political base for themselves. Thus, this sect or fraternity which was already in vogue, having turned out to be a sure resource against oppression, grew to an immense number especially at a time when the government was being managed by a woman⁸³. The tenant and farmer became more oppressed than ever and shoals of people flocked to the Sikhs and these people grew exceedingly numerous and commenced talking high to the officers of the Government⁸⁴. The experiment obviously tapped support from the grass root level and tried to inculcate in them a kind of assurance that the Sikhs could be viewed as something more than mere predators. Whenever a zamindar agreed to pay this tribute to any Sikh chief that chief not only himself refrained from plundering him but protected him from all others and this protection was by general consent held so sacred, that even if the grand army passed through a zamindari where the safeguards of the lowest chief are stationed it would not violate them⁸⁵. So the Rakhi system

molestation of any kind either by themselves or by their neighbours and government troops".

83. Munshi Ghulam Husain, *Siyar-Ul-Muta-akhkhirin*, tr. M. Raymond, Calcutta, 1902, Vol. 3, p. 340.

84. Ibid, Vol. 3, p. 342.

85. James Browne, *Introduction to the History of the*

facilitated not only the consolidation of its political base but in its process also traced out a line of demarcation of territory for each chief. In most of the cases it was within these defined limits that the chief built his power structure. The territory south west of Lahore fell under the protection of Nakkais; the Chaj and Rachna Doab territories came under the protection of Hari Singh Bhangi and Charhat Singh Sukarchakia. Some territories north of Amritsar also fell under rakhi of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Jai Singh Kanhiya. The southern bank of Sutlej came under the protection of Dip Singh and Karor Singh, while the Ahluwalia and Singhpura occupied some territories on the bank of the Sutlej⁸⁶. Faithful adherence to the sanctimonious non interference policy is a clue that attempts were made towards a concerted action in building up this power base which unfortunately terminated into many instead of a single one.⁸⁷ For this power edifice the rakhi

Origin and Progress of the Sikhs, pg. 16, reproduced in *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, ed. Ganda Singh, Calcutta, 1962, p. vii.

86. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of Sikhs*, Bombay, 1950, p. 158. Sohan Lal Suri 'Umdat U Tawarikh', ii, p. 5 cited from Dr. G.S. Chhabra *Advanced History of the Punjab*, Jullunder, 1968, Vol. 1, p. 403.

87. According to Ghulam Muhyy-ud-din (Bute Shah) when even a Sardar of ten trooper placed an area under the rakhi even one of the biggest sardars having five hundred or more trooper under him could not interfere in that area - Bute Shah,

system not only facilitated a mass base but also provided a wider field of recruitment to Dal Khalsa's ranks and the Dal was in better position to contest with Abdali the transfer of their homeland⁸⁸. However the rakhi system of exactions and the Dal Khalsa shared a kind of symbiotic relationship. As the rakhi system fostered the growth of Dal Khalsa in a similar manner the Dal Khalsa was an important determinant for the effective functioning of the protectorate system. It became increasingly possible for the Sikh leaders to provide effective protection to those who agreed to pay a part of revenue to them. Thus it was the armed strength of the Sikhs which provided the major thrust to the infant political apparatus and one sees along with the defining of territorial limit the beginning of a new form of military paraphernalia. The entire area got soon dotted with military camps called *derahs* at strategic points, new *garhi* (mud fortrees) were built and the old Mughal forts were repaired. Soon these became administrative headquarters for the various

Tarikh-i-Punjab, Daftar III, pg. 97, quoted from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 80.

88. Sita Ram Kohli, Foreword to English Translation of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, by V.S. Suri.

chiefs. Pathankot came to serve as the headquarters first of Nand Singh Bhangi and then of Tara Singh Kanhiya. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia developed the township of Sri Hargobindpur as the seat of his government. Sujampur became the tappa headquarter for Amar Singh Bagga, Haqiqat Singh Kanhiya founded the town of Fatehgarh as his headquarters. Behrampur and Qadian too were revived.

However it is observed that these exactions did not automatically lead to occupation and direct administration under the Sikh chief. Sometimes, the nature of exaction was close to predatory incursions. This happened often from 1764 to 1803 in the Ganga Doab⁸⁹. The nature of their interest in these territories turned out to be different from what it had been in the upper Doabs. To establish a protectorate with the aim of inducing a permanent hold over this area was a difficult task, especially when there were a

89. Foreign and Political Department 23rd June, 1783 (Translation of a copy of, an arzee from Sheikh Azemuddin Khan and Keramuttalae to Elmass Ali Khan under date 29th of Rubulaweb). It points out that the Sikh plundered Bedera..., Sorren, Kersera and destroying a talluqa of Fatehpoor and another of Selimpore, Renipore from these places they have carried away everything except the cows which was not their custom to take of Bullocks and buffaloes alone beside other goods and stock, they have taken at least 30000 steeds. There is no trace of the crop.

group of hostile forces working against them. All along the Sutlej-Yamuna divide, most of the chiefs in the lower doab were zamindars and jagirdars of the Mughals and the Afghans; and they made use of the politico administrative framework of the Mughal Empire or State of Kabul to keep a check on Sikh predatory wars. In the Malwa region, the Phulkian chieftances were an antipode to the rest of the autonomous Sikh principalities⁹⁰. They drew legitimacy and power from the Durrani throne without losing their autonomous status. In them they found the force that could help them to ward off Sikh threat from the upper Doab. So instead of establishing a protectorate in these areas, the Sikhs gathered in small batches on the bank of river Jamuna near the ferries. Then on crossing the river they would demand exactions at the rate of two annas in the rupee of revenue: meaning $1/8$ or 12.5%⁹¹. At another place which was about thirteen coss from Coss Gunge and twelve from Bedhera, it was reported that 5000 of their

90. The Malwa region of Punjab between the Satlej and Ghaggar. It comprises the districts of Ferozpur, Faridkot, Bhatinda, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Patiala, Ropar and a part of Ambala district, cited from H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 16.

91. H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 19.

horses attend 18000 bullocks with Banjaras and they have settled a price of 2 rupees on a bullock load of grain⁹². Such kind of depredations had an adverse effect on the economy of the region. So much so that in 1783 there was a scarcity of grain felt in and around the vicinity. Colonel Knudso ascribed this scarcity not so much to badness of the crop or the damage done to it by the inroads of Sikhs as to the large exportation of grain from this part to the west ward of Jumna. He reported that the agents from Delhi are employed all over the Doab and Rohilkund to purchase grain for the exigencies of that city and its vicinity. Banjaras having from 2000-4000 bullocks loaded with grain were continually crossing to Delhi, to which place the merchants were induced to carry it as the highest prices it bears there⁹³. However it must be pointed out here that in 1783 itself, the Sikhs had scaled the entire vicinity of Delhi, Aligarh, Hathras, Tundla, Shikokhabad and these depredation must have caused the demand for supply of grain from the Doab⁹⁴.

92. Foreign and Political Department, 23rd June, 1783, Fort William.

93. Foreign and Political Department, 8th April, 1783 (copy of a letter from Colonel Knudson to Mr. John Bristow).

94. Foreign and Political Department Jan.-June, 1783.

Thus the study focuses on the construction of a power base in the period when it was without a leader. It explores the link between political vacuum in leadership, contemporary economic life and its impact on organisational structure of the Sikh order. The most notable evolutionary change was the evolution of Khalsa from a dormant to a politically activated unit, which led to the emergence of Amritsar as a nerve centre and eventual formation of misl.

CHAPTER III

FUNCTIONING OF MISLS: PUNJAB MOVES TOWARDS

REGIONAL STABILITY

Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 gave the Sikhs a new lease of life. They came out of their obscurity and made plunder and depredation their immediate goal. So blatant was their militant fervour that Nadir Shah warned the Governor of Punjab 'Take care, the day is not distant when these rebel will take possession of the country'¹ Bhima Singh Bhangi took full advantage of the anarchy, ensuing from the invasion, and turned the little band of attackers, left by his predecessor into a powerful confederacy, which was popularly known as Bhangi Misl.² Jassa Singh Ahluwalia after depriving Nadir Shah's army of the booty that they were carrying, built the fort of Daliwal on the banks of

¹ George Forster, A Journey from Bengal to England through the norther part of India, Kashmere and Afghanistan, Persia into Russia by Caspian sea, reprint Patiala, 1970, Vol. I, p.272; W.L. M'Gregor, History of the Sikhs, Patiala 1970, Vol.I, p.115, 58; S. Mohammad Latif, History of Punjab : From the remotest antiquity to the present, New Delhi, 1984, p.212.

² Ahmad Shah Batalia, Appendix to Sohan lal Suri, Umdat-ut-Tawarikh p. 15, cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "Emergence and Dissolution of Bhangi Misl", *Punjab Past and Present*, April 1984, p.35. S. Muhammad Latif, op. cit. p. 296.

the Ravi, which became his headquarter.³ While some were able to establish a confederacy at the outset, there were others who initially joined Nawab Kapur Singh's confederacy, to later stream out into different misls. One such was Gulab Singh alias Gulaba, the founder of Dallewalia Misl, who became the active member of Nawab Kapur Singh's confederacy⁴ So also Jai Kanhiya, later to be the leader of Kanhiya Misl was baptised (Pahlul) by Kapur Singh and served for sometime in his confederacy. While these gained a reputation by joining the rebellious forces, there were others who took advantage of the enfeebled Mughal government and amassed power and wealth by becoming a part of their system and drawing strength from within. One such group was the Ramagarhias, whose leader Bhagwan Singh was in service of Adina Beg and commanded a contingent of one hundred horsemen. In 1739, during the invasion of Nadir Shah Bhagwan Singh, saved the life of the Governor of Lahore at the risk of his own and thus was rewarded with five villages:Valla, Verka, Sultanwind, Tung

³ Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab, being the History of principal states in the Punjab and their relation with the British Government*, New Delhi, 1977, p.499.

⁴ Kanhiyal lal 'Tarikh-i-Punjab' p.103; Guan Singh 'Tawarikh Guru Khalsa p. 250, Ibid from the article Rise of Fall of Dallewalia Misl'-Dr. Bhagat Singh ppp. Oct. 1985, p. 377.

and Chamba.⁵ His son Jassa Singh Ramgarhia joined Adina Beg's service as officer⁶ and was appointed a tehsildar of a sizeable territory.⁷ Jassa Singh had extended his services to Adina Beg Khan and Aziz Khan in their venture to seige the fort of Ram Rauni or Ramgarh at Amritsar which was a stronghold of the Sikhs. And interestingly for Jassa Singh this fort became an important headquarter. Its significance for him can be determined by the fact that his misl took its name from the name of this fort.

Since the Sikhs had limited resources, it became an essential prerequisite to pool them for the purpose of offence and defence. Nawab Kapur Singh is credited for commencing a regular kind of organisation of Sikh volunteers into bands (jathas), whose number consequently

⁵ Gian Singh, *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, Part II, cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *The Rise and Fall of Ramgarhia Misl*, PPP, Oct. 1987, p.253.

⁶ Kanaihya lal, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*, Lahore, 1877, p. 94; Gian Singh op.cit., p.234; Ahmad Shah Batalia, Appendix to Sohan lal Suri, *Umdat-Ut-Tawarikh*, Lahore, 1885, p.18. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *The Rise and Fall of Ramgarhias*, PPP, Oct. 1987, p. 253.

⁷ Kanhiya lal, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*, p. 94, Suraj Singh and Darbara Singh, *Itihas Ramgarhian*, Vol.I, p.411. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "The Rise and Fall of Ramgarhias", op. cit., p.253.

ncreased during subsequent years.⁸ In 1748, he provided further coherence to the organisation when the loose framework was compartmentalised into further compact units—the misls. Though twelve is the generally accepted number of the major confederacies, Cunnigham points out that, "...One misl gave birth to another, for the federative principle necessarily prevailed the union and an aspiring sub-chief could separate himself from his immediate party to form perhaps a greater one of his own."⁹ Therefore in 1820 Ahmad Shah Batala noted that there were more than four or five hundred Sardars but pre-eminent for their armies follower and territories were only a few groups.¹⁰ The Bhangi Misl aptly brings out the federative spirit prevailing within the misl. The associates of Bhangi chiefs were Lehna Singh of Lahore, Gujjar Singh of Lahore and Gujarat, Karam Singh Dulu of Chiniot, Milkha Singh of Rawalpindi, Karam Singh Man of Mananwala, Gurbaksh Singh of Doda, Sanwal Singh Randhawa of Chamiari and Dhanna Singh

⁸ Ali-ud-din Mufti, *Ibratnama*, "after the death of Muhammad Shah in 1748, there were thirty eight Sikh Sardars of the fifth generation (girsch). Apparently each of these Sardars had his own band of followers." p.284-85. Cited from Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of The Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1978, p.14.

⁹ J.D. Cunnigham, *A History of Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1972, p. 96

¹⁰ Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab During the Late Eighteenth Century*, New Delhi, 1993. p.94.

Kalalwal of Bhira, who were succeeded by Chait Singh, Sahib Singh, Jassa Singh, Jiwan Singh, Ram Singh, Suddh Singh, Nar Singh, Jodh Singh respectively; forming altogether eight different dynasties of rulers.¹¹ Even Sardar Charat Singh, the founder of Sukarchakia Misl, at the outset of his career was in the contingent of the Bhangis.¹²

The fact that many a associate of the Sardar in due course of time carved out their own independant chieftancies, provides an insight into the operational dynamics of the system. This has been reflected upon by Prinsep, who points out "The Sardars or Chiefs of the Sikh nation had been followed into the field by relations, friends and volunteers and not ordinarily by hired retainers. Most of these looked upon themselves as partners and associates in each enterprise and regarded the land now acquired as a common property in which each was to have his share, according to the degree in which he might have contributed to the acquisition. The associations were called misls implying that they were confederacies of equal, under chief of their own selection. The Chief was to lead in war and act as an arbiter in peace, he was

¹¹ Ibid, p. 95.

¹² Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, p. 135, Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 96.

respected and treated with deference by inferior Sardars but these owned no obligation to obey beyond what they might consider to be for their own reciprocal benefit or for the well being of the misl".¹³

The leader of the Dallewalia Misl, Tara Singh Ghaiba, was accompanied not only by his real brothers Man Singh, Sucha Singh and Dan Singh but also by other comrades such as Sujan Singh Badichah, Tara Singh Kakra, Dharam Singh, Kanwar Singh Kang.¹⁴ When Tara Singh Ghaiba took over Kotsaida and sixty other places, he distributed it among Sujan Singh's son Mahar Singh and his two brothers, Man Singh and Dan Singh.¹⁵ His cousin Dharam Singh received Sohian and eighty other places and Charat Singh occupied Kandharan and twelve other places¹⁶. However it must be pointed out that within the misl itself the Sardar was likely to possess larger territories than any of the other member of the misl and the prominence which the chief

¹³ H. Prinsep, *Origin of Sikh Power in Punjab and Political life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 1834, Reprint Patiala, 1970, p. 23.

¹⁴ Bute Shah, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*, Daftar IV p. 72. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "The rise and fall of Dallewalia Misl", PPP, Oct. 1985, p. 381.

¹⁵ Bute Shah, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-73. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "The Rise and Fall of Dallewalia Misl", *op.cit.*, p. 381.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.381.

enjoyed as a commander was consolidated through acquisition of larger resources.¹⁷

Conflict and Cooperation Among Misls

This land became one of the important criteria for assuming a power status and we see that in the period under review, almost all the misls were geared towards expanding their territorial boundaries. These territorial possessions were further divided among the associates of the sardar but at the same time, were carefully guarded. And thus, even though norms permitted these associates to transfer their services to whomsoever they pleased,¹⁸ any transference of territorial possession at this level would tantamount to a battle. Jhanda Singh Bhangi had conferred Pathankot on one of his misldar. However, after the death of the misldar, his widow got her daughter married to Tara Singh of the Kanhiya Misl and gifted him Pathankot. Since Pathankot was

¹⁷ James Browne, *History of Origin and Progress of Sikhs*, reprinted in Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1974. "They choose by majority of votes a leader to command their joint forces during the expedition, generally from among those whose Zamindaris are considerable", p.15.

¹⁸ J.D. Cunnigham, *op.cit.*, "...In theory such men (the Sikhs) were neither the subject nor the retainers of any feudal chiefs and they could transfer their service to whom they pleased or they could themselves become leaders and acquire new lands for their own use in the name of Khalsa or commonwealth.

passed on to another misl, and especially to one which Bhangis were inimical to, it became a bone of contention between the two misls. This ultimately resulted in fierce fighting between the Kanhiyas and Bhangis at Dinanagar.¹⁹

It was again the dispute over division of revenue of land, that was the main reason for making the two allied misls—the Ramgarhias and Kanhiyas at loggerheads.²⁰ The Ramgarhias and the Kanhiyas together had faced the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali,²¹ Jai Singh Kanhiya had participated on the side of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in the protection and later occupation of the fort of Ramgarh at Amritsar.²² Jassa Singh, aided by Kanhiya misl, had beseiged Dinanger, Batala Kalanaur, Sri Hargovindpur, Qadian and many other towns and places in the district of

¹⁹ Ahmad Shah Batalia, Appendix to Sohan Lal Suri Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, p. 16. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh "Emergence and Dissolution of Bhangi Misl," PPP. 1984, p. 413.

²⁰ S. Muhammad Latif, History of Punjab, p.308. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "The Rise and Fall of Ramgarhias," op.cit., According to him, their relation remained unruffled till 1763. However after their joint attack of Kasur, they got a huge booty which Jassa Singh Ramgarhia's brother tried to conceal. This created a rift between the two. p.256.

²¹ S. Muhammad Latif, *History of Punjab: From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time*, New Delhi, 1964, p. 306.

²² Ibid., p. 307.

Amritsar and Gurdaspur.²³ However the dispute over land made them hostile to each other and Kanhiyas in retaliation seiged Kalanaur and wrested the whole country upto the Sutlej from the Ramgarhias.²⁴

Political alliances among the misls or between a Sikh misl and a non Sikh chieftancy was generally entered into when it was favourable to the misl--the favourablity measured in terms of territorial expansion. When Braj Dev, the Raja of Jammu, asked the Kanhiya Misl for aid to recover a portion of Jammu territory annexed by Bhangis Misl, they readily agreed to provide the same.²⁵ However once the territory was recovered the Kanhiya chief deserted Braj Dev and went over to Bhangis. Karianwala, the territory referred to, again passed over to the Sikhs.²⁶ Even Maha Singh of Sukarchakia Misl, who had previously received Braj Dev into blood brotherhood by the ceremony of exchanging turban, also switched sides comfortably. He firmly established his authority at Jammu, erected a fort

23 Ibid., p. 307.

24 Ibid., p.308.

25 J.Hutchison and J.Ph.Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol. II, Lahore, 1933, p.547.

26 Ibid, p. 548.

at the south entrance of the pass, leading into Punjab.²⁷

Basholi was another hill chieftancy which suffered a similar fate. A bordering chief (Raj Singh of Chamba) had invaded the Basholi districts and plundered the inhabitants. The Sikhs were called to repel the enemy and defend the fort of Basholi, but after performing the required services, they became pleased with their new situation and refused to relinquish it.²⁸

Sansar Chand, who had always been ambitious to lay his hands over the fort of Kangra, asked the Kanhiya Misl to help him seige the stronghold.²⁹ In 1781-82, it did fall into their hand but by strategm the Sikhs captured it much to chagrin of Sansar Chand.³⁰

When there was a joint venture by a group of misls, the territory conquered was jointly occupied by the misls. The Kanhiya and Ramgarhias continued ruling common territories for a long time. Ahmad Shah Batala points out that they divided the revenue of Batala equally among

²⁷ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.I, London, 1798, Reprint Patiala, 1970, p.287.

²⁸ Ibid, p.270.

²⁹ J. Hutchison and J.Ph. Vogel, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 177.

³⁰ George Forster, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 208-209.

themselves.³¹ Similarly the Bhangis and Kanhiyas collectively captured Lahore in 1765 and partitioned the city between themselves.³² Kasur was divided among three principal allies: Bhangis, Ramgarhias and Kanahiyas. Out of four parts into which the town was split up, two parts were retained by Bhangis and one each by the Ramgarhia and Kanhiya.³³ Similarly Mehraj was jointly administered by all Phulkian Chiefs. Amritsar which belonged to all Sikh Sardars was dotted with misls' fortresses and Katras or bazars, such as Katra Bhangia and Katra Kanhiyas. The Sardars had also constructed bungahs (residential quarters) around the tank at Amritsar.

The altercations that the misls had among themselves, bring out another interesting fact. Since the entire region was dotted with a number of Sardars with nearly the same strength and resources, any attempt to disturb this status quo meant a call for a battle. A Sardar whose power and resources seemed to be on the rise, was considered a potential threat. Therefore, any conflicting issue with this Sardar would become a pretext for a battle. Contending

³¹ Ahmad Shah Batala, *Tawarikh-i-Hind*, Appendix to Vol.I of *Undat-ut-Tawarikh* of Sohan lal Suri, p. 14. Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, op.cit., p. 98.

³² Ibid, p. 98.

³³ Ibid., p. 98.

forces entered into various alliances and established innumerable political equations. Thus these battles were not localised or limited to two parties alone but were of colossal magnitude, where the entire region got divided into power blocs.

After the death of Nawab Kapur Singh, the next Sardar who was bestowed similar kind of respect, was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He was generally referred to as 'Baddi Sarkar' or 'Panth Ke Malik' Nearly all the Sikh Sardars who mattered in any way were in debt to Jassa Singh for military and moral support.³⁴ When this revered Sardar was challenged by the rising power of Ramgarhia, he left no stone unturned to force the Ramgarhias into an exile in the territory of Malwa.³⁵ This he did by forming a confederacy where he not only allied with Charat Singh Sukarchakia, Nar Singh Chamariwala, but also won over the Bhangis and Kanhiyas, who were initially allies of the Ramgarhias.³⁶

Similarly when Kanhiya Misl began to assert itself,

³⁴ *Ram Sukha Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, ed. Joginder Kaur, Patiala, 1981, p.40.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 41, It is pointed out that Ramgarhias barring Ranjit Singh Lakhpuria appear to have been important exception among Sikh Sardars and misldars who had not received Jassa Singh's patronage in some form or other.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.41.

Mahan Singh Sukarchakia, along with Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katoch, formed an alliance to nip this power at the very infant stage itself.³⁷

Misls and the Concept of Territory

The importance of the concept of a territory for a misl can be judged from the fact that certain social norms prevalent in the period gave further boost to this concept. One such was the practice of 'chahdar dalna' or Karewa or by which the brother of the deceased was to marry his widow and thus succeed through the woman to the estate.³⁸ The Karewa marriages were universally acknowledged as lawful among the Jat Sikhs and the issue was as competent to succeed to landed and personal property.³⁹ If a widow chose to refuse this new alliance, she was at liberty to do so, but in that case, her life was as miserable and austere as that of an ordinary Hindu widow. However, if the widow happened to marry an unconnected family with different clan or caste, the marriage was considered irregular, little

³⁷ Khushwaqat Rai, *Tawarikh-i-Sikhan*, p. 92. Ali-ud-din Mufti, *Ibratnama*, Vol. 1, p.278; Cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, "The Kanhiyan Misl: Its Rise and Fall," PPP, April 1986, p.115.

³⁸ Lepel Griffin, "The law of Inheritance to Chiefship", PPP, April 1972, p. 150.

³⁹ Ibid. p.150.

better than a concubinage and the issue had no right to succeed to the property--real or personal, of the father and could only claim a bare maintenance.⁴⁰ Even marriage of a widow to the cousin of her husband was considered less reputable and the legitimacy of the offsprings was at stake.⁴¹ Such has been noticed in the case of Phulkian Chiefs, where Ala Singh's grandson, Himmat Singh was devoid of the chiefship, since his widowed mother had married the deceased's cousin Sardul Singh and thereby Himmat Singh was regarded an issue of an irregular marriage.

This belief was in consonance with the prevalent behavioural pattern, where attachment to land was so strong that attempts were made to minimise the loss of land or territory. A widow remarrying into another clan or caste automatically meant transference of property and land rights. So, to revert even this form of loss, the Sikhs took to the practice of Karewa, by which the landed property remained within the family. Similarly it has been pointed out that though in the early stages succession to chiefship was never hereditary, in the later years

⁴⁰ Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, New Delhi, 1977, p.31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

chieftancy became limited to a particular family.⁴² In case the sardars had no sons, Sardari was conferred upon the nephew or an adopted son. Jhanda Singh Bhangi, was the adopted son of Sardar Hira Singh and Nar Singh Chamryari was the adopted son of Sardar Sawal Singh, who with the sanction of Gurmatta, succeeded to all the Chief's estate.⁴³ As Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had no son, his nephew Bhag Singh became his successor.⁴⁴ Thus the Sardars who, with the passage of time, tried to covet a stronger power base for themselves, were eager that the reigns of government stayed in their hand, even if that meant to adopt a son for heir purposes. Thereby inheritance of all landed right remained within the reigning family itself.

⁴² According to Ahmad Shah Batala, the founder of the Ramgarhia Misl was Khushal Singh, a Jat and his successor Anand Singh was also a Jat but later the leadership of the misl went into the hands of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (Carpenter by Profession) and his brothers. Similarly the chiefship of Bhangi Misl did not remain in the family of its founder Chajja Singh but went over to his companion Bhoma Singh and after Bhoma Singh, Hari Singh was made the Chief. After the death of Gurbaksh Singh (Misdar of Bhoma Singh) his Nephew Gujjar Singh was ignored in favour of Lahna Singh Kahlon, who was an officer in the contingent of Misdar. Ahmed Shah Batala, Appendix to Daftar I of Sohan Lal Suri's *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* pp. 15,18. cited from Dr. Bhagat Singh, *Sikh polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, op.cit., p. 95.

⁴³ Lepel Griffin, "The Law of Inheritance to Chiefship", PPP, April. 1972. p. 167.

⁴⁴ Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar, ed. Joginder Kaur, op.cit., p. 4

Misls and their Military Organisation

However, it may be pointed out at this juncture, that territorial acquisition could only be rendered possible, if the Chief had a strong military power base geared to face offensive and defensive situation. Lepel Griffin reveals, "in those days every village became a fort, built on a highmound to overlook the plain country, with but one entrance and narrow lanes in which two men could hardly walk abreast. A neighbour was synonymous with an enemy and the husbandmen ploughed their field with matchlock by their side."⁴⁵ The interior of the village was well equipped to meet any stout resistance. Apart from Kutcha fort with large bastions and its walls pierced with holes for musketry, there was also a large mud building which was somewhat like a citadel to which inhabitants could retreat as a last resort. It also had a long range of stables, innumerable circular huts that contained the supplies of garrison and under the bastion were small apartments for accomodation.⁴⁶ But this does not mean that chieftancies were devoid of specialised armed units to take care of

⁴⁵ Lepel H. Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, New Delhi, 1977, p.17.

⁴⁶ William Barr, *A March from Delhi to Peshawar and from thence to Kabul with the mission of Lt. Sir. C.M. Wade KT.C.B. including travels in Punjab; visit to the city of Lahore and a narrative of operation in Khyber Pass undertaken in 1839*, Patiala, 1970, pp. 28-29.

offensive and defensive warfares, for accounts point out to cavalry units colloqually known as 'Kathiwand'; infantry units and artillery divisions. The cavalry was the most popular unit among the Sikh misldars. It constituted a large chunk of the Sikh army, which is obvious from the high figures of horsemen under the Punjab chiefs.⁴⁷ "They found their own horses and received a double share of prize money. Each Chief in proportion of his means furnished horses and arms to his retainers, who were called *bargirs* and as the first tribute exacted from a conquered district was horses, the infantry soldier was after a successful campaign generally transformed into a trooper".⁴⁸

In contrast the infantry unit of the Indian armies and the Sikhs in particular were in a despicable state as can

⁴⁷ Foreign and political Department 26 Sep-28Dec 1780, Secret Programme, In a letter to sir Eyre Coote Commander in Chief of the forces in India, it was pointed out "The Sikhs and the Gujjars were mostly horsemen and they are like Marathas in that as they commence hostilities wherever they go" Alexander Dow in 1768 computed the Sikh army at 60,000 good horses (The History of Hindustan, 2 Vols London 1768 Vol. II Appendix 83,); Which was seconded by Ghulam Hussain in Siyar-ul-Mutakherin in 1768. James Browne in 1785 estimated the full strength of Sutlej Sikhs and trans Sutlej Sikh as 73,000 horses and George Thomas in 1799 wrote their total strength as 60,000 horses.

⁴⁸ Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, op.cit., pp. 513-514, and also Lepel Griffin, *Rulers of India: Ranjit Singh*, Delhi, 1957, pp. 85-86.

be gathered from the description of Mughal infantry in the 18th century "a multitude of people assembled together without regard to rank and file, some with swords and targets who could never stand the shock of a body of horses; some bearing matchlocks which in the best of order can produce but very uncertain fire; some armed with lances too long or too weak to be of any service even if ranged with utmost regularity of discipline. Little reliance could be placed on them. To keep night watches and to plunder defenceless people was their greatest service except there being a prerequisite to their commanders who received a fixed sum of every man and hired every man at a more or less price. In short, infantry was more a rabble of half armed men than anything else, being chiefly levies brought into the field by petty zamindars or men belonging to the jungle tribes.⁴⁹ Lepel Griffin beautifully sums up the position of the Sikh infantry, "The infantry soldier was considered altogether inferior to the cavalry and was in time of war left behind to garrison forts, look after the women or to follow as best he could, the fighting forces, until he in turned could afford to change his status and buy or steal a horse for his own use.⁵⁰ They consisted of

⁴⁹ Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of Mughal Empire*, London, 1763, p.417.

⁵⁰ Lepel Griffin, *Rulers of India: Ranjit Singh*, op.cit., p.133. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.I, op.cit., p.331.

khidmatgars, beldars, pahlwans and the like.⁵¹ The only division of infantry which enjoyed any respect was the Akalis. These were fanatical bodies of devotees, who dressed in dark blue and wore around their turban steel quoites. These men were generally the first one to storm a town and often did excellent service but they were lawless and uncertain and in peaceful times enjoyed boundless licences.⁵²

The Misl Army and the Economy

If horses formed an important part of the Sikh army, then the question arises from where did they procure their horses? Predatory warfare was one important source, as it has been pointed in a letter from F.P. Wendel addressed to Captain Harper that the French Chief's party perished completely since all horses were killed or caught by the Sikhs.⁵³

However apart from this stop gap arrangement for

⁵¹ Mahan Singh had four important pahlwans: Nadir Singh Dalpatia, Tara Singh Chinna, Khushal Singh and Fateh Khan Awan. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, 22. Cited from Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of Punjab during the 18th Century*, New Delhi, 1993, p.78.

⁵² Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, op.cit., p. 514.

⁵³ Foreign and Political Department, Fort William, 12, March 1776.

procuring horses, the prime source area was the Manjha district, which is known for its breed of horses.⁵⁴ The 'Dunnee breed' is found from beyond the River Jhelum (C.Hydaspes) where the country is dry and elevated.⁵⁵ These animals are exclusively fed on barley and a kind of creeping grass called 'doab' which is considered most nutritive.⁵⁶ Not much is known in particular of the horse breeding centres of the Sikh independant chieftancies but Ranjit Singh had studs and extensive breeding centre for horses. Ganesh Das Vadehra points out that in Sind Sagar Doab there is a town Chakwal which is said to breed fine horses. Another significant area in Sind Sagar Doab where fleet foot horses of strength and fine colour are bred, is in Son Kesar.⁵⁷ The districts of Rawalpindi, Attock, Peshawaur, were also famous for horses.⁵⁸

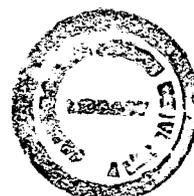
54 Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Oxford, 1973, p. 10.

55 Ibid. Vol.1, p.11.
George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.I. He writes, "The province of Lahore, Multan are noted for a breed of the best horses of Hindustan." p.334.

56 Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, op.cit., p.11.

57 Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, translated and edited by J.S. Griwal and Indu Banga, *Early 19th Century Punjab*, Amritsar, 1975, pp.47-48.

58 Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Military System of the Sikh 1799-1849*, Delhi, 1964, p. 208.



Since cavalry formed an important segment of the military prowess of Afghanistan, it has been pointed out that from its own district as well as from its contiguity to Tartary and Persia, one could procure good horses at moderate rate.⁵⁹ Thus trade links with these countries must have further provided access to so important an animal. These animals, which were sometimes sent to India under the name of Toorkmun horses, were reared in Balkh and the eastern parts of Toorkmania in the districts of Andkhoo and Maimuna as also on the banks of Oxus.⁶⁰ These horses, however, are of much inferior breed to the horses of Bokhara, the 'Merve' and 'Shurukhs'.⁶¹ Though reared in Toorkistan, they were only used as baggage horses or hacks. The reason for a very few genuine Toorkman horses been sent across Hindu Kush, was the limited number of purchases. The Afghan Chiefs and Ranjit Singh being the sole ones, as these horse were highly priced⁶² Since its procurement became an expensive dealing, Ranjit Singh made access to such priced horses, by entering into an

⁵⁹ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.II, op.cit., p.37.

⁶⁰ Alexander Burnes, *Travel into Bokhara*, Book I, op.cit., p. 274.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 274-275.

⁶² Ibid, p. 275. These horses were sold at 200 tillas as compared to the inferior horses sold at 100 tillas (650 Rupees).

arrangement with the chiefs of Peshawar who had to pay as an annual tax fifty to sixty Toorkman horses.⁶³

Thus George Thomas who fought against the Sikhs many a times wrote "...the size and speed of their (Sikhs) horses render their appearance imposing and formidable and superior to meet most of cavalry in Hindustan".⁶⁴ Even when the British met a tough resistance in form of plunder and depradation from the Sikhs in the Gangetic doab, they felt the ineffectiveness of their infantry units to meet such fearless challenges and attention began to be paid to bolster their cavalry sections.⁶⁵

The importance of this animal for the Sikhs be gauged from the fact that when Puttee, a royal horse stud centre, was attacked by an epidemic disease, a Mohammedan, who resided in a neighbourhood sanctuary is believed to have cured the horses. Filled with gratitude the Sikhs in

⁶³ . Ibid, p. 276. Sohanlal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Dattar III Part I, p. 4, translated by V.S. Suri. Ranjeet Singh Sent order to Sardar Tej Singh asking him to take swift and well bred horses from Nazim of Peshawar.

⁶⁴ George Thomas, *Military Memories of Mr. George Thomas*; Compiled and arranged by William Francklin, Calcutta, 1803. Cited from H.R. Gupta, *History of Sikhs*, Vol.IV, op.cit., p. 376.

⁶⁵ Foreign and Political Department, 12-30 June, 1783. Secret proceeding, 4th January - 1st April 1779. Secret proceedings, 28 Dec., 1776, no.3.

return, repaired and beautified his temple.⁶⁶ Another interesting fact that would reveal the esteem in which the cavalry unit was placed, was the practice of paying large sum through jagirs to ghurcharhas (Horsemen) in recognition of their meritorious services: Dayal Singh, Pathar Singh, Diwan Singh Batalia, Kapur Singh, Amir Singh, Gajja Singh are some examples.⁶⁷

The Sikhs however, speedily became famous for effective use of the matchlocks when mounted and this skill is said to have descended to them from their ancestors in whose hands the bow was a fatal weapon.⁶⁸ Small cannons, swivels, wall pieces, Zamburaks and seige guns were a few pieces of artillery popular among the chieftancies.⁶⁹ Raja Prithi Singh of Nurpur had 200 swivels and ten cannons; Sahib Singh Bhangi gave the pompous title of Shah Basant to his prized possession. Gulab Singh Bhangi and Sahib Singh

⁶⁶ Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, op.cit., pp.11-12.

⁶⁷ Lepel Griffin, *The Punjab Chiefs*, op.cit., pp.192, 249, 461 and 463. *Foreign and Political Proceedings* 29, Dec. 1849; No. 49, January 1853, No.228, 14 January 1853, Nos. 219 and 235; 27 May 1853, No. 219.

⁶⁸ J.D. Cunnigham, *A History of Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1972, p.99. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.I, op.cit., pp. 331-332.

⁶⁹ Zamburaks were light guns built of cast brass and iron cylinders and were between 3 to 6 pounds. Cited from Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Military System of the Sikhs 1799-1849*, Delhi, 1964, p.6.

Sialkotia had four pieces of cannon and eight wall pieces and fifty zamburak or camel guns.⁷⁰ They did not have many field guns and a very few heavy guns. The Chiefs were usually armed with steel caps, breast plates, arm guards, gauntlets which all acted as protective shields.⁷¹ That the artillery wing began to gain importance over the period of time, is evident from the fact that specialised officers were appointed to take care of this wing. William'O Brien under Sansar Chand of Kangra, Sultan Ali under Muzaffar Khan of Multan, Ghosi Khan and Mian Khushal Topchi under Mahan Singh Sukarchakia and Imam Shah Hussain under Jodh Singh Wazirabad were some of the artillery officers of the chiefs of Punjab during the late 18th century.⁷² Like the Mughal and Maratha predecessors the Sikhs gave dignified and pompous names to their guns such as Fateh Jang, Jang-i-Bijli, Sher-a-Daham. Sometimes the guns were named after their founders or places where they were cast for instance Top Dhian Singh Wali or Top Nakodar Wali.⁷³ However these piece of artillery became more of a status symbol and

⁷⁰ Foreign and Secret consultation 23 Jan 1797 no.5; 20 Feb. 1797, no. 16; 7 July 1797 no.3.

⁷¹ C. Grey, *European Adventures of Northern India 1785-1849*, edited by H.L.O.Garrett, Patiala, 1970, p.15.

⁷² Punjab Government Records Ludhiana Agency 1808-1815, 11, pp.188-89. Lepel Griffin, *The Punjab Chiefs*, op..cit., p. 79.

⁷³ Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Military System of the Sikhs*, op.cit., p.238.

therefore gradually lost their utility value. It has been pointed out that the big *Zamzama* gun called Bhangian Wali-Top changed hands several times from the Sukarchakia to the Chattas and from the latter to the Bhangi and was not used at all in any campaign.⁷⁴ Thus George Forster who must have also observed these lacunae wrote, "Though some artillery is maintained, it is awkwardly managed and its uses ill understood".⁷⁵

It was in the ineffectiveness of artillery that made the Sikhs take to guerilla tactics. The important devices usually employed by them were hanging of flanks, obstructing passages of rivers, cutting of supplies, hitting and running away. And it was lack of heavy gun to blow up the forts that made the Sikhs resort to stratagems such as bribing the inmates, false pretext, funds blockading with a view to starving out the enemy's garrison during a siege craft.

Arms and ammunitions were manufactured in important centres like Kotli Loharan, Lahore, Amritsar, Wazirabad and

⁷⁴ Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of Punjab During the late 18th Century*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 79.

⁷⁵ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.1, op.cit., p.331.

Kashmir.⁷⁶ Every year purchases worth thousand rupees were made from these centres.⁷⁷ However some prominent Chiefs like Dogra Rajas, Jamadar Khushal Singh, Tej Singh and Lehna Singh had magazines of their own use.⁷⁸ Sansar Chand of Kangra had also established a factory of small arms.⁷⁹ These chieftains appointed for the magazine of the artillery a superintendent (darogha) and writer (muharir) for maintenance of records. The magazines were well stocked and rules were framed for purchasing the various articles for magazine and maintaining proper accounts of expenditure.⁸⁰ Guns of different sizes were cast in the mistri khana (workshops). Muskets (tufang hindustani) pistols and flintlocks (banduk chakmakhi) too were manufactured here.⁸¹

However, it is important to bring to the limelight the

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- ⁷⁶ Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Military system of the Sikhs*, op.cit., p.240.
- ⁷⁷ Foreign and Secret consultation 25 Jan 1841: The blacksmith of Lahore were given Rs. 2000/- for making balls
- ⁷⁸ Foreign and Political Department, 18th July, 1838.
- ⁷⁹ C.Grey, *European Adventures of Northern India*, op.cit., p. 18. J. Hutchison and J. Ph.Vogel, *Punjab Hill States*, Vol.I, op.cit., p. 193.
- ⁸⁰ *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prbhakar*, edited by Joginder Kaur, Patiala, 1981, p.15.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., p.15.

fact that the army at this time was not compartmentalised into separate infantry, cavalry and artillery units but instead was divided into *derah* which were organised along clannish lines⁸². Thus each *derah* must have presented an admixture of all these three wings. Direct recruitment was made only for personal (Khas) troops of the chief and the majority of the soldiers were recruited and also commanded by Sarkardas and Jamadars.⁸³ Thus the link between the soldier and the chief was rather loose and as it was held together by ties of clannish affinity, which relegate the control commanded by the chiefs to the background.

In addition there was no system of rank or gradation⁸⁴ and each soldier was viewed as an equal partner which made it easier for him to snap this tender link and therefore we notice that the entire period is dotted with anecdotes of frequent transfers of allegiance or desertion.

It was the same concept of parity that seemed to have governed while sharing the profit accrued from plunder and depredation. Before delving into the issue it would be important to highlight the fact that the abnormal weakness

⁸² Ibid, p. 14.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 14.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.15.

for brigandage, which was so rampantly followed by the Sikhs was because of the state's unwillingness to undertake the responsibility of supplying, free of charge, the necessities of war. The soldiers were required to find their own horses, weapons, uniforms and tents and rations, in short, almost everything that was needed for a military career.⁸⁵ And as regard to the payment of salary, the most common mode was the *fasalandari* system under which the soldiers were paid every six months at the time of harvest.⁸⁶ This was partly in kind and partly in cash.⁸⁷ However, they found it difficult to make both ends meet particularly when the responsibility of making provision for their own arms, equipments and food grain fell on them alone. Thus, predatory attack was the only solution to their needs which, over the period of time, became rampant. Prinsep has explained how after every campaign the fruits of victory, including the new territory, were portioned out by the Sikhs according to the amount of services rendered. The *Sardaree* or the Chief's portion, being first divided off the remainder, was separated into parties or parcels for each *Surkund* and these were again subdivided and

85 Ibid., p.14

86 William Franklin, *The Military Memoirs of George Thomas*, op.cit., p.113.

87 Ram Sukha Rao's *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, edited by Jogindar Kaur, Patiala, 1981, p.14.

parcelled out to inferior leaders according to the number of horses they brought into the field. Each took his portion as a cosharer and held it in absolute independence.⁸⁸ Though beneficial to the individual fighter, this system, apart from providing a powerful impetus to the love of plunder, resulted in the perilous co-parcenary system which went a long way in hollowing the very foundation of their power.⁸⁹

Misldar as an 'Independent King'

It was the same streak of parity that was adhered to in all administrative arrangements. Each of them acted as an autonomous ruler strictly in accordance with the dictates of his mind and interest. Each leader and each individual established his government wheresoever he could in Punjab.⁹⁰ Thus the distinction accorded to the Chiefs was a military necessity, a 'self preserving regard nothing more'.⁹¹ The subordination of a misldar to a Sardar as

⁸⁸ Prinsep, *The origin of Sikh Power in Punjab: Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 1834, reprint Patiala, 1970, p.32.

⁸⁹ H.R. Gupta, *The History of the Sikh*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1978, p.13.

⁹⁰ J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*, Amritsar, 1972, p.106

⁹¹ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.II, op.cit., p.285.

described even by Ahmad Shah Batala remained all important upto the point of territorial occupation, when the misldar got a share in the territory conquered.⁹² However it stopped short of government and administration within the territory of the misldar as of the Sardar.⁹³

Thus each individual horseman, irrespective of the size of property in possession, was an arbitrary chief.⁹⁴ Forster admits that 'though on the first view the Sique government bears an appearance of aristocracy, but on closer examination one discovers a large view of popular power, branching through many of its parts'.⁹⁵

Thus, even though Charat Singh and Gujjar Singh led a joint expedition into Sind Sagar Doab, on its successful conclusion they partitioned the conquered territories among themselves and after which all appointments and assignments were left to the discretion of the individual Sardars. Charat Singh appointed Dharam Singh to guard Miani and Pind

⁹² Indu Banga, *The Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1978, p.32.

⁹³ Ibid., p.33.

⁹⁴ Charles Baron Hugel, *Kashmir and Punjab: Containing a particular Account of the Government and Character of the Sikhs*, Jammu, 1972, p.273.

⁹⁵ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, op.cit., pp. 328-329.

Dadan Khan, made Tehal Singh Chachhi the thanadar of Dalaur to look after the salt mines; appointed Sehaj Singh to the faujdari of Dhan; made Dal Singh Gill the Nazim of Ahmadbad assigning him a jager in the Rachna Doab. On the other hand, Gujjar Singh gave Rawalpindi in jagir to Milkha Singh, appointed Ran Singh as the tappadar of Sarai Kala and Jodh Singh Atariwala as tahsildar of Pothohar, while Tappa of Tarali and fortress of Rotala was conferred upon his own brother Chet Singh.⁹⁶

Similarly when Lahore was captured by three Sardars, Lehna Singh Bhangi, Gujjar Singh Bhangi and Sobha Singh Kanhiya, in 1765, it was ironically not occupied jointly. The city and the adjoining territories were partitioned among the three Sardars, each of whom established his own administration in his own jurisdiction.⁹⁷

Sialkot was another city which got divided among Sardar Jiwan Singh, Sahib Singh, Natha Singh Sahid, Mohan Singh Atarwalia. They divided the city of Sialkot among

⁹⁶ J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*, op.cit., p.106.

⁹⁷ Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, p. 128. Cited from Indu Banga, *The Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, op.cit., p.30. J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essay in Sikh History*, op.cit., p.90.

themselves covering each locality, lane and shop.⁹⁸

Even the kith and kins of the Sardars preferred to have their own areas of dominance. Such was the case with Sardar Bhag Singh's two sons who preferred to establish separate forts in the city of Hallowal by the name of Qila Sobha Singh and Qila Suba Singh in Samvat 1845 and 1848 respectively.⁹⁹

Even Amristar which had over the period of time assumed significant importance for the Sikhs, was dotted with innumerable forts. Bhangi Sardar Hari Singh established his fort in the southwest of Harmandir; Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in the South east, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in the east and Jai Singh Kanhiya in the north. Here they established separate 'katras'. A walled locality with only one main gate, the Katra had its own autonomus administration. The people paid ground rent 'tehzamini' for the plots of land they occupied and Chaukidari for the protection of their property.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ganesh Das Vadehra *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, op.cit., p.84.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 76-77.

¹⁰⁰ J.S.Grewal, "Historical Development of Amristar in Retrospect," Fauja Singh (ed.), *The City of Amritsar*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 377.

Another interesting example of a misldar who was independantly managing his affairs and informally behaving like a king in an independent kingdom, was Charat Singh Sukarchakia. According to Char Bagh-i-Punjab, Charat Singh Sukarchakia at the very outset of his career as a misldar of the Bhangis, was aspiring for a political role.¹⁰¹ He established his *de facto* rule over a large chunk of territory in Rachna Doab, wherein the early 1750s, he had established his *rakhi* or protectorate around the village inherited from his father. In 1761. he had maintained his independence against the Afghan Governor of Lahore and then rebuilt and fortified Gujranwala as his capital. In 1764, when he conquered the district of Gujarat, he constructed forts and appointed his own commandants and faujdars. In 1765, he appointed his own governor at Wazirabad, gave a jagir of Rs.4000/- to a commandant, granted villages to some of his old servants and asserting his superior rights over Rai Jalal in Southern Rawalpindi district. By 1774 he became so ambitious that he helped a Hindu prince against his father's overlord Jhanda Singh Bhangi.¹⁰²

And very soon the principle of hereditary succession,

¹⁰¹ Ganesh Das Vadehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, p. 135. Cited from Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the 18th and the 19th Centuries*, op.cit., p.96.

¹⁰² J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*, op.cit., p. 96.

which came to be established in all misls, was adopted as much by misldars as by the Chief themselves.¹⁰³

As early as 1752, Hukumat Singh, who is speculated to have commanded only 1500 horses and 500 foot soldiers, was issuing orders to the amils of pargana Kahnuwan from the town itself.¹⁰⁴ Similarly Amar Singh, a misldar of Jai Singh Kanhiya, had his own independent seal in the *Yar dasht patta* of Oct. 19, 1789.¹⁰⁵ Even Gurbaksh Singh Kanhiya, during the lifetime of his father Jai Singh Kanhiya (who still was the Sardar of the misl), issued orders which bore his name.¹⁰⁶ Thus each Sardar (which obviously includes a misldar who was a Sardar in his own territory) was exercising power and authority in his own name.

Every Sardar set up his own mint in the territory under control and thus the entire region was strewn with

¹⁰³ Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the 18th and the 19th Centuries*, op.cit., p.97.

¹⁰⁴ B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori, Simla*, 1969, pp.206-211.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.240.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.248.

mint houses.¹⁰⁷ Thus undoubtedly the balance of power was heavily tilted in favour of local independence. But then within this framework the centripetal forces did try to create an atmosphere where power and authority could depict itself as being vested in the Sardar. The Sardar adopted a court paraphernalia to give a touch of regality. The court procedure and etiquettes observed by Jassa Singh were said to be elaborate and formal.¹⁰⁸ The diwan, wakil, bakshi from other rulers and the secretarial staff (*munshis* and *mutasaddi*) attended the derbar formally attired. They sat at places fixed for them according to their relative rankings.¹⁰⁹ All attendant (*Khidmatgars*) mace bearers (*Chobdars*) and herald (*naqibs*) remained standing with folded hands. The diwan and bakshi received precedence over others in presenting their papers to chiefs and getting signature on them. After them the commanders, the courtiers and others brought the matter concerning their respective spheres. The Sardar was assisted by a range of officers that constituted the central secretariat (*Munshigari* or *daftar-i-Sarkari*). These included *Khulasa Nawais* (prepared Summary of all letters) *mir munshi* (Chief Secretary)

¹⁰⁷ Ganesh Das Vadehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, p. 132. Cited from Bhagat Singh, *Sikh polity in the 18th and the 19th Centuries*, op.cit., p.131.

¹⁰⁸ Ram Sukh Rao's *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, op.cit., p.43.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.43.

Murasala Nawais and Parwana Nawais (drafted letters); darogha (superintendent of treasury) and tahvidar (keeper of cash).¹¹⁰

As regards to Sardars' relationship with the vassals, it has been pointed out that besides acknowledging the Sardar's suzerainty, most of the chiefs paid Nazrana to him and their vakils were stationed at the headquarters of the misl.¹¹¹ To ensure the fidelity of the hill Rajas, the Sardars adopted the Mughal practice of retaining as hostages at his court a prince or a near relative of the subjugated chief.¹¹² When Suckhet Singh of fort Gobind Garh wanted to enter into a truce with Amar Singh of Patiala, the latter insisted that Suckhet Singh's son, along with four or five principle officers should be give to him as hostages.¹¹³

Forts as Administrative Units of Misdars

To streamline the administration at local level, the

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp.43-45.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.27.

¹¹² J.Hutchison and J.Ph.Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, op.cit., p.74.

¹¹³ Lepel Griffin, *The Rajas of Punjab*, op.cit., p.37.

forts became effective administrative units.¹¹⁴ The area commanded by one or more forts formed a revenue circle (*girda*) which seems to have changed its boundaries frequently. Wherever these boundaries were partly or entirely co-terminus with those of Mughal *paragana*, the term *paragana* has been used for them.¹¹⁵ The term *ta'alluqa* too has been used for administrative subdivision.¹¹⁶ The *thanadar* of the forts had administrative and military charges of the surrounding area. He was primarily concerned with maintenance of law and order. The term *thanadar* was interchangeable with *Kardar*, which was more frequently used. He was the most important administrator outside the headquarters of the chief. It appears that when his function as a revenue collector was underlined, the term *tehsildar* was used for his office.

¹¹⁴ Ram Sukh Rao's *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, op.cit., p.46.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.46.

¹¹⁶ Infact a comparison of the list of *talluqas* in the territories of the Sikh chiefs compiled from contemporary and near contemporary sources and compared with the list of *parganas* in the *Ain-i-Akbari* shows that atleast fifty to sixty names were common. This fact has been pointed out by Veena Sachdeva in *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the late 18th Century*. The evidence supports the view put forth by Indu Banga that the terms *paragana* and *talluqa* were used synonymously by Sikh Chiefs. Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1978, pp.67-69.

The *Kardars* were assisted by *qanungos*, *Chaudharies* and *Muqqadams* and thereby maintained the Mughal pattern of local administration.¹¹⁷

Thus each independent unit pretended to be a miniature Kingdom. As for all practical purposes, the qualitative difference between the *Sardar* and *Misldar* was first minimized and then obliterated and all of them became equally autonomous *Sardars* and the relationship earlier established by the *misl* gradually disappeared. By the last quarter of the 18th century, there were strictly speaking, no chiefs and no *misldars* but only so many *Sardars* of major and minor consequence.

With the death of *Guru Govind Singh*, as it has been referred earlier, the institution of *Guruship* came to an end and the *Guru* was vested in the *Khalsa*. The *Khalsa Panth*, thereby, became an article of living faith with the *Sikhs*. But how far under the aegies of independent *Sardars*, the religious faith of *Khalsa* underline their politics? Undoubtedly, this faith had given them a sense of solidarity, which conspicuously expressed itself in collective action for the maintenance and acquisition of

¹¹⁷ Refer to *Veena Sachdeva, Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the late 18th century, op.cit., pp. 71-77.*

means to political power. But at this juncture, it is important to raise the question, how far could institutions like *Sarbat Khalsa*, which was believed to have been resided by the Guru, and *Dal Khalsa* organised for joint action be successful in their effective functioning?

Forster writing in 1780 pointed out, "from the spirit of independence so invariably infused among them, their mutual jealousies and the rapacious roving temper, the *Siques* at this day are seldom seen cooperating in National concerts, but actuated by the influence of an individual ambition or private distrust they pursue such plans as only coincides with these motives."¹¹⁸ One of the letters in the foreign and political department gives account of several conferences of the *Khalsa Sikh* chief under the direction of Rai Singh by which an agreement was concluded with his excellency, the Wazir. They set aside their former connection with Zabita Khan and united themselves with the Wazir. However, the final transaction was yet to be completed and when nothing was becoming, the chiefs accused Rai Singh of misleading their judgement, "we told you by no means to renounce your engagement with Zabita Khan that the other side could not be depended on; yet you regarded not

¹¹⁸ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol.I, op.cit., p.291.

our opinion."¹¹⁹ It was not the entire Khalsa that formulated decision, but it was a selected few that governed the politics of the period.

In 1805 Malcom observed with reference to Gurmatta that 'every shadow of the concord which once formed the strength of Sikh nation, seemed to be extinguished.'¹²⁰ When Zaman Shah marched to Punjab in 1798 and reached Lahore, on the suggestion of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, a meeting of the Sarbat Khalsa was called in Amritsar.¹²¹ However Sahib Singh of Patiala 'declined the invitation to be present at the conference.'¹²²

The ineffectiveness of the Dal Khalsa did not remain oblivious to the rest of the contenders because when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia proposed to help the Mughal Emperor, he replied "If the addressee and the whole body of Sikh Sardars can form a binding confederacy and accompany his fortunate stirupp, the Empire will be restored..... The addressee should then send an arzi, under the seal of the

¹¹⁹ Foreign and Political Department, 23 Sep., 1776.

¹²⁰ John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, London, 1812, p.117.

¹²¹ Ganesh Das Vadehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, p.140, Cited from Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the 18th and the 19th Centuries*, op.cit., p.144.

¹²² Foreign and Political Proceedings, 16 Oct., 1779.

whole body of Sardars, by the hands of Sardar of eminence and character chosen from among themselves."¹²³ The fact that the requirement of a binding confederacy was explicitly put down on paper is an indication that the Sikhs who had originally laboured for a united front, were soon losing ground which is reaffirmed by the fact that there is no further reference of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia acknowledgement to the Mughal Emperor's proposal.

Similarly, in the Sikhs coins struck in 1765 and popularly known as Gobind Shahi coins, the sovereignty was not derived from an individual. But however, it does not follow that sovereignty was vested in the collective entity of Khalsa.¹²⁴ It has been argued that derivation of sovereignty from the Guru and God enabled each individual to assert his independence of any temporal lord.¹²⁵

Similarly in most of the Pindori documents, the Sikh rulers have used the phrase, *Amil-i-Khalsajio, Dharm-i-Khalsajio*. Thus here too, they all invoked God's help and name but the individual Sardar was the sole authority and

¹²³ Calender for Persian correspondence Vol.II, p. 1767-1769, No.849, The King to Jassa Singh, a Sikh Sardar.

¹²⁴ Indu Banga, *The Agrarian System of the Punjab*, op.cit., p. 36.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.36.

power. Thus theocracy in its application to the government of the Sikhs appear to hold a very little importance.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughal and the Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori*, op.cit., p.33.

CHAPTER IV

RANJIT SINGH'S PUNJAB: CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

This chapter seeks to analyse the element of continuity in Ranjit Singh's Punjab in terms of some of the issues like economy, religion, position of Khatri. which we have already discussed in the earlier chapters. It argues that Ranjit Singh was able to shape his kingdom because he manoeuvred and organised existing pattern of trade, services of groups like Khatri, the significance of pilgrimage centre like Amritsar and the tensions between the misls, to the best of his political advantage.

The Sardar's strong urge for self aggrandisement and sense of possession had adversely affected the spirit of agglomeration. Political altercation rising from scramble over land, became the most dominating feature of the period. Apart from armed forces being pitted against each other; political alliances with enemies' enemy, political manoeuvres and crafty dealings became the order of the day¹. It saw the meteoric rise of certain noteworthy misls; which, however, got checkmated by the rest, as a rising misl was always viewed as a potential threat to the established status quo. But the end of 18th century

¹ H.R. Gupta, *History of Sikh*, Vol.IV, Delhi, 1981, p.466.

presented an antithesis to what happened in preceding last quarter of that century. George Forster's prophecy "We may see some ambitious chief led on by his genius and success, and, absorbing the power of his associates, display, from the ruins of their commonwealth, the standard of monarchy" turned true.² For we see yet another invasion of Afghans under Zaman shah brought to the forefront the Sardar of the Sukerchakia Misl. Ranjit Singh and this time the rise was not shortlived but had come to stay for over a good half of the next century. The success story of Ranjit Singh is appealing but then the question arises, what made all the difference? Why was the Sukerchakia Misl successful in areas where other misls suffered set backs?

Ranjit Singh's Subjugation of the Misls.

A well administered, large, almost contiguous territory, extending from the middle Rachna to the middle Chaj and the middle Sind Sagar Doab that Ranjit Singh inherited from his ancestors became his launching pad.³ Ranjit Singh, in a gap of seven years beginning from 1799, became a proud possessor of the two most important cities-Lahore, which has always been associated with

² George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol. I, London, 1798, reprint Patiala, 1970, p. 340

³ J.S. Grewal, *The Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Sita Ram Kohli Memorial Lecture, Patiala, 1981, pp 3-4.

political power as it had, from time immemorial, been the political head quarter of Suba Lahore; and Amritsar, the control of which was inter alia to control or influence the Sikh opinion. Since accession of Lahore invoked the wrath of the Bhangis, who were in possession of the city, it became an important prerequisite to subjugate the Bhangis. Thus after establishing his authority over Lahore, Ranjit Singh began within this period a systematic onslaught commencing with Bhera which was under Jodh Singh Kalawala Bhangi, Chiniot under Jassa Singh Dulu; Sialkot, Gujarat under Sahib Singh Bhangi and terminated by wresting Amritsar in 1805 from the Bhangi.⁴ However he assigned respectable jagirs to the head of dispossessed families, gave them honourable appointment in administration or in army and thereby making use of the institution of jagirdari.⁵ This claim to suzerainty over autonomous chief was a prelude to the annexation of territory.⁶ It was this very political astuteness that went a long way to help Ranjit Singh to consolidate Punjab into a coherent and contiguous bloc.

⁴ Sohan lal suri *umdat-ut-Tawarikh II*, pp 56-57; cited from Bhagat Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Time*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 39. Veena sachdeva, "Subjugation of the Bhangis" in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga (ed.), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Time*, Amritsar, 1980, pp.79-85.

⁵ Veena Sachadeva op. cit. p. 85.

⁶ Indu Banga, *The Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 57.

This suzerain vassal relationship becomes most evident if one takes up the Ahluwalia Misl. The relationship began with a formal alliance between Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Ranjit Singh by the Ahd nama (treaty) of 1802, which was solemnised before the Guru Granth Sahib at Fatehabad.⁷ This was accompanied by dastar badli (an exchange of turbans) to mark the establishment of perpetual friendship and brotherhood. According to this treaty, Fateh Singh and Ranjit Singh were to join in defence and offence and regard each other's friends and foes as their own. Also they were to share equally in all joint conquests and each bearing the expenses of his respective army in these ventures. However Ranjit Singh did not come to the rescue of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, when he was threatened by an alliance of Jodh Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar chand.⁸ Instead the Maharaja left the defence of Jalandhar Doab entirely to Fateh Singh even asking him to leave his territories and come away if the situation became unmanageable.⁹ This accommodating attitude of Ranjit Singh for the Ramgarhias became most obvious in the battle of Sathiala in which Fateh Singh was determined to oust

⁷ Ram Sukha Rao's *Sri-Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar* p.28; edited by Joginder Kaur, Patiala, 1980. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh II* p.51, Cited from Bhagat Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times*, New Delhi, 1990, p.37.

⁸ Ibid, p.29.

⁹ Ibid, p, 29.

the same.¹⁰ Later on, after the death of Jodh Singh Ramgarhia, Ranjit Singh disregarded Fateh Singh's request for the division of the Ramgarhia territories in accordance with the terms of their alliance.¹¹ This makes it evident that contrary to the terms of agreement, where each one was to view the other as equal, Fateh Singh in reality had already relapsed into a subordinate relationship with Ranjit Singh. This position becomes clearer especially when one looks at the expedition where Fateh Singh had been dispatched by Ranjit Singh. In this campaign against Bhimbar, Rajauri, Attaok, Hazara, Multan, Peshawar, Fateh Singh was not entrusted with the supreme command.¹² He acted under either the son or the nominee of the Maharaja. Therefore, Fateh Singh was not placed above the Sardars such as Divan Mohkam Chand, Hari Singh Nalwa, Misar Diwan Chand and Mit Singh Bhadhanian.¹³ Payment of tribute that has been considered as a hallmark of vassalage is also evident from the innumerable references to their meetings and exchange of presents, which actually indicated the payment of nazrana, symbolic of an inferior position.¹⁴ Fateh Singh's vakils were

¹⁰ Ibid, p.29.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 29.

¹² Ibid, p.30.

¹³ Ibid, p.30.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 30.

regularly stationed at the court of Ranjit Singh. There is no reference to an accredited agent of Ranjit Singh permanently stationed at Kapurthala¹⁵ Another interesting fact that brings out the suzerain vassal relationship is that the jagirs that Fateh Singh distributed among some of the important Sardars were reverted to Ranjit Singh, instead of Fateh Singh - the granter, in case the vassal died.¹⁶ Thus would this suggest the continuation of the Mughal practice where the suzerain appropriated a part of mu'amala (vassal's revenue) in addition to the usual tribute?¹⁷

And similarly like the Mughals and the Sikh Chiefs it was a common practice of the Maharaja and his successors to take hostages from the vassal chiefs. After Fateh Singh's return from Jagraon, Ranjit Singh insisted on taking Kunwar Nihal Singh with him; this may be interpreted as Ranjit Singh's inclination to keep Kunwar

¹⁵ Ibid, pp.30-31.

¹⁶ Ibid p. 31.

¹⁷ It has been pointed out by Indu Banga that in Khalsa Darbar records the amount of mu'amala-i- qadim is generally given separately from the amount of nazrana due. For the year 1816, Diwan Amar Nath mentions 65,000 rupees as the mu'amala and 30,000 rupees as the nazrana due from the Raja of Mandi. She also quotes from Nurul Hasan's article to point out that the Mughal rulers attempted to change the character of the tribute payable by the chief into land revenue approximating it to the actual production. Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1978, p.49.

as a hostage.¹⁸ And when the Ahluwalia chief died, Kunwar Nihal Singh was given a Khilat by the Maharaja and had to pay a nazrana of 4,25,000 rupees before succeeding to the throne.¹⁹ Thus even Succession to the gaddi of a vassal principality was controlled by the Maharaja.

Though Ranjit Singh entered into a superior relation with Ahluwalia household under the garb of equal status, he however did not extend this practice to the other misls. In 1805 he took nazrana from Budh Singh Faizullahpuria and allowed him to remain in possession of Jalandhar and at this time nazrana was also paid by Tara Singh Dallewalia.²⁰ His marriage to the daughter of Nakkai chief in no way detered him from conquering the Nakkai territory and Sardar Kahan Singh was compensated by giving a Jagir worth twenty thousand rupees annually.²¹ He also spread his tentacles into the Ramgarhia territory and Jodh

¹⁸ Ram Sukh Rao's *Sri Fateh Pratap Prabhakar*, op. cit., p. 33. Due to some misunderstanding between Ranjit Singh and Fateh Ahluwalia in 1825 Fateh Singh crossed the River Sutlej and went to his possession of Jagraon in the cis sutlej area and sought the British protection there. However the misunderstanding was cleared later.

¹⁹ Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, III Translated by V.S. Suri, Delhi, 1972, pp. 311, 312, 313 & 314.

²⁰ Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* II, p. 61, cited from Indu Banga, op. cit., p.60.

²¹ Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, p.108, cited from Bhagat Singh, op.cit., pp.45-46.

Singh Ramgarhia remained a vassal of the Maharaja for nearly a decade.²² Even Sada Kaur, his mother-in-law, who had been a propelling force to make Ranjit Singh's coveted desires a reality, also had to pay 20,000 rupees as nazrana when she was given wadhni and pattoke across Sutlej in 1808.²³

Thus no Sikh chief of any importance seemed to have escaped Ranjit Singh's suzerain claims. But this claim was not a novel phenomena as we have seen earlier that even the Sikh chiefs adhered to the principle of vassalage what seemed new here was the magnitude of propagation of this concept. This, is also evident from the fact that the department that dealt with accounts of revenue receipts 'Daftari-i-Abwab-ul-Mal or Daftar-i-Maliyat had a separate section that dealt with the Nazrana accounts.²⁴

Another interesting aspect of this suzerain vassal relationship was that the associates of the chief of misls. who enjoyed the status of 'equal partners' in each

²² Amar Nath, *Zafarnama*, p.48; cited from Indu Banga, *Agarian system of the Sikhs*, op. cit., p. 61.

²³ Sohan lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, pp. 177-78. Amar Nath, *Zafarnama*, p. 88: cited from Indu Banga, op.cit., p. 61.

²⁴ Dr. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: A study of 450 orders in Persian*, Amritsar, 1987.

enterprise suffered set back under the aegis of Ranjit Singh. Gurubaksh Singh, an associate of Charat Singh Sukarchakia, had enjoyed a favourable position in all the Sukerchakia dealings. However his grand son, Ganda Singh had to pay a nazrana to Ranjit Singh, on his succession and a year later Wazirabad was taken over by Maharaja and Ganda Singh was given villages worth only 10,000 rupees for subsistence.²⁵.

Ranjit Singh and Non Sikh Chieftains

Ranjit Singh endeavoured at subjugating were not restricted to the Sikh chiefs alone. The dominion of the Khalsa were hemmed in by a ring of independent powers. On its west and south the Sikh territories were cordoned by a double row of Muslim Modern Principalities of these the inner one ran in curve beginning from Jhelum and and passing through Shahpur, Sahiwal, Jhang, Pak Pattan ending at Kasur in the close vicinity of Lahore. The outer row compressed the rulership of Kashmir, Hazara, Peshawar, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan and

²⁵ Sohan Lal Suri *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* (pb tr) II, 5 DG Gujranwala, (1895), p. 26; SR Sialkot 1865; cited from Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the late 18th Century*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 37.

Bahawalpur.²⁶ Ranjit Singh must have sensed the potential danger that these principalities posed as it were these very principalities particularly Muslim chiefs of Pind Dadan Khan, Rasul Nagar, Jhang, Kasur that had sent their agents to Zaman Shah inviting him to invade Punjab and expel the Sikhs from power²⁷

The chiefs of the inner parameter as described above happened to share a few common features. Either they owned a nominal allegiance to the Sikh Sardar as they had already terminated the Suzerain vassal relationship that they had shared with the chiefs and had started functioning as autonomous units. Kasur, which was invaded by Hari Singh Bhangi and was made to pay four lakhs Nazrana, a few years later under Nizammuddin successfully withstood pressure from the Bhangis.²⁸ Similarly Pak Pattan had defended itself successfully against the Hans & Nakkai Sikh chiefs.²⁹ In 1760 Hari Singh Bhangi had occupied chiniot and invaded Jhang. The Sial Chief Inayat-ullah Khan, who had managed to retain the territory

²⁶ Bhagat Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times*, op.cit., p. 35

²⁷ *Foreign and political Department*, 21 August, 1797, No. 10.

²⁸ Ali-ud-din, *Ibratnama*, pp. 378-379, DG Lahore (1883-84), p. 197; cited from Veena Sachdeva, op.cit., P. 27.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.54.

of Jhang by paying tribute, asserted his independence in 1778 and ousted the Bhangi chief.³⁰ Similarly Kharals of Kamalia had lost their territories on both sides of the river to Nakkai chiefs which were recovered in 1790 by Sadat Yar Khan II, the Kharal chief.³¹

Thus undoubtedly these chiefs had become a menace, coveting for power even if that meant inviting Shah Zaman to invade. The Kasur chief Nizamuddin Khan in 1790 had started entertaining ideas of becoming the governor of Lahore on behalf of Zaman Shah.³² Another interesting aspect is that the subjugation of the Sikh chiefs by Ranjit Singh did not automatically transfer the territories of the vassal, i.e., non Sikh Chief, which is a further indication of the loose linkages that the Sikh Sardar and the non Sikh vassal shared. So it became imperative for Ranjit Singh to tighten these loose linkages necessary for shaping a consolidated edifice. Thus the chief of Khushab, Sahiwal, Pind, Dadan Khan were allowed to remain tributaries for a few years before they were ejected from

³⁰ Ibid, p.56.

³¹ Ibid, p.57.

³² *Foreign and Secret consultation*, 25 Jan., 1797, No.9.
Foreign and Political Department, 25 Jan., 1799 No. 26.

their territories.³³ Ahmed Khan, the Sial chief of Jhang, was made tributary in 1803 and his territory was finally annexed in 1816.³⁴ The chief of Mankhera also had paid an ever increasing tribute to Ranjit Singh for over a decade, before Mankhera was annexed in 1821.³⁵

Expansion and Consolidation in the North Western Region

The development on the eastern border of Ranjit Singh's kingdom almost coincided with equally significant development in Afghanistan. The long standing civil war in Afghanistan had finally ended in 1809 when Barakzai Wazir Fateh Khan, supporting the claims of Shah Mahmud, one of the Durrani contenders for powers succeeded in deposing the reigning monarch Shah Shuja. After having established firmly in the land, the Wazir wanted to cross the Sulamain; make Peshawar, Attock, Derajat Multan and Kashmir his stronghold. Coupled with this threat was the danger posed by innumerable Muslim principalities who had lately benefitted from the prolonged civil war raging in

³³ Sohan lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, II, p. 97; cited from Indu Banga, *op. cit.*, p.57.

³⁴ Henry Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh power in Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 1834; Reprint Patiala, 1970, p.45.

³⁵ H.L.O. Garrett and G.L. Chopra, *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh: 1810-1817*, reprint Patiala, 1970, pp. 76, 89, 192 and 216.

Afghanistan and had drifted away from the strict control of Kabul Government.

Their nominal-allegiance was enough a passport for the Kabul rulers to establish their hold over them. Thus establishment of a frontier must have been the immediate reason. The mission commenced with acquisition of the fort of Attock,³⁶ followed by Multan. According to Faqir Azizuddin, in the beginning the chief of Multan was reluctant to pay tribute and troops were despatched against him but the whole matter gradually became 'well settled',³⁷ and he rendered all the obligations expected out of a vassal. However in 1818 on the pretext of accumulation of large arrear, Multan was annexed.³⁸ In 1819 an army was despatched for subjugating Kashmir, which met with feeble resistance. With the occupation of Kashmir, another major obstacle was removed. But unless Peshawar was brought under control, Ranjit Singh's endeavoures were not complete. So in 1822 he subdued Peshawar and the Governor of Peshawar agreed to pay 40,000

³⁶ This led to an open conflict between the two parties Ranjit Singh and Wazir Fateh Khan and the opposing armies met on the plain of Chuch in the vicinity of Attock in 1813. *Foreign and secret proceeding*, 6th June, 1813, No.2.

³⁷ Sohan lal Suri, *Umdat-ut Tawarikh II*, p. 284; cited from *Indu Banga*, op. cit., p.58.

³⁸ N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, reprint 1975, pp. 56-57.

rupees as nazrana and 20,000 rupees in future.³⁹

However, the threat of Dost Muhammad, who was establishing himself firmly in Kabul, made Ranjit Singh replace the system of indirect control through vassalage with that of direct control.⁴⁰ Thus, we see a direct rule was established in 1813 in Dera Ghazi, Dera Ismail Khan, Tonk and Banu. In 1834 Peshawar was annexed to Sikh dominion and brought under direct rule of Lahore Durbar. The pretext of such annexation was the inability to pay the arrears of tribute and ijara, which obviously would have accumulated since periodically Ranjit Singh increased the amount to be given as nazrana.

Apart from being strategically important the annexation of these territories was also important for commercial purposes. Alexander Burnes while tracing the route that carried the merchandise to Kabul pointed out that it passed from Bawalpur and Multan.⁴¹ The other was from Lahore, Attock, Peshawar to Kabul.⁴² But the route

³⁹ H.L.O.Garrett and G.L. Chopra, op. cit., p. 1.

⁴⁰ The same point is made by N. K. Sinha, when he writes 'But not long after the disturbance from Sayyid Ahmad in Peshawar was over, we recognise a change in his policy'. N.K. Sinha, op. cit., p.107.

⁴¹ Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. II, Oxford, 1973, p.414.

⁴² Ibid, p. 415.

from Punjab to Peshawar had become detrimental to trade since the chief of Peshawar imposed an exorbitant tax of sixty rupees on each horse between Peshawar and Lahore.⁴³ Thus no merchant could afford to transport his goods through the territories of Punjab to Peshawar and the Khyber pass between that city and Kabul had also become unsafe.⁴⁴ Along with its strategic importance Peshawar was known for its horses and horsetrade and for a particular form of rice called 'bara'. The 'bara' rice sold at 8 lbs. for a rupee and was exported as a rarity to Persia and Tartary.⁴⁵ The importance of these two items can also be gauged from the fact that the tribute exacted by Ranjit Singh that consisted of sixty horses and some rice, was a tribute peculiar to Peshawar. Thus Peshawar was viewed as an important entreport for commerce which must have been an added incentive for annexation. Ranjit Singh did benefit from bringing these areas into his dominion which is most evident from the flourishing trade carried on in shawls. Moorcraft pointed out that a much larger revenue, than that which was obtained from the land, was realised from the shawl manufacture. Every shawl being stamped and the stamp duty being 26 per cent upon the

⁴³ Ibid, p. 418.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.418.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.325.

estimated value.⁴⁶ Besides a considerable sum was raised by duties upon the import of wool and by the a charge upon every shop or workman connected with the manufacture.⁴⁷ The whole value of shawl good manufacture in Kashmir may be estimated at about thirty eight lakhs of rupees per annum.⁴⁸ The trade was carried on by merchants from Turkey, Armenia and Persia. An idea may also be formulated of the value to which these fabrics were manufactured, from the orders placed by Persian court that were about 12,000 rupees.⁴⁹

It would be significant to reveal here that Ranjit Singh's onslaughts on the hills was not without significance. Apart from the cohesion that was rendered by bringing these principalities under his aegis, it provided an access to Ladakh. As a result of its central situation it became the great thoroughfare, an active commercial intercourse between Tibet, Turkistan, China and even Russia on one hand and Kashmir and Punjab, on the other. However, more important it was for the supply of wool

46 W.Moorcraft and G. Trebeck, *Travel in the Himalayan Province of Hindustan*, Vol. II, edited by H. H. Wilson, Delhi, reprint 1971, p. 126.

47 Ibid, p. 126.

48 lbid, p. 126.

49 Alexander Burnes, op. cit., p. 399.

needed for shawls.⁵⁰ About 800 loads were annually exported to Kashmir, to which, by ancient custom and engagement, the export was exclusively confined and all attempts to other countries were punished by confiscations.⁵¹ Moorcraft thus points out that the yarn employed at Amritsar was prepared partly from the wool of Tibet and partly from that of Bokhara. From the former, a third of the fine wool was usually obtained. The latter was of mixed colour and uncertain quality and was suspected of being adulterated with down or fine wool of the Yak. The Tibet wool when picked sold for six or eight Nanak Shahi rupee a seer and the latter, from two to four.⁵²

Similarly the manufacture of 'kais' or silk of Multan which valued from 20 to 120 rupees was encouraged by Ranjit Singh. As from the time he captured the city, he gave clothes, none other than those made of 'kais' and thereby greatly increased the consumption.⁵³ All Sardars wore shashes and scarves of 'Kais'. These were also exported to Khorasan and the duties levied were moderate. The trade of Multan was at a large scale which is evident from the fact that there were forty shroffs, chiefly

⁵⁰ W.Moorcraft and G.Trebeck, op. cit., p. 346.

⁵¹ Ibid, Vol. I, p. 347.

⁵² Ibid, p. 111.

⁵³ Alexander Burnes, op. cit., p. 399.

natives of Shikarpur settled in Multan.⁵⁴

Thus undoubtedly Ranjit Singh while building a secure frontier did have commercial transaction in mind. This gets further authenticated by the fact that Ranjit Singh wanted to extend the southern limit of the frontier right upto Shikarpur.⁵⁵ The annexation of Shikarpur was considered essential both for political and commercial reasons. It commanded the gateways to Khorasan and Central Asia while commercially it lay on a major trade route connecting India with Baluchistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁵⁶

At this juncture it would be important to highlight the fact that the growth of trade was accompanied by growth of innumerable towns most of which had a large proportion of Khattris. Some of these towns were Kaliana, Rohtas, Bahlolpur, Daulatnagar, Hajwala, Gujarat, Wazirabad, Batala, Pind Bhattian and Eminabad.⁵⁷ In many parganas the Khattris were hereditary quanonos such as the

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 399.

⁵⁵ *Foreign and Political Proceedings*, 1st July, 1831, No. 43. N.K. Sinha, op. cit., p. 119.

⁵⁶ Alexander Burnes, op.cit., P. 409.

⁵⁷ Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Char-i-Bagh*, translated and edited by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Early Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Amritsar, 1975, p.27.

Ghais in Rohtas, Badheras in Bahlolpur, Sialkot and Gujarat, Sobitis in Jalalpur, Sahanis in Wazirabad, Nandas in Eminabad, Chopras in Lahore and Puris in Batala.⁵⁸ The Khatris, who had attained the position of diwans, nazims karadars, vakils under the Mughal, lost this patronisation after the Sikhs established their control.⁵⁹ The Sikhs who had predatory activities as their top priority, did not show any keenness in the beginning, to facilitate commercial activities. This becomes more obvious when Ganesh Das Vadehra points out to the ruins of certain cities, one being Sialkot, which in the former times was a pleasant town where the Vadehra ganungos had erected gardens and beautiful buildings.⁶⁰

The city of Aurangabad also suffered a similar fate.⁶¹ The population of Wazirabad had also dwindled in the beginning of Sikh rule. However, Sardar Gurbaksh Singh Waraich and his son Jodh Singh repopulated the city and it became a flowerishing centre.⁶² Thus the importance of towns to the economy soon dawned on the Sikh chiefs as we also see effort made by Gujar Singh who had seized the

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.27.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 123.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 85.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.78.

⁶² Ibid, p. 94.

illaqa of Gujarat and repopulated the town of Gujarat, giving encouragement and satisfaction to people from all places.⁶³ The construction of two temples dedicated to Devi and Murli Manohar brings to the forefront the fact that the Sikh chiefs were trying to restore normalcy to the ravaged area.⁶⁴ Efforts were made to bring Khattris and other particular craftsmen from all over to populate the place.⁶⁵ The Khattris are have said to have contributed by constructing tanks, baradari and gardens.⁶⁶ They began taking interest in local administration, as in Jalalpur all Khattris were Panchas.⁶⁷ Thus when the Sikh rulers realised that the affairs of the Government and finance could not be set right by degrading the Khattris, they called the Khattris with due respect and entrusted all financial matters to them.⁶⁸ Gradually they came to serve the Sikh rulers with loyalty as they had served the rulers of the former time. During the Sikh rule, Sobha Ram became the famous diwan of Sardar Mahan Singh Sukerchakia.⁶⁹ In the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, their respect and

⁶³ Ibid, p.58.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.62.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 69.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 123.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 98.

status increased.⁷⁰

Diwan Jawala Sahai, Diwan Hari Chand, Diwan Nihal Chand, the son of Amir Chand who served Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir as his most trusted minister, distinguished themselves from those who were formerly their equal.⁷¹ Shaikh Kaka, belonging to Shahni Khatri, was managing the mint house and the customs, besides holding the office of qanungo.⁷²

Thus Maharaja Ranjit Singh only extended the policy adopted by the Sikh chiefs, of utilising the invaluable services of Khatriis even though their importance for administration had dawned on to them at a very late stage. The cities regained their commercial look. One such city is Wazirabad, where Ranjit Singh's effort through his nazim Avitable is discernible.⁷³ He built a new quarter called Ram Katara on the side of Lahauri gate and widened the bazar. In the Sarai, he erected an octagonal tower and constructed a baradari. The Khatriis contributed by laying orchards and gardens, outside the city.⁷⁴ The most

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 123.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 98.

⁷² Ibid, p. 94.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 94.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

obvious and the best example of both devastation and rehabilitation is provided by the city of Lahore. During the invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali and the upsurge of Khalsa, the city was literally ruined; the twelve guzars or localities, which were outside the city wall, were completely razed to the ground. In the nine 'guzars' inside the city wall, only a few mansions remained intact.⁷⁵ When the Sikh chiefs occupied the city, they paid much attention to its rehabilitation. Ranjit Singh restored the city to much of its former glory. The fort and palaces were repaired and a new wall was built around the city. New mansions, gardens, wells, baolis and places of worship were erected. But inspite of all this, it has been pointed out that Lahore did not regain the number and prosperity of the Mughal time.⁷⁶ The inability of Lahore to restore back to prominence may have been a result of preference given to Amritsar-Multan route. The most commonly used trade route between India and Persia by Lahore, Attock, Peshawar to Kabul was deserted-this rose due to strained relations with Khaibris and also from heavier duties been levied by the rulers of Punjab than their neighbours.⁷⁷ So the traders reached Bahawalpur

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 29.

⁷⁷ Mohan Lal, *Travels in Punjab, Afghanistan and Turkisthan to Balkh, Bokhara and Herat and a Visit to Great Britan and Germany*, Patiala, 1971, pp. 77-78.

district direct and then proceeded to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Traders from Amritsar joined them via Jhang and Dera Ismail Khan.⁷⁸ The Amritsar-Multan route became popular over the period of time and the Kafilas (Caravans) were managed mostly by Pawidas and Lohanis.⁷⁹ In 1832, when Jacquimont visited Amritsar, it was throbbing with trade activities of Hindu Khattris, Baniyas, Muslims, Khojas, Kashmiri Muslims and Afghans.⁸⁰ Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave much impetus to industry and by 1850, manufactures of the city of Amritsar rose to value of Rs. 6,90,284 against Rs. 2,45,445 of Lahore.⁸¹ However, among the manufactures, it was shawl that was made in great numbers.⁸² Walter Hamilton regarded it a 'grand emporium' for shawls and saffron.⁸³ David Ross in 1882 gave a description of manufacture of the fabric which points out the extent of its manufacture "about 5000 looms are employed in the manufacture of shawls from the fine wool obtained from Tibet, Chang Chari Kirman, they are

78 Alexander Burnes, op. cit., p. 415.

79 Charles Baron Hugel, *Kashmir and Punjab*, Jammu, 1972, p. 274.

80 V. Jacquemont and A. Soltykoff, *Punjab Hunderd years Ago*, Translated and edited by H.L.O. Garrett, Patiala, 1971.

81 Foreign Consultation 144, 29 Dec, 1852.

82 Col. Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, Language Deptt., 1971 p. 50.

83 *Amritsar Past and present*, p.131.

chiefly worked by poor Kashmiri immigrants in the employ of traders.....It should however be borne in mind that the wool is all hand-sorted with great expenditure of time and labour.....spinning and dyeing colour of thread is also a most tedious operation; the weaving is slow, most difficult and delicate. From 500 to 1500 needles will be employed in working one pattern with the different descriptions of wool necessary and from 20 to 50 weavers may be employed at periods varying from 3 to 12 months in the manufacture of one shawl."⁸⁴ Burnes, on his visit to Punjab, pointed out that the Punjab Government at present in Amritsar had a store of shawls that could not be valued at less than half a million sterlings (fifty lakhs of rupees).⁸⁵ Thus Ganesh Das Vadhera aptly pointed out that 'today there is no other city in the whole of Punjab which is as large as Amritsar.'⁸⁶ Many Khattris of Lahore have adopted Amritsar as their home.⁸⁷

Control of Pilgrimage Centre Amritsar : The Kingdom Matures

As chief of the Sikh pilgrimage centre, Amritsar has

⁸⁴ David Ross, *The Land of Five Rivers and Sind*, Language Department, 1970, pp.193-194.

⁸⁵ Alexander Burnes, op. cit., p. 399.

⁸⁶ Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Char-Bagh-i-Punjab*, op. cit., p. 133.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 133.

ever since played an important cohesive role. Within the city, a particular focus for piety and panthic activity has been provided by the famous of all Sikh shrines, the Harmanier Sahib. For all elements related closely to religion, Amritsar must have served as an important nerve centre. Thus the question at stake and which requires immediate attention is, could Ranjit Singh strike a balance between religion and politics, which was an essential prerequisite for a stable state?

The doctrine of Guru Panth, which found a practical expression in the institution of gurmtta, served well at least in the first few decades of the second half of the 18th century. Although essentially a military instrument, which evolved in response to a military need; it expressed in a coherent form the more general religious doctrine of the Gurus' continuing presence within any congregation of his disciples. This institution, however, became positive hindrance, because the need that had produced it, no longer existed. Mcleod points out that in Ranjit Singh's framework of Suzerainty, corporate decisions bearing a religious sanction could hardly be welcomed. And thus in his effort to bring all other leaders under his own control, he imposed a ban upon all but strictly religious

assemblies.⁸⁸ However it would be important to highlight the fact that the doctrine had lost its relevance much before; probably in the last decades of the 18th century, as is evident from the ineffectiveness of gurmatta, held when Zaman Shah's invasion threatened them. The only difference was that it was beyond the ambit of the Sikh Sardars to overhaul the doctrine, as they lacked the required cohesion. Coupled with this, the fact that social differentiation created as a result of wider economic base, was an infringement to the idea of equality on which the Guru Panth was based in theory.⁸⁹ As a result, the theory of Guru Panth quickly lapsed into disuse leaving the issue of religious authority to the doctrine of scriptural Guru-'the Guru Granth'. Among the authoritative guardians of this constitutional form were the Akali. The Akal Bungah in the Harmandir Sahib complex formed their headquarter.⁹⁰ However, under the garb of religious character, they committed the grossest outrages and being excellent infantry men they were seasoned troopers. They dismounted for a charge in which two-handed sword was

⁸⁸ W.H.Mcleod, *The Evolution of Sikh Community*, Delhi, 1975, p.50.

⁸⁹ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge, 1990 p. 118 "between the ruling class and ordinary peasant there was a wide social gulf".

⁹⁰ Lepel Griffin, *Rulers of India: Ranjit Singh*, Delhi, 1957, p. 136.

their favourite weapon.⁹¹ Their fanaticism border on insanity and they nearly embroiled the Maharaja with the English by their fanatical attack upon Mr. Metcalfe's Mussalman escort in 1809.⁹² Thus they were unmitigated nuisance and danger during the Maharaja's reign and more than once they attempted to take his life.⁹³ "These fanatics", writes Burnes, "acknowledge no superiors and the ruler of the country can only moderate their frenzy by intrigues and bribery".⁹⁴ True to this statement we do have references where the Akalis appear to have held jagirs, received cash offering, horses and elephants from the period of the dominance of Sikh autonomus Sardars. Bhag Singh Ahluwalia had constructed the third storey of Akal Bunga and also given 10,000 rupees for covering some portions of temple with gold plates.⁹⁵ At one instance it has been pointed out that disputes arose over the distribution of offering among the various Akalis, who were customarily given a certain share. In January, 1814, for example, Maharaja called upon the Akalis and the men of Phul Singh Akalia and listened to their dispute and

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 136-137.

⁹² Ibid, p. 136.

⁹³ Lepel Griffin, op.cit., p. 136. Alexander Burnes, op.cit., Chapt.-I, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Alexander Burnes, op.cit., p.12.

⁹⁵ Ram Sukh Rao's, Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar, op. cit., p. 61.

claims about their share of income.⁹⁶ It is a speculation that since these disputes arose from offerings, these might have been engineered by Ranjit Singh himself.

Another interesting dealing is that of Ranjit Singh with the Sodhis, who were regarded as outcaste by the orthodox Sikhs since they were descendants of Dhir Malias. Contrary to previous practice, the Sodhis at this juncture carved out a niche for themselves. When Sodhi Wadh Bagh Singh of Kartarpur was threatened by Sadat Yar Khan, the faujdar of Jalandhar in 1763, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia accompanied by other Sikh chiefs rushed to the help of the Sodhis.⁹⁷ The Sodhis of Anadpur began to be referred to 'as Gurus and therefore worthy of respect'.⁹⁸ On all important occasions, offerings were sent to four branches of sodhis capital of Anandpur. Their mediation were sought in important matters as for example, Sodhi Uttam Singh, Ran Singh and Ranjit Singh had constituted the delegation which went to receive Fateh Singh back from the British territory.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ H.L.O. Garrett and G.L. Chopra, op. cit., p. 127.

⁹⁷ J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Time Amritsar*, 1980, p.68.

⁹⁸ Ram Sukh Rao's, *Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar*, op. cit., p. 81.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.61.

As regards to the Bedis, their role was not essentially different from the Sodhis. They enjoyed the same benefits which the Sodhis did. In this context it has been speculated 'It is not doubted that the head of Seikh Church, the Bedi or Sahib Singh might yet frustrate the designs of a ruler and by a crusade in behalf of this religion overthrow the best laid designs of an ambitious prince'.¹⁰⁰ To appease them, Ranjit Singh did take care to enlist the church in his cause by constantly receiving two priests with distinction. But then as Lepel Griffin aptly puts it they were 'silent attendants in the Dabar'.¹⁰¹ Thus they were not allowed to assert themselves, which may have been further assured by the policy of resumption of jagirs granted to them. Ranjit Singh resumed Chaprar after the death of Bedi Sahib Singh despite angry outbursts of Bedi Khan Singh.¹⁰²

Thus religion was kept at bay and its adherence was to the point where there was no fear of any injury to the state. However, at the same time, it was utilised to appease those who were so intricately connected with it. This policy had its streak even when the Sikhs were

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Burnes, op. cit., p. 286.

¹⁰¹ Lepel Griffin, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁰² Ram Sukh Rao's, Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar, op. cit., p. 62.

fragmented autonomus units and thus it was an element of continuity rather than change which is evident in this period. Ranjit Singh's territorial organisation and distribution of power in its main outline was not essentially different from that of the preceding century. The offices of Sipa Sahalar, Diwan, Subadar, Nazim, Faujdar, Thanadar and Amil were as familar to the subjects of Ranjit Singh as these were to the subjects of late 18th century.¹⁰³ The conferment of jagirs by Ranjit Singh was only an extension of the practise of his predecessor. Grant deeds in their pattern were similar to those of the 18th century. Here too Ranjit Singh sought for divine help and there are references to 'Khalsa Sarkar', but in reality power and authority emnated from the suzerain himself. Thus it has been aptly pointed out that Ranjit Singh's administration differed from that of his predecessor in degree, than in kind.¹⁰⁴ It was rather 'continuity' than 'change' that was the key note of Ranjit Singh's period and if there was a 'change', it was more in the term of reforms carried out in building his army-this very army helped it to make the difference in magnitude.

¹⁰³ J.S.Grewal, From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh : Essays in Sikh History, Amritsar, 1972, p.107.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.107.

CONCLUSION

The study has thus attempted to show the rise of Punjab as a regional state in the context of the creation and Jatisation of the Khalsa, the assumption of a political role by Banda and the formation and working of the misls. It has been argued that the last quarter of the 18th century was characterised by the emergence of a plurality of small centres of power. These fluctuated in size and were in a state of conflict. Ranjit Singh provided Punjab with initially, at least, a semblance of political order by negotiating with these variety of power centre.

The first chapter has shown that Banda Bahadur, who had successfully tapped the potentialities that the mass of followers had offered to him, was able to build a power base-'a prototype state'-with their help. It was this very spirit of sovereignty that was manifested in the institutional reorganisation of the Khalsa.

However, the chapters two and three show the formation, of a single contiguous coherent block. What dominated the political scenario of the second half of the 18th century is pluralistic division of territory into autonomous units controlled and administered by independant Sardars. This very development in its natural course gave

rise to innumerable political permutation and combinations for the purpose of offense and defense. Thus consolidation and fragmentation went hand in hand and became the chief reason for the fluidity in polity. Chapter four has argued that Ranjit Singh dexterously balanced the different conflicting interest by the combination of political accomodation and social control and thereby provided cohesion to the region. But apart from the cohesion that he imparted, Ranjit Singh's rule was in no way a break from the earlier system of governance, in fact if there was any difference it was a difference in degree rather than kind.

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