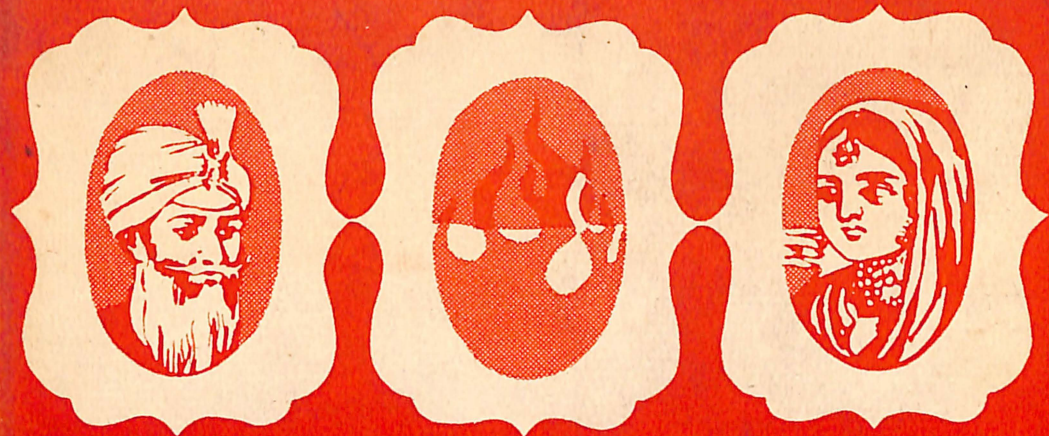


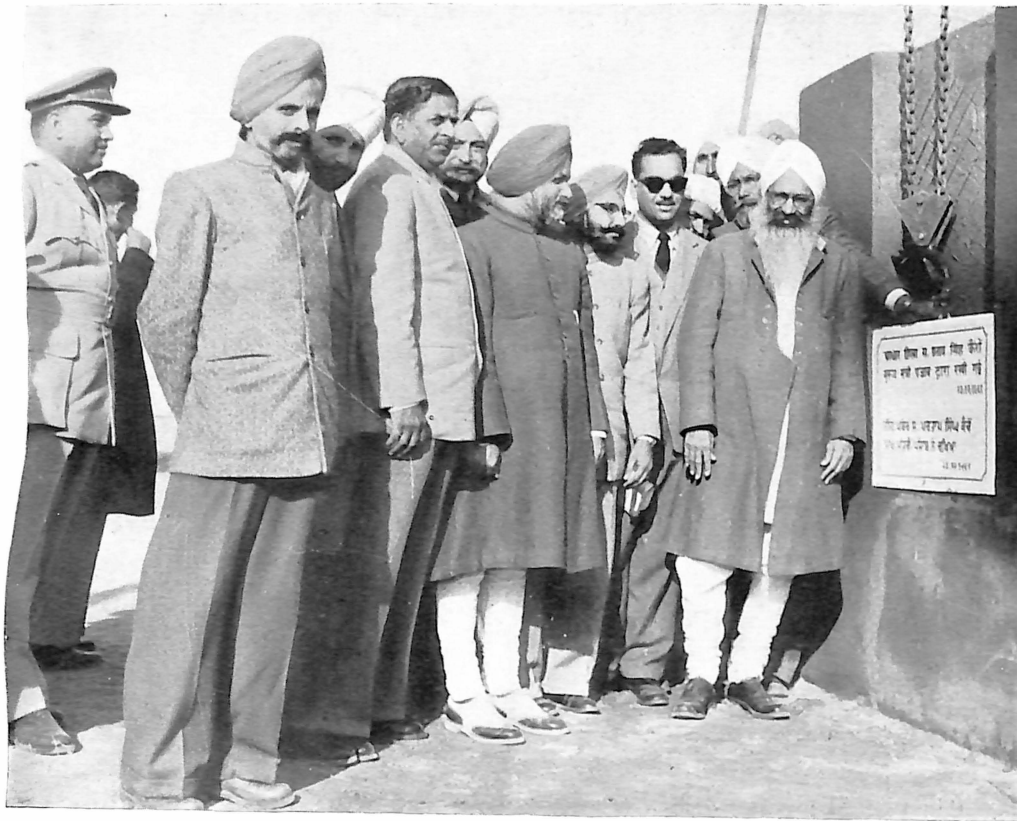


THE PUNJAB'S PIONEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS



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THE PUNJAB'S
PIONEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS



The Chief Minister, Punjab, S. Pratap Singh Kairon laying the foundation stone
of the National Heroes' Memorial, Ferozeshahar.

[Frontis

(By courtesy, Public Relation Deptt., Punjab Government)

THE PUNJAB'S PIONEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS

BY

M. L. AHLUWALIA AND KIRPAL SINGH

*With a Foreword by Sardar Partap Singh Kairon,
Chief Minister, Punjab*



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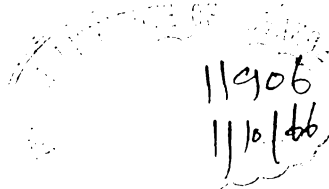
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*To
The Martyrs of the Freedom Struggle whose sacrifices
paved the way for the Country's independence*

FOREWORD •

PUNJABIS are known all over the world for their indomitable spirit and valiant deeds. Misfortunes, defeats and quirks of destiny have never daunted them. They have not only risen above the worst calamities and disasters but have always come at the top. Each set-back and reverse has only goaded them on to fresh and more vigorous effort.

Untold sufferings and sorrows through which the Punjabis had to pass to break the shackles of slavery is a story only of the recent past. The subjugation of the people of the Punjab at the hands of the British in 1846 and their subsequent endeavour to regain freedom is a tale full of exciting events. The Punjab was the last to lose its Independence. The dust in the battlefield had hardly settled when the struggle began anew.

Many resplendent names shine through the dark century of foreign rule, when the free spirit of the Punjab struck again and again at the citadel of British imperialism till it was rendered weak and hollow. Many brave sons of the Punjab kissed the gallows smilingly.

The authors of this book have done a great service to the country by recounting the exploits and achievements of some of the earliest freedom fighters. This monograph contains an account of the heroic role of Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala, Dewan Mul Raj, Bhai Maharaj Singh, Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala, Baba Bikram Singh and Maharani Jind Kaur, who organised and formed the *avant garde* of the independence movement launched with relentless purpose soon after the British suzerainty was established over the land of five rivers.

I am confident that these real-life stories of valour and heroism will serve as a source of inspiration to the present

generation which has to grapple with the problems of today. True to their tradition, the Punjabis will continue to be the guardians and torch-bearers of freedom. This is our proud legacy and historic obligation.

Chandigarh,
3 December 1962

PARTAP SINGH

PREFACE

SOON after the defeat of the forces of the Lahore Kingdom in 1846, an organised movement was initiated against the British. What was the nature of this movement, how it originated and why it failed forms an interesting subject for investigation. In this monograph, an analysis has been attempted through a study of the careers of some of its leaders.

As a matter of fact, many fought against the British during this period and suffered grievously at their hands. Thousands fell martyrs on the battlefields fighting against them, and all these known and unknown heroes have an unassailable claim on posterity. However, in view of the extent of the book, we have selected the six representative characters who had the rare distinction of launching and leading the struggle throughout the erstwhile Lahore Kingdom. Of these, the chapters on Sardars Sham Singh and Chattar Singh Attariwalas and Baba Bikram Singh are contributed by Kirpal Singh while the rest are written by the co-author.

The plan to bring out this monograph was drawn up towards the close of 1961, but because of the keen interest shown in the project by S. Partap Singh Kairon, the Punjab Chief Minister, its typescript was presented to him on Independence Day, 1962.

Our respectful regards are due to Professor Prem Kirpal, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of India; Colonel Sir Buta Singh, K.C.B.E.; Major Harrindar Singh, M.L.A. and Sardar Khushwant Singh for their kind interest in the success of the project. We are also indebted to Shri K. D. Bhargava, Director, National Archives of India; Dr. N. R. Khadgawat, Director of Archives, Government of Rajasthan and the Principal, Khalsa College, Amritsar, for

permission to draw upon the relevant source-material available in their custody. Our thanks are also due to Dr. V. G. Dighe, Senior Scholar, History of Freedom Movement Unit, New Delhi and Sardar Dharm Anant Singh for their useful suggestions. We are equally beholden to Shri I. N. Verma for preparation of the index and to Shri Nirmal Kant for his valuable assistance in compiling the text.

We are, however, deeply indebted to Sardar Partap Singh Kairon whose spontaneous encouragement and continued interest greatly facilitated the publication of this work.

We must also express our thanks to Orient Longmans Ltd. in general and to Mr R. G. Vincent in particular for their kind co-operation in its publication.

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INTRODUCTION

Maharaja Dalip Singh will by the Guru's grace be firmly established in his Kingdom; and the cow and Brahmin will be protected and our religion will prosper:..... The Maharaja and his mother are in great sorrow and affliction. It is our duty to-day to engage ourselves in their cause, you will obtain their favour and support. Khalsa ji! gird up your loins under the protection of the Guru, and Guru Govind Singh will preserve the honour.—Manifesto issued by the rebels from Multan.

WHEN the dust of an event has settled and the whole issue has passed into oblivion, the historian comes forward and after subjecting it to a post mortem tries to ascertain the causes and the nature of the occurrence for the benefit of posterity. Therein lies the utility of the historian to society.

We in India have recently passed through one of the most important events in a nation's history—emancipation from foreign rule. Our historians are now engaged in analysing the movement which brought us freedom. In view of the fact that the fight for freedom continued for over a century in which a large country with all her diversities was involved, the struggle assumes a peculiar character and, without being too rigid, can be divided into two well-marked phases—the one of the nineteenth century and the other of the twentieth.

During the first phase India lacked many of the essential factors of nationhood. Politically divided into a number of independent and semi-independent principalities, with an immense burden of deep-rooted prejudices of class, caste, religion and language, India then was hardly fit to be called a nation in the modern sense of the term. In those circumstances the anti-British movement or movements had

essentially to be local or regional and the issues upon which such movements sustained themselves also had a local or sectional appeal. The leadership, too, lacked what we may now call a national or an all-India character.

With this in mind, it is proposed to deal here with the first phase of the anti-British movement in the Punjab from 1846 onwards when the British had virtually occupied the sovereign kingdom of Lahore. A proper appraisal of the nature and extent of this movement is essential for correctly assessing the course and progress of the freedom struggle in the Punjab thereafter.

To be able to do so, it would be necessary to discuss at the very outset, (i) the circumstances under which the movement had its origin, (ii) the nature and extent of the movement, and (iii) the part played in it by the leaders as well as the army.

Whereas for centuries past the Punjab, situated as it was on the land routes connecting central Asia with India, used to be the first victim of foreign aggression from the North-West, in the case of the British occupation of India, it was the last to fall. Rather during the eighteenth century when the British were busy making a pincer movement into India from various directions, the Punjabis were themselves emerging as an independent power on the map of the country. The simultaneous emergence in India of both these powers was the result of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. To that extent there was something in common between the two.¹

The persecutions to which the followers of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind were subjected for nearly two centuries had, instead of exterminating them, moulded them into a self-conscious socio-political organisation, whose aim it had become to establish a sovereign power of their own as the only means of saving their religion and their culture.² To achieve this object the self-appointed soldiers of the Panth had braved all perils, undergone horrible tortures and

¹Kaye, *Sepoy War in India*, Vol. I, p.49.

²*Raj Karega Khalsa* became part and parcel of their daily prayers.

made innumerable sacrifices. Out of the blood of these martyrs was born, in 1799, the sovereign State of Ranjit Singh, which for the next forty years more or less halted the expansion of the British towards the regions beyond the Sutlej. Herein lay the seed of the future Anglo-Sikh clash.

Ranjit Singh was aware of his vulnerable position. He, therefore, devoted his entire life to raising a strong and well-equipped army so that when the struggle between the imperialist British and the resurgent, restive and proud Khalsa took place, it should not be a repetition of Plassey or Buxar. Undoubtedly when the first show-down came in 1845-46, the Khalsa army gave an excellent account of itself in the famous battles of Mudki, Ferozeshah, Aliwal and Sobroan.

These disciplined soldiers fought like soldiers of any other independent nation, and although they had to suffer defeat for various reasons, yet they also shattered the prestige of the British arms in India.¹ This was certainly no small gain, because most of the native soldiers of the East India Company who had fought in these battles are sure to have gone back to their cantonments with the firm impression that the disciplined Indian soldiers could easily match their British counterparts. Was it not really this conviction which encouraged those very native soldiers to test their strength against their English masters within a decade of the Anglo-Sikh contest?² There is a need to explore in this context the extent to which the army of the Lahore Durbar was responsible for leaving a tradition of nationalism for Indian soldiers, particularly because it had long been the impression that the Khalsa army was

¹William Edwards in his *Reminiscences of a Bengal Civilian* writes, 'The prestige of our arms had suffered greatly in native estimation by our disasters beyond the Indus, and it was deemed by no means unlikely that our army on the Sutlej might be destroyed in like manner, p.89.

²Among the native regiments which were found disaffected in the early part of 1857, the 2nd Grenadiers, the 43rd and the 70th had seen action both in Kandahar and the Punjab during the Anglo-Sikh wars. Kaye, *op. cit.* Vol.I, p.495,

mainly responsible for all the lawlessness and the ultimate extinction of the State of Lahore.

As a result of the spirit fostered by the Sikh Gurus in their militant followers, the Khalsa soldier had always considered himself an equal partner in the State and not a hired warrior. It was this tradition which had inspired the hitherto scattered and voluntary bands of the Sikhs to unite and form, during the most critical period in the history of the Pañth, the Dal Khalsa or a federal army of the Sikh Misls. It was the same spirit which made them win for Ranjit Singh almost all his major victories. For these and other obvious reasons the shrewd Maharaja had allowed this tradition to continue even under the changed political set-up of his monarchy.¹

During the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's inefficient successors, the Khalsa army assumed a more assertive position and uncompromisingly opposed all encroachments upon the sovereignty of their State in defiance of the mercenary spirit with which the Indian soldier had for some time past taken up the military career.²

There is no denying the fact that with the weakening of the civil administration and the unscrupulous attempts of each and every one of Ranjit Singh's successors to bribe the soldiery for their individual gains, there were occasionally uncontrolled acts of rowdyism and even looting, but by and large the army remained deeply patriotic. The loyalty and patriotism of the soldiery were exploited again and again by the designing politicians, whether they were the powerful Dogras and Sindhanwalias, or the designing Jawahar Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh. The day-to-day happenings at Lahore during 1844-45 would bear witness to the fact that whereas most of the Durbar chiefs were manoeuvring to

¹Officially Ranjit Singh's government was always styled as Sarkar Khalsaji. Only in 1845 when the Lahore army almost constituted the *de facto* government, the word Sarbat Khalsa, was introduced in the official papers but only for a little while.

²Writing about the Indian sepoys in the British army, William Edwards categorically states that 'they enter that army as they themselves say, from no feeling of patriotism or loyalty, but *Pet Ke Waste*, to fill their bellies. *Op. cit.* p.311.

court the British, the soldiery was making determined efforts to forestall all such designs,¹ and when as a result of the intrigues and counter-intrigues the civil authority had almost broken down, the army by reviving the traditional system of regimental panchayats tried in its own way to keep the government going.²

This has been certified by many responsible British officials in spite of the fact that they were ill at ease at the continued spirit of cohesion shown by the Durbar soldiery. George Campbell in his *Memoirs* says 'that in the period immediately preceding when matters were becoming very serious and the army had for the most part taken affairs into their own hands they maintained for a while wonderful order at Lahore through their *panches* exercised an almost puritanical discipline in the military republic.' Even a highly prejudiced British Political Agent like Major Broadfoot certified to the efficiency and sincerity of the Durbar soldiery even during the darkest days in the history of the Lahore Durbar. In his letter to the Foreign Secretary, dated 27 March 1845, he wrote, 'yet as on former occasions there is a singular species of order in this anarchy, the troops and Panchayats, except at the moment of a tumult, use the words of subordinates though they substantially command, and they Profess to desire a ruler as well as a leader declaring that without subordination the army and State will perish, neither have they shown any desire to give the nominal supremacy to any one of their own body in the same manner though their excesses in the hills were great especially in respect to women, yet they Maintain sufficient order in their camp, to have *bazars* with dealers in grain, whose convoys were respected, and though their officers are looked on rather as servants than commanders and

¹For details refer to the various reports of Major Broadfoot, the British Political Agent at Ludhiana, more particularly those in the *Secret Consultations*, dated 20 June 1845 Nos. 33, 56, 58; dated 15 August, No. 34 and dated 20 December, No. 113.

²Dr. Hari Ram Gupta in his *History of the Sikhs* writes that discipline among the soldiers of the Dal Khalsa was maintained by a Council of five prominent leaders whose awards of punishment 'were borne without any grumbling', as they were taken to be the *Panj Pyaras* or the Chosen Five of the Guru, p.292.

dare not do anything contrary to the inclinations of the Panchayats, they are to a considerable extent obeyed in carrying out movements approved by the Panchayats and the chauduries.¹

Again, writing in a similar strain, Broadfoot in his letter dated 14 July 1845 stated: 'The Durbar has also been lately a little excited by the accounts of our preparations received from their Newswriters at our various Stations.....The result is a more than ordinary degree of efficiency in military preparation. The artillery is an object of special attention. New guns have been cast, carriages in course of construction, the old carriages are under repair and the artillery draught cattle are sent to graze. Ammunition is also under preparation, and stores of every kind, muskets and swords also with gunpowder are ordered to be bought or manufactured in large quantities, and unless something occurs to divert the attention of the Durbar, the army will as to material be more efficient attention next cold weather than it has been for some years.'²

How could all this be done without the active support and co-operation of the army, if it were not functioning as an organised whole? Take yet another example. A couple of days before the murder of Jawahar Singh, the Wazir had virtually put the Lahore Fort in a complete state of defence against the possibility of use of force by the army. This caused great panic in the city. But the army, though all-powerful, maintained perfect law and order in the name of the *Sarbat Khalsa*, an authority in whose name all orders were then issued. Broadfoot, conveying this information to his government on 26 September 1845, stated, 'the troops continued on the 18th and subse-

¹*Secret Consultation*, 20 June 1845, No. 33. This was during their expedition against Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu. Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala, who led the Lahore army against the Raja, had himself complained to the Durbar about the excesses committed by the soldiers against women. But these excesses were surely the result of the wrong impression given to the soldiery by the anti-Gulab Singh faction at the Court led by Lal Singh and Tej Singh that the Dogras were the enemies of the Khalsa.

²*Secret Consultation*, 15 August 1845, No.34.

quent days to maintain the same attitude as before perfect order among themselves and strict discipline towards the city and its neighbourhood.¹

That the regimental panchayats sincerely aimed at maintaining discipline among the soldiers and protecting national interests is further proved by the fact that as soon as the decision to mobilize against the British was made, 'their regimental Panchayats', according to Cunningham, 'voluntarily stopped functioning by an agreement with the executive heads of the State', realising, 'the necessity of unity of counsel in the affairs of war'.² Welcoming this decision, the soldiers declared, 'We will not only drive the English back to Calcutta, but as far back as London.'³

True, they did not drive the British even beyond the Jumuna, much less back to London, yet they certainly lived up to their martial traditions, for which an equally brave enemy like the British were all praise again and again. Commending the great enthusiasm shown by these soldiers on the eve of the first Anglo-Sikh war, Cunningham writes, 'Every Sikh considered the cause as his own, and he would work as a labourer, as well as carry a musket, he would drag guns, drive bullocks, lead camels, and load and unload boats with a cheerful alacrity which contrasted strongly with the inapt and sluggish obedience of mere mercenaries (*native sepoys of the English army*) The youthful Khalsa was active and strong of heart.'⁴

No greater praise could be showered on the bravery of these Khalsa soldiers than Lord Gough's tribute while writing to Sir Robert Peel, the British Prime Minister, about the first Anglo-Sikh war. 'Policy precluded me from publicly recording', wrote the British C-in-C., 'my sentiments on the splendid gallantry of our fallen foe, or to record the acts

¹*Secret Consultation*, 20 December 1845, No. 115. The regimental panchayats were so particular about the discipline of individual soldiers that in one case when some soldiers attempted to rape the daughter of a Khatri of Lahore the culprits were, by the common consent of the panchayats, immediately surrendered to the Durbār officials for proper punishment.

²*History of the Sikhs*, p.263.

³*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p.238.

⁴*Op. cit.* p.264.

of heroism displayed, not only individually, but almost collectively by the Sikh Sirdars and army.....Certain it is that there would have been a different story to tell if the body of men had not been commanded by traitors.¹

Such accounts can be endlessly multiplied as every British official, whether civilian or of the army, who had witnessed the Lahore army fighting at close quarters had almost irresistibly praised their heroism. Thus William Edwards, the Under Secretary to the British Government, who followed the Governor-General in the very thick of these battles, unequivocally stated that, 'the actions of Moodhke and Ferozshah are matters of history. The Sikhs were the bravest and best disciplined enemy we had yet encountered, and never was an empire in greater peril at any previous period, than at this time.'² The same officer mentions having been told by Lord Hardinge soon after the Battle of Ferozeshah, 'that the fire (of the enemy's artillery) was even more terrible, than that at Albuera, for the Sikhs had guns in position of treble the calibre ever used in European Warfare.'³

How true to their salt and how brave the soldiers of the Lahore Durbar were, is further proved from the way they acted during the battle of Sobroan, when their traitorous Commander Tej Singh abandoned them to the British, having himself treacherously escaped across the river Sutlej and destroyed the bridge of boats. Hemmed in between the flooded river on the one side and the heavy firing by the British artillery and infantry on the other, 'they gave way', writes Edwards, 'in such admirable order as to excite the admiration of the British soldiers. Never perhaps was so obstinate a contest carried to the end; never before was such cohesion displayed in the ranks of the Khalsa army.....Few escaped, none it may be said surrendered. The Sikhs met their fate with that resignation which distinguishes their race.'⁴ According to the same

¹*Life of Lord Gough*, Vol. I, pp. 368-69.

²*Reminiscences of a Bengal Civilian*, p. 83.

³*Ibid.* p. 95.

⁴*Ibid.* pp. 118-19.

writer, no fewer than 8,000 brave souls perished in this deadly contest on the banks of the river Sutlej.

The war was soon over, the British were victorious, and the curtain rung down on the first act of this melodrama. The quislings had enabled the British to realise their long-cherished dream of occupying the last independent kingdom of India. Even then the surviving Khalsa soldiers, humbled as they were, never conceded in their heart of hearts that all was finished.¹ Undaunted by their recent severe reverses and unhampered by the political situation consequent on the British control over the person and policy of their sovereign, they soon created another opportunity to avenge the national insult. But this time it was not a war between one sovereign and another. On the contrary it was a rebel force led by rebel leaders which fought against the British forces of occupation illogically claiming to fight in the name of the powerless puppet boy-king of Lahore. Despite the complexities of the situation and the difficulties under which it had to function, the rebel army won fresh laurels.

At Multan, which was the spearhead of the second contest, a small but determined garrison under Dewan Mul Raj kept General Whish at his wits' end for several months. Even after the overwhelming British force had stormed the Citadel and the battered town bore ghastly witness to the terrible effects of British ordnance 'the garrison still at the bayonet's point showed the stuff of which they were made.'²

As to their skill in military tactics, there is no better example than the unplanned action into which the rebels had successfully drawn the otherwise cool and unruffled

¹Soon after the treaty of March 1846, when the British had occupied Lahore and a portion of the Palace, Cunningham remarked, 'to mark more plainly to the Indian world that a vaunting enemy had been effectually humbled;..... throughout the length and breadth of the land, the chiefs talked in the bitterness of their hearts, of the approaching downfall of the stern unharmonizing foreigners. Cunningham *op. cit.* p. 286.

²Kaye, *op. cit.* pp. 39-40. Writing about the enthusiasm shown by the town people, even Lord Dalhousie noted, 'that the rascals they were in heart and hand and even little boys were caught perched in the trees trying to pot the officers'. Baird, *Private Letters of Lord Dalhousie*, p. 51.

General Gough on the banks of the river Chenab. The contest left such a great stigma on the name of the British C-in-C and gave such a terrible shock to the entire British nation that even a partisan historian like Kaye indignantly recorded that 'Never was an official bulletin received in England with wilder out-cry of pain and passion.....and hundreds of English families turned from the angry past to the fearful future, and trembled as they thought the crowning action with that formidable enemy had yet to be fought.'¹ Never before had a battle fought on Indian soil reverberated so strongly in the streets of London.

Thus, despite a dearth of loyal commanders, shortage of essential supplies of arms, ammunition, food and fodder, and being misled and misdirected by the ruling junta at Lahore, the army reared by Maharaja Ranjit Singh from men of all castes and religions,² once again established a record of fighting skill, bravery and devotion, many a time setting at naught, the veteran British arms, backed though they were by the best professional skill and the inexhaustible resources of a rich and extensive empire. Such was the part played by the Lahore army.

The nature and extent of the anti-British movement in the Punjab soon after the British occupation in 1846 become more explicit if we survey the main events of the fateful years of 1846-48. By the Treaty of Lahore signed on 9 March 1846, 'the Sovereign Kingdom of the Punjab'

¹Kaye, *op. cit.* p. 51.

²Professor Sita Ram Kohli, particularly mentions that 'in almost all the battalions raised between Sambat 1864 and 1870 (A.D. 1807-1813) the Panjabi element was very meagre and the bulk of the regulars consisted of Hindustanis, Gurkhas and Afghans'. After 1818, he continues, 'we find the Panjabi element predominant in all the branches of the regular army....filled with Sikhs, Hindus, Muhammadans and Rajputs.' (*Catalogue of Khalsa Durbar Records*, Vol. I, pp. 2-3). But the Maharaja as a matter of policy always raised mixed battalions. This has been recorded by Capt. C. M. Wade, Political Agent at Ludhiana, who on his visit to the Court of Ranjit Singh in 1827 was shown the parade of the two regular battalions consisting of the Sikhs and the Poorbeas (asmen from Hindustan were then called in the Punjab). 'The reason for intermingling them with the Sikhs the Raja told me one day, (was) to counteract any mutinous disposition which the one or the other might evince' (Wade's Report, see *Political Consultation*, 12 Oct. 1827). Major Broadfoot in his letter of 4 January 1845 also explained that, 'the word Seik is colloquially used for the Lahore Soldier'. *Secret Consultation*, 4 April 1845, No. 6.

was reduced to merely the 'State of Lahore'. Maharaja Dalip Singh was deprived of the rich Jullundhar Doab and the adjoining hill territories which became part of British India, while the extensive provinces of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh passed on to Maharaja Gulab Singh under British Protection. The destiny of the Punjab now lay in the hands of the famous Lawrence brothers. Henry, the eldest, pulled the strings of the Lahore Durbar from behind the scenes, assisted by his brother George who was posted at Peshawar, while the promising and more energetic John controlled the Jullundhar Doab as its first Chief Commissioner. Henry and John no doubt differed widely in temperament and political ideology, but none the less both knew the ultimate aim of the British in the Punjab. All patriotic and anti-British elements were to be suppressed, the back of the defiant Khalsa army was to be broken, the entire population was to be disarmed and made to forget the ways of independent nations.

For over nine months the Lawrence brothers had really no difficulty in pursuing their schemes, as the chiefs who formed the Government at Lahore were mostly sullen, selfish and opportunists. But there was one trouble spot in this outwardly calm setting. It was the presence in the Durbar of Maharani Jind Kaur, as Regent of the child Dalip Singh. The overbearing British Resident did not like the ways of the equally over-clever lady Regent who was still respected both by the people and the army. Her position and popularity irritated the British officials more than anything else. So by careful manoeuvring, intrigue and coercion they soon managed to remove her from the Government before the year was out. By the so-called Treaty of Bhyrowal signed on 16 December 1846, a new management was forced upon the people. Instead of the Maharani, Henry Lawrence combined in himself the authority of Regent as well as Resident. She was, as they put it, 'pensioned off' to pass the rest of her life in the voluptuous surroundings of the Palace Zenana.

But the Resident and the Governor-General were wrong

in their estimation of the Maharani. Active in mind and body, she at once saw through the British game and before it was too late prepared to meet the challenge. She had at hand many smouldering embers from the last war with which she at once undertook to start a new conflagration. Already a few occurrences, such as the killing of cows to provide meat for the British soldiers stationed in the Punjab and the attempted entry with shoes on by a few British officials into the precincts of the Golden Temple, had created such a tense anti-British feeling among the people that the Maharani had virtually no difficulty in becoming the rallying point of all the disaffected elements in her former kingdom. She was acclaimed by all as 'the mother of the Khalsa'. This conflict between the Maharani and the British became the starting point of the second phase of the anti-British struggle.¹

Actually the fears which Henry Lawrence expressed in his letter of 2 June 1847 were soon to prove true. He wrote, 'So great is their own pride of race, and of a long unchecked career of victories that if every Sirdar and Seikh in the Punjab were to avow himself satisfied with the humbled position of his country, it would be the extreme of infatuation to believe him, or to doubt for a moment that among the crowd who are loudest in our praise, there are many who cannot forgive our victory or even our forbearance and who chafe at their own loss of power in exact proportion as they submit to ours.'² Within a short time the hatred of the people for the British exploded in a widespread revolt. Through a network of secret agents functioning throughout the truncated kingdom and the Jullundhar Doab, the disaffected chiefs were made to come out openly against the British³. The regiments in the service of the puppet Lahore Government, as well as those of the British

¹For details see the series of articles entitled 'Some Facts Behind the Second Anglo-Sikh War' by M.L. Ahluwalia, *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings Volumes*, Part II, Nos. XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII.

²*Secret Consultation*, 26 June 1847, No. 136.

³*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, Nos. 112 and 233 and *Secret Despatch to Court*, No. 5.

army of occupation, were approached to join the popular uprising,¹ while a general proclamation was issued that, 'The Khalsa may once more unite and relieve Maharaja and his mother from the thralldom of the Sahib Log.'² In the British-held Jullundhar Doab, Hoshiarpur and Una were the centres from where the rebels worked. From Una, Bedi Bikram Singh was sending out emissaries declaring that, 'the Government was going to be changed'. Besides him, chief among the other rebels on that side were Sodhi Ladha Singh of Kartarpur, Raja Narayan Pal of Katlehr, Ram Singh of Nurpur, Jodh Singh, Sunder Singh, Lal Singh Moraria and Arjan Singh of Ranghar Nangal.

No better idea of the popularity and extent of this anti-British feeling can be had than from the letter of 4 October 1848 addressed by Frederick Currie, the new Resident, to Lord Dalhousie wherein he says, 'That there has been from the period of our occupation, a very general spirit of disaffection pervading the length and breadth of the land, and affecting particularly the army and the disbanded soldiery but shared in by all the Hindoo and some part of the Mahommedan population.'³ It was really a correct picture of the situation, for during 1848-49, when Dewan Mul Raj and Sardars Chattar Singh and Sher Singh, the Attariwala chiefs, were fighting against the British in the distant provinces, the entire population at the Capital continued to show a keen interest in the outcome of this popular uprising by maintaining a secret liaison with the rebels. Currie, reporting this to his government on 6 November 1848, remarked 'the report of the Peshawar troops having at last joined Chuttur Singh was prevalent in the Bazars at Lahore and was talked of in the rebel camps for three days, before anything authentic on the

¹The British Resident in his letter of 9 May 1848 from Lahore reports, 'that a sensation had been created in the city by the detection of a conspiracy to corrupt the fidelity of the Native soldiers of Infantry, Artillery and Irregular cavalry and the seizer of the offenders.' (General Kahan Singh, Ganga Ram and nine others were arrested). *Secret Despatch to London*, 3 June 1848, No. 50.

²*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 157.

³*Secret Consultation*, 7 Oct. 1848, No. 621.

subject reached me.'¹ Not merely that, but Lahore even continued to be the recruiting centre and a rendezvous of the rebels and volunteers going to Multan or to the camp of the Attariwalas.² Lord Dalhousie in his Minute of 30 September 1848 himself recorded that, 'the purpose of the insurrection is the subversion of the British authority in the Punjab the ultimate design is the expulsion of the British beyond the Sutlej, and their destruction if it can be accomplished.'

Soon after it was strongly rumoured that during the Dussehra celebrations at Lahore, an attack on the Resident and his protégé chiefs assembled for the function 'was to be the signal for a general emeute'. This rumour prompted the British functionaries to tighten further the security arrangements to the point of suffocation. All the regiments and guards of the Lahore Durbar were removed from the Palace and the city, and the Fort was placed under two English Companies from the 53rd Foot, while the 14th Light Dragoons guarded the Resident. The entire security arrangements were personally supervised by Brigadier Campbell, commanding the British force at Lahore, and entry into the Palace was restricted only to those who had to participate in the Dussehra ceremony. What the British feared most was mischief on the parade-ground where the puppet Maharaja had to take the salute. To avoid any such possibility, the Resident did not allow the Maharaja's own army to participate in the function as was usual. Instead the salute was given by the British detachment composed of 'two Regiments of Infantry, a troop of Horse Artillery, a Squadron of H.M.'s 14th and one Irregular Cavalry,' who were ostensibly drawn up to give a twenty-one gun salute, but actually formed, in the words of the Resident, a 'formidable array, prepared to put down any riot that might occur in the

¹*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 218.

²This fact is confirmed by the confession of one rebel soldier, Lehna Singh, before Major Mackeson, Superintendent, cis-Sutlej States. The volunteers passing through Lahore were entertained at the free kitchen at the Samadh of Ranjit Singh. *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 236.

mass of the people assembled beyond the parade.' The only tradition followed in this mock show was the firing of the salute by the Maharaja's own two cannon, which were also lent for the purpose by the occupying British authorities.¹ As to the widespread nature of the revolt, Currie reported, 'all the Durbar officials in the Districts, and the people are in favour of the rebel cause, some passively, but most of them actively. The larger Sirdars are equally disaffected, but they are mostly looking on, biding their time.'²

As a consequence of this, Lord Dalhousie who hardly doubted the ultimate result of the British policy in the Punjab, was much perturbed by the possible repercussions it would have on the minds of the Indians as a whole. He therefore categorically instructed the Resident that, 'every hostile demonstration against us in every portion of the Punjab must be met, encountered and utterly crushed, as such a manifestation of the British power was essential not only for the British stay in the Punjab, but also necessary to its continuance throughout India.'³

The last and the most pertinent question which needs an answer is: why did the movement fail, particularly when the national upsurge was widespread and immensely popular, when both the civilian population and the soldiers were determined to make any sacrifice, when some experienced and powerful chiefs had taken the lead, and when blood without stint was shed for the noble cause? The answer to this question is not far to seek. The first and perhaps the greatest factor which weakened the movement was that the British had at the very outset removed Maharani Jind Kaur from the scene.⁴

Again, though the British had to keep the puppet Maharaja in his own kingdom, yet they had taken all precautions to prevent his falling into the hands of the rebels. Actually

¹*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 166.

²*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, Nos. 138 & 157.

³*Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 621.

⁴'A combined and comprehensive rebellion or insurrection after the departure of the Maharani was a difficult accomplishment.' Currie to Elliot, *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 123.

a number of attempts were made by Raja Sher Singh and later by Bhai Maharaj Singh to kidnap their Maharaja, in whose name they were conducting the campaign,¹ but all their schemes were foiled by the timely action of the British. The first thing that the British Resident did on receiving news of Raja Sher Singh's rebellion in September 1848 was to occupy Lahore Fort, arrest Sardar Gulab Singh, the younger brother of Raja Sher Singh, who was then the Palace guardian of the Maharaja, and put the entire city into a state of siege.²

Another cause of the failure of the uprising was that the rebels were everywhere hard-pressed for essential war supplies as well as for food and fodder, while the British had at their disposal unlimited supplies of men and materials.³ Another trick which the British officials played at various places was to use the frontier tribes against the rebel chiefs by exploiting their religious fanaticism and holding out hopes of exemption from taxes and other inducements.⁴

But more important than any of these reasons was, as Frederick Currie noted, 'the extraordinary distrust of all parties towards one another, conflicting interests, jealousies, animosities, family feuds,'⁵ which ultimately let down the movement. It is almost incredible that the entire Sikh soldiery which had joined Mul Raj along with Raja Sher Singh abandoned the Dewan soon after because of the dissension between the two rebel leaders;⁶ that most of the chiefs of the Durbar continued to play a dual role between the freedom fighters and the new British masters for personal gain;⁷ and that the descendants of the noble Sham Singh Attariwala were responsible for the ultimate

¹In a confidential letter dated 14 Sept. 1848, to his brother Gulab Singh, Raja Sher Singh had suggested that Maharaja Dalip Singh should be smuggled out. *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 616.

²*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 178.

³*Secret Despatch* from the Court of Directors, 24 November 1848, No. 1349.

⁴Capt. Abbot in Hazara and Edwards in Bannu raised the Mulkias and the Balauchis against the rebel chiefs. Similar tactics were employed in Leiah, the Derajat and other places, *Secret Consultations*, 25 Nov. 1848, Nos. 123 and 208.

⁵*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 123.

⁶*Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 131.

⁷*Ibid.* No. 138.

arrest and banishment of their own uncle, Chattar Singh, and his entire family to avenge an old family feud.¹ But all this had actually happened, and over and above the very priests of the sacred Harmandir Sahib, who a couple of years before had denounced the *Feringhies* as the foremost enemies of the Khalsa, were the first to celebrate the annexation of their Kingdom in 1849 by the same enemies.²

In short, we lost the Punjab to the British for the very same reasons that Tippu Sultan had lost his *Sultanate-i-Khudabad*, the Marathas their Empire and the Mughals their nominal sovereignty.

¹*Secret Consultation*, 24 November 1849, Nos. 55-64.

²Lt.-Col. T.M. Sherry, Commanding Officer, Govindghur Fort reported to Elliot, the Foreign Secretary, on 1 April 1849, that the priests celebrated the annexation by illuminations so that, 'the great square of Umritsar with its various temples was one blaze of light which reflected from the waters of the sacred pool produced a scene of most striking effect, it has ever been my lot to witness.' *Secret Consultation*, 28 April 1849, No. 23.

SARDAR SHAM SINGH ATTARIWALA

One old chief whose name should be recorded—Sham Singh 'among the faithless faithful only found' clothed in white and devoting himself to death, like Decius of old, called on those around him to strike for God and the Guru and dealing death everywhere rushed manfully upon his own. — R. BOSWORTH SMITH

IF the test of patriotism is to lay down one's life for one's country knowingly and willingly then surely Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala was one of the greatest men of India, who, careless of worldly benefits and personal comforts, sacrificed his all to save the Punjab's independence. He preferred death to thralldom and by his own example made it clear to his countrymen that nothing was more precious than independence and freedom from the foreign yoke. He testified to the saying of Kabir that 'he is really great who is cut to pieces but does not leave the battlefield.' 'Hoary headed Sardar Sham Singh', writes Mohammad Latif, 'dressed himself in a garment as white as his long snowy beard, galloped forward, cheering on his ardent followers and scorning death till the last fell martyr'¹ to his country's freedom. His superb example was a beacon and a source of inspiration to the numerous freedom fighters who fought against the British from 1846 to 1947.

Sham Singh had a reason to stake his life at this critical moment. He held a very high status in the Lahore Durbar because of his close connections with the reigning family of Lahore. In 1837 his daughter Nanaki was married to Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, the grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.² Besides, Sham Singh was also one of the most eminent military commanders of the Lahore State: he

¹ *History of the Punjab*, pp. 456-7.

² *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, Trans. V.S. Suri, p. 337.



SARDAR SHAM SINGH ATTARIWALA

*(By courtesy, Sikh History Research
Deptt., Khalsa College, Amritsar)*

had taken part in several military expeditions in which he had won laurels. In the Multan campaign of 1818 he was one of the first to enter the fort at great personal risk as soon as the walls had been breached. In so doing he had received a severe sword cut. Again in 1819, he participated in the expedition to Kashmir and fought in many actions en route at Gandgarh, Teri Navi Nari, Duthiar, and Jahangira. In 1834 he was deputed to lead a force to Bannu and in the campaign had his horse shot under him.¹

In order to appreciate fully his significant role in the struggle for freedom it is very essential to understand the circumstances in which he laid down his life.

AGGRESSIVE POLICY OF THE BRITISH

The British had for long been following an aggressive policy towards the Sikh Kingdom and ultimately they were the first to violate the treaty of permanent friendship of 1809, signed between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the East India Company, long before the Sikh forces crossed the Sutlej. Upholding the position of the Lahore Durbar, Major G. Carmichael Smyth writes, 'We have been told that the Sikhs violated the treaty by crossing the river with their army, but the question I only ask, had we not departed from the rules of friendship first? The year before war broke out, we kept the island between Ferozepur and the Punjab, though it belonged to the Sikhs Regarding the Punjab War, I am neither of the opinion that the Sikhs made an unprovoked attack nor that we have acted towards them with great forbearance. If the Sikhs were to be considered entirely an independent State in no way answerable to us, we should not have provoked them, for to assert that bridges of boats brought from Bombay was not a casus belli but merely a defensive measure is absurd, besides the Sikhs have translations of Sir Charles Napier's speech as it appeared in the Delhi Gazette stating that "If they (the robbers of Scinde) were left undisturbed while

¹Griffin, *Chiefs & Families of Note*, Vol. I, p. 296 (1909)

Scinde was quiet, they would become turbulent and troublesome when the British army was called on to move into the Punjab." The Seikhs thought it as well to be first in the field. Moreover they were not encamped in our territory but their own.'¹

That the British had been preparing in advance for such an eventuality is further proved from the following facts. Till 1838 Ludhiana was the only Cantonment of the British near the Lahore frontier with only 3,000 men and 12 cannon. By the end of 1838 Ferozepur had been converted into a British Cantonment with 5,000 men and 12 cannon. Cantonments were also established by the British at Ambala, Kasauli and Simla, and 14,000 European troops and 48 cannon were stationed there. After his arrival in India Lord Hardinge further increased the strength of his forces in these Cantonments by 22,000 men and 28 cannon, while just before the First Sikh War, their total strength was increased to 44,000 men and 100 cannon.² The Sikhs never denied the right of the English to make military arrangements as they pleased for the security of their own territories, but this concentration of British forces on the Sikh borders for no apparent reason was posing a great threat to the Lahore Durbar. To increase the apprehension of the Lahore Durbar many prominent British Officers had for long proposed the dismemberment of the Lahore Kingdom. Sir William Macnaughten proposed to break up the kingdom by bestowing Peshawar on Shah Shuja when the line of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was said to have come to an end with the death of Nau Nihal Singh, his grandson. Earlier it had been the desire of Sir Alexander Burnes to bestow the same tract of Lahore territory on Dost Muhammad Khan. Again during 1844 and 1845, 'the facts were whispered abroad and treasured up,' that the English were preparing boats at Bombay to make bridges across the Sutlej, that troops in Sind were being equipped for a march on Multan and that the various

¹Major Carmichael Smyth, *Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. XXI and XXII.

²Sita Ram Kohli, *Var Shah Mohammad*, (Punjabi) pp. 68 & 69.

garrisons of the North-West provinces were being gradually reinforced while some of them were abundantly supplied with the munitions of war as well as with the troops. None of these things were communicated to the Sikh Government, but they were nevertheless believed by all parties, and they were held to denote a campaign not of defence but of aggression.’¹ Cunningham rightly concluded by saying that ‘further inquiry will show that the policy pursued by the English themselves for several years was not in reality well calculated to ensure a continuance of pacific relations and they cannot, therefore, be held wholly blameless for a war which they expected and deprecated and which they knew could only end to their own aggrandizement.’²

TREACHERY OF THE SIKH LEADERS.

Through the treachery of Sardar Tej Singh, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh Army, and Lal Singh, the Minister who was secretly allied with the British, the Sikh Army’s plan of action proved a failure. When the Sikh Army had first crossed the Sutlej on 15 and 16 December 1845, their immediate target should have been to capture Ferozepur Cantonment which was not at all difficult. Instead, half the Army was made to march towards Mudki to arrest the advance of the British Commander-in-Chief on Ferozepur, while the other half was stationed at Ferozeshah. After the Battle of Mudki in which the British came off best, all the Sikh forces concentrated at Ferozeshah, where a battle was fought on 21 and 22 December. The Sikhs held the upper hand on the first day. G. B. Malleson writes, ‘Then among many panic set in. The cry of “India lost” was heard from one commanding officer who tried in vain to rally his men. The left attack on the Khalsa had failed so signally that it could not be renewed. The Sikh Army had repulsed the British attack. They had driven back Litler, forced Smith to retire, compelled even

¹ Cunningham, *op. cit.* (1918 ed.) pp. 278-9.

² *Ibid.* p. 287.

Gilbert to evacuate the position he had gained and had thrown the whole British army into disorder. What was more they had still 10,000 men under Tej Singh. Had a guiding mind directed the movements of the Sikh army nothing could have saved the exhausted British. But the Sikhs as we know possessed no guiding mind.'¹

Again had Ranjodh Singh of Phillaur Fort crossed the Sutlej between 12 December and 22 December 1845 he could have taken Delhi unopposed as the entire British force was concentrated on the Ferozepur side. Major G. Carmichael Smyth writes, 'Ranjoor Singh ought certainly to have marched direct upon Delhi instead of entrenching himself first at Buddowal and afterwards on the banks of the river; his cavalry might have laid waste the country and his army would have increased like a snowball and easily have got possession of a portion of the siege-train which was on the road without proper ammunition and unprotected.' Ranjodh Singh attacked Ludhiana on 6 January 1846,² and entrenched himself in the fort of Baddowal near Ludhiana. It was a very convincing victory for the Sikhs. But soon after the advantage was lost at the Battle of Aliwal, fought on 28 January, though after the battle it was found that, 'the ground was more thickly strewn with the bodies of victorious horsemen than of the beaten infantry.'³

Before the hostilities began Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala had gone to the village of Kakralay in Ludhiana District to celebrate the marriage of his son Kahan Singh. No sooner did he learn that the Sikh Army had crossed the Sutlej,⁴ than he hastened back to his village, Attari, fully realising the emergency and the extraordinary circumstances prevalent in his country. In the meantime news of the defeat of the Sikh Army at Ferozeshah had reached Maharani Jind Kaur, who also despatched ten horsemen to Attari with an urgent message for Sardar

¹ G.B. Malleeson, *The Decisive Battles of India*, p. 360.

² *Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. XXIV & XXV.

³ *Decisive Battles*, p. 367.

⁴ *Chiefs and Families of Note*, Vol. I, p. 297.

Sham Singh. The Attari Chief hurried to the scene of action in response to the Maharani's call only to find that Tej Singh and Lal Singh were conducting the war in a most shameful manner. The object of these traitors was to get their own troops dispersed by the converging forces of the enemy in the hope of being 'upheld as ministers of a dependent Kingdom by the grateful conquerors.'¹ When Sham Singh had apprised himself of this situation he hesitated to take command. But the very delicate political situation in the Punjab demanded supreme sacrifice and he had no alternative but to take up the post.

But more dangerous than the treachery of Tej Singh and Lal Singh in the battlefield was the political intrigue of Raja Gulab Singh, who was then conducting negotiations with the Governor-General. The Raja, as the plenipotentiary of the Lahore Durbar, did not hesitate to sell his country for silver. He had already agreed to the following conditions dictated by the British: (i) that the Sikh Army should be attacked by the English, (ii) that after being defeated it should be abandoned by its own Government, and (iii) that the passage of the Sutlej should be unopposed and the road to the capital laid open to the victor.²

Luckily for the Sikhs the main hitch still remained: the dispersal of the Sikh Army. The Raja had shown his inability to accomplish this and had left it entirely to the British, whose immediate aim was to drive the Sikhs across the Sutlej by force of arms and secure the unconditional submission of the chiefs and delegates of the army. But a single defeat could not completely disperse so large and well-equipped an army of brave men as the Sikhs, and it was at this juncture that Sham Singh came forward and declared his resolve to resist the British and stop them from occupying the land of the five rivers.

Sham Singh's announcement had the desired effect. The Sikhs, dejected at their defeat at Aliwal, were inspired

¹ Cunningham, *op. cit.* p. 291.

² *Ibid.* p. 309.

anew by the noble example of Sardar Sham Singh. Cunningham, graphically describes the situation: 'The dangers which threatened the Sikh people pressed upon their mind and they saw no escape from foreign subjection. The grey-headed chief, Sham Singh of Attari, made known his resolution to die in the first conflict with the enemies of his race and so to offer himself as a sacrifice of propitiation to the spirit of Gobind and to the genius of his mystic Commonwealth.'¹

TEJ SINGH'S WILES

The freedom-loving soul of Sham Singh could never dream of foreign subjugation of his motherland. Despite the traitor Tej Singh's best efforts to dissuade him from fighting against the British, he remained firm in his resolve. On the night of 9 February 1846, a few hours before the battle, Tej Singh held yet another meeting with Sham Singh and advised him not to fight against the British and thus lose his life. He argued that British reinforcements had arrived and in view of their preparations it was impossible to win the battle. He tried hard to persuade Sham Singh to flee from the battlefield rather than to fight, but Sham Singh, who could never think of such treachery to his country's cause, scornfully turned down the suggestion. The disappointed Tej Singh retorted angrily, 'If you are so brave you had better take an oath on it, for I believe you will come with me after all.' All the time Sham Singh had remained calm and serene. Promptly accepting the challenge, he called for the Holy Granth, prayed, and then swore on the Holy Book that should the Sikhs be defeated he would never leave the trenches alive.² The disappointed Tej Singh had to return unsuccessful.

As soon as the vow of Sardar Sham Singh became public, the assembled Sikh forces were filled with enthusiasm and once again the cry of 'Fight the Feringhies' rent the air. The Sham Singh-Tej Singh tussle on the night of 9 February had its effect. The former decided to fight to the last while

¹ Cunningham, *op. cit.* p. 311.

² Griffin, *op. cit.* p.297.

the latter had in his heart of hearts determined to betray the cause at the appropriate time.

Unfortunately the odds against the Sikhs did not end there. The other traitor, Lal Singh, had already secretly handed over to the British a complete plan of the disposition of the Sikh forces as it would be on the 10th morning. Even the date of the battle was not decided by the usual circumstances of battle, but according to the convenience of the British who were expecting reinforcements by that time.¹ The stage was thus set for a one-sided farce, not for a battle. But Sham Singh shattered all such illusions of the British. The 10th of February was going to be a proud day in the history of our country with Sham Singh playing the lead.

THE BATTLE OF SOBROAN

It was only natural that the entire deployment of the British forces should be done in order to balance the positions occupied by the Sikh forces. The British, therefore, planned to attack the Sikh entrenchments on the extreme right where Lal Singh had reported the defences to be weak. Sir Robert Dick's Division was ordered to commence the attack on this side with Sir Walter Gilbert's Division in immediate support on the right. Sir Harry Smith's Division was to be close to Gilbert's right to support him. Smith's Division had two brigades, one under Brigadier Penny, and the other under Brigadier Hicks. Penny's Brigade consisted of H.M.'s 31st Foot, the 47th Native Infantry and the Nussereee Battalion (Gurkhas). Hick's Brigade, consisting of H.M.'s 50th Foot and the 42nd Native Infantry, was to attack the enemy's extreme left.²

Sardar Sham Singh, also knowing that 10th February was going to be the day of battle, rose early in the morning, dressed himself in white, and mounting his white mare proceeded to address the Sikh Army.³ He reminded the

¹ W. Edwards, *Reminiscences of a Bengal Civilian*, p.99.

² Gough & Innes, *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars*, pp.121 & 122.

³ Griffin, *op. cit.* Vol. I., p.476.

assembled Khalsa about their glorious traditions of bravery and sacrifice in the past and begged them, as true sons of the soil, to die rather than turn their backs on the enemy. Since he had himself dedicated his life to the sacred cause, his words had the desired effect.

Meanwhile, the British had already taken up their respective positions under cover of the dense fog, and soon after, when the rising sun rapidly dispelled the thick fog, their guns suddenly opened heavy fire on the Sikh trenches. With this opening barrage, the Sikh drums beat the alarm and the bugles sounded to arm. In a few minutes their batteries were manned and began to answer shot for shot.

Dick's Division advanced according to plan and found the defences weak and easily surmountable, as Lal Singh's emissaries had reported. The 10th Queen's Regiment broke through totally unopposed, but when the entire division had penetrated some way it was suddenly fallen upon by the Sikhs and driven back. Sir Robert Dick was himself mortally wounded. 'Rally those men', the Governor-General shouted.¹ Colonel Wood, his Aide-de-Camp, galloped to the centre of the line and seizing the colours from the hands of an ensign carried them to the front. In a moment the wavering British troops had rallied and stormed the breastworks simultaneously with the Brigade of Dick's Division, who had also experienced a similar check but had soon recovered their lost ground. Now both Gilbert's and Dick's Divisions engaged in what may be called the deadliest hand-to-hand encounter with the Sikh infantry.²

During the first British attack Sardar Sham Singh had been present almost everywhere.³ He did not allow his men to lose heart as he moved from column to column urging the men to fight on. His action stirred the Sikhs to greater efforts and the British were eventually repulsed. William Edwards, who was present during the attack, has

¹ Gough & Innes, *op. cit.* pp.1-24.

² Charles, Viscount Hardinge, *Viscount Hardinge*, pp.11 & 117.

³ Griffin, *op. cit.* p.476.

described the scene most graphically: 'Gilbert's Troops immediately advanced but finding the centre of the works from their height perfectly impregnable were driven back with very heavy loss. Sir Harry Smith's Division instead of being near the right of Gilbert was on the extreme left of the Sikh position. It also advanced on the works in front and was driven back with great loss.'

For some time the issue of the Battle of Sobroan was hanging in the balance as the conflict raged fiercely. Cunningham, describing this contest, writes: 'The round shot exploded tumbrils or dashed heaps of sand into the air; the hollow shells cast their fatal contents fully before them and the devious rocket sprang aloft with fury to fall hissing amid a flood of men; but all was in vain, the Sikhs stood unappalled and flash for flash returned and fire for fire.' The field was resplendent with embattled warriors.¹ Then as Sir Herbert Edwards says, 'The artillery galloped up and delivered their fire within 300 yards of the enemy's batteries and infantry charged home with the bayonet and carried the works without firing a single shot. As it was the finest attack, so also did it meet with the most determined hand-to-hand resistance with which the Khalsa soldiers had yet opposed the British.' The tide of battle now turned against the gallant defenders² and to make its turn irrevocable, the treacherous Commander, Tej Singh, instead of leading fresh men to bolster up the defences, fled across the bridge of boats sinking the central boat after crossing.³

MARTYRDOM

Gilbert's Division led the third charge on the Sikh centre. Mounting on one another's shoulders, the attackers gained a footing on the entrenchments and as they increased in number they rushed at the Sikh guns and captured them. Soon the news spread down the line⁴ that enemy troops

¹ Major-General Herbert B. Edwards, Cunningham, *op. cit.* p.313.

² *Memoirs, op. cit.* Vol. I, p.40.

³ *Ibid* pp.41 & 42.

⁴ Gough & Innes, *op. cit.* p. 127.

had won their way through to Sikh positions. Sardar Sham Singh, seeing his army facing defeat, took the final fatal plunge. He spurred forward against the 50th Foot, brandishing his sword and calling on his men to follow him. But soon he fell from his horse, his body pierced with seven balls.¹ He had remained true to his vow to the last. Bravely the Sardar had not only gone forward to defend his own positions, but had pushed deep into the enemy lines. As proof of this his dead body, according to the British Commander-in-Chief, 'was sought for in the captured camp by his followers', who were permitted to search for their dead leader.² His body was discovered where the dead lay thickest. His servants placed the body on a raft and swam with it across the river. Three days later the party reached Attari. Sham Singh's widow, who knew of her husband's resolution not to survive defeat, had already immolated herself with the clothes which the Sardar had worn on their wedding day.³ Her Samadh along with that of her husband is still to be seen outside the village of Attari.

The self-sacrifice of Sardar Sham Singh, the hero of Sobroan, had an inspiring effect. 'No Sikh offered to submit and no disciple of Gobind asked for quarter. They everywhere showed a front to the victor and stalked slowly and sullenly away while many rushed singly forth to meet assured death by contending with a multitude.'⁴

Sardar Sham Singh's courage and determination had turned Sobroan into the Waterloo of India, as according to Malleeson, victory for the Sikhs would have meant to the English the loss of India.⁵ The Sardar's devotion to his country's cause was unique in an era of betrayals and his fidelity and self-sacrifice shone like a beacon amidst the treachery and selfishness of his contemporaries who sold their country to the foreigners. Indeed Sardar Sham Singh proved himself a prince among patriots!

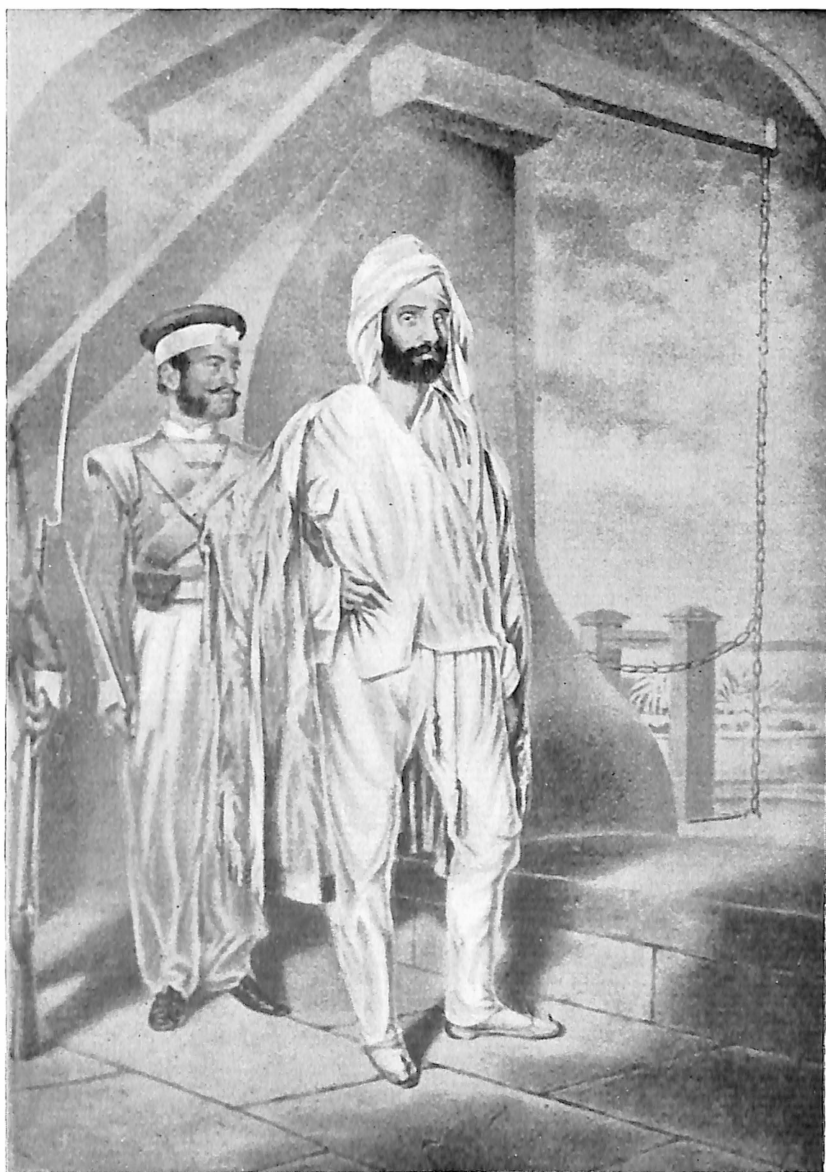
¹ Griffin, *op. cit.* p.498.

² *The War in India, Despatches*, pp. 37-38

³ Griffin, *op. cit.* 498.

⁴ Cunningham, *op. cit.* p. 315.

⁵ Malleeson, *Decisive Battles of India*, p. 373.



Dewan MUL RAJ while a prisoner at Fort William, Calcutta.

*(From a water-colour drawing
by C. Grant)*

DEWAN MUL RAJ

The religion and Government of the Khalsa are yet extant. I exist only as the servant of the Maharaja.—MUL RAJ

SHOULD it be dubbed an irony of fate or just a quirk of fortune that, of all the governors and chiefs of the Lahore Kingdom, Dewan Mul Raj was the first in revolt to restore the sovereignty of Maharaja Dalip Singh, despite the fact that he had suffered most grievously at the hands of selfish courtiers? After the occupation of the Lahore Kingdom in 1846, the British embarked on the policy of punishing the chiefs who had opposed them during the late war and rewarding those who had enabled them to establish their sway over the last independent kingdom of India. Dewan Mul Raj could clearly not be included in either of these categories. His was a unique position among the old governors, for on succeeding his father Dewan Sawan Mal in 1844, Mul Raj held the reins of one of the richest and the best governed provinces of the Lahore Durbar.

During his twenty-three years of governorship Dewan Sawan Mal had transformed the hitherto backward and poverty-stricken Subah of Multan into a *Dar-ul-Aman* or an abode of peace and prosperity. By sustained efforts, just measures and honesty of purpose, Sawan Mal had added to the prosperity of his people. Due to the stable conditions he established, trade and industry flourished and agriculture had also improved. For these reasons, the Lahore rulers had placed the largest slice of their territory under the able control of the Dewan. In 1844, the Multan Subah, therefore, extended from the borders of Bahawalpur to Mankira including in its jurisdiction the extensive territories of Dera Ismail Khan and Gazi Khan besides, Saughar, Kalabagh, etc. Its revenue yield, according to

the reckoning of the Multan officials was 47,43,755 rupees per annum.¹ Kaye in his *Sepoy War in India*, Vol. I, writes that Dewan Mul Raj who, on Sawan Mal's assassination in September 1844, had succeeded him as governor of Multan 'also had earned for himself the reputation of a chief with just and enlightened view of government and considerable administrative ability.'

The young Dewan soon proved his mettle. Even during the troubled years of 1844-46, peace, order and prosperity reigned supreme in his entire *subedari*. No greater praise could have been bestowed on him and his province than that contained in a secret report submitted by Lt.-Colonel Henry Lawrence to his government in March 1846. It runs as follows: 'Mooltan forms the seat of a very powerful viceroyalty under the rule of an energetic Hindoo, at whose disposal is placed a large force with very extensive powers for the purpose of overawing the refractory subjects of the Seikh Government in the vicinity.... The Banking influence of Mooltan is considerable, greater than that, for which Shikarpore has so long been celebrated, and there are Sowcars and Shroffs in its Bazars, who are reputed to be capable of commanding a million specie. The Mooltan Hoondees (bills of exchange) are the great mediums of transacting business over the whole of the vast countries, where agents are scattered, and are always considered as cash from the Caspian to the Ganges.... Much of the present prosperity of Mooltan and its dependencies must be attributed to the full freedom to the Hindoo merchants and bankers, and the judicious appointment of one of their own class as a ruler.'²

John Lawrence, officiating for his brother at Lahore, wrote about Mul Raj in October 1846 in a similar strain: 'He is, however, the only popular administrator throughout the Punjab. His force is estimated at about 6000 men

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, No. 126. According to the records of the Lahore Durbar it yielded roughly rupees 34,95,542 per annum of which rupees 21,66,588 were paid as government share, rupees 9,83,917 went for expenses of administration and rupees 3,45,037 as the governor's profit. Ibid.

² *Secret Consultation*, 25 April 1846, No. 15.

and guns drawn by Horses and Bullocks, in which of course those in forts are not included.’¹

Actually the commercial potentialities of Multan had attracted the attention of the British in the early thirties of the nineteenth century. As a result of the commercial treaties then signed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Mithankot in Multan was converted into an entrepot for British trade with the neighbouring kingdoms. Furthermore, during the first Anglo-Afghan War, the province of Multan was virtually converted by the British into a base for their military supplies. After the conquest of Sindh in 1843, they began to cast greedy eyes upon Multan and during the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845-46, several British officials had suggested the feasibility of invading the province from the Sindh border and detaching it from the Lahore Kingdom. Even after the occupation of the Lahore Kingdom by the British in 1846, some of the British officials continued to study this rich province from the same angle. J. D. Cunningham, the then Assistant Agent to the Governor-General, North-Western Frontier, even held a meeting with the Nawab of Bahawalpur for this purpose. In a letter from Fazilka on 5 January 1846 he reported the result of the discussion to Sir Charles Napier, Governor of Sindh, saying, ‘If the British Government desired to bring him (Mul Raj) over to its interests, he, the Nawab would undertake to do so.’² In the meantime, however, the British were able to occupy the entire Lahore Kingdom, so they began to consider the strategically important province of Multan from a different angle. But before the British Resident had the necessary time to formulate his scheme for the establishment of a new set-up in Multan, Wazir Lal Singh complicated the matter by his attempt to wrest the province from Dewan Mul Raj for his cousin Missar Bhagwan Singh. To dispossess Mul Raj of this rich tract a force under Bhagwan Singh was sent against him in May/June 1846. The Dewan easily defeated the Durbar forces near Jhang and appealed for justice.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, No. 1079.

² *Ibid.* No. 302.

Henry Lawrence who found himself implicated in this shortsighted policy took shelter under a double-edged policy. To the Governor-General he wrote, 'There are many objections to hereditary succession in Mooltan, as in other Oriental Provinces; but considering that the son of Sawan Mull appears to follow in the steps of his Father, and to pay some respect to the rights of the people, it appears to me that his seat would be ill-filled by a Brother of the Minister, or by a rough regulation general; by a ruder Sirdar; or a mere Mootsuddie sent to establish a new family.'¹ What the Resident hinted at was the desirability of ultimately placing Multan under British administration. Nevertheless, he tried to browbeat the Dewan into upholding the false prestige of the British name. He wrote to the Dewan on 22 June 1846 saying: 'It has lately come to my knowledge that you are pursuing a course totally opposed to the wishes of the British Government.' Then charging him with, 'the design of appropriating Mooltan', the Resident warned him that, 'This the British Government will not only never permit, but should it be necessary, at this time, will assist the Lahore Durbar in the preservation of its rights.'² This statement was not only a complete distortion of facts but was also quite unbecoming from a person of the integrity of Henry Lawrence. It will not be necessary to dilate here on the details of the controversy which continued for the next six months between Mul Raj and the British Resident on the finalization of new terms, as these are outside the purview of this study. What emerged from this episode was the Dewan's entire loss of faith in the British. In response to his further appeal for justice and fair play, Henry Lawrence wrote from Simla on 15 September 1846 that if the conditions imposed by the Durbar were distasteful he could resign.³

To add insult to injury John Lawrence, then officiating for his brother at Lahore, was almost discourteous to the

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, No. 952.

² *Ibid.* No. 953.

³ *Ibid.* No. 1120.

Dewan and in an attempt to soil his reputation released the following statement about the once ablest administrator. 'Mul Raj', John Lawrence wrote, 'has a good manner and bearing, but does not appear to be either a bold or clever man. His manner is inferior to his conversation. He gave me the impression of possessing little knowledge of the world in general and of the British in particular.'¹ By riding roughshod over Mul Raj, John doubtless succeeded in getting an agreement signed by him on 29 October 1846 surrendering nearly a quarter of his province and agreeing to pay nearly 25 per cent more on the remaining territory than what was paid on the whole. Obviously the Dewan left Lahore, hurt and insulted by such cavalier treatment. Even his request that the new arrangements should hold good for seven years till the Maharaja came of age was rejected.

From then onwards the Dewan continued to be victimized by British officials at all levels. Charges of maladministration and bad faith were levelled against him on flimsy grounds. In April 1847 Captain Nicholson accused the Dewan of bad administration merely because the latter had not received him personally but had sent his brother.² Soon after the settlement of his revenues, he was deprived of income from trade duties contrary to the agreement of 29 October.³

The next measure was the Resident's order of 21 August 1847, curtailing the Dewan's judicial powers,⁴ while on 27 August he was ordered to furnish immediately a full report of all troops and guns at his disposal.⁵ In doing so the British overlooked the fact that Mul Raj, unlike the salaried governors serving in other provinces, was still holding Multan on contract basis and the imposition of new conditions had an adverse effect on his revenues, besides being a breach of contract.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, No. 1236.

² *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p.85.

³ *Ibid.* p. 119.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.264.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.268.

These despotic actions of the Resident had eventually convinced the Dewan that the British did not mean fair play in the Punjab. Already by the treaty of Bhyrowal, they had condemned the Regent Maharani Jind Kaur and usurped all the powers of the Lahore Durbar. Mul Raj had also witnessed by now the ruthless policy pursued by the British administrators against all patriotic elements in the Lahore Kingdom. Consequently the Dewan like many others realized the absolute necessity of ridding themselves of the new masters. His inflexible determination to espouse the patriotic cause is evident from his reception of Jowai, whom Maharani Jind Kaur had sent to Multan in May/June 1847 and the encouraging message sent by him to the deposed Maharani through this maid-servant.¹

It seems the Dewan continued thereafter to bide his time and await a suitable opportunity to assail the common enemy. Thus towards the close of 1847 when a crisis was imminent, he paid another visit to Lahore, settled all his dues and tendered his resignation to John Lawrence on 18 December. The Dewan's motive in taking this step was to protest against the intolerant attitude of the British authorities and also to shelve the responsibility of administering a difficult province merely to benefit the foreign masters. John Lawrence saw through this subterfuge and declined to relieve him till suitable alternative arrangements were made. He accordingly wrote to the Governor-General 'I should prefer that Dewan Mool Raj continued to hold Mooltan for another year, for the rest of the Punjab will afford ample occupation for all our energies for that period. Hereafter it will be well to get rid of the Dewan.'²

Thereafter events moved in a set pattern. The Dewan on reaching Multan concentrated on the dispersal of his wealth and then sent his final resignation in March 1848. The charge of the Presidentship of the Lahore Council had by that time been taken over by Frederick Currie, the late Secretary, Foreign Department, Fort William. His appoint-

¹ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 180.

² Sita Ram Kohli, *Trial of Dewan Mul Raj*, p. 94.

ment had already seriously disturbed the minds of the knowledgeable circles in the Punjab. On arrival at Lahore Currie promptly accepted the Dewan's resignation, appointed Vans Agnew, a British civil servant, and Lieutenant Anderson of the Bombay Army to take charge along with Sardar Kahan Singh Mann who was to act as the nominal head. The new Governor and the two British officers reached Multan on 18 April 1848 accompanied by a strong detachment of 500 Gorkha troops of the Lahore Durbar. The outgoing Governor received the party with honours befitting their status and rank and on the following day made over the charge of the fort to them.

The Crisis Develops

On 19 April 1848 when the British officers came out of the fort after taking charge from the Dewan, they were attacked and wounded by a person lying in wait outside the gate. It has not been possible so far to fathom the true reason for this outrage, nor has Mul Raj been held responsible for this.¹ The fact remains that the transfer of the control of Multan was viewed by the general public of the Province with deep misgivings and dislike, and the troops of the Dewan were also enraged at the prospect of disbandment. Mul Raj himself was certainly not weak and incapable as has hitherto been believed. He was cool and calculating, never forgetting how often he had been insulted and affronted by British officials during the past two years. As recently as 18 April soon after he had received the new Governor and the two British officials, he 'was peremptorily called upon to give in his accounts' not of the current year,

¹ The ballad in Gurmukhi showing that Mul Raj had taken up the command of the rebel forces only on the urging of his mother, was composed as late as 1850 by a certain Hakim Chand. How far this could be considered a trustworthy information is difficult to say. Please see the ballad and its English translation in Sita Ram Kohli, *Trial of Dewan Mul Raj*, pp. 8-9.

Another ballad though composed by an anti-Mul Raj Biloch named Sobha contains clear indications of popular resentment against the British. Lines 8-13 of this ballad are indicative of the religious susceptibilities of the natives. *The Gazetteer of the Multan District*, (1902 ed.), pp. 377-83. As a matter of fact many such ballads were composed about the Multan revolt after the annexation of the Punjab.

but of the last ten years for which period nothing stood in his name. The result was that 'disconcerted and annoyed, he quitted their presence', and in the ensuing interval planned his future strategy.¹ Kaye is correct when he remarks that 'when Mul Raj raised the standard of rebellion at Mooltan, he but anticipated a movement for which the whole country was ripe...and the Sikhs *chafing* under the irritating interference of the European stranger, were about to make a common effort to expel him.'² What came to the surface at Lahore simultaneously with the revolt at Multan had the meaning that Mul Raj undoubtedly was prepared to challenge British supremacy as he did. His secret correspondence with Maharani Jind Kaur, Kahan Singh Mann, the Governor-designate of Multan, and others, seized at Lahore on 8 May, and the testimony of the conspirator Ganga Ram before his execution on 11 May afford conclusive proof that Mul Raj was for long taking well-concerted steps to lead the patriots' revolt.³ Therefore, what Mul Raj did first after taking over the leadership was to issue a declaration to the effect that 'The religion and the Government of the Khalsa are yet extant. I exist only as the servant of the Maharaja.'⁴ To make the venture successful he then started sending secret messengers to all parts of the Punjab to recruit volunteers and for opening of other fronts against the British.

The first to join him in the holy cause was Bhai Maharaj Singh, who with a force of more than a thousand volunteers

¹ Kaye, *op.cit.* p.20.

² *Ibid.* p.22.

³ *Secret Despatch to Secretary of State*, No. 50 of 1848. For details see author's article entitled *Some Facts Behind the Second Anglo-Sikh War*, published in the *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings*, Volume XXXV, Part II. Dewan Mul Raj's *vakil*, Mustaffa Khan, told Edwards confidently on 10 May that 'Sardar Kahan Singh Mann, had been at the bottom of the plot against Mr. Agnew and Lt. Anderson...and that all the troops who escorted the Sahibs from Lahore but one man an artillery officer were bribed.' Again, learning of the march of Edwards with the native force against him, the Dewan sent a message to them on 27 April requesting them to join the popular cause that, 'the Khalsa may once more unite and relieve the Maharajah and his mother from the thralldom of the Sahib Log.' *Governor-General's Secret Despatch*, No. 50 of 1848.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 621.

reached Multan by June 1848. In the Doaba and the Hoshiarpur District, Sodhi Ladha Singh of Kartarpur began recruiting for the Dewan.¹ Emissaries were also despatched to all the chiefs and zamindars of the Cis-Sutlej states requesting them to unite with the subjects of the Lahore Kingdom, in the name of common religion and culture.

He wrote to the Maharaja of Patiala to take over their command saying, 'It is becoming your Highness that you collect together and unite all the Rajas and Sardars and make prisoners or drive out all the people of the British for by uniting with us you will preserve your possessions and your rule, and your faith which is more precious than all other things.' Similar letters were written by Dewan Mul Raj to the Raja of Nabha, the Sardars of Bhadaur and Malodh, Gopal Singh Singhpuria, Sobha Singh Kalsia and Dina Singh of Bhaidwans.²

The above correspondence and manifestos issued from Multan³ disclose a clear-cut and well-calculated plan of the Dewan in his anti-British operations. In attempting to draw to his side the Sikh chiefs and rulers of Cis-Sutlej, Mul Raj wanted to divert the attention of the British forces beyond the Punjab, and besides was also assiduously seeking alliance with Amir Dost Muhammad Khan of Kabul and his brother Sultan Muhammad Khan to form a Sikh-Afghan confederation against the British. His emissaries too were actively engaged in Bannu, Kohat, Hazara and Peshawar to stir up a general rebellion. The Dewan's correspondence with Amir Dost Muhammad Khan, Sultan Muhammad Khan and Sardar Chattar Singh during 1848 throws much light on his plans in that direction. His last letter to Dost Muhammad Khan written soon after the revolt of Sardar Chattar Singh at Hazara merits special consideration. Referring to the fact that he had not received the last letter of the Amir as mentioned by Sardar Chattar Singh, the Dewan wrote, 'Be as it may. I have derived the

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 233.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 621.

greatest support and confidence from your kindness; for, to your distinguished encouragement and countenance alone am I indebted for the complete sympathy with which Sardar Chuttur Singh (praised be God for it) threw himself into this business and joined me in rooting out and getting rid of these *Feringees*, who were in fact the mortal enemies of both Hindoos and Mussulmeen; and now that you have collected the mighty armies of Khorassan and Kohistan, and with all your noble relatives in Cabul are turning your steps towards Peshawar; and are planning to send reinforcements to me here by the route of Bannoo and Koorum and numerous other kindnesses detailed in your letter; I cannot but feel grateful and overenjoyed than ever of myself. I shall merely say that being identified with truth, Providence is most gracious to me. As for the *Feringees* who have been such a long while encamped at the safe distance of 3 *koss* from Mooltan, not a night or day passes that I do not engage them where they are, either by a cannonade, or else hand to hand with sword and musket and arrow. By the blessings of God I have already killed some thousands of them yet. With the help of Providence, I hope the day has come for these *Feringees* to be ruined and utterly trodden underfoot in every direction.’¹

In another letter to Sardar Chattar Singh, Dewan Mul Raj acknowledged the Sardar's earlier letter and the happy tidings of his having captured Majors George Lawrence and Bowie and their families. He also acknowledged a copy of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan's letter to Chattar Singh which the latter had sent to him for information. He then continues, ‘Thank God you have got hold of these illbred *Feringees* ! The tree of my hopes has indeed borne fruit; and the bud of my desire begins to blossom.’ Then wishing him Godspeed in his future operations the Dewan wrote, ‘May the immortal Lord bring to a speedy and successful issue what remains to be done at Attock and bless you more and more. You have shown the wisdom of Aristotle in inducing Dost Muhammad Khan to join you

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 20 January 1848, No. 148.

so heartily in serving our Sirkar and destroying the treaty-breaking *Feringees*.' Then applauding the Sardar for the boldness he had shown in rising against the British in that quarter the Dewan said, 'My pen is unequal to do justice to the manly courage you have brought to the assistance of your religion and your country.....All I say therefore is go on, and also even more than what you have done; and finish what is left to be done at Attock.' He then pointed out to Sardar Chattar Singh the danger involved in not setting out immediately to join his son Raja Sher Singh since there was every possibility of an early clash between the forces of the Raja and the British and also reviled Sheikh Imamud-Din, Cortlandt and Dewan Jawahar Mal Dutt for not joining the movement in spite of repeated messages sent to them saying that they were not proving 'faithful to their salt.' About himself the Dewan wrote, 'Never mind I and my troops are as yet unshaken.'¹

In the letter addressed to Sultan Muhammad Khan, Mul Raj congratulated him on capturing Majors Lawrence and Bowie and handing them over to Sardar Chattar Singh; then after giving details of the position in Multan the Dewan exhorted Sultan Muhammad Khan to make 'the exclusion of the English from the Punjab' his primary object.²

Nor was the Dewan inactive on the military front, as for over nine months he had kept the mighty British engaged without surrendering the city and the fort of Multan. From April to September, his columns continued to harass the combined troops of Edwards, Cortlandt, the Bahawalpur Nawab, Sheikh Imamud-Din and General Whish. Early in May he had even despatched 'a picked body of 250 horse and 1 gun to disturb the British supply line near Ferozpur.'³ Soon after Raja Sher Singh marched from Multan, the Dewan quickly changed his military strategy to suit the new situation. Henceforth his 'main

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 20 January 1848, No. 148.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 138.

purpose was to fight a defensive battle with a few picked and faithful soldiers and to fight from within the walls of the city and the fort.¹ Even with his small garrison of 7,000 soldiers opposing the 35,000-strong British force, the Dewan managed to hold out for the next four months continuously foiling every new strategy adopted by the besiegers, with commendable dispatch and determination. It will be worthwhile to mention here a few of these incidents.

After prolonged preparations, General Whish had decided to launch an offensive on the morning of 7 November. In the van would be Cortlandt's force and the irregular Pathans supported by the British columns on the flanks, but the Dewan was able to smash this entire combination by winning over to his side before daybreak nearly half of the regular regiments of Cortlandt. This engendered so much confusion and consternation in the British Command that the entire strategy was changed in a hastily convened meeting at 4 a.m. on the 7th and it was decided to launch the attack at 10 a.m. But by 6-30 the Dewan's forces took the initiative with a volley of musketry fire followed by a determined attack on the 500 Pathans of Edwards' column posted near the Surajkund Nallah. The attack was so furious that the entire Pathan force with the 8th Gun Battery were pushed back to within 400 yards of the main British camp. In the battle that ensued, the Dewan's forces 'for some time met every accession of force found upon the spot by Edwards by similar reinforcements.'² Having won over most of the Durbar troops under General Cortlandt, Mul Raj next made a final bid to detach Sheikh Imamud-Din from the British camp. In a letter which reached the Sheikh on 2 December 1848, he wrote, 'To be loyal and true to one's masters is the very gem of manhood. You are the wise man of this age. Let by-gones therefore be by-gones; and looking on my house as your own, come here in all confidence of a hearty welcome; and unite with me in

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 138.

² *Secret Consultation*, 30 December 1848, No. 117.

a public cause.¹ The Dewan had also despatched with this letter, the one he had received from Sardar Chattar Singh dated 9 November also addressed to the Sheikh. Both the leaders had written to the Sheikh, as his assistance to the British was doing incalculable harm to the patriotic cause. At that time he was on the march to Jhung to support the rear of the British forces in action against Multan.²

It will be needless to give a more detailed account of the siege of Multan and the incredible hardships which the Dewan and his faithful people continued to endure in the hope of outside relief. Unfortunately, nothing was possible as the British having thrown in all their resources in the Punjab were successful in preventing the forces of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan and the Attariwala chiefs from joining Mul Raj. Notwithstanding the presentiment that his doom was near, the Dewan continued resistance to the bitter end, due in no small measure to the rare courage and devotion to duty of his brave Rohilla and Pathan soldiers. On 27 December, General Whish made a general assault on the city. The day-long bombardment besides inflicting untold destruction of life and property of the people also culminated in exploding the entire magazine inside the fort.³ In spite of this, the dour resistance encountered by the columns of Brigadier Stalker and Brigadier Markham who first entered the city breaches on 2 January 1849 was beyond all expectation, for the Dewan's soldiers fought almost 'from street to street.'⁴ Even after the capture of the city and in spite of the attempt made by Edwards to lure away the Dewan's soldiers by bribery, none did surrender till 22 January, when the fort had been battered to rubble with 'upwards of six and thirty thousand heavy shot and shell.'⁵

The best tribute that could be paid to the Dewan and his gallant soldiers was unwittingly paid by the Governor-

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 30th December 1848, No. 171.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Secret Consultation*, 27 January 1849, No. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.* No. 155.

⁵ Baird, *op.cit.* p.51.

General himself who in his Proclamation issued on 1 February 1849 wrote, 'The capture of this important fortress which during a protracted period has resisted the powerful armament brought against it, and had been defended with gallantry and endurance is a just subject of congratulation to the Government of India and to the Army.'¹ So it was to the Dewan for not living up to the false assessment made of him by John Lawrence.

After his surrender, the Dewan met the inevitable fate of every unsuccessful rebel. He was imprisoned and kept under most strict conditions till after the annexation of the Punjab, the British found leisure to try him for the triple charges of rebellion, murder and waging war against what they called 'his sovereign'.²

The Commissioners who held the trial, sentenced him to death and then recommended him as usual to the Governor-General's clemency. This was granted with the instructions that the death sentence be commuted to 'imprisonment for life in banishment beyond the Seas.'³ Up to January 1850, the Dewan was incarcerated in the Lahore Fort, when he and the other state prisoners were externed from the Punjab, with instructions to be kept in irons and sent straight to Calcutta.

On reaching Calcutta, Mul Raj was imprisoned in one of the bastions of Fort William. His health was already shattered beyond recovery on account of the privations of a prolonged siege, the mental tortures of an ignominious trial and the rigours of detention in which he was kept. His health took a serious turn by August 1851 because of all this, and necessitated his removal to Banaras for a change of climate.⁴ He had not reached his destination when he breathed his last near Buxur on 11 August, at the early age of 36 years. His remains were cremated on the banks of the Ganges off Partapur.

The leadership of this patriotic revolt had not only cost

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 24 February 1849, No. 152.

² *Ibid.* No. 150.

³ *Governor-General's Despatch to Secret Committee*, No. 47 of 30 July 1849.

⁴ Baird, *op.cit.* p.175.

Mul Raj his life, but also brought dire ruin to the citizens of Multan, attended by devastation which could not be made good for several decades to come. Soon after the surrender, the city was thrown open to lie at the mercy of a revengeful enemy, whose soldiers and prize agents left nothing standing and ransacked every nook and corner for more prize money. The worst-hit were the Governor's family consisting of his wife, daughter and son together with the three widows, a sister, three sons, and a daughter-in-law of Dewan Sawan Mal. In October 1850, these hapless people were found by the deputy Commissioner of Sheikhpura, William Ford, living, 'in very indigent circumstances' in a single room. Moved to pity, Ford recommended a nominal pension of Rs. 85 per month for the entire family which was sanctioned by the Government.¹

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 18 October 1850, Nos. 17-19.

BHAI MAHARAJ SINGH

There will be another National War, let all the true Sikhs rise on the day fixed.
—BHAI MAHARAJ SINGH

IF Maharani Jind Kaur was the brain behind the first anti-British movement in the Punjab, Nihal Singh popularly known as Bhai Maharaj Singh was its soul. None of the heroes of this struggle either did or suffered so much for this cause as did this Sikh saint. Being given to a life of dedication and devotion to God, Bhai Maharaj Singh led the anti-British campaign as part of his moral obligation towards his people, and unlike others, he had neither any axe to grind nor any personal score to settle with the British. For him it was a divine mission for the success of which he staked his personal freedom, comfort, reputation and ultimately his life.

Unfortunately not much is known about his early life and career, except that he was one of the trusted followers of Bhai Bir Singh and that during his later years was himself revered by a vast following, including most of the Sikh chiefs at the Lahore Durbar. As such he was undoubtedly the fittest person to head a popular movement like the one he did.

The first revolutionary act in his career was to bless the famous Prema Conspiracy. This Conspiracy was really the first open attempt made against the British in the Punjab in which besides a number of influential persons, a couple of regiments of the Durbar army, Bhai Budh Singh and Munshi Buta Singh, the near attendants of Maharani Jind Kaur, were involved. The plot was to murder the British Resident Lt.-Col. Henry Lawrence and the pro-British chiefs of the Durbar when they assembled at the meeting scheduled for 21 April, 1847 in the Shalimar Gardens. Prema, an ex-A.D.C. of Maharaja Gulab Singh, along with Sardar

Lal Singh *Adalti* was to lead the attack. Bhai Maharaj Singh is said to have given his sword and his blessing to the leaders. Unfortunately the scheme leaked out about three weeks before the due date and stringent measures were at once adopted to hunt down the conspirators, most of whom had gone underground.¹ A virtual reign of terror was let loose in the occupied Kingdom of Lahore. Anybody suspected of harbouring the culprits stood in danger of losing not only his freedom but also his property on the slightest hint from any person!

Severer still were the steps taken to apprehend Bhai Maharaj Singh. The British Resident had got arrested all the Bhai's personal attendants at Amritsar and when all third-degree methods against them failed to bring forth any clue about their master's whereabouts, orders were issued to ransack the entire Majha which was supposed to be his stronghold. At the same time his property at Amritsar was confiscated and a reward of one thousand Rupees put on his head.² Although the British Resident gave out that the arrest of a popular leader like the Bhai need not be affected 'by military but by civil means', yet the military means were never completely abandoned. On receipt of information from Baba Lachman Singh, the *Kardar* of Amritsar, that Bhai Maharaj Singh was sheltered by the zamindars of Hadiara near Amritsar, a strong party of 100 *sowars* was at once despatched to Hadiara with instructions to arrest all the zamindars suspected of sheltering the fugitive. Orders were also issued to all the *Kardars* and other officials in the kingdom to help the authorities to capture the Bhai.³ But either because of the profound respect he enjoyed in the hearts of the masses or because of the wide-spread ill-feeling against the British, or both, the Bhai could not be caught for the next three years, even

¹ On 18 November, 1847, 11 persons, including Prema and Munshi Buta Singh, were deported to Delhi to serve various prison sentences there.

² His property was sold by public auction on 25 June 1847, *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, pp. 175-6, 180, 185.

³ 'Notifications were also published that if any one should harbour him the house and *jagheers* of the persons so offending would be confiscated to Government.' *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 182.

though the reward for his capture had been successively increased to the huge amount of ten thousand Rupees.¹ In his Minute of 30 September 1848, Lord Dalhousie had to note this fact very despairingly. He wrote: 'The Zemin-dars, the population and the Chiefs openly displayed entire sympathy in the cause; and the Durbar officials and the Kardars who were ordered to pursue him, followed him tranquilly, and remained on the best terms with him.'²

During the period between the Prema Conspiracy and the revolt of Dewan Mul Raj, the courageous divine kept on preparing the ground for the impending trial of strength with the new masters of the Punjab. Fearless of arrest, he moved from village to village preaching to the people the need for immediate action against the enemies of the *Khalsa*. When he heard about the revolt in Multan he welcomed it as a God-given opportunity and at once sent his secret messengers to the rebel Dewan. On receiving Dewan Mul Raj's reply,³ the Bhai set out for Multan, raising volunteers on the way so that by the time he reached his destination he had under his command a sizable force of more than a thousand devoted fighters. Reporting this to the higher authorities, Lord Dalhousie said, shortly after the banishment of the Ranee and revolt of Mul Raj, 'Bhai Maharaj Singh raised the standard of rebellion in the Manjah. He speedily collected many thousand men, traversed the districts towards the North of the Doabs; was everywhere received with favor and gathered numbers daily.'⁴

On reaching Multan, the Bhai and his party were received with marked consideration by the Dewan, who personally came out to welcome him, offered a *nazarana* of forty gold *mohars* and then conducted him into the fort.

But differences soon arose between the two leaders, and the Bhai very soon left Multan with his volunteers to join Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala in Hazara who was also

¹ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p.260.

² *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 621.

³ Correspondence between Dewan Mul Raj and Bhai Maharaj Singh was carried on through messengers disguised as *fakirs*.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 621.

then heading for a clash with the British.¹ Instead of proceeding straight from Multan to Hazara, the Bhai followed a more circuitous route via Pakpattan, Muktsar, Anandpur and Jawala Mukhi, circling the foot of the Punjab hills. It seems that he adopted this course for various reasons. For one, he was extremely popular in Majha and the Jullundhar Doab and it was therefore safer for him to move through this region and avoid being detected by the British authorities. Another reason was that he could thus enrol more volunteers from these regions where his influence was dominant.

Even by following this longer route the Bhai was able to reach Rawalpindi in the shortest possible time to communicate with Sardar Chattar Singh well before the rebel forces started towards Lahore. How the arrival of the Bhai in that quarter was likely to give a great fillip to the anti-British movement is evident from what Captain Abbott wrote on 9 June 1848. Commenting on Major Napier's report on his failure to apprehend the elusive divine, Abbott despairingly stated 'in February last I strongly urged to the officiating Resident the importance of this man's immediate seizure.....What was easy then has proved impossible since the revolt of Mooltan and the escape of this robber, whom the army are anxious to canonize, will, I fear, strengthen the cause of the insurgents.'²

From Rawalpindi Bhai Maharaj Singh proceeded to Ram Nagar, passing through the villages of Banda, Sukho, Dhartala, Saido and Chakwal, preaching everywhere the need to oust the British at all cost. At Ram Nagar he would 'go about fearlessly among the armies enjoining the Sikhs to be firm and courageous.' After the Battle of Ram Nagar he accompanied the rebel force to Rasul and thereafter fought at Chillianwala and Gujrat.³

During these battles the rebels' greatest worry was the

¹ According to a wrong intelligence report of 15 June 1848, it was stated that Bhai Maharaj Singh had drowned in the river Chenab with 800 followers. *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. IV, p. 502.

² Ibid. p.182.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, Nos. 20-31.

shortage of food and fodder. The Bhai did a lot to augment the supply of these necessities. During the campaigns he even dashed to Jammu to personally request Mian Pheena,¹ a son of Maharaja Gulab Singh, to allow his volunteers to collect grain from that State. The task of transporting these supplies to the rebel camp was allotted to a certain Mitha Singh at whose disposal the Bhai had placed a large camel force.²

RESOLVE TO FIGHT ALONE

After the defeat at Gujrat, Bhai Maharaj Singh escaped to Rawalpindi with the army and other rebel chiefs. While there he is said to have repeatedly advised the chiefs to meet the British in at least one more battle either at Rawalpindi or Punja Sahib, but the majority opinion was against this. 'The pusillanimity of the rebel chiefs', as the Bhai described it, however, did not discourage him from continuing the fight on his own, although it meant starting all over again, for the entire rebel force 16,000 strong was going to be surrendered to General Gilbert. To continue his mission safely he at once escaped with his followers to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, making the town of Devi Battala his secret headquarters. From here he moved later on further into the interior, to Chambi which was more inaccessible and hence better from the point of view of security. From Chambi he continued to send secret emissaries to various parts of the Punjab pressing the subjects of the erstwhile Kingdom of Lahore to continue their hostility to the British.

ATTEMPT TO SECURE MAHARAJA DALIP SINGH

While at Chambi, Bhai Maharaj Singh came to learn about the likely removal of Maharaja Dalip Singh from the Punjab. Realising that the removal of the Maharaja from his people would once for all weaken the popular cause, the Bhai thought it desirable to secure the person

¹ Mian Pheena's actual name was Ranbir Singh.

² *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, Nos. 20-31.

of the Maharaja in whose name the struggle for freedom was to continue. To achieve this a party of trusted followers, consisting of an ex-Commandant, Prem Singh; Ram Singh of Rawal; Butta Singh and Jawahar Singh of Sarhali; Mehtab Singh of Naushehra, near Battala; along with Bhup Singh and Dal Singh was sent to Lahore. At Lahore a certain Mian Ganeshi was to assist the party in their project. The plan was to conduct the Maharaja to the Jammu hills from where regular operations would start in his name.

This was really a very crucial period, as Henry Lawrence later recorded. 'The minds of men', he wrote, 'were much excited, the Maha Raja was about to leave Lahore an exile; the leaders in the late war who had just been arrested, were about to follow. Bhai Maharaj Singh a Sikh priest of reputed sanctity and of great influence, the first man who raised the standard of rebellion beyond the confines of Multan, in 1848, and the only leader of note who did not lay down his arms to Sir Walter Gilbert, at Rawal Pindee, was tampering with the Sikhs of the Punjab Cavalry Corps at Lahore. Six of his emissaries watched by the Police, had been for weeks, and were at that very time, residing close under the palace walls, with a view to abducting the young Maha Raja.'¹

A NEW PLAN

After deputing these men to Lahore, Bhaiji himself set out to make arrangements for the general rebellion. From July to October 1849 he stayed at Sajuwal in the District of Battala where he decided to attack the Cantonments of Hoshiarpur and Jullundar. As men and money were needed for this trial of strength with the British, a scheme was drawn up to use the influence of the local priests everywhere to encourage the people to co-operate with the rebels. It was also decided to send emissaries to Punjabi brethren as far as Kabul and Kandahar, and also to get the

¹ *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XXII, 1854.

support of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan and Sultan Muhammad Khan. To implement this programme, the Bhai divided his followers into batches and sent them in various directions. Basawa Singh of Nurpur Chopra and Baj Singh were sent with letters to Bhais Kishen Singh and Nihal Singh to raise men and money in Kandahar and Kabul. Likewise Bhup Singh, Dal Singh, Jhanda Singh and Jawala Singh were sent to make preparations in the Majha, while Alla Singh Rarewala, Nana Singh and Mitha Singh were sent to Anandpur; Hari Singh to Ambala; Narain Singh, Bahadur Singh and Gurmukh Singh to the Doaba; and Dharm Singh, Nihal Singh and Kahan Singh Bhikhivindia to Lahore.¹

In the hills of the Punjab, Bedi Bikram Singh's agents, Attra and Assa Ram, were doing what was needed on behalf of Bhaiji. Bhoopa and Gurdita, of the famous Kanungo family of Hajipur, and Mian Attar Singh, a descendant of the Katogh rulers of Kangra, also promised to supply 1,000 matchlockmen, between ten to twenty thousand rupees and nearly 10,000 maunds of grain for the cause.²

After sending his envoys everywhere, the Bhai himself proceeded to make a personal survey of the entire situation before launching his final attack. From Sajuwal he went to Gulleran and then, crossing the river Beas at Rai-Ka-Pattan, reached Kishupur in Hoshiarpur District, where he contacted many influential people, including ex-Major Mangal Singh of Hajipur. From Kishupur, the Bhai moved to Kaurala, where he was visited by many local *zamindars* and other influential people of the area. It was at Kaurala that Bhag Singh, who had been deputed to Peshawar, brought letters from Sultan Mohammad Khan and several other Pathan chiefs.

THE PLOT FAILS

Unfortunately, while Bhai Maharaj Singh was going

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, Nos. 20-31.

² *Secret Consultation*, op. cit.

ahead with his preparations, he was informed that the plot to seize the Maharaja had failed and that some of the conspirators had been arrested. Undismayed by such ill omens, the Bhai continued his operations and reached Hoshiarpur via Birampur. At Hoshiarpur he was met by Gurmukh Singh Langri, Ishar Singh, Bahadur Singh, Dharam Singh, and Kharak Singh, his personal attendant. They told him that in accordance with the plan, arrangements were complete for looting the Government Treasury at Bajwara and attacking the Hoshiarpur Cantonment.

But Bhaiji was such a stickler for detail that on the same night he personally visited the Sikh lines and secured promises of assistance from the officers of the regiments, namely Prem Singh, Sukha Singh, Futteh Singh, Jai Singh, Havildar Bhag Singh and others. He also secretly visited Bajwara. In the meantime information was received that arrangements were complete for assembling nearly 4,000 men at Datarpur, near Hajipur, and that similar preparations were also completed in Majha, Malwa, and Hazara.

Satisfied with these reports, the Bhai went to the village of Sham near Jullundar on the night of 3rd-4th December, where, after holding another secret discussion with his chief collaborators, fixed the 20th of *posh* (3 January 1850) as the date for assaulting the Cantonments of Hoshiarpur and Jullundar. For this purpose he had collected large stocks of grain and arms near Tanda, and secured the services of two artillerymen, Deva Singh and Kahan Singh, Jats of the Kapurthala State.

ARREST

As the day of attack drew near, Maharaj Singh paid hurried visits to many centres in the Jullundar Doab where his agents were secretly working. After completing the survey, he reached Adampur on the night of 28 December, where, on the report of a Muslim informer, he was arrested in a sugarcane field, along with his few followers, by Mr. Vansittart, Deputy Commissioner of Jullundar.

The news of his arrest created such a stir among the British authorities that many of them even doubted that he was the rebel they had hunted for so long. However, after some time his identity was firmly established and the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, sent a special message of congratulation to Mr. Vansittart.

No sooner had Bhai Maharaj Singh and his party reached Jullundar and been confined in the civil jail, than the news spread like wild fire through the city and its neighbourhood, and by evening thousands of people had gathered near the jail. This made the authorities so apprehensive that Mr. Macleod, Commissioner of Jullundar, had to put Bhaji in chains and remove him to the Military lines for security reasons. The Bhai was also separated from his other associates, and allowed to keep only one of his personal attendants, Kharak Singh. Soon the excitement spread to other parts of the Punjab and, fearing large-scale commotion at any moment, the Punjab Government suggested to the Government of India that the Bhai should be at once transported. Lord Dalhousie, agreeing to the proposal, observed: 'I should myself have desired that so mischievous and so bold a traitor should be at once brought to trial, and if considered should be subjected to the heaviest penalty which public law can inflict, but in deference to the opinion expressed by the local authorities, I accede to the wish that has been expressed that the Bhai should be forthwith removed from the jurisdiction of the Board, and from among his own people with a view to avoid the excitement and prolonged uncertainty which the delay necessarily attendant on a trial would create.'¹

The Governor-General, therefore, ordered that the Bhai should be first sent to Allahabad along with the other State prisoners: Attariwala Sardars Chattar Singh, Sher Singh and Avtar Singh; Lal Singh Morariah; Mehtab Singh Majithia; Dewan Hakim Rai; Kanwar Krishan Singh; Arjan Singh and Dewan Mul Raj, who had already left Lahore on 1 February 1850. From Allahabad Bhaji was to be sent to Calcutta where the place of his future stay

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 25 January 1850, Nos. 46-52.

would be decided. Accordingly, Bhai Maharaj Singh and his personal attendant Kharak Singh were made over to Brigadier Wheeler at Jullundar, who escorted them to Ludhiana along with other prisoners. From Ludhiana the State prisoners were sent to Allahabad under the custody of Major-General Sir D. Hill. The party reached Allahabad on 12 March 1850, from where Bhai Maharaj Singh, his attendant, Kharak Singh, and Dewan Mul Raj were sent on to Calcutta.

BANISHMENT TO SINGAPORE

Before the party reached Calcutta, the Governor-General issued another order on 22 March 1850 stating that while Dewan Mul Raj would be interned at Calcutta in the barracks known as Wales Bastion, the Bhai and his attendant should be immediately deported to Singapore. When, therefore, the Bhai reached Calcutta on 19 April 1850, he was detained in the Fort under the special supervision of Colonel Warren, the Town Major, till 15 May 1850, when he and his attendant were put on board the *Mohammad Shah*, with a guard of one sergeant, one corporal and six privates of Her Majesty's 70th Regiment of Artillery. The party reached Singapore on 14 June 1850, and the two rebels were lodged in one of the upper rooms of the New Jail, where a special military guard was put on them.

In view of the special instructions issued by the Government of India for the proper security of the two prisoners, even the two windows in the Bhai's cell were walled up and a strong iron gate was put up in the *verandah* to separate it entirely from the rest of the building. The total area of the cell, including the *verandah*, was hardly 41 feet by 15 feet, which because of the walling up of the windows had been further rendered dark, dingy, and absolutely unhealthy.¹ The result was that after nearly three years of solitary confinement, Bhaiji not only became blind, but also developed rheumatic pains in the feet and ankles, which, during

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 28 February 1851, Nos. 52-57.

the next three years, reduced him to a mere skeleton. In view of the prisoner's ill health, the Civil Surgeon, Singapore, recommended in 1853 that Bhai Maharaj Singh should be allowed an occasional walk in the open, but, unfortunately, this suggestion was turned down by the Government of India for security reasons. The result was that during the next three years the Bhai's health continued to deteriorate and about two months before his death, his neck and tongue became so swollen, that it became very difficult for him to swallow anything. The divine Patriot's soul left for its heavenly abode on 5 July 1856, just a year before the Great Rebellion.¹

PRAISE FROM THE BRITISH

Those who sacrifice their lives for a noble cause are said to possess a lofty character, single-minded devotion and the courage of conviction. Bhai Maharaj Singh possessed all these qualities in abundance. Being a priest, he had no worldly ambition, yet with a rare devotion and at considerable risk to his life he continued to inspire all the high and the low to fight for the freedom of the Punjab. This fact is testified to by Mr. Vansittart, who wrote: 'It is fair to assume that if Maharaj by a stay of 3 weeks in Doab caused the excitement which he did cause, the agitation in the more turbulent Manjha where he passed months, with which country he was so familiar, must have been deeper, and the expectation of a coming struggle more intense.' He further continued, 'The Bhai is not an ordinary man. He is to the natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands, and are more implicitly believed than those worked by the ancient prophets.'²

Further, Vansittart was so greatly impressed by his personality that he recommended special treatment to be accorded to the Bhai on political considerations. The Deputy Commissioner therefore wrote, 'It had been my

¹ *Political Consultation*, 29 August 1856, Nos. 225-27.

² *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, No. 25.

wish to have laid no stress on the importance of the man and to have treated him as an ordinary captive. But I cannot contend against the religious fanaticism of a whole country, nor against the united wrath of a great nation.' But at the same time he suggested that strict measures should be taken to prevent his escape. He cautioned his Government: 'If Maharaj Singh were to escape and to elude re-apprehension the Sikh national mind will be like the single mind of a single individual.'¹

Against those British officers who contended that the activities of Bhai Maharaj Singh were limited only to the sphere of the Sikhs, one can quote Mr. P. Melvill, Officiating Secretary to the Punjab Board of Administration, who in his report on the case noted, 'The Bhai was reverently considered by all classes of the native population not even excepting the greater portion of Mohamedans to be imbued with miraculous powers rendering him an object of great reverence and his arrest has been manifestly distasteful to the native community generally.' It is undoubtedly true that Bhaiji had gathered mostly Sikhs and Hindus around him to fight against the British, but he possessed the vision of a politician which prompted him even to negotiate with Muslim chiefs like Sultan Muhammad Khan and his brother Dost Muhammad Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan.

NO ILL-WILL TOWARDS THE BRITISH

Another important trait in the character of Bhai Maharaj Singh was his lack of ill-will towards the British. This can be proved from the fact that he had given general instructions to his followers that at the time of assaulting the Cantonments they should not kill the English officers, but should capture them and bring them before him. Among his other characteristics, mention may be made of his habit of thoroughness, his mastery over detail, and the untiring zeal which he displayed throughout these years. This can be proved from the way he continued to move from one part of the Punjab

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, No. 25.

to another, organizing the people, collecting stores and deciding about the strategy of his various moves, little caring that the British were out to capture him at any cost. He even did not consider it too risky to come out in the open and take part in the battles of Ram Nagar and Gujrat.

Mr. Macleod, Commissioner of Jullundar Division, praised these qualities by saying, 'It appears to me certain that the Bhai was in some respects a very remarkable man. He seems to have possessed very great sagacity and self-reliance. He evinced an uncommon aptitude for forming general plans and having these simultaneously carried out by different agents acting independently.' He also praised the Bhai's great resourcefulness, forethought and design in the following words, 'The same characteristic has evidently distinguished him throughout his career for it is alleged that great as were the vicissitudes, trials and troubles through which the Khalsa army had to pass during both the campaigns, the Bhai alone was never found without resources. Any number of persons who might resort to him and hundreds, and sometimes it is said thousands, did so, being quite sure of obtaining from him their daily meal, for the purpose of providing which he carried about with him scores of cooks or *Langris* and the requisite materials.'

It would be best to conclude the estimate of Bhai Maharaj Singh and his movement with a contrast with what Henry Lawrence and Lord Hardinge had lately said about the anti-British movement. Henry Lawrence wrote to Lord Hardinge, 'That the discontented will grumble and talk and cabal; they will even consult their priests and pundits for auspicious days and for the time when the Khalsa may again be victorious; but beyond highway robberies, burglaries and assassinations little evil is to be expected from those who have so lately been defeated in four battles.' The Governor-General in reply wrote, 'What can the malcontents do, they have no army, no artillery, no materials and no money.'¹

Had Bhai Maharaj Singh not been captured just a few

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 June 1847, Nos. 146-48.

days before the British Cantonments were to be attacked, surely the British would have had yet another experience, not of highway robbery, but of an open and dignified challenge to their might and the immoral and illegal imposition of their rule over a people who valued their independence more than their lives. Only for these reasons let the name of Bhai Maharaj Singh remain enshrined in our hearts, for the noble cause for which he fought and died.

SARDAR CHATTAR SINGH ATTARIWALA

Every Hindu and Musalman subject who has eaten the salt of our great, pure and mighty government has proved himself true to both his sovereign and religion. It becomes you, therefore, to remember what you owe to your sovereign.

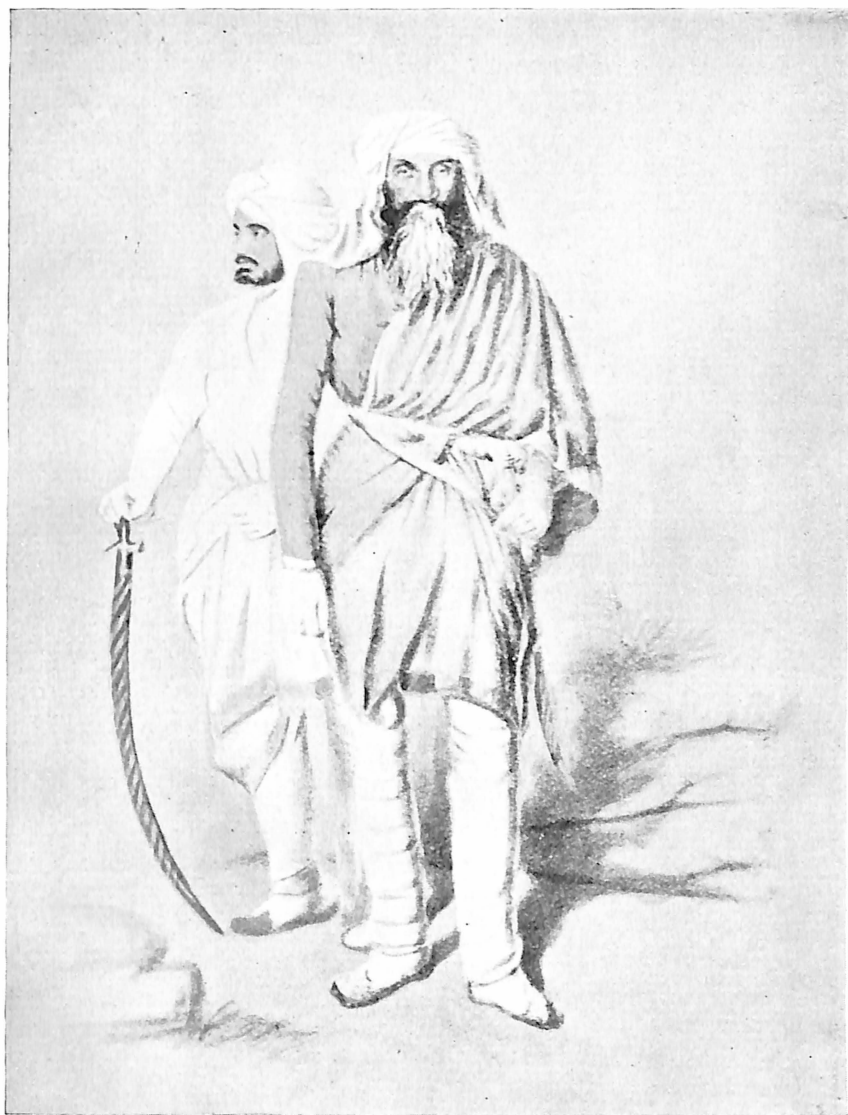
—Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala

SARDAR CHATTAR SINGH's role in organising an armed rebellion to free his country from the British yoke is of special significance. He was one of the few who could fathom that the policy of the 'communal poise' followed by the British in the Muslim-dominated areas of the Lahore Kingdom was intended to perpetuate their domination over this important frontier of India. By forming an alliance with Dost Muhammad Khan of Afghanistan, Chattar Singh made a daring bid to thwart this sinister design of the British authorities.

To appreciate fully the role Chattar Singh played in neutralising the divide and rule policy of the British it will be necessary to refer here to the prevailing situation in the Hazara territory from the late twenties of the nineteenth century, when Syed Ahmad had launched his *Jehad* against the Sikh Government.

It was in Hazara that the Muslim fanatics from British-held territory, led by Syed Ahmad of Bareilly, had waged religious wars against the Government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The first *Jehad* was raised in 1828 when Ahmad Ali Shah, the nephew of Syed Ahmad, came to Hazara with a large number of followers recruited from India. About 2,000 people joined these fanatics in Hazara.¹ This *Jehad* had posed a great problem to the Government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The movement had no doubt

¹ H. D. Watson, *Gazetteer of Hazara District*, p. 130.



SARDAR CHATTAR SINGH ATTARIWALA

*(From a water-colour drawing
by C. Grant)*

petered out after the defeat of Ahmad Ali Shah by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and the death of Syed Ahmad himself in the battle of Balakot in 1830, but the excitable and impetuous character of the inhabitants of this region 'who lacked the robust qualities of manliness of Peshawar Pathan or sturdy independence of Punjab Mohammadans of Rawalpindi and Jhelum'¹ was responsible for continued riots. Mainly because of this Maharaja Gulab Singh had agreed to exchange Hazara for another territory of the Lahore Durbar when the boundary of his newly-created state was being delineated in 1846-47 by James Abbot.² H. D. Watson writes that 'in November 1846 while Captain James Abbot was at Hassan Abdal settling boundary between the Punjab and Kashmir, he received a deputation from the tribes of Haripur plain who implored the British Government to save them from the fate of being slave to the Kashmir Maharaja.'³ Captain Abbot who had recommended this transfer had a great hand in encouraging these tribes of Hazara to agitate for a change. Therefore, it was not without reason that Abbot was appointed as his Assistant when Sardar Chattar Singh was appointed as Governor of Hazara.

Chattar Singh was no raw youth but a man advanced in years⁴ and also one of the foremost courtiers of the Lahore Durbar. He was, therefore, quick to understand the implications of the new arrangements in Hazara. That is why when the governorship of Hazara was offered to him he suspected foul play and was reluctant to accept it, while Abbot who had already taken up his new assignment complained to the Resident about the absence of the Governor.⁵ It was only after much persuasion that Chattar Singh agreed and arrived at Hazara in July 1847. As was expected, the aged chief found that the youthful and over-energetic Assistant Resident, Abbot, was bent on

¹ *Gazetteer of Hazara District*, p. 19.

² *Ibid.* p. 134.

³ *Ibid.* p. 136.

⁴ L. Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, pp. 503, 504

⁵ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 208.

ruling the Lahore subjects directly rather than through the Governor duly appointed by the Lahore Durbar whom he had merely 'to aid and advise in execution of his duties'.¹

Although the Sardar could not stomach the actions of Abbot yet he allowed him a long rope but finding that he did not turn over a new leaf, the Governor was compelled to speak plainly. In August 1848, he wrote to the Resident saying that 'Treaty with the English is that they will protect the Maharaja till he has attained his majority and when he is able to govern, give up all concern in the country'.² But the policy followed by Abbot and his other comrades, he felt, was calculated not to renounce all British claims but to strengthen their hold by keeping 'Mohammadan population of the Punjab in the state of enmity with the Sikhs'.³ This set the ball rolling and the Governor soon found himself in deep waters.

By way of reply to Chattar Singh's protests, James Abbot just doubled his efforts to incite 'the Mohammadan peasantry with the object of exterminating the Sikh troops and Governor'.⁴

Further light is shed on Abbot's plan from his own report to the Resident at Lahore. He wrote, 'I assembled the Chiefs of Hazara, explained what had happened and called upon them by the memory of their murdered parents, friends and relatives to rise and aid me in destroying the Sikh forces in detail. I issued *purwanas* to this effect throughout the land and marched to a strong position. I have ordered out the armed peasantry and will do my best to destroy the Sikh Army'.⁵ This is how Abbot aroused the worst communal feeling among the tribals of Hazara against the Sikhs.

Abbot did not rest there. His next step was a refusal to

¹ Major Evans Bell, *The Annexation of the Punjab and Maharaja Duleep Singh*, p. 23.

² *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 503

³ Kaye and Malletson, *History of the Indian Mutiny, 1857-58*, Vol. I, p. 24.

⁴ Evans Bell, *op. cit.* p. 28.

⁵ *Parliamentary Papers relating to the Punjab—1847-49*, p. 301.

disburse the pay of the two Sikh Regiments stationed in Pakhli with the Sikh Governor, on the plea that these Regiments were planning to join the revolt in Multan or march to Lahore.

If Abbot as the British representative considered it his duty to act in this way, Chatter Singh too was fervently loyal to his sovereign, Maharaja Dalip Singh, and to his country. In fact, the revolt of Dewan Mul Raj in Multan, the rising of the Sikh Regiments in Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar and elsewhere and the uprising of the people in the central Punjab and the Jullundar Doab were not isolated events. The reason was the same everywhere, that is, the British functioning in the name of the Lahore Maharaja were behaving despotically to the local chiefs and the people, so it was only natural that the leader of this anti-British movement in the North-Western frontiers should have been a chief of Chatter Singh's calibre and stature.

The Sardar had another personal grudge. This was the Resident's refusal to arrange the marriage of Maharaja Dalip Singh with his daughter, although Raja Sher Singh had approached the Resident on several occasions with this proposal. By August 1848, the crisis in the Punjab was coming to a head. Chatter Singh taking advantage of the situation sent a long note to the British Resident denouncing Abbot for numerous acts of omission and commission. Some of these were:

(1) That he had blockaded several forts with the help of Muslim levies and continued enlisting more men at Nara in the neighbourhood of Pakhli.

(2) That he had given to the tribes of Hazara Rs. 20,000 and promised them the exemption of one to three years' revenue if they destroyed the Sikh forces in Hazara and killed the Governor.

(3) That the inhabitants according to the instructions of Abbot were besieging all the forts and outposts.

(4) That Abbot used to write to Colonel Canora letters of exciting character against the Governor.

(5) That Abbot in Hazara and Nicholson in Sindh Sagar Doab had stopped supplies to him.¹

Though these charges were forwarded for investigation to George Lawrence, the Principal Assistant Resident, Peshawar, who himself was bent on humiliating the Governor and not easing the situation. So, with this aim in view, he advised the Resident to summon Chattar Singh to Lahore to answer his charges of disloyalty etc. as this was the best way of separating 'him from the mutinous troops over whom his name and large possessions give him considerable influence.'² He also wrote to the Governor requesting him to see Captain Abbot and settle the points at issue. But the Sardar's dignity and self-respect forbade such a course and he insisted that Abbot must disband these unauthorised levies of tribal fanatics. To this George Lawrence retorted, 'It is known that European Officers are appointed to Elaqas to assist in their good government and if Nazims do not co-operate with them how is the business to be carried'³ In reply to Chattar Singh's request for troops, the Principal Assistant Resident arrogantly stated that, 'With regard to your request that I should send troops hence to Hazara, what can you think of me? European officers are employed to preserve the peace of the country and keep the troops in state of discipline and to send force from this to join mutineers would be absurd.'⁴ When the Sardar laid stress on the unpropriety of Abbot raising the new levies of troops, George Lawrence made a very peculiar reply saying that 'he could dismiss the people as easily as he assembled the people.'⁵

This was sufficient indication that the British officials at all levels were blind to reason and there appeared to be a well-laid plan to belittle and degrade the Governors and officials of the Lahore Durbar wherever they displayed outstanding ability as efficient and self-respecting adminis-

¹ *Parliamentary Papers relating to the Punjab, 1847-48* No. 490.

² *Secret Consultation*. 7 October 1848, No. 490.

³ *Ibid.* No. 512.

⁴ *Ibid.* No. 503.

⁵ *Ibid.* No. 490.

trators. It was neither just nor fair to have involved Chattar Singh in such an impasse. Even Nicholson, apparently acting as a mediator between the Governor and his British Assistant tried to intimidate the former by warning, that 'if he immediately submit and send back the troops to their posts, I guarantee his life and *izut* being spared but I neither guarantee his *Nazimship* nor his *Jagheer* which indeed I have intimated him he cannot expect to be allowed to retain. Further he is to reside in any part of the Punjab he may be desired, and if, considered advisable he is to leave Punjab for a year or two on a pilgrimage.'¹

Once he had exhausted all constitutional means to impress upon the British Resident and his Assistants that their arbitrary behaviour was contrary to the spirit and letter of the treaty of Bhyrowal, Chattar Singh adopted the one course left to secure justice for Maharaja Dalip Singh and the Lahore Durbar, by resorting to arms. He, therefore, sent appeals to the Sikh Regiments at Peshawar, Attock, Bannu and elsewhere to rise as patriots. The Sikh forces at Peshawar at once responded to his call and sent a written bond pledging complete loyalty to the Governor and his noble cause. Soon after the regiments at Bannu also declared allegiance to him,² for the soldiers of the Lahore Durbar had long awaited such an opportunity, and had neither forgiven nor forgotten their defeat on the banks of the Sutlej. It was also the general belief among these soldiers that the Punjab was destined to regain her lost independence after two and a half years.³ The banishment of Maharani Jindan had only increased their animosity towards the British. Chattar Singh was also in correspondence with his sons about the latest developments and finding Raja Sher Singh hesitant to espouse the nationalist cause, admonished him by writing, 'you have nothing to do with the treaty made with the English and if you wish to preserve my existence and religion of your country you must act

¹ *Punjab Papers*, op. cit. p. 295.

² *Secret Consultation*, 24 November 1849, No. 312; and Baird, *Private Letters of Marquess of Dalhousie*, p. 36.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, Nos. 69-70 and 190.

accordingly.' Immediately afterwards he despatched Sardar Surat Singh Majithia to the Raja exhorting him to revolt against the British without further procrastination. The Majithia Sardar, when he reached the camp of Raja Sher Singh, declared that now was the time to expel the *Farangis* from the country and that any Sardar who opposed the movement was an enemy of the Khalsa.¹

Raja Sher Singh responded to this clarion call enthusiastically and joined the camp of Dewan Mul Raj on 14 September 1848, with a force 5,000 strong. On the eve of his crossing over to the anti-British camp, Sher Singh also wrote to his younger brother Gulab Singh at Lahore as follows: 'The Singh Sahib (Sardar Chattar Singh) has several times written to me that Captain Abbot had caused him much grief and trouble and that he had also exerted himself to destroy and disperse the Khalsa troops. I resolved, therefore, yesterday to join Singh Sahib and devote myself to the cause of our religion. If you have any regard to the directions of the Singh Sahib or my advice prepare immediately on receipt of this letter to join Singh Sahib or to go to Jammu or any other place you may think fit. If you disregard my advice, act as you please but remember that it is incumbent upon sons to obey the instructions of their father, for life is short. Do not wait for another letter. God is between us. If we live, we shall meet, if not God wills it. I shall enter the fort of Mooltan with my troops on 1st *Asuj* (14 September 1848).'²

The defection of the Attariwala chiefs from the British at once transformed the anti-British revolt into a kingdom-wide movement. Reporting this fact, Mr. Currie wrote to his Government, 'Whatever Sirdar Chattar Singh's rebellion may have risen partizans hitherto there seems little doubt that disaffection throughout the country is so general and so many means have been employed by himthat every general insurrection is about to develop

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No.617.

² *Ibid.* No. 627.

itself and that putting down Chattar Singh in Hazara was not to go very far off to restore order.’¹

The result of this general uprising was that even tribesmen, who had earlier promised support to James Abbot, abandoned him at many places. Reporting this to his superiors, Abbot noted that: ‘The garrison of three neighbouring forts had submitted to me and had received certain advances of pay with *purwanas* upon the Chuch Kardar for two months more and promissory notes for the payment of all arrears where the country should be settled upon condition of their not taking service with Chattar Singh. These men after most solemn promises of compliance went with one accord over to the enemy. The circumstances caused great indignation in my camp. The garrison of Shirwan is being proved to be in correspondence with Chattar Singh.’²

ALLIANCE WITH DOST MOHAMMAD KHAN

The most intelligent move on the part of Sardar Chattar Singh was to secure the alliance of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, the ruler of Kabul and thus strengthen the anti-British front. It was really a counter-move against the British policy of ‘setting up Muslims against the Sikhs.’ For this purpose he arranged a meeting with the ruler of Afghanistan, through the good offices of Sultan Muhammad Khan, which happily resulted in Dost Muhammad Khan agreeing to join Chattar Singh while the latter promised to cede Peshawar to the Afghans after the expulsion of their common enemy, the British. The Amir’s son, Akram Khan, was to join the camp of Sardar Chattar Singh with his army.³

The Sardar having thus consolidated his position, made a move to counter the steps taken by Abbot. The opening shots, however, had unfortunately to be fired against one of Chattar Singh’s own Artillery Officers, Colonel Canora, a secret ally of Abbot who refused to

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 123.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

co-operate with the Sikh army while Abbot had besieged the residence of the Lahore Governor at Haripore with the Muslim levies, and was urging them to exterminate every Sikh opposed to the British.¹

Canora who had two guns in his charge not only refused to move out of the city with the battery but even loaded his guns with double charges of grape to open fire on his own men. The Governor naturally could not tolerate such mutinous conduct from his subordinate officer. He therefore sent two Companies of Sikh Infantry to seize the guns. Thereupon Colonel Canora first shot down his own gunner, who refused to fire on the Infantry, then personally applied a match to one of the guns which fortunately missed fire. In the ensuing mêlée, Canora as well as the two Sikh officers of the Sikh detachment were killed.² This was termed as 'cold blooded murder' by James Abbot who demanded from Chattar Singh the murderers of Canora for trial and punishment.³

Chattar Singh, refuting the charge, asserted that 'Canora had been killed together with the gunner while in mutiny.'⁴ He, therefore, publicly rewarded the soldiers who had obeyed him and captured the guns from the mutinous Colonel at the risk of their lives. He then advanced against Abbot who had taken up an advantageous position near the foot of the Gundgurh mountains, known as 'the throne of Hazara'. Happily for the Sardar 'the spirited race' of the 'bravest and loyal population' organised by Abbot could not withstand the Sikh regular troops for even a day and, 'had to flee after expending their ammunitions.'⁵

Chattar Singh's next act was to join the forces of Raja Sher Singh which were then moving towards the North-West. The British authorities strove to prevent this union

¹ For details of the Canora episode, see by M. L. Ahluwalia, *Some Facts Behind the Second Anglo-Sikh War—III*, *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings*, Vol. No. XXXVI, Part II.

² Major Evans Bell, *op. cit.* pp. 26-27.

³ *Papers relating to Punjab*, p. 303.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 503.

⁵ *Ibid.* No. 516.

between the forces of father and son, but could not succeed. Chattar Singh was able to capture Peshawar and Attock and take George Lawrence and Lieutenant Bowie prisoners. Raja Sher Singh on his part had inflicted reverses on the British arms at Ram Nagar and Chillianwala on 22 November 1848, and 13 January 1849. Such was the impression created by the rebel forces in these battles that it raised a storm in the British Parliament leading to the appointment of Sir Charles Napier as Commander-in-Chief in place of General Gough.¹

In hastening to join the forces of his father, Raja Sher Singh somehow committed a grave tactical blunder by allowing the British time to capture Multan and then divert their entire strength against him. Had Sher Singh not given this opportunity to the British to recoup after the bloody battle of Chillianwala, but had attacked them before the fall of Multan on 21 January 1849, he might have won the day. When father and son combined at Rasul, their united forces together with ten thousand strong of Akram Khan's army were far inferior to the British forces which were now almost fully mobilized. The melancholy result was the famous battle of Gujrat fought on 21 February 1849, where the allied Sikh-Afghan forces suffered a crushing defeat, even when 'the Sikh leaders had displayed higher qualities of leadership as compared to their Sutlej campaigns.'²

ARREST AND CONFINEMENT

After the disaster of Gujrat the Sikh leaders fled to Rawalpindi, where a high-level conference was held to settle their future plan of campaign but, with the British forces in hot pursuit, they decided to surrender. This was on 12 March 1849 at Manakyala. The spectacle on that memorable day was awe-inspiring and heart-rending. Gloomy and silent, tearful and downcast, the Sikh soldiers advanced in single file throwing their arms in heaps.³

¹ *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars*, p. 236.

² *Ibid.* p. 249.

³ Mohammad Latif, *History of the Punjab*, p. 571.

The surrender of Sardar Chattar Singh and his sons was followed by the annexation of the Punjab. The Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, feeling that the spirit of these rebels was completely broken by their recent tribulations, loss of power and jagirs, decided to confine them within the bounds of their village Attari with the following restrictions:

- (1) They were not to be beyond $1\frac{1}{2}$ *kos* of Attari without written permission.
- (2) They were not to retain any arms.
- (3) They were not to correspond with anyone concerned in the late war.

To their utter consternation, the British authorities very soon discovered that in spite of these restrictions all patriotic elements in the Punjab persisted in looking to the Attariwalas for a lead and Attari was again becoming the storm centre of the Punjab.¹ A regular liaison was being maintained between all anti-British forces through the agency of Brahmins and priests. In his semi-official letter dated 12 September, Sir Henry Lawrence wrote, 'It is well known that these Brahmins are the class of men by whom political intrigues are carried on. Sher Singh knows how often Ranee [Maharani Jind Kaur] had recourse to it and how often she was prohibited.' Lord Dalhousie in full concurrence, now wrote that 'The Attari family beyond doubt was in constant correspondence with many of those who were implicated in the last war. They were causing messages to come and go.'² It was, therefore, decided to arrest and banish Sardar Chattar Singh and all other rebel chiefs from the Punjab as further reprisal.

The first of November, 1849, was the date fixed for their arrest, and under the instructions of the Governor-General this was to be effected in such a way as not to allow any opportunity for mischief. To arrest the Attariwala family, John Lawrence, R. Montgomery, Major Edwards and Hodson with a corps of Irregular Cavalry and Pathan

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 24 November 1849, Nos. 54-55.

² *Secret Consultation*, 22 February 1850, Nos. 15-23; Baird, *op. cit.* p. 99.



Fort of Sardar Chattar Singh at Attari (Dist. Amritsar).

It was dismantled by Hodson on 1 November 1849.

(By courtesy, Sikh History Research Deptt., Khalsa College, Amritsar)

Horse, set out from Lahore at 1 a.m. and reaching the village before daybreak at once surrounded it, and swooped upon the slumbering leaders. Chattar Singh, together with his sons, Sher Singh, Avtar Singh, Tej Singh, and their cousins, Nahar Singh and Bishan Singh, were all arrested and conveyed to Lahore fort by 11 a.m. Hodson remained at Attari to confiscate the property of the arrested chiefs and also dismantle their fort.¹

From Lahore the Attariwala chiefs were sent to Allahabad Fort with other rebel chiefs. At Allahabad very strict vigilance was kept over them.² They were not even allowed to sleep in the open during the summer months.³

Once again in spite of all surveillance, the Attari chiefs were able to effect liaison with Maharani Jind Kaur who was then confined at Banaras. This led to the removal of Sardar Chattar Singh and his sons to Calcutta where they were imprisoned in the fort with still greater restrictions. The aged chief who had stoically endured the hardships and privations of prison life all these years finally collapsed. In October 1855 he was laid low with severe dysentery which became chronic and resulted in his death on 27 December 1855.⁴

Thus culminated the glorious career of a noble man who had staked all for the freedom of his motherland, who had rightly diagnosed the divide and rule policy of the British and but for whom there would not have been the second Anglo-Sikh War.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 24 November 1849, Nos. 54-55.

² *Secret Consultation*, 26 April 1850, No. 106.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 28 February 1851, No. 76.

⁴ *Political Consultation*, 18 January 1856, No. 21.

BABA BIKRAM SINGH BEDI

Since life is short it is not becoming in you to forget what is due from you (towards your country)

—Baba, Bikram Singh

As Dewan Mul Raj had done in Multan and Derajat, Sardar Chattar Singh in Hazara and Peshawar, and Bhai Maharaj Singh in Majha, so too had Baba Bikram Singh first raised the standard of revolt in Una, his home town, in Hoshiarpur District. In a way Baba Bikram Singh's revolt in the British-occupied Jullundar Doab had greater significance than may be taken for granted. By rising against the British he had virtually refused to recognise their rule in the Jullundar Doab. Protesting against the aggressive British policy, the Bedi also refused to be wooed by the British Commissioner of the Jullundar Doab, John Lawrence, and the Governor-General, Henry Hardinge, by twice turning down offers of a handsome pension.

Baba Bikram Singh's refusal to compromise with the British Government was quite natural. His father, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, had always been held in high esteem by the Sikh chiefs even before Maharaja Ranjit Singh had risen to power. According to Griffin, on one occasion the Sikh forces of Patiala had refused to fight against Baba Sahib Singh out of respect for his saintly character. During the last days of Misal rule in the Punjab, Baba Sahib Singh had played a significant part by his efforts to maintain some sort of cohesion in an otherwise tottering system of government. Later, realising the need for a strong and unified government of the entire *Khalsa*, he did his best to help Maharaja Ranjit Singh establish his supreme power. Ranjit Singh respected him so much that he had even taken 'pahul' from the Baba. Later it was Sahib Singh



BABA BIKRAM SINGH BEDI

*(From a wall painting at his
Samadh at Amritsar)*

Bedi who performed the coronation of the Maharaja. As a token of regard for the respected Bedi, the Maharaja had conferred upon him a jagir of seventy-eight villages near Una.¹ Thus Baba Sahib Singh had acted throughout as the trusted adviser and religious guide of the Maharaja. It was at his instance that the Maharaja had sanctioned huge jagirs to the Sikh shrines at Nanakana Sahib, which yielded a large income to the Shromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, Amritsar, till the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

On the death of Sahib Singh in 1834, Bikram Singh succeeded to his father's position.² Though he was not the eldest son of Sahib Singh, yet the latter had nominated him as his successor on account of his ability and courage which none of his other sons possessed to that degree. Like his father, Baba Bikram Singh also continued to act as the preceptor of the Lahore royal family. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Bikram Singh played a still more significant role. In order to save the kingdom from disintegration he had brought about a reconciliation between Maharaja Sher Singh and the Sindhanwalia chiefs at a time when the Sikh kingdom was verging on destruction through their mutual bickerings and internal dissensions.³

CLASH WITH THE BRITISH

After the annexation of the Jullundar Doab by the British in 1846, Baba Bikram Singh was one of the few powerful jagirdars left in that area. He held a jagir worth two lakhs of rupees, which included more than a dozen villages granted to him by Maharaja Sher Singh and Maharaja Dalip Singh, including the strong forts of Nurpur, Gunachaur and Dakhni Sarai.⁴

It was on account of his high status and power that John

¹ Bute Shah, *Tarikh-i-Punjab (Persian Ms.)* Vol. I, Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, p. 509.

² Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, Vol. I (1909), 130.

³ Ram Singh, *Gurmukhi Diary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Photostat copy from Public Library, Lahore. Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, pp. 983-984.

Lawrence, after taking up the Commissionership of the area, brought the Baba to the special notice of the Governor-General. Lawrence wrote, 'Baba Bikram Singh the Onnah Chief is a lineal descendant of Baba Nanak (and) is, therefore, looked upon as the chief Priest of the Sikhs.'¹ John Lawrence's purpose in mentioning Bikram Singh to his Government was to suggest the need for treating such influential persons with caution. But the Government's caution in respect of a few individuals was not practicable in view of their policy to disarm the population completely. Baba Bikram Singh held his jagir and had his own arms and ammunition—all according to the laws of the Lahore Durbar. His forts at Nurpur, Gunachaur and Dakhni Sarai were well fortified.

In such a situation a clash between the two parties was inevitable. This clash occurred when Brigadier Wheeler and his Pathan Regiment were deputed to collect guns from all the chiefs and zamindars throughout the Jullundar Doab. By way of conciliation the British Government had announced that the cannon seized from the local chiefs would be melted down and the metal returned to their owners. After completing his mission with most of the chiefs, Brigadier Wheeler made a night attack on Dakhni Sarai. Baba Bikram Singh, however, succeeded in foiling Wheeler by removing the guns from the fort well in time. Before Wheeler could approach and dismantle the fort, the guns had reached Una. This was an unexpected rebuff to Wheeler, who immediately apprised the Commissioner of the situation and took strong measures against the residents of Dakhni Sarai. Under his orders the Commanding Officer at Nakodar posted a detachment of Irregular Horse in the fort of Dakhni Sarai, who prevented Bedi's officers from levying custom duties.

At this illegal occupation of the fort and seeing the hardship to which the inhabitants of the Sarai were consequently exposed by the conduct of the British troops, the Bedi sent a bitter note of protest to John Lawrence. At

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, Nos. 979-82

the same time the Baba's *vakil* impressed upon the Chief Commissioner that his Master had suffered great indignity from Major Wheeler's actions. John Lawrence, who was from the very outset convinced of the necessity of treating Baba Bikram Singh more leniently, was annoyed at Major Wheeler's handling of the situation. He, therefore, advised the Major 'privately to have the party removed, which he accordingly did.'¹ John Lawrence justified this move on the plea that the people of the Jullundar Doab were ignorant of the new rules prohibiting the possession of arms, as no proclamation had been issued to that effect after the British annexation of the territory. He, therefore, felt that Bikram Singh had acted through ignorance.²

Bikram Singh, however, was not going to fall into the trap laid for him by the British Commissioner. This becomes more than evident from the courteous but curt reply he sent to John Lawrence on 26 May 1846, in reply to the latter's message of 10 May advising the Bedi to give up the guns. Bikram Singh refused to surrender the guns which to him was a more ignoble act than anything else. From this decisive reply of the Bedi's John Lawrence came to realize the type of man he was up against. The overbearing Commissioner had no alternative but to issue a final warning, 'that if I did not hear the arrival of the guns within 7 days I should report him to the Government.'³

For his own part Bikram Singh had already decided on his course of action. He was not going to be cowed by threats whatever the consequences.

JAGIR CONFISCATED

After the Bedi had refused to surrender the guns at any cost, John Lawrence took the next step. He recommended to his Government that Bikram Singh's jagirs be confiscated by way of punishment and a pension be offered to him as compensation. The Governor-General agreed to this pro-

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, No. 979.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* Nos. 979-82.

posal and informed the Commissioner that, 'the jagheers of Baba Bikram Singh are among those meant to be assumed by the British officers' as a fair step in depriving the Bedi of the means of doing any harm to the imperialist Government.¹ At the same time orders were also issued that all the forts of Bikram Singh were to be dismantled.

All this made Bikram Singh all the more determined to oppose the British. He refused the offer of a pension of Rs. 31,212 against his jagirs² and enthusiastically set about organising a strong opposition. He started recruiting men, contacting disaffected chiefs in the neighbouring territories, and sounding others who were at some distance.³

To prevent the Bedi from doing any harm to the British, John Lawrence ordered a thorough search of the Baba's premises at Una and the confiscation of all arms found in his possession. To the astonishment of the search party a large number of arms were found concealed in the garden of the Bedi's estate. As punishment the Chief Commissioner reduced the pension offer to an insignificant amount of Rs. 12,000/-⁴ which the Baba indignantly refused.⁵

REVOLT IN THE HILLS

After turning down the offer of reduced pension, Baba Bikram Singh devoted himself whole-heartedly to organising an armed opposition to the British. The venue for the revolt was to be the hills. This was decided by the fact that in the beginning of 1848 the British regiments in Kangra were completely withdrawn while the garrison at Nurpur was reduced to three companies detached from the headquarters at Hajipur.⁶ Taking full advantage of the situation, the Bedi began to organise a confederation of all the other disgruntled hill chiefs. He sent emissaries to the people to rise up against the British, whose rule, he stated, 'was

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 December 1846, Nos. 983-84.

² Griffin, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 130.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 233.

⁴ Griffin, *op. cit.* p. 130.

⁵ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 233.

⁶ *Kangra District Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 40.

soon going to end.' The hill Rajas who had lost their independence¹ during the Sikh rule began to prepare to free themselves again.

Baba Bikram Singh contacted all the prominent persons in the Jullundar Doab. Sodhi Lodha Singh of Kartarpur, who was also a lineal descendant of the Sikh Gurus and was held in high esteem in the area, was contacted by Bikram Singh who advised him to prepare for the final struggle against the British. Among the others contacted, the most prominent were Sodhi Jodh Singh, Sunder Singh and their maternal uncle Ram Singh, who possessed a jagir in that area. All these chiefs started recruiting men on behalf of Baba Bikram Singh.²

Since many prominent persons had responded to the call of the Baba and the people in general were favourably disposed towards him, Robert Cust, Deputy Commissioner, Hoshiarpur, grew alarmed and suggested to John Lawrence that the Baba should be banished from the Punjab and sent to Hardwar. Lawrence, however, did not accept the suggestion for political considerations. The Commissioner felt that any³ such step at that moment would on the one hand, unnecessarily expose the British policy to severe criticism and on the other, turn the sympathy of the general public in favour of the Bedi.

Baba Bikram Singh was fully aware that his rising in the Jullundar Doab would scarcely shake the British power. He, therefore, made his mission very broadbased. He sent his emissary to Sardar Chattar Singh, the Governor of Hazara, a fact which Captain James Abbot, Assistant Resident, Hazara, reported to the Resident: 'The Gooroo whom Sirdar Chuttur Singh received with so much distinction is confidently said to be from Jullundar, his name Achara Singh, his family Sodhi. Great mystery is preserved respecting him, the Nazim affecting to know nothing of him, and his name being ascertained with utmost difficulty.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 28 November 1848, No. 233.

² *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 233.

³ *Ibid.*

He is in a few days to proceed to Peshawar and doubtless is not without his mission. I presume he is one of the priestly jaghirdars who were deprived of their lands for treason.' ¹

It was at this time that Mul Raj rebelled in Multan. Baba Bikram Singh took the revolt of Dewan Mul Raj as a clarion call to oust the British. He, therefore, stirred up the hill Rajas to strike against the British at that opportune moment. John Lawrence was perfectly right when he reported to F. Currie, 'I hear from all sides that Bedi Bikram Singh has been the prime mover in the present insurrection and has induced these foolish rajas who are a primitive unsophisticated race to seize the present opportunity for asserting their independence.' ² Robert Cust, the Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur, had earlier reported, 'Onnab is the centre of all intrigues. The Tehsildar of Amb and Gurshankar, the Thanedar of Oonah and other private parties report that Bedee is enlisting men, that he is sending emissaries into the villages formerly held by him, that it is openly given out that the Government is going to be changed. In fact he is ready for open measures and only wants his opportunity.' ³

One of the first persons who responded to the call of the Baba was Ram Singh, the son of the minister of the Raja of Nurpur. Gathering a force from the hills of Jammu, he suddenly crossed the Ravi and occupied Shahpur Fort. John Lawrence personally led the campaign against Ram Singh. He stormed the rebel stronghold forcing Ram Singh to flee to the camp of Raja Sher Singh, across the Chenab. ⁴

At the same time, the hill Rajas of Jaswan and Datarpur also revolted, converting the entire belt of the Jaswan Valley from Hajipur to Rupar into a trouble-spot for the British. The Katoch Raja of Kangra also revolted and took possession of the neighbouring forts of Riyab and

¹ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 185.

² *Secret Consultation*, 30 December 1848, Nos. 182-85.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, No. 233.

⁴ J. Hutchison, *History of Punjab Hill States*, Vol. I, pp. 266-67.

Ambhemampur.¹ Baba Bikram Singh rushed to reinforce the Jaswan Raja's army, but unfortunately the Raja was defeated before Bikram Singh could join him.²

JOINS THE SIKH WAR

The defeat of the hill Rajas left Baba Bikram Singh alone in the field. He, therefore, thought it advisable to join the forces of Raja Sher Singh, who in the meantime had also rebelled. To do so, the Bedi crossed the river Beas at Sri Hargobindpur in December 1848 and hastened to join the forces of the Attariwala.³ The British Government was greatly perturbed by the Baba's escape and his linking up with the other rebels. A reward of Rs. 2,000 was consequently proclaimed for his arrest.⁴

After joining the main rebel force of the Sikhs, the Baba seemed to have taken upon himself the political leadership of the campaign. Thinking it impossible to oust the British without the help of the Barukzai chiefs, he persuaded Sardar Chattar Singh to make an alliance with Dost Muhammad Khan, Sirdar Sultan Muhammad and Peer Muhammad Dhari. The Baba himself addressed a letter to Imammudin, the ex-Governor of Kashmir, who was then actively engaged on the side of the British. Bikram Singh wrote to him that, 'All the Hindoos and Moosulmans of the country considering what is due from them as loyal subjects and upholders of their respective religions have assembled together. Dost Mohammad, esteeming the friendship of the Sirkar of more value than the worldly matters is marching hither with his army. Sirdar Sooltan Muhammad and Peer Mohammad Dhari although formerly enemies to the State have also thought the time opportune for establishing relations. I have brought about this result and doubt not that they will continue to abide by my

¹ *Kangra District Gazetteer*, 41-42, *Secret Consultation*, 30 December 1848, Nos. 182-85.

² *Hoshiarpur District Settlement Report*, 1879-84, p. 23.

³ *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar V, p. 145.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159.

suggestions.' Further appealing to him to join the common cause of liberating their country from the British yoke, the Baba wrote, 'Although it was unnecessary for me to write to you, yet in consideration of your former services, I have thought it proper to do so. The time is auspicious and if you are inclined to act with wisdom and with loyalty you will ensure advantage to yourself. If you will not join us, unite yourself at least with Sirdar Naryan Singh. I need not write more as you are well wisher of and faithful to Sirkar and will forget the services you have rendered of late to the British.'¹ This appeal, however, had no effect on Imammud-Din who forwarded this letter to F. Currie.²

After the battles of Chillianwala and Gujrat a meeting of the topmost leaders of the insurrection was held at Rawalpindi. At this meeting Bhai Maharaj Singh suggested that another battle should be fought to oust the British; Baba Bikram Singh was the only one who ardently supported this move,³ the rest were for surrender.

The Rawalpindi conference having endorsed the majority decision, Baba Bikram Singh surrendered along with the Attariwala Sardars. But the British Government did not think it advisable to allow him to go back to Una, his own home town, unlike the Attariwala and other rebel chiefs who were allowed this facility under certain restrictions. The only course left for the Bedi was to spend the remaining days of his life in the holy city of Amritsar where he died in 1863.⁴

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 24 February 1849, No. 249.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Secret Consultation*, 31 January 1850, Nos. 20-31.

⁴ Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, p. 130.



MAHARANI JIND KAUR

Born 1817

Died at Kensington
in England, 1 August 1863

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(By courtesy, Dr. Ganda Singh)

MAHARANI JIND KAUR

The first thing to be done is to root out the stem and you must continue to effect this by punishing the Ferranges. Use towards these Malechas the same wiles and artifices that they have used themselves and manage by some device to expel them from Lahore... Encourage the Hindusthanees as much as possible.... My thoughts night and day are fixed on the Punjab.

—Maharani Jind Kaur's message to
Raja Sher Singh from Banaras

MAHARANI Jind Kaur's career was as chequered as her role in Lahore politics has been controversial. A combination of good luck and doughty courage had brought this young and juniormost queen to the forefront of the Government of her country.¹ Her claim to act as Regent rested solely on the fact that she had been able to produce a male child² just ten months before the death of her husband and to press her son's claim to the throne amid the confusion that followed the assassination of Maharaja Sher Singh and his only legitimate son Prince Partap Singh. Once that claim had been recognised by a fairly large majority of the chiefs, Jindan was at once brought face to face with a situation which was both complicated and critical. She soon found herself surrounded by intriguing courtiers, an unmanageable soldiery, a host of rival claimants, and a threatening imperial power beyond the frontiers. In other words, she was caught in a cesspool of confusion, coups and counter-coups. This crisis instead of frightening her gave her the opportunity to prove her mettle. Displaying

¹ In 1843 Lord Ellenborough wrote to the Duke of Wellington, 'The mother of the boy Dhuleep Singh seems to be a woman of determined courage.' (Dr. Ganda Singh, *Private Correspondence Relating to the Anglo-Sikh Wars*, p. 464). This view was supported by Lord Dalhousie who described her as 'the only person having manly understanding in the Punjab' (*op. cit.* p. 66).

² Prince Dalip Singh was born on 23 *Bhadon* 1895 B. E. (6 September 1838). *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Translation by V. S. Suri, p. 525.

rare courage, daring and diplomacy, she was able to foil many a sinister design of her enemies at home. But no sooner had she tackled them successfully than she was called upon to deal with another foe, more powerful, more subtle and more determined. This was the Government of the English East India Company which had for long been eager to extend its sway up to the Khyber, the natural boundary of India in the North-West.

The Maharani was no match for these powerful imperialists, and, though she opposed them at every step, yet she was destined not to succeed. She preferred, however, to suffer the consequences rather than submit to injustice.

Before we proceed with the study of her anti-British career, it would be in the fitness of things to answer the charge so often levelled against her that she had herself invited the British to the Punjab.¹

There is no denying that Jind Kaur's chief aim and driving ambition was to secure the throne of Lahore permanently for her son and his successors, yet a careful study of the records of the period would convince anyone that she was never a willing party to any of the schemes of collaboration with the British, to the extent that other members of the Royal family of Lahore were. In 1841 Maharani Chand Kaur had offered the British six annas of every rupee of the State revenue for keeping her on the throne.² Sher Singh in his efforts to oust Chand Kaur had later offered even more alluring terms: the cession of the Lahore Durbar's cis-Sutlej territories plus nearly forty lakhs of rupees in cash.³ Rani Jindan's opponent, Prince Peshora

¹ As proof of this charge, her own letters written to Lt.-Col. Henry Lawrence and John Lawrence, the British Residents at Lahore, as well as to the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, are often mentioned, regardless of the fact that these letters were written by her under different circumstances and for a different purpose at a time when the British had already occupied the Lahore Kingdom. It would be interesting to note that throughout her anti-British career the Maharani never even conceded that she was a party to any of the plots. For her letters to the British Residents, see Dr. Ganda Singh, *op. cit.* Appendix C, pp. 488-93.

² M. L. Ahluwalia, *Mai Chand Kaur's Rule in the Punjab—An Estimate*, *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings*, Part II, Vol. XXXI.

³ M. L. Ahluwalia, *Sher Singh and the First War of Succession for the Lahore Throne*, *op. cit.* Part II, Vol. XXXII.

Singh, had bid even higher.¹ As a matter of fact, during the troubled years following the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a strong pro-British party had entrenched itself in the Lahore Court. The pillars of this party were Bhai Ram Singh, the Sindhanwalia Sardars, and Raja Gulab Singh, who were later joined by the opportunists Jawahar Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh.

The position was further complicated by the mutual rivalry between Jawahar Singh, Lal Singh and Raja Gulab Singh, as a result of which the last named was most shabbily treated during 1844 and early 1845. Somehow or the other the Dogra Chief had wriggled out of this dangerous situation but was left badly bruised and highly incensed, determined to wreak vengeance on the Jawahar Singh-Lal Singh faction-ridden Durbar. As a first step in his campaign for revenge Raja Gulab Singh used the good offices of Bhai Ram Singh. The Bhai called for the English News-writer at Lahore on the morning of 4 January 1845 and in the presence of Dewan Dina Nath and Fakir Aziz-ud-Din made this statement, 'What is to be done? Life is in danger from the Seikh soldiers, but for this it was our intention that a letter should have been written to Major George Broadfoot—from Maharajah Daleep Singh, and Raja Gulab Singh, Ranee Jindan, Sirdar Jawahar Singh concerning the punishment (*Tadaruk*) of the Seikhs, and the fixing a subsidy or tribute (*Nuzzerana*); and either Cashmere or the territory on that (i.e. the South) side of the Sutledge and permanent stationing of an English force at Lahore. The Ranee and Sirdar Jawahar Singh, and Raja Goolab Singh and one (sic) Sirdar wish it from our breasts.' Reporting this to the Political Agent, the News-writer in the same letter significantly mentioned, 'The Bhai Ram Singh said to your servant, Raja Goolab Singh wishes all these demands, but he wishes the chastisement (*Tadaruk*) of the Seiks'.²

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 4 April 1845, Nos. 15-18, 54-68 and III.

² *Secret Consultation*, 4 April 1845, No. 69. Bhai Ram Singh had played a similar role in 1841 during the contest between Mai Chand Kaur and Prince Sher Singh. See Articles by M. L. Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*

Thus for the first time did the pro-British party drag Maharani Jind Kaur's name into the offer made to the British. But the cat was soon out of the bag, for on 21 January 1845, Bhai Ram Singh again informed Major Broadfoot through the same agency that, 'he was prepared to obtain and transmit to him a written agreement from Raja Goolab Singh stipulating in return for our aid to cede the possessions of the Lahore Government on the south side of the Sutledge, and other limited territory on the north of the Sutledge and fifty lacs of Rupees.'¹

As a matter of policy the British Agent used to file these applications for help, implying that unless the request came from the head of the State no heed could be paid to those requests. The sponsors of the British-aid policy consequently tried to make Maharani Jindan send the offer officially. With this end in view they would prompt her at every turn of events to either escape from Lahore to the British territory along with her minor son or to apply for British armed intervention. But they found her always hesitant to follow any of their suggestions. This attitude of the Maharani seems to have made Raja Gulab Singh so impatient that in May 1845 he told her pointblank to invite the British. The Maharani's reply too, was equally plain. She silenced the Raja by pointing out the danger of the army hearing of such a negotiation and destroying herself and her son.² What she really wanted was not British aid but that someone among her own Chiefs should restore peace and run the government during her son's minority. Lord Hardinge in his secret Despatch of 20 June 1845 to the Court of Directors fully concedes this point.³

Their failure to force the Maharani to take this fatal step, forced the pro-British party to change their tactics. The lead was now taken by Sardar Jawahar Singh, who 'proposed to encourage the troops to cross the Sutledge, saying that it would either cause their destruction

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 4 April 1845, No. 111.

² *Secret Consultation*, 20 June 1845, No. 58.

³ *Ibid.*

by the English or their success would spread the Seik power, in either case a gain to the Government.'¹ The Maharani, however, remained adamant, which prompted Bhai Ram Singh of the anti-Jindan party to hint at a more sinister scheme with Gulab Singh in the background pulling the strings. In August 1845 he cautioned Major Broadfoot, 'against closing business with the existing Government as it was certain the troops on their return after the Dussehra would put to death Jowahir Singh and the Ranee with her son...that they would set up Peshora Singh and Raja Goolab Singh as King and Vizier.'²

The Maharani, however, once again proved more than a match for all the evil genius of her husband's old and trusted courtiers, and although her brother Jawahar Singh paid the penalty for his own debauchery, incapacity, and intrigue, she herself was able to win over the army and keep her son on the throne, though now more chastened than before. Lord Hardinge reported this to the Court of Directors saying, 'she is said to have shown much spirit and energy on more than one occasion lately and to have laid aside, to a great extent, all debaucheries with her veil. She now appears openly to her troops and in public generally and has been leading a more regular life.'³ But the intriguers were determined to play the British game, and they ultimately prevailed upon the adamant Queen Mother in November 1845. This fact was joyfully reported by the Governor-General to his superiors: 'that party urging the troops to advance are supposed to be favourable to Raja Goolab Singh, and the Ranee who has frequently vacillated in her decisions, had in the evening of the 20th November again expressed her desire that the troops should move forward.'⁴ The die was cast. The Maharani had soon to repent for her blunder and pay for it dearly.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 20 June, 1845, No. 58.

² *Secret Consultation*, 5 September 1845, No. 10.

³ *Governor-General's Despatch to Secret Committee*, No. 15 of December 1845.

⁴ *Governor-General's Despatch*, op. cit. The Maharani's continued opposition to the scheme of fighting with the British is also reported by the Court historian, Sohan Lal Suri. On the report of Rai Kishan Chand, the Court Vakil, that the British intend to occupy the Cis-Satluj territories of the Durbar, a

There was, however, a few months' interlude between the British occupation of Lahore and their open clash with the Queen Mother, though even during this period it was more than evident that they would not tolerate the overbearing Regent for long. Her removal from power was therefore the first condition laid down by the British for concluding the Treaty of Bhyrowal. Writing on 7 December 1846 from his camp across the Beas, Lord Hardinge categorically instructed Frederick Currie, who was then negotiating the new treaty at Lahore, that, 'in any agreement made for continuing the occupation of Lahore, her deprivation of power is an indispensable condition.'¹ Preparatory to this step Henry Lawrence had long been indulging in the usual game of slandering the Maharani in Despatches to his government. The Treaty of Bhyrowal, signed on 16 December 1846, thus sealed her fate, the only place left for her being the voluptuous surroundings of the palace *zenana*, as the British called it, with a bait of a large pension of a lakh and a half of rupees per year. Jindan was temporarily unnerved and disillusioned, but she soon resolved to beard the lion in his own den. It is for this decision which she followed so determinedly that the Maharani now occupies a place in history, her remaining years forming perhaps the noblest period of her otherwise tortured life.

PREPARING THE GROUND

In her agony the Maharani looked around for help.

lot of excitement was created. The anti-British party proposed military action but the Maharani cautioned the courtiers against such a step, saying that 'in the event of a clash with the British the government of Maharaja Dalip Singh was likely to suffer. Dewan Dina Nath and Fakir Aziz-ud-Din supporting her views.' *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar IV, Part III, p. 88.

¹ The Maharani was never consulted when finalizing these arrangements. Her own proposal conveyed to Frederick Currie on 14 December was that (i) she should continue as head of the State during the minority of her son; and (ii) that the British should only lend two regiments of Infantry, one of Cavalry and a Battery of Artillery, which was rejected by the Governor-General with the remark that it was, 'equivalent to a desire to undertake the management of their own affairs, without our intervention.' Dr. Ganda Singh, *op. cit* pp. 107-9.

Fortunately for her the 'ride roughshod' policy of the British had already created for them more enemies than friends. Thousands of retrenched Khalsa soldiers were roaming about, their livelihood gone and their pride shattered. The majority of the chiefs were unhappy as their jagirs were going to be either reduced or altogether confiscated. The susceptibilities of the general population were rudely hurt by the attempts of British officials to enter the Golden Temple with shoes on and by the supply of beef to the British regiments stationed in the Cantonments of the Lahore Durbar.¹

Jind Kaur's first attempt to wreak vengeance on the British Resident and the arch-intriguer Tej Singh, who now headed the subservient Durbar, was, however, crude in form and limited in scope. This was the Prema Conspiracy of February 1847. The Maharani throughout denied having had anything to do with the plot, yet none could imagine that the conspiracy in which her trusted Munshi, the noble Bhai Maharaj Singh, and many small chiefs and soldiers were involved could have matured without her connivance and secret support. But the plot failed and the great repression which was unloosed on the public by the indignant Resident was a bitter lesson for the Maharani. She soon realized that such half-hearted attempts would do more harm than good. Already there was a cry in British circles that the Maharani should be deported from the Punjab. Though Henry Lawrence did not go so far as a matter of policy, he certainly imposed more and more restrictions upon her in the palace. She was watched at every moment and all her movements were reported directly to the Resident. She was even refused permission to visit her estate at Dalipgarh with her son, and finally on 10 June 1847, even the chiefs of the Durbar were forbidden to see her, 'there being no necessity for any one to go inside the Purdah,' the Resident told them bluntly.²

¹ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 88.

² *Ibid.* pp. 17, 41 & 67. The Maharani had already complained on 21

It was during this period that the Maharani seems to have come to the conclusion that only a state-wide uprising could, if at all, shake the British. For that what she needed was not the sympathy of a few insignificant men like Prema but the whole-hearted support of the more powerful chiefs and of the army. She first tried Mul Raj, the governor of Multan. To feel his pulse the Maharani secretly despatched to Multan one of her trusted maid-servants named Jowaie under the pretext of getting a few white *Ak* plants for performing certain religious ceremonies. To her good luck the Dewan was equally frustrated with the British, and accorded Jowaie cordial treatment at Multan and was, 'most particular in his enquiries after Her Highness' health'. After a few days he made Jowaie depart with a *khillet* consisting of 5 pieces and 200 rupees along with the *Ak* plant and a secret letter in which he pleaded with the Maharani to, 'consider him her servant to command.'¹

The leakage of this move on the part of the Maharani no doubt gave the British another handle against her, yet it had also provided her with a useful hint that Mul Raj could be ready to support her against the British. Mul Raj really helped her cause early next year when Multan became the spearhead of the anti-British revolt. At that time Frederick Currie the then Resident at Lahore reminded the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Elliot, about the hand of the Maharani in that revolt. He wrote, 'you have not forgotten I dare say her sending a slave girl on a secret embassy to Mooltan last June or July, and her impudent excuse that she wanted a white *Ak* tree for enchantments. The "tree" had now put forth its leaves, and their "rug" is much what have been expected.'²

Within the next few months of the *Ak* incident came the Tej Singh episode, when the British decided to reward

February 1847 about the increased restrictions imposed upon her, saying that, 'her fate was resembling Maharani Chand Kaur.'

¹ *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, pp. 180, 186.

² *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 60.

the traitor with the title of Raja and fixed 17 August 1847 as the date for the ceremony. On hearing this, the Maharani was infuriated and ordered her young son not to apply *Tilak* on the forehead of the renegade and the child acted as directed.¹ This gave the Resident the opportunity he was seeking. He decided to banish the Maharani from the Kingdom. But to his great annoyance, none of the chiefs except Tej Singh was willing to take such an extreme step. As a compromise, the Maharani was removed on 19 August 1847 to the wayside fort of Sheikhpura. In his report to his Government the Resident wrote that it was but, 'the first step to the final banishment of the Ranee Jhunda from the country which she has so long disturbed.'² Within a few hours of the issuing of the order, the Maharani was hustled out of the Capital after her son was mercilessly torn from her. If perchance, a few courageous souls found themselves unable to endure the cries and laments of the widow of Ranjit Singh en route, and showed open abhorrence at such pitiless behaviour, they too did not escape scot-free.³ In justification of his action, the Resident asserted that Her Highness, 'has ever since been intriguing to disturb the Government and carried her opposition so far as quite to embarrass and impede the public business.' 'Every seditious intriguer', continued the Resident, 'who was displeased with the present order of things looked up to the Queen Mother as the head of the State, some of them even went so far as to plan the subversion of the restored Khalsa Government.'⁴ Of course this was a government in whose name John Lawrence had planned to reduce all sardars and chiefs to their former status of petty farmers, considering this the best means of securing tranquillity in the newly-acquired kingdom. The so-called sedi-

¹ The *Tilak* was ultimately applied by Bhai Nidhan Singh, *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, pp. 245-46.

² *Secret Despatch to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors*, 3 June 1848, No. 50.

³ One Bhai Chajju and a sepoy said, 'If they could have their own way they would not allow the Ranee to be seized in this manner and sent away from Lahore.' *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 236.

⁴ *Secret Despatch*, op. cit. 3 June 1848, No. 50.

tious intriguers were none else but those who had dared to oppose the British for their high-handed policies.

IN THE FORT OF SHEIKHUPURA

From 20 August 1847 to 16 May 1848 the Maharani was held in the fort of Sheikhpura under almost intolerable conditions. Her allowance of nearly Rs. 12,000/- p.m. was reduced to only Rs. 4,000/- p.m. as additional punishment,¹ and all communications with the outside world completely cut off. In reply to her complaints of ill-treatment she was informed on 2 September 1847 that (i) the separation from her son was the deliberate act of the Governor-General and would not be revoked, (ii) that during her Regency she had brought the government of the Durbar, 'to the verge of ruin', (iii) that her conduct since 1846, when on her appeal a British force had occupied Lahore was of such a nature that it induced the Governor-General 'no longer to entrust the Prince (Dalip Singh) to be brought up under her tuition', and (iv) that it now remained 'for Her Highness to be resigned to the decision which was irrevocable during the Maharaja's minority.' Not content with this, the Governor-General finally warned her in the above letter that, 'if her acts, either by letter, or by message are of a nature to convince the Government that she is so reckless as to persevere in abusing the facilities which her present residence may afford, by attempting to excite discontentment and disturbance on account of the separation from her son, even the Governor-General will not hesitate to take the next step of removing Her Highness out of the Punjab in the just exercise of the power vested in him by the late treaty.'²

Forewarned is forearmed. The Maharani after perusal of this reply could no longer be in the dark about the ultimate intentions of the British, and being a woman who

¹ *Secret Despatch to the Secret Committee*, 3 June 1848. Even the gardeners of the fort were penalized just for offering a bouquet to the Maharani, *Lahore Political Diaries*, op. cit. p. 301.

² *Secret Consultation*, 24 February 1849, No. 47.

had never learnt to submit easily, she accepted the challenge without hesitation. Henceforth the Maharani and the British authorities were openly pitted against one another. By well-planned strategy she, on the one hand, lulled the British authorities into a false feeling of security, by making occasional complaints about her allowances, jagir, and the restrictions imposed upon her,¹ while on the other hand she made full use of this unique opportunity to rouse the chiefs and the army to make a bold attempt at ousting the British from her Kingdom.

How she managed it was no more a mystery, when two sepoy of the 7th Irregular Cavalry on 2 May 1848 disclosed a sensational plot to Major Wheeler, the British Commanding Officer at Lahore. It was revealed from the ensuing investigations that a plan was afoot to seize Lahore Fort by a surprise attack from the Shahdara side; that Sardars Jawahar Singh, Kahan Singh and Ranjore Singh were to be the leaders; that during the attack, the sepoy of the British regiments were not to fire at the insurgents but keep the city gates on the Anarkali side closed to prevent the British soldiers from entering the city. Also, in order to make the insurrection as widespread as possible, it was revealed that secret messengers had been sent to the various Cantonments at Mukerian, Jammu, Peshawar and Ferozepore to effect a simultaneous rising. As a result of the enquiry, ex-General Kahan Singh, Bhai Ganga Ram, Tulsi Ram and many other conspirators were arrested on the night of 8 May 1848. The entire affair was reported by Mr. Currie to his Government on 9 May in these words, 'a sensation had been created in the city by the detection of a conspiracy to corrupt the fidelity of the Native soldiers of the Infantry, Artillery and Irregular Cavalry and the seizure of the offenders.' 'The enquiry revealed', continued the Resident, 'that Maharanee Jhunda Kaur the mother of the Maharaja is the instigator and adviser of all their schemes and plots, and they have produced letters said to

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 29 July 1848, No. 38.

have been written by Her Highness and other evidence in substantiation of their assertions.¹

On 11 May the two main offenders Ganga Ram and ex-General Kahan Singh were hanged, while Tulsi Ram who had provided further useful information about the plot was released. However, some eight or nine conspirators including Gobind Dass and Umrao Singh succeeded in escaping and joined Mul Raj at Multan. Ganga Ram before his execution made another sensational revelation that Kahan Singh Mann was at the bottom of the plot to murder Lumsden and Vans Agnew at Multan; that all the Lahore chiefs excepting Raja Dina Nath and Tej Singh were involved in the conspiracy, and that the Sikh force despatched against Mul Raj would join him at a suitable opportunity.² As a result of this a reign of terror was unloosed in the Capital and widespread searches were made, in the course of which Gama Beg, a person employed in the British Intelligence Department, procured further details about the correspondence exchanged between the Maharani and her family priest Misr Shiv Dyal through the treachery of a goldsmith named Maharaj.³ Before the correspondence was seized Misr Shiv Dyal was able to warn the Maharani in these words, 'The British intended to remove her from Sheikhupura. Ganga Ram her personal servant and Kahn Singh General were hanged. On the basis of the information given by another person (Tulsi Ram), several *sepoys* have been seized, while some others had escaped. The late Ganga Ram's mother and sister were also seized and beaten, and one amulet containing a secret paper was obtained from them. The British were going to arrest the *sadh* in Anarkali, but he had escaped with Umrao Singh *Poorbea* to Multan. Dewan Mul Raj's troops have retreated and fled. You have no friend now here. Look

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 65.

² *Ibid.* After the defeat of Dewan Mul Raj, Umrao Singh with others had taken shelter in the Bikaner State.

³ ?

to God and make some arrangements. Some day the Maharaja will be sent away from here.¹

Besides Misr Shiv Dyal, who acted as the intermediary between her and some of the chiefs and army officials the other accomplice in this effort was one Umrao Singh Hindustani, who twice visited Sheikhpura secretly. The conveying of messages to and from Sheikhpura was done by the Maharani's servants Naranjan and Mohan and the sons of Shiv Dyal. The Maharani had supplied large sums of money to be distributed among the native sepoys of the British regiments for their support at the insurrection.² She had even approached the neighbouring Raja of Bikaner,³ and was also in touch with Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir and the Amir of Kabul.

BANISHED FROM THE PUNJAB

After these sensational disclosures Mr. Currie did not think it advisable even to wait for orders from his Government to banish the Maharani from the Punjab. On 16 May she was therefore secretly removed to Ferozepur and on 23 May she was sent from there to Banaras, to be detained thereunder the personal supervision of Major MacGregor, the Agent to the Governor-General. She was strictly forbidden to communicate with anybody in the Punjab with a warning that, 'in case she would not abstain from practices and designs of a tendency to subvert the administration of the

¹ For all the correspondence exchanged between Maharani Jind Kaur, Dewan Mul Raj, Kahan Singh Mann and Misr Shiv Dyal please see M. L. Ahluwalia, *Some Facts Behind the Second Anglo-Sikh War*, Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings Vol. XXXV, Part II. Mr. Currie had already written for the Governor-General's sanction on 27 April 1848 for her banishment. *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 61 and *Governor-General's Despatch to Secret Committee*, No. 50 of 1848.

² *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 165. One Golabu a coachman used to move among the sepoy regiments on behalf of Kahan Singh Mann, Jawahar Singh and Ranjour Singh, the Lahore chiefs.

³ The ruler of Bikaner, Maharaja Sardar Singh used to keep Nahar Singh, his officer on the Bikaner-Punjab border, well posted with these facts. Correspondence available with the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

Punjab and injurious to the Maharaja or the British Government, it will in such case be necessary for the Government of India to cause the Maharanee to be confined in the fortress of Chunar.¹ On this occasion her allowance was further reduced to Rs. 1,000/- p.m.² Despite every precaution taken by Mr. Currie to smuggle the Maharani out of the Punjab, the news was soon abroad and added fuel to fire. To quote Currie, it adversely affected the sentiments of the Lahore force then advancing against Mul Raj, under the command of Raja Sher Singh. The Sikh soldiers unreservedly stated, wrote the Resident, that 'She was the mother of all the Khalsa, and that as she was gone, and the young Daleep Singh in our (British) hands, they had no longer any one to fight for and uphold, that they had no inducement to oppose Mool Raj and if he came to attack them, would seize the Sirdar and their officers and go over to him.'³ The majority of the Durbar chiefs who did not approve of the Maharani's banishment henceforth adopted, 'a more unconcerned attitude towards the whole affair.'⁴

The Maharani on reaching Banaras as usual had her jewels and other personal valuables transferred there, and then protested to the Governor-General against his highhandedness. She even engaged a British lawyer from Calcutta, named Newmarch, under whose guidance she sent on 12 October 1848, a strongly-worded petition to the Governor-General protesting at her unlawful confinement. The Maharani enquired from the Governor-General the reasons upon which the British Government were induced 'first to sanction her close confinement in the Fort of Sheikhpura and afterwards to exile her from her native land, deprive her of her property and subject her to the most strict and jealous confinement.' The document closes with the remarks 'I now commit my course to God, and to the vaunted justice of that nation of which you are the representative, and supporting myself

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 29 January 1849, No. 47.

² *Governor-General's Secret Despatch to Secret Committee*, No. 50 of 1848.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 7 October 1848, No. 190.

⁴ *Ibid.* No. 259.

with the firm hope of a happy result, I shall endeavour by meeting the rigour and indignities of my imprisonment in a calm and cheerful spirit to show that, my memory of the forbearance with which the British used the advantages of victory is stronger than my resentment at the severity which their too ready belief in the calumnies of my enemies has induced them to use towards myself.¹

The Maharani also asked for an increase of Rs. 250/- in her monthly allowance of Rs. 1,000/- on the plea that, even on a very modest scale, her expenses including those of her personal establishment amounted to Rs. 2,208/- per mensem a detailed list of which was appended to the petition. She further demanded a sum of Rs. 500/- for winter clothing, and also permission to keep her *Vakil*, Narain Dass, at Calcutta and pay him Rs. 500/- per mensem out of her gold and jewellery then deposited at Banaras.²

On 23 October 1848 Major MacGregor forwarded these petitions to Calcutta with the remarks, 'The only objection which I see to the compliance of the Maharanee's request for increase to her present allowance of Rs. 1,000/-per mensem is that in my opinion she would then be able to save money out of her monthly allowance which might be applied by her to some improper purposes.'³ As expected, the Governor-General rejected the Maharani's request for an increased allowance and advised her to 'live within the income provided for her by the Lahore Durbar.'⁴ Her appeal for a fair trial met with the same fate on the plea 'that her conduct was examined by the Government of Lahore and was found to have been such as to render necessary the measure of punishment and precaution which have since been taken and that the Government of India sees no reason to renew, and declines to renew investigations which have already been completed and acted upon.'⁵

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 25 November 1848, Nos. 248-49.

² *Op. cit.* No. 246.

³ *Op. cit.* No. 245.

⁴ *Op. cit.* No. 247.

⁵ *Op. cit.* No. 250.

At a time when the anti-British revolt at Multan had extended to the entire Lahore Kingdom, with Raja Sher Singh in the camp of Mul Raj, proving to the hilt the truth of Ganga Ram's statement made at the gallows five months before; when the Sikh forces at Bannu, Hazara and Peshawar had risen under the leadership of Sardar Chattar Singh, and Dost Muhammad Khan, the Amir of Kabul, had agreed to join the freedom struggle, the British had no recourse but to be harsh and adamant with Maharani Jind Kaur, the inspirer, nay the originator of this great upheaval.

Nothing, however, could daunt the Maharani from pursuing her designs. Though about a thousand miles away from the scene of action, deprived of her wealth and power and surrounded by the bayonets of her revengeful enemy, this intrepid queen still defied British surveillance and continued to urge the freedom fighters to struggle on heedless of future consequences.

Her trusted band of servants had always stood her in good stead, and they kept her in touch with the rebels almost to the last. Through them she continued to send letters and messages to Dewan Mul Raj, Sardar Chattar Singh and Raja Sher Singh.¹

Of these, the letter which reached Raja Sher Singh at Rawalpindi on 8 March 1849 is the most significant. This letter seems to have been written after the battles of Chillianwala and Ram Nagar. In appreciation of Sher Singh's conspicuous gallantry in these actions, the Maharani wrote, 'A hundred praises on your gallantry. As long as heavens and the earth last, people will talk of your fame. The first thing to be done is to root out the stem and you must continue to effect this by punishing the Ferranges. Use towards these *Malechas* the same wiles and artifices that they have used themselves and manage by some device to expel them from Lahore.....Above all be confident. They have no force in this direction and are at dissension among themselves. Encourage the *Hindusthanees* as much as possible..... I

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 112.

sent two men to you some time ago who have no doubt reached you. My thoughts night and day are fixed on the Punjab.Remember me to Jhunda Singh.¹

This letter is of importance because it provides a sufficient clue to the working of the Maharani's mind. She was naturally feeling restless and ill at ease when the fate of her Kingdom was in the balance, and there can be no doubt that during this crucial period she decided to escape from the British detention.

TRANSFER TO CHUNAR FORT AND ESCAPE

Before personally risking herself, the Maharani first contrived that one of her maid-servants named Hargo should escape and thereby test the vigilance of the guards. Hargo was able to escape easily though apprehended later. But to the Maharani's misfortune on 4 April 1849, Major MacGregor received information from Lahore about her recent communication with the rebels, which changed the aspect of the whole situation. The Governor-General's Agent at once decided to confine the Maharani in the Fort of Chunar and early next morning a *Palki* was placed before her room and she was ordered to enter it. Besides Major MacGregor, there were present Lieutenant Nelson with two companies of Infantry and a *Rassalah* of Irregular Cavalry to enforce obedience and escort her to Chunar.

It was undoubtedly one of the most critical moments in the life of the Maharani. She protested and wept over this arbitrary treatment but was helpless and had to obey. By ten o'clock she and her sixteen lady attendants had reached Chunar and been locked in cells within the hated fort. Major MacGregor who had accompanied the party to Chunar, personally made over charge of the State prisoner

¹ The above letter was dated 1 Phagan (10 February) which Raja Sher Singh told was purposely ante-dated by about a month in order to mislead the authorities if intercepted. As a last resort the Maharani had also authorized him to make the British leave the Punjab on the condition of getting four annas in a rupee of the State revenues. But Henry Lawrence felt that this sentence was purposely put to mislead the British into a false position. *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 114.

to Captain Rees, the Fort Commandant. At the time of handing over, the Governor-General's Agent requested the Maharani to put out her hand to the Fort Commandant for identification which she refused to do on the plea of being a *Purdah* lady. As a last precaution Major MacGregor told Captain Rees to 'Remember her voice', and always to verify her presence by exchanging a few words with her from outside. Before leaving Chunar, the Major again warned Captain Rees 'to be vigilant and visit the Rani frequently taking care to identify the prisoner by the voice.'

For the next ten days Captain Rees continued to call to the Maharani regularly, inspect other arrangements and then only report to his superiors at Banaras that all was well. On 15 April he noticed that the voice from inside the cell had 'slightly thickened', but on enquiry, received the reply that it was due to the 'cold she was suffering'. Captain Rees faithfully reported this to Major MacGregor. Thus all seemed well till about 4 a.m. on 19 April when the alarm was raised that the Maharani was missing. The Commandant was amazed and baffled as he still found inside the fort all the 17 prisoners he had taken over on 5 April 1849.

How the Maharani escaped and who impersonated her could not be established by the Court of Enquiry which was held at Chunar the very next day under the Chairmanship of Major C. Troap. Further to confound the British authorities, a letter apparently written by the Maharani before her escape, was found at the fort gate on 19 April wherein she stated that, 'she had managed to escape not with the help of any of her attendants but with the help of a spell.' The letter concluded with the remark, 'You put me in the cage and locked me up. For all your locks and your sentries I got out by my magic.....I had told you plainly not to punish me too hard. Now see whether the Punjab shall not be finally settled, and you will begin to think (realise). But don't think I ran away, understand well, that I escaped by myself unaided.....When I quitted the Fort of Chunar I threw down two papers on my *guddee*

(seat) and one I threw on the European's *charpoy*¹ and woke your fine European out of sleep, now don't imagine, I got out like a thief.'²

Whether this letter was her own or written by someone else and then placed at the Fort gate on the 19th morning as a part of the plan to expose her escape at the proper time could never be ascertained. The only point to be established after thorough investigation was that the Maharani had escaped as early as the 6th evening and not on the 19th morning and that the *Seenawallee* episode was a ruse cleverly employed against the Fort guards and the Fort Commandant for several days.³

Whatever the facts, the Maharani had hoodwinked the British once and for all. In anticipation of her escape, a Punjabi servant of her household was said to be in waiting by the river *ghat* to guide her to a boat which lay in readiness. From Chunar she went to Patna and then to the Nepal border disguised as a *bairagan*. During this journey, as she afterwards disclosed to Rana Jung Bahadur, she eluded the British by various devices, always in the guise of a *bairagan* pilgrim on a visit to her ailing Guru in Nepal. Only a woman of the Maharani's resolute character and acute intelligence could have succeeded in such a venture.

Her sensational escape created a great stir in British circles. When the news reached Lord Dalhousie at Simla, he was dumbfounded and his sole consolation was that 'the scandalous carelessness which has now permitted her escape did not occur a few months ago; when her presence among the Sikhs in the Punjab, as the widow of Runjeet Singh would have roused their enthusiasm and would have greatly encouraged and strengthened them.'⁴ But the Governor-General noted indignantly, 'That she should

¹ As ordered by Major MacGregor the key of the Fort gate was always kept by the British Sergeant on duty. The native guards were not trusted.

² *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 133.

³ Since the evening of 6 April, one old lady continued to visit the cell of the Maharani inside the Fort posing as her *seenawallee* or the tailor lady, although her real *seenawallee* was at Banaras till 15 April. It is believed that she had escaped in the guise of this *Seenawallee*. *Secret Consultations*, 26 May 1849, Nos. 125 & 136.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 115.

have been able to effect her escape from a fortress such as Chunar and from a British guard is a discreditable circumstance.'¹

The Maharani's flight changed the entire complexion of affairs and the Governor-General issued the following instructions to his Agent at Banaras: (i) that her jewels and other property at Banaras be confiscated, (ii) that in case she had crossed the frontiers of British India, she was not to be allowed to draw her allowance, and (iii) that he should not enter into any communication with her without previous reference to the Government.

The Maharani had meanwhile, reached the Nepal border and sent one of her personal attendants to Rana Jung Bahadur, Nepal's Prime Minister, requesting sanctuary. On receiving this assurance she entered Kathmandu in person on Sunday, 29 April 1849. Unfortunately, on reaching the Nepal Capital the Maharani learnt that the Punjab rebellion had failed and the Lahore Kingdom annexed to the British Empire. This shattering intelligence naturally compelled her to change all her plans. Her consuming anxiety then was to find out about the safety of her son, the ex-Maharaja, and the intentions of the British regarding his future. With this motive she expressed a desire to meet the British Resident in Nepal.

The Resident refused to receive her, though he informed the Maharani that Dalip Singh was quite safe and a pension had been sanctioned to him.² She next appealed for restoration of her property and for permission to live with her son. The Resident replied that because of the disclosure of her recent correspondence with Raja Sher Singh and other rebel leaders, her property at Banaras had been confiscated as punishment and that furthermore, her flight from Chunar and beyond the British territories had deprived, 'her of all right to consideration from this government.' She was also informed that no portion of the Maharaja's allowance shall be allowed to her as long

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 134.

² *Ibid.* No. 139.

as she was residing beyond the limits of the British territories, nor would she be 'permitted to reside with her son.'¹

In point of fact, the British authorities were now not at all eager for her return as they did not fear any grave danger from her after the annexation of the Punjab. Moreover they had no desire to embroil themselves unnecessarily with the Nepal Durbar on this, now insignificant, issue. The Governor-General in his Minute of 8 May 1849 therefore noted, 'It would be unwise and impolitic to demand the delivery to us of the Maharanee, when it is next to certain that the demand would be refused and the refusal would either lead to force or at least to an unfriendly feeling between the States.' The best course in his opinion was to exert diplomatic pressure on the Nepal Durbar to keep the Maharani in close confinement. Accordingly the British Resident at Kathmandu, who on the first intimation of her arrival at the Nepal Capital, had already told the Prime Minister that 'Her future security would be the concern of the Nepal Government', further conveyed to him the views of the Governor-General that the Durbar would, 'prevent her from all injurious intrigues against the British Government.'² A very precarious situation for the Nepal Durbar!³

This did not in any way deter the royal refugee from going ahead with her plans. Though she was refused the delivery of her personal jewellery by the British, she had been shrewd enough to bring with her from Chunar jewellery to the value of about one lakh of rupees. With the proceeds of this and the same faithful band of personal servants she again got in touch with the Punjab rebels then detained in Allahabad Fort. She also began to correspond with Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir with the object of making another attempt at subverting British authority in the Punjab, where Bhai Maharaj Singh was still continuing the struggle single-handed. Simultaneously, she continued her efforts to win over the King of Nepal.

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 26 May 1849, No. 144.

² *Ibid.* No. 137.

³ *Ibid.* Nos. 141-42.

These activities came to a head when on 6 March 1850, J. E. Erskine, officiating British Resident at Kathmandu, was suddenly informed that the Nepal King intended to accord a royal reception to the Maharani of Lahore on the evening of 8 March. The British Resident took prompt action and told the Nepal authorities that such a move was contrary to the assurances they had already given to the Governor-General. This admonition was enough to make the King cancel the reception. Erskine reported the incident to his Government with an assurance that he will continue to, 'discourage in future any intention which I may observe in this Court to recognise publicly this restless and intriguing lady.'¹

The second part of the plan came to light in September of the same year on apprehension of the Maharani's letters addressed to the Punjab State prisoners in Allahabad Fort. In a letter written in Gurmukhi and addressed to Boota Singh and Lal Singh the Maharani stated, 'You will be particular in attending to the instructions communicated by Narain² to Dusodhar. Let your mind be at ease. We are not sitting idle.....Bagha³ will explain all the particularsthe steps we have taken with reference to the information we are in possession of, will it is hoped, be crowned with success by the Sutgooroojee in a few days.'⁴

Subsequently, as a result of the enquiry, it was learnt that Sita Ram and Parsu Ram, residents of Cawnpore, with Sobha Singh, the Maharani's confidential retainer, were moving regularly from Nepal to Allahabad for this purpose; that contact with the State prisoners was maintained through the agency of two *Hindustanees* named Ramparshad and Ramdeen, the cooks of the State prisoners; that the centre of activity in Allahabad was the house of one Parvati *Jogin*; that these individuals had even compiled up-to-date rolls of Hindu and Sikh sepoy serving in the

¹ *Political Consultation*, 22 March 1850, No. 408.

² Narain Dass was her *vakil*.

³ Bagha was also one of her personal attendants from Lahore.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 25 October 1850, Nos. 41-42.

British regiments then posted at Allahabad, Cawnpur and Lucknow etc, probably with the object of enlisting their help in creating disturbances.¹

In a second letter addressed to Gurdial Singh, the father of the prisoner Boota Singh, she authorized him to utilize the entire property left at his disposal for raising men and holding them in readiness to break out in rebellion at Peshawar. In a third letter the Maharani had given similar instructions to Narain Dass the keeper of her property at Banaras, and to Isree Singh her *vakil* at Calcutta. In yet another letter she asked the son of the ex-General Kahan Singh of Lopoke near Amritsar to, 'make it known in the Manjha country that in the month of *Kooar* when the insurrection breaks out at Peshawar you must also rise.' To Raja Sher Singh she wrote, 'I who am a woman contrived to make my escape from the fortress of Chunar. You are a man. If you can make your escape by the aid of money so much the better. If you think it better to remain where you are, hire men and be ready to join when the insurrection breaks out in the month of *Kooar*.' He was also told to take a sum of Rs. 20,000 which she had sent to Parvati *Jogin* through Sobha Singh.

The Maharani, as it transpired, had also written to ex-Raja Lal Singh of the Lahore Durbar requesting him to write to the Barukzai chiefs Sultan Muhammad Khan, Peer Muhammad Khan and Amir Dost Muhammad Khan urging them to rise against the English.²

On detection of this new scheme of the Maharani, the Governor-General warned the State prisoners at Allahabad to desist from further contact with her on pain of severe punishment and furthermore, instructed the British Resident at Kathmandu to request the Nepal Durbar to pay more heed to her activities.³ When the British Resident called

¹ Parsu Ram was an ex-sepoy of the Lahore Durbar and had fought against the British in the battle of Mudhki, while Sita Ram *alias* Dalchand had earlier served in the personal establishment of the Maharani. Associated with them for this purpose was a priest of the river *ghat* at Allahabad named Jagan Nath Pragmal. Among the intercepted letters there were two papers which contained the verdict of a soothsayer of Allahabad about the future of the Maharani and her son Dalip Singh. *Secret Consultation*, 9 September 1850, No. 7.

² *Secret Consultation*, 27 September 1850, Nos. 9-10.

³ *Ibid.* No. 11.

upon the Nepal Prime Minister to convey these views of the Governor-General, Rana Jung Bahadur also confirmed the newspaper reports about the attempts made by the Punjabis from outside the country to contact the Maharani, and also that during the last fortnight six or seven Sikhs had been apprehended while attempting to cross into Nepal. He also apprised the Resident of the attempts made by the Maharani to pass on a *hundi* of Rs. 2,000/- to her fellow-conspirators. As a result of British instigation, the Prime Minister met the Maharani and informed her that in accordance with her assurances to the Nepal Raj she was not expected to intrigue with the enemies of the British Government.¹

Henceforth relations between the Maharani and Rana Jung Bahadur became strained and she began to look to other quarters for help.² Some time ago she had received a verbal message from Maharaja Gulab Singh. She, therefore, began to explore the possibility of slipping into the Jammu and Kashmir State. In February 1851 she sent Badrinath, Doola Singh and Chunda Singh to Kashmir with letters addressed to Maharaja Gulab Singh and his Wazir Chunu. She again sent later in the year, one Rajinder Gir in the guise of a *fakir* to the Maharaja. In reply to these pleas, the Maharaja is said to have again conveyed his verbal approval of the scheme through Chunda Singh who returned to Nepal in 1851.³

Before the Maharani could leave Nepal her correspondence with Maharaja Gulab Singh was also discovered. The Governor-General thereupon instructed his Resident in Nepal to lodge a strong protest with the Durbar and also to inform the Maharani that if 'she would try to enter the British territories she would be seized and imprisoned more severely than was done earlier.'⁴

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 27 September 1850, No. 16.

² *Political Consultation*, 16 May 1851, No. 3.

³ *Secret Consultation*, 25 June 1852, No. 134. Badrinath and Doola Singh had come to Nepal in February 1851 to attend the famous Shivratri festival. Before returning they had called upon the Maharani. Badrinath was a relation of Raja Dina Nath a Minister in the erstwhile Lahore Court.

⁴ *Secret Consultation*, 25 June 1852, No. 139.

THE MAHARANI CONTACTS DALIP SINGH IN LONDON

Every avenue of escape being thus closed to her, the Maharani ultimately thought of contacting her son who was then in London. This took her quite some time, but somehow she managed to get into touch with him through her agents at Patna and Amritsar. Correspondence between mother and son continued for some time till it became public in 1856, when an Urdu paper *Koh-i-Noor* published this item in its issue of 1 April. Soon after this a letter of Maharaja Dalip Singh addressed to his mother also fell into the hands of the British Resident at Kathmandu.

In the above letter the Maharaja regretted his inability to assist his mother to come to England through his own efforts, and advised her to try and reach that country herself with the aid of Raja Jung Bahadur Singh. He also warned her that, 'Whatever you do, do very cautiously and carefully without getting me into any scruple.' As soon as this letter fell into the hands of the British Resident, he instituted thorough enquiries and reported the matter to his Government on 28 August 1856, saying that the intention of Maharani Jind Kaur was to proceed to England to join her son and then to fight her case for the restoration of her personal property and jagir. He also reported that the Nepal Durbar was equally anxious to be quit of her, the only hitch being the Maharani's fear of detention by the British.¹

By this time the policy at Calcutta had also changed. The new Governor-General, Lord Canning, in his Minute of 12 September 1856 thought it more advisable to permit the Maharani to contact her son openly. He accordingly wrote to the Court of Directors for orders.

Before the Directors could reach any decision the Mutiny broke out in India during which the Maharani tried her luck again. This sensational disclosure was

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 20 October 1856, No. 185. The letter was written in English. The Maharani had therefore handed it over to Rana Jung Bahadur for translation from some English-knowing gentleman of the British Embassy staff.

made by the arrest in 1859 of the Maharani's ex-servants Chet Singh and Jawala Singh of village Singhpura in Amritsar District and of Miya of the village of Mulla in the Gurdaspur District. These persons were alleged to have frequently entered the Punjab during the Mutiny of 1857-58 carrying the Maharani's messages to the people of her erstwhile Kingdom and also to the State prisoners at Allahabad urging them to rise once again against the British Government. The most active figure in this plot was Chet Singh, the brother of Megh Singh, whom Mr. Temple, the Punjab Commissioner, described in his report as 'a known rebel'. He had not only helped the Maharani in her escape to Nepal but had thereafter visited the Punjab several times, 'at the height of the Mutiny and evading all attempts to being arrested he again went back to Nepal in 1858.' This disclosure led to further large-scale arrests and arbitrary punishment of the people in the Punjab.¹

The British authorities were now convinced that the only way to check the Maharani in her seditious career was to divert her attention from her country. The Secretary of State for India therefore allowed Maharaja Dalip Singh in 1860, to correspond with his mother and to bring her to England. It was also decided to allow the Maharani to take away with her the frozen assets which could not be confiscated under the law, notwithstanding the prolonged controversy on this issue between Lord Dalhousie on the one hand, and the Attorney-General of India and the Court of Directors on the other.² The Governor-General on receiving these orders, instructed Lt.-Colonel Ramsay, the then British Resident at Kathmandu, to permit the Maharani to proceed to Calcutta where her son would

¹ *Secret Consultation*, 17 June 1859; Nos. 124-47. Chet Singh, Megh Singh and Miya were *Kahars* by caste. Miya's brothers Jamiyat and Ghaseeta who too were arrested were also at one time employed by the Maharani. The Maharani's secret letters and messages were conveyed to the people during the Mutiny through a Banking House of Amritsar owned by a certain Charat Singh and his son Ram Singh.

² *Political Despatch from Secretary of State for India*, 28 October 1860, No. 79.

arrive and receive her.¹ She was also told that on return to British India she would be sanctioned a pension of Rs. 30,000/- per year, although for security reasons she must agree to live under the conditions imposed upon her by the Government. On 29 December 1860, the Maharani gave her written consent to these terms and conditions in the hope of at least, regaining her son if not her Kingdom. The Maharani met Dalip Singh at Calcutta in April 1861,² and both mother and son sailed for England on 4 May, arriving in July 1861, only for the Maharani to die two years later in a quiet corner of her son's castle, 'prematurely old, well-nigh blind, broken and subdued in spirit.'³

The only thing which she could do during that period was to remind her son of his duty to his country and his religion. The later life of Dalip Singh is sufficient indication of the success of the Maharani in converting her son into a true nationalist.

¹ *Secret Proceedings*, No. 148 of 1860.

² *Foreign Department 'A' Proceedings*, No. 27 of June 1861, and No. 92 of July 1861.

³ Kaye, *Sepoy War in India*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 48.

APPENDIX

THE LAST FIGHT OF SHAM SINGH ATTARIWALA¹

Strife and tumult wild prevailing,
Camp and palace shout in glee;
'Let the Khalsa sweep the English
From the Sutlej to the sea!'
Warned the vain Attari chieftain
'Traitor! Coward!' rose the cry.
Scornful turned he round and answered
'Cowards! Ye the first to fly.'

Tore from his breast each jewel
In-wrought stone and beaten gold:
Vowed to death and deadly service,
Valour crowned and stern and bold,
Then about his kingly figure
Garments white and pure as snow
Cast in ample folds and stately,
Symbol of his doom of woe.

Straight then on his white mare mounting
'Comrade thou of stormy days
Borne by us together—bravely
Once more bear me, where the ways
Thick are set with battle's slaughter!
Guru Govind hear my prayer
And the glory of the Khalsa
Let my death today up-bear.'

Where the fighting raged the fiercest
Shot and shell unceasing hailed,
Waved the banner of Attar,
Flashed the sword that never failed!
High above the combat's uproar
Stern their war-cry rose and proud—

¹ By courtesy, Sardar Khushwant Singh.

Forward now and backward swept, through
Battle's murky flame-hot shroud.

But the English host out-spreading—
Surging like a giant wave,
Standard-crested, onward pouring
O'er the dead and dying brave,
Moves upon its course relentless,
Hark! a mighty British cheer
'Mid the clash of sword and bayonet
Rings out menacing and clear.

'Once more Guru ji ki Fateh!
Once more valiant charge and blow,
Honour, hearth and home defending,
Ere we kiss the dust below!
Three-score men rode out behind him—
Three-score loyal hearts and brave:
Hero-hearted, death-devoted,
Sought—and found—a soldier's grave!

Lo, his people on the morrow
Swum the river to the plain:
Wide lamenting, there they found him,
Highest-shrined among the slain,
Let the swelling waves of Sutlej
Bear him proudly on her breast
Whither kinsfolk wait to light him
To the sacred realms of rest.

Gallant heart! The Guru knoweth
Seven times pierced how you died
Fate decreed your valour fruitless—
But the glory shall abide!
And the years shall bring a marvel
Khalsa lord and man shall show,
Heart and soul in proud obedience,
Warring for their English foe.

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THE PUNJAB'S PIONEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS

The part played by the Punjab in the early days of India's freedom struggle has not received due attention. This work traces the beginning of the movement in the Punjab up to 1846 just after its surrender to the British. The story is built around the roles of six leading personalities who initiated it. The book reads at the fast pace of a novel, but is history, for it is based on hitherto unexplored source material. The authors have exploded many of the myths built up over the years around the leaders of this struggle. The character of the movement is vividly portrayed in the Introduction and should serve as an example for all Indians even today.

ORIENT LONGMANS