

RANJIT SINGH

From an original painting in the possession of
A. Ghosh Esq., Calcutta.

PH.
24-2031
Si 64 N
73

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Acc. No. 15733
Date 25/10/66
SIMLA

Notes on the Life and Times of Ranjit Singh.

Introduction.

Captain the Hon'ble W. G. Osborne, Military Secretary to the Earl of Auckland, Governor-General of India (1836-42),* who visited the Court of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Adinanagar in 1838 remarked: "The attention which is bestowed upon Indian politics and history is so rare and superficial, that there are probably many persons to whom the name of Ranjit Singh is sufficiently familiar, who are very imperfectly acquainted with his origin, career and the nation which he ruled." In spite of the march of time and the growing thirst for historical research this observation holds good to-day. This monograph, based as it is on unpublished records in the archives of the Government of India, should throw a new flood of light on the life and times of the "Lion of the Punjab."

There is, perhaps, no more notable and picturesque figure among the Indian Chiefs who rose to power and carved his way to eminence on the ruins of the once great and magnificent Mughal Empire than the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Kingdom of Lahore. In the beginning of the 19th century amidst the fierce conflicts and dissensions of the Sikh Chiefs and *Sirdars* he found his opportunity and seizing it with energy and promptitude welded an unruly and disorganised people into a compact and powerful nation and converted them into a strong military body, "which", according to Hunter, "for steadiness and religious fervour has had no parallel since the 'Ironsides' of Oliver Cromwell."

The great French traveller Victor Jacquemont, who visited Ranjit Singh's Court at Lahore, remarked: "Ranjit Singh is an extraordinary man—a Bonaparte in miniature." His conversation is like a nightmare. He is almost the first inquisitive Indian I have met and his curiosity balances the apathy of his nation. He has asked me a hundred thousand questions about India, the British, Europe, Bonaparte, this world in general and the next, hell, paradise, God, the devil and a myriad of others of the same kind."

* Capt. Osborne was also the nephew of Lord Auckland (*vide* Sec. O. C. 3rd October, 1838, No. 102).



Library

IAS, Shimla

TMP 954.503 1 Si 64 N



00015735

Ranjit Singh and Napoleon Bonaparte compared.

Jacquemont's comparison of Ranjit Singh with Napoleon is not as fanciful as it appears. From the records we find that Ranjit Singh had many similarities with Napoleon. Ranjit Singh's way of honouring his famous generals, Misser Dewan Chand with the title of "Khair Khwah Ba-safa Zafar Jang Bahadur" and with a *khilat* valued at a lakh of rupces after the fall of Multan in 1818 and Boodh Singh with the honorary dress on the battle-field after his suppression of Syed Ahmed's terrible revolt near Attock early in 1827¹ closely resembled Napoleon's way of honouring his famous marshals, Lannes and Davout, after the battles of Montebello and Auerstadt in 1800 and 1806; Ranjit Singh's hazardous expedition in 1822 to the Afghan town of Menkerah² an inhospitable, sandy and cheerless tract between the Indus and the Sutlej—and Napoleon's expeditions to the deserts of Syria and Egypt in 1798 have many features in common; Ranjit Singh's way of encouraging his disheartened troops at the fierce Battle of Nowshera in 1823 "by placing himself at the heat of the battle with a flying standard in hand and uttering fiery words of exhortations"³ reminds us of the tactics which Napoleon so often displayed in his several battles, notably at Arcola and Lodi in 1796; Ranjit Singh's expedition against the wild and warlike Afghan tribes of the Derbend country (in Baluchistan) after crossing the most dangerous part of the Indus between Ghazi and Tribela in 1825⁴ corresponds in several ways to Napoleon's great expedition against the hardy and impetuous Cossacks of Russia after crossing the Niemen river in 1809; Ranjit Singh's masterly retreat from the Derbend province to Lahore single-handed through hills, mountains and deserts at the astonishing speed of 50 to 60 miles a day after recrossing the Indus⁵ recalls to our mind Napoleon's great retreat from Moscow through the wilds of Russia to Paris all alone in 1812 after effecting the perilous passage of the River Beresina. Sir Lepel Griffin, a writer of great repute, also finds many common features between the kingdoms of Ranjit Singh and Napoleon. He says: "The Sikh monarchy founded by Ranjit Singh was *Napoleonic* in the suddenness of its rise, the brilliancy of its success and the completeness of its overthrow."

¹ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, pp. 18-19 and 165.

² *Ibid*, pp. 135-6.

³ *Ibid*, p. 142.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 155 (in this attempt Ranjit Singh lost more than 500 men by drowning).

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 157.

Ranjit Singh's inquisitiveness.

Regarding the "inquisitiveness" of Ranjit Singh of which Jacquemont speaks, a detailed account of his "Insatiable curiosity" will be found in the letters⁶ of Captain C. M. Wade, Political Agent at Ludhiana, to the Secretary of the Board, dated the 22nd, 25th and 31st May 1831 and 31st December 1832. The Hon'ble Captain Osborne who had the opportunity of conversing with Ranjit Singh in 1838 thus speaks of his "keen inquisitiveness" in his (Osborne's) *Journal*:—"It is hardly possible to give an idea of the ceaseless rapidity with which his questions flow or the infinite variety of subjects they embrace."

Ranjit Singh's origin; wells in the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh cannot lay claim to a notable pedigree. From the records⁷ his origin can be traced to a petty *Zemindar* (some say farmer) by the name of Daisoo, a Jat of Sansee race, who dwelt in a village called Sukercheck in the district of Manjha. A son by the name of Nodh and a humble patrimony of "three ploughs and a well" were "all" which Daisoo possessed in this world. It may be noted here that the possession of wells is considered very valuable in the Punjab, where on account of the dearth of extensive river-systems and water-supply, any reservoir of water is a source of wealth to their possessors. The value of wells in the Punjab is evidenced by the fact that when Ranjit Singh visited Menkerah in 1822 he ordered several wells to be dug around its Fort.⁸ Little did Daisoo dream that one of his descendants was destined to carve out for himself a great kingdom, greater than Italy,⁹ to be the proud possessor of that peerless gem, the Kohinor,¹⁰ once the glory of the Peacock throne of the Mughal Court, to become a powerful potentate, whose friendship would be courted not only by the Indian Chiefs and Rajas but also by foreign kings and princes and successive Governors-General from the Earl of Minto down to the Earl of Auckland¹¹, that he would create a powerful and well-trained army strong enough to resist the whole might of the British

⁶ Pol. O. C. 1st July, 1831, Nos. 42-5; Sec. O. C. 23rd April, 1833, No. 14.

⁷ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 45.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹ *The Sikhs* by Gen. Sir J. H. Gordon, p. 118.

¹⁰ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, pp. 98-9.

¹¹ Pol. O. C. 18th July, 1838, Nos. 52-4; Sec. O. C. 16th October, 1839, No. 12; Pol. O. C. 29th July, 1831, Nos. 39-40, etc.

Empire in the hard-contested Sikh Wars (1845-9) and, on his death, would leave the Empire he founded at the zenith of its glory. "Such was the magnificence of his palaces at Lahore, Cashmere, Multan and Adinanagar" that Ranjit Singh admitted to Capt. Wade that "he himself felt surprised at the gifts of Fortune in changing his destiny."¹² What a contrast between Daisoo, the humble possessor of "a well and three ploughs" and his descendant, Ranjit Singh—the undisputed monarch of "the Land of the five rivers!"

The year '1757'.

Let us now turn for a moment to the history of the East India Company in Bengal. The year in which Maha Singh, the father of Ranjit Singh, was born was the most momentous in the annals of the Company. It was the year 1757¹³. In this memorable year Lord Clive sowed on the battle-field of Plassey the seed of the great British-Indian Empire.

Death of Maha Singh.

Maha Singh, who was a brave predatory chief, died in 1787¹⁴ at the early age of 30 leaving a fairly large territory. Ranjit Singh was then, according to the records, a boy of 7 years of age. As during this period, women¹⁵ used to play an important part in public affairs, the task of administering the estates left by Maha Singh devolved on his widow, who was assisted by her late husband's dewan named Lekheo or Lekhpet.¹⁶ Obsessed with the glamour of power she was even unmindful of her own son's interests. Ranjit Singh, however, was a boy of a different mould altogether. Instead of indulging in idle pleasures, he spent his time in manly and warlike exercises.¹⁷ He himself told Captain Wade, Political Assistant at Ludhiana, in one of his conversations with him in the year 1831¹⁸ that "when my father died, he left

¹² Sec. O. C. 23rd April, 1833, No. 14. (Letter from C. M. Wade to W. H. Macnaughten, dated 31st December, 1832, para. 3.)

¹³ But Syed Muhammad Latif in his *History of the Punjab* puts this date as 1760, and the year of his death as 1792 (p. 335).

¹⁴ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 51. But Gordon in his book, *The Sikhs*, puts this date as 1792 (p. 83); he further says that Ranjit Singh was twelve years old when his father died.

¹⁵ They not only took part in 'public affairs' but also in 'military affairs.' Mâe Sedda Kower, mother-in-law of Ranjit, materially helped him in his military campaigns (*vide* For. & Pol. Misc. vol. 206, pp. 57 and 124).

¹⁶ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 52-3.

¹⁸ Pol. O. C. 1 Jul., 1831, No. 45.

20,000 rounds of shots which I spent in firing at marks." Such 'heroic boyhood' was surely not destined by Nature to lose itself in effeminate degeneracy as planned by his selfish mother.

Ranjit Singh ends the regency of his mother.

At the age of 13 (about the year 1793), Ranjit Singh,¹⁹ with the aid of his father's maternal uncle, Dal Singh, assumed the government of his father's estates. It may be noted here that Ranjit Singh has been accused by some writers²⁰ of matricide "to remove the obstacle which interfered with the attainment of his ambition". But there is nothing definite in the records which can substantiate this charge. This much only is alleged.²¹ "It is said that the means which Ranjit Singh adopted to effect his purpose involved a commission of some criminal acts, which if founded on truth, would appear deeply to implicate his moral character."

Ranjit Singh as a leader of men.

Ranjit Singh's great career since his assumption of his government in 1793 up to his last campaign against Peshawar in 1828 was a long series of thrilling military exploits extending over 40 years which, according to Sir Lepel Griffin, "undoubtedly puts his name among the great leaders of men from Julius Caesar down to Napoleon Bonaparte".

Ranjit Singh's Campaigns.

It is not within the scope of this paper to recount in detail the campaigns of Ranjit Singh, but two of the most important of them cannot be overlooked:

(1) Against Lahore:—

Ranjit Singh's campaign against Lahore in 1799 in which he was materially aided by his mother-in-law, Mae Sedda Kower, was "the first event of his life from which his rise is chiefly to be dated".²² It was here in 1801 that Ranjit Singh "formally assumed the title of 'Maharaja' and established a Mint and issued in token of sovereignty a

¹⁹ For. & Pol. Dept. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 53; but Gordon and Thorburn in their works, *The Sikhs and The Punjab in Peace and War*, put the age as 17.

²⁰ *The Punjab in Peace and War* by S. S. Thorburn, p. 21; *The History of India*, by Beveridge, Vol. III, p. 274.

²¹ For. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 53.

²² For. Misc. vol. No. 206, pp. 57-8.

coin in his name, on the obverse of which was the inscription Hospitality, the Sword, Victory and Conquest, and on the reverse, the era and place of coining.

(2) Against Azim Khan:—

Ranjit Singh's campaign against the Afghan King, Azim Khan,²³ who came to invade his dominion in 1823 ranks as one of the greatest battles of the world. "The army of Azim Khan was estimated at 25,000 and Ranjit Singh had about 35,000 men." It would have ended in disaster for Ranjit Singh had not his propitious star brought providential help to him. On the fateful field of Nowshera where the two armies met, the troops of Azim Khan fought with such desperation that Ranjit Singh very nearly lost his crown. The documents say that the Afghans "worked up to a pitch of frenzied enthusiasm, stained their hands and feet with the juice of *henna* and rushed upon the Sikhs." It further appears from the records, that just when the Afghans were going to strike the decisive blow, Azim Khan, their Chief, misled by a false rumour "that the Sikhs had penetrated to the rear of the field and that his harem was in danger," hastily retreated from the field to its rescue, a fact which dispirited his soldiers and led victory to the standard of Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh not a cruel man.

Although to build his mighty empire Ranjit Singh humbled successive Chiefs and *Sirdars* of the Punjab and the adjoining countries and used all manner of means to exact big tributes and *nazaranas* from them to enrich and replenish his Treasury,²⁴ let it be said to his credit, that he never wantonly sullied and soiled his hands with their blood. On the contrary, the records of the Imperial Record Department teem with instances of his favour and bounty, bestowed irrespective of caste, creed and religion. In some cases even the booty²⁵ taken by his soldiers was ordered to be returned to the proper owners. For a full catalogue of such favoured names, the records may be profitably consulted.

²³ For. Misc. vol. No. 206, pp. 140-45; Ranjit Singh was so much impressed with the "furious impetuosity" of the Afghan soldiers on the battlefield of Nowshera that he remarked to Capt. Wade "the Sikhs hardly know how to contend" (page 141).

²⁴ Capt. Osborne says that "Ranjit had 12 millions in gold in his Treasury at Amritsar in 1839. (Osborne's *Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, London, 1840, p. 218.)

²⁵ For. & Pol. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 118.

Three eminent Europeans have testified to the clemency of Ranjit Singh, *viz.*, Baron Carl Von Hugel, a German traveller who visited Ranjit Singh's Court in 1835; H. E. Fane, Aide-de-Camp to the then Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, who visited the Court of Ranjit Singh in 1837; and Osborne, who, at the instance of Lord Auckland, visited the Court of Ranjit Singh in 1838. Osborne wrote in the following terms: "The Maharaja rules with a rod of iron, it is true; but in justice to him it must be stated that except in actual open warfare he has never been known to take life, though his own²⁶ has been attempted more than once, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilized monarchs."

Ranjit Singh's shortcomings.

None the less he was not without his blemishes:—

- (a) About the year 1810,²⁷ Ranjit Singh, without any justification, exacted 10,000 rupees from the innocent *faqirs* of Utchgul Imam, the shrine of a Mahammadan saint.
- (b) About the year 1813²⁸ he extorted the 'Kohinoor' jewel from its possessor, Shah Shuja, ex-monarch of Cabul, who was at the time under his protection.
- (c) In 1817²⁹ Ranjit Singh without sufficient reason dispossessed the Raja of Nurpur at the instigation of Raja Sansar Chand, Chief of Katoch, who bore a private grudge and had him placed in confinement.
- (d) In 1821³⁰ Ranjit Singh without apparent reason imprisoned, after confiscating all her territories, his mother-in-law, Mae Sedda Kower, who had so largely helped him in his earlier career. It may, however, be mentioned that her estate of Wednee, on the east of the Sutlej, was immediately released on the intervention of Capt. Murray, then at Ludhiana.
- (e) About the year 1822³¹ some *Jagirdars* were heavily fined by Ranjit Singh without any adequate reason. One of them, Sirdar Dal Singh, who was fined one lakh of rupees committed suicide by taking poison.

²⁶ Pol. O. C. 1 Jul., 1831, No. 43.

²⁷ For. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 86.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 99.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 112.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 125.

³¹ For. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 139.

- (f) Some time in the year 1826³² Ranjit Singh's character underwent a great change and it became a strange combination of "excessive liberality and avarice." While he was granting extensive charity to his favourites he was committing "indiscriminate extortion from every officer of the State." Misser Dewan Chand—a sturdy upright man and the hero of the Multan, Cashmère and Derbend expeditions—strongly protested against the Maharaja's avarice. Ranjit Singh so far forgot himself that he severely scolded him for his so-called audacity. This was too much for the heart of that great soldier. Deeply mortified, he ended his life, some say, by poison.
- (g) In 1828³³ Ranjit Singh tried to force Raja Anuruddha Chand, Chief of Katoch, to marry his sister with his favourite minister, Raja Dhiyan Singh. But Anuruddha refused the alliance on account of the obscure origin of Dhiyan Singh. As Ranjit Singh still continued to press Raja Anuruddha unreasonably for this marriage, the latter requested a month's time to enable his sister to take a bath in the holy waters of the Ganges at Hurdwar—an act essential for a Punjab lady preliminary to her marriage. In the meantime Raja Anuruddha with his family and sister fled to Nalagher, east of the Sutlej. Ranjit Singh on this plea dispossessed him of his territories and annexed them.

Ranjit Singh's contact with the British.

Ranjit Singh's first relations with the British began in 1805,³⁴ just after his return to Lahore from his Multan expedition of 1804. In that year he first came into contact with the British by taking an important part in the treaty which was concluded between Jaswant Rao Holkar and Lord Lake when the former, after crossing the Beas river at Byrowal, entered Ranjit Singh's dominion near Amritsar, closely pursued by the latter. But his first permanent connection with the British dates from the year 1808. It happened thus:—The phenomenal military success of his great general Dewan Mohkem Chand on the Cis-Sutlej states in 1807³⁵ emboldened Ranjit Singh to conquer the

³² *Ibid*, p. 161-2.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 171-3.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 70.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 74-5.

whole country east of the Sutlej up to the Jamuna—the northern boundary of the then Company's dominion in India. To force him to desist and also to invite his co-operation to thwart the threatened attack of Napoleon on India about this time, Lord Minto sent a mission to his Court³⁶ in 1808 headed by Charles Metcalfe, then First Assistant to the Resident at Delhi.

Muharram of 1809; Treaty of Amritsar, 1809.

It happened that amongst Metcalfe's attendants there were a number of Muhammadans. It being *Muharram* time (February 1809) they were celebrating the martyrdom of Husain with the usual ceremonies. The passing of *taziahs* to the place of burial to the accompaniment of wailing and tomtoming excited the Akali Sikhs to frenzy. A rush upon Metcalfe's camp would have surely taken place, had not these handful of Muhammadans, trained in European military discipline, stood to arms and scattered the rioters. Ranjit Singh reached the scene just in time to see the Sikhs dispersed. He hastened to Metcalfe, made ample apologies for the unprovoked attack on his men, complimented him on the discipline of his sepoy and granted all the British demands. He then entered into a friendly treaty with the British on the 25th April, 1809,³⁷ the details of which are given in the records.³⁸ One important condition of the treaty was that "the Maharaja should not extend his conquests to the east of the Sutlej."

The Muharram incident established his faith in European military discipline and he sought to have his soldiers trained according to Western standards. We find from the records³⁹ that in the fierce battle of Nowshera with the Afghans in 1823, when the fate of his empire was in the balance,⁴⁰ Ranjit Singh once more felt strongly the necessity of imparting European military training to his troops.

A peep into the later Mughal period; Foreign adventurers into Indian Courts.

After the fall of the magnificent Mughal Empire in the beginning of the 19th century, Hindustan presented a sad spectacle of constant internecine warfare, rapine and violence. The imbecility of the later Mughal Emperors, their indolence and love of ease and luxury paved the way for ambitious foreign adventurers to try their fortune in India,

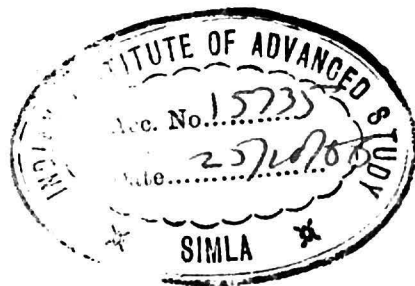
³⁶ For. Misc. vol. No. 206, p. 76.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 78.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 78-80.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 141-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 142.



which appeared to them a most alluring prize, a land strewn with gems and jewels, a perfect *El Dorado* of Fairy tale. Bands of enterprising Europeans⁴¹, began to flood the Indian Courts and enter the armies of the Native rulers. Their unquestionable talent and knowledge of military tactics won the admiration of the Native Princes and Chiefs, who eagerly employed them with a view to organizing their armies according to European modes of discipline.

Allard and Ventura.

Amongst these adventurers were two French veterans of Waterloo—Allard and Ventura—whose services were eagerly utilised by the Maharaja about the year 1823. From the records⁴² it appears that after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire on the field of Waterloo in 1815, they left their native country, passed through Constantinople and Asia Minor, and accepted service in Persia. Not meeting with any success there, they proceeded to India by way of Candahar, Cabul and Peshawar and arrived at Shahdara opposite to Lahore, in 1823. Although their admission into Ranjit Singh's service stirred the jealousy of his old servants, we find from the records that "it created a new era in his Government which led to those changes in its military organisation which the benefit of European science is calculated to introduce." It is interesting to note the Frenchmen's smart reply—that "a shawl once woven cannot be re-woven"—when a battalion already trained in Indian methods were put under them for European training. The following incident shows how the appointments of European foreigners in the army of the Maharaja was resented by the Sikh soldiers:—"In 1826 Generals Ventura and Allard represented to the Maharaja that a number of Sikh *Sardars* and soldiers had refused to serve under them as they were foreigners and were ready to oppose their authority with drawn swords. The Maharaja at once at the head of a body of troops and with some guns came out of the city to Anarkali and ordered his tents to be pitched there. Many arrests were made, officers degraded and ringleaders fined. These prompt measures restored order among the troops, the Maharaja taking the utmost precaution to allay unfounded fears." Next year, Ranjit Singh allowed some more Europeans to enter his army. They were Oms, a Spaniard, Court, a Frenchman, Avitabile, an Italian, and Mevius, a Prussian. In the year 1831 an Italian, Signor Catchioli,⁴³ came to

⁴¹ India Pol. Despatch to the Court of Directors, No. 14 of 1831.

⁴² For. Misc. vol. No. 206, pp. 125-34.

⁴³ Pol. O. C., 4 Nov., 1831, No. 19.

Ranjit Singh's Court at Lahore for service but failed to secure it. It is interesting to note that Ranjit Singh also encouraged the Gurkhas⁴⁴ to enter his army. His army, besides these, contained a large number of Muhammadan troops.⁴⁵

Ranjit Singh's ill-health; cholera outbreak of 1827.

The suicide of Ranjit Singh's great general, Missir Dewan Chand, in 1826 (*sup.*, page 8) was an irreparable loss to the Punjab and was followed by a series of unhappy events. In that same year⁴⁶ the Maharaja was struck down by a serious attack of fever, due to the excessive rains. On account of the virulence and obstinacy of the fever, Doctor Murray of Ludhiana was immediately sent for by Faqir Imam-ud-din, the Maharaja's most devoted officer. The doctor at the request of the Maharaja stayed with him for nearly 7 months. Under his able treatment the Maharaja regained his normal condition. It appears from the records that Doctor Murray made a very favourable impression on the Maharaja, though Latif in the *History of the Punjab* (p. 436) says:—"that Doctor Murray was kept more as an object of curiosity than anything else." At the end of this year (we learn from the records) some powerful subject-chiefs threw up their allegiance to the Maharaja and tried to be independent of him. Further we find from the papers that in the monsoon of the year 1827,⁴⁷ Cholera, which about this period was raging in Hindustan, reached the Punjab. Its effects on the Punjab and the adjoining countries were terrific. It devastated the cities of Lahore and Amritsar, claiming for its victim no less a man than General Boodh Singh, who had only a few months before done signal service in checking the terrible revolt of the Afghan fanatic, Syed Ahmed, near Attock—a brilliant military achievement on which Capt. Wade congratulated the Maharaja.⁴⁸ "This scourge," say the documents,⁴⁹ "extended quickly from the plains of the Punjab to Cashmere, when its progress was marked with increased devastation, about 10,000 persons having perished in the valley." To add to the calamity, "a severe earthquake⁵⁰ occurred there nearly at the same time; which overthrew many houses and buried many people in their ruins."

⁴⁴ Pol. O. C., 1 Jul., 1831, No. 43; 18 Jul., 1838, No. 53.

⁴⁵ Sec. O. C., 7 Aug., 1839, Nos. 11-12.

⁴⁶ For. Misc. vol. 206, p. 162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-71.

⁴⁸ For a complete history of Syed Ahmed the students are referred to the *History of the Punjab* by S. M. Latif, pp. 437-9; Pol. O. C., 1 Jul., 1831, No. 42.

⁴⁹ For. Misc. vol. 206, p. 169.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Ranjit Singh's love of horses.

Ranjit Singh's love of horses amounted almost to a passion and he maintained an enormous stud for his personal use, collected from all parts of India, Arabia and Persia. From the records,⁵¹ we find that in making treaties with the vanquished foes and in punishing his refractory subordinate Chiefs, he was in the habit of demanding horses as one of the essential conditions. The records further enlighten us as to what an enormous amount of trouble he took between the years 1820 and 1828 to secure the horse "Leilee" of rare beauty from its owner, Yar Muhammad Khan, Governor of Peshawar, and how liberally he rewarded Ventura for ultimately securing the animal for him through the instrumentality of his friend, Sheikh Faiz. Ranjit Singh also secured another horse named "Zerd Kehar" from the Afghans of Peshawar in 1827. The Maharaja's peculiarity was so well-known to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck,⁵² that on several occasions he presented beautiful horses to him.

The dress of Ranjit Singh.

In dress the Maharaja was scrupulously simple, though his court, which was an imitation of the Court of the Great Mughals, was thronged with "Chiefs and Nobles blazing with gold and jewels and dressed and armed in every conceivable variety of colour and fashion." In winter and spring he generally wore a warm dress of saffron-coloured Cashmere cloth and in the hot weather white Bengal Muslin without jewel or ornament. His liking for Bengal Muslin can be adduced from the fact that in the year⁵³ 1832 the British Government presented 10 pieces of the finest Dacca Muslin to him. From the papers⁵⁴ we also find that Benares *Kimkhabs* and other valuable wearing stuffs were not distasteful to him. The simplicity in dress of the Maharaja, even when attending his Court is thus described by Captain Osborne who was present at his Adinanagar Court in 1838:—"Cross-legged in a golden chair, dressed in simple white, wearing no ornaments but a single string⁵⁵ of enormous pearls round the waist and the celebrated Kohinoor or

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 156.

⁵² Pol. O. C., 22 Jul., 1831, Nos. 23-4; 4 Nov. 1831, Nos. 76-8; 30 Dec. 1831, Nos. 42-4.

⁵³ Pol. O. C., 4 Jun., 1832, Nos. 4 and 7-8.

⁵⁴ Pol. O. C., 26 Aug., 1831, No. 57; 4 Nov. 1831, No. 52.

⁵⁵ Capt. Osborne speaks thus about this ornament:—"The Maharaja's string of pearls was, I think, handsomer than the diamond—Kohinoor. They are about 300 in number and literally the size of small marbles, all picked pearls and round, and perfect both in shape and colour."

' mountain of light ' on his arm—the jewel rivalled, if not surpassed, in brilliancy by the glance of fire which every now and then shot from his single eye as it wandered restlessly round the circle—sat the ' Lion of the Punjab '."

Ranjit Singh's Religion.

Ranjit Singh's religion, as far as can be ascertained from the records, was the moral system propagated by the Sikh reformer, Guru Govind, greatly modified by Brahminical tenets. The following instances will illustrate this point:—

- (a) On the birth of his son, Kharak Singh, in 1802⁵⁶ he went to bathe in the " pool of Tarentaren ", near Amritsar—a tank sacred to the Sikhs.
- (b) In the year 1803⁵⁷ he went on a pilgrimage to the Ganges at Hurdwar, the sacred city of the Hindus, which was then in the hands of the Mahrattas.
- (c) In the year 1815 Ranjit Singh presented a gilded roof to the Jawalamukhi temple at Kangra and in 1831 sent 125 rupees⁵⁸ as an offering to the shrine.
- (d) In 1823⁵⁹ after the terrible Battle of Nowshera he went to the Golden Temple of Amritsar " to offer thanksgiving for his victory and to make a donation of a lakh of rupees to the Sikh priests."
- (e) Capt. Wade,⁶⁰ who was present at his Court at Adinanagar in 1831, tells us that " about 1 p.m. he rises and passes an hour in hearing a portion of the *Granth* read out to him."
- (f) In the year 1838⁶¹ when Lord Auckland paid him a visit at Amritsar, the Maharaja went with him to attend the religious service at the Golden Temple.
- (g) Lastly we find that when in the year 1839⁶² the shadow of death was fast creeping upon his paralysed body he ordered (though the order was never carried out) that the Kohinoor should be sent to the temple of Jagganath at Puri.

⁵⁶ For. Misc. vol. 206, p. 66.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 68.

⁵⁸ Pol. O. C., 1st July, 1831, No. 42.

⁵⁹ For. Mis. vol. 206, p. 145.

⁶⁰ Pol. O. C., 1st July, 1831, No. 45.

⁶¹ *The Sikhs* by J. H. Gordon, p. 109.

⁶² Sec. O. C., 4th December, 1839, No. 78.

These incidents tend to prove that whatever may have been the actual religious faith of Ranjit Singh, it was undoubtedly greatly influenced by the Brahminical cult. But that the Maharaja was not a religious bigot will be evidenced from the fact that he had also great faith in the prayers of Muhammadan *faqirs* and *darveshes*.⁶³

His sense of superstition.

As a hard-hearted man of the world the Maharaja should have been above all weaknesses, yet at times we find he was a slave to superstition and put faith in omens, charms, and witchcraft.

Ranjit Singh true to his treaty; offered bribes by the Secret Agents.

To his credit it must be said that after the conclusion of the Treaty of 1809 with the British, Ranjit Singh took every care to abide by its conditions. Though secret agents⁶⁴ from different Indian States strained their utmost between the years 1824 and 1826 by offer of large bribes⁶⁵ to tempt him to be false to this treaty he continued true to its terms. The Jats of Bharatpur were so enraged that, according to General Gordon, they sent him women's garments as a mark of their dissatisfaction with his conduct.

Ranjit Singh's efforts to perpetuate his friendship with the British.

The records⁶⁶ of the Imperial Record Department abound with papers which go to show how by means of friendly intercourse with British officials, presents, missions and letters, Ranjit Singh endeavoured to perpetuate his friendship with the English at home, as well as in India.

Attacked with paralysis.

In the year 1835 he had his first stroke of paralysis. Before this attack which shattered his iron constitution, Ranjit Singh, according to the records,⁶⁷ "was in excellent health and was in complete possession of that activity of mind and body which had always been the prominent

⁶³ *History of the Punjab*, by S. M. Latif, 1891, p. 466.

⁶⁴ For. and Pol. Misc. vol. 206, p. 159. We find from Pol. O. C., 9th May, 1838, No. 47, that Nepal's agents used to come to the Court of Ranjit Singh in the disguise of *Faqirs*.

⁶⁵ Durjan Sal of Bharatpur offered Ranjit Singh 50 thousand rupees a day besides a large gratuity for the co-operation of his troops on the East of the Sutlej. (For Misc. vol. 296, p. 159.)

⁶⁶ For. Misc. vol. 206, p. 168; Sec. O. C., 30 Apr., 1833, No. 11; Pol. O. C., 14 Nov., 1836, Nos. 7-9; Govr.-Genl.'s Sec. Despatch to the Court of Directors, dated Kurnul, 19th November, 1831, paras. 34-41, etc.

⁶⁷ Pol. O. C., 1 Jul., 1831, No. 42.

feature of his character." In the beginning of the year 1837⁶⁸ Ranjit Singh had a second stroke of paralysis on his right side which continued for six months. On this occasion he did not lose the power of speech. Misfortune followed thick and fast. A year after his second stroke of paralysis, his favourite wife, the mother of Kharak Singh, whom he endearingly called by the name of 'Nakahun'⁶⁹—she being a daughter of the family of 'Nakkai' Chiefs—breathed her last on the 20th July, 1838. Scarcely a week had elapsed when his own life was seriously threatened by the attack of a mad elephant. His third paralytic stroke was in the month of December, 1838,⁷⁰ and this ended his great career. It was greatly due to his excesses during Lord Auckland's visit to him at Ferozepur in that year.

Ranjit Singh's death.

He passed away peacefully at Lahore on the evening of the 27th June, 1839,⁷¹ 'retaining his mental faculties unimpaired to the last.' It appears from the records that "to avoid the sudden effect on his troops and the population, the news of the Maharaja's death was at first attempted to be kept secret."

"During the few last days of his illness", the documents state, "prayers were said and offerings were sent to the different shrines for his recovery, and His Highness bestowed in charity—money, jewels and other property to the value of nearly 50 lakhs of rupees.⁷² Among his jewels, he directed the well-known Kohinoor⁷³ to be sent to the temple of Jagannath at Puri, muttering at the same time the great truth that "no one carried with him his worldly wealth and that such a bequest would perpetuate my name."

The Governor-General, Lord Auckland, lost no time in shewing due honour to the memory of the late Maharaja. The following General Order, dated Simla (Political Department) the 4th July 1839⁷⁴ was issued:—"The Right Hon'ble the Governor-General having this day received from the Offg. Political Agent at Ludhiana official announcement of the melancholy intelligence of the demise of His Highness Maharaja Runjeet Singh, Ruler of the Punjab, on the 27th ultimo

⁶⁸ Sec. O. C., 7 Aug. 1839, No. 10.

⁶⁹ Pol. O. C., 9 Jan. 1839, No. 29.

⁷⁰ Sec. O. C., 7 Aug. 1839, No. 10.

⁷¹ Sec. O. C., 4th December, 1839, No. 78.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*; but Misser Beli Ram who was in charge of the Treasury, objected to its delivery on the ground of its being "State" property.

⁷⁴ Pol. O. C., 11 Sept., 1839, No. 96.

is pleased in testimony of his deep regret for the loss of this faithful and highly valued Ally of the British Government to direct that minute guns to the number of 60 corresponding with the years of the deceased be fired from the ramparts of the Forts of Delhi, Agra and Allahabad, and at all the principal stations of the army throughout the North-Western Provinces. The ceremony will be also observed at the Frontier stations of Loodhiana and Ferozepore." A mission of condolence was also sent⁷⁵ to Kharak Singh at Lahore "consisting of the Offg. Political Agent at Ludhiana and some officers of his personal staff."

Conclusion.

"So lived and died the "Lion of the Punjab." "It was his extraordinary talent alone", says Marshman, "which reared the edifice of Sikh greatness and if it had not been hemmed in by the irresistible power of the East India Company would undoubtedly have established a new and magnificent empire in Hindoostan. By indefatigable exertions he succeeded in creating an army 80,000⁷⁶ strong with 300⁷⁷ pieces of cannon, superior in discipline, valour and equipment to any force which had ever been seen in India under Native colours." When he died the Sikh power in India was at its zenith and "then it exploded", says General Sir J. H. Gordon, "disappearing in fierce but fading flames."

⁷⁵ Sec. O. C., 4 Dec., 1839, No. 80.

⁷⁶ Ranjit Singh's army was composed of:—

(1) The French legion, clothed and exercised in the European manner	8,000 men.
(2) <i>Gorchelis</i> and <i>Gorcher Khas</i> , armed with muskets, wearing armour, and paid either in money or lands 4,000 "
(3) Disciplined battalions 14,940 "
(4) Cavalry in various fortresses 3,000 "
(5) Infantry <i>Pultuns</i> (Regiments), equipped variously 23,950 "
(6) Contingent of the <i>Sirdars</i> in Cavalry 27,014 "

80,904 men.

To this 34,014 horses and 101 elephants may be added.

For further information on this subject the reader is referred to Persian Ms. No. 622 of the Khuda Bakhsh Library at Bankipur.

⁷⁷ According to Captain Murray the number of cannons were 376 besides 370 *Jinjals* or long pieces of ordnance which used to be carried by camels. For fuller details see Pol. O. C., 14th Feb., 1838, Nos. 57-8.

A. F. M. ABDUL ALI.



