

Floundering Sikh rule after Ranjit Singh - A Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study **Anglo-Sikh Wars**, (1845–46; 1848–49), two campaigns fought between the Sikhs and the British. They resulted in the conquest and annexation by the British of the Punjab in northwestern India. The first war was precipitated by mutual suspicions and the turbulence of the Sikh army. The Sikh state in the Punjab had been built into a formidable power by the maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ruled from 1801 to 1839. Within six years of his death, however, the government had broken down in a series of palace revolutions and assassinations. By 1843 the ruler was a boy—the youngest son of Ranjit Singh—whose mother was proclaimed queen regent. Actual power, however, resided with the army, which was itself in the hands of *panchs*, or military committees. Relations with the British had already been strained by the refusal of the Sikhs to allow the passage of British troops through their territory during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838–42). Having determined to invade British India under the pretext of forestalling a British attack, the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej River in December 1845. They were defeated in the four bloody and hard-fought battles of Mudki, Ferozpur, Aliwal, and Sohraon. The British annexed Sikh lands east of the Sutlej and between it and the Beas River; Kashmir and Jammu were detached, and the Sikh army was limited to 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. A British resident was stationed in Lahore with British troops. **Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49)** between the English and the Sikhs was fought at Ramnagar on November 22, 1848. But it remained indecisive. The second battle was fought at **Chilianwala on January 13, 1849**. It also remained indecisive but the English succeeded in Multan. Mulraj surrendered on January 22. However, the **decisive battle was fought at Gujrat, a town near the Chenab on February 21, 1849**. The Sikhs were badly defeated. In March, 1849, Sher Singh, Chattar Singh and the rest of the Sikh commanders surrendered to the English. Dalhousie annexed Punjab on March 29, 1849. Maharaja Dalip Singh was granted a pension of rupees four to five lacs annually and, was along with his mother, *Rani Jhinda*, deported to England.

Key words: Ranjit Singh, Mudki, Sohraon, Mulraj, Treaty of Lahore and Sutlej, British.

Introduction

Maharaja Sikh Monarchy in the Punjab, which strained from river Sutlej to Khyber Pass. He had reigned Ranjit Singh recognized a great the Punjab for forty years which remained the unique phase of the Sikh political attainment. His rule, by all morals, was impartial, humanitarian and lenient towards all societies. He certainly not found it essential to punish even a single individual to debase, not even those who bid to assassinate him. His empire was never a hereditary because he was the ruler of one of the federations. He had exclusive credit for deporting the Afghans and the Mughals from the regions under the Sikh domain. He clarified that he was one of the Sikhs and did not call him the Maharaja. He should only to be called Singh Sahib. These were all the components of the Sikh state. However, he did not work a lot in making the Sikh state as his successional realm and bring the Sikh at the top of state management. He deceased in Lahore on

June 27, 1839, after a simple attack of paralysis. With his demise, the Sikh kingdom began to collapse on social and political sphere. Two Anglo-Sikh wars overthrew the Sikh armed forces and the seizure of their monarchy in 1849

The Second Sikh War began with the revolt of Mulraj, governor of Multan, in April 1848 and became a national revolt when the Sikh army joined the rebels on September 14. Indecisive battles characterized by great ferocity and bad generalship were fought at Ramnagar (November 22) and at Chilianwala (Jan. 13, 1849) before the final British victory at Gujrat (February 21). The Sikh army surrendered on March 12, and the Punjab was then annexed.

The First Anglo-Sikh War was fought between the Sikh Empire and the British East India Company in 1845 and 1846 in and around the Ferozepur district of Punjab. It resulted in defeat and partial subjugation of the Sikh empire and cession of Jammu and Kashmir as a separate princely state under British suzerainty.

The Sikh kingdom of Punjab was expanded and consolidated by Maharajah Ranjit Singh during the early years of the nineteenth century, about the same time as the British-controlled territories were advanced by conquest or annexation to the borders of the Punjab. Ranjit Singh maintained a policy of wary friendship with the British, ceding some territory south of the Sutlej River,^[3] while at the same time building up his military forces both to deter aggression by the British and to wage war against the Afghans. He hired American and European mercenary soldiers to train his army, and also incorporated contingents of Hindus and Muslims into his army.

On March 10, 1849, Sher Singh, along with his father and a few Sardars, reached in his camp and handed over their swords. On March 11, 1849, they were captured by the British and thus they convinced that no Sikh left to fear them [14]. The British then chose to annex the whole regions of the Sikh dynasty. On March 29, 1849, the text of affiliation was constituted. Maharani Chand Kaur and her son, Dalip Singh, were sent to England. This narration was engraved on marble stone on the wall of Sheesh Mahal [6]. The points of this pact were that: • Maharaja Dalip Singh surrenders his all rights and the privilege of his successors in regards to the Punjab and all territory of the Punjab is given to the British in pay for the gigantic amount of expenses spent by the British during the skirmishes. • Kohinoor, precious stone, is given to Queen of Britain which Ranjit Singh had taken from King of Kabul. • The British would offer forty five hundred thousand rupees every year to Dalip Singh and his relatives as expenses. Dalip Singh rapidly signed on this agreement and thus, the administrations of all his old workers were ended. In 1854, his all other properties were seized and sent him to England. He embraced Christianity and was given him a domain at Elvedon in Suffolk.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze **Anglo-Sikh Wars** or campaigns between the British and the Sikhs. The first conflict took place in 1845-1846 and the second in 1848-1849. The first Sikh war led to a partial control of the Sikh kingdom by the British. However, in the second Anglo-Sikh War in which for the first time annexed the whole of Punjab to British India and led to the fall of the Sikh empire

Floundering Sikh rule after Ranjit Singh

The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of radical changes in the Punjab which was dominated by the Sikhs. But after the death of Ranjit Singh, his successor could not maintain it due to many reasons. One of them was Anglo-Sikh Wars which totally demolished the Sikh Kingdom. During the proposed period, the Sikh rule was on the verge of

closure and the new British rulers were attempting to obtain the entire Subcontinent. The present work related to those reasons which resulted the decline of the Sikh Rule. Besides this, it highlights the major facts and consequences of these wars. Its main aim is to examine the causes and consequences of these wars in promoting or demoting Sikh rule. Kharak Singh, the eldest son of Ranjit, was designated as the Maharaja by his father. Ranjit Singh assigned the task of his protection to Dhian Singh Dogra who asserted to be honest with him and the Sikh state. Yet, Ranjit Singh understood that he would soon prove to be traitor to his son, family and the Sikh state. Besides this, Kharak Singh was not appropriate to elaborate problems that revealed at the crucial time. So, Dhian Singh was visualizing to install his son, Hira Singh, on the chair of the Sikh state. He and his brother, Gulab Singh, tried their best to assume all the powers of the selected Maharaja but could not be fruitful. Chet Singh Bajwa handled the Maharaja Kharak Singh in government matters.

He put aside the Dogras and Nau Nihal Singh, son of Kharak Singh. Under the treacheries, Nau Nihal Singh was made de facto as monarch on August 10, 1839, and his father was restrained in the fortress. Nevertheless, Nau Nihal Singh rejected to play into the hands of these fabulous Dogras. He recognized his competence to rule and the determination to administer the state. By this act, he dissatisfied the Dogras and recouped the control over the military too. On November 5, 1840, Kharak Singh died and the very next day when Nau Nihal Singh came to the citadel, the mischievous fell down which extremely hurt his head with the stone block. This block cracked his head and, as a result, he died. Briefly, he could not become the Maharaja, however he had demonstrated his competency to grasp the high title. If his expiration had not come so soon he would have administered the kingdom excellently and intrigues against the Sikh state could have been escaped. Kharak Singh and Nau Nihal Singh' demise hastened a catastrophe which not only enfeebled the State but was also the first step of inner uproars. Chand Kaur, mother of Nau Nihal Singh, took the supremacy of the state in her hands. Sher Singh and Chand Kaur were two plaintiffs because Sher Singh was the son of the Maharaja's first wife. He was relatively a healthier administrator. He, with the reinforcement of Dhian Singh, made a proposal for the throne whilst Chand Kaur was reinforced by the chiefs of Sandhawalialia.

On November 9, 1840, Sher Singh was installed as the Maharaja but, after just 23 days, he was dislodged by Chand Kaur. On December 2, 1840, she took the sovereignty and declared Malika Mukaddas2 (Queen Empress). During November 5, 1840 and January 18, 1841, there appeared a bloodstained and Sher Singh proclaimed himself as the Maharaja. Maharani surrendered all the privileges to throne and received a Jagir of 9 Lakh rupees per annum. Sher Singh administered from January 20, 1841 to September 15, 1843. He nominated Dhian Singh as Chief Minister. In spite of the hardships and the penetrating groups in the Sikh Sardars, he governed in the Punjab with capability and astuteness. He had been welcomed by the Sikh command and the adjacent British Empire. He was too feeble and nervous to control. He not only elevated substantial alarm for Lahore Durbar but also the British who predicted nothing lower than a total turmoil. In these circumstances, some British officials recommended that an army of 12000 men should be proceeded to Lahore to preserve the Maharaja from the Sikh military. Although he had introduced himself as a king to the troops, yet he was unable to command them. The troops were disciplined and there was no mark of disobedience. For some time, the Maharaja fully trusted on the favour of Dhian Singh but he, by assuming his too much power, called back the Sandhawalialias. They had not disremembered that embarrassment which they had experienced. So, the British granted them shelter.

In November 1842, Ajit Singh, who was anti Dogras and Pro-British, was appointed as a commander in the armed forces. On September 15, 1843, he and his uncle, Lehna Singh, assassinated Dhian Singh, Sher Singh and his son, Partap Singh.

They had strategy to rule over the State. But Hira Singh killed the both in revenge of his father's assassination, yet Dhian Singh's demise was in the Sikh interests . With the assassination of Sher Singh, the supremacy transferred to the disordered army. Dalip Singh, in the presence of his three surviving brothers, was designated as the Maharaja on September 15, 1843. Hira Singh was made his chief The area under study has an extremely incredible importance in the history of Punjab and Multan. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of radical changes in the Punjab which was dominated by the Sikhs. But after the death of Ranjit Singh, his successor could not maintain it due to many reasons. One of them was Anglo-Sikh Wars which totally demolished the Sikh Kingdom. During the proposed period, the Sikh rule was on the verge of closure and the new British rulers were attempting to obtain the entire Subcontinent. The present work related to those reasons which resulted the decline of the Sikh Rule. Besides this, it highlights the major facts and consequences of these wars. Its main aim is to examine the causes and consequences of these wars in promoting or demoting Sikh rule. Kharak Singh, the eldest son of Ranjit, was designated as the Maharaja by his father. Ranjit Singh assigned the task of his protection to Dhian Singh Dogra who asserted to be honest with him and the Sikh state.

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Rani Jindan took over the control of the state affairs in her hands with the assistance of her brother, Jawahar Singh . Pashaura Singh seized the Attock fort and declared himself as the Maharaja but he was killed by the Sikh military. The Khalsa army Punchayat found Jawahar Singh to be accountable and instructed him to appear before it. On September 21, 1845, when he came before the Army Punchayat, he was deceased . But it failed to have any impression on the Sikh state. All these circumstances had been noticed by the governors and officials of Multan but they kept quiet. After Ranjit's demise, the story completes with the challenging Anglo-Sikh Wars which observed the decline of his kingdom in the hands of his descendants. The initial strain in Anglo-Sikh relationships happened over a quarter century after the confirmation of the Sutlej Treaty³ It endorsed an Anglo-Sikh dual attack at Afghanistan to keep Shah Shuja on the seat of Kabul . The demand for the course of troops was not as clear as it showed because the British wanted to quantify the power of the Sikh armed forces, however the abuse of benevolence was to be taken still more. In 1841 the British, for sending its troops in Kabul, claimed Lahore Durbar's assistance. Lahore Darbar satisfied them to send a force under Gulab Singh but the British attempted to buy him .

EVENTS OF THE FIRST ANGLO-SIKH WAR

The British took serious note of the inaugural battle of the First Anglo-Sikh War in their internal councils, since it was soon obvious that a high cost had been paid for its triumph and catastrophe . On December 13, 1845, the British pronounced war on the Sikhs with the decree that the area beyond Sutlej would be regarded under their sphere too. Five battles, Mudki, Ferozshah, Buddowal, Aliwal and Sobraon,⁴ were fought from December 18, 1845 to February 10, 1846. The Sikh armed force achieved Ferozepur as it was in a position to overcome the British armed forces. The head of the

Sikh armed forces was also supporting the British . The Sikh and the British armed forces met on the combat zones at Mudki on December 18, 1845 and at Ferozshah on December 21, 1845. Tej Singh, the commander-in-chief of the Sikh armed force, guaranteed the annihilation of the Sikh forces as the British army was not in a position to crush the Sikhs . He, along with 5000 Sikh warriors, fled from the front line at Mudki by instructing the Sikh forces to leave the war exactly when the army was at the stage of triumph. Same approach was adopted by the Sikh leaders at Ferozshah as per guideline from the British .

On January 23, 1846, the Sikh armed forces battled with the British at Sobraon, yet this fight was lost even before the war because the leader of the Sikhs had sent data to the British about the Sikh army two days earlier. He guaranteed that the Sikh military would be misinformed and would be overcome . The Sikh military, who was still occupied with war, surprised when it found sand in the sacks of ammo. In such a traitorous circumstance, how could the armed force be triumphant? The double dealing in the skirmish of Aliwal was repeated by the Brahmin officer . Hasrat narrates: If, Lal Singh and Tej Sing, Generals of the Sikh armed force, had not sold out their armed force, the aftereffect of the skirmishes amongst the Sikhs and the British would have thoroughly been distinctive . In this way, the British could win these fights otherwise it was difficult to vanquish the Sikh armed forces. Cunningham describes: The English, therefore, humiliated Gulab Singh because their willingness to recognize a Sikh sway in Lahore should have been dispersed, yet the Raja announced his powerlessness to manage troops which still intimidated him and other well-wishers of the Ranjit Singh's family. This powerlessness was somewhat overstated to narrow minded objects. Under these conditions of subtle approach and blatant sedition, war of Sobraon was battled . He further described: Indeed Tej Singh, rather than leading fresh men to support the worsening strength of the troops to his right side, fled on the initial attack and either unintentionally or by conformation sank the boat on the bridge . It was the peak of treason and infidelity where more than fifteen thousand Sikhs murdered. The holders of wealth, nourishment and ammo of war helped the British to vanquish them and joined the foes to concede the foundation of their Government at Lahore .

The penetrating competitions and egotistical inspirations of the Sikh Sardar were obviously accountable for such circumstances. It was sure that Lal Singh was not only in correspondence with Capt. Nicolson but also referred the plan of the Sikh's arrangement at Sobraon to Col. Lawrence on February 7, 1846 . Majorgeneral Sir J. Littler crossed the Sutlej at night and on February 12, 1846, the fortress of Kasur was occupied without restriction . On February 15, 1846, the raja and a few Sardars met with Governor General at Kasur. They were informed that Dalip Singh would keep on his sovereignty, however the territories between the Bias and the Sutlej would be held by the subjugators. He must paid 1500000 pound as insurance for the expenditures of the war. On February 20, 1846, the terms were reluctantly concurred and the British armed force landed at the Sikh capital of Lahore . Dalip Singh was announced as the Maharaja of Punjab whilst Tej Singh was made Minister and Chief of armed forces . It is not comprehended why their intrigues could not be known to the Sikhs and why they were not repulsed for such horrifying violations. It is unmatched that how these few rascals succeeded to crumble such enormous Sikh Empire and to make the valour Sikhs vulnerable by their intrigues. Truly, it was their disloyalty that the British were permitted to reach Lahore on February 26, 1846 as per the preplanned strategy . On March 11, 1846, a pact was settled between the Sikh ruler and the British by which the whole region under the realm of the Sikh was separated into following three sections .

- The region amongst Sutlej and Bias was affiliated by the British.
- The regions of Jammu and Kashmir was handed over to Gulab Singh Dogra in acknowledgment of the services as conspirators of the Sikh.
- The rest of the Punjab region was admitted to be under the sphere of Maharaja

Dalip Singh as the Sikh State. It was also mentioned in the accord that Dalip Singh, until achieving the age of adulthood on September 4, 1854, would stay under the custody of the British government. It was a joke because, during Ranjit Singh's era, the Britishers did not attempt to enter in the Punjab for half a century. We see that, during the first Anglo-Sikh war, Multan and its ruler kept silence like an impartial one and did not play any part in support or against the both sides. The reason was that Mulraj was really going to resign and had no enthusiasm for the war. The reality is that, he would have surrendered if he had the chance.

SECOND ANGLO-SIKH WAR

The British preceded their tricks with the assistance of the deceivers even in the region reserved for Dalip Singh. If the success of the Punjab had been the object then it must have been inaccessible operations to cover Peshawar and Multan. For this purpose, they made equipped uprisings in Multan with the inspiration of pushing their military for further affiliation. The inhabitants were included in spreading the revolt against Multan. Actually, the Sikh armed forces had united with the supposed defies of Multan against the British plotting. The Multan Rebellion, oppressed by the British, had irritated the Sikhs. Towards the end of the Sikh battle 1845-46, Sir Charles Napier walked to Multan and reached to the central command of armed forces. In the areas of Multan and Hazara, the British forces were sent to annihilate the uprisings. It was the height of roguish plots, yet there was no power to uncover it. The Govt. of India had chosen the Punjab to reach a critical stage. On November 21, 1847, Diwan Mulraj offered his resignation. Mr. V. Agnew and Anderson were sent to Multan with Kahn Singh who was to take a charge of the new Diwan. A little force of 530 irregular men was also sent with them. Both were assaulted by Mulraj's people and killed. So, it was planned to send a force to penalize this deed and insubordination. In July 1848, it was agreed to quick operations against the stronghold of Multan with the help of the troops of Nawab of Bahawalpur and Edwards so that Diwan Mulraj could be defeated. On July 22, 1848, a decree was issued against Mulraj with regards to his disobedience and tricky murder of the British officers. Lord Dalhousie, who was exceptionally eager to wipe out the Sikh power, announced the war against the Sikhs. He said that it was the second Anglo-Sikh war and they are not on the eve of, but in the core of war with Sikh dynasty. I have drawn the sword and discarded the scabbard. On August 18, 1848, Major General Whish marched with seven thousand men and stayed near Multan fort. He issued a decree to the residents and a convention of war was held with regards to the technique of assault on September 06, 1848. The place was blasted and different operations were started. On September 14, 1848, Sher Singh, with his troops, walked from Multan whilst General Whish held a meeting in which it was resolved to pull back from the siege and wait for assistance.

Conclusion

The decline of the Sikh rule started rapidly after the first Anglo-Sikh War because there was no one sturdy and capable enough to succeed him. At the top of the executive set up, there were no dedicated Sikhs to save it from the intrigues of the British. It provided a unique occasion to the cunning and judicious British to enter intrigues with conspirators which they could not do in Ranjit Singh's life. His sons were not capable to deal with such a dangerous condition because all of them were eliminated one after the other with the help of the Dogras and the Brahmins.

So, as a result of second AngloSikh War, the Sikh Kingdom became more weakened and then fall into decline. These Anglo-Sikh wars proved a turning point in the history of the Sikh dynasty because they had totally changed the political scenario of the Punjab and Multan. After second Anglo-Sikh war, the Punjab and Multan had gone under the direct control of the British Empire which demolished that Sikh state which Ranjit Singh had founded by a great struggle. It can be easily observed that only Ranjit Singh's successors were not responsible for the decline of the Sikh kingdom, but he, for some extent, was also responsible. Dogras and the Brahmins, who had neither share in founding the Sikh state nor any commitment to the Sikh state, had been installed on the key posts. The consequences of these blunders were proved catastrophic for the Sikhs. Similarly, he had no rationalization for exiling the chiefs of the confederacies from the management of the Sikh State. If he had not transported the Dogras and the Brahmins to the helm of the government and given the civil management into the hands of the skilled and faithful Sikh Sardars then could be escaped from this catastrophe.

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