

Decline & Fall of the Sikh Kingdom: The Lesser-known Facts

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PART II

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THE SIGNATORY TO THE proclamation of protection received by Cis-Sutlej states against Lahore through the "Ittilah-Nama" of May 1809 and of 22nd August 1811, notified by the English, briefly envisaged that: (a) They were received 'under the British protection and are secure from the authority and influence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh'; (b) Should a British force march through their country, 'they shall furnish, such force, with grains and other necessaries on demand'; (c) Against any enemy of the English, the chiefs 'will join the British Army with all their force under proper obedience.'

How did the Chiefs subservient to the English prove their adherence to the above mentioned proclamation?

Raja Ajit Singh of Ladwa was the sole exception, as he remained true to his salt and country, and as a member of the Khalsa brotherhood joined the Sikh forces and took part in the Anglo-Sikh war fighting against the English.

Raja Devinder Singh of Nabha was no friend of the English and was in intrigue with Lahore Durbar before the Anglo Sikh war, but he did receive Col. Ochterlony's force with cordiality on its arrival at Nabha during 1808. He did not support the English till after the battles of Mudki. Thereafter he provided ample supplies to the English, but after the end of the war he was ordered to be deposed, and was kept initially at Mathura and thereafter at Lahore, where the palace of Maharaja Kharak Singh was allotted to him as his residence. The English confiscated one-fourth of his territories and subsequently divided these equally between Rajas of Patiala and Faridkot, as war reward.

Sirdar Nihal Singh of Kapurthala, though bound by the treaty of 25 April 1809, did not support the English. The Kapurthala force, under the command of Hyder Ali, composed of cavalry, infantry and artillery units, fought at Aliwal, and Buddowal against the English. After the war, Sirdar Nihal Singh explained to the English that he was unable to restrain his troops, who broke into mutiny and had imprisoned him in his palace. The English did not believe him and his Cis-e-Sutlej states were confiscated, but Jalandhar Doab estates were allowed to be maintained in his independent possession. Having learnt the lesson, during the second Anglo Sikh war, Sirdar Nihal Singh did his best to assist the English. At the close of war, the Governor General visited Kapurthala and Nihal Singh received the title of Raja.

A detachment of the troops of Jind State accompanied the Patiala contingent that went to Gungrana, under Capt. Hey, when the second Sikh war broke out. The Raja offered to lead his troops in person to Lahore to join English army, but the offer was declined by the English with thanks.

Kaithal state was one of the original states whose chief Sirdar Lal Singh had sought English protection in the year 1808. During the spring of 1843 disturbances broke out in

Kaithal state. Patiala state sent two guns and 1000 horse men to cooperate with the English troops to subdue the uprising. The troops arrested Tek Singh, the leader of the insurgents, who was a Jat Sikh of village Kulram in Jind. Tek Singh, four elephants, two brass guns, one and half Lakh rupees and other considerable property were sent by Patiala state forces to the English at Ambala as war booty. The 3rd Sikh infantry carried the Patiala - awarded battle honour 'Kaithal 1843' for this campaign. **The destruction of the commonwealth of the Khalsa had begun in 1843 as had been forecast by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, on his deathbed, while looking at a map of the country, he had said (*Sab Lal Ho Jaiga*) All areas would turn red.**

Sirdar Pahara Singh of Faridkot, when war broke out with Lahore Durbar, attached himself to the English and did his best to collect supplies and carriages for war and furnished guides to the army. At the end of the war he was awarded half of the territories confiscated from Raja of Nabha and also received the title of Raja. When the battle ground at Ferozeshah was abandoned, both by English and Sikh armies, this great friend of the English, had single-handedly turned the English defeat into victory by persuading the retreating English army to return to the battle field. The Sikh army under Misar Tej Singh as per his planning, had abandoned the battle field. Pahara Singh died in April, 1849 and his son Raja Wazir Singh served under the English during the second Anglo Sikh war. He was even more loyal to the English than his Late father Pahara Singh.

When, towards the end of 1845, the war between the Lahore Sarkar and English became certain, Maharaj Karam Singh declared his loyalty and devotion to the English. Once again he promised and furnished all necessary supplies, rations and other material needed to wage war. Patiala contingent, which supported the English consisted of 2000 cavalry, 2000 infantry, 200, Zambrakchis (camel artillery) and six field guns. The following units carried the Patiala-issued Battle Honour "Sikh war 1845" (sic) for this campaign, i.e. – 2nd Yadavindra infantry, 3 Sikh Infantry, 4th Infantry. But on 23rd December the day after the battle of Ferozeshah, Karam Singh died without reaping the harvest he had sown. He was succeeded by his son Raja Narindra Singh, who was even better disposed towards the English than his father.^{5,6}

During the first Anglo-Sikh War, after four pitched battles, the Governor General was content, or compelled, to leave Lahore a "dependent" ally. After the terms were agreed to, Maharaja Dalip Singh on 20 February 1846 came and tendered his submission in person to the English. **The separate sway of the Sikhs and independence of Punjab came to an end.**

The English assumed the protectorate of Punjab during the minority of Maharaja Dalip Singh. An agreement was concluded between the English and the state of Lahore, on 9th March, 1846 – supplementary articles were added on 11th March and final agreement was concluded on 16th December 1846.

Highlights of the agreement were the creation of Regency of Lahore. An Englishman, Sir Henry Lawrence was appointed as controller of the regency, with full powers to direct and control every department of the state. Stationing of English troops in the fort of Lahore was effected.

The peace which followed was a patch up as the Sikh people had not been subdued. The traitors who received the largest awards were Gulab Singh, Tej Singh, Lal Singh Maharaja of Patiala and Raja of Faridkot for rendering services to the English. But one Mr. Honigberges, who was physician in the Court of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh was awarded pension for life for services rendered to the Lahore Durbar.⁸ The Sikh people had recognized that those who were now enjoying the rewards were the ones who had actually betrayed them.

At the end of the war, Company's 'treasury was empty and its trade had adverse effect on its share price in England.' During the year 1805, Marquis Wellesley was the Governor General of India, and was in touch with Sikh chiefs. Just as Maharaja Ranjit Singh was facilitating the peace treaty, between the English and the Marathas, Wellesley was called back to Britain, by the Board of Control. He found himself answering the Parliament. The Company debts were colossal, standing at £ 28.5 million (1806) – Two third of which stemmed from Marquis' wars.

Lord Cornwallis replaced him, under a strict brief not to engage in any further wars or make additional annexations. The Company's treasury was empty at the end of first Anglo-Sikh war. The Company was bankrupt at the end of 1847. Hence the Governor General, Lord Hardinge was recalled to England. He took along with him Sir Henry Lawrence, who was at that time administering the Sikh affairs at Lahore. **Lord Hardinge's friends, on his departure had declared that there would not be another shot fired in India for another ten years.**

Within six months, Mool Raj, the Governor of Multan, revolted against the Lahore Durbar, on the issue of demand for revenue due to the Lahore Durbar. After some fruitless interchange of communication, the Durbar ordered the siege of fort of Multan, which began on 7th September 1848. The people of the neighboring regions came to join Mool Raj. Sikh troops issued an appeal to their co-religionists. The opportunity to fight for independence had arrived. With the rising of Sardar Chattar Singh, Governor of the N.W.F. Districts and on 14th September the defection of Sardar Sher Singh of Attari, with his whole force, gave greater impetus to the national movement. It left no one in doubt that Khalsa has resolved to strike a great blow for independence.

When the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, who had replaced Lord Hardinge and was headquartered at Barakpur (near Calcutta) learnt about it – though it was the internal matter of the Lahore Durbar – declared: **“As the Sikh people wished war, they shall have it with a vengeance”.**

Lord Gough who was at Shimla announced the formation of an army at Ferozepur, by the name of “The Army of Punjab” under his personal command. It would be idle to assert that rulers of Patiala or, for that matter, any Sikh chief south of the Sutlej, there existed an active spirit of loyalty to one's country. **Hence these pronouncements by the English were music to the ears of Cis-Sutlej chiefs. Maharaja Narindra Singh of Patiala offered his services to the English.** As the Company's treasury was empty, Lord Dalhousie asked for financial help to raise the Army of Punjab. Maharaja Narindra Singh loaned Rs. 30 Lakhs and also offered services of his troops, but they were not needed by the English – with this money the English proceeded to mass 50,000 men on Sutlej, 9,000 in Lahore and 9,000 at Ferozepur.

Raja Wazir Singh of Faridkot who was more loyal to the English than his late father Pahara Singh, joined the English contingent at the head of his state army, and served under the English to subjugate Lahore Durbar. Raja of Jind state, offered to lead his troops in person to Lahore, under the English Army of Punjab. But the offer was declined. Sardar Nihal Singh of Kapurthala did his best to assist the English with war – like material and

transportation facilities. At the end of the war the English Governor General visited Kapurthala and Nihal Singh received the title of Raja.

Early in November 1848 Lord Gough crossed Sutlej, with the army composed of English regiments and Hindustani mercenaries. He marched to Lahore, to dethrone the young Maharaja Dalip Singh, who had neither revolted against the English nor was part to any conspiracy, whereas English were legally his guardian and protector – they were marching against their own protectorate.

The Military dispatches of the second Anglo-Sikh war are as unreliable and worthless as those of the first Anglo-Sikh war, asserts Col. G B Melleson. True accounts of the war were published by Sir Henry Duravd and Col. Melleson, and need not be reproduced here. Towards the end of the war, the Sikh army under the command of Sardar Sher Singh of Attariwala had retired to Rasul, after the battle of Chillianwala.

He was joined by his father Sardar Chattar Singh, who now assumed the Army command. One of the sons of Amir of Kabul joined them with fifteen hundred Afghans. In all thirty four thousand men had assembled to face the English. The leaders now found it difficult to provide for such a strength for many days. Lack of war like materials and rations was their major weakness.

On 6th March English prisoners with the Sikh army were released, for lack of resources to maintain them. On 14th March Sardar Chattar Singh, Sher Singh and principal Sikh leaders delivered their swords into the hands of the British General – with tears in their eyes and uttering the words '*Aj Ranjit Singh mar gaya*' – Ranjit Singh has died today!

Thus the Sikh Army surrendered unconditionally. So ended the Second Anglo-Sikh War. The English army crushed the uprising, conquered Punjab and enslaved it's population.

Punjab was 'annexed'. But the question arises: 'from whom?' Lord Dalhousie was explicit: from Dalip Singh. The ward and the protectorate, who were also of the English, signatories to the agreement of a "Perpetual Friendship" with the Sikh State of Lahore. 'Ablly assisted' by Maharaja Rajinder Singh of Patiala, who financed the bankrupt East India Company to raise the Army of Punjab'. **The English looted the Lahore treasury, plundered the Sikh heritage, wealth of Sikh nation and personal affects of Guru Gobind Singh Ji- including his weapons and the Kalgi.** These relics are still in the hands of descendents of the English 'plunderers', in the treasury and Museum in London.

Conclusion:

It is clear that, among the Sikh chiefs of South of the Sutlej, with the exception of Raja Ajit Singh of Ladwa, there existed no spirit of loyalty to one's Motherland, fellow Sikh chiefs or compatriots. The splendid valour shown at Ferozeshah by the Maharaja's army, was neutralized by the treachery of Sikh leaders. This battle that could have been a victory turned into defeat and virtually decided the fate of Punjab – courtesy: Pahara Singh.⁹ The Rajas of Nabha and Kapurthala were victims of their own circumstances, though their heart and soul were with their Sikh brothers and Punjabis, who fought the English irrespective of caste or religion. It was to be expected that English would reward traitors – which they did, by designating them Majarajas, Rajas, Jagirdars and through other rewards for services rendered to the English.

The most sinister treachery is that of the physician who was rewarded with a life – pension for 'services rendered to the Lahore Durbar'. He was the physician to the erstwhile Sikh court of Lahore, viz, John Martin Honigberger, a person of European descent who had

stayed at Lahore for several years. What were the services he had rendered to the Lahore Durbar for which the victorious English rewarded him? It is well known that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had, at the time of his death, aged more than 15 years - in biological terms! Was the Maharaja administered a slow-acting poison by Honigberger, for which he was awarded pension for life? This, and other, issues raised by me need more research by honest historians - to shatter the conspiracy of silence and bring true facts to light. Some day, I believe, the truth will prevail and the facade built by "slanted historians" will be torn, and truth shall emerge.



(End of Part II)
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