

The Legendary Baba Jassa Singh Ramgarhia: Charisma Vs Destiny

*Sumant Dhamija**

@ Copyright with author.

* 6/32A, Shanti Niketan, New Delhi-110021. Email: sumant_dhamija@hotmail.com



Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (JSR), not to be confused with another celebrity, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, was one of the greatest heroes of 18th century Punjab. A devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh, he rose from being a humble soldier to one of the great leaders of Punjab. Born in 1723 at Sursingh in the *tarkhan* caste village near Khemkaran, his life spanned the entire century and he saw in his lifetime freedom from both the Mughals, and the Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali, and then sovereignty for the Sikhs, objectives to which he dedicated his life. He died in 1803 having seen more action than most warriors see in several lifetimes!

It was after the death of Banda Bahadur in 1715, when the Sikhs were leaderless and almost near annihilation, that Bhagwan Singh, JSR's father joined the army of the Punjab Governor, Abdus Samad Khan. Bhagwan Singh, a valiant fighter died in the battle of Lahore(1739) against Nadir Shah

servicing the next governor, Zakaria Khan(1726-45). His five sons who had also taken employment under Zakaria Khan showed their courage and fighting skills - they and their 100 companions saved his life. Deeply impressed he gave them one village each as a reward. JSR, the eldest got Walla together with the title of *Risaldar* while the others each got Verka, Sultanwind, Tung and Chubhal together with the lower ranks of *Tumandar*.

Opportunity:

This was the time of complete confusion and anarchy in Punjab following Nadir Shah's return to Persia. The Sikhs were the main cause of this. Zakaria Khan knew he had to subdue them for the economy to recover. He therefore instituted a series of harsh measures against them. These succeeded making the Sikhs move from the Bari Doab to the Jalandhar Doab, in the territory of Adina Beg Khan, the *faujdar* or military governor. Adina Beg Khan did not take strong action against them feeling perhaps that if he did do so and succeeded, he would no longer be required and hence lose the *Faujdari* to someone who could pay more for it. So he made a pretence of action. The Sikhs were allowed to carry on their activities in the peripheries provided they did not create an extreme law and order situation in the areas directly under him. Zakaria Khan, not impressed with this behaviour, put pressure on him to act. In this fluid state of affairs, JSR was asked by the Sikhs to make representations to Adina Beg Khan on their behalf-Zakaria Khan knew about this and indeed encouraged this, aware of JSR's rare qualities of diplomacy. Adina Beg however proved too astute for the young JSR, recognized his attributes as a negotiator with the Sikhs and made him an offer which he found difficult to refuse, much to the disappointment of the Sikhs. JSR, who in any case preferred the atmosphere of Jalandhar to Lahore, was gratified by Adina Beg's offer of command over 160 men to go with his position of *Tehshildar* which no doubt influenced

his decision. The Sikhs however soon came to terms with this themselves, seeing an advantage in having their man as a restraining influence on the Government, but laid down conditions on him especially those requiring timely information of the activities of government forces. They felt secure in their hearts that JSR would join them when it was most opportune and upon the request of the Khalsa. Part of the reasons for acceptance of JSR's present position was due partly also to his exalted Sikh lineage-both his grandfather, Hardas Singh and father, Bhagwan Singh had been baptized with *Amrit* by Guru Gobind Singh. Hardas Singh had been with the Guru through thick and thin and only went back to his native Ichogal when the latter proceeded down to the Deccan in 1707. He then joined Banda in his fight against the Mughals till his death in the battle of Bajwara in 1715. JSR too was content with his position and with a master who he realized would not be hard on the Khalsa. But his relationship with the Khalsa was going to change-he was accused of female infanticide and so excommunicated as per the *rahit* (rules of conduct). It was argued that JSR was unaware of this and that he was not present at the occasion of the death of his new born daughter but the Khalsa, fired by the idealism of a new creed, were not in a forgiving mood. JSR however continued whatever passive support he could give but it would take a great sacrifice on his part before the Khalsa would change their hearts about him.

Repression:

When Zakaria Khan died in 1745 there followed a period of complete anarchy. The Sikhs took advantage and began to move freely even to the extent of visiting their holy tank at Amritsar, a dangerous move under any circumstance. In 1747 they managed to build a small *rauni*, or mud fort at Amritsar on the basis of a *Gurmata* in March, 1747. This was called *Ram Rauni* or God's shelter after Guru Ram Das, the founder of Amritsar. It could hold up to 500 men and was useful to house some of those who had lost their homes during Zakaria Khan's harsh measures in the previous years. It also acted as a temporary shelter to many. The Sikhs, emboldened, now began to make regular visits to Amritsar which was now slowly becoming for the Sikhs a place to rally around. They met in strength on the occasions of Vaisakhi in spring and at Diwali at the beginning of winter. It was in 1747-8 that Ahmad Shah Abdali the great Afghan king and founder of modern Afghanistan, invaded India. Whilst he was able to conquer Punjab he was defeated by the Mughal forces in their last and spectacular victory, at Menupur. The 'hero' of the battle, Muin-ul-Mulk, popularly known as Mir Mannu, was given the governorship of Punjab as a reward. It was under him that the Sikhs found themselves on the receiving end once again.

The first encounter that took place between the two sides was when the Sikhs had gathered for the Diwali festival at the *Ram Rauni Fort*. Mir Mannu who had banned Sikh entry into Amritsar ordered Adina Beg and Diwan Kaura Mal to attack them. They fled before the Mughal forces except for about 500 who took shelter in the mud fort and were besieged there. The siege lasted 4 months by which time 200 had died in various skirmishes. With the situation becoming critical they decided on a battle to the death. A Sikh disguised as a Mughal soldier stole into the night to check enemy positions and quite by chance spotted JSR, who on being told of the condition of the Sikhs inside the *rauni*, had a sudden change of attitude. Perhaps the taunts of the Sikh soldier had their desired effect. But whatever the reason, JSR had a complete change of heart. In any

case this situation of serving two masters could not last. The Sikhs wanted complete sovereignty and sooner or later he would have to choose between his coreligionists and those that opposed them. He sent a note with an arrow that he would help and immediately got into action. He arranged for ammunition, food and supplies and entered the fort at night with 200 troops- to much jubilation. He had meanwhile asked Diwan Kaura Mal, a Khulasa Sikh i.e. one who believed Nanak but not a *Khalsa*, to intervene on behalf of the Sikhs without much hope that he would be able to do so successfully. Although opposed by Adina Beg who considered JSR's act as high treachery, Kaura Mal was able to prevail upon Mir Mannu to raise the siege. The siege was subsequently lifted although the decision may have had more to do with rumors of Ahmad Shah's impending invasion. JSR, by his action, had shown he was prepared to face certain death for the cause. With this show of heroism, JSR asked for and received the Khalsa's ready forgiveness both for the possible infanticide and his initial allegiance to the Mughals. And so started a meteoric career which was to bring glory to himself and the Khalsa and ultimately lead to freedom for Punjab.

On 29th March, 1748, the Dal Khalsa consisting of both the Taruna and the Buddha Dals, was officially divided among 11 misls, under the sole leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. During this period JSR and his two brothers Tara Singh and Mali Singh joined Nand Singh of the Sanghana Misl, after the village of the same name to which he belonged. JSR was easily accepted. He would now only serve the *Panth* and this he did with a vengeance. Soon he was made second in command on account of his military and organisational ability and upon Nand Singh's death, was made head of the Misl.

Invasion:

Ahmad Shah had attacked again in 1749 but this time Mir Mannu, the very courageous and competent Governor of Punjab could not, without adequate help from Delhi, face him on equal terms and he was defeated. Ahmad Shah in any case impressed by Mir Mannu, let him continue as Governor but now on his behalf. Mir Mannu, a strong and competent ruler brought about a semblance of peace to Punjab. It was only after his death in November, 1753 that the Sikhs found themselves strong enough to emerge. Their first act was to build a solid structure in place of Ram rauni. **On the basis of a *gurmata*, passed at the holy shrine, JSR was given this task and he displayed his building capabilities to the fullest by constructing a strong fortress which came to be known as Ram Garh after Guru Ram Das. JSR henceforth was called Ramgarhia in appreciation of the work done by him.**

The new fortress saw its first action in 1758 during the governorship of Adina Beg Khan, after he sent a force of 4000 carpenters with steel hatchets and axes to clear the forests in the neighborhood of Amritsar where the Sikhs took refuge when attacked. A large number of them now took shelter at Ram Garh believing that they would be united with God if they died fighting in the Guru's fort. JSR, Amar Singh Kingra and Jai Singh Kanhaiya and their troops, besieged at the fort, put up a brave fight. It was a combination of these three and in particular Jai Singh's sorties against the besiegers that led to the siege being lifted in two months.

Adina Beg Khan died in September, 1758 and in the immediate vacuum that followed in the utter chaos and confusion in Punjab which now had no immediate effective authority either from Delhi or Kabul, all Misl leader and members attempted to acquire as much land as possible. JSR joined up with Jai Singh Kanhaiya for furthering this objective. They chose and conquered the fertile tract of Riyarki lying at the foothills of the Himalayas and north of Amritsar. Ramgarhia territory lay on both sides of the River

Beas and included Miani, Sehri, Maraala, Urmur Tanda, Yahyapur Teghowal, Maniwal, Dabwan Jhora, Mukandpur, Saiha in the Jalandhar Doab. In the Bari Doab it included Batala, given to Mali Singh and Kalanaur given to Tara Singh. It also included Dinanagar, Qadian, Mattewal, Ghuman and finally, Hargobindpur which he made his capital. (Harbans Singh Viridi-Warrior Diplomat-Jassa Singh Ramgarhia; Writers Foundation, Chandigarh. Page-104). All the Zamindars including Saran Das of Jandiala, Dharam Das of Toli and Mirza Nur Mohammad of Qadian accepted him as overlord and started paying tribute to him. (Pages 1201- *A History of Sikh Misls* by Bhagat Singh, 1993, Punjabi University, Patiala). With so much territory under his control, JSR, knowing that possession was the key and that the welfare of the people was equally important, was always on the move, visiting these and making improvements in these places.

Alliance:

In 1763, the Kanhaiya- Ramgarhia combination attacked and conquered the very rich province of Kasur. A large booty fell to them. This was however the beginning of serious disagreements between the two Misls on the question of the division of the spoils. The Ramgarhias buried the vast treasure in a jungle near Begowal never to find it again. The Kanhaiyas predictably, did not believe the story that they had put it there as a temporary measure before it was to be divided up. Subsequently JSR's younger brother, Mali Singh, looted 50,00,000 rupees from Hirday Ram, a rich merchant but refused to divide it despite, we are led to believe, the elder brother's protestations, giving further evidence to the Kanhaiyas of Ramgarhia duplicity. JSR was indulgent to his younger brother who though brave and useful in battle, was greedy and impulsive and responsible for many of the troubles faced by the family leading almost to complete ruin.

Ahmad Shah invaded Punjab in March, 1762, and with a view to completely destroy their backbone, slaughtered 25000 at Kup in what came to be known as the Wada Ghallughara. 25,000 Sikhs including women and children, were slaughtered at Kup, about 250 kms northwest of Delhi. Here Ramgarhia was very much part of the action although the heroes of the day were Charat Singh Suckerchakia and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. It was here that JSR convinced the much wounded Ahluwalia Chief to retire from the field to fight another day. Ahmad Shah subsequently came to the Harminder Sahib, blew it up so that not a brick was left and with a view to hurting religious sentiment, he filled the Holy Tank with the carcasses of cows! In October of the same year, he was at Lahore when he learnt that the entire Sikh nation had gathered for its bi-annual meet at Amritsar. He felt he would deliver a death blow to the Sikhs and so he attacked them with all the troops at his disposal in Lahore. All the Misl chiefs were in attendance and JSR and the others fought with a devastating fury to protect their scared monument and their families. Their time for vengeance had come. It was the occasion of Diwali which fell on the 17th October. Despite a full solar eclipse Ahmad Shah was confident-he had 50,000 battle hardened Afghans. The Sikhs realizing that their quest for freedom and sovereignty would be shattered with defeat, fought with a primeval ferociousness. Shouting *Wahe Guruji ka Khalsa*, their war cry, they charged the Afghans. George Forrester(*A journey from Bengal to England through North India, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Persia into Russia (1782-83)* R. Faulder, London 1798 pp.321-22) recounts this engagement " ... the Sicque(sic) nation amounting to 60,000 cavalry, ... displayed during a bloody contest which lasted from morning until night, an enthusiastic and fierce courage, which ultimately forced Ahmad Shah to draw off his army and retire with precipitation to Lahore." The Sikh victory though not complete or comprehensive, had, like the battle of Ayn Jalut(1260) when the

Mamelukes of Egypt had defeated the Mongols, shattered the myth of Afghan invincibility.

The Lion Roars:

In 1764, JSR took part in the combined Sikh attack and utterly destroyed Sirhind, a town associated with martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's two younger sons.

In 1765, Ahmad Shah attacked again. He would have to deal with the Sikhs before he reached Delhi and its rich environs. The Sikhs attacked the advance guard on the western banks of the River Sutlej, opposite Ropar. The Afghans got into regular formation-Ahmad Shah in the centre with 6000; Shah Wali Khan, Jahan Khan, Shah Pasand Khan and Anzala Khan with 12000 on the right and Nasir Khan with 12000 Baluchis on the left. Qazi Nur Muhammad Khan, brought along to write about the expedition, clearly impressed by the Sikh fighting abilities, described JSR as looking like a lion in stature with his own flag and war drum. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, alongside him was described as a 'mountain'. Once again Ahmad Shah was stopped in his tracks.

Ahmad Shah was to attack again in 1767-8 this being his eighth and last effective 'invasion' of India. Jahan Khan, Ahmad Shah's commander in chief attacked Amritsar but was driven back. Subsequently JSR, now head of the Taruna Dal fought alongside Jassa Singh Ahluwallia and stopped Ahmad Shah at a point near the River Beas. After a fierce contest Ahmad Shah felt he had no choice but to return. This was the last time they would see Ahmad Shah. Punjab was now free after more than 600 years of foreign rule. The Sikhs had now reached the pinnacle of their power. Their territories stretched from the Indus in the West, the hill territories in the East to the environs of Delhi. However the very victories that had given power to them would cause differences. Flush with victories, there was a desire to conquer more. Now not only was there no clear and present danger that had kept them together but they found it difficult to give up the sword. They were warriors-experienced and hardy and wanted action and adventure. They also needed resources for the benefit of their kingdoms as they now had a serious responsibility to their subjects. They had already inspired their subjects with their fighting abilities- now they had to ensure prosperity. Whilst they did raid the Rohilla territory and the environs of Delhi, it was clear that ultimately they would come into conflict with each other. It was inevitable that in their desire for influence and resources they would collide with the Marathas, the Hill Rajas, Oudh and even their own co-religionists. In respect of the latter the fragile unity could disrupt at any moment. And indeed it did. Despite the desire to share equally one side was bound to feel that the other had got the better of the deal. Also old enmities were to come to the fore, greed and personal ambitions would play a part. There were other irritants-territories had been divided in a haphazard manner so that very often they intermingled-this was so for example between the Ramgarhias and Kanhaiyas both in the Upper Bari Doab and the Jalandhar Doab. In Amritsar too where each Sardar had their Bungas(residential quarters) and Qatras(bazaars)joint boundaries sometimes soured relations especially in later years with the shortage of real estate in the city centre near the Harmandir Sahib. There were bound to be ego clashes between the very independent minded leaders, the feeling sometimes misplaced, that they were inferior to none. Unity therefore was bound to suffer. The dissension in the earlier periods came to the fore.

Hill Chiefs in the Fray:

JSR, like his fellow chiefs, too put his mind to increasing his territories. He had a fine army of 8000 horse and 3000 foot. He had not gained any territory from the Sikh

conquest of Sirhind unlike some of the other Misl chiefs. He turned his attention to the territory of the Hill Chiefs and first conquered portions of the Bari and Jalandhar Doabs which were adjacent to the hills. In 1770 he fought against the most powerful of the Hill Chiefs, Ghamand Katoch of Kangra, assisted by the Rajas of Chamba, Haripur, Jasswan and others, and after the third attempt, at the battle of Talwara on the southern banks of the Beas, was able to defeat him and make tributaries of him and the others. This gave him 200,000 rupees per annum. He built a fort at Talwara to keep the hill chiefs under check with 4,000 troops under his brother Mali Singh. His territories now included those in the districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur and in the district of Kangra and Hoshiarpur in the Jalandhar Doab and other small tributaries giving revenues totaling a staggering 20,00,000 rupees.

The extent of his territories was bound to cause envy. In 1773, he first saw himself fighting his old foe, the Kanhaiyas allied to Ghamand Katoch of Kangra both of whom he repulsed. Shortly afterwards JSR saw himself on the side of the Bhangis fighting the combined forces of the Sucherchakias, Ahluwalias and the Kanhaiyas. At the battle of Dinanagar (1774) both sides retired after ten days of hard fighting.

Comrade-in-Arms:

It was however Mali Singh's behavior towards the Ahluwalia Chief that would affect JSR's fortunes. Both the Ahluwalia and Ramgarhia chief had been very close as friends and comrade at arms. It was not difficult to see why they got on. Whilst the Ahluwalia Chief was the more literate of the two, he treated the other as a younger brother. The latter's courage was legendary and infectious and he was always ready and willing to fight the enemy without thought of any risk to his life. He instilled faith and inspired hope among his followers. He was also a generous chief and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia at first indulgently overlooked his attitude towards Mali Singh. But an irritation had commenced shortly after Ahmad Shah's 7

th invasion in 1767 when the Ahluwalia Sardar was wounded and had to retire from battle. JSR, already head of the Taruna Dal now had become head of the Dal Khalsa for a brief period. There appeared to be a change in attitude towards Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, one bordering on arrogance, this being encouraged by both Mali and Tara Singh. But Jassa Singh Ahluwalia would have forgiven him had not an incident taken place which would forever ruin the peace between them.

It was in 1775 when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was on his way to Achal for the purposes of hunting, when at a place a short distance away from Mali Singh's territory, he and his party were attacked, without provocation, by the latter. Many of the Ahluwalia troops were killed and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia himself was wounded and fell off his horse, unconscious. Had he died, the incident would have been forgotten in due course of time. Mali Singh took the unconscious Ahluwalia chief to Sri Hargobindpur where he was attended to and sent back by JSR with full honors. He did not accept JSR's apology on behalf of Mali Singh feeling this was a premeditated and uncalled for action especially when the two chiefs were at peace. He informed his fellow chiefs that he would take his revenge and the others, hoping for part of the Ramgarhia spoils willingly agreed, indeed some of them insisted that JSR had to be driven out of Punjab. Shortly afterwards, he attacked the Ramgarhia army at Zahura. Ramgarhia was wounded by a shot fired by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and defeated and fled from the fort. Jassa Singh gave the fort to Baghel Singh Karorasinghia both to strengthen him and buy loyalty. Not satisfied with this victory, he waited for another opportunity which arrived in 1778. The Kanhaiyas- Jai Singh and Haqiqat Singh, both wanting revenge against the Ramgarhias

joined the Ahluwalia's and gave them a crushing defeat at Sri Hargobindpur and expelled JSR from his capital. They then took his territories one by one. Jai Singh Kanhaiya's son, Gurbaksh Singh attacked Batala, Mali Singh's territory. This was an easy victory as the inhabitants completely alienated from Mali Singh because of his cruel behaviour, opened the gates of the city. Mali Singh fled while his brother, Khushal Singh was wounded dying a few days later. The troops then marched to Kalanaur, the headquarters of JSR's other brother, Tara Singh, who was also defeated and killed. Kalanaur now became Haqiqat Bhangi's headquarters. The three surviving brothers, JSR, Mali Singh and Jai Singh made their way to the semi-desert of Hansi and Hissar. Jassa Singh could have captured and killed them but out of regard for an old comrade at arms, he told his cousin Kanwar Bhag Singh, to let them through his territory unmolested. Ramgarhia had gone from high fortune to nothing in the twinkling of an eye.

It is said that adversity brings out the best in us and in Ramgarhia it did so in full measure. He left his wife and family at one of his territories, Lekhpur (Phagwara) in the care of Ranjit Singh Ramgarhia, knowing that they would not be harmed by Ahluwalia or the others and started with great determination and grit the process of reviving his family fortunes. He had learnt his lessons. One did not lock horns with the powerful especially Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was both the political and spiritual head of the Panth and a figure revered by them. He had made a strategic blunder and he would pay for it. He had made the mistake of underestimating him- thinking less of his power and stature because of familiarity, camaraderie and friendship. He would lick his wounds and start at the bottom once again. And he would endeavor to keep his uncontrollable younger brother, Mali Singh in check.

JSR arrived at Hissar in 1778 with his son, Jodh Singh. The next few years saw JSR go from being completely down and out to become, one of the foremost Chiefs of the Sikh fraternity with his previous territories once again under his control. Jodh Singh was given asylum by Amar Singh of Patiala, a survivor who appeared in the past to be equally friendly with the Afghans and Mughals as he was with the Sikhs. The former was due more because of geographical location than any deep seated conviction although he did do very well from his association with Ahmad Shah Abdali who conferred on him the title of Raja. JSR came in time to help Amar Singh with the Bhattis of Sirsa. He was paid a nominal sum of 500 rupees a day but this was atleast a start! He and his men kept low and lived frugally. There were a few raids in the environs of Delhi which yielded enough to keep his men together until one fine day, one of his men found a small fortune of gold coins worth 400000 rupees in a well in Sirsa, adjacent to Bhatti territory. This was a godsend and enabled him to keep his men together and finally, with more men, subdue the Bhattis. He set up his base at Tosham, about 10 kilometres from Bhiwani. Ideally situated to raid Delhi, 130 kilometres away and also neighboring towns of Hansi, it was also sufficiently near the hills to find easy shelter when under threat.

Delhi Invaded:

By 1783, when the Dal Khalsa, under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, attacked Delhi, he felt confident enough to join them with his men who now numbered 10,000 after others had joined up from the neighboring districts. It was on the 11th March that the Dal Khalsa entered the royal palace and placed Jassa Singh Ahluwalia on the throne of Hindustan. JSR simply could not stomach his arch enemy being elevated to this position, and objected strongly; swords were drawn by both

sides and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, extremely embarrassed at this show of disunity, stepped down. So ended a possible chance for the Sikhs to rule Hindustan. But the geopolitical situation would perhaps in any case made this impossible for long- the Marathas and British were simply too strong and the Sikhs on the other hand, divided and without a vision and certainly not having the resources for the staying power necessary for a Delhi occupation. JSR came back to Tosham happy at getting back at his foe and at the loot he accumulated from the palaces, the main items of which were four guns and a large marble slab six foot by four foot and three inches high used for Mughal coronation ceremonies which was subsequently taken to Ramgarhia Bunga at Amritsar and where it can be seen today. On his way back he inflicted a crushing defeat on Gurdit Singh Dallewalia and Bhagat Singh.

JSR was still not powerful enough to claim his territories in Punjab. His arch foe, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was simply too powerful. Matters however took a sudden turn to his advantage when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia died in October 1783. He was getting on but he still had the energy of an ox and the motivation that comes from the burning desire to right a wrong. He needed vast quantities of cash to achieve his aims. Amar Singh, his ally had died in 1781 leaving Patiala without the strength to help anyone else and so he would now have to use his own initiative.

He joined Karam Singh Nirmala on his first foray into the rich districts of the Ganga Doab in January/February 1784. A force of 30000 plundered Sarsawa and then Sardhana. The next foray, along with Baghel Singh, and Gurdit Singh Ladwa took place exactly a year later in January, 1785. The Sikh forces crossed the Jamuna and plundered along until they reached Rohilkhand across the River Ganga. Chandausi, a rich town of over 2000 Bankers, jewelers and merchants was looted together with the villages of Barsi and Mahmudpur, and about 1000000 rupees collected.

JSR now had enough cash to collect men and materials to recover his own territories in Punjab. His only other rival, Jai Singh Kanhaiya was now in a weak position, his chief ally, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, having died. Further Jai Singh had deep differences with Mahan Singh Suckerchakia and Raja Sasar Chand Katoch, having seized Kangra fort from the latter in 1774. The combined armies of the Suckerchakias, Ramgarhia's and Sansar Chand Katoch marched upon Batala, now the the Kanhaiya capital. They were joined by Amar Singh Bagga, a Ramgarhia relative who had switched sides. In the battle of Achal in February 1785 the allies were victorious on the death of Gurbaksh Singh, Jai Singh's eldest son which took all the fight out of the father. JSR recovered all his territories and made Batala his headquarters with his summer base at Nadaun in the Kangra hills. At Batala JSR would build an impressive fort, ten metres high and seven metres thick.

End of a Colossus:

In the next few years, until his death in 1803, JSR would successfully defend most of his territories. In 1787 Jai Singh Kanhaiya, Mahan Suckerchakia, Bhag Singh Ahluwalia and the Rajas of Chamba and Nupur attacked Batala, his headquarters. The fort was saved not least because the inhabitants, who revered him for his fine qualities, supported him. In the siege of Miani(1796) Sada Kaur, wife of Gurbaksh Singh Kanhaiya , and Mahan Suckerchakia together with Bhag Singh Ahluwalia, JSR got lucky- the entire camp of the besiegers was swept away after a torrential rain flooded the dry bed of the River Beas on which they were camped.

Bhag Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's grand nephew inherited his disputes with the Ramgarhia but also had to face a constant challenge from the former's sons-in-law who were peeved at not being offered the headship of the Misl, often encouraged by the Ramgarhias. The opposition of the Ramgarhias had intensified and they used their

alliance with Raja Sansar Chand Katoch of Kangra to capture Ahluwalia territories and encouraged their Zamindars to revolt against them. Battles were fought at Nagoke, Miani, Begowal and Gardhiwal. Bhag Singh was, as under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, assisted by the Suckerchakias and Kanhaiyas. At the end of the century and the beginning of the next further battles were fought with the Ramgarhias at Mekian, Mukhala, Bhanga, Bajwara and Kehala. It was only after the death of JSR in 1803 that the Ahluwalias had a decisive victory at the battle of Drauli in 1804 and finally at the battle of Sathiala in 1808.

Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was a colossus among the Sikhs, respected by both friends and foes and feared by his enemies. He was good natured (called *biyar iklaq pasand* by Khuswaqt Rai) but what stood out was his generosity and helpfulness. He took his army to war when Usman Khan the ruler of Kasur, abducted the wife of a Brahmin. He freed her and killed Usman Khan. Later on when he was in the wilderness in Hissar, a similar incident occurred when a Brahmin's wife was abducted by the Governor. Here too she was freed but when the Brahmin community refused to accept her as being despoiled he convinced them of the necessity to do so and even gave 5000 rupees to the Brahmins family for this purpose. In another incident – when Maharaj Ranjit Singh had expelled his aunt, Raj Kaur, Gurdit Singh Bhangi and the latter's mother Sukhan from Amritsar, he gave them shelter as he did with Mai Laxmi of Phagwara who was driven out by him. His personal bravery was unmatched; he was known to fight tigers single handed-with his sword. It is difficult to give an idea of his courage at the battle field - 'a never say die' attitude, combined with a zest for fighting in the thick of battle without any concern for his physical safety. Endowed with great physical strength, he got out of many tight spots and won battles by the sheer power of his fighting. His troops were fired up by his personal example. All the great victories of the Sikhs owed something to this colossus. All these qualities endeared him to his Misl - and to the Panth.

Both his career and, indeed the history of the Sikhs, would have been different had he not crossed swords with Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Perhaps JSR was too indulgent to his younger brother, Mali Singh, a man with no feeling of goodwill, compassion or political astuteness, who induced him into this conflict. But JSR showed how he could recover and this he did through his personal grit and determination which was legendary but also his faith in the Gurus, which was absolute.

