CHAPTER 6
THE SIKHS (1708-68)

I. Character of the Sikh struggle for independence in the eighteenth century.

The history of the Sikhs in the eighteenth century was vastly different from that in the seventeenth. The seventeenth century witnessed a remarkable transformation in Sikhism. Guru Govind made the pacifist Sikh nation militant. In general, however, it was still primarily religious in character. Notwithstanding his opposition to the Mughals, fight with the Hill Rajas and Mughal officials, he did not plan a war of independence against Aurangzeb. His support of Bahadur Shah in the war of succession hinted at the possibility of an understanding with the Mughals. But his death, within a year of that of Aurangzeb, entirely changed the situation. The decline of the Mughal Empire after 1707 with all its concomitant consequences favoured the resurgence of the depressed Sikhs. The revolution, accomplished by the Guru, generated a political force, which soon inexorably developed into a war for independence and territorial power. Amidst various vicissitudes after 1716 the struggle continued till by 1768 the Sikhs succeeded in establishing a state. Hence the eighteenth century marks a formative epoch in the history of the Sikhs who grew to be one of the finest nations in arms.

The Sikh struggle was in some ways similar to the Maratha. Both were important factors in the dismemberment of the Mughal empire. At the same time the respective struggle for independence called forth supreme qualities of sacrifice, endurance and devotion without fear which constituted a silver lining to the dark clouds of anarchy, intrigue and confusion which characterised the eighteenth
century. Both formed an inspiring and instructive chapter in the history of the country. Both peoples threw up, after demise of giants like Shivaji and Govind, comparatively inexperienced and obscure men like Raja Ram, Santa Ghorpade, Banda, Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Kalal who led their respective nations, through ups and downs, to victory. It was not so much the personal achievement of an individual hero as the collective achievement of a nation in arms. But while the Maratha confederate state of the eighteenth century with all its internal weaknesses developed under the Peshwa’s personal ascendancy, into an imperial power, the ‘theocratic confederate feudalism’ of the Sikhs with an agrarian basis worked wonders on essentially democratic lines. Sikh monarchical imperialism developed only in the nineteenth century.

At first under Banda the Sikh uprising was essentially a lower-class movement, groping unsuccessfully towards an independent Sikh state. Its financial basis was weak and inadequate. Economically it sought to revolutionise landownership from Muslim zamindari estates to small Sikh peasant proprietorships with a ruthlessness which alienated the Muslims. After Banda there grew up the Khalsa commonwealth, reconciling the Muslim peasantry.

Several well-marked epochs may be discerned in the Sikh war of independence: (i) 1708-16, from the death of Guru Govind to the death of Banda; peasant rising, (ii) 1716-52, from the death of Banda to Afghan occupation of the Punjab; (iii) 1752-68, the period of Ahmad Abdali’s invasions and the establishment of the Sikhs as a political and territorial power.

II. Banda and Sikh Peasant Revolt (1708-16)

His early activities: Banda is a highly controversial figure in history. Modern research has illumined his origin and early life which were previously obscure. He.
had a meteoric career. Lachman Das, son of a Rajput ploughman of Rajaouri (in Poonch), born in October, 1670, became Madho Das on joining the Bairagi order. He went southwards and spent several years in places like Nasik, practising occultism, yoga and tantras. At Nander he met the Guru, felt attracted to Sikhism and became his Banda (slave, disciple).

Banda’s emergence as a temporal leader of the Sikhs in 1708 was a natural sequel to the events of the last days of Guru Govind. It illustrates the depth of discernment and the extent of Guru Govind’s plans and preparations, the dynamic leadership of Banda as well as the universal sense of oppression of the people under the Mughal government. Failing to get justice from Bahadur Shah in the course of negotiations over the question of punishing Wazir Khan, the murderer of his sons, Guru Govind, as Sikh traditions say, sent Banda secretly to the Punjab as the jashadar or leader of a small group of men, calling him Bahadur, and entrusting him with five arrows from his quiver, his drum and standard and orders urging the people to join him and volunteer for service. He appeared in Kharkhauda (35 miles west of Delhi), claiming to be the Guru and started a freedom struggle from the oppressive Mughal government. Some modern scholars reject the Guru’s revengeful commission of Banda.

Response was immediate and quick. Even the local zamindars who knew the Guru accepted him. The principal reason behind Banda’s initial success was moral and economic. The military leader assumed a spiritual role. His call electrified the downtrodden, but frightened the oppressors. The landless were assured of land; the oppressed of justice; all and sundry were offered protection against thieves, bigots and oppressors. Discarding the moderate policy of the Guru towards the Mughals, Banda declared virtually a general war against the government, though localised in the Punjab. His main support came from the lower classes,—the Jats, Khattris and members
of 'such ignoble professions as the scavengers and leather-dressers', including the aggrieved peasants oppressed by zamindars and revenue officials, and the grain merchants (banjars) harassed by highwaymen. His followers came from three distinct groups: (i) devoted followers of Guru Govind, inspired by the spirit of sacrifice for religion; (ii) soldiers sent by Phulkian chieftains not daring to fight openly with the Mughals; and (iii) adventurers and irregulars, including persecuted peasants and others, motivated by plunder,—unreliable and mostly responsible for murder and plunder. The upper classes held aloof and often supported the government. His numerical strength soon swelled from 7000-8000 to 40,000 followers. Verily it became a mass movement in which all were pledged either to 'win the crown of victory or drink the cup of martyrdom'.

(a) Activity in the Plains: First, he challenged and dislodged the Mughals from the cis-Sutlej plains. Armed peasants came converging towards Sirhind through Malwa. Sonepat, Kaithal, Samana, Shahabad and Sadhaura (26 miles east of Ambala) were among his first targets.

Next he advanced towards the detested Sirhind. Wazir Khan, its 80-year old governor and the murderer of Guru Govind's sons, warned Muslim landowners of sure ruin if Banda won. The ulama preached holy war. But Banda surprised him at Chappar Chiri on a plain between Alwan Sarai and Banur (c. 10-12 miles n. e. of Sirhind) and killed him (22 May, 1710). In the captured town of Sirhind (24 May) Wazir Khan's Brahman, peshkar and oppressive revenue official and adviser, the 'Hindu betrayer', Sucha Nand was taken alive. The town was pillaged, mosques were defiled, houses were burnt and Muhammadans slaughtered including women and children. According to Sikh tradition, one of Guru Govind's wives, Mata Sundari, wrote to Banda to stop his 'career of carnage and spoliation', as he had 'accomplished the mission imposed on him by the Guru'. Sirhind was the first territorial
conquest of the Sikhs,—the first step in the eventual conquest of the Punjab. It brought the whole cis-Sutlej area from Karnal to Ludhiana under them.

From Sirhind as centre Banda fanned out towards different directions, occupying the whole of Sarkar Sirhind of Delhi province in the south and east, except in the west. Stricken with fear the imperial officers fled.

The country between the Sutlej and the Jamuna with an annual revenue of 36 lakhs was occupied. Sardar Khan, a Muhammadan Rajput zamindar, opposed their further progress southwards from Thaneshtwar. Asad Khan Vakil i mutlaq (vice-gerent), governor of Delhi, did nothing.

In the east across the Jamuna the Sikhs occupied half of the district of Saharanpur, a Muslim stronghold vacated by its faujdar Ali Hamid Khan Qanauji and the people, and laid it waste. It was the signal for Gujar herdsmen (now Nanak Prasth) to rise against nawabs and zamindars, spreading panic in the Jamuna-Ganga Doab,—the rich fleeing to Oudh or to the hills in the north. But the repeated Sikh onslaughts failed to break the defence of Jalalabad (30 miles south of Saharanpur and 20 miles west of Deoband) under Jalal Khan.

The Trans-Sutlej Jalandhar Doab was also liberated. At the battle of Rahon (October, 1710) the guerrilla tactics of the Sikhs routed Shams Khan, faujdar of Sultanpur.

(b) Activity in the west: In this deluge only Lahore and Kasur in the west held out, being too strong for the Sikhs. They first organized a rising in the Majha and ravaged parganas like Batala, a market for goods from Kashmir and Kabul, and Kalanaur. Subsequently they attacked Lahore but it was twice defended by its Kabuli governor, Sayyid Aslam Khan, deputy of Prince Jahandar, who raised the Haidri flag for jihad. The Mughal counter-offensive has been described in Chapter 2, Section C.
Early Sikh Polity:

It is sometimes believed that the Sikhs had no clear-cut or definite political or social objectives. On the other hand, Banda has been described as a 'political leveller and social uplifter', 'socialist in his thinking and a communist in methods' (Ganda Singh). Let us examine these views. Early Sikh polity cannot be treated in isolation from the democratic Khalsa set up by Guru Govind. Where did sovereignty lie, in Banda or in the Khalsa? In theory power was derived from God but this did not affect the nature of Banda's authority. A firm and stable occupation of a considerable area was at first out of question. But gradually the Sikhs came to command the whole area of eastern and south-eastern Punjab except Lahore, crippling the faujdar of Jalandhar. The Jamuna-Ganga Doab was overrun. In the cis-Sutlej area they were masters of Sirhind from Machiwar to Karnal and even penetrated into the province of Delhi. There was no time for promulgation of a new regular constitution. It was all military occupation. In the occupied parganas all power came to be usurped by the humble Sikhs. They set up their own administration by a 'striking and complete' reversal of existing customs. The erstwhile Bairagi and Bahadur now became the Badshah (Sacha Padshah or True Sovereign. Assuming a regal state, he became a King in all but name, with his Singhs (Lions) as disciples and invented a new form of salutation (Fateh Darshan, 'May you behold victory'). Coins were struck with the following inscription: 'The sword of Nanak is the granter of all desires, and the victory is of Guru Govind Singh, the King of Kings'. His seal referred to degh (cauldron) and tegh (sword). He also introduced his own calendar dating from the victory at Sirhind. Besides these marks of temporal supremacy, Banda also claimed, like many sovereigns, to be even above grammar, changing nouns in Hindi and Persian from feminine to masculine form.
Banda appointed suitable persons as governors of different places: Sirhind under Baj Singh, his counsellor, with Ali Singh of Salaudi as his deputy; Samana under Bhai Fateh Singh; while Thaneshwar was placed under the joint charge of Ram Singh and Baba Binod Singh. The old fort of Mukhispur (also called the Dabar) renamed Lohgarh, halfway between Sadhaura (Sarkar Sirhind) and Nahan (in Sirmur, 12 miles n.e. of Sadhaura) became the headquarters. Down the scale the Sikhs became the rulers of their homes, as thanahdars and taksildars (revenue-collectors), who were usually recruited from the lower classes. As Irvine says: 'A low scavenger or leather-dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru, when in a short space of time he would return to his birth-place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand,' It was indeed a revolution on the social and political plane.

The military strength of Banda was admittedly weak. He was naturally deficient in artillery, guns and muskets and elephants. Even horses could not be provided for all. His peasant army fought with long spears, hatchets, swords, bows and arrows. Later on he collected some guns and muskets by seizure. This weakness in arms was more than compensated by his swelling numbers, roused to fever heat and zeal, as well as by his tactics. Banda introduced the typically Sikh guerrilla tactics dhaiphut (hit and run and turn back to hit), as illustrated at Rahon in the Punjab.

Financially also the Sikh power was yet weak, depending mainly on plunder and exactions. Banda seized the property of Wazir Khan (valued at two kors of rupees), Sucha Nand and others (amounting to several thousands). Subsequently the occupied areas yielded large revenues. But the collections were uncertain on account of the prevailing disorder.

On the economic plane signs of a class war were manifest. Banda and his early Sikhs visualised some sort
-of an 'egalitarian society with a peasant-clan basis'. (S. Chandra). In their efforts to improve their position, the down-trodden and suffering Sikhs spared neither Hindus nor Muslims, plundering and persecuting the privileged upper or richer classes, who naturally became hostile and sided with the Mughal government upholding law and order. So Banda's success depended on his rapid mobilisation of increasing number of peasants. The oppressed peasants of Malwa, Jalandhar Doab and elsewhere rose against their zamindars. Thus vast Muslim estates were parcelled and divided among Sikh and Hindu peasants. Within the brief space of seven years the inequitable Mughal landlordism was abolished, peasant proprietorship introduced in the occupied areas and the class basis of landholdings in the Punjab was transformed.

Religious policy: Banda converted both Hindus and Muslims to Sikhism. But the movement did not progress much. According to Ghulam Husain Banda was a 'barbarian' and 'an infernal monster'. Ganda Singh, however, does not regard him as anti-Muslim: his movement was a political freedom struggle: famous mausoleums were not destroyed; he did not put religious restrictions on the Muslims: he fixed allowances, wages and allowed prayers of the Muslims in his army, saying 'I will not oppose the Muslims' (Akbarat 28 April, 1711). It is, however, to be admitted that many Muslims were alienated on account of his destruction of life and property. Some modern writers have pointed out that this retarded the growth of Punjabi nationalism. But the Sikhs had already developed a spirit of nationality (Payne).

Banda failed to establish a Sikh state. But his supreme achievement lay in the fact that he spearheaded a mass resistance against the Mughals and created a will to resist tyranny. A downtrodden peasantry was roused to take up arms and shake the empire. The freedom struggle was given a socio-economic twist. The process of making the cultivators proprietors could not of course be
implemented. But Banda undoubtedly was one of the most remarkable men in the eighteenth century.

III. The Period From 1716 to 1752

With the suppression of Banda’s rising in 1715 and his execution in 1716 the fortunes of the Sikhs reached their nadir. The history of the slow but steady revival of their power is profoundly inspiring and instructive. Throughout their struggle for independence the Sikhs got unforeseen chances of survival and recovery after every official attempt to wipe them out. This rhythm in the Sikh war of independence, comparable to the piston movement in a locomotive engine wheels, indicated real progress.

Policy of Persecution: A relentless policy of persecution was started by the Turani general, Abdus Samad Khan, appointed governor of Lahore (1713-26) and entitled Saif-ud-daula (‘sword of the state’) in 1714. The Sikhs had suffered great and depressing losses already. Now a general round-up was ordered with a price on the heads of Sikhs. Two alternatives were open to persons captured: death or apostasy. Many conformed to Hinduism or gave up the outward signs of belief, shaving their beards (Sahajdhari). The sincere devotees escaped to hills and forests, south of the Sutlej. The unabated fury of the Khan’s ruthless policy turned the extensive plains of the Punjab, in the words of Khafi Khan, into a dish filled with blood. The Sikhs kept quiet for a generation.

The next governor of Lahore, Zakariya Khan (1726-46, also of Multan after his father’s death in 1737) adopted a ‘dual policy’ towards the Sikhs, combining firmness and kindness, which appeared to be successful for a while. Treating the Sikh freebooters as undesirable, Zakariya vindicated law and order by relentless pursuit and killing. At the same time he repaired the ravages, re-settled towns and villages, so that people might live in peace and contentment with cheap grain. But the task was not easy.
Land remained uncultivated. Life and property were unsafe. So many preferred joining the Sikh roving bands to being robbed by them.

Failure of Persecution: Persecution, however, failed in its object. On the other hand it steaded the Sikhs into becoming sworn and desperate resisters of the Mughals. Peasants, uprooted from the land, became professional soldiers. Others became outlaws, lurking as robbers in hills, valleys and forests, eking out a precarious livelihood. Occasionally they would descend from their hide-outs, disturb the peace, plunder the caravans and loot the royal treasure. The Lakhi Jangal (with lakhs of trees) in Bhatinda district offered an impenetrable barrier to the Mughal cavalry hounds, but the Sikh deer could freely and easily move away. The masses, peasants and artisans became peaceful villagers, nursing their religion secretly and devotedly, while others bided their time for revenge and victory. Without a spiritual guru to ordain them, without a temporal guide to lead them, the ‘rude untutored’, disorganised Sikhs, united only by devotion to a common faith, worked their way to greatness. Religious zeal, militancy and prospects of economic gain all combined to produce an eruption.

But this needed organisation. The Sikhs evolved a method of settling their communal matters at biennial assemblies (known as Sarbat Khalsa held on 1st Baisakh and at Diwali), issuing decrees (gurmata), appointing group-leaders and selecting envoys and agents. Internal differences within the Khalsa, between the Bandai (seeking to deify Banda) and the Tat Khalsa (revering him but disapproving his apotheosis) were settled by 1721. Directed by the Sarbat Khalsa jathas or bands of outlaws (e.g. Tara Singh) took villages under their protection.

Policy of Appeasement: During these dark days the Sikh democracy, facing the dismal prospect of annihilation, but united by the fervour of the faith, now threw up right men to plan organised resistance. In May 1733 Kapur Singh Fyzulla-
puria, a humble servant of the people (cooking their food, washing the dishes and fanning them), was hailed as leader when he accepted Zakariya Khan's conciliatory offer of an one-lakh jagir and the title of 'Nawab', though at first it was scornfully treated. He and his close associate Jassa Singh Kalal (Ahluwalia, of village Ahl) became the makers of Sikh destiny now. They reorganised an army in two groups according to age or experience: (a) the Budha Dal (elder veterans) under eight leaders: (i) Shyam Singh, (ii) Gurbakhsh Singh of Royanwal, (iii) Gurbakhsh Singh of Jita, (iv) Bhag Singh, (v) Gurdyal Singh, (vi) Kubar Singh, (vii) Bhumiya Singh, and (viii) Jassa Singh Kalal (Secretary of Nawab Kapur Singh); and (b) the Taruna Dal (or younger group), sub-divided into five jathas, respectively commanded by (i) Dip Singh and Sudha Singh, (ii) Karam Singh and Dharm Singh, (iii) Kan Singh and Binode Singh, (iv) Dasnandha Singh, (v) comprising Majhabi Sikhs under Madan Singh and Bir Singh. This was the nucleus of the future Dal Khalsa or the army of the theocracy of the Singhys. It was similar to the Seniorum and Juniorum of early Roman army, organised in groups of centuries sub-divided according to age.

By giving the jagir to Kapur Singh Zakariya Khan had hoped that the swords of the Sikhs would be turned to ploughshares, the rebels into peaceful citizens. But the Mughal jagir did not conciliate the Sikhs, whose youths moved across the Bari Doab and forcibly realised government revenue. From their mountain fastnesses or recesses the Sikhs, carried on their predatory warfare in the plains skirting the hills, 'as if to try the temper of the government' (Browne).

So the policy of appeasement was discarded. Unsupported by Delhi, distrusted by the emperor and distracted by intrigues of the Hindustani party against the Turani party to which he belonged, Zakariya Khan confiscated the jagir. His diwan, Lakhpat Rai, had repeated clashes with the elder Sikhs who occupied parts of Malwa. The governor had
himself to intervene and restore authority. In 1738 Bhai Māṇī Singh, who was instrumental in increasing the number of Sikh converts, had secured the Governor's sanction for the Diwali fair at Amritsar on a promise of paying Rs. 5000/- to the treasury. But on coming to learn the Governor's secret plan to attack the fair, the Sikhs fled away. For non-payment of the amount Mani Singh suffered martyrdom. But his blood became the seed of the church.

Nadir Shah and after (1739-52)

1. Sikhs helped by Nadir's Invasion.

The year 1739 set afoot a period of foreign invasions from the north-west, first under Nadir Shah and then under Ahmad Shah Durrani, which continued nearly thirty years down to 1769. These profoundly affected the fortunes of the Sikhs. They got excellent opportunities not only for survival but also for reorganization (1739-52) and recuperation. A prolonged contest for supremacy between the Mughals and the Sikhs began. The Sikhs, already begun to be organised, grew in power, due mainly to two factors, external and internal. The invasion of Nadir Shah (Jan-May, 1739) was highly significant for the rise of the Sikh power. By causing commotion, confusion or disorder in the provinces of the Punjab and Delhi, it weakened the strong government of Zakariya Khan, who submitted to him and became pre-occupied with the invader. This helped the Sikhs. Scared by the approach of the invader the Khalsa took refuge in the hills. Many wealthy citizens of the Punjab also escaped to the hills with their valuables only to fall an easy prey to the Sikhs whose sardars at once jumped from poverty to riches. Petty robbers under pressure of persecution now grew to be powerful free-booters and marauders. Others preferred to join the Sikhs in the hills as a means of securing immunity from plunder as well as of gaining wealth and authority. Renegades from religion
under the Satrap's intimidation now rejoined the fold; their numbers swelled with the adhesion of Hindus after the foreign Persian and Afghan invasions. Sallying out of their obscure hiding places in hills and forests they plundered wherever the government officers were weak. At first petty, the depredations grew in boldness with time without any fear of reprisal. They carried fire and sword throughout the north-east in the Punjab plains. Their light cavalry bands not only plundered the stragglers of Nadir's army but even his rear heavily encumbered with the spoils of India during his return march. The formidable invader was powerless to punish the Sikh plunderers whose homes were their saddles, as Zakariya informed Nadir. The latter is said to have prophesied that they would be masters of the country in future. Thus during his invasion the Sikhs became reputed as 'dare-devil soldiers' and also became wealthy. They grew bolder. All fear of the discredited Mughal government vanished from their hearts. Braving the risk of capture or even death, the Sikh cavaliers now rode at full gallop openly to the holy temple at Amritsar instead of in secret and disguise as before.

It became now increasingly difficult to effect the suppression of the Sikhs, led by gifted and able leaders like Kapur Singh, Bagh Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Backed by the peasantry the Khalsa descended from the hills and established a small mud fort at Dalewal village on the Ravi which became their 'retreat and refuge' as well as a store house of booty. From this centre they ravaged the surrounding country in the upper Bari Doab even near Lahore. The scarcity of the Punjab government troops, caused by Nadir's invasion, and defeat and deaths at Karnal, facilitated the task of the Sikhs.

2. Zakariya Khan's anti-Sikh Measures

(a) Adina Beg Khan in Jalandhar Doab:

A set-back came with Nadir's confirmation of Zakariya
Khan as the governor of Lahore. The Sikhs were considered to be the chief source of danger and their fort was destroyed. Withdrawing from Lahore and the Bari Doab (between the Ravi and the Sutlej) they shifted their activities to Jalandhar Doab (between the Beas and the Sutlej). After Nadir's departure Zakariya entrusted the task of restoring order in Jalandhar Doab to an experienced officer, Adina Beg Khan. Son of Channu, he belonged to Sharakpur (in Lahore Tahsil). In his early days he was at Allahabad for a time. He came to have some knowledge of revenue matters. On returning to the Punjab he became a contractor. During Nadir's invasion Zakariya Khan had put him in charge of Sultanpur.

Adina Beg Khan played a very prominent part in the history of the Sikh war of independence. Having previous experience of revenue and political matters he was considered eminently suitable for the task of subduing the Sikhs in Jalandhar Doab. His political conduct was motivated entirely by shrewd opportunism with a view to securing his own interests rather than those of the State. So he was essentially volatile,now siding with one and now with another. Downright annihilation of the Sikhs would sap his power and influence. So he carried out his mission of restoring order only partially. Assuming a serious air he yet acquiesced in Sikh depredations up to a certain limit. When Zakariya asked him to expel the Sikhs, he asked them to evacuate the Doab. He persuaded Jassa Singh Thoka (later Ramgarhia) whom the Sikhs had sent to negotiate, to join the Mughals. So the Sikhs in dismay entered Sirhind Sarkar across the Sutlej and caused serious disturbances under Daranat Shah in the cis-Sutlej area in Delhi province, then in a very weak condition.

(b) Beyond the Sutlej

The situation was different in the Trans-Sutlej area, where the government of Zakariya Khan was strong and
vigilant. (a) He pursued a policy of all round pressure on the Sikhs: a graded scale of rewards was fixed (blanket for hair cutting: ten rupees for disclosing the whereabouts: and fifty rupees for head-hunting): plunder of Sikh houses was permitted; giving shelter to a Sikh and withholding of information were punishable with death; any one supplying food and grain to a Sikh was converted to Islam. Captive Sikhs were beheaded at the horse market (nakhas) of Lahore (Shahidganj). (b) Secondly he harnessed the entire official machinery against the Sikhs: the landed aristocracy (rais and zamindars), the revenue officials (chaudharis, muqaddams) and non-official town gentry were made to co-operate with the government, either by force or persuasion. The peasants largely undid the government action by sheltering the fugitives and ambushing the police. No wonder the Sikhs had to suffer more and their numbers fell. From the Punjab plains they escaped to the hilly areas and Jammu and Kangra, the desert areas in Bikaner and Malwa, and the forest areas of Lakh Jangal. Many canted and adopted Hinduism. Undaunted by desertions and deaths, the Sikhs kept up their spirits by recalling the message of the Gurus,—of discipline, service and sacrifice of Guru Govind. Hunted down like beasts, concealing by day and coming out by night for food they lived on plants, fruits and flesh. To mitigate their increasing hardships they frequently took to prayer (Ardas). With an iron will they regularly visited Amritsar for worship, preferring imprisonment or death to abjuration of faith. Realising that the policy of force would not ensure permanent results but cause greater confusion and expense the government relaxed a bit, expecting peaceful settlement of the Sikh peasants.

3. **Weakness of the Punjab Government and Sikh reprisals.**

The death of Zakariya Khan (July 1745), an able, just and popular governor of the Punjab, universally respected
by Hindus and Muslims, was followed first by succession of his son Yahya Khan and then by a civil war with his brother Hayatullah Khan (or Shah Nawaz) with consequent skirmishes and confusion. Ultimately Wazir Qamaruddin was appointed absentee governor of this strategic frontier province. These circumstances destroyed the peace and prosperity of the province. Lawless plunderers and adventurers desolated the land. The Raja of Jammu rebelled.

The Sikhs took advantage of this weakness of the Punjab government to indulge in increasing depredations. In 1745 Jassa Singh came down to the plains and raided Kasur along with other sardars. The situation grew worse when the discontented, sturdy Jat peasantry of the Manjha, crushed between the millstones of the exacting revenue officials and the maltreating military contingents, joined the lawless Sikhs in desperation. Armed highwaymen (Dharwel) in bodies of tens and twenties infested the roads, attacked villages and towns, amassed money and purchased horses. Their leaders set up encampments (dehras). To defend their persons and property, to popularise the faith, to look after the growing number of recruits and to follow systematized plunder, the Sikhs had organised themselves into regular plundering bands. They were now reorganised by the Sarbat Khalsa (on the Diwali, October 14, 1745) under the supreme command of Nawab Kapur Singh with 25 cavalry groups. Every one got a personal share in government. Religion and common interests, defensive and offensive, united these associations. This strengthened the military potential of the Sikhs, following guerrilla warfare as the most effective and least dangerous course. As career was open to talent it helped to produce leaders. Thus in the interval between the invasions of Nadir and Ahmad Abdali the military importance of the Sikhs grew (Forster). Some of the jathadars contributed a great deal to free the country from the Mughals and the invaders. Encouraged by a few successes the Sikhs resolved to punish their enemies
by raiding villages, killing some chaudhuris and mugaar-ddams, plundering many towns, and inciting peasants not to pay government revenue. A group of bold guerrillas in Mughal disguise swooped on Lahore in a cold January night, killed the qazis and muftis and then disappeared with the spoils in the jungle on the Ravi.

4. Civil War in the Punjab

In 1746 Yahya Khan replaced Mir Mumin Khan for his failure to suppress the 'tumult and trouble' of the Sikhs. The new deputy governor, assisted by his diwan Lakhpat Rai, launched a crusade against the despoilers of Lahore. The diwan's brother, Jaspat Rai, was killed. There was a general stampede of the government troops. The diwan vowed to destroy the Khalsa root and branch, arrested, imprisoned and slaughtered many Sikhs at Shahidganj, including Bhai Taru Singh, a highly respected Sikh religious leader, who used to help the Sikhs by concealing them in forests (c. 1745). The Sikh guerrillas, hiding in the swamps of the upper Ravi, were pursued by Yahya and his diwan. Yahya ordered a general massacre of the Sikhs (first ghallughara or holocaust) in June, 1746. All officers and hill people were commanded to co-operate with the diwan. Any one uttering the Guru's name had his belly ripped up. Such strong government repression, coupled with scarcity of provisions and ammunition, weakened the Sikh cause, and many forsook the faith and resumed peaceful avocations.

However, the Sikhs got a much needed respite from the civil war between Yahya Khan and Hayatullah (Shah Nawaz) (Nov. 1746 to March, 1747) which dislocated the government machinery. Shah Nawaz secretly helped the Sikhs by giving news of the movements of Yahya's troops, seducing them and even openly incited them against his brother. Finally Shah Nawaz came to power (March, 1747). To secure Sikh goodwill he replaced the old and experienced Lakhpat Rai by Kaura Mal, a Nanakshahi, as
diwan but retained the pro-Sikh Adina Beg Khan as governor of Jalandhar Doab. They advised Shah Nawaz not to interfere with the Sikhs, who also wanted a breathing time. The latter again renewed their visits to Amritsar for inspiration, rallying the forces of the Panth. They boldly swooped down on the Bari and Rachna Doabs, collected booty and replenished their stores, arms, horses, etc. The Sarbat Khalsa even built the fort of Ram Rauni (God’s shelter) at Amritsar (March 30, 1747), in honour of its founder, Guru Ramdas.

Once in power, Shah Nawaz renewed the anti-Sikh policy. A man of intemperate habits and bloodthirsty character he was said to be more cruel than even Nadir. Peace-loving peasants took to lawless activities. His common punishments were amputation, piercing the eyes or the brain and ripping the belly open. When Yahya Khan escaped from prison to Delhi Shah Nawaz sought support from Ahmad Shah (Abdali of Afghanistan to escape retribution from the Emperor and Wazir Qamaruddin (maternal uncle and father-in-law of Yahya).

5. The Sikhs and the Afghans:
First three invasions of Ahmad Abdali (1748-52)

After Nadir Shah’s murder in 1747, one of his officers, Ahmad Khan Abdali, founder of the kingdom of Afghanistan, wrested the territories from Nadir’s empire including the trans-Indus areas of the Punjab. Abdali’s Indian career, as reflected in successive nine invasions from 1748 to 1769, not only formed an important chapter of the Sikh war of independence but had a decisive influence on it. It is indeed a great paradox that this staunch enemy of the Sikhs turned out in the long run, and unconsciously of course, to be their chief benefactor in the Punjab.

First Durrani Invasion, 1748. Ahmad Shah’s first Indian invasion failed. Shah Nawaz had at first invited him on condition of ‘crown to Ahmad, wazirship to Shah Nawaz’.
Subsequently, however, he resisted. But being defeated he fled to Delhi. Wazir Qamaruddin was killed but his son Muin-ul-mulk (Mir Mannu), the hero of Manupur (near Sirhind), defeated the invader (March 11, 1748) and recovered the Punjab.

The Sikhs remained neutral in the Mughal-Afghan contest. But Ala Singh, founder of the Patiala Raj, fought for the Mughals at Manupur. The Sikhs utilised the confused situation to occupy large areas of Bari and Jalandhar Doabs. They captured the unemployed but equipped soldiers in parganahs: Some wealthy zamindars became inclined towards the Sikhs. When Shah Nawaz recalled Adina Beg from Jalandhar Doab to check Abdali’s advance, the Sikhs became free to reassert themselves. The twenty-five Sikh regiments subdivided themselves into more than sixty and had skirmishes with Afghan soldiers. Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia, an ancestor of Ranjit Singh, even plundered the stores, arms and horses of the retreating Afghan army (March 18-26, 1748). Jassa Singh Ahluwalia defeated Adina Beg Khan and filled up the void in Central Punjab.

Sikh Reorganization: The retreat of Ahmad Shah led the Sarbat Khalsa to hold an assembly at Amritsar on the Baisakhi, 29 March, 1748, and reorganize the army on a new principle of federal union. The existing sixty-five small personal groups (jathas) of 1745 under individual captains were leagued into eleven main divisions (misl), each under an outstanding leader, collectively named Dal Khalsa Jiu or the army of the theocracy of Singhis. Personal ambition came to be subordinated to the needs of the Sikh commonwealth. The Dal was its standing army, forging a new bond of union between the soldiers and the sardars with the whole Panth. A Sikh was free to join a misl of his choice. A misl could act independently within its jurisdiction. But matters of common interest required orders from the supreme commander of the Dal Khalsa who became the head of the church and state (Badshah). Jassa
Singh Ahluwalia now took over as such from the aged Nawab Kapur Singh. In fine internal freedom was combined with strict discipline under a single command with a view to preventing disintegration and freeing the land from foreign invaders.

The eleven leaders and their misls constituting Dal Khalsa were as follows:

i) Jassa Singh Ahluwalia—Ahluwalia;
ii) Nawab Kapur Singh—Fyzullapuria or Singhpuria;
iii) Naudh Singh (father of Charhat Singh, whose grandson was Ranjit Singh)—Sukkerchakkia (near Gujranwala);
iv) Dasanandha Singh, standard (nishan) bearer—Nishanwalia;
v) Hari Singh of Panjwad, whose predecessor Bhum Singh was addicted to bhang (hashish)—Bhangi;
vii) Jai Singh of Kahna—Kanhaya;
vii) Hira Singh of Baharwal (in Nakka near Lahore)—Nakkiya;
viii) Gulab Singh of Dallewal—Dallewalia;
ix) Deep Singh—Shahid;
x) Karora Singh of Pajigarah—Karora Singha;
xii) Nand Singh—Ramgarhia.

The twelfth misl was Phoolkia under Ala Singh of Patiala but he was not a part of the Dal. The misls were named either after a leader or his habits or symbols or area of activity, and the fighting force of each ranged from 10 to 20 thousand cavalry.

The Governor's Crusade (1748-49): The re-organization of the Sikhs and the establishment of the misldari system constituted a milestone in their history. They were once again united as in the time of Guru Govind and Banda. Their numbers swelled and they fought the faujdars. However the appointment of Muin-ul-mulk as governor of the Punjab to frighten the Afghans and the Sikhs alike set afoot another period of ruthless persecution of the Sikhs as in the days of Zakariya Khan. For
the Sikhs the rule of Mir Mannu was the worst period of oppression. Kaura Mal was appointed his diwan and Adina Beg Khan was confirmed as faujdar of Jalandhar Doab.

Though confronted with formidable difficulties, the new governor at once launched his anti-Afghan and anti-Sikh campaigns. The diwan, supported by the Turanis and the Sikhs, drove the Afghans from Multan; The Sikhs reeled for a time but stood again. They played a game of hide and seek. Avoiding open fight they resorted to plunder and devastation. On the approach of the troops they settled down as cultivators and fled to hills and jungles, only to resume their depredations when the troops turned back. Regular military action was accompanied by imprisonment or slaughter. Rewards were placed on Sikh heads. The governor's hunting expeditions often ended in round-ups and killings. A trooper, losing his horse in an encounter with the Sikhs, got a new one from the government. Thus security on the roads was restored in a year. Evacuating the Bari Doab the Sikhs entered the Jalandhar Doab whose faujdar, Adina, was somewhat favourable towards them. When the governor strictly ordered him to subdue them, he asked for reinforcements. The governor, his diwan and Adina jointly besieged Ram Rauni fort. It speaks volumes for the discipline, tenacity and the tactics of the Sikhs that they could, notwithstanding their military deficiencies, withstand the siege for nearly five months (c. Oct. 1748-Feb. 1749).

Then the diwan suggested conciliation. At the same time news of an impending invasion of Ahmad Abdali came. The governor was, therefore, forced by circumstances, to offer the Sikhs one-fourth of the revenue of pargana Pattis if they would remain peaceful. The offer was accepted. The Sikhs got a short respite and they settled down till the end of 1749, and were joined by non-Sikh peasants and village menials.

Precautionary measures were, however, adopted by the governor in strengthening the artillery, casting a new type-
of 990 light guns or long firelocks (jizairs), recruiting gunners (jizairchis) in the Lahore army, supervising their practices and rewarding efficient marksmen. Clearly there was no psychological change. Neither side trusted the other. Many ardent Sikhs preferred to pursue old predatory methods to receiving Mughal doles.

**Second Durrani Invasion (c. Dec. 1749-Feb. 1750) and Renewed Persecution**: The second invasion of Ahmad Shah was short. Unsupported by Delhi Wazir Safdar Jang, the governor of the Punjab, Muin-ul-mulk, halted the invader on the Chenab. But he was outflanked by the Afghan general Jahan Khan marching upon Lahore. The governor considered it expedient to 'shake the chain of friendship and accommodation in Abdali's ears and smother the fire that had not yet broken out into a flame' (Siyar). He ceded the revenues of Chahar Mahals (Sialkot, Pasur, Gujrat and Aurangabad amounting to fourteen lakhs) to Abdali.

The invasion was a signal for a resumption of the Sikh offensive. When the governor was busy on the Chenab and his deputy had gone ahead against Jahan Khan, the Sikhs under Nawab Kapur Singh plundered the unprotected capital, Lahore.

The viceroy renewed persecution of the audacious Sikhs (March-June, 1750)—confiscating their jagirs, stopping allowances and ordering slaughter.

**Sikh respite from Safdar-Muin rivalry**: But once again there came a respite for the Sikhs. Safdar Jang, the new wazir of Delhi, encouraged conspiracies against Muin-ul-mulk of whom he was jealous, and whose force was inadequate. The wazir incited Nasir Khan, ex-governor of Kabul, to plot against Muin, though it was the latter who had him appointed faujdar of the Chahar Mahals. But Nasir Khan was defeated and had to fly to Delhi (July 1750; 1749 acc. to Sarkar). Next, the wazir placed Shah Nawaz in independent charge of Multan as against Muin. Moving through the Laki Jangal, Shah
Nawaz corresponded with the Sikhs to create trouble for the governor in and around Lahore. Shah Nawaz was, however, killed in a fight with Diwan Kaura Mal (c. Sept. 1750) assisted by a large force including Mughals, Afghans, Punjabi Muhammadans and Sikhs (under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia). The Diwan was appointed (subordinate) governor of Multan and entitled Maharaja. He rewarded the Sikh leaders, retained the Sikhs in his army and granted twelve villages to the Harmandir temple. Many peasants embraced Sikhism in 1749-50.

Resumption of offensive: Once freed from troubles Muin-ul-mulk resumed his repressive policy, driving the Sikhs from pillar to post. Mumin Khan chastised the Sikhs who disturbed Lahore. Arrest, slaughter (10-20 a month) and pursuit went together. From towns and villages they fled first to places along river banks (the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej) and thence once more to the Himalayan spurs, forests of Central and Eastern Punjab and the deserts of Malwa and Bikaner. But persecution proved to be of no avail. The oppressed Jat peasants joined the Khalsa. The repressive policy had, however, to be suspended again during the third invasion of Ahmad Abdali.

Third Durrani Invasion (December, 1751—April, 1752): A new phase started in the Sikh war of independence with the third invasion of Ahmad Abdali in December, 1751. Muin-ul-mulk had failed to remit the stipulated revenues of Chahar Mahals largely on account of the disorder and depredations created by the Sikhs. In the army of the governor fighting the invader across the Ravi, the Sikh contingent was the largest (20,000). But when Abdali outflanked him, he retreated and entrenched. His supplies were exhausted. Acting on the advice of Adina Beg who wanted immediate showdown and against that of the diwan who advised waiting for the hot weather to scald the invader, the governor unwisely came out to offer battle but had to surrender after the death of his hard-pressed diwan (March, 6, 1752), whom the governor had not
reinforced on the suggestion of Adina. On submission Muin became the Afghan governor of Lahore. His cession by treaty of the provinces of Lahore and Multan (March, 1752) was confirmed by the weak emperor (April 13). Thus the immensely strategic frontier province of the Punjab was lost. Henceforth the Sikhs had to deal with the Afghan government and not with the Mughal.

IV. The period from 1752-68: From reorganisation to victory

Sikh recuperation: The conflict between the Afghan and the Mughal armies during the four months from December 1751 to March 1752 distracted the province of the Punjab and enfeebled the administration. This gave the Sikhs a splendid opportunity for recuperating their power, gaining recruits and amassing riches. They extended their activities, plunder and slaughter to the Bari and Jalandhar Doabs, extinguishing many a Muslim family. Crossing the Sutlej they advanced towards Thaneswar, came near Delhi and retired towards Hissar. Some penetrated in the west into the Rechna and Chaj Doabs. The Sukker-chakkias under Chharat even subdued the Trans-Jhelum Muslim Gakkars.

Renewed Persecution: So on being comparatively free from the effects of the Afghan invasion and Delhi politics both Muin-ul-mulk and Adina found that most of their territories had been in Sikh occupation. This revival of Sikh power led to renewed persecution (March 1752-Nov. 1753).

(a) Measures of the Governor: The energetic governor took upon himself the task of suppressing the irrepressible Sikhs. He came upon Batala and destroyed Ram Rauni fort at Amritsar. Detachments of troops were sent to stamp out the Sikhs who were plundering unguarded towns in North Bari Doab. Khwaja Mirza Khan and his Mughalians were rewarded for Sikh head-hunting. Roving columns
of 2000 horsemen lay dispersed for combing operations in different parts of the province, swooping on groups of one or two hundred Sikhs and not sparing even non-combatants, women and children. Generally speaking they resisted the official outrages. But being powerless against the governor’s light portable artillery they escaped to their hide-outs in impenetrable forests or northern hills. Aware of the governor's potential strength, the Sikhs realised that he was not the person to tolerate lawlessness. Skirmishes continued.

(b) Adina Beg Khan: The governor also deputed the faujdar of Jalandhar Doab, Adina Beg Khan, along with Siddiq (Sadiq) Beg Khan against the Sikhs. The crafty faujdar literally ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds. Realising that his importance depended on the continuance of the Sikh movement, he refrained from completely wiping out the rebels. He made a show of his strength by a surprise attack on a body of pilgrims at Anandpur (March, 1753). But on ground of expediency he conciliated them when they plundered villages in the Jalandhar and Bari Doabs, and even granted them the revenues of some areas and took many (including carpenter Jassa Singh Thoka Ramgarhia) in his service. A ‘secret understanding’ between the faujdar and the Sikhs limited their excursions but enabled them to gather ‘strength and resources’ for the future (Malcolm).

Causes of survival of the Sikhs: Notwithstanding the array of adverse forces like Mughal repression, the Persian and Afghan invasions, certain factors helped the survival of the Sikhs. Five years of persecution under Muin-ul-mulk proved to be of no avail in crushing their movement just as an earlier governor of the Punjab, Zakariya Khan, had also failed. Some factors were inherent in Sikhism itself. Religious zeal, moral ardour, the cause of the Panth, the sense of discipline and obedience to the leader, the will to fight tyranny and oppression, unlimited power of endurance, all combined to weld the community into a compact whole.
...and present a united resistance in the face of the common danger. The guerrilla method of warfare, adopted by the militarily weak Sikhs, lacking adequate arms and too weak to face the well-equipped Mughal troops, was admirably suited to the geography of the country and the temper of the people. Behind the resolute fighters of freedom stood the people, the down-trodden and oppressed peasants, sheltering them, shielding them and helping them in different ways. Mir Mannu could do nothing to his elusive opponents except striking the water with his sword. Other factors arose from external circumstances. The invasions of Abdali paralysed and enfeebled the government, and diverted the attention of the governor and of his troops from the task of restoring law and order to the country. This gave the Sikhs breathing time and encouraged them to indulge in repeated risings.

Paradoxically enough, Muin-ul-mulk, a sworn enemy of the Sikhs, indirectly helped the revival of their power. A pithy contemporary Sikh doggerel aptly compared Mir Mannu to a sickle and the Sikh to the fodder: the more he reaped, the more the green grass blades grew. Persecution defeated its purpose. The maintenance of a large force to deal with the Sikhs proved to be expensive. The government had to squeeze the peasantry of the Punjab. Heavy revenue exactions, coupled with oppression of revenue officers and the Mughal troops made the peasants discontented and restless. No redress for grievances against the government, no protection against oppression was forthcoming, except from the Sikhs who were pledged to the principle of fraternity. The harassed populace found protection and strength only on joining the commonwealth. Oppression served to secure converts and swell the ranks of the Dal Khalsa. Sikhism thus became a panacea for political and economic ills, a political remedy against governmental oppression, an economic solution of poverty through peasant proprietorship or plunder. It grew to be an instrument of power and of self as well as a handmaid of vengeance.
It is interesting to notice the play of the contingent and the unforeseen in the history of the Sikhs. Whenever the government tried to tighten the screw, some counterbalancing forces worked to relax the pressure. Even Zakariya Khan and Muin-ul-mulk had to pause at times giving the Sikhs a breathing time. Again, two officers of the Punjab government were also responsible for helping the Sikhs. Diwan Kaura Mal Khatri was a Shahajdhari (or uninitiated) Sikh with open attachment to the Sikh cause. But he was indispensable to the governor Mir Mannu. It was on his advice that the governor withdrew the mobile light artillery men, permitted the Sikhs to retain Ram Rauni fort and even asked them to join the campaign against Shah Nawaz. Forster writes: ‘The Sikh nation might have been destroyed but for the intervention of the diwan. The Sikhs were left to strengthen themselves, enlarge territory,... whilst Kaura Mal lived, his influence over the Sikhs restrained their degradations.’

Adina Beg Khan, the selfish, greedy and opportunist governor of Jalandhar Doab, had the capacity to subdue the Sikhs but preferred not to. Considering that his importance was linked up with the Sikh movement, he thought that if he crushed it he would be replaced by another. Deputed against the Sikhs, he made a ‘secret understanding’ with them, though outwardly he made a show of force. At times he assigned revenues to them. For his good treatment the Sikhs grew stronger and they gradually occupied many villages as jagir’ (Diwan Bakht Mal, Khalsanamah).

The Punjab government was also weakened by internal commotions,—civil wars and personal rivalries, rebellions, etc. The dispute between Yahya and Shah Nawaz and between Muin-ul-mulk and Shah Nawaz, frequent gubernatorial changes and rebellions after the death of Muin-ul-mulk afforded welcome relief to the harassed Sikhs.

Further the weak state of the central government at Delhi with perennial party squabbles and personal rivalries,
uncontrolled by a strong emperor or wazir, naturally encouraged and strengthened the Sikhs. Zakariya Khan, a Turani, was distrusted by the emperor, whose ears were poisoned by the Hindustani party then in power. Similarly Safdar Jang wazir, an Irani Shah, was jealous of the Turani Mir Mannu and did not help him against the Afghan invader. The latter defeated the governor. The rivalry of Javid Khan at the Delhi court also went against Safdar's plans. By his defensive agreement of 1752 with the Holkar and Sindhia, the Marathas would defend the empire from enemies, external and domestic, and the emperor would grant the chauth of the Punjab. But Javid Khan during the absence of the wazir, induced the emperor to accept the cession of Lahore, Multan and Sirhind. The weakness of emperor Ahmad Shah and his complete dependence on the eunuch Javid Khan were responsible for the loss of the important province of the Punjab.

Last but not the least the successive invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali shattered the Mughal administration in the Punjab and routed the Marathas in 1761. The political vacuum created there came to be filled up by the Sikhs.

*The Punjab under Sikh Protection: The Rakhi System* (1753-57): With the sudden death of the strong governor Muin-ul-mulk (3 Nov. 1753) the Punjab became anarchical. During a period of the rule of infants and petticoat government, master-minded by the profligate widow of the governor, and frequent changes of governors (nine in three years), Lahore fell a prey to revolutions, counter-revolutions, plunder and murder. Administration utterly collapsed. Law and order disappeared. Neither the Mughal nor the Afghan could turn any attention to this important but convulsed area. Delhi was itself the scene of civil wars, conspiracies and murders. The Durrani, preoccupied with his own internal problems and disturbances, could only send small help occasionally to Lahore. The province became sequestrated into units, some under the Afghans, some under Lahore and some under Adina Beg Khan.
The death of the governor removed the main hurdle of the Sikhs. Untrammelled they took advantage of the 'local distractions of a falling empire' (Malcolm) to extend and consolidate their power. They grew in numbers and audacity. The Dal Khalsa became the single strong power in the Punjab. Amritsar became their headquarters. They rebuilt Ram Rauni fort which became their base of operations in Lahore, Patti, Eminabad, Ambala and Sirhind. Bands of 'bearded depradators,' under the guidance of their leaders, moved in different directions, plundering towns, and villages, carrying away 'flocks and herds' and destroying cultivation, if not paid any contribution (Prinsep). Even law-abiding sections of the Sikhs withheld their rent; Sikh mercenaries helped Adina Beg Khan, the faujdar of Jalandhar in taking over Sirhind by defeating Qutb Khan Rohilla. Leaving the Khan near Thaneshwar the Sikhs swept into the territory of Raja Madho Singh of Jaipur, who had to hire a Maratha force to expel them. They forced Adina to cede Fathabad parchana as jagir (Nov. 1755), advanced to the environs of Lahore (April 1756), and settled in Upper Bari Doab in the districts of Kalanaur, Batala and Amritsar.

During this lack of governance life and property became unsafe in the Punjab. The peasantry was ruined by revenue farmers, government troops, outlaws and Sikh plundering bands. The zamindars 'raised their heads in rebellion and blocked the traffic on all the roads'. Even powerful nobles tried to make hay. Najabat Khan of Kunj pura took to highway robbery, dressing his Afghans as Durranis. Insecurity on highways threw trade out of gear.

In this situation the Khalsa, the only organised and strong power in the Punjab, reversed its role from plunderers into protectors and rulers, thereby laying the foundations of their political power. Villagers had their life and property guaranteed against everybody in return for payment of one-fifth of income twice a year (at the end of Rabi and Kharif harvests, May and October). With large
areas in four out of five Doabs under the protection (rakhi) of the Sikh Khalsa, the Punjab virtually came to be administered by the Sikhs with a fairly strong economic basis. A ‘protected’ area was placed under one or more units of the Khalsa; a reserve force (including unattached units) was maintained at Amritsar for emergencies; small forts were established and garrisoned by the ‘chiefs, absolute masters in their respective principalities. This was the ‘Rakhi’ or ‘Jamdari’ system, the first step towards territorial chieftancy.

**Fourth Durrani Invasian (Nov., 1756-April, 1757)**

Ahmad Shah left Afghanistan (November, 1756) for the fourth time at the invitation of Mughlani Begam, Najibuddaula and Emperor Alamgir II in a more serious vein than before. The Sikhs dared not meet him in open combat. They were also unable to save their protected flocks, who escaped en masse to hills, forests and ravines beyond the reach of the invaders. ‘From Lahore to Sirhind not a village was left tenanted; all men, high and low, having fled away in all directions’ (Tarikh i Alamgir Sani). Adina Beg fled to the north. Taking advantage of these disorders, the Sikhs plundered the ‘un-protected’ peoples (i.e. outside the Rakhi system) as well as the unprotected Jalandhar Doab. During the homeward march of Abdali, gorged with huge plunder, the Sikh marauders attacked him several times between Delhi and the Indus, robbed his van under Prince Timur, cut off his provisions and relieved him of part of his baggage. On way to Lahore Timur sacked the Sikh town of Kartarpur with its temple and Gurudwaras. From Lahore Abdali sent punitive expeditions to plunder and devastate Amritsar and the temple, desecrating its sacred tank. The Sikhs beat a retreat to the hills of Jammu. So Abdali secured the collaboration of the powerful Raja Ranjit Dev of Jammu by granting him three Badshahi parganahs in Sialkot district (Zafarwal, Seci-22
Sānkhatra and Aurangabad), in expelling the Sikhs from their hill forts and helping the governor of Lahore in anti-Sikhs campaigns. Harassed by Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia of Gujranwala, Abdali could not do anything more than asking those left behind ‘to take vengeance on the Sikhs’ for their excesses.

The Sikhs after Abdali’s departure
(May, 1757-Oct., 1759)

The Afghan rulers of Lahore, governor Timur Shah and his general Jahan Khan, sought to subjugate the Sikhs. Law and order and security on highways must be established; land revenue and trade taxes must be realised; justice must be administered both at Lahore and the districts. A clash with the Sikhs, burning with vengeance at the desecration of the temple, was inevitable. Deep Singh, the care-taker of the temple, and among the most revered Sikh heroes, collected a body of Sikhs for rebuilding the temple at Chak Guru (Amritsar). Jahan Khan, later reinforced by Haji Atai Khan, killed many, occupied Amritsar and again desecrated the temple. Kartarpur was also sacked. A peaceful non-plundering devotee of this place, Sodhi Barbhag Singh, the Chaudhuri of Thamm Saheb gurudwara was also belaboured and the temple there destroyed. For the killing of two Afghans at Kot Buddha Ramdas, the local Chaudhuri, was tortured.

All these incidents infuriated and roused the Sikh misldars under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to vengeance. Jahan Khan was at his wit’s end. He also needed money. To mutinet Adina Beg, whom Timur had wisely retained as faujdar of Jalandhar Doab, the only person who had experience of dealing with the Sikhs, Jahan Khan summoned him to Lahore. Suspecting foul play Adina fled to the northern hills and was joined by Mirza Jan Khan. He won over Sodhi Barbhag Singh and Jassa Singh by giving tribute, as well as the deputy governor of Sirhind.
In Adina the Dal Khalsa found an ally for concerted action against the Afghans. They were defeated at Mahilpur Hoshiarpur dt.). Adina offered protection money to the Sikhs to save the Jalandhar Doab. Flushed with victory they pushed on to Lahore. A Lahore army, 25,000 strong, was routed and relieved of its artillery and equipment. Successive captains and contingents in different directions met with discomfiture. Swarms of Sikhs approached even Lahore and plundered its suburbs without any opposition. The government lost its prestige. Lawlessness reigned supreme. The Sikhs were said to have ‘upset Abdali’s rule’, —at Maratha advice (as Maratha records claim). Not only Lahore but the Doab and Sirhind area also were disturbed by the Sikhs with about 10,000 horsemen and countless footmen.

Adina invites the Marathas

A new turn was now given not only to the history of the Punjab but of India as a whole by Adina. His lifelong ambition was to be the ruler of the Punjab. As a shrewd realist he anticipated eventual Durrani vengeance; in that case the Sikhs would not be able to help him against Abdali in person; they would never acquiesce in his overlordship; they were getting too powerful for him; they aspired after Khalsa raj (rule): Raj Karega Khalsa Yaki Rahe na koi (the Khalsa shall rule, and no refractory shall exist). He expected the Marathas to be the only reliable power to make him master of the Punjab, but as they would be preoccupied elsewhere, he would be left as its de facto ruler. While assuring the Marathas of conquests up to the Indus, Adina was, however, careful enough to maintain outward friendship with the Sikhs and secured their co-operation with the Marathas against the Afghans. He now invited the Marathas under Raghunath Rao, then in occupation of Delhi, to come to the Punjab and help him, offering a lakh of rupees a day while on march and fifty thousand
while halting. Accepting the offer Raghunath advanced to Sirhind in March 1758 with a two-lakh strong army. some Sikh misls (like the Abluwalia, Bhangi, Ramgarhia and Sukkerchakkia). Sirhind fell to the three combined armies, its Durrani governor, Abdus Samad, being defeated and captured. The town was despoiled first by the Sikhs, much to the chagrin of their Deccani co-adjutors who followed them, a clash being avoided by the clever Khan. Adina sought to dupe Jahan Khan by representing to him that the Marathas had surprised him and he joined them on grounds of expediency. The history of India would have been different if the Marathas and the Sikhs, the two martial peoples of India would have co-operated against the Afghans. But that contingency was not thought of. Timur Shah and his general precipitately evacuated Lahore before the advancing Marathas who entered it with Adina and the Sikhs (April, 1758). The prince was pursued and barely escaped when crossing the Chenab. But the Afghan baggages and artillery were plundered by the Marathas, who could not immediately pursue the Afghans up to Attock on account of floods on the Chenab. The Sikhs had the Amritsar tank cleansed up by Afghan captives. The Marathas secured immense plunder and cash worth several crores. Adina’s calculating policy worked well. The Marathas gave him the governorship of the Punjab, but only as a tributary. Leaving his son-in-law, Khwaja Mirza Khan, as his deputy in Lahore, he went to Batala in the Jalandhar Doab. Sirhind was placed under Siddiq Beg Khan; Jankoji remained near Delhi to attend to the affairs of northern India.

A crucial stage now began in the history of the Punjab. It had become a cockpit of three masters; the Mughals, the Afghans and the Marathas. The withdrawal of the last two and the weakness of the first now left the field apparently open for Adina Beg’s ascendancy. But he had soon to contend with his erstwhile allies, the Sikhs. So long he had generally been their helper encouraging their lawless
activities. But now as the actual ruler of the Punjab he sought to stop these in the interest of peace necessary to pay his 75-lakh tribute money. But the Sikhs, with their organization and indomitable spirit, born of years of persecution, refused to be controlled. They held him to be under their protection, as he had paid the protection-money. Even during his ascendancy Chharat Singh and Jassa Singh were very actively asserting themselves respectively in the Bari Doab and Jalandhar Doab. He recruited soldiers, commissioned the local zamindars and chiefs to co-operate with him in subduing the Sikhs, cut down their jungle refuge, and besieged Ram Rauni fort (now named Ramgarh). The former friendly abettor of the Sikhs had become their controller and enemy. Recovering from their initial dismay, the Sikhs defeated the governor’s forces near Kandian and punished those sections of local people who sided with him. Adina now continued his anti-Sikh drive with redoubled vigour. The Sikhs reeled and escaped to Malwa but were defeated by Sadiq Beg of Sirhind.

Adina, however, could not long enjoy the fruits of the fulfilment of his life’s mission. He suddenly died in September, 1758. He could so long maintain himself ‘amidst the clashing interests of the decadent Mughals, the triumphant Durranis, the indomitable Sikhs and the arrogant Marathas’. If he was fortunate while alive, he was ‘fortunate even in his death’ (N. K. Sinha). It saved him from being a sure target of the vengeance of the Abdali during the latter’s fifth invasion. The secret of his success lay in his realism and uncanny grasp of the needs of the situation. A truly amoral statesman of the Machiavellian type he believed that the end justified the means. A realist to the core he spared no scruples to gain his personal interests. He literally ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds. His long experience of and understanding with the Sikhs made him indispensable to every ruler of the Punjab. If the latter helped him in fulfilling his schemes
and strengthening his position, he also encouraged and helped them.

The sudden death of Adina gave another respite to the hardpressed Sikhs, who were now left as the only de-facto master of the Punjab. In view of the expected Afghan reprisal and the impending Maratha advance the Sarbat Khalsa decided (Oct., 1758) to occupy as much of the province as possible outside Lahore. By extending the Rakhi system to a major part of the Jalandhar Doab and north Bari Doab they began to settle as territorial aristocratic chieftains in the ‘protected’ areas (Oct. 1758-Oct. 1759) and became irrepressible. By defeating the diwan of Adina (Bishwambhar Das, according to Siyar) they virtually became master of Jalandhar Doab, subduing or sweeping away the important local chiefs, Hindu or Muslim. The misl organisation of the Sikhs became a confederate commonwealth of equal associations.

Elsewhere the Punjab became anarchical after Adina’s death. Khwajah Mirza Khan in Lahore, not in secure control of his Mughalia soldiers, failed to cope with the Sikh ‘rebels and robbers’. If the wazir of Delhi sent his agents (Sayyid Jamiluddin Khan and Ubedullah Khan Kashmiri) to Lahore, the Marathas also sent a force under Antaji Manakeshwar. His approach not only scared away Delhi’s agents but also the Afghans and the Gakkars, desirous of plundering Gujrat pargana, from the banks of the Chenab (Dec., 1758). Deputed by the Peshwa to restore order but uncertain of the attitude of the Sikhs, Dattaji Sindhia progressed slowly through Malwa. He appointed Sabaji Sindhia to occupy Lahore (March, 1759). The Sikhs did not check the Marathas, but co-operated with them in driving away the Afghans under Jahan Khan across the Indus. Sabaji’s forces penetrated as far as Peshawar. This period of change and disorder was favourable for expansion of Sikh power in Jalandhar Doab (under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia) and in Bari and Rechna Doabs (under Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia).
Fifth Durrani Invasion (Oct., 1759—March, 1761) and after.

The stage was now set for a Durrani-Maratha showdown. The Durrani came, as noted earlier, in response to appeals of his agent, Najib (expelled from Delhi, and besieged by Dattaji Sindhia at Shukartal), Emperor Alamgir II and other Muslim rulers apprehensive of the mounting wave of Hindu militancy and even some Hindu Rajas (Madho Singh of Jaipur and Bijay Singh of Malwa) as well as to wreak vengeance on the Marathas who had driven out his son and penetrated to Peshawar. The Marathas under Sabaji fled leaving the Punjab undefended. Single-handed the Sikhs, now grown strong in numbers and organization, offered a stiff resistance killing 2000 Afghans and wounding Jahan Khan. But when Abdali reoccupied Lahore and proceeded towards Delhi, the Sikhs gave way.

Abdali’s administrative set-up lacked stability. Sirhind was under Zain Khan; Sarbuland Khan, governor of Lahore, remained at Jalandhar; Dadan Khan, his agent at Lahore resigned at the Sikh stranglehold, and was replaced by Amir Muhammad Khan as governor of Lahore. Ahmad Shah, preoccupied with his preparations for his confrontation with the Marathas could not turn his attention to the Punjab, which was in an utterly disordered state. So during the period of a year and a half (October 1759—March 1761) the Sikhs had a free hand. The Sarbat Khalsa planned (Diwali, 1760) to capture Lahore. Led by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, other misldars, Jai Singh Kanhaya, Hari Singh Bhangi, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia easily occupied the suburbs of Lahore, and plundered its outlying areas. They built mud forts and fortalices generally in rich areas and along the principal highways which served as refuges in crises and threats to hostile communities. The governor of Chahar Mahals (Rustam Khan) and his assistant (Miskin) were themselves captured by the Sikhs (Oct., 1760). The governor of
Lahore deemed it better to buy the Sikhs off than to allow the treasury to be plundered. As the ownership of Lahore was still uncertain, the Sikhs accepted Rs. 30,000 and retired. After Panipat, the Afghans fell upon the Malwa Sikhs under Ala Singh of Patiala (1739-61) who had helped the Marathas. He first saved himself by submission to the invader and then pacified an angry Dal Khalsa who threatened excommunication.

During Abdali's homeward march the defiant Sikhs harassed him from the Sutlej to the Indus (April-May, 1761). Laden with plunder and weary with battle, the Afghans 'could do nothing' to stop the tip and run tactics of the Sikhs who relieved the invader of much booty and rescued captured women. Abdali expected to return after six months. When he crossed the Indus the Sikhs returned to drive out the Afghan armies left behind. They defeated and killed Khwaja Mirza Jan in charge of Chahar Mahals and spread havoc in the province (c. June-July). Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia took a leading part against the Afghans, harassing and defeating Nuruddin Bamezei who had been sent to help Ubaid Khan, governor of the Punjab, against the Sikhs and besieging Sialkot (c. Aug., 1761). The governor, who was nothing 'more than commander of an outlying post', lost his heavy artillery in an unsuccessful bid to reduce the Sukkerchakkia fortress of Gujranwala (Sept., 1761) where he was himself encircled by the Sikh misldars led by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. At the Diwali, 1761, the Sarbat Khalsa decided to occupy Lahore and free the Punjab from the invaders and treacherous elements. By November they captured Lahore town (not the fort which was blockaded under Jassa Singh at the head of the Dal Khalsa. He was proclaimed king of Lahore. The Padshah, as he was called, came now to be called Sultan ul Qaum (King of the Nation).

There is, however, considerable difference of opinion about the first coinage of the Sikhs: Cunningham, 1757; Browne, 1758; Griffin, 1762; C. L. Rodgers considers these-
early coins to be spurious; Ganesh Das (a late writer) thinks that these were fake coins struck in 1764 to incite Abdali; Gupta, Nov., 1761; Khuswant Singh, 1761; N. K. Sinha, following C. K. Rodgers, holds that the first coin was minted by the Sikhs in 1765.

Realising the weakness of the Afghan government with the Shah far away, the Sikhs now started a systematic move to secure lands, to build strongholds and fortresses (e.g. mud fort of Gujranwala), plunder the surrounding country and expel Abdali’s officials. Khwaja Obaid Khan, the Durrani governor of Lahore, was shut up in Lahore fort. The Durrani faujdars Saadat Khan and Sadiq Khan Afridi in Jalandhar Doab were defeated. Their chief, Raja Ghumand Chand Katauch who had joined Abdali, sought refuge in the hills. The entire area from the Sutlej to the Indus came under the Sikhs except a few refractory pockets. Acting on the national resolution of the Sarbat Khalsa (Gurumata Oct. 1761) the Sikhs sought to capture the strongholds of Abdali’s Punjabi allies and helpers standing in the way of the liberation of the country. The nearest at hand were the Niranjanis of Jandiala (12 miles east of Amritsar), the traditional allies of the Durrans with several dark records of sworn hostility to the Sikhs (specially during 1740-53). Aqil Das, the Guru of this dissenting sect, unable to get any protection from Abdali’s officers, sought his help.

**Sixth Durrani Invasion (1762): Ghalughara. and After.**

In a lightning march Ahmad Shah came for the sixth time to destroy the Sikh menace. He soon reoccupied Lahore town. The Sikhs raised the siege of Jandiala, and crossing the Sutlej, began plundering the country round Sirhind and Malerkotla. They were surprised by Abdali and Zain Khan, governor of Sirhind, at Kup village, six miles north of Malerkotla. Encumbered with their women, children, non-combatants and camp followers (bahir) and
their camp equipage of luggages (bar bardari), the Sikhs kept on a running fight, with a cordon (gol gila) round the bahir. On way to Barnala through Afghan villages, the fleeing Sikhs were caught up and, according to Ganda Singh, nearly 10,000 people were massacred (Wadda Ghalughara, the Great Holocaust, February 5, 1762).

This was followed by the sack of Barnala. Its master Ala Jat (Sardar Ala Singh of Patiala) was then 'the most powerful chieftain in the Cis-Sutlej region', with his stronghold at Bhawanigarh. Pursuing a 'pro-Maratha and anti-Afghan' attitude, he was a reaping a good advantage during the disorders caused by Abdali's invasions. Evacuating his fort Ala Singh at first fled but subsequently he submitted, paying a ransom and a tribute, at the intercession of Najib ud daula. Abdali honoured him with the title of Rajah. This attitude was in sharp contrast with his earlier policy and shows Aamad Shah not only as a conqueror but also a realistic statesman, following a policy of divide and rule or as Cunningham says, 'the policy of widening the difference between a Malwa and a Manjha Singh. Ala Singh was guided more by a sense of expediency than treachery to the Sikhs cause, though many Sikhs came to distrust him afterwards. Retracing his steps from Sirhind, Ahmad Shah had the Amritsar temple blown up, desecrated the pool, erected pyramids of Sikh heads, and had the defiled mosques washed with the blood of the Sikhs. With the help of Raja Ranjit Dev of Jammu, Kashmir was reconquered from Sukh Jiwan who had acknowledged Mughal suzerainty and stopped paying tribute to Abdali. He now appointed Nuruddin Bamezai governor of Kashmir.

The irrepressible Sikhs again rose up in arms. In Sirhind they defeated its governor Zain Khan at Harnulgarh (April-May, 1762). The Jalandhar Doab was plundered by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the Bari and Chaj Doabs by Chharat Singh. Communications between Delhi and Lahore were disrupted. The Diwali (October, 1762) assembly of Sarbat Khalsa rejected Abdali's offer of peace.
Opinions differ as to whether there was a battle at Amritsar. Browne, Aliuddin, H. R. Gupta and Ganda Singh accept it; but Malcolm, Sarkar and Sinha do not. It was indecisive, if at all.

Ahmad Shah had to return (December, 1762) on account of internal disorders in Afghanistan, leaving a Hindu, Kabuli Mal, as governor of Lahore. He divided other districts among his Afghan and Rajput supporters: Zain Khan in Sirhind; Bhikan Khan in Maler Kotla; Saadat Khan in Jalandhar Doab; Murad Khan in Bari Doab; Khwaja Ubaid Khan in Kalanaur; Jahan Khan in Rechna and Sind Sagar Doabs besides Peshawar; Nuruddin Bamezai in Kashmir; and Raja Ghumand Chand Katauch of Kangra in the Hill territories between the Sutlej and Beas.

During 1763-64 the Sikhs spread in different directions. They recovered Kasur. Its immense plunder became the foundation of the opulence of many Sikh chiefs. Next they defeated Saadat Khan of Jalandhar Doab. Jahan Khan, deputed by the Shah, was defeated at Sialkot (November, 1763). Across the Sutlej they conquered and occupied Sirhind, killing Bhikari Khan at Maler Kotla (December) and Zain Khan, the unpopular governor at Sirhind (January 1764). Sirhind was utterly ruined. The Sikhs became the undisputed master of the cis-Sutlej area. They even invested Lahore and its neighbourhood (February), compelling the governor to pay tribute to them and to have a Sikh vakil there, marking 'the beginning of the Sikh control' in Lahore. Afghan rule in the Chenab-Jhelum area was ended by Chhарат Singh Sukkerchakki and the Bhangi sardars during the summer of 1764. Sarbuland Khan, faujdar of Rohtas, was routed, captured and finally released by Chhарат Singh. The Sikhs also spread to Multan and even beyond to the Deras. Their quick success was facilitated to a large extent by the voluntary submission of many villages. In the east they entered the Jamuna-Ganga Doab, plundering Shaharanpur (February, 1764). Najib ud daula had to buy them off. Thus the Sikhs came to control the entire region
from the Indus to the Jamuna and occasionally up to the Ganges, and from the Himalays to Multan and beyond.

*Seventh Durrani Invasion and after (1764-66): Struggle for domination in the Punjab.*

Alarmed by reports of the activities of the Sikhs, Ahmad Shah came to India in March, 1764, as we know from Maratha sources. But during this very brief expedition lasting hardly for a fortnight he could not turn his attention to subjugating the Sikhs. He had to hurriedly return home on account of domestic disorders including a rebellion in Qandahar, mutinous troops and scarcity in his army. A rumour of his defeat by the Sikhs was reported by Raja Durlabh Ram to Calcutta (April 23, 1764).

By October, 1764 the Shah came again, in conjunction with Nasir Khan Baluchi for a holy war (*jihad*) against the Sikhs. The combined Afghan and Baluch army converged on Lahore. The Sikhs under Chharat Singh harassed the Shah by their usual tactics. The Amritsar temple was blown up and the pool desecrated for the third time (December). From Lahore he proceeded to Sirhind along a circuitous route through the predominantly Sikh area of Jalandhar Doab, with its plentiful provisions which could be easily plundered by the *ghazis*. Plunder and indiscriminate massacre marked his trail. The Sikhs surprised the advanced guard of the experienced Jahan Khan and harassed the inexperienced Nasir Khan Baluchi. Instead of going to Sirhind or pursuing the Sikhs, the Shah proceeded to Kunjpura to help Najib ud daula, then besieged in Delhi by the allied forces of Jawahir Singh, son of Suraj Mal Jat, the Marathas and Sikhs. But the situation changed after the conclusion of peace between Najib and Jawahir (middle of February, 1765). Nasir Khan suggested a grand military alliance of 'the armies of Najib, Shuja and the chiefs of Delhi, and of the Jats and the Marathas' against the Sikhs, 'because the hare of a country can only be caught.
by a dog of that country'. But this was not accepted by the Durrani, who wanted to escape the summer and rains of India. Fifteen thousand Sikhs released from the Rohilla-Jat campaign had returned. The Shah, therefore, decided to return. At Sirhind Ala Singh of Patiala paid respects to him. He was ‘a chief, nay a commander of an army, who was a zamindar in the land and a ruler (hakim), a governor (zabit) and a commissioner (amin)....nobody else is so resourceful in the countries of the Punjab, Lahore and Sirhind as he is.’ The Shah honoured him and augmented his fief by the grant of Sirhind. The task of subjugation of the Sikhs was entrusted to him and other Indian allies,—the Rohillas, Jats and Marathas. Abdali also sought to conciliate the zamindars and even forgive the Sikh chiefs if they submitted. But the latter were made of a different mettle. His Indian allies were given jagirs and advised how to deal with the Sikhs, but the former well knew that these were no longer his to distribute.

As soon as he crossed the Sutlej he was pursued and harassed by the elusive Sikhs under their misldars adopting their usual hit and run tactics. The Shah exclaimed: ‘What! during my own reign the royal palanquin is trembling at the hands of the Sikhs. When my own army is sluggish in the holy war, it is but proper that the Sikhs should come rushing upon them. What shall the world say to me when in every part of the country the infidel Sikhs are rushing upon my army.’ For seven days within the Sutlej and the Beas there was a ‘running fight’ between the Afghans and the Sikhs. The latter occasionally fought regular battles besides following their guerrilla tactics.

During the next year and a half till November 1766, the Shah remained busy at home. The Sikhs could, therefore, establish their hold on the country. The Sarbat Khalsa met in April, 1765. The Amritsar temple and pool were restored and cleansed. Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, was recaptured (April 16) and divided into three parts, each under one leader. Lehna Singh, holding the central
and most important part, was a liberal and able ruler, who
won over the Muslims, wiped out their anti-Sikh feelings.
and fostered brotherly relations between the two commu-
nities. Silver coins were issued with the inscription ‘Degh,
Tegh, Fateh’ and in the name of Nanak and Govind,
following the inscription of Banda. Sikh sovereignty was
now openly established in the Punjab.

The Sikhs led an expedition against Ala Singh of Patiala,
whose submission was regarded as a ‘national disgrace’. He
was helped by Najib. But a compromise was made, thanks
to the efforts of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Thereafter the
Sikhs crossed the Jamuna and fought with Najib. On behalf
of the Jats they defeated the Marathas (March, 1766). But
they met with discomfiture as the hands of Najib at Delhi.
Later they occupied Pak Pattan and advanced to Multan.

**Eighth Durrani Invasion and after, 1766-68**

Ahmad Shah came to India in November-December,
1766, to extirpate the Sikhs and perhaps also in response to
the invitation of Mir Qasim of Bengal. The zamindars of
Aurangabad, Pasrur, Gujrat and Sialcot, had to pay a
contribution of a lakh and a half rupees as the neighbouring
villages sheltered the Sikhs. They had also to give
undertakings not to protect them and to apprehend any
Sikh and hand him over to the Shah for punishment. The
three Sikh governors of Lahore fled on the Shah’s approach.
The Muslims of Lahore induced the Shah to offer its
governorship to Lehna Singh. On the latter’s refusal it
was given to Dadan Khan. During his subsequent
movements from Lahore, the Shah was so harassed by the
Sikhs with their hovering and pouncing tricks, that he
offered peace to the Sikh leaders. But conscious of his
weakness, the latter refused to negotiate with him. They
defeated Jahan Khan in an open fight before Amritsar
(January 17, 1767), but it was occupied by the Shah.

In the Jalandhar Doab the envoys of some Indian chiefs-
paid respects to the Shah. The Sikhs renewed their activities plundering the Shah’s baggage from Nasir Balochi and waylaying a caravan laden with fruits for the Shah. His position was insecure, as his influence was limited to the places under military occupation. Across the Sutlej at Ismailabad (south of Ambala) Najib Rohilla joined him and advised him not to advance to Delhi. No Indian chief from beyond Delhi attended on him, partly because of the advice of the English East India Company to Emperor (Shah Alam II), his wazir Shuja, the Rohillas, Jats and Marathas, and partly because the halo of his invincibility had been shattered by the Sikhs.

On his return journey the Shah honoured Amar Singh, grandson of Ala Singh of Patiala with the title of Raja i Rajagan and granted the government of Sirhind on the recommendation of the astute Afghan wazir Shah Wali Khan, heavily bribed by Ala Singh’s widow, in preference to Zabita Khan, Najib’s son. Ahmad Shah was merely following the ‘divide and rule’ policy against the Sikhs. Amar Singh struck coins in the name of the Shah, adding the wazir’s tribal name ‘Bamezei’ to his own on his seal.

During Najib’s absence in the Afghan camp the Sikhs made a chapparwal or fighting raid into his territory. But they retreated at the approach of Jahan Khan, guided by Zabita Khan.

Abdali’s mutinous soldiers whose pay was long in arrears, and who were ill-compensated by inadequate plunder, returned to Afghanistan against his order. Conscious of his failure and apprehensive of the approaching summer as well as spread of the mutiny, the Shah also turned back via Multan, unable, it is said, to meet a Sikh force of 1,20,000 at Amritsar in a fight. The numerical strength of the Sikhs made it impossible for him to subdue them. As soon as Abdali crossed the Indus, they reoccupied Lahore. Its governor, pressed by local Muslims to hand it over to the Sikhs, was pensioned off. The Manjha districts and Central Punjab including Lahore were lost to the Shah.
Before the end of 1767 the Sikhs became practically masters of the area between the Indus to the Jamuna-Ganga Doab, collecting rakhi (protection money) or kambli (blanket money). The Bhangi misl was the largest and most extensive. But it was the Sukkerchakkia misl which eventually triumphed in the struggle for survival. By the end of 1768 Chharat Singh Sukkerchakkia occupied the famous Rohtas fort after a siege. Western Punjab (Sind, Sagar and Jech Doabs) continued to be disputed areas till they were finally lost by the Afghans to the Sikhs after the Shah’s death. The Sikh dominion in the Punjab stood as a barrier between the Durrani kingdom and the Mughals, and stopped the flow of hardy races from the n.w. to the Muslim rulers in India.

Ninth Durrani Invasion (1768-9): End of Afghan rule over the Punjab

In his last effort to re-conquer the Punjab (Dec., 1768-Jan., 1769), Abdali could not advance beyond the Chenab and failed to dislodge the Sikhs, now firmly established. The Afghan imperium in the Punjab was at an end. In his tenth invasion (Dec., 1769-Jan., 1770) he could not even cross the Indus.

V. Reasons of Durrani Failure and of Sikh Success

Speaking of the Sikhs Ahmad Shah had once boasted: “I will beat these infidels in such a way that the bones within their bodies will be reduced to fluffs of cotton”. (Jang Namah). Shah Alam II expected him “to drive to the mansions of perdition this infidel race, the fomentors of all mischief”. This great and mighty conqueror could defeat big standing armies of the Mughal and the Maratha governments. But with all his military genius he failed to subdue an obscure people in arms. In a sense this was natural. For even a great and gifted individual cannot
cope with a nation in arms, inspired by an awareness of its own destiny. Napoleon was successful so long as he fought with governments in Europe, but it was national patriotism in Spain and Russia, which crushed him. To understand why the Durrani failed it is necessary to analyse the elements of strength of the Sikhs and the weaknesses of the Afghans.

Some elements of strength of Sikh character have already been analysed before. It is only necessary here to emphasize two features. One was their religious zeal, combined with moral ardour. Abdali was fully conscious of its strength. He is said to have observed that the Sikhs could be completely reduced only when their religious fervour had evaporated. This did not take place in his time. Decay had not yet set in within the Sikh commonwealth. Ranade's observations about the Marathas during the war of independence may equally be applicable to the Sikhs: 'mere free-booters and plunderers never could have obtained success in such a war against such a foe. It was a higher moral force which brought out all the virtues of the best men of the nation.' Even the hostile Nur Muhammad writes that in one respect the Sikhs excelled 'all other fighting people': 'In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid servant, nor are these mischievous people given to thieving....' ('Jangnamah'). Again, they 'set a bound to the impulse of revenge, and though the Afghan massacre and persecution must have been deeply imprinted on their minds, they did not, it is said, destroy one prisoner in cold blood.' (Forster).

Certainly this idealism among the Sikhs went a long way to their securing goodwill of the people.

The second factor was the Sikh method of warfare. A militarily weak people could fight for independence successfully against powerful, well-organised armies by resorting to guerrilla warfare. The Sikhs did the same. Abdali wanted them to fight regular battles. But he failed
to compel them to fight on his own terms. They could hardly face his incomparably stronger and superior army in open, regular or orthodox fights. Once only at Kup near Malar Kotla (1762) were they surprised by Abdali and compelled to fight a regular battle in which they were defeated. From 1748 to 1769 they successfully followed their special guerrilla tactics of ‘hit and run’, swooping ‘like the lion and escaping like the fox’, or coming ‘stealthily like thieves (to) attack like wolves’ (Jangnamah). Like ants and locusts they pervaded everywhere. But they were elusive and evaded capture. By timely withdrawal, cutting off his supplies, plundering his convoys, hovering round his armies and killing stragglers, they wore Abdali out. In fact their strategy was to encompass his ruin without fighting. Of the numerous instances of such Sikh activities, special reference may be made of the attack on the Shah’s goods in 1757 and 1761. On the first occasion almost half of Abdali’s treasure and plunder carried on 28,000 elephants and other animals and carts, 80,000 horses were plundered. On the second occasion the Afghan camp, rich with booty, protected by mud enclosures and guards, was plundered every night by groups of handful Sikhs with impunity.

Unlike the Rajputs who often rushed to battle without consideration of consequences the Sikhs did not resort to precipitate action. At the same time they did not commit the folly of leaving the initiative to the enemy and adopting a purely defensive strategy like the Marathas on the eve of Panipat. They steered a middle course between hasty action and complete inaction, as circumstances demanded. They did not shrink from retreating if necessary without any false sense of shame or prestige. Their flight was only a war tactic, for ‘they turn back to face their pursuers and set fire even to water’. The hostile Qazi Nur Muhammad thus admits: ‘If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in battle.’

The Sikh method of warfare was admirably suitable for the terrain of the country, the temper of the people and the
circumstances. The forest and hill retreats of the Sikhs were inaccessible to Abdali. Their tactics were successful because of mass support. The ordinary people and peasants, out of admiration and fear were behind them, giving them shelter and food and nursed their sick and wounded. Even the Zamindars, apprehensive of reprisal from the Sikhs after Abdali’s departure, supported them.

But the supreme success of the Sikhs was due more to the whole nation than to any single individual. The Khalsa or the Sikh commonwealth symbolising the hopes and aspirations of the Sikhs, stood as a solid pillar of monolithic unity and so exhibited remarkable vitality and strength. Decisions taken in the biennial assemblies of Sarbat Khalsa were implicitly carried out. The Dal Khalsa or the army of the theocracy of Singhis became the instrument of the sovereignty of the Khalsa Raj. Devoted soldiers and able leaders constituted its strength. Gurmata or central diet and the Dal Khalsa were theocratic and democratic.

The Sikhs possessed some excellent martial qualities, viz power of endurance, fearlessness, courage, unexampled mobility, and dexterity in hand to hand fight. Their physical prowess has thus been commended even by the abusive Qazi Nur Muhammad: ‘The body of every one of them is like a piece of rock, and in physical grandeur every one of them is equal to more than fifty’. Their horses were of excellent size and were very swift. ‘A Sikh soldier had really to be killed twice.’ The best example of their death-defying sacrifice and fearlessness is supplied by the martyrdom of 30 Sikhs in guarding the Amritsar temple in 1764. According to Imad us Saadat the Sikhs ranked second to the Durranis as soldiers; they could ride 200 kos (c. 400 miles) and kill a person 900 kadams (steps) away. It is not surprising that they made excellent guerrillas, surpassing even the Marathas. ‘Of the two great soldierly virtues, constancy in disaster and hopefulness in defeat, no people striving for independence, ever possessed a larger share’. They knew how to overcome the shock of a disaster and how
to turn a victory to advantage. Even the ghallughār (holocaust) of 1762 failed to depress their bouyiancy.

To the democratic centralism of the Sikh commonwealth and the death-defying sacrifice of the Sikh private must be added the inimitable organising skill and the capacity of the Sikh leaders. Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Kalal, Chharat Singh and a host of other generals were not only able and highly successful but they outstripped even the Durrani generals and administrators like Jahan Khan, Zain Khan and Prince Timur. The romantic role of Jassa Singh in the Sikh struggle for independence deserves to be written in letters of gold. The brewer’s son was invariably nominated commander by the Sarbat Khalsa. A born general, he justified this selection. His tall and handsome appearance clearly marked him out from the rest and he did not require a separate badge. Indeed he towered head and shoulders above others. Possessing patriotism, courage, industry, firmness, temperance and fixed determination to resist, he became the soul of many a successful operation e.g. against Jahan Khan and the Afghans of Kasur, though at times he suffered reverses and had to escape. Unyielding to considerations of power and pelf, uncompromising in the matter of independence, he refused to be won over by Ahmad Shah (1762-3, 1767).

With generalship he combined moral qualities like religious fervour, piety, character and humaneness, rare among his Afghan prototypes. This won him universal respect and enabled him to command unswerving obedience from his men. He was admired by all and chieftains like Amar Singh considered him worthy of emulation. His sense of toleration saved Ala Singh from the wrath of the Sikhs. He was a source of inspiration in moments of gloom. In fine ‘his ascendancy was precisely that which superior minds acquire in times of difficulty’ (N. K. Sinha). The unceasing life and death struggles of the misldar sardars led by such leaders against the Mughals and the Afghans, made them increasingly popular and swelled their numbers, while by defea-
ting the local rulers they became masters of principalities.

Abdali’s empire extended from the west of Khorasan to Sirhind and from the Oxus to the Sea. But he was handicapped by the perennial insecurity of his western frontier, as illustrated by his domestic problems, rebellions and disturbances in Herat, Nishapur, Khorasan, Meshed and other regions during 1752-68. These frequently diverted his attention from the Punjab, prevented him from concentrating on the Sikhs and dragged him away before he could consolidate his Indian conquests. Hence the Afghan-Sikh duel may well be compared to the alternate ebb and flow of tides. The Sikhs receded with the flow-tide of the Afghans only to surge forward when the latter returned home. The military gains of Abdali came to be undone by his weak and inefficient officers.

Abdali’s administrative methods and policy were unstable. This superb military genius proved to be unrealistic and unsuccessful as an administrator in the Punjab. In the words of Cunningham, he was ‘an ideal Afghan genius fitted for conquest but incapable of empire’. Abdali’s methods of administration, marked by downright force, slaughter, enslavement and plunder, lacked realism, the higher spirit of reconciliation of subjects. By contrast Lehna’s short rule over Lahore, characterised by liberalism and non-sectarian prejudices, so won over the Muslim subjects, that they persuaded Abdali to offer governorship to him,—which sapped the basis of his claim that he was fighting for the cause of the Muslims.

Clearly the Durrani government in the Punjab was military in character. But his army was not adequate to keep the country in subjection. His scheme of military rule in the Punjab was comparable to Napoleon’s dictum followed in Spain: ‘It is the important posts that must be held. One ought not to go everywhere’. Unable to release a sufficiently strong force to check the Sikhs in the Punjab he had indeed selected some strategic centres like Gujrat, Rohtas, Lahore, Sirhind and Multan and had them guarded
by his generals. But the forces under their disposal were insufficient for defence. Again he had neither time nor resources to begin or persevere to hunt the Sikhs in hill retreats as Mir Mannu had tried. Moreover, as administrators his governors, generals and officers lacked tact and resourcefulness. His son Timur, governor for a year, was unfit to tackle the national opposition in the Punjab like Joseph Bonaparte in Spain. His general Jahan Khan, a fine cavalry leader, also lacked tact, antagonising both Adina and the Sikhs. Zain Khan in charge of Sirhind was oppressive, highhanded and dishonest. Violating all rules and regulations he did not pay salaries to his soldiers. He plundered villages and paid one-fourth of their arrear wages in looted grain. He made friends with the hill chiefs and was interested in amassing riches. His unjust and unpopular administration alienated the people from him.

Lacking a strong army, the mainstay of military rule, and needing the spontaneous goodwill of the subjects, Ahmad Shah should have tried to create a strong party favourable to him. But he had no firm allies to hold the Sikhs in check. The Maler Kotla Afghans were too weak to help him effectively. Moreover he displayed shortsightedness in depending on his might, indiscriminate bloodshed and repeated acts of revenge and oppression. His terror tactics, instead of terrorising the Sikhs, served to steel their hearts and taught them to shed more blood for a deathless cause. Perhaps it was after realising the futility of the policy of force and fear and on the initiative of his wazir, Shah Wali Khan, that he came to adopt a policy of conciliation in some cases, a policy of divide and rule (since 1762). But it was then too late.

Thus Abdali’s method of war and diplomatic approach proved to be futile in effect, enabling the Sikhs ‘to organise war by means of war’. His son, when pressed to invade the Punjab, considered this to be useless, admitting that his father’s ‘expeditions were responsible for the prosperity of the Sikhs’. (Umdat ut Taworikh).