

# Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa - The Legend Hero of Punjab

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## Abstract

The present paper gives the information about the life of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. The paper is divided into three sections. First section deals with the early life of Hari Singh Nalwa. It gives information about his birth place, clan and his ancestors, it also described how Hari Singh meet Maharaja Ranjit Singh and why Maharaja adorned him a name of "Nall-wa". It also describes his governorship in Kashmir and Greater Hazara. The second section deals with his conquest. Hari Singh Nalwa participated in the twenty major battles and his military achievements in these battles were also described. The third section deals with his administration. He was sent to the most troublesome spots of the Sikh empire in order to "create a tradition of vigorous and efficient administration. Government of India in 2013 issued a postage stamp and marked the 176th anniversary of Hari Singh Nalwa's death. Besides this some other relevant information is also to mention here i.e. Hari Singh Nalwa's life became a popular theme for martial ballads. His earliest biographers were poets, including *Qadir Bakhsh urf Kadaryar*, *Misr Hari Chand urf Qadaryaar* and *Ram Dayal*, all in the 19th century. *Amar Chitra Katha* first published the biography of Hari Singh Nalwa in 1978. In 20th century, the song *Mere Desh ki Dharti* from the 1967 Bollywood film *Upkaar* eulogises him.

## Keywords

Hari Singh Nalwa, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, military achievements, Sikh empire

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Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was the great Commander-in-chief of the Sikh Army whose courage and strength are unparalleled in Sikh History. The indelible mark left by this son of Punjab in a short period of time during Maharaj Ranjeet Singh's reign will always remain a golden chapter in history. His administration and foresight were just a few of his qualities, which were responsible for his rise to number one in the Darbar of the Maharaja, and being promoted to serve as a governor of Kashmir and the volatile Peshawar. He was the only individual whose name was minted on the currency of Punjab. His name spelt terror into the hearts of the Afghans and the Afghan mothers used to silence their crying children by saying, "(quiet child), Khamosh bash- Haria raghle (Haria has come)!" Sardar Hari Singh was born in 1791 CE in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) to Mata Dharam Kaur and father Sardar Gurdial Singh of the Uppal Khattri clan. S. Gurdial Singh was a commandant in the 'Shukerchakia Missal'. Hari Singh was only seven when his father died and it was in 1805 CE that he came under the attention of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. In an open field event, which the Maharaja, used to organize. At an open field event, which the Maharaja used to regularly organize, Hari Singh showed his excellence in the events of horse riding, sword fighting, spear throwing and warfare etc., which completely astounded and pleased the Maharaja and immediately he invited Hari Singh to join his army. Hari's family was of 'Khatri' origin belonging to the Uppal tribe. They had migrated from Majitha, north of Amritsar, to Gujranwala in the eighteenth century. The first entry in the Nalwa family records maintained by the Pandas (Haridwar) was made in 1808 CE. It reads: "Kshatriya Uppal resident of Gujranwala, Hari Singh son of Gurdas Singhji and grandson of Bishen Singhji. Hari Singh's son is Gurdit Singhji."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Vanit Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa, "Champion of*

Hari Singh's grandfather was killed in 1762. His father accompanied Charrat Singh and Mahan Singh (Ranjit Singh's grandfather and father respectively) and on all their expeditions, and received in jagir the village of Balloke near Shahdera Hari lost his father at the age of seven.<sup>3</sup>

ਪੰਦ੍ਰਵੇਂ ਬਰਸ ਖੂਬ ਪਹਿਣਕੇ ਹਥਿਆਰ ਯਾਰੇ, ਪੈਦਲ ਘੋਲ  
 ਕਰ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਬਾਘ ਸੁਟ ਮਾਰਦਾ।  
 ਸੁੰਦਰ ਸਰੂਪ ਤੇਜ ਕੋਈ ਨ ਸੰਭਾਲ ਸਕੇ, ਮੁਖੜਾ ਦੀਦਾਰੀ  
 ਜਿਵੇਂ ਲਾਲ ਦਮਕਾਰਦਾ।  
 ਬਾਲਪਣ ਦੀ ਸੋਭਾ ਗੁਣ ਸੁਣ ਸੂਰਮੇ ਦੇ, ਛੋਡ ਦਿੱਤਾ  
 ਸ਼ਤਰੂਆਂ ਨੇ ਅੰਨ ਪਾਣੀ ਘਾਰ ਦਾ।  
 ਸੀਤਾਰਾਮਾ ਨਾਮ ਧਾਮ ਸੋਲਵੇਂ ਬਰਸ, ਹੋ ਗਿਆ ਮਸ਼ਹੂਰ  
 ਹਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਦਾ॥੪॥

*Pandrvein baras khoob pehen ke hathiyaar yaaro, paidal ghol kar sher bagh sutt maarda, Sundar saroop tej koi naa sambhaal sakke, mukhra deedari jivein laal damkaarda, Baalpan di shobha gunn sunn soorme de, chhod ditta shatruan ne ann-paani ghaarda, Sitarama naam dhaam solvein baras, ho gya mash-hoor Hari Singh Sardar da.*<sup>4</sup>

#### Killing a lion

He was solely with the Maharajah for a number of months when someday he was asked to accompany the Maharajah for a hunt. As they entered the forest, suddenly a person feeding lion jumped on him and threw him on the ground. Hari Singh was completely caught

*the Khalsaji" (1791-1837), Manohar Publishers, 2009, p. 9.*

<sup>3</sup> L. Griffin, *the Panjab Chiefs, Historical and Biographical Notices*, T. C. Mc Cartney-Chronicle Press, Lahore, 1865, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Amarnath, *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh (Persian)*, ed. Sita Ram Kohli, University of Panjab, Lahore, 1928, p. 31.

unaware and failed to even have the opportunity to draw his weapon. However he got hold of the jaw of the lion and with great force flung the lion away, and withdrawing his weapon, with one blow cut off the lion's head. The Maharajah and therefore the different courtiers were extraordinarily stunned at this exploit. From that day forward Hari Singh was given the appellative of "Nalwa" by the Maharajah, who acknowledged that Hari Singh had killed the lion like the means King Nall went to hunt (King Nall was a really brave king and was proverbial for his audacity to kill lions and different dangerous animals along with his vacant hands, and hence the maharajah adorned Hari Singh with that title i.e. "Nall-wa"- 'like Nall')<sup>5</sup>

Baron Hugel, a European traveller, writes in his book, *Travels In Kashmir & the Punjab*: "I surprised him by knowledge whence he had gained the appellation of Nalwa, and of his having cloven the head of a tiger, which had already seized him as its prey. He told the Diwan to bring some drawings and gave me his portrait, in act of killing the beast."

**Governor of Kashmir** 1820-21: Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed the first religion Governor of Kashmir in 1820. He ruled the province for somewhat over a year once the pull of the Sikh Forward Policy compelled his recall from the province. Hari Singh Nalwa was remembered in Kashmir for one thing he least expected. The currency minted while he was the governor had been the topic matter of much speculation.<sup>6</sup> Following his departure from this subah, all the coins minted below the Sikhs in this province were known as the '*Hari*

*Singhee*'. Thereafter, no matter whom was the governor all coins minted in Kashmir continuing to be known as the '*Hari Singhee*' even following Hari Singh's death? Muslim and British historians criticised Hari Singh's tenure because the Governor of Kashmir. Deposit records show that their assessment was supported an incomplete understanding of the case.<sup>7</sup>

**Jagirdar-Governor Greater Hazara** 1822-37: The possibility of consolidating the North West Frontier of the Indian sub-continent into a province was presented by the relentless efforts of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. What he achieved during this region in a span of 15 years with limited resources and in the interior of a most turbulent population, was nothing in need of a miracle. Hazara, the crown of the Sindh Sagar Doab, was the most vital of all the territories below his Governance. His proceedings during this space present the best example of his talent as a military commander and as an administrator. The compiler of the Hazara lexicon acknowledged that Hari Singh Nalwa left his mark upon this district, that at that point solely a powerful hand like his may effectively control. "Of unbounded energy and courageousness, he was pitiless towards those who opposed his path. The town of Haripur befittingly perpetuates his name and therefore the fort of Harkishangarh forms an enduring monument of his power."<sup>8</sup>

It was on the 24th of February 1810, that the Maharaja, along with Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, attacked Multan. This was a very hard battle where the Multan Fort was fortified by the Nawab of Bahawalpur, and even after

<sup>5</sup> Vanit Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa, "Champion of the Khalsaji" (1791-1837)*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009. p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Surinder Singh, *Coinage: Sovereignty to the Guru, in Maharaja Ranjit Singh - Commemoration volume on Bicentenary of his Coronation 1801-2001* eds. Prithipal Singh Kapur and Dharam Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2001, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Ganeshi Lal. *Siyahat-i-Kashmir (Kashmir Nama or Tarikh-i-Kashmir) by March-June 1846*, tr. Vidya Sagar Suri, 1955, Simla: The Punjab Government Record Office Pub. Monograph No. 4

<sup>8</sup> *NWFP Gazetteers - Gazetteer of the Hazara District 1907*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1908.

considerable bombardment the walls of the fort held on. It was suggested that if some warriors could reach the fort and place dynamite near the walls and blow the wall apart, the army then could enter the fort. This was a suicidal mission, but Sardar Hari Singh was the first volunteer to jump and accept the challenge. He, along with 74 others did the needful and the Sikh army entered the fort and the battle was won, but Hari Singh was very seriously wounded, and had no hope of living. But after some time he recovered, to the delight of the Maharaja and the Sikh army, who now considered him an exceptional soldier, and was duly honoured by the Maharaja with more estate and money. His further conquests included Mitha Tiwana, Uch, and the historic win over the Afghans at the Attock Fort. Later on 20th April 1819, the Sikh army under the command of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa attacked Kashmir. A very ferocious battle was fought but eventually Kashmir became a part of the Sikh Empire. Diwan Moti Ram was given the governorship of Kashmir, but he proved a weak administrator, and was replaced by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa on 24th August 1820. Sardar Hari Singh governed Kashmir in such an excellent manner that the Maharaja was highly pleased with him, and to reward him, the Maharaja instructed the Kashmir mint to name the currency after Hari Singh Nalwa. The "Hari Singh Rupee" can presently be seen in museums. The Maharaja needed Hari Singh for other campaigns, and as the situation of Kashmir was under control, he requisitioned Hari Singh back to Lahore, where plans were discussed to bring more territories under the Sikh Raj. While returning from Kashmir Sardar Hari Singh conquered Mangli on the way, which was another great win. He reached Lahore on 28th November 1821, and the Maharaja was extremely overjoyed to see him and learn of the triumph of Mangli. The Sikh army started their campaign with taking Mungher, Hazara and Hari Pur, which was named after Sardar Hari Singh. At the fort of

Khairabad, the Sikh army under the command of Sardar Hari Singh only numbered 8000 and the Afghani army numbered nearly 150000. But the sheer bravery and audacity of the Sikh warriors was enough to overcome such a powerful force. Sir Alexander Barnes in his book "Barnes Travels - in Bukhara" narrates this Sikh victory as a milestone in history. On 16th of October 1831 Sardar Hari Singh was amongst the prominent Sardars, who along with Maharaja Ranjeet Singh met the British Governor General Lord Bentinck at the historic meeting of Ropar.<sup>9</sup>

The twenty major battles of Hari Singh Nalwa (either participated or were in command):

**Battle of Kasur 1807:** Hari Singh's first significant participation in a Sikh conquest on assuming charge of an independent contingent was in 1807, at the capture of Kasur. This place had long been a thorn in the side of Ranjit Singh's power because of its proximity to his capital city of Lahore. It was captured in the fourth attempt. This attack was led by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Jodh Singh Ramgarhia. During the campaign the Sardar showed remarkable bravery and dexterity.<sup>10</sup> The Sardar was granted a *jagir* in recognition of his services.<sup>11</sup>

**Battle of Sialkot 1808:** Ranjit Singh nominated Hari Singh Nalwa to take Sialkot from its ruler Jiwan Singh. This was his first battle under an independent command. The two armies were engaged for a couple of days,

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<sup>9</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1932, p. 97-98.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, p. 36.

eventually seventeen year old Hari Singh carried the day.<sup>12</sup>

**Battle of Attock 1813:** The fort of Attock was a major replenishment point for all armies crossing the Indus. In the early 19th century, Afghan appointees of the Kingdom of Kabul held this fort, as they did most of the territory along this frontier. This battle was fought and won by the Sikhs on the banks of the Indus under the leadership of Dewan Mokham Chand, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's general, against Azim Khan and his brother Dost Mohammad Khan, on behalf of Shah Mahmud of Kabul. Besides Hari Singh Nalwa, Hukam Singh Attariwala, Shyamu Singh, Khalsa Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Behmam Singh Malliawala actively participated in this battle. This was the first victory of the Sikhs over the Durrani and the Barakzais.<sup>13</sup> With the conquest of Attock, the adjoining regions of Hazara-i-Karlugh and Gandhgarh became tributary to the Sikhs. In 1815, Sherbaaz Khan of Gandhgarh challenged Hari Singh Nalwa's authority and was defeated.<sup>14</sup>

**Abortive attempt on Kashmir 1814:** The Sikhs attempted to take Kashmir soon after the Battle of Attock. The army was under the general command of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who camped at Rajauri. The troops were led towards Srinagar by Ram Dayal, grandson of Dewan Mokham Chand, while Jamadar Khushal Singh commanded the van, Hari Singh Nalwa and Nihal Singh Attariwala brought up the rear. Lack of provisions, delay

in the arrival of reinforcements, bad weather and treachery of the allies forced the Sikhs to retreat. The next few years were spent in subduing Muslim chiefs within the Kashmir territory, en route Srinagar Valley.<sup>15</sup> In 1815–16, Hari Singh Nalwa attacked and destroyed the stronghold of the traitorous Rajauri chief.<sup>16</sup>

**Conquest of Mahmudkot (Mehmood Kot, Muzaffargarh 1816):** In preparation of the conquest of the strongly fortified Mankera, Ranjit Singh decided to approach it from its southern extremity. After the Baisakhi of 1816, Misr Diwan Chand, Illahi Bakhsh, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Nihal Singh Attariwala and Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by seven paltans and the topkhana went towards Mahmudkot. When news of its conquest arrived, it left the Maharaja so elated at the success of Sikh arms that he celebrated this victory with the firing of cannons. Two years later, on their way to Multan, the Sikhs captured the forts of Khangarh and Muzaffargarh.<sup>17</sup>

**Battle of Multan 1818:** The winter of 1810 saw a jubilant Sikh army stationed near Multan in the Bari Doab. They were riding high on the success of having conquered the Chajj Doab. The possession of the city of Multan was taken with little resistance; however, the fort could not be captured. The fort was bombarded and mined without effect. Sardar Nihal Singh Attariwala and the young Hari Singh Nalwa were seriously wounded. A fire pot thrown from the walls of the fort fell on Hari Singh and he was so badly burnt that it was some months before he was fit for

<sup>12</sup> Opcit, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> G.S. Nayyar, *The Campaigns of General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Panjabi University Patiala, 1995, p. 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> Amar Singh, *Chamakda Hira Ya Jiwan Britant Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa*, Anglo-Sanskrit Press. Lahore, 1903. p. 112-13.

<sup>15</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1932, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> G.S. Nayyar, *The Campaigns of General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Panjabi University Patiala, 1995, p. 88.



service.<sup>18</sup> Ranjit Singh was disconcerted beyond measure at the length of the siege and perforce had to abandon the attempt. Multan was finally conquered under the nominal command of Kharak Singh and the actual command of Misr Diwan Chand. It was a fiercely contested battle in which Muzzaffar Khan and his sons defended the place with exemplary courage, but they could not withstand the onslaught of the Sikhs. Hari Singh Nalwa was "chiefly instrumental" in the capture of the citadel.<sup>19</sup>

**Peshawar becomes tributary 1818:** When Shah Mahmud's son, Shah Kamran, killed their Barakzai Vazir Fateh Khan in August 1818 the Sikhs took advantage of the resulting confusion and their army formally forded the Indus and entered Peshawar, the summer capital of the Kingdom of Kabul (modern-day Afghanistan), for the first time. Thereafter, Hari Singh Nalwa was deputed towards Peshawar in order to keep the Sikh *dabdaba kayam* — maintain the pressure.

**Mitha Tiwana 1818:** In the beginning of 1819, Hari Singh accompanied Misr Diwan Chand to collect tribute from the Nawab of Mankera. On completion of the mission, Diwan Chand crossed the river Chenab along with his topkhana and set up his camp in Pindi Bhattian near Chiniot. He was asked to leave Hari Singh stationed in the suburbs of Nurpur and Mitha Tiwana. Hari Singh must have achieved significant success for soon thereafter the Maharaja bestowed all the possessions of the Tiwana chiefs in *jagir* on the Sardar.<sup>20</sup>

**Kashmir becomes a part of the Punjab 1819:** In April 1819, the Sikh army marched towards Kashmir. On this occasion,

Prince Kharak Singh held nominal command. Diwan Chand led the vanguard, while Hari Singh Nalwa brought up the rear for the support of the leading troops. The third division, under the personal command of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, expedited supplies and conveyed these to the advance troops.<sup>21</sup> On the morning of 5 July 1819, the Sikh columns advanced to the sound of bugles. A severe engagement took place between the two armies and the Sikhs captured Kashmir. Great rejoicing followed in the Sikh camp and the cities of Lahore and Amritsar were illuminated for three successive nights. Thus came to an end the five centuries of Muslim rule in Kashmir.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, as Governor of Kashmir, Hari Singh Nalwa put down the rebellion of the most troublesome Khakha chief, Gulam Ali.<sup>23</sup>

**Battle of Pakhli 1819:** Under the Afghans, Hazara-i-Karlugh, Gandhgarh and Gakhar territory were governed from Attock. Kashmir collected the revenue from the upper regions of Pakhli, Damtaur and Darband. Numerous attempts by the Sikhs to collect revenue from Hazara-i-Karlugh not only met with failure, but also the loss of prominent Sikh administrators and commanders. Following the Sikh conquest of Kashmir, tribute was due from Pakhli, Damtaur, and Darband. On his return to the Punjab plains from the Kashmir Valley, Hari Singh and his companions followed the traditional *kafila* (caravan) route through Pakhli hoping to collect tribute from the region. The Sikh request for Nazrana resulted

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<sup>18</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Opcit, p. 16.

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<sup>21</sup> G.S. Nayar, *The Campaigns of General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Panjabi University Patiala, 1995, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

in the usual “fighting and mulcting”; the party however, was successful in their mission.<sup>24</sup>

**Battle of Mangal 1821:** Hari Singh's most spectacular success in the region of Pakistan's Hazara came two years later. On the successful conclusion of his governorship of Kashmir, he departed from the Valley and crossed the river Kishenganga at Muzaffarabad with 7000-foot soldiers. Hari Singh Nalwa traversed the hazardous mountainous terrain successfully, however when his entourage reached Mangal (Mangli, Pakistan) he found his passage opposed. Mangal, the ancient capital of Urusa was now the stronghold of the chief of the Jaduns who controlled the entire region of Damtaur. Hari Singh requested the tribesmen for a passage through their territory, but they demanded a tax on all the Kashmir goods and treasure he was taking with him. All trade *kafilas* routinely paid this toll. Hari Singh's claim that the goods he carried were not for trade purposes was not accepted. When parleying produced no result, battle was the only option. A combined tribal force numbering no less than 25,000 gathered from all the adjoining areas and challenged Hari Singh and his men. Despite being completely outnumbered, the Sardar stormed their stockades and defeated his opponents with a loss to them of 2,000 men. Hari Singh then left to join forces with the Sikh army poised for an attack on Mankera, but after he had collected a fine from every house and built a fort in this vicinity.<sup>25</sup>

**Battle of Mankera 1822:** The Sindh Sagar Doab was chiefly controlled from Mankera and Mitha Tiwana. Nawab Hafiz Ahmed Khan, a relative of the Durranis, exerted considerable influence in this region. Besides Mankera, he commanded a vast area protected by 12 forts. With the weakening of Afghan rule in Kabul, the governors of Attock,

Mankera, Mitha Tiwana and Khushab had declared their independence. Ranjit Singh celebrated the Dussehra of 1821 across the river Ravi, at Shahdera. Hari Singh, Governor of Kashmir, was most familiar with the territory that the Maharaja had now set his eyes on. Nalwa was summoned post-haste to join the Lahore Army already on its way towards the river Indus. The Maharaja and his army had crossed the Jhelum when Hari Singh Nalwa, accompanied by his Kashmir platoons, joined them at Mitha Tiwana. The Sikhs commenced offensive operations in early November. Nawab Hafiz Ahmed's predecessor, Nawab Mohammed Khan, had formed a cordon around Mankera with 12 forts—Haidrabad, Maujgarh, Fatehpur, Pipal, Darya Khan, Khanpur, Jhandawala, Kalor, Dulewala, Bhakkar, Dingana and Chaubara. The Sikh army occupied these forts and soon the only place that remained to be conquered was Mankera itself. A few years earlier, the Nawab of Mankera had actively participated in the reduction of Mitha Tiwana. The Tiwanas, now feudatories of Hari Singh Nalwa, were eager participants in returning that favour to the Nawab. The force was divided into three parts—one column being under Hari Singh—and each column entered the Mankera territory by a different route; capturing various places enroute all three columns rejoined near Mankera town. Mankera was besieged, with Nalwa's force being on the west of the fort.<sup>26</sup>

The fort of Mankera stood in the middle of the Thal. It was built of mud with a citadel of burnt brick surrounded by a dry ditch. To make the central fortress inaccessible, no wells were permitted by the Nawab to be sunk within a radius of 15 Kos. During the night of 26 November Hari Singh Nalwa, together with other chiefs and *jagirdars*, established their *morchas* (batteries) within long gunshot

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, p. 38.

of the place. They found old wells, which their men cleared out and fresh ones were dug. On the nights of 6–7 December, they approached closer to the ditch. The ensuing skirmish was ferocious and resulted in considerable loss of life. The siege of the fort of Mankera lasted 25 days. Finally, the Nawab accepted defeat and the last Saddozai stronghold fell to the Sikhs. The Nawab was allowed to proceed towards Dera Ismail Khan, which was granted to him as *jagir*.<sup>27</sup> His descendants held the area until 1836.

**Battle of Nowshera (Naushehra) 1823:** The Sikhs forayed into Peshawar for the first time in 1818, but did not occupy the territory. They were content with collecting tribute from Yar Mohammed, its Barakzai governor. Azim Khan, Yar Mohammed's half-brother in Kabul, totally disapproved of the latter's deference to the Sikhs and decided to march down at the head of a large force to vindicate the honour of the Afghans. Azim Khan wanted to avenge both, the supplication of his Peshawar brethren and the loss of Kashmir. Hari Singh Nalwa was the first to cross the Indus at Attock to the Sikh post of Khairabad; he was accompanied by Diwan Kirpa Ram and Khalsa Sher Singh, the Maharaja's teenaged son, besides 8,000 men.

The Kabul Army was expected near Nowshera, on the banks of the river Kabul (Landai). Hari Singh's immediate plan was to capture the Yusafzai stronghold to the north of the Landai at Jehangira, and the Khattak territory to its south at Akora Khattak. The latter was taken without difficulty however Jehangira was a masonry fort with very strong towers and the Yusafzais offered tough resistance. Hari Singh entered the fort and established his *thana* there.<sup>28</sup> The

remaining troops re-crossed the Landai River and returned to their base camp at Akora. Mohammed Azim Khan had encamped about ten miles north-west of Hari Singh's position, on the right bank of the Landai, facing the town of Nowshera, awaiting Ranjit Singh's approach. The Sikhs had scheduled two battles – one along either bank of the Landai.

After Hari Singh had successfully reduced the tribal strongholds on either side of the river, Ranjit Singh departed from the fort of Attock. He crossed the Landai River at a ford below Akora, and set up his camp near the fort of Jehangira. The famous army commander Akali Phula Singh and the no less renowned Gurkha commander BAL Bahadur, with their respective troops, accompanied the Maharaja. The Barakzais merely witnessed the main action from across the river. Hari Singh Nalwa's presence had prevented them from crossing the Landai.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, the inheritors of Ahmed Shah Abdali's legacy fled the scene in the direction of Jalalabad chased by Hari Singh Nalwa and his men to the very mouth of the Khyber Pass.

**Battle of Sirikot 1824:** Sirikot lay less than ten miles to the north-west of Haripur. This Mashwani village was strategically placed in a basin at the top of the northeast end of the Gandhgarh Range, which made its secure location a haven for the rebellious chiefs in the entire region. Hari Singh Nalwa went towards Sirikot before the rains of 1824. It was another six months before the attempt produced conclusive results. The Sardar almost lost his life in the course of this expedition. Ranjit Singh's military campaign for the winter of 1824 was scheduled towards Peshawar and Kabul. While stationed at Wazirabad, he received an *arzi* (written petition) from Sardar Hari Singh<sup>30</sup> informing him that he and his men were overwhelmingly

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<sup>27</sup> Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh Maharaja of the Punjab*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2001, p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> *Opcit*, p. 39.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>30</sup> The Akhbars, Times, London, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1825.



outnumbered – one Sikh to ten Afghans. Ranjit Singh marched to [Rohtas], from there to [Rawalpindi] and via [Sarai Kala] reached Sirikot. The news of the approach of the Sikh army led to an instant dispersal of the insurgents.

The increasing success of the Sikh arms greatly disappointed the Yusafzai and other tribes inhabiting the trans-Indus region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Battle of Nowshera convinced them of their extreme vulnerability. Not only had the Kabul Barakzais let them down, but their subsequent application to the British for help had also met with little success.

**Battle of Saidu 1827:** The redeemer of the Yusafzais came in the form of one Sayyid Ahmad,<sup>31</sup> who despite being a 'Hindki' was accepted as a leader by them. Budh Singh Sandhanwalia, accompanied by 4,000 horsemen, was deputed towards Attock to assist in suppressing the Yusafzai rebellion. The Maharaja's brief required him to thereafter to proceed towards Peshawar and collect tribute from Yar Mohammed Khan Barakzai. Budh Singh first heard of the Sayyid after he had crossed the Indus and encamped near the fort of Khairabad. Ranjit Singh was still on the sickbed when the news of the Sayyid's arrival, at the head of a large force of the Yusafzai peasantry, reached him. The gallantry of the Yusafzai defence in the Battle of Nowshera was still vivid in his mind. On receiving this news, he immediately put into motion all the forces that he could muster and immediately dispatched them towards the frontier.

The Barakzais in Peshawar, though outwardly professing allegiance to the Sikhs, were in reality in league with the insurgents. The Sayyid marched from Peshawar in the direction of Nowshera. Sardar Budh Singh

wrote to the Sayyid seeking for a clarification of his intention. The Sayyid haughtily replied that he would first take the fort of Attock and then engage Budh Singh in battle.

Hari Singh Nalwa stood guard at the fort of Attock with the intention of keeping the Sayyid and his men from crossing the river until reinforcements arrived from Lahore. News had reached the Sikhs that the jihadis accompanying the Sayyid numbered several thousand. The battle between the Sayyid and the Sikhs was fought on 14 Phagun (23 February) 1827. The action commenced at about ten in the morning. The Muslim war cry of *Allah hu Akbar*, or "God is the greatest", was answered by the Sikhs with *Bole so nihal, Sat Sri Akal*, or "they who affirm the name of God, the only immortal truth, will find fulfilment". Ironically, the opposing forces first professed the glory of the very same God Almighty, albeit in different languages, before they commenced slaughtering each other. The cannonade lasted about two hours. The Sikhs charged at their opponents, routed them, and continued a victorious pursuit for six miles, taking all their guns, swivels, camp equipage, etc. The number of killed was not mentioned, but blood was said to have flowed in torrents. The Sayyid sustained a complete defeat despite his vastly superior numbers. He was compelled to retreat to the Yusafzai Mountains. It was reported that 8,000 Sikhs had defended themselves against an enraged population of 150,000 Mohammedans.<sup>32</sup> A salute was fired, illumination was ordered by drumbeat in the city of Lahore in honour of the victory.

**Peshawar 1834:** The actual occupation of the great city of Peshawar and its ruinous fort, the Bala Hisar, by the Sikhs was quite a comedy and a total anti-climax. It was a reflection of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's

<sup>31</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, p. 40.

formidable reputation in 'Pashtunistan'. Masson arrived in Peshawar just in time to see the Sikhs take control of the city. His eyewitness account reports that the Afghans simply fled the place and Hari Singh Nalwa occupied Peshawar without a battle.<sup>33</sup>

**Dost Mohammad Khan flees 1835:** Hari Singh Nalwa was the governor of Peshawar when Dost Mohammed personally came at the head of a large force to challenge the Sikhs. Following his victory against Shah Shuja at Kandahar, in the first quarter of 1835, Dost Mohammed declared himself *padshah* (king), gave a call for jihad and set off from Kabul to wrest Peshawar from the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh directed his generals to amuse the Afghans with negotiations and to win over Sultan Mohammed Khan. He directed them that on no account, even if attacked, were they to enter into a general engagement until his arrival.<sup>34</sup>

Hari Singh Nalwa and the other Sikh chieftains requested Ranjit Singh to permit them to engage with the Kabul Afghans. On 30 Baisakh (10 May 1835), Sardar Hari Singh, Raja Gulab Singh, Misr Sukh Raj, Sardar Attar Singh Sandhanwalia, Jamadar Khushal Singh, the Raja Kalan (Dhian Singh), Monsieur Court, Signor Avitabile, Sardar Tej Singh, Dhaunkal Singh, Illahi Bakhsh of the topkhana, Sardar Jawala Singh and Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia were ordered to move. The troops fanned out over five Kos, forming a semicircle in front of the Amir's encampment. Sardar Hari Singh proposed that the water of the stream Bara, which flowed in the direction of Dost Mohammed Khan's camp, be dammed. When the Ghazis appeared, Sardar Hari Singh commenced firing his guns. The Maharaja, however, prohibited him from indulging in battle and dispatched his Vakils to negotiate with the Amir.

Once Dost Mohammed Khan was assured that the Sikhs would affect a truce until their Vakils were in his camp, he let them know what he really felt. Harsh words were exchanged. He accused Fakir Aziz-ud-din of making "use of much language, having plenty of leaves but little fruit". On finding both his step brothers, Jabbar and Sultan, irredeemably lost to him, Dost Mohammed decided to retire from the field with the whole of his army, armament and equipage. He left at night, making sure that the Fakir did not return to the Sikh camp until after he had gone through the Khyber Pass.<sup>35</sup>

**Jamrud (Khyber Pass) 1836:** In October 1836, following the Dussehra celebrations in Amritsar, Hari Singh made a sudden attack on the village of Jamrud, at the mouth of the Khyber Pass. The Misha Khel Khyberis, the owners of this village, were renowned for their excellent marksmanship and total lack of respect for any authority. Hari Singh Nalwa's first encounter with this tribe had taken place following the Battle of Nowshera when he had pursued the fleeing Azim Khan; and once again, when he chased Dost Mohammed Khan in 1835.

The occupation of Jamrud was rather strongly contested, but it appeared that the place was taken by surprise. On its capture, Hari Singh Nalwa gave instructions to fortify the position without delay. A small existing fort was immediately put into repair. News of this event was immediately transmitted to Kabul. Masson informed Wade of the passage of events along this frontier in a letter dated 31 October 1836. With the conquest of Jamrud, at the very mouth of the Khyber,<sup>36</sup> the frontier of the Sikh

<sup>33</sup> Opcit, pp. 50-51.

<sup>34</sup> Opcit, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> F.S. Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, (second edition) Lion Art Press, Karachi, 2001, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, p. 41.

Empire now bordered the foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains

**Panjtaar 1836:** The defeat of the Khyber is sent shock waves through the Afghan community. However, more was to follow. Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by Kanwar Sher Singh, now proceeded towards the Yusafzai strongholds, north-east of Peshawar, which had withheld tribute for three years. The Sikhs completely defeated the Yusafzais, with their chief, Fateh Khan of Panjtaar, losing his territory.<sup>37</sup> It was reported that 15,000 mulkia fled before the Sikhs like a herd of goats, many being killed and the remaining taking refuge in the hills. After burning and levelling Panjtaar to the ground, Hari Singh returned to Peshawar realising all the arrears of revenue. Fateh Khan was obliged to sign an agreement to pay tribute on which condition Panjtaar was released. When news of the conquest of Panjtar reached the Court of Lahore, a display of fireworks was proposed.

**Battle of Jamrud 1837:** The news of the conquest of Jamrud put Dost Mohammed Khan into a state of greatest alarm. General Hari Singh's latest possession gave the Sikhs the command of the entrance into the valley of Khyber. "If this was a prelude to further aggressive measures," the Amir "saw in the intimation and submission of the people of Khyber, the road laid open to Jalalabad." Were the Sikhs to take Jalalabad, their next stop would be Kabul. This information was followed by the intelligence of the defeat of the Panjtaris.

The Maharaja's grandson, Nau Nihal Singh was getting married in March 1837. Troops had been withdrawn from all over the Punjab to put up a show of strength for the British Commander-in-chief who was invited to the

wedding. Yar Mohammed Khan has been invited to the great celebration. Hari Singh Nalwa too was supposed to be at Amritsar, but in reality was in Peshawar (some accounts say he was ill<sup>38</sup>) Dost Mohammed had ordered his army to march towards Jamrud together with five sons and his chief advisors with orders not to engage with the Sikhs, but more as a show of strength and try and wrest the forts of Shabqadar, Jamrud and Peshawar.<sup>39</sup> Hari Singh had also been instructed not to engage with the Afghans till reinforcements arrived from Lahore.

Hari Singh's lieutenant, Mahan Singh, was in the fortress of Jamrud with 600 men and limited supplies. Hari Singh was in the strong fort of Peshawar. He was forced to go to the rescue of his men who were surrounded from every side by the Afghan forces, without water in the small fortress. Though the Sikhs were totally outnumbered, the sudden arrival of Hari Singh Nalwa put the Afghans in total panic. In the melee, Hari Singh Nalwa was accidentally grievously wounded. Before he died, he told his lieutenant not to let the news of his death out till the arrival of reinforcements, which is what he did. While the Afghans knew that Hari Singh had been wounded, they waited for over a week doing nothing, till the news of his death was confirmed. By this time, the Lahore troops had arrived and they merely witness the Afghans fleeing back to Kabul.<sup>40</sup> Hari Singh Nalwa had not only defended Jamrud and Peshawar, but had prevented the Afghans from ravaging the entire north-west frontier. The Afghans achieved none of their stated objectives. The loss of Hari Singh Nalwa was

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<sup>37</sup> G.S. Nayar, *The Campaigns of General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Panjabi University Patiala, 1995, p. 152.

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<sup>38</sup> Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh Maharaja of the Punjab*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2001, p. 193.

<sup>39</sup> F.S. Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, (second edition) Lion Art Press, Karachi, 2001, p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, the Sikh Review, 1976, p. 45.

irreparable and this Sikh victory was as costly as a defeat.<sup>41</sup>

Victories over the Afghans were a favourite topic of conversation for Ranjit Singh. He was to immortalise these by ordering a shawl from Kashmir at the record price of Rs5000, in which were depicted the scenes of the battles fought with them. Following the death of Hari Singh Nalwa, no further conquests were made in this direction. The Khyber Pass continued as the Sikh frontier till the annexation of the Punjab by the British.<sup>42</sup>

Administrator:

Hari Singh's administrative rule covered one-third of the Sikh Empire. He served as the Governor of Kashmir (1820–21), Greater Hazara (1822–1837) and was twice appointed the Governor of Peshawar (1834-35 & 1836-his death). In his private capacity, Hari Singh Nalwa was required to administer his vast *jagir* spread all over the kingdom.<sup>43</sup> He was sent to the most troublesome spots of the Sikh empire in order to "create a tradition of vigorous and efficient administration".<sup>44</sup> The territories under his jurisdiction later formed part of the British Districts of Peshawar, Hazara (Pakhli, Dامتاور, Haripur, Darband, Gandhgarh, Dhund, Karral and Khanpur), Attock (Chhachch, Hassan Abdal), Jhelum (Pindi Gheb, Katas), Mianwali (Kachhi), Shahpur (Warcha, Mitha Tiwana and Nurpur), Dera Ismail Khan (Bannu, Tank, and

Kundi), Rawalpindi (Rawalpindi, Kallar) and Gujranwala. In 1832, at the specific request of William Bentinck, the Maharajah proposed a fixed table of duties for the whole of his territories. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was one of the three men deputed to fix the duties from Attock (on the Indus) to Filor (on the Sutlej).

In Kashmir, however, Sikh rule was generally considered oppressive,<sup>45</sup> protected perhaps by the remoteness of Kashmir from the capital of the Sikh empire in Lahore. The Sikhs enacted a number of anti-Muslim laws,<sup>46</sup> which included handing out death sentences for cow slaughter,<sup>47</sup> closing down the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar, and banning the *azaan*, the public Muslim call to prayer.<sup>48</sup> Kashmir had also now begun to attract European visitors, several of whom wrote of the abject poverty of the vast Muslim peasantry and of the exorbitant taxes under the Sikhs.<sup>49</sup>

The Sikh rule in lands dominated for centuries by Muslims was an exception in the political history of the latter. To be ruled by '*kafirs*' was the worst kind of ignominy to befall a Muslim.<sup>50</sup> Before the Sikhs came to Kashmir (1819 CE), the Afghans had ruled it for 67 years. For the Muslims, Sikh rule was the darkest period of the history of the place,

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<sup>45</sup> T.N. Mada, "*Kashmir, Kashmiris, Kashmiriyat: An Introductory Essay*", in Rao, Aparna, *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture?* Manohar Publication, Delhi, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Chitralkha Zutshi, *Language of belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the making of Kashmir*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Chitralkha Zutshi, *Opcit*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> Victoria Schofield, *Opcit*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Historical Study of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Times*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1994, p. 100.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 46 and See also Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh Maharaja of the Punjab*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2001, p. 194.

<sup>42</sup> M.M. Mathews, *An Ever Present Danger*, Combat Studies Institute Press, Kansas, 2010, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Historical Study of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Times*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1994, p. 98.

while for the Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) nothing was worse than the Afghan rule.<sup>51</sup> The Sikh conquest of Kashmir was prompted by an appeal from its Hindu population. The oppressed Hindus had been subjected to forced conversions, their women raped, their temples desecrated, and cows slaughtered.<sup>52</sup> Efforts by the Sikhs to keep peace in far-flung regions pressed them to close mosques and ban the call to prayer because the Muslim clergy charged the population to frenzy with a call for 'jihad' at every pretext.<sup>53</sup> Cow-slaughter (Holy Cow) offended the religious sentiments of the Hindu population and therefore it met with severe punishment in the Sikh empire. In Peshawar, keeping in view "the turbulence of the lawless tribes ... and the geographical and political exigencies of the situation" Hari Singh's methods were most suitable.<sup>54</sup>

Nalwa was also a builder. At least 56 buildings were attributed to him, which included forts, ramparts, towers, gurudwaras, tanks, *samadhis*, temples, mosques, towns, *havelis*, *sarais* and gardens.<sup>55</sup> He built the fortified town of Haripur in 1822. This was the first planned town in the region, with a superb water distribution system.<sup>56</sup> His very strong fort of Harkishengarh, situated in the

valley at the foothill of mountains, had four gates. It was surrounded by a wall, four yards thick and 16 yards high. Nalwa's presence brought such a feeling of security to the region that when Hügel visited Haripur in 1835-6, he found the town humming with activity.<sup>57</sup> A large number of Khattris migrated there and established a flourishing trade. Haripur, tehsil and district, in Hazara, North-West Frontier Province, are named after him. Nalwa contributed to the prosperity of Gujranwala, which he was given as a *jagir* sometime after 1799,<sup>58</sup> which he held till his death in 1837.

He built all the main Sikh forts in the trans-Indus region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - Jehangira<sup>59</sup> and Nowshera on the left and right bank respectively of the river Kabul, Sumergarh (or Bala Hisar Fort in the city of Peshawar),<sup>60</sup> for the Sikh Kingdom. In addition, he laid the foundation for the fort of Fatehgarh, at Jamrud (Jamrud Fort).<sup>61</sup> He reinforced Akbar's Attock fort situated on the left bank of the river Indus<sup>62</sup> by building very high bastions at each of the gates. He also built the fort of Uri in Kashmir.<sup>63</sup>

A religious man, Nalwa built Gurdwara Panja Sahib in the town of Hassan Abdal, south-west of Haripur and north-west of Rawalpindi in

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<sup>51</sup> G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashmir Being a History of Kashmir From the Earliest Times to Our Own* (Reprinted ed.), Life and Light Publishers, New Delhi, p. 750.

<sup>52</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> Amar Singh, *Chamakda Hira Ya Jiwan Britant Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa*, Anglo-Sanskrit Press. Lahore, 1903. p. 115.

<sup>54</sup> Gulcharan Singh, *General Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh Review*, 1976, pp. 53-54.

<sup>55</sup> Krishan Lal Sachdeva, "Hari Singh Nalwa – A Great Builder", in Kapur, P. S., *Perspectives on Hari Singh Nalwa*, ABS Publication, Jalandhar, 1993, p. 74.

<sup>56</sup> P.S. Kapur, & Khushwant Singh, "A Forward Base in the Tribal Areas", in Kapur, P. S.; Dharam, Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Patiala: Punjabi University, Patiala, 2001, p. 163.

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<sup>57</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Historical Study of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Times*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1994, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>59</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> S.M. Jaffar, *Peshawar: Past and Present*, S. Muhammad Sadiq Khan, Peshawar, 1945, p. 123.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>62</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Historical Study of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Times*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1994, p. 102.

<sup>63</sup> G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashmir Being a History of Kashmir From the Earliest Times to Our Own* (Reprinted ed.), Life and Light Publishers, New Delhi, p. 729.



Pakistan, to commemorate Guru Nanak's journey through that region.<sup>64</sup> He had donated the gold required to cover the dome of the Akal Takht within the Harmandir Sahib complex in Amritsar.<sup>65</sup> Following Hari Singh Nalwa's death, his sons Jawahir Singh Nalwa and Arjan Singh Nalwa<sup>66</sup> fought against the British to protect the sovereignty of the Kingdom of the Sikhs, with the former being noted for his defence in the Battle of Chillianwala.

20th century, the song *Mere Desh ki Dharti* from the 1967 Bollywood film *Upkaar* eulogises him.

For decades after his death, Yusufzai women would say "Raghe Hari Singh" ("Hari Singh is coming") to frighten their children into obedience.<sup>67</sup> A commemorative postage stamp was issued by the Government of India in 2013, marking the 176th anniversary of Nalwa's death. Hari Singh Nalwa died fighting the Pathan forces of Dost Mohammed Khan of Afghanistan. He was cremated in the Jamrud Fort built at the mouth of the Khyber Pass in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Babu Gajju Mall Kapur, a Hindu resident of Peshawar, commemorated his memory by building a memorial in the fort in 1892.<sup>68</sup>

Hari Singh Nalwa's life became a popular theme for martial ballads. His earliest biographers were poets, including *Qadir Bakhsh urf Kadaryar*, *Misr Hari Chand urf Qadaryaar* and *Ram Dayal*, all in the 19th century. *Amar Chitra Katha* first published the biography of Hari Singh Nalwa in 1978. In

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<sup>64</sup> Mohammad Waliullah Khan, *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan*, Department of Archaeology Ministry of Education and Information, Government of Pakistan, Karachi, 1962, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple: Past and Present* (Revised ed.), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2004, p. 214.

<sup>66</sup> Sohan Lal Suri identifies Jawahir Singh Nalwa and Arjan Singh Nalwa.

<sup>67</sup> Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans 550BC-AD1957*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd, London, 1985, p. 313.

<sup>68</sup> Autar Singh Sandhu, *General Hari Singh Nalwa*, Cunningham Historical Society, Lahore, 1935, p. 85.

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