

## Punjab in 18<sup>th</sup> Century: A Historical Survey

Amit

Research Scholar Department of History, MDU, Rohtak (Hr.)

### ABSTRACT:-

*Punjab was the wealthiest provision of the Mughal Empire in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. In the beginning of eighteenth century after Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh Bhadur took the commands of sikhs and unites them but after his execution Sikh rule could not sustain. The province weakened after first quarter of Eighteenth century because the Punjab was repeatedly invaded by Nadir Shah and weak governors of Mughals in Punjab. In Eighteenth century Sikh had formed twelve loose groups called Misls to protect themselves. In the mid of eighteenth century Afgani invaded the Punjab by nine times and Mughal persecution was often brutal. Internal squabbles prevented the Misls from uniting to control the region until Ranjit Singh became head of the Sukerchakia Misl.*

**KEYWORDS-** *Misl, sikh, Mughals, Governor.*

**INTRODUCTION:-**The Mughal Empire was vast and extensive in the beginning of the eighteenth century. After the death of

Aurangzeb in Muazam emerged victories ascended the Mughal throne with the title of Bhadur Shah-1 (1707-12). He was the last of the Mughal rulers to exercise real authority. He was learned dignified and tried to reverse some of the narrow minded policies and measures adopted by Aurangzeb. Bhadur Shah -1 followed conciliatory policies towards the Rajputs and Marathas but a strict policy towards Sikhs. Mughal made reconciliation with Guru Gobind Singh and granted him high Mansab but after the death of Guru the Sikh raised a revolt under the leadership of Banda Bhadur who was nominated by Guru Gobind Singh.

In the second decade of century Banda Bahadur had been able to conquer a number of territories and had become the master of whole of Sirhind division, Bist Jalandhar doab, District of Amritsar and Gurdaspur and few parganas of Sharanpur division.<sup>(1)</sup> During Banda's period Bahadur Shah issued edict that no Sikh should be allowed to move about in the town and village. Despite all this Banda Singh

Bahadur was able to establish a Sikh state and issued coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>(2)</sup> Banda Singh freed the peasants from giving land revenue to their overlords and made a tiller the owner of the land. In this way he initiated a system that was to be gradually followed everywhere.<sup>(3)</sup> Banda Bahadur followed the policy of emancipating the downtrodden. In 1715 CE Farrukh Syar, the Mughal Emperor sent a huge contingent to capture Banda Singh Bahadur. He was besieged in the Haveli of Gurdas Nangal. Banda Singh Bahadur valiantly withstood the siege for many months but ultimately had to submit. In order to terrorize the Sikhs, a long procession of about seven hundred Sikhs was taken out from Lahore to Delhi captured Sikhs were publically executed in Delhi.<sup>(4)</sup> Banda was eventually besieged and captured by Abdus Samad Khan at Gurdas Nangal and was executed in 1716<sup>(5)</sup> and the Sikh rule could not sustain after his execution.

After Banda there was a problem in keeping the Sikh who had been scattered to various places under a unified command. The Punjab from 1716-1752 was ruled by four Mughal Governors, Abdus Samad Khan, Zabariyan Khan, Yatiya Khan and Muin Ul

Mulk (Mir Mannu). The tendency of Mughal Governors was perpetuate in the provinces during the weakening of imperial authority at the center. Since they were successful in maintaining themselves as governors in the Punjab, threat to their positions could come from two sources: Foreign invasions and an internal uprising. Since the stakes were high the Mughal governors followed two types of policies against the internal revolts: repression and pacification or conciliation. The immediate problem for the Sikhs was how to escape from persecution without giving up their ideals and attitude of independence.<sup>(6)</sup> During the tenure of Abdus Samad Khan till 1726, Sikhs had started organizing resistance to the Mughal officials. His successor Zabariya Khan adopted a vigorous policy of repression against the Sikhs and simultaneously he tried to pacify the Sikh leaders by offering them revenue free grants.<sup>(7)</sup>

The situation changed with dramatic suddenness with the news of a Persian invasion from the Northwest. The invasion of the Persian ruler Nadir Shah in 1739-40 had an adverse effect not only on the Mughal Empire but also on Zakariya Khan's position

in the province of Lahore. His invasion denuded Delhi of its riches and obliged Zakariya Khan to re-establish his hold over the province. After Nadir Shah's invasion there prevailed and confusion in Punjab of which full advantage was taken by Sikhs. They organized themselves in groups.<sup>(9)</sup>

After Zakariya Khan, Yahiya Khan became the governor of Lahore. During his governorship the Sikh received a serious setback known as small holocaust from Diwan Lakhpat Rai. Diwan Lakhpat Rai led the Mughal army against the Sikhs in the marshes of Khanuwan and about 7000 Sikhs were killed in a single action.<sup>(10)</sup> In 1748 Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded Punjab on the invitation of Shah Nawaj. The Mughal armies defeated him. The credit for victory against Abdali was given to Mir Mannu, and he was made the governor of Lahore. But Abdali was successful in 1752 when he obliged the Mughal emperor to cede to him the provinces of Kashmir, Lahore, Multan and the Sarkar or Sarhihd.<sup>(11)</sup> Mir Mannu was reappointed as the governor of Lahore by Abdali. He tried the alternative policies of repression and conciliation against the Sikh but failed.

Nadir Shah's invasion of 1738-39 CE and Ahmad Shah Abdali's repeated invasions from 1747-1769 EC created confusion and chaos in the whole northwestern India. The Punjab suffered the most. There was no sense of security. The people in Punjab were always in a fix as to whom to pay land revenue and whom not to. The Mughal government had been destroyed by the Afghans and Marathas. The Marathas were subsequently defeated by Afghans.<sup>(12)</sup> Almost every alternate year Ahmad Shah Abdali would invade and devastate the land and loot the population irrespective of their religion.

The only opposition standing was the Sikh moving bands that resisted the invader and helped the peasantry. Gradually different villages began to seek protection from various Sikh chiefs. This led to the development of Protection (Rakhy) system owing to the continuous political insecurity and chaos the prominent Sikh chiefs began to possess big patches of land and there developed Misaldari system. In 1748 twelve misls were constituted: Sukarchakia, Ahluwalia, Phulkian, Nakai, Kanhiya, Ramgarhia, Bhangi, Faisalpuria (Sishpuria), Nishanwalia, Karor, Dallewalia and

Shaheed.<sup>(13)</sup> The new members of these Misls were became more popular because cultivators had to pay a much smaller part of their produce and were safe.<sup>(14)</sup>

Mir Mannu – the governor of Punjab died in 1753. After some time Maratha army appeared in Punjab, who was acting nominally on behalf of Mughal emperor and influential in north India, and tried to replace themselves with Mughals.<sup>(15)</sup> In the year 1761, Maratha retreated the army of Abdali and a historical battle fought in Panipat. This battle was turning point in the history and finally eliminated Marathas from the politics of province of Lahore.<sup>(16)</sup> The struggle between the Afgans and the Marathas proved a golden opportunity to the Sikh who had mean while added to their strength and resources. It could be said that battle of Panipat which was fought between the Marathas and the Afgans was really won by the Sikhs.<sup>(17)</sup> They started ousting the Afgan nominees of Ahmad Shah Abdali and occupying territories for themselves in different parts of the province of Lahore. They brought the entire land from the Sutluj and the Indus under their control.

Within a few week of the departure, the Sikh sardar Gujjar Singh Bhangi, Lahna Singh

Bhangi and Sobha Singh Kanhiya turned out his nominee from Lahore and occupied the city and partitioned it among themselves.<sup>(18)</sup> A coin was struck at Lahore to proclaim the sovereign status of Sikhs. Sikh rule was reestablished and it had come to stay.<sup>(19)</sup> On assuming the sovereignty they remained undisputed masters of Punjab and occupied it as a permanent inheritance. They allowed the members of misls to appropriate as many villages and town as they could easily manage under their authority.<sup>(20)</sup> The Sikh rose amongst the common people, setting aside the politico-administrative framework of the Mughal empire and setting themselves up against all its supporters and they evolved on the basis of their common sense.<sup>(21)</sup> The important chief like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Charat Singh Sukarchakia, Gujjar Singh, Jai Singh Kanhiya and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia asserted their suzerain claim over some of the hill principalities.<sup>(22)</sup> They were fighting among themselves. In the later 18<sup>th</sup> century the whole territory combined under the Misl Sukarchakia and Punjab became powerful kingdom under Ranjit Singh.

---

**REFERNECES:-**

- [1] J.S Grewal, The Sikh of Punjab, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, 83.
- [2] Teja Singh & Ganda Singh, Ashort History of Sikhs, Orient Congman 1950. P. 80-86.
- [3] Ibid.p. 107.
- [4] Khafi Khan, Muntkhab-ul-Lubab, Vol.3, p. 766.
- [5] Hari Ram Gupta, History of Sikhs, Vol.2, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1982, p. 27-34.
- [6] Kirpal Singh, Char Bhag1-Punjab (ed.), Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1965, p. 124-25.
- [7] Muzzafar Alam, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India, Awadh and Punjsb (1707-48), Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1986. 77.
- [8] Indu Banga, Agrarian System of the Sikhs. 13.
- [9] H.R. Gupta, History of Sikh. Vol. 2, 54.
- [10] H.T. Prinsep, Origin of Sikh power in the Punjab and political life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Punjab languages Department, Patiala, 1970. 3-4.
- [11] J.S Grewal, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Polity Economy and Society, 4.
- [12] Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, Ashort History of Sikh, op. cit, 159.
- [13] Ram Sukh Rao, Sri Fateh Singh Pratap Prabhakar (ed), Joginder Kaur, Patiala, 1980, 2.
- [14] Radha Rani, Peasantry under Sikh rule, 1765-1849, Phd thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1988, 15.
- [15] Joginder Kaur, Sri Fateh SinghPratap Prabhakar,2.
- [16] J.S Grewal, Rise of Sikhs, 91.
- [17] Khuswant Singh, History of Sikhs, 91.
- [18] H.R. Gupta, History of Sikhs, Vol.2, 228-229.
- [19] Indu Banga, Agrarian system of Sikhs, 19.
- [20] Indu Banga, Agrarian system of Sikhs, 20.
- [21] J.S. Grewal, The Sikh of Punjab, 92.
- [22] J.S. Grewal, The Sikh of Punjab, 94.