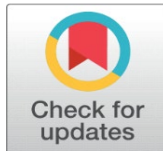
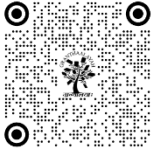


# THE RISE AND GROWTH OF THE LAHORE ARMY UNDER MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

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## ABSTRACT

Formation of Lahore army under Ranjit Singh is an important issue of the history of the Sikhs in Punjab. Hence, with forming a regular disciplined army, Ranjit Singh conquered a good number of territories and established his sway over there. In the beginning of his career, Ranjit Singh followed the guerilla method of fighting to defeat his rivals. With the help of this war strategy he made a stern strike on his enemy soldiers from the behind. This tactics of dhaiphut (hit and run strategy) facilitated Ranjit Singh to create disturbance to the Afghan soldiers of Zaman Shah at Lahore during their fourth and last invasions into Punjab. After returning of Zaman Shah from Lahore to Kabul, Ranjit Singh occupied Lahore with the help of his troops in 1799. Then he apprehended the necessity to form a disciplined army with the help of western way of fighting to materialize his dream in promoting the Sikh empire across the whole of the territories of all Sikh chiefs in Punjab. At the initial stage of the introduction of European means of training, the Sikhs had reluctance and apathy to pursue it. Because, the Sikhs felt it beneath to their prestige to fight on foot. Rather they were habituated in fighting with horse. Ranjit Singh encouraged them with rewards to pursue the western method of fighting. He remained in the training ground daily for three to four hours. After rigorous training of nine months during the Dusserah of 1803, the Lahore army first exhibited their western method of training at Amritsar before Ranjit Singh. With making a meticulous spectacle, Ranjit Singh included cavalry, artillery and infantry into the Lahore army under him.

**Keywords:** Ranjit Singh, Lahore Army, Punjab, Sikhs, British

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Lahore army under Ranjit Singh occupies a vital place in the history of Punjab. Ranjit Singh formed a regular army to promote the Sikh empire in Punjab. With the help of his large, disciplined army, he brought a good number of territories under him.<sup>1</sup> This is to note that Ranjit Singh started his career as a misldar of his father's misl, Sukerchakia. During those days, in the time of his misldari, alike his Sukerchakia misl other misls also kept troops under these. In contemporary Punjab, there were 12 Sikh misls.<sup>2</sup> These misls with the help of their own troops tried to make safeguards against the plundering raid of the foreign foes. Even, the misls strove to extend their territorial limit from the hands of other weak misls with the assistance of their misldari troops. Here, it would not be irrelevant to interpret the term of misl. Misl implies to the Sikh principality in Punjab. There were 12 Sikh misls in Punjab. Of these 12 misls, there were 6 misls in the northernwards and the rest 6 misls were in the southernwards of the Sutlej. The 6 misls situated in the inter tract of the Sutlej and Jumna which were inscribed as the Cis-Sutlej misls.<sup>3</sup> However, the powerful misls kept more troops and the small misls hold less troops under themselves. There were about seventy thousand troops under all of these 12

Sikh misls. Ranjit Singh inherited the possession of his father's misl, Sukerchakia and hold a considerable strength of five thousand troops under him.<sup>4</sup> His mother-in-law Sada Kaur's troops enhanced his soldierly strength to a great extent.<sup>5</sup>

'Gurumata' played a constructive role to consolidate the power of the troops of Ranjit Singh. Here, the word 'Gurumata' may be discussed. Otherwise, the discussion may be an incomplete one. 'Gurumata' is the combination of two terms, one is Guru and other is mata. Guru implies to the teacher and mata means to the wise mentoring of the teacher.<sup>6</sup> So, 'Gurumata' was held at Amritsar to take a wise decision by making an oath on the sacred scripture Granthasaheb by the Sikhs twice a year during the Baisakhee and Dewali.<sup>7</sup> It was arranged an assemblage on account of 'Gurumata' at Amritsar. There his mother-in-law, Sada Kaur turned up along with her troops of Kanhaya misl. It was taken the united opinion to make counter actions against the Afghan soldiers of Zaman Shah at Lahore during their fourth and last invasion.<sup>8</sup> Ranjit Singh got conducive in leading his troops with the cooperation of the troops of his mother-in-law Sada Kaur. It may be mentioned that Sada Kaur played a vital part in assisting Ranjit Singh in the Sikh court at Lahore.<sup>9</sup> Apart from it, she extended her soldierly help with the troops of the Kanhaya misl to Ranjit Singh in raising a strong blow on the Afghan invaders at Lahore. Zaman Shah, the ruler of Kabul continued invading activities for four months at Kabul in 1798.<sup>10</sup> Ranjit Singh moved forward towards ahead to protect the innocent dwellers of Lahore by raising his arms against the Afghan invaders with due courage with the help of small number of troops comprising with about 10 to 12 thousand men.<sup>11</sup>

Guerilla method of fighting was followed by the troops under Ranjit Singh in the beginning of his conquering career. Ranjit Singh pursued Guerilla means of fighting to defeat the enemy troops.<sup>12</sup> The Sikh troops under Ranjit Singh in the initial phase gave emphasis to fight by riding horse. In this context, they followed the Guerilla fighting strategy. Instead of fighting from the front, they attacked the enemy troops from the behind. In this perspective, the Sikh troops followed the method of hit and run (dhaiphut tactics). With the help of this dhaiphut tactics, Ranjit Singh attacked nearly at every night and killed a good number of Afghan soldiers of Zaman Shah at Lahore.<sup>13</sup> After attacking the Afghan invaders at Lahore, Ranjit Singh's troops disappeared into the dark of the night. Because of the fear of dhaiphut war strategy of Ranjit Singh's troops, the Afghan invaders of Zaman Shah did not display their courage to remain in the country side.<sup>14</sup> Rather, they concentrated their eyes to remain at Lahore. But, here at Lahore, Ranjit Singh also continued his Guerilla method of fighting and made great interruption on the looting march of Zaman Shah's Afghan invaders at Lahore by pursuing the dhaiphut war tactics.<sup>15</sup>

'Rakhi' was another important part of the soldierly assistance to the inhabitants of Punjab from the attack of the foreign invaders. Here, the term 'Rakhi' may be explained in order to depict a pen picture of the formation, evolution of the Lahore army under Ranjit Singh. 'Rakhi' refers to the protection tax subscribed by the subjects to the chief of the independencies in gaining safeguards during the invasion of foreign intruders.<sup>16</sup> The common Punjabis provided their protection tax to the Sikh chiefs of the principalities in the hope of the attainment of safety from plundering activities of the invaders.<sup>17</sup> But in reality, it was noticed that the chiefs removed their family members from the plains of Punjab to the hills of Jammu and Kashmir and then they deserted from their confederacies. The chiefs fled from their own territories to the distant place in search of safety before the escaping of their subjects.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, the stand of Ranjit Singh was a rare one. Because, instead of escaping from his Sukerchakia misl, Ranjit Singh kept himself affirmed with due courage with the help of his small band of troops. In this context, he got the guiding inspiration of his mother-in-law Sada Kaur who reminded him to obey the pious duty of extending protection to his subjects who tributed protection tax in the hope of attaining safety during perilous moment of external attack.<sup>19</sup> However, Ranjit Singh got enormous popularity on account of his soldierly help to the citizens of Lahore. The leading citizens of Lahore appreciated the heroic role of Ranjit Singh. At the same time, they blamed the Bhangi rulers of Lahore for their apathy and indifference in making safeguards during the Afghan invasion.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, they made an appeal to Ranjit Singh in assuming the political authority of Lahore in his own hand. Ranjit Singh did not spoil a moment in achieving this golden opportunity. He apprehended the sorrows and sufferings of the citizens of Lahore who gave protection tax (Rakhi) to the Bhangi rulers of Lahore. However, Ranjit Singh marched a conjoint force of 25000 men along with the troops of his mother-in-law Sada Kaur to conquer Lahore.<sup>21</sup> The Bhangi rulers could not prevent the conquering attack of Ranjit Singh and they were compelled to lay down arms before him. This triumph enthroned Ranjit Singh in the monarchical power of Lahore within six months after the retreat of Zaman Shah from Lahore to Kabul.<sup>22</sup> It may be regarded that half brother of Zaman Shah named Mamud revolted at Kabul against Zaman Shah. So, Zaman Shah went back to Kabul.

Afghan khilat of Zaman Shah was dispatched to Ranjit Singh after the assuming of ruling authority of the latter at Lahore. Here, it may be narrated the Afghan Khilat of Zaman Shah to Ranjit Singh meticulously. It refers to the Afghan

presents sent in March, 1800 by Zaman Shah, Amir of Kabul to Ranjit Singh as the mark of reward for the great service accomplished by Ranjit Singh to Zaman Shah.<sup>23</sup> It is supposed that on the way of his hasty returning from Lahore to Kabul, Zaman Shah and his Afghan soldiers lost 12 guns into the deep water of the Chenab (Jhanai) river.<sup>24</sup> This news reached to Ranjit Singh who conducted rescuing work in search of the lost guns of Zaman Shah and he successfully rescued 8 guns. Afterwards, Ranjit Singh gave back these 8 guns to Zaman Shah.<sup>25</sup> This great service of Ranjit Singh highly pleased Zaman Shah. Under this circumstance, Zaman Shah dispatched Afghan Khilat (grant) to Ranjit Singh.<sup>26</sup> It is rumored that this Afghan Khilat attributed legal recognition of Ranjit Singh's accession to the ruling authority at Lahore.<sup>27</sup> In this context, it should not be forgotten that Ranjit was able to occupy Lahore under him with the help of his troops by ousting the Bhangi rulers from there.<sup>28</sup> Gradually he established his sway on the most of the trans-Sutlej misls.<sup>29</sup>

The indomitable ambition of Ranjit Singh to promote the Sikh empire in the entire country southwards of the Sutlej beyond raising his arms against the British haunted him in making a large strong army.<sup>30</sup> It is supposed that Ranjit Singh once observed the western way of parade of the British Indian force at Amritsar. The process of moving the legs unitedly at one time of the British Indian force on the instruction of some simple words brought the prudent notice of Ranjit Singh there.<sup>31</sup> Apart from it, Ranjit Singh made out that the British with the help of their well trained force defeated the indigenous powers of India one after another. Therefore, Ranjit Singh gave importance in introducing western method of fighting in the Lahore army.<sup>32</sup> He sent secretly a few number of Punjabi youths to join into the British Indian force to acquire cognition about the western method of training. This is to note that the Sikhs in the initial phase of the introduction of the western way of training of Ranjit Singh, did not display their curiosity and attention to take this new fighting strategy. Hence, they felt it prestigious for themselves to fight by riding horse. Despite it, the Sikhs were the courageous soldiers on foot.<sup>33</sup> But, they initially did not prefer to fight on foot under the cover of the western training tactics. Ranjit Singh could understand the real importance of the western method of fighting. In 1803, Ranjit Singh introduced the western training strategy in his Lahore army. He engaged the Europeans to train his army in the European way of drill.<sup>34</sup> In order to remove apathy from the minds of his troops, Ranjit Singh arranged to provide rewards to the well performers. In every day, Ranjit Singh remained in the training sessions for 3 to 4 hours for nine months.<sup>35</sup> The western method of training befitted the Lahore army after rigorous training to a certain extent in the Dusserah of 1803.<sup>36</sup> Ranjit Singh rewarded the best performer at the end of the daily training regularly. In this perspective, he did not show relaxation to the performer of sloven uniform and ill training. He imposed punishment by reducing his rank and attributing fine. But in common, Ranjit Singh avoided to follow the strict path of taking harshness. Rather, he encouraged to follow the western method of training by appreciating the well doers with granting rewards of huge land and pension.<sup>37</sup> Ranjit Singh had a fondness of arranging field sports in each year. It may be regarded that it was conducive for him in building up his disciplined army.<sup>38</sup>

Efficiency, eligibility, talents etc. were given emphasis by Ranjit Singh to recruit men in his Lahore army.<sup>39</sup> Biasness based on faith, regionality, nationality was not allowed by him in making his large army. Ranjit Singh did not confine his concentration to engage troops under him only from the Sikh community. But on the basis of virtue and competency, he recruited the men from various beliefs, cultures and countries. This is to note that in the Lahore army under Ranjit Singh, there were the Sikhs, Rajputs, Dogras, Gurkhas, Sandhanwalias, Hindus, Mohommadans etc. Ranjit Singh engaged about 42 Europeans in his Khalsa troops.<sup>40</sup> Among the foreigners, there were the Englishmen, French, Italians, Germans, Americans, Spaniards, Greeks, Russians etc. in the Ranjit Singh's army. Apart from it, there were the Anglo-Indians. Ranjit Singh tried to domesticate the Europeans in Punjab by wedding. He tried to keep them far from taking beef, tobacco.<sup>41</sup> Besides it, he instructed the European officers not to do offence to the Sikh faith. He made aware his European officers to keep their beards. Ranjit Singh reminded his European officers to raise their arms against their cradle land if the circumstance demanded to do so.<sup>42</sup> Ranjit Singh kept news about the promise of his European officers in their service of fighting with the enemy troops. He came to know from three Englishmen at one morning's walk that his European officers would not raise their arms on account of Ranjit Singh in the issue of war with the British. He was informed with these three Englishmen that the European officers under him would not fight against the British and French. They might fight beyond these two powers with the other European powers. This information displeased Ranjit Singh and he assigned the duties of training the Lahore army to the European officers as the drill masters. The European officers were attributed their duties in such manner so that they could not enhance their dominance.<sup>43</sup> They were trained by the Europeans to materialize the ambition of Ranjit Singh to keep an army equivalent to any urgency.<sup>44</sup>

Monthly cash payment system was introduced by Ranjit Singh in his Lahore army by following that system from the British Indian government. But, on account of the insufficient fund of the Lahore treasury it was not possible for Ranjit Singh to pay his troops the salary in every month. Therefore, it fell the due salary in the form of arrears for month after month. As a sequel, there were the arrears of 6 months of the Sikh troops.<sup>45</sup> It may be regarded that they were given their salary for five times in each year. The service tenure of a troop depended upon the bodily fitness. There was no upper age limit of retirement. The retired troop could send his family members in the 30 percent of the entire seats of the troops. The retired troop did not enjoy the facility of pension scheme. In the event of dead or wounded, the family members like wife, mother, son, brother etc. sometimes were granted a sum of allowance named 'Dharmarth' in accordance with the pay rolls.<sup>46</sup> The monthly cash payment system was an innovative one by Ranjit Singh. In order to conduct this system, there was the necessity of the supply of revenues to the Lahore treasury. Beyond it, Ranjit Singh suffered from complicated diseases due to old age. Simultaneously, there continued friendly relations with the British.<sup>47</sup> Despite it, Ranjit Singh strove to modernize his army. It was noticed that sometimes the army were unpaid in less than one year. Once, on account of the discontent of the Gurkha troops with regards to their salary and arrears, Ranjit Singh compelled to take shelter at Govind Garh. During the reign of Ranjit Singh, a foot soldier was paid 7 rupees per month as salary.<sup>48</sup> Ranjit Singh gave emphasis on the integrity and armed brotherhood of the army of the Khalsa.<sup>49</sup>

The configuration of the Lahore army was divided by Ranjit Singh into three units in the assemblage of the Sikh Sardars and army officers during the spring of 1804 at the fortress of Govind Garh. The first unit sustained under the direct command of Ranjit Singh himself, which was prepared to accomplish their duty on brief instruction. In this unit, there was the combination of infantry, cavalry and artillery.<sup>50</sup> There were 13000 men in this unit. In this unit, there were the leading army officers like Hari Singh Nalwa, Hukma Singh Chimini, Desa Singh Majithia. There was Chaudhry Ghase Khan to look after the artillery.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Sheikh Abdullah and Roshan Khan had the command on the infantry, equipped with western training way. The second unit was on the hands of the chiefs who extended army service in exchange of jagirs.<sup>52</sup> In the second unit, lion portion chiefs were of Bhangi family who were engaged in their positions along with their possessions once more after their incorporation into the Sikh empire of Ranjit Singh. These chiefs had the duty to send troops at the battlefield. There were 5000 to 10000 troops under this unit.<sup>53</sup> The third unit was formed with the troops of the independencies like the Kanhayas, Nakkais and a few others who made alliance with Ranjit Singh. In 1804, Ranjit Singh had the strength to lead 31000 troops in the war.<sup>54</sup> Later on, in 1811, there were 4061 men in the regular army of Ranjit Singh. Of whom 2852 were infantry and 1209 were artillery. This strength stood 38242 of whom 29617 were infantry, 4090 were cavalry and 4535 artillery in 1838. There was expensed Rs. 374101 monthly to conduct the regular army under Ranjit Singh.<sup>55</sup> On the eve of the beginning of the first Anglo-Sikh war, there were 70000 regular troops and 40000 irregular troops in the Lahore army of the Sikhs.<sup>56</sup>

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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