



Chaotic Condition of Lahore Darbar after Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Emergence of British Rule in Punjab

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Abstract

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a period of conspiracies started in the Lahore court, which turned out to be very fatal for the Lahore court. Two factions of Dogras and Sandhanwalia formed in the Darbar. Who hatched conspiracies to establish control over the successors of the Maharaja. The weak successors of the Maharaja could not keep any control over them. Due to which many murders took place in the court and the dynasty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh began to end. This research work will throw light upon this dangerous situation of Lahore Darbar in the said period.

Intoduction

In the 18th century the Sikh *misals* are credited with establishing an independent Sikh rule in Punjab after defeating the Afghans. Their number was twelve and they had established twelve small kingdoms all over the Punjab. But after some time, these twelve *misal* chieftains started fighting among themselves. In these circumstances, the young Sardar Ranjit Singh of Sukarchakia *misal* decided to conquer all these *misals* and establish a powerful state. In July, 1799, he defeated the Bhangi chieftains and took control of Lahore, the capital of Punjab, and thereafter conquered Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar and established a vast kingdom in Punjab. By uniting Punjab, Ranjit Singh made it so powerful that the Afghans, who were



oppressing it daily, never turned towards Punjab again and the river of invaders that had been flowing towards Punjab for several hundred years, Ranjit Singh Closed forever. Thus, Ranjit Singh was considered as the greatest ruler of Asia of his time but after his death this glorious reign came to an end within the next 10 years.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died at Lahore on June 27, 1839, after nominating his eldest son Kharak Singh as his successor with Raja Dhian Singh as the Wazir, a position that he had under the Maharaja. Thus, Kharak Singh became the ruler of Lahore at the age of thirty-eight, but he was not able to fulfill the political responsibilities and administrative tasks of the Lahore Darbar. Even though Maharaja Ranjit Singh had sent him on many campaigns, still he could not become a good commander or a good administrator. Soon he came under the influence some flatterers. It was under his influence that all the decisions related to the state administration started to be taken and the focus turned against Dhian Singh. Dhian Singh was able administrator of the Lahore Darbar, but Kharak Singh did not trust him and Maharaja Kharak Singh assigned the ministerial work to Chet Singh Bajwa. Chet Singh Bajwa was a very close relative of Kharak Singh's brother-in-law Mangal Singh and through Mangal Singh he had access to Kharak Singh. Kharak Singh was so impressed by Chet Singh that he started taking Chet Singh's advice in every matter. Dhian Singh did not like this influence of Chet Singh because Dhian Singh was gradually replacing him. Chet Singh brought General Ventura to his side. Ventura did not like Dhian Singh. Chet Singh sent Kharak Singh and stopped Dhian Singh and Hira Singh from freely coming to the Royal Palace, which infuriated Dhian Singh. Raja Dhian Singh and other Dogra chieftains were not only against Chet Singh, but also against Kharak Singh. Chet Singh started to commit atrocities to eliminate Raja Dhian Singh. Dhian Singh defames Kharak Singh and Chet Singh by saying that Chet Singh is a treacherous man and that he is in league with the British and with his advice Kharak Singh is ready to accept the submission of the British and give the British government 6 annas out of the total revenue. These were fabricated stories and were fabricated to incite people against Kharak Singh and Chet Singh. In this way, Dhyan Singh, Kharak Singh and his advisers wanted to bring them down in the eyes of the people by accusing them of being traitors. In September 1839 CE. Naunihal Singh, the only son of Maharaja Kharak Singh, came back to Lahore from Peshawar. Raja Dhyan Singh had a close



relationship with Naunihal Singh. Naunihal Singh requested his father Kharak Singh to remove Chet Singh from his post. But the Maharaja did not pay attention to his words. Naunihal Singh failed to remove Chet Singh from the post because Kharak Singh did not want to remove him under any circumstances. Naunihal Singh also tried to remove Chet Singh through Raja Hira Singh but he did not succeed. When Kharak Singh wanted to give Naunihal Singh a Jagir of ten or twelve lakh rupees annually on the condition that he does not oppose Chet Singh, Naunihal Singh said, he did not need a Jagir, he thought only of the state's welfare. Raja Dhyan Singh should be allowed to live but Chet Singh's interference in state affairs is very unreasonable. But these things had no effect on Kharak Singh. Chet Singh had openly started saying that he would get Dhyan Singh killed. But before it could reach any good end, Dhyan Singh planned to kill Chet Singh and also decided that all the work of the state should be handed over from Kharak Singh to Naunihal Singh.

Thus, Raja Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh, Suchet Singh and Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh and many more Sardars together entered the bedroom of Kharak Singh and killed Chet Singh in his presence. After this act of violence, Kharak Singh shut himself up, and though he occasionally attended the Darbar, he never forgot the insult.

Now Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh took the management of the state in his own hands and appointed Raja Dhian Singh as his Prime Minister. Just for a year or so, their administration was successful. Unrest in the Hazara region was put down by Sardar Chattar Singh Atariwala, the governor of Kashmir and Multan, Colonel Mihan Singh and Diwan Sawan Mal, were called to Lahore to pay up the arrears; expeditions sent to Skardu, Mandi and Kullu were successful, and the of the British officers like Mac-Naughten to favor the fugitive Shah Shuja at the cost of Maharaja Kharak Singh in the Peshawar region were failed.

Maharaja Kharak Singh died on 4th November, 1840. On returning from the obsequies of his father Naunihal Singh, was killed by a stone falling on his head from one of the gateways of Lahore, while passing under it in his howdah. After the death of Kanwar Naunihal Singh, Kanwar Sher Singh, the second son of Ranjit Singh, was the next choice for the Throne of Lahore. But Naunihal Singh's mother Chand Kaur staked a claim of her own say that till the Kanwar's pregnant wife delivered a child, he should be accepted as a ruler. Sher Singh retired to Batala and Dhian Singh went to Jammu. The administration of the state under Chand Kaur



suffered an immense setback. In her helplessness Rani Chand Kaur sent urgent messages to Dhian Singh to come to Lahore, but he did not pay any heed to it. Rather he asked Sher Singh to proceed to Lahore at the head of an army to put an end to the Rani's weak rule. Sher Singh entered the Lahore fort and was recognized as Maharaja and Dhian Singh as Prime Minister.

When Sher Singh ascended the throne on January 20, 1841, all the chiefs except the Sandhanwalias made their obeisance to him. The Sandhanwalias were afraid of being penalized because of their opposition to Sher Singh. The new ruler had difficulties from the rank and file of the army. In order to seek their support, the Maharaja had promised to raise their salaries. But there was not enough money in the treasury to satisfy the soldiers. Sher Singh and Dhian Singh had to make strenuous efforts to bring about normalcy. Rani Chand Kaur was first poisoned and then battered with stones on June 9, 1842. Undoubtedly, Sher Singh and Dhian Singh were party to this heinous crime. The Sandhanwalia Sardars murdered Sher Singh, his son Kanwar Partab Singh and Dhian Singh on the same day September 15, 1843. Punjab was conquered by the British in 1849 and became a province of British India. The Sikh Empire had been defeated. The British had annexed Punjab after defeating the Sikhs in the Second Anglo-Sikh War and finally in 1849, Punjab came under the control of British. It was in the year 1858, when under the terms of the Queen's Proclamation issued by Queen Victoria, the Punjab, along with the rest of British India, came under the direct rule of the British Crown.

Conclusion:

We have seen that during these three years from 1839 to 1842, the Lahore Darbar remained a hotbed of conspiracies. Senior ministers and chieftains were involved in these conspiracies. No one in the Lahore court seemed to be able to control the whole situation. Due to which this magnificent empire began to decline and in 1849 the British defeated the Sikhs and annexed Punjab to British India.



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