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**SOME ASPECTS OF THE SIKH STRUGGLE AGAINST
THE INVASION OF AHMAD SHAH ABDALI (1764-1765)
AS REFLECTED IN QAZI NUR MUHAMMAD'S
JANG NAMA**

Qazi Nur Muhammad¹ in the version of Jang Nama² did not express in words the total strengths of the Sikh armed forces. During the clash of the armed forces of the Sikhs and the Afghans in the form of guerrilla warfare as well as pitched battles fought at various days and at different places, it was difficult for him to notice and calculate the accurate and correct strength of the forces of the enemy. From the beginning of the campaign when Ahmad Shah Abdali crossed the river Ravi until his last days in the Bist Doab, he was inevitably contend with the rising power of the Sikh Sardars to destroy them completely. But all his endeavours had failed and he, in disappointment, left the campaign mid way and started his home journey.

Similarly, the Qazi did not provide any concrete information regarding the total number of the Sikh Sardars in terms of arithmetical value. Being an alien in the Punjab, he was not capable to recognize many of the Sikh Sardars. In spite of this he recorded pieces of information with regard to few Sikh Sardars i. e. Charhat Singh Sukerchakia,³ Jhanda Singh Bhangi,⁴ Jassa Singh Ahluwalia,⁵ Jassa Singh Ramgharia,⁶ Jai Singh Kanhiya,⁷ Hari Singh, Gulab Singh,⁸ Gujjar Singh⁹ and Lehna Singh Bhangi.¹⁰

Qazi Nur Muhammad categorized the armies of the Sikhs into two different sections. The soldiers of the first category were martial, fearless and very brave but they were enthusiastically inclined towards Sikh religion and however, in a critical situation, sacrificed their lives in the interest of the Chak Guru (Amritsar). They did not paid serious attention to the consequences. Whenever Ahmad Shah Abdali led campaign in order to desecrate the temple at Chak Guru, the contingents of the Sikh religious devotees obstructed the path of the enemy and fought bravely for the defense of their religious house. For the protection of the Chak Guru, a small proportion of the Sikh soldiers laid their lives against the onslaught of the enemy.¹¹

The second group of the Sikh Sardars wanted to establish their own political hegemony in the Punjab. They were fighting for a cause to uproot and eradicate the foreign Afghan rule. They vigorously fought against the successive invasions of

Ahmad Shah Abdali. When Ahmad Shah Abdali was returned to Afghanistan the Sikhs occupied all the important towns and cities after dislodging the administrators or commanders who were deputed to serve in the capacity of maintaining law and order and collection of revenue from the farmers. The number of Sikhs who were struggling for political control and land was much larger than the Sikh religious soldiers. They contend the warm wave of Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions with traditional weapons like swords, 12 spears, 13 muskets, 14 burning torches, 15 axes 16 and bows and arrows. 17 The available facts of Qazi Nur Muhammad did not indicated whether they used heavy guns (rehklas) or not against the soldiers of the Shah.

Regarding physical structure, the Sikh Sardars were strong, healthy as well as bearing solid bodies. In the realm of warfare they were well disciplined and dexterous. They attacked the forces of the enemy with alacrity, abruptly and collectively with full force alongwith lauding and shouting slogans. 18 At this moment Qazi Nur Muhammad does not record the words of their slogans but he has praised enthusiastically their intrepidity and adroitness in the use of weapons. 19 In this connection it is interesting to note that all the Sikh Sardars saved and rescued themselves from the dangerous invasion of the Shah as there is not even a single name of Sikh army Sardar who was killed in this war. On the other hand, the Baluch troops suffered large scale harm and Qazi Nur Muhammad has given a lengthy detail

of the Baluch soldiers who were killed in this war.

In this expedition of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Sikhs confronted desperately against the Afghan invaders.²⁰ In order to check the advance movements of the Shah they practised guerrilla tactics and sometimes blocked the way.²¹ In addition to, they ascertained familiarity regarding the abilities and capabilities of Afghan army chiefs and accordingly, took their positions to strike them with more power and strength.²²

The invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali aimed at suppressing the rising power of the Sikhs had failed desperately. After realizing the pros and cons of the situation with regard to the affiliation of the Sikhs with the gentry and peasantry, the commanders of the Shah suggested him:

Jats and Marathas have abundance of troops
and all of them are exemplary.

Arrange from them armies and
leave on Sikhs to pull out their roots.

Hare of each land is astute but

the dog of the same country can hold it certainly.²³

War Strategy of the Sikhs

When Ahmad Shah Abdali alongwith his troops traversed and ford the rivers Sindh and Chenab, the Sikhs did not obstructed his way and after analyzing the whole situation, abandoned all their possessions such as Multan and Rohtas.

They united themselves and launched a comprehensive plan of attack after the armies of the Shah crossed the river Ravi and entered the city of Lahore in the Bari Doab.²⁴ The Sikhs were capable to harm Ahmad Shah Abdali to the highest possible amount by blocking his way when he was returning to his own country. As a matter of fact, they persistently wanted to eliminate the menace of the successive Ahmad Shah Abdali's foreign invasions which disturbed and break down the political, economic, social, religious and cultural structure of the Punjab.

The secondary strategy of the Sikhs was to run away abruptly and be pursued by the forces of the enemy. In this context, the forces of the enemy was separated from the main part of the army and the Sikhs, in turn, returned and exploiting the situation by launching a massive surprising onslaught on the enemy. In this connection, the Sikhs encircled the enemy.

By this dangerous strategy, they propelled with force to throw down Nasir Khan from his horse and violently tried to kill him. But Nasir Khan hardly saved his life with the fresh arrival of reinforcement. In this skirmish his horse and his one soldier was killed²⁵ while the other injured. Nasir Khan's attendant was also killed by the Sikhs.²⁶ Besides, the armies of the Shah were struggling against the scorching summer heat of the plains of the Punjab.²⁷ The Sikhs had made adjustment to these harsh conditions very effectively. They acquainted the fact that the unpleasant weather conditions proved harmful to the swift

movements of the troops of Ahmad Shah Abdali and as a result, effected the progress of the campaign.

Ahmad Shah Abdali's Endeavour against the Sikhs (November 1764):

Ahmad Shah Abdali deputed Guhram Khan of Magsi clan to take charge of the vanguard of the Baluch armies, who, in turn, was assisted by Ahmad Khan of Balidi clan and his son. In pitched battle Ahmad Khan and his son were mercilessly killed by the Sikhs.²⁸ In addition to, four dexterous Baluch soldiers²⁹ and four soldiers from the Lasharis and Dinari clans³⁰ were killed. Twelve more soldiers from the Baluch army were killed. A large number of Sikh soldiers were also died.³¹ The Sikhs separated Mir Abdul Nabi of Risanis clan from rest of the main force and injured him seriously.³²

Charhat Singh Sukerchakia came in advance of Nasir Khan to contest but perceiving a large number of troops under the command of Nasir Khan he retreated his steps and merged into the Sikh troops quickly. Nasir Khan pursued in order to overtake him. But, for the time being, his horse was shot and he fell down. In a critical situation, Nasir Khan saved his life with difficulty.³³ Bahadur from Salusy clan, Mazaar Muhammad Siani, Jalani from Mulazai clan and Mir Jalal of Lehri clan were killed fighting for the safety of Nasir Khan in the battle.³⁴ Mir Barkhi and Fatuhi Darogha fought against the Sikhs remarkably.³⁵ During the night fall the battle came to an end and both sides retreated

in the different directions.³⁶

The second pitched battle between the Sikhs and the Afghans took place at Chak Guru. The Afghan and Baluch armies under the command of Ahmad Shah Abdali entered the holy precincts of Chak Guru with the intention of destroying the Sikh power completely. Qazi Nur Muhammad pointed out that there were merely 30 Sikhs for the defense of the Chak Guru. They wanted to defend and protect the foundations of their religion and tried desperately to prevent the enemy to ravage and desecrate their pilgrimage centre. Owing to their small number they did not stand against the warm wave of Abdali's attack and consequently lost their lives.³⁷

The third battle fought between the Sikhs and Ahmad Shah Abdali in the Batala region. From the version of Qazi Nur Muhammad it appears that Sayyid Nur Shah,³⁸ Ghulam Hussain of Bangzai Clan,³⁹ Muhammad Hussain,⁴⁰ Barkhi Qambrani⁴¹ and Fatuhi Darogha⁴² fought with courage and bravery and played a remarkable role. Soloman was killed in the battle.⁴³ Nasir Khan pursued a few fugitive Sikh soldiers.⁴⁴ Owing to sun set the battle had ceased. It appears that this battle remained indecisive. In a sudden and swift movement Ahmad Shah Abdali together with his forces forded the river Beas and entered in the region of Bist Doab.⁴⁵ On the way Nasir Khan seen a few Sikh soldiers into the riverains but neither the Baluch troops nor the Sikh soldiers initiated fight.⁴⁶

After appointing Ala Singh as the chief administrator of Sirhind, Ahmad Shah Abdali alongwith his personal forces forded the river Sutlej and stayed into the riverains.⁴⁷ Secret information arrived regarding assemblage of a large number of Sikh troops at Chak Guru.⁴⁸ He swiftly forded the river Sutlej and entered again into Bist Doab. During his march Sikh armies repeatedly harassed, attacked⁴⁹ and blocked his way:

They (the Sikhs) blocked the route of the royal armies, the world astonished at their impertinence.⁵⁰

With a view to get rid of Ahmad Shah Abdali completely the Sikh Sardars devised a strategy to separate the Shah from Jahan Khan (commanding right wing)⁵¹ and Nasir Khan (commanding left wing).⁵² For this purpose the Sikhs also organized themselves in a regular battle array. In the centre was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was fearlessly standing like a mountain and close by him was the other Jassa Singh Ramgarhia who looked like a lion in stature.⁵³ There were many other associates with Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. On his right side were Charhat Singh Sukerchakia, Jhanda Singh Bhangi, Lehna Singh and Jai Singh Kanhiya⁵⁴ and on the left side were Ram Das, Hari Singh Bhangi, Gulab Singh and Gujjar Singh.⁵⁵ Besides, the Sikh Sardars wanted to exploit the deteriorating conditions of the Afghan soldiers who were prone to suffer from the scorching summer heat and consequently tired⁵⁶ during their long stay in the Punjab.

From the right wing a small proportion of the Sikh soldiers abruptly ran away and Jahan Khan and his soldiers ran to pursue them. As a result, however, Jahan Khan's side became totally unoccupied. Meanwhile, the fugitive Sikh soldiers returned to their previous positions again.

There started a firing of guns from both sides. Ahmad Shah Abdali called at Nasir Khan and ordered him to take the command of the unoccupied side of Jahan Khan where he previously deputed as the commander of the right wing.⁵⁸

During the battle, Sayyid Nur Shah⁵⁹ was injured while Abdur Rehman of Harooni⁶⁰ clan, Mir Khan Dinari⁶¹ and Mithar Khan⁶² were killed. In spite of the instruction of the Shah not to follow the fugitive Sikh soldiers, Nasir Khan proceeded further to pursue the fugitive Sikh soldiers. As a consequent, he was separated from the main part of the army and encircled by the Sikhs.⁶³ Unguarded on both sides especially at the right and left Ahmad Shah Abdali remained exclusive in the centre to face the Sikh troops.

Regarding bloodshed, according to Qazi Nur Muhammad, Bakhtiar Khan Patti and his soldiers killed 10 Sikh soldiers; the Afghan armies killed 500 Sikhs and Baluch soldiers killed 124 soldiers from the Sikh armies in this battle.⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that Qazi Nur Muhammad does not give any concrete or solid information with regard to the killings on the side of the Afghan soldiers.

The battle ceased after the Namaz of night.⁶⁵ On the next day, battle restarted early at the sunrise. The Sikhs changed their positions contrary to the previous day.⁶⁶ Similarly, the battle between the Sikhs and Ahmad Shah Abdali constantly continued for seven days. Ahmad Shah Abdali was unable to suppress the power and influence of the Sikhs, and in disappointment, decided to start retreating journey to Kabul and on the seventh day he forded the river Beas. Ahmad Shah Abdali made no halt even at Lahore. He swiftly and quickly forded the river Ravi on the same day as the Sikhs repeatedly harassed the rear of his army. This phenomenon of repeated harassment to the forces of Ahmad Shah Abdali continued even to the banks of the river Chenab where most of his soldiers and military stores were drowned away.⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that Ahmad Shah Abdali was still in the Punjab when, in 1765, three Bhangi Sikh Sardars namely Gujjar Singh, Lehna Singh and Sobha Singh occupied the provincial capital Lahore and parcelled out among themselves and struck a coin to mark their sovereign status. Qazi Nur Muhammad testifies that the extension of the Sikh power was totally and permanently established in the various parts of the Punjab and their influence had extended upto Baluchistan. Ahmad Shah Abdali offered to Mir Nasir Khan and other Baluch chiefs the territories of the Chenab, Jhang, Multan and the Deras (Ghazi Khan and Ismail Khan) as reward for their services. But such was the fear of the Sikhs instilled in their minds that all of

them refused to accept the offer. Apparently for fear of their inability to hold them against the rising power of the Sikhs.

In this connection, however, the account of Qazi Nur Muhammad is very significant and useful source to ascertain the various aspects pertaining to the struggle of the Sikh Sardars against the invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali and his vassal chief Mir Nasir Khan Baluch in the process to understand the decline of political power of Ahmad Shah Abdali and rise of the Sikh power in the Punjab during the late eighteenth century.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Qazi Nur Muhammad as it is depicted from his Jang Namah was a native of Gunjaba in Baluchistan state (Pakistan). His ancestors had come to Baluchistan in the earlier part of eight century, when Muhammad Bin Qasim defeated the Hindu ruler of Sindh, Dahir. They, however, settled permanently there. They served as Qazis and held the post as hereditary prerogative under the local administration of the province. Qazi Nur Muhammad studied Persian literature, Arabic classics, Islamic principles and history and acquired a perfect mastery in all these branches of knowledge. He was appointed the Qazi of Gunjaba by the then Mir of Kalat, Abdullah Khan. After the death of Mir Abdullah Khan, Qazi Nur Muhammad came into contact with the succeeding Mir Nasir Khan, son of Abdullah Khan. Nasir Khan made Gunjaba his winter capital. In 1764 A.D. the Qazi accompanied his patron, Mir Nasir Khan, to assist Ahmad Shah Abdali when he invaded India with a view to suppress the rising power of the Sikhs in the Punjab. After the completion of expedition the Qazi compiled the whole information of war events in the form of Jang Namah and completed it in 1178 A.H. / 1765 A.D. The Jang Namah is divided into 55

chapters.

From the work of Qazi Nur Muhammad we find that he got married and had a son whose marriage he wanted to celebrate according to the prevailing expensive and pompous customs. The Jang Namah reveals that he experienced a long life and died in an advanced age: For detailed study see Qazi Nur Muhammad, Jang Namah (Persian text), Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1939, Chapter 07 (Lines 16-43); Chapter 10 (Line 124); Chapter 54 (Lines 109-110); Chapter 55 (Lines 62-63, 67).

2. Jang Namah is the only detailed account of the seventh invasion on the Punjab by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1764-1765. Most of the historians on the Durrani dynasty have either omitted this invasion altogether or have confused it with that of the year 1767. This work adds a new dimension of the history of Ahmad Shah Abdali and that of the Punjab.

3. Qazi Nur Muhammad, Jang Namah (Persian text), Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1939, Chapter 36 (Line 132); Chapter 42 (Line 13); Chapter 23 (Line 146).

4. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 124).

5. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 121).

6. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 120).

7. Ibid., Chapter 42 (Line 02); Chapter 36 (Line 124).

8. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 125).

9. Loc.cit.

10. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 124).

11. Ibid., Chapter 25 (Lines 50-55).

12. Ibid., Chapter 41 (Line 10).

13. Loc.cit.

14. Ibid., Chapter 41 (Lines 20, 23, 25).

15. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 18).

16. Ibid., Chapter 41 (Line 16).

17. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 18); Chapter 41 (Lines 14-15).

18. Ibid., Chapter 41 (Line 17); Chapter 41 (Line 21); Chapter 28 (Line 01).
19. Ibid., Chapter 41 (Lines 23-24).
20. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Line 04); Chapter 28 (Line 18); Chapter 36 (Line 05); Chapter 43 (Line 05).
21. Ibid., Chapter 43 (Line 05); Chapter 36 (Line 12).
22. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Line 46); Chapter 36 (Lines 120-125).
23. Ibid., Chapter 33 (Lines 36-38).
24. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Line 47).
25. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 152-180); Chapter 37 (Line 74) Chapter 36 (Line 289).
26. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Lines 55-56).
27. Ibid., Chapter 33 (Lines 43-47).
28. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 56-57, 60-78).
29. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 79-80).
30. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Line 81).
31. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 82-83).
32. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 141, 144, 146).
33. Ibid., Chapter 23 (Lines 147-152, 154-155).
34. Ibid., Chapter 24 (Lines 13, 35, 43, 45, 47, 51, 81, 89).
35. Ibid., Chapter 24 (Lines 93-108).
36. Ibid., Chapter 24 (Line 23).
37. Ibid., Chapter 25 (Lines 49-50). These thirty Sikhs who fearlessly challenged an army of thirty thousand Afghans and Baluchs and so devotedly sacrificed themselves for the defense and protection of their religion belonged to the contingent of the Shahid Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh of village Leehl, near Khem Karan, in the district of Tarn Taran (Punjab). This event took place on Saturday 03 Jumadi-us-Sani 1178 A.H. / A.D. 01 December, 1764.
38. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Lines 31-32).
39. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Lines 33-39).

40. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 40).
41. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 41).
42. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 44).
43. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Lines 50-56).
44. Ibid., Chapter 28 (Line 65).
45. Ibid., Chapter 29 (Lines 06-11).
46. Ibid., Chapter 29 (Lines 18-24).
47. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 01-04).
48. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 05).
49. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 10-13).
50. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 12).
51. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Line 151).
52. Ibid., Chapter 37 (Lines 64-70).
53. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 120-122).
54. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 123-124).
55. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 125-126).
56. Ibid., Chapter 33 (Line 47).
57. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 155-156).
58. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 148-153).
59. Ibid., Chapter 36 (Lines 290-296).
60. Ibid., Chapter 37 (Lines 33-39).
61. Ibid., Chapter 37 (Lines 41-45).
62. Ibid., Chapter 37 (Lines 46-51).
63. Ibid., Chapter 37 (Lines 64-70); Chapter 36 (Lines 162-170).
64. Ibid., Chapter 40 (Lines 27-29).
65. Ibid., Chapter 39 (Line 36); Chapter 37 (Line 52).
66. Ibid., Chapter 43 (Lines 05-10).
67. Ibid., Chapter 45 (Lines 38-39, 41-42); Chapter 46 (Lines 65-70).