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Sardar Sham Singh Atari

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## SARDAR SHAM SINGH ATÂRÎ WÂLÂ

Sardar Sham Singh is a glittering diamond of Sikh history. He is shining like a pole star in the sky of Sikh *Panth* for his deeds of valour shown during various campaigns in the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and thereafter in the battle of Sabhraon. The ancestors of S. Sham Singh belonged to Jaisalmer. Initially they settled in the villages of Phool kings and thereafter in 1735 some of their men came and settled down in village Kaonke near Jagraon. A member of their family named Gauhar Singh and some other Singhs came to *Majha* during the period of the *misl*s and founded another village/town by the name of Kaonke. Then on the direction of some ascetics, Sardar Gauhar Singh founded another village on a mound of ruins and constructed a high *Atârî* (mansion). Because of this mansion, the village became known as *Atârî*. All Sikhs residing there were known as Atariwala Sikhs. The elders of Sardar Sham Singh took up jobs in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and all of them achieved high status. His father S. Nihal Singh was an employee of S. Sahib Singh Bhangi.

In 1795 and 1798, Afghans fought a couple of battles with S. Sahib Singh to have Gujarat vacated. In the first battle, the Afghan army was led by Bahadur Khan while in the second, the Afghan forces were under the command of Ahmad Shah Shahanchi and Bahadur Khan. Afghans fought bravely in both battles, but they were defeated. Ahmad Shah Shahanchi was killed. S. Nihal Singh showed much valour in these battles. Sometimes later, he left the service of S. Sahib Singh Bhangi and joined Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a commander of a contingent. He took part in all

big battles. He showed exemplary valour during the battles of Kasur and Multan.

S. Sham Singh had joined the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when S. Nihal Singh was still in service. His father not only trained S. Sham Singh in horse riding, archery and use of other weapons of war but made him adept in these disciplines.

When S. Sham Singh got the opportunity of taking up the job and responsibility of his father, Maharaja Sahib was amazed to see his deeds of valour and felt assured that the youngman will fulfil the void created by the departure of his father. Even in the life time of S. Nihal Singh, his son Sham Singh had received a diamond studded aigrette from Maharaja Sahib.

S. Sham Singh also became the heir of Sukho *Jagir* worth 50,000 rupees annually.

The first battle that he took part in after the death of his father was fought in 1818 where he showed much courage and bravery. In this battle of Multan, the great gun of Bhangis was sent from Amritsar to the battlefield of Multan. This gun was capable of firing a ball of one mound (about 40 kgs). The battle was fierce. Sikhs had overcome the city but were stuck on the fort. About 20,000 Ghazis were fighting on the side of Nawab Muzzafar Khan. Maharaja Ranjit Singh left his palace and came into the field with a pledge that he will go back into the palace after the Sikhs have over-run the fort. The gallant deeds of the Sikhs have been described aptly by Munshi Ghulam Jilani in 'Jangnama Multan'.

“I was roaming in the Sikh Camp as a spy of Nawab in the disguise of a Sikh. On 02 Jan 1818 when I set out on my duty of gathering information, I heard some noise coming from one side. When I reached the place where the noise was coming from, I saw 12-13 Sikhs arguing and each one of them was saying—“I shall be the first.” No ! I shall be the first. When I reached near, I found that a wheel of the Bhangi Gun had broken. This gun could only break the wall of the fort. The singhs were supporting the gun axle on their shoulder before it could be fired. It was sure death. For this brave act of the Singhs, the gun kept firing the balls at the fort and it succeeded in breaching the wall. As soon as the breach occurred, the contingent led by Akali Phoola Singh charged into the fort through the breach. They took the enemy in hand to hand fight.”

Nawab Muzzafar Khan died along with his two sons. They fought bravely. Sardar Sham Singh fought bravely. He received a deep wound of sword on his shoulder. The Maharaja Sahib was mighty pleased hearing the deeds of gallantry of S. Sham Singh. It impressed him much.

By the common strategy of S. Hari Singh Nalwa and S. Sham Singh, the *Khalsa* army won the battle of ‘Sapahia’ against the Afghans. It placed the entire Kashmir under the *Khalsa* rule. As a mark of celebration of this historic victory, every house in both Amritsar and Lahore were lit up every night for three days. S. Sham Singh received a very expensive and beautiful dress from Maharaja Sahib.

In the battle of Balakot that was fought between *Jehadis* of Sayad Ahmad Breilvi and *Khalsa* Army, some differences developed between Kanwar Sher Singh and S. Sham Singh Atari. However Kanwar Sher Singh accepted the deft advice of S. Sham Singh that brought a decisive victory for the Sikhs. The Sikhs found the dead body of Sayad Ahmad

Bareilvi who was buried with full military honour. Kanwar Sher Singh, S. Jai Singh and S. Sham Singh were recipients of Persian gun, gold coins and a flag of *Jehadis* each. The battle also raised the honour of S. Sham Singh as a brave, fearless soldier and a strategist.

The victory of Bannu in 1834, where the horse of S. Sham Singh was also killed, established him a wise and determined commander.

S. Sham Singh proposed to solemnise the marriage of his daughter Nanaki with Kanwar Naunihal Singh son of Kanwar Kharak Singh and grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Ji. It was accepted by the Maharaja. In 1835, they were betrothed and the marriage was solemnised in 1837 with great pomp and show. Maharaja Sahib gave out much in charity. He bestowed military honours and titles to his brave commanders. Now that he had become a close relation of Maharaja, Sham Singh Atârî now received a place of honour in the royal court.

In 1838, a treaty took place between British rulers, Shah Shujah and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was meant to make Shah Shujah the king of Kabul. And to achieve this mission, some army was sent from Lahore under the leadership of Kanwar Naunihal Singh and S. Sham Singh Atari.

After the demise of Maharaja Sahib, Maharaja Sher Singh appointed S. Sham Singh to ensure safe passage of Shah Shujah and Captain George Proudfoot from Punjab to Afghanistan. The task was done with the assistance of Sikh army. S. Sham Singh accomplished the task despite many provocations of Captain George Proudfoot who was

trying to spoil the relationship between East India Company and the *Khalsa Raj*. This caravan of Shah Shujah consisted of about 600 women, some servants and their valuables. Captain Proudfoot was deputed to provide safety cover for it. This caravan commenced from Ludhiana and had to reach Kabul.

When on 15th September 1943, Maharaja Sher Singh and Prime Minister Dhian Singh were murdered at the hands of Sardar Lehna Singh and Sardar Ajit Singh Sandhawalia and young Dalip Singh was crowned as king, Raja Hira Singh Dogra himself became Prime Minister. He was dreaming of becoming king of the Punjab since long. He then started finishing his enemies one by one. First of all, he had his uncle Suchet Singh killed at the hands of the army. He gave a raise in the wages of the soldiers and won over many officials by making them presents of gold necklaces and diamonds. He had Baba Bir Singh of Naurangabad blown into pieces by the Sikh soldiers. When these soldiers returned after killing Baba Bir Singh, they were ridiculed by the people but Raja Hira Singh rewarded them and won them over. During this time, S. Sham Singh had gone to Atârî in connection with the death of his son.

When he learnt such dastardly acts of the soldiers, he cursed them and said, **“If you needed money, you could have asked me. Why have you committed such a heinous crime of killing Baba Bir Singh? You should have been firm in your religions rather than falling in the trap of Dogras and do acts which will weaken the Sikh Raj.”** S. Sham Singh was much distressed at the action of Raja Hira Singh. 12th December 1944 proved ill

omened for Raja Hira Singh. Rani Jinda took Maharaja Dalip Singh to the army and said, **“Khalsa Ji ! if Raja Dalip Singh is the king of Punjab, then he will rule according to my, my brothers and other Sikh leader’s counsel. And if Raja Hira Singh is the king for all practical purposes, then my child Dalip Singh will give up the kingship today.”**

The soldiers replied that their emperor was Raja Dalip Singh only. On the loud proclamations of ‘Sat Sri Akal’, all of them confirmed the decision.

When Raja Hira Singh came to know of such strong support of the Sikh army in favour of Rani Jinda, he along with Pandit Jallah, his principle counsellor ran away towards Jammu. They were on elephants and horses. He had already placed an army of 3000 loyal Dogra soldiers on road to Jammu. Very soon, they reached their camp and felt safe since they had taken much of the treasure from Lahore *darbar*.

When S. Sham Singh learnt about the fleeing of Raja Hira Singh and Pandit Jallah along with much of the royal treasure, he took some Sikh soldiers and persued the real enemies of *Sikh Raj*. The Dogras could not face the Sikh soldiers. Hira Singh threw the stolen treasures towards the soldiers and tried to save his life, but they could not bear the wrath of the Sikh soldiers and both of them were put to sword. At last the heart felt desire of S. Sham Singh was fulfilled with the death of those who had been the hidden enemies of *Sikh Raj*. The Sikh army managed to bring back the treasure of the Lahore *darbar*. Those Dogras who had come from Jammu to provide help to Raja Hira Singh ran

away and many fell to the sword of Sikhs in their effort of saving Raja Hira Singh.

Articles worth 20 lakhs had been recovered from the house of Raja Hira Singh. All his property was confiscated.

S. Sham Singh was also assigned the task of bringing Raja Gulab Singh to books. It was during the times of Raja Hira Singh that Raja Gulab Singh had taken control of the 'Jagir' of his brother Suchet Singh after his demise that in fact should have gone back to Lahore darbar. During his tenure as Chief Minister, Hira Singh had syphoned out much wealth from Lahore darbar to Jammu with the help of his brother Mian Jawahar Singh. Its primary aim was to raise a Dogra army that would help take over Lahore kingdom ultimately. If not, they should be able to provide protection and safety to the Dogra leaders like Hira Singh and Pandit Jallah.

The Lahore darbar now asked Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu that—(1) They should return the Jagir of Suchet Singh to the Lahore darbar. (2) Pay back the sum due from Jammu since the days of Hira Singh (3) Return all assets of Hira Singh to Lahore darbar.

Gulab Singh did not accept any condition and got ready to face the might of Lahore. After much struggle, S. Sham Singh Atârî, S. Lal Singh, S. Sewa Singh Majithia managed to present Raja Gulab Singh before Lahore darbar.

Raja Gulab Singh accepted to pay a sum of rupees sixty eight lakhs in cash to the Lahore darbar. He also returned the Jagirs of Suchet Singh and Hira Singh. Raja Gulab Singh was made to stay at Lahore for next four months in

order to settle all the issues. He was then permitted to go back to Jammu. During the campaign of Sikh army against Jammu, Raja Gulab Singh sought help from the Britishers through George Proudfoot but could not succeed.

Normally, S. Sham Singh kept himself away from the political problems of Lahore darbar. He took up arms against Dogras because they were bent upon destroying *Khalsa Raj* after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and establishing Dogra Raj. On the contrary, S. Sham Singh wanted the prosperity of *Sikh Raj*.

Not only Dogras, even Britishers were bent upon bringing Punjab under their regime. They used the traitor Dogras to the maximum. The efforts of disloyal Gulab Singh, Teja Singh and Lal Singh finally brought the *Sikh Raj* under the control of the British rule. They instigated the Britishers to occupy Punjab and disclosed many secrets of the Sikh army to them. As a result, Britishers crossed river Satluj and took over those areas which were part of Sikh regime but no army was kept there according to the treaty of 1809.

The Sikh army was much angry at this act of the Britishers. They crossed river Satluj to take back their territory and this commenced the sequence of battles between the two. The Sikhs fought gallantly in every battle. Every time they were near victory, the Dogras would hatch a conspiracy with Britishers and turn sure victory into a defeat.

The following battles fought between Sikhs and Britishers are famous :

- (a) Battle of Mudaki – 18th and 19th December 1845.
- (b) Battle of Pheru Shah – 21st and 22nd December 1845.
- (c) Battle of Badowal – 6th January 1846.
- (d) Battle of Aliwal – 28th January 1846.
- (e) Battle of Sabhraon – 10th February 1846.

The Sikhs fought bravely but how could they have won when their own commanders (Lal Singh and Teja Singh) had conspired with the enemy ensuring their defeat. This is unimaginable.

Before the commencement of the battles with Sikhs, S. Sham Singh had gone to village Kakrhala (District Ludhiana) to attend the marriage ceremony of his son Sardar Kahn Singh. He had left the service at Lahore and had come to Atârî. He was very much distressed to see the events and developments those had taken place after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Finding himself helpless against the indisciplined army and the ruling officials, he resigned and came back home.

As soon as S. Sham Singh heard the news of Sikh army crossing over the river Satluj, he left Kakrhala and came back to Atârî.

When Maharani Jindan received the sad news of Sikh army's defeat at Pheru Shah, she sent a band of ten horse-rider to S. Sham Singh with a message "**Sardar Ji, you alone can do something and save the Sikh Raj. Please come and take over command of the Sikh army.**"

S. Sham Singh prepared himself to go to the battlefield as soon as he received the message of Maharani. Before setting out, he pledged to win or perish in the battlefield. He joined the battlefield straight from his village Atârî and joined the Sikh army which was re-organising itself after the defeat of battle of Pheru Shah. When he heard the details of events of various battles from the Sikh soldiers, he was struck dumb at the shameful deeds of traitors—Lal Singh and Teja Singh. All the military hardware and guns that had fallen into the hands of Britishers had reduced the fighting capabilities of the Sikhs considerably. And yet all the logistic support for the future battles was in the hands of disloyal Teja Singh and Lal Singh.

These were the conditions when S. Sham Singh had to take over command of the Sikh army. He could see no ray of hope of their victory. He had no alternative than accepting this responsibility. S. Sham Singh declared before the Sikh soldiers that they will face the enemy with determination and thwart the efforts of the Britishers to occupy the kingdom of Shere-Punjab and *Khalsa Raj*. This declaration lifted the sagging morale of the Sikh soldiers and they got ready to take up cudgels with the Britishers once again.

The traitor Teja Singh still did not give up his role of disloyalty. On 9th February 1846, he recommended S. Sham Singh to escape from the battlefield and save himself from the might of the Britishers. S. Sham Singh rejected the suggestion of the traitor Teja Singh. Teja Singh further said-

"It you are so brave, swear that you will not run away from the battlefield."

Sardar Sham Singh made an *Ardâs* (supplication) before Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the presence of other Sikh leaders and vowed that in the case of defeat of the Sikh army, he will not go back alive.

As soon as the news of this vow reached the Sikhs of the army, there was a fresh wave of enthusiasm amongst them. They shouted "Kill the Britishers". S. Sham Singh was preparing for his martyrdom on one hand while Teja Singh was planning the downfall of the Sikh army. The treacherous Lal Singh was sending the sketches of field deployment of the Sikhs to the British Commanders. Both of them had decided 10th February as the day of battle since it was to the convenience of the Britishers. By 9th February, British army was expecting re-inforcements.

S. Sham Singh Ji got up at the ambrosial hour of 10th February. He went through his morning routine of saying prayers, dressed up, went and stood at the head of the Sikh soldiers. He reminded the Sikhs of their brave deeds and those of their ancestors and inspired them not to turn their back to the enemy. Face and fight the enemy to win or become a martyr for the freedom of Punjab.

After addressing his soldiers, he came to his tent. He dressed himself in white and mounted his white mare. He looked like a bridegroom going to marry the death bride in the battlefield.

As soon as the Sun rose, the Britishers fired their first canon ball towards the Sikhs. The Sikhs started replying with equal intensity.

As stated by Lal Singh, Sir Robert Dick attacked the

extreme right flank of the Sikhs which was considered weak and made a deep ingress into them. The Sikhs reacted fast and in a counter attack, pushed Robert Dick back. Robert Dick was wounded. Seeing the unexpected development, Lord Harding, Governor General shouted and ordered the escaping soldiers to re-assemble. His assistant took hold of the flag and started leading the column. Mr. Gilbert also arrived for their assistance. Both the columns re-organised themselves and confronted the Sikhs once again.

S. Sham Singh was galloping his mare from one part of the battlefield to the other and encouraging his soldiers. Sikh soldiers were fighting putting their lives at stake.

Sir Gilbert tried to advance towards the army deployed in central part of the Sikh force but retreated after facing a bloody nose.

Sir Harry Smith advanced towards the left flank of the Sikhs with his division, but suffered heavy loses at the hands of Sikhs.

Shah Muhammad describes the battle in the following verse-

***Âiyân parhtâlân beerh ke topân,  
aggon singhan ne pâsarhey morh dîtey.  
Sewâ Singh te Mâkhey Khan hoey sidhey,  
halley tin firangî de torh dîtey.  
Shâm Singh Sardâr Atârî wâle,  
banh shastarî jorh vichhor dîtey.  
Shah Muhamadâ singhân ne goriân dey,  
vâng nimbûân lahoo nichorh dîtey.***

As the time passed, this battle of Sabhraon became more furious. Who had an edge in the battle was difficult

to say. The environment was very hazy due to heavy smoke caused by burning gun powder. The shine of the swords could be seen off and on.

Suddenly, the British artillery units moved forward and started firing from as near as 300 yards. The British soldiers bayonet charged the Sikh position's under the cover of gun fire. Despite valiant efforts of the Sikhs to repulse the attack, the British infantry managed to secure a foothold in the fieldwork of Sikhs. This turned the tide of the battle against the Sikhs. The traitor Teja Singh who was waiting for such development to take place ran away from the battlefield instead of coming to the assistance of his own soldiers. He crossed the river Satluj by the boat bridge. As soon as he and his henchmen had crossed, Teja Singh blew up the boat bridge thus cutting out all possibility of the Sikh soldiers to fall back to the safety of their own land.

Sir Gilbert attacked the stronghold of the *Khalsa* for the third time and captured the gun positions of the Sikhs. This news of the failure of the Sikhs to protect their guns spread all around in no time. S. Sham Singh Atârî could see the defeat of the Sikhs staring in the face. With unsheathed sword, he charged into the ranks of fifth infantry of the Britishers. He let loose a reign of terror on the enemy and encouraged his soldiers to be brave and fight. S. Sham Singh came under a volley of fire from the front. He was hit by seven bullets and he fell off his mare and became a martyr for the freedom of Punjab. The Sikh soldiers kept on exhibiting their expertise in the art of warfare and kept falling dead due to the overwhelming strength of the British army.

Thus ended the Battle of Sabhraon which was won by the Britishers.

When the body of S. Sham Singh was searched, it was found where the Britishers had positioned their soldiers. Many dead bodies of the British soldiers were buried beneath his body.

The Sikhs carried the body of S. Sham Singh across the river on a raft and then sent it to his village Atârî with utmost respect. When his body was set on fire, it was like setting fire to the freedom of Punjab.

His unique martyrdom had such a salutary effect on Sikh soldiers and other common Sikhs that they decided to avenge the defeat of Battle of Sabhraon. They hated the sight of the Britishers and kept hating them till they had all their rage expended against them in the Battle of Chaliânwala and Gujrat.

The following are the comments of Mr. Cunningham on the bravery of Sikhs during the Battle of Sabhraon fought under the leadership of S. Sham Singh.

**“No Sikh gave in. No follower of Guru Gobind Singh begged for mercy. They displayed total arrogance even in the face of their victors. Many out of them went into the rank and files of their enemy and embraced martyrdom. The others walked off the battlefield arrogantly and in pride.”**

Mr. Melson writes, “If the Sikhs had won, India would have slipped out of the hands of the Britishers.”

It the touchstone of patriotism is to sacrifice one's life willingly for the country, then S. Sham Singh fits the qualitative requirements completely. He preferred death over the slavery of foreigners. He sacrificed his personal and worldly pleasure for the freedom of the country.

### **Personality of S. Sham Singh**

He was full of traits of bravery, sacrifice, prosperity, beside being a good strategist and a statesman. Like other Sikh generals and warriors of his time, he always considered himself a humble servant of his Guru. It was to maintain the glory and grandeur of Sikhism that he took the battlefield even in his old age and sacrificed his life. The historians have paid him very emotional tributes. "The Sardar surrendered and offered himself before the Guru," writes M. Latif. Sir Lapel Griffin has written it very nicely, **"S. Sham Singh was a fine representative of the Jat clan, who is famous for their honesty, strength, bravery and manly qualities the world over. The biggest tragedy was that there was no one to fill the void created by his death. It is true that there were plenty of Sikhs of the second grade in the villages of Lahore and Amritsar who were simple minded yet equally brave and manly. But there was not even one amongst the conspiring leaders of Lahore. Had there been a few more leaders like S. Sham Singh, the bloody battle of Satluj would never have taken place and the Sikhs would never have lost their freedom."**

Where as S. Sham Singh was very brave and courageous, he was also very just, philanthropic, kind hearted, donor and God fearing. He was also an expert

statesman. He knew fully well that the Lahore *darbar* was full of intrigues and conspiracies, the traitors were planning to destroy the *Sikh Raj*. The confrontations with Britishers were also the result of these chess like manoeuvres. That is perhaps why, he did not take part in the first two battles at Mudaki and Pheru. But when his self esteem and self respect was challenged, he thought it wise and honourable to sacrifice himself for the *Panth*, nation and the country. He thought it unwise to go into the pros and cons and indulge in various arguments. This is what bravery is. Emerson, the famous American writer has written-

**"Bravery experiences and does not involve itself in arguments. Therefore, it is ever right."**

It is for this kind of sacrifice that the name of S. Sham Singh shines for ever. He fulfilled the pledges of maintaining the glory and grandeur of the country, nation and the *Panth* in the true traditions of a Gursikh. Saees Wahabi was one of the persons who had seen the brave deeds of S. Sham Singh. He was very much impressed by his bravery and courage. This gentleman name Saees Wahabi was a resident of Gujarkhan and he lived till his very late age. He would come to see sons and grandsons of S. Sham Singh every year out of pure affection for them and respect for S. Sham Singh. He would take S. Harbans Singh and his other brothers in his lap and tearfully narrate to them the episodes of bravery of S. Sham Singh. He would end his narration by the words—"O dear children, be brave and proud like your grandfather S. Sham Singh. What greater, more profound evidence of the bravery of S. Sham Singh can be established or recalled? His bravery had impressed

a person so much that he had never felt tired of relating it for years and felt emotionally attached with it.

Today when many of our scholars and leaders are compromising the Sikh tenants with Brahmanism just to earn favours of the ruling class, the political leaders are making every effort to destroy the unique character of Sikhs for the sake of extracting political mileage. It is the duty of the Sikh youth to follow on the footsteps of S. Sham Singh and opt to tread the path of sacrifice for the greater good of the Panth. They will have to shed their desires for comforts of life, false prestige, perishable assets and so on. They need to understand the teachings of Satguru Ji, mould their lives accordingly and inspire others to follow them too. This is a singular way that can stabilize the wayward and tossing boat of Sikh nation.

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## ANGLO SIKH BATTLES

During the life time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Britishers had extended a hand of friendship towards the *Khalsa Raj*. But they had kept an eye on Punjab with evil in their mind. The death of Maharaja Sahib changed the political scenario and the equation between them and these developments enabled the Britishers to interfere in Punjab affairs with greater impunity. The cause of this political turmoil was Dogras who proved to be snakes in the grass for *Sikh Raj*. They had always been conspiring to usurp the *Sikh Raj* that they were unable to do themselves. So they now tried to uproot the *Khalsa Raj* in totality. The British regime was also on the look out for an opportunity to annexe the land of five rivers into their empire. So they started conspiring with Gulab Singh. Thereafter both Teja Singh and Lal Singh, commanders of the *Khalsa* army sold themselves into the hands of British regime. As a reward of this treachery, they were favoured with *Jagirs* and titles. It is evident that these two natives of U.P. had worn the garb of Sikhs with the intention of destroying the Sikh empire.

A brief review of the historical events that led to the disastrous condition of the *Sikh Raj* would be worth an effort. After the killing of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh by Dhian Singh Dogra, he suggested to Sir William Macnaton the Governor General of India that they should extend help to Shah Shujah of Kabul in order to recover the territory of Peshawar, that would make the *Sikh Raj* weak.

Till 1838, the Britishers had only one cantonment at Ludhiana. 3000 troops with 12 guns were stationed there.

By the time Lord Harding came to India as Governor General, the Britishers had established and developed Simla, Ambala and Kasauli as cantonment. More than 14,000 troops had been positioned in all these cantonments. These troops had 48 guns with them. Lord Harding added 22,000 troops and 28 guns in the existing number.

The Britishers had transported much of the military hardware from Bombay at least a year before the start of hostilities between the two. Most of the hardware was in the form of boats for constructing a bridge over river Satluj. The Sikh leaders were not unaware of the military preparations being made by the Britishers.

On one side, the people of Punjab were much disturbed at these news and the sympathizers of the *Sikh Raj* were considering these preparations as the declaration of war by the Britishers. The sinners who were bent upon finishing the *Sikh Raj* in Punjab were feeling happy at the developments. Teja Singh the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh army along with Lal Singh were busy sending the secrets of the *Khalsa* army to the Britishers through some of their agents. They were also receiving information of favours they would be rewarded with. Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu had more or less finalised his deal secretly with the Britishers.

In order to instigate the Sikh army, the Britishers occupied the areas across river Satluj which were under the *Sikh Raj* but had no Sikh army located under the treaty of 1809.

### **Battle of Mudaki**

The above events filled the minds of the Sikh soldiers

with anguish. So, in order to take back the area from the Britishers, Sikhs crossed river Satluj on the night of 14th and 15th December 1845. The Khalsa army was about 30,000 strong. It consisted of infantry soldiers, cavaliers and gunners. The Sikh soldiers seemed to be in high spirits and were itching to throw out the Britishers from their territory. These troops were led by Teja Singh and Lal Singh who had become disloyal and one with the Britishers. Their planning of battle was such that would put the Sikh soldiers at a disadvantage straight away, ensuring their defeat. On the other hand Dogra Gulab Singh who enjoyed a much confidence in Lahore Court had fixed up his share of reward in lieu of the treason that he was playing with *Sikh Raj*. This army had such generals as S. Chatar Singh Kaliawala, S. Ram Singh, Vantura and S. Budh Singh.

When the Sikh army crossed river Satluj, it was a very easy task to head for Ferozepur Cantt and occupy it. It was thinly held and possible re-enforcement was not available nearby. But the traitor Teja Singh took 10,000 soldiers with him and sat near Ferozepur. The Sikh soldiers were gnashing their teeth to attack but were not given permission.

Some soldiers were sent to Phillaur under the command of S. Ranjodh Singh Majithia. Both S. Chattar Singh and S. Budh Singh opposed the dispersal of army in this fashion and recommended to invest the city of Ferozepur first but both Teja Singh and Lal Singh did not take the advice as worth while and stuck to their guns.

On 14th December 1845, 12,000 Sikhs faced as many number of British soldiers. The British army was under the command of Sir Hugh Gough. Sir Henry Smith, Machaskil

and Mactyre were readily available for help. These generals had fought many successful battles with Marahattas, Rajputs and Mughals. Today they were prepared to face the brave Sikhs who had made a mark for themselves against the courageous Pathans right up to Jamraud.

Out of 12,000 soldiers, 4000 were Dogras and Muslims. Lal Singh was their Commander. This was his personal army. He kept them in the rear and pushed 8000 Sikh soldiers ahead to fight with the British army soldiers. He had already entered into a conspiracy with the British Commanders.

The guns opened up. Both sides let loose their fire. The gun smoke and dust raised a storm like condition masking the Sun light. The horsemen closed in from both sides. The English soldiers started falling in heaps after bearing the onslaught of Sikh swords and lances. Limbs from the bodies started falling on the ground. Many heads roled on the ground like water melon. The British soldiers could not bear the onslaught of the *Khalsa* sword and they started scattering hither and thither. General Budh Singh struck a death blow on Macascal. Seeing the defeat of the British army imminent, Sir Robert Sail inspired his soldiers to fight and die bravely. Sardar Suchet Singh attacked Sir Robert Sail with his spear that penetrated deep into his chest. Sir Robert Sail fell on the sand in a heap and died instantly. It was evening and had become dark. The armies on both sides pulled back. The Britishers suffered heavy casualties.

Both armies came face to face the next day in the morning. Sikhs remained dominant through out the day. Just when the Sikh victory was imminent, Lal Singh ordered his

army to withdraw. This order caused much commotion amongst the Sikh soldiers. About 6000 Sikh soldiers were still fighting in the battlefield but without their Commander-in-Chief.

Lord Gough was surprised to see the fighting spirit of the Sikhs and that too when their Commander had run away.

By now Lord Harding brought fresh re-inforcement in the battlefield. It changed the outcome of the battle. Sikhs now started withdrawing. They formed back to back pair with each other and kept facing the enemy. They bore the attack on their chest but never on their back. Thus the Britishers won the Battle of Mudaki due to the treason of Sikh Commander-in-Chief. This was the first ill deed of disloyal Lal Singh and Teja Singh.

Shah Muhammad writes as under about this battle :

***Shâh Muhammadâ ik sarkâr bâjhaun  
faujân jitt ke ant nûn hârîân nî.***

### ***Battle of Pheru Shah***

When the Sikhs were losing the battle at Mudaki, their Commander-in-Chief, Teja Singh had crossed the quay at Harike along with ten thousand soldiers and camped at Sultan Khan Wala, thus fulfilling his commitment of loyalty to the Britishers. The Sikh soldiers were keen to go to the help of their brethren fighting at Mudaki, but this disloyal Teja Singh was sitting here against the desires of the Sikh soldiers and watching the fun.

After the defeat at Mudaki, the Sikh army assembled at Pheru Shah. The command of the army was now vested into the hands of Lal Singh. Teja Singh was still sitting at

Sultan Khan Wala with a garrison of ten thousand strong Sikh soldiers.

The Sikh army came into a fight with the British soldiers on 21st December 1845. The Sikh soldiers wanted to avenge their defeat at Mudaki. Their guns spewed fire mercilessly. The cavalry left no effort to run over the enemy ranks. The infantry soldiers engaged the enemy in close quarter battle using swords and other such like weapons. The performance of Sikh soldiers left the British Commander flabbergasted. There was complete unrest among them. The Sikhs crushed the might of the garrisons of Littler, Smith and Gilbert. They all withdrew and it became a problem for them to re-assemble and re-organise their forces.

Mr. G.B. Melson writes, that the British Commanders were trying to re-organise their soldiers and were shouting at the top of their voice that they were going to lose India that day.”

Lord Harding the Governor General was fighting under the command of Sir Hughes Gough. He did not bother about his high post and offered his services for the victory of his country.

The night was approaching. What to speak of fighting, it became difficult for the British soldiers to even recognise each others. Sir Hughes Gough asked his commanders to occupy the position just in the rear of wherever they were so that they could re-launch themselves from there. But many commanders could not receive the message and they kept going here and there in utter confusion. Both Sir Harry Smith and General Littler were unable to locate their

soldiers.

All the staff officers of Lord Harding and Sir Hughes Gough had been killed or battle wounded during the day. A son of Lord Harding was still alive. Major Broadfoot and Captain Nicholson had been killed. Almost all the political agents were either dead or wounded.

Lord Harding was pleading with his intelligence troops to search the soldiers since a very large number of them were not to be found. He was busy sending some important papers to Ambala beside ordering the cremation of those who had died.

The day of 22nd December dawned. Both sides had been busy collecting their scattered soldiers and were now ready to face each other. The war trumpet sounded. The guns started firing and the area was engulfed with the din of battle. The Sikh warriors were fighting to prevent their beloved Punjab becoming part of British India while the Britishers were bent upon annexing it to their kingdom. They were trying to achieve their objective through British soldiers and Indian soldiers recruited from various provinces. They had already accepted the slavery of the Britishers and were now proving their loyalty to their masters by helping them put the chains of slavery around the necks of the Punjabis.

As the day progressed, the battle at Pheru Shah intensified. Some Sikhs under the disloyal Teja Singh revolted and joined their brethren. Teja Singh followed them with his loyal soldier to the battlefield of Pheru Shah.

The Sikhs were once again dominant. The Britishers were running away from the field. Just when the victory was

inevitable, both Teja Singh and Lal Singh absconded from the battlefield along with their henchmen soldiers. They did not want success for the Sikhs. The Sikh soldiers were now in utter confusion and chaos prevailed.

It was a strange sight where both vanquished and victorious were leaving the scene of action not knowing what to do.

Just then Teja Singh sent a message to Lord Harding that the field was absolutely vacant and they should not run. Lord Harding asked his soldiers to go back to the battle site who captured the handful of Sikhs and all their military hardware.

Another disloyal General like Teja Singh and Lal Singh was Ranjodh Singh. He had an army of ten thousand soldiers under him. He had started from Lahore for the battlefield but instead kept camping in the fort at Phillaur. When the Sikhs were busy fighting at Mudaki and Pheru Shah, he instead of attacking a handful of soldiers at Ludhiana did not budge an inch from his place. The excuse extended by him was that he was blocking the passage of British army that was expected from Delhi and going to Ferozepur.

This was the golden opportunity of winning the Britishers key station of Ludhiana. Had Ranjodh Singh crossed river Satluj between 12th and 22nd December 1845, attacked and run over Ludhiana and advanced towards Delhi, there was no one to oppose him. Infact as soon as Ranjodh Singh had reached Phillaur with his army, there was restlessness and confusion amongst the British ranks at Ludhiana and Ambala. As a proof of the poor defence arrangements at

Phillaur, it is worth mentioning that some soldiers of Ranjodh Singh went to Ludhiana and set fire to the barracks of the soldiers there and they met no resistance.

### ***Battle of Aliwal***

After the victory of Mudaki and Pheru Shah, Sir Henry Smith was sent to Ludhiana for its defence, Ranjodh Singh attacked the army of Sir Henry Smith. He did this on the request of S. Ajit Singh (king of Ladwa near Karnal) who had made a plea to him bearing Sikh sentiments. On 6th January 1846, he confronted Harry Smith at Badowal and defeated him. Harry Smith escaped to Ludhiana saving his life. Some re-inforcement arrived from Meerut and Delhi. They brought some guns and the soldiers were fresh too. So Harry Smith set out on 28th January with a big force to avenge his defeat. Both armies faced each other at Aliwal. The British army won the battle with very heavy loses compared to Sikhs.

### ***Battle of Sabhraon***

When Maharani Jindan learnt that the Sikhs had lost the battle at Pheru Shah due to conspiracy of Raja Lal Singh, she was much disturbed. So she sent a message to S. Sham Singh at Atari to go and take over the command of Sikh army. S. Sham Singh wrote some replies to the messages, and explained the intricacies of politics and the demerits of battle. Maharani Jindan wrote a letter again and said, "Sardar Ji! Where are you now? The Maharaja cannot come now to incite your pride?" Sir Lapel Griffin writes, "The Sardar (Sham Singh) was accused of being coward and was made to hear other taunting and sarcastic remarks like- afraid to die etc." At last he sent a message to the queen,

“O.K. ! So be the will of the Lord. If the Maharaja is not coming back, we too will reach there one day so why not now? Have no worry. I Shall abide by your command.”

At last S. Sham Singh with all his qualities of loyalty, honour, respect and grandeur, marched for the battlefield at the head of his brave soldiers. Before setting out, he made a supplication and pledged not to return to Atârî if defeated. He also humbly requested before Satguru Ji, “O True Emperor! If you must bring me back, please do it with a glow of victory on my face, and if this is not to be, then grant me a place in Your holy feet relieving me of all sins and defaults.”

Sardar Sahib crossed river Satluj at Sabhraon and joined his army camp. On 9th February 1846, Teja Singh took Sham Singh aside and said, “When the Britishers attack, you should also run back along with me. S. Sham Singh took this bitter counsel with a heavy heart and then let loose his diatribes on him. Teja Singh also turned black and blue and said, “If you are so brave then swear that you will not abscond from the battlefield. I have a latent belief that you will follow me in the end.” S. Sham Singh made an *Ârdâs* before Sri Guru Granth Sahib and pledged that if the Sikhs were defeated, he will not leave his post and return alive. On the other hand, having suffered great lose the Britishers were concerned about escaping alive and not winning the battle. At last sensing his end near Lord Harding prepared himself to die in the battlefield. So he sent back all his medals and a few instructions through his son.

On 10th February, the British army started firing salvo from their guns. Now S. Sham Singh was planning how to

create confusion in the rank and files of the enemy. He mounted his white mare and took his seven thousand strong into the battlefield. The British army launched three attacks. The gallant soldiers of the tenth master repulsed them bravely. The enemy was losing ground and were on the verge of tactical defeat, when the traitor Teja Singh ran away from the field causing demoralisation of the Sikhs. This conspiracy had been hatched by him with British officials. When his army had crossed the river, he blew up the boat bridge so that no more re-inforcement could reach the Sikhs, nor could they themselves withdraw for safer and secure place to re-organise themselves. Thus firing continued from both sides, resulting in heavy losses to both sides. If Sikhs withdrew to the river line, they were fired at or fell victims to the vagaries of the river. What a treachry? It had ended all chances of help reaching from Lahore.

With great courage and bravado, S. Sham Singh was inspiring the Singhs to face the enemy with bravery. The adverse development on the river had least effect on his performance. He was completely focussed on the task at hand. He was going from one part of the battlefield to the other and motivating his Sikhs stating their past deeds and their history. His presence in any one quarter of the field was enough to tilt the situation in the favour of the *Khalsa*.

The syce of S. Sham Singh was also present in this battle when his mount died of a bullet shot. He immediately brought another horse for him. He mounted the horse and ordered syce to go away from the battlefield. He also told him to convey at Atârî that he would not return alive. In the meantime, the enemy resorted to heavy shelling. The Singhs withdrew towards the river. Many died in the battlefield while

others could not escape the vagaries of the river. When almost won battle was nearly lost due to the treachry of the likes of Teja Singh and Lal Singh, S. Sham Singh marched forward courageously wielding his sword and attacked platoon number 50. He was hit by seven bullets but he fulfilled his pledge and did not retreat. At last this great old General fell on the ground and achieved martyrdom.

The Battle of Sabhraon is a living example of the gallantry and bravery of the Sikh soldiers that would always be remembered with praise in the history.

Lord Gough, the Commander of the British Forces writes, “2083 British soldiers became casualties in the form of dead and wounded in this battle. This included Major Foot and some other prominent officials who had faced Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The Sikh army was in a much better state than us. They had 67 guns which were far superior than our guns. But they suffered casualties to the extent of 5 to ten thousand. This was primarily due to the treason of Lal Singh and Teja Singh. What can be more authentic than the evidence of the enemy. They also gave the disloyalty of the traitor.” Capt Cunningham who was also present in the battle writes, “Although intense shelling was taking place, no Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh sought protection.” What greater example of their bravery can be sketched? Shah Muhammad has described the battle as under :

*Âiân paltnâ bîrh ke topkhâney,  
aggon singhan ne pâsrhey morh suttey.  
Mewâ Singh te Mâkhey Khân hoey sidhey,  
halley tin pharangî de torh suttey.*

*Sham Singh Sardâr Âtâri Wâley,  
bannh shastrî(n) jorh vichhorh suttey.  
Shah Muhammadâ Singhân ne goriân de,  
vâng nimbooân lahû nichorh suttey. 90.*

*Paey dhâvio hoey ke pher dhâvâ,  
Francis te jithey sî char yaarî.  
Kundal ghatiân vâng kamân goshey,  
banî ânn sardârân nûn bahut khuârî.  
Tejâ Singh Sardar pul vadh ditâ,  
ghareen nass na jâey eh fauj sârî.  
Shah Muhammadâ maru shahîd ho ke,  
atey jân nâ karnghey pher piârî. 91.*

*Jang Hind-Punjab da hon laggâ,  
dovein bādshâhî faujân bhârîân nî.  
Aj hoevey sarkâr tân mul pâvey,  
jehrhîân khâlsey ne tegân mârîân nî.  
Shah Muhammada ik sarkâr bājhaon,  
faujân jitt ke antt nûn hârîân nî. 92.*

*Kaee sûrmey mâr ke moey othey,  
jinnâh hath kîtey tegân nangîân de.  
Rehandey gher ke vich dariâ dobey,  
sharrey mârîo ne topân changîân de. 93.*

*Kaî mavân de putt nî moey othey,  
sîney lagiân tej katârîân nî.  
Jinnâh bhainân de vîr na miley markey,  
paîân rondîân phiran vichârîân nî.  
Changey jinnâhn de sir de moey vâlî,  
khulley wâl te phiran vichârîân nî.  
Shah Muhammadâ bauhat sardâr mârey,  
paîân rāj de vich gubârîân nî. 94.*

