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## **Frayed Polity of Punjab in Mid of 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

*Ahmad Shah Abdali cherished the dream to conquer the entire Punjab and annex it to the Kabul Kingdom. For this purpose he made repeated invasions from 1747 – 1767 CE. Sensing the spirit of times, Nawab Kapur Singh in 1748 CE organised Dal Khalsa by uniting various Jathas of the Sikhs. The organisation of Dal Khalsa created a force to be reckoned with. In the middle of 18th century, Punjab witnessed the quadruple struggle between Mughals, Marathas, Afghans and the Sikhs for the rule of Punjab. Mughals were defeated by Ahmed Shah Abdali who ransacked Delhi and collected huge wealth in 1756 CE. Marathas occupied Punjab in 1757 CE. Abdali was not to tolerate this, he brought a huge army and defeated the Marathas in the combat which is known as 3rd Battle of Panipat in 1761 CE. Marathas had superiority of number and superiority of ammunition but they could not defeat Abdali who employed superior strategy and provided better leadership in the war over the Marathas. Having vanquished the Mughals and the Marathas, now he turned his attention to Sikhs. Sikhs had to face the wrath of Ahmad Shah Abdali who wanted to vanquish the Sikhs as well. Due to these skirmishes, Sikhs collected resources and gathered under the flag of Khalsa. They fought against Ahmad Shah Abdali until the weakness of Afghani forces.*

**Keywords:** - Sikh, Khalsa, Sarbat Khalsa, Adi Granth, Hari Mandir, Baisakhi.

A war was fought between the sons of Zakriya Khan in Punjab which concluded with a victory of Shah Nawaz Khan who then went on to become the governor of Punjab. However he was devoid of the support of Delhi Court where there was influence of Wazir Qamar-ud-din who wanted that Punjab be restored under judicial powers of Yahiya Khan whom Shah Nawaz Khan had just defeated. Hence Delhi refused to secure him about his position as viceroyalty of Punjab. Feeling unconfident about his position Shah Nawaz Khan came in touch with Ahmad Shah Abdali who was the new ruler of Afghanistan through Adina Beg who was a powerful noble of Punjab. Shah Nawaz in return for help agreed to embrace the Shia faith and promised to recognize Ahmad Shah Abdali as his suzerain. This however quickly exchanged as by the time Abdali reached Lahore to seek the help of Shah Nawaz, the latter had already deserted him by joining sides with former foe Wazir Qamar-ud-Din. This resulted in a battle between the both in which Shah Nawaz was defeated and Abdali marched ahead to Delhi. This resulted in a bloody battle in Manupur on 11th March, 1748 between Wazir Qamar-ud-Dinand and Ahmad Shah Abdali in which Qamar was killed but his son Muin-ul-Mulk ultimately triumphed over Ahmad Shah who fled back to Afghanistan.

Muin-ul-Mulk, popularly known as Mannu was now crowned as Governor of Punjab by the emperor of Delhi. However upon reaching Lahore he found absolute anarchy and appointed Kaura Mal as the Diwan Of Lahore and Adina Beg as the Faujdar of the Jullundur Doab who was also ordered to control the Sikhs who had greatly increased their influence there during this period (1746-48). Amidst of all this Ahmad Shah invaded Punjab for the second time within nine months in December 1748. The Lahore Governor was also denied help by Wazir Safdar Jung who was the Delhi Emperor at the time. Mannu marched alone and the battle was fought at Sodara in which he was eventually defeated. Upon defeat, Mannu signed an agreement through Maulvi Abdullah included that he would cede four 'Mahals' - Sialkot, Pasrur, Gujrat and Aurangabad to Ahmad Shah. These Mahals would still be guarded by Mannu's men but he had to pay an Annual revenue of fourteen Lakh rupees to Ahmad Shah.

A major reason for the defeat of Mannu was the lack of help from Wazir Safdsar Jung. This was due to the fact that the Wazir was strictly against Turki party whose epicenter was Mir Mannu. Sir J. N. Sarkar describes Delhi Wazir Safdar Jung as short sighted and lacking qualities of Statesmanship, patriotism or devotion to the kingdom and someone who was destined to bring down the Mughal Reign to ruins.

The emergence of Sikhs was a major turning point during this period of instability in Punjab. They reformed the Dal Khalsa which was first formed in 1734 and the Sikh Community declared Jassa Sing Ahluwalia as their leader on Baisakhi Day in 1748. Amritsar became a fortress for celebrating Diwali, Holi and Baisakhi during these times. This growing power of Sikhs was a growing concern to Mannu who announced a reward of ten rupees for Sikh's head and announced that whosoever would capture a horse from a Sikh would have full ownership of the same. During the end of 1748, Drastic measures were taken up by Mannu and Adina Beg to control the Sikhs by doing things such as the besiege of Sikh Fort Ram Rauni. During this time Ahmad Shah entered Punjab and Mannu was faced with a two front war. However upon listening to his Diwan, Kaura Mal he made a settlement with Sikhs and agreed to grant them one fourth of the profits of Parganah of Patti.

Ahmad Shah invaded India with his largest army yet again in 1751. He asked Mir Mannu for the arrears for the four 'Mahals' but Mannu could only pay a part of it due to supposed lack of money. This caused Abdali to advance towards Lahore in March 1752 which resulted in killing of Kaura Mal and Mannu being taken as prisoner. Upon being presented as a prisoner in front of Abdali, Mannu was asked by the Abdali himself as to what should he do since Mannu had

presented a great resistance to his force. To this, Mannu replied that if Abdali was a true Padshah, he should pardon Mannu. This reply greatly impressed Ahmad Shah causing him to re-entitle Mannu as "Farzand Khan Bahadur Rustan-i-Hind" and signed a treaty with him following which the kingdoms of Multan and Lahore were now ceded by Mannu but would continue to be run by Mannu with the same administrative policies as before. Hence Mannu was now appointed as first Afghan Governor to rule Punjab on behalf of Ahmad Shah. This now caused Mannu to re-focus on Sikhs who had started to regain momentum in their conquest for Independence by firstly withdrawing Jagir granted by him to Sikhs in 1749. He sent a large force under Sadiq Beg and Adina Beg to conquer over Sikhs which they did. Later on Adina Beg made a secret pact with Sikhs in hope for utilizing them for his own personal advancements in the future. Mir Mannu however continued his brutalities which led to many Sikh Deaths. Sikhs who were captured by his men were brought to Lahore and were hammered to death by wooden clubs. However, even after all his efforts he was not completely able to eliminate the Sikh danger who remained strong even during these times. H.R. Gupta mocks Mannu by saying that the harder he grew, the bolder Sikhs became. Sikhs continued resilience was due to their unity in a strong group by the name of the Dal Khalsa. H.R. Gupta is quoted as saying that strong religious feelings in discipline and a vow by every member to trust the leadership was the main reason behind the strong resilience by the Sikhs. Another major reason for this was the peasants joining hands with them in order to free themselves of paying taxes to the state and also getting the freedom to stand up for themselves bravely. This slowly started causing more and more peasants to get attracted to Sikh Principles such as growing long hair, take Pahaul etc. Lastly, Sikhs knew that Diwan Kaura Mal who was greatly trusted by Mannu was himself a Sahajdari Sikh who saved Sikhs whenever he could.

Mir Mannu died suddenly in November 1753. The period that followed for the next five years was that of total chaos and filled with revolts and counter-revolts. Ahmad Shah had now appointed his infant son, Mahmud as the governor of Punjab and Mannu's son, Muhammad Amin as his Deputy. However all this lasted only for some time and the real power in Punjab now lay in the hands of Mughlani Begum; the masterful widow of Mannu. Suriya Begum, which was the real name of Mughlani Begum was a characterless woman who was guided by her eunuchs alas Chief confidants in all affairs. Most of the Punjab Nobles started feeling that their own rule would yield a safer and happier kingdom rather than the anarchy that was present from the Begum's follies and vices. This led to start of many small time revolts by independent nobles and the first one to succeed in overcoming Begum's rule was Khwaja Abdullah. However, his rule only lasted for a meager six months after which he was overthrown by the Begum with help from Wazir Imad-Ul-Mulk and Adina Beg. This culminated in restoration of power back in the Begum's hands. However, after same time she was again removed as the Governor of Punjab by the Wazir Of Delhi due to her inability To Rule. On seeing this she asked for help from Ahmad Shah who himself felt his authority over Lahore being threatened by the Wazir of Delhi. This led to Ahmad Shah invading Punjab for the fourth time in 1756. No sort of resilience from the other side led him to easily conquer over Lahore and Delhi where he was considered as 'Guest Of Emperor'. He further went on to conquer Agra too.

Upon returning from Punjab Ahmad Shah entitled his son Timur Khan as its viceroy and Jahan Khan as the viceroy's Deputy. Now the first thing Timur Khan did to suppress the rising powers of Sikhs was go to battle with them which is famously known as The Battle of Gahrwal in which Sikhs suffered brutal casualties. But Sikhs could still not be taken down totally as Timur Khan found out the secret alliance Adina Beg had with them. This eventually led the falling out between Adina Beg and Timur Khan upon which Adina Beg invited the Marathas to invade Punjab by

attracting them to the rich harvest of spoil that was in their reach. The Maratha Leaders and Adina Beg together marched on to Lahore where they defeated Timur Khan and his deputy Jahan Khan both of whom fled to Kabul. However, Marathas did not want to settle in Punjab and gave it to Adina Beg In April, 1758 who in return was to annual tribute of seventy five lakhs to them. Hence Adina Beg finally got what he had always wanted; the Subedari Of Lahore. He however couldn't enjoy his power even for a whole year as he died shortly afterwards in September, 1758. Ahmad Shah invaded Punjab for the fifth time in 1759 to avenge his son's defeat and to punish the Marathas and the Sikhs. He was able to conquer over Punjab yet again as he faced little resilience there from Sabaji who was the Maratha Governor of Punjab at the time. He then marched on Delhi and almost waited for a year in the vicinity of Delhi in order to gather a large army to battle with the Marathas in Delhi.

This growing tension resulted in the infamous third battle of Panipat between the Afghans under Abdul Shah and the Marathas under Sadashiv Bahu on January 14, 1761. Both armies were almost equal in strength but the Marathas faced defeat due to excellent cavalry and generalship of the Afghans. One of the major consequences of the war was that still Punjab wasn't under the hands of Afghans as the Sikhs took advantage of the heavy damage Afghans had suffered in the war who were left with inadequate resources to crush the Sikhs this time. This finally concluded with the Sikhs establishing a stronghold in Punjab. Sikhs were even able to loot a rich booty out of the portion, Abdali was carrying back to Kabul and were also able to rescue around two thousand women who were being taken away as war captives. On leaving Abdali gave Multan to Sarbland Khan, Lahore to Khwaja Obed and Sirhind to Zain Khan and ordering them to crush the Sikhs together. However when Khwaja Obed marched against Sikhs in September 1761 to Gujranwala with a large force he was heavily defeated by the Sikh bands under Sardars Jassa Ahluwalia, Hari Singh Bhangi and Jai Singh Kanhya. This led to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia marching to Lahore and capturing it assuming the title of 'Sultan-ul-Quam'. He even had coins inscribed glorifying Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.

In October, 1761 The Sarbat Khalsa decided to take action against the leader of Niranjani Sect, Akhil Das of Jandiala who had been found spying for Ahmad Shah. Upon Knowing this Akhil Das seek help from Ahmad Shah who returned to India for the sixth time. Upon knowing the whereabouts of Sikhs, he marched on to Malerkotla where the Sikhs were completely taken by surprise and their main body was separated from the train consisting of arms, ammunition and provisions which was at a nearby village named Garma about four miles away from them. Hardly had they started moving when Durrani army launched a fierce attack on them in which about twenty thousand Sikhs including many women and children were killed. This was also the battle in which the Sikhs lost their famous volume of book Adi Granth, which was written by the Tenth Guru at Talwandi Sabo (Damdama Sahib). This incident came to be known as the second great holocaust in Sikh History. After this Abdali retraced back to Lahore en-route killing people and destroying holy places of Sikhs such as Hari Mandir, now called The Golden Temple in Amritsar. Upon reaching Lahore on March 3rd, 1762 he erected pyramids of the skulls of Sikhs. Ahmad Shah stayed in Lahore for the following Months and at the same time Sikhs started regrouping in heavy numbers and around sixty thousand Sikhs assembled at Amritsar and vowed to take revenge against Ahmad Shah for the atrocities he had made them go through. Then followed the long day battle of Amritsar between Ahmad Shah's army and the Sikhs which resulted in defeat of Ahmad Shah who fled to Lahore in darkness. Upon hearing of restlessness growing back in Kabul, Ahmad Shah now decided to go back to Kabul from Lahore and before leaving allotted various jurisdictions under different nominees under him. No sooner had Ahmad Shah left that Sikhs

started harassing these nominees again, which ultimately caused Ahmad Shah to come back and invade Lahore for the Eighth time in October, 1762 with eighteen thousand men. However, upon reaching he found that Sikhs had fled the plains of Punjab and fled to their Jungle Retreats. He only found around thirty Sikhs upon reaching Amritsar and butchered them all when they started fighting to protect their temple. Following this Ahmad Shah made repeated efforts to suppress Sikhs but could not manage to do so. Upon seeing whole of Punjab up in arms ready for rebellion, he felt helpless and returned to Kabul in 1765. As soon as he left the Sikhs returned and celebrated Baisakhi in Amritsar. Ahmad Shah again returned in 1766 to reassert his power over Punjab but proved to be no match for the Sikhs who were closely knit by religious beliefs and had a very upbeat courage and fearlessness in them. Hence it is seen that from 1748 to 1766, Punjab was the epicenter of a struggle among the major four powers- The Marathas, The Afghans, The Sikhs and The Mughals. This whole struggle for supremacy finally resulted in the undisputed victory of the Sikhs who finally realized their dream of Independence.

Dr. H.R. Gupta mainly believes two reasons for the triumphant of the Sikhs. First and foremost was the resourcefulness of mind and their endurance to sustain even during the most difficult times without losing sight of the final goal they had in mind. Secondly was their fighting art consisting of quick observation, timely reaction and the habit of trusting one's comrades and the leaders which shaped them into brilliant warriors. Adina Beg too had played a double role for several years for his gains and at the most difficult times had even protected Sikhs against the Afghans which went a long way in saving Sikhs from embarrassment of defeat at many times. It can also be seen that Sikhs were found to be very proactive and mindful regarding the timing of their battles by not fighting upfront with the enemy at times and the resorting to guerilla warfare at times taking the enemy by surprise.

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