

THE MULTAN COMPAIGN BY MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

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ABSTRACT

Multan was an important city both from the commercial and strategic points of view. During the period of the decline of the Mughal empire, it was conquered by the Afgans. Ranjit Singh was determined to annex it. By Conquering Multan, Ranjit Singh could drive a wedge between the Muslim states of Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan as these Muslim states could always plan a common cause against the Lahore Durbar. Financially too, the conquest of the Multan could be very beneficially to Ranjit Singh. With all these considerations in mind, Ranjit Singh had to lead about seven campaigns to Multan in the course of a decade and a half.

Before the last expedition Ranjit Singh had completed the inner circle of his conquests by annexing the minor states. The last expedition was to prove a struggle for life and death, a struggle for survival. So both the opponents made considerable preparation for the coming event. During the each successive attack the Nawab of Multan had shown on in increasingly determined capacity to resist. So Ranjit Singh made huge military preparations to effect the final conquest of Mulatan. Lastly, in the seventh expedition the citadel of Multan fell into Ranjit Singh's hand on Monday, 2nd June, 1818 A.D..

Thus, it was the second great victory won over the Afgans, the first being won five years earlier when Fateh Khan Barkzai had been defeated at Hazro. By annexing the Multan territory, Ranjit Singh had extended his hold along the Indus from Attock in the north to the Panjnaad in south. The capture of Multan gave the Ranjit Singh control of the trade route running from Kandhar and passing through Multan going to Delhi. The annexation of Multan also increased the revenue resources of Ranjit Singh.

THE MULTAN CAMPAIGN BY MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

Multan was an important historical city. It was an important city both from the commercial and the strategic points of view. During the period of the decline of the Mughal empire, it was conquered by the Afghans. Later the Bhangi sardars captured it and held it for about a decade. In 1779 A.D. Timur Shah, the successor of Ahmad Shah Abdali, ousted the Bhangi sardar and appointed his kinsman Muzaffar Khan Sadozai as the governor of Multan. When Ranjit Singh came to power, Multan was held by Nawab Muzaffar Khan of the Sadozai clan. Multan was considered to be invulnerable but due to its importance, particularly on strategic and commercial grounds, Ranjit Singh was determined to annex it. By conquering Multan, Ranjit Singh could drive a wedge between the muslim states of Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan as these Muslim states could always plan a common cause against the Lahore Durbar. Financially too, the conquest of the Multan could be very beneficial to Ranjit Singh. With all these considerations in mind, Ranjit Singh set his heart on the annexation of Multan. He had to lead about seven campaigns to Multan in the course of a decade and a half.

FIRST EXPEDITION (1802):

Ranjit Singh had just returned after having suppressed the rebellion at Kasur, when he decided to march towards Multan. His troops were tired and were not in position to launch another expedition so soon. But he assembled his forces, exhorted them and marched towards Multan. Rest when a new kingdom was in the process of creation was not acceptable.¹ According to Griffin², "In 1802, Muzaffar Khan first saw the young chief Ranjit Singh, who had marched from Lahore to spy out the land. The Nawab came out to meet him, 30 miles from the city and chief, having inter-changed valuable presents, parted as very good friends."

Instead of giving a fight³ to the intruders, the Nawab offered a huge sum as nazrana and also promised to pay the Lahore Durbar a yearly tribute. The Sikh force then returned to Lahore.

SECOND EXPEDITION (1805 A.D.):

This friendship did not last long, as in 1804 A.D. Ahmad Khan Sial, ruler of Jhang, was ousted by Ranjit Singh from Jhang. Ahmad Khan approached Nawab Muzaffar Khan who placed his forces at Ahmad Khan's disposal to regain his lost territory but again Ranjit Singh defeated him. According to Griffin,⁴ "Again in 1806 A.D., after having reduced Jhang, Ranjit Singh marched towards Multan and reached Mahtam, 20 miles north of the city, when the Nawab, who had no wish to fight gave him Rs. 70,000 to retire."

But Ranjit Singh had not yet finished the task that Holkar, having been defeated by the British, entered his territory for refuge. Hence Ranjit Singh having bestowed a valuable *Khillat* on the Nawab, returned to Amritsar.⁵

THIRD EXPEDITION (1807 A.D.):

There were several reasons for this expedition. Muzaffar Khan was conspiring with Qutab Khan, the ruler of Kasur, who after succeeding his brother Nizamuddin, wanted to break with Lahore. Secondly, Muzaffar Khan gave shelter to Ahmad Khan Sial of Jhang who being defeated by Ranjit Singh, had fled from his territory. Thirdly, the Nawab had dilly dallied in paying the promised tribute for which explanation had been asked for from the Nawab. When no satisfactory answer was forthcoming, Ranjit Singh decided to send another expedition to Multan.

After reaching the vicinity of Multan, Fateh Singh Kalianwala was sent by Ranjit Singh to demand from the ruler an explanation for his conduct and the reason for his stopping the payment of the annual tribute. On receiving an unsatisfactory reply, Ranjit Singh invaded the city and occupied its many parts but he utterly failed in capturing the fort and had to retire after getting an indemnity of a large sum of money.⁶

FOURTH EXPEDITION (1810):

This time Ranjit Singh used his political sagacity in order to isolate the Nawab of Multan by entering into a treaty with the British in 1809 A.D. Another step in the same direction by Ranjit Singh was to offer political asylum to Shah Shuja as the ex-king's influence might be of use to him. A proposal of joint attack on Multan was discussed with them, however it could not be materialized.

The fourth expedition of Multan was launched in 1810 A.D.. The Nawab of Multan had again abstained from paying the yearly tribute. So the Ranjit Singh dispatched a sufficiently strong force to deal with the Nawab. On February 20, 1810 A.D. Ranjit Singh started against Muzaffar Khan, and in the next four days the *Durbar* forces reached the outskirts of Multan. The Nawab was ready to fight the Ranjit Singh's forces. The Sikh forces captured the town on February 25, 1810 A.D. Then they laid siege to the fort which lasted nearly for two months and mines were laid beneath the western wall of the fort. In utter despair and disappointment, the Nawab raised the white flag and agreed to pay a huge amount as war indemnity⁷ and nazrana which according to Amar Nath was Rs. 1,80,000.⁸

When the two parties were thus busy in the bloody battle, both of them appealed separately to the British for help. But the latter refused to do so for the reason that after the Treaty of Amritsar with Ranjit Singh, Multan lay outside their province.⁹

FIFTH EXPEDITION (1812 A.D.):

Shortly after the conclusion of the above terms in April 1810 A.D., Nawab Muzaffar Khan, again resumed correspondence with the British seeking help against the Sikhs. The British however declined to accede to his request.

Ranjit Singh ordered Mohsin Shah, the *Vakil* of Nawab to pay eighty thousand rupees as annual tribute.¹⁰ In the mean time he planned to send Prince Kharak Singh to Multan.¹¹ Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Sardar Jodh Singh were summoned from Kapurthala and Amritsar to accompany the

prince.¹² Apart from these arrangements Mohsin Shah was asked to expedite the payment of revenue.¹³ On 24th November, 1813 A.D. (30th Ziquaad 1228 A.H.) a letter was dispatched to Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan asking him to send the representative of the Nopal Sarkar back along with the sum of revenue.¹⁴ However, Nawab did not comply with the demand. In February, 1815 A.D. (1230 A.H.) Ranjit Singh ordered Dal Singh Bharania to proceed Multan.¹⁵ Sikh army plundered the city and left for Lahore without much success.

SIXTH EXPEDITION (1816 A.D.):

In February¹⁶, 1816 A.D. an irregular attack was made upon Multan by the Sikhs. A strong force had been sent to Bahawalpur and Multan to collect the tribute and there being some delay in Muzaffar Khan's payment, Akali Phula Singh mad and drunk with '*Bhung*' led a storming party of fanatics like himself against the town, and with such impetuosity did they make the attack that they gained possession of some of the outworks of the citadel. But fakir Azizuddin made due apologies, the Nawab paid his tribute quicker than he would otherwise have done, and the Sikh army proceeded toward Mankera.¹⁷

SEVENTH EXPEDITION (1817 A.D.):

As usual, the Nawab discontinued paying the promised tribute. So in January, 1817 A.D. another expedition under Diwan Bhawani Das was sent to Multan. Misar Diwan Chand the artillery commander, followed the main body with a large number of guns. The fort was besieged and the Nawab put up a gallant defence. Diwan Bhiwani Das, who was not a soldier but a civil administrator, proved to be a mediocre commander lacking in determination. A number of skirmishes took place between the two forces, but no determined attack was launched.¹⁸ According to Griffin¹⁹, "In 1817 A.D. a Sikh army under Diwan Chand marched against Multan and attacked the fort but was repulsed, and retired on payment of 10,000 rupees". Diwan Bhawani Das was suitably punished by the Ranjit Singh. He was arrested and a fine of 10,000 was imposed on him.²⁰

The Multanis were so much impressed by the Sikhs invasion of Multan that they started saying : "*Sain jo bala aundi hai uthiyon di hai*" (misfortune, when it comes is from the north).²¹

LAST EXPEDITION AND ANNEXATION OF MULTAN (1818 A.D.):

By now, Ranjit Singh had completed the inner circle of his conquests by annexing the minor states of Sahiwal, Mitha-Tiwana, Jhang, Pakpattan and Kasur etc. So he expected no threat from their direction and was free to deal with bigger targets, such as Multan, Kashmir, Derajat and Peshawar. Multan had defied Ranjit Singh so far. But this time he was determined to finish the Afghan hegemony on his southern flank. Also, the Nawab had every time promised to pay tribute, but, after sometime had almost always failed to fulfill his word.

This expedition was to prove a struggle for life and death, a struggle for survival. So both the opponents made considerable preparation for the coming event. During the each successive attack the Nawab of Multan had shown on increasingly determined capacity to resist. So Ranjit Singh made huge military preparations to effect the final conquest of Multan.

The 18,000 Sikh army had been ordered to rendezvous in the beginning of the year 1818 A.D. on south-west frontier of the Sikh dominion. Kanwar Kharak Singh was now appointed to the nominal command, aided by Misar Diwan Chand, who had risen by his merit and activity from a low situation to be commandant of the artillery, and who undertook for the reduction of the fort of Multan if vested with the chief command during the siege.²² Kanwar Kharak Singh then a lad of sixteen years.²³ An elaborate system of boat transportation, through river Ravi, Chenab and Jehlum was organized with a chief base at Lahore²⁴ on January, 1818 A.D. (18 Maagh Samat 1875 B.K.) a big army with Kunwar Kharak Singh, Sardar Hari Singh, Sardar Sham Singh Bahadur, Sardar Dhanna Singh Malwai etc. set out from Lahore to conquer Multan.²⁵

Muzaffar Khan, could succeed to keep the army of Ranjit Singh at bay because he firmly got himself establishment in the fort and gave a stiff and long resistance to the invader.²⁶

A demand was made of an exorbitant sum in cash and five of Muzaffar Khan's best horses, and this not being immediately complied. His forts of Muzaffargarh and Khangarh were captured. In February the city of Multan was occupied and its fort closely invested, without much loss. The approaches were made according to no consistent plan, but every jagirdar and chief erected his own battery, and a promiscuous fire was kept up from guns and small arms against every part of the defences. The means of the garrison were, however, so deficient, that even under this irregular method of attack, the wall of the fort was, by the continual fire kept up, breached in several places and the upper works and defences were nearly demolished in the course of the month of April.²⁷

Fighting was so balanced that both the Sikhs and the Pathans had to invoke the help of God for victory. Sikhs prayed to Guru Gobind Singh for victory, while the Afghans offered prayers at the tomb of Shams Tabriz for their success in repulsing the Sikh attack. Ganesh Dass a contemporary Punjabi poet, and author of '*Fateh Nama Guru Khalsa Ji Ka*' even gives an imaginary conversation between Shams Tabriz and Guru Gobind Singh in which the latter finally predicts the victory of his votaries.

In May, the approaches were carried close to the Dhool-Kot and the army became eager to be led to the storm, but Ranjit Singh, who though absent regulated every thing connected with the siege, forbade any risk being run, and continued his offer to the Nawab of a Jagir, if he would surrender. He was obstinate in his refusal and seemed determined to hold out to the last extremity.²⁸ Till the 2nd June the bombardment went on. Two large breaches had been made in the walls, for the great Bhangian Di Top' or Zamzama of Ahmad Shah had been brought from Lahore, and had been four times fired with effect. More than one assault was given by the Sikhs, but they were repulsed, on one occasion with the loss of 1800 men.²⁹

Thus, the citadel of Multan fell into the Ranjit Singh's hand on Monday, 2nd June, 1818 A.D.. Sohan Lal Suri writes the date of Multan victory in the following words :-

Dah hazar w hashat sad haftad w panj !

*Fateh shud Multan baad aj sarf ganj !*³⁰

and Ganesh Dass writes in his Couplets as :-

Jaith sudi akadashi, fateh kiyo Multan !

Samar aath das janiye aur pahchattar maan !³¹

Thus, according to Sita Ram Kohli fort capitulated on June 2, 1818 A.D..³²

The fort of Shujahabad was also captured and five guns taken from it. The walls of Multan were speedily repaired, a garrison of 600 men was placed in the fort under Dul Singh Nukernee, Jodh Singh Kalsee and Deena Singh and the Sikh army returned to Lahore in the beginning of September (Asun).³³

Ranjit Singh celebrated the victory by sending rich offering to *Durbar* Sahib at Amritsar. *Deepmala* was celebrated in Amritsar and Lahore and huge rewards and titles bestowed on the brave generals and soldiers who won this honour of the conquest. On this occasion great rejoicing took place at Lahore *Durbar*. Ranjit Singh traveled through the famous streets of Lahore, showering down rupees on poor peoples.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it was the second great victory won over the Afghans, the first being won five years earlier when Fateh Khan Barkzai had been defeated at Hazro. By annexing the Multan territory, Ranjit Singh had extended his hold along the Indus from Attock in the north to the Panjnad in south. It broke the Afghan power in the Punjab and opened the road to Sind. The capture of Multan gave the Ranjit Singh control of the trade route running from Kandhar and passing through Multan going to Delhi. The annexation of Multan also increased the revenue resources of Ranjit Singh.

References:

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2. Griffin Lapel, *Rulers of India Ranjit Singh*, London, 1905, p.183.
3. Lal Kanehiya, *op. cit.* (Tr in Punjabi by Jeet Singh Sheetal), p.152; writes that there happened a great fight between Maharaja and Muzaffar Khan, but other historian like, Amar Nath, Lepel Griffin, N.K. Sinha and G.L. Chorpa did not mention any fight between them.
4. Griffin Lapel, *op. cit.*, p.183.
5. Singh Gulcharan (ed. Ganda Singh), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Conquest of Multan*, Vol.-XIX-1, Patiala, 1985, p.70.
6. Griffin Lepel, *op. cit.*, p.183; Prem Singh Hoti, *op. cit.*, p.68;
7. According to Griffin, *op. cit.*, p.184, A last of his intense mortification, Maharaja had to raise the siege and to be content with a ransom of Rs. 2,50,000. The Nawab also agreed to furnish a quota of troops to Ranjit Singh.
8. Singh Bhagat, (ed. Ganda Singh), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: First Death Centenary Memorial Volume*, p.28.
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13. *Ibid.*, p.86.
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16. According to W.L. M'Gregor, *The History of the Sikhs*, Vol.-1, London, 1846, p.176, Ranjit Singh set out for Multan in the month of Bhadon (August), 1816 A.D.
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33. M'Gregor W.L., *op. cit.*, P. 181.