

Peshawar: An Integral Part of Competing Empires of Durrani, Sikhs and British

Razia Sultana*

Abstract

Peshawar remained an integral part of the Durrani Empire till the end. During the declining phase of the dynasty, multiple forces played vital role to accelerate the process of disintegration. The Sikh-Durrani clashes for the possession of Peshawar were devastating for the decaying Durrani power.

In this connection, towards the last stages of the Durrani power, the Sikh-British clashes over the control of the Sikh territory was quite important as in that Peshawar despite being very important strategic territory remained on the side lines. Interestingly, Sikh-British warfare confined to the Sikh mainland and Peshawar came into their possession as a dividend when eventually the English forces came out successful and captured the whole of Sikh kingdom in 1849.

Introduction

Peshawar as a border province remained an epicentre of strategic and political activities between the competing powers in the wider region. For Afghans under the Durrani Peshawar was a springboard of their military campaigns against the Indian rulers whose submission provided

* Chairperson, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

immense resources to the Afghan rulers to expand and consolidate their empire. The emerging Sikh power considered Peshawar as a strategically crucial border province that even incited their ultimate desire to annex Afghanistan which though never fulfilled. The Sikh-British turf battles in the post-Ranjit Singh era were although primarily fought to subdue the kingdom of Punjab as a whole however the British kept a vigilant eye over the developments at the border province since long. So in the broad strategic design of the British, Peshawar was an important area that had to be brought under control to safeguard their Indian possessions against aggression from the North.

The main aim of this paper is to underscore the role of Peshawar as an integral part of Durrani, Sikhs and also of the British and its importance for maintaining stability in their empires.

Peshawar, being a frontier region remained constantly in transition due to frequent inroads from Central Asia and Afghanistan. Similarly, frequent change of masters had also been responsible for perpetual instability and chaos. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Peshawar remained a major cause of tension between Durrani and emerging Sikh power. Though, it had been taken over by the Sikhs in 1823, yet the hostility between the two on the same issue continued till 1837. Meanwhile, several attempts had been made by the Barakzai Sardars, who by that time were the dependants of the ruler of Punjab, to contest the Sikh supremacy. Similarly, the ruler of Kabul, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, being an aspirant to make the province part of his dominion, made two desperate attempts to regain Peshawar. Nevertheless, his efforts were foiled by the Sikh soldiery¹, yet the earnest strides of the Barakzai ruler manifested the strategic importance of the Peshawar province for the Kingdom of Kabul.

1 Government of Punjab, *Gazetteer of Punjab: Peshawar District, 1897-98*, pp. 70-73.

Arrival of the British in the Peshawar region was a later development. In fact, they did not attempt to take the province as part of their Indian possessions till Ranjit Singh was alive. Reasons were many for instance, the English were cautious imperialists and avoided pre-emptive military policy. Secondly, the Sikh State of Punjab was a strong buffer between the English and Durrani rulers of Kabul. Thirdly, the English leaders of that time were contented with making Sutlej as a boundary line in the North-West of their sphere of influence.²

During the Sikh-Durrani conflict, the English kept silent and watched it with utmost vigilance. They remained friendly with the ruler of Punjab, Ranjit Singh, throughout that period, and viewed the Sikh-Durrani clashes as an opportunity to get the overlordship of India. However, they did not take active part in the conflict, but, being watchful, the English did not sit idle rather they effectively used diplomatic skills against their local warlords i.e. Sikhs, Marhathas and Muslims. They also successfully contained two foreign powers, French and Russian, whose policy of territorial expansion alarmed the leadership of the East India Company. Enough diplomatic skill was used in this regard, which ultimately neutralized the might and ambition of French and Russian rulers, who wanted to jointly invade India and grab the possessions of the East India Company. Diplomacy, anyhow, of the East India Company was marvellous at those crucial times. At a time, it concluded treaties of friendship with Sikhs in Punjab and with Persia in 1809. Consequently, a chance of combat with the Durrani was averted because they were engaged in the West of Afghanistan by Persian.³

Within no time, the situation became such that the English were the only paramount power in India, the rest of

2 H.H. Dodwell, ed., *The Cambridge History of India* Vol. V (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), pp.147-48.

3 Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani* (Bombay: 1959) p.376; Karam Ali, *Muzaffar Nama*, pp. 180-81. See also H.H. Dod Well, ed., *Op.Cit.*, pp.173-74.

the local and neighbouring powers got out of the picture one after another. All such successes of the English emphasized upon the fact that high goals could be achievable through consistency, hard work, and tact. If English had become the masters of the Indian land and resources, their diplomatic skills and vigilance should be accredited.

Military capacity of the English was secondary or in some cases negligible in comparison to diplomacy and stratagem. Indeed, English could rely upon soldiers of their own stalk however, they were less in numbers. On the other hand, mercenary forces could fight for them battles but not wars. So, in many cases they preferred diplomacy unless fighting became inevitable.⁴

The English Ascendancy in Punjab

The East India Company was no longer a trading company by the eighteenth century and had assumed a great deal of political power. The court of Delhi was in their control and all other contenders, local and foreign, aspirants of the throne of India were kept at bay. During the year 1809, a treaty of friendship was concluded between the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh and the English, which brought the boundary of Indian possessions of the East India Company to the banks of Sutlej.⁵ The clauses of the treaty were:

1. Perpetual friendship shall subsist between the British Government and the State of Lahore. The latter shall be considered with respect by the former, to be on the footing of the most favoured powers, and the British Government will have no concern with the territories and subjects of the Raja to the northward of the river Sutlej.
2. The Raja will never maintain in the territory which he occupies on the left bank of river Sutlej more troops than are necessary for the internal duties of that territory, nor

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 340-41. See also P.F. Walker, *Afghanistan*, (London, 1881), p.18; Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani, *Nishan-i-Haidari*, pp. 241-46. See also H.W. Bellew, *Afghanistan and Afghans*, (Sampson low Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1879), p. 31.

5 *Correspondence Relating to Persia and Afghanistan* (London: J. Harrison and Son, 1839), p. 313; Bute Shah Alias Ghulam Muhy-ud-Din, *Tarikh-i-Punjab*, pp. 157-60.

commit or suffer any encroachments on the possessions or rights of the Chiefs in its vicinity.

3. In the event of a violation of any of the preceding articles, or of a departure from the rules of friendship, this treaty shall be considered null and void.

This treaty, consisting of four articles, having been settled and concluded at Amritsar on the 25th of April, 1809. Mr. C.T. Metcalfe had delivered to the Raja of Lahore a copy of the same in English and Persian, under his seal and signature; and the Raja had delivered another copy of the same under his seal and signature, and Mr. C.T. Metcalfe engaged to procure within the space of two months a copy of the same, duly ratified by the Right Honourable the Governor General in Council, on the receipt of which by the Raja, the present treaty would be deemed complete and binding on both parties, and the copy of it then delivered to the Raja would be returned.⁶

The treaty apparently seemed very simple and clear. It ensured non-interference in the territories and policies of each other, but between the lines the British left enough room through which they assumed certain amount of control over the policies of Lahore Darbar. Similarly, Ranjit Singh's relations with the neighbouring states and provinces of Punjab Government, Sind, Bahawalpure, Peshawar and Afghanistan were also keenly watched over.

Ranjit Singh managed his stately affairs in such a manner that till his death the British could not violate whatever they had committed in the treaty. During his rule, Ranjit Singh put all his efforts for the consolidation and uplift of the newly established Sikh State. He took the developmental and expansionist measures so fast that by 1813 he converted Punjab into a strong kingdom.⁷ Ranjit Singh met success because he adopted two parallel policies which were quite appropriate against the East India Company and the Durrani rulers of Afghanistan,

6 *Correspondence Relating to Persia and Afghanistan, Op.Cit.*, pp. 313-14; Bute Shah Alias Ghulam Muhay-ud-Din, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 157-60.

7 Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*. See also H.W. Bellew, *Op.Cit.*, p. 39.

respectively. For instance, diplomacy won him the English on one and military aggression reduced the threat of Barakzai rulers of Peshawar and Kabul on the other hand. For carrying out all those measures Ranjit Singh relied on his military, which he raised very carefully.

The death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 proved a death blow to the Sikh State of Punjab. His successors were no match for their predecessors. The usual rule which was commonly practiced in such circumstances, followed. Incapable rulers were dictated by the treacherous ministers, who preferred their own small benefits over dynastic interests. The consequences of such a policy were nothing else but the decline of Sikh kingdom. Traitors sold the Sikhs at the hands of strangers and the doom of their own race became inevitable.

However, authorities of the East India Company were contented with the arrangements they had made through a friendly treaty with the Sikhs, in the first decade of the nineteenth century. They were still satisfied with having Sutlej as a boundary line of their territorial possessions towards the North-West. The changes which took place at the Lahore Darbar after the death of Ranjit Singh made the British realize to make shifts in their policies towards the Sikh State of Punjab.⁸ Even if the English were at ease with Ranjit Singh, that was also due to their own interest, because in him they found a strong military leader who could check effectively the armed incursions of Durrani rulers against Indian territories. In his absence, they could not find anybody else from the same lot to replace him as defender of the northern borders of India.

At the same time, Sikh courtiers were so unscrupulous that they wanted the East Indian Company's officials to take over their dominion, and let them continue in power under the British protection. Interestingly, though leaders were dishonest but the military and a common Sikh was as loyal to

8 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, ed., *The Punjab Papers: Selection from the Private Papers of Lord Auckland, Lord Ellenborough, Viscount Sikhs* (India: Hoshiarpur, 1970), pp. 58-59.

the State as they were during the lifetime of Ranjit Singh. During post-Ranjit Singh period, Sikh leadership was insincere, but they could not put into practice their nefarious designs in the presence of strong Khalsa army. So, they decided to crush the power and vitality of the Khalsa army.⁹ A series of wars with the British were started and such commanders were appointed in whom they found the ones who could accomplish the cherished task of the deceitful Sikh nobility. Such were the circumstances under which the British decided to bring a substantial shift in their policy towards the Sikhs State of Punjab. Besides, weak Sikh State escalated the British apprehensions *vis-à-vis* Durranis, Persian and Russian intrusion in the frontier region and becoming a threat to their Indian possessions.

Sikh-British Wars between 1845-46

Under the treaty of 1809, the British and the ruler of Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh had entered into a friendly relationship. The terms and conditions of which were followed by both till the first Anglo-Afghan War, 1838. However, after the death of Ranjit Singh the policy of the British towards the State of Punjab tremendously changed for instance, William Macnaghtan suggested the dismemberment of the Sikh state and wanted of the English authorities to bestow Peshawar on Shah Shuja. Similarly, Sir Alexander Burnes advocated that Peshawar should be given into the custody of Dost Mohammad Khan. Another plan was also thought out in this regard, which suggested to march upon the Sikh capital and disperse its army in 1843.¹⁰

In 1845, it was widespread news that the British were making preparations to attack the Sikh dominion. Sikh military and masses were well aware of the fact that the British were imperialists and their ambition was to conquer Lahore. So, in the face of powerful opponents, the Sikh

9 Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *The First and Second Sikh Wars*, (Government Central Branches Press, Simla), 1911, p. 10. See also Ganda Singh, *Private Correspondence Relating to the Anglo-Sikh Wars*, (Sikh History Society, Amritsar-Patiala, 1955), p. 80.

10 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 293.

power and confidence was shattered. Consequently, they were defensive in their war preparations.¹¹

The British were apprehensive of the Sikh in their own way because the Sikh army became so predominant that the officials could not control them. Similarly, the machinery of the government had broken down due to inability of the higher authorities. In the absence of any strong administration the bands of plunderers arose everywhere and insecurity prevailed. In those circumstances the British felt it necessary to protect their own interest.¹² Their line of action was based on this pretext, "The Sikh army, whose insubordinate conduct is one of the chief causes of the anarchy and misrule which have brought the Sikh state to the brink of destruction, is about to be disbanded."¹³ For that purpose, they chose the military option, and started strengthening the frontier posts with arms and ammunition. At the same time, through urgent measures, the size of the army was also enlarged.

The appointment of Colonel Richmond and later of Major Broadfoot as an agent for the affairs of Sikhs further explained the policy of the East India Company towards Punjab. Major Broadfoot's first step, after becoming an agent of Sikhs affairs, was the declaration of Cis-Sutlej possessions of Lahore under the British protection, including Patiala and other principalities. Escheating of the Kingdom of Punjab after the death of Maharaja Dhuleep Singh was also part of the plan. However, Sikh authorities were not formally informed about this shift in the policy of the British towards their state.¹⁴ On the other hand the masses of Punjab were assured by the British authorities. A secret report recorded in this regard, "The inhabitants of the cities in the Punjab will in that cause be perfectly safe, in person and property, from any molestation by the British troops; and they are hereby

11 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, ed., *Op.Cit.*, p. 59. See also R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 9-15.

12 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, ed, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 67,70,81.

13 East India Company, *Despatches and Orders*, 1846, p. 100.

14 R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 9-10.

called upon to dismiss apprehension, and to follow their respective calling with all confidence."¹⁵

Moreover the information from the secret reports further explained the war preparations on the side of the British as:

"It has been recommended to fortify the castle at Ferozepur on the Sutlej. But this measure was recommended principally with a view to render that town a commercial depot and bazaar in relation with commercial navigation of the Indus. Whatever may be the views of the Government in this respect, I would recommend, as a measure of military precaution, the construction of a secure work on the site of the castle of Ferozepur. This with a barrack or cantonment at Ludhiana, secured by a good redoubt, would be all that would be necessary in the way of work in the part of the position. The army in this position might maintain itself. It might move forward into the Punjab, whether in an offensive movement with a view to conquest, or as one defensive, with a view to attack its enemy at the passage of some of the river in that country, or to threaten the communication of an enemy advancing from the North-West. The countries of the protected Sikh chieftains would be in the rear of the army; and as they are highly cultivated and fertile would afford supplies of provision and forage during any length of time which it might be necessary to detain the army in that position. These Sikh chieftains, the Raja Patiala and others, ought to be cultivated and their light cavalry taken into the service of the army. They will thus feel an additional interest in the defence of that frontier."¹⁶

The occurrence of some incidents conveyed the intentions of the British to the State of Punjab in clear terms. For instance:

"Ludhiana had indeed, long been occupied by a British detachment, but this, and the Subathu garrison, was the sole outpost of the advancing empire in that direction up to the period of Afghan War in 1838. In that year 12,000 men assembled at Ferozepore, which had passed under British protection three years before, for the advance into Khurasan; and a Division of troops was left there during the campaign. To support these two posts of Ludhiana and Ferozepore, a reserve was posted at Ambala in 1842. The occupation of Sind in the meantime threatened Sikh territory at Multan, and a bridge of boats was thrown across the Sutlej near Ferozepore, while small streams plied on the river. The Sikhs then had come to think their independence menaced and war inevitable, while on their side

15 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, p. 141.

16 Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, (P.C.) pp. 43, 65-66,73.

the English expected to be forced into a collision with the overbearing soldiery of the Khalsa.¹⁷

Furthermore, in 1845, some horsemen of Multan crossed into Sind in search of marauders. The Governor Charles Napier soon ordered for the preservation of integrity of his frontier from violation.¹⁸ That act of the Governor of Sind was confirmed as a proof of the desire of the British to bring about a war with the State of Punjab.

Keeping in view such a situation the Sikh army and general public were convinced that war with the English was inevitable. But higher Sikh authorities were not willing to take the initiative. Their motives were contradictory to the interest of state and that of the public. They were scared of army's dominance which derived its force from the system of committees. None of the government authorities had control over them, Lal Singh; Tej Singh including Raja of Jammu felt their incapacity to control the troops. Consequently, the Chiefs of Punjab Sher Singh Sindhamvalus and others preferred to become tributary of the East India Company instead of to be humiliated by their own troops.¹⁹ They even made up their mind to disperse their military by engaging them into hot encounters with a compatible power, which was none other than the British.

In fact, the assassination of Maharaja Sher Singh in 1843, and subsequent death of Minister Dhean Singh and many other Chiefs at Lahore led to the virtual transfer of all power to the disorganized army that assembled there and whose power appeared to be exercised through committees in several corps corresponding together and acting in concert.²⁰

Unfortunately, those military committees could not assess the insincerity of their leaders. In fact, war preparations on the British side created urgency that did not

17 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*

18 Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, p. 9; Ganda Singh, *Op.Cit.*, p. 77.

19 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 83-92; Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 10-12.

20 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 66-86.

allow the Sikh army to think themselves but to listen to the instructions of such mercenary men as Lal Singh and Tej Singh.²¹

However, those were Khalsa contingents who took the initiative against the British. They threatened Ferozpure and crossed the river Sutlej. By crossing the river Sikhs broke the treaty, which was concluded between the two powers in 1809. The attack, however, was not materialized due to Lal Singh and Tej Singh's treachery. They assured the local British authorities of their secret and efficient good will, which turned the tables on the Sikh side.²²

Meanwhile, the Khalsa made a blunder when it suspended the power of the military committees temporarily in favour of executive heads to enable them to take quick decisions during emergency. On the contrary, those unworthy men used that power for making conspiracy against their own people.

During the years 1845 and 1846 four battles were fought between the British and the Sikhs, which in the end decided in favour of the British. The battle of Moodkee was first of the series, which was fought on 18 December, 1845. The town was situated at twenty miles distance from Ferozpure. The strength of the Sikh army was twenty thousand infantry and forty pieces of artillery. The number of the cavalry was between eight to ten thousand horsemen; Lal Singh led the Sikhs side. A hot battle ensued between the two. Sikhs displayed great traits of soldiery but in the end they were repulsed by the British forces with the loss of seventeen guns. However, the success of the British was not complete as their loss in men and material was severe.²³

So, another battlefield was selected to test their arms that were Pheerooshur, about ten miles from Ferozpure and

21 Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 81-82.

22 East India Company, *Despatches & General Orders*, 1846, p.4. See also R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, p. 19; Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, p. 90.

23 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 306; J.W. Balwin, *A Narrative of Four Months of Campaigning in India*, Norwich, pp.14-16. See also East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 2-7.

Moodkee. This time the Sikhs came with full preparations with twelve thousand infantry, eight to ten thousand cavalry and hundred pieces of artillery. On the other hand, the English contained six to nine pieces of artillery. Similarly, their number was ten times lesser than that of Sikhs. But they had belief in their good fortune and military skill. During the battle, Sikhs were about to carry the day but the leadership of Lord Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, and Lord Harding, Lieutenant-General and second in command, won for the British a partial victory and driven the Sikhs from the field. In fact, the arrival of Sikh reserve under Tej Singh provided an opportunity to the Sikhs to recover from the shattered position, but Tej Singh delayed the renewal of hostilities till Lal Singh's force was put to fight as their main objective was to disperse the Sikh army not to strengthen it.

According to Sangat Singh: The Khalsa force under the command of two misers, Lal Singh and Tej Singh, who proved the arch-j, crossed the Sutlej and entrenched themselves in their own territories in the second week of December 1845. Tej Singh knew that much of the artillery munitions had been tempered with and rendered useless. Tej Singh and Lal Singh conveyed to the local English authorities their secret and efficient good will. Lal Singh sought instructions from the English political agent, Capt. Nicholson, and acted accordingly.²⁴

Even at the last moment he, (Tej Singh), opted for skirmishes instead of resolute attack. And after a short time, he precipitately fled, leaving the subordinates without a leader.²⁵ On the contrary, the British deeply felt the might of the Sikh arms and were seriously apprehensive for the peace and safety of their dominion. However, if the Sikhs had pressed forward that day they would have won against the almost vanquished British forces, but they did not. As a result the battle was won by the British forces along with

24 Sangat Singh, *The Sikhs in History*, uncommon books (New Delhi: 1995), p.127. See also East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1, 3, 21, 24; Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 307-309; Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 56-57.

25 R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 23, 26.

seventy pieces of artillery and some other assets including, conquered and confiscated territories.

Though the British army was twice successful against the Khalsa forces, yet they could not shatter the overwhelming power of Sikh army. So, the British forces again reinforced themselves and took up a position which stretched from Ferozpure towards Hurreekkee. Similarly, Sikh army took the position on the right bank of river Sutlej. Meanwhile, the British commander delayed the encounter, because they lacked the ammunition and heavy guns. This favourable situation emboldened the Sikhs. Moreover, the Cis-Sutlej feudatories kept themselves aloof from siding with the British. On the contrary, the Raja of Ladwa joined hands with the Sikhs army and sent a force under Runjor Singh, which moved in the vicinity of Ludhiana.²⁶

On the 17th of January 1846, Major-General Sir Harry Smith was sent by the East India Company with a brigade to capture Dhurm Kot in order to secure smooth transit of grain to the British army, which he did. Although, the main objective of Sir Harry Smith was to cover the march of large convoy of guns, ammunition and treasure, which was in progress to Ferozpure, but when it was known that Runjor Singh crossed the Sutlej and threatened Ludhiana, he was ordered to proceed to the relief of that place. The Sikhs arrayed their forces at Buddowal, while the British army had a different strategy. It wanted to join Ludhiana brigade before having any encounter with the Khalsa army.²⁷

While on the way to Ludhiana, the British army was attacked by the Sikhs. Skirmishes took place between the two but the British forces were steady in their objective, they did not stop for combat and continued their marches. The Sikhs, however, did not pursue them.²⁸ In the end Ludhiana was relieved from the hold of Sikhs.²⁹

26 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 311-12. See also East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp.56-57.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64. See also Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, p.96.

28 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, p. 64.

29 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 316.

Despite being defeated consecutively, Lal Singh and Tej Singh were deeply worried because of the power and ambition of Khalsa. Meanwhile, on the Sikhs side a political change of importance took place. Raja Gulab Singh was declared the minister and leader of the Sikhs at Lahore. Following which, he visited Lahore, the capital of the State of Punjab to ensure unity and vigour among the counsels of the Sikhs.

Since, the war objectives of both the sides were not yet achieved; therefore culmination of the war seemed impossible. Another battle was fought between the two at Aleewal on 28 January 1846. Harry Smith the British General led eleven thousand men against their opponent. The rival party was led by Runjor Singh, a Sikh warrior of Ladwa. A deadly struggle followed, during which Sikhs were driven across the Sutlej. The British captured fifty pieces of cannon and returned triumphant from the battle field.³⁰

Duplicity of Gulab Singh on that moment did great harm to the Sikhs cause. On one hand, he incited the Sikhs to resume hostilities against the British and on the other hand, he entered into negotiations with the leaders of the East India Company for peace. The Governor General willingly accepted the offer of Sikhs for negotiations, because it suited him. The limitations of the British were genuine because it was impossible for the British authorities to subjugate Punjab in one season. Similarly, defeating an army as numerous as his own and laying siege to Multan, Jammu and Peshawar within a few months was full of risks.³¹

On the other hand, the main objective of the British for the moment was to drive the Sikhs across the Sutlej by force or through the unconditional submission of the Chiefs and delegates of the Sikh army. Keeping in view all these factors, the British intimated to Gulab Singh their readiness for the talk, and explained their parameters also. That, they would

30 J.W. Baldwim, *Op.Cit.*, p. 94. See also East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp.66, 74.

31 Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Op.Cit.*, p. 94. See also Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 319-20.

acknowledge the Sikhs sovereignty in Lahore but in return the Sikh government had to disband their military. Gulab Singh declared his inability to deal with the troops over these terms. However, later a secret understanding was reached between the Sikhs and British respectively.³² The secret understanding comprised of the following points:

- a. The Sikh army should be attacked by the English.
- b. When beaten the military should openly be abandoned by its own government.
- c. Passage of the Sutlej should be opened for the British.
- d. Road to the capital should be laid open to the victors.³³

These terms and conditions were quite humiliating however, since the Sikh leadership was not sincere to its own cause, therefore, they accepted those terms of understanding unscrupulously. Under those circumstances and shameless treason the battle of Subraon was fought on the 10th of February, 1846.

Even this time Sikhs were not lacking in number, training and high spirit for war but there was want of leadership, unity and clear goal. Following their design, at a first place they were ordered to take up a place which was absolutely disadvantageous for the Sikhs side. On top of that, the Sikhs side was led by deceitful Lal Singh, who was watched by a body of the British cavalry in order to witness how sincerely he would bring about the fall of his own forces. The confidence of the British soldiers was great, because recently they had been successful against the Sikhs.³⁴

At Subraon, the Sikh army was caught by surprise when the British soldiers opened fire on them just after the sunrise. Moreover, the traitor Tej Singh, instead of leading fresh men to sustain the failing strength of his troops on his right, fled on his first assault and either accidentally or deliberately put a halt in the middle of the bridge of communication. Despite that, the Sikh soldiers were not

32 Ganda Singh, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 97-98.

33 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 321.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

ready to submit. However, in the end the battle was decided in favour of the British.³⁵

The British high-ups were so delighted by this victory that it was ordered, "to commemorate this great victory, (Subraon), the Governor will cause a medal to be struck with "Subraon" engraved upon it, to be presented to the victorious army in the service of the East India Company, and requests his Excellency the Commander-in-Chief to forward the list usually furnished of those engraved."³⁶

Soon after that, the fort of Kassur was occupied by the British without opposition. One more attempt was also made by the Sikhs when some twenty thousand of them assembled at Amritsar but it ended up in vain. The power of the Khalsa had been destroyed. The Sikhs, who were the custodian of treasury, food and ammunition of war brought about the defeat of their army and later openly joined the enemy.³⁷

When military option failed the Sikhs warriors opted for negotiations. The latter empowered Gulab Singh to treat with the British on their behalf. Consequently, on 15 February 1846, the Raja and some other Chiefs visited the Governor General at Kassur, where they agreed to the already reached upon points.

The terms demanded and concluded were:

- a. The surrender, in full sovereignty, of the territory, hills and plain, lying between the Sutlej and Beas rivers.
- b. The payment of one and a half crores of rupees as indemnity for the expenses of the war.
- c. The disbandment of the present Sikh army and its reorganization on the system and regulations with regard to pay which it obtained in the time of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh — the arrangement for limiting the extent of the force to be henceforth employed, to be determined in communication with the British Government.

35 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, p. 100. See also *Ibid.*, pp. 108-114.

36 J.W. Baldwin, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 55-62. See also Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 70, 99, 100, 101.

37 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 329.

- d. The surrender to us of all the guns that had been pointed against us.
- e. The entire regulation and control of both the banks of the river Sutlej, and such other arrangements for setting the future boundaries of the Sikh state, and the organization of its administration, as might be determined at Lahore.³⁸

These terms were reluctantly accepted by the Sikh delegation. Later, the young Maharaja came and tendered his submission in person on 20 February, 1846. Soon afterwards, the British army arrived at the Sikh capital, Lahore. And within two days a portion of the citadel was garrisoned by the British regiments. The motive behind that was to display to the Indians that a vaunting enemy had been effectively humbled. The Governor General being deeply annoyed with the Sikhs, due to constant military incursions from their side, wanted to overawe the Sikhs. For that, he chose Beas as a boundary between the British territories and of the Sikhs, instead of Sutlej because the new boundary offered more commanding position to the British against Lahore.³⁹

The situation on the Sikhs side was same like that of any losing side. Gulab Singh, who was according to the previous arrangements appointed the minister of Lahore Darbar, became more ambitious under the prevailing circumstances, and wanted to dominate the entire Sikh dominion of Lahore. This ambition of his was equally shared by Raja, Lal Sing.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Gulab Singh despite being strong could not maintain his position without the British support. The British, on the other hand had left him on his own and assured him no helping hand. In the mean time, Gulab Singh suddenly took a turn and asked the Governor General to pay him for the services he rendered for the British cause. The British authorities, instead of taking up a hard line with

38 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 90-93. See also *Ibid.*, p.100; J.W. Baldwin, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 65-66,71.

39 East India Company, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 93-96, 146. See also J.W. Baldwin, *Op.Cit.*, p. 66.

40 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 330-331.

Gulab Singh, decided to conciliate with him. On the terms that, Kashmir and the hill states from the Beas to the Indus were cut off from the Punjab Proper and transferred to Gulab Singh as a separate sovereign, for a million of Pound Sterling. That way Gulab Singh was entitled as Maharaja at Amritsar on 15 March, 1846. Lal Singh became the minister of Punjab Government again.⁴¹

Lal Singh and all other traitor chiefs knew that they could not maintain their position without the support of British even against the reduced Sikh army. Therefore, they gladly accepted an arrangement which made the British the immediate masters of the reduced dominion of Ranjit Singh, on the condition that, until the feeble successor should attain the age of manhood they would remain there.⁴²

British Took over the Province of Peshawar Without Bloodshed

The Sikh State of Punjab was consisted of four provinces, Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar. Its governmental system was consolidated by Ranjit Singh on strong ground. However, the situation did not remain the same after his death. The Sikh-British wars changed the political scene at Lahore Darbar. The British East India Company became the defacto sovereign of the Government of Punjab. Consequently, it took an indirect control of all the territories belonged to the Sikh State of Punjab, except Kashmir which was handed over to Gulab Singh as a political favour, for a million pound sterling.

So Peshawar came under the British influence as a result of the fall of Sikh Power and Colonel Lawrence, who was appointed as a political assistant to the resident at Lahore in 1846, was sent to Peshawar in early 1847, in order to perform his duties as a friendly adviser to the native officials. However, he was not authorized to interfere in the day to day

41 Ganda Singh II, *Op.Cit.*, p. 105. See also Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 331-32; Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 94-96.

42 Cunningham, *Op.Cit.*, p. 333. See also Ganda Singh, *Op.Cit.*, p. 105; *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series Punjab*, Vol 1, Calcutta, 1908, pp.32-33.

administrative matters of the province, except when justice could not be obtained otherwise. Similarly, the control of a large and efficient garrison not less than one-third of the army of the Darbar was also given in his hands.⁴³

Anyhow, Major G. Lawrence's comments, after reaching Peshawar were:

The arrival of British functionaries in this remote and hitherto neglected portion of the empire may be considered its salvation. To such a state had oppression driven the people that all were ready to rise against their rulers, which they most assuredly would have done had they not been deterred by the prompt suppression of Kashmir insurrection. Peshawar had been kept in order under the strong rule of General Avitabile, but he had left in 1843. The treasury was now empty, and the irregular troops were clamorous for pay. The regular Sikh army at Peshawar under General Gulab Singh was, 6,000 strong. Of the other British officers who have been named, Lieutenant John Nicholson was placed in charge of Hazara; General Cort Landt, of the Sikh service, had the script of territory across the Indus, between Peshawar and Dera Ghazi Khan; Lieutenant Edwards was at Bannu in the Derajat. One of Major Lawrence's assistants, Lieutenant Herbert, was afterwards the defender of Attock. The Governor of Hazara was Sirdar Chattar Singh, father of Sher Singh, both of whom played a leading part in the Sikh rivalry of 1848.⁴⁴

The tenure of George Lawrence, as an advisor of the British government at Peshawar went very smooth. However, during 1847 Mashokhel, Mashogagar, Mohammad villages, and Babozai refused to pay the revenue, levied by the Sikh government some times back. The local officials with the support of the British authorities resorted to coercion, in order to compel the Chieftains of those areas to pay the revenue. The military operation ended successfully and the tribesmen complied with the orders of the government.⁴⁵

Later, in 1848-49 the Peshawar troops turned rebellious, and Colonel Lawrence had to leave Peshawar for Kohat. At Kohat, he was received very cordially by Sardar Sultan Mohammad Khan Barakzai. However, apparently nice with

43 R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 45-6.

44 Government of Punjab, *Op.Cit.*, p. 78. See also Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, p. 43.

45 Government of Punjab, *Op.Cit.*, p.78.

the refugee, Colonel Lawrance, and his family, Sultan Mohammad on the other hand entered into negotiations with the Lahore Darbar. His habitual duplicity of character made Colonel Lawrence and his family prisoners of the Sikhs, until the termination of the war.⁴⁶

However, when the Sikh garrison surrendered in 1849 the Sikhs titular rule was put to an end. The surrender of the Sikh army has been recorded in the Journal of a Subaltern in these words:

As anticipated, the sight of us brought them to submission, and they are bringing in their arms as fast as possible. By evening, they had all deposited them, and the country was covered for miles with dispersing multitude.⁴⁷

Consequently, Peshawar just like other parts of the Sikh State was taken into direct control by the East India Company. Colonel Lawrence was appointed as a first Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar in April 1849.⁴⁸ The administrative position of Peshawar remained the same as it was during the Sikh rule. However, its separation from the Government of Punjab and confirmation as a full fledged province, under the name of NWFP, was a later development.

46 Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, p.76.

47 Sandford Deniel Augustus, *Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern* (London, n.d.) pp. 199-200. See also Lieut. Col. R.G. Burton, *Op.Cit.*, p.129.

48 Government of Punjab, *Op.Cit.*, p. 78. See also H.W. Bellew, *Op.Cit.*, p.58.