

### First Reading: Jaṅg Hind-Paṅjāb (ਜੰਗ ਹਿੰਦ-ਪੰਜਾਬ)

#### Background

After Raṅjīt Singh's (ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) death in 1839, the kingdom fell almost immediately into disorder. His unpopular legitimate son, Khaṛak Singh (ਖੜਕ ਸਿੰਘ), was removed from power within a few months. Then his wife Jind Kaur (ਜਿੰਦ ਕੌਰ) took over for her infant son, Dalīp Singh (ਦਲੀਪ ਸਿੰਘ), who was obviously too young to rule at that time. Meanwhile, immediately after the death of Raṅjīt Singh, the East India Company had begun to increase its military strength on the borders of Paṅjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ). It cannot be denied that there was a desire to expand British influence and control of Paṅjāb. This desire to expand and control Paṅjāb brought increasing tension within Paṅjāb and the Sikhs (ਸਿੱਖ).

#### Outbreak of War

There were several reasons as to why war between the Sikhs and the British broke out. They were:

- The anarchy or chaos in Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) following the death of Raṅjīt Singh resulting in a power struggle.
- Suspicions among the Sikh army arising from the recent British military campaigns, including the annexation of Gvāliar (ਗਵਾਲਿਅਰ) and Sindh (ਸਿੰਧ) in 1841 and the campaign in Afghanistan in 1842.
- An increase in the number of British troops near the border of the Lāhaur Kingdom.

After common demands and accusations between the Sikh Darbār (ਦਰਬਾਰ) and the East India Company, diplomatic relations broke between the two. An East India Company army began marching towards Firozpur (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਪੁਰ), where a division was already stationed. This army was commanded by Sir Hugh Gough, the commander in chief of the Baṅgāl (ਬੰਗਾਲ) Army, and Sir Henry Hardinge, the British Governor General. On 11 December 1845, the Paṅjāb army began to cross the river Satluj (ਸਤਲੁਜ), near Harī ke Pattan (ਹਰੀ ਕੇ ਪੱਤਣ), to its own territory on the other side of the river. On 13 December, Lord Hardinge declared war, accusing the Sikhs of invading British territories.

#### Questions for Reading one:

1. Locate the river Satluj on a map and explain why crossing that river would be a justification for war?
2. Why do you believe there was disorder in Lāhaur after the death of Raṅjīt Singh and how could the Sikhs have prevented the anarchy from happening?
3. Based on your study of Raṅjīt Singh do you believe he could have somehow set up his government differently?
4. Was Raṅjīt Singh's government in line with the principle of the *Gurūs* (ਗੁਰੂ)?

## Second Reading: First Jaṅg Hind-Paṅjāb

### Battle of Mudkī (ਮੁਦਕੀ); 18 December 1845

The Sikh army was divided into two. Tej Singh (ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ) proceeded towards Firozpur to confront General Littler. The other Sikh general, Lāl Singh (ਲਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ) entrenched the larger part of his force near village Pherū Shāhar (ਫੇਰੂ ਸ਼ਹਰ) (later known as Firozshahar - ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਸ਼ਹਰ) and he marched right into Gough and Hardinge. Despite the enemy's superiority in men and arms, Lāl Singh ordered his troops to begin war while he himself retired to Firozshahar. The leaderless Paṅjābīs fought a grim hand-to-hand battle against a more numerous enemy led by a more experienced commander. The battle continued with fierce intensity till midnight (and came to be known as Midnight Mudkī). After the loss of half their force and fifteen of their guns, the Sikh army withdrew from the battlefield.

This particular first battle was not of great military significance except that it gave the British their first experience of the fighting qualities of the Sikh soldiers. The British had heavy casualties. Lord Hardinge got back his superior position of Governor General and agreed to become second-in-command to his commander-in-chief. The march to Satluj resumed.

### Battle of Phirozshahar (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਸ਼ਹਰ); 21 December 1845

Following Mudkī, the British Army proceeded northwestwards with a view to join forces with the surrounded British troops stationed at Firozpur. The Sikh army for some reason did not prevent the meeting of the two forces around its main defensive position about the village of Firoz Shāh (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ ਸ਼ਹਰ) in the early morning of 21 December 1845. Around 4pm the British began their attack on the Sikh army entrenched in the village. The majority of the fighting took place in the darkness and continued throughout the night. The British succeeded in capturing and securing areas where the Sikhs were camping.

The next morning, the British forces were terribly exhausted from fighting for over 16 hours. The Sikh forces, under the command of Tej Singh, arrived from Firozpur, fresh and ready to fight. However, Tej Singh, the commander-in-chief for the Sikh forces failed to provide direction to his troops and, thus, lead to another defeat for the Sikh army. Following the orders of Tej Singh, the Sikh army withdrew from the area abandoning their equipment. Both sides suffered heavy casualties and did not meet again until some five weeks later.

It is important to note that the Sikh army could have easily had a victory at Firozshahar. However, many Sikh historians have come to believe that Tej Singh and Lāl Singh were traitors and were corresponding with the British. This explains why they would leave their armies for no particular reason.

### Battle of Alīvāl (ਅਲੀਵਾਲ); 28 January 1846

Lord Gough decided to wait for reinforcements before crossing the Satluj and pushing on to Lāhaur. While Lord Gough was waiting for his reinforcements, the Sikh army, under the leadership of Raṅjodh Singh Majīṭhīā (ਰਣਜੋਧ ਸਿੰਘ ਮਜੀਠੀਆ) and Ajīt Singh (ਅਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) of Lāḍvā (ਲਾਡਵਾ), crossed the Satluj and encamped in an area close to Ludhiāṇā (ਲੁਧਿਆਣਾ). A British force, under the leadership of Sir Henry Amith, was sent to deal with the threat the Sikhs now presented in Ludhiāṇā.

The Battle of Alīvāl (ਅਲੀਵਾਲ) had a Sikh Force of approximately of 7,000 cavalry and 17,000 infantry, half of which were regular troops. Sir Henry Smith was able to direct a well-coordinated

attack using cavalry, artillery, and infantry. The Sikh army once again fought hard and long but by late afternoon, withdrew their forces.

### **Battle of Sabhrāom (ਸਭਰਾਓਮ); 10 February 1846**

Following the arrival of heavy artillery from Dillī (ਦਿੱਲੀ) and the rejoining of forces engaged at Alīvāl, the British proceeded towards the Sikh fortified position at Sabhrāom. Gough and Hardinge decided to make a frontal assault on Sabhrāom and destroy the Sikh army with one blow. The British were hoping they would be able to quickly defeat the Sikh army because of the two traitors Tej Singh and Lāl Singh.

The following explains how Tej Singh helped destroy his own Sikh Army: “Despite being the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh Army, Tej Singh proceeded to secure the destruction of the Sikh Army by placing his forces behind fortifications with its rear to a wide, fast-flowing river, severely inhibiting the Army’s maneuverability and affording no means of effective withdrawal.” (From Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail- <http://www.asht.info/>)

Then Tej Singh fled across the temporary bridge and had it destroyed. But most of the other generals stayed to fight. One of the most famous was Shām Singh Aṭārīvālā (ਸ਼ਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਅਟਾਰੀਵਾਲਾ) who rallied the Sikhs to continue fighting as a desperate last stand against the enemy. The situation was horrible for the Sikh army since they were surrounded by the British army from all three sides so those that tried to escape drowned in the high waters of the River Satluj. It is said that nearly 10,000 lost their lives at this battle. It was a complete loss. There were also huge British losses, approximately one-seventh of its total army was either killed or wounded.

The Battle of Sabhrāom ended the First War. A peace treaty followed and there were many administrative changes. However, the Lāhaur Court remained intact and Tej Singh retained a place in the Council at Lāhaur, working under a British officer.

### **Questions for the Second Reading:**

1. Explain why it was difficult for the Sikh army to be successful during the battles of the first Jaṅg Hind- Pañjāb?
2. What could have been done differently so that the Sikh army could have been more successful?
3. What do you think the Sikhs should have done with their Commander-in-Chief Tej Singh if they knew about him working with the British? What would you have done?
4. What were some of the differences between the British and Sikh army, including their fighting styles?

### Third Reading: Second Jaṅg Hind-Paṅjāb

#### The Battle of Cīlāmvālā (ਚਿਲੀਆਂਵਾਲਾ); 13 January 1849

Described as ‘the last attempt of the army of Raṅjīt Singh to recover independence’, this battle ranks as one of the most awesome encounters of the Second Jaṅg Hind-Paṅjāb. On the afternoon of 13 January 1849, the British launched their attack. The Sikhs sighted the British advancing from the village Cīlāmvālā and began to open fire. For about an hour the Sikhs kept their enemy at bay. Then the British tried to force the Sikh army into the river, but the Sikhs scattered into the brushwood jungle and began using their ‘hit and run’ tactics. The battle raged until night and in the morning the Sikhs declared a victory by firing their gun salutes. The losses again were huge for both sides, but records show that the Sikh army fought with great courage and determination. Considering this a great victory, the Sikhs asked for the investment of Dalīp Singh (ਦਲੀਪ ਸਿੰਘ) as *Mahārājā* (ਮਹਾਰਾਜਾ) and the evacuation of British troops from the Paṅjāb. The offer was rejected.

#### The Battle of Gujarāt (ਗੁਜਰਾਤ); 21 February 1849

On the morning of 21 February 1849, the Sikh army had advanced towards the Cināb (ਚਿਨਾਬ) river near the town of Gujarāt. They were much weaker than the British army at this time. In fact the British army now consisted of 56,636 men, 11,569 horses, 96 field guns, 67 siege-guns, and six 8-inch howitzers (type of artillery) drawn by elephants. This is why the Battle of Gujarāt is sometimes called “the battle of guns”.

The British attack began at 7:30 am. The Sikh army guns opened fire right after, thus disclosing their positions and range. The British general brought the three divisions to a sudden halt and ordered the whole artillery to fire. The weight of numbers and armor decided who would win this battle. The Sikh army could not hold up to the British for long and this battle was over within a few hours. However, Lord Dalhousie wrote the following about the Sikh army that clearly displays their determination. He says, “The Sikhs displayed the skill, courage and activity which belong to their race”.

With this British victory Sher Singh (ਸ਼ੇਰ ਸਿੰਘ) and Catar Singh (ਚਤਰ ਸਿੰਘ) formally surrendered their swords to Major Gilbert near Rāvalpinḍī (ਰਾਵਲਪਿੰਡੀ). “Today Raṅjīt Singh is dead,” sighed the soldiers as they kissed their swords before laying them down. Soon after Lord Dalhousie proclaimed annexation of Paṅjāb. His foreign secretary, Henry Meirs Elliot arrived at Lāhaur to obtain the signatures of the members of the Council of Regency and the minor king, Dalīp Singh. The young Dalīp Singh affixed his signatures and he was deprived of his crown and the kingdom.

#### Questions for the third reading:

1. What did the Sikh army do differently that enabled them to be successful at the battle of Cīlāmvālā?
2. What mistake did the Sikh army make at the Battle of Gujarāt that helped them lose this battle?
3. What affect do you believe this loss, at the Battle of Gujarāt, had on the Sikhs of that time?

#### All three sources are adapted from:

- Harbans Singh, The Encyclopedia of Sikhism.
- Khushvant Singh, A History of the Sikhs Volume II: 1839-2004.
- The Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail website - <http://www.asht.info/>.



**Station 1: Background On Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb**



**Station 2: First Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb**



**Station 3: Second Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb**



**Station 4: Activity**