British Historiography on the Sikh Power in Punjab

G. Khurana

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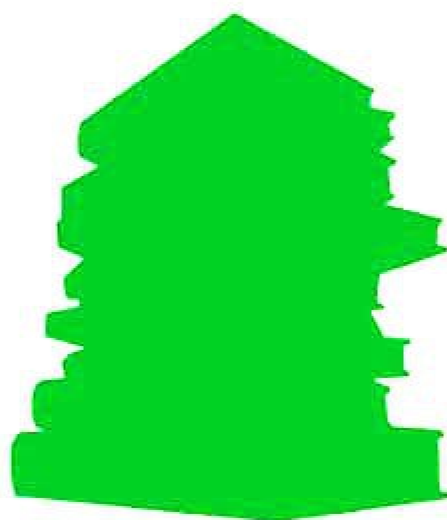

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To

The late Bhakt Ramditta Ji

who always lighted my path

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PREFACE

The present study is an attempt to interpret and evaluate the contemporary British historiography on the Sikh power in the Punjab. It unveils the influences under which the British writings on the Sikhs originated, and the motives which animated the British writers to produce their works. Furthermore, it examines the British historiography in the context of the political and intellectual climate in which these writings were produced and the process of evolution by which the writings on the Sikhs came to have a personality of their own, independent of the writings on Indian history.

The study of the British writings on the Sikhs has lately engaged increased attention of scholars. Besides a number of solitary scholarly papers, a useful collection of articles on the historians and historiography of the Sikhs edited by Dr. Fauja Singh has appeared. This joint venture, however, does not provide that thematic unity of treatment which is necessary in an inquiry of this kind. Historiography is not an isolated phenomenon, but one whose development in a particular period has to be seen as a whole. As such, the subject continues to invite further reflection and discussion.

This is the first attempt to examine the whole process of development of British historiography on the Sikhs, the foundation of the leading tradition of historiography in, perhaps, one of the most significant periods of Sikh history. It would be a crudity of history to treat the individual writers as if they were separate, insulated streams, and not composing a single river. In the present treatment, distinctions have also been drawn at different levels of analysis on which the historians have operated, and thus the criterion of historical inquiry and the assumptions on which they have worked have also been clarified.

The course of British writings on the Sikhs was intimately connected with the political power of the Sikhs and the issues

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of Anglo-Sikh relationship. Most of the writers came into contact with the Sikhs in their official capacity. This gave the British officials a first-hand opportunity of knowing the Sikhs. An attempt has been made in this work to see as to how far the British writers were able to free themselves from their notions about the alien society that the Sikhs were to them when they set out to comprehend their ways, and how far their ideas about the Sikhs influenced their dealings with them. Thus it, in effect, deals with the basic issue of the capacity, or incapacity, of a foreign observer to make authentically historical enunciations, particularly when he, at the same time, happens to be a government official. For this study it is the historian who is placed in the foreground, through an attempt has been made to examine his writing in the frame-work of the political situation prevailing at the time when it was produced.

The study is mainly based on its direct sources, that is, the writings of the British on the Sikhs. However, two European writers, A.L.H. Polier and Henry Steinach, have also been studied in detail because the former was in British service for most of the time, and the latter published his work in London, completely identifying himself with the British in terms of opinion and purpose. The journal maintained by W.G. Osborne during his visit to Punjab has been examined at length in view of his vivid depiction of Ranjit Singh and his courtiers in all their colours and shades. The relevant archival source-material at the National Archives of India, New Delhi and other literature available at the libraries at Amritsar, Calcutta, Chandigarh, Delhi, Ferozepur, Kurukshetra and Patiala, has also been consulted. Some useful material was secured from the India Office Library, London, in the form of photo copies.

My indebtedness for inspiration and assistance during the writing of this book has been manifold.

I am deeply beholden to my teacher, Professor V.N. Datta, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kurukshetra University, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement. I have benefited immensely from his keen perception and insight in historio-

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graphy. I owe gratitude to Professor J.S. Grewal, Vice-Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University and Dr. B.K. Kalia, former Professor and Head of the Department of English, Kurukshetra University, for their useful suggestions. I am indebted to my colleagues Dr. S.C. Mittal, Dr. K.L. Tuteja, Dr. A.K. Shaida and Mr. G.L. Narang for their constant support. My thanks are no less due to the staff of National Library, Calcutta, National Archives of India, New Delhi, the British Council Library, New Delhi, Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, Dwarka Dass Library (Simla), Chandigarh, the University Library, Kurukshetra and of a number of other libraries visited by me. I am thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for giving me a substantial grant for the preparation and publication of this work, and to my publishers for the efficiency and promptness with which they have brought out this book. My affectionate gratitude is due to my parents and Nisha, my wife, for their indulgent consideration, which sustained me throughout my work.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PIONEERS

After Guru Gobind Singh's death in October 1708, his followers mounted their first organised effort to become the masters of their land. Though initially successful, the movement collapsed within a few years. In December 1715, Banda, who led this movement, was captured along with a number of his followers.

It was only by coincidence that in February 1716, when Banda and his fellow prisoners were being paraded in the streets of Delhi, an embassy of the British Governor of Fort William was present at the court of Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar. The embassy which consisted of John Surman and Edward Stephenson is known as the Surman embassy. Surman and Stephenson witnessed the beheading of most of the Sikhs, and left a glowing account of their religious fervour and sacrifice. According to them, "it is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatized from this new formed Religion."[1] This is the earliest known reference by the British to the religious zeal of the Sikhs.

Banda's execution was followed by an attempt on the part of the Mughal government to extirpate the Sikhs. But persecutions proved self-defeating. The government changed its strategy

[1]Letter from John Surman & Edward Stephenson to Robert Hedges, President and Governor of Fort William, Bengal. Dated Delhi, March 10, 1716. C.R. Wilson, *The Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, Vol. II, Part II, "The Surman Embassy," Letter XII (I), p. 119.

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and gave a *jagir*[2] to the *Khalsa*[3] in 1733 in the hope of pacifying it. This experiment also failed and the Mughal Governor of Punjab, Zakariya Khan, reverted to the old policy. In the first half of 1739, Nadir Shah led the Central Asian troops into India. This was the beginning of the end of Mughal Empire. The Sikhs were not slow to seize their opportunity. The next twenty five years which saw the decline of the Mughal Empire also saw the rise of Sikh *misls* to power.

In 1752, Ahmad Shah Durrani, who succeeded Nadir Shah in Afghanistan, annexed Lahore and Multan to his own kingdom.[4] This did not perturb the Sikhs who appointed Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as their leader. The Sikhs suffered heavily at the hands of the Durrani troops but they never lost heart and prepared themselves for another encounter. The Sikhs emerged stronger after the Durrani invasions.[5] From 1768 onwards the Sikhs became not only supreme in their own land but also took to a career of gradual aggrandisement. It was because of their incursions near the gates of Delhi and even into the territories of *Nawab Vazir* of Oudh, an ally of the Company, that the Sikhs attracted the attention of the British.[6]

Three literary works with direct bearing on the history and politics of the Sikhs appeared in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Two of these works were the product of the individual initiative of A.L.H. Polier[7] and George

[2]This *jagir* and the title of *Nawab* were bestowed upon Kapur Singh by the Khalsa. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 121.

[3]"The Khalsa is best described," says McLeod, "as an order, as a society possessing a religious foundation and a military discipline." W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 4. Also see John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, pp. 114-15.

[4]Hari Ram Gupta, *Studies in Later Mughal History of the Punjab*, pp. 167-68.

[5]Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani*, p. 308. For the strategy of the Sikhs against the troops of Ahmad Shah see, Arjun Dass Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War*, pp. 79-82.

[6]William Francklin, *Military Memoirs of George Thomas* (hereafter cited as George Thomas), Appendix II, p. 351.

[7]A.L.H. Polier, "The Siques," ed. Ganda Singh, *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1962.

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Forster.[8] The third was produced by James Browne under orders of the British Government.[9] Polier wrote a paper, Forster a travelogue, and Browne a tract. The three authors not only had different objects in view but also adopted different modes of investigation. Their conclusions, in some respects, were not identical, but there is considerable similarity in the questions they asked.

The first of the three writings under reference is that of Colonel Antonie Louis Henri Polier, a Swiss engineer. He was born at Lausanne in February 1741. His father, H.E. Polier, was of French origin, naturalized in Switzerland. He came to India in 1757, the year of the battle of Plassey, and entered into the service of the United East India Company. His uncle, Paul Phillip Polier, was already in the Company service and was commanding the Fort St. George (Madras). A.L.H. Polier was a diligent worker. In 1762 he became chief engineer, with the rank of Captain. He also joined active service under Clive. Polier could not get further promotion because of his nationality, and resigned in 1776. Warren Hastings helped Polier to enter into the service of Shuja-ud-Daula, the *Nawab* of Oudh, who employed him as an architect and engineer. Polier lost his job owing to the hostile attitude of Governor-General's Council and served the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam for some time. In 1782 Warren Hastings took him back into Company's service as Lt. Colonel, with permission to reside at Lucknow. He returned to Europe in 1788 and settled in France near Avignon in 1792. His oriental display of wealth attracted robbers (or revolutionaries) and he was murdered on February 9, 1795.[10]

It was during his stay at Lucknow that Polier developed interest in the history and religions of India. Lucknow had become a seat of culture and learning during the eighteenth

[8]George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, 2 vols., London, 1798.

[9]James Browne, "History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks," published with another tract under the common title *India Tracts*, London, 1788.

[10]C.E. Buckland, ed. *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 339. Also see A.L.H. Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

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century. He collected a number of manuscripts from Lucknow, Delhi, Agra and the neighbouring places. He presented to the British Museum in London a complete set of the *Vedas* and some other manuscripts. A number of these manuscripts are also preserved at Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris.

Polier contributed a number of papers to the Asiatic Society of Bengal of which he was elected a member on January 29, 1784. He presented his paper on *The Siques* or *History of the Seeks* on December 20, 1787. A copy of this paper available at India Office Library, London, bears no date but it was written in 1777 at Delhi. This date is mentioned by George Forster who extensively quotes from a Memoir which, he believes, was written by Colonel Polier.[11] That Forster is not wrong in his belief is clearly shown by a comparison of the texts of Forster and Polier. However, there is some alteration in the arrangement as well as contents. Obviously, Polier made these changes at a later date and this accounts for the confusion in dating the paper.[12]

Polier's paper, though brief, touches upon almost every aspect of the contemporary Sikh society. It describes their religious beliefs, socio-political structure, diet, dress and military system. Polier realises the strength of the institutions created by Guru Gobind Singh and records that the Khalsa "might prove very formidable to its neighbours and overwhelm them in the end." But he also notices the disunity, internecine divisions and jealousies which prevented the Sikhs from being as strong as they might have been.

The motives which prompted Polier to write his paper are hard to guess. He was not a member of the Asiatic Society when he wrote this paper nor does the language of the paper suggest a purely literary temper. It has been suggested that Polier wanted to impress upon the British the urgent need to

[11]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 333.

[12]Ganda Singh and Fauja Singh believe on the basis of "internal evidence" that the paper was written in 1780. Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, pp. 53, 60, 64; Fauja Singh, ed. *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, pp. 9, 23.

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exterminate the 'evil' of the Sikhs.[13] But even this becomes questionable in view of the fact that he did not take much interest in the propagation of his views and communicated his paper only a decade after he had written it.

The second account of the Sikhs is from Major James Browne. It is the first regular treatise on the Sikhs produced by an Englishman. However, of the text of thirty pages, first twenty seven consist of the English translation of a Persian manuscript. Browne, in his introduction, mentions that it was prepared from some manuscripts in *Devnagri* character by "two Hindoos of considerable knowledge." He neither mentions the names of the authors nor the title of the manuscript. This manuscript was *Risala-i-Nanak Shah*, also called *Risala dar Ahwal-i-Nanak Shah Darwesh*, a copy of which is preserved in the Abdus-Salam section of the Muslim University, Aligarh. The author of the manuscript was Budh Singh Arora of Lahore, who was assisted by Lala Ajaib Singh Suraj of Malerkotla.[14]

James Browne entered the army of the East India Company in 1765 at the age of 21. He gradually rose to the rank of Captain in June 1771. Next year he was appointed aide-de-Camp to Warren Hastings. He was appointed Collector of the Jungle Terry districts in 1773.[15] In January 1781, Browne was promoted to the rank of Major.

The British Government in India had been perplexed since 1776 by the rumours of a possible alliance between Shah Alam, the Rohillas, the Marathas and the Sikhs for the invasion of Oudh. War against Oudh practically meant war against the Company. This convinced Warren Hastings of the necessity of interfering in the politics of Delhi. For a moment the situation was averted but became grave once again after the death of Najjaf Khan in April 1782. Under the circumstances Warren Hastings resolved to send Browne as his personal representative

[13]Fauja Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[14]Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, pp. 1-2.

[15]Buckland, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Browne wrote a tract entitled "Description of the Jungle Terry Districts, their Revenue, Trade and Government: With a plan for the improvement of them," which is included in his publication *India Tracts.*

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to the court of Delhi.[16]

Browne was required to assist *Nawab Vazir* Asaf-ud-Daula and to assure Shah Alam of the 'attachment' of the Company to his person and interests.[17] But he was warned to keep away from the factional politics of the court. However, contrary to it, Browne plunged himself into court politics. He also advocated a strong anti-Sikh alliance, and was even willing to invite the Marathas against the Sikhs. Warren Hastings did not approve of the envoy's activities. The kaleidoscopic politics of the court hardly suited a man of strong convictions like Browne. The mission failed to achieve its object and the ascendancy of Mahadji Sindhia at the court of Delhi made Browne's stay impossible in view of his recent activities which were prejudicial to the Maratha leader. Warren Hastings left India in February 1785 and his successor, Sir John Macpherson, recalled Browne on March 1, 1785.[18]

James Browne did not reconcile himself to his recall. He left for England early in 1786. Browne was still in England when Macpherson reached there. Browne wanted to elicit a public apology from Macpherson but failing in that he challenged him to a duel. They fought at Hyde Park, London, in September 1787 but both escaped unhurt. On September 17, 1787 Browne submitted a copy of his "History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks" to John Motteux, the Chairman of the Court of Directors. This was published in London under orders of the Court along with Browne's "Description of the Jungle Terry Districts," which he had presented to the Chairman of the Court on June 20, 1787. Browne became Lieutenant-Colonel on February 2, 1788 and returned to India. He married Miss Catherine Charlotte Raper in December 1789. He died at Dinapore on June 22, 1792, when he was only forty eight.[19]

The text of Browne's tract deals with the history of the Sikhs

[16]Browne was not designated as envoy to "avoid the *eclact* of a publick appointment," of course with full understanding of the other members of the Board. Warren Hastings to Major Browne, August 20, 1782, Krishan Dayal Bhargava, ed. *Browne Correspondence*, Letter No. 1, p. 1.

[17]*Ibid*., pp. 1-5.

[18]*Ibid*. John Macpherson to Major Browne, Calcutta, March 1, 1785, No. 130, p. 237.

[19]Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, pp. 5 6.

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from the birth of Guru Nanak to the establishment of the supremacy of the Sikhs in Punjab. It covers the events upto March 31, 1785 when a treaty was concluded between the Marathas and the *Khalsaji*. Browne obtained a copy of this treaty and transmitted it to Calcutta on April 9, 1785. The focus of the tract is on the activities of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur, and the struggle of the Sikhs against Ahmad Shah Durrani. He also added a valuable introduction discussing the factors which led to the rise of the Sikhs and their socio-political structure. He is of the opinion that because of their internal vigour the Sikhs were bound to be exceedingly formidable to all their neighbours.

The third writer under reference is George Forster. He was appointed a civil servant in the Madras Presidency of the East India Company in 1782.[20] His love of adventure made him undertake a dangerous and arduous overland journey from Bengal to England. His strong physique and resolute spirit made this journey possible and his integrity and intelligence as an observer rendered this journey memorable. He left Calcutta on May 23, 1782, and besides stray references to the Sikhs, wrote a connected account about them at Jammu in March-April 1783.[21] Forster was in regular communication with A.L.H. Polier and obtained from him, besides other information, "large historical tracts."[22] The Sikhs were an important factor to Forster in the total picture of the contemporary India which he wanted to sketch.

Thus Polier, Browne and Forster were interested in the Sikhs from different places and angles. Polier's was a view from Oudh, a settled territory in comparative peace and under a perpetual threat of being violated by the Sikhs. Browne's information was gathered at Delhi, which also like Oudh, was threatened by the Sikhs. However, Browne was also in direct touch with the Sikhs. He had received complementary missions from some of their chiefs and had an idea of what the Sikhs

[20]Buckland, *op. cit*., p. 151.

[21]Forster, *op. cit*., letter XI, Vol. I, pp. 291-340. This letter was written by Forster to Mr. Gregory from Lucknow. Also see Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, pp. 75-78.

[22]Forster, *op. cit*., Preface, xii, Vol. I, p. 33. These tracts also included Polier's paper on the Sikhs.

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had to say about themselves. Forster wrote his account of the Sikhs at Jammu after having himself seen the Sikhs in their own land and in the adjacent territories through which he had travelled.[23]

It is clear from the writings of Polier, Browne and Forster that the Sikhs had become relevant to the late eighteenth century writers because of their newly acquired power in the Punjab and the unsettling influence of their incursions in the adjoining areas. The Sikhs, to use J.D. Cunningham's phrase, were in a "state of progression." They had acquired "national importance" and might prove "very formidable" to their neighbours.[24] It was evident to Browne that "the rapid progress of this sect will hereafter render a knowledge of them, their strength, and government, very important to the administration of Bengal."[25] Thus the major questions before these three European observers were to determine the nature of Sikh upsurge and to discover the fountain of their energy. It is the quest for answering these questions, that, in spite of apparent divergence of emphasis, lent an underlying unity to their writings.

Polier, Browne and Forster agree that religion was a vital factor in the emergence of the Sikhs as a political power. The natural question which transpires from this assumption is that of the nature of Sikhism and the extent of its influence on the political power of the Sikhs. Polier considers Sikhism "a new sect" but also notices that it had a "strong taint of the Gentoo religion" from the days of Guru Nanak.[26] However, he believes that Sikhs owed their political power primarily to the weakness of the Mughal Government. Religion helped the Sikhs win the proselytes from "the lowest and most abject castes."

Browne does not consider Sikhism to be a religion altogether distinct from Hinduism. He writes in his introduction that Sikhism bore the same relation to Hinduism as "the Protestant does to the Romish."[27] Religion played an indirect role

[23]Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 291, 340.
[24]Polier, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.
[25]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. iv.
[26]Polier, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56, 63. "Gentoo" here denotes Hindu.
[27]The text of the tract says that the followers of Guru Nanak were called "Sicks" but the men whom he "instructed in the mysteries of his doctrine, he called Murids." Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

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in their rise. This made them victim of "the barbarous bigotry of Aurangzebe," and this persecution, as usual, strengthened the Sikhs.

Forster finds Guru Nanak endowed with all the qualities required for "the institution of a new system of religion."[28] He observes that "though many essential differences exist between the religious code of the Hindoos and that of the Sicques, a large space of their ground-work exhibits strong features of similarity."[29] Forster attributes the rise of the Sikhs to their "invincible perseverance" and their resourcefulness in boldly seizing on every hold which offered support. He believes that it was their religious spirit and its intensity which led to their rise on the political scene of the country. Unlike most of his contemporaries Forster considers the decline of the Mughals and Durranis only as "auxiliary causes."[30]

The reasons which inspired the people to embrace Sikhism is another vital question which interests these writers. Polier believes that some people embraced Sikhism "from fear, others from a love of novelty and independence."[31] According to Browne:

> They made the distinction of their sect a political as much as a religious principle, rendering the admission into it easy to all, and the immediate temporal advantages of protection and independence, as great and as evident as possible; while they at the same time levied contributions upon all their neighbours who refused to come into their fraternity.[32]

Forster believes that besides the success of the Sikhs and the love of plunder among the converts, some became Sikhs "to obtain a protection against the rapacity of the Sicque government, others to take shelter from the oppressions or just demands of the empire."[33]

[28]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 293.
[29]*Ibid.*, p. 294.
[30]*Ibid.*, p. 327.
[31]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[32]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. v. Similar sentiments are contained in the text, pp. 10, 17-18.
[33]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 312 .

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Since a large number of converts to Sikhism belonged to the jat and gujar tribes, who were mostly agriculturists, Polier, Browne and Forster considered Sikhism to be essentially a movement of the "cultivators of land."[34]

The nature of the politico-religious organization of the Sikhs is perhaps the most perplexing yet pertinent question which the early writers ask, and attempt to answer. Polier believes it to be an "aristocratic republick."[35] According to him:

> As for the Government of the Siques, it is properly an aristocracy, in which no pre-eminence is allowed except that which power and force naturally gives, otherwise all the chiefs, great or small, and even the poorest and most abject Siques, look on themselves as perfectly equal in all the public concerns and in the greatest council or *Goormotta*[36] of the nation, held annually either at *Ambarsar, Lahore* or some other place.[37]

Similar views were recorded by Browne and Forster. Both of them think that the Government of the Sikhs appeared to be an aristocracy, but the submission of the Sikhs to an elected chief was only nominal and that too for a particular occasion.[38] As such the organization of the Sikhs was essentially a "common wealth."[39] Browne notices that the coins struck by Jassa Singh Kalal in the country of Ahmad "by the grace of God," were later "withdrawn by the grand Diet of the Sick chiefs" and new coins were struck in the "names of *Gooroo Nanak* and *Gooroo Gobind Singh*."[40] He is also aware that their government was called "Khalsah Gee."[41]

[34]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Also see Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. iv, Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 312.

[35]Letter from Major Polier to Colonel Ironside at Belgram, Delhi, May 22, 1776, in Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, p. 65.

[36]*Gurmatta* was not "the greatest council" of the Sikhs, as contended by Polier, Browne and Forster, but, a "resolution passed in an assembly of the Sikhs in the presence of the Sacred Book." V.N. Datta, *Amritsar, Past and Present*, p. 10.

[37]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[38]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. vi-vii; Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 328-29.

[39]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 311.

[40]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. vi.

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 29.

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It is also evident from the writings of Polier, Browne and Forster that the Sikhs were moderate in their exactions and zealous in safeguarding all those who sought their protection as well as their own people. The protection granted by even the smallest chief was respected by the entire community.[42] That is why the country was not only well cultivated but came to have a good reputation for the manufacture of "very fine cloth" and "the best arms in Hindostan."[43]

The simplicity of diet and dress of the Sikhs, their light baggage, unostentatious camp, and quick and long marches elicit the approbation of the European observers. According to Polier, "the Siques are in general strong and well-made, accustomed from their infancy to the most laborious life and the hardest fare; they make marches and undergo fatigues that will appear really astonishing."[44] He describes their food as "the coarsest" and notices that "bread baked in ashes, soaked afterwards in a mash made of different kinds of pulse, is their best dish, and such as they seldom indulge themselves with, except when at full leisure; otherwise notches or grains hastily parched are all they care for."[45] Forster quotes these observations.[46] Both Polier and Forster notice the excess of the intoxicants used by the Sikhs, and the haughtiness of their deportment but also record that they "seldom kill in cold blood or make slaves."[47]

The extent of the efficiency of the Sikh soldiers was also a point of vital interest. Browne, following the popularly accepted notion, describes the Sikh cavalry as "remarkably good, the men being very hardy and well armed with sabres and excellent matchlocks, which they use with great dexterity; the horses bred in their country are one of the best breeds in the empire."[48] Polier's views are identical with Browne, so far as horses and matchlocks of the Sikhs are concerned,[49] but he thinks rather

[42]*Ibid.*, Introduction, p. viii. Also see Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[43]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. ix. Also see Francklin, *The History of the Reign of Shah Allum* (hereafter cited as Shah Allum), p. 53.

[44]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 62. Also see Francklin, *George Thomas*, pp. 109-10.

[45]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[46]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 333, 335.

[47]*Ibid.*, pp. 321, 329; Polier, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 63.

[48]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. ix.

[49]For an opposite view, see H.G. Keene, *Hindostan Under the Free Lances*, p. 84.

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low of the Sikh cavalry. His main criticism against the Sikh soldiers is that they had a "disorderly manner" of their fight and "that they know not what it is to be in a close or der or to charge sword in hand."[50] Forster, who was a civilian, does not have much to say on the techniques of war, but he clearly notices that "the discordant interests which agitate the Sicque nation, and the constitutional genius of the people must incapacitate them, during the existence of these causes, from becoming a formidable offensive power."[51]

Both Polier and Browne fail to appreciate the nature of the Sikh movement. Polier regards the Sikhs as "the terror and plague of this part of India." He even expects that once Najjaf Khan was free from his entanglement with the Macheri chief,[52] he would expel the Sikhs from the area upto Sarhind. He feels that the Sikhs might be "effectually reduced" in case Taimur Shah also simultaneously pressed them from the West.[53] Browne's main concern was to prevent the Sikhs from continuing their incursions into the territory of Oudh.[54] Forster had no mind to suggest the extirpation of the Sikhs. Nevertheless he was fully aware of the "licentious manners of the disciples of Nanock, especially when employed in foreign service" and was too glad to reach Nurpur "unhurt by the Sicques, tigers or thieves."[55]

Though these authors often make hostile judgements on the contemporary Sikh community, yet a close examination of their writings reveals that in reality they are complementing the Sikh community on a variety of scores. For example, when Browne writes that the Sikhs were atheists he gives the reason for it that "*Wah Gorou* repeated several times is their only symbol." Where could be a more positive verdict on the religious beliefs of the Sikhs than this? It doesn't matter if Polier dubbs the Sikhs as the "terror and plague" so long as his paper contains a judgement like the following:

[50]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[51]Forster, *op. cit.*, p. 339; George Thomas also expressed similar views. Francklin, *George Thomas*, pp. 104-5.

[52]Mirza Najjaf Khan was the *Mir Bakshi* of Shah Alam. He led a campaign against Rao Raja Partap Singh of Macheri.

[53]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[54]Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

[55]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 247, 257.

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> Their own immediate possessions are exceedingly well cultivated, populous and rich; the revenues in general taken in kind throughout and not in money, which is very favourable to the tiller. In short few countries can vie with theirs, particularly in this part of India.[56]

Browne's testimony is still more favourable for the Sikhs than that of Polier. According to him:

> A sect which contained in its original principles so much internal vigour, as sustained it against the bloody persecution of a great government, determined, and interested to suppress it, raised it up again with fresh strength on every opportunity which occurred, and at length enabled it so far to subdue all opposition, as to acquire an entire and undisturbed dominion over some of the finest provinces of the empire, from whence it makes incursions into others holding out protection to all who join, and destruction to all who oppose it, a sect, which makes religion and politics unite in its aggrandizement, and renders the entrance into it so easy to all who desire to become members of it, cannot fail to extend itself very far, and in the end to be exceedingly formidable to all its neighbours.[57]

No society at any stage has won outright applause of the observers, and the Sikh society in the late eighteenth century was certainly not a perfect one. Early European observers naturally brought to bear on the subject of their writing the prejudices of a diverse culture. Both Polier and Browne, as noted earlier, were placed at stations from where a favourable view of the Sikhs was almost impossible. Once these limitations are taken into account it will become obvious that they are not guilty of any wilful distortion of facts.

It is interesting to observe that all the three writings contain a prophecy. Polier closes his paper with "a pretended prophecy, which the Siques say has been delivered down by some of their Gorou, that the Siques after remaining sometime the terror of

[56]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 62. This is fully corroborated by George Thomas. Francklin, *George Thomas*, p. 101.

[57]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. xi-xii.

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India would at last be finally destroyed by white men coming from the westward."[58] Polier never believed it and clearly termed it "a pretended prophecy." As such it is not wishful thinking on Polier's part, as has been recently made out,[59] but a reflection on the superstitious beliefs and practices of the eighteenth century Indian society.

The fact that the society at that time was extremely credulous, and all types of rumours and prophecies were afloat, is fully evident from William Francklin's "singular account of an impostor among the Seiks" whose knowledge of mankind, from long and deep reflection, had convinced him that it was no difficult matter "to render his countrymen the dupes of his own artifices."[60] It may also be noticed that the text of Browne's tract explains the rise of the Sikhs in terms of a heavenly declaration made to Guru Gobind Singh.[61] The following extract from Charles Masson not only corroborates Polier, but also mirrors the popular superstitions:

> It is believed that Nanak prophesied many things like capture of Multan, Kashmir, Mankirat and Peshawar. There yet remains to be fulfilled the captures of Kabul, before the gates of which vast numbers of Sikhs are to fall, and their subjection to British authority for one hundred and forty years (which they suppose will commence on the demise of Ranjit Singh).[62]

Unlike Polier, both Browne and Forster believe history to be akin to science. They not only interpret history of the Sikhs in terms of certain 'laws' of human history but also attempt to predict the future on the basis of their study of the present. Referring to the persecution of the Sikhs by Aurangzeb, Browne writes that "persecution, as will ever be the case, gave strength to that which it meant to destroy." Writing under the foreshades of the French Revolution, Browne continues his introduction in the same vein:

[58]Polier, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[59]Fauja Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
[60]Francklin, *George Thomas*, pp. 273-85.
[61]Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 27.
[62]Charles Masson, *Narrative of various Journeys in Beluchistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab*, Vol. I, p. 428.

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> The Sicks from necessity confederated together, and finding that their peaceable deportment did not secure them from oppression, they took up arms to defend themselves against a tyrannical government; and as will always happen where the common rights of humanity are violated, a hero arose, whose courage and ability directed the efforts of his injured followers, to a just, though severe revenge.[63]

Forster even goes a step ahead of Browne. Systematic in his approach and sympathetic in his understanding, he feels the strength as well as weakness of the Sikh community. He is keen to base his observations on facts. Where it is not possible, he is forced to take recourse to legends and hagiographies which he clearly mentions.[64] Like Browne, Forster tries to generalise. For example, on the basis of the dealings of the Sikhs with their neighbours he comes to the conclusion that losing a kingdom must be "the invariable result of every connection made with the Sicques."[65] Forster is at his best when his quest for the application of the laws of history makes him predict the rise of a strong man in Punjab:

> Should any future cause call forth the combined efforts of the Sicques to maintain the existence of empire and religion, we may see some ambitious chief led on by his genius and success, and, absorbing the power of his associates, display, from the ruins of their commonwealth, the standard of monarchy. The page of history is filled with the like efforts springing from the like causes. Under such a form of government I have little hesitation in saying, that the Sicques would be soon advanced to the first rank amongst the native princes of Hindostan, and would become a terror to the surrounding states.[66]

This attempt to prophesy is meaningful and needs to be viewed in a larger context. This is the kind of speculation in which Edmund Burke indulges for he too realises the rise of Napoleon

[63]Browne, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. v.
[64]Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 292, 300, 320.
[65]*Ibid.*, p. 270.
[66]*Ibid.*, p. 340.

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out of the turmoils of the French Revolution. Forster also foresees the rise of Ranjit Singh, whom M. Jacquemont later on calls "a Bonaparte in miniature."

With the exception of Forster, the early writers have not found favour with some of the scholars.[67] The contents of their writings are undoubtedly faulty, as is often the case with most of the pioneering works. Nevertheless one cannot help noticing that in spite of their being close to the events of the day these writers could achieve a certain degree of detachment and made significant observations on the society and polity of the Sikhs. To appreciate their writings it is necessary to bear in mind the handicaps from which they suffered, e.g.: the limited means of collecting information (after all the Sikh territory was a *terra incognita*), the general ignorance of Indian society (Mill's and Elphinstone's histories had not yet appeared), and the difficulty of general communication betwean Indians and foreigners (the Asiatic Society of Bengal had not made much headway by then). The succeeding authors were influenced by these writings far more by virtue of the questions they raised than the answers they attempted. It is because of the nature of these questions that these writings have remained relevant for nearly two centuries, and should be still regarded as valuable contributions to the subject which they try to illuminate.

[67]Ganda Singh, ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, p. 6. Fauja Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

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CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDATION

The year 1803 saw the end of the Maratha influence in northern India and the British occupation of Delhi.[1] This latter development pushed the British frontier to the Jamuna and made the East India Company an immediate neighbour of the Sikhs, "a singular nation" that inhabited the territories between the river Jamuna and the Indus. The Sikhs had already attracted the attention of the British in the last quarter of the eighteenth century because of their incursions into the Doab. The changed situation made knowledge about the Sikhs still more imperative.[2] The Directors of the Company, by their Despatch of June 5, 1805, desired that all available information on the geography and history of India should be collected.[3]

The British came into direct contact with the Sikh chiefs in 1805 as a result of Jaswant Rao Holkar's advance into the Punjab. Lord Lake followed Holkar, whose hope to gain the Sikh chiefs to his cause soon gave way to despair. On December 24, 1805, Holkar accepted the terms offered by Lake. This saved the Punjab from the embarrassing presence of the contending armies of the Marathas and the British. During this campaign

[1]The Marathas under Louis Bourquin were defeated by Lord Lake on September 11, 1803 beneath the walls of Delhi. Delhi was occupied on Sept. 15 and under the treaty of Surji Anjangaon (Dec. 30, 1803) Daulat Rao Sindhia was forced to cede Delhi, Agra, Rohtak, Hissar, Sirsa, and Gurgaon. See H.H. Dodwell, *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 374, and V.N. Chakravorty, *Anglo-Maratha Relations and Malcolm 1798-1830*, pp. 36-37.

[2]In 1803 Lord Lake was directed to send friendly letters to the Sikh chiefs. But neither Fort William nor Delhi Residency was in a position to provide the names of these chiefs. The required information was eventually supplied by an Agent of the Resident with Sindhia. B.J. Hasrat, *Anglo-Sikh Relations*, p. 41.

[3]J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, p. 110.

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into the Punjab, Lord Lake was accompanied by a political officer John Malcolm, who was required to persuade the Sikh chiefs not to render any help to Holkar. This was Malcolm's first visit to the Punjab, and he fully utilised this opportunity by collecting every available information about the history, manners and religion of the Sikhs. He visited Calcutta towards the end of 1806 and stayed there for about six months. It was during this period that his *Sketch of the Sikhs* was completed.[4]

John Malcolm was born at Burnfoot in the parish of Westerkirk, Dumfriesshire on May 2, 1769.[5] He was not able to have much formal education. His father, George Malcolm, had been ruined by untoward financial speculations. John Malcolm's maternal uncle, John Pasley, a rich London merchant, took him to London in July 1781. After a brief spell of schooling, Malcolm was produced before the Directors of the East India Company, who, after initial hesitation in view of Malcolm's tender age, commissioned him in the army.[6] Malcolm, after a few more months at school, sailed for India in the autumn of 1782, and landed at Madras in April 1783 when he was only fourteen years of age.

'Boy Malcolm', as he came to be popularly known, was regarded as "a careless, good-humoured fellow, illiterate, but with pregnant ability."[7] He embarked on active service for the first time in 1790 during the renewal of war against Tipu. After participating in the siege of Copoulee, his regiment joined the main army of the Nizam of Deccan. There Malcolm came into contact with Sir John Kennaway and Graeme Mercer, two seasoned diplomats in the Company's service, and thus was kindled in him the zeal of joining the diplomatic service. Besides the power and grandeur which this service dangled before him,

[4]It was first published in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XI, and was separately published in 1812.

[5]John Kaye calls it the year of heroes. Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington were born during this year. See John Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Major General Sir John Malcolm*, Vol. I, p. 4.

[6]For the particulars of this memorable interview see John Kaye, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[7]George Smith, ed. *The Dictionary of National Biography* (henceforth cited as *D.N.B.*), Vol. XII, p. 848.

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monetary consideration might have weighed on Malcolm's mind.[8]

Malcolm, with his characteristic energy, plunged himself into the study of Persian, which was considered to be a passport to diplomatic service.[9] He soon mastered the idiom of the language. To make up the deficiency of proper schooling he decided to educate himself. He travelled widely, read a lot, and gained considerable experience. He studied the history of India and meditated on the principles responsible for the creation of the British Empire in India and those on which depended its stability. Thus, through his conscious effort, young Malcolm came to be a full man. He was a self-educated man in the authentic sense of the term. One of the Malcolm's favourite authors was Edmund Burke, and his ideas exercised that transforming impact on Malcolm's mind which was destined to last for a life time.[10]

Malcolm embarked for England in February 1794 and landed in July. During his stay there he attracted the attention of Dundas, President of the Board of Control, by a paper on the grievances of the East India Company's officers. He also came to know Sir Alured Clark, the designate Commander-in-Chief, and was appointed a member of his staff. He sailed for India in May 1795.

Back in Madras once again in 1796, though still a Lieutenant, Malcolm acted as Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief. In April 1798 Lord Wellesley (then Lord Morington) landed in India to take over as the Governor-General. In the hope of gaining political employment, Malcolm placed the papers drawn up by him on the native states of India before Wellesley. He was appointed Assistant to the Resident of Hyderabad on

[8]Kaye has attempted to build an altogether different image. However, Malcolm's letters dated Feb. 6, 1796 and Aug. 6, 1796, to his mother and sister respectively, clearly show the inferiority complex from which he suffered while comparing his emoluments with those of his brother 'Bob' who was going to be nominated the Commercial Resident at Vishakhapatnam. John Kaye, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 49. Also see Victor G. Kierman, *Metcalfe Mission to Lahore*, p. 6.

[9]Malcolm's letter to his brother Gilbert, dated F be.22 1795, Kaye, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[10]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 229.

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September 10, 1798. He took an active part in the second Mysore war, and the settlement of Mysore. He was selected to lead the English Mission to the court of Persia and sailed for the Persian Gulf on December 29, 1799.[11] In spite of numerous difficulties he conducted the mission to the entire satisfaction of Lord Wellesley.

In 1803 Malcolm took an active part in the negotiations for peace with Daulat Rao Sindhia which followed the Maratha war. He was also appointed Resident of Mysore. He visited Calcutta in March 1805 on summons from Wellesley. He was sent on a mission to Sindhia in May that year. Subsequently he joined Lord Lake and assisted him in diplomacy in his pursuit of Jaswant Rao Holkar in the Punjab.

Malcolm married on July 4, 1807 and was tipped for a mission (an abortive one) to Persia in 1808. He left once again for Tehran in January 1810. During his journey he completed his book *The Political Sketch of India* which he had begun in 1809.[12] On his return to India he stayed at Bombay and wrote his *History of Persia*. He visited England in July 1812 and was there for about five years. Shortly after his arrival he was knighted and was made a K.C.B. in April 1815. He also became acquainted with Sir Walter Scott and published *History of Persia*.[13] This proved a great success and Malcolm received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws at Oxford in 1816.[14]

Malcolm returned to India in 1817 and participated enthusiastically in the implementation of Lord Hastings' new policy by bringing Central India within the fold of the treaties of Subordinate Cooperation. He was promoted to the rank of a Brigadier and played a key role in the conclusion of the Pindari and the Maratha war. However, he failed to get the Governorship of Bombay, Madras or the newly acquired territories in Central India on which he had rested his hopes. He returned to England in sheer disgust. His ambition was

[11] *D.N.B.*, Vol. XII, p. 849.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 852; John Malcolm, *The Political History of India* (ed. K.N. Panikkar), New Delhi, 1970, Vol. I, Editor's Preface.

[13] *History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Times*, London, 1815.

[14] *D.N.B.*, Vol. XII, p. 852.

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fulfilled only in November 1828 when he succeeded his colleague and friend Mountstuart Elphinstone as the Governor of Bombay which office he held up to December 5, 1830. During his stay at Bombay he published the *Life of Clive* on which Macaulay wrote his famous *Edinburgh Review* article.[15]

Malcolm entered the House of Commons in April 1831 from the borough of Launcestor mainly with a view to advancing the Indian interests.[16] He had been a Tory all his life. He fought for the retention of the rotten and pocket boroughs because that offered an opportunity for the Indian interests to be represented in the House. However, he lost the election from Dumfries boroughs in the dissolved Parliament. Malcolm actively campaigned for renewal of the Company's charter in 1833. He was struck by paralysis and died in London on May 30, 1833.[17]

This varied and fairly long spell of official life had a profound influence on Malcolm's mind. His studies and beliefs had brought him very close to Burke's notion of history according to which human society is a continuous community of the past, present and future.[18] He had acquired a "deep faith in tradition, in the wisdom of the past, in established things and ways."[19] His intimate and long association with India had given him sympathy and compassion for the Indian people. He had learnt a good deal from his colleagues such as Mountstuart Elphinstone, who whetted his literary appetite, and James Mackintosh, who gave a certain degree of precision and exactness to Malcolm's vigorous but unpractised mind.[20]

The writing of history was congenial to Malcolm's temper in ways more than one. His idea of history made, for him, knowledge of the past of a society a pre-requisite for the understanding of its present condition. Unlike the "Utilitarians",

[15]Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, pp. 479-549.

[16]*Calcutta Review*, No. LVIII, December 1857, p. 352.

[17]*D.N.B.*, Vol. XII, p. 856.

[18]Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, p. 15.

[19]V.N. Datta, "Grounds for Differences Between Malcolm and Bentinck," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 21st Session, 1958, p. 451.

[20]John Kaye, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 62.

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Malcolm, who subscribed to the Romantic school, believed that the institutions evolve but are never transplanted. He asserted that "we must divest our minds of all arrogant pretensions arising from the presumed superiority of our own knowledge, and seek the accomplishment of great ends we have in view by the means which are best suited to the peculiar nature of the objects."[21]

However, Malcolm's immediate object in writing about the Sikhs was the increased importance of knowing about the Sikhs and the relative non-availability of reliable information about this community. It was his conviction that "the most savage states are those who have most prejudices, and who are consequently most easily conciliated or offended."[22] The ignorance of an outsider would not induce them to "pardon an outrage against their religion or customs."[23] On the other hand, the knowledge of their history, beliefs and usages by those whom they "cannot but admit to possess superior intelligence," had the most conciliatory and pleasing effect on them. This was particularly important at a juncture when the British were actively trying to befriend the Sikhs. They had entered into a friendly treaty with Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia in 1806. Thus in the choice of his subject Malcolm was guided by the consideration of immediate necessity. Malcolm might have also been motivated to expose the weakness of Punjab with a view to suggesting its incorporation into the British sphere of influence. This is evident from his ambitious attitude and the expansionist policy which he supported in his later career.

Malcolm was fully aware of the high norms required of a work of history[24] and had the highest regard for facts. A historical work, according to him, had to be "not specious

[21]Malcolm, *Political History of India*, Vol. II, p. 142.

[22]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 5.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

[24]It was this realisation which made Malcolm assign to some of his works most unostentative titles like *Sketches of the Political History of India, Sketch of the Sikhs* and *A Memoir of Central India*. The gravity attached to history during the early years of the 19th century can be imagined from the fact that Mark Wilks styled his work of 1500 pages on the history of Mysore as *Historical Sketches*.

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theory, but an accumulation of facts."[25] Judgements based on "imperfect knowledge, narrow views and general maxims of rule" had little relevance in the eyes of Malcolm.[26] Study of history was meaningful to Malcolm only in the light of lessons which were required "to guide our judgement through the difficult, and, we may say, the awful task of governing the vast dominions which we have acquired in the East."

Malcolm believed that the regard for facts did not preclude a sympathetic disposition. A sympathetic account could not be considered 'partial', so long as the narrator supported it by record.[27] It was partly this desire of being friendly without losing touch with facts which made Malcolm rely wherever possible on the Sikh sources in preference to the non-Sikh ones. According to him, "in every research into the general history of mankind, it is of the most essential importance to hear what a nation has to say of itself."[28] This was in the simplest terms Burke's idea of judging history from the opposite point of view.

Malcolm produced his *Sketch of the Sikhs* under considerable limitations. Malcolm, like his distinguished and brilliant contemporaries Metcalfe and Elphinstone, had little time to spare—such was the hard and strenuous official life of these men who had to weather many storms. Besides the problem of finding leisure, Malcolm had difficulty in thrashing out his source-material. The evidence he came across was often of contradictory nature. He found it rather difficult to separate facts from fiction, and regarded this as a general problem of writing the history of "religious impostors."[29]

Malcolm feared that the information conveyed by him might be "very defective." He wanted his work to make up the deficiency of the earlier works which had "served more to excite than to gratify curiosity," and at the same time to "stimulate and aid some person, who has more leisure and better oppor-

[25]Malcolm's review of Capt. William's *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Bengal Native Infantry*, *Quarterly Review*, Vol. XVIII, p. 386.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 387

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 409.

[28]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 5.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

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tunities," for writing a complete history of the Sikhs.[30] Thus he believed that his work was just a preliminary effort to prepare the foundation for a more solid and authentic historical work on the subject.

Malcolm had collected his material with great flair. Besides the writings on the Sikhs by Browne and Forster, his source-material included the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, erroneously called *Gyana Ratnavali*, the *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala,* Bakhat Mal's *Khalsa Nama,*[31] the *Adi Granth*, the *Dasam Padshah Ka Granth,* the *Vichitra Natak* and the *Siyarul Mutakhirin.* Some of the tracts in Dogri and Punjabi dialects which he collected were translated for him by Dr. John Leyden.[32]

Malcolm did not confine himself to the literary sources. He derived a good deal of information about the family and territories of the Raja of Nandon from the envoy of Sansar Chand who had attended on Lord Lake in 1805, when the British army was in the Punjab.[33] He consulted at Calcutta "a Sikh priest of the Nirmala Order," whom he "found equally intelligent and communicative."[34] The Sanskritized spellings e.g., in words like 'Vedi', 'Vatala', 'Govind', and knowledge of Hinduism seem to be the obvious contribution of this priest.

The *Sketch of the Sikhs* is divided into the following three sections:

(i) Sketch of the history and present state of the Sikhs, with observations on their religious institutions, usages, manners and character;

(ii) Countries and government of the Sikhs; and

(iii) Religion of the Sikhs.

Malcolm devotes considerable attention to the history of the Sikhs from the birth of Guru Nanak to the year 1805, when

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[31] Fauja Singh, while writing about the sources used by Malcolm, says that "he has not said so, but may also have used Bakhat Mal's account of the Sikhs called *Khalsa Nama* because he had a copy of it in his possession and subsequently rendered it into English." *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs,* p. 18. Malcolm clearly mentions this work in his footnote in connection with Guru Nanak's distribution of everything in the granary of Daulat Khan. *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 14.

[32] Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 3.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 58, footnote.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

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Malcolm visited Punjab. This account is not only aimed at supplementing the information which Browne and Forster had conveyed but is also intended for serving as the background against which Malcolm wants to discuss the socio-political institutions and the religion of the Sikhs. He depicts Guru Nanak as a great protagonist of Hindu-Muslim unity, who worked without rousing "the bigotry of the intolerant and tyrannical Muhammedan government under which he lived."[35] Unlike James Browne, Malcolm is aware that the arming of the Sikhs began during the time of Guru Hargobind. Malcolm, like Forster,[36] finds it considerably difficult to explain the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur. According to him, "the Sikh records of their own history, from the death of Har Govind to that of Tegh Bahadur, are contradictory and unsatisfactory, and appear to merit little attention."[37] However, while thus rejecting the Sikh version, Malcolm does not openly accept the contention of the *Siyarul Mutakhirin* that the Guru was put to death because he "committed the most violent depredations on the peaceable inhabitants of the Punjab," but only quoted it in a footnote.[38]

Malcolm notices the impact of the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur on the nature of the movement of the Sikhs. According to him:

> The history of the Sikhs, after the death of Tegh Bahadur, assumes a new aspect. It is no longer the record of a sect, who, revering the conciliatory and mild tenets of their founder, desired more to protect themselves than to injure others.[39]

From this event onwards Malcolm's account of the Sikhs presents a chain reaction, a system of challenge and response.

Guru Gobind Singh, as a result of the horror perpetrated on his father, called upon his followers "to lay aside their

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[36] Forster, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 300.
[37] Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 40.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 38. These views of Ghulam Hussein are not acceptable to modern scholars; see I.B. Banerjee, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. II, p. 63.
[39] Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 41.

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peaceable habits, to graft the resolute courage of the soldier on the enthusiastic faith of the devotee...."[40] Malcolm notices that Guru Gobind Singh admitted converts from all tribes and broke all barriers of caste in creating a cadre of armed followers. Malcolm looks upon the institution of 'Guru Mata' and the founding of a 'federative republic' as proofs of "the comprehensive and able mind of this bold reformer."[41] Malcolm is alive to the limitations of Guru Gobind Singh and writes that the success of the Guru was not to be assessed in terms of his own limited success in the face of "one of the greatest empires in the universe." According to him:

> The spirit, however, which he infused into his followers, was handed down as a rich inheritance to their children; who, though they consider Baba Nanac as the author of their religion, revere, with a just gratitude, Guru Govind, as the founder of their worldly greatness and political independence.[42]

The work of Guru Gobind Singh was continued by Banda, who according to Malcolm, "though a brave and able leader, was one of the most cruel and ferocious of men...."[43] According to Malcolm, the Sikhs, during the attack on Sarhind, put to death almost all inhabitants of that place and "in a spirit of wild and brutal rage, dug up the carcasses of the dead, and exposed them to be devoured by beasts of prey."[44] This version is based on the highly prejudiced account of Ghulam Hussein who, by and large, followed Khafi Khan. Khafi Khan goes to the extent of saying that even the wombs of pregnant women were ripped open by the Sikhs and babies cut to pieces.[45] Malcolm describes the Sikh invasion of Saharanpur in the same vein. According to him:

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
[45] For the Sikh version of the event see Gyani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh-i-Guru Khalsa*, pp. 19-28. Also see Fauja Singh, ed. *Sirhind Through the Ages*, pp. 101-2.

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> Every excess that the most wanton barbarity could commit, every cruelty that an unappeased appetite of revenge could suggest, was inflicted upon the miserable inhabitants of the provinces through which they passed. Life was only granted to those who conformed to the religion, and adopted the habits and dress of the Sikhs.[46]

According to Malcolm, Banda's cruelty was not confined to the Muslims, but many Akalis also "suffered martyrdom" at his hands for refusing to change their mode of salutation, diet or dress.[47] Malcolm, nevertheless, quotes extensively from Ghulam Hussein with a view to relating the "intrepidity" with which Banda and his followers met death after they were imprisoned. This account fully confirms the earlier verdict which John Surman and Edward Stephens had passed on the Sikhs.[48]

The death of Banda was a grave set-back to the power of the Sikhs. According to Malcolm, nothing was heard of the Sikhs thereafter till Nadir Shah's invasion. The confusion which prevailed in the Punjab during the subsequent years was highly favourable to the Sikhs who not only looted "the peaceable inhabitants of the Penjab, who sought shelter in the hills," but also "added both to their wealth and reputation, by harassing and plundering the rear of Nadir Shah's army."[49]

Ahmad Shah Durrani, who succeeded Nadir Shah, tried his best to destroy the emerging power of the Sikhs. This struggle continued till 1767 when he invaded the Punjab for the last time. This left the Sikhs the masters of their own land. According to Malcolm:

> The Sikh nation, who have, throughout their early history, always appeared, like a suppressed flame, to rise into higher splendour from every attempt to crush them, had become, while they were oppressed, as formidable for their union, as for their determined courage and unconquerable spirit of resistance.[50]

[46]Malcolm, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.
[47]*Ibid.*, p. 84.
[48]See infra, p. 1.
[49]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 86.
[50]*Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

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Malcolm believes that noble qualities of the Sikhs could emerge only in the face of a common danger. Once the external threat was over, the Sikhs became disunited and destitute of all their former qualities. This situation led Malcolm to assert that General Perron, the French Commander of Daulat Rao Sindhia, would have made all the cis-Sutlej Sikh chiefs the tributaries of Sindhia, had the war with the English Government not occurred. When Malcolm entered the Punjab in 1805, he found it "weak and distracted in a degree that could hardly have been imagined." According to him, "every shadow of that concord, which once formed the strength of the Sikh nation, seemed to be extinguished."[51] This conclusion logically amounts to advocating the adoption of a bold policy towards the Sikhs, which was actually done in 1809.

Malcolm's account of the political history of the Sikhs is useful, but the most valuable part of his work is the study of the institutions and manners of the Sikhs. Niebuhr, in his lectures on Roman history in 1811-12, pointed out that "the early history of every nation must be rather of institutions than of events, of classes than of individuals, of customs than of laws."[52] It is not a little remarkable that Malcolm had come to realise the necessity of the study of institutions even before Niebuhr gave his verdict.

Malcolm describes the government of the Sikhs as a "theocracy." According to him, the Sikhs "obey a temporal chief, it is true; but that chief preserves his power and authority by professing himself the servant of the Khalsa."[53] Malcolm takes the "Khalsa" to mean "the state or commonwealth" and adds that it is "supposed, by the Sikhs, to have a mystical meaning, and to imply that superior government., under the protection of which they live...."[54] The highest body of the Sikhs, according to Malcolm, was "Guru mata or great national council, which is intended to have a supreme authority over their federative republic."[55]

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[52] G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 18.
[53] Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 114.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15, fn.
[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

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Malcolm, like Browne and Forster, does not content himself by merely referring to *Gurmatta*, but also describes its actual procedure. According to him:

> The assembly, which is called the Guru-mata, is convened by the Acalis; and when the chiefs meet upon this solemn occasion it is concluded that all private animosities cease, and that every man sacrifices his personal feelings at the shrine of the general good; and, actuated by principles of pure patriotism, thinks of nothing but the interests of the religion, and commonwealth, to which he belongs.[56]

A recent writer has not only declared Malcolm evidently responsible for confusing *Gurmatta* with the *Sarbat Khalsa*, but has also found him guilty of gross exaggeration on the ground that the Sikh chiefs did not become oblivious to their self-interest in the meetings of the *Sarbat Khalsa*.[57] It is true that Malcolm goes wrong in his understanding of the *Gurmatta*, but he is himself a victim of this error rather than its author. As mentioned earlier, the error had originated in the writings of Polier, Browne and Forster. Regarding the questionable "disinterested patriotism" of the Sikh chiefs, Malcolm is fully conscious of the contradictions between their theory and practice and gives the following description of the "Guru-mata" held in 1805:

> ...it was attended by few chiefs: and most of the absentees, who had any power, were bold and forward in their offers to resist any resolution to which this council might come.[58]

Malcolm also examines the effect of institutions on the character of the individual. He records that it was because of the profession of common religion and liberty of every individual to abandon one leader in favour of another, that the lowest Sikh horseman came to assume a "very independent style." This independent style of the people forced their chiefs to treat them

[56]*Ibid.*, p. 120, cf. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab*, pp. 15-16.

[57]McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, pp. 48-49.

[58]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 107.

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with utmost consideration both in military and civil affairs.

Commenting on the sharing of crop between the cultivator and his chief, Malcolm records that the chief, though entitled to one-half of the gross produce, never levied the full share "and in no country, perhaps, is the Rayat, or cultivator, treated with more indulgence."[59]

Malcolm notices that the administration of justice in the territorties held by the Sikhs was very defective and rude. He rightly perceives that this state of affairs resulted from there having been no fixed code. The only books the Sikhs cared for were their holy scriptures. These scriptures, though inculcating general maxims of justice, were not books of law. Ordinary disputes were settled by the "Panchayats" of the people or their chiefs, but since capital punishment was never awarded, a murder was generally avenged by the relations of the deceased.[60]

Malcolm observes the impact which the internal dissensions had on the military performance of the Sikhs. According to him:

> The Sikhs are almost all horsemen and they take great delight in riding. Their horses were, a few years ago, famous, and those bred in the Lakhi Jungle, and other parts of their territory, were justly celebrated for their strength, temper, and activity; but the internal distractions of these territories has been unfavourable to the encouragement of the breed, which has consequently declined; and the Sikhs now are in no respect better mounted than the Mahratas.[61]

Malcolm finds the religion of the Sikhs the most "curious and important" aspect of his subject. He describes Sikhism as "a creed of pure deism, grounded on the most sublime general truths, blended with the belief of all the absurdities of the Hindu mythology, and the fables of Muhammedanism."[62] There is an

[59]*Ibid.*, p. 126.

[60]*Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

[61]*Ibid.*, pp. 140-41. Also see private letter from A. Mathews, Camp Boorea (5 miles west of the Jumna), April 17, 1808 to Mr. Fagan, M.L. Ahluwalia, ed. *Select Documents Relating to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Negotiations with the British Envoy Charles Theohilus Metcalfe, 1808-1809*, p. 39.

[62]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 144.

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obvious inconsistency in Malcolm's evaluation of the religion of the Sikhs. As pointed out in the *Edinburgh Review*, "to speak of a creed of pure deism blended with the belief of absurdities is the same thing as to speak of a perfect system of philosophy, of which the greater part is nonsense."[63] Malcolm describes Guru Nanak as a reformer rather than a subverter of Hinduism. But he believes that the reforms of Guru Gobind Singh were irreconcilable with Hinduism. According to him, "wherever the religion of Guru Gobind prevails, the institutions of Brahma must fall."[64]

Malcolm's account of the Sikhs, though fairly objective, suffers from several inaccuracies and wrong judgements. His interpretation of Guru Hargobind's two swords, *Piri* and *Miri*, is far from satisfactory. His explanation of the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur is not tenable. His account of Banda is prejudiced. The name of the Governor of Sarhind whom Banda defeated was Wazir Khan and not Foujdar Khan as contended by Malcolm. At times Malcolm contradicts himself. For example, in one place he says that in reality the government of the Sikhs was an "oligarchy", but in another place he calls it a "theocracy."[65] Similar contradictions are found in his account of the religion of the Sikhs and description of their character.

Malcolm's work, with all its shortcomings, however, remains a fundamental contribution to the British historiography on the Sikhs. Malcolm not only enriches the subject with new information but also adds a new dimension to the nature and scope of the whole inquiry into the subject. Malcolm addresses himself to the task of studying the institutions of the Sikhs. His keenness to substantiate all that he states makes him dive deep into the subject. For example, when Browne records that their persecution gave strength to the Sikhs, he explains it only in terms of general maxims. Malcolm also says that the Sikhs emerged stronger from every bid to crush them, but gives the following well-defined reason:

[63] *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXI, 1813, p. 439; according to J.S. Grewal, the review was by James Mill, *Muslim Rule in India*, p. 206.

[64] Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 151.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 114.

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> ...a state of persecution and distress was the one most favourable for the action of a constitution like theirs; which, formed upon general and abstract principles, required constant and great sacrifices of personal advantage to the public good; and such can alone be expected from men, acting under the influence of that enthusiasm, which the fervor of a new religion, or a struggle for independence, can alone impart, and which are ever most readily made, when it becomes obvious to all, that a complete union in the general cause is the only hope of individual safety.[66]

Forster believes that the internal dissensions of the Sikhs would soon pave the way for the rise of a strong leader. Malcolm comes to an opposite conclusion on the ground that the Sikhs believe themselves to have been placed by their "last and most revered prophet, under the peculiar care of God." This, according to Malcolm, led the Sikhs to consider the Khalsa as a theocracy. Contrary to it, Ranjit Singh rose to power immediately after Malcolm's visit to the Punjab.[67] However, this does not make him revise his thesis. While updating his *Sketch of the Political History of India* in 1826 he records the following impression about the power of Ranjit Singh: "We cannot yet contemplate the kingdom of this prince as one that is likely to long outlive its founder." Malcolm comes to this conclusion because he understands that "in spite of its imposing appearance" the power of Ranjit Singh was based on "very loose and incohesive materials."[68]

Malcolm is unorthodox in his approach to his source-material. This is what makes James Mill question the authority of Malcolm's work. According to Mill:

> Though the inaccurate Persians are not much to be trusted, the fabling Seiks, making everything miraculous in origin of their sect, are still less.[69]

[66]*Ibid.*, p. 103.
[67]*Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.
[68]Malcolm, *The Political History of India*, Vol. I, p. 319.
[69]James Mill, *The History of British India*, ed. H.H. Wilson, Vol. II, p. 303.

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But Wilson questions Mill's attitude towards the Sikh sources and is quick to realise the strength of Malcolm's stand. According to him:

> Without attaching more credit to the Sikh accounts than they deserve, their authority is preferable to those of the Mohammedan writers, whose defect is not inaccuracy only, but religious bigotry also, the Sketch of the Sikhs by Sir J. Malcolm ...is a much safer guide than even the Seir Mutakhareen.[70]

Malcolm both in the treatment of his subject and the selection of his source-material displays an amalgam of the eighteenth century 'Enlightenment' and the nineteenth century 'Romantic' tendencies. The impact of 'Enlightenment' is clearly reflected in Malcolm's minute study of the institutions of the Sikhs. If he prefers the Sikh sources to others, it is largely because the Sikh sources alone can answer the type of questions which Malcolm raises in analyzing his evidence. In his overall concept of history and the purpose of its writing, Malcolm is a Romanticist, but with a difference. He is devoid of that imaginative power which often characterises the writings of this school. His style is slovenly and involved, and lacks that sensitive and imaginative composition and vividness which is a trait of the Romantic school.

John Kaye, who regards Malcolm's works as "rather elaborate reports than finished compositions," points out the limitations of Malcolm and offers an explanation in the following words:

> It would have been a miracle indeed, if Malcolm, who since the age of thirteen had seldom had any other home than a canvas tent, and whose library was a rusty bullock-trunk, should—I will not say thought as deeply and written as correctly as Mackintosh, but been eminently distinguished for these qualities at all.[71]

Considering the limitations of Malcolm, his taking up of a sub-

[70] *Ibid.*, footnote.
[71] John Kaye, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 62-63.

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ject so little known to most of his contemporaries is a contribution in itself. It is not a small credit that Malcolm's work not only substantially enhances the knowledge of his contemporaries about the Sikhs but also exercises considerable impact on the subsequent writers of Sikh history. He is not only a pioneer in the study of the institutions of the Sikhs, he places the history of the Sikhs on a sufficiently firm foundation.

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CHAPTER 3

A NEW DIMENSION

Prinsep's work on the Sikh power in the Punjab appeared in 1834, nearly twenty-five years after Malcolm had written his *Sketch of the Sikhs.* A fundamental change had taken place in the Punjab during this period. Instead of a congeries of mutually fighting and almost independent chiefships, Punjab now presented a large unified kingdom. The energies of the Sikhs, which had been sapped by internal conflicts, wild ambitions and petty intrigues got a new direction under Ranjit Singh. However, Ranjit Singh's ambition of unifying the entire Punjab under his leadership proved abortive. The fear of Ranjit Singh made the cis-Sutlej Sikh chiefs opt for the British protection. These developments placed the British in an entirely new situation. They had not only to maintain friendly relations with a fairly powerful neighbour, but were also to settle matters when approached by the protected Sikh chiefs.

Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India (1828-35), in pursuance of the above mentioned ends, sought from the officers employed in the management of the Sikh affairs "some general information as to the history and condition of the chiefs and the habits and customs of the sect."[1] Bentinck was a very practical administrator, who firmly believed in the security and virtue of the British rule. It was in accordance with the wishes of Bentinck that both Captain William Murray, the Political Agent at Ambala, and Captain Wade, the Assistant at Ludhiana, submitted voluminous reports containing

[1]H.T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and Political Life of Muharaja Runjeet Singh*, Calcutta, 1834, Preface, p. vi. This preface was eliminated from the subsequent edition of the book by Mahboob Alam Khan, *The Punjab Series*, Vol. II, Lahore, 1897. The edition brought out by the Language Dept., Punjab in 1970 also does not contain this preface. References in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are to the latest edition.

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valuable information on all the required points. These reports, particularly the one of Murray, served as the base for Prinsep's work.

Both William Murray and C.M. Wade had known the Sikhs from a close quarter. Murray had been in the Punjab for about fifteen years, and Wade for seven years by the time they submitted their reports. Murray had taken to the writing of "Political and Historical Review of the Sikh States" while he was serving at Ludhiana as Political Assistant.[2] He had even requested different Sikh chieftains to send their *vakils* to him for helping him with his project. Murray's prolonged stay in the Punjab had also created in his mind certain prejudices which were further nurtured by his bitter controversy with Wade from 1823 onwards. Wade, who had been posted at Ludhiana as Political Assistant in 1823, was required to rout all his correspondence through Murray. This he considered derogatory to his self-respect and he pleaded for his independence. To the chagrin of Murray he succeeded in obtaining an independent charge of foreign relations with the Punjab and the trans-Indus States in 1827. This was partly due to Ranjit Singh's request to Bentinck.[3] This step greatly diminished the power and prestige of Murray and left him bitter not only against Wade but also against Ranjit Singh. Personal differences soon found their way into the policy matters, and during the following four years both Murray and Wade, who often supported the cause of Ranjit Singh, were locked in a paper duel over the exact extent of Ranjit Singh's cis-Sutlej territories. These disputes served the cause of history by making both the officers acquire a mastery of detail, though at the same time also deepening their prejudices.

Murray, in the preparation of his report, had consulted a number of Persian and non-Persian works on the rise of the Sikhs from 1742 onwards. As recorded by J.D. Cunningham, Murray's chief reliance was on the works of Buti Shah and

[2]Murray to Metcalfe, March 26, 1826, quoted by R.R. Sethi, *The Mighty and Shrewd Maharaja*, p. 21. For the details of report see, H.S. Bhatia, ed. *Rare Documents on Sikhs and Their Rule in the Punjab*, pp. 41-141.

[3]R.R. Sethi, *The Lahore Darbar*, p. 21.

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Sohan Lal.[4] He was also in touch with Khushwaqt Rai. For the recent events he collected oral evidence from the persons who he thought were knowledgeable, but he did not stop there. He checked this information by comparing it with the account in the *Akhbars* which were available in his office. He also used a large number of English documents dealing with events from 1803 onwards.[5]

It is quite obvious from his account that Murray does not form a good opinion of the contemporary Sikh society. He is particularly struck by the utter lack of literacy among the Sikhs.[6] This illiteracy was the natural consequence of the unsettled conditions prevalent in the Punjab during the eighteenth century and the literary percentage in other parts of India being also rather low.[7] Another thing he notices is that superstition was widespread in the Punjab, which mostly stemmed from illiteracy. The administration of Civil and Criminal Justice, according to Murray, was vested in the Sikh chiefs, who arbitrarily imposed fines for almost all kinds of crimes.[8] This observation is also made by Henry Lawrence.[9] Murray also describes in detail the Muslim and Sikh Law of Succession. He, among other things, records the system of nuptial contracts and notes that in some cases the needy parents received money by promising a girl to three or four different families.[10] This often resulted in a dispute among the suitors. The custom of marrying the widow of a brother was prevalent among Jat families. Murray notices with approbation the almost non-existence of *Sati* among the

[4]J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 118. Buti Shah was in the service of the British at Ludhiana and wrote *Tawarikh-i-Punjab*, in Persian in 1848; Sohan Lal who was employed in the court of Ranjit Singh, wrote *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, in Persian (now tr. into English by V.S. Suri).

[5]J.D. Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[6]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

[7]R.C. Majumdar, ed. *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II, pp. 61-62.

[8]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[9]Henry Lawrence, *Adventures of an Officer*, Vol. II, pp. 484-85.

[10]Alexander Gardner noted this practice in the Kirghiz families of Central Asia, Hugh Pearse, *Soldier and Traveller--Memories of Alexander Gardner*, p. 141.

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Sikhs.[11] However, he deplores the low moral standards of the people.[12]

Murray's criticism of the Sikh society is particularly severe when he observes that "sense of shame, or feelings of honour, have no place in the breast of a Jat, and the same may be said of men of other low tribes."[13] One wonders at Murray's concept of the sense of honour. But Cunningham's description of the conduct of the Sikhs after being routed in the battle of Sobraon is sufficient to mitigate any such insinuation. According to J.D. Cunningham:

> ...although assailed on either side by squadrons of horse and battalions of foot, no Sikh offered to submit and no disciple of Gobind asked for quarter. They everywhere showed a front to the victors.[14]

Murray also describes the system of land revenue under the Sikhs. He concludes that *Batai* (sharing the produce) was a kind of *Lotai* (plunder).[15] This is in sharp contrast to the views expressed by Browne and Malcolm. Malcolm had written about the Punjab that the cultivator was treated there with more indulgence than anywhere else.[16] The views of Murray are, however, not acceptable to the specialists on the subject and some of his notions appear to be preconceived.[17]

William Murray died before he could reshape his report to publish it in the form of a book. It was in these circumstances that this work was undertaken by H.T. Prinsep, the then Persian Secretary to the Indian Government, in order to "rescue from the oblivion of a record-office information calculated to be so extensively useful, and...to do honour to this distinguished and

[11]*Sati* is the practice of the widow burning herself with her husband's dead body or with some of his articles.

[12]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]J.D. Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

[15]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

[16]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 126.

[17]Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, pp. 110-11. Also see S.S. Hans, *Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature (AD 1500-1850)*, Ph. D. Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev Univ., Amritsar, 1980, p. 479.

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lamented officer, and to lay before his friends and the world a lasting testimony of his worth and talents."[18] Prinsep, though he claimed to be only a compiler, left a deep impact on the entire work. He not only added to Murray's materials from Captain Wade's report and other sources, but re-wrote the whole of the historical part. The tenth chapter, which contains the account of Bentinck's meeting with Ranjit Singh, was written by Prinsep from his own observation.

Henry Thoby Prinsep was born in Thoby (England) on July 15, 1793. His father, John Prinsep, came to India as a military cadet. Later he took to trafficking in indigo, returned to England in 1788, and published *A Review of the Trade of the East India Company* and a few other pamphlets. He was a member of the Parliament from 1802 to 1806. He suffered a huge loss in trade, and procured an appointment as a bailiff to the court of the borough of Southwork.[19] Henry Thoby, after being educated under a private tutor, joined Mr. Knox's School at Tunbridge when he was thirteen. He obtained a writership in the East India Company in 1807 and entered Haileybury College. He reached Calcutta on July 20, 1809 at the age of sixteen. After a training period of two years he was employed in the Judicial Department. He was appointed in the Secretariat in 1814, and was subsequently promoted to the newly created office of the Superintendent and Remembrancer of Legal Affairs. Prinsep once again joined the Governor-General's suite during Lord Hastings' tours which embraced the period of Nepal and Pindari Wars and the Third Maratha War.

Prinsep obtained the Governor-General's permission to write *A History of the Political and Military Transactions in India during the Administration of Marquess of Hastings*. He sent the manuscript to his elder brother, Charles Robert Prinsep. Lord Hastings wrote a letter to George Canning, President, Board of Control, recommending that the publication of the work should be sanctioned. Canning disallowed the request even without reading the manuscript. But Charles went ahead with the publication and sent the proofs to the Board of Control. Canning, on finding that the work did not contain anything

[18]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, 1st ed., Preface, p. ix.
[19]*D.N.B.*, Vol. XVI, p. 392.

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objectionable, cancelled his earlier orders. Besides this work and his *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab* (1834), Prinsep's publications include *Notes on the Historical Results deducible from the Recent Discoveries in Afghanistan* (1844); *Notion of Corn-Laws and Custom Duties* (1844); *A General Register of the Hon'ble East India Company's Civil Servants of the Bengal Establishment from 1790-1842* (1844); *Tibet Tartary and Mongolia...*(1851); *Indian Question of 1853* (1853); *The Code of Criminal Procedure...*(1866); and *The Criminal Procedure Code Amendment Act...*(1874).

Prinsep showed remarkable insight into the revenue affairs. It was at his recommendation that the Government, in order to ensure proper payment of land revenue, passed a law known as the Regulation VIII of 1819. Prinsep was appointed Persian Secretary to the Government on December 16, 1820, on a salary of Rs. 3000 a month. He was appointed a member of Governor-General's Council during a temporary vacancy in 1835, and was given a permanent appointment five years later. He retired from service in 1843, and settled in London.[20]

Prinsep, like his father, was keen to enter Parliament. He contested from four constituencies as a Conservative candidate, and was elected from Harwich, but was unseated on technical grounds. He was elected member of the Court of Directors in 1850 and retained his Directorship even when the Council of India was established in 1858. He retired in 1874 because of deafness and failing sight, and died on February 11, 1878.[21]

Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab* was written at a time when the Anglo-Russian relations were in a low key.[22] This had roused the British anxiety about the possible danger from the North-West. Since the security of this front depended on the British friendship with Ranjit Singh, and the

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 393.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 394.

[22]The Treaty of Unikar Skelessi was concluded between Russia and Turky on July 8, 1833. By a secret clause, the Sultan pledged to close the Dardanells to all foreign ships, thereby making Russia inaccessible to the western powers from the south. Relations with Russia were also strained because of the refusal of Tsar Nicholas to accept Sir Stratford Canning as the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg. See R.W. Seton Watson, *Britain in Europe*, 1955, pp. 176-77, 180-81; and Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

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capacity of the latter to defend himself against an invasion from the North-West, Punjab assumed an added importance in the eyes of the British.

Prinsep deemed Sikhism to be essentially political in nature and linked its activity and fortunes directly with those of the Mughal empire. Unlike George Forster, Prinsep attributed the Sikh upsurge to economic rather than religious factors. Religion was, therefore, brought into play only as a handmade of politics. Sikhism, to Prinsep, was essentially a movement of the Jat peasantry driven to desperation as a result of impoverishment by prolonged extortion on the part of the Mughal rulers. According to him, the rebels found the tenets of the *Granth* of Guru Gobind more suitable to their purpose than "the more peaceable doctrines of the Vedas and Shastras of pure Hinduism."[23] The peasants revived in their customs and ceremonies "the latent flame of the Sikh ritual" as a bond of "union and excitement against their oppressors."

Prinsep, though disinterested in the squabbles and petty feuds of the Sikh *misls*, attempted a careful analysis of the nature of these organizations. Considering the fact that no work written prior to Prinsep shows any acquaintance with the structure of the *misls*, the contribution of Prinsep in this regard is fundamental and his explanation is illuminating. According to him, the *misls* were "confederacies of equals, under chiefs of their own selection."[24] Prinsep finds it necessary to explain in his work the key terms of the institutions. He defines the *Gurmatta* as the "special council where expeditions of importance, or any matters of more than ordinary moment were submitted to their united wisdom." Prinsep interprets *Rakha* to be a black mail and *Dal Khalsa Ji* as a joint force of several *misls*.

A staunch advocate of firm central authority, Prinsep finds nothing cohesive in the Sikh polity during the *misl* period.[25] He believes that it was not the common bond which united the Sikhs, but the threat of danger to their existence. He compares

[23]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 23. For a critical discussion on the nature of the *misls* see J.S. Grewal, *Essays in Sikh History*, pp. 87-91.

[25]Cf. W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, pp. 38-45.

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the rule of the Sikh *misls* in the Punjab with the Saxon occupation of England and the seizure of the best part of Gaul by the Clovis and the Franks. Prinsep considers the structure of Government created by the Sikhs during this period as "the very rudest that the most ignorant tribes ever devised."[26]

The career and achievements of Ranjit Singh and the nature of his government form the core of Prinsep's concern in the work. The last eight chapters of the work are exclusively devoted to Ranjit Singh, and even the first three are, by far, aimed at giving an idea of the circumstances that led to the emergence of the power of Ranjit Singh. Perhaps that is why the work, when first published, was popularly known as the *Life of Runjeet Singh*.[27]

As Secretary to the Governor-General, Prinsep attended the famous meeting held at Ropar in October 1831 between Bentinck and Ranjit Singh.[28] Prinsep was struck by the friendly attitude of the Maharaja and came to feel perfectly at home in the royal presence.[29] This first hand personal knowledge of Ranjit Singh lent to Prinsep's account of the Maharaja a lively and authentic character.

Ranjit Singh was more fond of the military officers rather than civilians like Prinsep. Consequently Prinsep could not achieve that type of personal rapport with Ranjit Singh which W.G. Osborne (the author of the *Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*), was able to establish. Thus Prinsep, though well-informed, could not come to have a sympathetic understanding of Ranjit Singh. According to Prinsep, Ranjit Singh's empire was based on plunder and usurpation, and he often disregarded the solemnity of the engagements contracted by him.[30] Prinsep highlights

[26]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[27]Henry Lawrence (*Adventures of an Officer*, Vol. I, p. 15) and Carmichael Smyth (*A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, Appendix-viii), referred to the work as Prinsep's *Life of Runjeet Singh*, but J.D. Cunningham (*A History of the Sikhs*, p. 85) described the book as Murray's *Ranjit Singh* by Prinsep. In subsequent references Cunningham only writes Murray, *Ranjit Singh*.

[28]Memorandum by the Secretary to the Governor-General, 30th Oct. 1831, No. 8, *Govt. of India, For. Sec.* 6th Jan. 1832.

[29]Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Tr. V.S. Suri, Daftar III, p. 99.

[30]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 60, 65.

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the determination of Ranjit Singh "to level into subjects and dependents, owing all to himself, every one who was in a position to assert independence, or who prided himself on a separate origin, and enjoyed patrimonies, won by his own or his ancestor's swords."[31]

Prinsep, like Metcalfe, had a rather low opinion of the Sikh troops. He describes in detail the routing of the Akalis by Metcalfe's small escort. Prinsep is assiduous in giving details of Ranjit Singh's retreat during the Kashmir expedition, which involved the loss of nearly all baggage.[32] He frequently tries to undermine the triumphs of the Sikhs and is never tired of offering an apology for their adversaries. For instance, the success of Diwan Mohkam Chand against Dost Muhammad during the Kashmir expedition in July 1813 is attributed to the strong hot wind which blew dust into the face of the Afghans. The success of the Sikh army against Multan is explained in terms of the deficient means of the garrison, which, according to Prinsep, neither expected assault, nor was prepared for a consistent and determined resistance.[33]

The success of the Sikhs is often attributed to the bravery of certain individuals rather than to the conduct of troops as a whole. Describing Diwan Mohkam Chand's expedition of Kashmir, Prinsep writes as follows:

> Dost Muhammad now attacked with his horse, and the Sikhs were sinking before him, when the Diwan in person on his elephant, carried two guns, which discharging grapes checked the Afghans.[34]

Similarly the success of Sikhs in capturing Multan is attributed to the unauthorized assault of Akali Sadhu Singh and his followers.

Prinsep's account of the action of the *Gazis* or fighters for their faith, (January 1824), in which the Sikh troops were able to dislodge Afghan leaders Muhammad Zaman Khan and

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 91. For another version of some of these battles see, Diwan Amar Nath, *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh* (ed. Sita Ram Kohli), Lahore, 1928.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

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Sadiq Khan from the hills of Naushahar, leaves the impression that the Sikh troops were totally ineffective against the Afghans. Prinsep vividly describes the manner in which Phula Singh Akali and his men were "completely destroyed" by the Muslims.[35]

Prinsep, on the authority of Captain Murray, estimates the total number of Ranjit Singh's army as 82,014, the detailed break up of which is as follows:[36]

	Men	
1st. The available regular troops		
Cavalry disciplined by Monsieur Allard, and the special troops mounted on horses of the State, the Gorchar, and Gorchar Khan	12,811	
Infantry, Disciplined Battalions, Najibs, and troops, more or less drilled under the eye of the Maharaja	14,941	
Total regular troops, horse and foot		27,752
Garrison corps, including the troops employed in Kasmir,—Cavalry	3,000	
Infantry, variously armed and equipped	23,950	
		26,950
Contingents of Sardars, consisting in the plains, principally of cavalry, but in the hills of foot soldiers		27,312
Total troops, horse and foot		82,014

Unlike the European armies, there were no organised and regimented corps of artillery in the Sikh army. It was under the charge of a Darogah and consisted of 376 guns and 370 swivels.

Prinsep does not attempt an estimate of the amount annually spent by the Maharaja on his troops. But, as described by Murray, he records that the entire resources of the country under Ranjit Singh amounted to Rs. 2,58,09,500 per annum. As Jagirs worth Rs. 1,09,28,000 per annum were held by the Sikh families and other establishments without any obligation

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 147, cf. Sita Ram Kohli, *Catalogue of Khalsa Darbar Records*, Vol. I, p. 5.

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of payment, the total Khalsa revenue was Rs. 1,48,81,500.[37]

Prinsep, who had himself evinced considerable insight into the details of the land revenue system, does not perceive "any constitution or fixed form of Government" in Ranjit Singh's Kingdom. According to him:

> With respect to the policy and internal government of Ranjit Singh, the most remarkable feature is, the entire absence of anything like system, or principle in his management. His career throughout has been that of an encroaching usurper, and seizer of all within his reach, but what he has so possessed himself of, he subjects to no systematic administration.[38]

Prinsep gives a graphic picture of the character of the Sikh chief. He tries to highlight the unbounded lust, both in matters of sex and possession, which characterized the personality of Ranjit Singh. According to Prinsep, the profligacies of Ranjit Singh "rival the worst that is reported in history of the profligacies of ancient Rome."[39] He even accuses Ranjit Singh of sodomy, and attributes the rise of Khushal Singh and his brothers to this accursed habit of Ranjit Singh.

On Ranjit Singh's conduct Prinsep writes as follows:

> His uniform conduct and career through life, prove him to be selfish, sensual, and...profligately greedy—plundering and reducing to misery without the slightest feeling, or remorse, widows, orphans and families possessing claims to consideration and respect, that one wonders should not have been recognised, even if it were only from policy.[40]

However, despite these remarks Prinsep's picture of Ranjit Singh cannot be called hostile. He is conscious of some of the

[37]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 146, cf. Carmichael Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, Appendix, p. xxxvii.

[38]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 67.

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 142, cf. J.D. Cunningham, "Some Account of the Political Conditions and Military Resources of the Punjab—1844," *Govt. of India, For. Dept. Secret Cons. 28 March 1845*, No. 66 K.W., para 107. Also see, Ram Sukh Rao, *Sri Fateh Singh Partap Prabhakar*, ff 323 b and 324 ab.

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illustrious qualities of Ranjit Singh, which he records in the following lines:

> Ranjit Singh has, in the formation especially of his military force, evinced the same enquiring activity, the same attention to minutiae, and perseverance in watching the execution of his plans, which characterized the first Peter of Russia; and, compared with all that we see and hear of other chiefs who have raised themselves to high dominion, he ranks amongst those, whose means have been the least exceptionable, his career being stained by no bloody executions, and by much fewer crimes than are chargeable against most founders of dynasties.[41]

Prinsep appreciates the gains which Ranjit Singh made on the North-Western frontier, and the sagacity with which he reconciled the "brave and bigotted" Muhammedans to his sway. Prinsep also notices with approbation that "there is no ferocity in his (Ranjit Singh's) disposition and he has never taken life, even under circumstances of aggravated offence."[42]

Contradictions in Prinsep's estimate of Ranjit Singh can be fully explained in terms of contradictions in the personality of Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh, no doubt, was a bundle of paradoxes, and it is, in fact, this paradoxical character that makes him human. At a later period and in a different context Henry Lawrence describes Ranjit Singh as "the wisest and most foolish of monarchs; the gentlest and purest, as well as the most ferocious and debased of kings."[43] On the whole, Prinsep's assessment of Ranjit's character is fairly balanced. His views are further validated by the observations of Osborne, who at times almost repeats the opinions expressed by Prinsep.[44]

Prinsep displays his characteristic frankness in commenting on the Anglo-Sikh relations. Despite the delicate nature of the subject and the high position held by the author in the Government of India, he does not restrain himself from expressing the

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[43] Henry Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 519.
[44] Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

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views which were opposed to the British official stand. He states frankly that the real purpose of sending presents from the British king to Ranjit Singh through Lieutenant Burnes was to obtain information about the navigation of the Indus. This step, according to Prinsep, was necessitated by "the recent success of Russia in Persia and the probability of that power entertaining further designs."[45] This view has been found to be correct.[46]

Prinsep clearly states that Bentinck deliberately kept Ranjit Singh in the dark about the British designs on the Sindh. This, according to him, was done on the assumption that had Ranjit Singh known the British intentions "he might, with every profession of a desire to forward them, contrive by intrigue and secret working to counteract the negotiation." Prinsep describes the purpose of Lieutenant-Colonel Pottinger's mission to Sindh as follows:

> The object of entering upon this negociation, at the particular juncture, was, perhaps, in some measure political, having reference to the necessity of being prepared against the possibility of designs on the part of Russia, should she succeed in establishing her influence in Persia.[47]

This admission on Prinsep's part is significant in view of the fact that even as late as October 1837, i.e. three years after the publication of Prinsep's work, the Government of India was trying to maintain that what had animated the British policy was the desire to secure the "harmony among all the neighbouring powers."[48]

Prinsep had a correct estimate of the foundation of the Anglo-Sikh relations. He was convinced of Ranjit Singh's fidelity to the British because it was based on mutual self-interest. Prinsep describes Ranjit Singh's position as follows:

[45]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[46]B.J. Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, pp. 144-45.

[47]*Prinsep, op. cit.*, p. 133.

[48]C.M. Wade, The Political Agent, North West Frontier Agency to the Secretary to the Government of India, 5th Oct. 1837, *Govt. of India, For. Dept., Pol. Proc.* No. 65, 20th Oct. 1837.

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> His professions, his interest, and his inclinations, are all for us at present, and he derives no little strength and security, from giving it out, that he is on such terms with the British nation.[49]

Prinsep believes that the key to the understanding of Ranjit's relations with the British lies in a proper analysis of Ranjit Singh's personality. This appraisal is indicated in the following statement of Prinsep:

> In action, he (Ranjit Singh) has always shown himself personally brave, and collected, but his plans betray no boldness or adventurous hazard.[50]

Thus Prinsep is of the opinion that Ranjit Singh would not venture to pick up any quarrel with the British as such a step might embroil his kingdom into a war. As pointed out by N.K. Sinha, "perhaps with the solicitude inherent in all builders he feared to expose the kingdom he had created to the risk of war and chose instead the policy of yielding, yielding and yielding."[51] Ranjit Singh made his ego subservient to his interests and continued to play a second fiddle. According to C.M. Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiana:

> To suppose that Ranjit Singh is attached to us by any other principle than that of self-interest would be a delusion which neither I nor my able predecessors in office, Sir David Ochtorlony and Captain Murray, have allowed ourselves to entertain, though ready to accord every credit to the Maharaja's long tried fidelity.[52]

Though having considerable value as a study of Ranjit Singh and his people, Prinsep's work does, at times, suffer from contradictions and inaccuracies. The following extract, which refers

[49]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 142.

[51]N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 91. Also see Victor Jacquemont, *Letters From India, 1829-1832*, London, 1936, pp. 46-47.

[52]C.M. Wade to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, 3rd Oct. 1837. *Govt. of India, For. Dept., Pol. Proc.* No. 61, 20th October 1837.

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to the Sikh invasion of Sarhind in December 1763, is one such example:

> The town of Sarhind was then carried, and most of the buildings razed to the ground, the Sikh animosity against the place being excited by the recollection, that the wife and infant son of their saint Guru Govind had there been inhumanly put to death by Vazir Khan, the governor for Aurangzeb. Not a house was left standing, and it is even to this day deemed a meritorious act by a Sikh, to pull down three bricks from any standing wall of Sarhind, and convey them to the Satluj or Jamna to be cast there into the river.[53]

Wazir Khan had caused two sons of Guru Gobind Singh to be put to death but not "wife and infant son" as stated by Prinsep. The children were accompanied by their grandmother who died of grief. Again, it is hard to reconcile the statements: "most of the buildings razed to the ground" and then "not a house was left standing". The first statement is based on the facts of the events,[54] and the second reflects the hatred which the Sikhs nurtured towards Sarhind during the days of Prinsep.

Prinsep's contention that Ranjit Singh obtained the grant of Lahore from Shah Zaman in return for the restoration of eight of the twelve guns lost by the Shah in the swollen Jhelum is no longer acceptable.[55] Captain Murray had not mentioned the circumstances leading to the grant of Lahore. Prinsep relied on the authority of Captain Wade. But once Prinsep accepted this event as a fact, other contemporary writers were quick to follow him.

Prinsep consistently underestimates the power of the Sikhs. This is because, like most of his contemporaries (except J.D. Cunningham), Prinsep takes a rather superficial view of the Sikh society. He fails to see the force of religious fervour and the military potential of the Sikh masses which lay hidden behind the ambitions of the turbulent and impulsive chiefs.

[53]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 21. According to Lepel Griffin, this practice was enjoined by Guru Gobind Singh, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 50.
[54]Hari Ram Gupta, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 200.
[55]Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 41, footnote.

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This lapse on the part of the British observers was recognised only after the commencement of the First Anglo-Sikh War.

At times Prinsep takes things for granted, without looking beneath the surface. Mir Mannu's appointment as the Governor of the Punjab has been described by Prinsep as a "reward and acknowledgement of his service."[56] This device was in fact used to dispose of his claim to the *Vizarat* of Delhi, which had been held by Mannu's father.

At the close of his work, Prinsep provides some notes based on a comparison of his work with Khushwaqt Rai's *Tarikh-i-Sikhan*. Charles Metcalfe gave to Prinsep the work of Khushwaqt Rai when a part of Prinsep's book was already in the press. On comparing his work with that of Khushwaqt Rai, Prinsep came to the conclusion that the *Tarikh-i-Sikhan* must have been amongst the materials consulted by Murray for the preparation of his work.[57]

Whereas Malcolm has attempted to interpret the history of the Sikhs in terms of the relative strength and weakness of their institutions, Prinsep evaluates the Sikhs in terms of the policy and inclination of Ranjit Singh. Prinsep's weakness lies in his failure to comprehend the latent flame of Sikh religion and the potentials of the Sikh masses, with whom he had no contact. This limitation naturally leaves a flaw in his portrait. His strength lies in a fair appraisal of the personalities of Ranjit Singh and the men around him. Prinsep's work reads like a report, and lacks the historical skill of organization. In spite of this, however, it remains the base for the subsequent literary works on the Sikhs. Even an acute observer like Baron Charles Hugel chiefly relies on Prinsep's work for providing a brief historical sketch of Ranjit Singh and his predecessors.[58] The introduction to Osborne's Journal[59] and the historical part of Henry Lawrence's work[60] are, by and large, based on Prinsep. Henry Steinbach[61] reproduces from Prinsep the appendix

[56]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[57]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, 1st ed., Preface, p. x. Also see Khushwaqt Rai, *Reign of Ranjeet Singh.*

[58]Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, pp. 266-82.

[59]W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, pp. 8-13.

[60]Henry Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 236-60.

[61]Henry Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, pp. 78-92.

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written by Murray on the manners, rules, and customs of the Sikhs. In 1846, William Allen & Co., London brought out an enlarged and updated edition of Prinsep's work.[62] This gave a new lease of life to Prinsep's book which had been long out of print.[63] It is difficult to name a subsequent author on the subject who does not refer to Prinsep's work. Certainly it could be radically changed, reduced or modified, but never ignored.

Some of the opinions of Prinsep are no longer valid, but many of his observations have proved almost prophetic. This is particularly true of his remarks about the relations of the British with Ranjit Singh and the fate of European soldiers in the Punjab. A contemporary reviewer has described Prinsep's work as "attractive to everyone who feels an interest in the concerns of British India."[64] But the concerns of Prinsep really imply the personality of Ranjit Singh, who was recognized as the fountain of the entire policy towards the British. Though the institutional aspect to which Malcolm makes a contribution, is lacking in Prinsep's work, it still remains as the first and one of the most authentic works of its period on the life and times of Ranjit Singh.

[62]*History of the Panjab and the Rise, Progress and Present Conditions of the Sect and Nation of the Sikhs.*

[63]*Ibid.*, Preface, p. xi.

[64]*The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia*, Vol. XVI, New Series, January-April 1835, p. 153.

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CHAPTER 4

MEN AND MANNERS

Auckland, the Governor-General of India, deputed his Secretary W.H. McNaghten, to the court of Ranjit Singh in May 1838. McNaghten was accompanied by C.M. Wade, the Political Agent at Ludhiana, and three members of the Governor-General's entourage. They were Captain W.G. Osborne, Dr. Drummond, and Captain G. McGregor. This mission was sent with a view to cementing the alliance with Ranjit Singh in view of "the recent attempts of the Persians on Herat, the ambiguous conduct of Dost Muhammad,[1] and the suspicions which had been excited with respect to the proceedings and ulterior designs of Russia."[2]

Auckland had sent Alexander Burnes to Afghanistan in 1837 in order to counteract the increasing Russian influence. Burnes' diplomacy cut no ice with Dost Muhammad in the face of a promise of large sums of money by Vickovich, the Russian Agent at Kabul.[3] Dost Muhammad wanted Peshawar as the price of his friendship with the British. It was not possible to oblige him as this place belonged to the Sikhs.[4] In these circumstances

[1]Dost Muhammad Khan was Amir of Afghanistan. He was defeated by the British and had to surrender in November 1840.

[2]W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, London, 1840; 2nd Ed., entitled *Ranjit Singh the Lion of the Punjab*, Calcutta, 1952, p. 18. Unless indicated otherwise, the references made hereafter are to this edition.

[3]Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 204. However Burnes had expressed the opinion that Dost Muhammad was "willing to receive a little from England, rather than much from any other side," and it was the unhelpful attitude of the British government which pushed Dost Muhammad towards Russia. J.W. Kaye, *The War in Afghanistan*, Vol. I, pp. 198-99.

[4]Political Agent at Ludhiana to Secretary to the Govt. of India, Oct. 9, 1837, *No. 75, For. Pol.* Oct. 20, 1837.

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Auckland withdrew Burnes' mission from Kabul in April 1838. Burnes' mission roused the fear and jealousy of Ranjit Singh.[5] Auckland was keen to "avoid giving the slightest umbrage to our old and faithful ally Runjeet Singh,"[6] and expressed a wish to meet him. Ranjit Singh sent a complimentary deputation to Auckland headed by Fakir Azizuddin, to reiterate his goodwill towards the British Government and convey that he would be delighted to meet the Governor-General.[7] It was in response to this deputation that the McNaghten mission was sent to Adina Nagar where Ranjit Singh was spending his summer. McNaghten succeeded in his mission. Auckland and Ranjit Singh met at Ferozepur and the famous Tripartite Treaty was signed by them on June 26, 1838.

W.G. Osborne, who accompanied McNaghten in the capacity of Military Secretary to the Governor-General, preserved a vivid account of his visit to the court of Ranjit Singh in the form of a journal. It was written to "beguile the tedium of a camp life, and without the remotest intention of publication."[8] However, the "excited state" of the Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh, roused considerable British interest and it prompted Osborne to publish his journal.[9]

William Godolphin Osborne was born in 1804. He was a nephew of Auckland and had been in India for a number of years before he visited Ranjit Singh's court and had also participated in the second siege of Bharatpur, in 1825. Osborne's family connections, military experience and openness of conversation had endeared him to Ranjit Singh. The Maharaja treated Osborne with great respect and bade him to speak to his uncle Auckland on several things to strengthen the foundation of unity and friendship.[10] The Maharaja bestowed lavish

[5] *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1837, No. 65.

[6] *Ibid.* Secretary to the Govt. of India to the Political Agent at Ludhiana, Oct. 20, 1837, No. 78.

[7] For an account of this mission see, Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, Vol. I, pp. 185-87.

[8] Osborne, *op. cit.*, Preface, p. 1.

[9] *Ibid.* William Barr also published his journal because of similar reasons. *Journal of a March from Delhi to Cabul*, Preface, p. viii.

[10] Sohan Lal, '*Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, p. 477.

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presents on Osborne. The farewell gifts alone consisted of Rs. 500/- in cash, one horse with a silver saddle, one sword with a covering, a pair of gold bangles, a pearl necklace, a bejewelled underturban, a piece of *pashmina*, two *Doshalas* and nine other garments.[11]

Osborne had a well cultivated mind. Besides other works, he probably read Mill's *History of British India*, Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* and Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*. He does not quote from any of these works in his journal, but some of his judgements are deeply influenced by these writings. For example his observation about the disposition of Ranjit Singh that "except in actual open warfare he has never been known to take life, though his own has been attempted more than once, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilised monarchs,"[12] is similar to Prinsep's who writes that "there is no ferocity in his disposition, and he has never taken life, even under circumstances of aggravated offence...his career being stained by no bloody executions, and by much fewer crimes, than are chargeable against most founders of dynasties."[13] Like Prinsep, Osborne also accuses Ranjit Singh of paederasty, with the only difference that whereas the former suggests it was with Khushal Singh,[14] the latter contends it was with Hira Singh.[15] There is a good deal of similarity in their views about the character of the Sikh army, the future of Punjab and the Anglo-Sikh relations.

Osborne's journal contains entries from May 19 to July 13, 1838. At the time of its publication in 1840 a detailed introduction was added to the journal. The introduction gives a brief idea of the religion of the Sikhs and the circumstances which led to their rise as a political power in the context of the general conditions of the country. It also describes the rise of Ranjit Singh, his dealings with Shah Shuja, and his relations with the British. Though punctuated by some brilliant observations, the

[11]*Ibid.* Also see Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[12]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[13]Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, pp. 143, 148.
[14]*Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
[15]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

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introduction is, by and large, based on the works of James Mill, John Malcolm[16] and H.T. Prinsep.[17] It is, at times, faulty in respect of dates.[18] Some of the assumptions of the author are not borne out by facts. For example, the statement that the Sikhs became "distinguished by peculiar garb and manners" before Gobind Singh is not correct. Similarly the Sikhs never lived "apart from the other inhabitants, in separate villages and communities where one always presided as the head of the rest."[19] These errors are due to the author's reliance on James Mill's *History of British India* which had come to be considered a work of ready reference on the history and culture of the Indian people.[20]

In a review of Osborne's work in *Asiatic Journal*, it is pointed out that there are certain contradictions in the above mentioned introduction and the journal. This makes the reviewer suspect that the introductory sketch is compiled "apparently by another hand."[21] The reviewer points out that whereas in the introduction Ranjit Singh is described as "a devout believer in the doctrine and a punctual observer of the ceremonies of his religion," in the journal it was recorded about Ranjit Singh that "though he is by profession a Sikh, in religion he is in reality a sceptic." The reviewer fails to realize that this apparent contradiction only reflects the contradictions in the personality of Ranjit Singh. As aptly observed in the introduction, an "invariable inconsistency" existed between Ranjit Singh's professed belief and his habitual conduct: "nothing could be more different than the precepts of Nanak and the practices of Ranjit."[22] These contradictions also baffle Prinsep at times

[16]For example cp. p. 7 of this introduction with pp. 19 and 24 of Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*.

[17]Cp. pp. 6, 8, 13, 17 of Osborne's introduction with pp. 7, 11, 72, 68 respectively of Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*.

[18]For example the Mughal empire was founded in 1526 and not 1525. Humayun died in 1556, and not 1555. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[20]James Mill, *The History of British India*, ed., H.H. Wilson, Vol. II, p. 302.

[21]*Asiatic Journal*, Vol. XXXI, January-April 1840, p. 195.

[22]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

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and as such it may be wrong to conclude that the introduction was not written by Osborne.[23]

Osborne does not view Ranjit Singh in the context of Forster's prophecy.[24] His Ranjit Singh is not only an 'eventful' man but also an 'event making' personality.[25] Like Prinsep, he believes that Ranjit Singh "by his own natural and unassisted intellect raised himself from the situation of a private individual to that of a despotic monarch over a turbulent and powerful nation."[26] Ranjit Singh according to Osborne was a "very extraordinary man:"[27] "cunning and distrustful himself, he has succeeded in inspiring his followers with a strong and devoted attachment to his person; with a quick talent at reading men's minds, he is an equal adept at concealing his own."[28]

Osborne regards Ranjit Singh as "mild and merciful as a ruler" but does not form a high opinion of his administration. The administrative system of Ranjit Singh appears to him to be almost primitive in comparison with that of the British, and the mounting avarice of Ranjit Singh responsible for the sad state of affairs to a large extent. According to Osborne, "with six millions sterling in his treasury at Amritsar, such is his love of money, that he will risk the loss of his Kingdom rather than open his hoards, and disgusts his people and army by his ill-timed and cruel parsimony."[29] Osborne particularly notices the unhappy lot of the European officers.

Regarding the administration of justice, Osborne writes that Ranjit Singh's "executions are very prompt and simple, and follow quickly on the sentence....He is himself accuser, judge

[23]Khushwant Singh has also expressed a similar opinion. See, W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, rpt. Karachi, 1973, introduction, p. xiv.

[24]Forster had predicted the rise of a strongman among Sikhs as early as 1783. In view of that the rise of Ranjit Singh is often attributed to the contemporary situation. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, Vol. I, p. 340.

[25]See Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History*, p. 154.

[26]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 32.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 35.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

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and jury; and five minutes is about the duration of the longest trail at Lahore."[30]

Osborne regards the Sikh soldiers as "the finest material in the world for forming an army."[31] According to him:

> They are finer men, I think, than the Company's Sipahis, have fewer prejudices than most Indians, and are more easily managed....They are hardy far beyond the generality of Indians, and seem a merry, lighthearted race of people....The Sikh army possesses one great advantage over our own—the ease with which it can be moved...thirty thousand of their troops could be moved with more facility, and less expense and loss of time, than three Company's regiments on this side of the Sutlej.[32]

However, Osborne's estimate of the Sikh army is in sharp contrast to his estimate of Sikh soldiers. He considers the Sikh army to be "utterly useless and inefficient." According to him, "little dependence can be placed on their discipline, in a case of emergency....As they are at present constituted, Ranjit Singh's own opinon of them is the most correct...he places little confidence in their actual service."[33] Osborne blames the avarice of Ranjit Singh and his distrust of the European officers for this state of affairs. According to him, "this is one of the many instances in which Ranjit sacrifices his own interests to his unconquerable avarice."[34]

Osborne considers some of the feats of the Sikh artillery as "creditable to any artillery in the world,"[35] but he forms a very low opinion of Allard's cavalry. According to him, "they are men of all ages, ill-looking, ill-dressed, and worse

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 67; Henry Lawrence corroborated the views of Osborne, *Adventures of an Officer*, Vol. I, p. 71. Also see Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, p. 73.

[31] Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 61; this view is contradicted by Henry Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 86; but was later on confirmed during the First Anglo-Sikh War; see Gulshan Lall Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, pp. 62-63.

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mounted."[36] In this description Osborne holds an opinion shared also by Lawrence[37] and Steinbach.[38] These opinions constitute a point of special interest for historians as it was partly because of these opinions that the British entered into war against the Sikhs in a light-hearted manner and had to face near discomfiture in its early stages.

Osborne's journal throws valuable light on the life and condition of the peasantry in the Punjab. He found only a few mud villages in the plain from the Sutlej to Adinanagar, indicating thereby that the country was thinly populated. This was because of the fact that life and property were not secure in the area before the establishment of Ranjit Singh's supremacy. This sense of insecurity is indicated in the following description of rural areas by Osborne:

> Every village, however contemptible it may be in size and appearance, possesses a small round mud fort or turret in the centre, resembling an overgrown Martello tower, loopholed for musketry, and the generality of them with a dry and shallow ditch, but without guns.[39]

Osborne observes that only a small quantity of ground was under cultivation, but that the crops were varied and good. That is why he comes to the conclusion that "the soil appears to be rich and prolific."[40] The land revenue policy of the Maharaja left much to be desired and Osborne anticipates that a mild and just government in the country could produce rapid increase in revenue. According to Osborne, "with a more enlightened government, there can be little doubt of the Punjab becoming one of the richest provinces of India."[41]

[36]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 61; this opinion is not accepted by John J.H. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, p. 10!. Also see, Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Military System of the Sikhs*, pp. 165-68.

[37]Henry Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 13.

[38]Henry Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[39]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 22.

[41]*Ibid.*

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Osborne gives a vivid account of the dresses and ornaments of the courtiers and courtesans of Ranjit Singh. He finds the Sikh chiefs "eminently good-looking." Osborne described Raja Suchet Singh as "one of the handsomest of the Sikh chiefs" and recorded the following description of his dress and appearance:

> His dress was magnificent; a helmet or scull cap of bright polished steel inlaid with gold, and a deep fringe of chain mail, of the same material, reaching to his shoulders, three plumes of black heron's feathers waving on his chest, and three shawls of lilac, white, and scarlet, twisted very round and tight, interlaced with one another and gathered round the edge of the helmet, a chelenk of rubies and diamonds on his forehead. Back, breastplates, and gauntlets of steel, richly embossed with gold and precious stones, worn over a rich, thick-quilted jacket of bright yellow silk, with magnificent armlets of rubies and diamonds on each arm, a shield of the polished hide of the rhinoceros, embossed and ornamented with gold, a jewelled sabre and matchlock, with his long and glossy black beard and moustaches he looked the very beau ideal of a Sikh chief.[42]

Osborne gives an equally good account of the dresses of the courtesans. Their dress was rich and graceful consisting, as it did, of gold embroidered shawl and very loose petticoats of handsomely worked silk. He describes their head ornaments as "singular and very becoming." They wore "enormous strings of pearls for earrings" and their natural beauty was supurb, though the imitation of the Mughal custom of covering lower eyelids with gold leaf gave them a "ghastly appearance."[43]

Osborne notices the wretched lot of the poor courtesans. Young innocent girls were torn apart from their parents, their beauty being their sole crime. Then began their woesome tale of night parties, *Bara Tamasha*, and a life of perpetual infamy. A few of them had the good fortune of reaching the top, but almost all had the misfortune of being eventually cast aside

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 26.
[43]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

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like a worn garment, never to be washed or reclaimed.[44] The most infamous could get rich by rewards and grants, but were under perpetual uncertainty of the resumption of the grants, as no specific titles were awarded.[45]

Osborne's journal, like that of Hastings' shows that the uncommon features of the Indian society attracted the attention of the British writers more often than the things which were common, though frequently the latter were much more significant. A company of jugglers or a miracle-monger *Fakir* could, perhaps, rouse more curiosity in the mind of some of these observers than the systems of Indian philosophy.[46] It is also clear from Osborne's journal that the European Officers were living in a state of considerable torture due to the heat of the plains of India. Osborne records that "the heat is perfectly intolerable; we are unable to eat, drink, or sleep, and support existence by suction alone."[47] The whole journal, like Hastings', is full of such entries.[48] When this oppressive problem is taken into account, one cannot help appreciating the zeal of European officers who not only successfully performed highly strenuous official duties but also found the energy to write so much and often so well.

Osborne's journal is important not only because it gives a vivid picture of Ranjit Singh and his nobility, but also because it provides an insight into the conversion of the author from a none-too-friendly to a friendly observer in a short span of less than two months. Osborne had entered the Punjab on May 19, 1838. That he had come with a preconceived notion about the Kingdom of Punjab and its future is clear from the fact that even before he reached the court of Ranjit Singh he was advocating the annexation of the Punjab at the earliest possible opportunity. The entry in the journal against the dates

[44]A touching account of the wretched lot of these women during and after service is presented by Henry Lawrence through the tale of Gulabi. Henry Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-44.

[45]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[46]*Ibid.*, pp. 46-51; Francis Rawdon Hastings, ed., *The Private Journal of the Marquess of Hastings*, pp. 11-12.

[47]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[48]Hastings, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 13, 21.

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May 22, 23, 24 and 25 runs as follows:

> We have, therefore, both looking to our own situation as regards the present policy of Russia, and to the future welfare of the country itself, but one course to pursue on Ranjit Singh's death—the instant occupation of the Punjab by an overwhelming force and the establishment of our north-western frontier on the Indus.[49]

But gradually Osborne was won over by the openness of Ranjit Singh's conversation and his unbounded liberality.[50] He wanted to preserve the presents given to him by Ranjit Singh and felt disgusted because these had to be deposited in the coffers of the Company.[51] All that he could retain was the decoration of military order of the 'Ranjit Star of the Punjab' of which he was created a Knight. Osborne speaks of Ranjit Singh with deep affection and reports his death with a sense of personal loss. The idea of annexation with which the author had entered Punjab altogether vanished from his mind by the time he closed his account.

Osborne is at his best when drawing his pen-sketches. He describes Raja Dhyan Singh as "a noble specimen of the human race." Dhyan Singh presented to Osborne "a singular instance of a favourite and a man in power, whose talents and virtues are more appreciated than his power and influence are envied."[52] Osborne describes Fakir Azizuddin as "a fine-looking man, of about five and forty, not over clean in his person, but with a pleasant and good-humoured, though crafty-looking counte-

[49]Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp, 22-23.

[50]Shahamat Ali, who visited the court of Ranjit Singh in Jan. 1839, in the suite of C.M. Wade, formed a different opinion of Ranjit Singh's liberality in view of his personal bitter experience. According to him, "his (Ranjit Singh's) avarice increases with his age and the disappointments of his life, for it is only of late that his Highness has shown such a covetous disposition." Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, London, 1847, rpt. Patiala, 1970, p. 12.

[51]For a defence of the official policy of taking away the presents from the Company's servants see Henry Edward Fane's *Five Years in India*, Vol. I, pp. 89-90.

[52]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

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nance, and his manners are so kind and unassuming that it is impossible not to like him."[53] However, the judgement of Osborne does not always keep pace with his power to portray. He does go wrong at times in his assessment, as he does in his portrait of Sher Singh.

Osborne's journal, though brief, is graphic in style. Osborne makes his reader walk with him, feeling at one moment the intense heat of the plains of the Punjab in the month of June, and at another moment enjoying the performance of Ranjit's beautiful corps of 'Amazons.' He succeeds in giving his readers a feel of the extraordinary personality of Ranjit Singh. Like the cross-questions of the Maharaja, which touched the subjects of most opposite nature, the journal depicts the socio-cultural milieu of the Punjab in its variety and richness.

Osborne, like his aunt Emily Eden,[54] was an amateur painter and fully brought his talent to bear on his subject in the form of sixteen lithograph portraitures "in the superb style and elaborate setting of contemporary Sikh art."[55]

Osborne was not a historian in the narrow sense of the term. His opportunities of meeting people or seeing things for himself were limited by the official character of his visit to the Punjab. However, due to his penetrating mind, his observations on men and manners and reflections on some of the events of the time have rightly come to be regarded as fairly authoritative. Osborne's highly capable depiction of Ranjit Singh in all his colours and shades makes his journal a work of lasting utility.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 28. The description of Azizuddin by Osborne was confirmed by *The Calcutta Star* in its article "The court and courtiers of Lahore." However, the author of the article pointed out the mistake of Osborne in assessing the age of the Fakir. This article was reproduced in *Asiatic Journal*, Vol. II, Third Series, November-April 1844.

[54] Emily Eden was Auckland's sister. Her famous account *Up the Country* is dedicated to W.G. Osborne.

[55] B.J. Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, p. 6.

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CHAPTER 5

A PLEA FOR THE ANNEXATION

History often flourishes most during the periods of uncertainty and upheaval—more writings on the French Revolution were produced in Britain before 1800 than in any decade of the nineteenth century.[1] The decade between Ranjit Singh's death and the annexation of the Punjab remains a creative period from the point of view of contribution to the history of the Punjab. However, the period is also chaotic in the sense that a lot of propaganda and journalistic literature passed under the name of history. The writers often had a point of view to uphold, and believed that the best mode of authenticating that point of view was to derive support from history.

The kingdom of Ranjit Singh was carved out through the united efforts of the monarch, the nobility and the army. These three forces fell apart soon after the death of Ranjit Singh, plunging Punjab into the worst type of anarchy. The first reaction that this situation provoked so far as the British were concerned was by way of a powerful plea for the annexation of the Punjab.

The idea of annexing the Punjab had been exercising the mind of British officials even before Ranjit Singh's death. Osborne had desired "the instant occupation of the Punjab by an overwhelming force" on Ranjit Singh's death.[2] However, the first work on the history of the Punjab with an all out plea in favour of the annexation came not from an English official, but from Steinbach, a Prussian adventurer[3] in the service of

[1]Hedva Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution*, p. 3.

[2]W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, 2nd ed., p. 23.

[3]C. Grey, *Europeen Adventurers of Northern India*, ed., H.L.O. Garrett, p. 325. Sita Ram Kohli described Steinbach as an Austrian, but did not quote any source. Sita Ram Kohli, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Hindi), p. 202.

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the Kingdom of Lahore, who later took up a job with Gulab Singh of Jammu.

Henry Steinbach published his book entitled *The Punjaub* in June 1845. Completely identifying himself with Englishmen in terms of opinion and purpose, he professed to write as a part of his duty to give his countrymen the clearest notion of the Sikh state.[4] The knowledge of the Sikhs had become imperative in view of the impending annexation of the Punjab. The annexation, according to Steinbach, had been rendered necessary by the complete breakdown of the government of the Sikhs. However, a careful perusal of Steinbach's career and his relationship with the Sikhs is necessary before one can be sure of the fairness of the author's conviction and the accuracy of his observations.

Henry Steinbach joined the service under Ranjit Singh in 1836 and was appointed the commander of an infantry battalion. His salary initially fixed at Rs. 600/- per month was gradually raised to Rs. 800/- by 1841,[5] which was fairly good as compared with that of Ranjit Singh's European officers who joined after 1827, but this was less than a quarter of what was given to Jean Baptiste Ventura and Jean Francis Allard in 1822.[6] Steinbach was rather unlucky in the sense that by the time he entered Ranjit Singh's service, the heyday of the European adventurers was already over. Maharaja's army had been sufficiently modernised, and he was no longer keen to bestow the same lavish favours on the European officers as he had done a decade before.

The terms of service offered to the Europeans were often not respectable. They had to enter into written agreements, and were required to marry a native of the Punjab, serve Ranjit Singh faithfully even against their own country, and not to leave their station without obtaining special permission. All

[4]Henry Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, Thacker & Co., London, 1845, rpt. Patiala, 1970, Preface, iv.

[5]C. Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 325. In the list of Ranjit Singh's European Officers given by Sita Ram Kohli, the initial salary of Steinbach is shown as Rs. 700. Sita Ram Kohli, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[6]Ventura and Allard were given a salary of Rs. 2500/- per month, Sita Ram Kohli, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

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these things were narrated by the European officers to Osborne during his visit to the Court of Ranjit Singh in 1838. The impression which he formed was that the European officers "do not seem very fond of his service, which is not to be wondered at, for they are both badly and irregularly paid, and are treated with little respect or confidence."[7]

Steinbach was required to perform "continuous field service in isolated districts."[8] However, in July 1838, his platoon was ordered to Sheikhupura along with the platoon of Forde.[9] Sheikhupura was the estate of Ranjit Singh's wife Mai Nakain. She died in July 1838, and her estate was passed on to Kharak Singh. However, the prince was required to dispense with the services of old horsemen and the platoons, and surrender all the cash and the village of Khanpur to the Maharaja. Steinbach got the village of Khanpur in lieu of his salary.[10] Steinbach was present in Lahore when Ranjit Singh breathed his last.[11]

The position of European officers in the Sikh service became untenable in the reign of Sher Singh as had been predicted by H.T. Prinsep.[12] In June 1841 the Kashmira Battalion commanded by Colonel Steinbach directed him to proceed to Lahore. The troops were in a state of mutiny and threatened Steinbach with dire consequences in case of his failure to persuade Maharaja Sher Singh to accede to their demands. Steinbach proceeded to Lahore leaving his command in charge of Avitabile, the Governor of Peshawer. Avitabile broke the mutinous battalion and killed many soldiers who tried to resist.[13] Steinbach, on his return to Peshawer, was appointed to the command vacated by the death of Mathew Forde. But even these troops returned to Lahore in 1843, without orders,

[7]W.G. Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57, cf. Harbans Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, pp. 41-42.

[8]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[9]Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, Part IV, p. 502; Forde had entered the service of Ranjit Singh in 1837, and was appointed Officer in the Infantry. Sita Ram Kohli, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[10]Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

[11]John Martin Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, p. 101.

[12]H.T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, p. 106.

[13]C. Grey, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-43.

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with a view to sharing the spoils of the struggle for power at the capital.

Steinbach obtained leave for a year and went to Europe. When he returned in May 1844, he found that his services were no longer required by the Lahore-Durbar.[14] Under these circumstances Steinbach applied to Gulab Singh and was given the command of a couple of battalions and a few guns. It was at this juncture that Steinbach wrote his book on the Punjab.

Steinbach served under Gulab Singh from 1844 to 1851. He conducted a number of campaigns in Kashmir. In 1848 he was directed to join the British force which was engaged in the siege of Multan. However, as Gulab Singh did not want to commit himself, Steinbach had to remain on the road till the Second Anglo-Sikh War was nearly over. He resigned his post in 1851 in protest on being superseded by an Indian Commander while on active service.

Steinbach solicited the intervention of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, to effect his rehabilitation. This was refused because the Government of India did not deem it fit to interfere in the affairs of Gulab Singh. Moreover Dalhousie had no high opinion of Steinbach, and dismissed his application with the remark that "it is quite possible that the Indian was the better man of the two."[15] This enraged Steinbach who met Dalhousie and expressed his strong resentment. With his job lost and ego hurt, Steinbach returned to Europe.

Steinbach was as well-read a man as could be expected under the circumstances.[16] His book on the Punjab indicates that

[14] Steinbach's petition for joining his duty was read in the court on May 4, 1844. "It was written in answer that when he was wanted he would be sent for—of the things he had brought, he could despatch two watches, the price should be paid to him." 'Abstract of Intelligence from the Punjab, dated Lahore, May 4, 1844,' H.R. Gupta, ed. *Panjab on the Eve of First Sikh War*, 1844, p. 177.

[15] C. Grey, *op. cit*., p. 326.

[16] An idea of the difficulties of these officers in obtaining reading material from Calcutta can be formed from G.A. Henry, *Through the Sikh War*, p. 54.

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besides Malcolm's *Sketch* and Prinsep's *Life of Runjeet Singh*, he had carefully read Thornton's *Gazetteer*, and the travel-accounts of Moorcroft & Trebeck and Baron Charles Hugel. He was also keeping himself abreast of the latest researches which were being reported in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and *Asiatic Researches*.[17] However, like most of his contemporaries, Steinbach had only limited interest in the past of the Sikhs. He laid no claim to originality and did not confine this work to his own observations. Instead, he chose to be a "careful compiler" and attempted to provide "the fullest information available" borrowing freely from the major existing works on the subject.

Steinbach recorded in his preface that he had taken up the subject in view of the "extreme ignorance" which prevailed in England about the Punjab which was "acquiring additional political interest in the eyes of the British Government."[18]

In its design the work was intended to be like a Gazetteer. Thornton had already done a pioneering job, but the Punjab, being not fully accessible to the Europeans, was still a little known land. Steinbach believed that the information contained in his book was vital in view of the impending annexation of the Punjab. This realization made Steinbach perform a double job—pleading for the annexation and conveying such information as would be useful in bringing about the annexation and controlling the country afterwards.

In his book Steinbach describes the topography of the Punjab and briefly narrates the history of the Sikhs up to the death of Ranjit Singh. This is done with a view to providing just the necessary background. The author strictly limits the scope of his work to narrating "the events more immediately connected with the state of disruption following upon the death of Runjeet Singh."[19] Steinbach, like Prinsep,[20] attributes the rise of the Sikhs as a political power to "the desperate state of poverty to

[17]"Table of Heights of Mountains in the Punjaub" which the author appended to his work, contains fifty one footnotes and is enough to show that when removed from his land and people, Steinbach was keeping up his reading. Steinbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-45.

[18]*Ibid.*, Preface, p. iii.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

[20]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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which a series of exactions on the part of the government had reduced the Sikh landholders." He also freely borrows the views of Prinsep that the cultivators proclaimed the tenets of Govind Singh as a bond of union and excitement against their oppressors.[21] According to Steinbach, once the common danger was over, and the Sikhs were the master of their own land, they took to quarrelling among themselves. Thus the end of the *misls* became inevitable, which paved the way for the rise of Ranjit Singh, who became the "sole ruler of the entire Punjaub," by his "gradual aggrandizement."[22]

Steinbach gives no systematic account of Ranjit Singh. Nevertheless, the book sheds quite a few side-lights on the character of Ranjit Singh, his court, administration and army. All that Steinbach records is not based on his own observation. A specimen of the proceedings of the Lahore-Durbar was given to Steinbach by a news-writer at the court, and his own observation convinced him that the account was authentic. The account of the memorable interview which took place between Auckland and the Maharaja on 29th November, 1838 at Ferozpur, was taken by Steinbach from Stocqueler's *Memorials of Afghanistan*.

From Steinbach's work Ranjit Singh emerges as one of the richest monarchs of his times, though flourishing solely on ill-gotten wealth. Every pearl in the royal treasury is made out to have been coined out of the blood of the peasantry. In his person, Ranjit Singh is painted as extremely ambitious, licentious and superstitious. But even in his superstition the Maharaja comes out as very much respectful to all religions and tolerant towards men professing to be religious, which is fully corroborated by subsequent writers.[23]

Steinbach is more detailed in his treatment of the post-Ranjit Singh period. The period from the death of Ranjit Singh (June

[21] Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 2. Also see *Asrar-i-Samdi* (Pbi. tr.), p. 8.

[22] Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[23] Prem Singh, "Character of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as an Individual and as a Ruler," Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, ed. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, pp. 220-22. Also see N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 187.

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1839) to the commencement of Jawahir Singh's ministry (May 1845) is divided into two parts, the death of Nau Nihal Singh (November 1840) forming the dividing line. The tragic chapter of the history of the Punjab begins with the accession of Kharak Singh. According to Steinbach, "notwithstanding the powerful auxiliaries of a well-filled treasury, a numerous and well-appointed army, and the able advisers of his late father, it is doubtful whether an individual could have been found less calculated to occupy the place of Runjeet Singh than his successor, Kurruck Singh."[24]

Steinbach describes the history of the Punjab after the accession of Kharak Singh in terms of ambitions, intrigues and counter-intrigues of the Jamwal brothers, who were more feared than liked. For a moment the Sikh chiefs led by Chet Singh succeeded in prescribing limits to the power of the Dogra fraternity. Dhian Singh retaliated by playing upon the ambitions of the young prince Nau Nihal Singh. In the early hours of October 8, 1839, the Prince and his party assassinated Chet Singh in the chamber of Kharak Singh, and put him under restraint. Steinbach records that shortly after the murder of Chet Singh, Kharak Singh was "formally deposed, and the Prince Noo Nehal Singh assumed the reins of government."[25] This view seems hardly tenable. Though Nau Nihal Singh assumed supreme power, he allowed Kharak Singh to remain on the throne.[26] Dhian Singh had temporarily succeeded in getting rid of his rivals. But he soon found Nau Nihal Sihgh too large for his pocket.

According to Steinbach, Nau Nihal Singh, "notwithstanding his impetuous and dissolute habits,...was nevertheless a youth of considerable ability, and the only person capable of controlling the power of Rajah Dhyan Singh and his brothers." But Steinbach felt convinced of the hostility of Nau Nihal Singh towards the British. He accused him of having made overtures to the courts of Nepal, Kabul and almost every other native power

[24]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
[25]*Ibid.*, p. 22.
[26]*Asiatic Journal*, Vol. XXXVII (New Series), Sept.-Dec. 1840, p. 201. Also see Sita Ram Kohli, *Sunset of the Sikh Empire*, p. 17.

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for forming a joint front against the English. Steinbach came to the conclusion that had Nau Nihal Singh lived, "a war with the Punjaub and Nepaul would have been inevitable, and Afghanistan would have taken part in the quarrel."[27]

Nau Nihal Singh was not destined to rule for long. Kharak Singh died on November 5, 1840. Prince Nau Nihal Singh being away to Fatehgarh, was immediately summoned. The last rites of Maharaja Kharak Singh were performed the same evening. When Nau Nihal Singh was returning from the funeral-ground, the archway of the city gate crashed over his head. His skull was so dreadfully fractured that he could not speak thereafter, and expired in a few hours.[28]

Steinbach describes the death of Nau Nihal Singh as "one of the most extraordinary events—of which history presents a record," but he scrupulously avoids giving any judgement of his own. According to him:

> The incident is generally supposed to have been premeditated, and not the effect of accident, as stated by the Government; but the whole affair was so enveloped in mystery, that even to the present day it has been found impossible to attach suspicion to any party.[29]

The death of Nau Nihal Singh was the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Lahore. Sher Singh, the supposed son of Ranjit Singh, eventually succeeded to the throne after a fierce struggle with Chand Kaur, the mother of Nau Nihal Singh. As rightly observed by Steinbach, this struggle for the throne introduced a new element into the Sikh body politic. Both the claimants had bestowed lavish presents and made extravagant

[27] Steinbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24. Also see Thornton, *History of the Punjab*, Vol. II, p. 213.

[28] Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 25; Alexander Gardner laid the onus for the murder of the prince on Dhian Singh, but his views are unacceptable even to the editor of his *Memories*. Hugh Pearse, ed. *Soldier and Traveller: Memories of Alexander Gardner*, pp. 224-25, 226, footnote 1. Also see John Martin Honigberger, *op. cit.*, p. 108 and Lepel Griffin, *Punjab Chiefs*, new edition, Vol. II, pp. 26-27.

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promises to obtain and sustain the support of the troops. This made the leviathan come alive. A realization was forced on the troops that their bayonets and not the smooth tongues of the deceitful ministers were the real instruments of power. The tall promises were never made good by these men of politics. The troops in turn, therefore, took to helping themselves. Thus commenced that spell of "anarchy and disorder which for several months threatened the utter dissolution of the empire, and the unavoidabie interference of the British power."[30]

As noticed earlier, European officers, including Steinbach, had to bear the brunt of the wrath of the unbridled troops. Lieutenant Colonel Foulkes,[31] who was posted at Mandi, lost his life. Forde escaped, after losing everything, but died at Peshawar. General Court and Ventura lost their property. According to Steinbach, "it was the intention of the troops to have sacrificed the lives of all the European officers; but most of them having obtained information of this diabolical project, the attempts were frustrated by corresponding energy."[32] The troops gradually got tired of their own excesses and moderated their demands. This led to settlement between the troops and the Government and a temporary restoration of order. Sher Singh now "gave himself up to every species of debauchery." A conspiracy was soon formed against him and he was killed on September 15, 1843 by the Sindhanwalia chiefs, Ajit Singh and Lehna Singh. Partap Singh, the son of Sher Singh, was soon murdered and Dhian Singh also became the victim of the regicides.

Steinbach's version of the assassination of Sher Singh is slightly different from the accounts given by Gardner, who claims to have been present close to the scene, and W.L. M'Gregor. Steinbach accuses Dhian Singh of having entered into a conspiracy to take Sher Singh's life.[33] Gardner clears Dhian Singh

[30]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[31]Foulkes was a French and had joined the service of Ranjit Singh in 1836. He was in command of a cavalry regiment.

[32]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 31. For details of the havoc caused by the troops, see Sita Ram Kohli, *Sunset of the Sikh Empire*, pp. 39-41.

[33]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-35.

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of this charge.[34] M'Gregor asserts that both the king as well as the minister were a party to each other's murder.[35] On the whole, the version given by Steinbach seems to be nearer the truth.

Hira Singh by an appeal to the troops avenged his father's murder. He became a minister under Dalip Singh, a supposed son of the Maharaja, on the throne. Hira Singh was able to effectively deal with his rivals which included his own uncle Suchet Singh and Kashmira Singh and Peshawara Singh, two supposed sons of Ranjit Singh. But eventually, Hira Singh found the things slipping from his hands in view of the combination formed against him by the chiefs as well as the troops under the leadership of Jawahir Singh, the maternal uncle of the boy king Dalip Singh. According to Steinbach, Jawahir Singh proceeded "at the head of a party of the Khalsa troops, to the minister's house, when a conflict took place, which ended in the flight of Hira Singh and his adherents, including his favourite councillor and confederate the Pundit Jella, their route being towards Jummoo."[36] The party was soon overtaken and annihilated. Jawahir Singh took over as minister, but the troops and chiefs were in favour of Lehna Singh Majithia who was then residing at Benaras.

Steinbach's account of the kaleidoscopic events after the death of Ranjit Singh is sufficiently valuable. Steinbach's intention, however, appears to have been neither to lay a faithful description before his contemporaries nor to preserve an eyewitness account for posterity. The entire account was aimed at convincing the British nation, with which the author completely identified himself, that "these successions of violent changes destroy all hope of permanent government in the Punjaub."[37] The Government of India seemed to have already resolved that "we must not have a Muhammadan power on this side of the Attock. The Rajpoots of the hills could not hold the

[34]Hugh Pearse, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-48.
[35]W.L. M'Gregor, *The History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 17.
[36]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[37]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

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Punjab, and if it can't be Sikh, it must, I suppose, be British."[38] Steinbach's work is calculated at making all concerned see that the government of the Punjab could no longer be Sikh. Thus there was hardly anything to choose from, the only alternative being the annexation of the Punjab.

Steinbach must have felt the satisfaction of having built a strong case for the desirability of annexation of the Punjab. But to Steinbach's dismay, the real rulers of India cared more for the dividends of the shareholders than for the trophies and the standards of war—the age of Clive, Hastings and Wellesley was over. Thus, Steinbach set his face to the more difficult task of convincing his readers about the profitability as well as the feasibility of the annexation, which he strongly and cogently advocated.

The economics of the annexation had been the most pertinent question in the whole issue. As early as 1838, when Osborne wrote of annexing the Punjab, he was quick to add that the throat of the East India Company "will be well oiled by the rapidly increasing revenue upon the introduction of a mild and equable form of government."[39] Like Osborne, Steinbach vouched for the fertility of the soil of the Punjab. According to him, the gardens of the Punjab yielded "a great variety of fruits unknown even by name to Europeans." According to Steinbach, "if the Punjaub be not equal in fertility to the provinces of India under British rule, it is second only to the most favoured of those districts." Steinbach felt that the land was not properly manured because people used cow-dung for fuel and once the scientific system of agriculture prevalent in the United Kingdom and its colonies was adopted, "the fruits of the land would soon be as unrivalled for their quality as their abundance."[40]

As regards the mineral wealth of the Punjab, Steinbach pointed out that iron, copper, lead, salt, coal, nitre, plumbage and gold mines abounded in the country, and that on being properly

[38]F. Currie to Broadfoot (Private) January 19, 1845. B.J. Hasrat, *The Punjab Papers*, p. 81.

[39]Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[40]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

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exploited would yield an enormous revenue.[41] Steinbach attributed the neglect of these treasures to the government's jealousy of European interference. Steinbach also recorded the fact of there being an abundance of all kinds of animals, birds and fishes in the Punjab.

Steinbach pointed out the possibility of the establishment of a very lucrative trade once the proper climate for investment was created. He gives an account of the valuable skills of the artisans of the Punjab and mentions with admiration their products, including the shawls of Kashmir "which once enjoyed so high a reputation in Europe and which still possess a value in the eyes of women of taste and fashion.[42] According to him, the trade and commerce had deteriorated because the "Sikh tyranny and misgovernment" had "in a measure blighted the efforts of the artisan." He was also optimistic about possibility of a profitable trade with Central Asia when the Punjab was annexed.

In addition to tempting the British with the agricultural, mineralogical and commercial potential of the Punjab, Steinbach attempted to rouse the cupidity of the English by giving an idea of the wealth amassed by Ranjit Singh, much of which, according to him, was intact in the treasury of the government of Lahore. In spite of the fact that almost all writers had described the mounting averice of Ranjit Singh towards the end of his life,[43] Steinbach persists in the myth of Ranjit's liberality. Finding a historical account difficult, the author adopted a more subtle way of producing the desired effect. He did so by reproducing what he said to be a sketch provided by a news-writer. He also reproduced an account of the meeting between the Governor-General, Lord Auckland and Ranjit Singh from Stocqueler's *Memorials of Afghanistan* to give his idea of the prodigious wealth of Ranjit Singh.

Having advocated the necessity of annexing the Punjab and having shown that the annexation would more than pay for

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 47.
[42]*Ibid.*, p. 50.
[43]See, for example, Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 33 and Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, p. 12.

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its cost, the only task left for Steinbach was to convince the British nation that the annexation could be brought about without much difficulty.

Notwithstanding the high standard of military efficiency which had become the pride of the British, Steinbach thought it necessary to prove the feasibility of the annexation. Perhaps this was required in view of the British debacle in Kabul which was still fresh in the popular mind when Steinbach was writing his book. Steinbach painted the monarchy of the Punjab as tutelar, its aristocracy as spent up, and its army as mutinous and utterly licentious. The whole structure was made out by Steinbach to be cracking under its own weight and all that he expected from the English was to give a *coup de grace* by moving their troops into the Punjab.

Steinbach's account of the religion of the Sikhs, and of their population, manners and customs, government and army is primarily calculated to expose the inherent contradictions and weakness of the nation of the Sikhs. Following Malcolm, Steinbach speaks highly of the "pure deism" of Guru Nanak, but records that Guru Arjan Dev had made enemies by "refusing to admit the writings of a furious Hindoo Zealot into the *Granth*."[44] Guru Har Gobind had to fight against the Muslim rulers of the Punjab. Steinbach observes that "the strife was bitter as long as it lasted, and laid the seeds of the irreconcilable hatred which to this hour subsists between the Sikhs and the Mussulmans."[45] According to Steinbach, it was, however, because of the conflict with the Hindus as well as the Muhammadans that "from the time of Guru Govind, the struggle of the Sikhs to re-establish themselves as a separate nation engaged their attention."[46]

Steinbach appreciates the fine looks and the simple diet of the Sikhs but places them "very low in the scale of humanity."[47] For the manners and customs of the Sikhs, Steinbach extensively reproduces the observations of Murray,[48] as if only to per-

[44]Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
[45]*Ibid.*, pp. 120-21.
[46]*Ibid.*, p. 121.
[47]*Ibid.*, p. 77.
[48]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

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petuate the myth that "sense of shame or feeling of honour have no place in the breast of a Jat."

Regarding the form of the Government of the Sikhs, Steinbach concludes that "a despotism is the best suited to their temperament." Steinbach ignores the description of Malcolm and follows Murray in his account of the land revenue administration in the Punjab.[49] He records that due to the exactions of the farmers of land revenue, the condition of the peasantry "was always the most abject and pitiful." The limit of the revenue on land, according to Steinbach, was regulated by "the caprice, power, necessity or despotism of the chiefs; some of whom claim one-half, others two-fifths, and some have been known to appropriate as much as three-fourths of the whole."[50] As a logical corollary to this observation, Steinbach concludes that, "it may readily be conceived that the transfer of the country from Sikh to British rule will not be unacceptable to the agricultural population, who see that, in the provinces of India, contiguous to the Punjaub, the cultivator enjoys in peace and security a fair proportion of the results of his industry."[51]

Steinbach believes that the desire for the change of masters was particularly strong among the Muslims. Hindus, though not friendly to the Sikhs, had their reservations about the annexation because of the beef-eating among the Europeans. The only section from which Steinbach feared real opposition to any move for the annexation was the Sikh soldiery. This is what made a description of the Sikh arms relevant to the thesis of Steinbach.

As could be most expected, Steinbach harps on the thesis of Prinsep, Osborne and Henry Lawrence that though the Sikhs had the qualities of good soldiers, little reliance could be placed on their army which was undisciplined, ill-practised, ill-armed and ill-mounted. Steinbach gives the following account of the Sikh soldiers and their weapons:

> They form very correct lines, but in manoeuvring their movements are too slow....The arms, that is to say, the muskets,

[49] *Ibid.*
[50] Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
[51] *Ibid*, p. 57.

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are of very inferior stamp, incapable of throwing a ball to any distance, and on quick and repeated discharges liable to burst. Their firing is bad owing to the very small quantity of practice ammunition allowed by the government; not more than ten balls out of a hundred, at the distance of as many paces, would probably tell upon an enemy's ranks.[52]

Steinbach is of the opinion that once the Punjab was annexed, the defects of the Sikh troops could be removed and the British army replenished with the "iron-legged" soldiers from the Punjab.

Steinbach appended to his book the articles of the Treaty of Amritsar (April 25, 1809), and a brief account of the relationship subsisting between the English and the Sikh Government. He deemed this account necessary because "in the event of a rupture with the present rulers (if the word may be used) of the Punjaub, a violation of treaties will probably form the basis and justification of the quarrel." This account was considered "most useful and opportune" by *Calcutta Review*, which reproduced it in its entirety.[53]

Steinbach did not write for the sake of writing. His approach to history was didactic and his outlook on institutions was Utilitarian. His style is unostentatious and his statements often qualified. However, Steinbach fails to achieve a break-through because of his inability to acquire a feel of the Sikh society. This is partly due to the nature of his employment and largely because of his mental attitude towards the Sikhs. He could not perceive the change which the Sikh religion had brought in the life of the hardy peasants of the Punjab. He had been treated in a most cavalier manner both by the Sikh troops and their Government. This had made Steinbach bitter, and blurred his vision.

Notwithstanding these defects, Steinbach's work was well received by his contemporaries. The First Anglo-Sikh War broke out within a few months of the publication of Steinbach's

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[53] "Miscellaneous Notes—Recent Works on the Punjab," *Calcutta Review*, Vol. V, No. IX, Jan.-June 1846, pp. xiv-xxii.

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book and this increased the value of the work. The entire first edition was exhausted within nine months of the publication and the publisher brought out a second edition in March 1846.[54] *Calcutta Review*, which was very harsh towards the later works of W.L. M'Gregor, G.C. Symth and J.D. Cunningham, highly recommended the work of Steinbach.[55]

The whole book of Steinbach appears to have been pre-eminently calculated to convince the British public that immediate annexation of the Punjab was most desirable and would prove profitable. In fact, the excessive preoccupation of the author with this preconceived notion has marred much of the utility of the book. Nevertheless, written by a tolerably informed contemporary, the book remains a valuable first-hand account of the eventful period between the death of Ranjit Singh and the First Anglo-Sikh War. The book contains useful data on the socio-economic conditions of the Punjab. Moreover, it offers an important specimen of the thinking of European Officers in the Sikh service about the future of the kingdom of the Punjab.

The plea for annexation which began with Steinbach was continued for the next fifteen years, till the Punjab was finally annexed. As such Steinbach's work is a valuable link between the works of Prinsep and Osborne, which preceded it, and the work of M'Gregor and Smyth, which followed it. Whereas M'Gregor had pleaded for the complete subjugation of the Punjab after the First Anglo-Sikh War on the ground that the British control over the Punjab was only partial and that half measures would not pay, Smyth's main argument against allowing the continuance of the government of the Sikhs was that the family line of Ranjit Singh had terminated with Nau Nihal Singh. George Campbell, in his letters written under the pseudonym 'Economist', largely relied on Steinbach but argued that in fact

[54]The second edition of Steinbach's book has been reprinted under the title *Sikh Empire* (*Culture & Thought*), Ambala Cantt., May 1972.

[55]The reviewer also appreciated the *Adventures of an Officer* by Henry Lawrence. *Calcutta Review*, Vol V, No. IX, pp. ix-xi.

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"the Sikhs ended where Ranjeet rose."[56]

Thus the problem of annexation of the Punjab forms the key-stone in the development of the post-Ranjit Singh British historiography on the Sikhs, and Steinbach's book is significant as the first major contribution to the theme of the annexation.

[56]These letters were originally published in the *Mofussilite* from January to March 1849 and were later reproduced in the form of a book by Mahboob Alam Khan, *The Annexation of the Punjab*, by Economist, The Punjab Series. Vol. III, letter I, p. 10.

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CHAPTER 6

THE OFFICIAL ECHO

The First Anglo-Sikh War witnessed some of the most severely contested battles in India during the 19th century. The British officers were quite faithful in their reports on the valour demonstrated by the Sikh soldiers.[1] Naturally this was bound to make the victors appear in a more favourable light. The fierce fight with the Sikhs—whose heroism lent them the image of intrepid and determined fighters—and, to use the present day terminology, the extension of the British sphere of influence aroused deep interest among the British in the study of Sikh history. This growing interest led to the publication of considerable historical literature.

Henry Steinbach brought out a second edition of his work *The Punjaub,* which had been published only a year earlier. He added, in this edition, an appendix entitled "The Late Battles" which contained hardly any account of the Anglo-Sikh War, but only an extract from the *Delhi Gazette,* giving an idea of the places connected with the Anglo-Sikh War.[2] The D'Rozario & Co., Calcutta, published *The History of the Sikhs,* but this was only a reproduction of extracts from Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* and Steinbach's *The Punjaub.*

The first connected and up-to-date history of the Sikhs came from Allen & Co., London, which brought out an enlarged edition of Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab.* It was published in two volumes under the title of *History of the Punjab and of the rise, progress and present condition of the sect*

[1]Lord Gough, the British Commander-in-Chief, wrote in a private letter to Robert Peel that "were it not for a deep conviction that my country's good required the sacrifice, I could have wept to have witnessed the fearful slaughler of so devoted a body of men." Quoted by *Calcutta Review,* Vol. IX, No. XXII, January-June 1849, p. 554.

[2]Steinbach, *The Punjaub,* London, 1846. rpt. Ambala, 1972, p. 135.

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and nation of the Sikhs. The book is anonymous and this has caused confusion about its authorship. It is catalogued under the name of Thornton at the Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, under that of Prinsep at Khalsa College, Amritsar and under that of Murray at Dwarka Das Library, Chandigarh. At the National Library, Calcutta, it is simply listed as anonymous. The catalogue of the British Museum also lists it as anonymous. There is a similar confusion in the bibliographic references. However, the publishers had employed T.H. Thornton for bringing out the book.[3] But the name of the 'editor' was kept out, probably because the bulk of the book was a reproduction of H.T. Prinsep's work, who had in turn composed it from the papers of William Murray.

Thornton wrote the first five and the last nine chapters of the *History of the Punjab*, and reproduced Prinsep's work in chapters six to sixteen. He completed his work on May 11, 1846. About the reasons why he undertook this work, Thornton wrote as follows:

> The recent events in the Punjab have attracted the attention of Europe to that portion of India and a deep interest has been excited in England respecting the scene of some of the most splendid achievements of our army in a country now united by intimate relations with Great Britain.[4]

Thornton is of the opinion that Prinsep, with his "large stores of geographical, classical, and oriental knowledge added to his official experience and information," would have rendered the work "most valuable," but that his busy official engagement did not enable him to meet "the public demand for information upon this subject."[5]

Considering the hurry in which this book was produced, and the limited purpose of writing, Thornton had neither the time

[3]See J.S. Grewal, *Essay in Sikh History*, p. 129; T.H. Thornton is not Thomas Henry Thornton, who wrote *Account of the City of Lahore* and several other works. Thomas Henry Thornton was born in 1832. Obviously he could not have written the *History of the Punjab* in 1846. See Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 424.

[4]Thornton, *History of the Punjab*, Vol. I, Preface, p. xi.

[5]*Ibid.*

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nor the inclination of producing a piece of original research. However, the extensive reading of the author made him complete his work with remarkable skill. He was well acquainted with the early Greek writings on the Punjab, as also with the works of James Browne, John Malcolm, Charles Wilkins, James Mill, H.H. Wilson, M. Elphinstone, W.G. Osborne, H.M. Lawrence, Moorcroft, Vigne and Baron Hugel.[6] He made use of the writings of authoritative historians, both Orientalists and Occidentalists, and the official records cited in the works of historians like Mill and Elphinstone. He was also in touch with the journals like *Calcutta Review*, *Asiatic Researches* and *Calcutta Star*. His most important sources for the post-Ranjit Singh period, however, were the *Akhbars* (i.e the native newspapers), official dispatches and parliamentary papers.

Thornton's method of writing history was fairly close to reporting. He tried to collect as many facts as possible and ensured that the limited observations which he made were fully supported by facts. Like Malcolm, he tried to avoid vague generalities based on speculation. He would never cease making qualifications. Things never looked to him purely white or black. His observations are frequently punctuated by qualifying words like: "It appears," "it is stated," or "it is believed to be." His attitude towards his evidence was also quite cautious. For example, in his account of the post-Ranjit Singh period, Thornton observed the contradictory nature of the reports in the *Akhbars* upon which the historians for the most part tended to rely. He also stated in a footnote that "these news-writers may, in ordinary times, be trusted as to facts, though not as to inferences."[7]

Thornton's book deals with the hydrography and topography of the Punjab and its socio-economic melieu (largely of the Sikhs) besides the early and contemporary history of the Sikhs. In spite of covering a variety of subjects, the whole work is calculated to leave a particular impact on the readers' mind. The thesis put forward by Thornton is that the Jat Sikh soldiers, with whom the British had to fight, were no ordinary men, but

[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 22, 110; Vol. II, pp. 182, 191, 256, 258.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 263.

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belonged to the ancient fighting race of Scythian *Gete*,[8] who had resisted centuries ago Alexander the Great, Sultan Mahmud of Gazna and Babur, that the teachings of Guru Nanak had improved their mind and the efforts of Guru Gobind and Banda had given them a militant character.

Ranjit Singh trained the Sikhs for the armed force on modern lines. The events which followed his death gradually left the real power in the hands of the soldiers whose licentiousness and turbulent character made them attack the British territories in a spirit of desperate bravado. The "sudden and unprovoked" war was thus brought to a "rapid and glorious close by one short and brilliant campaign," after which the discipline and forbearance of the British was only matched by their valour. The campaign though costly and dreadful was bound to prove rewarding in view of the unmatched potential of the Punjab for the British commerce.

Thornton's chapters on the rise of the Sikhs and their religion, government and institutions[9] are primarily based on those of Malcolm and he repeats the mistakes committed by Malcolm.[10] He tries to supplement Malcolm by H.H. Wilson's observations. According to Thornton, "the religion of the Sikhs or Nanak Shahis, like that of the primitive Hindus, is based upon a pure deism, a belief in one God, the Creator of the Universe."[11] This is the Wilsonian version of Malcolm.[12] Characteristically, no doubt, the true spirit of Hinduism is of deism, but it must be remembered that it was the blatant ritualism in the time of Guru Nanak which provoked him to launch a crusade against

[8]James Tod identified *Gete* with *Jit*, *Jat*, and *Jut*; *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Vol. I, pp. 88-89.

[9]Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 79-134.

[10]Like Malcolm, Thornton not only gave an incorrect explanation of the purpose of Guru Har Gobind's two swords, but also confounded the name of Wazir Khan, the Mughal Governor of Sarhind, with his designation and mentioned him as Faujdar Khan.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 111.

[12]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 144; H.H. Wilson, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XVII, p. 233; Wilson, as pointed out by J.D. Cunningham, with all his linguistic equipment and philosophic framework, had failed to comprehend the real nature of Guru Nanak's reforms. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 76.

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the degrading practices which were vitiating Hinduism. Thornton followed Baron Hugel's account of the ceremonies at the Harmandir Sahib.[13] He makes the following estimate of Guru Gobind Singh's work:

> Guru Govind appears to have had in view not merely the separation of the Sikhs from the Hindus, but the overthrow of a system of a civil policy, which, being interwoven with the religion of a submissive race, made them slaves to their priesthood, and though calculated to retain a community in obedience to its rulers, made them an easy conquest to any powerful foreign invader.[14]

Thornton follows Malcolm's account of Banda and his atrocities, but draws his own conclusion about the impact of Banda's leadership on the Sikh community. According to him, Banda united the Sikhs under his banner and "the Sikhs gradually assumed the character and rank of a military nation."[15]

Prinsep, as noted earlier, has given an account of the Sikhs from 1742 to 1832. All that Thornton does about this period is to incorporate in the text of the notes from Khushwaqt Rai which Prinsep had given at the end of his work. Thornton adds three chapters on Ranjit Singh but his best effort seems to have been to continue his narration only in the light of Prinsep's assessment of the character and personality of Ranjit Singh. However, with the outbreak of the Anglo-Sikh War, Ranjit Singh had come to be regarded as the very model of friendship and fidelity.[16] Thornton could not help reflecting this change in his pages. According to him:

> Runjeet Singh has been likened to Mehemet Ali and to Napoleon. M. Jacquemont terms him, "a Bonaparte in Miniature." There are some points in which he resembles both; but, estimating his character with reference to his circumstances and

[13]Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and Punjab*, pp. 394-96.
[14]Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 109.
[15]*Ibid.*, p. 110.
[16]Proclamation by the Governor-General of India, Camp, Lushkuree Khan-ke-Serai, Dec. 13, 1845. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Appendix I, p. 371.

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> position, he is, perhaps, a more remarkable man than either. The worst parts of his personal character may be traced to the accidents of country and education, or rather want of education, [but] his best qualities belonged to himself.[17]

Thornton's description of Kharak Singh is a logical culmination of Prinsep's observation:

> . . . upon his (Ranjit Singh's) being removed from the scene, unless there be another to fill his place, with equal energy, and command over the attachment and affections of his dependents, which, it is be feared, is not the character of Kharak Singh, everything must necessarily fall into confusion.[18]

Like Steinbach, Thornton believes that Kharak Singh "gradually pined away under the effect of some slow, but subtle poison, which must have been administered by the orders, or with the connivance, of his son."[19] He briefly describes the accident which killed Nau Nihal Singh but like a reporter does not think it necessary to comment on the possibility of mischief. He accuses Nau Nihal Singh of hostility towards the British but in many ways places his character in a favourable light.

Thornton's treatment of the reign of Sher Singh (1840-1842) is more detailed than that of M'Gregor and Cunningham. He holds the view that Chand Kaur could have stayed in power had she been "a woman of prudence and decency, and had her council been men of ability and principle. . . in spite of the repugnance of a martial people like the Sikhs to be ruled by a woman."[20] Taking advantage of the unpopularity of Chand Kaur and the divided interests of her supporters, Sher Singh eventually succeeded, though after considerable slaughter, in capturing the throne. Troops became nearly out of control. According to Thornton, "the enormities of which they were guilty, it is said, almost baffle belief."[21] The evil soon spread

[17]Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 174.
[18]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
[19]Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 213.
[20]*Ibid.*, pp. 224-25.
[21]*Ibid.*, p. 229.

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to provinces and, as is described by Steinbach, a number of European and native officers lost their lives in this turmoil. Thornton admires the dependability of the Dogra troops in contrast to the Sikhs.

Thornton appreciates the conduct of Sher Singh towards the British after the calamity at Kabul. He gives no small credit to Mr. Clerk, the British Agent who was "just the person...to manage the rude and boisterous Sikhs."[22] Thornton also notices the expansion of the Sikh power in Tibet and the British attitude towards it. According to him, "with the exception of sending (with the consent of the Lahore court) a British officer (Lieutenant Cunningham) to the Sikh camp in the hills, no interruption, therefore, of their career of conquest was offered by the British Government."[23] Thornton seems to ignore the fact that no further interference was required, as the Sikhs had themselves agreed to retrace their steps.

Thornton bases his account of Sher Singh's murder on a *Purwana* addressed by Maharaja Dalip Singh to his *Vakil* at Ferozpur. He also quotes a native news-writer's report. The first account is nearer to the accepted version of the Maharaja's murder. These accounts blame the Sindawalias, Lehna Singh and Ajit Singh and are contradicted by those of M'Gregor and Symth.

Thornton devotes a chapter to the period of Hira Singh's domination. According to him, "the whole history of Hira Singh's administration is little more than a narrative of his endeavours to keep the troops in subordination to him."[24] There were troubles in various parts of the kingdom. Thornton gives details of the events which led to the violent death of Suchet Singh, Attar Singh, Bhai Bir Singh and Kashmira Singh, a supposed son of Ranjit Singh. The ministry ended in violence, as it had begun. Hira Singh and his chief adviser Pandit Jalla, along with their relations and followers became victims of the fury of troops. Thornton attributes the fall of Hira Singh

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 201; Thornton quotes this expression from *Calcutta Review.*
[23] Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 260.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

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to the agency of three parties—"the old Khalsa chiefs, who always entertained a dislike to the Dogur family; the mother and the uncle of the young Maharaja, suspicious of designs against him, or actuated by a thirst for power; and the army, which could not obtain from an impoverished treasury the extravagant donations they demanded."[25]

The removal of Hira Singh, according to Thornton, "was accomplished with far more facility than the erection of a new fabric of government."[26] Thornton describes the horrors which the troops perpetrated. Jawahir Singh, the maternal uncle of Dalip Singh was made Vazir but was shortly afterwards put to death. According to Thornton, "the precarious and perilous office of the *vuzeerat* was actually put to auction" by the *Panchas* of the army. Rani Jindan, the mother of Dalip Singh, was unable to satisfy the rapacity of troops who "were on the point of proclaiming the infant son of Sher Singh."[27] This is what, according to Thornton, led the Rani and her party to organise a proposal for a campaign across the Sutlej, so as to "turn the thoughts of those turbulent and mercenary men in another direction."[28]

Thornton lists four grounds on which the Lahore Durbar justified its going to war against the British. These were the military preparation by the British, non-compliance with a demand for the restitution of Suchet Singh's treasures, the question of the village of Moran, and the British refusal to allow the free passage of the Sikh troops into the cis-Sutlej territories of the Lahore government. Thornton does not discuss the merit of these grievances. It is a typical example of his tendency to avoid all controversial matters. All that he says in this matter is that "the forbearance of our Government, in spite of many provocations, was carried to an unusual extent."[29]

In the last chapter Thornton deals with the campaign of the Sutlej. Unlike three other contemporary authors, M'Gregor,

[25]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 301.
[26]*Ibid.*, p. 307.
[27]*Ibid.*, p. 327.
[28]*Ibid.*
[29]*Ibid.*, p. 330. For an opposite view see G. Carmichael Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, Introduction, p. xxi.

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Smyth and Cunningham, Thornton believes that while avoiding unnecessary provocation, the British were sufficiently well prepared to meet the Sikh army "which had cast off all subordination to legitimate authority."[30]

The *Panchas* of the army directed Tej Singh, the Commander-in-Chief, and Lal Singh, the Minister to advance to Sutlej on November 17, 1845. This resolution, according to Thornton, was approved by the Durbar. Thus the Sikh army consisting of "60,000 men and 200 cannon" moved towards the British frontier.[31]

The war which followed was a hard contest. At Mudki, according to Thornton; the exhausted British troops were attacked by "15,000 to 20,000 infantry, the same number of cavalry and 40 guns." Unlike M'Gregor, Thornton believes that the British artillery had done a fine job, but both agreed that the victory was won by the bayonets of the infantry.[32]

Thornton, unlike Smyth,[33] asserts that the guard at Ferozpur and Ludhiana was strong enough to hold out till relieved. He records that when the troops led by Tej Singh attacked the British on the morning of December 22, 1845, the British artillery for want of ammunition, was "unable to fire a single shot."[34] He considered the battle of Ferozeshah as "the severest ever fought in India, and one of the most honourable to the British arms in that country."[35] In the battle of Aliwal, "the Sikhs fought with much resolution, maintaining frequent rencontres with our cavalry hand to hand," but the British soldiers secured a convincing victory.[36]

Thornton's account of the slaughter of the retiring Sikhs after the battle of Sobraon reads as follows:

> ...the victors then, pressing them (the Sikhs) on every side, precipitated them in masses over the bridge, and into the

[30]Thornton, *op. cit*, Vol. II p. 330.

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 331.

[32]M'Gregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 46, 374.

[33]G.C. Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. 172-73; *The Calcutta Periodical Playcarded*, p. 21.

[34]Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 343.

[35]*Ibid.*

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 349.

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> Sutlej, which a sudden rise of seven inches had rendered hardly fordable. In their efforts to reach the right bank, through the deepened water, they suffered from our horse artillery a terrible carnage. Hundreds fell under this cannonade; hundreds upon hundreds were drowned in attempting the perilous passage.[37]

Thornton finds no fault with the conduct of the British officers before, during and after the war. According to him, "the enemy, possessing all the advantages of opportunity, numbers and discipline, directed by skill and backed by desperate resolution, was overwhelmed...."[38] He believes that the British conduct after the war was characteristic of their generosity and forbearance.

Thornton's work was the first detailed history of the Punjab and the Sikhs. Thus he fulfilled the desire which Malcolm had cherished in the first decade of the 19th century. In a sense, Thornton completed the work of Malcolm. Thornton did not attempt to present the Sikhs as "the creatures of a day,"[39] rather he considerably elevated the Sikhs by identifying them with the ancient tribes of the Scythian Getes. Considering the extreme ignorance which prevailed among the Europeans about the Sikhs,[40] the information gathered by Thornton is valuable. His treatment of the various periods of Sikh history is in proportion to their significance. His work is more restrained than that of M'Gregor, and much more sober than that of Smyth.

However, Thornton's work could not weigh in popularity with Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*, on which he had so extensively relied, or Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the*

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 353-54

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 376.

[39] Economist, *The Annexation of the Punjab*, The Punjab Series, Vol. III, Letter I, p. 4.

[40] Henry Steinbach in spite of his long service with the Sikhs described the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar as "a temple to Vishnu, one of the Sikh deities...." *The Punjaub*, p. 4; Charles Masson who travelled through Punjab described Guru Nanak as "born of Mahomedan parents." Similarly, he wrote that "the number of Gurus, or teachers of the sect was limited to nine...." *Narrative of Various Journeys in Beluchistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab*, Vol. I, pp. 418, 424.

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Punjab, which he had fully incorporated in his work.[41] This is because, unlike the other two works, Thornton's did not produce any fundamental displacement in the historiography on the subject. Thornton worked within the earlier framework and made no innovations. His work primarily deals with events and not with their origins, it describes but does not explain. It rouses curiosity but does not satiate it. It reads like a report lacking in explanatory mode of writing. Unlike the popular trends of writing history, it neither stirs reader's imagination nor helps in deducing moral lessons.[42] The anonymous character of the book[43] and Thornton's determination not to give offence[44] also prove his handicaps. His work echoes the official version of the First Anglo-Sikh War, giving the story from the British angle, and that is what separates Thornton from most of his predecessors and successors.

[41]J.D. Cunningham who completed his work in 1849 made repeated references to the works of Malcolm and Prinsep. He even noticed M'Gregor's *History of the Sikhs*, which appeared later than Thornton, but did not refer to Thornton's work.

[42]Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, pp. 3, 54, 90, 91.

[43]According to the Athenaeum, "The wise should know that these materials of history do not admit of anonymous publication. . .facts in the first order must be spoken far—must be authenticated before they can be received." *The Athenaeum*, March 24, 1849, p. 294.

[44]According to *Calcutta Review*, "We think very little of the contemporary annals which do not give offence in some quarter, and very little of the historian who shrinks from giving offence." *Calcutta Review*, Vol. IX, No. XXII, Jan.-June 1849, p. 523.

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CHAPTER 7

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

A war with the Sikhs had been expected by the British long before it actually came.[1] However, neither the British army nor the political officers in charge of the dealings with the Sikhs had imagined the intensity of the contest before the encounter with the Sikhs at Mudki. The war resulted in an all-time high British interest in the affairs of the Punjab. People became curious to know about the little known country of the Sikhs. The war also gave rise to a controversy about the conduct and performance of the British army. T.H. Thornton was the first to come out with a complete account of the Sikhs from their origin to the battles at the Sutlej. As noted earlier, the bulk of Thornton's book was, however, a reproduction of Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*. The first complete history of the Sikhs came from W.L. M'Gregor, a surgeon in the British army.

W.L. M'Gregor visited the court of Ranjit Singh on September 8, 1835. At that time he was posted at Ludhiana with the 1st European Light Infantry, and was sent by the Government to enquire after the health of the Maharaja.[2] M'Gregor presented to Ranjit Singh two pistols, some crystal cups and one box containing medicines. He was very warmly received, hospitably looked after and liberally provided during his brief stay at Lahore.[3] He took his leave on October 3, 1835 and was given a special robe of honour, one horse with a silver saddle, besides Rs. 15,000 in cash.[4] M'Gregor visited Lahore for the second

[1] *The Asiatic Journal*, Vol. XXXIV, Jan.-April 1841, p. 99.

[2] Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, p. 245. Also see M'Gregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 240.

[3] Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

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time in the succeeding year. The Maharaja's power of speech had been affected by the paralytic stroke which he had suffered. Dr. Harlan, who was employed as a physician to the court of Lahore, had suggested to the Maharaja to submit to the power of electricity and galvanism and demanded £ 5,000 sterling for construcing a galvanic battery. The Maharaja considered the amount rather high, and thus this work was passed on to M'Gregor. He accepted the office of a medical attendant on the Maharaja "more with a view of seeing Maharajah and conversing with him, than from any pecuniary consideration."[5] He reached Lahore by the end of 1836 as ordered by Metcalfe, the Governor of the North-Western Province, who had cordial relations with Ranjit Singh.[6]

M'Gregor performed his job considerably well. However, his efforts were not attended by the desired results. M'Gregor attributed his failure to the excessive drinking by the Maharaja during the visit of Sir Henry Fane, Commander-in-Chief of the British India, to Lahore in connection with the marriage of Nau Nihal Singh.[7] M'Gregor, by virtue of his service, wielded much influence over the Maharaja, and often used it to the British advantage. He also drew up a paper on the court of Ranjit Singh, and presented it to Lord Auckland in 1838.[8]

M'Gregor served at Ludhiana during the period preceding the First Anglo-Sikh War. He also officiated as the Political Agent, though temporarily.[9] During the First Anglo-Sikh War his regiment was ordered to embark on active duty. It reached Mudki on December 20, 1845. This gave M'Gregor a first-hand opportunity of witnessing some of the encounters. At the conclusion of the war M'Gregor accompanied the British troops which occupied Lahore. Thus M'Gregor had considerable opportunities of knowing the Sikhs on both sides of the Sutlej before he ventured on writing his *History of the Sikhs*. He had

[5]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 273-74.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 275.

[7]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 276; Vol. II, pp. 2-3. Also see, Henry Edward Fane, *Five Years in India*, Vol. I, p. 78.

[8]M'Gregor later on incorporated this paper in his book. M'Gregor, *op. cit*, Vol. I, pp. 202-66.

[9]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 281 footnote.

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seen them at the height of their power under Ranjit Singh and he was also present with them when the very existence of their kingdom was imperilled.

M'Gregor was a man of varied interests. He was by profession a surgeon, but was interested in administration. He had also a passion for the study of history. He had started digging up material on the history of the Sikhs nearly a decade before he wrote his book. He had acquired considerable information about Ranjit Singh and his court by 1838. During his stay at Lahore after the conclusion of the war he tried to find the details of the events after Ranjit Singh's death from persons whom he considered to be well-informed. However, M'Gregor's main source of reliance, besides the works of John Malcolm, H.T. Prinsep and E. Thornton, was "a history of the Maharajah kept by a Mussulman family in Wittala."[10] This reference is obviously to the *Kitab-i-Hind* of Ahmad Shah Batalvi.[11] Since M'Gregor did not know Persian, he had this work translated into Urdu by his friend Abdoolashah.[12] M'Gregor had met Hussein, the son of Ahmad Shah Batalvi in 1846,[13] and might have obtained from him the work of his father.

M'Gregor published his *History of the Sikhs* in two volumes. The first volume deals with the history of the Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak to the reign of Ranjit Singh. The second volume contains the events from the death of Ranjit Singh to the conclusion of the First Anglo-Sikh War, the bulk of it being devoted to the events of the war.

M'Gregor appreciates the unaggressive character of the Sikhs under Guru Nanak and his eight successors but regrets the changes introduced by Gobind Singh, the last Guru of the Sikhs. According to him:

> That the Sikhs, as originally constituted by Nanuk, were a singular people, there can be no doubt; but since the reformation of the tribe by Govind, the tenth and last Gooroo,

[10]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 29.

[11]Gurbax Singh has translated into Punjabi the extract from *Kitab-i-Hind* dealing with the history of the Sikhs under the title *Tarikh-i-Punjab*.

[12]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 291.

[13]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 17.

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they have lost all distinctiveness.[14]

However, M'Gregor is not blind to the bravery and indomitable courage of Guru Gobind under all circumstances and regards him as "undoubtedly a great man."[15] M'Gregor considers Banda to be a "murderous incendiary."[16] He is fairly close to Malcolm in this regard.[17] Nevertheless, he is singular in his belief that had Guru Gobind Singh been a younger man "there is little doubt that the punishment he would have inflicted on the Mussulmans, though differing in kind, would have been equally ample with that bestowed by Bunda."[18]

M'Gregor attributes the rise of the Sikhs in the second quarter of the eighteenth century to the laxity of the Mughal administration which had made the Zamindars of the Punjab throw off their allegiance to the government and oppress the peasantry. The peasants, who were mostly Jats, responded in turn by joining the Sikhs and taking the law in their own hands.[19] The process was further accelerated after the invasians of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah. Gradually the Sikhs became strong enough to openly challenge the government, and even defeated Jahan Khan.[20] After this the Sikh Sirdars began to appropriate as much territory as they could and the Sikhs became "a friendly nation, divided into what were called Missuls."[21] M'Gregor confines his brief account of the *misls* only to the trans-Sutlej territories as the cis-Sutlej *misls* had long ago merged into the protected Sikh States and he believes that their details belong to the history of the British Empire in India than

[14]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 46-47.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

[17]Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, pp. 77-78, 82. This view is literally followed by W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, pp. 83-94, and Mohammad Latif, *History of the Panjab*, pp. 274-75.

[18]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 110.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 114.

[20]According to M'Gregor, "Jahan Khan was Governor of Lahore." *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 116. This is incorrect. Ahmad Shah had appointed his son Prince Taimur as Governor "under the tutelage of a chief named Jahan Khan." J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 88.

[21]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 118.

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to the Sikhs of the Punjab.[22] M'Gregor's account of the Sikh *misls* is brief and appears to be primarily aimed at providing the necessary background to the rise of Ranjit Singh.

M'Gregor devotes the second half of his first volume to Ranjit Singh's career, his achievements, his courtiers and his relation with the British. His treatment of this period of Sikh history is markedly different from that of the pre-Ranjit Singh period. Besides being marked with originality, his account is tinctured with sympathy which is not the case with the earlier portion of his work. The bulk of this description is a reproduction of M'Gregor's paper written in 1838. M'Gregor describes at length some of the conquests of Ranjit Singh, but unlike Prinsep, he does not care to examine the structure of administration. However, he is fully aware that it was much more difficult to retain a conquest than to make it.[23] He attributes the success of Ranjit Singh to his habit of lending personal attention to the details of administration. M'Gregor believes that:

> The manner in which Runjeet retains his conquests entire, displays the energy of the man in even a stronger light than all his victories in the field of battle, and without knowing the habits and endless resources of this extraordinary individual, it appears difficult to conceive how he manages to preserve such order in his wide-extended dominions; but we cease to wonder, as my friend Fukeer Azeezoodeen has often remarked, on witnessing the minute attention which he bestows on the most trifling subject, from the shoeing of a horse, to the organization of an army.[24]

Ranjit Singh's care for the details has been fully borne out by the subsequent researches too, but he did not act autocratically. He was always willing to listen to his subordinates, and even offered to change his orders if they were found injurious to the interest of people.[25]

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 270.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[25] This is proved by a *Farman* of Ranjit Singh issued to Fakir Nuruddin. For a facsimile of this *Farman*, see Waheedudin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, pp. 31-32.

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M'Gregor follows the views of C.M. Wade in his approach to the Anglo-Sikh relations. In his opinion, the Maharaja dreaded the power of the British ever since 1805. But M'Gregor also adds that "if his (Ranjit Singh's) honour or that of his Kindom were compromised, he would try the issue."[26] M'Gregor describes the efforts made by Captain Wade to maintain friendly relations with Ranjit Singh and the healthy effect on Anglo-Sikh relations of the meeting between William Bentinck and Ranjit Singh. He closes the first volume of his work with the eulogistic remark that "among all the princes of the East, there were none who ever preserved their alliance with greater care than Runjeet Singh."[27]

M'Gregor briefly describes the events between Ranjit Singh's death and the breaking out of the First Anglo-Sikh War. He notices the circumstances leading to Kharak Singh's death and later on Nau Nihal Singh's but like Thornton and unlike Steinbach, does not enter into any controversy about the possiblity of a foul play. Though categoric about Nau Nihal Singh's dislike of the British, he describes the prince as possessing "a brave and indomitable spirit, united, at the same time, to great caution, discretion, and forethought."[28]

M'Gregor describes Sher Singh's accession, his degeneration into a drunken debauch and his eventual murder. Sher Singh, his son Partap Singh and his Minister Dhian Singh were murdered by the Sindhanwalias, Lehna Singh and Ajit Singh. M'Gregor, for his account of these murders, relies on the authority of Hussein Shah, son of Ahmad Shah of Batala "in whose possession are the very documents giving orders for the deaths of Sher Singh and Dhian Singh, under their own signatures"[29] He reaches at the conclusion that, "by the cunning of the Scindinwalas, the Maharajah and his Minister were made the unconscious murderers of each other."[30] These murders were soon avenged by Hira Singh, the son of Dhian Singh, who became the minister of the State.

[26]M'Gregor had written these lines during the life-time of Maharaja. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 264.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 291.

[28]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 5.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 17.

[30]*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

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This spate of political murders led to a vacuum at the top. The process was completed with the accession of the boy king Dalip Singh and the real power passed into the hands of the army which wielded it through its *Panchas*. M'Gregor describes that after the royal treasury failed to satisfy the rapacity of the troops, they turned to invading the British territories. He also adds that the troops ignored the advice given by Rani Jindan, and Tej Singh, the Commander-in-Chief, and many other chiefs who were opposed to a war with the British.[31] These views are no longer accepted.[32] Lal Singh was accepted as the nominal Commander-in-Chief in view of Rani's wishes. Gulab Singh was also called from Jammu to join the army but knowing the uncertainty of the coming contest he did not commit himself. He planned his strategy in a manner which might enable him to profit under all circumstances. According to M'Gregor, in spite of the daily reports of the hostile preparations by the Sikhs, Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General (1844-48) had refused to act, in view of "the orders from Home authorities."[33] But when the Sikh forces crossed the Sutlej, Hardinge as well as Gough, the Commander-in-Chief, took the field with all speed. The war was declared and the possessions of Dalip Singh on the left bank of Sutlej were confiscated.

This was followed by the battle of Mudki, where, in the opinion of M'Gregor, the Sikh columns were broken and dispersed, but not before they had committed great slaughter among the Europen officers and men.[34] Next came the battle of Feroze-

[31]*Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[32]J.D. Cunningham attributed the war to "the insidious exhortations of such mercenary men as Lal Singh and Tej Singh," besides the attitude of the British. J.D. Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 257; Barkat Rai Chopra has also expressed similar views. *Kingdom of the Punjab*, 1839-45, p. 418. According to W. Broadfoot, the Sikh chiefs and the Rani went to the extent of undertaking the filthy job of prompting the Khalsa troops to commit a number of acts, direct and indirect, which might provide an ostensible cause for the British interference, provided these influential persons were permitted to retain their *jagirs*, their powers and their nationality, viz. the nominal rule of their Maharaja. *Career of Major George Broadfoot*, pp. 256-57, 282 and 337. Sita Ram Kohli also holds the nobility guilty. *Sunset of the Sikh Empire*, pp. 98-99.

[33]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 43.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

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shah. After the Ferozpur contingent joined the main army, the British troops assaulted the Sikh positions on the afternoon of December 21, 1845. M'Gregor writes that despite the indomitable courage displayed by the European troops, only a part of the Sikh entrenchment could be carried before it became too cold to fight.[35] The bivouacked British army was constantly harassed by the Sikh soldiers and had to lie low without returning the fire. M'Gregor states that "never in the annals of warfare in India had matters attained such a threatening crisis."[36] The native infantry did not prove equal to the task.[37] The battle was renewed next morning and Sikh trenches were captured. Tej Singh now took the field and the Sikh cavalry threw back the British cavalry. However, the British infantry eventually made Tej Singh flee.[38]

The flight of Lal Singh and Tej Singh to Lahore created a crisis of leadership in the Sikh camp. The army *Panchas* invited Gulab Singh from Jammu to lead the troops but he was in no mood to take up this role. The British used this interval to capture Dharamkot, a "place of some importance to the Sikhs, and situated about half-way between Ferozpore and Loodiana."[39] This was done by Sir Harry Smith without much opposition, but when Harry Smith was passing from Buddowal on his way to Ludhiana, the Sikhs under Ranjodh Singh Majithia fired at him, seized most of his baggage and imprisoned some European soldiers.[40] After being reinforced, Harry Smith sought and soon got an opportunity to vindicate his honour. Ranjodh Singh and Ajit Singh were completely vanquished at Aliwal in "one of the best-managed actions on record."[41] This not only saved Ludhiana and protected the

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 104.

[36]*Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 109.

[38]Colonel Malleson has d scribed the battle of Ferozeshah as "a battle gained after it had been lost and then regained after its success had once more been imperilled" *The Decisive Battles of India*, p. 365.

[39]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 131-32.

[40]Sir Harry Smith himself described the action of Ranjodh Singh as "the most scientific move made during the war." But Ranjodh did not know how to profit by his advantageous position. *The Autobiography of Lt. General Sir Harry Smith*, Vol. II, pp. 186-87.

[41]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 136.

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siege train which was on its way to Mudki, but also put an effective end to the panic which had gripped Ambala and the hill territories of Subatu and Simla.

The Sikh army on the Sutlej was, meanwhile, busy completing a bridge across the river in the neighbourhood of Ferozpur. The bridge was protected by the guns on the right bank of Sutlej. The British army did not prevent its construction for reasons unknown to M'Gregor.

By this time Gulab Singh had reached Lahore to play a "deep game." M'Gregor observes that "the emissaries from Lahore reached the British camp early in February, but the siege train had now arrived, and Sir Harry Smith's division rejoined the main army, so that no reply was given to the Lahore Government though one was promised."[42]

The Sikhs constructed formidable entrenchment at Sobraon, having realized the danger of facing the English troops in the open field.[43] The British attacked the entrenchment on the morning of February 10, 1846.[44] The large guns and mortars were brought into full play, the effect of which was "most severely felt by the enemy."[45] But the issue of the battle had to be settled by musketry and bayonet as had been done at Mudki and Ferozeshah. In the opinion of M'Gregor, the British troops, after some initial reverses, silenced the fire of the Sikhs and "precipitated them in masses over their bridge, and into the Sutlej, which a sudden rise of seven inches had rendered hardly fordable." The passage of the Sutlej, while the British guns continued to fire, cost the Sikhs thousands of lives.[46] No quarters were asked for, nor were any offered. This was because the Sikhs had shown no mercy to the wounded and the dying British soldiers who fell during the earlier part of the action. According to M'Gregor, "the battle of Sobraon may be justly termed the 'Waterloo of India,' it was the

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 149.

[43]*Ibid.*, pp. 150, 152-53. However, J.D. Cunningham is of the view that the entrenchment at Sobraon "showed no trace whatever of scientific skill or unity of design," Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

[44]Governor-General's dispatch quoted by M'Gregor, *Ibid*., p. 159.

[45]*Ibid.*, p. 165.

[46]See Thornton, *History of the Punjab*, Vol. II, pp. 353-54.

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last, and one of the most hardest contested; like that great and ever memorable engagement, it completely broke the power of the foe."[47]

The Sobraon completed the work of Mudki. The discomfiture of the Sikh army was complete and the kingdom of Lahore was now within the power of victors. The British army crossed the Sutlej undisputed. Hardinge issued a Proclamation at Kasur on February 14, 1846. He reaffirmed his desire "to see a strong Sikh Government re-established in the Punjab, able to control its army and protect its subjects," but also asserted that he intended to take such steps as "shall secure the British frontier from a repetition of acts of aggression".[48]

Gulab Singh took advantage of the terror and consternation prevailing at Lahore and decided to carry through his 'wily policy', at whatever sacrifice, on the part of the Sikhs.[49] He rushed to Kasur with a view to negotiating peace and preventing the British advance on Lahore. M'Gregor wrote that Gulab Singh could not negotiate with the Governor-General and was directed to Henry Lawrence, who later on took over as Resident at Lahore, and, to Fredrick Currie, Secretary to the Government of India.[50] He returned to Lahore and took the young Maharaja with him. According to M'Gregor, "out of respect for the late Maharaja Runjeet Singh, and the tender years of his grandson, the Governor-General received Dhuleep Singh with the utmost kindness."[51]

M'Gregor appreciates that Hardinge had decided not to annex the Punjab. He believed that "such a step was impracticable; except at the risk of destroying the European portion of his

[47] M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 174.

[48] Governor-General's Proclamation, Kasur, February, 14, 1846, *Despatches and General Orders*, pp. 137-40; also see M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 197-98, 200.

[49] M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 201.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203; J.D. Cunningham writes that "on the 15th of the month, the Raja and several other chiefs were received by the Governor-General at Kasur . . . . After a long discussion the terms were reluctantly agreed to, the young Maharaja came and tendered his submission in person. . . ." J.D. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

[51] M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 203. Dalip Singh was the reputed son and not grandson of Ranjit Singh.

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troops, by exposure to burning sun, during the hot and rainy months."[52] The Treaty of Lahore (March 11, 1846) stipulated a war indemnity of one and a half crore rupees, the surrender of Jullundur Doab, and all the guns pointed against the British. The strength and the wages of the Sikh army were to be considerably reduced. Since the Lahore treasury was almost empty, by the Treaty of Amritsar (March 16, 1846), Kashmir was given to Gulab Singh, who, in turn, was to contribute a sum of Rupees seventy five lacs towards the stipulated amount of war indemnity. Gulab Singh was recognized as an independent ruler of Jammu and Kashmir both by the British and Sikh Government, and he thus succeeded in accomplishing his long-cherished dream. M'Gregor also writes about the Treaty of Bhyrowal (December 16, 1846) and gives a list of the political officers who were required to assist Henry Lawrence in the management of the affairs of the Sikhs. According to him, "a more efficient body of men could not have been selected."[53]

M'Gregor is of the opinion that the Sikhs would not have been reconciled to the existing arrangement and "sooner or later the day must come when the British standards will be again unfurled, and the Indus, and not the Beas, become the frontier barrier of her possessions in the east."[54] According to him, the Military administration would have been much more expedient for meeting the exigencies of the situation in the Punjab than the civil one as arranged by Hardinge.[55] No wonder that he observes that "in governing a country whose inhabitants are decidedly hostile to us, and only wait for an opportunity of expelling and destroying our servants and troops, surely military power is the best adapted for preventing both disasters."[56] He

[52]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 204.

[53]*Ibid*., p. 219.

[54]*Ibid*., p. 264.

[55]The Political v/s Military administration became the most burning issue after the British disaster in Afghanistan. According to *Calcutta Review*, "there is, indeed, no single controversial topic, which has eliminated so many sparks of bad feeling, none which has struck out so much acrimony, so much personality, so much bitter invective, and we may add, so much reckless mendacity." *Calcutta Review*, Vol. VII, No. XIV, pp. 293-94.

[56]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 287.

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italicizes these lines to make his point more emphatic. He advocates a military rule on Sindh pattern, preferably under Charles Napier, the creator of that pattern.

M'Gregor regretted the transfer of Kashmir to Gulab Singh. This was quite natural in view of his belief in the inevitability of the eventual annexation of the Punjab. Moreover, he was fully alive to the climatic and commercial significance of Kashmir. He also knew the limitations of the Sikh or Dogra rule. According to him, the country could be rehabilitated under British rule alone which might have made it the earthly paradise peopled by a happy race.[57]

M'Gregor's attempt was regarded by John Kaye, in an anonymous article in *Calcutta Review*, as "a nondescript performance, a graft of history upon a stock of personal narrative, the one ever destroying the vitality of other." The reviewer asserted that the three-fourth of the information given by the author was already available and went to the extent of suggesting that the remaining one-fourth information should have been given in a small volume under such unassuming title as "Journal of a Medical Officer, serving in the recent campaigns on the Sutlej, with a personal narrative of a visit to the Court of Runjeet Singh."[58]

It is difficult to agree with John Kaye, but the fact remains that M'Gregor did fail to write a balanced history. This failure of M'Gregor is, by and large, due to his excessive obsession with the contemporary situation. However, this trait was not confined to M'Gregor but was a common feature of the Victorian Society which "demanded of the historian not a knowledge of the past for its own sake but a demonsfration of morality teaching by examples."[59] M'Gregor fully displayed the contemporary fashion of depicting Ranjit Singh as a model of faith and friendship, notwithstanding the suspicion with which the British and Ranjit Singh viewed the progress of each

[57]*Ibid.*, p. 292.

[58]*Calcutta Review*, Vol. VII, No. XIV, p. 283. For the authorship of John Kaye, see *Classified Subject Index to Calcutta Review 1844-1920*, p. 199.

[59]E.T. Stokes, "The Administrators and Historical writing on India," C.H. Philips, *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, p. 385.

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other.[60] M'Gregor's contemporaneity is at its height while writing about the First Anglo-Sikh War and the events subsequent to it. He confidently predicts the fall of Dalip Singh's government and even suggests measures for the consequent annexation of the Punjab.[61]

M'Gregor considered himself to be a "faithful historian"[62] and endeavoured to "trace effects to their causes."[63] He tried to be careful in the selection of his sources so that he should not end up by laying "the ground-work of a romance."[64] As a historian he considered it his duty "to reconcile as far as possible conflicting accounts, and to render due honour to gallant troops engaged in a hard-fought battle, by assigning to each the proper meed of praise without detracting from the merits of others."[65]

M'Gregor was conscious of the high standard of political history and was determined to write "a history and not merely a military detail."[66] He admitted that he had not been able to give his materials "the condensed form peculiar to political history" and the part of his second volume dealing with the Anglo-Sikh War "must be accepted rather as a Journal of operations than as a comprehensive digest of the entire campaign."[67] He was also aware of the difficulty of writing too soon after the event and believed that "it is not from general statements that the true nature of battles is to be gleaned."[68] He altogether failed to resist this temptation for he does give as much information about the war with the Sikhs as he was able to collect. Besides the popular interest in the affairs of the Punjab, the character of his readership, which, by and large, consisted

[60]Francis Rawdon Hastings, ed. *The Private Journal of the Marquess of Hastings*, p. 25.

[61]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 264-66.

[62]*Ibid.*, p. 184.

[63]*Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

[64]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 47.

[65]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 362.

[66]*Ibid.*, p. 94.

[67]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, Preface, p. iv.

[68]*Ibid*., Vol. II, p. 376.

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of the military officials,[69] and what is more, his own disposition, can account for it.

M'Gregor shared the belief of the Victorian public that the function of a historian was to inform and exhort by placing the national character in its highest examples and to demonstrate how individual character moulded history.[70] He presented the European soldiers, particularly his own regiment, the First European Light Infantry, in the most favourable light. His regiment had joined the main army only a day before the battle of Ferozeshah and was attached to Gilbert's brigade. It heroically captured a portion of the 'enemy camp' in collaboration with 29th and 80th regiment. It was one of the few regiments which lay bivouacked on that fearful night. M'Gregor described Captain Thomas Box of his regiment as "as brave a soldier as ever entered the field of battle."[71] M'Gregor went to the extent of asserting that "the safety of India depended on Gilbert's retaining his position, and preventing the advance of the Sikhs during the night of the 21st."[72] In sharp contrast to the European troops, M'Gregor criticised the native infantry in most devastating manner. Describing the battle of Ferozeshahr, he accused it of having lost proper distance, getting behind the European troops and firing "often accidentally, killing or wounding the latter."[73] To M'Gregor the victories of the British were due to their superior character.

M'Gregor stood for a complete prostration of the Sikhs. He regretted the British forbearance and believed in the desirability of giving up Lahore and Amritsar to pillage.[74] He even

[69]The author made numerous references to his military readers, *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 69, 93, 94, 185, 323. This is also established by another evidence. Major Smyth's *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, published a few months after M'Gregor's work, contains a 'List of Subscribers' along with their Rank and Corps. Out of 297 subscribers who booked 311 copies of the work, only twenty-eight were non-military personnel, and their subscription was for one copy each. G. Carmichael Smyth, *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, January 1847, pp. ix-xiv.

[70]C.H. Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

[71]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 127.

[72]*Ibid.*, p. 362.

[73]*Ibid.*, p. 109.

[74]*Ibid.*, p. 283.

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advocated cow killing in Punjab despite the fact that he was fully aware of the strong Sikh prejudice against such a course.[75] This was because he completely ruled out the possibility of reconciling the Sikhs to the British hegemony. He displayed remarkable insight when he predicted the collapse of the government of Dalip Singh on the ground that it was too weak to stand without the British support and any government which depended on foreigners could not command the respect of its people.

M'Gregor was keen to publish his work "while yet the affairs of the Punjab possessed a high degree of interest in England."[76] He was aware of some of the shortcomings of his work and promised to revise it, if it ever saw another edition.[77] The first edition was sold within a few months and the second edition appeared in 1847. But M'Gregor preferred to quickly sell another edition than to undertake the labour of revising it. This clearly indicates that the pecuniary considerations weighed with M'Gregor. In its design and execution the work was not only calculated at giving the maximum possible information about the Sikhs to the English readers, but also at influencing the British policy towards the Punjab.

M'Gregor is the first historian on the Sikhs to have pointed out the possibility of treachery in the First Anglo-Sikh War.[78] His work also leaves traces of what is termed as "the martial race theory."[89] His faith in the efficacy of the bayonets is sustained throughout this work. His disgust with the conduct of the native infantry is expressed in most unmistakable terms. His concern for the welfare of European soldiers is intense.[80] His suggestions about the duties of a field-surgeon, and for making the medical aid to the soldiers more effective have been considered the most useful part of the work.[81]

[75]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 91. Also see Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 104.
[76]M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Preface, pp. iii-iv.
[77]*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 376.
[78]*Ibid.*, pp 140, 175, 307-8.
[89]*Ibid.*, pp. 51, 96.
[80]*Ibid.*, pp. 321-32, 355-58.
[81]*Calcutta Review*, Vol. VII, No. XIV, pp. 283-320.

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M'Gregor's mistakes and shortcomings are numerous.[82] His scrutiny of source-material is not sufficiently rigorous. His passions, at times, are too much roused to allow him to take an objective view of the situation. Nevertheless, assessed as a whole, the work found favour with his contemporaries and has retained some esteem of the posterity. It is more detailed than the work of Steinbach, more critical than the work of Thornton and much more serious than that of Smyth. Some of M'Gregor's mistakes are due to his lack of the knowledge of both Punjabi and Persian. Ignorance of source-material is no bliss, nor does it absolve a historian of his shortcomings, but it does imply that M'Gregor is not guilty of wilful falsification of facts, and writes only what he believes to be scrupulously correct.

[82]Relying on Alexander Dow's *History of Hindustan*, M'Gregor, at times, went wrong in the matter of dates. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 31.

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CHAPTER 8

THE CLAMOUR FOR LEGITIMACY

The question of the annexation of the Punjab remained the main theme of the British historiography on the Sikhs from 1845 to 1849. The historians of the period, though asking somewhat identical questions, often put forward different answers to support their theses. Whereas some found the British policy towards the Sikhs rather supine, others thought it too aggressive. The history of this period, rather than being a matter of one well-considered judgement, is a series of arguments and counter-arguments. Yet, it is in these writings that we have a sufficiently faithful source of arriving at the truth.

Steinbach, writing immediately before the First Anglo-Sikh War, had found annexation of the Punjab as the only desirable, viable and profitable course open to the British. M'Gregor suggested immediate and complete prostration of the Punjab, because the Sikhs could not be reconciled to the British domination. Carmichael Smyth advocated the adoption of a "commanding attitude" towards the Sikhs because the rulers after Kharak Singh and Nau Nihal Singh were not the legitimate successors to the throne of Lahore.

Major G. Carmichael Smyth of the Third Bengal Light Cavalry undertook the writing of *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, some time before the commencement of the First Anglo-Sikh War.[1] He had been in India for twenty-six years and could claim to be well-informed. Before the First Anglo-Sikh War he was posted at Karnal and was "intimately acquainted" with George Russell Clerk, the Political Agent, N.W. Frontier Agency (March 1840 to June 1843). Smyth was

[1]G. Carmichael Smyth, *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore, with some Account of the Jummoo Rajahs, The Seik Soldiers and their Sirdars*. W. Thacker & Co., Calcutta, 1847. rpt. Patiala, 1970, Preface, p. xx.

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also friendly to Ajit Singh, the Sikh chief who later on murdered Maharaja Sher Singh. He had obtained some information on the subject from Major Broadfoot. But his chief source of information was a journal kept by Gardner, a Captain in the Sikh Artillery from 1831 to 1846.[2] Major Smyth fought against the Sikhs in 1845-46, and was afterwards posted at Meerut. Then he was shifted to Jullundur, which was ceded by the Sikhs to the British in 1846. Here he completed his book in January 1847.

Smyth had no knowledge of either Persian or Punjabi, but he was fully aware of the importance of the use of indigenous sources. He obtained some manuscripts from one of the Sikh chiefs and had them translated for his use. He also carefully read the existing literature on the subject in English which included Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*, Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, Henry Lawrence's *Adventures of an Officer in the Punjaub*, and Steinbach's *The Punjaub*. He was also conversant with some of the leading journals particularly *Medical and Literary Journal* and *Calcutta Review*.[3]

Smyth commenced his writing with a view to describing what he believed to be the true inside story of the Lahore Durbar. However, his interest in doing so was far from academic. He wanted to produce a fast selling book and make a quick buck. He himself described his purpose as "laudable" because half the profit from the sale of the book was to be given to the distressed Irish and the other half to the Scottish.[4] The considerations which had prompted Broadfoot to urge Smyth to produce a book on the reigning family of Lahore were, however, entirely different. Broadfoot was appointed the Agent to Governor-General on the North-West Frontier by Hardinge in November 1844. This appointment was partly the cause and partly the result of the conviction that a war with the Sikhs

[2] *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. xvii.

[3] Smyth appended to his book notes on these works. The bulk of these notes were prepared by Gardner, but the author also seems to have gone through these books.

[4] An advertisement to this effect inserted by the author in *Delhi Gazette*, and *Mofussilite* in Jan. 1848, cited G. Carmichael Smyth, *The Calcutta Periodical Playcarded*, p. 3.

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could no longer be avoided.[5] But 'Home' was the great 'bug-bear'. The pacific Government of Peel was in no mood to depart from the old policy of peace and amity. In this matter its resolution was further strengthened by the influence of George Russell Clerk, who was all out for moderation and forbearance towards the Sikhs.[6] Thus cornered, Broadfoot was keen to encourage the publication of any such work as should destroy the little credit which the Sikhs still possessed in the eyes of the British public. In fact, an all-round blackening of the Sikhs was necessary for the adoption of a "commanding attitude," towards them, which Broadfoot practised and Smyth preached. It was with this motivation that Smyth got down to his work of writing history.

The Anglo-Sikh War broke out before Smyth could complete his book. This altered the entire context, and put the Sikhs in a different light than that in which the conduct of their chiefs and the proceedings of the Lahore Durbar had placed them. Broadfoot was killed in the war, thus removing whatever little friendly check he could have exercised over Major Symth's pen. Symth's personal experience with the conduct of war by the British turned out to be disgusting. It was under these circumstances that Major Smyth wrote his account of the proceedings of the British with the same acid pen as he had used against the Sikhs. This rendered the book "infamous," but at the same time it went a long way in exposing the hollowness of the British victory in the First Anglo-Sikh War—a work which M'Gregor had begun in 1846 and Cunningham completed in 1849.

Carmicheal Smyth's work is divided into five parts. The first part contains the introduction and the history of Ranjit Singh and his family. The second part, which forms the actual text of the book, is divided into twelve chapters, and is exclusively devoted to the public and private affairs of the ruling chiefs from the death of Ranjit Singh to the outbreak of the First

[5]Hardinge to Ellenborough (Private), January 23, 1845, B.J. Hasrat, *The Punjab Papers*, pp. 81-83.

[6]George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, Vol. I' pp. 75-76.

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Anglo-Sikh War. The third part consists of only eighteen pages, and is termed "The War with the British." The fourth part, entitled "Miscellaneous Notes," contains a description of Phula Singh Akali, Zorawar Singh, and Fateh Khan Tiwana, and deals with some of the revolts against the Sikh rule. The fifth part contains an account of the Jammu family particularly its genealogical history. In an appendix Smyth provides notes on the earlier works on Punjab history and some data on the social and economic life of the people of the Punjab.

Carmichael Smyth is perhaps the only Englishman who claims to have traced the origin of Ranjit Singh's family from the days of Guru Nanak. However, in doing so, the author does not end up holding up the respectability of the family, but rather by showing that the earliest known progenitor of the family "Kquloo Buttee" was possibly a bastard, and that the family's past suffered from the stigma of matricide. Smyth reveals that Maha Singh, the father of Ranjit Singh, "put his mother to death with his own hands" in 1778 because of her illicit relations with Hakikat Singh.[7] Maha Singh's agony, according to Smyth, was further heightened because he suspected the fidelity of his wife from the very day of his marriage. He was, "more than once heard to express strong doubts as to the paternity of Runjeet, his reputed son."[8] Grieved by these circumstances Maha Singh gradually drank himself to death.

Maha Singh was succeeded in 1780 by young Ranjit Singh, who, says Smyth, "followed the example of his father by putting his mother to death" in 1793.[9] This was followed by a career characterized by despoilation of others by means of force and treachery until Ranjit gradually rose from "the chief of a tribe of roving plunderers to the sovereignty of a nation."[10] Smyth did not give the details of Ranjit Singh's reign on the ground that these had already been "too often told." He attributed

[7]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. 10.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 12.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 13. Griffin also expresses a similar view. *Punjab Chiefs* (new ed.), Vol. II, Appendix-I, p. 387. However, this view is contrary to the portrait of Ranjit's character as given by H.T. Prinsep and W.G. Osborne.

[10]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. 19.

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the initial success of Ranjit Singh to the support of the Akalis, who served him "rather out of hate to the Mussulmans than out of regard for him."[11] Smyth considered Ranjit Singh to be treacherous by nature. He utterly ignored the opinions of Prinsep and Osborne on the character of Ranjit Singh, and wrote that Ranjit Singh raised "a force such as no eastern power had ever before possessed" in the hope of being "able to battle with the British for the sovereignty of Hindostan" at an opportune time.[12]

The fact of the imbecility of Kharak Singh, the successor of Ranjit Singh, is too well known. Smyth, unlike H.T. Prinsep and W.G. Osborne (who both considered this failing innate), attributed it to the mechanization of Dhian Singh. Kharak Singh, according to Smyth, attempted to prevent Dhian Singh from arrogating all the power to himself and encroaching upon the royal *zenana*. This proved fatal. Dhian Singh, in league with the queen and Nau Nihal Singh, the heir apparent, hatched a conspiracy against Kharak Singh and his favourite Chet Singh. Chet Singh was assassinated. According to Smyth, "Kurruck Sing was confined in the fort and the party having returned, Koonwur No Nehal Sing was proclaimed King."[13] This account is based on Steinbach but is not borne out by facts. Kharak Singh continued to hold his court until a few months before his death. However, the execution of his orders depended on the convenience of Nau Nihal Singh and Dhian Singh. In May 1840, Kharak Singh received George Russell Clerk with great display.[14]

Smyth asserts that Kharak Singh died in his confinement "from the slow effects of small doses of "Sapheda Kaskaree."[15] This is contradicted by John Martin Honigberger, who was serving as Surgeon to the court of Lahore at the time of Kharak Singh's death. Honigberger wrote that "the rumour was current that he (Kharak Singh) was poisoned and the poison employed was also specified but I do not believe it."[16]

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[14] Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[15] Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. 32-33.
[16] John Martin Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, p. 105.

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Nau Nihal Singh died on the very day of Kharak Singh's death. The circumstances of Nau Nihal Singh's death were wrapped in mystery and suspicion. Symth does not clearly commit himself to any view but gives a footnote from Gardner, claiming that Raja Dhian Singh was behind it.[17] With Nau Nihal Singh's death began one of the worst chapters of the history of the Sikhs. Smyth gives a detailed account of the events which followed, and believes that the Jamwal brothers perpetrated the mischief. Smyth states:

> The deep policy of the Jummoo brothers was now beginning to develop itself. They had got rid of the unfortunate Kurruck Sing, and of his active and ambitious son, No Nehal Sing; the Ranee Chund Kaur had been set aside, and Shere Sing was placed on the throne simply that he might be the more completely in the power of these his worst enemies.[18]

Smyth describes Sher Singh as "a brave and intrepid man and a good soldier,"[19] but made it clear that he was a usurper and "could not by the most forced construction be considered the posterity of Runjeet Singh."[20] Smyth lays out the circumstances leading to the assassination of Sher Singh. He is of the opinion that Ajit Singh had fully made up his mind to take his "wild justice" from Sher Singh long before the assassination took place. Ajit Singh even told Smyth that "Lord Sahib has done nothing but I will do something." Smyth's view of the death of Sher Singh and Dhian Singh is broadly similar to the one given by M'Gregor that both the King and his minister plotted against each other and in turn both were destroyed.[21]

Hira Singh, with the help of troops, promptly avenged the

[17]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. 35-36; Hugh Pearse, ed. *Soldier and Traveller—Memories of Alexander Gardner*, pp. 223-26. Also see Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

[18]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. 61.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 73.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. xviii

[21]M'Gregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 17.

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death of his father by killing Ajit Singh and Lehna Singh, and also some others who supported their design. Dalip Singh, who, according to Smyth, was actually the son of a servant of Ranjit Singh, succeeded Sher Singh to the throne. Smyth gives considerable details about the circumstances of Rani Jindan, the mother of Dalip Singh, in order to show that her conduct both before and after the coronation of Dalip Singh was most infamous.[22] The days of Hira Singh's ministership were replete with scandals and intrigues in the capital and troubles and disturbances elsewhere. Dalip Singh and his mentor, Pundit Jalla, were eventually put to death by troops. Jawahir Singh, the maternal uncle of Dalip Singh, who succeeded Hira Singh, met the same fate.

Smyth gives one full chapter to "Rajah Lall Sing and the Slave-girl Mungela." Here is a story of the scandals of "the virtuous trio" Rani Jindan, Raja Lal Singh and Mangela. It is because of Smyth's keenness to unearth the scandals of all types that Henry Lawrence, in an anonymous article in *Calcutta Review*, described the book as "hash" and placed it in the class of "the memoirs of a lady of quality," "the secret history of Josephine," and such like works to suit the prurient appetite of a particular class of readers.[23]

Smyth's assessment of the events leading to the war with the Sikhs and of the conduct of rival armies in the war has remained a most controversial part of his work. Smyth thinks that the British should not have placed any reliance on the fidelity of the Sikhs. They should have adopted a "commanding attitude" right after Nau Nihal Singh's death which terminated the legitimate line of Ranjit Singh's family. As this was not done for fear of criticism at 'Home', the only other course left was to leave the Sikhs unmolested and unprovoked. But even this was not done. An offshoot of this attitude was the "middle course," which as usual, turned out to be worse than both the alternatives.

[22]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, pp. 94-95. This is also supported by Honigberger, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[23]*Calcutta Review*, Vol. IX, No. XVIII, Jan.-June 1848, p. 511. For the authorship of Henry Lawrence see *Classified Subject Index to Calcutta Review, 1844-1920*, p. 209.

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As predicted by Steinbach,[24] the violation of the treaty of 1809 by the Sikhs was used as a plea by the British for going to the First Anglo-Sikh War. Contrary to Steinbach, Smyth believes that the treaty had become null and void with the termination of Ranjit Singh's line of succession. He vehemently opposes the official view that the Sikhs had violated the treaty. He writes that if the question was at all raised as to "who first departed from the rules of friendship? I am decidedly of opinion that we did."[25] To support his views, Smyth writes that the retention of the island between Ferozpur and the Punjab by the British was unjust, "owing to the deep water being between us and the island."[26] Smyth was also critical of the British transportation of the bridge of boats from Bombay[27] and the speech of Charles Napier which appeared in *Delhi Gazette*.[28] Taking these circumstances into account, Smyth concludes that "I am neither of opinion, that the Seiks made an *unprovoked attack*, nor that we have acted towards them with *great forbearance*...."[29] These views have been found to be correct by the later writers.[30]

Unlike J.D. Cunningham and George Campbell, Smyth was of the view that Broadfoot was not responsible for provoking the Sikhs. It was insinuated by *Calcutta Review* that Smyth "in almost so many words, declares that he (Broadfoot) forced on the Sikh War."[31] Smyth immediately joined issues

[24]Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, p. 129.

[25]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. xxiii.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. xxii. Smyth supports his view by quoting from Prinsep the principle to be followed in such cases. See Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, p. 161.

[27]Sir George Campbell, in whose charge the boats were kept, describes these boats as 'white elephants' and utterly useless, being too heavy for use in the shallow water of the Indus. He agrees with Smyth that the only purpose these boats served was to provoke the Sikhs. George Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

[28]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. xxii.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. xxi.

[30]J.D. Cunningham and George Campbell were also of the same view. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 249-52; George Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[31]*Calcutta Review*, Vol. IX, No. XVIII, p. 511.

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with his reviewer on the matter and asserted that the war resulted from the policy of the Government of India, over which Broadfoot had no control.[32]

Smyth's work clearly reflects the radical change in the British view of the Sikh character after the Sikh war. As a result of the writings of H.T. Prinsep and Henry Lawrence, the Sikhs had come to be regarded as a nation of "boasters and cowards."[33] The war convinced the British that the Sikhs were "brave men and good soldiers."[34] It was realised by them that the preparations which the British had made for meeting the Sikhs were far from adequate. A perusal of Smyth's work makes it clear that the British had won the war largely owing to the "blunders" of the Sikhs. Smyth points out many such blunders. In his opinion, the Sikhs could have destroyed Ferozpur and Ranjodh Singh ought to have marched on Delhi. The Sikhs could have also captured the British siege train which was ill-protected.

Smyth's account of the events in the Sikh camp is a moving one. Smyth is convinced of the treachery of Lal Singh and Tej Singh. According to him, "instead of watching for opportunities to employ the force to the best advantage against the enemy, it seemed as if the leaders of the Seiks were intent only on placing their troops in such a position as might render them an easy and complete conquest to their foes."[35] The troops remonstrated with their officers and even rebuked them but they would do nothing beyond that.[36] The spirit of initiative and the qualities of leadership which had characterized the Sikh *misldars* during the 18th century were found sadly wanting in the well-trained Sikh soldiers of the 19th century. In vain did Smyth look for something to happen, but no hero emerged from the ranks to lead the nation to victory. Without a head the troops could not do anything and helplessly followed their treacherous chiefs

[32]Smyth, *The Calcutta Periodical Playcarded*, p. 5,

[33]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. xxiv.

[34]*Ibid.*

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 180.

[36]This fact is also supported by Ajudhia Parshad in his Waqai-i-Jang-i-Sikhan, V.S. Suri, *Some Original Sources of Punjab History*, p. 73.

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wherever they led them.[37]

Smyth's account of the war is neither as detailed as M'Gregor's nor as accurate as Cunningham's. Smyth's observations were challenged by a reviewer[38] and he had to admit his mistake in stating that when the British army captured the Sikh encampment at Ferozeshah on the morning of December 22, 1845, "not a man that could get away was to be seen in the Seik Camp."[39]

Symth, like M'Gregor and Cunningham, did not approve of the creation of the independent principality of Jammu and Kashmir under Gulab Singh. He depicted Gulab Singh as "a very leech, sucking their (peasants) life's blood, the shameless slave-trader of their sons and daughters, brothers, sisters, wives and families. The would-be great merchant of the east; the very jack of all trades, the usurer, the turnpenny, the briber and the bribed."[40]

Smyth appended to his work lists of the plants and minerals found in Punjab, its manufactures, population, revenue and army. His estimate of the total population of Punjab in 1845 was 53,50,000 out of which, not more than 1,50,000 were armed. However, the total strength of the army, both Regular and Irregular, according to Smyth, was only 67,000 horse and foot with 276 pieces of ordnance, 163 of which were Horse Artillery.[41] This estimate falls far short of the one made by J.D. Cunningham in September 1844, who put the number of Sikh army at 92,000 Infantry, 31,800 Cavalry and 384 Guns.[42] In spite of the fact that Cunningham in his capacity as Assistant Agent to Governor-General, North-West Frontier, had better access to facts, the estimate of Smyth is nearer to the figures

[37]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, p. 181.

[38]*Calcutta Review*, Vol. IX, No. XVIII, pp. 520-23.

[39]Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 258.

[41]*Ibid.*, Appendix, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

[42]J.D. Cunningham, "Some Account of the Political Conditions and Military Resources of the Punjab—1844," *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret, 28 March, 1845*, No. 66 K.W., Appendix. Also see Sita Ram Kohli, *Catalogue of Khalsa Darbar Records*, Vol. I, p. 5.

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given by the later writers.[43] In another appendix, Smyth mentioned that the state was required to spend about 128 lakhs of Rupees on its army during the year 1844 whereas it got only Rs. 1,21,75,000 by way of revenue during that year.[44] Here again the estimate of Smyth vastly differs from Cunningham who put the figure at Rs. 3,24,75,000.[45] As calculated by N.K. Sinha, the revenue proceeds during this period were slightly less than Rupees two crore. Thus Smyth under-estimated the revenue of Punjab whereas Cunningham grossly over-estimated it.

Smyth did not bring to bear any particular philosophy on the writing of his history, but he was fully conscious of his responsibility as a writer. Commenting on one of the reviews of his book, he wrote that "truth must prevail over falsehood; honesty can never succumb to impertinence; the impostor's days are numbered; the liberty of the press and inquiring spirit of the present period will, I think, sufficiently expose this literary prostitute."[46] Obviously Smyth himself hated to be either an "impostor" by deceiving others, or a "literary prostitute" by dancing to the tune of someone else. However, Smyth did not find himself in a position to vouch for the validity of all the facts mentioned in his book, and that is why, perhaps, he preferred to style himself as the "editor" of the work rather than its author.

Unfortunately Smyth, with all his profession about stating nothing but the truth, is not always reliable. Much of his failing can be explained in terms of his undue reliance on Gardner who, though not as wicked as *Calcutta Review* tried to make out, was never so dependable as Smyth projects him to be.[47] However, with all his inaccuracies, Smyth has remained one of the

[43]J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (ed., H.L.O. Garrett), Appendix XXXIX, pp. 389-90, editor's note based on Sita Ram Kohli's estimate; also see H.C.B. Cook, *The Sikh Wars*, p. 37.

[44]Smyth, *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, Appendix, p. xxxvii. Also see B.R. Chopra, *Kingdom of the Punjab*, 1839-45, pp. 417-18.

[45]*Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret, 28 March 1845*, No. 66 K.W. Appendix.

[46]Smyth, *The Calcutta Periodical Playcarded*, p. 4.

[47]For an evaluation of Gardner as a man and as a writer, see Hugh Pearse, *op. cit*., pp. 1-12.

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most quoted contemporary sources for the history of the Sikhs. His work, for that matter, has also been found equally "useful" by authors of all shades of opinion. This is a work which attempts to explode the myth of the British forbearance towards the Sikhs. At the same time it refers to Ranjit Singh not as "the lion of Lahore" but as "the old impotent sinner," "the one-eyed monarch," "the old robber" and "a decrepit debauchee." Dhian Singh has been described as a "Sejanus to Runjeet," and the court of Lahore as the most outrageous model of eastern debaucheries.

Smyth's description of the most secret transactions often reads like an eye-witness account. This is largely due to Gardner's fabrication and Smyth's credulous approach towards the facts of which he had little knowledge. However, there is also another aspect of the work. Smyth does not falsify what his own observations suggest. This is what makes Smyth the "author" different from Smyth the "editor". History, in Smyth's time, was being assailed under a two-fold attack from sycophants, who saw heroism in every advance, and prudence in every retreat, and from the government which was wilfully suppressing facts to suit the convenience of certain politicians and their parties. State papers, which are supposed to be the best source-material of history had become "compilations of garbled documents—counterfeits, which the ministerial stamp forces into currency, defrauding a present generation and handing down to posterity a chain of dangerous lies."[48] Any attempt to divulge even a part of the truth could easily jeopardize the author's career. Once this fact is kept in mind it becomes difficult to dispute Symth's claim that his work is "independent and manly".[49]

Smyth's book, according to the *Mofussilite*, was "the first effort of a British officer in his own name to warn his country of a deadly disease which pervaded Indian councils, viz., the underhand concealment of errors and attempts to deceive the mother-country into a belief in its purity and wisdom, when it

[48]J.W. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, Vol. II, p. 13. Also see Vol. I, p. 199.

[49]Smyth, *The Calcutta Periodical Playcarded*, p. 4.

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has been most wanting in both."[50] All that Smyth could earn for himself was a reprimand from his government[51] and a frown of his scandalized readers. He deserved it. But he also deserved something better. All that Smyth wrote was not true ; nonthe-less he, in his own way, tried to question falsehood. This attempt of his, followed by J.D. Cunningham's similar effort set on foot a controversy about the course and conduct of the British policy before and during the First Anglo-Sikh War that eventually led to the discovery of the truth.

Smyth's work, unlike most of the Calcutta periodicals, found its way to the "library tables of England", and was widely noticed.[52] But this was due to the "unusual interest" which the political situation in the Punjab had roused and not the intrinsic worth of the book. Smyth began by questioning the legitimacy of the successors of Ranjit Singh and ended up by raising doubts about the propriety of the conduct of the British officials before and during the War with the Sikhs. Smyth miserably failed to produce a work of history, but he successfully disgorged it from the orbit of reporting. Viewed from this angle Smyth's contribution to the evolution of the British historiography on the Sikhs does have some value.

[50] *The Mofussilite*, July 25, 1848 cited, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[51] Hobhouse to Dalhousie; P.S. dated April 29, 1849 to letter dated April 21, 1849; B.J. Hasrat, *The Punjab Papers*, pp. 233-34.

[52] *The Times*, April 6, 1849, p. 7, col. 1.

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CHAPTER 9

THE CULMINATION

With the insurrection at Multan on April 20, 1848 began what came to be called the Second Anglo-Sikh War. This created an uncertainty about the fate of the Punjab, and the debate on annexation was revived. Forceful arguments and counter-arguments were advanced. The interest in the affairs of the Punjab mounted unprecedentedly and it was in the wake of this development that the Sikhs found their historian in J.D. Cunningham, and the historiography on the subject came of age.

Joseph Davey Cunningham was born in Lambeth on June 9, 1812 in a Scottish family with literary tradition.[1] His father Allan Cunningham (1784-1842), though a mason by profession, was the author of several works of poetry and prose including *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*.[2] Joseph was the eldest of Allan's six children. He was educated at different private schools in London. His father was advised to send him to Cambridge in view of his aptitude for Mathematics. But Joseph wished to be a soldier, so his father requested Sir Walter Scott to procure him a cadetship in the East India Company's army.[3] Joseph entered the Military Seminary at Addiscombe in 1829. He rose to be a senior scholar in that institution, and passed out in December 1830, winning the first prize in Mathematics, the sword of good conduct, and the first nomination to the Bengal Engineers.[4]

Joseph, after studying for a year at Chatham, sailed for

[1] *D.N.B.*, Vol. V, p. 314.

[2] "Biographical note on the Cunningham family," J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. xii.

[3] *D.N.B.*, Vol. V, pp. 314-15.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 315.

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Calcutta in the early part of 1832.[5] He was appointed to the staff of General McLeod, the then Chief Engineer in the Bengal Presidency. His first assignment was to survey and level, in conjunction with other officers, the country immediately westward of the Bhagantee river with a view to the formation of a navigable canal between the Ganges and the Hoogly. His work was found so commendable that while the other officers were withdrawn in 1834 and 1835, he completed the whole project during 1836-37. In 1837 he was employed in superintending the completion of the palace of the *Nawab* of Murshidabad.

Towards the end of 1837, Lord Auckland, impressed by Joseph's brilliance and efficiency, appointed him Assistant to the Political Agent at Ludhiana, partly in his capacity as an engineer, with a view to improving the defences of the town of Ferozpur. He was present at the interview between Lord Auckland and Ranjit Singh at Ferozpur in 1838. He accompanied the expedition to Kabul in 1839 under Sir Claude Wade and the Prince Tymur, and was present at the time of forcing of the Khyber pass. He was promoted as Lieutenant on May 20, 1839, and was placed in the civil charge of Ludhiana in 1840, under G. Russell Clerk, who had succeeded Colonel Wade. Cunningham accompanied Brigadier-General Shelton to Kabul as political officer in 1840-41. He returned with Colonel Wheeler and his brigade, which escorted Dost Muhammad, the deposed and imprisoned *Amir* of Kabul. Cunningham was employed in Tibet in 1841-42 on a mission connected with the hostilities between the Jammu troops and the Chinese.[6]

Cunningham was present at the interview between Lord Ellenborough, Dost Muhammad and the Sikhs held in 1842 at Ferozpur. He became Assistant to Colonel Richmond, who

[5]According to *D.N.B.*, "He sailed for India in February 1834." *D.N.B.*, Vol. V, p. 315. The biographical note on the Cunningham family which was added to the 3rd edition of Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs* also mentions 1834 as the date of Cunningham's sailing for India. This is contradicted by Cunningham's own Memorial, dated Indore, August 30, 1849. (Hereafter referred to as The Memorial), *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret*, September 28 1849, No. 12.

[6]Cunningham, *The Memorial*, para 3.

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had succeeded G. Russell Clerk in 1843. Cunningham was deputed to Bahawalpur in 1845 for settling certain disputes between that state and the neighbouring Rajput principalities.[7]

With the outbreak of the First Anglo-Sikh War, Cunningham's services at the frontier were considered imperative. He was first attached to Sir Charles Napier's headquarters in Sindh and then was attached to Sir Hugh Gough, the General commanding the army in the field. Cunningham was attached to Sir Harry Smith's division on January 16, 1846 to act as the political officer. He was present at the skirmish of Budhowal and at the battle of Aliwal.

Cunningham acted as aide-de-camp to Henry Hardinge, the Governor-General, at the battle of Sobraon. He received thanks of Harry Smith and of Hardinge for the services rendered by him during the war. He was also promoted to the rank of Captain by brevet on December 10, 1845. On the conclusion of the war, Cunningham was appointed Political Agent at Bhopal on a salary of Rs. 1500/- per month.[8]

Cunningham's duties at Bhopal were "delicate and difficult" and required the "greatest judgement and firmness."[9] He crushed the insurrectionary movement under Nawab Ameer Mohammad Khan in an "admirable and prompt manner."[10] His transactions at Bhopal won for him even the approbation of Hardinge, who wrote in his letter to Cunningham that "you have throughout these transactions, by your energy and promptitude, fully justified the favourable opinion I entertain of your abilities and character."[11]

The period of Cunningham's stay at Bhopal was the most fruitful period of his life from the literary and professional

[7]According to *D.N.B.*, Vol. V, p. 315, Cunningham was in Bahawalpur in 1844 and 1845. But Cunningham himself gives the date as 1845. Cunningham, *The Memorial*, para 3.

[8]From F. Currie to Capt. J.D. Cunningham, Camp Lahore, March 7, 1846, No. 457 of 1846, *Govt. of India Pol. Proc.*, April 11, 1846.

[9]Letter from R.N.C. Hamilton, Resident at Indore to J.D. Cunningham, dated Indore, August 2, 1849, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret*, September, 29, 1849, No. 3.

[10]*Ibid.*

[11]Demi-official letter from Lord Hardinge to Capt. J.D. Cunningham dated November 6, 1846, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret*, September 29, 1849, No 3.

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point of view. It was here that he wrote his *History of the Sikhs*. But besides this he also continued his interest in the antiquities and archaeology, a field in which his younger brother, Alexander Cunningham, became distinguished later on. Joseph Davey Cunningham published some of his findings in *Journal of the Asiatic Society* and these articles indicate his love for accuracy and his interest in the religions of India.[12] In his official duty, Cunningham won complete confidence of the Sikander Begam, the Regent of Bhopal. He persuaded her to construct roads, improve administration, to take interest in education, and to protect the places of historical importance. He persuaded the Begam as well as the other neighbouring states to increase their tribute to the British Government to enable it to increase the military contingents in their states. That Cunningham did all this in a most friendly and unostentatious manner cannot be better established than from the fact that the Begam felt deeply hurt at the orders of Cunningham's departure from Bhopal. She even interceded with Dalhousie on behalf of Cunningham. At the request of his successor, R.N.L. Hamilton, Cunningham called on the Begam and explained that the change was not due to anything done by him in Bhopal.[13]

Cunningham was removed from the political service on July 11, 1849 for "having made, in his last work upon the Sikhs, unauthorized use of official documents entrusted to his charge as a public officer."[14] However, G.B. Malleson in the preface to his book *The Decisive Battles of India* places the responsibility for Cunningham's dismissal squarely on Dalhousie who according to him "was not only a despot, but a despot who hated the expression of free opinion and of free thought." This opinion is prefixed to Cunningham's book in the shape of "An Appreciation." It is worth adding here that Malleson's view is not borne out by facts. Actually, Dalhousie at one stage wrote to the Secret Committee that "I do not

[12]*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XVI, Part II, July-December 1847, and Vol. XVII, Part I, January to June 1848.

[13]R.N.C. Hamilton to H.M. Elliot, No. 951, dated August 21, 1849, *Govt. of India For. Pol. Proc.*, October 6-27, 1849, No. 1122.

[14]Foreign Dept. Notification No. 246, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret*, September 29, 1849, No. 8.

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believe he (Cunningham) acted in wilful disregard of the Court and that howsoever unfounded the supposition really is, he did suppose that Y.H. Court had permitted him to publish his work." However, before these comments of Dalhousie could be despatched he received a letter dated Sept. 1, 1849 virtually censuring him for the award of a medal to every officer and soldier who had participated in the Punjab campaign. Dalhousie was cut to the quick. His personal relations with Hobhouse were already embittered.[15] In view of all these developments Dalhousie changed his earlier draft and only forwarded Cunningham's representation for the consideration of the Court.[16]

Cunningham was utterly shaken by the blow of his dismissal from political service. He made several representations for his rehabilitation but the efforts proved futile.[17] His last major assignment was the preparation of a report on the irrigation of the Ghaggar and the Sarasvati rivers. Cunningham carried on his work with his characteristic devotion and submitted a voluminous report.[18] The report was received by Lord Dalhousie with "high satisfaction."[19] But he was no longer the same old Cunningham who could spend the best part of his life in a tent. The years of cloistered labour had enfeebled his vigorous frame, and a smouldering sense of humiliation rankled in his mind. The heat of the plains had already shown its effect. Cunningham was advised to pursue his enquiries during the following cold season. This could not be done, as Cunningham never recovered. On February 28, 1851 died the historian of

[15]J.G.A. Baird, ed. *Private Letters of Marquess of Dalhousie*, p. 91.

[16]Governor-General to the Secret Committee dated September 19, 1849, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret*, No. 59.

[17]J.D. Cunningham, *The Memorial.* Also see S.S. Bal, "Cunningham's Attempts to Get Himself Rehabilitated in the Political Service," Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds. *Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh*, pp. 215-33.

[18]"Report on the Irrigation of the Guggur and Sursootee," by Captain J.D. Cunningham, July 26, 1850, *Govt. of India For. Pol. Dept.*, September, 13, 1850, Nos. 198-208.

[19]From H.M. Elliot, Secy. to the Govt. of India to Lieut. Colonel J.F. Boilean, Superintending Engineer, North-Western Provinces, Simla, August 28, 1850, *Ibid.*

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the Sikhs, and his mortal remains were buried at Ambala.[20]

When Cunningham was preparing himself at Addiscombe for his role in a country from where he was never to return, the question of the nature of the Government in India was agitating the British minds. Mill's *History of British India* published in 1817 had come to represent the height of conservative version in the wake of Utilitarianism. The religious principles of Hinduism had emerged as "the playsome whimsies of monkies in human shape," the art of the Hindus as one devoid of both "genius and taste" and the Hindu epics as the effusions of a wild imagination.[21] Mill's book was described as "the greatest work to appear in English after the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*."[22] But this did not sweep the entire nation off its feet and this is fully proved by the liberal spirit in which the Charter Act of 1833 was worded.[23] H.H. Wilson, by his scholarly footnotes, attempted to regulate the erratic pendulum of Mill's History but in the process gave it a new lease of life. So it was left to Elphinstone to beard the lion. He did his job, and but for his baneful modesty, would have had the satisfaction of replacing Mill.[24]

Like the Hindus, the Sikhs also attracted a number of authors. The work of Malcolm was followed by that of Prinsep. After passing through the double filter of Murray and Prinsep's conservatism, the Sikhs had emerged no better than Mill's Hindus. In the meanwhile Macaulay was busy revalidating

[20]From Lieut. Colonel, J.F. Boilean to H.M. Elliot, No. 3736, dated Ambala, February 28, 1851. *Govt. of India For. Const.* No. 216, March 21, 1851. The inscription at Cunningham's grave at the Ambala Cemetery reads as follows: 28th February 1851: To Captain Joseph Davey Cunningham Bengal Engineers born 9 June 1812 died 28th February 1851." S.R. Phogat, *Inscriptions of Haryana*, p. 108.

[21]For a critical study of James Mill, see J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 64-97.

[22]Quoted by J.S Grewal, *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[23]L. Wood ward, *The Age of Reform*, p. 409.

[24]For an analysis of the mind of Elphinstone see, V.N. Datta, "Mountstuart Elphinstone: His Training, Method and Intellectual System," *Sondermick aus*, No. 63, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin.

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Mill's thesis.[25] The process which began with Mill was completed with Henry Elliot's publication of Dowson's translation of extracts from the Muslim historians of India.

Thus in the time of Cunningham a fierce controversy about the religion and character of the people of India had been ushered in. With his intellectual background and the literary tradition of his family, Cunningham was soon lost in a study of Indian and Western religions. The mathematician in him looked for exactness and his scientific mind craved to be guided by personal observations rather than by the prevailing notions. Thus what distinguished Cunningham from most of his contemporaries was the sympathetic understanding coupled with the scientific attitude which he brought to bear on the subjects of his study and research.

Cunningham had an innate urge for the literary pursuits. He lost no opportunity of writing ever since he took up the political employment. He regularly kept a journal when he accompanied C.M. Wade to Kabul in 1839.[26] During his sojourn in upper Kunwar and the adjacent Bhoti districts from October 1842 to October 1843 he not only conducted himself "in a very delicate position with much discretion," but also "made observations on other matters of interest than those which formed the immediate object of his mission."[27] The mission was calculated to defuse the situation created by a conflict between the Jammu troops and the Chinese for paramountcy in Ladakh

[25]Macaulay, in his famous review of Malcolm's *Life of Sir Robert Clive*, wrote that Clive had to deal with "men destitute of what in Europe is called honour, with men who would give any promise without hesitation, and break any promise without shame, with men who would unscrupulously employ corruption, perjury, forgery, to compass their ends", Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, London, 1963, p. 508.

[26]Lieut. William Barr and Shahamat Ali who accompanied this mission published their journals. Cunningham's journal is not traceable, but Shahamat Ali writes that Cunningham not only encouraged him in his studies but also allowed him to correct his journal by comparing it with the one kept by Cunningham. Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, Preface xii; William Barr, *Journal of a March from Delhi to Cabul*, 1844.

[27]From G. Clerk, Envoy to the Court of Lahore to J. Thompson, No. 55, dt. March 6, 1843, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Pol. Proc.*, 17 May 1843, No. 11.

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and the adjoining areas. In this report Cunningham not only showed remarkable love for nature and aptitude for geology but also much insight into the religion and society of the people of the region. Cunningham's sympathetic understanding made him justify even a reprehensive institution like Polyandry. According to him:

> Polyandryism appears to be essential in a country in which the quantity of culturable land is limited and in which pastures are not extensive, in which there are but few facilities for carrying on commerce and in which there is no mineral wealth readily made available. This is the case in Tibet and in many portions of the Himalayas.[28]

However, Cunningham's sympathetic understanding of the people did not blind him to the flaws of the Kunwaries nor did it make him accept the following observation of Gerard: "Cheating, lying and theiving are unknown...they have the nicest notions of honesty of any people in the world." Cunningham judiciously pointed out the reasons why Gerard came to have this feeling. He cited instances to prove that "Kunwaries can lie, cheat, steal, and commit murder."[29]

Cunningham was a well-read man. It is evident that his readings were not confined to the study of the Indian history or the history of the Sikh, nor were these calculated to make him more efficient in the discharge of his official duties. As pointed out in a recent article, Cunningham's family tradition and personal aptitude combined to make him a voracious reader.[30] It is evident from the footnotes of Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs* that he was familiar with the bulk of classical and contemporary literature and was in touch with the latest researches as reported in the journals and periodicals.

[28]J.D. Cunningham, "Notes on Moorcroft's Travels in Ladakh etc. 1843," *Govt. of India For. Dept. Pol. Proc.*, 17 May 1843, No. 12A, p. 29. (This report was later published in the form of an article in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, Part I, January-June 1844).

[29]*Ibid.*, para 14, p. 33.

[30]S.S. Bal, "Joseph Davey Cunningham," Fauja Singh ed. *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, pp. 93-95.

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Cunningham repeatedly referred to the works of James Mill, H.H. Wilson, Mountstuart Elphinstone and Edward Thornton on the history of India and the works of James Browne, John Malcolm, William Murray, Henry Lawrence, Henry Steinbach, W.G. Osborne and W.L. M'Gregor on the history of the Sikhs. His references include *The Bible*, Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, Thirlwell's *History of Greece*, Hallam's *Middle Ages*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Ranke's *Ottoman Empire* and Prichard's *Physical History of Mankind*.

However, the author who seems to have influenced him most was Leopold Von Ranke "the greatest of German Historians." His influence is visible both in Cunningham's approach to the subject as well as his methodology. Cunningham, like Ranke, did not believe that human history was "moving inevitably to a predetermined consummation in this world."[31] This is what had led him to make an attempt to forestall the annexation of the Punjab. Like Ranke, Cunningham came to believe that the creative power of human beings was the real instrument of change.[32] He fully shared Ranke's belief that "freedom and necessity" were rubbing shoulders at every moment, and this interaction might give rise to something original at any moment.[33]

Ranke was fully convinced of the incapacity of the Turks to govern Christian people, and was sympathetic towards their efforts to overthrow the Turkish rule. Sikhs were to Cunningham what Christians were to Ranke[34] and this is precisely what had made Hardinge to term him as "a perfect Sikh." Cunningham fully shared the belief of Ranke that constitutions were no panacea and did not suit every country.[35] He fully believed in safeguarding the individuality of the Sikhs and the development of their community along with the lines of their historical growth.

Cunningham, like Ranke, felt a joyful emotion at the thought

[31]Herbert Butterfield, *Man on his Past*, p. 106.

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 80-81.

[34]Cunningham, "Some Account of the Political Conditions & Military Resources of the Punjab" (Hereafter cited as the Report), *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret Cons.*, March 28, 1845, No. 66 K.W.

[35]G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 80.

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of getting an important work going. Ranke had shown a marked determination in carrying out his mission of writing "without swerving a finger's breadth from the truth as he saw it",[36] and Cunningham resolved to follow suit.

Like Ranke "the real originator of the heroic study of records," Cunningham was determined to base himself on facts. He tried to tap sources of all description—history, chronicles, memoirs and hagiography. He fully shared Ranke's "joy in detail."[37] Cunningham's search for detail, like that of Ranke, was not for the sake of the particular subject under scrutiny, but was an attempt to put an episode "into its place in the whole story of the world development."[38] Like Ranke, Cunningham regarded the universal history as the final objective and was impelled to write about the Sikhs not for the sake of the Sikhs alone but for illuminating a dark corner of the "general history of humanity."[39]

Cunningham took to the writing on the Sikhs as a part of his official duty. The affairs of Punjab were far from settled and a collision with the Sikhs was not ruled out. A.F. Richmond, the Agent, N.W. Frontier, on the desire of Ellenborough, the Governor-General, promised to supply specific information about the army and forts of the Punjab and the political condition and the hill states of that country, on February 13, 1843.[40] Richmond entrusted this duty to J.D. Cunningham, who completed the report on September 11, 1844.[41] Richmond described Cunningham as an expert on the subject and recommended his report to the Governor-General in the most favourable terms. Thus even before Cunningham took to writing a full-fledged history of the Sikhs, he had come to be recognized as an authority on the affairs of the Punjab. However, the Report also brought into limelight the pro-Sikh feelings of Cunningham. The situation had considerably altered since Cunningham

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 79.
[37]Butterfield, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
[38]*Ibid.*, p. 105.
[39]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. xx.
[40]W. Edward to A.F. Richmond, August 3, 1849, No. 529 of 1844, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret, March 28, 1845*, No. 54.
[41]*Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret, March 28, 1845*, No. 66 K.W.

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took to the writing of his Report. Lord Ellenborough, the Governor-General, had been recalled and his successor Lord Hardinge had taken over on July 23, 1844. In November 1844, Broadfoot succeeded Richmond as Political Agent, N.W. Frontier. Hardinge found to his dismay that "our Assistants on the frontier will persist in dabbling in the intrigues of the Punjab and I fear I must withdraw Nicholson, and perhaps Cunningham."[42] This belief became much sharper in March 1845 as reflected in the following lines from Hardinge's letter to Ellenborough:

> I am sorry to say Richmond was in Cunningham's hands; and I hear that my letter desiring it to be understood and pointing out to the Rajahs that your foreign policy was to be unchanged, never was communicated; and that this Lieutinant has been taking latitude and power which if it be proved, will induce me to remove him immediately. He is a perfect Sikh.[43]

Cunningham had enjoyed the full confidence not only of Richmond but also of his predecessors, C.M. Wade and George Russell Clerk, both of whom, like Richmond, had employed Cunningham as a Personal Assistant.[44] Cunningham had come to wield considerable power in this capacity. Richmond had recommended him to the "favourable consideration" of the Governor-General in Council, in view of his "valuable services."[45] His position in the Ludhiana Agency was sufficiently senior.[46] All this was sufficient to make Cunningham aspire for succeeding A.F. Richmond when he vacated the office of the Agent to the Governor-General, N.W. Frontier, on November 1, 1844. The office was, however, given to Major

[42]Hardinge to Ellenborough (Private), February 20, 1845, B.J. Hasrat, *The Punjab Papers*, pp. 83-84.

[43]Hardinge to Ellenborough (Private), Calcutta, March 22, 1845, *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

[44]Cunningham, *The Memorial*, para 3.

[45]A.F. Richmond to F. Currie, No. 89, *Govt. of India For. Dept. Secret, March 28, 1845*, Nos. 60-66.

[46]See the detailed list of the officers of the Agency in B.R. Chopra, *Kingdom of the Punjab*, Appendix-K, p. 447.

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G. Broadfoot, which must have been a shattering blow to Cunningham. Broadfoot had no small contempt for the officers of the previous regime,[47] and this was coupled with Hardinge's distrust of Cunningham's activities. Cunningham was deprived of the post of Personal Assistant to the Agent and this considerably curtailed his powers. Cunningham's situation became worse because of his quarrel with Broadfoot.[48] This treatment left Cunningham sore against both Broadfoot and Hardinge. The spirit of this humiliation is stamped on some of the passages which deal with Hardinge and Broadfoot's role in the British policy towards the Sikhs.

Cunningham could, thus, never forget the shoddy treatment which he had received at the hands of Hardinge and Broadfoot. The differences between Cunningham and Hardinge were largely a policy matter, but the manner in which these were expressed resulted in personal bitterness. When Cunningham took to the writing of *History of the Sikhs* at Bhopal, the uppermost consideration in his mind was to give the Sikhs their due, but he was also keen to expose the policy which Hardinge and Broadfoot had followed against the wishes and the professed policy of the British Government.

Cunningham completed his *History of the Sikhs* when the Second Anglo-Sikh War was going on in its full fury. But the exciting contemporary situation did not sweep Cunningham off his feet. He did not convert his work into a commentary on the campaigns of the war. He discussed all phases of the history of the Sikhs with a perfect sense of proportion which was sadly missing in almost all the earlier works.

Cunningham's *magnum opus* contains nine chapters and covers the events from the origin of Sikhism to the conclusion of the First Anglo-Sikh War. The first chapter deals with the geographical, ethnological, cultural and religious characteristics of the Punjab, the land of the Sikhs. The second chapter is a study of the mission of Nanak in the contemporary settings. The third chapter covers the period from 1539 to 1716, the fourth from 1716 to 1764, and the fifth from 1765 to 1809. The sixth and seventh chapters are exclusively devoted to the

[47]George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, Vol. I.
[48]S.S. Bal, *British Policy towards Punjab*, pp. 259-61.

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study of Ranjit Singh's reign. The eighth chapter deals with the events between Ranjit Singh's death and Jawahir Singh's murder. The ninth and the last covers the events of the years 1845-46, and is termed "The War with the English."

The motives which inspired the author in preparing his work have been described by Cunningham himself in the preface to the second edition of his book. According to him:

> His main endeavour was to give Sikhism its place in the general history of humanity...impressing upon the people of England the great necessity of attending to the mental changes now in progress amongst their subject millions in the East, who are erroneously thought to be sunk in superstitious apathy, or to be held spell-bound in ignorance by a dark and designing priesthood.[49]

Besides this Cunningham also wanted to give an idea of the Anglo-Afghan and Anglo-Sikh relations, which fully exposed the mistakes of Hardinge and Broadfoot.

Cunningham was essentially a historian of ideas. His understanding of the Sikhs chiefly stemmed from his views on their religion and beliefs. Religion appeared to him to be the springboard of all actions of the Sikhs. By 1844 Cunningham had made a detailed study of various religions in India. He had discovered in Sikhism a revolutionary factor, and had come to the conclusion that "the Juts owe their present ascendancy to the new life breathed into them by their Religious Teachers Nanak and Govind Singh."[50] Cunningham was alive to the role of racial factor in the transformation of a nation, but he believed that "the characteristics of Race are less marked in their effects than those of Religion."[51] However, by 1849 Cunningham reversed his statement about the impact of race and religion and wrote that "the characteristics of race are perhaps more deep-seated and enduring than those of religion."[52] But the conclusion which Cunningham had drawn

[49]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. xx.
[50]Cunningham, *The Report*, para 4.
[51]*Ibid.*, para 16.
[52]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 12.

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earlier about the transforming impact of religion remained unchanged. According to him, Guru Gobind fired his yotaries with "Promethean fire." A living spirit which the Sikhs imbibed changed not only their minds but also their physical frames. "A Sikh chief," according to Cunningham, "is not more distinguishable by his stately person and free and manly bearing, than a minister of his faith is by a lofty thoughtfulness of look, which marks the fervour of his soul."[53] Cunningham also noticed the change which conversion to Islam had brought about in the Hindus of Malwa and Upper India during the course of one or two centuries. He regretted that Prichard in his *Physical History of Mankind* had not noticed the physical changes in Hottentots and Esquimaux consequent upon their conversion to Christianity.[54]

Cunningham saw in Sikhism the panacea to India's spiritual and physical ills. But his love for Sikhism was not at the expense of Christianity. Being a good Christian himself, nothing could be more dear to Cunningham's heart than the adoption of Christianity by the teeming millions of India. However, he was not one of the Evangelical lot "whose powers of perception are rendered oblique by religious zeal."[55] Like Vans Kennedy, Cunningham was quick to realise that if Akbar with all his resources had failed to establish Din-i-Ilahi in India, it was "hopeless" that the missionaries "should ever christianize the Indian and Muhammadan worlds."[56]

Cunningham asserts that the only other course left open to the British was to secure the triumph of christian virtues. Nothing worthwhile could be expected from Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam. These religions, according to him, though "extensively diffused. . . for the most part . . . no longer inspire their votaries with enthusiasm."[57] In sharp contrast to the followers of the above mentioned religions, Cunningham believes, "the Sikhs are converts to a new religion. . . their enthu-

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 75, footnote 3.

[55] Vans Kennedy, *Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society*, quoted by J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, p. 107. For an opposite view see *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXI, 1813, p. 435.

[56] Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 11.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 9,

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siasm is still fresh, and their faith is still an active and living principle."[58]

The logical conclusion which Cunningham wants to draw from the above mentioned comparison of Sikhism with other religions of India is restrained by an obvious inclination on his part of not being too explicit, wherever possible. In his book he merely confines himself to the recommendation that "this feeling of the Sikh people deserves the attention of the English, both as a civilized nation and a paramount government."[59] The fact that Cunningham saw in Sikhism a fit instrument for the propagation of christian virtues is much more explicit in his Report which reads as follows:

> When it is remembered that the Sikhs declare the unity of an invisible God, and maintain the social equality and freedom of man, our rejoicings over our own triumphs in the east, may perhaps be tempered with the reflection that we have almost crushed an infant power which might have destroyed the Brahminical systems of priest-craft and "caste", even more rapidly than we can ourselves accomplish that great object.[60]

Sikhism also fascinated Cunningham on another count. Sikhism, according to him, was a product of the interaction of the "genius of the Arabian prophet" with the "corrupt Brahminical doctrine." He similarly believed that the spirit of Sikhism, as a result of its contact with the British mind, "may give birth to well ordered institutions of a peculiar kind, if it is not crushed and superseded by the power and the civilization of the English."[61]

Cunningham found Sikhism very close to his own concept of religion. He was of the view that the real purpose of religion was to liberate and transform, to make men "throw aside every social as well as religious trammel, and to arise a new people freed from the debasing corruption of ages."[62]

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[60] Cunningham, *The Report*, para 15.
[61] *Ibid.*, para 4. Also see *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 80-81.
[62] Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 34.

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According to Cunningham, the leaders of various Bhakti cults "perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nation....It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality."[63]

In the British threat to the political power of the Sikhs, Cunningham saw a threat to their religion. Whereas in the case of Islam and Christianity he did not regard political power as an instrument of the spread of religion, he found a close link between the development of political power of the Sikhs and their religion. According to Cunningham, "the Sikhs continue to make converts, but chiefly within the limits of their dependent sway, for the colossal power of the English has arrested the progress of their arms to the eastward, and has left the Jats of the Jumna and Ganges to their old idolatry."[64] Cunningham's belief about the relationship between the religion of the Sikhs and their political power may not sound very logical when read with what he has to say about other religions, but it certainly provides the keynote to the proper understanding of his entire thesis.

Cunningham marks the stages by which Sikhism acquired a distinct identity. According to him, Guru Nanak disengaged his followers "from Hindu idolatry and Muhammadan superstition. Amar Das preserved the infant community from declining into a sect of quietists or ascetics; Arjun gave his increasing followers a written rule of conduct and civil organization; Har Gobind added the use of arms and a military system; and Gobind Singh bestowed upon them a distinct political existence, and inspired them with the desire of being socially free and nationally independent."[65]

Cunningham's treatment of Banda is in sharp contrast to that of Browne and Malcolm. Describing the capture of Sarhind by the Sikhs, Cunningham only writes that "Sirhind was plundered, and the Hindu betrayer and Musalman destroyer

[63]*Ibid.*, I.B. Banerjee does not fully accept this thesis of Cunningham, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. I, pp. 6-9.

[64]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 16.

[65]*Ibid.*, p. 80.

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of Gobind's children were themselves put to death by the avenging Sikhs."[66] To this account he adds a footnote directing his readers to Browne's *India Tracts* for "true or fanciful" particulars of the episode, but he also advises them to see Elphinstone's *History of India*.[67] Cunningham describes Banda as an "able and enterprising leader" and his followers as "the national Singhs." At the same time he makes no secret of his failure to "comprehend the general nature of Nanak's and Gobind's reforms."[68]

Cunningham examines the ideals and institutions which kept the Sikhs together during the greater part of the 18th century in the face of overwhelming odds. Whereas Prinsep tries to explain the survival of the Sikhs in terms of economic and political factors, Cunningham attributes it to the sincerity and strength of the faith of the followers of Guru Gobind. He observes in Sikhism that spirit "which impelled the naked Arabs upon the mail clad troops of Rome and Persia, and which led our own believing forefathers through Europe to battle for the cross on the shores of Asia."[69] Cunningham notices that the 'Khalsa' was proclaimed to be a State and when Jassa Singh[70] captured Lahore, money was coined by the grace of the 'Khalsa'.[71] Some of the writers do not accept the legend of the coin mentioned by Cunningham, but this does not weaken Cunningham's thesis in any way. Cunningham wants to point out that the Sikh State did not belong to any individual but to the whole body of the followers of Gobind, and the other inscription is still more in tune with it. The Sikhs

[66]*Ibid.*, p. 77.

[67]Elphinstone, *History of India*, pp. 686-87.

[68]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 79-80.

[69]Cunningham, *The Report*, para 14.

[70]For a Sketch of Jassa Singh see H.R. Gupta, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 51, footnote 1.

[71]There is considerable dispute about the legend of the first coin struck by the Sikhs. Hari Ram Gupta accepts the legend mentioned by Cunningham "coined by the grace of the 'Khalsa', in the country of Ahmed conquered by Jessa Kalal," N.K. Sinha does not accept it. See H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, pp. 161-68, and *Studies in Later Mughal History of the Panjab*, Appendix, pp. 307-17; N.K. Sinha, *Rise of the Sikh Power*, p. 53, footnote 3.

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repulsed Khwaja Obed, the Durrani Officer of Lahore in 1762. Cunningham believes that "the army of the 'Khalsa' assembled at Amritsar,...and perhaps the first regular 'Gurumatta' or diet for conclave, was held on this occasion."[72] Basing himself on Malcolm's account, Cunningham misinterprets the meaning of the Gurmatta which does not mean the "diet for conclave" but the decision of such a diet.

Cunningham regards the *misls* as "the first political system of the emancipated Sikhs"[73] and labelled it as a theocratic confederate feudalism because "God was their helper and only judge, community of faith or object was their moving principle, and warlike array, the devotion to steel of Gobind, was their material instrument."[74] It has been argued that such a system "will not be called theocracy today" and "Feudalism can hardly exist apart from Monarchy."[75] We can question the terminology used by Cunningham but this does not minimise the significance of Cunningham's observations.

Cunningham's treatment of Ranjit Singh is vastly different from most of the earlier authors. Prinsep describes Ranjit Singh as "an encroaching usurper, selfish, sensual, and profligately greedy."[76] Smyth applies to Ranjit Singh the most sordid appellation "the old impotent sinner," "the old robber."[77] Cunningham formed a high opinion of Ranjit Singh right after his first meeting with him on November 27, 1838. Cunningham saw in the kingdom of Ranjit Singh the fulfilment of the work of Guru Nanak and Gobind. Commenting on the degeneration of the earlier system of the *misls*, Cunningham writes:

> The singleness of purpose, the confident belief in the aid of God, which had animated mechanics and sphepherds to resent persecution, and to triumph over Ahmad Shah, no longer possessed the minds of their descendants....Their

[72]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 91.
[73]*Ibid.*, p. 151.
[74]*Ibid.*, p. 94, cf. J.S. Grewal, *Essays in Sikh History*, pp. 93-100.
[75]A.C. Banerjee, *Anglo-Sikh Relations*, p. xvii.
[76]Prinsep, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 144.
[77]Smyth, *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, Introduction, pp. xviii, xvvii.

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> ambition was personal and their desire was for worldly enjoyment.[78]

The selfish Sikh chiefs were keen to join the English or the Marathas for furtherance of their own designs. According to Cunningham:

> Ranjit Singh laboured, with more or less of intelligent design, to give unity and coherence to diverse atoms and scattered elements, to mould the increasing Sikh nation into a well-ordered state or commonwealth, as Gobind had developed a sect into a people, and had given application and purpose to the general institutions of Nanak.[79]

Ranjit Singh succeeded in his object. The bulk of Punjab was consolidated into a kingdom. The energies of Guru Gobind's followers were channelized in the conquest of distant provinces. Cunningham found that "the holy and viliant were honoured and rewarded, and a few Sikhs only whose fathers had held the plough were reduced to the same poverty by their more able rival."[80]

Cunningham is fully alive to the contradictions in the democratic tradition of Sikhism and the apparently despotic government of Ranjit Singh. He tries to explain it by arguing that Ranjit Singh "appeared to be an absolute monarch in the midst of willing and obedient subjects. But he knew that he merely directed into a particular channel a power which he could neither destroy nor control."[81]

Cunningham addresses himself to the question of civil administration in the Punjab. Rather than merely stating, like Prinsep, that there was no uniform and systematic administration, he tries to explain the reason for it in terms of the feudal character of the government. Cunningham believes that the system produced independence of character and gave sufficient scope to individual ambition. Life and property were secure and taxes

[78]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 119.
[79]*Ibid.*, p. 120.
[80]Cunningham, *The Report*, para 107.
[81]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 151.

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light. Any system beyond it "neither suited the Maharaja's genius nor that of the Sikh nation." The logical conclusion of Cunningham's observation is that the administration of Ranjit Singh best suited his people, the only test by which an administration ought to be judged.

Cunningham also points out the shortcomings of Ranjit Singh and the limitations of his work. He finds Ranjit Singh not only guilty of too much indulgence, but also liable to be charged with extreme partiality and favouritism. Cunningham believes that Ranjit Singh, with gradual concentration of all power in his hand, "placed himself in some degrees in opposition to the whole Sikh people." Since "the free followers of Gobind could not be the observant slaves of an equal member of the Khalsa," Ranjit Singh "sought for strangers whose applause would be more ready if less sincere, and in whom he could repose some confidence as the creatures of his favour."[82] Cunningham, at the same time, makes it clear that though Ranjit Singh favoured and trusted men like Khushal Singh and Dhian Singh, his mind was "never prostrate before that of others."[83] He could appreciate and reward merit whether he found it in a member of the *Khalsa* or an outsider.

Cunningham is not happy with the state of Anglo-Sikh relations. According to him, the Sikhs deserved immunity from overwhelming external pressure of the British, because though barbarous and ignorant, the Sikhs were in a "state of progression."[84] Cunningham underlines the limitations of the officials in the field who, with all their mastery of details, were "liable to be biassed by views which promise immediate and special advantage."[85] After the treaty of 1809 both Ranjit Singh and the British gradually overcame each other's distrust. But by 1823 the British began to entertain the schemes of self-aggrandisement. Thus, according to Cunningham, the British began by "sure yet unforeseen steps, to absorb his (Ranjit Singh's) dominion in their own, and to grasp, perhaps inscrutably to

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 160. Also see Fauja Singh, *Some Aspects of State and Society under Ranjit Singh*, pp. 102-103.

[83] Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 161.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 129, footnote 2.

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chasten, with the cold unfeeling hand of worldly rule, the youthful spirit of social change and religious reformation evoked by the genius of Nanak and Gobind."[86]

The Tripartite Treaty was signed in 1838 between the British, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja. This was ostensibly the height of Ranjit Singh's power. As pointed out by Cunningham, Ranjit Singh "was acknowledged to be an arbiter in the fate of that empire which had tyrannized over his peasant forefathers."[87] But Ranjit Singh was only a reluctant partner in the alliance. He died before the conclusion of the campaign.

Cunningham regards Kharak Singh as an "unworthy master of the Punjab." The ascendancy of Nau Nihal Singh soon reduced Kharak Singh to a cypher. Nau Nihal Singh pressurized the English Government into removing C.M. Wade from the Ludhiana Agency and he was succeeded by George Russel Clerk. Cunningham does not commit himself about the cause of Kharak Singh's death but strongly suspects foul play on the part of the Jamwal brothers in the fall of the archway which killed Nau Nihal Singh.[88]

Ranjit Singh had fostered the spirit of the Khalsa by creating a well-knit army, and channelised its energy by directing it on the course of extensive conquest. The extending arm of the British gradually made all expansion of the Sikh kingdom impossible, the firm hand of Ranjit Singh and of his grandson Nau Nihal Singh having been removed by death. In these circumstances the "vital spirit" of the Khalsa began to consume itself in "domestic contentions."[89] By 1841, the Sikh army "was no longer the willing instrument of an arbitrary and genial government, but it looked upon itself, and was regarded by others, as the representative body of the Sikh people."[90] Though still possessed with "a higher feeling," the army and its leaders, termed as the *Panchas*, sometimes added "military

[86]*Ibid.*, p. 163.

[87]*Ibid.*, p. 199.

[88]*Ibid.*, p. 208.

[89]*Ibid.*, p. 200. Also see Jagmohan Mahajan, *Circumstances leading to the Annexation of the Punjab*, pp. 15-21.

[90]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 215. Fauja Singh terms it "A Democratic Revolution," *After Ranjit Singh*, p. 107.

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licence to popular tumult" and were open to "self-willed prejudice or they might be bribed and cajoled by such able and unscrupulous men as Raja Gulab Singh."[91] After the murder of Sher Singh and his minister Dhian Singh, a serious attempt to restore order was made by Hira Singh and his family priest Pandit Jalla. But the Sikhs had a "latent sense" that "submission to Rajpoots and Brahmins is not to the advantage of the Khalsa or agreeable to the injunctions of Gooroo Govind."[92] Hira Singh and Pandit Jalla were put to death in December 1844. After a few months break, Jawahir Singh, the maternal uncle of the reigning Prince Dalip Singh succeeded Hira Singh but only to meet the fate of his predecessor.[93] According to Cunningham, "the soldiers were by degrees wrought upon to wage a war with their European neighbours."[94] In expectation of the war, Lal Singh was made *vazir* and Tej Singh the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh army early in November 1845.

The last chapter of Cunningham's work entitled "The War with the English," has proved to be the most controversial part of the book. Cunningham firmly holds the view that the war with the Sikhs resulted from the provocation given by the British officials, and was won in collaboration with the self-seeking Sikh chiefs. With his official knowledge and usual insight, Cunningham enumerates the steps taken by the British officials which produced a conviction among the Sikh soldiers that their kingdom was threatened. His criticism of Hardinge and George Broadfoot is particularly severe. Cunningham is of the opinion that in British relations with the neighbouring states, the character of the British Agent was as much an important factor as the policy itself. He questions the wisdom of the appointment of Broadfoot to the North-West Frontier Agency in view of his "so stormy a passage" through the

[91]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 216. Also see, Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, pp. 18, 21.

[92]Cunningham had written these lines in his Report in September 1844, when Hira Singh was still in power. The events which followed proved Cunningham to be only too true. Cunningham, *The Report*, para 154.

[93]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 245.

[94]*Ibid.*

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Punjab only thirty months before his appointment.[95] Broadfoot only proved the truth of the apprehension with which his appointment was viewed by declaring the cis-Sutlej possessions of Lahore to be under British protection.[96] Cunningham gives a detailed note showing that the contention of Broadfoot was wholly baseless. Broadfoot had authoritatively interfered in the affairs of the Sodhis of Anandpur Makhowal. When the Government of Lahore sent Lal Singh Adalti with a contingent of about 200 troops to Kot Kapura to collect revenue, Broadfoot not only repulsed these troops but also arrested their leaders. A shot was also fired by the English party. According to Cunningham, '"the extreme desire of the Sikh commandant to avoid doing anything which might be held to compromise his government, alone prevented a collision."[97] Cunningham also assails the transportation of the bridge-boats from Bombay to Ferozpur. He also criticises Charles Napier, not only for his undue show of force when some horsemen from Multan crossed into the undefined Sindh boundary in pursuit of certain marauders, but also for his reported talk about the conquest of the Punjab. The purpose of Cunningham in giving all these details is to show that the British Government by all these provocative actions only helped the self-seeking Sikh nobility.[98] Cunningham opines that "had the shrewd committees of the armies observed no military preparations on the part of the English, they would not have heeded the insidious exhortations

[95]According to Cunningham, "It was generally held by the English in India that Major Broadfoot's appointment greatly increased the probabilities of a war with the Sikhs; and the impression was equally strong that had Mr. Clerk, for instance, remained as Agent, there would have been no war," *Ibid.*, p. 255, foot note 1. George Campbell who served under Broadfoot in the cis-Sutlej States and claimed to know the "real facts", also expressed a similar opinion. Sir George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, Vol. I, p. 73.

[96]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 254, footnote 1. George Clerk also expressed similar views, but Broadfoot dismissed them with a frown. W. Broadfoot, *Life of George Broadfoot*, p. 324. Also see N.M. Khilnani, *British Power in the Punjab 1839-1858*, pp. 11-13.

[97]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 253. Also see George Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 77.

[98]For details of these acts of the British see Ganda Singh, ed. *Private Correspondence relating to the Anglo-Sikh Wars*, pp. 71-79.

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of such mercenary men as Lal Singh. . . ."[99] Cunningham regrets that the English always despised the Sikhs and the "unity and depth of feeling, derived from a young and fervid faith, were hardly recognised."[100]

The war which followed was a tragic story of the destruction of a brave army deserted by its own leaders. Nevertheless, the war proved the truth of Cunningham's warning that "their (Sikhs') strength is not to be estimated by their tens of thousands, but by the unity and energy of religious fervour and warlike temperament. They will care much, and they will endure much, for the mystic "Khalsa,."[101] The British victory resulted not from the valour of the British but from their intrigues with the leaders of the Sikh army. Cunningham regards Lal Singh and Tej Singh as "traitors" believing that their object was "to have the dreaded army of the Khalsa overcome and dispersed."[102] Thus, Cunningham tries to contrast the valour of the Sikh soldiers with the mean conduct of their own leaders on the one hand and of the English sepoys, whom Cunningham frequently calls mercenaries, on the other. Cunningham is unhappy with the settlement following the war, which he considers to be not based on the enlightened principle of national reconciliation but on the self-aggrandizement and rewarding of the sycophants and traitors like Gulab Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh.

The last chapter of Cunningham's book is virtually a continuation of what Smyth wrote a couple of years before: "I am neither of opinion, that the Seiks made an *unprovoked attack*, nor that we have acted towards them with *great forbearance*."[103] However, in the total setting of Cunningham's book the chapter is calculated to produce just the opposite effect than what Smyth had in mind.

Cunningham, like his Scottish contemporary Erskine, was an intellectual heir of the French and Scottish eighteenth century

[99]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 257.
[100]*Ibid.*, p. 260.
[101]Cunningham, *The Report*, para 15.
[102]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 267. Also see John Martin Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, pp. 121-22, and Jagjiwan Mohan Walia, *Parties and Politics at the Sikh Court 1799-1849*, p. 207.
[103]Smyth, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. xxi.

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"Enlightenment."[104] He all along aspired to describe the Sikh society in its totality, encompassing its mode of living, the quality of its mind and the idiom of its politics. His "scrupulous honesty," however, did not make his narration a dry enumeration of facts, but he was consistently alive to the spirit behind ths Sikh activity. His catholicity of religious views was coupled with a Romantic conception of nationality. His Ranke-like concern to base all that he says on nothing but facts is only matched by an honest interpretation of his data. His entire life and thought can be summed up in one word: sincerity. By sheer temperament, he was incapable of taking anything casually. His thumping success both as political officer as well as historian was due to his sincerity. At the same time his collapse and untimely death was also perhaps a tragedy in sincerity.[105]

Cunningham had developed a genuine admiration for the "enobling doctrine of Sikhism," but this did not mean an admiration for the Sikhs, whom he regarded as "uncouth half barbarians."[106] The work of Cunningham fully reflects the tremendous cultural difference of the British and Indians, which pervades the entire range of British writings on the Sikhs. Cunningham regards the Sikhs a nation, but his concept of nationality is akin to the contemporary Prussian nationalism rather than the later German nationalism. Cunningham wants justice for the Sikhs as an emerging nationality, and also freedom from an overwhelming external pressure as leaders of a congenial mental and social change.[107] These two threads of religion and nationality provide the warp and woof of Cunningham's entire texture. The strength of Cunningham's thesis chiefly stems from his view of Sikh religion. His empathy gave him that understanding of Sikhism which hardly any one of his predecessors or contemporaries possessed. Cunningham's unbounded sincerity, consciousness of his own shortcomings

[104]William Erskine, *A History of India under Babur*, Introduction, pp. ix-x.

[105]For the restrained behaviour of Cunningham after his dismissal from political service see A.S. Bhasin, "Cunningham the Historian of the Sikhs", in the *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. XL, Part II, August 1962.

[106]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 129, 245, 248.

[107]C.M. Wade also advocated a policy of forbearance though for different reasons. *Notes on the State of our Relations with the Punjab and the Best Mode of their Settlement*, p. 11.

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and an urge to describe things in their proper perspective often tended to restrain his pen. But he went on. This was because he had come to realize that "if people were wholly silent when a little doubtful, we might be without any written knowledge whatever, and I feel also that my errors may become objects of attention to succeeding inquiries, and in that way a source of arriving at the truth."[108]

Cunningham tried to overcome his complex by collecting every available source of information. He did not content himself with his study of existing literature on the subject in English but also used source-material in Punjabi and Persian. He had an adequate knowledge of both Persian[109] and Sanskrit,[110] but his main reliance for the preparation of his work seems to have been on the translated works. His keenness to be guided by his evidence is visible in his tacit acceptance of even that data which was not consistent with his own thesis. For example, following Ghulam Hussein's *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin*, he even wrote that Guru Tegh Bahadur "subsisted himself and his disciples by plunder. . . ."[111]

He treated his source-material as authority rather than evidence. Had he adopted a little more critical attitude towards Ghulam Hussein's work, he would not have overlooked the fact that *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* was written more than a hundred years after the execution of Tegh Bahadur. The same may be said about the hagiographies of the Sikh tradition, which Cunningham extensively used. It is the questionable authenticity of some of these sources that has made Cunningham's treatment of the Guru period weaker than that of the later period.

[108]J.D. Cunningham to George Clerk, Envoy to the Court of Lahore, dated Ambala, February 27, 1843: *Govt. of India For. Pol. Dept. 17, May 1843*, No. 12.

[109]From J.D. Cunningham to J.F. Boilean, dated Simla, July 25, 1850, *For. Pol. Dept., 13-9-1950*, Nos. 198-208.

[110]Cunningham copied a number of Sanskrit inscriptions from the Vijay Mandir, Udaipur etc. See *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XVII Part I, January-June 1848, pp. 69-70.

[111]Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 57. Also see Fauja Singh, "Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur," *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. I, No. I, February 1974, pp. 79-89 and Ganda Singh, "The Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur", *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. XI, Part II, 1977, pp. 201-202.

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Cunningham was fully aware of the controversial nature of his last five chapters but had "not knowingly at least, given a false colouring to affairs." The reaction which his book produced, particularly in the official circles took him by surprise. Hardinge regarded the book as a personal insult and tried to avenge himself both on the political as well as literary front.[112] The balancing position which Hardinge and his fellow Peelites held in the Russell's administration had made Hardinge a political heavy-weight. Hardinge's work was further facilitated because of George Thompson's notice for a discussion on the Punjab policy based on the parliamentary papers. Hobhouse instructed Dalhousie to call Cunningham's explanation for the unauthorized use of official documents and to dismiss him in the event of his failure to return a satisfactory answer. The needful was done and Cunningham was removed from all political employment.[113]

On the academic front Hardinge persuaded J.W. Kaye to write an article on Cunningham's book and this was published in *Calcutta Review*. The reviewer describes Cunningham as "the apologist of the Khalsa," and as one who wrote his history for the most part "as a Sikh historian would write it."[114] Referring to the charge of treachery by the Sikh leaders, Kaye observes that "their treachery was rather against than for us."[115] Cunningham's repeated reference to the influence of Guru Gobind Singh's ideas also draws a sordid remark from Kaye. "In questionable hero-worship, it is not given to every man to bend the bow of Carlyle."[116] Little does Kaye suspect that Cunningham's hero was not Gobind but Sikhism itself.[117] However, even Kaye gives Cunningham credit for believing that

[112] J.S. Grewal, *Essays in Sikh History*, pp. 124-25.

[113] Foreign Dept. Notification No. 246, *Govt. of India, For. Dept. Secret, 29 September, 1849*, No. 8.

[114] *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XI, No. XXII, January-June 1849, p. 523. For Kaye's authorship of the review see *Classified Subject Index to Calcutta Review, 1844-1920*, p. 199. B.S. Nijjar in one of his papers has described this article as "Decline and Fall of the Sikhs" by J.D. Cunningham which is incorrect, "Joseph Davey Cunningham," S.P. Sen, ed. *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, pp. 427-31.

[115] *Calcutta Review, op. cit.*, p. 523.

[116] *Ibid*. 531.

[117] J.S. Grewal, *Essays in Sikh History*, pp. 132-33.

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everything he says is scrupulously correct. Kaye regrets that Cunningham had "suffered his generosity to outstrip his justice, and whilst succouring his enemies, has despitefully entreated his friends."[118]

Much of Kaye's criticism is an elaboration of a review of Cunningham's book in *The Times*, which criticises Cunningham for his uninteresting details, and for making "the battles read as we may presume the battles of the Peninsula will read in the next volume of M. Thiers."[119] This criticism is occasioned because Cunningham seeks to displace the existing notion about the Sikhs as well as the battles at Sutlej. These notions are based on the official dispatches, T.H. Thornton's *History of the Punjab* and a learned article in *Edinburgh Review*. The author of the article places the entire blame for the First Anglo-Sikh War on the army and its *Panchas*, contending that "on the part of the British there was not the smallest provocation; on the part of the Sikh government there was not the smallest intention. Both were dragged into the conflict by the frenzy of a licentious soldiery...."[120] Earlier Carmichael Smyth had attempted to question the prevalent notions, but he was hardly suited to such a grave task. If Cunningham's book was attacked it was partly because it wounded Hardinge's vanity and partly because it attempted to explode the myth on which the British had been so persistently fed.

Cunningham's success as an author was due to his being a historian first and an Englishman afterwards. He had learnt from Ranke to see the other end of the stick and to maintain a scrupulous regard for the facts. It was rightly pointed out by *The Athenaeum*, that "Capt. Cunningham appears to possess a sound judgement in selecting his facts and a strict regard for the exact truth of history in dealing with them."[121] Cunningham was unique both in his approach to the subject as well as the method he chose. He provided hitherto unknown unity to the entire theme of Sikh history by interpreting it in terms of the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. He judged

[118] *Calcutta Review, op. cit.*, p. 523.
[119] *The Times*, April 6, 1849, col. 3.
[120] *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXIX, Jan. 1849, p 211.
[121] *The Athenaeum*, March 24, 1849, p. 293.

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the Sikhs not according to the norms of the Victorian Britain, but essentially against the background of the Medieval Europe.

The light shed by the first five chapters of Cunningham's work was blighted by the heat generated by the last four. But the spate of criticism did not make Cunningham change his views. In his second edition he, at places, moderated the language of the last chapter, and corrected himself where he was contradicted by evidence, but made no changes in the matter of opinion.[122] In India the book remained an *index expurgatrious* for about half a century, and was reprinted only in 1903.[123]

With Cunningham's book the British historiography on the Sikhs touched its highest watermark hitherto attained. The contemporary press in India was of the view that "all Captain Cunningham has said we now know is based on authentic public papers, therefore, it must all be true."[124] The posterity has only affirmed this verdict. N.K. Sinha dedicated his book, entitled *Rise of the Sikh Power*, to Joseph Davey Cunningham, "the conscientious and faithful historian whose *History of the Sikhs* first published in 1849 still remains a source of inspiration." Cunningham's book still continues to be a yardstick in many regards for the authors of the history of the Sikhs.

In Cunningham's work situation counts far more than character, though they do not blend, as they do in a masterpiece. His breathless account, however, captures the imagination even of professional historians—even though the character sketches are conventional. The most significant thing is not the story of a character, but the crisis. In the mounting crisis the

[122]For example, compare Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs*, London, 1849, pp. 297, 300-301 with pp. 291, 294 of the 2nd edition, London, 1852. Also see S.S. Bal, "The first edition of J.D. Cunningham's History of the Sikhs," *Proceedings of Punjab History Congress, Eleventh Session*, 1976 pp. 54-65.

[123]This was a reprint of the 1st edition and was published from Calcutta. Another reprint of the 1st edition with notes on the 2nd edition was published as "3rd edition," Calcutta, 1904. H.L.O. Garrett brought out a 'new and revised edition,' London, 1918. R.R. Sethi added some notes to the Garrett edition, Delhi, 1955.

[124]Dalhousie to Hobhouse (Private), Simla, September 6, 1845, Hasrat, *The Pujab Papers*, pp. 244-45.

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personages and the situations react on each other. Cunningham's history is not a series of detached episodes, but of situations each with exposition, growth and crisis. The crisis proceeds to its inexorable end, reaching, in Aristotle's terminology, a point of Catharsis, which turns the account into an organic whole. Cunningham gives evidence of a critical mind and his work assumes a scale and a degree of magnitude in time and space, an architectonic unity, and what is more, it evokes a great response of emotion.

The history which Cunningham wrote linked his name with the Sikhs for all times to come, though at the same time it jeopardized his bright career beyond all hope of redemption. Cunningham failed to stall the extinction of the political power of the Sikhs, but he had the satisfaction of having won for Sikhism an assured place in the history of mankind. And with it culminated the British historiography on the Sikhs.

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CONCLUSION

The British historiography on the Sikhs was a result of the British interest in the rise and growth of the Sikhs and the political power they had come to wield. The Sikhs had become a power to reckon with, and they just could not be ignored. But why, in particular, should the British be interested in the history of the Sikhs? What were their motives and objects?

It must be recognized that the British writers who wrote in the period under study, almost without exception, were not trained in the austerities of historical discipline. Some of them were just travellers, others occupied independent positions, and a few others were servants of the East India Company doing their routine duties, but having an innate urge to produce a journal, a tract or an historical work in their spare time. The motives behind the historical writing of these years differ from person to person—they vary, and in most of the cases they are mixed. The impelling reason in some cases is sheer intellectual curiosity on a highly sophisticated level, to know the unknown; in some others it is a desire to lavish idle fancy on contemporary events and personalities, especially when they are colourful like Ranjit Singh, Dhian Singh or Lal Singh; and in yet others, a utilitarian urge to make the British reading public aware of the potentialities of a new region having possibilities of development.

In the early stages, Polier, Browne and Forster became interested in the Sikhs in view of the influence that the latter had come to exercise, and their incursions into the territory of the *Nawab Vazir* of Oudh. The writings of Polier, Browne and Forster were pioneering attempts—the first ever made by the British or Europeans to give a connected account of the Sikhs. The inquiry of these writers was chiefly directed towards discovering the fountain of strength of the Sikhs. They asked questions about the nature of the religion of the Sikhs, the relationship of this religion with other Indian religions, the

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background and the profession of the converts to this faith and the motives which inspired them to embrace it, the socio-religious structure of the Sikh community and its potential to grow into a formidable power. None of the three pioneers could comprehend the real nature of the reforms of Guru Nanak, nor could they grasp the socio-political structure of the *misls*, but they were quick to perceive the unlimited potentiality of the sect, though they were not unanimous about the extent to which the Sikhs might be formidable or the direction which their energies might take.

John Malcolm took up the thread from his predecessors in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The British, as a result of their occupation of Delhi, had come to be the immediate neighbours of the Sikhs. This had naturally brought the Sikhs closer to the view of the British, who became interested in understanding them. Malcolm resolved to write about the Sikhs. The questions he asked were broadly similar to those raised by the earlier writers, but the results of his inquiries were profounder than theirs. According to Malcolm, the key to the understanding of the Sikhs and their political power lay in knowing their institutions (on which subject his contribution was substantial and illuminating). Thus he could easily be credited with laying the groundwork of the historiography on the Sikhs.

The career and achievements of Ranjit Singh gave a new impetus and character to the historiography of the Sikhs. This was natural. Historiography is not an isolated phenomenon nor is it the individual act of an author; it is constantly related to society and to the changes taking place in its intellectual climate. No wonder that the developments in the social and political situation of the period were reflected in the historiography.

Prinsep and Osborne concentrate on Ranjit Singh, his times and the persons around him. Prinsep covered the rise of Ranjit Singh in a historical perspective, and for the first time gave a clear notion of the nature and character of the Sikh *misls*. He also studied the administration of Ranjit Singh but failed to perceive anything in it that he could call a system.

Ranjit Singh died in June 1839. The only two universally recognised successors of Ranjit Singh died within the next two

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years. This plunged the Kingdom of Lahore into a turmoil from which it could never extricate itself. The political upheaval was felt across the border. The danger for the British was indeed acute. It was neither a threat from the predatory hoards of the *misl* period, nor from a cautious and calculating monarch who was a realist in diplomacy and knew how far to go. But it was a threat from a sufficiently modernized, fairly well-equipped and vastly numerous republican soldiery, impatient, turbulent, wild with ambition, and ready to stake anything for the cause it chose. The baneful example of such a multitude came to be dreaded more than its military power.[1] This unprecedented threat was, of course, a source of concern to the British, but it also aroused much additional interest and curiosity about the Sikhs, their politics, and their power, etc. The culmination of this interest arrived with the termination of the two well-contested Anglo-Sikh Wars.

On the whole, the British historiography on the Sikhs was animated by pragmatic consideration. The authors were either military officials or civil administrators, and, for the most part, their writings aimed at influencing the course of the British policy towards the Sikhs. This tendency was particularly pronounced during the post-Ranjit Singh period. Steinbach, though not an Englishman by birth, identified himself with the English and their cause for the immediate annexation of the Punjab. Thornton primarily wrote with a view to supporting the British policy towards the Punjab. M'Gregor was keen to use his work as a garland and a whip, thus paying tribute to the gallant Victorians and also lashing out at the arrant authorities. He was convinced that the Sikhs could never be reconciled to the British sway, and that the complete prostration of the Sikhs was a pre-requisite for the continuance of the British influence. Smyth, by and large, aimed at discrediting the royal family of Lahore for its ills and presaging its extinction. Cunningham wrote, primarily, with a view to advocating a policy of forbearance towards the Sikhs.

Thus, there is a considerable uniformity in the attitude of the British writers towards history, each of them being keen to

[1]Hardinge to Ellenborough (Private), January 8, 1845, B.J. Hasrat, *The Punjab Papers*, p. 79.

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derive a practical utility from his writing. This pragmatic approach of deriving practical advantage by way of influencing the course of British policy does not, however, seem to have dampened their intellectual curiosity, their propensity to know a new people and religion and to estimate their potentiality. There is also to be found in these writings an occasional desire to indulge in tittle-tattle, to expose the cupidity of social aberrations and perversions, stirring the British fancy.

In the authors' treatment of their subject there is evident a striking difference of approach. This is what lends to their theme a certain diversity of character. The bulk of the works on history before Cunningham are based on one indigenous source or another—either obtained by the authors from local people or produced by local writers at the author's request. In other words, the writers, for the most part, depend on local agencies for the acquisition of the knowledge they transmute into a narrative by use of their own observations and experiences. The information thus obtained is often supplemented by the observations of the authors who are both editors and writers of their works.

It must be admitted that the means of collecting information at the disposal of these writers were limited, particularly because of the language barrier. Since the materials were scanty, the authors took greater pains in dealing with their sources. They often accepted these materials as authorities rather than as sources to be analysed or scrutinized. They also took a more serious notice of the existing works on the subject. These historians frequently professed to be truthful but between their profession and actual practice there fell a shadow. The motives of the historians, though practical, were immediate and never as subtle as those of the authors on Indian History—particularly James Mill and Henry Elliot.[2] The attitude of most of these writers was unsympathetic towards the people about whom they wrote, and this could by no means be called a Utilitarian feature of mind. However, this unsympathetic posture was not due to any wilful obstinacy on the part of these writers but, by and large, to the immense chasm which separated the two sets of people

[2]Henry Elliot, *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, Vol. I, Preface, pp. xx-xxx.

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with their different social and intellectual backgrounds.

If Cunningham, the greatest of the historians on the Sikhs, was unlike his predecessors and successors, it is not because of his peculiar attitude towards the subject, but because of his capacity to evaluate the Sikh society on its own terms and within its own framework. His hands were not fettered by any single manuscript and his mind was not burdened by a preconceived notion. He was catholic in his approach to the religion of the Sikh and a true follower of Ranke in his treatment of the source-material. His work shows him a technical historian in the authentic sense of the term, though he had no professional training.

The history of the Sikhs, which had begun in the form of an article, a tract, or a travelogue, gradually assumed the character of a sketch, a report, and a journal. The efforts were diverse and individual but in the totality of their impact they struck a new course, so far as the history of the Sikhs was concerned, independent of the history of India. This was not like a school in the modern sense of the term, yet the attempts made were of ascending order like a flight of stairs. Judged in isolation, every author added hardly a few bricks, but the cumulative effect was immense. If Cunningham succeeded in giving an authentic history of the Sikhs, one that could serve as a fairly emulable model for others, it was not only because of his own force of intellect but also of the labour of his predecessors.

The British historiography on the Sikhs was essentially contemporary history. It was, thus, circumscribed by the contemporary situation, and the writers, for want of proper knowledge and technique, found it difficult to set the contemporary events and personages in their true perspective. However, there was a difference of degree. For example, whereas M'Gregor was completely swept off his feet by the contemporary situations, Cunningham displayed sufficient capacity to transcend his environment and hold on to a wider and more universal vision. The contemporaneous interest tended to lend to the writings of some of these writers a polemical character which made them readable.

The British historiography on the Sikhs, for the most part, aimed at influencing the policies of the government. In turn, the writers were also influenced by the attitude of the Government.

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In the early stages, when every possible information about the Sikhs was sought after, the Government keenly encouraged the writers. James Browne's work was published under the orders of the Chairman of the Court of Directors. Writers like Robert Orme, James Mill, H.H. Wilson, and H.T. Prinsep were given free access to the official records. Both Malcolm and Elphinstone were allowed leave with pay, table allowance and other facilities. However, the punishment was equally rigorous where the authors tried to transgress the norms of official propriety. *Friend of India* admitted on the authority of Major Broadfoot, that no "man can write a true narrative of the siege of Jellalabad who is not prepared to lay down his commission," and also added that "the same may be said of Moodkee or Ferozeshuhur, of Aliwal, of Sobraon." That *Friend of India* was not wrong was proved by Smyth earning a "reprimand" and Cunningham getting dismissed from political service. During the post-Ranjit Singh period, the British Government wanted to suppress the facts but the authors were determined not to be cowed down by it. On the contrary, they wanted to disclose the truth. The position of the authors was really dubious. Whereas they believed themselves to be the citizens of liberal Victorian Britain, and treated the affairs of India to be national affairs in the last resort, the Government of India regarded its functionaries nothing more than servants of the Government, and the affairs of India the concerns of a joint stock company. Besides the official policy, some non-government agencies like *Calcutta Review* were fully utilized by officials like John Kaye and Henry Lawrence to whip the defaulters. Nevertheless, the fact that despite these limitations some of the authors could publicly criticise even the highest functionaries of the state is a striking testimony to the mid-nineteenth century liberalism and idealism when men, whatever their convictions be, could stand up and write without caring for the consequences.

British works on the Sikhs suffered from many flaws. Some of the writers could not fully comprehend the real nature of Sikhism. As aptly pointed out by Cunningham, it is not an easy task to perceive the process of inward change and even the learned of Greece and Rome misunderstood the spirit of those humble men who obtained a new life by baptism. Social

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institutions have a way of eluding a historian's grasp, particularly when a foreigner takes up the analysis of a society which is not his own. Again most of the writers failed to separate facts from fiction. This was largely because unlike Indian history no systematic attempt had been made to reconstruct history of the Sikhs before the Europeans took up the job. Their source-material, for the most part, consisted of either the accounts of "bigoted Muslims" or "fabling Sikhs" or "garbled despatches." Combined with it was the gap of communication—mental as well as physical, and other limitations common to foreign observers. If the history of the Sikhs failed to achieve the standard of the history of India, or if Cunningham could not equal Elphinstone in the plenitude of scholarship and catholicity of judgement and deeper comprehension, it is largely because the source-material was scarce, fragmentary and hagiographic. Even then it may be said that despite all these limitations, Cunningham did to the history of the Sikhs what Elphinstone did to the history of India. Though British historians of the post-annexation period did not accept some of the assertions of Cunningham and questioned some of his assumptions and interpretations, his work remains what it was the most outstanding history of the Sikhs by a British author which may be modified and altered radically but never ignored.

There has been a great deal written in the period under study about the state of the Sikhs, and their history and religion by British writers. These writings are not only substantial but also greatly variegated. In fact, they could be regarded as various experimentations in the field of history. It has been brought out in the present study that from the earliest effort to J.D. Cunningham, there is a definite progressive development of historiography of the Sikhs by the British. Some of these works just provide raw material, facts not skilfully organized, but some others reflect an architectonic quality about their larger conceptions and a critical acumen of high order. Again, though in their individual achievements these works help us to understand merely what the Sikhs were about, in their totality they represent the most solid and distinctly representative type of historical thinking, which provides the British interpretation of Sikh history, culture and politics as a means of elucidating their policy towards the Sikhs. Probably in no period (except perhaps

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now with the establishment of research departments in some of the Indian and foreign universities) has there been such a sustained interest in elucidating the history of the Sikhs as there was in the period under study.

The historians of the period all appear to be goaded in their endeavour by both the past and the present. They look for cultural roots to account for the existence in the Sikhs of a sense of being a separate entity. They tend to delimit in them a social group with common descent, political interests, customs, tradition and religion. However, the variety of approach to the subject-matter demonstrated in their writings argues against any monastic attitude. They mostly follow a trial and error method. Moreover, lack as they naturally do the instinctive understanding of a "native historian," they fail to entirely comprehend the complexity of the Sikh social system. But amid frequent disagreement of the nature of the generalizations made by them and their understanding of the social phenomena at work, there is, nevertheless, evident in them all, to different degrees, the intellectual preoccupation of making historical generalizations. Their undeniable legacy to posterity is a tradition in Sikh history which is distinguished by individualistic approach, an approach which will always inspire fresh objective research on Sikh history.

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GLOSSARY

Adi Granth: the Guru Granth Sahib, sacred scripture of the Sikhs, compiled by Guru Arjun Dev in 1603-4.

Akali: "a devotee of Akal (the Timeless One, God)".

Dal Khalsa: the unified army of the Khalsa.

Dasam Granth: "the Book of the Tenth (Guru)," a collection of writings attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.

Faqir: "a poor man," Muslim renunciant; loosely used to designate Sufis and also non-Muslim renunciants.

Granth: book, volume.

Granth Sahib: the Guru Granth Sahib (See Adi Granth, above).

Gurmatta: "the mind, or intention, of the Guru," the will of the eternal Guru expressed in a formal decision made by a representative assembly of the Sikhs; a resolution of the Sarbat Khalsa.

Guru: religious teacher; preceptor. Usually a person, but sometimes understood as the divine inner voice.

Guru Granth Sahib: See Adi Granth, above.

Harmandir: "the Temple of God," the central Sikh shrine in Amritsar commonly known as the Golden Temple.

Jagir: an assignment of land revenue in lieu of salary.

Jat: an agrarian caste with strong military traditions, dominant in rural Punjab.

Khalsa: the Sikh order, brotherhood, instituted in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh.

Misl: Sikh military bands of the eighteenth century.

Misldar: chieftain of a misl.

Panchas / Punchs: members of a village council (Here used for the executive council of a Sikh regiment elected by the troops).

Sarbat Khalsa: the "entire Khalsa"; assemblies of jathedars and misldars.

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Sardar: chieftain; leader of a misl. 'Sardar' is nowadays used as title of address for all Sikh men, the corresponding title for a Sikh woman being 'Sardarani.'

Seek
Seick
Sick
Sicke
Sicque
Sique } Sikh

Singh: lit. 'lion'; the name assumed by all male members of the Khalsa.

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