

# The Conquest of Peshawar by Maharaja Ranjit Singh

## Abstract

The North-West frontier has always formed a vital problems and has always been of the utmost concern to the power paramount in India. Ranjit Singh knew well that it was very hard and costly to conquer the hardly mountainous tribes of the North-Western Frontier. Hari Singh Nalwa had been advising Ranjit Singh for a forward policy and that his French officer too were anxious to try their hands in Afghanistan as Ranjit Singh himself once told Wade, "The French officers tell me that if I palace ten regular battalions, two or three regiments of cavalry, and a few pieces of artillery at their disposal they will engage to conquer Kabul and subdue the whole of Afghanistan to my authority."

**Keywords-** West Frontier, Battle of Naushera, Battle of Jamrod

## Introduction

***In 1818 A.D. Ranjit Singh advanced to capture Peshawar. The battle of Jamrod was the last battle which Ranjit Singh fought against the Afgans. With this battle the borders of the sikh dominions were entered further North-West up to the Khyber pass.***

In 1818 A.D. Maharaja Ranjit Singh advanced to capture Peshawar which was held by Yar Mohammad, a chieftain appointed by Kabul as its governor. Ranjit Singh sent for Akali Phula Singh, who knew the North-West Frontier well, and questioned him about Attock and its environment. He told him that if north-west bastion was to be made secure against the Afgans and Pathans . On 15 October, 1818 A.D. Ranjit Singh marched out of Lahore at the head of his troops . Amongst the generals with him, whose name were becoming a terror amongst the tribes, Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phula Singh.<sup>1</sup> Many Pathans were murdered and alive raised the white flag accepting a humiliating surrender. Akali Phula Singh fought bravely in this battle.<sup>2</sup>

A proclamation was made by beat of drum assuring the citizens that they would not be molested and advising them to carry on their occupations as usual. The next morning Ranjit Singh rode on his elephant through the bazaars of Peshwar. It was the first time in 700 years that the city saw an Indian conqueror ride through its streets.<sup>3</sup>

Ranjit Singh occupied the Peshwar, but he decided not to rule it directly unless he had collected complete information regarding it. He handed over the city to his old friend Jahandad Khan, the ex-governor of Attock, and returned to Lahore. After his return to Lahore, Yar Muhammad Khan came back and Jahandad Khan gave him the city without any contradiction.

Ranjit Singh send another expedition almost immediately, but this time yar Muhammad himself paying a nazrana of Rs. 50,000 accepted to be Ranjit Singh's tributary. " Yar Muhammad accepted to pay forty thousand rupees to the Noble Sarkar as a tribute of submission regarding Peshwar and promised to pay twenty thousand rupees in future".<sup>4</sup>

Pathan tribes flared up in the open revolt against Yar Muhammad. Azim Khan, who exploited the religious sentiments of the tribesmen to his own advantages by proclaiming his intention of liberating the Pathans from the Yoke of the infidel. Within a few days over 25,000 Ghazis, volunteered to fight under the green banner of the prophet Yar Muhammad Khan sought safety in flight. Ranjit Singh would not, however, allow Azim Khan to strengthen his hold and take determined offensive.

Ranjit Singh ordered the army north wards. Diwan Chand, Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phula Singh were amongst the Punjabi generals. With them were Allard Ventura and Gorka Bal Bhadra, leading their newly trained battalions. Ranjit Singh ordered his soldiers to cross the Attock as best they could.

He was the first to plunge his horse in the stream, the rest of the army followed, elephant, camels horses and mules with men clinging to



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them. Many were carried away by the current and much valuable equipment was lost. Nevertheless before the Afgans snipers could arrive on the scene the Punjabis has control of the western bank. The Ghazes were taken by surprise and retreated . The gates of Jahanagira stronghold were thrown open and Prince Sher Singh welcomed his father with filial gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

The infuriated Afgan wazir thereupon proclaimed a holy war. Ranjit Singh also raised a huge force an even appealed to the Akalis to join him against the common danger of Islam. As Sinha <sup>6</sup> writes that "Azim Khan had appealed to the fanaticism of the neighboring tribes and given the war a religious character. But the fanaticism of the Akali was pitched against the fanaticism of the Ghazis".

A battle was fought between the Sikhs and the Afgans at Naushera. The army engaged numbered about twenty thousand on both side. The 'battle of Naushera'<sup>7</sup> was fought on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1823 A.D.

The forces came face to face with each other. Phula Singh Akali, Gharbha Singh, Karam Singh Chahal, two jagirdas, Bul Bhudur Singh Goorkhali and Kumedan, all of them men of distinction, died fighting.<sup>8</sup>

Azim Khan was during this action of the Ghazi, at Chumkava, about four mile and a half east of Peshwar. He made no effort to succour the warriors and war watched in his position by a Sikh force under Kirpa Ram, Sher Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa, which had advanced by the opposite, bank of the river. Upon learning that the party was overpowered and had dispersed, he retired to Jalalabad, on the Kabul road, leaving the field clear to Ranjit Singh.<sup>9</sup>

Ranjit Singh made his entry into Peshwar on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1824.<sup>10</sup> According to Batalvi,<sup>11</sup> " Ranjit Singh prohibited his army to rob the public." The citizens welcomed him and paid him tribute with gifts. At night the bazaars were illuminated in his honour.

In April Ranjit Singh secured the submission of Yar Muhmad Khan who came with some fine houses and with request to be allowed to hold Peshwar as a tributary of Lahore. The Sikhs was well content to make a settlement for the city and surrounding territory on this basis. He accordingly divided the country into five portion between Nawab Summad Khan.

Yar Muhamad Khan, Sultan Muhmad Khan, Syed Muhmed Khan and Pir Muhmad Khan who contracted to send him annually a tribute of horses, rice and fruits.<sup>12</sup>

Ranjit Singh arrived back in Lahore on the Muslim festival of Shashi-i-barat. Hindu and Sikha joined their Muslim brother in the celebration and greeted their victorious monarch with songs of welcome.<sup>13</sup>

Things, however, had not yet settled in Peshawar. It was only within three days of Ranjit Singh's establishment of peace in Peshawar that in 1827 A.D. an Afgan Ahmed declaring himself to be pagamber challenged Yar Muhammad Khan, occupied Peshawar and incited the Afgans for a Jihed against Ranjit Singh.

In 1834 A.D. again anarchy spread in Afganistan due to a civil war which started between

Dost Mohamad and Shah Shuja. Ranjit Singh realized that the right course for him could be to seize Peshawar.

Prince Nau Nihal Singh and Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa were sent with 8000 men, under pretence of demanding enhanced tribute, to seize the city, the prince obtained possession, the Barakzai Sardar fled, Sikhs occupied the coveted position. But Afgans were not disposed to allow them to hold it without opposition. In 1835 A.D. , Dost Mohamad invaded the district with the intension of retaking the city, but Fakir Azizudin, who was sent ahead of the army to delay his advance, was so successful in his mission that the Sikhs arrived in great force, and so nearly surrounded the Afgans that Dost Mohamad had hastily to retreat beyond the passes<sup>14</sup>. Ranjit Singh now devoted himself to the strengthening of his newly won position beyond the Indus.

Hari Singh Nalwa remained at Peshawar as commander in chief, was ordered to build a fort at Jamrod. Amir was furious and determined to take up the challenge thus thrown before his mountain getaway. In 1837 A.D. Dost Mohamad sent his son Akbar Khan with a large force against the Sikhs. The great general turned out all his garrison from Peshawar, 6000 foot, 1000 regular cavalry, and 3000 irregular, and marched to the relief. The sanguinary fight which ensued between the Sikhs and Afgans resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Hari Singh Nalwa fell, mortally wounded by two bullets in the side and stomach, and his men disheartened. But when the news of Afgans attack first reached Lahore, The Prince Nau Nihal, his father Kharak Singh and all the flower of the Sikh cavalry arrived at Peshawar. The Afgans withdrew to Jalalabad and the Jamroud fort and its surrounding were completely left in the hands of the Sikhs <sup>15</sup>.

Both parties suffered severely in this conflict, about 7000 men are said to have fallen. The Afgans acknowledged their loss to be 1500 including a son of Dost Mohamad Khan and several chiefs. When lieutenant Wood intered the pass a few months after this event, he beheld Sikhs scalps inhibited in the middle of the road, trophies of the field of Jamrod. <sup>16</sup>

The battle of Jamrod was the last battle which Ranjit Singh fought against the Afgans. With this battle the borders of the Sikh dominions were entered further North-West up to the Khyber pass. The annexation of the Peshawar by Ranjit Singh ended the long- sequence of invasions from the North-West. But Ranjit Singh had to pay a very heavy price for it in the life of his most favourite General Hari Singh Nalwa.

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