

INVASIONS OF AHMED SHAH ABDALI IN PUNJAB AND THE SIKHS

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Abstract: Ahmed Shah Abdali, the Afghan ruler, had invaded India with his predecessor Nadir Shah. He knew about the fertility of the land and other natural treasures and wealth of India. He wanted to spread the boundaries of his empire in India. He tried for it several times till his death, but his dream was not fulfilled. Punjab was the gateway of India for the invaders and Sikhs were the inhabitants of Punjab, who were famous for their bravery. Though, the central Government of India was weaker at the time of Abdali's invasions, but the Sikhs made it impossible for him to rule in Punjab. Afghan forces were harassed by the Sikhs when they were passing through Punjab. The Sikhs faced great destruction during those invasions but they became a strong power and established their own rule in Punjab.

Index Terms- Afghan, Sikhs, Abdali, invasion, plunder, forces, Punjab.

Ahmed Shah Abdali became the ruler of Afghan after Nadir Shah in June 1747. He was very ambitious person. Soon he increased his power and occupied Kabul and Peshawar. He had a strong army of hard tribes of central Asia. As successor to Nadir Shah, he claimed the right to conquer India. He invaded India in January 1748, on the invitation of Shah Nawaz Khan, the Governor of Lahore, who invited him against the Mughal Government of Delhi. But in the mean time as Abdali reached near Lahore with his forces, the Lahore Governor changed his policy, because the Delhi Government approved his Governship in Lahore. Afghan forces attacked on Lahore and plundered it badly.¹ A large amount of booty fell into the hands of Afghans. They got rich treasure of Shah Niwaz Khan and a large quantity of arms.² Then he marched toward Delhi. But the Afghans clashed with Mughal forces under Wazir Qamarudin near Sirhind. Though, Wazir Qamarudin was killed in that battle and his son Mir Mannu took the command in his hands and defeated the Afghan forces.³ In the mean time Ahmed Shah got the news about his nephew Luqman Khan's rebellion at Qandahar,⁴ so he was compelled to return back. Mir Mannu got the Governship of Lahore and Multan.⁵

The Sikhs came out from their hidden places, which were residing in the deep Jungle and hills after holocaust in which large number of Sikhs had lost their lives. When Abdali came to Punjab, it was a crucial period for rise and growth of the Sikh power in Punjab. That was a good opportunity for the Sikhs that the confusion was reining in Delhi and Lahore, they took full advantage of it. Some bands of the Sikh made several surprised attacks on the fleeing forces of Afghans and deprived them of number of horses and other wealth.⁶ Abdali knew about the Sikhs, because he also faced them in the invasion of Nadir Shah, when they plundered Afghan troops. Some other band of the Sikhs marched towards Amritsar under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They defeated Adeena Begh Khan and arrived at Amritsar. They occupied the city and the large part of the District. Then they organized Sikh national army. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was appointed as Commander of whole Sikh force. All the armed Sikhs were divided in to eleven bands under different leaders. All it gave a new strength to the activities of the Sikhs.⁷

All those Sikh bands started occupying the different parts of Punjab. They occupied the area of Bari Doab (area between Beas and Ravi), Rachna Doab (area between Ravi and Chenab), Beast Doab (area

¹ J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej, John Murray, London, 1849, P. 94.

² Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, Asia Publishing House, London, 1959, P. 52.

³ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, PP. 126-127.

⁴ Ganda Singh, *op. cit.*, P.69.

⁵ S. M. Latif, *The Histoty of Punjab*, Calcutta Central Press Company Limited, Calcutta, 1891, P. 221.

⁶ Sohan Lal, *Umdat-Ut-Tawarikh*, Dafter-I, Ariya Press, Lahore, 1985-89, P. 127.

⁷ Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash.*, Khalsa Tract Society, Amritsar, 1880, P. 907.

between Beas and Sutlej).⁸ At that time, the new Governor Mir Mannu was busy in his arrangements, therefore the Sikhs took advantage of it. When Mir Mannu tried to control over the growing power of the Sikhs, he took some strict actions against them. At the same time, Ahmed Shah Abdali again attacked on Punjab in December 1748.⁹ Firstly he wanted to take revenge of his defeat in India and secondly the situations of Delhi were also in his favor. Hearing about the Afghan invasion, Mir Mannu turned his forces towards the invader. Delhi Government did not support the Governor of Punjab at that time. Mannu made a settlement with Abdali. He agreed to pay him the revenue of four districts namely Sialkot, Aurangabad, Gujrat and Pasrur to him and accepted his dominations in those areas.¹⁰ Then Ahmed Shah Abdali returned back.

After it, Mir Mannu got help from the Sikhs on the suggestion of Kaura Mal against Shah Niwaz Khan, the new Governor of Multan. The joined forces of Mir Mannu and the Sikhs got victory on their enemy. The Sikhs got relief and they organized themselves. After some time Ahmed Shah Abdali marched on Punjab third time in December 1751, because Mir Mannu failed to pay him the decided amount regularly. Then the Sikh forces supported him against Abdali. *Diwan* Kaura Mal and some Sikh warriors died in the battle and some other went back because of some confusion. Abdali suggested Mannu that why they shaded the Muslim blood from both side. He would go back if he paid him the money asked for. He was impressed by the bravery of Mir Mannu, because he fought against Abdali without any support from his master. He appointed Mir Mannu as his Governor of Lahore and Multan and received 30, 00,000 rupees from him.¹¹ Afghan also occupied Kashmir before their return to Kabul. A large amount of money and area fell into the hands of Abdali in that invasion.

The Sikhs again faced very hard conditions. Mir Mannu changed his policy towards the Sikhs. In fact, he worried about the growing power of the Sikhs. He attacked on the Sikh territories. He sent many troops against the Sikhs. Those attacks intensified their struggle against the foreigner and they decided to rid the country of the enemy. The persecution of the Sikhs was started once again. Sikh ladies and children were also tortured by the Mughals.¹²

Delhi Government became weaker because of the internal quarrels. Abdali invaded India fourth time in November 1756, on the invitation of Muglani Bagem and some other Mughal Chiefs.¹³ Abdali reached at Delhi without any oppose. He easily occupied Delhi and got huge amount of wealth, jewelry, cash and other expansive things from the noble's houses in the city. He took away some ladies of Mughal *harem* and a large number of maid servants belonged with them. Mathura was too sacked ruthlessly by Afghans when the people were celebrating *Holi*.¹⁴ They also took away some Hindu women from Mathura. After some days, an epidemic spread in the Afghan's camp and numbers of Afghans were passing away daily. Then Abdali obliged to go back. He appointed Najib-ud-Daula as his agent in Delhi and Prince Taimur as Viceroy of the provinces of Punjab. He went back with a large amount of booty with horses and men. Sikh bands harassed his army up to the river Indus.¹⁵

Then the clash started between Taimur Shah and the Sikhs. Sikhs were gathered at Amritsar and Timur Shah ordered Jahan Khan and Haji Atai Khan to attack on the city with large forces. A large number of Sikhs and Afghans were killed in the battle. The Sikhs joined with Adina Beg (the Governor of Jalandhar *Doab*) and defeated Timur Shah. They seized all the artillery from the Afghan forces. They conquered a large part of country with the help of Adina Beg and the Marathas. The Sikhs had become a real power in Punjab. It became impossible for all to set their rule in Punjab without their cooperation. Afghans were defeated completely.¹⁶ Delhi went in to the control of Marathas.

Abdali invaded India fifth time in 1759, to avenge the defeat of Timur Shah. First he occupied Lahore and then he defeated Marathas in Panipat. All the Muslim states had allied with Afghan invader, though the Marathas had no other resource for help. Only Ala Singh of Patiala helped him, who accepted over lordship of Abdali. *Dal Khalsa*, the national army of the Sikhs, punished him for it.¹⁷ They got full advantage of the

⁸ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol-I, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, P. 128.

⁹ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, P. 72.

¹⁰ Nizam-ud-Din, *Shanama-i- Ahmedia*, MS. GS. 1772, PP.125-127.

¹¹ Ganda Singh and Teja Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Orient Longmans, Bombay, 1950, PP. 139-141.

¹² Giani, Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash*, PP. 636-637.

¹³ Ganda Singh and Teja Singh, *op. cit.*, P. 145.

¹⁴ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, P. 177.

¹⁵ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, P. 139.

¹⁶ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, P. 221.

¹⁷ Karam Singh, *Maharaja Ala Singh*, Khalsa Parcharak Vidyalaya, Taran Taran, 1918, PP. 207-213.

Afghan's attack. Abdali's Governor of Lahore was afraid of Sikhs and he made his capital in Jalandhar. The Sikhs decided to occupy Lahore. When they marched towards Lahore, then the Governor of Lahore offered them 30,000 rupees for *Karah Prasad*, and Sikhs retired after accepting the amount. On the Abdali's return from Delhi, the Sikhs harassed his forces. They relieved them from much of their booty and they also released 2200 Hindu women from the Afghan soldiers.¹⁸

After Abdali's return, the Sikhs spread in the different parts of Punjab and established their own territories. When Abdali came to know about the administration of Punjab, he appointed his general Nur-ud-Din Bamezei to control the activities of the Sikhs. But the Sikhs defeated the Afghan forces.¹⁹ Hearing about the defeat of Abdali's General, Khwaja Ubaid Khan, the Governor of Lahore, came to help him with large forces but they were also defeated by the Sikhs. Their number of horses, camels, guns and different ornaments fell in the hands of the Sikhs.²⁰ Then the Sikhs occupied Lahore and set their administration. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia received the title of *Sultan-Ul- Qaum*. He also issued the coins on the name of Guru.²¹

In 1761, the Sikhs passed a resolution on the occasion of Diwali at Amritsar to hold all areas of the Abdali's supporters. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia sent the message to Akil Das, one of his supporters, to surrender before the *Khalsa*. But he immediately sent the message to Abdali for help.²² Abdali was on his way to India, hurried to Jandiala after receiving the message. He came to know from intelligence that a large number of Sikhs with their families were gathered in village Kup near Malerkotla. The Shah reached there by the morning of 5th February, 1762 and attacked on the Sikhs. Though the Sikhs were not prepared for the battle, but they fought in cordon around their families. They tried to reach at Barnala in that way. But cordon was broke by the Afghan forces and thousands of Sikhs were killed in that action. It is known as *Wada Ghalughara* in Sikh History.²³

Abdali attacked on Golden Temple in April 1762, on the occasion of Baisakhi. All the pilgrims disappeared on his arrival. He destroyed the whole temple and all the other buildings around it. It was said that when the building was blown up, a brick struck Shah on his nose and the wound never recovered. The Sikhs became furious on it. The Sikhs marched against Zain Khan again, though Shah was at Lahore. The Sikhs got victory in the battle against Zain Khan and got lot of things from him. The Sikhs occupied many areas around Lahore. The Shah left for Afghanistan, on hearing about some disturbances there.²⁴ When Abdali left the Punjab, the Sikhs came out from their hidden places and started falling on the Government. They started to punish the Abdali's agents who were responsible for the suffering of the people. They became stronger, all the *Dals* joined together under the command of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. All *Dals* occupied their personal territories in different parts of the country.²⁵

The Shah again invaded India seventh time in 1764, after hearing about the activities of the Sikhs and found his Governors unable to stop them. Abdali planned a *jihad* against the Sikhs together with some other Muslim commanders. The Shah reached at Sind with large forces of Mohamadan, but the Sikhs left their places at their arrival. The Shah got the news that they moved to Amritsar. When the Afghan forces reached there, they found only few Sikhs there. Then he destroyed the sacred building and went back. He did not found the Sikhs anywhere. The Afghan forces moved to Sirhind through the Jalandhar *Doab*. The whole area was ransacked by the invader's armies. The people were massacred where they were found. All the things had been plundered from the houses. The army was plundering and sacking all the villages and town in their way.²⁶

The Shah came to know that no one could rule in Punjab other than the Sikhs. Ala Singh was the example of it. Abdali granted him with title of Raja and gave him some symbols of royalty. He also offered the same to other Sikhs. But they refused to accept sovereignty from a foreigner. They preferred to struggle than meaningless honour.²⁷ When Balochis and Kabuli Mal, who were supporting Abdali during the invasion, had gone for their territories, the Shah also took his way towards Afghanistan. The Sikhs occupied

¹⁸ Giani Gian Singh, *Shamsher Khasa*, Languages Department, Patiala, 1970, P. 145.

¹⁹ Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Praksh*, P. 762.

²⁰ Khushwaqt Rai, *Tarikh-i-Sikhian*, (1811), MS., GS., Punjabi University Patiala P. 60.

²¹ Gnessh Das Vadhra, *Chahar-Bag-i-Punjab* (Ed.) Dr. Kirpal Singh, Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1965, P.178.

²² *Gazetteer of Amritsar District*, P. 165.

²³ Giani Gian Singh, *op. cit.*, P. 740.

²⁴ Delhi Chronicle, PP. 192-193.

²⁵ Qazi Nur Muhammad, *Jung Nama* (1765) ed. by Ganda Singh, Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1939, PP. 103- 104.

²⁶ Ganda Singh and Teja Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, PP. 167-171.

²⁷ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, P. 306.

Lahore in 1765, after the departure of Abdali. *Bhangi Sardar* entered in the city with thousand of Sikhs and arrested the Afghan officers. The next day, the other *Sardars* occupied the surrounding areas of Lahore city. The whole area which was liberated from foreigners came in the hands of Sikh *Sardars*. They established their rule in those areas.²⁸

Abdali marched on Punjab eighth time in 1766, on the Shah Wali Khan's complaint against the Sikhs. And on the request of Mir Qasim of Bangal, who was seeking his help against the English. When Abdali reached near Rohtas, some Sikh troops attacked on Afghan forces with seven or eight thousand horses, but in the absence of common command most of them had lost their lives. But it alerted him about the growing power of the Sikhs. When the Shah reached at Lahore, the Sikh *Sardars* despaired in the different directions with large number of their horsemen. The Shah offered the *Subedari* of Lahore to Sardar Lehna Singh on the request of wise persons of Lahore. But he refused to accept the honour in the favor of his people.²⁹ Abdali returned to his camp at Mahmud Buti on 29th December. He left his baggage at Lahore. As he reached there, he got the news that the Sikh *Sardars* attacked on Lahore and plundered his baggage. Abdali immediately hurried back but the Sikhs slipped away. Then he tried to set a negotiation with the Sikhs. He sent message to Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the other *Sardars*. But all the *Sardars* refused to do so. Soon after it Abdali returned to his country and the Sikhs again resumed their old possessions.³⁰

Ahmed Shah Abdali made his last invasion in India in 1769. At that time the Sikhs had established their rule in the most parts of the country and became stronger than before. And it was difficult to dislodge them. So many disputes had risen among his follower and the Shah was compelled to return back.³¹

The Shah was wounded on his nose in his invasion on Sikh holy Temple. When the buildings around the holy tank were being destroyed by the Afghans, the Shah struck a stone on his nose. The wound reached on a dreadful stage in 1772. It developed into an ulcer. He nominated Prince Tiamur as his successor finding his end near and passed away on 23rd October, 1772.³²

The whole Punjab went under the protection of the Sikhs. They set their rule in Punjab under twelve *Misals*. All these were under different *Sardars* and were fully independent in their areas. They all had personal armies but they worked jointly at the time of common danger.

Ahmed Shah Abdali invaded India nine times but he could never set his rule there. He had to face the Sikhs in Punjab. They created problems in the way of his dream. They always occupied his areas after his departure. And they also plundered his forces when he returned back through Punjab with large amount of booty. The Sikhs became a strong power in Punjab at the time of his last invasion. Though, the Central Government did nothing against the invaders and for the protection of the inhabitants. Then the Sikhs came forward to protect their motherland.

²⁸ H. R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol-I, P. 262.

²⁹ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, PP. 313-314.

³⁰ Karam Singh, Ala Singh, PP. 245-247.

³¹ Ganda Singh, *Ahmed Shah Durrani*, P. 320.

³² *Ibid.*, P. 325.