

Prominent Sikh Personalities

SARDAR JASSA SINGH AHLUWALIA (SULTAN-UL-QUAM)

Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was a prominent Sikh military leader during the period of the Sikh Confederacy (Misl period). He was democratically elected as the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh Confederacy on the day of Vaisakhi, 1748. Subsequently, he was also honoured with the title of 'Nawab' at Amritsar in 1754 after the passing of Nawab Kapur Singh, the founder of the **Dal Khalsa**, in 1753.

Nawab Kapur Singh had led 65 jathas/bands of Sikh warriors. In 1745, he reorganized them into eleven bands; each with its own name, flag, and leader. These armies or jathas, eventually became Sikh Misls (Misl period). When combined to meet their common enemy, these eleven Misls become one strong Sikh force, known as **Dal Khalsa or the Army of the Khalsa.*

Childhood and Youth

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was born in the village of Ahlu, Lahore District, Punjab on 3rd May, 1718. At the tender age of four, he lost his father, Sardar Badar Singh. His mother then moved the family to Delhi and brought him up imbibing in him Sikh values. Jassa Singh learnt Gurmat Sangeet and was also taught by Mata Sundri Ji in Delhi. As a result, Jassa Singh performed excellent Kirtan and Mata Sundri Kaur Ji was very pleased with the young Sikh, and bestowed upon him great blessings.

On an occasion when Jassa Singh was performing Kirtan he was noticed by Nawab Kapoor Singh. Observing his good conduct and potential, Nawab Kapoor Singh persuaded his mother to allow the young Jassa Singh to begin tutelage under him.

Chota Ghalughara (Genocide)

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia grew up in a difficult time in Sikh history. In 1746, a new wave of violence was unleashed against the Khalsa Panth by India's Muslim rulers. With all the resources made available to them, a Moghul army was sent out to exterminate the Sikhs. All village officials in Punjab were ordered to cooperate with this Moghul army. The Sikhs resisted the Moghul army by fighting skirmishes with them. Some 15,000 Sikhs were killed in the Kahnawan area of Gurdaspur. This massacre of the Sikhs is known as Chota Ghalughara in Sikh history. Jassa Singh, who fought in the skirmishes in Chota Ghalughara, was a survivor of the massacre.

In 1747, Shah Nawaz took over as Governor of Lahore and realized the futility of trying to exterminate the Sikhs. To make peace with the Sikhs, Shah Nawaz blamed Lakhpat, the revenue minister of Lahore, as the main instigator of the Chota Ghalughara and dismissed him. Lakhpat received severe punishment and was killed by the Sikhs.

Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh Confederacy

In 1748, the Dal Khalsa chose Sardar Jassa Singh, who was the Sardar of the Ahluwalia Misl, to be their Commander-in-Chief. It was at this time that the Sikhs built their first fort in Amritsar called *Ram Rauni*.

Vadda Ghalughara (Genocide)

In one of his raids of India in 1761, Ahmad Shah Abdali's army defeated the Maratha army in the Third Battle of Panipat, and captured some 2000 Maratha women to be sold as slaves in Afghanistan. As Ahmad Shah Abdali's army was heading to Afghanistan, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia intercepted this army and freed the women, and returned them to their families.

Enraged at the defeat of his army at the hands of the Sikhs, Ahmad Shah Abdali, returned to Punjab during his sixth (next) invasion of India, with an even greater force and in revenge, sought to get rid of the Sikhs once and for all. In the course of this invasion, he destroyed the Harmandir Sahib and its Sarovar.

During this extremely challenging and difficult period for the Sikhs, some 35,000 to 50,000 Sikhs lost their lives in the skirmishes and *Battle of Kup* in 1762. Jassa Singh himself suffered some 22 wounds in this battle together with Charat Singh (grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) who suffered 19 wounds. This large scale genocide of the Sikhs is known in Sikh history as the Vadda Ghalughara (Large Massacre).

Despite the setback of the Vadda Ghalughara disaster, by the month of May 1762, the Sikhs showed their resilience and took up their arms again. In the second battle of Amritsar, which took place on October 17, 1762, they defeated the Afghan army thoroughly. Jassa Singh's army captured a sizable portion of Ahmed Shah Abdali's troops and forced the very hands which had desecrated the Harmandir Sahib and the holy Sarovar, to repair and rehabilitate it.

Thereafter, the Sikh Misls grew from strength to strength and in March 1783, the combined Sikh army of Baghel Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia attacked Delhi and conquered the Red Fort where they hoisted the Nishan Sahib.

Conclusion

Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia passed away in Amritsar on 23rd October 1783. To celebrate his contribution to Sikh and Indian history, the Government of India issued a commemorative postage stamp in his honour on 4th April, 1985.

