

Integrity & Valour of Sikhs in the expansion of Sikh Raj: Gen Zorawar Singh

Sikh History is just 550 years old. It starts from 1469, the year of Birth of the First Guru. Our first 240 years till 1708 are years of the Gurus, then followed Banda Singh Bahadur till 1716. Thereafter was a difficult time for the Sikhs, the Vada Ghallukara happened in 1762 after the 3rd Battle of Panipat in 1761, then emergence of Misls, Baghel Singh's conquest of Delhi of 1783, the fragmented power of misls till consolidation by Ranjit Singh and his coming to power in 1801. Here onwards started the golden period of Sikh Raj, which lasted for forty years. Thereafter was the quick decline of Sikh Raj and it disintegrated in just six years due intrigues and deceit of Dogra brothers. In the last Webinar, we held a short talk on these Intrigues and Deceits in the Palace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, wherein the Dogra brothers by their atrocious cruelty, avarice, treachery and unscrupulous ambition caused the downfall of the Sikh Raj.

Today we shall talk about the Integrity and Valour of Sikhs in the expansion of Sikh Raj that saw Ranjit Singh's kingdom extending from Sutlej to Khyber in Afghanistan, encompassing the Five rivers of Punjab, and then on to Baltistan in the North, Jammu, Kashmir, Leh, Ladakh and up to Taklakot beyond Lake Mansarovar in Tibet. There were mainly two Sikh Generals that made it possible. Hari Singh Nalwa expanded the Khalsa Raj on the West and Gen Zorawar Singh on the North and East. At our last Zoom meeting, we briefly covered Hari Singh Nalwa. Let us today talk about Zorawar Singh.

He was born in **Sep 1785** in the Kahlur state, and that's how he is also known as Zorawar Singh Kahluria. Kahlur is in the present day Bilaspur Dist of Himachal Pradesh, then in Punjab. Born to Sardar Harjit Singh, Zorawar Singh rose to become a General in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army at a very young age. He was deputed to operate under Raja Gulab Singh, the Dogra minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had been given charge of managing affairs in Kashmir. Earlier Zorawar Singh's integrity and sincerity had earned him the position of Wazir of Doda, Riassi and Kishtwar.

In 1834 Gen Zorawar Singh led an expedition to Ladakh via Kishtwar, Dachin, Warwan crossing the Lanvila pass at 14500'. He built forts at Suru and Leh valleys to administer the region and returned to Kishtwar. Soon there was a rebellion in

Ladakh and Zorawar Singh had to go back and this time he went via Umasila pass at 17300' into Zaskar and Leh. Here he consolidated his hold.

In 1840 Zorawar Singh led an expedition to Baltistan in the Karakoram Range (famous for K2 Peak) and conquered the region including Gilgit and Skardu. He deposed Ahmd Shah and helped his eldest son Mohd Shah come to power. He returned to Leh via the Nubra valley.

In 1841 Zorawar Singh turned his attention to the roof of the world, Tibet. His forces advanced on three axis with General Zorawar's column being on the tough northern side along Pagong Tso Lake to Rudok and leading all the way to Mansarovar. Zorawar Singh's forces had captured all the territory up to Taklakot, much beyond Lake Mansarovar and close to Nepal. The Tibetan forces were pushed beyond Mayum La pass. This was the first time since 1648, when Tibet up to Mayum pass was in Ladakh, that the area had been recaptured and that too by a Sikh General. The victory though was short lived. Winters had set in. The General decided to block the Mayum pass, wait at Tirathpuri and prepare for the offense in the coming summer months. By then more reinforcements would arrive. Logistics had been overstretched. A strong Chinese force under Tibetans, unknown to the Sikh army, crossed over from the south through all weather Matsang pass and surprised the Sikh force, which by then had become complacent due extreme winter conditions. The Tibetans were well acclimatized and had distinct advantage. A fierce battle took place at Taklakot, in which on **12 Dec 1841** Gen Zorawar was hit by a bullet on the shoulder; he kept fighting till a small spear pierced through his body and the General lay dead. Imagine his bravery, on a horseback fighting battle in - 40 degrees snow covered plateau. It is said that the Tibetans were so much in awe of his bravery that they took away pieces of his flesh to tie on their bodies, as it was a belief in them that anyone who ties the flesh of Lion to the body, bears children as strong as the Lion. This General they admitted was stronger than the lion. Recognising his valour, Tibetans built a Chorten (Cenotaph) at Taklakot and called it "Singh ba Ka Chorten" Lion's resting place. Pregnant Tibetan women still go to pray there so that their child to be born is as strong. Can one imagine today that the Sikh Kingdom's pennant once flew over the roof of the World?

The death of Zorawar Singh was avenged by the Sikh Raj army in 1842 at the Battle of Chushul which was won by them and the Sino-Tibetan force general was

executed. This led to the Treaty of Chushul in September 1842, signed between Qing, the ruler of China (Qing dynasty ruled China from 1644 to 1912), Lhasa Governor and Sri Khalsa Raj. Vide this treaty Ladakh was accepted as being part of Khalsa Raj and that the trading routes from China into Ladakh would always be kept open. That was the valour of Sikh Forces.

In the 1962 Indo China dispute, China did not allow India's claim on Ladakh occupied territories including Chushul as they said the treaty was with the Sri Khalsa Raj and not India.

So Guys I am sure you will all feel proud of your heritage.

Let me now close by saying 'Gurfateh'.



The Sikh Army under General Zorawar Singh advanced from Ladakh near Pagong Tso Lake into Tibet and captured all the area upto Taklakot beyond Lake Mansarovar, reaching close to Nepal Kingdom



The three axis advance of Sikh Army under Gen Zorawar Singh and capture of half of Tibet up to Taklakot and Mayum Pass



The Cenotaph built by the Tibetans at Taklakot at the place where rest the remains of Gen Zorawar Singh.

Singh ba ka Chorten – the resting place of the Lion

Singh Ba Ka Chorten