

## Intrigues of Palace: Maharaja Ranjit Singh

**1780 Nov:** Ranjit Singh is born to Mahan Singh and Raj Kaur.

Ranjit Singh belonged to Sukerchakia Clan, named after their village Shukarchak. This clan is also considered an offshoot of Sandhewalias. Charat Singh was his grandfather and Naudh Singh his Great Grand Father. Due to inter misl rivalry, his father Mahan Singh had killed Gurbaksh Singh of Jai Singh Nakai Misl. Mahan Singh died when Ranjit Singh was a child. Ranjit Singh took over his misl at a very young age.

**1795:** He married Mehtab Kaur, daughter of Gurbaksh Singh Nakai who had been slain by Ranjit's father. Ranjit Singh's mother in law, the widow Saad Kaur was quite crafty and wanted an influence in the Court to protect her Clan's interest. The couple was not on good terms and Maharani Mehtab kaur was generally at her mother's village. Her first son died early and later she had two more sons Sher Singh and Tara Singh. Some historians doubt that they were Ranjit Singh's biological sons. She died in **1813**.

**1798:** Ranjit Singh married Raj Kaur (name changed to Datar Kaur) of Nakai Misl. Though he married several times, including two widows of Bhangi Clan chief, Datar Kaur remained his closest and bore him his eldest son Khadak Singh. His other sons Peshaura Singh and Kashmiri Singh were born to the widow Daya kaur, he had married thru Chaddar ceremony. His youngest son Duleep was born in 1838 to Rani Jinda, who he had married in 1835.

In the court of Ranjit Singh, there were several Brilliant Generals, including two from France. His favourite being his Commander in Chief **Hari Singh Nalwa**, who was a few years younger to him.

**Hari Singh Nalwa** was the son of Gurdial Singh Uppal and grandson of Hardas Singh. He was brilliant in Martial Arts and a ferocious and tough fighter. He got his name Nalwa after he killed a tiger with a dagger and Ranjit Singh compared him to Raja Nal of Rajasthan who had done the same and hence he came to be known as Nalwa. He was dreaded by his enemies. He is credited for having captured Attock, Multan, Peshawar, Shopian, Nowshera, Sialkot, Saidu, whole of Kashmir and up to Afghanistan. He captured Kasur in 1807 and kept annexing territories for Ranjit Singh till 1837 when he was killed fighting in the Battle for Jamrud Fort, Khyber Pass on Afghanistan border. At the time of his death he was the Lord of Gujranwala, Kachi, Nurpur, Mitha Tiwana, Shekhowal and several other territories and his annual income was 8.52 lacs and he was maintaining two cavalry regiments, a bty of artillery and a Camel bty. Unfortunately after his death, his four sons (two older Gurdit and Jawahar from first wife and two younger Punjab and Arjun from his second wife) fought amongst each other for his inheritance. This resulted in the Maharaja taking over his estates and the sons were put on yearly jagirs totaling 20k rupees for all four combined. Descendancy from his son Arjun Singh continues and may be Ravi, Deepak and Tinkoo can trace Nalwa's ancestry. Hari Singh Nalwa's daughter was married to Lehna Singh, whose descendants are the paternal side of Anurag Bedi

Now we come to the **Dogra Brothers** who were behind the Intrigues and conspiracies in the palace of Ranjit Singh. There were these three brothers, the Jammwal Dogra Rajputs **Dhian Singh, Suchet Singh and Gulab Singh**, *dreaded fighters, very able administrators but with*

*atrocious cruelty, avarice, treachery and unscrupulous ambitions.* Dhian Singh was the Wazir of Ranjit Singh, Gulab Singh had been made the Raja of Jammu by Ranjit Singh and Suchet Singh was a Commander in the Forces. Dhian Singh had a son Hira Singh who was quite a favourite of Ranjit Singh and this got the Dogras dreaming of putting Hira Singh on the Lahore throne one day, having Jammu under Gulab Singh, favourable treaties with Afghanistan and Nepal and thus controlling the North. Here after started the intriguing schemes. Historians write that during the last years of Ranjit Singh, Dhian Singh took advantage of his weakness for Alcohol and got some of the Ranis to slow poison him.

**1839 June:** Ranjit Singh died, naming his eldest son Khadak Singh as the successor. It is mentioned by some historians that the Hindu ranis were forced into sati by Dhian Singh to keep secret of his misdeeds. On ascending the throne, Khadak Singh soon realized that Dhian Singh had ulterior designs. He started maintaining distance and started banking on Chet Singh Bajwa as his General and personal advisor. Even the French disliked Dhian Singh, but he being master of intrigue got working to set the situation in his favour. He started feeding rumours to Chand Kaur, wife of Khadak Singh, and to NauNihal Singh, son of Khadak Singh who was by then a young fierce and able warrior, that Chet Singh Bajwa would do harm to Kingdom and he along with the French may take control.

**1839 Oct:** A plot was hatched and Nau Nihal, Dhian Singh, Suchet Singh, Gulab Singh and Attar Singh Sandhewalia killed Chet Singh Bajwa. Khadak Singh was put under House arrest and Nau Nihal Singh along with Dhian Singh started managing the affairs. Now Dhian Singh turned his intrigues towards Nau Nihal Singh. He feared that Nau Nihal being very capable may side line Dhian Singh and bring in another Wazir, when he takes over the throne. He started to feed slow poison thru the slave girls to Maharaja Khadak Singh

**1839 Nov 04:** Khadak Singh dies of poisoning and to hide this fact three Slave girls and Rani Ishar kaur are forced into Sati. Rani Chand Kaur, the first wife of Khadak Singh is away at her village.

**1839 Nov 05:** After the funeral of Khadak Singh, Nau Nihal senses conspiracy and fears that he will be attacked. He holds the hand of Udham Singh, son of Gulab Singh and does not let him go and uses him as shield. When near the fort, a parapet falls on them. Udham Singh is killed and Nau Nihal Singh is carried in a palki standing by, into the Fort by Dhian Singh. Nau Nihal's wife knocks at the fort doors, but is not allowed entry. A little later it is declared that Nau Nihal is dead. Historians say that Dhian Singh got him killed by stoning his head. Col Gardner, an American soldier had seen Nau Nihal, when he was taken away and he did not have such grave injury. This gave credence to Historian view of Nau Nihal having been killed. Now Dhian Singh calls for Sher Singh, son of Ranjit Singh and Mehtab Kaur, to come to Lahore. He arrives on 7 Nov. Meanwhile Chand Kaur has also arrived. *Here starts further intrigue.* The two sides stake claim. Dogras play double game. A proposal is given to Chand Kaur to marry Sher Singh. She rejects. She offers to adopt Hira Singh, son of Dhian Singh for the throne. Sher Singh party rejects. She offers to let Attar Singh Sandhewalia to run the affairs. Dhian Singh rejects as he detests Sandhewalia brothers Attar Singh and Lehna Singh and their nephew Ajit Singh with whom Chand Kaur has an affair. Chand Kaur then proposes that she be allowed as a regent till Nau Nihal's wife Sahib Kaur delivers as she is three months pregnant. This arrangement is put in place and Dhian Singh retains Waziri and Sher Singh goes back.

**1841 Jan** Sher Singh arrives with his army at Lahore. Dhian Singh is in Jammu. Gulab Singh Defends the Fort and summons Dhian Singh, who hastens to return and is back with his intriguing moves. In the confusion of fighting, Gulab Singh takes away the Fort treasure from the Fort to Jammu. Subsequently this treasure is used by Gulab Singh for purchasing Kashmir from the British. Dhian Singh connives and gets Chand Kaur to step down and installs Sher Singh as the Maharaja. Down the line, to get Chand Kaur out of reckoning, she is poisoned and her head crushed by her slave girls, who are also done away with. This killing takes place on 12 Jun 1842. Meanwhile Sahib Kaur had delivered a still born and even she is done away with. The Sandhewalia Sardars are now gunning for the revenge of Chand Kaur.

**1843 Sep 15** Ajit Singh Sandhewalia kills Maharaja Sher Singh by deceit and Lehna Singh Sandhewalia kills Partab Singh, son of Maharaja Sher Singh and they carry their heads to the Fort where they are met by Dhian Singh, who tries to strike a deal but Ajit Singh Sandhewalia kills Dhian Singh. The Sandhewalia brothers proclaim Duleep Singh as the King and Lehna Singh Sandhewalia as the Wazir. This enrages Hira Singh, son of Dhian Singh. He bribes the army and gets them to revolt against the Sandhewalia brothers, who are then hounded in the Fort and killed. All this killing happens in two days ie 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Sep 1843. Duleep Singh is made the child Maharaja and Hira Singh becomes the Wazir.

The intrigue yet continued. Hira Singh went after Attar Singh Sandhewalia who crossed over Sutlej. Prince Kashmira and Prince Peshaura, the other sons of Ranjit Singh were with Baba Vir Singh, a revered saint. Even he was not spared and in **May 1844**, Hira Singh had Baba Vir Singh, Prince Kashmira Singh and Attar Singh Sandhewalia killed.

Jind Kaur now sought help of Sham Singh Attariwala. Hira Singh tried to flee with the left over Toshkhana of the Sikh Kingdom to Jammu, but was intercepted and killed by Sham Singh Attariwala forces. Jind Kaur's brother Jawahar Singh Aulakh became the Wazir. To make the position of Jind kaur safe he ordered the killing of Prince Peshaura Singh. The Sikh army got enraged at this and they butchered Jawahar Singh in Sep 1845. Thereafter happened the First Anglo Sikh war, where again deceit played its role and Lal Singh and Tej Singh, convert Sikhs from Hindu Brahmins, betrayed the Sikh Army and the British entered Punjab

***So that was the story of Intrigues and Deceit in Sikh Court played out from 1839 to 1845 and that brought the Sikh Empire crumbling down.***

*Just for perspective:*

*East of River Sutlej was British India. Between Sutlej and Beas falls Jullunder. Between Beas and Ravi fall Amritsar and Lahore. Between Ravi and Chenab is Gujranwala and Faisalabad. Between Chenab and Jhelum fall Gujrat and in the south on Jhelum is Multan. Between Jhelum and Indus is Rawalpindi, Mianwali and west of Indus are Attock, Jamrud, Khyber. That was the land of Five rivers under Ranjit Singh and his boundaries stretched far and beyond Baltistan, Jammu, Kashmir, Leh, Ladakh and a battle also fought in Tibet.*