

FOUNDATION OF JAMMU & KASHMIR STATE BY MAHARAJA GULAB SINGH

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188 years ago began the process of evolution of *State of Jammu & Kashmir* by an act of unprecedented historical significance in which Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab who ruled Jammu as Jagir of his son Prince Kharak Singh as well as other major principalities indirectly gave **Raj Tilak** to his most trusted & loyal Dogra **General Gulab Singhji on 17 June 1822** (4th Har 1879) **at Jia Pota, Akhnoor** (*Northern bank of mighty sprawling River Chenab also called Chanderbaga, overlooked by magnificent Akhnoor Fort built by Raja Alam Singh in 1802*) and made him Raja of Jammu. Therefore credit for the formation of a vast, multi religious, multi culture & a composite State of Jammu & Kashmir equally goes to the **Lion of Punjab**. Regrettably this fact is not known to many in J&K and may not have been ever heard of in rest of India. From that day onwards began the process of formation of our state under the astute leadership of a great visionary whose sagacity, achievements and contributions unfortunately remain buried in the debris of British and Indian archives. **He is one of few historical legacies that India can be genuinely proud of.** The memory of Maharaja Gulab Singhji will enable us sustain our Dogra pride much like any other vibrant community. His contributions to our political, cultural and religious lives are remembered on **17th June** every year at **Jia Pota** by **Raj Tilak Divas Celebration Committee Akhnoor** and on **21 Oct** every year at Jammu by Maharaja Gulab Singh Memorial Trust.

Gulab Singh was born on 5th of Kartik 1849 (**21 Oct 1792**) in Samailpur which was a Jagir of his grandfather Mian Zorawar Singh, nephew of **Raja Rajgan Ranjit Dev**, the most benevolent ruler in the Dogra history from 1730 to 1782. He learnt the art of warfare and swordsmanship from his grand uncle **Mian Mota** which he displayed remarkably **in 1808 in the battle of Gumat** against the warriors of mighty Sikh Army at the tender **age of 16**. His heroic feats in the battle of Gumat led him to the lordship of J&K via Lahore. When Jammu was about to be invested, 16 years old Gulab Singh assembled and led a band of young Dogra fighters in last desperate bid to save Jammu. They fought so bravely & beheaded their leading fighters in such a way that the Sikh Army was compelled to give up the plan of capturing Jammu and instead offered to enter into a treaty. Bhai **Hukam Singh Chimney**, the commander of Sikh Army apprised Maharaja Ranjit Singh of valour & ability of Gulab Singh and recommend that his talent be utilized in the Lahore Darbar and that is what was indeed destined already.

Once he took out his father's horse on a rough ride without permission in which the horse was injured. Infuriated by his father's rebuke, Gulab Singh left home and took service under S. Nihal Singh Attariwala at Sukhu Chak. After sometime he left for Bhimber to serve under Raja Sultan Khan. But the destiny had chartered another beautiful

destination for him though passing through rough and hazardous routes He was summoned by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Mian Mota presented him before the Maharaja at Sialkot in **Oct 1810**. Impressed, Maharaja appointed him *Cavalryman* when he was 18. *From there on began a rewarding, difficult & challenging long journey of accomplishments of the founder ruler of J&K.*

His father Mian Kishore Singh and brothers Dhian Singh & Suchet Singh were also employed and given important positions in Lahore Darbar. Soon Dhian Singh was appointed Prime Minister. In **1813** Mian Kishore Singh & Gulab Singh took active part in the **battle of Attok** and won over Fateh Khan, the Governor of Kabul. In **1814** Gulab Singh skillfully secured the vulnerable flank from Mandi to Bushair for the attack on Kashmir led by Maharaja himself and subsequent withdrawal, after which Maharaja granted him *Jagirs* of Kharoti and Babool (Bayol) and promoted him to the command of a Cavalry sub unit. *Within mere 4 years he had become a Commander and a Jagirdar from a sepoy.* In **1815** he was given the Jagirs of Lala Chobara (in Sialkot) and Ramgarh as well as permission to keep additional 200 horses. More golden opportunities followed him during expeditions against **Multan** in 1818 and against *Kashmir* in **1819** in which he carried the day by following unique & unconventional strategies. In **1819**, Maharaja of Punjab tasked Gulab Singh to seize **Raja Agha Khan of Rajouri** which he did with a **rare bold strategy**. He was captured and taken to Lahore. Neutralising Mian Dido in **1820** was another remarkable achievement. Same year he took active part in the invasion of Munerka and Dera Gazi Khan after which Jagir of Chakla was given to him. Mian Kishore Singh was titled as Raja of all the Jagirs with full executive and judicial powers. In **1821** Gulab Singh occupied **Kishtwar** and added the principality in Punjab empire. When Mian Dewan Singh of **Reasi** revolted against Darbar, Gulab Singh conquered it easily and built **Bhingarh Fort** for its defence after which Gen Zorawar Singh was appointed administrator of Reasi.

Finally the great day came when Maharaja Ranjit Singh came to Jammu and *declared Gulab Singh as Raja of Jammu on 17 June 1822* by himself putting Raj Tilak on his forehead. Tilak was applied upside down & the unconventional act justified by stating that he had planted his roots to *Patal* so that Dogra Raj could not be uprooted. *With this act of Raj Tilak, a saga of addition of territories began and by the mid of 19th Century, Maharaja Gulab Singh became independent ruler of a vast state of Jammu & Kashmir.*

In **1827** Sayed Ahmed, an Afghan noble proclaimed himself a reformist and declared Jihad against Sikhs. Maharaja sent his force across **Attock** under S. Budh Singh Sindhanwalia and asked Gulab Singh to proceed from Jammu. Sikh chief preferred defensive strategy which Gulab Singh opposed, luckily fortune favoured the bold Raja Gulab Singh. *Raja Gulab Singh led the attacks against Peshawar and Jallalabad.* After their capture Prince Sher Singh (favourite and able son of Maharaja Ranjat Singh) was appointed Governor on 23 March **1835** and Gulab Singh was made Revenue Minister. In April **1837**, Afghans attacked **fort of Jamrud** which guarded the entrance to Khyber

Pass. Hari Singh Nalwa offered heroic resistance till Gulab Singh reached with his 3 Battalions, 1000 horses & 12 pieces of Artillery and succeeded in defeating the invader.

Gulab Singh had received vast Jagirs in Punjab. He got salt mines of Pind Dadan Khan, Lune & Miani worth lakhs on lease. To further improve economical and financial state of Jammu he obtained monopoly over timber trade by acquiring markets of Jhelum & Wazirabad on lease. To get control over the trade of Pashmina shawls, Raja Gulab Singh had his eye on **Kashmir & Ladakh**. In 1834 Gen Zorawar Singh captured Ladakh. He over ran Zanskar and Paddar in 1836.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on 27 June 1839 and was succeeded by his son **Kharak Singh** who also died a year later. **Prince Nau Nihal Singh** son of Kharak Singh too died on the same day. He got buried under the debris of Palace Deodi while returning to the palace after his father's cremation which collapsed just then when he arrived under it. Along with him died Udham Singh (son of Gulab Singh). Some Historians call it a master conspiracy. (few even point finger of suspicion towards Gulab Singh). After the **tragic death** of Nau Nihal Singh great confusion prevailed as the direct line of accession to the vacant throne was broken. **Rani Chand Kaur**, mother of Nau Nihal Singh became **Regent** for the son yet to be born to the wife of the deceased prince. Dhian Singh, (Prime Minister) was not in agreement with this proposal. He was in favour of Prince Sher Singh to rule. Rani Chand Kaur sought the help of Gulab Singh against fear of take over by **Sher Singh** and appointed him Commander-in Chief. But before Gulab Singh reached Lahore Sher Singh won over the army by offering them enhanced pay and perks. On 15 January **1841**, Sher Singh captured Lahore and asked Raja Gulab Singh to surrender but Gulab Singh on the contrary held his spirits and went up the ramparts of **Hazuri Gate**, challenged the invader and forced him to flee despite his having broken the gate of the palace. Sher Singh's offensive having been dented, he showed eagerness for negotiations. Under the agreement, Rani Chand Kaur abandoned her claim to the throne and got the Jagir of Kudi Kudiali near Bhimber costing Rs 9 Lac and Gulab Singh was allowed safe exit from the fort on 20 Jan 1841. Before leaving Lahore on 23 January, *Raja Gulab Singh presented **Koh-i-Noor*** (which Maharaja Ranjit Singh had got from Shah Shuja, Afghan Ruler, after capturing him) to Sher Singh. Pleased Sher Singh presented him with villages worth 20 Lac West of Bhimber. Rani Chand Kaur appointed Gulab Singh to manage her Jagir and accompanied him to Jammu with her valuables worth 20 Lac and lived at Jammu till her death. *Sher Singh was formally installed as Maharaja of Punjab on 27 January 1841 & Dhian Singh was made Prime Minister.*

By **May 1841 Gen Zorawar Singh** had penetrated deep into Tibet when he was ordered by Lahore Darbar to give up this conquests. Gulab Singh was ordered to proceed to Kabul against Akbar Khan son of Dost Mohd who had dislodged Britishers from Kabul. 10 Dec 1841 was fixed for the evacuation of Tibet but before that Tibetans encircled Dogra forces. **Gen Zorawar Singh died fighting on 12 December 1841** which was a great set back to the plans of Raja Gulab Singh. (**Towering statue of Gen Zorawar Singh at the exit of Railway Station Jammu reminds us of his remarkable achievements**). Gulab Singh reached Peshawar on 29 January **1842** with 10,000 Dogra troops. It is here that he came in direct contact with Capt Lawrence of British forces.

Gulab Singh advised Capt Lawrence delay and caution in the capture of Peshawar since the Sikh army was no more a cohesive outfit, moreover no General had accompanied the army. Hence Capt Lawrence got written orders from Maharaja Sher Singh by which Sikh Army came under direct command of Gulab Singh. Britishers offered the rule of Jallalabad to Gulab Singh if he captures Kabul and Jallalabad because of bleak chances of victory. Gulab Singh led Sikh forces to ***Khyber Pass to invest Peshawar & Jallalabad*** which were annexed after bloody fights. To recognize his services Britishers rewarded & decorated Gulab Singh.

On 15 Sept **1843** Maharaja Sher Singh and Dhian Singh were murdered by Sindhanwalias, brothers of Rani Chand Kaur. On 20 Sept Sindhanwalias were murdered by Sikh Army to revenge the murder of Sher Singh & Dhian Singh. Prince **Dalip Singh** (the minor son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh from Rani Jindan) **was proclaimed as emperor with Hira Singh** (son of Dhian Singh) **as Prime Minister**. But due to *palace intrigues*, Suchet Singh was murdered on 27 March. Hira Singh & Sohna Singh (2nd son of Gulab Singh) were murdered on 21 December 1844. ***Thus ended the saga of Dogra ascendancy in Punjab but their ascendancy in J&K continued.***

After the murder of Hira Singh, his supporters were haunted and their house ransacked. Frustration and anarchy prevailed in Darbar. To pacify the troops, 3 months pay was released to them after which treasuries went dry. Gulab Singh was considered the only source of revenue. Moreover after the death of his relatives, he was considered weakest for harsh penalty. Gulab Singh was ordered to surrender whole property of Hira Singh & half of Suchet Singh. He refused to comply & decided to meet Sikh forces in the battlefield. Jammu was attacked in February 1845. Negotiations brought respite to Maharaja Gulab Singh who agreed to accompany Sikh forces to Lahore as ***prisoner***. But before entering Lahore the same army had been patronized by Gulab Singh which ushered him as ***King & great Dogra warrior***, considered loyal to Darbar and proposed to be appointed as Wazir-e-Azam with full powers to pay the army from his resources at Jammu. Raja Gulab Singh stayed at Lahore for three & half months during which he convinced the Panches and the religious heads that real threat to Punjab was from Britishers and only he could defend them. *Since peace, trade and commerce had suffered a lot after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death they looked up to Gulab Singh as the only person who could restore peace, tranquility, trade and restore the situation.* But Raja Gulab Singh preferred to return to his own kingdom assuring to be at the service of Darbar whenever summoned. He was permitted to return on 9 August **1845**.

The period between the murder of Hira Singh in **Dec 1844** to beginning August **1845** had been the worst & the saga of trials and tribulations in the life of Maharaja Gulab Singh as well as highly crucial for Jammu Raj. Life of Gulab Singh remained under threat all this while. But his diplomatic skills, sagacity and cool headedness averted every crisis and ultimately he emerged as unharmed victor.

On 13 December **1845** Lord Hardinge, the Governor General declared war against Lahore after the Sikh army had crossed Sutlej by violating their own commitment of not doing so. Army wanted to be led by Gulab Singh in war against Britishers. Rani was

asked to retire forever or would be chained. Gulab Singh was empowered to decide to fight or to make peace. But Gulab Singh relented again on the grounds that his brothers, sons and nephew had been slain at Lahore and suspicion about Dogras loyalty still prevailed therefore it will be difficult to justify any decision that he will make in favour of war/peace. But army persisted with their request of inviting him to Lahore to lead them in the battlefield. Finally he reached Lahore on 29 January **1846** on persistent requests of Rani and the army. On 30th January he was declared Wazir-e-Azam. On 1st February in his 1st darbar he declared that the war with Britishers was a folly and decision was taken to send an emissary to Britishers for friendship & peace. Some Panches still insisted to fight under him on which Gulab Singh asked them to select another warrior/commander better than him. Since there was none they also left the final decision on him. On 10th February ended the Anglo-Sikh war after the final defeat of Sikh Army in the battle of Sobaron. On 13 March British forces reached Kasur (5 kms from Lahore). He was given written undertaking by Rani Jindan, Maharaja Dalip Singh and the Panches that they will abide by any agreement that he will reach with British. At the same time Britishers sent a letter asking Darbar that Gulab Singh be sent to negotiate if Sikhs wished to preserve the kingdom of Lahore. Gulab Singh was requested to meet the Britishers immediately to check their advance to Lahore which was welcomed by Governor General. He negotiated with British on behalf of Sikh empire. Britishers put up the following terms. (i) War indemnity of 2 Crores. (ii) Annexation of Doab to British empire. (iii) Complete disbandment of Sikh empire. (iv) Abrogation of titles of Dalip Singh besides many other harsh penalties. Not agreeing to these harsh terms, Gulab Singh made it clear that the Sikh & the Dogra cavalry was intact to march to Delhi while their forces were entrenched near Lahore. By converting their weakness into his strength, he got the amount reduced to 1.5 Crores and got Maharaja Dalip Singh's titles restored besides many other concessions by the **Treaty of Lahore** signed on **9 March 1846**. ***Governor General conferred the title of His Exalted Highness, The Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir upon Raja Gulab Singh on 15 March 1846 with entitlement of 21 Gun Salute.***

Lahore Darbar offered the Principalities of Chamba and those West of Ravi & East of Indus River which were under their rule to the British empire in lieu of war indemnity. Britishers found these areas indefensible being far flung & inhospitable. Britishers negotiated these areas with Maharaja Gulab Singh. On **16 March 1846** Governor General separately concluded the **Treaty of Amritsar** with him under which all hilly territories situated Eastwards of Indus and Westwards of Ravi including Chamba were given to him. Maharaja paid Rs.75 Lac against Darbar's war indemnity for these Principalities. After this treaty, Kashmir came under him along with its dependencies of Gilgit, Indus valley and Chilas. In 1847 Rulers of Rajouri, Bhimber, Poonch, Jasrota, Ramnagar, Basohli & Kishtwar were given pension and retired. Thus came into existence the vast state of Jammu & Kashmir under the direct rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh. He died on 30 August 1858. Magnificent **statue of His Highness** in front of **Amar Mahal Museum** Jammu speaks volumes of his wisdom, sagacity and achievements.

The **greatness of Maharaja** lay in his superb statesmanship coupled with deep foresight that enabled him to use every opportunity to the best of its advantage when that knocked at his door. He thus gave India a state of composite religions and cultures of

three distinct regions ie, Ladakh, Kashmir and Jammu, interdependent on each other for their socio-economic growth. The unity of J&K is a source of secular strength of India.