

The Victory of Kangra Fort By Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Abstract

Maharaja Ranjit was the great ruler of the Punjab in the 19th century. He expanded his reign in all the surrounding area. He expanded his state in the plains comfortably, but in the hill area the things were different. There were many petty chiefs in these regions, who has their own ambitions to expand. The more important of them were the chief of Kangra, Mandi, Kulu and Jammu. The fort of Kangra was very old and important. It was built by the royal Rajput family of Kangra state. In 1809 A.D. Sansar Chand, ruler of Kangra, appealed to Ranjit Singh for help against Gorkha chief, Amar Singh Thapa. Ranit Singh's army defeated the Thapa's army and as per agreement with Sansar Chand he took the possession of fort. The victory of Kangra was an important milestone in Ranjit Singh's life.

Keywords: Kangra, Durranis, Misaldar Nazrana, Durbar, Gorkhas, Wazir, British.

Introduction

Ranjit Singh expanded his state in the plains comfortable within his supremacy. But in the hill region, the things were different. There were many petty chiefs in these regions, who has their own ambitions to expand. The more important of them were the chief of Kangra Mandi, Kulu, Basoli, Chamba, Nurpur and Jammu.

After the decline of Durranis in the Punjab plains, the Kangra hill states came under the influence of the Sikhs Misaldars, particularly Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and later Jai Singh Kanhiya, who controlled Kot Kangra by 1783 A.D.. Later on the territories of Sada Kaur occupied by Sansar Chand were restored to her with help of Ranjit Singh. In 1809 A.D.. Ranjit Singh got full control of Kangra fort.

Aims of the Study

1. To study the expansion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign.
2. To study the background of Kangra fort in the hill area.
3. To study how Ranjit did Singh defeat the Gorkha Chief, Amar Singh Thapa.
4. To study how did Ranjit Singh win the fort of Kangra.
5. To study the relation of Sada kaur and Kangra state.

Historical Background of Kangra Fort

The Kangra fort was built by the royal Rajput family of Kangra state, which traces its origins to the ancient Trigarta Kingdom, mentioned in the Mahabharata epic.

The fort of Kangra resisted Akbar's siege in 1615 A.D. However Jahangir successfully subdued the fort in 1620 A.D..¹ Kangra was at the time ruled by Raja Hari Chand Katoch, Mughal emperor Jahangir with the help of Suraj Mal garrisoned with his troops.² The Katoch kings repeatedly looted Mughal controlled regions, weaking the Mughal control, aiding in the decline of Mughal power, Raja Sansar Chand II succeeded in recovering the ancient fort of his ancistors, in 1789 A.D..

Sada Kaur and Kangra State

Ranjit Singh directed his attention towards Kangra, where Sada Kaur, mother-in-law of Ranjit Singh, was fighting unsuccessfully against the Raja Nurpur and Sansar Chand of Kangra. According to Sinha,³ " In the hill country Sansar Chand of Kangra was pursuing a policy similar to that which Ranjit Singh adopted in the plains and the two, therefore, came to an inevitable collision."

Some of the territories of Sada Kaur had been usurped by Sansar Chand of Kangra. He was planning to further penetrate into Sada Kaur's territories. She informed Ranjit Singh of Sansar Chand's designs. Ranjit Singh led an army into Kangra. Sansar Chand ran away for his life. The territories of Sada Kaur occupied by Sansar Chand were restored to her.⁴



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Sansar Chand coveted the fertile plains at the foot of the hills, Hosiarpur and Bijwara with ambitions to extend his influence in the Jalandhar Doab. But soon he was expelled from Hosiarpur and Bijwara by Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh also computed some hill area of Sansar Chand and returned to Lahore.⁵

Sansar Chand's Help by Ranjit Singh

In 1805 A.D. Amar Singh Thapa, the Gorkha Commander, surrounded the fort of Kangra. The first encounter took place at Mahal-Mori where Sansar Chand made brave stand but was defeated. Sansar Chand was forced to make an appeal to Ranjit Singh for help. Amar Singh Thapa also sends his amabassador to Ranjit Singh for help. But Ranjit Singh accepted Sansar Chand's appeal. Ranjit Singh's troops reached at the holly palace Jawalamukhi. With the fear of Ranjit Singh's army Gorkha left the fort of Kangra and ran away in Mandi. Sansar Chand presented Shahi *Nazrana* to Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh ordered Fateh Singh Kaliyawala to stay at Bijwara to see, the Gorkhas activities, and went to Lahore.⁶

Sansar Chand's Appeal to Ranjit Singh

In 1809 A.D. Ranjit Singh went against Kangra, on account of Gorkha chief, Amar Singh Thapa having attacked Sansar Chand. The latter had made an able offence for the space of four years, but a lenth, he determined to give up this strong fort to Ranjit Singh, and sent a Vakil to Ranjit Singh with offer of it, provided Ranjit Singh would drive the Gorkhas out of his country.⁷

According to Khuswant Singh,⁸ "Sansar Chand appealed both to the English and Ranjit Singh for help. To counteract Sansar Chand's move, the Gorkhas also asked the British to help them conquer Kangra and offered tribute to Ranjit Singh if he would stay away. The British turned down the Gorkhas request and the Rajput plea... Sansar Chand's request was favorably received, but it was considered necessary that Kangra should first declared itself a part of the Punjab and surrender the fort to *Durbar's* troops. Sansar Chand, who had been fighting a losing battle against the Gorkhas, agreed to the *Durbar* terms."

Ranjit Singh took a large army with him and was accompanied by Sada Kaur. He took the road by Batala and Jawalamukhi and at the later palace collected all his sardars, and made them take an oath that they would support him in the war which he was about to wage against the Gorkhas.⁹

A fierce engagement took place between the Sikhs and Amar Singh Thapa's troops and it was computed, that at least 1000 fell on each side. 'The *Durbar* ordered the hill chief of Kangra region to stop selling provisions to the Gorkhas and is troops. The Gorkhas unable to face the Sikhs forces abandoned the siege of fort in despair and paid a *Nazrana* to the victor.¹⁰

Possession of Fort

For the fulfillment of the agreement with Sansar Chand, his son was sent as a hostage, but after the departure of the Gorkhas Sansar Chand refused to deliver up Kangra.¹¹ Ranjit Singh then said to Sansar Chand, "If you value the safety of Anirudh

Chand (his son), you must go in person to the fort and order its surrender, otherwise Anirudh Chand will pay the price." Sansar Chand and Ranjit Singh then mounted on elephant proceeded to the fort where they received a message from Naurang that Sansar Chand should enter alone. Sansar Chand took the *Wazir* by hand and led him out of the fort, and Ranjit Singh with a few of his officers entered the fort and took its possession.¹² To Sansar Chand he gave a written undertaking, ensuring to him the possession of the state, except the portions attached to the fort since Mughal times, consisting of 66 villages in the Kangra valley.¹³

He sought the protection of the British government and declared his attachment to it and was ready with a body of 10-12 thousand men to devote him to its cause. Sansar Chand stated, "My object is getting my former possession of justice felt in my hands. I am continuously putting up my prayers that auspicious day may arrive when I shall be favored with an interview which will be a source to me of temporal and eternal happiness"¹⁴

Celebration of Victory

Desa Singh Majithea was appointed commandant of Kangra when the news spread among the hill states, that Ranjit Singh was in the possessions of a fort, hither to considered by them impregnable, they readily yielded allegiance through which he passed on his way homewards were decorated to welcome him. The Golden Temple was illuminated in his honour. Ranjit Singh rode through the brightly lit streets on the back of his biggest elephant and showered silver coins on the public.¹⁵

The victory at Kangra was an important milestone in Ranjit Singh's life. Ten years earlier, when he had become Ranjit Singh of the Punjab, there was a cordon of hostile powers girdling his kingdom? Now he had one powerful neighbour, the British and they both were friendly.

Conclusion

Ranjit Singh expanded his state in the plains comfortable with his supremacy. But in the hill regions, the things were different. The fort of Kangra was very old and important. It was built by the royal Rajput family of Kangra state. This fort was also subdued by Jahangir in 1615 A.D. In 1789 A.D., it was under the control of Raja Sansar Chand. In 1809 A.D. Sansar Chand appealed to Ranjit Singh for help against Gorkha Chief, Amar Singh Thapa. Ranjit Singh's army defeated the Thapa's army. Thapa abandoned the siege of fort. As per agreement between Ranjit Singh and Sansar Chand, Ranjit Singh took the possession of fort. The Golden Temple was illuminated on this victory. The victory at Kangra was an important milestone in Ranjit Singh's life.

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