

War Tactics and Military Strategy of Sikh Misals

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Abstract:

The paper is an attempt to highlight the war tactics and military strategy of Sikh Misals. The paper is based on primary Sources like, Rattan Singh Bhangu's Prachin Panth Parkash, Francklin's The Military memoirs of George Thomas and Ahamad Shah, Tarikha -i- Hind, Qazi Nur Mohammad's Jhang Nama.

Keywords: Sikh Misals, Guerilla War Strategy, DhaiPhat, War Tactics, Mughals.

Aims and Objectives:

1. The research paper highlight the organisation of sikhs after the decline of Banda Singh Bahadur.
2. To highlight the various war tactics and military strategy of the Sikh Misals.
3. The paper explore the guerilla war strategy of Sikh misals which was very helpful during the dark period.
4. The paper explain the role of Sikh leaders against the Mughal's and Afghan's.
5. To explain the cruel actions of Mughal and Afghan's against Sikhs.

After the decline of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716, the Sikhs had not any common leader who lead them. The Sikhs were established 12 jathas, called Misals. So the province partition into twelve independent states under the Sikh rulers and the only bond of union among them was a common faith, when they presented the solid front to the enemy. Otherwise these states were quite independent one another.ⁱ These misals were used different strategy and tactics against the enemy and successfully defend the Afghans and Mughals.

The Sikh method of attacking the enemy was that a party of horsemen gallops fast toward the enemy and then draws up the horses, discharge the volley of fire upon the enemy and then withdraw. Then they reloaded their guns and repeated the same process. This caused casualties and annoyance the enemy. They used the skirmishing tactics with rapidity and on each occasion a fresh wave of troops took the place of tired ones. Horses were also replaced and both man and animal returned to fight refreshed.ⁱⁱ

The Sikh Misals were mainly used the Guerilla war strategy. Guerilla Warfare is generally defined as "Irregular Warfare Waged by independent bands of armed civilians" Among most military and official Guerilla circles; it is described as "a form of warfare by which the strategically weaker side assumes the tactical offensive in selected forms, times and places".ⁱⁱⁱ The word Guerilla is a diminutive of Guerra, the Spanish word for little war.^{iv} The Sikhs had another tactic of Guerrilla Warfare in which their operation comprised Hit and Run called a DhaiPhat. Rattan Singh Bhangu describes this mode of warfare as: "The wise and the experienced were of the opinion that in battle

there are two and half movements. Rushing on the enemy and retreating make two and to strike is the half. The Guru has taught us to run away and to come back again to fight. This is a great tactic. The Guru himself adopted these and in it there is no dishonor".^v

The greatest military development was the evolution of the Guerilla mode of fighting under the Sikhs. Form their experience of nearly half a century of a life and death struggle against the superior power of Mughals and Afghans the Sikhs fully realized the necessity of an underground or irregular mode of fighting. The Guerilla fighting by the Sikhs grew up spontaneously under the pressure of circumstances as no other alternative was left to them. We may enumerate several factors which explain the popularity and growth of this form of fighting. The first was the failure of Banda Singh and his having been made captive and ultimately his brutal execution at Delhi. The Sikhs could not ignore the lesson which they learnt after paying very heavy price. Banda Singh had succeeded in giving a jolt, though serious at times, to the Mughal Empire. But it was felt that in opens and pitched warfare the Sikhs were no match for the Imperialists rulers.^{vi}

Another factor was the Sikhs' deficiency in artillery that affected their capability for regular warfare. The Mughals against whom the Sikhs were pitted had effective artillery or an impressive park of cannon. Thirdly, Zakariya khan's policy of alternating persecution and relaxation drove them out of their habitations in to jungles and hills. The official machinery, particularly the moving columns made the life of the Sikhs utterly miserable and made them resort to guerilla methods of fighting and in view of their handicap of resources and numerical strength they had no other alternative. The Guerilla warfare by the Sikh Misals had proved effective on more than one occasion. Lastly, the death of Banda Singh left the Sikhs leaderless and without any central body which could organize and guide them in the face of the serious situation confronting them. This resulted in leaving the Sikhs to their own resources, which inevitably resorted to irregular methods of fighting.^{vii}

Form 1716 to 1724, there was not much of Sikhs were reeling under the terrible blows suffered by them by the mass are of their men at Delhi. They took some time to recover from the shock and to make up their loss. About the late twenties of the eighteenth century the Sikhs again began meet the threat of their liquidation by the government they employed the Guerilla Strategy to impede every foreign invasion by cutting off their supplies, harassing their army both in camp and on march, plundering their baggage, hovering round the troops, pursuing them at the time of their retreat, raiding their flanks rear and vanguards, making attacks on their foraging parties, falling up on their detachments , also blocking their passage of roads and rivers.^{viii}

The year 1724, however was hardly over when they began to make their appearance again in the plains of the Punjab. The formed themselves in to small bands and began their old tactics of harassing the Government by their plundering expeditions and Guerilla warfare.^{ix} AbdusSamad Khan was transferred to Multan in 1726, and his more energetic Son, Zakaria Khan, also known as Khan Bahadur,^x was appointed to take his place as the governor of Lahore. In 1726, Tarra Singh of Wan, a renowned Sikh leader, and his 26 men was killed after Governor Zakaria Khan, sent 2200horses, 40 zamburak, 5 elephant, and 4 cannons, under the command of his deputy, Momim Khan.^{xi} The murder of Tarra Singh spread across the Sikhs in Punjab. Finding no Sikhs around, the government falsely announced in each village with the beat of a drum, that all Sikhs had been eliminated but the common

people knew the truth that this was not the case.^{xii} The Sikhs did not face the army directly, because of their small numbers, but adopted dhaiphut guerrilla warfare (hit and run) tactics.

Under the leadership of Nawab Kapoor Singh and Jathedar Darbara Singh, in attempt to weaken their enemy looted many of the Mughals caravans and supplies and for some years no money from revenue could reach the government treasury.^{xiii} When the forces of government tried to punish the outlaws, they were unable to contact them, as the Sikhs did not live in houses or forts, but ran away to their rendezvous in forests or other places difficult to access.

The Sikhs accepted the offer of peace, the title of Nawab was conferred upon Kapur Singh, and the hostilities ceased, but hostile feelings persisted. The Governor, suspicious of the Sikhs, started reorganizing and re-equipping his army, while Kapur Singh organized the scattered bands of Sikhs in to Dal Khalsa (The army of the khalsa), and further divided it in to two armies, Budha Dal and Taruna Dal. These two armies, 'the Army of the veterans' and 'the army of the youngsters' were further subdivided into smaller units and put through their first course of regular training. The peace, which was actually a truce, was obviously not destined to last long.^{xiv}

Between 1734 and 1738 the forces of the Punjab Governor, and the Sikhs bands kept on fighting skirmishes the way they had fought earlier. But before one could defeat the other, a third party walked in. Nadir Shah, who had recently risen to power in Persia, invaded India in early 1739. He defeated the provincial forces of Zakirya Khan and obliged them to follow him in his train to the battlefield of Karnal where, in turn, he defeated the emperor of India.^{xv}

The Sikhs made their attacks on the Nadir's rear on a dark night when it was heavily raining, on the bank of the Chenab before Nadir crossed it. And these attacks continued to be made on every second or third night, from different directions, till Nadir left the Indian soil.^{xvi} At Lahore Nadir Shah is reported to have asked Zakirya Khan as to who were those 'long haired barbarians' who had dared to molest him. He further ordered him to destroy their homes and hearths. Zakirya Khan's reply highlights the Guerilla character of the Sikh struggle. 'Their homes,' replied Zakirya Khan, "are the saddles of their horse. These people have no fixed place of residence. They avoid populated areas and live entirely in jungles. They lead on extremely hard life and know not the taste of salt and butter. They live off the land on jungle berries and coarse grain. They were such hardies that they can go without water a whole summer day and can spend winter nights in open without even burning a spark of fire." "If that be so," Prophesied Nadir Shah, "These people ought to be put down, otherwise they will take possession of your country".^{xvii}

It was not always that Sikh that the Sikhs used guerilla methods of fighting. In 1762 they were faced with a very difficult situation when surrounded by Afghan force near Malerkotla. The Sikhs were accompanied by their families. They made a solid cordon of defence around their families and moved on fighting from village to village. But because of overwhelming strength of Afghans the cordon was at last broken by invaders and wholesale massacre ensued resulting in the murder of about ten thousand Sikhs. It is called Wada Ghallughara or big holocaust. This is an example of Sikhs fighting a battle in defence.^{xviii}

Sometime they adopted a regular formation for a pitched battle. During the seventh invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1765, in the battle of Sulej the Sikhs had well arranged army of their own.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia commanded the centre; the right was lead by Charhat Singh Sukarchakia, Jhanda Singh Bhangi and Jai Singh Kanaihya and the left was under the command of Hari Singh, Gulab Singh and Gujjar Singh Bhangi.^{xix}

Conclusion:

On the basis of all historical facts, we can say that the Sikh Misals mode of Warfare was very significant war Strategy for Sikhs. The defeat of Banda and destruction of his army (1716 A.D) were followed by a period of persecution which for the time being proved most disastrous to the Sikhs. Hundreds of Sikhs fell victim's everyday to the bigotry and fanaticism of the Mughal ruler and thousands, merely for the sake of booty cut their hair, shaved their breads and joined the Hindu flock again. After that, the Sikh Misals were Adopted deferent war Strategy during very difficult period when they had not any strong leader. With the help war strategies Sikhs were successfully defend the Mughal and foreign invasions of Afghan. They were failed the brutal policies of the governors of the Punjab and rise as a very strong power in Punjab. With the use of efficient war tactics and strategy, Sikhs were looted the Nadar shah in 1739, when he was come back his country after expedition of India. So we can say that the Sikh Misals mode of warfare was very supportive for the existence of Sikhs during the darkest period.

ⁱ Gokul Chand Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, Gujral Art Press, New Delhi, 1962, p. 145

ⁱⁱ B. N. Majumdar, *Military System of the Sikhs*, Army Educational Store, New Delhi, 1965, p. 36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel P. Huntington, *Modren Guerilla Warfare*, Free press of Glencoe, 1962, P. 16.

^{iv} Arjan Das Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War: The Sikh People War 1699-1768*, Willy Eastren Limited, New Delhi, 1975, P. 2.

^v Rattan Singh Bhangu, *PrachinPanthPrakash*, Wazir Hind Press, 1939, P. 130.

^{vi} Franklin, *The Military Memories of the George Thomas*, Harkaro Press, Calcutta, 1803, P. 71-72.

^{vii} Bhagat Singh, *A History of the Sikh Misls*, Punjabi University Patiala, 1993, P. 436.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, P. 436.

^{ix} G. C. Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, New Book Society of India, New Delhi, 1960, P. 116.

^x Teja Singh, *A Short history of the Sikhs 1469-1765*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, P. 113.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, P. 115.

^{xii} Gurbaksh Singh, *TheKhalsa Generals*, The Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society, 1927, P. 15.

^{xiii} Teja Singh, *A Short history of the Sikhs 1469-1765*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, P. 116.

^{xiv} Arjan Das Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War: The Sikh People War 1699-1768*, Willy Eastren Limited, New Delhi, 1975, P. 41.

^{xv} Bhagat Singh, *A History of the Sikh Misls*, Punjabi University Patiala, 1993, P. 428.

^{xvi} G. S Chabra, *Advanced History of the Punjab*, New Acadamic Publishing Co. Jalandhar, 1968, p. 367.

^{xvii} Ahmad Shah, *Tarikh-i-Hind*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969, p. 35.

^{xviii} Bhagat Singh, *A History of the Sikh Misls*, Punjabi University Patiala, 1993, P. 439-440.

^{xix} QaziNurMuhamad, *Jang Nama (1764-1765)*, Edited Ganda Singh, Amritsar, 1939, pp. 50-51.