

CONTRIBUTION OF SIKH MISLS IN GREAT SIKH HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Misl is an Arabic word that means same or similar. Its prime trait was that they did not believe in prejudice but believe in equality for everyone and bound together by the bonds of common faith in Sikhism. They did not fear death, nor did they have any appetite for earthly pleasures. They were very strict and were routine in their religious duties of Bana and Bani. It is definitely a great tribute to those Sikhs that facing extremely unjust and deceitful treatment from Mughals and Afghans but they displayed such high character, moral and ethical values.

KEYWORDS: *Twelve Misls, Progress, Nature, Ethics, The Story of the Sikhs' Deeds Opens Up the Great Difference Between Head and Heart Between Knowledge and Action, Between Saying and Doing, Between Words and Works and Between A Dead and a Living Faith¹*

INTRODUCTION

Misl is an Arabic term that means similar or the same. Misl's primary trait was that they did not believe in prejudice. They believe in equality for everyone, according to the Sikh Faith.

In compliance with the shift in circumstances, the Sikh Misls were gradually set up. The violence against the Sikhs started to be carried out after the death of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 AD. Abdus Samad Khan, Zakriya Khan and Yahiya Khan, the Mughal rulers of Punjab, committed atrocities against the Sikhs. The Sikh took refuge in the hills and jungles, fed up with these cruelties, to save their lives. The Sikhs, or Jathas, formed small groups. Whenever they got a chance, these groups invaded the Mughal armies and looted the government treasury and other items. In 1734 AD, Buddha Dal and Taruna Dal formed groups with the aim of organizing the Sikh force under Nawab Kapur Singh. Each community had a leader of its own, a Nagara, and a flag, but they ate together.

The rule of the Sikh misls was just and impartial with full freedom to worship and of religion. There is not a single instance of any forcible conversion to Sikh religion. Everyone had full protection in all respects.²

Progress: After the death of Zakriya Khan, the Sikhs organized twenty-five Jathas in 1745 AD. Gradually these Jathas rose to sixty-five. With the rise of massacres committed by the Mughals against the Sikhs and the invasions by Ahmad Shah Abdali. The need for greater unity amongst the Sikhs was realized by Nawab Kapur Singh. A large congregation of Sikhs was held on the occasion of Diwali in Akal Takhat Amritsar in 1748. They unanimously took two decisions that had far-reaching consequences and helped their struggle to uproot Mughal rule in a meticulous way and instead establish their own Sikh rule.

The first was to appoint Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as the supreme leader of Sikhs so as to unite all Sikh leaders under one command and discipline, though all decisions were to be taken after all due deliberations amongst all Sikh leaders at Akal Takht and were to be acted upon by all Sikhs. The Second was to form the Sikh confederacies (misls) headed by one leader- Jathedar.

Under their Jathedar, all the Sikh warriors of each jatha were to operate. The reports of the progress of each jatha of the struggle was to be regularly sent to Akal Takht so that the position and progress of the struggle could be asserted and unified.

Each confederacy was to occupy the territories of the area under its command and not to surrender it. They were to keep the conquered territories under their administration in future and were to punish those guilty of atrocities. All The leaders of the confederacies misls were to meet regularly to review the progress of the struggle.

The Confederacies main aim was to conquer the Punjab territories from the Mughal occupation to establish the Sikh rule and to preach Sikhism.³

Nature of Sikh Misl: It's very difficult to determine the nature of the organization of Misls because all the time, it was never same, secondly various factors like- socio-political, religions blended together its collection. Even Historical factors played an important role in re- shaping or remolding the organizations of Sikh Misl.

Views of Different Historians Regarding the Nature of Sikh Misls

According to Historian Cunningham, "Their system resolved itself into a theocratic confederate feudalism."

According to N.K. Sinha, "The individuals joined the ranks of a chief or a sardar, whom they considered deserving of their leadership on grounds of valour, experience, wealth and birth. The booty was divided in proportion to the contribution of each group of horsemen, of course the chief's position being first divided off. These was again further sub-division among the individuals composing each group. Each held his portion in absolute independence. There was no obligation except for common purposes."

According to A.C. Bannerjee, "The main characteristics of Sikh Confederacy was its stress on equality. All were equal in status-religiously, politically or socially and enjoyed full freedom and equality, although they had to fight under their leader during a war. Besides this, these misls were bound together by the bonds of common faith."

Twelve Sikh Misls

Faizalpuria Misl: The first misl to be created was Faizalpuria Misl. Nawab Kapur Singh was the founder of this misl who occupy the Faizalpur village near Amritsar. Later on, he named this area Singhpur. So, this misl is also known as Singhpuria misl. After the death of Nawab Kapur Singh, his nephew Khushal Singh became the leader. Khushal Singh was very brave and worthy chief and he expended his misl to Nurpur, Jalandhar, Behrampur and Patti. After his death Ranjit Singh defeated his son Budh Singh and annexed his misl to his own empire.

Ahluwalia Misl: During the reign of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, this misl was very powerful. He was the ruler of the cities – Kapurthala, Sultanpur Lodhi, Hoshiarpur, Nur Mahal.

Bhag was the next leader after Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Then Fateh Singh Ahluwalia was the successor of Bhag Singh. Ranjit Singh acted wisely and established friendly relations with him. Ranjit Singh used his power and services for the expansion of his own empire.

Ramgarhia Misl: This was one of the famous misl of Punjab. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was the most powerful sardar of His misl. Batala, Qadian, Sri Hargobindpur, Kalanaur and Riarki were under this misl. When Ranjit Singh came to power, Jassa Singh had grown old. After him, Jodh Singh was also a brave warrior and capable leader. Taking into account his strong position, Ranjit Singh formed friendly relations with him as long as Jodh Singh was alive, Ranjit Singh did not clash with him.

Bhangi Misl: It was located in the northwest part of the Sutlej River. The major towns of Misl were Lahore, Saikot, Amritsar and Gujrat. In that area, it was the strongest misl. But later in time, it did not remain as solid. Since Sardar Gulab Singh and Sardar Sahib Singh were not involved in the misls' administration and spent the bulk of their time drinking and drugging. They were also fed up with even people of that misl.

Sukarchakia Misl: The chief of Sukarchakia Misl was Charat Singh. Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Aminabad, Dadan Khan village, and Jalalabad were occupied by him. Mahan Singh, his son, became his successor after Charat Singh. By conquering Rasul Nagar and gaining Alipur, he enlarged his Misl. Bhangi misl was left by some Bhangi sardars and acknowledged Mahan Singh's suzerainty on being impressed by his conquests. All the Bhangi chiefs from the regions of Multan, Bhatian village, Bahawalpur and Shahiwal were thrown out by Mahan Singh. After Mahan Singh's death in 1742 AD, his son Ranjit Singh became his successor. At that time there were eleven other misls in Punjab. Each misl ruled in its own area. Earlier they resisted the Afghans unitedly. But they were no longer together when the danger of being threatened by Afghans subsided. They all became greedy and selfish. They became busy in extending their own misls. They started fighting with each other. Fortunately, none of the misleaders were powerful at the rise of Ranjit Singh. Either the warriors of influential errors had died or had grown old. No Misaldar had the strength to resist Ranjit Singh at that time.

Kanhaiya Misl: The chief of Kanhaiya Misl was Jai Singh Kanhaiya. He was a resident of the village of Kanaha, located 24 km east of Lahore. The Misl, after the name of that village, was called Kanhaiya. Jai Singh Kanaheya was a courageous and brave warrior to the full. The area of Hazipur, Gurdaspur and Mukerian was under this misl. Jai Singh Kanaheya and his son Gurbax Singh died at the time of Ranjit Singh's rise. Sada Kaur was the Leader of the Misl. during that time. She was a clever and capable woman and mother-in-law of Ranjit Singh. She helped Ranjit Singh in the expansion of his empire.

Dallewala Misl: Gulab Singh was Dallewala Misl's chief. He was a resident of the village of Dallewal, close to Dera Baba Nanak. The Misl, therefore, was called Dallewal Misl. Tara Singh Gheba was the well-known leader of the Misl. Phillour, Nakodar and Rahon regions came under this misl.

Nakai Misl: The founder of Misl was Hira Singh. He captured an area named Naka near Lahore, taking advantage of the disturbances in Punjab caused by Afghan attacks. This misl was then called the Nakai.

Phulkian Misl: Chaudhari Phul (1623-1689 AD) was the chief of Phulkian Misl, who ruled over the regions of Jind, Nabha and Patiala. The Misl, after the name of Phul, was called Phulkian. The chiefs of Phulkian Misl were Sahib Singh at Patiala, Bhag Singh at Jind and Jaswant Singh at Nabha at the time of Ranjit Singh's rise.

Karorsinghia Misl: The founder of this Misl was Karora Singh. This misl was after his name named Karorsinghia. The resident of the village of Panjarhia was Karora Singh. Baghel Singh, the successor of Karora Singh, was the popular chief of the Misl. By conquering Bhunga, Rurka and Nawan Shahar etc., he expanded the region of misl. Many places between the Markanda

and Yamuna rivers were under him. Between Jagadhri and Karnal, he made chalaundi his capital.

Nishanwalia Misl: Sangat Singh and Mohar Singh were the creators of this misl. Nishanwalia misl was called this misl because they used to bear the Khalsa's Nishan Sahib (flag). The regions of Ambala, Markanda and Shahbad were beneath them.

Shahid Misl: The founder of this misl was Sudha Singh. He was a mehanth of Talwandi Sabo. Baba Deep Singh of this Jatha became a martyre while fighting against the enemies. Therefore, this misl was named Shahid Misl after him. Karam Singh and Gurbax Singh of this misl occupied many areas in the east of the Sutlej river. Most of the people of this misl were Nihang. Therefore, this misl was also called Nihang Misl.

Moral and Ethical Values: Sikhs were absolutely devoted to their cause and dedicated to it. They still retained the spirit infused into them by Amrit from the double-edged sword. It was still in their minds that, in their noble cause, they had their Guru's blessing and the protection of Heaven. They did not fear death, nor did they have any appetite for earthly pleasures. In their adherence to the Sikh code of conduct, they were very strict and were routine in their religious duties of Bana and Bani. So, it did not concern them with the difficulties of living.

Readers, have we not witnessed a miracle? The strength waged by the Khalsa was so glorious that any people in any culture would be proud of it.⁴

It was the Sikhs alone who rescued India from the Mughals and Afghans' clutches and secured Indians' fundamental human rights, particularly the fully crushed right to freedom of religion. The Sikhs had to lead a life of suffering and make supreme sacrifices in order to accomplish this. These courageous, dedicated Sikhs wiped out both the evil forces of the Mughals and Afghans without their bold standing and sacrifices. They created an independent sovereign Sikh state, the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in India would not have been where they are today.

Since the Sikhs have been taught to uphold their spiritual and ethical traditions, the unjust and deceitful conduct of the other side is hated by ethics and morals. The Sikhs were highly regarded by their opponents.

Let no one kill a fleeing soldier, nor the one who had surrendered. And no woman's or civilian (arrested) captured in reprisal or booty. We are fighting for a religious cause, our right to live with honor and a piece and not for the sake of self- glory or rule over others.⁵

None of the Sikh warriors misbehaved with any of the defeated enemies or their wives, even after being victorious. Instead, all the women were treated like their mothers or sisters. It is definitely a great tribute to those Sikhs that, facing extremely unjust and deceitful treatment from the other hand, they displayed such high character, moral and ethical values.

The Sikh leaders proved the importance of Guru Go bind Singh's blessings, allowing the Sikhs to wash out the Mughals and Afghans and create their own independent Sikh state. All the Sikh rulers of this age and struggle were real, truthful and committed Sikhs.

We may see some ambitious chiefs, led only his genius and success absorbing the power of his associates display from the ruins of their commonwealth, the standard of monarchy.⁶

In order to provide food to farers as well as to the poor and the needy, the chiefs still maintained their free kitchens and paid particular attention to this part of the operation in the case of a famine. In 1783, S. Budh Singh sold all his property to help the people with grains. So, there were a no. of examples of the geniuses of Sikh leaders in great history.

CONCLUSIONS

Sikh Misls have a significant role as the foundations were laid in Sikh history for the Sikh empire. Misls were historical essentials for survive of panthic organizations. In addition to helping to keep the organizations together, Misls have helped to establish and promote Sikhism. The Misls system has proven to be very helpful in defending the area from foreign invaders.

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