



What contributions have Sikhs made as Soldiers and Warriors?

Sikhs by nature are respectful, courageous, hardworking, and enterprising. Look into their short span of history and you will find their pitcher is full of sacrifices and hard work which has contributed so much towards the building of the Indian nation. If not for them, the course of Indian History would have been very different. Volumes could be written on the contributions made by the Sikhs, who constitute less than 2% of Indian population. Just a few are listed below:

During 17th Century, when India was ruled by Mughals (Muslim Extremists), Hindus, Sikhs, and people from other religions were humiliated and deprived of any right to conduct their religious practices. Mughals treated the Hindu women as their own property and were forcing all Hindus to accept Islam and even used to kill if they refused to accept.

Sikhs have always believed in the right of an individual to practice a religion of his or her own choice and have always fought against tyranny. Jahangir, the fourth Mughal emperor wrote in his memoirs, Tuzak-i-Jahangiri about Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Guru of Sikhs, "For a long time the thought had been presenting itself to me that he should be bought to the fold of Islam". In 1606, when the Guru refused the forceful conversion, he was put to death by boiling in a cauldron and sitting on a hot iron plate.

Guru Har Gobind Ji, the sixth Guru of Sikhs, raised his voice again the oppression by Muslim Extremists and fought against them for years.

During late 1600s, Aurangzeb, the 6th Mughal ruler was a fanatic ruler who desired to convert every Indian to Islam. Tyrannized by Aurangzeb's forceful conversions in 1675, Kashmiri Pandits (Hindu Priests) approached Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the ninth Guru of Sikhs.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji came forward and told the Mughal emperor that if he could succeed in converting him to Islam, all the Hindus would accept the same. But, if he failed to do so, he should stop all of his oppression. The Mughal emperor happily agreed to the challenge and invited Guru Ji to Delhi. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji was tortured for five days, he was made to sit on hot iron plates, and hot oil was poured on his body. He was boiled in hot water and subjected to many more tortures in the hope that he would cave in and accept Islam. Guru Ji however did not even scream once, he was a true devotee of God and had been meditation on God for decades. After extreme tortures when Aurengzeb failed to convert Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji to Islam, he beheaded the Guru in Chandni Chowk, Delhi.

Thus Guru Ji sacrificed his life for the protection of Hindu religion. Can anybody lay down his life and that too for the protection of another religion? This is the reason he is still remembered as "Hind Ki Chaddar", Shield of India. For the sake of whom he had sacrificed his life, none of the them came forward to lift his body, fearing that they would also be assassinated.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji offered to sacrifice his life to protect another religion. This was a unique and unparalleled sacrifice in the records of human history. He laid down his life in defence of religious tolerance, freedom of worship, and freedom of religion. He gave his life for the Hindus' right to wear the sacred thread despite the fact that Sikhs themselves do not believe in these rituals. This was martyrdom for the defence of basic human values.

Watching these incidences, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru of Sikhs made a resolution that he would convert Sikhs to such human beings who would not be able the devotees of God but in order to protect their religion and the right of worship for others they would be warriors as well. Guru Gobind Singh Ji as instructed by God, created Khalsa and fought many battles against Muslim Extremists to protect the freedom of every individual.

For seven centuries, since the invasion of Mahmud Ghazni in the 10th century, many ruthless invaders played havoc with the life of Indians. Recurring defeats had sapped the psychic energy of the Indians so much that they had resigned themselves to their fate. It was Guru Gobind Singh Ji who implanted fearlessness amongst the Sikhs to fight against all odds. He wrote to Aurangzeb saying, "When all means have failed, it is right to pick up the sword".

In the year 1699 he proclaimed, "A Sikh will fight against an army of one hundred and twenty five thousand", as Sikhs were only few thousand in numbers while the Mughals were in millions. He set himself against oppression and intolerance. He did not fight against any territory or worldly power, or against any religion or sect. He fought for the basic human rights.

In addition to the numerous Sikhs who lost their life in defense of the right to freedom, Guru Gobind Singh Ji's two sons were martyred on the battleground, while the other two preferred to be bricked alive than give up their beloved religion Sikhism. In 1709, Guru Gobind Singh Ji left this world with a lifetime of heroic events which changed the History of India.

Bulle Shah, a celebrated Sufi Muslim Saint said, "I neither say of the past, nor of the future, but I talk of the time of Guru Gobind Singh and announce openly that if it was not for him, all Indians would have been circumscribed and converted to foreign culture and religion".

In 1710, Banda Singh Bahadur was the first Indian to re-establish Indian rule after seven centuries of foreign rule in India. He fought fierce battles with the forces of Aurangzeb, although this was short lived.

Between 1713 and 1801 the Sikhs were homeless and living as Guerillas, demonstrating heroic acts of courage at every possible instance. The tyrant rulers had put a reward of Rs. 25 for every Sikh head and Rs. 100 for every Sikh caught alive. The money is compared to hundred thousand US dollars of today. Those caught alive were cut to pieces. Many new vocabularies originated,

such as 12 o' clock warriors, Sikh who fought at midnight to use the darkness to their advantage.

In 1738 Nadir Shah, the Persian ruler invaded India from Kabul, Afghanistan and went on a rampage to Delhi. He was returning to Persia in summer of 1739 while carrying a huge booty of looted wealth, Kohinoor diamond, women, artisans and slaves. To avoid the summer heat, the convoy would rest during the day and travel at night. At the peak of the day heat at 12 noon and at 12'0 clock midnight, the Sikh guerillas started attacking his convoy right from Punjab up to the Indus. They freed many women, artisans, slaves and deprived him of large amount of wealth. The women were escorted back to Delhi by the Sikhs. It was a heroic act, which no one else dared, of fighting against the might of Nadir Shah by a handful of Sikhs and freeing the women. The Sikhs started getting recognized as people who go mad at 12 o' clock and therefore the 12 o' clock jokes of nowadays originated. When Nadir Shah asked Zakhariya Khan "who are these warriors and where they live", Zakhariya replied, "They are the followers of Guru Nanak and live on their horses".

After the return of Nadir Shah to Persia, Zakhariya Khan went on a rampage against the Sikh movement and killed 10,000 of them in a short span of time.

Between 1748 & 1765, Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ruler from Afghanistan rampaged India nine times. Again, the Sikhs attacked his returning convoys during the peak summer heat and midnight. Sikhs freed hundreds of women and escorted them back to their homes. These acts of Sikhs aggravated Ahmed Shah Abdali, who swore to take revenge at an appropriate time. During his sixth invasion, he caught the Sikhs by surprise and killed 25,000 Sikhs in a short time. However, the spirit of the Sikhs remained high.

Finally, Sikhs under Ranjit Singh, in 1798 bought an end to the 800 years of foreign invasions into India through Khyber pass, by bringing it under their control. This was the best gift Sikhs gave to the nation which finally allowed the rest of India to breathe in peace. Hari Singh Nalwa, who manned the Khyber pass for years became a name of threat in Afghanistan. Ranjit Singh brought the world famous Kohinoor diamond back to India, which was looted by Nadir Shah earlier.

If it was not for the Sikhs, who brought back Kashmir in 1819, today Kashmir would have been a part of Afghanistan. Ladakh owes its existence on the map of India to Zorawar Singh, who brought the region back to India in 1836.

The Battle of Saragarhi was fought on 12 September 1897 at the North West province of India between twenty-one Sikhs of the 4th Battalion of the Sikh Regiment defending an army post against 10,000 Afghans. All 21 Sikhs fought till the last bullet had been fired against the Afghan army. Twenty one Sikh soldiers then charged with their Kirpans to be eventually cut down to pieces. The easier way out would have been to surrender but the spirit of Sikhs has always made them do what Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru had said, "Grant me this wish, O Sword. I may never fear to stand up for righteousness. I may not fear when I go to war. If my defeat is definitive, I may die fighting in the battlefield for the sake of righteousness".

With an end to Mughal invasions from Afghanistan, British invasion from the south initiated. Sikhs were the last to surrender to the British in the Indian sub-continent and were the first to raise arms against them.

After two bloody Anglo-Sikh wars did British manage to take over Punjab as the last kingdom on the map of British-India Empire. It is an irony of fate that the Sikhs had to fight against their own countrymen as British forces employed Indians from the south to invade Punjab. It was not due to lack of soldiers' courage or conviction that the wars against British were lost, but a treachery by Gulab, a minister under Ranjit Singh, who joined hands with the British in exchange for the title of Kashmir upon winning the war.

Despite the loss of empire to British, the spirit of freedom amongst Sikhs was soaring high. Whereas the British would daily fire a canon at 12 noon by the East India Co. time, the Sikhs on the other hand refused to recognize the British time. There is one and a half hour time difference between Calcutta and Punjab time and therefore the Sikhs maintained their firing of the Canon at 12 noon Punjab time. Amongst the general public there was confusion as to which canon denoted the 12 noon. Therefore at the fire of the first canon the public would say "12 o' clock of British" and on the second fire, an hour and a half later, they would say "12 o' clock of Sikhs." Soon the spirit of defiance and freedom was forgotten by fellow Indians and they

started linking the heroism demonstrated by Sikhs during Nadir Shah and Abdalis invasions at 12 noon to the act of defiance during British period and again started the 12 o' clock jokes.

Much before 1919, when Mahatma Gandhi issued the call for satyagraha (boycotting English goods), the Sikhs under Baba Ram Singh had started the boycott movement in 1863. Eighty two Sikhs were tied to canons & blown apart by British. Sikhs were the only Indian community to be internationally acclaimed as early as 1897 for their heroism and courage.

On April 13, 1919, the British conducted Jallianwala Bagh massacre, which consisted of killing 1300 unarmed Indians mostly Sikhs in a single day. Thousands of unarmed, innocent & peaceful Indians had assembled in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar to register a peaceful protest against British colonial rule when General Michael O' Dwyer came with his troops and opened fire on the unarmed civilians.

The first battle for freedom from British was won by Sikhs, when after loss of many lives in 1929 they were able to take over the charge of their shrines from British. On this victory Mahatma Gandhi sent a telegram writing, "The first decisive battle of independence of India won - congratulations".

Bhagat Singh while studying in Berkeley University in California went back to Punjab to fight against the British army and was hanged in 1913 while fighting for freedom.

Udham Singh in 1940 went to London and shot General Michael O' Dwyer at a public meeting as a revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Udham Singh did not flee, surrendered himself, and was later executed.

Even though Sikhs were 2% of the population of India, out of 42,000 recruits in the Indian National Army under the command of Subhash Chandra Bose, 28,000 soldiers, contributing 67% were Sikhs.

Following is the contribution of Sikhs who are less than 2% of the population of India in the freedom struggle against the British:

Punished	Total	Sikhs	% of Sikhs
Hanged by British	121	93	77%
Life Imprisonment	2646	2147	81%

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre	1300	799	62%
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Book source: "History of Indian National Congress"

Partition of India in 1947 brought innumerable death to Sikhs and was one of the greatest disaster known in the Indian history. Surely the Sikhs paid the heaviest price for the freedom of the country.

Punjab lost its most fertile part to Pakistan during the partition. However, today due to hard labor of Sikh farmers, the Punjab in India produces much higher quantities of food grain than the fertile Punjab in Pakistan. Punjab contributes 40% of rice and 51% of wheat into the central pool of food grains in India.

Sikhs were the first to rise and fight invasions by Pakistan in 1960s and 1970s. Pakistan's invasion lead to full force wars between Indian and Pakistan. Again Sikh, this time joining hands with Hindus contributed and laid their lives down to protect the borders and freedom of India. Pakistan lost all the wars.

Contribution of Sikhs towards the Indian Defense Services is the highest with respect to their 2% population size. This community has also won the maximum number of gallantry awards since independence - 5 Param Vir Chakras (PVCs), 40 Maha Vir Chakras (MVCs), 209 Vir Chakras (VrCs).

Today Sikhs are still 2% of the population of Indian but 20% of Indian Military consists of Sikhs. As a part of Indian Military, Sikhs have constantly been fighting Muslim terrorists on the border of Pakistan and India since last India-Pakistan war.