

The Soil Cultivated by Patriotic Blood; Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh

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I. INTRODUCTION

Duggar

Duggar or Dogras i.e. The Dogra clan are the Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group in India and Pakistan being Dogri language speakers spread predominantly in the Jammu region of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state now formed as the Jammu and Kashmir state now formed as the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory besides also the inhabitation of the adjoining areas of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh apart from North-Eastern Pakistan Dogras of Jammu who are understood to have traditionally inhabited in the areas of Shivalik slopes of Lower Himalayas ranging between sacred lakes of Surinsar and Mansar at the initial stage but later spread over the entire Jammu region, the majority of which are in belief of Hinduism though rest in minority the followers of other religious belief by conversion to Islam mostly during sixteenth and seventeenth century.

As the Greek poet Homer said “without a sign his sword, the brave man draws and asks no men but his country’s cause”. The soil of Duggars in Jammu region has fascinated past history about the sagas of bravery, gritting, determination, unimpeachable resolve and feats of warriors, patriotism in upholding the honour of the soil even by sacrifice of their lives very gladly, for which the descending generation feel proud to be Duggar, the descendants of war heroes.

Kashmir

The history of Kashmir is intertwined with history of the broader Indian subcontinent and the surrounding regions comprising Central Asia, South Asia and East Asia. Historically Kashmir is referred to Kashmir Valley being part of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir so came into form after the Amritsar Treaty of 1846 AD i.e. comprising the Jammu region, and Ladakh. Presently, post 1947 located as Jammu Region, Kashmir Region, Ladakh Region and the part of the state measuring 78000 square kilometers under illegal control of Pakistan and about 43000 square kilometers under illegal control of China (Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract)

In the first half of the 1st millennium, the Kashmir region had remained the vital centre of Sanatan (Hinduism) philosophy and later also of Buddhism but in the ninth century, Shivism glorified for five centuries. All that was eclipsed by Islamization in Kashmir taking place during 13th of 15 century, though the foot steps of ancient and medieval period could not be wiped out in toto. In 1339 A.D. Shah Mir the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir gave birth of Shah Mir dynasty and paved a way for the ruling of Muslim manarchs including Mughals who ruled between 1586 AD to 1751 AD, Afghani Durrani Empire between 1747 AD to 1819 Kashmir under Sikhs rule remained between 1819 to 1846 and Dogras rule between 1846 to 1947.

Etymologically, “Kashmir” meant “descicatted land” According to the Hindu literature, entire Kashmir valley was in form of Lake which is drained out by Maharishi Kashayapa by forming outchannle in the Baramulla (Varaha-mula) hills, by establishing the main town still called Kashya-pura which has been identified as Kaspapyros of Hecataeus and Cashmere. All the can be understood for the birth and establishment of Kashmir, Neelmat purana can be a source of knowledge, besides Kalhana’s Rajtarangani, also its supplements authored by Jonaraja (1411-1463 CE) Srivara and Prajyabhata and Suka coming to end with Akbar’s conquest of Kashmir in 1586 CE. The text Ratrangani was translated in Persian by Muslim Scholars such as Nizam-ud-din Farishta and Abdul Fazi. Baharistan-I-Shahi and Haider Malik’s Tarikh-I Kashmir (1621 CE) are the Persian texts of Sultanate period. Kashmir was also effected in 1947 with the tribes aggression and were pushed back by the Indian Army.

Ladakh

Information about the birth of Ladakh is sacred. The earliest layer in the population of Ladakh comprised of Dard who are said be the producers of gold during the ancient period. In the 8th century Ladakh was involved in clash between Tibetan expansion pressing from East and Chinese influence exerted from Central Asia through the Parses. Ladakh of Ladvags meaning “The land of High Passes” has a rich and diverse history. The history of Ladakh can be divided into three period i.e. ancient period (till 10th century AD) the medieval period (10th century to 19 century) and modern period (19th century to till date)

The first groups of the people who settled in Ladakh were Mous and Dars. Mous migrated from present Himachal Pradesh while as Dards cause from present Gilgit. Both these races were Aryans. The present day Gya-Meru Area was first to be settled.

Ladakh bore witness to the struggle between the Tibetan Empire and the Tang Empire of China. Tibetan forces briefly subdued the natives for brief period during 7th and 8th centuries. There is a huge gap of history between 12th century to 17th century.

It was Prince Richan Shah son of King Lhacher Gyalpo who went to Srinagar Kashmir and played active part in power struggle. By converting to Islam he reigned as first Muslim King of Kashmir from, 1320 to 1323 AD.

In 1400 AD, Ladakh became an era of two Kingdoms viz Tagspa BumLde became King of Upper Ladakh while his younger brother Tagspa Bum became the King of Lower Ladakh. Tagspa Bum Lde outlawed animal slaughter and built the Chamba (Maitreya) temple in Leh, While Tagspa Bum built fortress of Tigmogang.

Ladakh is said to had been invaded repeatedly during 15th to 16th century. After hin the Uighurs under Miza Haider repeatedly invaded Ladakh in the first half of 16th century. In the midst of this turmoil the Namgyal Dynasty was founded with its capital at Basgo which untied both Upper and Low Ladakh besides conquered by Zanskar by beating back repeatedly a series of Invasions from Kashmir and kashgar. So the Namgya Kingdom remained at its greatest extent between 1575-1595 AD. The empire lost in 1616 AD. A glorious renaissance was made by Serigge Namgyal by occupying throne in 1616 AD who built 9 storey Leh Palace after conquering West Tibet and Central Tibet. He also built the Hemis monestary.

The Ladakh thereafter had remained under turmoil because of the invasions and bottles Ladakhis-Tibetins and Mangolians and finally came in clutches of Aurangzeb by seaking his help to defeat 5th Dalai Lama Invasion.

In 1947, tribal raders backed by Pakistan came within 10 miles of Leh Town and a local militia force also was brought into fight such tribal forces and had played a pivotal role in getting the area cleared with the help of the Indian forces.

II. THE HISTORY OF GALLANTARY AWARDS

The Heroes of war during the course of period prior to independence were being out of their gallant acts were being specially titled as Rajas, Rai-s, Wazirs and alike by way of granting zagirs or other gift etc. During the British rule the army personnel regarded with their gallant acts and were being honoured with like Victoria Cross and Military Medals etc.

2.1 British India Medals**The Indian Distinguished Service Medal (IDSM)**

It was a military decoration awarded by the British Empire to Indian citizens serving in the Indian Armed Forces and Police. When it was instituted in 1907 AD, it was the second highest award available to the Indians, behind the “Indain Order of Merit,” however eligibility for the Victoria cross was extended to cover all common wealth subjects in 1911, the IDSM became third highest in order of precedence. Some Medals were titled as Distinguished conduct Medal, Distinguished Service Cross (United Kingdom) and Order of British India.

However following the partition of India and subsequent “Independence of India” in 1947 it was decided to discontinue the awards as aforesaid. The Government of India on 26th January 1950 had instituted three gallantary awards namely Param Virchakra, Mahavir Chakra and Virchakra, which were deemed to have effect from 15th August 1947. Apart these, Ashok Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Shaurya Chakra awards also came into being thereafter.

Ashok Charka Class I, Ashok Chakra Class II and Ashok Chakra Class III were instituted by the Government of India on 4th January 1952 which deemed to have effect from 15th August 1947. These awards were renamed as the Ashok Chakra, The Kirtu Chakra, and the Shaurya Chakra. Order of precedence of these awards is the Param Vir Chakra, the Ashok Chakra, the Mahavir Chakra, the Kirti Chakra, the Vir Chakra and the Shaurya Chakra.

2.2 Designer of the Post Independence Medals

Mrs. Savitri Rai Kanolkar

Mrs. Savitri Rai was born on 29th July 1913, Switzerland as “Eve Yvonee Manday de Maros”. She met cadet Vikram Ramji Khanolkar who was Switzerland during a term break from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, United Kingdom (U.K.) They fell in love and married later. Subsequently, she changed her name to Mrs. Savitri Bai Khanolkar.

Mrs. Khanolkar was chosen to design the medals owing to her indepth understanding of Indian culture and her artistic skills. Besides designing the Param Vir Chakra, she designed the major Gallantary Medals for both war and peace, namely Ashok Chakra (AC), Maha Vir Chakra (MVC), Kirti Chakra (KC) Virchakra (Vrc) and Shaurya Chakra (SC) She also designed the General Service Medal-1947 used until 1965. Interestingly, Som Nath Sharma, was posthumously awarded India's first Param Vir Chakra in the battle of Budgam in 1947. Mr. Khanolkar's husband Vikram Ramji Khanolkar rose to the rank of Major General of Indian Army. She passed away on 26th November 1990. Mrs Savitri Rai was the daughter of an Hungarian origin father and Russian Origin mother, who came to India in 1932 and married with Vikram Ramji Khanolkar at Lucknow by adopting Hindu traditions. She became Vegiterian, learnt to Speak Marathi, Hindi and Sanskrit. She also learnt Indian music, dance and painting. She did not like to be called as foreigner but called herself an European with Indian soul, Because of her reading Hindu literature, like Puranas etc. as well as the ancient history, he had gained the status of Scholar and a member among the learned personalities of Hinduism. Impressed with her deep interest and knowledge in Hindu literature, the Adjutant General, Major Hira Lal Atal asked her to help in designing Param Vir Chakra soon after India got her Independence.

She designed the Chakra with design of double Vajra. Thinking of Rishi Dadhichi whose body was voluntarily used for making Indra's Vajra. Param Vir Chakra in cast in Brozen with Ashok Stambh, surrounding by four replicas of Indra's Vajras and flanked by swords in the centre.

She was an active social worker and helped the families of soldiers killed in war and partition refugees. After the death of her husband in 1952, Savitri chose the path of spirituality and spent her later years with the Ram Krishna Math. She left her heavenly abode on 26th November 1990 in New Delhi at the age of 77 after leading exceptional life and leaving her mark in India history especially the Army history of excellance¹.

2.3 Savior of Srinagar, Major Som Nath Sharma Param Vir Chakra

Major Som Nath was born on 31st January 1923, in the family of Military Officer Amar Nath Sharma, a Dogra Brahman in Village Dadh in Kangra District Punjab now Himachal Pradesh and interestingly his sister-in law was the daughter in law of Mrs. Savitri Khanolkar and Maj. General Vikram Ramji Khanolkar. Mrs. Savitri Khanolkar was the person known as the designer of War and Peace Medals of post independence period, the prime of the in was the Param Vir Chakra, the first being awarded to Major Som Nath Sharma posthumously.

Sharma after graduation from Royal Military College, on 22nd February 1942, was commissioned into the 8th Battalion, 19 Hyderabad Regiment of British India Army, which later on after Independence became Indians Army's 4th Battalion Kumao Regiment. He served in Burma during the Arakan Campaign of World war II against Japanese, under the command of K.S. Thimmya, who after wards became the Indian Chief of the Army staff (1957-1964) Throughout his military career he was deeply influenced by his uncle Captain K.D. Vasudiva's gallant acts, who had served in the 8th Battalion, in participating in the Malayan Campaign during which he laid his life while aiding hundred of soldiers under his command to survive from Japanese offensive.

On October 27th, 1947, a batch of troops of Indian Army was deployed to respond the invasion of Pakistan reported into Kashmir valley on October 22, 1947. On October 31st, 1947, 'D' company of 4th Battalion of Kumao Regiment

under the command of Major Som Nath was airlifted to Srinagar. During this time his left hand was in a plaster cast because of injuries sustained previously in the hockey field, but insisted on being with the company in combat the permission was granted².

On November 3 a batch of three companies was deployed in the Budgam area for petrol duties, with an object to check the infiltrators moving towards Srinagar from North. As there was no enemy movement, two of the three companies returned to Srinagar at 2 p.m. However Sharma's 'D' company was ordered to stay until 3 p.m. at 2.30 p.m. a fire on 'D' company came from a local residential house at Budgam but the counterfire for the time being was avoided to save from injuries and killings of innocent civilians. Suddenly a tribal Lushkar (Militiamen called in English) of 700 infiltrators approached Budgam from the direction of Gulmarg. 'D' company was soon surrounded from three sides and sustained heavy casualties from motorfire. Sharma realising the importance to hold into positng in the wake of endangered Srinagar city and the airport, ordered his company to fight bravely and counter the heavy firing of enemy shot in outnumbered i.e. by ration of seven to one, often exposing himself to enemy fire, by running himself (Mr Sharma) from one post to another³.

When heavy casualties adversely affected the company's firing power, Sharma took upon himself the task of distributing ammunition to his men operating with light machine guns. While busy in fighting with the infiltrators, a mortor shell exploded on a pile of ammunition near Sharma⁴. Before he succumbed to injuries he transmitted massage to his brigade's headquarters which reads ;

“The enemies are only 50 yards from us, we are highly out numbered. We are under devastating fire. I shall not withdraw an inch but fight to our last man and our last round.”

By the time a relief company from the 1st Battalion of the Kumaon Regiment reached Budgam, the position held by Sharma's company had been over run. However the 200 casualties suffered by tribal infiltrators cause them to lose the impetus to advance. This bought time for Indian forces to fly Srinagar airfield and block the ingress into Srinagar itself. During the battle, alongwith Sharma one Junior Commission Officer and 20 other ranks of D company were martyred. Sharma's body was recovered three days later in a disfigured and beyond recognition state, but his body was identified by means of leather holster of his pistol and few pages of Bhagwat Gita in his chest pocket.

2.4 Param Vir Chakra

On 21st June 1950, Sharma's award of Param Vir Chakra, for his action on 3rd November 1947 in defending the Srinagar airport was gazette. This was the first time, the honour had been awarded since its in caption, coincidentally, Savitri Khanolkar, the mother in law of his brother was the designer of the Paramvir Chakra⁴.

The official citation reads :

“On 3 November' 1947, Major Som Nath Sharma's company was order on a fighting petrol to Budgam in the Kashmir valley. He reached his objective at first light on 3 November and took up the position South of Budgram at 11 a.m. The enemy estimated at about 500, attacked his company position from three sides. The company bargain to sustain heavy casualties. Finally realizing the gravity of the situation and the direct threat that would result to both the gravity of the situation and the direct threat that would result to both the aerodrome and Srinagar via Hum Hom, Major Som Nath Sharma urged his company to fight the enemy tenaciously. With extreme bravely he kept rushing across the open ground to his action exposing himself to heavy occurrate fire to urge them to hold on. Keeping his nerve, he skillfully directed the fire of his section into the over advancing enemy. He repeatedly expose himself to the full fury of enemy fire and laid out cloth strips to guide our aircraft into their target of full view of the enemy. Realising that casualties had effected the effectiveness of his light automatic, this officer whose left hand was plastered in plaster, personally commenced filling magazines and issuing them to the light machine gunners. A mortor shell landed right in the middle of ammunition resulting in an explosion on landed killed him. Major Sharma's company held on to this position and remnates withdrew only when almost completely surrounded. His inspiring example resulted in the enemy being delayed for six hours, thus gaining time for our reinforcement to get in to position at Hum Hom to stem the tide of enemy advance. His leadership, gallantry and tenacious defence were such that his men were inspired to fight the enemy by seven to one, six hours after this gallant officer had been to killed. He has set an example of courage and

qualities seldom equaled in the history of Indians Army. His last message to the Brigade Headquarters a few moments before he was killed was “the enemy are 50 yards from us, we are heavily outnumbered. We are under devastating fire. I shall not withdraw an inch but will fight to the last man and the last round⁵”

The other casualties so faced by the Indian Army at Budgam alongwith Major Som Nath Sharma were as ;

2.5 Sepoy Dewan Singh Maha Vir Chakra

Sepoy Dewan Singh who was also awarded Maha Vir Chakra while fighting with enemy at Budgam, the Citation there of is read as ;

“On 3 November 1947, at Srinagar in Kashmir during an action against the tribesmen at Badgam, Sepoy Dewan Singh was No. 1 Bren gunner of a platoon. The tribesmen were advancing overwhelming numbers and the odds were such that the platoon commander was ordered to withdraw. The enemy by now had reached very near. On seeing this, Sepoy Dewan Singh picked up his Bren gun and commenced firing from his hip with great accuracy and speed. He was responsible for inflicting at least 15 casualties on the enemy, thereby allowing the other personnel of his platoon to withdraw. While firing at the enemy he was severely wounded in the shoulder but Sepoy Dewan Singh would not leave his Bren gun till he himself was killed. This Sepoy in complete disregard of his own life and through his example of determined and heroic offensive action, undoubtedly saved not only his section by the whole of the remaining platoon from being completely overrun.

His courage, gallantry and devotion to duty are examples to other soldiers⁶”

The award was given posthumously after his laying down his life on 3 November 1947 at Badam, Srinagar Kashmir. In this Badgam defensive casualties from Indian army were 50 in 1947 but whereas number of casualties of enemy was more than 200.

The fierce resistance of Major Sharma’s company had caused 200 casualties to the raiders. Also the tribal leader of the Lashkar had a bullet through his leg. The Pakistani raiders made no attempt to exploit the vulnerabilities that night of 3/4 November and move to the airfield or to Srinagar city. It is surmised that incapacitation of the leader, the heavy losses and reports of movement of Punjab into the area had caused the raiders to misjudge the tactical situation. This bought time for additional Indian troops to in the valley to fall back from Patan to Srinagar, reorganize and block all routes of ingress to Srinagar⁷. The term Lashkar so used in this context of war means a group of a thousand tribes of one ethnicity from North-West Frontier Province, armed by Pakistani Army and encouraged to infiltrate and raid Kashmir for booty. In fact the battle of Badam took place at a very crucial point of time when Indian troops had just begun their fly in into Srinagar airfield during opening stage of war and the Lashkars were advancing along three axes- North of Wular Lake, along the main Muzzafrabad-Baramulla-Patan-Srinagar axis and from Gulmarg. Along the Gulmarg route, a Lashkar of 700 raiders was known to be approaching Budgam but no contact had been made⁸. The Lashkar could soon be in position seize the airfield and block the inductions of the Indian troops by air. Alternatively, they could bypass the Patan defences from the South and reach Srinagar unhindered.

2.6 Crucial role of Brigadier Rajinder Singh Mahavir Chakar in Baramulla-Uri Sector

Brigadier Rajinder Singh was born on 14th June 1899 in Village Bagoona, now renamed Rajinderpura in Samba District of Jammu and Kashmir in a family of distinguished Military background. His ancestor Baj has died in harness, while being in service of Maharaja Gulab Singh. His grandfather Hamir Singh and father Subedar Lakha Singh were both war veterans. Rajinder Singh was brought up by his uncle Lt. Colonel Govind Singh, from his childhood and passed out from Prince of Wales College (Now Gandhi Memorial Science College) in Jammu in 1921⁹.

Rajinder Singh was commissioned on 14th June 1921 in the Jammu and Kashmir State Forces as a second Lieutenant. On September 25, 1947, he was placed as chief of the Army Staff of the Jammu and Kashmir Forces, by the relieving Major General H.L. Scott from such position¹⁰.

In September 1947, Pakistan started preparation for raids into Kashmir, with an aim of capturing Srinagar. On the night of October 21/22 a large number of Pakistani regulars and tribal irregulars had gathered near Muzzafrabad¹¹ and were instigating the Muslim soldiers, rebelled and killed the officer incharge and all Dogra Soldiers at the base¹¹. This

left 180 kilometer route to Srinagar from Muzzafrabad unguarded besides also raided Muzaffrabad too. On October 22, Brigadier Rajinder Singh being Chief of the Army Staff was order to defend the State until troops arrived (by fighting till death) i.e. save the state till the last man and last bullet¹².

According to Lieutenant General L.P. Sen “Available to him (Brg Rajinder Singh) in Badami Bagh Cantonment was total 1850 Officers and men of Jammu and Kashmir State Forces of whom 500 were Poonchi i.e. Muslims. In view of what had taken place, he may have lost faith in the letter and decided not to put their loyalty to test¹³. The proud of the soil was forced with the visiting situation to fight with swarm of Afridees, Mahsuds, Wazirs, Swathis and others known as Quballyees, who were instigated aided, armed and pushed to Kashmir by Pakistan under the overall command of “Colonel Akbar Khan and General Tarik”

Brigadier Rajinder Singh left Srinagar at 6.30 p.m. on 22nd October 1947, alongwith 150-260 men and officers from Badami Bagh Cantonment, equipped with outdated weapons by using private vehicles and reached Uri at 2 AM, and thereafter with a small small platoon, after fighting raiders at Garhi, he was made to realize that his force was extremely out-numbered against raiders having armed with superior weapons. Again on 23rd October, Maharaja Hari Singh had sent a command to Brigadier Singh through Captain Jawala Singh “to hold enemy at Uri at all costs and the last man. Reinforcement is sent with captain Jawala Singh.” On October 24th, Jawala Singh arrived with small number of about 100 men reinforcement. Brigadier ordered destruction of bridge to slow down the raiders and thereafter back to Mahoura for another defensive position. On 26 october 1947, the enemy launched another attack. The defense held effectively again and the raider’s movement was again halted. At dusk Brigadier Singh ordered a withdrawal towards Baramulla. At 1 AM on 27th October the retreating vehicles were attacked at Dewan Maudir Boniyar¹⁴ and convoy halted. The Brigadier’s driver was killed so Brigadier drove himself; however soon after he was also mortally wounded. The Brigadier ordered his men to continue ahead with planned defensive strategy and leave him where he was. Nothing more was heard of Brigadier Rajinder Singh. His men continued fighting until next day, but nearly all were killed soon after. However the delay the Brigadier and his men caused the raider can be counted as four days, enough time for diplomatic decisions for the arrival of Indian Army. Brigadier and his men fought for four days without food and less potent weapons with low ammunition very valiantly. At last Brigadier Rajinder Singh succumbed to his injuries. Later on a barbaric act of Pakistani army took nails and put his body hands¹⁵. Per Chakraverty, At Uri Jammu and Kashmir troops under Brigadier Rajinder Singh fought bravely against the invaders, but had to retreat towards Baramulla as they run short of ammunition. The Brigadier and his soldiers perished almost the last man, fighting gallantly against the superior force of all enemy. He and his handful of men thus held up thousands of enemy raiders for most valuable days and were instrumental in serving the Kashmir valley from pillage and plunder¹⁶.

On December 30th, 1949, for his act of gallantry in Jammu and Kashmir, Brigadier Rajinder Singh was posthumously awarded India’s first “Maha Vir Chakra”. His wife RamDei received the Medal from Army chief Field Marshal Criappa with citation read as;

“Immediately after partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, thousands of raiders assisted by Pakistani regulars invaded the state of Jammu and Kashmir all along its border. The Jammu and Kashmir state forces, stretched along its 550 mile long border displayed a penn-pocket with limited arms, ammunition and supplies, without road communication and heavily out-numbered fought tenaciously holding onto their position. Kohla-Domel, garrison fell into the invaders on 22nd October, 1947. The fate of the valley as of the whole state hung precariously on a slender thread.

Brigadier Rajinder Singh, chief of Military staff, took over the command of relief column and proceed to check the raiders. Another column with available troops nearly 100 was dispatched on 23rd of October, 1947, to join Brigadier Rajinder Singh with orders from Maharaja Hari Singh Commander-in-chief as follows;

‘Brigadier Rajinder Singh is commanded to hold enemy at Uri at all costs and to the last man. Reinforcement is sent with captain Jawala Singh.....’

Brigadier Rajinder Singh and his band of soldiers carried out the orders of the Maharaja to the letter and spirit. Fighting bravely for every inch of land, they displayed enemy advance by two crucial days during which important discussions were taken. Indian Army joined the fight and the Jammu and Kashmir state was thus saved for India by

Brigadier Rajinder Singh. He made the supreme sacrifice of his life on 26th October 1947, valiantly fighting the Pakistani raiders in Uri-Rampur sector.¹⁷,

The Supreme sacrifice of Brigadier Rajinder Singh, the true savior of Jammu and Kashmir, has in fact been undermined by the Government of India in awarding Maha Vir Chakra, commiserating to the merits of his martyrdom, but the justice thereto demand the highest gallantry award “The Param Vir Chakra” being an honour to the entire Dogra Clan, being proud of Brigadier Rajinder Singh, the supreme hero of Jammu and Kashmir of the Indo-pakistan 1947-48 battle. Although the demand for award of Param Vir Chakra was raised at different quarters besides the then Defence Minister in the year 1999, George Fernadis, had said at Rajinder Singh-pura Memorial that “I am in agreement....that he should be given PVC”. But the justice in practical is still seeking the light of true day, not only to be done but seems practically to have done audaciously.

2.7 Civilian of Baramulla—Maqbool Sherwani

Maqbool Sherwani (Koshur) was a Kashmiri Muslim youth who delayed the march of Paktoon tribes men from Pakistan and rebel forces (for the then Jammu and Kashmir State) in October 1947. In this manner he played an important role in buying time for the Indian Sikh Regiment troops who landed in Srinagar the once the accession was accepted.

Maqbool spotted tribes men planning to invade Kashmir. He misguided them to wrong path, when asked to guide for route for Srinagar Airport. He was crucified by the anger of rebel forces upon their realization that he misguided them to delay their march and arrive at the distribution of target or objective. Maqbool Sherwani is considered hero and martyr of Kashmir by the Indian Army.

According to Shiben Khaibri Sherwani of the age of 19 years as shopkeeper of Baramulla, had played an imminent role by riding on his motorcycle, went around the town telling Kabaliyees not to advance towards Srinagar as Indian-troops had reached the outskirts of Baramulla. The raiders got themselves immobilized for full four days and by themselves immobilized for full four days and by that time the Indian Army had landed in Srinagar that speaks why October 27th 1947 is celebrated every year as infantry day. Not only this, he put the raiders on wrong track from Baramulla just to halt their advance so that Indian troops could liberate the fallen areas from the enemy. For this he was caught by the wild and uncivilized hordes of Kabaliyees and asked to say “Pakistan Zindabad” which this true son of the soil refused. He was nailed alive to a post through the palms and chest at Baramulla crossing and as many as 14 bullets were pumped into his body. Three days after his martyrdom for the honour of his mother land and the people¹⁹.

The other awardees of Uri sector battle in 1947-48 were;

2.8 Jem Nand Singh MVC

“On 12 December’ 1947, Sikh was out on a fighting patrol Tribesmen in the Jammu and Kashmir state. The enemy, who was occupying previously prepared bunker position, opened fire on the leading company of the battalion killing 10 men on the spot and wounding another 15. These wounded soldiers were lying within 10 yards of enemy position. The enemy was attempting, under very heavy covering fire, to pull in these casualties and capture their arms and was at the same time carrying out encircling movement round this position. Counter attacks by the company on these bunkers had failed, resulting in even heavier casualties. Another company was then ordered to attack from the left flank. Jamadar Nand Singh, VC, was commanding one of its forward platoons.

His platoon went into attack like a band of Trojans with himself to the fore. The fire was intense and his men were falling left and right of him. Yet he pressed his men followed him shouting cries of ‘Sat Sri Akal’ and closed in on the enemy. He carried on fierce hand to hand fighting ensued. Jamadar Nand Singh was first to draw blood with his bayonet. Although wounded, he killed five of the enemy. By this fine example, his men inspired to frenzy and fought like fiends bayoneting right and left. The enemy broke and fled, but very few of them could escape.

This brave VCO had captured his objective, but as he stood there on top of the bunker, a burst of enemy LMG hit him in the chest and killed him on the spot. However his mission had been completed. The valour, leadership and

selfless devotion to duty displayed by this son of India in this little action was something that cannot be described, much less matched. He was Victoria cross fo the last war and had more than lived up to the reputation of one”²⁰.

2.9 NK Chand Singh MVC

“Naik Chand Singh of Sikh Regiment of Indian infantry forces was born of 01 January 1992 and laid his life in Uri Sector on 22 November 1947 during Indo-Pakistan near and was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 22 Nov 1947. The citation is read as :

“At Uri on 22 Nov 1947 at about 2215 hours in operation against tribes men in Kashmir (Jammu and Kashmir State) the enemy attacked hill 085107 held by a platoon of Sikh. This feature was vital for the defence of the Uri Camp. Naik Chand Singh commanded a section of his platoon.

The main burnt of the attack fell on Naik Chand Singh’s Section. Most calmly he held off fire until the first enemy wave was within 25 yards of his position, and then opened up with all he had LMG, rifles and hand grenades. The enemy was completely surprised and withdrew some 20 yards and took up position behind boulders and bushes. Naik Chand Singh realized that his hand grenade were not reaching the enemy position, from where he was. So he came out of histrench thrice inspite of heavy enemy fire and standing in the open harled grenades after grenades at the enemy. He was wounded in the forearm.

At about 2230 hours the enemy brought a sinch mortor into action. Naik Chand Singh, inspite of his wounded arm, volunteered to lead a raid to destroy this mortor. This party, making good use of cover, crawled upto within a few tyards of the mortor position. Here Naik Chand Singh threw a coup-le of grenades and charged the morot position with bayonets. Naik Chand Singh killed one of the crew with his bayonet and the remainder fled. The mortor was put out of action. Naik Chand Singh withdrew safely with his two comrades.

The enemy was still in position behind cover on the left flank. As the automatic and rifle fire was not effective, Naik Chand Singh came out of his trench and started throwing grenades. While so doing he got a burst of enemy LMG fire and was killed instantaneously. The destruction of his mortor demoralized the enemy so much that he lost heart and did not put in another attack. Naik Chand Singh’s supreme sacrifice had saved the Sikh position”²¹.

2.10 Subedar Bishan Singh, Sardar Bahadur MVC

He laid down his life while fighting with tribals in Uri Sector on 12th December’ 1947 and was awarded Mahavir Chakra, The citation where of is read as ;

“On 12th December 1947 at Uri, a battalion of Sikh Regiment was out on petrol. At about 1340 hours the battalion bumped the enemy in strength and a fierce hand to hand fight took place. During the withdrawal Subedar Bishan Singh was second incharge of a company, which was holding the last layback position, A fierce hand to hand fight again took place. Subedar Bishan Singh with what was left of his small company organized a counter attack. Although wounded in the right arm, he personally led his company, bayoneted two of the enemy with his own hands. Another wave of enemy attacked and Subedar Bishan Singh was wounded for a second time, but with utter contempt for his life. This brave officer led his menon, cheering and encouraging. He killed another couple of the enemy with his bayonet. This so demoralized the enemy that they fled in all directions. Subedar Bishan Singh was then chosing the fleeing enemy, shouting cries of “Sat Sri Akal”. It was then that this brave VCO paid the highest price for his outstanding gallantry. He was killed by a bullet in the chest.

As act of cool courage, inspiring leadership and dogged determination against heavy odds, this outstanding example would find few to surpass it. This gallant action fought by this brave officer to death enabled the battalion to evacuate all the casualties to safety and gave the enemy a bloody wounded to lick”²².

2.11 Lt. Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai MVC

“Lieutenant Col Dewan Ranjit Rai was the commanding officer of Sikh. Immediately on landing at Srinagar, on 27 October 1947, he appreciated that it was imperative to hold and oppose the raiders as far away as possible from the vital city of Srinagar and its adjacent airfield.

As very little time was at his disposal, he personally conducted reconnaissance and operations at such personal risk that he was eventually killed. By his complete disregard of personal danger and his determined and inspired leadership, the raiders were stopped sufficient far away to enable a build up for the eventual decisive defeat.

The officer gave his life in a successful endeavour to save Srinagar by displaying courage of the highest order²³. The officer was born on 6 February 1913 and laid down his life of 27th October 1947, in operation of 1947 Indo-Pak Kashmir war and was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 27th October 1947.

2.12 Mirpur Kotli, Poonch, Rajouri, Nowshera Sector

Brigadier Usman MVC

Brigadier Usman was born on 15th July 1935 at Bibipur Zaamgarh District (Present Man District), United Provinces, British India, to Jamilan Bibi and Mohammad Farooq Khanambir Usman. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 1st February 1934 and attached in India to the 1st Battalion of the Cameronian on 12 March 1934. In 1947 Brg. Usman became commander of 50th Parachute Brigade, having been deployed at Jhangar in December 1947. On December 25th 1947 with the odds stacked heavily against the brigade, Pakistani forces captured Jhangar, Located at the junction of roads coming from Mirpur, Kotli, Jhangar was of strategic importance. On that day, Usman took a vow to recapture Jhangar-afeat he accomplished three months later but at the cost of his own life.

In January-February 1948, Usman repulsed three attacks on Nowshera and Jhangar, both highly strategic location in Jammu and Kashmir. During the defence of Nowshera against overwhelming odds and numbers, Indian force inflicted about 2000 casualties on the Pakistanis (about 1000 dead and 1000 wounded) while on the Indian forces suffered only 33 dead and 102 wounded. His defence earned him the nickname Lion of Nowshera²⁴. Pakistani forces then announced a sum of Rs. 50,000 as reward for his head. Unaffected by his praise and congratulation, Usman continued to sleep on a mat laid on the floor as he had vowed that he would not sleep on bed till he recaptures Jhangar, from where he had to withdraw in late 1947.

The operation of recapture of Jhangar and Poonch under the overall supervision of the then Lieutenant General K.M. Carippa, under the command of Brigadier Usman was commended in the last week of February 1948. The 19th Infantry Brigade advanced along the north ridge, while the 50th Parachute Brigade cleared the hills dominating the Nowshera-Jhangar road in the South. In May, 1948, Jhangar was once again subjected to heavy artillery bombardment and many determined attacks were launched on Jhangar by the Pakistan Army. However Usman frustrated all their attempts to recapture it. It was during this defence of Jhangar that Usman after recapture of the territory was killed on 3 July 1948, by an enemy 25- pound shell. His last words were "I am dying but let not territory we were fighting for all for the enemy". He was awarded Maha Vir Chakra' posthumously.

The then Prime Minister of India along with his cabinet colleagues attended the funeral of Usman-the highest ranking military commander" to lay down his life in the battle filed by giving him 'state funeral of a martyr' Khwaja Ahmad Abhas, the Journalist from India described his death 'a precious life, of imagination of unanswering patriotism has fallen a victim to communal fanaticism. Brigadier Usman's brave example will be an abiding source of inspiration'²⁵.

2.13 Sub Major (the then Naik) Krishana Sonewale MVC

The then Naik had also played crucial role at Nowshera and was awarded Mahavir Chakra on February 6, 1948, the citation reads ;

"On 6 February 1948, the enemy launched simultaneous attack on all Naushera Picquets. The MMG Post on No. 7 Picquet was subjected to heavy small arms fire and attacked by about twelve hundred of the enemy. The raiders advanced in mass formation from all directions. Naik Krishana Sonawale was in command of this post and opened up with his gun at point blank range. The raiders advanced several waves and made series of attempts to assault the position.

Naik Krishna Sonawale maintained perfect coolness amongst his gunteam and continued to inflict heavy casualties. During this engagement, the No. 1 of the gun who was operating it got wounded in the neck. Naik Krishna Sonawale

took over the gun himself and continued to operate it with all the skill. When doing so, his right hand was perforated by a full LMG burst fired at him by the enemy from close range. This NCO Though Seriously wounded and regardless of the danger to his life continued to fire the gun with his left hand. Thus maintaining momentum of fire at this critical moment. The gun was later damaged beyond repairs, but this NCO kept on engaging the enemy by throwing hand grenades with his left hand. He also directed his gun team to do the same. The attack was beaten off with heavy losses to the enemy. Naik Krishna Sonawala displayed personal courage determination, coolness and devotion to duty and gave outstanding lead to his men for a very strained and trying period of two hours²⁶.

2.14 Poonch

Military operation took place in Poonch district, in 1948 during the conflict between the Indian Army and Pakistan and Pakistani aided POJK forces. Poonch withstood a seize by these forces from November 1947 until relieved by an Indian offensive “Operation Easy” on 20th November 1948. The besieged garrison, commanded by Brig Pritam Singh was maintained by air Supply Military Operation ended with Poonch town and the eastern part of Poonch district in hands of India and western part of Poonch district in Pakistasn hands. The Casualties faced and gallant acts of Indian Army personnel can be exemplified as ;

2.15 Major Malkiat Singh Brar MVC

The Mahavir Chakra Awardes of 8th February' 1948 is reads as ;

“On 7th February 1948 at Poonch, Major M.S. Brar was commanding B company of his battalion, which captured an important hill feature against heavy opposition.

With day break, the enemy launched a determined counter attack at about 1030 hours. The forward platoon post had suffered heavy casualties and there were only two men capable of fighting Major Brar ran with Brengun to the forward post with utter disregard for his personal safety and fired from the hip at the advancing enemy from point blank range. His fire stopped the hostiles who ran back and took over behind rocks. Thus Major Bra's gallantry saved the forward platoon from being overrun. Then despite his wounds. Major Brar personally evacuated most of his casualties under very heavy enemy automatic fire. He went round all forwards posts and collected two Brengus and five rifles belonging to the dead. Inspite of the order to stop, he went on Supervising the evacuation of the company's casualties, when 3-inch mortor bomb landed close to him and wounded him mortally Major Brar was killed on the spot saying “Well done B company. Got down, I am right” Personal bravery of a higher type has rarely been seen²⁷.

2.16 Sepoy Man Singh Mahavir Chakra

Sepoy Man Singh was awarded on 25 January 1948, Mahavir Chakra for his gallant act, the citation reads as ; “On 25th January' 1948, Sepoy Man Singh was in a picquet in Poonch in the J&K Sector when it was very strongly attacked by the enemy more than two hundred strong. His platoon was holding the front sector of Key defensive position. They approached close to the picquet perimeter covered by their six LMGs and grenade discharges firing heavily from a distance of about 400 yards. Sepoy Man Singh's platoon had suffered about 50 percent casualties and the enemy was going to rush in at any moment.

Sepoy Man Singh on his own initiative, came out of his slit trench and ran forward engaging the enemy with grenades and eventually succeeded in silencing two of the enemy LMGs. In the meantime, a burst of LMG fire hit him on his head. Inspite of the moral wound sustained by him, he fired another grenade saying “I am finished but I will finish you too”, and thus smashed another enemy LMG with its accompanying numbers. The gallant actions of Sepoy Man Singh at the cost of his own life, which set an example of bravery and devotion to duty, saved a terrible loss of lives to his company and helped in protection of the Poonch Garrison²⁸.

2.17 Tithwal-Handwara

Subedar Major was awarded for his gallant acts the Param Vir Chakra on 13th October 1948 in operation 1948. Polo Hyderabad, the citation of which is read as ;

“Tithwal in Jammu and Kashmir was captured on 23rd May’ 1948. After that date the enemy made numerous attempts to recapture Richhmar Gali and thence Tithwal on 13th October 1948, coinciding with ID, the enemy decided to launch a brigade attack to retake Richhmar Gali and by passing Tithwal advance into Srinagar Valley. Lance Naik (Later Subedar and Honorable Captain) was commanding a section. The enemy commenced his attack with heavy shelling of guns and mortars. The fire was so accurate that not a single bunker in the platoon locality was left unscathed. Communication trenches caved in. Bravely Lance Naik Karan Singh went from a bunker to bunker, giving succor to the wounded and urging men to fight. The enemy launched eight separate attacks that day. In one such attack, the enemy managed to obtain a foothold in the platoon locality. Immediately Lance Naik Karam Singh, who was severely wounded by then, with a few men hurled himself in a counter attack and evicted the enemy after a close quarter encounter which accounted for many enemy dead, having been dispatched by the bayonet.

Lance Naik Karan Singh proved himself to be a countless and born leader of men in crises. Nothing could be subdue him and no amount of fire or hardship could be subdue him and no amount of fire or hardship could break his spirit. His gallant actions on the day inspired his colleagues to face the massive onslaught unflinchingly. It was his fiercely proud spirit, which was largely responsible for the gallant stand at Tithwal that day”²⁹.

2.18 Pindras

Jemadar Lall Singh MVC

Jemadar Lall Singh of Indian Army was the Viceroy’s commissioned officer, having been accorded rarest distinction i.e. Awards of Military cross (MC) for valour and a bar, and had further served with distinction in his regiment in India and Burma during second world war. After India attained independence he also took part in Indo-Pak war of 1947-48. Hailing from Buchkar Village of Ludhiana District in Punjab who was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 15th November 1948 the citation of which is read as ;

“On the night of 14th November 1948 at Pindras, Jemadar Lal Singh was in command of the leading platoon of the company that attacked the Brown Hill feature. When within 20 yards of the enemy, he came under heavy fire. Showing great presence of mind, he crawled forward to the leading section under incessant fire and ordered them to dig in. He then crawled to the other sections and though hit seven times he went on giving directions and cheering them up.

Although profusely bleeding, he by his personal example, cool courage guts and stamina enabled the platoon to stick to the position. At dawn, when the other two platoons advanced for the attack, he put himself with the first section and charged the enemy position killing six of them and capturing the feature.

By daring dash and skillful leadership, this JCO achieved an outstanding results”³⁰.

2.19 Zojila Pass War 1947-48

On November 1, 1948, in the battle of Zojila, the Indian Army saved Ladakh being cut off from India. The battle of Zojila was the most audacious and significant operation of the 1947-48 Jammu and Kashmir war between India and Pakistan. Tanks rumbled in at 11575 feet and caught the Pakistani raiders dumbstruck of General K.S. Thimayya, 77 (Para) Brigade Commanded by Brigadier K.L. Atal was given the task of capturing Zojila in September 1948, This brigade of Chindits and Burma fame comprised, 3 JAT, 1/5 Gorkhas, 5 Maratha Light Infantry, a platoon of machine gunners and a few ancillary units. 1 Patiala located at Baltal after clearing sonamarg valley was put under command of the brigade for this mission. The heroes of this battle can be exemplified as ;

2.20 Brig. Kanhy Lal Atal MVC - Citation

“Brigadier K.L. Atal was the brigade commander incharge operations in Zojila area which commenced on 1 November 1948 in the break through over the Zojila Pass and culminated in the capture of Kargil on 23rd November. The detailed planning preparation and execution of the entire operations were carried out under intense wintry conditions with great determination, consummate skill and boldness on the part of brigadier Atal.

After the breakthrough at Zojila, the brigade was held up at Pindras by the enemy entrenched in a strong dominating position and overlooking the only defile through which our advance was possible. Brigadier Atal took his tactical HQ

with the leading battalion well forward where he came under heavy enemy machine gun and mortar fire. He pushed a strong brigade attack, which over ran the enemy and enabled to Kargil to continue.

Later, when the leading battalion was held up four miles short of Kargul, he personally led two companies over a difficult mountainous track, at great personal risk, which took him to the rear of the enemy and ultimately into Kargil. Throughout the operations, Brigadier Atal Sata very example of Leadership and personal courage under enemy fire without any regard for his own safety³¹.

Brigadier Kanhya Lal Atal was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 23 November, 1948 for his gallant Acts and determination.

2.21 Civilian Portor, Mohammad Ismail MVC

Mohammad Ismail a resident of Village Kulan, Sonamarg Kashmir was also awarded Mahavir Chakra during operation of 1947-Indo-Pak Kashmir was on 23rd June 1948. The citation is read as ;

“On 23 June 1948, in the Zojila Pass area in Jammu and Kashmir, a reconnaissance patrol was ambushed and a man was severely wounded. He rolled down the side of the hill, and was unable to get back to the picquet. All attempts by the section to recover the wounded man failed as the enemy had covered the area with fire. Ismail, who was a civilian labourer, volunteered to bring the wounded man single handed. He displayed outstanding skill in negotiating the most impassable snow covered slopes swept by MMG fire. By superb physical effort he got the wounded man, bundled up in his blanket and brought him to safety Again on September 1948, at Zojila Pass during an attack by 3 JAT, Ismail Volunteered to accompany that unit as a guide. Advancing with the leading scouts inspite of close continuous fire he guided the troops and it was only when a hidden MMG had wiped out the leading line that he fell into enemy hands and became a prisoner on both occasions Ismail displayed bravery, devotion to duty and disregard for personal safety.³²”

2.22 Major General Anant Singh Pathania MVC

Anant Singh Pathania was born on 25th May 1913 in Kangra Himachal Pradesh, just two years before his father Lt. Colonel Raghbir Singh Pathania, 2nd Jammu and Kashmir Rifles was killed in action while commanding the battalion in Jassin, Tanganvyika ; His mother was the daughter of General Baj Singh, Kashmir Imperial Service Troops, a fine old soldiers and gentleman who was always keen to be in the thickness of a fight. He joined army and in 1947-48 Indo-Pakistan war he was the Lt. Colonel and Commanding 1/5 Gorkha Rifles during the Zojila Operations and on 14 November 1948, he was awarded Mahavir Chakra Medal, the Citation of which is read as ;

“The fine Achievement of 1/5 Gorkha Rifles during Zojila Operations was due entirely to the courage and fine leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Anant Singh Pathania.

The hardest battle fought by the infantry was breaking the well fortified enemy position on Anant feature. The success of this operation was due entirely to Lieutenant Colonel Pathania’s personal reconnaissance of enemy defence. Throughout the reconnaissance stage and during the attack, this officer personally led his men. He was a source of great encouragement to his men³³. Pathania expired on 19 December 2007 at Dharmshala Residence, though he had permanent residence at Exchange Road Jammu.

2.23 The Pursuit to Kargil

After successful capture of Drass under the command of Brigadier Atal on 15th November 1948, the advance of Indian forces started for Kargul on 18th November. On 19th November Patiala occupied Shamsha Khabar and Kharbu the main village. On 23rd November, the men of 1/5 RGR entered Kargul at 0400 hours and established control on 24th November. During this pursuit, the following gallantry acts are worth mentioning.

2.24 Havildar Ram Prashad Gurung MVC

Havildar Ram Prashad Gurung was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 15th November 1948, during operation 1948 Polo-Hyderabad, the citation of which is read as;

“After breaking up of the Zojila defences on 2nd November 1948, a platoon of 5 GR was sent up Badgumbar Nar to round up the Hostiles. The platoon suddenly came up against heavy enemy fire from a well dug bunker. In order to

avoid casualties it was necessary to find two men who would creep up and knock out the bunker. Lance Havildar Ram Prashad was the first to volunteer and he crept forward with grenades and stengun. He was followed by Rifleman. It was due to daring spirit shown by Lance Havildar Ram Parshad and the way he planned the attack that the bunker was knocked out and the enemy position captured. The fearless NCO showed an admirable sense of duty and daring leadership, and was a great inspiration to his men”³⁴.

2.25 NK Pritam Singh MVC

“On 3 July 1948, at Gumri in Jammu and Kashmir State, Naik Pritam Singh was incharge of Signal detachment when enemy shelling cut all the line communications and made movement impossible. He volunteered to go out and repair the lines. He moved out with cool determination, completely unperturbed by shells bursting all around him and heavy enemy MMG fire directed on him. Escaping sure death right under the nose of the enemy, he mended the wires and got back under the hail of MMG fire having seen the line through. He repeated the or deal through heavy fire twice in the afternoon. Once he repaired the line to another picquet and next he replaced a broken down wirteless set of yet another picquet. This NCO showed exemplary fortitude, courage and devotion to duty throughout the nerve shattering and most trying operation.

He dearless and tenacious conduct filled everyone in the unit with great inspiration and admiration for him”³⁵. He was awarded Mahavir Chakra Medal on 3rd July 1948.

2.26 Leh Operations (1947-48)

Military operation took place in Ladakh in 1948 during the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir between the Indian Army and Pakistan, raiders infiltrated to capture the remote area of Ladakh. The eviction of this invading force of tribal raiders, who enjoyed numerical superiority, better lines of communication, commanding high ground and superior logistics was major military achievements for the small force of Indian soldiers.

The eminent role of three cousins hailing from Lahaul Himachal Pradesh in Ladakh

Lt. Col Thakur Prithi Chand MVC

In February 1948, Major Thakur Prithi Chand of the 2nd Dogra Battalion Volunteered to command a small force of 18 volunteers from Indian Army in the Kashmir Valley to Leh to raise and train a militia force and organize the defence of that area. He led this small band of brave men in mid winter across Zojila. On arrival at Leh, Maj Prithi Chand took command of two Platoons of Jammu and Kashmir Forces and with his own men hurriedly raised and trained Zoo Malitia. Thakur Prithi Singh was awarded Mahavir Chakra for his gallantry acts in Ladakh area, the citation of which is read as;

“In February 1948, Major Thakur Prithi chand of the 2nd Dogra Battalion volunteered to command a small force of 18 volunteers from the Indian Army in the Kashmir Valley to Leh to raise and train a militia force and organize the defence of the area. He led his small band of brave men in mid winter across Zojila at mountain pass of 11000 feet, in snow blizzard and over 20 feet deep snow without any special snow or winter equipment. Thus in itself was an epic feat. On arrival at Leh Major Prithi Chand took command of two platoons of Jammu and Kashmir State Forces and with his own men, hurriedly raised and trained some 200 militia. By May, the enemy had over run most Baltistan, captured Kargil and was advancing on Leh along the Indus and Nubra Valleys. The young officer with little tactical Knowledge or experience, but filled with intense patriotism and indomitable spirit held the enemy advance by adopting guerilla tactics. Covering a front extending over hundred of miles, he organized raids and ambudhes on the enemy, Frequently leading them himself Major Prithi Chand underwent extreme physical strain ; he appeared everywhere. One day he was in Indus valley and next day or the day after, he would be in Nubra valley many miles away. He and his men lived mostly on Sattu and with very little ammunition he kept the enemy at bay till reinforcement were sent to him by air. Posterity will sing the praises of Major Prithi Chand and his small band of men for generation to come, and the people of Ladakh valley will always remember them as their saviors. Major Prithi Chand through out these operations displayed exceptional leadership, courage and indomitable spirit in the highest traditions of the Indian Army”³⁶.

2.27 Major Khushal Chand MVC

The Mahavir Chakra Awardee for 1948 Polo Hyderabad who also played crucial role in saving Leh, the citation of which is read as ;

“In February 1948, Major Kushal Chand was one of the two officers who volunteered to go to help in raising a local militia force and to conduct the defence of the Ladakh Valley. For four months Major Kushal chand with one platoon of J&K State Forces and about twenty local militia hastily trained, delayed the enemy advance south towards Leh alongwith Indus valley. He conducted guerilla war fare of skilfull he had many more men than actually had. On one occasion he held the Khaltsi bridge for 24 hours with just himself and one sepoy, and later set it on fire. This displayed the enemy for a further week. Throughout these operations without proper ration, without mortors and with an acute shortage of ammunition, Major Khushal Chand led his small band with vigour and skill and by personal example of daring and ‘dare devil’ he carried out his task successfully. He thus maintained the high traditions of the Indian Army and set a fine example to those serving with them”³⁷.

2.28 Major Hari Chand MVC

The Mahavir Chakra Awardee for 1948 Polo Hyderabad operation for saving Ladakh valley and the cousin of Major Prithi Chand and Major Khushal Chand hailing from Lahaul Himachal Pradesh his gallantry actes are as per citation reas as;

“In 1948 Major Hari Chand was selected by the Commander in Chief, General K.M. Carippa, to throw out the enemy from Leh Sector. He led his column of sturdy Gorkhas which took the unconventional route from Kulu to Leh across the virgin Hiamalya ranges. It was accomplished when the Indian Army had no experience of mountain warfare. This paid dividend in that we were able to win the race to Leh.

The fortress of Leh held out against repeated enemy attacks. The enemy was planning to bring field guns which would have changed the complexion of batte.

Major Hari Chand took a handful of men and went 80 miles behind the enemy lines in most in hospitable terrain. After reducing an enemy position at an altitude of 18000 feet, Major Hari Chand destroyed enemy ammunition and ordinance dumps. An enemy column was also ambushed and heavy casualties were inflected on it. The commander of Pak forces in this sector just managed to escape. This forced the enemy to call off his attack to Leh and withdraw from this sector as far as he could. For these acts of gallantry and outstanding leadership in the face of the enemy, Major hari Chand was awarded Mahavir Chakra³⁸.The citation further quotes;

In 1962, The Lieutenant Colonel Hari Chand MVC was commanding a battalion, which was responsible for the defence of the airfield at Chushul. The cool planning and exemplary leadership of Lietenant Colonel Hari Chand MVC enabled the battalion to inflict such heavy casualties on the enemy that the Chinese were forced to call off the attack and the airfield was saved. For this operation the battalion was awarded 17 decoratons including a Param Vir Chakra and a Mahavir Chakra.

2.29 Col. Chewang Richen MVC

Chewang Richen, born in village Sumur in Nubra in 1931 hailed from a family but led as “Lion of Ladakh”, who joined the Ladakh Guards in 1948 and served in Indo-Pakistan war of 1947 and dring such war was not only promoted in ranks but also accorded Mahavir Chakra being the youngest receipient of the such award. The citation is read as:

“As a young lad of 17 Chewang Rinchen enrolled himself in Ladakh Guards on 25 July, 1948 with hardly a week’s training he organized and trained local militia unit of 28 youths. In September, operating alongside Indian Army Units, he fought in the Nubra Valley. His grim defence of a position on the Khary nullah earned him promotion to the rank of Jamadar (Naib Subedar). In the same month negotiating 17000 feet high snow clad pass under most trying conditions, he helped the capture of Lama House, a vital enemy strong hold.

On December, having marched for three days over high snow drifts, he put a fierce attack on a high hill feature near Biagdando and captured it.This action was immediately followed by his capture of Tukkar Hill, the last enemy position in Leh Tehsil. The last action involved crossing over snow clad hills 21000 feet high. Half of his platoon was suffering

from frostbite. But under his inspiring leadership and following his example of personal bravery, his men had accomplished a seemingly impossible feat. He was then promoted Subedar. In these actions, Subedar Chewang Rinchen displayed personal bravery, resourcefulness, leadership and dedication of duty of high or less.”³⁹

He was awarded second time Mahavir Chakra also in Battle of Turtuk during Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. The citation is read as;

“Major Chewang Rinchen of Ladakh Scouts was commander of the force assigned the task of capturing the Chalunka Complex of enemy defences in the Partap Pur sector. Each of these nine enemy strong points were held by one to two platoons and fortified with mines and wire obstacles. This operation was planned and executed with professional competence and great zeal. Under most adverse weather conditions, Major Rinchen led his command, displaying aggressive spirit and cool courage, fighting from bunker to bunker, exhorting and encouraging his men to destroy the enemy, making the operation complete success. In this action Major Chewang Rinchen displayed inspiring leadership, indomitable courage, initiating and exceptional devotion to duty in the highest traditions of Indian Army.”

2.30 Sepoy Togbe Leh Militia

Sepoy Togbe (some also mentioned as Topgai) was a local from Leh who was one of the trainees of Militia from Ladakh having been trained by Major Khushal Chand Mahavir Chakra in 1947, in the wake of the intrusion of Pakistani invaders, creating panic in the member who assisted Major Khushal Chand in dealing with emergent position created in 1947, Said Sepoy Toghe (Topgai) was also shown against the 2nd Dogra forces among the awardees of Vir Chakra Medal for his Gallantry acts.⁴⁰

2.31 Indo-China 1962 War

Havaldar Saroop Singh was born on 15 April 1924 in Kotari Village of Poonch District who joined army on 15 April 1948 and in order to save Ladakh from the intruders from across the border, the Nubra Guard was formed by the Indian Army out of the Ladakhi warriors. In 1952, they formed the 7th battalion J&K Militia. The Battalion J&K Militia 14 Bn was subsequently raised in 1959 at Srinagar. Havildar Saroop Singh joined 14 Battalion after its formation which later displayed to defend against the Chinese aggressive in 1962.

During 1962 Indo-China war Havildar Saroop Singh’s unit was displayed in Ladakh, the main battle grouped for the war. On 19th October 1962, Havildar Singh was deployed at the Bhujang post and was functioning as second in command of the post. He was awarded Mahavir Chakra posthumously. The citation is read as;

“On the night of 19th October 1962, when a post at Bhujang in Ladakh was attacked by Chinese, Havildar Saroop Singh, second in command of the post fought gallantry until he was ever powered and killed by the enemy Havildar Saroop Singh displayed courage and devotion to duty of a high order.”⁴¹

The awardee is at present resident of Ajit Nagar, Gadigarh, Jammu 181101.

2.32 Skardu Battle 1947-48

Lt. Col Sher Jung Thapa-Skardu’s Tiger MVC

Col. Dilbag Dabas, Sher Jung born on June 18, 1908 at Abbottabad presently in Pakistan, and his family presently is settled in Himachal in village Kulan, Sonamarg, Jammu and Kashmir. He was awarded Mahavir Chakra on 14th August 1948, the citation of which is read as;

“In 10 August 1947, at the time of invasion of Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan raiders, the entire northern frontier of Jammu and Kashmir state from Buuji to Leh approximately 200 miles (excluding Gilgit Agency) was manned by the 6th Battalion. After the fall of Buuji in early November, 1947, the Battalion was ordered to move Skardu with as many troops as possible.

On 11 February 1948, Skardu was attacked and surrendered by the enemy of approximately 600 strong strength. The enemy was routed under the determined strength of Lieutenant Colonel Sher Jung Thapa. Unable to capture the fort, the enemy laid a seige to the enemy attempts to capture the fort were thwarted every time under the dynamic and inspiring leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Sher Jung Thappa. After going through the seige for long and when not help of any

kind could be given from outside, Lieutenant Colonel Sher Jung Thappa was asked by Major General K.S. Thimayya, D.S.O, GOC19 Infantry Division to surrender which he stoutly opposed and continued to hold on the fort steadfast by without any regard to his personal safety.

On the fateful day of 14 August 1948, the Gallant survivors of the 6th, utterly exhausted and on the verge of starvation, outnumbered to 5 to 1 without ammunition, rations, and any hope of success from outside Skardu which had kept a superior enemy at bay for six months and three days. For this gallant action, Lieutenant Colonel later Brigadier Sher Jung Thapa was awarded Mahavir Chakra.”

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