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### **A Saga of Valour: first Ghallughara**

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*The antiquity of the Sikhs after the martyrdom of Banda Singh in 1716 was eventful and the fresh impressions of tyrannies of the Sikhs started. Throughout this shady phase, 1716 to 1748, the Sikhs were left without any permanent leader, who could guide them through this dangerous passé. In the history of the Sikhs, this shady phase is recorded of the massive skirmish between the Sikhs on the one hand the Mughals and Afghans on the other, in which the sons of the soil had not only to fight for their lives, but were able, after long and determined misery, to assert their superior right to rule over their own land.*

#### **Aims and Objectives**

- To find how the Sikhs establish their power after the death of Banda Singh.
- To analyses how the Sikhs overcome from this dark period.
- To explore how the Sikhs gave challenge to Mughal authority.
- To find how the Sikhs re-establish themselves after this bloody battle.

Zakariya Khan the governor of Lahore made concerted efforts from 1726 to 1745 to eliminate the Sikhs, but all in vain. Thousands of them were executed but there were still a large number of them who had managed to escape the general Sikh massacre. All the ruthless policies adopted by him were of no avail and failed to comprehensively annihilate the Sikhs.<sup>1</sup> Zakariya Khan died on

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<sup>1</sup> Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, (NP), 1880, reprinted by Language Department Punjab, Patiala, 1970, pp. 752-54.

July, 1745 without fulfilling his objective and leaving behind his three sons named Yahiya Khan, Shah Nawaz Khan and Mir Baqi and the war of successor started between them.<sup>2</sup>

Soon Mughal emperor Mohammad Shah agreed to appoint Yahiya Khan as the Governor of Lahore and Shah Nawaz Khan as the Governor of Multan.<sup>3</sup> Yahiya Khan did not have a sympathetic attitude towards the Sikhs. He unleashed hostilities against them with all the alacrity he was capable of. In the momentous evening of January, 1746 a Sikhs under the leadership of Jassa Singh *Ahluwalia*, Naudh Singh *Sukerchakia*, Sukha Singh, Beer Singh, Hari Singh and Chajja Singh, Gurbakhsh Singh, Karora Singh, Dyal Singh, Deep Singh (latter known as *Shahid*), Hira Singh *Nakai*, Jassa Singh *Ramgarhia*, Aggar Singh and Sham Singh Naroke, Madan Singh *Vir* arrived in the city of Lahore. They not only sacked the town but also the areas falling under the *Suba* Lahore.<sup>4</sup> The Mughal armies came conflicted the Sikhs but, once again escaping the Mughals and the Sikhs fled towards the jungle on the banks of river Ravi. Soon Yahiya Khan sent *Diwan*, Lakhpat Rai at the head of a large battalion with definite orders not to return without pursuing the Sikhs out of the territory. When the Sikhs heard about the Lakhpat Rai attack they abandoned their shelter on the banks of Ravi and progressed to Eimanabad.<sup>5</sup>

In circumstances the Sikh, about 2000 in number, went to visit Gurudwara Rori Sahib at Eminabad (a sacred place owing to the memory of *Guru Nanak Dev*). When Jaspat Rai, the *Faujdar* of Eminabad came to know about the entrance of Sikhs in Rori Sahib in Eminabad, he sent them strict orders to vacate his territory without delay. The Sikhs in their reply said that they would eat and rest for the night and would leave immediately the next morning. However, Jaspat Rai was not ready to extend such concessions. He ordered his army to attack the Sikhs. Although, the Sikhs did not wish to engage the enemy in a combat, they had to fight. This fight had been imposed upon them and they drew their swords. The bloody battle took place at Baddo Ki Gosian in February – March, 1746. Jaspat Rai was killed in the battlefield in a fit of panic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tahmas Khan, Miskin, *Tahmas Namah*, (NP), 1779, (Translated into English by P.Setu Madahwa Rao), reprint Bombay, 1967, p. 7; Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-i-Halat-i-Sikhan*, 1811, MS., (Translated into Punjabi by Milkhi Ram); Ram Sukh Rao, *Jassa Singh Binod*, (NP, ND), M.S, (Translation of Punjabi), p. 63; Bakhat Mal, *Khalsa Namah*, (NP), 1810-14, MS., translated into Punjabi by Janak Singh, p. 27; Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, (NP), 1865, (edited by, Bhai Vir Singh, 1914, Amritsar, reprinted by Wazir Hind Press, 1972p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Bakhat Mal, *Khalsa Namah*,. pp. 302-3.

<sup>4</sup> Bakhat Mal, *Khalsa Namah* p.. 27; Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-i-Halat-i-Sikhan*,, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-i-Halat-i-Sikhan*, p. 63; Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Nama*, (NP), 1854, MS., translated into Punjabi by Gurbakhsh Singh, pp. 217-18 ; Ram Sukh Rao, *Jassa Singh Binod*,P.2.

When Lakhpat Rai who Diwan at the court of Yahiya was angered with rage when he received the news of his Brother Jaspat Rai's death. He approached to the *Nawab* Yahiya Khan at Lahore and flinging his turban at his feet swore that he would re-tie it on his head only when he had destroyed the Sikhs root and branch. Then he got a general proclamation issued from the *Nawab* for the extirpation of the Sikhs. A massive campaign to eliminate the Sikhs was thus launched. To begin with all the Sikhs living in Lahore were arrested and made over to sweepers for execution.<sup>7</sup>

Soon by the beat of Drum, Lakhpat Rai, out of inordinate vengeance, got a universal announcement made in the whole province that no one should read the Sikh scriptures and any one taking the name of the *Guru* would be arrested and his belly ripped open. Even the word *Gur* (molasses), which sounded like *Guru*, was not to be uttered, but the word *Rori* was to be used instead. The word *Granth* was also to be replaced with *Pothi*.<sup>8</sup> Many volumes of the holy *Granth* were collected and thrown into rivers and wells in this wave of fanatic and hysterical malevolence. The tank of Amritsar temple was also filled with earth.<sup>9</sup>

In these circumstances Sikhs escaped into the forest of the river Ravi. Afterward Lakhpat Rai ordered to his moving party to set out in search of the Sikhs elsewhere. He personally commanded the royal army and marched against the Sikhs. In an attempt to duck out of the fury of the storm nearly 15,000 Sikhs took shelter in the forests of Kahanuwan.<sup>10</sup> The Sikhs at this time continue fight for their lives under their prominent leadership of Jassa Singh *Ahluwalia*, Gurbakhsh Singh Roranwala, Gurdial Singh *Dallewalia*, Naudh Singh *Sukerchakia*, Karora Singh, Dial Singh, Deep Singh (latter known as *Shahid*), Sham Singh Naroke (latter joined with the *Bhangis*) Hira Singh *Nakai*, Jassa Singh *Ramgarhia*, Chajja Singh *Bhangi*, Bhima Singh *Bhangi* and Hari Singh *Bhangi*, Aggar Singh (*Bhangi*), Sukha Singh, Beer Singh, Madan Singh *Vir*. Quite unrelentingly, the royal army first laid a siege to their sanctuary and then set fire to the jungle. The Sikhs were trapped inside - a steep mountain in front, a flooded river on the right and a strong-minded enemy behind; they had no ammunition, no food and no help.<sup>11</sup> In desperation, some of them tried to wade through the river Ravi, which was in spate; most of them failed to do

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<sup>7</sup> Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-i-Halat-i-Sikhan*, p. 63; Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Nama*, p. 217-18; Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 305-6.

<sup>8</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 308-9; Ram Sukh Rao, *Jassa Singh Binod*, p 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Nama*, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup> Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-i-Halat-i-Sikhan*, p.64; Ali-ud-din Mufti, *Ibrat Nama*, .p.218.

<sup>11</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 310-13.

so and drowned in the bid to escape. Those who climbed the mountains were caught by the Rajput soldiers who were on guard duty and were killed.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently Mughal forces were fully equipped with the essential where withal of warfare. They were in possession of cannons and other potent weapons to shoot the Sikhs. Just as the Sikhs tried to scale the mountains to escape the valley of fire, the Mughal army opened fire thus blocking their way.<sup>13</sup> Seeing no end to this horrible predicament, the Sikh *Sardars* decided that those on foot should try their luck with the hills and others who had horses under them should cut their way through the enemy and follow any direction which they could take. Some of them were as follows: Jassa Singh *Ahluwalia*, Tara Singh, Charat Singh, Deep Singh, Sudha Singh, Aggar Singh(*Bhangi*), Dargaha Singh, Daljeet Singh, Gurbakhsh Singh Roranwala, Sham Singh, Hira Singh, Dharam Singh, Karm Singh and Sher Singh Hari Singh *Bhangi*, Bhima Singh *Bhangi*, Chajja Singh *Bhangi*, Sukha Singh.<sup>14</sup>

*Diwan* Lakhpat Rai ordered his forces to point the cannons in the directions of the Sikhs hideouts and that instead of allowing them to be distracted by looting and plundering, they should lead a determined all-out attack to exterminate every Sikh wherever they could find one. He offered cash prize of rupees fifty for the head of every Sikh.<sup>15</sup> Sensing unprecedented danger, the Sikhs decided to leave the battlefield and take any direction that could take them to safety. Thus, fighting a fierce and unequal battle against the adversary, some of them went towards Doba while a few others fled towards Kullu and Kangra valley. Some of them even succeeded in climbing the mountains in spite of the stumbling blocks of enemy soldiers. The Mughal armed forces were still pursuing the Sikhs. In the final reckoning, at least 7,000 Sikhs were killed and some three thousands of them were caught by the mountain flaks of Basoli and handed over to Lakhpat Rai. They were made prisoners and sent to Lahore where they were tortured to death at *Nakhas Chowk*. Their heads were piled up to make pyramids and their bodies buried under the walls of the Mosque.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the historians of 18<sup>th</sup> century in their accounts they stated about the strength of the Sikhs who were dead in this action likewise Khushwaqat Rai sated that 400 hundred Sikhs

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<sup>12</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 313-14.

<sup>13</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 314-15.

<sup>14</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 314-16; Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, pp. 781-82.

<sup>15</sup> Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, pp. 784-86.

<sup>16</sup> Ram Sukh Rao, *Jassa Singh Binod*, p. 2; Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, pp. 786-88; Syed Muhammad Latif, *Lahore its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, , Lahore, 1892. p.74.

were killed in this bloody battle and near about 400 Sikhs were made prisoners. But Rattan Singh Bhangu says that near about 30.000 to 40.000 Sikhs were killed in this action. The strength given by Rattan Singh Bhangu is too much because the total strength of the Sikhs at that time was near about 15, 000. So the strength given by Rattan Singh Bhangu may be the total strength of the Sikhs who were dead and missing during this action.<sup>17</sup>

This transpired in April-May, 1746. They called it *Ghallughara* (the Holocaust). But sixteen years later in 1762, they had to suffer a worse disaster at the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan conqueror. This incident in retrospect therefore, came to be known as *Chhota Ghallughara* (the small Holocaust) in the history of the Punjab.<sup>18</sup>

#### Conclusion

Such strong measures checked the progress of the Sikhs for the time being. The enthusiasm of the victories of the Guru decreased considerably. However, they do not lose their heart and large number of the Sikhs people joined their *Jathas*, for the sake of their devotion to the Khalsa faith. Soon the strength of their *Jathas* fairly large and they continued tried to liberate the Punjab from the Mughals and Afghans.

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<sup>17</sup> Lepel Griffin, *The Punjab Chiefs*, Lahore, 1865. Revised into Vol-I and Vol-II, Lahore 1890, pp. 385-86; Bhagat Singh, *History of the Sikh Misals*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1993, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 321-22; Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, pp. 788-90.