

The Great Holocaust (Wadda Ghalughara)

In 1761 the Sikhs under Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia occupied Lahore. They proclaimed him king. He coined money in the name of the Guru. The Khalsa gathered that year at Amritsar to celebrate their annual day of Diwali. They passed a resolution to capture the strongholds of the allies and helpers of Ahmad Shah Abdali. The nearest helper and ally of the foreigner was Aqil Das Niranjania of Jandiala. He was a sworn enemy of the Sikhs. He had always aided their enemies. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia informed him of the decision of the Khalsa. It was a thought that he would submit and make a compromise with the Sikhs. But he did nothing of the kind. He at once wrote to Ahmad Shah and invited his help. Ahmad Shah was already on his way to Hindustan. Aqil Das's messenger met him at Rohtas. He hurried towards Jandiala. He found that the Sikhs had raised the siege and gone away towards Sarhind. The reason for their hurried withdrawal was this: before meeting the invader they wanted to take their families to a place beyond his reach. There was another reason also. The governor of Sarhind, Zain Khan had recently killed Sardar Dial Singh Brar. The Sikhs wanted to avenge his death. They began to gather in villages close to Malerkotla. The chief of the place invited Zain Khan to help him. At the same time he informed Ahmad Shah about gathering of the Sikhs near Malerkotla.

From Jandiala Ahmad Shah had gone to Lahore. When he heard the news of the Sikhs' gathering near Malerkotla, he started from Lahore on the third of February, 1762. By making hurried marches, he reached the village of Kupp, near Malerkotla by the morning of the 5th of Feb. About 30,000 Sikhs were encamped there with their families and all their belongings. He had already sent instructions to Zain Khan that he should attack the Sikhs on the front. He himself was to fall upon them from the rear. He ordered soldiers to kill all people found in Hindustani dress. In order to distinguish Zain Khan's forces from those of the Sikhs, the former were told to wear green leaves in their turbans. Several thousand Sikhs were killed. Most of them were women and children. The Sikhs had been taken by surprise. Immediately they held a council. They decided to die fighting. Of course, they could have saved themselves by surrendering and giving up their faith, but the thought never crossed their minds. They threw a cordon around their women and children, and began to move forward. They moved on fighting. Ahmad Shah wanted to have a pitched battle with the Sikhs. But they went on moving as they fought. They moved on fighting from village to village. The people of the places through which they passed gave them no shelter. They feared invader. On the contrary, they fell upon them and killed a large number. The Sikhs continued to move on. Their aim was to reach Barnala. They hoped that, at that place, they would get help from Baba Ala Singh. If they got no help from him there, they were to pass on to the dry desert of Bhathinda.

But before they could reach Barnala, their cordon was broken by Ahmad Shah's soldiers. A wholesale massacre of Sikhs followed. At least ten thousand Sikhs were killed in this action. The wholesale destruction of the Sikhs occurred on the 5th of Feb 1762. It is called Wadda Ghalughara or the Great Holocaust. In all, over 20,000 men, women and children perished in this campaign of slaughter. We should remember that these heroic Sikhs were massacred because they had tried to rid their country of cruel fanatic and despotic rulers. They were inspired with patriotic urges and emotions of the noblest type. They were freedom fighters in a most real sense. They were men of unshakeable faith, unbeatable courage, unbreakable will, and unmatched capacity to do and suffer for their faith and ideals. They died heroic deaths in order to create conditions in which their countrymen could live with honor and self-respect. They achieved their glorious martyrdom. They are remembered, and shall ever be remembered, with respect and admiration by students of history as well as, by all the followers of the Sikh Gurus. Let us bow our heads to these patriots and fighters for their and our country's freedom.

Excerpts taken from these books.

Sikh History Book 5 by Kartar Singh ji.

Published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi

Ahmad Shah Abdali during his fifth invasion defeated Marathas in the battle of Panipat on the 13th January, 1761 A.D., and plundered Delhi at will. He started back on 22nd March, 1761 A.D., with his booty and thousands of young men and women (app. 22,000 to be precise) as his captives. When he crossed river Sutlej in April 1761 A.D., the Singhs started looting him and setting the prisoners free and sending them back to their homes. After reaching Lahore, Abdali sent army to arrest the Singhs but there was no success. Abdali left Lahore for Kabul in May 1761 A.D. The Singhs again started looting him and freeing the captives. Before he reached river Attak, the Singhs were able to free all the captives and snatch much of the booty.

On their way back from river Attak, the Singhs looted Gujrat, Sialkot, Sirhind and Malerkotla turn by turn, these states were protectorates of Abdali.

All the Sikh chiefs met at Amritsar on the occasion of Diwali on the 22nd October, 1761 A.D. They passed a resolution and besieged Lahore under the leadership of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Governor Ubaid Khan took shelter in the fort. The Singhs occupied the city. Aqil Dass of Jandiala, an enemy of the Sikhs, sent his horsemen to Abdali with a request for attack. For the purpose of leaving their families in safe area before the arrival of Abdali, the Sikhs proceeded with them towards Malwa. (Current Area of Ludhiana, Patiala)

Getting the message of Aqil Dass, Abdali reached Lahore on 3rd February, 1762 A.D. He sent messages to the Commanders of Sirhind and Malerkotla (Son of the same Nawaab Sher Khan of Malerkotla who had tried to protect the 'Chhote Sahibzade) to block the passage of Sikhs. On the 5th February, Abdali mounted an attack on the Sikhs near village Kup. The Commander of Sirhind, Kasam Khan blocked the passage of Sikhs. When the Sikhs give a befitting reply, he ran towards Malerkotla. The Sikhs had hardly advanced 3 miles when Jain Khan, the Governor of Sirhind and Shah Wali Khan came forward. With that raid, the Sikhs were uprooted. Their wall of safety around the families (women and children) was broken due to which a large number of families were killed. In spite of these losses, the Singhs did not lose courage. They continued to march towards Barnala with the caravan. By evening, they reached the village Kutabe Bahmani, there the Sikhs started to quench their thirst from the pool. When the army tried to reach the pool to drink water, the Singhs stood in their way. They did not allow the army to pass until the whole of the caravan had quenched their thirst and moved forward. After the Sikhs had gone, the army was able to reach the pool. During the time, Abdali's army was drinking water from the pool, the Sikhs had gone far away. Due to the night fall, Abdali abandoned to pursue the Sikhs. Moving ahead even during the night, the Sikhs went towards Kotkapura and Faridkot.

In this greater holocaust, ten to twelve thousand Singhs attained martyrdom and about twenty thousand women and children were murdered. Every Singh had suffered some injury that day. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had 64 wounds on his body. In only three months Sikhs avenged this defeat by attacking Abdali's general, stationed at Amritsar and massacring his 20,000 troops, 5-10,000 troops that surrendered were forced to clean up Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras.

Excerpts taken from this book.

Bed-time stories- 7

"Sikh martyrs" written by Sardar Santokh Singh Jagdev.

Published by Sikh missionary resource centre, Birmingham