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Indians and Britishers: Rivalry from the Battle of Delhi (1803) to the Battle for Delhi (1857): With special reference to Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of NCR Delhi

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Abstract

The East India Company, after taking Bengal, Bihar and Odisha in its full control, executed further its expansion into upper Ganga Valley. Delhi was on its target. Governor-General Lord Wellesley made 2 plans for taking Delhi and Bundelkhand. He executed these sending General Gerard Lake to bring Emperor Shah Alam II into Company's control on the basis of military power. The Marathas under Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior were responsible to safeguard both the emperor and the city of Delhi. The fall of Aligarh Fort was a set back to them but their leader Madho Rao Maratha at Malagarh Fort was amongst those who had tried their best to resist Company's army. A fierce battle was fought on September 11, 1803 at the very site now known as the 'Golf Course' of Noida. At this site was the main camp of General Lake. The Marathas were supported by a number of prominent zamindars and chaudharies of NCR Delhi. Amongst them were Chaudhary Ganga Bishan's family members and kinsmen of Khindaura and nearby villages. Tikam Singh and Pitam Singh of the Asaura Riyasat's family and their other close relatives and supporters also fought on Indian side but finally many of them remained slain on the battle field fighting against General Lake. Historically, this battle is known as the 'Battle of Delhi'. After a long period of exact 53 years and 8 month from the Battle of Delhi, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan Tyagi's nephew Dilsukh Chaudhary killed 5 European Army Officers on May 11, 1857 on account of the old rivalry.

Keywords

Battle of Delhi, Battle for Delhi, Ganga-Yamuna Doab, Aligarh Fort, Malagarh Fort, Bilaspur Fort, Khindaura, Ghayaspur, East India Company.

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Indians and Britishers: Rivalry from the Battle of Delhi (1803) to the Battle for Delhi (1857): With special reference to Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of NCR Delhi

This paper is in the series of an attempt to unearth the families and leaders of Indians fought in the Battle of Delhi to support the Maratha contingents against the East India Company's forces under General Gerard Lake¹ on September 11, 1803. The rivalry existed till long that is witnessed on killing of 5 Europeans in the village of Khindaura situated in NCR Delhi in the present *tehsil* of Modinagar in Ghaziabad District of Uttar Pradesh on May 11, 1857 during the 'Indian War of Independence of 1857'.

The upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab region has been a platform to control the northern India politically on the basis of purely military strength. For estimating its geo-historic value in this respect, Prof. Percival Spear rightly remarks:²

"Two hundred years ago Delhi had been a great and imperial city for a century, with anything between one and two million inhabitants. It was the largest and most renowned city, not only of India, but of all the East from Constantinople to Canton. Its Court was brilliant, its mosques and colleges numerous, and its literary and artistic fame as high as its political renown. Within fifty years its provinces vanished, its wealth was plundered, its Emperor was blinded, and the city shrank to be a provincial capital of less than two hundred thousand people. The greatness of the change is not appreciated because the magnitude of Mughal Delhi is not realized. The main steps in the decline, the sacks of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the civil wars of the 'omrahs' or nobles, the atrocities of Ghulam Qadir Khan, are well known. But the drama which accompanied these events, the ebb and flow of changing fortune, the alternating hopes and deepening gloom, are too often disregarded in the facile terms 'decadence', 'effete glory' and 'inevitable decline'. Because Delhi is great now, with its new-planned capital city, it is forgotten that it was ever great before; because the disorders which now occur are within the city itself the days are forgotten when every village was a walled fortress, when no one could travel without an escort, and when robbers picked off unwary travellers from behind the walls of decaying monuments. The Mutiny is commonly the only dramatic event connected with the history of Delhi; to the Delhi-wallah it is an isolated catastrophe not comparable to the disasters of the previous century."

Discussing Nadir Shah's invasion and Ghulam Qadir's atrocities, he further writes:³

"It is the purpose of this study to trace the history of Delhi from the time that it ceased to be the capital of Mughal India until it became a completely British city after the Mutiny in 1858. The first date may be conveniently fixed in 1761 when the tides of Afghans and Marathas had swept over the Empire to meet, in a titanic shock, on the fatal field of Panipat, and thereafter in receding to leave that troubled turmoil of rival chiefs and shadowy sovereignties which is known as the Great Anarchy. From 1738, the year of the first Maratha excursion to the environs of Delhi, the tale of the Empire's dying throes has been told with masterly clarity by Sir Jadunath Sarkar up to 1772. But thereafter comes a gap. Interest has been concentrated more upon the fortunes of picturesque personalities than the fate of the people and the imperial district. The fortunes of the adventurer George Thomas, of the brigand Ghulam Qadir, of the Frenchman de Boigne, of the Christian Princess Samru, have been more attractive subjects than the citizens of Delhi, tossed about by every wind of fortune, or the peasants of the districts, sheltering behind the mud walls of their villages, or fleeing to the stony hills. But though society seemed decadent, politics rotten, and rival chieftains fierce and unscrupulous, there was method in the political madness of the day. In order to follow the ever-changing situation, something should first be said of the underlying political factors which governed the Delhi situation."

What glory of the city of Delhi enjoyed has been categorically pointed out by the historian when he explains:⁴

"No city east of Constantinople has so attracted the possessors of or the aspirants to power. This is because Delhi, in relation to the rest of India, occupies a position of fundamental strategic importance. Situated on the Doab, the alluvial plain of the Ganges and the Jumna, it stands in the centre of a corridor which connects the Punjab and the north-west with the rest of India. To the north, the corridor narrows and runs north-west, bounded on the one side by the mighty Himalayas, and on the other by the Rajputana desert. There is no natural obstacle before the Indus is reached; the mountains beyond are of little value for defence because the Afghan passes descend steeply on the Indian side but only gently on the Afghan. The neighbours of India are for ever looking down on the plains of India; India is for ever looking up to the forbidding mountain ranges. The only way to make these passes safe is to control both sides, as the Mughuls did from the time of Akbar to that of Muhammad Shah, and as the British Government did on a restricted scale. But this involves the occupation of the Afghan plateau, the

rigours of whose climate Indian troops from the plains have never been willing to endure for long."

Delhi, in real sense of the term was "Dehali", the gateway as well as the 'potential master of Hindustan' having 'its master' as the 'potential master of whole peninsula:⁵

"The invader from the north-west must always follow the Punjab corridor until he reaches the Jumna and the neighbourhood of Delhi. Arrived at Delhi the whole of India lies open before him. To the south-east the thousand miles of the flat Gangetic plain invites him through rich cornlands to the richer rice-fields of Bengal. The master of Delhi is the potential master of Hindustan and, since the wealth of India is to be found in Hindustan, its master is the potential master of the whole peninsula. To the south runs the route to the rich lands of Malwa and central India and on to the Deccan. To the south-west the route skirts Rajputana to the indigo and rice-fields of Gujarat. Ajmer, which is the key of Rajputana, is within easy reach of Delhi, and there is no natural obstacle on the main routes until the river Narbada and the Vindhya mountains are reached. Therefore every ambitious power from the north, seeking the control of the country, and every Indian power aspiring to empire, has sought to possess Delhi as the key of Hindustan. These strategical facts are recognized in Hindu tradition, which has an underlying faith in the fundamental political as well as the cultural unity of India. The unity of the country, however frequently broken, is as natural an Indian conception as the balance of power, however often threatened, is a constant European conception of politics."

The Mughal masters of Delhi in 18th century had gradually lost their control in a time-bracket when the mighty Marathas were ready to take it in their control. Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath⁶ and after his death in 1719⁷, his eldest son and successor Peshwa Bajirao not only had their plans but the power and strategical ability also to capture Delhi.⁸

On the other hand Nadir Shah's episodes⁹ and his death opened the Afghans, under his ex-commander Ahmad Durrani's leadership, the way to come into the field as Maratha's competitor. The historian, further throws light on the scene highlighting these points systematically as follows:¹⁰

"In the eighteenth century, the power which had for two centuries controlled Delhi and India rapidly decayed, and immediately the winds of war began blowing to fill in the political depression thus created. There were two candidates for empire, the Afghans in the north, who had become independent of Persia at the death of Nadir Shah, and the Marathas in the south. The Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali had warlike vigour and the financial sinews of war, but lacked political

cohesion. Their once promising Indian empire degenerated into a series of blindings and betrayals. The Marathas possessed military skill and political finesse, but, based on the comparatively infertile Deccan, which had been further impoverished by years of Mughul warfare, they lacked the necessary resources for a continued effort. The result was that when these two powers met in apparently decisive combat at Panipat, the one thing which can with certainty be said of that famous carnage was that it was not decisive. Within a few years the Marathas, who were beaten, had returned to Hindustan, and the Afghans, who were victorious, had disappeared permanently from India. It did not even decide negatively that the Marathas should not enjoy the Empire of India, for twenty years later the Empire was again within their grasp with no one in the north to stop them. Later developments made it clear that even had the Marathas won Panipat, they would not long have held the Empire, and this for two reasons. First, they lacked the necessary resources in men and money, and secondly their own internal jealousies and dissensions were too great. What Panipat really did was to reveal, as in a lightning flash, the political bankruptcy of the Afghan chiefs and the material poverty of the Marathas. The fact that it took the Marathas ten years to recover from the blow is evidence not so much of the severity of the defeat, as of their lack of reserves."

In a time so tough for the Mughals at Delhi, the Marathas under Mahadji Sindhia and Tukoji Holkar; the Sikhs; the Jats and the Afghans from Rohilkhand were the concerns:¹¹

"Who then was to fill the void created by the retirement of the contending armies? To the north, in the Punjab, the Sikhs ventured down from the hills into which they had been driven by Bahadur Shah and Farrukhsiyar fifty years before; in petty conflicts with village zamindars, local Muslim chiefs, and each other, they gradually spread over the country and sorted themselves out into twelve misls or loose confederacies. To the west, the Rajput chiefs, faint from interminable Maratha depredations, enjoyed a brief respite which their political incapacity prevented them from using effectively. To the south, central India and Malwa as far as the river Chambal gradually fell into the hands of the Maratha chiefs Madho Rao Sindia and Tukaji Holkar. In theory merely officers of the Peshwa, their families were both destined to become independent, but their progress was hindered by their mutual jealousies. To the south-east lay the province of Oudh, whose hereditary governor was the able and ambitious Shuja-ud-daula. He was shortly to become Vazir of the Empire-the ejection from which office of his father, Safdar Jang, in 1754 was one of the immediate causes of the collapse of the Empire. Due east of Delhi, sandwiched

between the Ganges and the hills of Kumaun, lay the district of Rohilkhand, once part of Oudh. It had been occupied about 1740 by the Rohilla tribe of Afghans, who had been driven by Nadir Shah before him into India. As turbulent and enterprising as any of their race, they also proved to be a disintegrating factor throughout this period."

It was the year of 1788, when the drama was played by the infamous Ghulam Qadir,¹² son of former Mir Bakshi Zabita Khan, He was also the eldest grandson of the former Mir Bakshi Najibuddaula, father of Zabita Khan. He committed every kind of atrocity with far inhuman brutality dealing with Emperor Shah Alam II. He, even made the Emperor blind in the Red Fort but no news of his crimes was out¹³. When the news reached the ears of Mahadji Sindhia, he immediately sent a strong force to release the Emperor from his captivity. The Maratha force besieged the Red Fort and Ghulam Qadir had to flee in a dark night. Finally, he was caught from Bamanauli¹⁴ from a house of a Brahmin. Ali Bahadur¹⁵, grandson of Peshwa Bajirao from Mastani took the captive Ghulam Qadir to the Mathura Camp of Mahadji where he was tortured and finally beheaded.

In the meantime, Emperor Shah Alam II restored Mahadji to the office of the Mir Bakshi¹⁶ i.e. Commander-in-Chief and bestowed upon him the country from Etawah to the foot-hills of Shivalik in presently district of Haridwar as well.¹⁷ This area of Upper-Ganga-Yamuna Doab consisted of the various territories falling in the *Subas* of Agra and Delhi. The *sirkars* of Agra, Koil, Delhi and Saharanpur covered this area particularly somewhere partly or fully.

Since the year of 1788 to his death in 1794; 17 Agra Fort remained under the control of Mahadji Sindhia who had established at Gwalior. After his death in 1794, his nephew and adopted son by Daulat Rao Sindhia succeeded him.¹⁸

During those last years of the eighteenth century, Lord Wellesley was the Governor-General of the East India Company.¹⁹ He was responsible to execute his two plans relating to the geographical area discussed above and that of the Bundelkhand.²⁰ He was a colonial expansionist. Delhi was on his point, with deadly targeted one. He ordered to General Gerard Lake²¹ to invade the country and reach Delhi to bring Emperor Shah Alam II under Company's protection.²² The main hurdle was Daulat Rao Sindhia's forces trained in European style of warfare under the able command of General M. Perron. Writing the then situation, Percival Spear remarks:²³

".....and in 1803 the Maratha troops opposing the British at Delhi numbered in all about 19,000."

General Gerard Lake's expedition might be made futile, if Maratha General Monsier. Perron would have resisted him, but, he was the person

already in terms with Governor-General. He was in secret correspondence who had written to seek permission to travel to Europe in Company's ship.²⁴ Those days the ships of East India Company were considered the safest means to travel in the seas. His would be voyage was a thing of merely a permission from G.G. Lord Wellesley.

Lord Wellesley took the full advantage of it but he never showed a slight sign of his dealing with General Perron to General Lake. Lake was kept totally unaware to that secret correspondence.

Unaware of the secret terms of Governor-General with General Monsier Perron, General Lake marched with his full preparation of having been already done in July 1803.²⁵ He crossed the Ganga near Farrukhabad and entered the territory ruled by Sindhia. He reached Mathura and attacked the Aligarh Fort where a very fierce battle was fought.²⁶ The inmates fought fiercely but, on 3 September, 1803; the fort fell into Lake's hands.²⁷

Next to Aligarh Fort was the fort of Malagarh²⁸ under one Madho Rao Maratha.²⁹ He sent messages to his allies as well as to James Skinner,³⁰ his subordinate Anglo-European warrior who had been given charge of Bilaspur Fort³¹ from the Marathas. Amongst the former, a number of prominent *zemindars* came and assembled under the umbrella of the Marathas³² but Skinner had shown the sign of defection.³³ On it, Madho Rao being confirmed on his treachery, sent hard message and approached his fort to besiege him. But James Skinner very sharp in war tactics did not give Madho Rao Maratha a chance and came out of his fort³⁴ and some miles away gave resistance to Madho Rao.³⁵ A fierce battle was fought in which Madho Rao's cavalry could not defeat James Skinner³⁶ and had to come in terms.³⁷ Madho Rao, preferred to come into terms so that he might advance to guard Delhi and Emperor Shah Alam II.

This was a juncture at which the role of Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of Khindaura is seen.³⁸ He was a cavalrymen who alongwith his tribesman joined the Battle of Delhi fought on September 11, 1803.³⁹ That battle has its historical importance. Actually, it is that Battle of Delhi, which actually was not fought at Delhi. It is also called as the "Battle of Patparganj".

Neither the 'Battle of Delhi' or the 'Battle of Patparganj' was fought at Delhi nor at Patparganj. In fact, it was fought at the very place presently known as the Golf Course of Noida. The battle ground covered the area of some nearby tiny villages. But the centre of the British force under General Gerard Lake was at this very place.

In this battle General Lake remained victorious. The Indian side under the leadership of Madho Rao and other Marathas was defeated. The Maratha lieutenants posted at Kothigate Hapur and those at Ajarara *thana* including the prominent local *zamindars* and Chaudharies were slain on the battlefield.⁴⁰ Amongst them some have been discovered by the author

during the last 4 decades. Some prominent local figures discovered are as follows:⁴¹

1. Family members of Chaudhary Ganga Bishan Tyagi of Khindaura and their supporting clansmen as well as other ones.
2. Family members of Chaudhary Pitam Singh and Tikam Singh of *Riyasat* family of Asaura with their clansmen and other supporters.

It could not be found out whether other ones were in which exact number? But the author encounters the evidence that one Ghasi Ram,⁴² a Jat of Narwal gotra resisted the forces of the East India Company under Col. Burn when he had reached Shamli.⁴³ Ghasi Ram, a protege of the Marathas, resisted him.⁴⁴ His son Mohar Singh participated in 1857 against the Britishers who was caught and had been hanged till death from a Neem tree in the Shamli tehsil campus.⁴⁵ The author has identified the exact point where that *Neem* tree stood. Later on, in the second half of the twentieth century, the prominent citizens of Shamli took a lead to establish Vaishya Degree College, Shamli in that very historic campus of Shamli tehsil.

The 'War of Indian Independence of 1857' started from Meerut on Sunday, May 10, 1857⁴⁶ proved a war for getting rid of the foreign rule. On the next morning i.e. on 11th May, it broke out at Delhi. On the same historic day of 11th May, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan⁴⁷ and his brave nephew w Dilsukh Chaudhary⁴⁸, imprisoned 6 Europeans⁴⁹ amongst them 4 were lieutenants. On his order, the villagers of Khindawra, Kumhera, Bhaneda, Suhana and Ghayaspur killed the captives.⁵⁰ Only one named Captain Osburne could escape from the scene to tell the story to the Magistrate at Meerut.⁵¹

The names of the killed are as follows:⁵²

1. Lieutenant Willough by of Delhi Magazine.
2. Lieutenant Butler of 54th Native Infantry.
3. Lieutenant Ensign Angelo of 54th Native Infantry.
4. Lieutenant Hyslope of 74th native Infantry.
5. Mr. Stewart of Delhi College.

Thus from the 'Battle of Delhi' fought on September 11, 1803 to the 'Battle for Delhi' fought from 10th May to 20th September 1857 and after; till the death of Tatya Tope in 1859, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan⁵³, a Tyagi Brahmin was actively alive to take revenge. His desire strong in nature can be felt in his words (when asking for water reaching home after the killings of 5 Europeans) as follows:⁵⁴

*"Aaj kaleje me thandak padi hei,
Chavvaun saal baad jakar.
Bahu pani laade,
Dilsukh ne 4 ka badlaa 6 se liya hei."*

Means:

"Today, after 54 years, my soul is at peace.
Daughter-in-law, bring [me] water,
Dilsukh has taken revenge for 4 [of our family]
by killing 6 [of East India Company]."

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