

MAHARAJA RIPUDAMAN SINGH OF NABHA AND THE MORCHA OF JAITO

Nabha state was having 2nd place in the Punjab state. This area was 968 square mile and according to the census of 1921, its population was 263,394 and its revenue population was 24,00,000.¹

Nabha was a famous and prosperous state. Hamir Singh was the founder of Nabha state, who was the son of Tirlok Singh. Tirlok Singh was son of Bhai Phul Singh, who was concerning to the joint ancestors of Fulkiea, Patiala, Nabha and Jind. The kings of Fulkiea state were cousins.²

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh was born on 4th March, 1883 in the house of Maharaja Hira Singh. Maharaj Ripudaman Singh ascended to throne on 24th January, 1912 when he was 28 years old. Maharaja Ripudaman Singh was the king of a different type. He was a patriot, supporter of the social and political progressive movements. He was well educated but his upbringing was according to Sikh traditions. Therefore, he was the person to obey the Sikh religion.³

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh had been additional member of Council of Governor General from 1906 to 1908. He altogether with the National leaders Gopal Krishan Gokhle and Madan Mohan Malaviya, expressed their protest against the Press Bill of British Government and became anti British Government.⁴

He submitted the `Anand Marriage Act`, Bill before the council in an effective way.⁵

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh opposed every wrong act of the British Government and expressed his protest against bureaucracy. Maharaja Ripudaman Singh, from the very beginning was the supporter of *Akali Lahar*/movement. He gave full powers to the *Akalis* regarding *Sudhar of Gurudwaras*. In 1922, The Britishers started a campaign to arrest the *Akalis*. Police arrested 1700 *Akalis* from the different states but Maharaja Ripudaman Singh did not help the British Government.⁶

S.G.P.C. announced to celebrate the protest day against the massacre of Nankana Sahib and suggested the Sikhs to wear black turban. Maharaja himself wore Black turban and announced holiday on *Ardas* Day of Nankana Sahib. Due to this, British Government was in trouble because British Government was going to arrest all black turban men.⁷

The date to send the Martyr *Jatha* was announced to reconstruct the demolished wall of *Gurudwara Rakab Ganj*, Maharaja helped the British Government by being the mediator between the British Government and Sikhs, but still British Government was against the Maharaja and the British Government was in search of the opportunity to cause loss to him.⁸

Besides this, the King of Patiala Raja Bhupinder Singh had good relation with the British Government. In those days a dispute was running between both the states, and British Government found that opportunity and appointed Mr. Stuart as Judge of High Court of Allahabad to enquire the matter of Maharaja Ripudaman and Bhupinder Singh. That Judge investigated the matter for 4 months and submitted his report to Governor General and declared the matter against the Maharaja Nabha and forced the Maharaja to quit the throne. On 9th July, 1923 Maharaja Nabha Ripudaman Singh was removed from the throne and was sent to Dehradun after agreement to pay Rs.3,00,000/- annually.⁹

King of Nabha had no permission to walk, nor had the permission to provide education to his children. The following statement was related to this fact:

*"When Justice Stuart investigated the matter of State Nabha, then on 21th April 1923, Chief Minister of Nabha submitted a proposal before the Indian Government that Maharaja Nabha dynamically be permitted to establish his control over state administration, its aim was to give permission to the Maharaja for rest to reinstate his health which was bring deteriorated after the depression created due to wrong investigation of British Government."*¹⁰

It was known from the letter of British Government written by Karnal Minchin to Political secretariat J.P. Thompson, that Maharaja reached Kasoli on 05 June, 1923 to consult with representatives of the state regarding matter of dispute of State Nabha and to solve the dispute but it was heard at one time that Maharaja Ripudaman Singh was ready to consider the conditions of the British Government but Maharaja refused to admit the same and Maharaja wrote about the situation regarding dynamically retiring from administration of his state that:

*"They took wrong advantage of my weak health, my selfish officials were under the influence of my opponents and other officials of British Government suggested me to cool down the temper of British Government by handing over my all powers."*¹¹

On 5th June, 1923 after meeting with Karnal Minthin and in the month of July, 1923 during his quit claim, there were occurred some new incidents. Due to that the situation was changed. When the Indian Government was busy to decide the conditions on which the permission might be granted to Maharaja. British Government also wrote letter to Lord Peal, Secretary of state to allow the said conditions, then some *Akali* leaders like Master Tara Singh, Bawa Harkrishan Singh and Teja Singh Samundary went to Maharaja and suggested the Maharaja not to break the connection with the British Government.¹²

They assured Maharaja that either he would be enthroned again or all Sikhs would offer their martyr for the aim.¹³

After the assurance of *Akali* leaders, Maharaja changed his behavior and decided not to bow his head before the British Government and started consulting with the *Akali* leaders. He took help from the editors of newspapers like *Sacha Dhandora*, *Daler-E-Hind*, *Bir Akali* and *Kirpan Bahadur*. Those newspapers declared Maharaja as Nationalist Maharaja, a hardcore *Khuddar Sikh Hakam* and religious leader of Sikh population. This *Akali* newspaper thought the quit claim of Maharaja as an interference in the Sikh religion, because Guru Gobind Singh sent a *Hukamnama* to the ancestors of Nabha State and as per the said *Hukamnama*, Guru Gobind Singh stated that "*Guru Ka Apna Ghar Tera Ghar Mera Asse*".¹⁴

On the other hand when the Maharaja was sent to Dehradun, the British Government announced that Maharaja had left the throne at his own desire but people knew the reality. On the same day, S.G.P.C. announced to conduct a protest against that illegal Act of the British Government. To show the protest against that action of the Government, S.G.P.C. announced to celebrate *Ardas* Day on 29th July and Nabha day on 9th September. Sikhs had the belief that British Government had removed Maharaja from the throne to take revenge from him. The confidence of Sikhs was high due to the front of Nankana Sahib and victory of *Guru Ka Bagh*. They had full confidence and trust on themselves and had courage to remove injustice by their sacrifices.¹⁵

On 2nd August, S.G.P.C. sent a call to Governor General and demanded to conduct inquiry of matter in which British Government forcibly got the signature of Maharaja Nabha on the papers to leave the throne himself, but British Government did not consider the request of S.G.P.C.

National Newspapers wrote a lot about Maharaja Nabha that, “*There was injustice with a great electric Indian Maharaja, who had to bear the cost of his electric mind and its result was that Akalis were going in depression*”.¹⁶

Moti Lal Nehru reached the railway station of Nabha, talking to the people, he put a question before them, “Do you believe in the false things about Maharaja Nabha?” People answered that, campaign of dishonour was done by some traitors. Moti Lal Nehru put another question, “Do you want to reinstate Maharaja Nabha on throne again?” Then people answered in one common voice that they want to reinstate the throne of Maharaja Nabha with great honour.¹⁷

In the beginning to express the desires of the people, a grand *Diwan* was conducted at *Gurudwara Gangsar Jaito* and *Akhand Path* was started. Administration of Nabha Wilson Johnston and other officials opposed the same and he sent some armed and uniforms police men and arrested the Sikhs and *Sewadars* who were peacefully enjoying the *Path*. They also arrested Bhai Inder Singh who was reciting the *Path* of *Guru Granth Sahib* in a peaceful manner and *Akhand Path* was disrupted.

Except the matter of Maharaja Nabha, matter to reinstate of *Akhand Path*, the matter of disruption in the *Akhand Path* due to bullying of police assumed more significance among the Sikhs and S.G.P.C. decided to conduct a front against all those incidents. This front became more religious than political. The Sikh *Panth* decided that until the *Akhand Path* was performed in a peaceful manner at the same place, they would not remove the front from the spot and they would not fear to make any type of sacrifice.¹⁸

On 15th September, 1923, a *Jatha* including 25 sikhs moved to *Jaito*, and Sikhs from the *Jatha* reached *Jaito* in a peaceful manner preaching about reinstate of *Akhand Path*. They were arrested by the police at *Jaito* as per British Government order and were left them in the forests without food and gave severe beating to them, Sikhs without money and food, after bearing difficulties tried to reach Amritsar to rejoin the *Jathas*.¹⁹

A big seminar of all India Congress was organized at Delhi in which they discussed the difficulties being faced by the Sikhs. Pandit J L Nehru, Principal Gidwani and Shri K Satnam moved to *Jaito*. On 21st September, when they reached *Jaito*, got arrested by the police and in the month of November, 1923 they were released. Nehru talked about the difficulties of those two months in his autobiography and said that whole day they were confined in the *Jail* and in the evening they were sent to the Station and next night they faced hard difficulties and spent half night in a train box and half night at Nabha *Jail*. They were left at Nabha *Jail* in a small *Kothri*. Nehru gave his best support to the *Jaito* front by giving his arrest and also his father Moti Lal Nehru, who was a senior Advocate in profession, went back without meeting his son.²⁰

When *Jathas* including 25-25 *Sikhs each* reached *Jaito* Front, police arrested them and left at a so long distance in the forests. Except this some great *Akali* leaders were also arrested by the police at *Jaito* front and they were sent to the Jails. Thousands of *Akali* leaders were confined in *Bhai Ferru* fort. At that time, the leaders who were not arrested by the police, they were consulting with the arrested leaders and decided that they had to send a *Jatha* including 500 *Sikhs* on 09 Feb, 1924 to begin *Akhand Path* Sahib at *Jaito* and on 7th January, 1924, 56 members from 2nd S.G.P.C. were also arrested and at 3rd time they created another Executive Committee.²¹

On 9th February a big gathering of Sikhs was organised at *Akal Takhat* Sahib, because on the same day, first Martyr *Jatha* was to be sent to *Jaito* and for this *Jatha*, about 3000 Sikh people reached there.

When *Jatha* was about to go after the *Ardas*, there was a *Vairagmai* view and S. Udhm Singh Varpal was appointed as a head of *Jatha* and *Jathedar* of *Akal Takhat* gave message to the *Jatha* Sikhs took oath to recite the *Path* in a peaceful manner and moved to *Jaito*.²¹

This *Shahidi Jatha* was going to *Jaito* via Chabba, Taran Taran, Nushehra, Makhu, Zira, Talwandi Bhai etc. Sikh people without having any fear welcomed the *Jatha* and served the *Jatha*. The last stage of *Jatha* was at village Bargari 6 km away from *Jaito*. After night rest, morning *Kirtan* was done and after took food on 21st February at midday they moved to *Jaito* and thousands of Sikhs joined the same. Some National Congress leaders like Dr. Kichlu, Principal Gidwani, Mr. Jimand Editor of New York Times, American Newspaper and Noor Muhamad Nama Nigar of *Khilafat* movement and Muhammad Amin also joined the *Jatha*.²²

Jatha recited words like “*Moh Marn Ka Chao Hai Mart Tan Hari Ke Duar, Sura Soi Jo Lahre Din Ke Hait*” as they moved toward *Tibbi Sahib*. Administrative Mr. Johnston announced an order to stop moving forward or they would be fired. There was army standing and in the fort they established Machinery weapons and they created a net with fencing wire to arrest the *Jatha*.²³

When *Jatha* did not stop after announcement of Mr. Johnston, he gave order of firing. They started firing at about 2:00 Minute to 2:30 Minute and second part of firing was started at 2:55 and remained till 3 Minute.²⁴

Jatha had already known that to reach *Jaito* was to face death and *Jatha* was ready achieve martyrdom, so it *Jatha* did not stop during the firing, and kept on moving forward without having fear of death.²⁵

Sikhs were moving forward toward *Gurudwara Gangsar* from *Tibbi Sahib*, at that time, Fauji groups started giving severe

beating to the Sikhs with sticks as *Saka Guru Ka Bagh*. During this so many *Sikhs* gave martyrdom and were injured. *Jatha* was arrested and tortured badly. Gidwani and Kichlu also got confined in the Jail.²⁶

At the time of sending the 2nd *Jatha*, S.G.P.C. requested the Sikh population that wherever the *Jatha* was stopped for rest and food other *Sikhs* could only serve the *Jatha* and say goodbye to them and not to go with *Jatha*.²⁷

The *Jatha* stopped at various places and on 13 March reached a village which was nearby *Jaito* and next day the *Jatha* was going to enter *Jaito*. On the other hand, on 14 March at morning Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Kartar Singh, Gulab Singh and others joined the *Jatha*, but it was not ready to admit anything. When *Jatha* reached at distance of 100-150 yards from *Jaito*, Johnston was present at the spot. Malaviya said that, there was no weapon with the *Jatha* and army could not fire the peaceful and armless *Jatha*. *Jatha* started moving forward, then Johnston ordered to arrest the *Jatha* and the officers arrested the *Sikhs* of *Jatha* and confined them at fort of *Jaito* and after some time *Sikhs* were sent to Nabha Jail. The news about the *Jaito* Front and courage of *Sikhs* was published in all the newspapers of the world. People from whole world appreciated the bravery of the *Sikhs* and forced the British Government to reinstate its religious freedom.²⁸

After that on 22nd March, 3rd *Jatha* departed from *Akal Takhat* Sahib and on 7th April, 1924 reached *Jaito*. Army and police already maintained the position to welcome *Jatha* as earlier. At that time, Tara Singh M.L.A., Mia Fazal Had and S. Kartar Singh Member Legislative Assembly also reached the spot. *Jatha* was arrested in small groups and sent to the fort and after some time they were sent to Jail.²⁹ Dr. Kichlu said that “they were fully satisfied that except normal small sticks, *Jatha* did not have any type of weapon etc.”³⁰

S. Jimand also wrote a letter to Mahatama Gandhi that, “I want to repeat this again that on 21st February at 2P.M. when *Jatha* entered the area of Nabha, then I watched the crowd which was going behind the *Jatha*, as far as I think the crowd were not armed and they behaved peacefully.”³¹

When the British Government demanded inquiry regarding *Jaito* Front, *Akali* leaders started sending more *Jathas*. Although some of the national leaders suggested the *Akalis* not to send more *Jathas*. It was also an interesting thing that Mahatama Gandhi, who was the inspiration, also suggested the *Akalis* to stop the *Lahar* and not to send more *Jatha*. On 4th March, 1924 Mahatma Gandhi wrote a letter in the name of Secretariat of S.G.P.C. that he would help them, if the *Akalis* got separated their *Dharmik Sudhar Lahar*/movement from political matter of Nabha state, but the reality was that at the time of *Saka Nankana*, he himself suggested the *Sikhs* to conduct non cooperation movement against the British Government.³² S.G.P.C. and *Akali* leaders refused to consider the advice of anybody and 4th *Shahidi Jatha* departed on 21th March from Anandpur Sahib, 5th *Jatha* departed on 12 April from Layalpur. At first, all *Jathas* were presented before *Akal Takhat* Sahib and departed from *Akal Takhat* Sahib and reached *Jaito* and gave their arrests.³³

When sixth *Jatha* which was of *Sikhs* of Ferozpur reached *Jaito* on 10 May, British Government continued the difficulties towards the *Jatha* and arrested the sixth *Jatha*. After the arrest of this *Jatha*, British Government created a committee under the supervision of William Birdwood to consult with Sikh leaders. Bhai Fateh Singh, Head *Granthi* of Shri Darbar Sahib said in his statement that Babar Badshah arrested many Fakirs and Guru Nanak Dev Ji, but when he knew the reality, he repented and today the British Government was bullying like past. William Birdwood committee could not do anything, as long as all *Gurudwaras* were not released.³⁴

7th *Shahidi Jatha* of Districts of Doaba departed on 1st June, 8th *Jatha* of District Shekhupura departed on 22 May from Nankana Sahib, 9th *Jatha* of District Amritsar on 25th June, headed towards *Jaito*. In the 10th *Jatha* *Sikhs* from Lahore, Amritsar and Gurdaspur joined. In the 11th *Jatha* *Sikhs* from Ludhiana and Ferozpur joined, they all departed from Amritsar on 13th July and reached *Jaito* at different times.³⁵

Jathas were not coming from Punjab only, rather on 29th June, 1924, a *Jatha* including 100 *Sikhs* from Bengal, (Kolkata) departed from Sikh Sangat *Gurudwara* via Patna, Banaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Saharanpur, Ambala and reached Amritsar on 13th July. In whichever city the *Jatha* stayed, the Sikh Sangat gave big welcome to them and served them. Discussion of *Saka* happened at *Jaito* had raised and *Sikhs* from other states started coming to Amritsar and joined the *Jatha*. A *Jatha* of 11 *Sikhs* from Canada departed from Canada on 17th July, 1924 and landed from the plane in the month of September at Kolkata and via big cities reached Amritsar on 28 September. Similarly a *Jatha* from Hong kong reached Amritsar on 24 Feb, 1925 and a *Jatha* of 25 *Sikhs* from Shanghai (China) reached Amritsar on 19 July, 1925.³⁶

Due to the decision of *Akali* leaders not to stop sending *Jatha*, the number of *Akali* prisoners was increasing and Punjab Government was becoming upset. Due to the failure of British Government to find the solution of *Akali* problem as well as failure of British Government to submit the bill regarding it, the efforts of Muhamad Ali Jinha and Madan Mohan Malaviya got freedom to submit *Gurudwara* Bill before the Central Legislative Assembly. During such situations, British Officials and *Akali* leaders started doing efforts to find the solution of *Jaito* problem.³⁷

After considering the suggestion of Mahatama Gandhi, the executive of S.G.P.C. sent its representative to meet Maharaja Nabha at Dehradun, because Mahatama Gandhi told S.G.P.C. in his letter that *Akalis* might leave the question of political matter of Nabha. When delegation reached to Maharaja, Raja Singh President of delegation put more emphasis upon Maharaja that there was difficulty to move forward of S.G.P.C., Maharaja said to leave the question of Nabha.³⁸

But the interesting thing was that in the month of July, 1925 Maharaja came to know that more *Akalis* were ready to get the bill passed and were ready to give their oath regarding this, then Maharaja suggested the *Akalis* not to accept the bill and wrote that the result to leave the question of Nabha state would be that after some time the British Government would ruin him and his family.³⁹

12th *Jatha* departed on 17th August, 1924, 13th *Jatha* left on 18th September, 14th *Jatha* left on 15 December, 1924, 15th *Jatha* on 1st

March, 1925 and 16th *Jatha* on 17 April, 1925 from Amritsar and reached *Jaito* passing through villages and cities and was arrested by the police at *Jaito*. On 17th April, 1925 a special *Jatha* of 100 Sikhs departed from *Akal Takhat*, as it was on the way, they got news that British Government reinstated the *Akhand Path* and and this *Jatha* reached *Jaito* and started the *Akhand Path*.⁴⁰

To perform this *Akhand Path*, Sikhs faced so many difficulties and many Sikhs were terminated from the services, posts and Sardaries. As per a British Government report, about 10,000 sikhs were arrested at *Jaito* Front and Sikhs which participated in the said front have to pay 1,00,000/- as fine.⁴¹

During that when the *Gurudwara* Act was fully prepared the British Government agreed with the Sikhs and *Akhand Path* was started at *Jaito*. The *morcha* was won by the Sikhs but the S.G.P.C. left the question of Maharaja Nabha.⁴²

Although the Sikhs did never interfere into the politics of the British government as they were not concentrated to the political matters, but the British government started disturbing the personal, public and religious life of the Sikhs. On the political front, the British government started torturing and insulting Maharaja Ripudaman Singh because it was clear to the British government that Maharaja was a great ruler and a powerful soldier of the Sikh community. It was the fault of the government that they decided to remove Maharaja from the throne. That removal became a great and crucial issue for the Sikhs.

The British government did also interfere into the religious matters of the Sikhs and it violated the sanctity of the *Holi Gurudwara* of *Jaito*. The Sikhs wanted to protest against the British government in a very peaceful manner. A number of Sikh devotees tried to visit *Jaito*, but the British officials created a lot of problems in the peaceful religious programmes of the Sikhs. Not only this, the British government also attacked the peace loving devotees who were moving to *Jaito*.

Maharaja was a brave Sikh ruler and he opposed the wrong policies of British Government. He raised his voice against all the wrong activities of the British Government, hence he was removed from the throne. It was a time when the Sikhs wanted to organize an *Akhand Path* at *Jaito* but British Government did not allow this and various problems were created for the Sikhs that resulted the *Jaito Morcha*. Various national leaders appreciated the courage and struggle of the Sikhs.

This interference in the political and religious life of the Sikhs became a great problem for the British government. It was the struggle and courage of the Sikhs that compelled the British government to surrender before the Sikhs.

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