

Brave Shaheeds of Chamkaur Sahib

The following extract is taken from the "Game of Love" Edited by Harjinder Singh, available at www.akaalpublishers.com This short extract from the book sheds light on Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee and the battle of Chamkaur Sahib, where about 40 Sikhs bravely fought an army of 1 million (read on to see this in Guru Jee's own words). The Shaheedi/Martyrdom of the Sikhs who laid down their lives and the older sons of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, Baba Ajeet Singh Jee & Baba Jujhar Singh Jee will be celebrated the world over on the 21st December 2008. Please read on to learn of this glorious history.

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee led a peaceful life until 1689 AD when he defended Anandpur Sahib in his first battle, the battle of Bhangani. This battle was against the Hindu Hill Rajas (Kings) who despised the Guru for raising all castes on a common platform and also wanted to dislodge the Sikhs from Anandpur. They were successfully routed and rebuffed by Sri Guru Gobind Singh and his brave warriors. The Hill Rajas called on the Mughals to support them to defeat Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee who was branded as a common foe to the Muslims and Hindus by the respective rulers.

In 1704 the combined forces attacked the Sikhs but knew that they could not defeat the Sikhs in open battle, as they had been rebuffed once again. Thus they laid siege to Anandpur in the summer of 1704, the Sikhs and Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee were in a fort called Anandgarh for months during this siege. There was a deadlock, the opposing forces could not draw the Sikhs out of Anandgarh and could not see any breaking of the impasse. Thus, after solemn oaths taken upon the Cow and Quran by the respective enemies that no attack would be launched, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee agreed to leave the fort. This was on the 20 December 1704, but the treacherous enemy forces broke their 'solemn oaths' and attacked the Sikhs, but the Sikhs tactfully rebuffed their attacks once again and Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee reached Chamkaur on the 21 December 1704 after crossing the Sirsa stream.

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee and forty surviving Sikhs raised a defensive position in a raised mud house (Garhi). The Sikhs showed exemplary bravery in battle from the Chamkaur Garhi, but many of the Sikhs were martyred, but Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee still managed to escape unscathed. In His own words Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee narrates victory in letters to Aurangzeb the Mughal Emperor, these are called Fatehnama and Zafarnama, namely meaning prose of victory. Firstly I will quote the whole of the Fatehnama and provide commentary where necessary:

In the name of the Lord who manifests Himself as weapons of war viz (through) the sword, the axe, the arrow, the spear, and the shield. The Lord is with the brave warriors who, mounted on their horses, fly through the air. The Lord who has bestowed upon you the kingdom¹, has granted me the honour of protecting the faith. Where as you are engaged in plunder by deceit and lies, I am on the path of truth and purity. The name "Aurangzeb" does not befit you, since a king who is supposed to bring honour to the throne, will not indulge in deceit Aurangzeb! Your rosary is nothing more than a bundle of beads and thread. With every move of a bead, you entrap others in your snare Aurangzeb! By your grisly act, you have put your father's name in the dust; by murdering your own brothers, you have added (to the list of your evil deeds) and from that (by imprisoning your father and murdering your brothers) you have laid a weak foundation of your kingdom. Now by the grace of the Lord, I have made the water of

¹ Referring to Aurangzeb

steel (Amrit for my warriors) which will fall upon you like a torrent and with this (torrent of Amrit), your sinister kingdom will vanish from this holy land without a trace. You came thirsty (defeated) from the mountains of South; the Rajputs have also made you drink the bitter cup (of defeat). Now you are casting your sight towards this side (Punjab). Here also your thirst will remain unquenched I will put fire under your feet when you come to Punjab and I will not let you even drink water here. What is so great if a jackal kills two cubs of a tiger by deceit and cunning?² Since that formidable tiger still lives, he will definitely take revenge (from the jackal). I no longer trust you or your God since I have seen your God as well as his word. I do not trust your oaths any more and now there is no other way for me except to take up the sword³. If you are an old fox, I will too keep my tigers out of your snare. If you come to me for detailed and frank talks, I shall show you the path of purity and truthfulness. Let the forces from both sides array in the battlefield at such a distance that they are visible to each other. The battle field should be arranged in such a manner that both the forces should be separated by a reasonable distance (of two furlongs). Then I will advance in the battle field for combat with your forces along with two of my riders. So far you have been enjoying the fruits of a cosy and comfortable life but never faced the fierce warriors (in the battle field). Now come into the battle field with your weapons and stop tormenting the people who are the creation of the Lord. (Fatehnama, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, translation from www.zafarnama.com)

This challenge from Sri Gobind Singh Jee of an open and face to face battle was never taken up by Aurangzeb. From the wording of the Fatehnama, one can see complete defiance and the spirit of victory of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, even though he had at this time sacrificed his beloved close associates in Chamkaur and his four sons and mother. This is the greatness of the Father of the Sikhs, an undying rising spirit. I will now quote directly from Zafarnama of how Sri Guru Gobind Singh narrates the events of the battle of Chamkaur:

“What can forty hungry men do, when suddenly ten-lac⁴ strong army pounces upon them? That the promise breakers launched a surprise attack with their swords and arrows and guns. It was out of sheer helplessness that I came in the battle field. (Having thus decided) I came with all the battle plans and munitions. When all the stratagem employed for (solving) a problem are exhausted, (only) then taking your hand to the sword is legitimate.⁵ What trust can I have on your oath on Koran? Otherwise you tell why I should have taken this path (of taking up the sword). I do not know that this person (Aurangzeb) is cunning like a fox. Otherwise I would never have come to this place i.e. Chamkaur (by vacating AnandGarh on the false oaths of Aurangzeb and his men). If any person believes an oath on Koran, he should neither be tied (arrested) nor killed. They (the enemy) dressed in black and like flies came suddenly with great uproar. Any person who came out from behind the wall, took one arrow (on his body) and was submerged in blood. Any person who did not come out from (behind) that wall, did not take an arrow and (hence) did not become miserable (die). When I

² It is unclear if Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee is referring to the older or younger Sahibzadas (His sons) here, but regardless of this the Sahibzade were all martyred due to treacherous false oaths taken by the Mughals & Hill Rajas in battle.

³ All the battles that Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee was victorious in were all defensive, in that the Sikhs were attacked and the Sikhs (in the times of Sri Gobind Singh Jee) never made any territorial land claims even when they were victorious in battle – this is unparalleled in history.

⁴ 1,000,000

⁵ This is the most quoted verse of Zafarnama. 300 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji had laid down the circumstances when a person or a nation can pick up the sword against the other. (Comment taken from original translation)

saw that Nahar had come out from behind the wall for battle, he immediately took one of my arrows on himself (and died).

Many Afghans who used to tell tall stories (about their bravery) also ran away from the battlefield. That large number of other Afghans came for the battle like a flood of arrows and bullets. They launched many a brave attacks. (However) some of these (attacks) were intelligently launched but some were sheer madness. They launched many attacks and they took many wounds upon themselves. They killed two (of my) men and also gave their own lives as well.

That coward Khawaja (who was hiding behind the wall) did not come out in the battlefield like a brave man. Alas! If I had seen his (Khawaja's) face, I would have sent him to the other world just with one arrow. In the end many fighters from both sides died quickly after being wounded by arrows and bullets. The battlefield was full of (severed) heads and legs, which gave the impression as if these were balls and sticks.⁶

The whizzing of arrows and vibrations of the strings of bows produced huge commotions. And cries of "hai-hu" were coming from the whole battle field. And the dreadful noises of weapons had their affect on the bravest of brave men who gave the impression as if they had lost their mental balance. And finally what could the bravery of my forty warriors do in battle when countless of these (Afghans) fell upon them." (Zafarnama – verses 19 - 41, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, translation from www.zafarnama.com)

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee shows no relenting even if his sons have been sacrificed,

What happened that you have killed four children (my sons), the coiled snake (in the form of my Khalsa) still remains. What manliness you have shown by extinguishing a few sparks (Sahibzadas). You have made the conflagration brighter and more furious. How nicely the sweet-tongued poet Firdosi has said that "to act in haste is the work of a devil."⁷ When I meet you in the court of your Lord, you will appear as a witness there (and answer all the crimes committed by you)." (Zafarnama – verses 78-81, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, translation from www.zafarnama.com)

One final comment on the Chamkaur battle that needs to be noted is that Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee is a truly a unique Father, who could have saved his older sons from being sacrificed in the battle. Yet, He happily let them enter battle and attain martyrdom. He truly treated all Sikhs as his children and when leaving the Chamkaur Garhi he took his shoes off so he would not step on any of the martyred Sikhs with his shoes on. This was the love He had for His Sikhs.

Another misconception about the Sikhs and especially the battles of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee that needs to be clarified is that the Hindu Hill Rajas were as much against the Muslim Mughals, sometimes the Islamic element is over-emphasised and the Hindu Hill Rajas are given a convenient oversight. In the Guru's words,

⁶ If the battle field was full of severed heads and legs (which could not be counted), it again reflects on the heavy price the Mughal forces had to pay at the hands of the defenders of Chamkaur. (Comment taken from original translation)

⁷ Guru Jee is referring to the summary execution of the young Sahibzadas at Sirhind which he has termed as an act of a devil. (Comment taken from original translation)

“I am also the annihilator of the hill rajas, the idol worshippers. They are idol worshipers and I am engaged in defeating “the very concept” of idol worship.” (Zafarnama – verse 95, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, translation from www.zafarnama.com)

I would like to also clarify that Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee fought against tyranny and did not undertake battle to attack any faith or faithful. Sikhs in their zealous nature sometimes refer to the battles of the Guru as being against Muslims, but this is mistaken. The battles were to uproot tyranny regardless of faith allegiance of those being fought.

I think it would also be befitting to quote how Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee narrates that the faithful are protected by the Almighty in battle and dire circumstances:

In time of need, He blinds the enemy and takes out the helpless without an injury to him, even from a thorn (a thorn cannot prick him if God does not ordain it).⁸ The Compassionate Lord always showers mercy upon any person who follows the path of truthfulness. Anyone who serves the Almighty with total devotion is blessed with peace and tranquillity. What deception can an enemy inflict on a person who is under the protection of Lord Himself. (Zafarnama – verses 100-103, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee, translation from www.zafarnama.com)

The above lines are universal and apply to the faithful, regardless of their religious allegiance. I thought it would be befitting to finish this chapter with the narration of the story of the final martyr of Chamkaur battle – Bibi Harsharan Kaur,

“... in village Khroond, a daughter of Guru Gobind Singh, Bibi Harsharan Kaur, asked for her mother’s permission to perform the final rites for the Shaheeds. Her old mother replied, “it is total darkness outside and soldiers are everywhere around the fort, how will you even go near?”

Hearing this, Kalgeedhar’s⁹ lioness daughter replied with resolve “I will avoid the soldiers and perform the cremation, and if need be, I’ll fight and die.” The mother gave her courage and hugged her daughter and then explained the maryada¹⁰ to follow for the cremation. After performing Ardas, Bibi Harsharan Kaur left for the Chamkaur Fort.

The battlefield which saw iron smashing against iron, the bellows of elephants, the trotting of hooves and calls of “Kill! Capture!” was now totally silent and enveloped in complete darkness. In such a situation, the 16 year old girl Bibi Harsharan Kaur avoided the guards and arrived at the Fort. She saw that bodies were lying everywhere and distinguishing between Sikh and Mughal was very difficult. She still had faith and began to find arms with Karas and torsos with kachheras and heads with long Kesh. As she found a body, she would wipe the face of every Shaheed. Both Sahibzadas and about 30 Shaheeds were found and then she began to collect wood. Fearing the approaching light of dawn, Bibi Harsharan Kaur worked very quickly and soon prepared a pyre. She then lit the fire.

Seeing the rising flames, the guards were shocked and advanced towards the pyre. Bibi Harsharan Kaur was seen in the light of the flames sitting beside the pyre. She was quietly reciting Kirtan Sohila.

⁸ Guru Ji is referring to his escape from Chamkaur. (Comment taken from original translation)

⁹ The plume wearing Sovereign – reference to Sri Gobind Singh Jee

¹⁰ Rites

The guards were shocked and confused as to how a lone woman could come into the fort on such a dark night.

The guards asked in a loud voice,

“Who are you?”

Bibi Jee: I am the daughter of Guru Gobind Singh

Officer: What are you doing here?

Bibi Jee: I am cremating my martyred brothers.

Officer: Don't you know about the order that coming here is a crime?

Bibi Jee: I know it.

Officer: Then why have you disobeyed that order?

Bibi Jee: The orders of a false king do not stand before the orders of the Sachay Patshah (True King)

Officer: Meaning?

Bibi Jee: Meaning that I have respect for the Singhs in my heart and with the Guru's grace I have done my duty. I don't care about your King's orders.

Hearing such stern answers from Bibi Harsharan Kaur, the infuriated Mughal Soldiers attempted to capture her and attack. Bibi Jee grabbed her Kirpan and fought back with determination. After killing and maiming many soldiers, Bibi Harsharan Kaur was injured and fell to the ground. The soldiers picked Bibi Harsharan Kaur up and threw her into the pyre, burning her alive.

The next day the cordon around the Fort was lifted because it was clear that the Sahibzade and most of the Shaheed Singhs had been cremated. The ancestors of the Phulkiaan family, Rama and Triloka, then cremated whichever Singhs remained. The story of Bibi Harsharan Kaur reached Guru Gobind Singh Jee Maharaj in Talvande Sabo (Damdama Sahib).

Upon hearing of her daughter's martyrdom, the old mother thanked Akhaal Purakh. She said, "My daughter has proven herself worthy." The story of the cremation of the Chamkaur Shaheeds will forever serve as a glowing star of inspiration for all Singhs and Singhnees."

(Account of Bibi Harsharan Kaur, adapted from Mahinder Singh ChachraaRee in Soora December 1997 Translated by Admin www.tapoban.org)