

The Attack of Aurangzeb's Army

For two years after this, the Guru moved about in different directions. It will be wrong to imagine that the courage and determination of the Guru suffered a fall because of this defeat. On the contrary, he was steeled by adversity. During this period he remained busy in rallying his Sikhs for the coming battles. He busied himself in hunting during his stay with Sohli. From there he moved into the domain of the Raja of Bhanbour. After a brief stay there he went to Rawalsar and celebrated Baisakhi there. Then he crossed into the principality of the Raja of Mandi and built a fort there. Some Sikhs came to meet him with some presents. The Raja Kalmotia looted them on the way. On learning of this, the Guru sent his son Ajit Singh for redressal. Mahant Jwalamukhi came with five hundred men to help Raja Kalmotia. The Mahant incited many Rajas against the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh came at last to help his son. The Raja Kalmotia was defeated and the Guru chastised the Mahant. The Sikhs looted Jwalamukhi. The offerings of his Sikhs were the only income the Guru had. If these were to be looted enroute by Rajas the Guru was within his right to attack these people.

In the Baisakh of Samat 1758 (1701 A.D.), the Guru returned to Anandpur, which had been looted and destroyed by both the Muslims and the Rajas. He built the place a new, repaired the fort and administering Pahul to his four sons made them Singhs. After visiting many places, the Guru witnessed the Kurukshetra Fair in Asarh of 1759 (1702 A.D.) and returned to Anandpur. He busied himself in military preparations. The Sikhs started calling him the *Sacha Patshah* (The True Emperor) and he became known far and wide by this name. It was not a new term, some of the earlier Gurus had also been so called. But now it was used extensively with redoubled zeal and devotion. The Hill Rajas who were already jealous of his growing power and popularity, became alarmed now. They felt their existence in danger and determined to finish him. After great deliberations, they decided to inflame the Emperor against him and then attack him with the help of the Imperial force.

A messenger was sent to implead the Emperor for help after poisoning his ears against the Guru. He informed the Emperor that the Guru called himself the True Emperor, dressed and conducted himself like one, had collected a large army of Sikhs, had invented a new religion and was ready to conflict with the Muslims. All robbers and dacoits had joined his group and his power was growing daily. He pleaded that if this newly gushing spring was not plugged at once, it would be impossible to stem the roaring torrent that it shall grow into. The Emperor was enraged and his tyrannical and fanatical blood started boiling. He deemed it a god-send that all the Hill Rajas were against the Guru and resolved to finish him.

The Fourth Attack: Aurangzeb ordered Bazid Khan, the Subedar of Sirhind to capture the Guru and produce him in the Imperial Court at Delhi. He sent three of his generals, Amir Khan Das-Hazari, Nijabat Khan and Wahid Khan to help the Subedar. Raja Ajmer Chand was sent with this force, which was reinforced by the forces of the Hill Rajas. This combined army besieged Anandpur on Phalgun 17 of Samat 1759 (1703 A.D.). The Guru having a much smaller army did not come out of the Fort and fought from within. A bloody battle raged for five days. Many Singhs were killed, but they had accounted for a greater number of the enemy. The Guru coming out on the sixth day waged a vigorous attack. He killed Sardar Azeem Khan, a noted general and Paindey Khan. Raja Hari Chand Jassowalia was killed by Mamon Khan, a servant of the Guru.

The Fifth Attack: Feeling humiliated over this defeat, Aurangzeb decided to despatch a very large army against the Guru. He ordered the Subedar of Lahore, and it is said also the Subedar of Kashmir to join forces with the Subedar of Sirhind, to defeat the Guru, capture him alive and produce him at his Imperial Court in Delhi. *It speaks volumes for the courage and capability of the Guru that the forces of the entire Northern region were deployed against a mere recluse.* This formidable force consisting of the armies of the Subedars of Delhi, Sirhind, Lahore and Kashmir went into action against the Guru and his men. It is said that the Guru had been able to muster only ten thousand men. He deputed his eldest son Ajit Singh to man the *Kesgarh* Fort with two thousand soldiers. Man Singh and Sher Singh with one thousand men were despatched to the *Lohgarh* Fort. Alam Singh and Suket Singh with three thousand soldiers were sent to *Damdama* Fort. Ude Singh was detailed to *Agampur* Fort. But it appears that either these details are incorrect or all these people came to the open field at Anandpur where the great battle took place.

Guru Gobind Singh himself was at Anandpur. The Imperial army surrounded Anandpur and a terrible battle ensued. The Sikhs fought very bravely and beat back the Muslims many times. The Muslims with fresh reinforcement attacked fiercely. The Sikhs faced their charge with exemplary courage. The Muslims were about to enter Anandpur when Ajit Singh jumped into the fray with a batch of dedicated Sikhs, but the advancing wave of the Muslims appeared to be irresistible. Seeing the predicament of his forces, Guru Gobind Singh personally led a counter-attack. A very bloody engagement took place. The Sikhs fought with gusto. Azeem Khan and Dilawar Khan, two high officers of the Imperial army were killed. Towards the close of the evening the Muslim army wilted under this fierce onslaught and *decamped*. The Sikhs had won the day.

The battle was resumed on the second day. The Guru was at Damdama now. Zabardast Khan threw

a cannonball in his direction. The Guru had a miraculous escape but some nearby Sikhs were killed. For some days the Sikhs fought back against fierce attacks by the multitudinous Muslim hordes. How long could a handful of men stand against such vast numbers? When the number of the Sikhs was considerably reduced they went back into the Fort of Anandpur and closed its portals. The Imperial forces cut off their supplies of food and other necessities. During one night of the siege, the Sikhs finding an opportune time waged a surprise attack and in utter confusions the Muslim forces moved back and lifted the siege. Raja Dadwal and Raja Jassowal were killed. The Sikhs captured some booty. The Imperial forces hung back in the neighbourhood waiting for further reinforcement.

The Sixth Attack: Aurangzeb gathered another big force from all over the Empire, supplemented it with Rajput troops and despatched the combined army to help the forces of Subedars of Sirhind, Lahore, Delhi and Kashmir. This redoubled Imperial army attacked and besieged Anandpur in Chet of Samat 1761 (1704 A.D.). The Sikhs bore the hardships of the siege with great fortitude. When there was no food left, the Sikhs preferred death in the battlefield to dying of starvation. But the Guru wanted the Sikhs to face the siege for some days more. There were some Sikhs who were fed up with the privations they faced and desired to leave Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh told them that they could leave Anandpur only after disowning him and declaring that they were not Sikhs. Some disavowed their Guru and faith, while others remained faithful.

The Hill Rajas sent a Brahmin who on oath of the sacred cow, brought word to the Guru that the army would not follow and molest the Sikhs if the Guru abandoned the Anandpur Fort with his men. The Guru like a truthful man believed the word and taking his men, their families and his own left the Fort for Kiratpur. The Imperial forces after looting the Fort, went back on their solemn pledge and pursued the Sikhs. Next day, the Guru and his people reached Kanwalsar on the banks of Sirsa stream, which was in flood. They were between the devil and the deep sea. The Imperial army was hot on their heels and in front was the raging torrent. He was in the position of General Cronje who in the war of Transval with his four thousand Boers was trapped by a large British force. There was a stream on one side and the hills on the other. Cronje capitulated. Guru Gobind Singh faced even a more unenviable predicament. He had women, children and the aged to protect and he was harassed and pressed upon by the Muslim hordes. At last some Sikhs braved the raging river and took the families across. Just then the Muslim army launched a severe attack. The Guru, with the remnants of his small band, faced them. But his men faltered in the face of such heavy odds and they were routed.

Guru Gobind Singh with his two sons and forty Sikhs entered Chamkaur and took shelter in

an enclosure. In this flight, the aged mother of the Guru, with her two grandsons, took shelter with Ganga Ram, an old Brahmin cook of the Guru's household (her tale of woe shall be related later on). Let us turn to the field of Chamkaur where the Guru performed miraculous feats of daring not equalled in the entire history of the world. The Imperial army and the Hindu hordes who were pursuing the Guru well knew that the Guru had entered Chamkaur with only forty men. He did not have any forces left and like a lion was shut up in a cage. The enemy could not hope for a better situation than this and decided to capture him alive. So this adobe structure, this shelter-house was surrounded on all sides.

The reader may well visualize the set up, the critical situation for the Guru. A whole army of an Empire supported by the Rajputs and the forces of Hill Rajas poised against a handful of Sikhs, destitute and in dire straits, sheltered in an adobe building and surrounded on all sides. The entire history of the world can scarcely produce another example of a handful of men facing such vast multitudes. No king, no general had ever stood up or even thought of making a fight against myriads of Imperial forces. The Guru not only faced these overwhelming odds but also slipped through them.

He was unperturbed and undaunted. He effected his escape not for fear of losing his life. He was not a coward; he saved himself for the fulfilment of his holy mission. He wanted to have a breathing space so as to regroup and revitalise his people. Were he a coward, he would have taken his sons alive with him. He would not have sent his sons out to make heroic sacrifices right before his eyes. He left after signing with the blood of his sons, the Divine Document enshrining his message of Universal Love and Brotherhood. The heroic sacrifices of his sons were the testimonies affirming this Glorious Deed. *He did all this for the shameless, spineless, dastardly and ungrateful Hindu nation. Who is there among the Hindus so pur-blind, so base, so rash, so mean, so cynical, as to accuse the Guru of cowardliness.*

The Emperors of Germany, Austria and Russia despite having huge armies with them surrendered unabashed before Napoleon. And so did thousands of Muslims soldiers of Egypt. A brave General like Cronje, despite having guns and four thousand Boer fighters with him laid down arms before the British Army. But look at the unparalleled courage displayed by Guru Gobind Singh! He had only forty Sikhs with him in a dilapidated adobe structure at Chamkaur surrounded by the Imperial hordes. The enemy General sent a message demanding the Guru to surrender and bid good-bye to his Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh refused to buckle under and his son despatched the insolent soldier on the spot. He sent his reply through a Sikh saying that Lord Akal commands him to die fighting rather than giving himself up, to spread the Khalsa Dharma

rather than forsaking it.

He had only forty Sikhs with him in a poor adobe structure besieged by countless foes. Judge his reply considering his highly vulnerable position. Can any man accuse him of cowardice? Here he proved the truth of his saying that he would cause the sparrows to spurn the hawks and then alone be worthy of being called Gobind Singh. He and his men kept the Imperial army at bay throughout the day. An exceptional exploit, a daring display of dauntless courage, a victory of the spirit over mere physical force. The Guru Missed no opportunity to jump into the fray with a sword in his hand to help and bolster his valiant Sikhs—the Famous Forty. He sends his sons out, one by one, to fight unflinchingly and die fighting before his very eyes. He utters no words of anguish, feels no lashings of regret, does not abjure his faith or give up his mission.

We all know the story of Rostam who mistakenly kills his son in a bout. Who lashed by regret slithers to the ground in a swoon and on gaining consciousness is determined to kill himself. *A brave man like Napoleon had tears in his eyes at the death of his general. Ram Chander wept piteously at the swooning of his brother Lakshman and ordered Hanuman to bring the reviving herb.* Guru Gobind Singh was not disheartened by the death of his eldest son Ajit Singh but continued the fight. His second son Jujhar Singh who was barely fourteen or fifteen comes before his father. He seeks permission from his father, the Guru, to measure swords with the enemy and avenge his brother's death. The Guru is not swayed by fatherly love or considerations of his son's tender age. He allows his son to fight and meet certain death. Did any other father face such a situation and behave so nonchalantly? It seems he willed his son to dare the enemy and die and thus seal with the last attestation through self- sacrifice, his father's Immortal Document of Love and Brotherhood of man.

Jujhar Singh wants to drink water before going out to fight. His father, the Guru, tells him to go ahead and quench his thirst with the enemy's blood and not with water. He further tells Jujhar Singh to drink from the cup of martyrdom in the battlefield and that his thirst is symbolic of the thirst of the Khalsa for their enemy's blood. He blesses his son to march to Heaven on the path of the Martyrs already taken by his brother, Ajit Singh. Despite his tender years, Jujhar Singh jumps into the battle like a redoubtable warrior and sheds his blood for the defence of Hindu Dharma.

Fie on him who denigrates the Guru by accusing him of cowardliness! May his mouth fill with filth and dirt who utters such accusals? The Guru left the field to fight another day for his country and Dharma at a more opportune time. He could have very easily saved his sons and taken them with him out of Chamkaur.

The Sikhs fought fiercely till dusk. By then only three Sikhs were left alive, namely Dharam

Singh, Man Singh and Daya Singh, along with their Guru. Just imagine! The whole Imperial army cannot dare to capture these four Sikhs. The door of the adobe building is closed. Visualize the awe which the Guru inspires in the enemy. Not a single soul among them dares to approach the door and break it open, though it is kept under constant watch. The Guru kisses the faces of his sons and the hands of the Five Beloveds, leaves their bodies behind and surveying the field scornfully moves out of Chamkaur. What was dearer to him than his sons, than his Five Beloveds, than his Sikhs, for which he was saving himself? It was for his faith, his mission of universal brotherhood and his duty to defend the country and the downtrodden, though ungrateful Hindus that, he after sacrificing his worldly all was keeping himself alive.