

The Epistle of Victory

After passing through some villages like Sheikhpura, Dhanoula, Namgarh, the Guru in the month of Maghar of Samat 1761 (1705 A.D.) reached Dina. He rested there for some time and improved his condition a little. He collected some weapons from the region, initiated some Singhs and armed them. He received offerings from his Sikhs. He penned his famous missive "Zafar Nama" in Persian, meant for Aurangzeb, who, it is said, sent for the Guru, assuring him of safe conduct, and proper respect. The Guru refused to believe in Aurangzeb's word of honour and wrote to him forcefully that he should refrain from cruelty and tyranny; otherwise he would face the wrath of the Lord for his evil conduct. *The Guru added that he personally had neither any domain nor desire of seizing any territory but he and his Sikhs would ever be ready to move against him and work for his downfall.* The Sikhs would pay him back in his own coin. This letter proves Guru Gobind Singhs's fearlessness and his dedication to his mission.

After leaving Dina and passing through many villages, the Guru reached Kot Kapura. Rai Kapura looked after the Guru well and offered him money and many horses but refused to do anything else. Guru Gobind Singh had desired Rai Kapura to keep him at Kot Kapura, allow him to train his men in warfare and also to lend him his personal support. Thus disappointed in the fulfilment of his desire, the Guru moved out and reached village Dhilwan. There lived Sodhi Koul Sahib, a descendant of Pirthi Chand. He received the Guru warmly and requested him to take off his blue robes. Guru Gobind Singh consigned his robes to the fire in his farsightedness so that his Sikhs may not take to worshipping them. But his Sikhs beholden to their Guru at every step could not be kept from keeping safe the sacred relics of their Guru like Nishan Sahib, Chola Sahib which adorn Gurdwaras now. It is a sad story that these relics are worshipped in a way and used as a means of earning money. It is proper that these should be reserved and held very dear by every Sikh.

The Regrouping of the Sikhs

Here the Guru was joined by those Sikhs who had disowned him at Anandpur Sahib during the siege. They came to ask forgiveness for their grievous sin. When these Sikhs had reached their homes after deserting their Guru, they were taken to task by their brethren and put to great shame. They had fallen so low in the estimation of the people that it had become very difficult for them to pass their days in that region. Now they were forced to turn to their Guru for pardon. This is an indication of the love and reverence which the people had for their Guru and of the public support which his mission was gaining. The Subedar of Sirhind got wind of the Guru's sojourn in

the area and the rallying of Sikhs around him. So partly in compliance with Aurangzeb's order and partly fearing chastisement for his own crimes, he decided to finish the Guru and he set out to achieve this end. Guru Gobind Singh was again forced into an unequal engagement. He was able to muster only a handful of Sikhs

Taking positions in the sandy plain of Khidrana, Guru Gobind Singh with his band of sturdy Sikhs waited for the forces of Sirhind. Wazir Khan, the Subedar reached there and the battlefield came to life. The Sikhs fought tenaciously to the last ounce of courage and energy in their bodies. The field was littered with heaps of corpses. The Sikhs captured the only source of fresh water in the area. The Muslim army was much troubled by the lack of water and waged many attacks to regain the spring. Repulsed time and again and tormented by thirst, the Muslim army was disheartened and decamped. The Sikhs pursued them relentlessly for four to five miles and inflicted heavy casualties. Utterly vanquished, the Muslim army went back to the safety of Sirhind and abandoned any future campaigns against the Guru, in the dangerous wilds and jungle areas. Thus, the Guru and his Sikhs captured the battlefield, having decidedly defeated the Imperial army.

The Guru, thus, proved the wisdom of leaving the field at Chamkaur and silenced his detractors. It was his farsightedness and will to fight another day in pursuance of his mission for the defence and welfare of the Hindus and the Hindu Dharma that caused him to move out of a hopeless situation. It is well to remember here that Rai Kapura of Kot Kapura who had refused to help the Guru against the Muslims, fought on the side of Muslims against the Guru and was killed in this battle. Proving once again that the degenerate Hindus, instead of helping the Guru for their own welfare, had opposed him at every step. They never hesitated to lift their swords against him. They had been reduced to abject slavery, both mental and physical and to moral decrepitude.

When the Muslim army had fled from the battlefield; Guru Gobind Singh approached the bodies of his Sikhs who had fallen in the battle. With his handkerchief, he wiped the blood from their faces, extolling their bravery and exclaiming that they had attained heaven by virtue of their sword-arm. There was still some life in Mahan Singh of Majha. The Guru poured some water in his mouth and he opened his eyes to find his Guru before him. He recovered to some extent and in reply

to his Guru's offer of a reward for his heroic services, he very feebly requested his Guru to tear the Deed, disowning their Guru, signed by him and his comrades. Guru Gobind Singh took out the document from his cummerbund, where he had been keeping it all along and tore it before the eyes of Mahan Singh. Thus, the Forty Sikhs were taken back into the Khalsa fold.

This act of Mahan Singh is highly praiseworthy and is remembered and recounted with great love and esteem. In the dying moments of his martyred life, he had thoughts only for the welfare of his brethren and countrymen. Selfless sacrifice for his country and Khalsa Dharma and selfless service of his comrades were uppermost in his mind till his last breath. Blessed are such people indeed who die desiring the welfare of their comrades and countrymen, who shed their blood for upholding the honour of their homeland, who consecrate their lives to the good of their country and countrymen. *Only those countries, that had such men in their folds, touched great heights in their history.* Only such countries attained great splendour and achieved great degrees of perfection in any field. Sacrifice spells success for nations. In all times and all climes, its great need had been felt, is still felt and will continue to be felt. No people, no country can attain anything worthwhile without offering sacrifices. The lamp of national honour is lit by mending the wick of selfless service and by pouring the oil of self-sacrifice. The edifice of a nation's greatness is raised on the firm foundation of self- sacrifice. Guru Gobind Singh personally performed the last rites of his brave Sikhs.

He founded a town in commemoration of this battle and gave it the name of Muktsar, meaning thereby, the Tank of Liberation. He called all those Sikhs who had died there as the Muktas (The Liberated Ones). Then passing through many villages the Guru went to Wazidpur, where the people did not allow him to stay. *In this jungle tract, some soldiers of the Brar clan insisted on receiving their pay, but the Guru had nothing to offer them except hunger.* During this period, the Sikhs had often to go without food for a day or two. The Guru managed to pay his men after receiving some monetary help from a Sikh devotee. One of the Sikh soldiers, Dewan Singh by name refused to receive his pay. The Guru administered Amrit to one Brahmin Faqir, who had become a Muslim at his birth, and called him Ajmer Singh.

The Guru at Damdama

Guru Gobind Singh reached Talwandi and his wife arrived there from Delhi. After staying there for some days, he went to Bathinda and then to Damdama. It is commonly held that since the Guru

had some respite (meaning 'Dam' in the vernacular) here, the place was called Damdama Sahib.

Another tradition goes that the Guru sent his letter to Aurangzeb from here through Daya Singh and Dharam Singh, who brought the Emperor's reply as well. The Emperor had invited the Guru to Delhi in flattering terms. Having no faith in the Emperor's word and his assurances, the Guru, did not visit him. He busied himself in more important work and sent a strongly-worded reply wherein he openly reproached Aurangzeb for his cruel and evil deeds. The Guru reminded him of the wrath of God about to fall on him. The Guru also declared that the Dharma of Guru Nanak is the finest of all, that Delhi holds no terror for him since he is unawed by any earthly power, that he has no attachment for the world and its goods, that he is patiently awaiting his end. The Guru warned Aurangzeb about the evil consequences of his evil acts when he shall be hauled up on the Judgement Day and found wanting in the face of the piteous cries of accusal raised against him by thousands of innocent beings tortured to death by him on this earth. How should it fare with him at that time, the Guru asked him to visualize. Moved by this letter, Aurangzeb sent for Guru Gobind Singh once again, but the Guru did not respond.

Damdama Sahib is held sacred for yet another reason. The whole of Guru Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) was- rewritten here and the Guru added the Bani of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This volume of Guru Granth Sahib is called the *Bir of Damdama*. Some people hold that the Guru effected some changes in some verses of the Granth, but there is nothing much to substantiate this claim. The Guru, per force, had to get the Granth rewritten, as the followers of Dhir Mal who had the original Granth with them had refused to hand it over. He also wanted to incorporate the Bani of the Ninth Guru, in this Granth. He had respite from continuous warfare now and could attend to these things. It is firmly held that Guru Gobind Singh composed some portions of his famous *Vachittar Natak* in which he deals with the lives and doings, of the first nine Gurus, writes about his personal life and eulogized the Glory of Akal Purkh as the Fountain-Head for all his actions.

Guru's March towards Deccan

From Damdama, the Guru moved towards Deccan to carry his mission to regions other than the Punjab. He passed through Rajputana. The Rajputs and their Rajas had so far been

untouched by his mission. Probably this was what had prompted him to approach them in their own region. The people welcomed him in a befitting manner, gave him due respect, entertained him. They were impressed by his sermons and benefitted from them. At one place, Mahant Chet Ram, a follower of Dadu Saint received him very warmly. A mention of this meeting is made in many traditional accounts.

While passing through this territory, the Guru witnessed the Mela of Purnamashi (Full Moon) in Kartik month of Samat 1763 (1706 A.D.) at Pushkar Raj. When the Guru visited Ajmer, a faithful devotee of his constructed a ghat there in commemoration of his visit. It is known as Gobind Ghat (wharf). Guru Gobind Singh learnt of the death of Aurangzeb while he was camping at Baghaur town. Aurangzeb died in Samat 1764 (1707 A.D). The Guru showed no sign of elation of any kind and kept his usual composure on hearing this news.

The Guru and Bahadur Shah

After the demise of Aurangzeb, a tug of war ensued among his sons for the Imperial throne. At the time of his father's death, Bahadur Shah, the eldest son was at Kabul. Azeem Shah, another son of Aurangzeb drew his sword in defiance and sending for his younger brother Kam Bakhsh, got him murdered, thus following in the foot steps of his father who had despatched his brother Murad likewise. Bahadur had to face a cruel and strong enemy. Fearing that he might face the same fate as did Dara Shikoh, he made great preparations for the war. He also wanted to benefit by the help of Guru Gobind Singh at this critical juncture.

By that time the Sikhs had established themselves as a strong force to reckon with and had formed a sizeable number. Bahadur Shah saw in the person of the Guru, the means of enlisting the support of Sikhs for his own good. In his farsightedness he might have imagined that in the case of his proving victorious, he would not have to face the opposition of the Sikhs and their Guru, who had made his opposition to the tyrannical Muslim rule very clear. Therefore, Bahadur Shah sent two Hindu Dewans to the Guru soliciting his help. After pondering over all aspects of the matter, the Guru resolved to help him. The Guru did not have to oppose any Hindu power and as a friend he could bide his time, stay near the Emperor and also near his Sikhs whom he would be able to train and equip. The above factors must have weighed heavily with him while making this decision.

When the Guru approached Bahadur Shah, the latter received him courteously and with proper respect. At last the Guru helped him by bringing a large force of his Khalsa on Bahadur Shah's side against Azeem Shah at the battlefield of Agra. Tradition goes that the Guru pierced Azeem Shah with an arrow while he was sitting atop his elephant. It may be imagined that the Guru tried to do so. Azeem Shah was killed whether at the hands of the Guru or of somebody else. But there is no doubt that the Guru was greatly responsible for Bahadur Shah's victory. In gratitude for the Guru's help, the new Emperor, Bahadur Shah, took him to Delhi and he stayed there for some time. When Bahadur Shah started on his Deccan campaign, the Guru accompanied him. Before leaving, the Guru allowed his wife Sundri Ji to adopt a son, who was called Ajit Singh. The Guru in the company of the Emperor passed through Mathura, Bharatpur, Jaipur etc. and reached Ujjain. Bahadur Shah wanted to send the Guru with a big force under him against the Marathas. The Guru saw through the political gambit of the Emperor and refused to oblige him.