

PREFACE TO ZAFARNAMA & FATEHNAMA

Guru Gobind Singh Ji had spent about 33 years of his life at Anandpur Sahib. Right from his adolescent years till he left the place in 1704, the Hill Rajas were constantly harassing him. They resented his religious and social reforms and could not relish his leveling of all castes and raising of Shudras to a position of equality with the Brahmins and Kashatriyas. Their aim was to dislodge him from Anandpur Sahib. The harassment, which started with pin pricks, culminated in open hostilities beginning with the battle of Bhangani in 1689 which resulted in total rout of the Hill Rajas. In every subsequent battle, the Sikhs inflicted crushing defeat on their combined forces. Having miserably failed in their nefarious aim, Raja Ajmer Chand of Kehlur and his cohorts from the area submitted a petition to Aurangzeb representing Guru Gobind Singh as a mortal foe of Mughal empire, Islam and Hindu religion. They sought the help of Imperial forces to exterminate the dangerous common enemy.

The emperor was infuriated; he felt that the Guru was becoming a real potent danger for the Mughal rule. Consequently in 1704, a large Imperial force was sent to Punjab to subdue Guru Ji; they were supported by the Pahari Rajas in this endeavour. The Sikhs met this combined force near Ropar and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. At the end of the day's fighting, the Imperial Commanders and the Pahari Rajas had realized that it would not be possible to defeat the Sikhs in open battle. They, therefore, decided to lay siege to the city of Anandpur; this was in summer of 1704. After a long siege, which lasted for many months, Guru Gobind Singh Ji left Anandpur Sahib during the night of 20 December 1704. A solemn promise was made to him earlier under oath on Cow and Quran that he will not be molested if he did so. But the enemy did not keep their word and attacked the Sikhs who bravely checked their advance. Guru Ji reached Chamkaur by the evening of 21 December, after crossing Sirsa stream which was in spate on that day, and took defensive position in a raised mud house (Garhi) with his 40 surviving Sikhs. A battle ensued in the morning next day morning ie 22 December 1704. But in spite of heavy odds against them, the Sikhs showed exemplary courage in repulsing the attacks of the enemy forces. By the evening, most of the defenders of Chamkaur had attained martyrdom. Guru Ji managed to leave the Garhi during the night after the surviving Sikhs within the Garhi caused confusion amongst the enemy forces.

After passing through Machhiwara, Hehar in Ludhiana district, Jatpura, and Rajkot, Guru Ji reached Dina village ,where he was welcomed by many Sikhs. Here, in March 1705, he wrote the famous " Zafarnama" or "Letter of Victory" to Aurangzeb and sent it to him through Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh. The emperor was camping in South India at that time. Even though Guru Ji had lost every thing (his four sons, his mother, his fighters), he felt that in spite of his apparent

reverses he had won a moral victory over the crafty Mughal who had broken all his vows. The whole letter reads like a rebuke addressed by a superior personality to the one on a lower place, rebuking him for his weaknesses and excesses. The tone of the letter is in keeping with its title.

The Zafarnama has been written in exquisite Persian verse, composed of 111 verses. As mentioned above he wrote this letter during his stay at Dina which is about two miles from Kangar; he has referred to the latter place in verse 58. Guru Ji has devoted 34 verses of Zafarnama in praise of God, 20 verses describe the battle of Chamkaur, 15 verses convey rebuke to Aurangzeb for breaking oath by him and by his agents, 36 refer to his shortcomings as a just ruler and his invitations to Guru Ji for discussions. He had also warned Aurangzeb about the resolve of the Khalsa not to rest till his evil empire is brought to an end (verses 78 and 79). Guru Ji has also written six verses (89 to 94) in praise of Aurangzeb, which shows that he was not against the individual or his religion but against his policy of oppression. Guru Ji was not in favour of war, which was forced on him (verse 21). In fact all battles in which he was engaged, were fought in self-defence; he never attacked anyone for territorial or military gains. After defeating the Pahari Rajas in the battle of Bhangani, he did not confiscate their land and property (Is there any parallel example in the history of world where a victor has treated the vanquished in such a manner?) He has even laid down that war should be the last resort when all other means to solve a problem are exhausted (verse 22). Lastly Guru Ji has referred to the other enemy viz the Pahari Rajas, whom he was trying to emancipate from the Mughal yoke but instead was forced to take up the sword against them (verse 95). If these Hill Rajas had not played into the hands of the Mughals and joined forces with the Guru Ji and accepted him as their guide and liberator, the Mughal power would have been broken effectively sooner. There would have been no tyrants like Mir Mannus, and Furrukhsiyars later and further conversion campaigns would have ended. In fact there would have been altogether a different India today (Life of Guru Gobind Singh by Prof Kartar Singh).

How did the Zafarnama, in its present form, reach us? Original letter written in the hand of Guru Ji is not available. However it is said that a copy of Zafarnama, written in the hand of Guru Ji, was found with the Mahant of Patna Sahib in 1890 and one Babu Jagan Nath made a copy; this copy was somehow misplaced by him. Since Babu Jagan Nath was himself a scholar in Persian language, he could reproduce it from his memory and got it printed in Nagri Parcharni Patrika in Benaras. He is also believed to have sent a copy to Sardar Umrao Singh Shergill in Amritsar who is said to have given it to Khalsa college and which in turn reproduced in Makhz-e Twarikh Sikhan. In Punjab newspapers, it first appeared in the Khalsa Samachar of 16 July 1942. Then in 1944, Sardar Kapur Singh ICS published it in Urdu Ajit of Lahore under the heading "Fatehnama". It is quite possible that in the process of translations and publications of Zafarnama at different stages, some verses were not reproduced correctly and what we have today is not the

original Zafarnama of Guru Ji in its entirety. The abrupt end of Zafarnama also indicates that it is not complete and that some verses have been left out. Objections raised by some scholars on the authenticity of a few verses may be viewed in this context.

Was the Zafarnama as we know today ever sent to Aurangzeb? Scholars have different views on this. While most agree that Zafarnama in the present form in verse was indeed sent, others have strong reservations. Dr Mohan Singh MA Ph D writing in the "Spokesman" of November 1956 has gone to the extent to state, "the belief that Zafarnama was ever sent to Aurangzeb through Bhai Daya Singh is a figment of imagination". Some believe that a diplomatic communication, in prose, was indeed sent by Guru Ji (not the Zafarnama as we know), which gave the details of excesses committed by the Nawab of Sirhind in collusion with and on the instigation of Pahari Rajas. The Zafarnama in the present form is the versified form of this diplomatic communication by Bhai Nand Lal who was a great scholar of Persian language (Life of Guru Gobind Singh Ji by Dalip Singh). This argument suffers from the infirmity that Bhai Nand Lal, along with other poets, had left Anandpur before the siege of the city began in 1704 (Kalam Bhai Nand Lal by Piara Singh Padam). After that he met Guru Ji in 1707 seeking his help for Prince Bahadur Shah against his brother Azam in the war of succession for the Mughal throne after the death of Aurangzeb (Life of Guru Gobind Singh by Prof Kartar Singh). All the historical incidents mentioned in the Zafarnama cover a period of a few months ie from end of December 1704 to the beginning of 1705 when Bhai Nand Lal was nowhere near Guru Ji.

A number of studies have been done on the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh Ji like Jap, Akal Ustat, Bachitar Natak, Zafarnama etc; these all together are known as Dasam Granth. Gurmat Granth Parcharak Sabha Amritsar in its report of 1897 clearly stated that all these compositions of Dasam Granth including Zafarnama are in fact written by Guru Ji; many other Sikh scholars have confirmed this. Many students from 1955 onwards have received doctorates on their research work on Dasam Granth; barring one or two all have confirmed that Dasam Granth, including Zafarnama has indeed been composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji (Dasam Granth Sahib by Dr Ratan Singh Jaggi and Dr Gursharn Kaur Jaggi, published by Gobind Sadan, New Delhi). This should remove all doubts of the sceptics regarding the authorship of Zafarnama. Having established that it is indeed composed by Guru Ji, the next question is : was it sent to Aurangzeb through Bhai Daya Singh? It may be quite difficult to convince the likes of Dr Mohan Singh since there is no reference to it in the Emperor's court records. One can only conjecture that if it was indeed written by Guru Ji, it must have been sent. Guru Ji had castigated the emperor for the cold blooded murder of the young Sahibzadas at Sirhind; the Quazi there had quoted Kuran in support their execution. Since this act was in fact against the holy Kuran , it was more prudent for the emperor to have it just ignored by his paid court historians.

There are a number of translations available which have clubbed Zafarnama with 11 Hikayats. Zafarnama has been given the title "Hikayat No 1" in these translations. Hikayat is a Persian word which means "a story" or "a work of fiction". Referring to Zafarnama, which indicts Aurangzeb's oppressive rule in strongest language as "a story" or "fiction" does not only lower the high moral standing of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, but also trivializes a great historical and literary work. The eleven Hikayats deal with the low level of morality of some women. Guru Ji had written these Hikayats or stories for the benefit of Sikhs so they could draw appropriate lessons for developing a strong moral character. These Hikayats in Persian language are like the stories of Charitropakhian (both are included in Dasam Granth) which are also stories of women with low moral values and which were written by Guru Ji for the same purpose. Such stories must have had a profound supplementary effect on the moral character of Sikhs. Quazi Nuruddin who accompanied Ahmed Shah Abdali to India writes in his historical account "Jangnama" that "these dogs (Sikhs) will not cast an evil eye on the women of their enemy nor will attack a fallen opponent. These dogs (Sikhs) had high moral character". (Zafarnama by Gurdial Singh Bhola Advocate and printed by Allahabad Press Delhi).

Scholars who have clubbed the Zafarnama with the eleven Hikayats have allowed their imagination to run wild. They hold the view that Guru Ji sent the entire composition including the Hikayats to Aurangzeb through Bhai Daya Singh. According to them, the Emperor was supposed to draw appropriate lesson from the stories of these women of ill repute! At the end of each Hikayat, such appropriate lesson has in fact been summarised for the benefit of the reader! The question arises: was it physically possible for the emperor to go through (or be read) these additional 767 verses of the Hikayats and comprehend their meaning when he was bed ridden. It appears that these scholars have erred in clubbing these Hikayats with Zafarnam since these were also composed in Persian language. It was a matter of convenience for them to put all works of Guru Ji in Persian language together and give them all a common title "Hikayats" including the Zafarnama.

There is another work of Guru Ji in Persian language known as "Fatehnama" also meaning a "letter of victory". There are 24 verses of this letter. Here again there is difference of opinion amongst scholars. Some opine that this letter was sent before the Zafarnama while according to some, this is in fact a part of Zafarnama itself. The latter have started the Zafarnama with the 24 verses of Fatehnama; first verse of traditional Zafarnama becoming verse 25 in such compositions (Zafarnama by Nanak Chand Naaz). I have followed the traditional view and have not clubbed the two; Fatehnama appears separately on this web site.

There is an another controversy about the year in which Guru Ji had left Anandgarh fort. According to some scholars this happened in December 1704 while others feel that Guru Ji left the fort in November 1705. As per SGPC website, the battle of Chamkaur was fought on 22 December 1704 and the young Sahibzadas were martyred four days later

ie on 26 December 1704. The Sikh scholars, historians and intelligentsia owe it to the Sikh masses to get together and remove this minor controversy about these dates.

The layout of the translation is as follows: each verse of Zafarnama and Fatehnama appears in Gurumkhi, Persian and Roman scripts, followed by the meaning of each word in English and finally the meaning of the entire verse in English (in bold letters). Wherever required I have given a small commentary after some verses either to explain the meaning of the verse in detail or to compare the translation with others; this appears in English language, in italics.

Persian, the medium used by Guru Ji in composing Zafarnama and Fatehnama, is a beautiful language. It is quite easy to understand since it generally follows a set pattern in changes in its verbs, nouns etc. For ease of understanding of the language, I have attached a " Note on Persian Language" which, I trust, the reader will find quite useful.

This website ie www.zafarnama.com was first hoisted on 20 December 2001. This site has now been updated on 15 December 2005.

I shall welcome suggestions for improvement of the translation at ranjay@vsln.com

New Delhi

Wg Cdr Jasbir Singh (Retd)