

PREFACE TO ZAFARNAMA

Zafar (victory, conquest, success), Nama (letter) or Letter of Victory was written by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji to Aurangzeb in 1705. To understand the relevance of this letter, it is important to know the history of the period immediately before it was written.

After establishing a new order on the Baisakhi day in 1699, the Master had engaged himself in steadily increasing his military might. He knew that in order to put an end to the oppression let loose by Aurangzeb in the name of religion, he will have to take on the Mughal forces in battle. While this was going on, there arose a new enemy from unexpected quarters. Seeing the increase in the military power of the Master, the Hill Chieftains around Anandpur felt threatened. They got together and tried their best to defeat the Guruji militarily on a number of occasions. Every time the defenders of Anandpur inflicted a crushing defeat on them. Ultimately these Hill Chieftains wrote to Aurangzeb informing him about the threat the Khalsa forces under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh could pose to the Mughal Empire. The very people the Master was trying to save from the tyranny of the Mughal Empire, themselves joined hands with their oppressor against their potential liberator. This unholy alliance consisting of the imperial army and the armies of the Hill Chieftains tried their best to dislodge the Master from Anandpur fort but failed every time. Ultimately, in 1704, Aurangzeb sent a strong force under the command of Wazir Khan to capture the Master. The armies of the Hill Chieftains joined Wazir Khan. This combined force was formidable in sheer numbers. They could not defeat the Khalsa force in direct battle. Instead of launching an attack on the fort, these forces laid siege to the city of Anandpur.

Earlier Wazir Khan and his henchmen had employed cunning methods to evict the Master from the Anandpur fort by swearing on Koran that if Guruji left the fort, no harm will be done to him and that he could go out without any fear. Before the dispatch of Wazir Khan to capture the Master, Aurangzeb had also written two letters to the Guruji inviting him to meet him (Aurangzeb) for a face-to-face meet. Guruji had then declined to meet the emperor.

Now with the siege of Anandpur, life was becoming difficult for the people since they ran out of provisions. The morale began to wilt. Ultimately, under pressure from Mata Gujri Ji and the Sikhs, Guru Ji decided to leave the fort on 20 December 1704. Following dates are important and are relevant to the Zafarnama:

Night of 20/21 Dec 1704 Guru Ji left Anandpur with 500 strong force and his family members.

21 Dec 1704 Guru Ji reached Chamkaur after passing through Kiratpur, Nirmohgarh and crossing Sirsa. Most of the force was eliminated while defending against the enemy forces that had chased the Guru Ji's party. Only 40 strong force (verse 19) and two eldest Sahibzadas reached Chamkaur. By evening, Guru Ji had taken defensive position at a raised mud house or haveili to give battle to enemy forces.

- 22 Dec 1704** Battle of Chamkaur as described in Zafarnama (verses 19 to 42)
- Night of 22 Dec 1704** Guru Ji left Chamkaur and reached Machhiwara along with just three Sikhs. Then moved to Hehar in Ludhiana Dist disguised as Uch da Pir. Finally reached Dina near village Kangar (verse 58) after passing through Jatpura, and Raikot. Here he wrote Zafarnama. Guruji received third letter from Aurangzeb while at Dina inviting him to meet him (Aurangzeb) about which he has made reference in Zafarnama (verse 54).
- 27 December 1704** Execution of Sahibzada Zoravar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh on orders of Governor of Sarhind.
- March, April 1705** Guru Ji wrote Zafarnama while at Dina and sent it through Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh for Aurangzeb who was in Deccan at that time.
- 20 January 1706** Aurangzeb reached Ahmed Nagar from Deccan. Zafarnama was delivered to Aurangzeb sometime in February/March 1706 at Ahmed Nagar.

The letter written in exquisite Persian verse gives detailed descriptive account of the Battle of Chamkaur fought on 22 December 1704. Guru Ji has also reminded Aurangzeb that he and his henchmen had broken their oaths taken on Koran and still they could not harm him. Guru Ji felt that in spite of his apparent reverses; he had won a moral victory over the crafty Mughal who had broken all his vows. In spite of sending a huge army to capture or kill the Master, the Mughal forces could not succeed in their mission. This 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.

There are 111 verses in the Zafarnama. Guru Ji has shown his unflinching faith in the Almighty even after suffering extreme personal loss. He has devoted 34 verses (the maximum), which are in praise of God. 24 verses describe the battle of Chamkaur, 15 verses convey rebuke to Aurangzeb for breaking oath by him and by his agents, 32 refer to the invitation from Aurangzeb to Guru Ji and his refusal to go and meet the emperor; instead Guruji has asked the emperor through some of these verses that he (Aurangzeb) should visit him as promised by him earlier through one of his communications. The Master 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). He 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. Guruji 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. He has even laid down that war should be the last resort when all other means to solve a problem are exhausted (verse 22).

Anyone reading about life of Guru Gobind Singh will marvel at his leadership as a military commander and his courage. Oxford dictionary

defines courage as "ability to disregard fear". Guruji had gone much beyond this. Not only he personally exhibited total disregard for fear at all times, he was able to banish fear from amongst the weak and tormented who were under oppression for generations. In fact he gave a new meaning to "courage". The battle of Chamkaur fought by a handful (just 40 in all) of these new combatants against the combined might of the armies of Aurangzeb and the Hill Chieftains numbering tens of thousands successfully speaks about the highest level of their courage; they did not yield even an inch of ground to the enemy forces while they lived. No battle has ever been fought by so few against so many. Was it a coincidence that after about 193 years of the battle of Chamkaur another battle was fought by the same people at Saragarhi (21 Sikhs against 20,000 Afghans) on 12 September 1897 with the same result; the handful of Sikhs inflicting heavy casualties on the Afghans. A write up on the subject by Brig D M Bahl of the Indian Army appeared in the Tribune dated 12 September 1997; this is shown as a link on the main page. The point to note is that in the battle of Saragarhi, the Master was not there with the Sikhs in flesh and blood but still they achieved phenomenal successes. One can imagine what could the heroes of Chamkaur have achieved when the Master was present with them personally.

The highest standards of courage and supreme sacrifice for a just cause that were set by the heroes of Anandgarh fort and Chamkaur in 1704 are being emulated by the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh to this day. Even in the Independence struggle for our country, the Sikhs were in the forefront in suffering the most. Mr Rajinder Sachar in his book "Recovery of India" gives vivid details of the sacrifices made by the Sikhs. According to him out of 2175 persons martyred under the British Rule, 1557 or 71% were Sikhs; out of 2646 persons who were sentenced for life imprisonment in Kala Pani (Andaman Islands), 2147 or 80% were Sikhs; out of 127 persons who were hanged, 92 or 72% were Sikhs and out of total of 20,000 persons who formed Subhash Chander Bose's INA, 12,00 or 60% were Sikhs. So much was contributed by a community, which forms only 2% of the population of the country.

Ernest Hemingway has very beautifully described courage in three words "Grace Under Pressure". Imagine the frame of mind of a person who is hounded all his life, his father is murdered, his two sons die in the battle of Chamkaur, his other two sons are assassinated, his mother dies along with them, he cannot even rest for a while since he is royal fugitive. In such a situation ordinary people can lose mental balance. But still Guru Gobind Singh sings in the praise of the Almighty. Is there any example of a person in the entire history of mankind when such stoical grace has been shown by anyone under such extreme personal pressures? Zafarnama was written by the Master after suffering all the personal tragedies. He was ne-plus-ultra in manliness - householder, poet, scholar, thinker, reformer, prophet, lover of truth and purity, fearless as a lion, champion of the weak and the oppressed, opponent of tyranny, a general, an archer, statesman, administrator, patriot, nation builder, giant in physical strength, a true practitioner of bushido, a *Bhakt*, a *Daata*, and a *Sur*, all rolled in one person. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth incarnation of Nanak, is the greatest man that has ever walked on this earth.

I have used both Gurmukhi and Roman scripts to write the Zafarnama, verse by verse and then give the word meanings in English and finally the meaning of each verse in English. Where required, I have given a small commentary after the "meanings" of the verse.

I have translated the Zafarnama keeping today's youth in mind. It is they who need to discover the great Guru through his writings. I hope that the people for whom this translation has been done will find it useful. Lastly, I request you to inform as many people as possible about this web site so that the message of Guru Ji can reach far and wide.

I can be contacted at ranjay@vsnl.com or info@zafarnama.com

New Delhi
20th December, 2002

Wg. Cdr. Jasbir Singh