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A Historical Battle of Suba-i-Ajmer

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ABSTRACT: The battle of Deorai¹ was one of the most decisive battles of Mughal History in India which sealed the fate of Dara, the elder son of Emperor Shahjahan and made Aurangzeb the de facto ruler of the Mughal Empire.

Ajmer with animportance, which added to its natural beauties, its superb situation, and its political distinction have placed it on a high pedestal amongst the cities of India.

Emperor Akbar made Ajmer the head-quarters in 1561 AD for his operations in Rajputana and Gujrat. He made it a subha, making Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Sirohi subordinate to it. According to the Ain-i-Akbari, the length of the Ajmer subah was 336 miles, and breadth 300 miles; and it was bounded by Agra²

After illness of Shah Jahan in the year 1657 AD, a severe war of succession among his four sons Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad started.³Dara Shikoh's three younger brothers, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad Baksh who were in Bengal, Deccan and Gujrat respectively, marched towards the capital, Agra, each claiming the throne. After the battles of Fatehabad and Samugarh, (29th May, 1658 AD) Dara Shikoh was driven out of Agra, and Aurangzeb imprisoned his own father Emperor Shah Jahan, who remained interned in a building in the Agra Fort till his death in 1664 A.D.⁴

I. INTRODUCTION

Dara approached for Ajmer where Tartib Khan, Nazim of Ajmer evacuated before Dara's arrival. At last Dara had to depend upon his own forces against the army of Aurangzeb, reinforced by the forces of Jaipur and Marwar. Dara moved his force in the defiles, blocked up the roads with barriers is stone and earth, constructed morchas (entrenchments), distributed the bastions to his men and fortified them all with "weapons fo war."⁵ Dara appointed one of his chiefs to each morcha. On his right hand, the first morcha, which was adjacent to GarhBeetli was placed under the charge of Sayad Ibrahim, (Mustafakhan) and Askar Khan and Jan Beg and his son who was at the time, the Commander of the Artillery. The morcha next to it, was placed under Firoz Mewati who was one of his ablest and most reliable chiefs. Beside it, on the elevation commanding the view of the pass, a few bigger pieces of ordinance were placed, and Dara fixed his residence near that place. On his left side, a second morchas was constructed by sipaharshikoh and Muhammad Sharif, (Qileej Khan) and who had been appointed Pay Master General, as well as Barkandaz Khan and other were appointed to guard and protect it. Beyond this morcha, SipaharShikoh was placed in Charge of another which was contiguous to the hill.⁶

Four miles to the south of Ajmer, the hills of the Taragarh range are left by a narrow gorge, known as the Chashma, through which a track leads from the city, by the valley of Inderkot, west of Taragarh, to the plain of village Deorai. Dara occupied a position astride the entrance to this gorge, his left, his left flank resting on the crags of GarhBeethi, his right on the almost equally lofty and inaccessible hill named the Kokla, and his front, (save where this was broken by the ravine of the Chashma), defended by a wall of massive masonry, a portion, probably, of the outer line of fortifications of the ancient fortress-city of Inderkot[1,2,3]. This rampart, though its crest was dismantled and partly ruinous, was built of huge blocks of solid rock, which still at this day defy the attacks of time; and placed as it is on a commanding and well-defined ridge, it formed a most formidable obstacle to a direct assault. Dara quickly repaired it, mounted guns on the bastions, and constructed trenches and redoubts to cover the lines of approach. In this position, his communication with Ajmer, where his army drew its supplies, was secure; he covered the weakest point of the defence of the city, that by which they have so often been penetrated, the back-door of the Inderkot valley; and he threatened the flank of his opponent, should Aurangzeb move directly on Ajmer. In this all but impregnable position, he could await with some degree of confidence, in spite of his inferiority in numbers, the attack of his redoubtable enemy. Thus Dara's two flanks were safely positioned at the hills of Beethli and Kokla.⁷

II. DISCUSSION

Aurangzeb advanced via Ramsar and pitched his tents at Deorai, four miles from Ajmer. The artillery under Saif Shakin Khan was sent forward to take up a position in front of Dara's entrenchments. Raja Jai Singh, in command of the vanguard, took up a position to the right of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb, on his part, cared little for advantages or disadvantages of position. Elated by his recent victories, and with an immense superiority in men, material and morale, he was confident of victory, and was only anxious to bring his adversary to bay. Starting from Ramsar lake, Aurangzeb



halted one mile from Deorai on 11th March, 1659 A.D. At this position he was about two miles away from Dara's trenches and four miles from the city of Ajmer. On the night of 11 March, Phurdil Khan a gallant officer of Aurangzeb's army marched secretly and climbed a mound between the two armies with his 150 men and passed the night there. In the morning, seeing the presence of the enemy,⁸ Dara sent his choicest soldiers to dislodge Phurdil Khan but by the time Aurangzeb sent his 20000 soldiers to support his officer. As usual in Mughal warfare, the fight started with artillery duel on the evening of 12th and continued to the dawn of 13th with incessant firing from both sides. "Earth and heaven shook with noise." "Clouds of gun powder smoke covered the field." [4,5,6]

Towards evening, the battle commenced in earnest with a heavy artillery fire on both sides, which lasted throughout the night and for the greater part of the next day. "The powder-smoke hung in the air like a thunder-cloud, through which the flashes of the guns shone like lightning, while the earth became sulphureous with flame and fire." A new plan was chalked out according to which in place of engaging division to division and artillery and attempt to break the earth-works, a concentrated attack on a particular point was devised. The trenches of Shah Nawaz Khan (Dara's general) were chosen to make this concentrated attack. In the morning of 14th, Aurangzeb also rebuked his generals for their non-success of two days and urged them to bring some success by showing courageous deeds.⁹

On the morning of the third day of the combat, Aurangzeb determined to make a supreme effort. He assembled his generals, rebuked them for their want of energy, and urged them to deliver a combined assault without further delay. Early the same morning, a fresh development had occurred, of which Aurangzeb was quick to avail himself, and which finally decided the issue of this doubtful struggle. According to the plan the attack was threefold: First, the bulk of Aurangzeb's army was to attack the left wing of Dara's army at the trenches of Shah Nawaz Khan, Secondly, Raja Rajrup of Jammu hills was to attack with his cavalry in front of Kokla hill. The Third part of the plan was very secret and was like 'Tulganwa' of Babur's days. Raja Rajrup and his clansmen were expert in mountaineering. They discovered a path by which they could reach at the back of the Kokla hill unnoticed. After taking the permission from Aurangzeb for their plan and help of royal musketeers, they moved to their destination secretly. In the evening they succeeded in reaching at the back of the Kokla hill. To divert the enemy's attention Raja Rajrup himself appeared with his cavalry in front of the Kokla hill while his men went towards its back. [7,8,9]

III. RESULTS

Dara with his son, SipaharShikoh, was standing on an eminence in the centre of his line, whence he could command a view of the whole battle-field. Seeing the success of Diler Khan on his right flank, and the approach of Jai Singh who was moving up in support, he concluded hastily that the battle was going against him. The situation was indeed critical, but not desperate. The centre and left of his line were not even seriously threatened, and he still had 7000 men in reserve. A swift counter-attack might have driven the exhausted troops of Diler Khan from their position, before Jai Singh, whose advance was unaccountable slow, could arrive to help him. But, while Dara stood there, "taking counsel of his fears", a wild shouting and firing from the summit of the Kokla hill announced that the enemy had seized that point of vantage, from which they threatened his right rear and his line of retreat. This new disaster decided the issue in Dara's mind. Unlike Aurangzeb, he had not the resolution to make a supreme effort to avert defeat. No doubt the strain of three days' fighting had told on his nerves. Perhaps, also, since the defection of Jaswant Singh, he had expected to loose, and resigned himself easily to the inevitable decree of kismet.¹¹ In the gathering dusk he stole away, leaving his unbeaten army to its fate. Not even venturing to return to Ajmer, where his harem and treasure loaded on elephants and ready for the worst, were awaiting news of the battle, he fled westward over the hills towards Merta with harem group.¹² But with the flight of Dara, all was lost. As the fatal news passed from man to man, the stubborn ranks which had held their ground for three days melted into a spate of undisciplined humanity, which quickly blocked the narrow gorge, their only road of escape. For, with the arrival of Jai Singh, at last it was apparent that resistance was at an end; and a general slaughter began, which lasted far into the night. [10,11,12]

IV. CONCLUSION

On 16th March, the day after Victory Aurangzeb paid homage at the tomb of Khwaja Sahib and presented a sum of Rs. 5,000 to the attendants as offering for the victory. He despatched a force under jai Singh and Bahadur Khan to pursuit Dara. After the victory Aurangzeb settled the affairs of Suba-i-Ajmer and left for Delhi in March, 1659 A.D. After that for the full twenty years upto 1679, due to affairs in other parts of the Empire, Aurangzeb could not visit Ajmer.¹³

It was, really a cruel stroke of destiny that, Prince Dara, who was born and brought up at Ajmer was finally defeated by his younger brother Aurangzeb at the same place and was forced to lead the life of a fugitive in the Empire of which he was heir apparent once.



During the Mughal period of about one hundred and fifty five years (from 1556 to 1712 A.D.) when the Mughal Emperors Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb and Bahadur Shah reigned in India, Ajmer enjoyed comparative peace.[13]

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