

The Chronicles of Mewar and Maharana Pratap

Abhishek Bose¹, Bandana Singh²

Lawyer/ History Buff, Supreme Court, New Delhi, India

Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel Management, T John College, Bangalore, India

Abstract: *The battle of Haldighati is one of the most fiercest battles ever fought in the annals of Indian History and it truly showcases the valour and bravery of the Rajput clan and their love for their motherland. The battle was fought near the village of Haldighati in Rajasthan over 400 years ago, when the glory of the Mughal empire was at its peak and Akbar, the Mughal emperor dreamt of Unified India under the Mughal flagship. The Mughals though large in numbers and artillery faced the mighty Sisodias of Mewar, a Rajput clan. The Mughals won the battle after a hard won fight, but Rana Pratap who led the Rajput side managed to escape and for the remaining years of his life played a cat and mouse game of great intent and innovation with Akbar and his commanders. Akbar used all the resources at his disposal to destroy Rana Pratap but all in vain. The mighty emperor failed to capture the valiant Rana and Mewar was the only kingdom during Akbar's time to remain free of Mughal Domination.*

Keywords: Battle of Haldighati, Rajputana, Mughal emperor, Mughal dream of unified India, Mewar, Rana Pratap, Akbar

The land, the rajputs occupied in Northern India to a great extent shaped their personalities the way we see them today. The land came to be known as - Rajasthan - or the 'abode of the princes'.

The Rajputs are one of the most hardworking races in Indian History and the same may be witnessed in some of the most magnificent and imposing forts and palaces they built at the backdrop of the arid, hilly and Aravalli landscape at Chittorgarh, Jodhpur and Alwar. The forts that the Rajputs erected offered strategic military protection against attacks from enemy also proved to be a strong defensive stronghold. The desert favoured the Rajputs as they were truly the sons of the soil. Mewar stood as the most isolated, among all the other Rajput kingdoms. The Aravallis acted as a natural barrier, sealing Mewar from the rest of Rajasthan.

Originally, Mewar was known as Medpat and the Paramara family, was the earliest family to rule in the region. Mewar, was also the largest kingdom in Rajputana. The hilly regions of the Mewar kingdom were inhabited by the Bhils. The geographical isolation, terrain and tough physical surroundings made the people of Mewar self-reliant and naturally defensive. Also, they developed an intense desire to preserve their ancestral glory at any cost. Since the beginning, the people of Mewar evolved both physically and mentally for the kind of Guerilla warfare that Rana Pratap would adopt to elude the Mughal machinery.

Rana Pratap himself belonged to an illustrious family. Pratap's clan claims their lineage from the House of Surya - The sun God. Though, in reality, it was Bappa Singh Rawal of the Guhilot dynasty, in AD 734, established his capital at Chittor and proclaimed himself as the ruler of Mewar. The family names to Sisodia when Maharana Hamir Singh I from Sisodia mounted the throne. The Guhilot dynasty moved to Rajasthan from Gujarat and settled down in the South-Western part. A stable regime was established for the next eight centuries and the successive generations offered and sacrificed valiantly to restore the glory of Chittor and Mewar from the invaders, from time to time. Jaitra Singh, ruled between 1213-61, made Chittor the seat of the Mewar government. Chittor had always been one of the most contested seats of power. It was the first capital of Mewar

Kingdom and successive generations made it as the seat of Government. The city of Chittor can be approached through seven gates of which the top most was the "Ram Pol" on the West. A good number of water tanks, constructed on the slopes ensured a secure supply of water even at the times of War or siege. The Impeccable Chittorgarh fort, placed like a crown on the Aravallis stands near the bank of the river Gambhiri. The length of the fort is about three miles and a quarter and its breadth is a maximum of half a mile. The fort was earlier known as "Chitra-Durga" or "Chitrakuta", the fort is supposed to have been built during the Rajput-Maurya dynasty in the 7th Century AD. The fort was named as "Chitrakut" after Chitrang Mori, a Rajput chief. According to traditional sources, the Mori dynasty was in possession of the fort when Bappa Rawal seized it in AD 734. The fort was, 'within the grasp of no foe, nor can the vassals of its chief know the sentiment of fear...so intricate are its paths of ascent, that though you might find entrance, there would be no hope of return. The Chittorgarh fort was the bastion of Rajput power and the occupation of Chittorgarh fort was the primary objective of anyone who wanted to establish their rule over Rajasthan.

Historically, three sieges of immense nature took place for the possession of the fort, the first one occurred in AD 1303. The romantic legend of Rani Padmini is connected with this siege. Alauddin's armies devastated Chittor and the fort remained in possession for about ten years until the same was retaken by Maharana Hamir Singh I. Maharana Hamir Singh was a child who survived the onslaught of Alauddin's army as he was sent to safety at Kelwara before Alauddin arrived. Hamir Singh established the House of Sisodia's rule in Mewar and extended the frontiers of the kingdom. His successors Kshetra Singh and Lakha extended the kingdom further. Lakha was a prolific builder and used the wealth of the newly discovered silver and lead mines to re-build temples and palaces. He constructed many dams to cut out reservoirs and lakes. The famous Pichola lake in Udaipur was excavated during his reign.

Sangram Singh or popularly known as Rana Sanga, grandfather of Maharana Pratap, exercised perhaps the most enduring influence on Maharana Pratap. Sangram Singh, who himself was a valiant warrior suffered from many

Volume 9 Issue 4, April 2020

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

physical disadvantages. He was in exile from the kingdom after a fight with his elder brother, Prithiviraj, the heir-apparent, during which he lost an eye. He also lost an arm in another battle and was crippled by a cannonball in another conflict. The most famous of his adventure being the battle of Khanwa, which took place on 17th March, 1527.

Maharana Pratap's father, Udai Singh, was the fourth son of Sangram Singh. Udai Singh was just five when his father died and his eldest surviving brother succeeded to the throne as Ratan Singh II. Two years later, Ratan Singh II was murdered and his other brother, Vikramaditya, succeeded to the throne. Vikramaditya was not an able ruler, had an uncontrollable temper and was a wastrel whose bad behavior annoyed the nobles. The nobles, to counter this audacity, appointed a regent named Banbir as ruler until Udai Singh reached the age of eighteen and could be made the ruler.

Banbir was ambitious and wanted to become the king himself. In 1537, one evening, he sword in hand went to the harem of Vikramaditya, who was busy in merry making, murdered him. Then, he headed towards the chamber of Udai Singh, But Udai Singh's nurse Panna Dai, who clearly understood what Banbir Singh came for sacrificed her own child to save the young Prince life. She smuggled Udai Singh out of the fort and took him to Kumbhalgarh. She put the young Prince in the charge of Asha Shah, the local governor of Kumbhalgarh. On the other hand, Banbir thought he had killed both the heir-apparent and declared himself as the ruler.

The teenaged Udai Singh, remained in hiding until 1539, passing off as the Governor's nephew. One day, the Chief of Songara, from the neighbouring Mewar, visited the Kumbhalgarh fortress. Soon after meeting the seventeen years old Udai Singh, he was convinced that he was no Governor's nephew. The news quickly spread that the heir to the Mewar throne was still alive. The nobles of Mewar then headed to Kumbhalgarh to confirm the news. They interviewed the prince, heard the testimony of Panna Dai and proclaimed Udai Singh as the new ruler of Mewar. In 1540, after the coronation, Udai Singh supported by the nobles and Chieftains, marched to Chittor. Banbir, in quick time, assembled a small army to fight them. They met at Mavli, a small town near Chittor, where Banbir stood defeated and Maharana Udai Singh II triumphantly returned to his capital. It seems that Udai Singh had married while he was in Kumbhalgarh, Since traditional records show that his first son, Pratap, was born there on 9th may 1540.

June, 1544, Sher Shah after defeating Raja Maldeo of Jodhpur, approached Chittor. Udai Singh who was in no position to fight with the Afghans, sent the keys of the fort to Sher Shah as a token of Submission. Sher Shah himself was not eager to embroil himself in another war and signed the treaty with Mewar ruler.

When Mandu, the capital of Malwa, was stormed, its sultan, Baz Bahadur, took refuge in Chittor. Akabr, tried diplomacy and sent a peacekeeping mission to Udai Singh with an offer to marry one of the Rana's daughter. This method of Subjugation by matrimonial alliance had previously worked with various Rajput states, but Udai Singh was adamant not

enter into any kind of compromise with the Mughals. As a result, Akbar decided to annex Mewar. There were few reasons for the same decision, Firstly, Akbar wanted to Punish Udai Singh for his defiance and secondly, which was more a strategic concern that the Rajputs Chiefs looked to the Sisodias of Mewar as their natural and chosen leaders, if they could be forced to submit, the other Rajput Chiefs too, would submit in fear. On 25th October, 1567, Akbar pitched his camp below the Chittorgarh fort. Akbar erected the green flag of Islam and a obelisk, the "Chiraghdan" or "Akbar-ka-Dewa" (Akbar's lamp). It was formed of large blocks of Compact limestone, and had an interior staircase leading to the top. A huge lamp was placed on this to denote the imperial headquarters. Udai Singh, during this timeframe, had called all the loyal Mewari Chieftains to assemble at the capital. He left Chittor in the hands of four Rajput Chiefs. Jaimal, Parts, Kalla, and Saindass, and fled to the town of Girwa. Initially, Akbar lost all hope to conquer the fort. The fort was impeccable in design and seemed impossible to breach, was supplied with provisions, and was guarded by eight thousand valiant Rajput warriors. Akbar first attempt to take the fort by direct assault caused a heavy casualty of 200 men a day. So, the decision was to proceed through the mines. The Mughals employed cannon to breach the walls. Though, a part of the wall got destroyed, the Rajputs would repair the same at night. In the early hours of 23 February, Udai Singh's general Jaimal came to inspect the breach and was killed by a stray bullet. The Rajputs immediately withdrew from the ramparts and at the same night the woman and children committed "Jauhar".

Patta one of the general of Udai Singh became the new leader and he led the warriors of Mewar in the decisive battle. They put up a show of courage and bravery, but unfortunately the same was not enough and they were all killed. Next day, in the early hours Akbar entered the fortress in triumph and ordered a general massacre 'Which ceased only for a lack of victims'. According to a few accounts, 30,000 people were killed in the massacre. The courage displayed by the adversaries of Akbar didn't go unnoticed by Akbar though, he erected the statues of Jaimal and Patta mounted on elephants at the gate of the Agra fort.

Udai Singh lived at Kumbhalgarh and Gogunda for shorter periods, later he shifted his capital and the seat of his government to the new place beside the picturesque Lake Pichola, which he named after himself - Udaipur. The whole story goes like this: one morning, Udai Singh was out for hunting near lake Pichola and speared a fast moving Rabbit. All of a sudden, he saw a safe immersed in meditation. After paying his respects to the holy man, he recounted the tale of fall of Chittor. Thereafter, he asked the sage where he should built his new capital. The sage answered that he should build his new capital right there, where his destiny had brought him.

Udaipur was a planned city. Houses for nobles and other subjects were constructed near the palace, by Udai Singh. The Maharana collected funds, reorganized his army, captured new territories and established a new revenue collection system. The establishment of the new city, made Mewar officially as a part of the kingdom of Udaipur and Udai Singh, the Maharana of Udaipur.

Tragically, Udai Singh not live long to enjoy his new-found capital and he died in Gogunda in 1572, six months short of his 50th birthday. He was the ruler of Mewar for 35 years. Rana Udai Singh had 25 sons, Crown Prince Pratap Singh was the eldest. Pratap's mother was Rani Jeevant Kanwar, who was the daughter of Akhey Raj Songare Chauhan of Jalore. Like all Rajput princes, Pratap learned the skills of Warfare during childhood. Even as kids, Marital spirit was strong within Rana Pratap and his brothers. Competitiveness was the relationship they shared, especially with Udai Singh's second son, Sakta Singh Kunwar. At the age of five, Sakta cut his hand with a dagger to showcase how brave and fearless he was. This incident marked an Astrologer's prediction that he would bring misfortune to Mewar. Udai Singh immediately ordered that the child be put to death. But a Choondawat Chief of Salumbar (theChoondawat's were the leading Chieftains of Mewar), intervened on Sakta's behalf and offered to adopt the child as he had no child of his own. Udai Singh approved the request and the Chief promised to raise the child so that he can become a future leader of the Choondawats. Later, Sakta was sent to attend the Royal court where he took the place beside Pratap, the heir-apparent.

The brothers were good friends at the beginning but gradually the relationship turned into rivalry. It reached its climax one day when as teenagers, the two brothers went out on a hunting expedition along with the court. Pratap suddenly proposed to end their quarrel by a single combat to see who was the best lancer. As they positioned their horses and took up their Lance's, the two ambitious and headstrong boys agreed to charge together. Now, this would have been suicidal, everyone was shocked. The family priest assessing the situation to be grave one intervened and begged them not to continue as that would bring more scandal to the house or Mewar. Neither Boys was in a mood to let go of the opportunity and listen to the humble advice of the family priest and they became more adamant to settle the scores forever and their differences then and there. The priest finding no way to amend the situation for the better and to prevent this madness draw his own dagger and plunged it into his own heart. This needless death shocked and surprised both the boys. They realised the futility of their rash decision, they decided not to charge. As a direct consequence of this incident, Sakta, who was not in his Father's good books anyway, was banished from the Kingdom. Udai Singh gave him a small army of 200 soldiers. The disgraced youth, burning with the fire of resentment and revenge against his own clan and family, joined Akbar's army.

References

- [1] The Mughal Empire: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
- [2] Ain-i-Akbari: Abul Fazl
- [3] A Comprehensive History of India: People's Publishing House
- [4] Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan: James Tod