

Banda Singh Bahadur- A Great Sikh Warrior



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Abstract

Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was one of the most remarkable men that India produced in the 18th century. He was a great Sikh general who established Sikh rule in large part of Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh taught him the basic principles of Sikhism and baptised him. Guru sent Banda Singh on a mission to Punjab to punish the guilty and cruel rulers of the time. He was also provided with five brave Sikhs as advisors and necessary weapons. Banda Singh was soon joined by thousands of Sikhs in his crusade against the wicked rulers. Within a short span of time, Sikhs under Banda Singh's leadership put an end to life of many tyrant rulers, including Nawab Wazir Khan, the main culprit behind death of younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. He was the first to seize territory for the Khalsa and paved the way of the ultimate conquest of the Punjab by them. In the conquered territory extending several Mughal sarkars, Banda Bahadar had virtually supplanted the Mughal Empire. He heralded the new state by striking a coin, deriving his authority from God through the grace of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. He shook one of the most powerful empires in the world to its very foundations with such violence that it was never again able to reestablish its authority. Faruksiyar, Delhi's emperor sent a large force from Delhi and mobilized from elsewhere in Punjab to defeat and capture Banda Singh. Sikhs were surrounded by large number of Mughal forces in the fortress of Gurdas Nagal. They fought valiantly under Banda Singh's command but due to depleting ration, they ultimately became too weak to fight with the enemies. Ultimately, the brave general Banda Singh Bahadur was arrested along with seven hundred Sikh soldiers and brought to Delhi. Sikhs were offered amnesty by Mughals in lieu of accepting Islam but not even a single Sikh betrayed the spirit of Sikhism and embraced Islam. After an ordeal of about three months, on 9th June 1716, Baba Banda Singh was put to death mercilessly by pinching the flesh from his body, bit by bit, with means of hot pincers. The sacrifices of Banda Singh and his men did not discourage the Sikhs but it ultimately led to establish Khalsa Raj under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799 AD.

Keywords: Great Sikh, Leadership & Mughal Sarkars.

Introduction

Early Life

Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was born in October 1670 in a Rajput family doing farming in village Rajouri (district Punch), Kashmir. His actual name was Lachman Dev. He was very fond of horse-riding, martial-art and hunting and he was also expert in use of bow and arrow and other weapons. While hunting a she-deer and tearing the belly of the deer, he saw twin unborn off-springs writhing in pain and dying in front of his eyes and he was deeply moved by this incident, left hunting and became an ascetic. He became follower of Sadhu Ram Daas of Ram Thamman near Lahore (now in Pakistan). After some time he followed Janaki Daas. His name was changed to Madho Daas. While moving from place to place, he reached Punchvati near Nasik in Maharashtra and became follower Sadhu Aughhar Nath and served Aughhar Nath with full devotion for 5 years. Aughhar Nath pleased with his services bestowed him with all his virtues, occult powers and even his own created holy book. At the age of 21 years, Madho Daas reached Nanded to set up his own Ashram. Madho Daas with lot of miraculous powers and fame was the head of a big Ashram. He was very proud of his wisdom, meditation, occult powers and fame. He started insulting, putting down all saints, *sadhus*, intellectuals, *faquirs* etc. whosoever came to his Dera.

Crusade of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur

Guru Gobind Singh after leaving Punjab travelled towards South India along with some Sikhs and visited Lachhman Das's ashram and sat on his cot in his absence. Accepting defeat, Lachhman Das Bairagi fell at

the feet of Guru Gobind Singh and sought forgiveness and said, "O, Guru Ji, I am your Banda (Slave). Show me the right path." Guru Gobind Singh taught him the basic principles of Sikhism and baptised him. Lachhman was given the name 'Banda Singh'. After a meeting with Guru Gobind Singh on 3 September 1708, he became a Sikh. The Guru ordered him to go to Punjab as a leader of a mission to destroy the Mughal empire root and branch with the help of the Sikh army. Banda Singh Bahadur camped in Kharkodha, near Sonapat. From there he took over Sonapat and Kaithal. In 1709 he defeated Mughals in the Battle of Samana and captured the Mughal city of Samana, killing about 10,000 Mohammedans.

Samana was famous for minting coins. With this treasury the Sikhs became financially stable. The Sikhs soon took over Mustafabad and Sadhora (near Jagadhari).

Banda Singh's Sikh Raj

The Sikhs captured the cis-satluj areas of Punjab, including Ghurham, Kapor, Banoor, Malerkotla and Nahan. On 12 May 1710 in the Battle of Chappar Chiri (near Landran and Mohali), the Sikhs killed Wazir Khan (the Governor of Sirhind), and Dewan Suchanand who were responsible for the martyrdom of the two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Two days later the Sikhs captured Sirhind. Banda Singh was now in control of territory from the Sutluj to the Yamuna and ordered that ownership of the land be given to the farmers, to let them live in dignity and self-respect. After Sirhind he marched to Doaba, Pamal, Maler Kotla. The areas which lay in between Doaba excluding some part of Ludhiana were captured without much bloodshed. After that he undertook Panipat & Karnal and disconnected the communication & transportation between the Delhi & Lahore. It was well planned strategy to get to Lahore as it was the second base of Mughals after Delhi.

Banda was in full mood to eradicate Mughals from Northern part of India. He reached Phagwada & challenged Jaladhar Nawab to fight but he surrendered without war. Crossing the Beas river, he reached Manjha (Amritsar). This area belonged to Hindu majority so he was warmly welcomed. He marched towards Hoshiarpur where all Islamic armies gathered to fight with him. At Baijwada, the armies conflicted with each other but the commander of Muslim army was killed by Banda Bahadur. His death made the Khalsa gave the victory in their hand. The whole area between Yamuna & Sutlej came under the Banda command which he gave to Baba Vinod Singh. Sardar Baaj Singh & Fateh Singh was given command to undertake all captured & uncaptured area. Within two years from Karnal-Panipat to Hissar, Hansi, Tarawadi, Kaithal, Jind, Sirsa, Ferozpur, Chuniya, Kasur, Gurdaspur, Pathankot & Kangra all the regions were under the Saffron flag.

Now, Banda marched towards Uttar Pradesh. He conquered Saharanpur where Ali Muhammad Khan was raising his army on the name of jihad. Then Banda turned to Najimabad, where the Pathan ruler Shahnawaj Khan was soon was killed by Banda Bahadur. After that a troop towards Jalalabad was sent and got victory over Pathan Jalal Khan. Banda Bahadur came back to Lohagarh after these

victories in U.P. & declared Amritsar as a free state. It was a miracle as no one had ever before conquered such vast area ever during Mughal's rule. Muslims were so terrified by him that the name of Banda was more than enough to get victory.

Persecution from the Mughals

Bahadur Shah was horrified with Banda's continuous victories. Some historians write that he wrote him letter for peace. But as Bahadur Shah get acquainted that Banda was again in hilly areas, he sent his veteran commanders Asgar Khan, Samand Khan, Samand Khan, Abdulla Khan & Noor Khan to capture Banda Bahadur Singh. The Mughals army reached towards Lohagarh and Rajput army also came to help them. Coming to the war, Banda also reached the fort of Lohagarh. Both armies fought in Kot Ambu Kha. The Mughals were nearly 1 lakh & the Sikhs/Hindus were nearly 15-20 thousand which were reducing. The army of Banda had to leave the place as the cannons were uncontrollable in the field. Banda himself had to leave the place. Banda reached Lohagarh somehow, where the army was still safe. The fort was surrounded by Mughals army and was disconnected with the rest of the world. At the night Sikhs went out of the fort in search of food, many lost their lives. Banda knew things couldn't go like this so far. So, Banda planted a duplicate Gulab Singh to bluff Mughals army & escaped from the fort. When Bahadur Shah came to know that Banda had been captured he was rejoiced with pleasure but soon his bubble was busted when he knew that the prisoner was his duplicate. Mughal King was so feared and he thought that some kind of jinn's were helping him to get out. Mughal king left Delhi for Lahore where he died in 1713.

Farrukh Siyar became ruler of Mughals throne after Bahadur Shah. He was a cunning man, and he knew that Banda is invincible by armed forces. Using the theory of divide and rule, he wrote a letter & conveyed it by a Hindu Ram Dayal to the wife of Guru Gobind Singh Sundari Devi that he wants peace & Banda is blood thirsty of Mughals; Punjab & Mughals want to live peacefully. Sundari accepted his proposal and wrote a letter to Banda to accept this proposal. Banda knew very well the aim of Guru Gobind Singh to establish Khalsa. So, when Banda read her letter he was surprised and wrote back that this is just a trick to divide us. He reminded her that they bluffed Guru Gobind Singh & brutally murdered his sons. He couldn't forget the sacrifice of Guru Teg Bahadur & Guru Arjun Dev. Sikhs & Hindus had suffered so much under cruel hands of that it's not wise to forgive them. He is following Guru Govind Singh orders will continue following it. This reply made Sundari annoyed; she ordered all Sikhs not to support Banda as he is arrogant and insulted her and did not followed her orders. Those who will support Banda will be considered out of Sikhism.

The jealous elements got a big chasm to oppose Banda Bahadur. During Baisakhi celebrations of 1717 A.D, when Banda sat on the throne of the assembly, Baba Kahan Singh & Vinod Singh asked him to stand up. Whole assembly was divided into two parts - one was called Tat Khalsa & another was called Bandai Khalsa. Tat Khalsa Sikhs went under

Mughals flag. Now, only few Sikhs were left with Banda Bahadur Singh. To increase his strength, Banda started recruiting Vaishya & Brahmans in his army from Hindu society. Both Vaishya & Brahmans picked sword to save the Vedic Dharma. Soon, he trained his army but his army was not so strong. Now, the Hindu army and a few Sikhs of Banda fought with Mughals at Nanokot. It was a crusade for both the armies. Jai Dharma, Jai Bharat, Jai Shri Ram, Jai Maa Kali, Har Har Mahadev & Allaha-hu-Akbar slogans were raising from both sides of the armies. A heavy slaughter took place. Banda Bahadur fought continually three days by sitting on the back of horse and became victorious finally. Again, Banda's glory was all around.

Without wasting time, Banda wanted to march towards Lahore from Gurdaspur Fort. As his army reached Batala, Lahore & Delhi coalition forces was there to stop him. Mughals were badly frightened because they knew if they lose Lahore, then they will have limited breath in Delhi and in also India. Both the armies fought bravely but victory went to Banda again. Banda reached Gurdaspur & ordered his army to march to Lahore. Aslam Khan, Governor of Lahore, attacked on him with his 10 thousand men. Banda captured the eastern zone till the end of day. The next day, to his surprise, Banda saw 5000 Sikhs of Tat Khalsa headed by Meer Singh Khalsa in the harwal brigade of Mughals who are ready to fight with him on the banner of Islamic green flag. Banda was shocked and retraced his feet back. Although Banda wanted to take revenge for the children of Guru Govind Singh & to defend Khalsa panth of Guru Govind Singh yet he did not raise sword on his own people. If that day those 5000 Sikhs didn't supported Mughals, Lahore would have been under Banda's rule. No Nadir Shah or Ahmad Shah could have tortured Sikhs in future. Banda wrote letter to Tat Khalsa head which was read in the Tat Khalsa community; some supported him but final verdict was against him. A young Sikh said Mughals are not betraying us, its Banda who is doing so. Banda was a man of infinite potential. He never gave up his high morale. He marched towards Kalanaur from Gurdaspur. The Nawab Fatedeen surrendered. Then, Sialkot was taken without any bloodshed because the Nawab ran away. Banda then took Wajirabad & Gujarat like small cities. He then captured Pothohar (now Islamabad).

Siege in Gurdas Nangal

As emperor Farrukh Siyar heard about his victories, he send a war veteran Abdul Samand with a troop of 30,000 men towards Gurdaspur. Banda instantly marched towards Gurdaspur. Abdul Samand wrote a letter that he did not wish to fight with him soon he will leave the place. But in 1718 A.D Banda was badly surrounded by Mughals. Banda was having 10-12 thousand men but he could not fight for long without water and food. All the army inside the fort was starving and Banda himself became so thin that his bones could be seen. Finally, after four months, fort gate was open to welcome the death. Mughals started slaughtering & capturing of Banda's army. But, no one had courage to go near this Lion Banda Bahadur. Banda peeped from a window and signaled Pathans to capture him.

Criticism

Banda Bahadur was criticized for various reasons by Tat Khalsa and Nihang Singhs which include: creation of his own Panth called Bandai Khalsa, changing Khalsa rites and code of conduct, unnecessary battles and killing of Muslims, abusing Mata Sundri, and surrendered to Mughal army with 700 personnel. All early Sikh historical resources including Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Giani Gian Singh, Historian Karam Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Nihang Dharam Singh etc. also mentioned these facts.

Torture and Execution

On 7 December 1715, Banda Singh Bahadur was captured from the Gurdas Nangal fort and put in an iron cage. The man who was another name of fear over last 14 years was now taken in shackles & then inside a cage. He was treated like animals. He was sent to Delhi. On the way, where ever his cage passed through Muslim areas, rotten food & vegetables are thrown over him. Muslims distributed sweets while Hindus wept in their houses. When Banda in the cage reached Kashmiri gate of Delhi with his 740 men including his general Baaj Singh, The emperor Farrukh Siyar came to greet Abdul Samand. Samand was awarded the Governance of Lahore. Banda's face was painted black, he was covered with the sheep skin and his exhibition was kept for three days.

The emperor Farrukh Siyar asked Banda why he revolted against his empire. So, he replied that an empire without justice is not considered as an empire. Farukhsear asked him that why he killed Muslims, Banda replied that tit for tat is the only way to overcome from the unjust rule. Muslims supported Mughals in their injustice. Guilty must be punished so he did the same. The emperor Farrukh Siyar ordered Qazi to start the Islamic court. Qazi put his condition that Banda's life can be spared if he accepted Islam. Otherwise, his body will cut into pieces. Banda replied your Allaha is biased because all the blames which are imposed on him will remain no more as he will accept Islam. A biased God is no God, I refuse to accept Islam. 100 Sikhs were slaughtered by butchers every day. After seventh day, Banda was asked again will he accept Islam. Banda spit aside and said "NO". After that Qazi ordered butchers to get the extreme of brutality. His young son was killed in front of him and his heart was forcibly inserted in his mouth by butchers. Red hot pincers were inserted inside the body of Banda again & again and flesh was taken away each time. Banda kept calm during the whole torture. He raised slogans of Jai Dharma again & again. When no flesh remained inside his body, his body was tied behind the elephant and dragged. Finally, he was slaughtered into pieces.

Salute to great Sikh Warrior Sardar Banda Singh Bahadur who gave all but not his beliefs.

Highlights of Banda Singh Bahadur's Campaign

1. Baba Banda Singh created the first Khalsa commonwealth of Guru Gobind Singh ji's dreams in Punjab.
2. He abolished feudal system of Jagirdari and established democracy and Panchayati raj.
3. The Mughal chronicle writers created a myth that Guru Gobind Singh's spirit has entered his body.

He was represented as Guru-incarnate for the Sikhs.

4. All chronicle writers used most derogatory epithets for Banda Singh and his comrades. Even when they hate Banda Singh and his comrades in strongest terms, Khafi Khan is all praise for their courage and bravery. They died to the last man rejecting all offers of saving their lives. Their dead bodies were hanged from tree tops on all entry points to Delhi to create a fear psychosis among the public.
5. It is unfortunate that fissures appeared in followers of Banda Singh Bahadur and they split into two groups: Bandais and Tat Khalsa. This may be one of the reasons of their defeat at the hands of Abdus Samad Khan.
6. In campaign of Lohgarh and Gurdas Nangal, Hindu Rajas of Shivalik hill states supported the Mughal army by men and materials. They proved to be traitors to the noble cause of Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda fought for liberation of India but Indians preferred the slavery of Mughals!

Conclusion

Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was one of the most remarkable men and possessed all the qualities of a great warrior and a natural leader of the people, a friend of the weak and oppressed. He played a significant role in the history of the Sikhs, history of this region comprising present day Punjab, Haryana, parts of Jammu and Himachal Pradesh as well as in the history of the 18th Century in India. In fact, Guru Guru Gobind Singh decided to send Banda Bahadur back to the Punjab to rouse the peasantry so that the tyrant rule of Mughals may be put to an end. He was the first to seize territory for the Khalsa and paved the way of the ultimate conquest of the Punjab by them. He shook one of the most powerful empires in the world to its very foundations with such violence that it was never again able to reestablish its authority. He was the master of the whole region lying between the Sutlej and Jamuna and he reigned and exacted tributes from all sections of the population. He made Sikhism popular with the people of Punjab by his bravery and generosity. He had sown what the Khalsa State meant. He had brought about a revolution in the minds of the Sikhs and the oppressed Sections of the Society. A will was created among the Sikhs and the other oppressed to have their own way.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, it was Banda Bahadur who looked for justice in Punjab. Banda Bahadur Singh justified the lines "*Purja Purja Kat mare, Kabahu na chade khet*" (Even though your body may be cut into pieces but never leave your belief). Banda lived for the Dharma. He was a great Sikh warrior and had a pious soul otherwise he could have accepted Islam to take the revenge with the Sikhs who betrayed him. He could have committed suicide inside the fort Gurdaspur but to open the eyes of Tat Khalsa he accepted the insult and painful death. If Banda would have been supported by Sikhs he would have uprooted Islamic rule from our country and expanded the Hindu rule up to Kandahar in Afghanistan. It was his firm base that helped Maharaja Ranjeet Singh to establish his rule in later years.

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