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## Analysis of Sikh struggle for sovereignty under Banda Bahadur (1670-1716)

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### Abstract:

The present research paper deals with the historical analysis of Banda Bahadur's struggle for the establishment of first sovereign sikh state in Punjab in the beginning of eighteenth century. There are lots of new facts and figures available which created a need to reevaluate the role and contribution of Banda Bahadur to Sikh community. Commander of the Sikh forces in his struggle with the Mughal rule in Punjab created a first sovereign sikh state immediately after the death of Aurangzeb during the rule of Bahadur Shah I. This article deals with his struggle against the Mughal Nobility, establishment of new Sikh State, suppression by Mughal forces initially by Emperor Bahadur Shah I and subsequently by Emperor Farrukhsiyar, administration of the newly created state and various controversies related with him.

### INTRODUCTION:

Religious traditions have played a crucial role in conceptualizing the idea of social equality and social justice and also in responding to perceptions of social injustice, inequalities and prejudices. The concepts of democracy, egalitarianism, ethnic equality, love, justice, liberty, equality, philanthropy are deeply embedded in Sikh thought as enshrined in the Gurbani of the Sikh Gurus. Sikh Gurus challenged many of the religious beliefs and practices of their time. They stressed on Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Mankind, devotion to One God, service to mankind, equality of human race, truthful conduct, social solidarity, human dignity, household living and social justice. They denounced caste system, social inequality, parochial divisions, gender discrimination, social injustice, renunciation, religious hypocrisy, superstitions and empty religious rituals. Sikh Gurus also played exemplary and vibrant role and gave supreme sacrifices in fight against political absolutism, fanaticism and social injustice. In continuation of these merit, Banda Singh Bahadur, commander of Sikh forces after the death of tenth and last Guru of Sikhs Guru Gobind Singh, shown a great courage and valour against

prevailed political anarchy, social injustice and economical discrimination. Banda Singh Bahadur occupies a very important place in the history of Punjab in general and the Sikhs in particular. He had left a legacy of life and death struggle against the cruelties of Mughal rule which resulted in establishing a sovereign Sikh rule in 1710s. There has been a never ending controversy regarding the origin and early life of Banda, whether he was a Rajput, a Mohyal Brahmin, a Sodhi Khatri or a Maratha? Where he was born? How did he reached Deccan and become Bairagi? and what he established was a Hindu Raj or a Sikh Kingdom? However in this blind puzzle of controversies, sincere and dedicated effort was missed to reveal the real works of Banda.

Like Shiva ji Maratha he was a great warrior, able administrator and freedom fighter who led the Sikh community's struggle for justice and equality against the Mughals. His struggle shook the entire Mughal empire from its foundation so intensely that it could not stand further in Punjab even after his Martyrdom and Sikhs became masters of their own land. We all know that Shiva ji is our national hero and his day of accession is celebrated as a festival in a country. But unfortunately Banda Bahadur could not get

his due credit for his achievements, due to various reasons. Insufficient information, Patronage writings, distorted facts and figures, Misinterpretation of facts, unscientific treatment of all events, facts and figures depicted him as a dacoit, rebel, usurper, cruel and blood sucker of the Muslims.

#### EARLY LIFE:

His real name was Iachhman dev, born in 1670 in the small town of Poonch in the district of Rajouri in state of Jammu and Kashmir. His father Ramdev Bhatti, was a small farmer, belongs to Rajput tribe. In his childhood he was fond of Horse riding, Hunting and Martial art. At the age of 16, during his hunting campaign he killed a pregnant doe and he saw twins unborn off springs dying in pain in front of his eyes. He was so much moved of that incident that he left hunting, became ascetic and left the home. In course of events first he met with Ram Dass and then Janaki Dass who changed his name to Madho Das Bairagi. Finally he met with Aughhar Nath at Panchvati near Nasik in state of Maharashtra and became his follower. Aughhar Nath was very pleased to see his sincerity and his dedicated services. He bestowed him with all his virtues, occult powers and miraculous teaching of magic. After the death of his Guru, Madho Das became the head of his ashram and shifted his dera to Nander in the state of Maharashtra, near Godavari river, where he established a bigger one. People started flocking to him for counseling and healing and seek his blessings for the fulfillment of their desires and soon he became popular in that area.

#### MEETING WITH GURU GOBIND SINGH:

On the other hand tenth Guru of Sikhs Guru Gobind Singh ji also reached Nander where he met Madho Das. Guru ji was in South India along with the troops of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah I, in hope that Emperor will do the justice and punish those offenders who were responsible for the cruelties and atrocities done to the Guru and his family in Punjab. Even emperor promised to hand over all the guilty and requested the Guru to accompany him to Deccan where the people revolted against him. In south, while accompanying him, Guru ji became clear of the intentions of king. Due to his reluctant

behaviour Guru ji parted his way from king separated his caravan, and kept on moving and reached Nander, where he met Madho Das. Guru ji had heard the repute of Madho Das during the travel and was interested to meet him. After meeting him he greatly touched his gestures. Madho Das was also greatly impressed by the sacrifices made by Guru ji and his family for the sake of humanity and offered himself at their service and called himself as a Banda (Slave) of Guru (Master). Guru ji found in Madho Das a capable person having capacity to create a unity amongst the weak and oppressed people. Madho Das preferred himself to be addressed as 'Banda' of the Guru..

#### HEADING TOWARDS PUNJAB:

The Guru bestowed the title of Bahadur upon him and instructed him to carry forward the struggle which he had started in Punjab to save the people from the oppressive and cruel rule of the Mughals. He charged him with the duty of punishing the evildoers who had persecuted the Sikhs and murdered his sons, nephews and other devotees. The Guru blessed him that so long as he carried out the Guru's mission, the Guru's hand will always be at his back. Banda was instructed to follow the teaching of Guru Gobind Singh in letter and spirit. Five Sikhs representing 'Khalsa', 20 bodyguards were sent with the chosen disciples of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh gave him a double edged sword (Khanda), five arrows, a battle drum, a flag and the letter of instructions (Hukmnamah) issued to in the name of commonwealth of Khalsa and people of the Punjab to help Banda Bahadur. To avoid trouble at the hands of the Mughals, Banda along with his companion had to travel in disguise and marched via Rajasthan and reached Kharkhanda, 50 km west of Delhi near Sonapat. He camped there and forward the Guru's letter to the Sikhs. Crowd began to flock to his camp. Men, women and the families of the devotees of the Guru began to assemble in a large number. Khafi Khan writes "In two or three months time, four to five thousand pony riders, seven to eight thousand warlike footmen joined him. Day by Day their number increased and abundant money and material by pillage fell into their hands."

**CONQUESTS OF THE PUNJAB:**

Banda's appeal to the people and the news of assassination of their Guru in Nander, created a highly inflammable situation in Punjab. According to Khuswant Singh "at that time the distinction between formally baptized 'Singh' and a Hindu who, while retaining his Hindu name and practices, was in close sympathy with the Khalsa, was not great." Banda gave an open challenge to Mughals by attacking Sonapat, not far from the Imperial seat of power- Delhi. He entered Sonapat, looted the state treasury, and homes of the rich, and distributed whatever he got amongst his men. Then he took Samana, Kaithal, Mustafabad without much resistance.

At Samana, the Mughal army commander Jalal-ul-din had taken active part in the martyrdom of the ninth Sikh Guru. Shakil Beg and Bashil Beg, responsible for the killing of the minor sons of the tenth Guru at Sirhind, were also residents of that place. Samana was conquered by the Sikh army led by Banda Singh Bahadur on October 26, 1709. Fateh Singh was appointed the Governor of Samana, and then he attacked on sadhaura. Nawab of Sadhaura, Usmaan Khan and his associates, killer of Peer Budhu Shah was punished by Sikh generals by cutting his body into pieces and plundered the whole town. Banda then captured Kaithal, then he took Ghurram, Thaska, Shahbad, Kapuri, Banoor, Malerkotla and Nahan.

At that time Emperor was still busy in Deccan fighting with his brother Kam Baksh. Banda had intentionally targeted these important commercial towns and trading centre before attacking Sirhind, his ultimate destination. His purpose was to collect sufficient money for paying to his army and to purchase the necessary weapons and other war material and ration. He also wished to weaken the chances of reaching immediate reinforcement to the help of Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind by defeating the faujdars and other imperial officials on the way. Banda Bahadur had appointed his own men as 'Amils' responsible for the civil as well as military administration of the newly conquered areas. Thus he acquired the political power of that areas and dispatched the Hukamnamas of Guru Gobind Singh to various Sikh chiefs in the rest of the Punjab for the attack on Sirhind.

**BATTLE OF CHAPPER CHIRI (1710):**

Now his next target was faujdar of Sirhind, Nawab Wazir Khan, murderer of the Sons and relatives of Guru Gobind Singh and also was responsible for the assassination of Guru ji at Nander. In the meantime Banda had heard that Sikhs of Punjab would flock round him to reinforce him and in addition a large number of Hindus had also accompanying them. Imperial writer wrote a report that around 70 thousand of them had assembled at sadhaura. Wazir Khan, the faujdar of Sirhind repeatedly wrote to the Emperor for reinforcement and Emperor issued an orders to faujdar of Emnabad and Diwan of Lahore to take action against rebels but no one could extend help to Wazir Khan because they had themselves become helpless due to rebellion in their own land. However Wazir Khan came out to meet them with a large force and religious crusader as Wazir Khan declared it as a 'Holy War'. Both the armies came face to face at plains of Chapper-Chiri on May 12, 1710.

A very fierce battle took place between both the armies and at one time Sikhs, after a feeble resistance, turned and fled from the battleground, but soon Banda took the control and overcame from this situation with his cool mindedness, courage and determination. Baj Singh and Fateh Singh, two Generals of Banda fought very bravely with Wazir Khan and finally killed him. Mughal army fled from the scene after seeing the falling head to the ground of Wazir Khan leaving behind their weapons and horses. Soon Banda entered in the Sirhind and ransacked the whole town and collected a very big amount of money. Then he appointed Baj Singh as Subedar of Sirhind and proclaimed orders that none would attack on the people of Sirhind and distributed the booty and land whatever he got, to his men and other small farmers of the town.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF SIKH RULE:**

Becoming the ruler of Sirhind Banda gave the orders to give ownership of the land to the tillers and farmers and let them live in dignity and self respect. From Sirhind he sent his contingents to other areas to conquer. Banda Singh Bahadur attacked Saharanpur and Jalalabad in July 1710. In the fierce battle Karnal and Panipat were also

occupied by the Sikh warriors. This made Banda the real master of the territory between river Jamuna and Sutlej. Banda Bahadur developed the village of Mukhlispur, fortified it and renamed it as Lohgarh and made it as his capital. He gave order to abolish Zamindari system in his conquered area and distributed it amongst the tillers of the soil. He issued the coins in the name of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh and also issued a royal seal. Sikhs then occupied Jalandhar and Amritsar areas including Hoshiarpur and Phagwara. All these territories were divided in separate units to be administrated by Sikh commanders of repute. Thus within two years the Sikhs established their rule in all these territories up to Lahore of Punjab province.

#### BAHADUR SHAH'S MARCH TOWARDS PUNJAB:

All his activities made Emperor worried and he gave up his plan to suppress the revolt in Rajasthan and marched towards Punjab. The entire Imperial force was reorganized to kill or defeat Banda. All Generals were directed to join the Imperial army at once and to ensure that there were no Sikh agents in the army, all the Hindus were issued orders to clean shave their beards. Banda was in Uttar Pradesh when Mughal army under Munim Khan marched towards Sirhind and conquer it again. The Sikhs moved towards Lohgarh for the final battle where Banda had already reached and then Sikhs defeated the Mughal army. Mughals called up their reinforcement and laid siege on the fort with 60,000 troops under the command of Emperor himself. Banda left the fort at night in disguise when he felt it was impossible to handle a such a large number of Mughal force with artillery with his meager resources and went to a secret place in the hills of Chamba. Emperor got shocked at this news and he gave the orders to kill the all Sikhs on December 10, 1710. After this Emperor went back to Delhi and got Sick and he died on February 18, 1712.

#### BATTLE OF GURDAS NANGAL AND BANDA'S ARREST:

In the mean time Banda Singh Bahadur occupied Chamba state and then Jammu state was conquered by the Sikhs in 1711. Banda wrote to the Sikhs to get themselves reorganized at once

at Kiratpur Sahib and planned a attack on Nahan and Bilaspur. After the defeat and subsequent death of Raja Bhim Chand of Bilaspur all hilly chiefs accepted his sovereignty and paid him a revenue. On the other side Emperor's four Sons were fighting with each other the accession to the throne. At last Farrukhsiyar became the new Emperor and he appointed the Faujdar of Jammu, Abdus Samad Khan the noted 'Sword of the State' title holder which he got for his courage and bravery, as a new Governor of Lahore to tackle the griming situation of Punjab. In 1713 Sikhs were defeated by the Mughal forces at Lohgarh and vacated the fort and slipped into the remote region of Jammu. Sikhs captured Gurdaspur, Batala and Kalanaur. In March 1715, Banda was in the village of Gurdas Nangal when Mughal force laid siege to the fort where he was planning to face off the final battle with the enemy. The Sikhs fought very bravely and defended the small fort for eight months. But due to their meager resources and starvation Sikhs finally surrendered to Imperial army. The Mughal army became successful in entering the fort on December 7, 1715 and arrested Banda Singh Bahadur and 740 other Sikh warriors.

#### TORTURE AND EXECUTION:

They were taken to Delhi in custody and reached there on February 2, 1716. They were paraded in a very humiliating conditions in Delhi. In this procession 740 alive Sikh prisoners along with their leader, Banda Bahadur who was in chains, tied on top of an elephant in a iron cage and in a dress of a joker with a cap on his head, were paraded. In this procession 2000 Sikh heads hung on spears and 700 cartloads of heads of slaughtered Sikhs used to terrorize the population. All the Sikh prisoners were offered the release and posts of their choice in defense or civil administration if they would convert to Islam, otherwise they would be tortured and killed. In refusing to conversion to Islam they were tortured and executed in group of 100 men per day. During their torture and executions Sikhs were silent and they showed no sign of any dejection, fear or humiliation, instead they were singing their sacred hymns accepting it as a will of almighty.

After a few days when all 700 of his men

were killed in front of Delhi Gate, Banda was interrogated about his wealth, war plan, strategies and ammunition. when Banda remained silent his eyes were pulled out, limbs were severed, and even his 4 years old son Ajay Singh was also tortured and his chest was pierced and his heart was pushed into the mouth of Banda. When Banda remained silent and reciting the sacred hymns of Gurbani, his hands and feet were chopped off, hot sharp rods were inserted into his flesh, his other companions were hacked to death and finally on refusing to accept Islam, his head was chopped off.

#### CONCLUSION:

Banda Bahadur occupies an important and vital place in the History of Medieval India. He was not only a great devout of Khalsa or great disciple of Guru Gobind Singh but also a great freedom fighter who fought for the downtrodden and peasantry against the despotic and autocratic cruel rule of Mughal officials. In this biographical account Banda has not been assessed as a Bairagi or Baptized Sikh, but as a great warrior of Punjab, saviour of the poor and downtrodden, who ultimately grabbed political power and founded a benevolent rule. He was one of the bravest general and most enthusiast ruler of the time who took up the arms against the tyrannical rule of the Mughals. Like other warriors of his time Dhanaji and Shantaji Ghorpade, he gave the severe blow to the prestige and stability of the Mughal rule. Khuswant Singh wrote that "he Shook one of the most powerful empire in the world to its very foundations with such violence that it was never again able to re-establish its authority." Banda inspired the common masses of Punjab to resist the tyranny and live and die like a freedom fighter. Although his rule was short-lived and he met with a tragic end yet he occupies a high place in the history of Punjab. He lit the flame of inspiration for Independence and self rule in them. Making an estimate of his achievements G. C. Narang remarks that "Guru Gobind Singh had diverted the attention of his followers from plough to the sword. He had sown the seeds, Banda reaped the harvest. The Guru had destroyed the awe inspired by the Mughal despotism. Banda completely broke the charm of its invincibility.

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