
Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, Sikhs and Mughals in Punjab

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ABSTRACTS

The present study is an attempt to know the religious thoughts of Baba Banda Bahadur. The identity of the Sikhs as a brave community for defending the society from inimical forces has been firmly established by the heroic deeds of Banda Singh Bahadur who battled against the mighty forces of the Mughal tyrants. Treating religion as patriotism par excellence, it is no wonder that the first Sikh state was launched under his remarkable leadership signifying the triumph of unity for liberation. At this juncture, the emergence of Banda Singh Bahadur heralded a new era by giving a clarion call of unity between all sections of society. Instilling righteousness, Dharma, upholding the dignity of the poor, he mobilized people to sacrifice personal and narrow interests at the altar of freedom. In the face of a serious challenge to the integrity of the nation, he fired the imagination of the masses for achieving a glorious future. This paper can be examining the curious work about Hindu-Sikh relation as they have evolved in recent times. Certain misgivings on this issue giving rise to militancy and terrorism. Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh Sovereignty might get erased from the political psyche of the people who browse through the painstaking efforts.

Key Notes – *Sikh, Saints Mughal, Patriotism, Dharma, Hindu-Sikh, Sovereignty.*

INTRODUCTION

Banda was born at Rajauri, in district Poonch of the western Kashmir on 27th October, 1660.¹ His father, Ram Dev, was a *Rajput* ploughman, and his early name was Lachhman Das. In his early years Lachhman Das is said to have been given too much to chivalrous pursuits. He often went for hunting, and on one such occasion an event is said to have occurred which changed the entire course of his life. The story goes that once he killed a doe, which was pregnant and as she died, from her womb fell down her young one which died on the spot just before his eyes. This incident was sufficient for Lachhman Das to shake him and to make him have a review of his life and activities. Convinced of the futility of the life he had been living in the past years, he decided to renounce it and became a *Bairagi* under the name Madho Das.²

Banda now roamed from place to place meeting saints and *Yogis*, and finally coming at Nasik on the bank of the Godavri he came into contact with a *Yogi* named Augher Nath from whom he learnt occultism, and then moved to Nander in the Deccan where he established his monastery.³

When Guru Gobind Singh visited his monastery, he tried to play the same trick on him but here he found no ordinary mortal to be thus victimized. After having tried all his occult powers but failed, he fell at the Guru's feet and begged for his pardon. The Guru asked him who he was and in utter humility Madho Das replied that he was the Guru's *Banda*, or his slave. Pleased with his humility, the Guru patted him and giving him the title of *Banda* he commissioned him to go to the Punjab.⁴

At the time Banda was commissioned, the Guru gave him five arrows from out of his quiver, and handed over to him his drum and banner as emblems of his authority. The Guru instructed Banda to remain pure of heart and honest.

Banda in fact was the first man in the Punjab to realize that the only escape from the Mughal atrocities and religious persecutions was to destroy the Mughal power itself. Unlike other religious leaders with radical views, he preached a missionary religion and gave an organized fight to traditional Hinduism. His philosophy of life was based on his own personal experiences presents his thoughts with remarkable consistency. Whereas the other radical thinkers only criticized the existing systems without suggesting alternatives, approach was positive and practical, with a definite aim and socio-religious programme in mind. He founded a new religion that helped unite the robust peasantry of Panjab. He regulated the community life of his followers who were required strictly to worship together in congregation and to dine together.⁵

Banda fixing up his headquarters in Sadhaura, started to Repair its hitherto neglected fort, renaming it Loh Garh. He assumed royal authority and struck coins which on their observe bore the inscription :

"By True Lord's grace is struck the coin in the two worlds :

*Guru Nanak's sword is the grantor of all boons, and victory belongs to the king of kings,
Guru Gobind Singh."*⁶

Banda was a great general and a conqueror. There is no doubt that Guru Gobind Singh breathed a new spirit in the Sikhs, but writes Dr. Narang, "it was Banda who taught them first how to fight and conquer, with the result that the whole country from Lahore to Panipat lay for once, particularly at Banda's feet."⁷ Banda had to contend with many difficulties.

Banda gives a graphic description of the sufferings of the people and the authorities committed by the in vedas. His social, religious and political views were broad-based and were well founded on a drive of spiritual regeneration towards liberal and a new life of grace. In his efforts to consolidate Sikhism, Banda, turns first to victory on Sonapat and then to Kaithal, Sahora, Samana and Sarhind finally. His journey towards liberalization is not a cup of tea for everybody rather he is physical, and psycho-spiritually tortured and tormented by situations and his rebellions. It Sarhind it happened with him that in front of his eyes his two youngest sons had been bricked alive. But he declares that the purpose of his life is to work for Dharma and his people to raise the virtuous and to uproot the wicked.

Banda not possessing the position of the tenth Guru so that the Sikhs, rich and poor, should have flocked to him with presents of arms. It is also alleged that Banda failed to act on the advice of 'Five Sikhs' as enjoined by the Guru. He substituted '*Fateh Darshan*', in place of the salutation '*Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa, Sri Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh;*' and though later on he withdrew the new slogan, many Sikhs should definitely have been estranged against him, at which Rattan Singh Bhangu claims. That he was *vaishnava* as against the Sikhs being meat-eaters.⁸ He is also alleged to have founded a new sect of *Bandeis*, or the followers of Banda as the eleventh Sikh Guru after Guru Gobind Singh, as against the *Tatwa Khalsa* who considered Guru Gobind Singh, to be the last Guru in human body ; though it is held by some writers such as Karam Singh that it was only a later development and that those not differing with Banda's views in his own time though being called *Bandeis* they never became a sect distinct from the other Sikhs so long as Banda lived.⁹

Nor was he second to anybody in his zeal and love for the Sikh faith. Whatever important work Banda under took, he started only with an *ardasa* or prayer to the Almighty.¹⁰ Whosoever came in contact with him, Banda told him to repeat *Name* and remember that they were all humble instruments in the hands of the Almighty Lord. He converted a large number of Hindus and Muslims to his faith, but there is no evidence that he used any force in doing so.

Sometimes it has been alleged that he hated Muslims and had deep faith in Sikhism and to propound his Sikh religion he shed innocent blood of pregnant women, children and poor Muslims. But the fact remains that Banda was a brave and intellectual leader who organized Sikhs against Mughals and leads Sikhs in freedom movement against various invaders. Not only Muslim writers painted his picture surrounded with darken clouds but also many European writers too released his character's description in negative of mankind. Cunningham writes thus: "The memory of Banda is not held in much esteem by the Sikhs... He did not perhaps comprehend the general nature of Nank's and Gobind's reforms."¹¹ To nullify this allegation this

one example is itself sufficient proof to show his futility that at Kalanaur in April 1711 about 5000 Muslims got registered their entry in his army and raised fight against their own blood and brethren. The point need not be laboured beyond this. His role motive behind this blood-shed was only to instigate the emotions of self-respect and a sense of independence among his followers. By doing so, he rendered greatest service to his country and ignited a revolution oriented towards independence to his countrymen undoubtedly his activities worked as the basis of further movement of freedom in the history of India. He ignited the spark and set down a particular patch to be followed by patriots which Sikhs community continually and heartily followed. Resultantly, Sikhs got success in overthrowing the Mughal authority in the Punjab and deviated the bloody-ways of invasions of Abdali mounted across the Indus. Otherwise Abdali's invasions would have engulfed the entire India and he would have been successful in destroying the glory of Hindu culture and civilization. Hence he proved himself to the person who has oriented views wrapped in pious feelings patriotism that help in uniting people & Punjab in overthrowing the Mughal empire. He got success in uniting the Sikhs in Punjab and in prevailing the will to resist tyranny whether it is Mughal state, Zamidar or anybody else. He himself never lured in temptations of a princely life after accepting Islam but remained a source of motivation for Sikhs throughout a pious message to the people of Punjab that their survival lies in overthrowing the power of tyranny by breaching the shackles of slavery.

Conclusion

Despite all Banda's Shortcomings and failures, till the last of his breath he remained only humble in his attitude and honest of heart. His letters show that he never appropriated to himself the position of a *Guru*. His coins and seals bore only the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. In the midst of all the temptations which his position offered, he never touched a stranger woman. He was a strong lover of justice, who heard complaints of the poor and helpless and punished the tyrants and oppressors. Despite all the allegations against him, he differed seriously only with Binod Singh and none else of the important Sikhs, and that too only on tactics of war and not on religious principles. If he remained throughout his life a vegetarian, that was no anti-Sikh practice at all.

Banda had attempted to introduce certain religious innovations amongst the Sikhs, which were resented by the orthodox elements led by Guru Gobind Singh's widow, Sundri.¹² Sundri was revered by the whole community as the mother of the Sikhs. Banda had himself somewhat changed in his personal habits. From the hermit of a Deccan monastery, he had become a petty king, living in regal pomp with courtiers and a couple of wives.¹³ Amongst a people who had exaggerated respect for asceticism and had come to believe in Banda's miraculous powers, this caused serious misgiving. On the actual field of battle some of his most trusted lieutenants disagreed with his strategy and deserted him.¹⁴

Banda was surrounded by the Mughal forces near Gurdaspur and starved into surrender.

From the Punjab he, his family, and several hundred of his soldiers were led in chains to Delhi.¹⁵ There his wife was forced into the royal harem and the prisoners were publicly beheaded. On 9th June, 1716, Banda himself was led to the scaffold. His infant son was placed in his lap for him to kill. The sadistic orgy came to an end with the torture and execution of Banda himself.¹⁶

For some years after Banda's death the Sikhs disappeared from the Punjab as a political force. Old dissensions gained a new lease of life. Disapproval of Banda's innovations were looked upon by his followers, the Bandei Khalsa, as a disavowal of his enterprise. In these dissensions, the influence of Sundri decided the issue against the Bandei. The religious affairs of the community were entrusted to Mani Singh, a contemporary of the last Guru, was appointed head priest of the temple at Amritsar.

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