

Struggle of Banda Singh Bahadur for sovereignty (1670-1716)

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Abstract:-*This paper includes the historical aspects of the struggle of Banda Singh Bahadur for establishing first sovereign Sikh state in Punjab in the beginning of eighteenth century. Lots of new facts and figures are available which needs to re-evaluate the role and contribution of Banda Bahadur to Sikh community. After the death of Aurangzeb, in his struggle with the Mughal rule in Punjab, this Commander of the Sikh forces created a first sovereign Sikh state during the rule of Bahadur Shah-I. The present article deals with his struggle against the Mughal Nobility, for establishing new Sikh State, suppressed by Mughal forces, initially by Emperor Bahadur Shah-I and subsequently by the new administrator of the newly created state (Emperor Farrukhsiyar), and various other controversies related with him.*

Introduction:-

Religious societies plays key role in establishing social equality and social justice. The critical and enshrined thoughts of the Gurbani are love, justice, liberty, democracy, consensus, equality and generosity. Sikh Gurus have challenged many of the religious beliefs and practices of their time. They have also played exemplary and energetic role and gave extreme sacrifices in fighting against political absolutism, fanaticism and social injustice. Banda Singh Bahadur occupies a very important place in the history of Punjab in general and the Sikhs in particular. The current paper includes the real works of Banda Singh Bahadur.

Objectives of this study:-

1. To know about the life history of Banda Singh Bahadur,
2. To explore the main evidences of his life.
3. To explore his real contribution to the society.

The Early Life:-

Banda Singh Bahadur was born on 16th October 1670 in a Rajput family of village Rajouri of district Punch, State of Kashmir. His childhood name was Lachhman Das. In his childhood, he was very fond of horse riding, martial art, and hunting and was expert in use of bow and arrow and other weapons used in wars at that time. At the age of 15 years, he hunted a pregnant deer. She gave birth to two off springs, which could not survive and died in pain in front of Lachhman Das. This incidence disturbed him so much that he left hunting and became an ascetic person. He became follower of a saint Ram Das. After some time he followed Janaki Das who changed his name from Lachhman Das to Madho Das. While moving from place to

place, he reached Punchvati near Nasik in Maharashtra and became follower of saint Aughhar Nath. Madho Das 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. Aughhar Nath expired in 1691. Thus at the age of 21 years, Madho Das attained miraculous powers and reached Nander to set up his own Ashram. At the age of 38 years, Madho Das with lot of miraculous powers and fame started insulting, putting down all saints, sadhus, intellectuals etc. who so ever came to his Dera.

Contact with Guru Gobind Singh:-

Guru Gobind Singh came to Nander in the last week of September, 1708. He came to know about Bairagi Madho Das. He decided to visit his ashram. The Bairagi tried his magic powers on the Guru. But no magic could prevail against Guru Gobind Singh. Madho Singh gave up. He was dominated by Guru Gobind Singh. He fell at the Guru's feet Saying, 'I am your *Banda*, your slave. Accept me and enlight me the real path of life.' Guru Gobind Singh gave him the name of Banda Singh. Throughout his life, he was known by the title of Banda Singh, a title which he chose for himself. Soon, the Guru conferred on him the title of 'Bahadur'. Thus he came to be called Banda Singh Bahadur. But he was more popularly known as Banda Bahadur.

Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda Singh to Punjab to put a stop to the cruelty of Punjab rulers, to punish the guilty and cruel misrulers, to fight for human rights, uplift and strengthen the poor, the low and slave like people who could not even imagine freedom. The Guru blessed him with Guru's order to Sikh Sangats, five arrows, a double-edged sword (Khanda) and a big leather mounted drum (Nagaara). He sent with him five Sikhs (Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Binod Singh, Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Bijay Singh and Bhai Ran Singh) for psychoanalysis.

Now, he was no longer a *Bairagi*. He has been transformed into Guru Gobind Singh's lion, a hero, and a saint-soldier, ready to fight the tyrants, to conquer or die in the name of his Master. He soon acquainted himself with the history of the Sikhs and Sikhism, with the lofty ideals of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, and with the efforts made by them towards raising a nation of saint-warriors.

Struggles of Banda Singh Bahadur:-

To meet financial needs, Banda Singh first made fervent appeals to big businessmen of that time. After meeting the basic requirements, in Feb. 1709 he started attacking various towns and conquered various areas of Punjab. Banda had approximately 500 men with him when he reached the borders of the Punjab in Feb. 1709. He easily took over two centers, Sonapat and Kaithal (Now in Haryana). Meanwhile, more people joined him. Samana, a large Mughal city famous for minting coins, was conquered on 11th November 1709. With the treasury in their hands, the Sikhs became financially stable. Other centers like Mustafabad, Sadhora, Ghurham, Thaskaa, Shahbaad, Kapoori, Sadhora, Malerkotla etc. were also taken. Usmaan Khan, the

murderer of Peer Bhudu Shah was killed by Banda Singh's army. At Usmaan Khan's death, even the people of Sadhora felt relief and were grateful to the Sikh army. In the meantime another group of Sikhs from Majha (Central Punjab) attacked Ropar and other nearby areas and joined with the forces of Banda Singh.

Now main aim for the Sikhs was Sarhind and its Nawab Wazir Khan. The Sikhs were emotionally charged with the memory of the cold-blooded murder of the two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh at Sarhind. They attacked the city on 12th May 1710 at Chhappar Chiri, a place 15 miles away from Sarhind and became its masters on 14th May. The death of Wazir Khan and his lackeys brought a long awaited relief to the people. Most of the high officials and administrators were killed. Their buildings were destroyed and looted. Even in war, Banda Bahadur had instructed not to harm any Mosque, Madrassa and Makbras (Graves). Irrespective of their religion, the old, women and children were protected from any harm. Sheikh Ahmed Sarhind was the main conspirator for the death of Guru Arjan dev Ji. Even his grave was not destroyed. As and when any area was conquered Banda Singh appointed one of his trusted lieutenants to govern these places and who in turn appointed other local people for administration. In his first administrative order, Banda gave the ownership of the land to the farmers and let them live in dignity and self respect. Keeping continuous the wave of attacks on other areas, in 1710 itself he took over other Northern Areas in between rivers of Yamuna and Ganga such as Saharan Pur, Shamli, and Muzzafar Nagar etc. Banda Singh established his capital at Mukhlis Garh, a place situated in the base of hills and away from the main highway and central areas from security point of view. He repaired the fort of Mukhlis Garh and renamed it as Lohgarh (fortress of steel). He even started a mint to make coins and stamps in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and established Khalsa Kingdom.

Banda sent Sikhs to the Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), because of many state officials and administrators regarding repression of the people, particularly of harassment of non-Muslims. The Sikhs took over Saharanpur, Jalalabad, and other areas nearby, bringing relief to the population. Also, in the west of the Sutlej, and in the regions of Jalandar and Amritsar, the Sikhs started fighting for the rights of the people. It was Banda Singh Bahadur who had laid foundation of the Sikh Empire in 1710.

Seeing such a rise of Banda Singh, The Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah at Delhi, became nervous and furious. To take back his lost areas, he started chasing Banda Singh with all his forces. The entire Indian force was organized to defeat and kill Banda Bahadur. The governors were ordered to immediately dispatch their armies to the Punjab, and new fighters were recruited. All the generals were directed to join the Emperor's army. To ensure that there were no Sikh agents in the army camps, an order was issued on August 29, 1710, to all Hindus to

shave off their beards. The emperor knew that the Sikhs loyal to their faith would not cut their beards, hence would leave his army, and would not be able to spy.

Viewing the situation, Banda Singh and his forces returned to the fort of Lohgarh in Dec 1710. The Mughal forces surrounded the fort and cut off all supplies. As soon as the emperor's army reached there, the Sikhs fell upon them and defeated them. Khafi Khan writes, "The sudden attack of the fakirs (Sikhs) threatened the army seriously. Watching their dead and wounded, one could conclude that the army is losing the battle." Kanwar Khan describes the battle in these words: "I saw with my eyes every wretched Sikh jumping out of his trench, attacking the soldiers bravely and dying fearlessly." Baba Banda Singh left the fort at night and went to a secret place in the upper hills. Punishing various kings of hills who were part of the Mughal forces against Guru Gobind Singh, he moved towards Jammu.

The failure of the army to kill or catch Banda shocked the Emperor. On 10 December 1710 he ordered that, wherever a Sikh was found, he should be murdered. The Emperor, Bahadur Shah lost his mental balance, became sick and died on 18 February 1712. For one year there was fight for the Throne of Delhi among his sons. To take gain of the situation Banda Singh collected his forces and again conquered Batala , Kalanaour, Sarhind, Muzzafar Nagar and other areas in 1712 and ruled till 1715. It was for the first time that Banda Singh broke the belief of Mughals that they could not be conquered by any one. He established a democratic rule. The poor and down trodden got a sense of living with dignity. Those who tilled the land became its owners. He had power of devils but heart of saints. Banda Singh is known to have abolished or halted the Zamindari system in the time he was active and gave the farmers proprietorship of their own land. He protected the poor and low, did not harm those who surrendered.

Execution of Banda Singh Bahadur:-

In Delhi, Farrukhsiyar son of Azimu-Shaan became king of Hindustan in Feb 1713. The new Emperor, Farrukhsiyar, sent a strong force to Punjab to arrest 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. They fought valiantly but due to depleting ration, in due course they 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, after eight months. In Delhi, they were insulted and paraded in Delhi bazaars. Sikhs were offered amnesty by Mughals in lieu of accepting Islam. Not even a single Sikh betrayed the spirit of Sikhism and embraced Islam. Inside the fortress, Sikhs survived on leaves, trees, and even bark of trees. They were tortured and killed publicly. After a nightmare of about three months, Baba Banda Singh was killed in one of the cruelest manners mentioned in the history of mankind on June 9, 1716. His four year old son Ajai Singh was put to death in front of him. His liver was thrust into Banda Singh's mouth. But Baba remained as tranquil as ever, and even this act

failed to break his resolve and determination. Finally, Banda was put to death mercilessly by pinching the flesh from his body, bit by bit, with means of hot pincers. His eyes were pulled out and his feet were chopped off. It was inhumane, unsocial and forest ruled activity of the victorious Mughals for having treated the sikhs in such ill manners. Such dreadful were the scenes, perhaps no body except those who saw could believe.

The sacrifices of Banda Singh and his men did not discourage the sikhs but prepared them for the worst future fights. Passing through very difficult times for the next 40 years, the sikhs ruled at Lahore under the leadership of Nawab Kapoor Singh and then by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in 1756. Later on they ruled all over Punjab in the form of 12 Sikh Misels (groups) under different names. This ultimately led to establish Khalsa Raj under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799 AD.

Conclusion:-

Banda Singh Bahadur was a great warrior, like Shiva Ji Maratha, a noble administrator and freedom fighter who led the Sikh community's struggle for justice and equality. 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 Singh Bahadur could not get his due credit for his achievements, due to many reasons like 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.

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