

Banda Singh Bahadur: An unsung national hero

Gurupreet Kaur¹, Ram Singh Gurna²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of History, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India

² Professor, Department of History, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India

Abstract

Banda Singh Bahadur, a renowned but unappreciated figure in both Sikh and Indian history, played a crucial role in the early 18th century in the development of the Sikh community and in the insurrection against the reign of the Mughal Empire. Banda was a member of a long line of warriors in his family, but he became a devoted Khalsa leader who, once he saw Guru Gobind Singh, advocated for equality and justice. He initiated violent conflicts under the guidance of the Guru, the objective of which was to establish an independent Sikh state and to exact retribution against the oppression of the Mughals. The first nation founded by the Sikhs may be traced back to his military expedition into Punjab, which was a watershed point in Sikh history. Banda Singh went above and beyond the call of duty in his efforts to bring his vision of a just society into existence. He did not only lead in war. He made social improvements, including as putting an end to feudal taxes on peasants and promoting equality among people. His determination and strategic skill enabled him to establish Sikh dominance in an environment that was not at all receptive to their political agenda, despite the fact that he encountered substantial opposition. In the end, his surrender and his willingness to make sacrifices demonstrated his unshakeable commitment to the Sikh cause and proved that he was a courageous man. This research delves into the investigation of Banda Singh Bahadur's identity, connections to the clan, achievements in the military, and long-lasting legacy. It offers the theory that Bahadur is an unsung national hero whose influence on the history of both Sikhs and Indians is significant.

Keywords: Banda Singh Bahadur, Khalsa, Sikh Nation, Mughal Resistance, Martyrdom, Unsung Hero

Introduction

Lachman Dev, who would later be known as Banda Singh Bahadur, was born in 1670 in Rajouri, Jammu and Kashmir. He was an important figure in the history of the Sikhs and was a fierce opponent of the Mughal Empire. During the time that he spent with Guru Gobind Singh, he experienced a transformation from being a reclusive wanderer to becoming a military commander. This narrative is representative of the route to enlightenment and national resistance ^[1]. His achievements paved the way for social transformation in Punjab, as well as for the freedom of the Sikhs, despite the fact that his reign was short-lived.



Fig 1: Banda Singh Bahadur

As a member of the Rajput family, Banda Singh Bahadur had an exceptional talent for martial arts from a very young age. He renounced his material existence and adopted the name Madho Das Bairagi when he was fifteen years old. In the year 1708, he was introduced to Guru Gobind Singh, who bestowed upon him the name Gurbaksh Singh and initiated him into the Khalsa brotherhood. This was the beginning of a change in his life that would eventually lead him to become more ascetic ^[2]. Having been granted the Guru's approval, Banda Singh Bahadur departed to engage in combat against the tyranny perpetrated by the Mughals. Beginning in the year 1709, Banda Singh Bahadur launched a series of military campaigns against the Mughal Empire. The conquest of the Mughal citadel at Sonipat by his men was his first significant victory. Following his victory, he seized control of Sadhaura and Samana and eventually defeated the Mughal leader Wazir Khan in the crucial Battle of Chappar Chiri ^[3]. The establishment of the first Sikh state and the execution of the Mughal monarch at the siege of Sirhind were both consequences of these triumphs. The reign of Banda Singh Bahadur was characterised by significant changes in the social order. By eliminating the zamindari system and transferring land to the peasants, he made sure that the tillers were established as masters of the land that they worked. The purpose of this initiative was to provide the voiceless the ability to express their opinions and put a stop to the feudal system ^[4]. The Fateh Burj at Chappar Chiri, which is located among the various monuments that pay homage to him, serves as a monument to his courage and his ideal of a society that is just.

Objectives

1. To scrutinise the life, identity, and contributions of Banda Singh Bahadur as a Khalsa leader and national hero.
2. To investigate his military operations and his involvement in the establishment of the first Sikh state in Punjab.

Banda Singh's importance to Sikhs in the early 1800s is highlighted in a summary written by John Malcolm in 1812. "They do not revere his memory, and he is termed by some of their authors, a heretic who, intoxicated with victory, endeavoured to change the religious institutions and laws of Guru Gobind Singh]," according to his statement ^[5]. According to the ancient Sikh scribes, Banda Singh married against their advice not to do so. In place of the customary "Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa! Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh" that was used by the Khalsa, he introduced the "Fateh Darshan" greeting. There were further accusations made against Banda Singh claiming that he was an advocate for a diet that consisted only of vegetables. Ratan Singh Bhangu (1841), the author of *Sri Guru Panth Prakash* (also known as *Parchin Panth Prakash*), devotes a great deal of attention to the Banda in his writing, yet he never refers to him as Singh or Khalsa, not even once ^[6]. Giani Gian Singh (1822–1921) was the first Sikh individual to write a complete history of the Sikh people.

Unlike previous Sikh writers who wrote in poetry, Giani Gian Singh wrote in prose and modern-day Punjabi. The *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, which was published in both Urdu and Punjabi in numerous volumes beginning in 1890, was his work. This book was later dubbed *Shamsher Khalsa* and *Raj Khalsa*. The book became very popular, and it repeated the assertions mentioned above against Banda Singh without investigating or questioning the accusations. It might be said that Karam Singh Historian (1884–1930) was one of the first Sikhs to take history seriously, studying and evaluating it in a scholarly manner. These assertions were later refuted by him and, after that, by Professor Ganda Singh (1900–1987), both of whom provided cogent rebuttals. Due to the fact that Sikhs are not prohibited from getting married, it is not reasonable to assume that Guru Gobind Singh gave Banda Singh such an injunction. Banda may have thought of himself as a king, but the coins that he made, which are seen as proof of his sovereignty, were minted in the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. This method was adopted by Misls, Sardars, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The "Fateh Darshan" was a new greeting that Banda invented; it was not intended to replace the traditional "Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh," but rather to serve as a complementary salutation. Despite this, the Khalsa had a period of decline ^[7].

The famous Sikh historian Professor Hari Ram Gupta, who wrote five works on the issue and passed away in 1992 at the age of 1902, asserts that Guru Gobind Singh was not a Khalsa since he accepted Banda as a disciple but did not administer *Khande de Pahul* ^[8]. This contradicts what Professor Ganda Singh has said. He has referenced 35 historians who have recognised Banda as a Sikh, as well as Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. Prof. Gupta provides just a single source to back his allegation, which is an unexpected and sad revelation. He argues that Banda was not proclaimed a Khalsa since Giani Gian Singh mentioned so in *Guru Panth Prakash* (first edition 1880). Banda was

initiated as a Sikh and became a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, according to the *Guru Panth Prakash*.

Shahr Nanded Godavari Tat, Othare Joi Jay. *Bande Ko Nij Sikh Kar*, Pathae Punjab Desaye ^[2, 9].

Madho Das adopted the name of Banda Singh when he became a student of the Guru, as documented in Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*. Professor Gupta makes a mistake that is out of the ordinary. A predecessor of Bhai Parmanand said that after receiving *Khande de Pahul*, Banda became Khalsa. The writing of "*Pahul Guru Ki Chhak Ke*," which was authored by Banya Singh Hathhiya and then incorporated in Kesar Singh Chhibber's (1769) *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, is referenced as ^[11].

There is a scarcity of information about Banda's childhood or his years as a young kid. He was born as Madho/Lachman Das to parents who were in poverty. Giani Gian Singh was the first historian to make a statement regarding the Banda Singh clan in Part 1 of *Shamsher Khalsa*. He points to an old document (pothi) that claims that Banda was a member of the Rajput caste. It is said that Ram Dev Kshatri, Banda's father, is the maalik of two or three villages. This old writing has not been seen by anybody since the Giani does not make any reference to it ^[12].

Bhai Parmanand and Professor Gupta are two individuals who have used Giani Gian Singh as a source of information and who have concluded that Banda was a Rajput. Ram Dev, the father of Banda Singh, was a Bhardwaj Rajput who did not own much property due to the fact that he was not employed by the government, as stated in Karam Singh Historian's book, *Banda Bahadar* (1905).

From an economic standpoint, Ram Dev was a member of the middle class. When it comes to his employment, Karam Singh is quite evasive. He merely states that he is employed in the same industry as his neighbours ^[13]. The name of the Bhardwaj family does not appear anywhere in the records left behind by the historian. Ram Dev was just an ordinary Rajput ploughman who belonged to the Bhardwaj clan, and Banda came from very modest origins, according to Professor Ganda Singh (1935) ^[14]. Ram Dev's portrayal changed very significantly. He moved from being seen as a rich landowner to being presented as an impoverished farmer. The esteemed historian refers to Karam Singh Historian and Giani Gian Singh as sources of evidence for this assertion when questioned about the evidence supporting this claim.

According to the writings of the Farsi chronicler Khafi Khan, who wrote in the year 1731 in *Muntakhabu'l Lubab*, "Some of the Khatri who kept their identities as followers and disciples of that rebel a secret approached Muhammad Amin Khan and other intermediaries of nobility with offers of substantial monetary compensation in exchange for sparing the life of that evil man, but this was not considered." It is interesting to note that the Khatri are noted as being followers of Banda who kept their allegiance disguised. Furthermore, they offered the Mughals a ransom in return for sparing Banda's life. Banda was in close proximity to Guru Gobind Singh and had a great deal of faith in him, as shown by Budh Singh Arora in his book *Risala-i-Nanak Shah*, which was written in 1783 in the Farsi language.

These historical texts have led some to conclude that Banda was of Khatri descent. These tales are rather old, yet the evidence is still speculative. Between the years 1884 and 1900, R.C. Temple composed *The Legends of the Panjab*,

which was published in three volumes. The third volume of the prelude references one of the works, LXIX: The Story of Banda Bairagi, although it has not yet been released to the public ^[17]. The abbreviation "HA" can refer to a variety of different things. Rose compiled a three-volume lexicon of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province by drawing on information from Denzil Ibbetson's Punjab Census Report, which was published in 1883, and Edward Maclagan's Punjab Census Report, which was published in 1892. These three volumes were released during the course of the years 1911 to 1919. "Ahwal I Lachhman Das urf Banda Sahib Chela Guru Singh Sahib," a song written by Hakim Rai, was published by H.A. Rose and may have been produced and noticed by R. C. Temple. According to the opening line of the song, which was written by Hakim Rai, Banda was a member of the Sodhi Khatri family ^[18]. Banda was a Punjabi Khatri who hailed from the Sialkot district, as stated in the footnote ^[19] that Rose references earlier on. This is in accordance with a different narrative. After his death, his son, Ranjit Singh, and his second wife, Sahib Kaur, continued to live ^[20]. Baba Jatinder Pal Singh Sodhi is the head of the Gurdwara Dera Baba Banda Singh Bahadar in Reasi. He is located 75 km from Jammu and is a descendant of Banda Singh Bahadar. During the period that he lived, Mahant/Baba Fateh Singh was granted four jagirs by Maharaja Ranjit Singh ^[21]. It is said that Banda Singh Bahadar was the spiritual son, also known as the Naadi son, of Guru Gobind Singh. This information comes from records that are maintained at the Dera that were discussed before. The name of Banda's biological father is not included on the genealogical chart (kursinama). This is also brought up in Hardwar's old Pande Vahis ^[22].

In The History of the Mohyals (1986) ^[23], P. N. Bali made the claim that Banda was a Chhibber Brahmin, although there is no evidence to substantiate this assumption. This assertion is peculiar considering that Banda is not included in the 1911 book titled The History of the Muhiyals, the Militant Brahman Race of India, which was written by T.P. Russell Stracey for the General Muhiyal Sabha ^[24]. The city of Lahore, Pakistan In 1938, Lahore released a reprint edition. This episode is another one in which Banda does not appear in any capacity.

Banda Singh moved to the Punjab region of India after he had received Guru Gobind Singh's counsel, instructions, and blessings. Among those days, dacoity was a common occurrence among the villages. The robbers were courageously engaged and defeated by Banda Singh. Banda Singh encouraged the people to rise up against the tyranny and injustice that were being perpetrated by the Mughal rulers. This was done in a manner that was reminiscent of the resistance against dacoits. An extraordinary number of people responded to the petition that he submitted. As a result, he gained a greater number of followers. 5 At this moment on the morning of November 11, 1709, Banda Singh took the decision to attack Samana. The overwhelming majority of Mughals and Sayyads were either slain or fled the city out of fear for their lives at the hands of the Sikh army, despite the fact that some of them fought heroically. By the time that evening arrived, the town and the main fort had been taken over by the Sikhs ^[25].

Banda Singh had already seized control of the cities of Ghuram, Sanaur, Thaska, Thaneswar, Shahabad, and Mustafabad before he attacked Sadhaura. On his trip to

Sadhaura, a group of Hindus from the area that surrounded Kapuri approached Banda Singh with information of the atrocities that had been perpetrated by the head of Kapuri, Kadam-ud-Din, and they implored him to punish him for his transgressions. The wicked Kadam-ud-Din was an object of disdain for the Hindus. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. Banda Singh's troops pushed into Kapuri without wasting any time. He had been abandoned by the troops who had previously been under his command, who had fled while he had still been there. He had confined himself to his home.

His residence was burnt down by the Sikhs, and he was killed immediately ^[26]. The powerful Mughal citadel of Sadhaura was the next objective of Banda Singh's expedition. Usman Khan, who was noted for being a tyrant, was the ruler of the city. He had deep emotions of antipathy toward Sikhs and Hindus. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. The prohibition on Hindus performing their religious rituals was another one of the restrictions. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. The Sikhs seized the Sadhaura after a courageous struggle against the opponents.

The Mughals submitted and then begged the Sikhs to absolve them of their sins. Another individual who received a death sentence was Usman Khan, who was taken into custody ^[27]. It was Banda Singh's intention now to mount an attack on the city of Sirhind. Many of the Ghazis flocked to the side of the leader of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, in support of his declaration of a jihad, or Islamic war, against the kafirs, which is what the Sikhs are called. The battle took place on May 22, 1710 in a location known as the Chappar Chiri fields. Banda Singh's army pushed into the city of Sarhind on May 24, 1710. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. Wazir Khan met his fate as a result of this war. Following his victory, Banda Bahadur established his own rule in this area ^[28].

During the eighteenth century, the Punjab region was the scene of a great deal of political uncertainty and turbulence as a result of the conflicts between the Marathas, the Mughals, and the Afghans, all of whom were vying for control of the region. In the midst of all this chaos and unrest, the Sikhs, under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, began to emerge as a prominent group. The Sikhs were able to successfully oppose the Mughal Empire and secure their freedom under the assistance of Guru Gobind Singh. Because they were one of the most influential successor kingdoms in India throughout the eighteenth century, the Sikhs' rise to prominence in parallel with the collapse of the Mughal Empire remains a popular subject of study among historians ^[29].

In the year 1708, during a solar eclipse on the banks of the Godavari River, Banda Singh Bahadur was introduced into the Khalsa brotherhood and given the Khande da Pahul (nectar) after meeting with Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Bhai Binod Singh, Kahan Singh, Baj Singh, Daya Singh, and Ram Singh, who are together referred to as the Piaras, were assigned to establish Sikh authority along with the Nishan Sahib (flag) and a Nagara (drum). They were also given the role of serving as the military head of the Khalsa warriors (IST Kartik 1764 BK).

After his appointment, Banda Singh Bahadur made his way to Punjab in order to increase the strength of the Sikh army. The number of people in his army grew from tens of

thousands of untrained Hindus to forty thousand when he was able to get thousands of Sikhs from the Doaba, Majha, and Malwa regions into his ranks^[30, 31]. He established his first encampment at the Kharkhauda pargana, which is adjacent to the villages of Sehri and Khandra, so that he could carry out raids against the rulers of the Mughal Empire. His strategy consisted on creating discord and undermining imperial authority by launching an assault against a smaller castle first. This would give him the opportunity to evaluate how prepared his soldiers were^[32]. Banda Singh Bahadur launched his first major conquest on November 26, 1709, and with little opposition he overcame the local rulers in Samana. After that, he moved on to subjugate the villages of Bhuna and the region of Kaithal^[33, 34]. He continued on to Sadhaura after putting an end to Qadamuddin's reign of tyranny in Kapuri. He beat Usman Khan, who was the ruler of that area^[35]. After seeing the success he had achieved, a significant number of Sikhs and Hindus residing in the vicinity choose to participate in his efforts. Banda Singh Bahadur was the beneficiary of heavenly favor, and his devout followers were further encouraged by his reputation for impartiality and regal generosity. He was able to further strengthen his grip over both the administration and the military by providing citizens a share in the territories that they had helped seize and by encouraging them to become members of the Khalsa brotherhood.

The unification of the Sikh communities of Majha and Malwa was the key to determining whether or not the subsequent endeavors would be successful. Banda Singh Bahadur's soldiers were able to join forces and overcome Mughal and Afghan troops in the cities of Banur and Ropar^[36 -39], despite Wazir Khan of Sirhind's best efforts to prevent the union. The last step of these battles was the attack on Sirhind, the castle of Wazir Khan. Wazir Khan was the man who had ordered the execution of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's sons. On May 22, 1710, the Sikh warriors won a decisive victory against the Mughal forces at the Battle of Chappar Chiri. This victory was a significant factor in solidifying Sikh authority in the region. As a result of the battle, Wazir Khan was slain^[40 - 43].

After these conquests were completed, Lohgarh, which is located between Sadhaura and Nahan, became the capital of Banda Singh Bahadur. He was responsible for the production of coinage with the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, the establishment of an official seal for administrative purposes^[44, 45], and the construction of fortifications. His administration was able to win over the favor of rural populations by allowing peasants actual ownership of land and eliminating the zamindari system^[46]. In order to ensure the protection of the local inhabitants and the collection of taxes by appointed representatives, Banda Singh Bahadur took action.

Within the span of a single year, the six districts of the Punjab region that reach from Panipat to Lahore were included into the kingdom of Banda Singh Bahadur. Even after he was forced to abandon Lohgarh as a result of the sieges carried out by the Mughals, he continued to dispatch hukamnamas in order to assemble the Khalsa for more military operations. By using guerilla tactics, carefully reinforcing their positions, and rallying his warriors, he was able to keep the Sikhs engaged in conflict with the Mughals. Even though he was eventually captured and executed in the year 1716, his short-lived but impactful leadership

irreversibly altered the political landscape of the Sikh community, clearing the road for Sikh autonomy in the Punjab region^[47].

As a result, the establishment of the Sikh state by Banda Singh Bahadur was a significant turning point in Indian history throughout the eighteenth century. It was a defining point in the history of the Sikhs. It marked the beginning of their ascent from being an oppressed religious minority to being a strong political and military power capable of exercising control over area, altering property ownership and judicial systems, and posing a challenge to the Mughal Empire. Banda Singh Bahadur provided a legacy of courage, leadership, and dedication to the Guru's purpose that ultimately paved the way for the Sikhs to finally gain power in Punjab.

Emperor Farukh Syer sent orders to Abdus Samad Khan, the governor of Lahore, instructing him to face off against Banda Singh as soon as possible. An order was issued for all of the Faujdars and Jagirdars of Punjab to gather at Lahore under the leadership of Abdus Samad Khan. Aside from the Hindu kings of Malabar, Kullu, and Mandi, all of the hill rulers in the Mughal Empire were in conflict with Banda Singh and Abdus Samad Khan's troops. The combined Mughal force laid siege to the town of Gurdaspur Nangal after attacking the Sikh army. The fortress was home to a large population of Hindu and Mughal hill warriors, numbering more than fifty times the number of Sikhs. On December 7, 1715, after an eight-month siege, the citadel was taken, and Banda Singh and his supporters were captured by the allied forces headed by Abdus Samad Khan. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters. In addition to that, Banda Singh's wife and son, Ajay Singh, who is five years old, were placed under arrest.

Banda Singh was shackled and incarcerated in an iron cage by the Mughals. The Sikh warriors who had been arrested were also restrained by ropes. Gurdas Nangal was the place where Banda Singh and his comrades were transferred to before being sent to Delhi. On February 29, 1716, the Sikh prisoners of war marched through the streets of Delhi after having entered the city^[48]. At the Tripolia Fort, Ibrahim-ud-Din Khan Mir-Atish arrested and imprisoned eighteen of Banda Singh's most famous comrades, including Baj Singh, Fateh Singh, Ram Singh, Ali Singh, Gulab Singh Bakkshi, and others. They put up with three months of severe suffering. The wife and child of Banda Singh were kidnapped by Darbar Khan Nazir of the harem^[49]. Sarbrah-Khan Kotwal was provided with more Sikh prisoners to put to death. The execution began on the fifth day of March in the year 1716. According to the author G. S. Deol, one hundred of these individuals were taken out of their captivity and beheaded every day. Every single person was granted a pardon before to execution on the condition that they converted to Islam; however, every single brave Sikh refused to accept that offer and looked forward to death with great anticipation, handing their heads to the executioners.

On March 10, 1716, two eyewitnesses, John Sermon and Edward Stephenson, sent a letter to Robert Hedges, who was the president and governor of Fort William and Council in Bengal at the time, in which they praised the sacrifices that the Sikhs had made^[50]. On 9 June 1716, Sarbrah Khan (Kotwal) and Ibrahim-Ud-Din Mir Aatish escorted Banda Singh Bahadur, his son Ajay Singh, and other famous followers out of the Fort of Delhi in a parade. They were all escorted in a parade down the historic alleyways of

Mehrauli, leading them to the Khwaja Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki shrine, which is located adjacent to Qutab Minar. Banda Singh was escorted in a ceremonial procession past the burial site of Emperor Bahadur Shah after he had finished riding on the elephant. Emperor Bahadur Shah had gone away prior to that time. He was presented with an option between converting to Islam or being killed, but since he was a devout student of Guru Gobind Singh, he choose to die instead.

After that, his son, Ajay Singh, who was four and a half years old at the time, was placed on his lap and was instructed to cut his neck, but he refused to do so. Banda Singh kept his body still as the executioner carried out the gruesome task of removing the child's heart, placing it in his mouth, and decorating his neck with a garland that was fashioned from the child's intestines—all of this occurred as a result of his refusal to comply. Ajay Singh is the youngest martyr that has ever lived in the history of the world. After then, the Emperor issued the command to rip off Banda Singh's flesh with pincers that were red hot, and this continued until he passed away. - The generated text has been blocked by our content filters.

Banda Singh was said to have shown remarkable self-control throughout the duration of his torture and to have died away with his determination unbroken, according to Elphinstone. The eyewitness of Banda Singh's martyrdom, Khafi Khan, relates in his writings that it is impossible for anybody to believe in anything that did not occur in person. All of the individuals who were members of the same community as Banda Singh rejected the offer that he had made to them, which was to convert to the Islamic religion. They met their deaths at the same moment in time, in line with the story given by Sewa Singh ^[51].

Conclusion

Banda Singh Bahadur, a national hero who has not received the recognition that he is due, is worthy of all the honour and respect that he receives. As a result of his unwavering bravery, devotion to justice, and adept leadership, the Sikh community's battle against the oppression of the Mughals became an essential part of the history of India. Banda Singh was a leader who had a vision in every sense of the word. He had a spiritual epiphany at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh, marched across Punjab, established the first Sikh state, and implemented social reforms. He embarks on a path of personal growth, and the broader struggle for Sikh sovereignty and equality is reflected in his identity, connections to his clan, and transformation into a Khalsa warrior. The memory of Banda Singh endures to this day as an inspiration to generations to come, instilling in them an appreciation for courage, sacrifice, and the struggle for justice. This legacy remains despite the fact that Banda Singh encountered tremendous opposition and ultimately chose to embrace martyrdom. His legacy, as a national hero, will serve to encourage future generations to recognise and respect the individuals whose labour paved the way for a society that is more equitable and just.

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