

Punjab Polity in the Earlier Decade of Eighteenth Century- A Historical Review

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Abstract:

Guru Gobind Singh prepared the ground for the political developments in the end of seventeenth century by establishment of Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh choose Banda Singh Bahadur to lead Sikhs in Punjab. Banda Singh started with few companions but because he was looked up by the defeder of the faith and companion of the oppressed. He was joined by thousands of Sikhs to punish the tyrant Mughals and their forces. Banda Singh fought bravely and created such a will in the ordinary masses to resist tyranny that he developed the Mughal forces in battle after battle and laid the foundation of the Sikh empire, and in 1710 established Khalsa Raj in Punjab. He abolished the Zamindari system and treated everybody justly and equally. Enraged by the success and popularity of Banda Singh, the Mughal emperor ordered the government of Lahore and other governors of adjoining area to collectively orgnize themselves and to destroy the power of Banda Bahadur. Banda Singh along with around seven hundreds of Sikhs was captured and taken to Delhi where all the captured Sikhs were brutally put to death publicly over a period of few days.

Keywords: Sikh, Khalsa, , Mughals, Guru, Ashram , Banda, Dera, Mushlims

Introduction:

Sikh inspired by Guru Gobind Singh's leadership and organised in the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh decided that the time had arrived when 'Silent Worshippers' must convert themselves into 'heros who face the steel of their enemies'. The creation of Khalsa is justly regarded as Guru Gobind Singh's greatest achievement. The principle was established that the Guru and disciple were equals and the guru's traditional function of initiating the novices in the faith could be performed by any five Sikhs as representatives of the Khalsa. An interval of about nine years separates the abolition of personal Guruship (1708) from the birth of

Khalsa at the Keshgarh assembly. A Sikh historian says that 'before the eighteenth century started the basis framework of political ideas had already been worked out'. Guru Gobind Singh prepared the ground for the political developments in the Eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century opened with policy of supression of Sikhs by Mughal Government. In the first decade, Anandpur Sahib was besieged by huge Mughal army which come to be aid to the aid of Pahari Hindu Rajas (Rajas of Hill Kingdoms) ongoing effort to subjugate the Sikhs. They wanted to dislodge Guru Gobind Singh from Anandpur Sahib. These aggressive compaigns resulted in the martyrdom of the

four sons of Guru Gobind Singh from Anandpur Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh tried for many months to persuade Bahadur Shah to take action against Wazir Khan before he arrived at conclusion that he would obtain no justice from the Mughals. He continued to negotiate with the emperor, but decided to send one of his followers to the Punjab to rouse the peasantry in the event that the negotiations proved fruitless. Although there were many old and trusted disciples with him. The choice fell on a comparative stronger who the Guru had known for only a few weeks. This was an ascetic named Lachman Das, who was born in October 1670 in Rajput family in Rajouri, Kashmir. He became follower of Sadhu Ram Das of Ram Tamman near Lahore. After some time he followed Janki Das. His name was changes to Madho Das. While moving from place to place, he reached Punchvati near Nasik in Maharashtra and became follower Sadhu Aughhar Nath. Aughhar Nath expired in 1691. Thus at the age of twenty one years, Madho Das, the Rajput youth attained miraculous powers and reached Nander to set up his own Ashram.

In September 1708 Guru Gobind Singh along with few Sikhs reached at the Ashram of Madho Das Bairagi. At that time he was not in his dera. The Guru took his seat and the Sikhs spread all over the dera to arrange and cook food. "Guru I am your Banda". He assured Guru Sahib to do as per his advice. The Guru started in his Dera for a few days. He was given 'Amrit' and named Guru Bakhsh Singh but remained famous with

the name of Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda then made an army general by Guru, who fell on the cruel rulers of Punjab like a storm and cloud burst.

In October, 1708, at Nander, Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda Singh to Punjab and advice him to put a stop to the cruelty of Punjab rulers, punish the guilty and cruel misrulers, to fight for human rights, uplift and strengthen the poor. The Guru blessed him with Sikh Sangats, five arrows, a double edged sword, a big leather mounted drum and sent with him five Sikhs named: Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Binod Singh, Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Bijay Singh and Bhai Ran Singh. Another twenty five Sikhs as companions and fighters. Guru had already created Khalsa, prepared Banda Singh Bahadur and sent him to Punjab.

It was first time in the Sikh history that Sikhs were attackers and offensives but their aim was same as earlier. Banda Singh was on the way to Punjab, when Guru Gobind Singh after giving Guruship to the everlasting Shabad Guru-Guru Granth Sahib, had left his world. After reaching Punjab, Banda Singh sent Guru's message to the Sikhs all over Punjab, Kashmir and Afganistan. News of passing away of their dear Guru, Guru Gobind Singh added fuel to the fire for fighting the Mughal rulers and making sacrifices. Listening to the call of Banda Singh at the behest of Guru, Sikhs started joining Banda Singh. In a short period Banda Singh had 4000 horse riders and 7800 artillery Sikh with him. After some more time the strength of 40000 warriors was at his command. His army

consisted by four type of people. The followers (from Punjab, Kandhar, Multan, Kashmir) God fearing Muslims, poor and low caste and some unknown selfish with the intention of loot.

To meet financial needs, Banda Singh made appeals to big businessmen of that time. After meeting the basic requirements in Feb. 1709, he started attacking various towns and conquered various areas. Banda arrived at Narnaul, there he saws the complete destruction of Satnamis. Banda suppressed some decoits and robbers and stable Narnaul. In Hissar, he was well received by Hindus and Sikhs as a leader of the nationalist movement and deputy of Guru Gobind Singh. In Tohana, Band issued letters to Malwa Sikhs to join in his crusade against Wazir Khan of Sarhind. At Sonipat, fifty kilometers of Delhi in North, early in November 1709, Banda commanded about 500 followers . He attacked Government treasury, plundered it and distributed it among his retinue. Near Kaithal, Banda seized a government treasury which was its way from the northern districts to Delhi.

Samana, 50 Kilometers North was the native place of Jalal-ud-did Jallad, the professional executioner, who had beheaded Guru Teg Bahadur, while his sons had beheaded to younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Anandpur also belong to Samana, it was an accursed place in the eyes of Sikhs. Banda fell upon the town on 26 November 1709. The inhabitants were massacred in cold blood and town thoroughly squeezed. Samana was the first territorial conquest and the first

administrative unit of Banda. Damala was the village of Pathans who had deserted Guru Gobind Singh Ji in the battle of Bhangani, it was ravaged. Shahbad Markanda also fell to Banda. Sadhaura 25 kms distant in the leadership of Usman Khan. Here the muslim population maltreated the local Hindus. Banda attacked the town and destroyed it.

The ultimate aim of Banda was to punish Wazir Khan and conquer Sarhind. He wanted to study military resources of Sarhind. He was anxious to see what steps government will take against him. He therefore established his head-quarters in the beginning of 1710, at Mukhlispur situated in lower Shiwalik Hills south of Nahan, about 25 kms from Sadhaura. The name of Mukhlispur was changed to Lohgarh and it become the capital of first Sikh state. Banda established the peasant proprietorship and won approbation and support of the overwhelming majority of population. He devoted three montsin organising his civil and military administration. Delhi government had made no attempt to recover their lost territory from him. Wazir Khan of Sirhind was making his own preparations independently to meet the danger from Banda.

Banda organise his army in his force most of were untrained, raw levies, not full armed. Banda possessed no elephants, no good horses and no gunes. His followers had matchlocks, spears, swords, bows and arrows. On the other side Wazir Khan joined by the nawab of Malerkotla and all

other Muslim chiefs and Jagirdars. The total number of Sikh troops are forty thousands and Muslims were thirty thousands. The battle was fought at Chhappar Chiri, 20 kms from Sarhind. The artillery fire of Mughals told heavily on the plunderers in Banda's camp. Under the plan work of Banda and Sikh leaders converged on Wazir Khan and he was killed. Banda won the battle. The government treasury and movable property worth two crores fell into Banda's hand which was removed to Lohgarh. Entire province of Sarhind come into Banda's possession. Now Banda advances towards Lahore where the city remained safe owing to its fortifications. But the entire suburbs for miles around was completely devastated. In this campaign Banda was joined by thousands of low caste Hindus who come into fold of Khalsa.

On seeing the activities, instructions were issued to governors of Delhi and Oudh and other officers to march towards Punjab. Prohibitory laws against Sikhs were passed. Banda was chased out of every corner of Punjab and he took refuge in the Shivalik Hills. The massive imperial forces drove the Sikhs from Sarhind and other places to take shelter in the fort of Lohgarh in a hilly region. On March 1715, the army under the rule of Samad Khan, the Mughal king of Delhi, drove Banda Bahadur and Sikh forces in the village of Gurdas Nangal, Gurdaspur, Punjab and laid siege to the village. The Sikhs defended the small fort for eight months under conditions of great hardship, but on 7 December 1715 the Mughals broke into the starving garrison and captured Banda Singh

and his companions and executed them in Delhi in 1716.

Under Banda's regime the tiller of soil rejected the land lords and the farmers themselves became the master of their lands. Large estates were broken into smaller holdings in the hands of farmers. These agrarian changes improve the living standards of farmers and they readily joined him. During the short span of Banda's rule, there was both political as well as social revolution in Punjab which has been well summed up by William Irvine (based on Persian accounts) saying that " In all parganas' occupied by Sikhs the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather dresser. The lowest of the low in Indian estimation had only to leave home and join Banda when in short time he would return to his birth place as its ruler with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well born and wealth went out to greet him as escort him had often risked themselves in battlefield became so **cowed** down that they were afraid even to remonstrate.

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