



THE VALIANT BANDA BAHADUR: MILITARY EXPEDITION IN HARYANA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on Banda Singh Bahadur's (1670–1716) military expedition in the Haryana region who became the part of the struggle against the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century. He is known for the devastation of the Mughal provincial capital, Sirhind, and is revered as one of the most venerable martyrs among of the Khalsa. Banda Singh Bahadur abolished the zamindari system, and granted property rights to the farmers of the land after establishing his region in Punjab. There was a critical event in the development of the Dal Khalsa and the Sikh Misls as a result of agrarian uprising against the Mughal administration that eventually led to Ranjit Singh capturing Lahore in 1799 and establishing the Sikh Kingdom of the Punjab.

At the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, the great Mughal Empire founded by Akbar was in a miserable condition. Administration, economic life, military strength and social organization – all seemed to be advancing to their downfall. After Aurangzeb's death on February 20, 1707, followed by a war of succession among his three sons and the mighty Mughal Empire fell like a house of cards resulted as the victory of his eldest son, Prince Muazzam. The sixty five-year-old prince ascended the throne under the name Bahadur Shah I (1707 A.D. - 1712 A. D.). Bahadur Shah' death in 1712, was followed by a fresh war of succession among his four sons. Ultimately Jahandar Shah (1712-13), a worthless, corrupt who became emperor after liquidating his three brothers and he was murdered by Farrukhsiyar (1713-19), who succeeded him. Banda Singh Bahadur during 1708-1716 became the leader of the Sikhs and the fight against Mughal Empire. After a meeting with Guru Gobind Singh the Guru Gobind Singh conferred the title of Bahadur on Banda on 3 September 1708 in Nanded and awarded him with full political as well as military powers as his deputy to carry on the national struggle in the Punjab to punish Wazir Khan of Sarhind and his soldiers. The Guru Gobind Singh ordered him to go to Punjab and fight against the Mughals with the help of the Sikh army. He was awarded with a standard arrow and a drum as symbols of temporal authority. Banda assumed leadership of the huge gathering of the followers, created a stir determination to avenge the atrocities to which not only Guru Gobind Singh himself, but also his children, followers and the entire family were severely suffered.¹ Banda Singh Bahadur became the leader of Sikh army in 1708 and he was sent to Punjab to fight against Mughal

Empire. Though the Sikh army under Banda Singh was not a regular army yet they were highly devoted as well as motivated to root out Mughals' tyrannous reign. The main aim of Banda was to punish Wazir Khan and conquer Sirhind. Banda Bahadur began the Sikh war of Independence against Mughal authority to fulfil the desire of his Guru Gobind Singh. According to Khafi Khan the number of Sikhs had risen to thirty to forty thousands. He had to fight against Mughals in the present Haryana before he could achieve his ultimate aim. Banda Bahadur, on his expedition, assembled his followers and marched towards present Haryana. He had to fight against Mughals in Narnaul, Hissar, Tohana, Sonapat, Kaithal, Samana, Sadhaura and Lohgarh before achieving his objective.

Narnaul: The Satnamis who were mostly agriculturists and a peaceful sect believing in the unity of God. They were popularly known for their honesty, industrious nature and formed a brotherhood calling themselves Satnamis as Satnam means the good name of good work as well as they were against the idol worship. After Aurangzeb's death (1707), the position changed extreme and rigorously. The weak and inefficient successors of Aurangzeb who sat on the Mughal throne, who failed to check the forces of chaos and confusion that were let loose at that time. As a result, the people became disorderly all around and refused to pay revenue. Their abodes which were nothing short of fortresses surrounded by mud walls could only be reduced by artillery and huge force which the local authority could not always gather. Banda Bahadur saw the complete destruction of the Satnami sect with his own eyes, which had risen in revolt against the Mughals when arrived at Narnaul in 1709. His blood boiled on learning that entire sect of Satnamis had been completely wiped out of their existence and Banda successfully suppressed here some dacoits and robbers.ⁱⁱ

Hissar: Hisar was the headquarters of the revenue Division known as Sarkar during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) and became an important centre in Haryana region for Mughals as some of Mughal Princes who were related to Hisar, subsequently became the Emperors. The city of Hisar is then known in the history of India as the Duke of Wellington of Mughal Era. "On the death of Aurangzeb in 1707," says the *Gazetteer*, "we find Nawab Shah Dad Khan, a Pathan of Kasur, 'Nazim' of the *Sarkar* of Hisar; and under his rule, from 1707 to 1737, the people and the country appeared to have prospered exceedingly." Banda Bahadur arrived in Hisar in 1709. He was welcome by Hindus and Sikhs as a leader of their movement and deputy of Guru Gobind Singh and offerings were made to him in the cause of the country and dharam (religion and virtue) which he distributed among the poor and the needy.

Tohana: Banda Singh Bahadur arrived at Tohana in 1709 and appealed to the Sikhs of Malwa, to join him in his campaign against Wazir Khan of Sirhind. On his appeal lot of people joined his campaign.

Sonapat: In the beginning of November 1709 Banda Bahadur marched to Sonapat fifty kilometers north of Delhi, early and led about five hundred followers attacking the town and threw an open challenge to the Mughal Empire.ⁱⁱⁱ He attacked the government treasury, plundered it and distributed it among his followers as well as needy. This was his great success against the government and his prestige was raised considerably. The faujdar was utterly unprepared, but was routed^{iv} and was defeated as well as the winners plundered the state treasury. Banda Singh Bahadur made proper arrangements to escort Mata Sahib Kaur to Delhi. Mata Sahib Kaur was sent to Delhi under armed escort, to join Mata Sundari, who was acting as the head of the Khalsa after the death of her husband, Guru Gobind Singh. In the history of Punjab the circumstances of the time never offered so far to the ambition of a leader who was conscious of great talents, and called to the command of a warlike people, only too eager to support him in any enterprise he might undertake. Banda Bahadur directed his attention to the east towards Delhi. He wanted to leave Mata Sahib Devi in Delhi and plunder the Government officials of the fertile area of Haryana.

Kaithal: Banda Singh Bahadur arrived at Kaithal, about a hundred kilometers further north in 1709 and looted a government treasury, which was being sent from the northern districts to Delhi. He gave it away to his followers without keeping out for himself.

Samana: Samana had a wall all around fortifying strongly, every Haveli was a fortress and the Mughal force was well armed deploying guns for the town's defence. Jalal-ud-din Jallad resided at Samana who

was the professional executioner- executed Guru Teg Bahadur as well as his son, Jalal-ud-din Jallad executed the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Another Muslim, Ali Hussain betrayed Guru Gobind Singh by promising false to lure Guru Gobind Singh to evacuate Anandpur fort also inhabited at Samana. Samana was an accursed place of betraying Muslims in the eyes of the trusting Sikhs. The entire Sikh peasantry of the neighbourhood was now up inside with Banda Singh Bahadur, such was due to discontentment of native Sikhs against Muslims, thereby peasant army under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur had increased to a large number of army. Banda Singh Bahadur arrived in Samana town in Jind District in Haryana on November 26, 1709 and his objective was to lay up at some distance the previous day thereby lulled them to attack. That night the Sikh soldiers approached rapidly from some distance, entered the town before the gates could be closed. The Battle of Samana took place between Banda Singh Bahadur and Wazir Khan and after a little struggle they captured and sacked them and the Muslim were massacred in the same way as Muslims earlier treated to Sikhs. Banda Singh Bahadur shook the administration of Delhi.^v Thus, they avenged the past atrocities of Muslims as Muslim historian, Latif in his history of Punjab published in the late 1880s, after defeating Wazir Khan, The Sikh army captured the town of Samana from Mughal rule and massacred them and 10,000 Muslim men and women were assassinated. Rajmohan Gandhi in book "Revenge and Reconciliation" this account may be explained^{vi} as Samana was the district town and had nine Parganas attached to it and placed under the charge of brave Sikh warrior Fateh Singh. Samana was established as the first administrative unit of Banda Singh Bahadur after the first territorial victory applying intelligible the three main principles of war of Surprise, Mobility and Economy of Force (he took least casualties).

Sadhaura: Sadhaura is in Haryana and it was ruled by Sayyids and Shaikhs in the beginning of the 18th century. Its ruler was Osman Khan, who was notorious for the oppression of his masses. He was the cruel ruler who had tortured to death great Muslim Saint Sayyid Badar-ud-din Shah popularly known as Pir Buddha Shah because he had supported Guru Gobind Singh in the Battle of Bhangani. The Hindus were treated very badly under his reign.^{vii} On the arrival of Banda Singh Bahadur's army, the leading Muslims of the town gathered in a big and strongly built fort. Banda Singh arrived the town with his followers. The Battle of Sadhaura took place between Sikhs and the Sayyids as well as Shaikhs of Sadhaura in 1709 and after fierce fighting on the streets of Sadhaura, the town fell in the hands of Sikhs. They were all quickly put to death by army of Banda Bahadur. The Sayyids and Shaikhs were massacred by the Sikhs. Its ruler Osman Khan was also executed and established native rule of kings with native religion with tolerant views. This building where Sikhs avenged by killing all occupants has come to be known as Qatal Garhi (the Fort of Murder). Banda Singh Bahadur destroyed the Muslim dominated area of the town. A contemporary Muslim historian, Khafi Khan, wrote: "In two or three months time, four to five thousands horse-riders, and seven to eight thousand warlike footmen joined him. Day by day their number increased, and abundant money and material by pillage of muslims fell into the hands of Hindu and Sikh warriors. Numerous muslim villages were laid waste and Banda Singh bahadur appointed his own Sikh native police officers (thanedars) and established his sovereignty by setting up of the collectors of revenue (Tahsil-dar-e-mal)".

Lohgarh: The main aim of Banda was to punish Wazir Khan and conquer Sirhind. The time was required to consolidate his material and territorial gains. He also wanted to study the military resources of Sirhind. He was anxious to see what steps the government would take against him. He therefore established his headquarters, in the beginning of February 1710, at Mukhlisgarh situated in the lower Siwalik Hills south of Nahan, about twenty kilometers from Sadhaura. His fort stood on a hilltop. Two kuhls or water channels flowed at its base and supplied water to it. This fort was repaired and put in a state of defence. All the money, gold and costly material acquired in the expeditions were treasured here. He produced his coins and issued orders under his seal. The name of Mukhlisgarh was changed to Lohgarh (Fort of Steel), which became the capital of the first Sikh state.

Sirhind: Banda Bahadur's major objective was to conquer Sirhind which was the historic town of South East Punjab. It represented the cruelty of its Governor, Wazir Khan to all Sikhs. James Brown, the British Historian opined that he was most barbarous and outrageous and Sikhs were yearning for his bloodshed. The army of Banda Bahadur itching towards Sirhind after victory of several battles. After the victory of Samana and Sadhaura he warned Wazir Khan and began to fortify the walls of Sirhind and he arrived to a village named Chhappar Chiri in order to check Banda's army.^{viii} The battle between Wazir Khan and Baba Banda Singh took place at Chhappar Chirri (near Landran and Mohali). Wazir Khan with his strong army consisted of elephants, artillery, cavalry and infantry as well as supported by the Nawab of Malerkotla and other Chieftains into the battlefield uprooted the army of Banda Singh Bahadur in the beginning. Then Banda Singh himself jumped into battle leading the Sikh army in a terrible battle in which Wazir Khan was killed and his army defeated. Thus Chhappar Chirri was a historical battle fought on May 12, 1710 in which mighty Mughal army was defeated by the army of Banda Bahadur. Baba Banda Singh Bahadur captured Sirhind was occupied on 14th May 1710 and his army devastated Sirhind and killed all those courtiers who had voted in favour the execution of the two younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh. The Persian sources remarked army of Banda Bahadur as the butchers of Sirhind as it destroyed the city and killed its entire population, even pregnant Muslim women were not spared. Sirhind was devastated completely which is called Guru-cursed as his army wanted to avenge the killing of younger Sahibzadas. In Sikh parlance, it is called. Muslim Ranghars, who were born out of Muslim father and Hindu mother were called Ranghars resided in Kunjpura, Ghuram and Thaska known as notorious for rape and rapine were devastated cruelly. Damla was the village of Pathans who had deserted Guru Gobind Singh ji in the battle of Bhangani which was also destroyed. Shahbad Markanda also captured by Banda Bahadur. But it was unfortunate that during the reign of Farrukhsiyar, Banda Bahadur was arrested after a ferocious battle which was fought in December 1715 and was sent to Delhi, where he was tortured cruelly to death in June 1716.

Thus we may conclude that the era of Banda Bahadur began with the victory of Sarhind battle in May 12, 1710. He ruled over the region, which was surrounded by Shiwalik hills in the north, on the west by river Tangri, in the east river Jamuna, and in the south bounded by a line passing through Samana, Thanesar, Kaithal and Karnal. He proclaimed that the actual owners of the land are the farmers and abolished the Zamindari System of land prevailing under the Mughals. Therefore, thus he established the farmer's proprietorship, and won the overwhelming support of the people. A renowned historian of medieval India, Khafi Khan states that Banda "issued orders to imperial officers and agents and big jagirdars to submit and give up their business." Thus, we observe that Guru Gobind Singh's dream of political sovereignty was fulfilled within a year.

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