

BABA BANDA SINGH BAHADUR: A STUDY OF HIS INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF SOVEREIGNTY (1708-1716)

Manoj Kaumar

ABSTRACT

chihal nafar banjara Nanak-prasatan ,az navah Multan vagera-dar chabutara kotwali rasida, Agar musalman shawand bihatar, Vila biqushand. Barz rasid ki az qufr barghasht namishwand. Huqumshud – biqushand

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The main objective of this research paper is to explore the nature of Sikh struggle for sovereignty and to throw light on their individual consciousness of the same. This struggle was mainly led by a historical character Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. The paper endeavours to show relevance of Banda Singh Bahadur in Sikh History. Historians and scholars have shown scant interest on this particular period. I will talk about the nature of Sikh sovereignty and resistance during early 18th century and also try to explain the concept of sovereignty in the context of Sikh struggle. I shall also try to argue that there was an emergence of a novel idea of sovereignty. I have, to the best of my ability, tried to answer these question thoroughly in my research. There is no doubt that sovereignty is a modern word but the actual meaning and sense of this word has evolved from ancient territorial connotations like chhetra, gram, subas, rajya and rashtra. The Sikh struggle has played an important role in the medieval history of india, especially northern India in the the 18th century. It took over 100 years of struggle to establish the Khalsa Raj under Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in Punjab. I have divided my research paper in two sections. In the first section I will talk about the forms and nature of sovereignty and in the second section I shall discuss the manifestation of this sovereignty in Sikh struggle with special focus on Banda Bahadur and his idea of leadership.

Key Words: Banda Singh Bahadur, Sovereignty, Social Justice, Leadership, Consciousness, Nationalism, Punjabiyat.

FORMS AND NATURE OF SOVEREIGNTY: A STUDY TO IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF SIKH STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty as a term has its origin in the Latin word 'Superanus' meaning supreme.¹ Though Sovereignty is a modern concept, it did exist in ancient and medieval times in the very idea of supremacy. From

the time of classical writers, like Aristotle Sovereignty or as he referred it 'supreme power' of the state, had its existence. Aristotle classified his states on the basis of whether few people or many bore the supreme power. A concept of sovereignty existed with the Romans who used notion like emporium that is authority and majesties to explain sovereignty. The very idea of 'legal and political sovereignty' existed during this period. They considered the state as the legal sovereign and people as the political sovereign. During the later

part of the Roman Empire *absolute sovereignty* evolved but with time it gave way to *popular sovereignty* especially with Teutonic people. These people believed in the idea of individual independence and formed popular assemblies powerful enough to elect and to remove rulers.²

This is a sovereign power of a state which provides it the power to do things according to its wishes or as Jellinek defines it “that characteristic of the state in virtue of which it cannot be legally bound except by its own will or limited by any other power than itself.”³ The following possible definitions of sovereignty have been offered. Sovereignty is the most extensive form of jurisdiction under international law. In general terms, it denotes full and unchallengeable power over a piece of territory and all the persons from time to time therein.⁴ According to Krasner identifies the following four ways in which the term sovereignty is commonly used:

- Domestic sovereignty, which refers to the organisation of political authority within a state and the level of control enjoyed by a state.
- Interdependence sovereignty, which is concerned with the question of control, for example, the ability of a state to control movements across its own borders.
- International legal sovereignty, which is concerned with establishing the status of a political entity in the international system. The state is treated at the international level similarly to the individual at the national level.
- Westphalian sovereignty is violated when external factors influence or determine the domestic authority structures. This form of sovereignty can be compromised through intervention as well as through invitation, when a state voluntarily subjects internal authority structures to external constraints.⁵

Therefore, sovereignty is neither “natural” nor static. Because of a process that has increasingly placed constraints on the freedom of action of states; the substance of the notion of sovereignty has changed and will further change in future.⁶

The classical definition of external sovereignty is given by Max Huber in the *Island of Palmas Case*; Sovereignty in the relation between States signifies independence. According to MacCormick the distinction between internal and external sovereignty makes it possible to contemplate the division and limitation of state sovereignty.⁷ The *traditional understanding of sovereignty* as independence and supreme authority may be attributed to Jean Bodin’s sixteenth-century definition of sovereignty in his work *Les Six Livres de Republique* as the absolute and perpetual power of a state.

According to Bodin, the concept of sovereignty primarily entails the absolute and sole competence of law making within the territorial boundaries of a state and that the state would not tolerate any other *law-creating agent* above it. According to Bodin’s theory of sovereignty, the sovereign power is bound by international law, which results either from treaties or from divine or natural law. Although Bodin’s conception of sovereignty as introduced in the sixteenth century was accepted by writers on politics, the majority of these writers held the opinion that sovereignty may be restricted by a constitution and by positive law.⁸ Although international law is partly independent of the will of states, Grotius nevertheless sees it as binding on sovereign states. According to him the law of nature is discerned by human reason and urges man to seek a peaceful and organised society.⁹

When we evaluate these theories we realise that traditionally sovereignty has been denoted as the independent and supreme authority of a state. However, it is evident that the early authors of international law did not regard state sovereignty as absolute and unlimited, but subject to higher norms.¹⁰ The classical understanding of sovereignty in the *eighteenth century* a distinction was made between absolute, perfect or full sovereignty on the one hand, and relative, imperfect or half sovereignty on the other. *Absolute sovereignty* was ascribed to monarchs who had an unqualified independence within and without their states. *Relative sovereignty* was attributed to those monarchs who were to some

extent dependent on other monarchs in the different aspects of the internal or foreign affairs of the state.

The sovereignty of one state, however, cannot be subordinate to that of another state because sovereignties are, by their very essence, equal. A consequence of this is that the concept of sovereignty tends to merge increasingly with the concept of independence.¹¹ However, the independence of a state is not absolute. It is limited by the equal freedom and independence of other states as well as by international conventions and specific agreements entered into by states.¹² The concept of sovereignty as it developed includes a number of general features and also a series of distinctions. All of this helps to arrive at the correct meaning of sovereignty. The first of this is the distinction between 'legal' and 'political' sovereignty. While legal sovereignty implies the supreme law-making authority of a state, the political sovereignty means the will of the people.¹³

Another distinction is made between 'De jure' and 'De facto' sovereignty. A De jure sovereign is given supreme power by the law. He rules and people obey him, although he may be less in physical strength. On the other hand, De facto sovereign is one whom the law of country does not recognize as a sovereign but he enjoys supreme power either by virtue of his physical strength or moral force. Thus, he may be a military dictator, a spiritual priest, traditional ruler etc. It is often seen that in due course of time a De facto sovereign obtains legal status and ultimately becomes De jure sovereign. This can be illustrated with the example of Bolshevik regime in Russia which from a De facto became a De jure regime.¹⁴ The concept of legal sovereignty or absolute sovereignty of the state diminished with the coming of the theory of the 'Two Swords' which came during the Medieval Age. This theory was against the practice of both secular and spiritual power being bestowed on a single person or a group of people. With the coming of this theory, power began to be shared by the state and the church with 'ecclesiastical affairs' handled by ecclesiastical courts. This hampered and went against the

sovereignty of the state. The concept of 'Two Swords' created a relationship between Emperor and the Pope.¹⁵

In the medieval period 'Monistic theory' of sovereignty has played major role to understand the nature of sovereignty. This theory emphasized the vesting of supreme power in a single central authority which is bestowed the power to make supreme laws.¹⁶ In other hand F.H. Hinsley rightly comments At a time when it had become that the conflict between rulers and ruled should be terminated, Bodin realized and it was an impressive intellectual feat- that the conflict would be solved only if it was possible both to establish the existence of a necessarily unrestricted ruling power and to distinguish this power from an absolutism that was free to disregard all laws and regulations.¹⁷ Harold Laski is one of the proponents of pluralistic theory of sovereignty. The first being pre-eminently of pluralism, the second of Fabian and, third basically of Marxism.¹⁸ The Fabian society, whose views Laski shared was founded by a group of intellectuals who often gathered together to study and discuss the current social ethical problems. In his first phase Laski came strongly against the monistic theory of sovereignty and in his book 'A Grammar of Politics' declared the whole concept to be obsolete and said, "In the background of difficulties it is impossible to make the legal theory of sovereignty valid for political philosophy."¹⁹

On the other hand when we trace the theory of popular sovereignty finally we realise the nature of Sikh struggle because this concept means giving ultimate sovereignty to the people. It holds that people are the real sovereign and it is they who assign duties to different agents kings who are subject to the sovereign people. This sovereignty resides in the whole community and not in an individual or a group.²⁰ The king in this way becomes an agent and an executive head of the people and works for their betterment. One of the important proponents of popular sovereignty is Cicero of ancient Rome, who believed that, "The common wealth is the people's affair".²¹

The idea of popular sovereignty in true sense gained ground with the revolt against absolute monarchy. A lots of civil and international warfare started by the second half of the sixteenth century after mainly influenced by monarchomac who upheld the sovereignty of the people against the sovereignty of the kings. These thoughts were expressed in the writings of the monarch or anti monarchical writers like Marsiglio of Padua (1270-1340), William of Ockam (c1287-1347), George Buchanan (1506-1582) etc. During sixteenth and seventeenth century. They conceive that sovereignty originally belonged to the people and it is they who are the source of power. Marsiglio held: "The whole cooperation of citizens, or its weightier part, either makes law itself, directly, or entrusts this task to some person or persons, who are not and cannot be the legislator in the absolute sense, but only for specific matters, and temporarily, and by virtue of the authority of the prime legislator"²²

The doctrine of popular sovereignty gained universal appeal and popularity with its inclusion in the American and French proclamations. In the context of India, popular sovereignty was used to provide security to the masses from oppression. The king worked as a representative of the masses. The principal of popular sovereignty is always against the absolutist sovereignty. On which theory, the Sikh struggle of 18th century lies can be understood after examine the principles which underlined Banda Bahadur quest for independence. There is no doubt that the influence of the movement started by Banda had long temporal spread although his leadership itself was of short span. Whenever there is a war, rebellion, revolt, movement in history it always brings a change in the way History is written.

The historical representation of Banda Bahdur establishes his unique trait of steely determination. After his historic meet with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded, Banda lived each moment of his life as a warrior. Although there were shortcomings in his general ship yet it did not deter him from leading khalsa as an experienced and able commander. He was martyred in the cause for establishing Khalsa Raj. *Bairagi* banda was becoming

Bahadar Banda with each new challenge as if learning something new with every milestone he reached. He displayed a similar commitment to his Guru like a *murid* shows to his Sufi *murshid*. Detailed evaluation of Sikh aspiration for Independence must be studied under the ambit of different forms and theories of sovereignty which we have discussed in this paper. The important forms are legal and political sovereignty, absolute sovereignty, Domestic sovereignty, Interdependence sovereignty, International legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, Interdependent sovereignty, Internal sovereignty, External sovereignty, Traditional understanding of sovereignty, International law of sovereignty, Absolute sovereignty, Relative sovereignty, De-jure facto sovereignty, Two swords of theory, Monistic theory, Floristic theory of sovereignty, Religious, and cultural sovereignty and Popular sovereignty. The aim is to understand the Sikh struggle in light of the different theories of Sovereignty.

We find that the nature of Sikh struggle was closer to popular sovereignty with elements of absolutism and democracy. As we have mentioned that the definition of popular sovereignty comprises regional and linguistic groups organising themselves for common political, economical, social , religious and cultural goal. They strive collectively to uplift themselves under a well established leadership as can be well seen from pre-modern to the present. Earlier the popular rebellion was done with positive thinking.

BABA BANDA SINGH BAHADUR, POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND KHALSA RAJ

The Philosophy of Sikhism from its very inception contained within itself inherent potential of conflict with the existing social relation. "After the emergence of khalsa", in the words of Teja singh and Ganda singh "People who were from subaltern classes of the society got equal rights after embracing the khalsa panth". The underprivileged

of different religions like hindu, jats, muslims and communities of merchant and traders , *Bhangi, barber, cobblers, scavenger, peasant, farmers, blacksmith, labours, leather workers* etc.²³ Began to identify themselves with Banda's vision. These people were not soldiers by profession yet they organised themselves under Guru Gobind Singh and later under Banda Singh Bahadur into a potent force. What was the reason for this drastic change? How did this change happen on such a big scale and what was the effect of this change in Sikh History? Answer to these questions has been dealt in this section which will help us to understand the Banda Bahadur consciousness of sovereignty. There is no doubt that till today there is no written evidence about the early life of Banda Bahadur and as a result Historians and research scholars have had to face the problems in constructing his history.

According to the *Aine-i- Akbari* emperor Akbar was illiterate but his consciousness, theory of kingship, tolerance of other religions and his Imperialistic thinking kept him in the league of 'Great Rulers'.²⁴ This was the reason for healthy relation between Sikhs guru and Akbar. To understand the consciousness of Banda Bahadur with evidence we have to wait till his meeting with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded. After 1707 A.D we are able to trace some valid historical facts about the Bandas's consciousness of sovereignty. To better understand the internal political history of punjab we have to study the 18th century changes. According to the Muzzafar Alam, in the context of whole 18th century, the political influence of nobles like the *mansabdars* of Mughal Empire was deteriorating resulting in crises in the system of revenue extraction which the administrative nobles were dependent.²⁵ Regional struggle in Mughal Empire had even decreased the revenue extraction from the *Jagirs*.²⁶ New classes emerged and their political influence got strong. These people were regional land owners or from the *zamindari* class.²⁷ These classes purchased the landowning rights and changed land rights from non- hereditary to hereditary rights. Two specific aspects of these social relations are invented to be taken up. First is the

caste system which was a part of both the practical and social relation as also of the ideological relations. But my focus only Second aspect ther social relation deals with the *Zamindari* system i.e., land rights.

This class started collecting the market and trade tax. Some of these like *Maratha's, Sikh's, jaat's*, to make their political influence more strong raised their voices against the Mughul empire. These people organised themselves as one brotherhood at the level of *Pargana* to dominate the region with their political influence. Sikh used brotherhood and clan relationship and Sikh religious beliefs to ignore the political and administrative system of Mughal Empire.²⁸ The struggle of Banda Bahadur (1715-1716) established the sovereignty of Sikh in the Punjab region. He took advantage of social gathering like common kitchen, *langar*²⁹, festivities, pond etc. to make him more acceptable to the rising population of Sikh and the locals in the Punjab region. Though Banda's rebellion was suppresses it gave common identity to Sikh community.³⁰

Banda Bahadur mission for Sikh sovereignty has been researched by many scholar and many of these research papers have been published. If we study this research article thoroughly, we will come to an understanding of the Banda Bahadur characters and his leadership qualities. When Banda Bahadur moved out from Nanded he was confident and determined to establish sovereign *Khalsa Raj*. The *huqmanama* he got from Guru Gobind Singh, gathered thousands of people in his army. But the question was to de-throne the Mughal Empire which was ruling India from last 175 years was not an easy task. Banda Bahadur had to go through a proper plan and the lack of proper planning can be noticed in his early mission. When he started assembling an army people from different dynasty and region started joining it like *Rama* of *Phulkiya dynasty*, Tiloka, Ali Sikh from Malwa, Mali Sikh from *Allaudi* they all joined with Banda Bahadur *fauz*. This happened because by this time the oppression of farmers, peasants and people from other religions by the

mughals was at its peak and the condition of rebellion was arising in region of Punjab *Subah*.³¹

The *jama* which was collected in the Mughal empire from a *subah* was estimated, region to region depending on the fertility of the region's soil. The *Haasil* was less than estimated by Mughal nobles. So the gap between the *Jama* or *Haasils* was getting bigger and bigger for eg, The *Hasil* from Punjab was not reaching the center, instead the *qar* was going to *sipahsalar*s and others. This was happening because the control of the center in the *subah* was getting weaker day by day. The succeeding Mughal rulers focussed more on *Takht-i-taus* instead of administration.³² Banda Bahadar took advantage of this situation and acted. The Mughal army suffered losses after losses which emboldened Banda to lead another battle at *Sadhaura*. After defeating the Mughal army near *Sadhaura* Banda Bahadur conquered a place called *Mukhlispur* and made it his *garhi* (headquarter). On the 10th of december 1710, Bahadur shah, the Mughal emperor had issued an order saying: *naanak parastaan raa jaa ba-yaband ba qatl rasaananad* (meaning where ever a follower or Guru Nanak is found, he should be killed); as a result , thousands of sikh were killed. Again, when in april 1715, Banda singh and his companions were surrounded by a mammoth Mughal army, in the *Garhi* of *Gurdas Nangal*, Abdus Samad Khan the Governor of the *Sikhs* too announced awards for killing sikhs.³³

Muntakhabu-I-Lubab by Mohammad Hasim Khafi khan provides additional details: "Muhammad Farrukhsiyar, who reigned from 1713 to 1715 AD experienced the War between the Sikhs and Mughals and Maratha periodically during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries AD as the Sikhs gained increasing power and influence in the Punjab a power the Mughals struggled to curtail, given the strategic and economic importance of Punjab." ³⁴ Khafi khan further narrates the struggle of Banda singh "The violence of the Sikhs under Banda singh passed all bounds. The injuries and indignities they inflicted on Musulmans, and the destruction of mosques and tombs, were looked upon by them as righteous meritorious acts. They

had built a fort at Gurdaspur in the Punjab, ten or twelve days' journey from Dehli, and extended its limits so that fifty or sixty thousand horse and foot could find protection. They strengthened the towers and walls of the place, took possession of all the cultivated land around and ravaged the country from *Lahore* to *Sirhind*. *Abdu-s Samad Khan* Diler Jang was appointed Subedar of *Lahore*, and was sent with a select army and artillery. *Abdu-s Samad* engaged the vast army of the Banda Guru near his fort. The infidels fought so fiercely that the army of Islam was nearly overpowered; and they over and over again showed the greatest daring."³⁵

Banda Singh Bahadar captured *Sarhind* next and the *subedar of sirhind* deserted the post. Before *Sarhind* Banda conquered *Samana*, *Kharkhauda*, and *Lohgarh*. Wazir khan raised a call for *Jihad* against Banda Bahadar. The brutality done by banda in *Samana* alerted Muslims.³⁶ The condition of *Lohgarh* was different and *Banda* conscious of the fact that his army comprised mainly of farmers and peasants sought an alliance with *Jats of Mujhail* . He attacked *Sirhind* on equal footing with mughal army. Somewhere 10 miles away from *Sarhind* the mughal army and banda's army came face to face. This war took place in *chapad- chidi* , 10 miles away from *Siirhind*. This war was with the people who wanted to live with *independence* and sovereignty.³⁷ Banda Bahadur was learning too from Mughal in various wars and skirmishes. If we study the mission of Banda we will understand that he used alliances to win against his enemies. He was trying to get more and more people to fight against Mughals. The alliance of *Jats of Mujhail* proves the leadership and general ship of Banda Bahadur.³⁸

The war of *Chapar-Chidi* made Banda Bahadur a warrior and a general from *Shishya* and *Biaragi*. If we evaluate the war of *Chapar-Chidi* we will understand that Wazir khan, the experienced mughal general, was not able to win against Banda Bahadur which reflects the degeneration had fallen to. The Mughal army was standing on the borders without proper training and exercise. *Sirhind* gave the *Sikhs* enough revenue to plan to wage future wars.³⁹

The war at *Sirhind* took many innocent Muslim lives but one should not forget that Banda waged these wars not for the expansion of his empire but to punish the Mughal. Banda soon realised that the early success on the battlefield that abode well for the Sikhs to take Punjab as there sovereign *Khalsa Raj*.⁴⁰ His success made him sovereign of the doab which was in between the *Yamuna* and *Satlej*. The revenue extraction of the doab was approximately 36 lakh per annum. "Bairagi" Banda due to his success, strategic plans, *mooridgi* got the tittle of Banda Singh to "Bahadar". The region was finally established as sovereign *khalsa raj* under Maharaja Ranjeet singh.

After this Banda Bahadar conquered "Behat, Aabeta, Nanota, Saharanpore, Jallandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kalanaur, Batala, Pathankot approximately all the areas between the *Yamuna* and *Ravi*. To display his sovereignty he minted coins, on which the name of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak was engraved and he became the *Bashinda* or Representative of *Khalsa Raj*. Concept of *Gurus langar* and *deg*, also helped in popularising the sikh greatness and this was Banda Bahadur's *popular struggle*.

CONCLUSION

On 5th march 1716-to 12th march 1716 the *Qatl-e-aam* of the Banda Bahadur and his companions has already been published in many book and various article. But what was its impact on Indian history? If

we examine Sikh struggle of early 18th century, *linguistic nationalism* is seen in the regional struggle. However, after the movement started by Banda Bahadur there is visible consciousness of *Punjabiya* and this helped him and others to get into the common feeling of brotherhood and clan relationship. Banda Bahadur redefined the relationship between the *Guru* and *Shishya*. The extreme trust in his master made Banda Bahadur a *Sikh* idol. If we evaluate the political ups and downs then many questions arise. In which important question was his way of leadership?

Resources which are available do not discuss the strategy of all the wars in which Banda Bahadur had taken part. This makes me think that when Banda Bahadur moved out from Nanded he was well informed about the Mughal army which he manipulated to his advantage showing his keen leadership quality. He was an inexperienced general who came into the war first time but with his determination and leadership he inspired scores of people to join him and resist the oppression of Mughals. The nascent kingdom finally emerged as a powerful sovereign *Khalsa Raj* under Ranjeet Singh. The sikh had struggled for over a century for it. All the people from Sikh community like Guru Gobind Singh, Baba Banda Bahadar and others and even people from different religion all struggled until Maharaja Ranjeet Singh established well settled sovereign *Khalsa Raj*. The struggle of Banda Bahdur for *popular sovereignty* and *linguistic nationalism* has given a different direction to the history of India.

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