

BETWEEN EMPIRE AND IDEA OF KHALSA RAJ: REASSESSING BANDA SINGH BAHADUR'S STATE FORMATION THROUGH AKHBARAT-I DARBAR-I-MA'ULLA

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ABSTRACT

After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb, North India witnessed profound political fragmentation. The weakening of Mughal authority, coupled with ineffective successors, created a power vacuum that enabled new regional formations to emerge. Among these, Punjab became the first suba to assert independence under the leadership of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda Singh Bahadur, however, never styled himself as a "King," "Emperor," or "Guru." His leadership was neither absolute nor despotic; rather, it embodied the principles of collective decision-making and participatory governance as envisioned by Guru Gobind Singh through the institution of the Khalsa. Banda adhered to a form of egalitarian leadership; he was first among equals and consistently sought counsel from senior Sikhs who had accompanied him from Nanded, appointing them to important commands and governorships.

This paper critically examines the *Akhbarat-i Darbar-i-Ma'ulla* and *Ibratnamah* to explore how these Persian chronicles portrayed Banda Singh Bahadur's role in articulating and defending the ideal of Sikh sovereignty. Through these sources, the study reassesses the nature of Banda Singh Bahadur's movement as a unique experiment in early eighteenth-century state formation anchored in spiritual egalitarianism, collective governance, and the political vision of Guru Gobind Singh.

Keywords: Banda Bahadur Singh, Sovereignty, Khalsa Raj, Sikh Coins, *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, *Ibratnamah*

**"Azmat-i-Nanak Guru ham Zahar-o-batan ast,
Padshah-i-din-o-duniya aap Sachcha Sahib ast."**

Banda Singh Bahadur was the first Sikh leader to lay the foundation for the political sovereignty of the Sikhs, demonstrating in practice what self-government truly meant. Following the decisive Battle of Chappar Chiri on 12 May 1710, in which Wazir Khan, the Governor of Sirhind, was slain, Banda Singh advanced toward Sirhind, located about ten miles from the battlefield. According to Dr Ganda Singh, Banda Singh entered the city on 14 May 1710. The province of Sirhind, comprising twenty-eight parganas and stretching from the Sutlej to the Yamuna and from the Shivalik Hills to

Kunjapura, Karnal, and Kaithal, generated an annual revenue of approximately thirty-six lakh rupees. With its conquest, Banda Singh assumed administrative control over the territory.ⁱ

Baj Singh, his trusted companion from Nanded, was appointed Subedar (Governor) of Sirhind, with Ali Singh as his deputy. Bhai Fateh Singh retained his position as Governor of Samana, while Ram Singh, Baj Singh's brother, was made joint Governor of Thanesar alongside Baba Binod Singh. All faujdars of the twenty-eight newly conquered parganas were replaced by men loyal to Banda Singh Bahadur, thereby establishing a new administrative framework based on Sikh leadership and allegiance.ⁱⁱ

Banda Singh's mission extended beyond mere military conquest; it was a crusade for national awakening and liberation from Mughal oppression. While Gurus Hargobind and Gobind Singh had transformed the Sikhs into a martial community, their warfare was essentially defensive; they neither annexed territories nor sought material gains.ⁱⁱⁱ However, under Banda Singh, the seeds of sovereignty that had been sown earlier now flourished. Banda believed that excessive tolerance and religious forbearance had long rendered Indians subservient to foreign powers. He therefore emphasised the necessity of active resistance, "a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye", as the only viable path toward freedom.

Banda Singh's approach was bold and transformative. He waged offensive campaigns, seized enemy territories and wealth, established an independent administration, and issued his own coins and official seals. His decrees carried the authority of farmāns, symbolising parity with the Mughal rulers. Furthermore, he introduced a new Sammat (era), marking his victory at Sirhind, a deliberate assertion of political equality and cultural self-confidence. Through these measures, Banda Singh Bahadur sought not merely to weaken Mughal power but to uproot it entirely and establish an indigenous, self-governing polity based on the principles of justice, equality, and Sikh sovereignty.^{iv}

After the conquest of Sirhind and its adjoining territories, Banda Singh Bahadur faced the crucial task of selecting a suitable headquarters, one that was strategically secure, naturally fortified, and beyond the immediate reach of enemy forces. His choice ultimately settled upon the fort of Mukhlispur, which he transformed into his principal base for future military operations. Having captured Mukhlispur following his victory at Sadhaura, Banda Singh found the fort in a state of neglect and ruin. It was soon reconstructed, reinforced, and renamed Lohgarh, or the "Iron Fort," symbolising resilience and strength.^v

Lohgarh became the depository of all the treasures from Sirhind, the spoils of war, and the revenues and tributes collected from the conquered

regions. Its geographical location was particularly advantageous, perched atop a hill amid the rugged slopes of the Lower Himalayas, accessible only through rocky paths and narrow rivulets, making it naturally impregnable. Banda Singh also maintained cordial relations with the ruler of Nahan, whose territory lay behind Mukhlispur, further strengthening his strategic position. The selection of Lohgarh thus reflected not only Banda Singh's military foresight but also his political vision to consolidate earlier conquests and establish a secure base for future expeditions. The fort was well stocked with arms and war materials, serving as a central depot for military operations.^{vi} As noted by Khazan Singh, Banda Singh extensively fortified Lohgarh and equipped it with substantial stores of ammunition and provisions. However, the historical interpretation regarding Lohgarh as Banda Singh's capital remains debated. While eminent historians such as Ganda Singh, G.S. Deol, and Gurbux Singh have asserted that Lohgarh functioned as his capital, Surinder Singh argues that this claim lacks concrete evidence and rests largely on historical hearsay. He maintains that the fortress, covering only a few acres, could not realistically have served as a state capital, regardless of the modest scale of Banda Singh's dominion.

Moreover, the Sikhs, who were continuously engaged in defending their hard-won territories, had little opportunity to establish a permanent administrative capital.^{vii}

Banda Singh Bahadur never referred to himself as a King, Emperor, or Guru, nor did he exhibit traits of absolutism or despotism. His leadership was rooted in the democratic and collective principles bestowed upon the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. Banda Singh upheld the Afghan theory of leadership, positioning himself as first among equals rather than an autocratic ruler. He consistently respected the opinions of senior Sikhs who had accompanied him from Nanded, entrusting them with important military commands and administrative responsibilities over various territories.^{viii}

Historical records also indicate instances where the Khalsa overruled Banda Singh's decisions, and he willingly accepted their verdicts. A notable example occurred when the proposal to introduce a new war cry, "Fateh Darshan," to replace the traditional Sikh salutation "Wahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahiguru Ji Ki Fateh" was put forward. The Khalsa rejected the change, and Banda Singh accepted their decision. Moreover, all symbols of sovereignty, including the coinage and state insignia, were issued in the name of the Sikh Gurus and the Khalsa, not in his own. Banda Singh Bahadur never adopted any royal epithet or personal title; instead, he humbly preferred to be known simply as Banda, the devoted servant of the Guru.^{ix}

Following the establishment of the Sikh State across Sirhind and its adjoining regions, both contemporary sources such as the Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mu'alla^x and later historians, including William Irvine in *The Later Mughals* and Karam Singh in *Banda Kaun Si*, discussed the Sikh coinage issued during his rule. However, Irvine's assertion that the coins were struck in the name of a new sovereign, Banda Singh Bahadur, is inaccurate. In reality, the inscriptions clearly indicate that the coins were minted in the name of the Sikh Gurus rather than Banda Singh himself. This evidence underscores his unwavering devotion to the Gurus and his refusal to claim personal sovereignty, even as he governed a state founded under his leadership.^{xi}

COINS OF BABA BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

Second-Year Coin:

Obverse: "Sikhah Zad Bar Har do Alam Tegh-Nanak Wahib Ast Fateh Gobind Shah-Shahan Fazal Sachcha Sahib Ast"^{xii}

Reverse: "Zarb Ba Aman-ud-Dahar Maswarat Shahr Zinat-ut-Takht Khalsa Mubarak Bakht."^{xiii}

Third-Year Coin:

In the third-year issue, the term "Gobind" on the obverse was inscribed as "Gobind Singh," and

"Aman-ud-Dahar" on the reverse was replaced by "Aman-ud-Din."^{xiv} The first Sikh State established under Banda Singh Bahadur also possessed an official royal seal, which was used on *Hukamnamahs* (royal orders) and *farmans* (letters patent). This seal, slightly smaller than a British-era copper paisa coin (pre-1947), was used to make impressions on government orders. The earliest record of the Sikh seal appears in a report dated January 1710 CE in the *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mu'alla*. According to the chief news writer, Hidayat Kesh, the seal of Banda Bahadur bore the following Persian verse:

**"Azmat-i-Nanak Guru ham Zahar-o-batan ast,
Padshah-i-din-o-duniya aap Sachcha Sahib ast."**

"Inwardly and outwardly, the greatness of Guru Nanak is manifest; The true Guru is the sovereign of both the spiritual and temporal worlds." This inscription is also noted by a contemporary historian in *Hadiqat-ul-Aqalim*. However, the presence of this specific legend on any surviving *Hukamnamah* or official document of Banda Singh Bahadur has not been verified. The authenticated seal impressions found on two extant *Hukamnamahs*, one addressed to the *Sangat* of Jaunpur and the other to *Bhai Dharam Singh*, contain a different inscription:

**"Deg Tegh Fateh Nusrat Baidarang,
Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh."**

"The kettle (Deg) symbolises charity to feed the poor, the sword (Tegh) stands for the defence of the weak and oppressed; Victory and divine assistance (Fateh and Nusrat) are blessings received from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh." This profound legend, first employed by Banda Singh Bahadur, was later adopted by successive Sikh rulers and continued to appear on their coinage as a lasting emblem of the Sikh political and spiritual ideal.^{xv}

BANDA SINGH BAHADUR'S ACTIVITIES AND CONQUESTS (AKHBARAT-I DARBAR-I-MA'ULLA)

The bulk of the document details Banda's 1709–1715 campaigns, portraying him as a "rebel leader" but acknowledging his reforms. Key activities include land redistribution and fort sieges, framed as "plunder" by Mughal scribes but as liberation by Sikhs. Banda's Samana conquest (p. 31): Banda Singh fought a fierce battle at Samana. The Singhs, in their thousands, overwhelmed the Mughals, slaying Wazir Khan's forces." The document notes 1709 Lohgarh establishment (p. 32): Banda Singh, after conquering Samana, returned to Lohgarh and addressed a letter to the Sikhs... The Guru Gobind Singh's conception was realised in this theocratic state." Aurangzeb is invoked indirectly via his governors (p. 33): The policies of the late Emperor Aurangzeb against the Sikhs were the cause; Banda's uprising avenged the Guru's sons.^{xvi} Governor Wazir Khan's response (pp. 35-40): "Wazir Khan, the butcher of the Guru's sons, marched with 10,000 troops... but Banda's forces, inspired by the Guru, repelled them at Sadhaura" (p. 36). Banda's activities include peasant uprisings^{xvii} (p. 38): "Banda Singh's followers, poor peasants, rose against the Mughals, abolishing zamindari and granting land to tillers. The document records the 1710 Sirhind battle (p. 40): Banda Singh stormed Sirhind, avenging the Guru's sons; Wazir Khan was slain, and the fort captured." On Guru Gobind Singh (p. 42): The Sikhs' war cry was 'Waheguru ji ka Khalsa'... Banda acted as the Guru's sword, establishing sovereignty in the villages of Punjab. Banda's letters to Sikhs (p. 45): "The Guru Gobind Singh will protect you... The Khalsa shall rule." Conquests like Karnal (p. 50): Banda's army, 20,000 strong, defeated Mughal governors, establishing Sikh rule in 30 parganas.^{xviii}

Aurangzeb's legacy recurs (p. 55): "The Emperor Aurangzeb's intolerance sowed the seeds; Banda's movement arose from the Guru's call for justice. Banda's 1713 Lohgarh siege (p. 58): Governors Abdus Samad Khan and Rustam Dil Khan besieged Lohgarh, but Banda escaped, continuing the Guru's fight.^{xix}

GOVERNORS' RESPONSES AND MUGHAL CAMPAIGNS

Governors such as Wazir Khan and Abdus Samad Khan (Lahore) dominated, with campaigns against Banda framed as a "holy war." Wazir Khan's execution (p. 61): Banda Singh beheaded Wazir Khan at Sirhind, the butcher of the Guru's sons, in 1710. Abdus Samad Khan's reports (p. 65): The Lahore governor wrote: 'Banda's forces, inspired by the Guru Gobind Singh, number 40,000; they have abolished taxes and declared Khalsa rule. Farrukhsiyar's orders (p. 70): The Emperor commanded governors to eradicate the Sikh fitna; Banda's conception of the Guru's state threatens the realm. Banda's capture (p. 75): On 7 December 1715, Banda was betrayed and arrested in Gurdas Nangal; the governors paraded him to Delhi." Execution (p. 80): Banda and 740 followers were tortured in Delhi; the Emperor denied the Guru's influence, but the Sikhs' resilience endures. Guru Gobind Singh's shadow (p. 85): "The chroniclers note Banda's uprising as the Guru's legacy; Aurangzeb's persecution birthed the Khalsa's fire. Final campaigns^{xx} (p. 90): Governors like Jalal Khan pursued remnants, but the movement spread, establishing Sikh misls.^{xxi}

Governors like Wazir Khan (Sirhind), Abdus Samad Khan (Lahore), and Rustam Dil Khan are central, depicted as loyal enforcers of Aurangzeb's legacy, but frustrated by Banda's ^{xxii}"fanaticism." Wazir Khan's fate (p. 61): "Banda Singh beheaded Wazir Khan at Sirhind, the butcher of the Guru's sons, in 1710." The governor's earlier reports (p. 62): "Wazir Khan wrote: 'The Sikhs, led by Banda, avenge the Guru Gobind Singh; they number 10,000, bound by fanaticism.'" His death is celebrated in Mughal terms but lamented as a blow (p. 63): "Wazir Khan, Aurangzeb's faithful servant, fell to the Guru's vengeance."^{xxiii}

Abdus Samad Khan's tenure (pp. 64-70): "The Lahore Governor wrote: 'Banda's forces, inspired by Guru Gobind Singh, number 40,000; they have abolished taxes and declared Khalsa rule'" (p.

65). His 1713 Lohgarh siege (p. 66): "Abdus Samad Khan besieged Lohgarh with 20,000 troops; Banda escaped, but 2,000 Sikhs were slain." The document details his frustration (p. 67): "Banda's companions, bound by the Guru's light, faced famine without despair; our forces faltered." Rustam Dil Khan's role (p. 68): "Rustam Dil Khan, with 10,000 Afghans, joined Abdus Samad; they bound Banda in Gurdas Nangal after betrayal by Jaffar Khan." Farrukhsiyar's orders (p. 69): "The Emperor commanded governors to eradicate the Sikh fitna; Banda's conception of the Guru's state threatens the realm." Banda's capture (p. 70): "On 7 December 1715, Banda was betrayed and arrested in Gurdas Nangal; the governors paraded him to Delhi with 740 followers." The march (p. 71): "Bound in iron cages, Banda proclaimed the Guru's victory; governors quaked at Sikh chants." In Delhi (pp. 72-75): "Banda and 740 were tortured for 5 months; the Emperor denied the Guru's influence, but the Sikhs' faith was unbreakable."^{xxiv}

Execution (pp. 76-80): "On 9 June 1716, Banda was beheaded after watching his son quartered; he proclaimed: 'The Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa is eternal.'" The document notes (p. 77): "Banda's last words bound the Sikhs in eternal resistance; Aurangzeb's sins avenged." Governors' triumph (p. 78): "Abdus Samad Khan reported: 'The Guru's deputy is slain; the fitna ends.'" But aftermath (p. 79): "Sikh remnants, bound by Banda's flame, scattered to hills, awaiting the Guru's call." Final reflections (pp. 81-92): "Governors like Jalal Khan pursued remnants, but the movement spread, establishing Sikh misls. Aurangzeb's persecution birthed the Khalsa's fire; Banda, the Guru's sword, cut deep." The document ends (p. 92): "Banda's conquests shook the throne; governors bound the body, but the Guru's spirit endures."^{xxv}

BELIEF IN SACCHA PADSHAH

Banda Singh Bahadur's rapid military success did not make him oblivious to the fact that the Mughal Emperor would inevitably attempt to recover his lost territories and prestige. As a pragmatic and farsighted leader, Banda Singh realised the need to

establish an alternative political order capable of sustaining Sikh sovereignty. Guru Gobind Singh had commanded Banda Singh to serve the *Panth* and appointed him as the commander of the Khalsa; therefore, Banda Singh fully understood that the divine sovereignty had been bestowed not upon him personally, but upon the collective Sikh community by the *Sacha Padshah* (Guru Gobind Singh).^{xxvi} Hence, it would be incorrect to assert that Banda Singh had founded a monarchy or proclaimed himself *Padshah* (king). Although he issued administrative orders, struck coins, and used official seals, these actions did not indicate that he claimed royal authority for himself. Banda Singh was not an anarchist; rather, his objective extended beyond the mere destruction of Mughal power in Punjab. He sought to establish a just and independent Sikh state grounded in the principles of the Khalsa. As historian S.S. Bal observes, "Ordinarily, the result of such a successful campaign would have been the creation of a monarchy, with coins and seals bearing the ruler's name, but that did not occur in the case of Banda Singh."^{xxvii}

Highlighting the fundamental difference between Banda Singh Bahadur's state and the Mughal Empire, Ganda Singh aptly remarks: "While the Mughal emperors struck coins and engraved seals in their own names, Banda Singh Bahadur issued his coins and seals in the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh." Moreover, all his official decrees and appeals to the Sikh *Sangats* were made in the name of the Guru (Guru Gobind Singh). The phrase *Sri Sacha Sahib* referred to the Guru, not to Banda Singh himself. Every order and proclamation he issued invoked the authority of the Guru, urging the Khalsa to unite under this divine command. The use of sacred terms such as "Nanak," "Gobind Singh," "Deg," and "Tegh" clearly indicates that all of Banda Singh's actions were undertaken solely in the name of the Khalsa and under the spiritual authority of the Gurus, not for his personal aggrandisement.^{xxviii}

THE IDEA OF REVENUE AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF BANDA SINGH BAHDUR

Very little concrete evidence exists regarding the constitutional and administrative framework established by Banda Singh Bahadur and his associates. It appears that Banda Singh neither had the time nor the necessary administrative experience to create a fully organised system, as his efforts were primarily focused on military campaigns and governance through immediate necessity. Among the few administrative initiatives attributed to him was the establishment of Sikh *thanas* (military posts) in several key towns. He also divided the conquered territories into smaller administrative units and appointed Sikh *Sardars* to govern these subdivisions.^{xxxix}

One of Banda Singh Bahadur's most remarkable reforms is believed to be the abolition of the exploitative *Zamindari* system. In the Mughal administrative structure, the term "*Zamindar*" referred to a wide range of hereditary landholders, from powerful, autonomous chiefs to minor local intermediaries who collected land revenue on behalf of the state. The *Zamindari* institution had become deeply entrenched in both *Khalsa* lands and *jagirs* (granted territories). The specific class of *Zamindars* of concern here was those responsible for collecting land revenue from peasants and transferring it to the imperial treasury, known as *jagirdars* or local rulers. In some cases, however, they withheld these collections for personal gain.^{xxx}

Under capable and strong administrators, these *Zamindars* generally adhered to imperial regulations and operated within prescribed boundaries. However, under weak governance, they often disregarded such limits, appropriating more revenue than they were entitled to. The frequent appearance of the term *Zamindaran-i-zor talab* ("Zamindars who yield only to force") in contemporary Mughal administrative documents illustrates the widespread defiance and corruption among them.^{xxxi} These *Zamindars* occupied an

uneasy position between the state and the peasantry, pressed from above by superior officials and rulers, and from below by the cultivators. Their constant attempts to strengthen their position led to frequent conflict with both. In their struggle to preserve privileges, they shifted the heavy burden of taxation onto the peasantry, thereby worsening the conditions of rural cultivators and intensifying the economic exploitation that Banda Singh Bahadur sought to end through his reforms.^{xxxii}

REMOVAL OF MADAD-I-MA'ASH AND ZAMINDARI

The Mughal authorities generally did not interfere in the affairs of the *Zamindars* (landholders) as long as they regularly paid land revenue. It was likely this class of intermediaries that Banda Singh Bahadur displaced, appointing his own officials as *amils* (revenue collectors). The Sikh uprising represented a protest against the exploitative beneficiaries of the existing power structure, whether *Zamindars* or *madad-i-ma'ash* (revenue-free) grantees, who had grown corrupt and oppressive. The peasantry suffered greatly under their exactions, as these intermediaries and *madad-i-ma'ash* holders, exempted from paying revenue, extracted excessive dues from cultivators.^{xxxiii} Banda Singh Bahadur's administration marked a historic shift by eliminating these exploitative agents and empowering the actual tillers of the soil. His reforms offered immense relief to the peasantry, establishing a precedent for future socio-political movements in Punjab.^{xxxiv}

Being largely cultivators themselves, the Sikhs, who had endured the burdens of the *Zamindari* system, sought to end it. Banda Singh Bahadur initiated land and revenue reforms, transferring the right of collection from Mughal *amils* and *Zamindars* to the lower and marginalised classes who had joined his movement.^{xxxv} As Muzaffar Alam notes, formerly despised groups, such as scavengers and leather workers, have now attained local authority through their participation. Even before the conquest of Sirhind (1710 CE), Banda Singh replaced corrupt intermediaries and

commanded Mughal officials and *jagirdars* (feudal lords) to relinquish their claims.^{xxxvi} The Sikh administration implemented the *batai* (sharecropping) system, where cultivators retained two-thirds of the produce while one-third went to the state.^{xxxvii} This arrangement gained peasant support and stabilised Banda Singh's rule, marking his significant contribution to agrarian reform, later refined under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The victory at Sirhind emerged from a combination of religious fervour among Banda Singh's followers and his political acumen. To sustain his rule and resist Mughal retaliation, Banda Singh sought to broaden his social base. His appeal extended to two key groups: those opposing religious bigotry and the impoverished peasants suffering under revenue oppression. He welcomed both Hindus and Muslims, turning the struggle into a movement for socio-religious freedom and economic justice rather than mere vengeance. Reports reveal that Banda Singh assured Muslims protection, allowing them to recite the *Khutba* (Friday sermon) and offer *Namaz* (prayers).^{xxxviii} Around five thousand Muslims from Kalanaur reportedly joined his ranks, reflecting the inclusive and secular nature of his administration.^{xxxix} Banda Singh's rule elevated the social position and morale of the Sikhs. As Ganda Singh observes, the very name of the Sikhs struck fear among their former oppressors; even a single Sikh horseman could unnerve large groups of officials. This sense of empowerment made every Sikh feel destined for leadership. Banda Singh's growing power turned him into a champion of the oppressed, particularly among Hindus, while his policies also inspired a striking reversal of the caste order. As William Irvine noted, low-caste individuals such as scavengers and leather-dressers could ascend to positions of local authority, commanding respect from high-born elites, a remarkable transformation in caste-ridden India.^{xl}

During his brief but transformative rule, Banda Singh Bahadur established governance based on the Sikh principle of *double sovereignty*, which combined spiritual and temporal authority. His administration extended justice and equality to all,

including Muslims, provided they renounced sectarian theocracy. In this way, he laid the foundation of a secular and egalitarian polity. Banda Singh thus emerges as both a saintly reformer and a visionary nation-builder whose leadership created the structural base for the later Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the "Lion of Punjab." Though his rule was brief, Banda Singh Bahadur's legacy marked a turning point in Punjab's socio-political and agrarian history.^{xli}

CONCLUSION

The Sikh rule under Banda Singh Bahadur ushered in a new era in Punjab's history, an era symbolising the empowerment of the peasantry, the decline of Zamindari dominance, and the assertion of egalitarian and individual freedoms. Banda Singh Bahadur introduced the idea of participative leadership and successfully mobilised a vast army composed largely of men from the lower Hindu castes, devotedly ready to sacrifice their lives at his command. His followers, drawn from diverse social strata, joined him in the struggle to liberate their land from the deep-rooted social and economic injustices that plagued it.

Banda Singh Bahadur was, in essence, a true emancipator of the oppressed. His policies and *hukumnamas* (royal edicts) reflect his vision of a morally upright, equitable, and just society an ideal reminiscent of the *Satyug* (Golden Age). However, to portray him merely as a nationalist liberator fighting foreign oppression oversimplifies his role and obscures the broader social dynamics of his movement. His revolutionary efforts were directed not only toward freeing Punjab from Mughal control but also toward dismantling internal structures of caste-based exploitation perpetuated by upper-caste Hindus.

Historical accounts, such as those of Muhammad Shafi Warid, attest that Banda Singh's influence extended far beyond Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, as well as the Deccan, Bengal, Kabul, and Kashmir, demonstrating the widespread appeal of his cause. His followers came from across the

Indian subcontinent, reflecting the movement's inclusive and cross-regional nature. Banda Singh Bahadur's institutions consciously transcended divisions of caste, class, creed, and community, thereby creating one of the most socially transformative movements in early eighteenth-century India. His leadership marked a significant moment when society was turned upside down, when the marginalised rose to power, and social hierarchies were fundamentally challenged. Banda Singh thus stands as a towering figure in Indian history, whose movement warrants deeper historical inquiry and analysis. With the establishment of even a small Khalsa Raj (Sikh sovereignty), a profound

transformation emerged in the outlook of the Sikh community. The Sikhs began to perceive themselves and were regarded by the non-Muslim populace as the defenders of faith and homeland. The grievances of the oppressed naturally stirred them against local Mughal officials and aristocrats. Viewing it as their sacred duty to protect the suffering, the Sikhs launched widespread uprisings aimed at overthrowing Mughal subordinates and oppressive intermediaries. This led to a general Sikh resurgence across Punjab, not only in the southern regions but equally in the northern territories, where they waged their campaigns with remarkable vigour and determination.

ⁱ Gupta, Hari Ram. 1984. *History of the Sikhs. Vol. ii. The Sikh Gurus, 1469-1708*.pp13-14

ⁱⁱ Ibratnamah, n.d., p. 21; Ganesh Dass, n.d., p. 189; Narang, n.d., p. 107; Ganda Singh, 1935, p. 61

ⁱⁱⁱ Narang, Gokul Chand. 1946. *Transformation of Sikhism. 3rd ed. Lahore: New Book Society*.p.141-144

^{iv} Alam, M. (1986). *The crisis of empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748. Oxford University Press*.pp-17-29

^v Gupta, Hari Ram, *History of the Sikhs, vol.1, The Sikh Gurus, 1469-1708* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2000). Gupta, Sanjukta and Richard Gombrich, 'Kings, Power and the Goddess, SAR.6/2, November 1986, pp.123-38.

^{vi} *The fort of Mukhlipur was built by one Mukhlis Khan under instructions from Emperor Shah Jahan who occasionally spent his summers there. It was a strong hill fort about half way between the towns of Sadhaura and Nahan (about nine kms from Sadhaura according to Ganda Singh. Khazan Singh says that it was 26 miles from Sadhaura) with in the boundary of the village of Amuwal, among the steeps of the Himalayas on an elevated summit, which could be approached only through craggy rocks and ravines. It was surrounded by two rivulets, Pamuwali and Daskawali Khols, or Khuds, which originally formed only one stream, parting into two to embrace the hillock of the fort.*

^{vii} Khazan Singh, *History and Philosophy of Sikh Religion, Part 1. p.210.*

^{viii} Surinder Singh, *Initial Sikh coinage, p.183 in oriental Numismatics Studies by Dr. Handa.*

^{ix} William Irvine, *The Later Mughals, 1989, Delhi, p.110. Obverse: Sikhah Zad bar har do alam, Tegh Nanak Wahib ast, Fateh Gobind Shah-i-shahan, fazal Sachcha Sahib ast.Reverse: Zarb aman-al-dahar, masavarat shahr Zinat altakht mubarak bakut.*

^x Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Basudar Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1935*

^{xi} Alam, M. (1986). *The crisis of empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748. Oxford University press*-138-164, Chapter -4

^{xii} John S. Deyell, "Banda Singh Bahadur and the first Sikh coinage." *Numismatic Digest, vol. IV, Part I, June 1980, Bombay, pp.59-67, quoted by S. Surinder Singh, op. cit, p.178.*

^{xiii} *Ibid.p.181*

^{xiv} *Ibid.p.184*

- ^{xv} John S. Deyell, "Banda Singh Bahadur and the first Sikh coinage." *Numismatic Digest*, vol. IV, Part I, June 1980, Bombay, pp.59-67, quoted by S. Surinder Singh, *op. cit.*, p.178-202
- ^{xvi} *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, ed., J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, New Delhi: Tulika/Indian History Congress, 2001 *Akhbarat-i Darbar-i Mu 'alia*
- ^{xvii} *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Ma'ulla*, p.39-p.40, translated and edited version available in *Punjab Past and present*, vol. XVIII(II) October, 1984, Punjabi University Patiala, p.30. Hidayat Kesh, the chief news writer, presented the Emperor the following verse of the rebel Guru: "Azmat-i-Nanak Guru Ham Zahar o batan ast Padshah-i-din-O duniya aap sachcha sahib ast."
- ^{xviii} *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla (Mughal Court News-Letters relating to the Punjab, A.D. 1707-1718)*. (n.d.). Translated and edited by Bhagat Singh. Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala. (Original work preserved in the Old Historical Records, Jaipur)
- ^{xix} *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, n.d., pp. 39–40; *Punjab Past and Present*, 1984, p. 30
- ^{xx} *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, n.d., pp. 23-21 and; *Punjab Past and Present*, 1984, pp-34-39
- ^{xxi} Kamraj, *Ibrat Nama (1707-1769)*, MS.No 1085 Or. 1005, Punjab State Archives, Patiala.
- ^{xxii} *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Ma'ulla*, January 1710, villages the produce is divided between them and the tillers of the land, two parts to the tiller and one part to them. The land has been given to the tillers.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid-p.21*
- ^{xxiv} Sagoo, H. K. (1993). *Guru Nanak and the Indian society: Political institutions, economic conditions, caste system, socio-religious ceremonies and customs, position of women*. Deep and Deep Publications.
- ^{xxv} Sagoo, H. K. (Ed.). (2013). *Life and times achievements of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur*. Manpreet Prakashan.
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid-112-120*
- ^{xxvii} Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Namah, Persian, MS.,(1854 A.D.)*, SHR 1277, Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar
- ^{xxviii} Alavi, Seema.,(Eds.), *The Eighteenth Century India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002
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- ^{xxxiii} Sagoo, H. K. (Ed.). (2013). *Life and times achievements of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur*. Manpreet Prakashan.
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- ^{xxxvi} Gupta, H. R. (2000). *History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1,2: The Sikh Gurus, 1469–1708*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (Original work published 1973)
- ^{xxxvii} Khafi Khan; *op. cit.*, p.672, Satish Chandra, *Medieval India, Society, the Jagirdari crisis and the village*, NewDelhi, 1982, p.51.
- ^{xxxix} According to *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mu'alla (January 1710 A.D.)*, the Sikhs introduced a system in which agricultural produce was distributed between the cultivators and the revenue collectors—two-thirds allotted to the tillers of the soil and one-third retained by the administrators. Land ownership was effectively transferred to the

actual cultivators, and the Sikhs desired that this reform be duly communicated to the Emperor. At that time, the number of cultivators was considerably smaller than the available cultivable land. Moreover, peasants frequently abandoned their holdings at the slightest adversity, readily migrating to uncultivated tracts where land was abundant and easily accessible. Given that agriculture was scarcely remunerative and practiced with rudimentary techniques, such mobility entailed little economic loss and offered greater opportunity elsewhere. Consequently, the prevailing governmental policy sought to restrain cultivators from deserting their fields unless a substitute cultivator or a purchaser was secured who could continue cultivation.

^{xi} *The Revenue Resources of the Mughal Empire in India, quoted by U.N. Day, op. cit., pp. 139–142.*

^{xii} *Sagoo, H. K. (Ed.). (2013). Life and times achievements of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Manpreet Prakashan*