



---

## Revising the Remarkable Tale of Courage and Social Justice Mughal Resistance under Banda Singh Bahadur

**Shalu Rani**

Assistant Professor, Department of History, GCG Kairu Bhiwani, India, shalujangra91@gmail.com

---

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19492681>

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 20-03-2026

**Published:** 10-04-2026

---

**Keywords:**

*Mughal Empire, Sikh, Khalsa, Zamindari, Chappar-Chiri, Lohgarh, Justice.*

---

### ABSTRACT

Present paper deals with the struggle and achievements of Banda Singh Bahadur. It discusses how Banda Singh Bahadur presented a strong resistance against the cruelty, exploitation and injustice of Mughals. Firstly, it discusses about his early life and how he became the part of Guru Govind Singh's mission to end the tyranny of brutal Mughal regime. Then it talks about his conflict with Mughals and how Banda Singh Bahadur established the Khalsa rule in 1710. It could be termed as the notable event of Indian History which had shackled the foundation of Mughal Empire. Furthermore, this paper attempts to analyze the nature of his rule. In which equality, social justice, end of exploitation and sectarian harmony were the main characteristics of this rule. Such liberal environment attracted a number of Muslims who felt themselves safe under this rule and also joined his army. The tale of Banda Singh's courage and prowess, spread all over India which also led to composition of literature on his heroic deeds. In which, Rabindranath Tagore composed a famous poem on Banda Singh Bahadur. Present study also tries to analyze that Banda Singh's struggle could be seen in the terms of nationalism also. Banda Singh was the first person to place before the Sikhs practical demonstration of resolute nationalism, and taught them to sacrifice themselves smilingly at the altar of the Khalsa.

---

**Introduction:** Banda Singh Bahadur was one of the prominent personalities in Indian history. He contributed significantly in establishing social justice for Sikhas against the Mughals. In Punjab region,



Mughal rule was a symbol of social injustice. Authorities under Mughals were highly exploitative. They could violate the chastity of any woman. Slaughtering of Cows was prevalent and non-Muslims were not permitted to perform their religious rites and rituals. Peasants were exploited by zamindars. Non-Muslims had to pay more taxes than to Muslim. There was no way to justice.<sup>i</sup> Banda helped these people to get free from Mughal tyranny. He called upon the people to resist against the Mughals. He told them that they should atone for the injustice done to them by the Mughals. He taught them the lesson of independence.

At the sametime, he bravely fought against the oppressive rule of the Mughals and was succeeded to capturing the region of Sadhaura and Sirhind. He established the Khalsa rule in 1710 and conducted the political activities from the fort of Lohgarh. He established a rule where there was equality, freedom, harmony and an end to exploitation. He made the peasants to own their lands, and abolished the feudal system. It had oppressed the poor and middle class for generations. He was such a courageous and rightful person that his contemporary chroniclers as well as later historians have praised him a lot. Khafi Khan<sup>ii</sup> is all praise for his courage and valour. Against the idea of Muhammadan writers, Thornton<sup>iii</sup> says that he was not aggressive at all. Rather when we consider the circumstances under which he took up the sword, we find him not ineptly savage but an enemy of the cruel, sent to punish crimes.

Rabindranath Tagore greatly praised him a lot for his courage and prowess. He wrote a famous poem named “*Bandi Bir*” on Banda Singh Bahadur and his brave Sikh fighters.<sup>iv</sup> He sang poem describing his capture by the Mughals, addressing him like a ‘*lion in shackles*.’ Next to the Guru, Banda Singh was the first person who demonstrated to the Sikhas the practical form of staunch nationalism, and taught them to sacrifice themselves smilingly at the altar of the Khalsa. He was the first man to give a severe blow to the intolerant rule of the Mughals in the Punjab region and to break the first chain of conquests by the Sikh over the province. In order to get freedom from that tyrannical Mughal rule, he did seek help from other neighboring states too. Rajasthani records prove that Banda Singh wrote letters to Rajput Maharajas to join his war against the Mughal Empire. He wrote a letter to Mirza Raja Sawai Jai Singh in September 1711, but did not receive any moral or physical support.<sup>v</sup> Rajput chiefs decided to continue with their fiefdom.

**Life of Banda Singh Bahadur:** Before dealing with the struggle and achievements of Banda Singh Bahadur against the Mughal Empire, it would be appropriate to discuss his early-life. Banda Singh was born on 16th October, 1670, in the small village of Rajauri in the Poonch district of Kashmir region. Historians believe that he belonged to Dogra Rajput family.<sup>vi</sup> He was named as Lachman Dev in his



childhood. His father Ram Dev was an ordinary farmer. Lachman Dev had started assisting his father in farming. Apart from this, he used to go to forests for hunting. Once he shot at a pregnant deer. The deer fell down struggling. He went to her and saw the deer and her two young ones dying. This terrible scene proved to be a turning point of his life and he decided to give up hunting. After this event, he started leading a disappointed and depressed life. Now, he had no interest left in worldly affairs. One day, a group of Bairagi Sadhus came to Rajauri and stayed there. Lachman Dev met this group of Sadhus. He was very impressed by teachings of Janaki Prashad, a sadhu of this group. He decided to leave his home and joined this Bairagi group. As per the customs of the Bairagis, Janaki Prashad gave him a new name Madho Das.<sup>vii</sup> Madho Das roamed to various places with the group of Bairagi Sadhus. During these wanderings he met a yogi named Aughadnath who taught him Yoga and exorcism. Then he shifted to Nander, where he built a small ashram and started staying there. Madho Das's asrama soon developed into a big Dera. Soon, Madho das became very famous for his tantric practices. People used to come to him for his blessed sight, the treatment of their ailments through tantra and for the fulfillment of their desires.

**Meeting with Guru Gobind Singh:** Meeting with Guru Gobind Singh brought an enormous change in his life. The Mughal rulers and their army were plundering Hindus and converting them to Islam forcibly during that time. Guru Gobind Singh, had waged a relentless war against the dictatorship of the Mughal rulers. Guru Gobind Singh had come to Deccan with Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah and reached at Nander in 1707. One day Guru along with his Sikhs reached at the monastery of Madho Das Bairagi. Madho Das tried his magical art on Guru Gobind Singh but failed to subdue. Finally, he surrendered himself to Guru Gobind Singh and became his Banda or slave.<sup>viii</sup> He was given the new name of Gurbakhash Singh by the Guru. He was called as Banda Singh Bahadur after taking Amritpān in September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1708.<sup>ix</sup> Guru Gobind Singh directed him to go to Punjab to eliminate the oppression by Mughal rulers.

**Banda Singh Bahadur's encounters with Mughals:** According to the guidance and the directions of Guru Govind Singh, Banda Singh moved to Punjab. When he reached in Punjab, Sikhas gathered under his banner. In his early campaigns he occupied Mughal regions and punished the cruel authorities. During those days, dacoity was very common in the villages. Banda Singh took strict action against the bandits and defeated them. Like the fight against the dacoits, Banda Singh called upon the people to fight against the injustice and exploitation of the Mughal rulers. People responded positively to his appeal and supported him. As a result, the number of his followers was drastically increased. Now Banda Singh decided to attack on Samana on 11th November 1709. Some Mughals and Sayyads fought bravely but most of them were put to sword by the Sikh army and some fled away to save their lives. By the evening,



the Sikhs captured the town and the main fort. Banda Singh also captured the regions of Ghuram, Sanaur, Thaska, Thaneswar, Ambala, Shahabad and Mustafabad.

When Banda Singh was going to Sadhaura, a group of local Hindus of the area near Kapuri informed him about the oppressive nature of Kadam-ud-Din, the chief of Kapuri and requested to punish him against his cruelties. Kadam-ud-Din was a cruel person, who hated Hindus.<sup>x</sup> He made a special gang of his soldiers to abduct the beautiful and young Hindu girls for his sexual pleasure. Banda Singh's army immediately completed the preparations and marched against Kapuri. Kadam-ud-Din's army fled away and left him alone. He had shut himself in his palace. Sikhs set fire on palace in which he was burnt to death.<sup>xi</sup> Then Banda Singh proceeded towards Sadhaura.

It was Sadhaura, where first closely contested battle between Banda Singh and Mughals was fought. Banda Singh's next expedition was against Sadhaura which was under the stronghold of the Mughals. The governor of this city, Usman Khan, was a tyrant and notorious ruler. He was against the Hindus and the Sikhs. There would hardly be any Hindu woman whose chastity had not been violated by him. Cows were slaughtered in front of the houses of Hindus. Even Hindus were not allowed to perform their religious ceremonies. He had imposed four times much tax upon Hindus as compared to Muslims. The Sikhs fought bravely and succeeded to capture the region of Sadhaura. Usman Khan was also captured and given death sentence.<sup>xiii</sup> Then Banda proceeded to Mukhlispur, which was easily occupied. Later it was renamed as Lohgarh.

Now, Banda Singh decided to attack on Sirhind. It was the place where Guru Govind Singh and his two sons were brutally murdered. Wazir Khan, the chieftain of Sirhind started a religious war against the Sikhs and received a positive response from large number of Ghazis. The battle took place in the ground of ChapparChiri on 22th May, 1710.<sup>xiii</sup> Banda Singh's army entered in Sirhind on 24th May, 1710. The Muslim inhabitants were put to death and the city was plundered. Wazir Khan was also killed. After the victory, Banda Singh Bahadur established his own rule here.

### **First Khalsa rule in 1710**

Under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur, the Sikhs conquered all the regions of Punjab from Lahore to Delhi within a less than a time period of one year. After conquering Sirhind, Banda Singh established the first Khalsa rule. He neither occupied the throne nor called himself a king. He appointed brave commanders of the Khalsa army to be administrators of various regions. Considering the retribution by the Mughals for the attacks by the Khalsa forces Banda Singh selected his military headquarters to be



deep in the hills of Haryana would dense forest and narrow passages would limit the mobility of Mughal army. He established the capital of Sikh Kingdom at Mukhlispur and named it as Lohgarh.<sup>xiv</sup> The entire treasure of Sirhind, including booties, nazranas and revenue was accumulated at Lohgarh, the safest resort. Now, he became a virtual king and conducted his government from this place. Banda Singh also constructed a famous sign-board of Khalsa rule on the Lahore-Delhi-road near Thanesar. He inscribed following words on the sign-board: 'BadshāhKhabardārKhalse de Rāj de had ithoShuru Hundi hai' which means 'Mughal emperor should be, careful for Khalsa rule begins from here' which was meant to humiliate the emperor.<sup>xv</sup> He issued various coins, symbolizing his sovereignty, on the name of Guru Nanak Dev ji and Guru Gobind Singh ji. He also issued a new calendar for Sikhs to regularize the independence from the Mughal rule. The success of Banda Singh inspired the people to join Sikhism and Khalsa panth. Banda Singh soon became popular as the protector of the Sikh faith and the champion of the downtrodden. He started regular durbars where people came and told him their problems and he spared no pains in redressing their grievances. Therefore, he was successful in winning the sympathy and love of common man.

### **Communal Harmony:**

Banda Singh Bahadur was Harmonious person. He wanted to develop great harmony in his regime. Banda Singh appointed many Muslims to high administrative positions in the Khalsa regime which beckons to his liberal approach. According to contemporary Muslim chroniclers, Banda Singh's liberal attitude caught many Muslims to provide their services for Khalsa rule. Persian chronicles mention "All those Muslims who had joined the administration of Banda Singh, were given daily allowances and wages." He allowed them to read Khutbā and offer prayers. Moreover, he did not follow the popular practice of imposing religious taxes to those communities that practiced different faiths to the rulers." Muslims found themselves very safe in his rule which also incited to join the Khalsa army.

**Justice:** Banda Singh Bahadur ensured that the masses of his regime could get justice. He never allowed anyone to exploit the weak. His justice was prompt and he gave severe punishment to his tyrannical officials. The rank and position of the delinquent never influenced his spirit of justice. Even, his ways of dealing with criminal cases made him a terror to the tribe of petty functionaries.

**Welfare:** In his zeal for emancipation of the exploited and downtrodden, he earned the blessings of the poor and the needy whose cries had not been heard by anyone for centuries. He tried to develop all the classes of his region. He raised the lowest of the low to the highest positions under his government. The untouchables, unapproachable like sweepers and pariahs, were elevated to the position of rulers. Irvine



says that either a low scavenger or leather-dresser, the lowest in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join Guru. In a short time, he would return to his birthplace as its ruler, with his order of appointment. The well-born and rich went out to greet him and escort him. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined hands, waiting his orders. None dared to disobey his order, and men, who had often risked themselves in battle-fields, became so cowed down that they were afraid of even to remonstrate.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Maintaining Moral Standards:** He had a spotless morality and led a very immaculate life. He was true to the path of the Khalsa, which he himself expostulated in his hukamnāmāhs. He directed his men never to attack the honor of women of the conquered enemy.<sup>xvii</sup> He is said to have transgressed the parting injunction of the Guru, but in this he committed no moral or social sin even according to Sikh ideology.

Siyar-ul-Mutakherin<sup>xviii</sup> bears witness in the words: he was a Syc by profession, that is one of those attached to the tenets of Guru Govind Singh and who from their birth, or from the moment of their initiation, never cut or shave their beard. He never used tobacco or the Halal meat. He never indulged in illicit relation with a woman. There was nothing in his life which could be taken as his dissension from the tenets of Sikhism.

**Abolition of Zamindari System:** In matters of Government, he initiated one of the greatest reforms in the country by abolishing the Zamindari system. Zamindari had reduced the agriculturists to the status of slaves.<sup>xix</sup> Contemporary chroniclers give the account of the oppression of the peasantry. As Bhimsena says that, “*there is no limit to the oppression of these men. Of their oppression and cruelty what one may write? For no description may suffice.*”<sup>xx</sup> They knew from their own knowledge that the peasants suffered under this inequitable system, and that the emancipation lay only in its removal. With the establishment of Banda Singh's Raj, the actual cultivators of the soil became the owners of their land. Therefore the oppression resulting from the old system was ended forever from Punjab.<sup>xxi</sup> These Zamindars<sup>xxii</sup>, or Landlords, who in most cases were high Government authorities were practically responsible to no higher authority. The authorities in themselves did not meddle in their internal management as long as they paid their fixed contribution. No matter how, how much or on what basis they decided their exactions from the actual cultivators of land, who were practically reduced to the status of mere slaves. Almost all the Government officials were addicted to corruption, and the whole system of law and order was distorted. The tyranny of these zamindars was an ever-ending and never-redressed grievance. Soon Sikhs decided to strike out this evil from root and branch. The Sikhs deserve the greatest credit for this great reformation by which the actual cultivators of the soil became the proprietors of their



holdings. The Zamindari System, a source of never-ending oppression of the peasantry, was all eradicated from the Land of Punjab. Later, during the time of the Sikh Misals and the reign of Maharajah Ranjit Singh this reform was carried out to its fullest extent.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Surrender and Martyrdom:** To check the rising power of Sikhs, Emperor Farukhsyer issued the order to Abdus Samad Khan, the Governor of Lahore, to take immediate action against Banda Singh Bahadur.<sup>xxiv</sup> All the Faujdars and Jagirdars of Punjab region were directed to join Abdus Samad Khan at Lahore. All Hindu rulers of hilly areas except Kullu, Mandi and Malabar, joined Mughal army under the command of Abdus Samad Khan. The combined Mughal forces reached at Gurdaspur Nangal and attacked the Sikh army and besieged the fortress. Mughal army was much larger than that of Banda Bahadur's army. After a siege of eight months, the Mughal army, was succeeded to seize the fortress and capture Banda Singh and his followers on 7 December, 1715. About three hundred Sikhs were put to death on the spot. Banda Singh was arrested by the Mughals. Arrested Sikh soldiers were also tied with ropes. Banda Singh and his followers were brought to Delhi from Gurdas Nangal. The procession of Sikh prisoners entered at Delhi on 29 February 1716 and passed through the different streets. Sikhs were tortured for next three months. The execution began on 5 March 1716. G. S. Deol<sup>xxv</sup> writes that one hundred of them were taken out of their prison every day and were beheaded. Before execution, everybody was offered pardon, if he accepted Islam but every brave Sikh clearly refused that offer and welcomed death. Messers John Sermon and Edward Stephenson, who were witness of this incident of execution, praised the martyrdom of the Sikhs, in a letter wrote to Robert Hedges, on 10 March 1716. Finally, Banda Singh Bahadur, his son Ajay Singh and his leading comrades were taken out of the Fort of Delhi on 9th June 1716, in a procession. They all were paraded through the street of the old city to the shrine of Khwaja Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki. Banda Singh Bahadur was brought down from the elephant. First of all he was paraded round the tomb of the late Badshah Bahadur Shah. After that, he was asked to accept either Islam or death. But as a true follower and devotee of Guru Gobind Singh, he preferred to death. Siyar-ul-Mutaakhrin<sup>xxvi</sup> gives the description of this martyrdom. He says that, his four and a half years old son, Ajay Singh, was then placed in his lap and he was asked to cut his throat. Banda Singh refused by stating, "I will never kill him even if he is your son." On his refusal, the executioner cut the child to pieces and heart of the child was then thrust into the mouth of Banda Singh. A garland of the child's intestines was put round the neck of Banda Singh but he did not utter even a word with his tongue. Thus, Ajay Singh became the youngest martyr of the world history. Then as per the directions of the Emperor, Banda Singh's flesh was torn off with red-hot rods and the process continued till his death. Finally, he was decapitated and hacked to pieces, limb by limb. Elphinstone writes that during his



tortures, Banda Singh showed unparalleled calmness and died with unshaken constancy. Khafi Khan<sup>xxvii</sup>, an eyewitness of Banda Singh's martyrdom, writes that something was happened on which nobody can believe, except eyewitness. It refers to the brutality of the incident. The rest of the companions of Banda Singh were offered life if they chose to accept Islam but not a single Sikh accepted this offer.

**Conclusions:** On the basis of above study, it can be concluded that Banda Singh was incited by the purest of motives in consecrating himself for the liberation and independence of his people. Khalsa accomplished under his leadership inspired a major revolution eventually leading to downfall of the Mughal Empire. The rise of the Sikh Empire that saw Maharaja Ranjit Singh leading the Sikhs to supremacy in the Punjab by 1799. Banda Singh presented a great resistance against Mughals which shook its foundation. Although Banda Singh Bahadur was defeated by the Mughals in 1716 but they had failed to crush his ideology. Banda Singh Bahadur was a great warrior who fought against the Mughal tyranny. He moved further the campaign launched by the Sikh Gurus. Although, he is known as the first Sikh ruler in the history of the Sikhs but he had a secular image among the Hindu-Sikh community. He tried to build a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity by his struggle against the Mughal Tyranny. He waived off the tax on agriculture land. Banda Singh was the first person who brought out this revolutionary change in cultivation sector in India. His sacrifice for humanity is remarkable in the history. That is why he is respectfully known as Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in Sikh and Hindu Community. Moreover, he was the first person to place before the Sikhs practical demonstration of staunch nationalism, and to teach them to sacrifice themselves. Thus, the Khalsa rule, he established, is one of the examples of a harmonious state where all the religions were given equal positions, and people were free from the exploitation.

#### Notes and References:

---

<sup>i</sup>Ganda Singh, Life of Banda Singh Bahadur, Based on Contemporary and Original Records (Patiala:Publication Bureau Punjabi University, 1999),p.31.

<sup>ii</sup> Many incredible stories and of devotion and unshaken consistency were so wonderful that even those who were eye witness to them who were inclined to dismiss them as incredible says khafi Khan, Quoted in Ganda Singh, Life of Banda Singh Bahadur p.152.

<sup>iii</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>iv</sup>Monish R Chatterji, "The valiant Prisoner Bandi Bir", Arts and Literature, (2018), p.1.



- <sup>v</sup>Balwant Singh Dhillon, *Rajasthani Documents on Banda Singh Bahadur*, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2016), 71-72.
- <sup>vi</sup> K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*, (Delhi: U.C. Kapur and Sons Publications, 1969), p.197.
- <sup>vii</sup> Harbans Kaur Sahu, *Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh sovereignty*, (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2001), p.113.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. p.116.
- <sup>ix</sup> K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*, p.198.
- <sup>x</sup> Harbans Kaur Sahu, *Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh sovereignty*, p.127.
- <sup>xi</sup> Sohan Singh, *Banda the Brave*, Lahore: Narayana Singh Gyani, 1915), p.69.
- <sup>xii</sup> Harbans Kaur Sahu, *Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh sovereignty*, p.127.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Gurwinder Singh, "Life and Achievements of first Sikh Ruler: Baba Banda Singh Bahadur", *IJSDR*, 7, (2022), p.89.
- <sup>xiv</sup> K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*, p.199-200.
- <sup>xv</sup> Apinder Singh, *Banda Singh Bahadur*, (Central Sikh Gurudwara Board, 2016), p.17.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur*, p.162.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid., p.163.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Quoted in Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur*, p.163.
- <sup>xix</sup> Ibid., p.59.
- <sup>xx</sup> Quoted in Rupinder Singh Brar, *A man Called Banda*, 2019, p.66.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur*, p.163
- <sup>xxii</sup> Any person who had been from of old a proprietor of several pargnahs was designated a Zamindar', who employed or turned out the cultivators at his sweet will and pleasure.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur*, p.163
- <sup>xxiv</sup> K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*, p.202.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Deol G.S., *Banda Bahadur*, (Jullundur: New Academic Publishing Company, 1972), 13-15.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Quoted in K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*, p. 206.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Rupinder Singh Brar, *A Man Called Banda*, p. 71.