

# Timeline: Baba Banda Singh Bahadur

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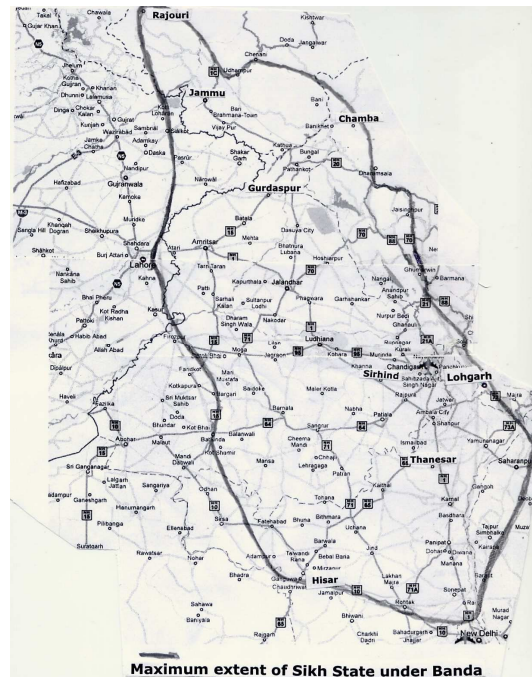


A timeline of the life of Guru Gobind Singh Jee's *banda*, **Baba Banda Singh Bahadur**, is presented hereunder. He was arguably the greatest general the Sikhs have ever had and under his banner a truth seeking underclass of all beliefs (Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and others) fought in the name of 'liberty, fraternity and brotherhood of man' to overthrow the tyrannical Mughal Rule to establish a Sikh State in Northern India in the early years of the

eighteenth Century. However, history (including Sikh history) until very recently has not been kind to his achievements even though they form the precursor to Dal Khalsa and the Sikh Misl, which finally culminated in the establishment of the Sikh Kingdom (Capitol, Lahore) by Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the end of the eighteenth century. He was a rare hero whose memory and spectacular achievements in the name of the Oneness of Nanak-Gobind-Granth-Panth against such heavy odds must be celebrated on historic days not only by the Sikhs but by all Indians. If it was not for him and Shivajee Maratha, the course of history of present day India would have taken a different turn.

**1670 to 1707:** Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was born in 1670 A.D. with the name Lashman Das into a well-to-do Manhas Rajput family of farmers in Poonch, near Rajouri, Kashmir. As a young man he played with firearms and enjoyed hunting until one day he killed a female deer who, to his great devastation, he found to be pregnant with twins. This shook him so much that he renounced the world and became a recluse. He roamed around seeking solace in the company of faqirs and yogis but also learning yoga and magic, eventually settling in Nanded, Maharashtra, in a hut from where he practiced austerities.

**1708:** Guru Gobind Singh Jee visited the hut of Lashman Das to see for himself his magical powers of which He had heard so much. However, when he saw Guru Jee he was so charmed by His fearless presence that he forgot his magical powers and fell on His feet and proclaimed that he was His Banda (slave). Subsequently he was baptised by Guru Jee as Gurbakhsh Singh but he continued to be affectionately known Banda or Banda Bahadur (the Brave). Sikh history remembers him as Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and it also tells us that in September/October, Guru Jee selected him to proceed to the Punjab to punish the enemies of the Khalsa, including those who were responsible for the summary execution of Guru Teg Bahadur, beheading of the two younger sons of Guru Jee and the death of Mata Gujri in the captivity of the Mughal Faujdar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan. Before departure, according to the Sikh chronicles, Guru Jee presented him with five arrows from His quiver and a khanda and instructed him 'not to forget himself on attaining power' and 'to keep chaste and disciplined in war as in peace and not to set himself up above the people, and keep the love of God and Guru always in his mind'. Guru Jee also assured him that 'whenever he was in need or distress, he should assemble five Khalsa and offer prayers along with them and his desires



Maximum extent of Sikh State under Banda

would be fulfilled'. With Banda, Guru Jee dispatched an advisory council of five baptised Sikhs - Baba Vinod Singh, Ram Singh, Baba Kahn Singh, Fateh Singh, Baba Baz Singh - and twenty five soldiers as his bodyguard. Guru Jee also wrote letters to his well- to- do disciples in the Punjab to provide all the assistance they could to Banda for the success of the mission. Soon after bidding Banda farewell to the Punjab, Guru Jee succumbed to an injury received during an assassination attempt on his life by a hired hand of Subedar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan.

**1709:** News of Guru Jee's demise made Banda's blood boil but he knew he had to proceed towards the Punjab with great caution through Maharashtra and Rajastan keeping a low profile so as not to come under the radar of the Mughal Emperor, his army and his administrators. As he passed through Narnaul, Hissar and Tohana, he was joined by many like minded people and when in November he attacked Sonapat and plundered the government treasury, his force numbered about 500 fighters. His popularity as the General of the force was continually building up as he looked after them like his equals and in accordance with the Sikh scriptures, distributed among them food and money he plundered or received from farmers and business people sympathetic to the mission of Guru Jee. His success at Sonapat was repeated at Kaithal and Samana where the victory was more rewarding as, Jalal-ud-din, executioner of Guru Teg Bahadur and the two killers of Guru Jee's young sons were put an end to and the soldiery received a big share of the looted government treasury, even leaving a handsome sum for future warfare. These victories made Subedar of Sirhind extremely worried and he was desperately strengthening his defences and forces. But Banda deliberately ignored Sirhind and attacked Kapuri and then Sadhaura which fell after a hard fought battle with great loss of life on both sides. Meanwhile Sikhs and punjabis of other beliefs who supported Banda's cause from the Punjab side of the River Satluj were trying to join Banda but they were attacked by the Nawab of Malerkotra, a right hand man of Nawab of Sirhind, with a force that was more numerous and in possession of pieces of artillery and large quantities of ammunition. The Sikhs and their supporters with their peasant roots and Guru Jee's energy flowing through their veins fought with swords, arrows and small arms and tore their way through the superior forces to join hands with Banda somewhere between Banur and Kharar.

**1710:** Having been reinforced, Banda lost no time to attack Sirhind. On 12<sup>th</sup> May Wazir Khan marched about ten miles out of the town on to the plains of Chapper-Chiri personally leading his troops numbering over twenty thousand including approximately eight thousand musketeers, six thousand horse together with an elephant corps, several pieces of artillery and trained body of gunners to man them, to stop the advance of Banda and his force of approximately fifteen thousand with insufficient horses and certainly no elephants or artillery but with razor sharp swords. There followed a fierce fight with big losses on both sides. But it was the reckless courage and spirit of sacrifice on the part of the Sikh soldiery which won the day. Wazir Khan was killed by Fateh Singh's sword. The remainder of his army retreated towards Sirhind pursued by the Sikh forces who in two days razed the whole of the infrastructure of the city which supported the Moghal administration to the ground. This was appropriate punishment for Sirhind and its ruler who was the brains behind all the terrible crimes against Guru Jee, His family and His Sikhs. Only mosques, temples and other places of worship together with properties of supporters (which comprised people of all faiths) of Banda were spared. The fall of the city rewarded Banda with lot of money and baggage together with horses, elephants, military stores and equipment. With these resources Banda set about administering the territory that he had won. He appointed Baz Singh (One of Guru Jee's chosen one from Nanded) Governor of Sirhind and its outlying areas, with Ali Singh as his Deputy. Other confidants of his were made administrators of Thanesar and Samana. He then did a deed which was the first in Indian History. Through a proclamation of 27<sup>th</sup> May, he abolished the corrupt system of Zamindars (absentee landlords) and distributed their land to the tillers of the soil, thus creating peasant proprietors which increased his reputation for justice and fair play and solidified his support among the poor of all religions. His next act was to shift his political base from Sirhind to Mukhlispur and rebuild its old fortress and named it Lohgarh. To mark the beginning of the conquest of Sirhind, he struck first of the Sikh coins not in his own name but in the name of his True Guru, Nanak-Gobind Singh. His official seal was dedicated to the glory of the Guru without any reference to himself. Banda had the realisation that he must continue increasing the territory under his rule. Now that he had a better equipped force with greater confidence, he was able to conquer with comparative ease

Saharanpur followed by Jalalabad, Jullundar and Hoshiarpur. Banda's successes inspired Sikhs of Majha to rise in revolt and with a small irregular army of seven to eight thousand overran Batala, Kalanaur and Pathankot and even threatened Lahore. Indeed, now the Sikhs were masters of the whole of the Punjab, east of Lahore. This state of affairs unnerved Emperor Bahadur Shah who in person marched towards the Punjab on June 27 with a huge army of at least sixty thousand strong including some Rajput troops, killing any Sikhs who resisted his advance. Banda with his soldiers, as part of his tactics, evacuated Thanesar and Sirhind and retired into Lohgarh Fort. From the fort, Banda's force attacked with muskets and arrows the Emperor's army encamped at Sadhaura on December 4. The Emperor lost a huge number of soldiers in the fight and thought he was going to lose. But the Sikhs had to retire to their fort for a respite. Meanwhile the Emperor got reinforcements and then decided to lay siege to the fort rather than attack it. Banda became aware of the Emperor's superior army and with all his able bodied soldiers he successfully escaped from the fort in the dark of the night and found a hiding place in the hills of Nahan. When the Emperor overran the fort the following day all he found was a Banda-look-alike and a few dying or dead Sikh soldiers. Although the Emperor captured three cannons and seventeen light pieces and had two million coins dug out of the fort, he went mad with fury that his army had allowed Banda and his soldiers to escape and ordered his general, Hamid Khan to search for him and capture him dead or alive. Banda on the other hand lost no time in writing Hukumnamas to Sikhs all over to join him forthwith in a just war. A large number of Sikhs on getting the call gathered at Kiratpur and helped Banda to march upon the Emperor's side-kicks, Rajas of the hill areas of the Punjab including Bilaspur, Mundi, Kulu and Chamba, who all submitted to him without any fight except for Bilaspur which was attacked and its force destroyed or scattered. Raja of Chamba, as a gesture of his friendship, offered the hand of a girl from the royal family in marriage to Banda, which he accepted with all the modesty of a Sikh. She bore him a son whom he called Ajay Singh. Married life was no impediment to him to continue recovering lost territories. Raipur, Behrampur, Kalanaur and Batala, were overrun very quickly. But now he was being pursued by the imperial forces whose orders were to kill Sikhs wherever they were found. Even the civilians of the Sikh faith were targeted and when caught, they were sold to the Mughal soldiers in the horse market of Lahore. In the circumstances, Banda again retired to familiar territory of the hills of Jammu.

**1712:** Emperor Bahadur Shah died on February 18. His successor was his weakling son who was dethroned by his own nephew, Farukh Siyar. Banda took advantage of this uncertain period in the Mughal rule and came out of hiding to again capture Sadhaura and Logarh. However the Punjab Governor, Abdus Samad and his son, Zakaria Khan, Faujdar of Jammu, were carrying out Emperor's orders to the letter to destroy the Sikh people for once and all.

**1713:** The extermination policy of Zakaria in relation to the Sikhs forced Banda to give up his newly recovered territories, including Lohgarh in October. He with his soldiers forthwith retired to his beloved Jammu hills where he married for the second time, which resulted in the birth of his second son, Ranjit Singh.

**1714:** Early in the year, Banda came out of retirement and with his army fought a pitched battle to take over Kalanaur and Batala. This frightened the Emperor who gave the Lahore Governor, Abdus Samad Khan a real dressing down for allowing the Sikhs to rise again. The Governor, to keep his job, was forced to reinforce his troops with those of some Hindu hill-chiefs like the Rajas of Kangra and Jasrota and pursued the Sikh forces with greater urgency. The Sikhs put up an excellent show but odds were heavily stacked against them. Accordingly, Banda was obliged to retreat to a fort he had recently improvised in the village of Gurdas-Nangal, near the town of Gurdaspur. He had a moat dug around the improvised fort and by diverting the nearby canal he flooded it and the surrounding areas with water. By now his force was encircled by the Emperor's troops. In spite of this, the Sikhs would go across the water in small groups, gather grass for their animals and foodstuff for the besieged warriors and return to the safety of the fort in a hail of bullets and arrows by the surrounding Mughal troops, leaving many of their comrades behind either wounded or dead. Obviously this sort of affairs could not last for long. Soon they were forced to survive on their oxen and horses and other animals and in the absence of firewood, were obliged to eat raw flesh thus causing dysentery and other diseases among them and loss of life. After a time, they stripped bark of

the trees and gathered their small shoots to eat to keep living. It is even said that some of them had to cut flesh from their own thighs and eat it to keep body and soul together. In this way, Banda and his soldiers resisted, according to some historians for nine months, the pressure of all the military might that the mighty Mughal empire could throw at him. Not a single soldier deserted his fort except his advisor, Vinod Singh and some of his followers who wanted to cut through the siege and fight the enemy in the open. Eight thousand soldiers are said to have died due to hunger and disease, thousands had been killed in daily clashes and others were on the verge of collapse.

**1715:** By December 17, the conditions in the fort had got so bad that Banda was forced to throw open, without any resistance or sorrow, the gates of the fort. Many Sikh soldiers were put to the sword there and then. Their heads were stuffed with hay and stuck upon spears and taken out in procession, lead by Banda, dressed in a mock regal dress, seated on an elephant and confined in an iron cage. He was followed by several hundred of his surviving stalwarts, including his wife and three year old son, Ajay Singh riding on saddle-less camels. Even in this condition, it is said that the Mughals dreaded Banda so much that 'a Mughal officer was tied to him to plunge his dagger into his body if he tried to escape'. Thus the vanquished were paraded through the streets of Lahore to large jeers and taunts of the dust and rock throwing crowd. Afterwards, they were taken to Delhi for appearance before the Emperor.

**1716:** In February, the prisoners and the stuffed heads arrived in Delhi. Before entering the city, their faces were blackened and their heads attired with wooden caps to project them as figures of mockery as they proceeded in a procession. Nevertheless the Sikh prisoners showed no signs of dejection or humiliation in their faces and went about in the procession in a happy and cheerful manner, sweetly singing their sacred hymns. After the procession had passed before the Emperor, orders were given for confining Banda, his wife, his son and three of his trusted comrades in the fort. Other Sikh prisoners were put to death in small numbers every day. Before putting them to death, every one of them was promised mercy if he/she would renounce his/her faith in favour of Islam. Not a single son/daughter of Guru Gobind Singh betrayed the religion of their forefathers and accepted death with patience and resolution. On June 19, Banda's turn for death came. He and his 26 companions were paraded through the Delhi streets and then taken to Qutab Minar and made to go around the tomb of Bahadur Shah as if in a homage. His favourite companions, Baj Singh and Ali Singh were executed first, one by one, in his presence. Others then met the same fate. Lastly, he was dragged from his iron cage like an animal, mockingly robed as a prince with a scarlet turban with the heads of his followers paraded on spikes around him. When he refused to convert to Islam, his three year old son, Ajay Singh was put in his lap and when he did not cut his throat as ordered, the executioner cut the child to pieces and 'thrust his quivering young heart into the father's mouth'. Banda stood 'unmoved, like a statue, fully resigned to the Will of God'. His execution that followed is narrated by historical records as the 'most barbaric. His eyes were cut out of their sockets, one by one. His hands and feet were then chopped off. His body was then torn by red-hot pincers and finally his head was executed.' According to all historians, including Muslim and others, Banda bore his tortures like a true brave Sikh he was, with utmost equanimity and poise of the mind and soul. He remained true to his Guru Jee to the last breath of his body.

**After the martyrdom of Banda, Sikhs faced the most savage persecution by the Mughal rulers in their history. They had to struggle for nearly ninety more years before their dream of a sovereign Sikh Kingdom with Lahore its capitol, was realised.**

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