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The Battle of Chapar Chiri The Vedic Prophecies
Lore of Banda Singh Bahadur Ahead of the Times

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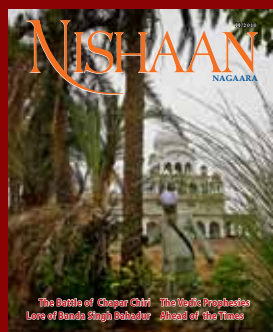


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[Photograph by Malkiat Singh]

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Editorial

A world waiting

Kartarpur' (City of Creator) and 'Begampura' (City without Sorrow) are the Guru's (perfect) vision of purposeful living, as articulated in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scriptural canon. They are described as achievable utopias. In the spiritual domain of these places, the incessant Divine presence for lasting peace is felt by all who visit, such that travellers become not only citizens, but friends. The political state is stable because of steady governance—a system of leadership, which is only possible when no citizen is deemed second or third class, but rather enjoys equal status with no suffering nor fear. The economic arena of this state is excellent and famous for levying no unfair taxes. Consequently, all of the residents are wealthy and content. This is the vision that each Sikh is first to make as an integral part of awareness, and then forge such a connection with these ideals as to realise them as realities for universal good, beyond borders and beliefs.

And all this has already happened, in 1710. The Khalsa Raj, or Republic, was successfully established by Gurbaksh Singh, lovingly remembered by the Sikhs as Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda for he chose to become the Guru's disciple; Singh for he formally gave allegiance to the Guru; and Bahadur for being a fierce warrior of the Guru.

Over the course of a lifetime, a person inevitably changes several times, embracing a newly discovered ideal and then falling over oneself in pursuit of another that speaks more freshly. There is no mistake what Banda was seeking. His was a life defined by two extreme identities by the age of 38, when he met Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in September 1708. Before that fateful meeting, his allegiance had been to Vaishnavite and Shavite traditions. He was a natural fighter and hunter and known as Lachman Dev. He had studied religious texts, spirituality, and Tantra. His journey contained a career as a Rajput warrior but also as an ascetic called Madho Das Bairagi, after he was turned from hunting by the immense pain of killing a doe which carried two dead fawn.

Recently, I volunteered for the Panjab Digital Library working on their exhibition on the Khalsa Raj. One late night I said to my friend, Davinder Pal Singh, "I'm getting old, I'm too tired today, I will work on it tomorrow." Davinder Pal's immediate reply: "You know Banda was 38 when he started his Sikh journey." This gave me great pause, as I thought, "How small minded of me! I have been repeating Guru Amardas Sahib's beautiful rendition every morning: O my body what you have done since you came into this world? And I am still allowing my smaller agendas to weigh me down! I must recreate the entire structure of what I consider to be my purpose!"

By way of this example, and in the light of those deeds and words which continue to define Banda Singh Bahadur, I posit that Sikhs are wasting their energies today on quotidian squabbles over what to eat and what to read. Why are we translating our personal preferences into religious laws?

Perhaps, we are in trouble because our Remembrance and Identification with the Divine (*naam-simran*) is reduced to a mere ritualistic discipline, when the Divine should instead be a source of great inspiration and strength in working toward realising an open and inclusive society! We should all ask ourselves today, this very minute: has the Guru really entered my life? Has the Guru penetrated my being at the level of my deep thoughts and feelings, not merely the routine of my day?

But let us turn back to Banda in exploring these questions. We know that he was already several decades into his journey when the Guru entered his life and he became Guru's Banda (disciple). The inspiration of Banda Singh Bahadur can be understood, as Gurbani (infinite wisdom) reveals "Fortunate is the one who discovers the path." The Guru blessed Banda and proscribed his role: he would establish Sikh sovereignty and uproot tyranny; through bravery in war and careful planning, he would establish the government, which has come to define *Raj Karega Khalsa* (the Khalsa shall rule). Thus Banda, was chosen by Guru Gobind Singh along with a council of five Sikhs for a very clear mission to the Panjab.

Banda understood what a Sikh must do is constant continuation of the Guru's mission, not of his own.

Hence, the proclamation "Coin struck in both the worlds by the guarantee of Guru Nanak's Sword—By the grace of sovereign Master, victory to Guru Gobind Singh, the King of Kings." Banda's ideological sharpness and clarity is amazing: Guru Nanak passed the sword-wisdom to Guru Angad and commenced the Sikh doctrine of double sovereignty, spiritual and political. So, the very question of whether Sikhs ought to be politically active is really moot. We can look in this light at today's discussion on the *kirpan's* (sword) relevance, and see it is being facilitated by either ignorance of Sikhi, or with intent to make Sikhs impotent. Have we understood that the kirpan is to be used gracefully to protect someone's honour as the last resort?

In so many of his accomplishments, the greatest asset Banda had was his faith in the Guru. He attempted an arduous and punishing journey of some 2,500 km., with no training, no weapons, no army—just faith in his Guru. Yet, in 20 months, Banda Singh Bahadur captured Sarhind and established the Khalsa Raj. Reflect on this and then ask: after 26 years, is protest the only venue for what happened in 1984? Should we be content to sit and await a leader with a "background"? Is the Sikh submission becoming merely an act of ceremony, losing sight of the doctrine of Love and Justice which is a call to Action?

With this question, perhaps we can turn to history for inspiration in action when we ask: who was it that fought with Banda to defeat the Mughals? And what did they actually bring to fight such a formidable power?

The majority of them were Sikhs and tillers of the soil. A small number were mercenaries who joined to take advantage of

the situation. (Again, we jump to more contemporary times and see that something very similar happened from 1984-1993.

These soldiers brought to the battle one thousand swords, 217 small swords, 114 daggers, 278 shields, 173 bows, and 180 rifles, in addition to sickles, spading forks, shovels and axes. Yes, these were the weapons that were confiscated in Gurdas Nangal. This means that the most powerful Empire in South Asia at the time was confronted with farming implements and rudimentary arms, whatever was at hand. It was the battle of ideology fought with spirit. Recall the battle of Amritsar in June 1984!

To that effect, there is no excuse for the silent spectator in contemporary battles! You and I need to start participating, for in light of such resilience and improvised strength, how can we cite lack of resources or people as excuses in not pursuing the Sikh agenda?

Where are the Guru's *Bande* today to uphold what is embossed on the seal of the Khalsa Raj: "The cauldron to feed, sword to defend and the resultant victory have been achieved with the unrestrained help received from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh". Are we really working to feed the hungry? Or providing simply more boost to those who are already partaking in excesses? Are we using our resources to give voice to the voiceless, or merely altering our values to align with the established? Let us go beyond the training ground of the Gurdwara to where we learn to invoke the spirit of victory.

In terms of rights and freedoms granted to the people, the Khalsa Raj was far ahead of its time. Banda swept aside 700 years of slavery and the myth of foreign powers. His reforms were truly remarkable; making changes and according freedoms unknown in the western world in the early eighteenth century. Most historians credit Banda with land reformation, for he abolished zamindari and redistributed land equitably among the tillers. His was a land revolution where the old model of revenue was reversed. Formerly structured as one part to the tiller and three parts to the government, Banda created a system that accorded three parts to the tiller and one part to the government. These land rights were meant to be blue-prints for today, but we must ask ourselves what has happened to this system in today's Panjab?

And as a general, Banda showed such honesty and integrity as to be an example today to leaders everywhere. Recall Banda's response to Muhammad Amin Khan, as he took graceful responsibility for excesses and wrongs which were committed during his military campaigns by a few mercenaries and looters. Banda invoked the Divine Law, rather than revenge as the motive for his movement against the Mughals. In fact, in the Khalsa Raj, vengeance had no place: no Dargah (Muslim sacred places) in Sadhaura and Sarhind were demolished. This is true despite the fact that leaders of these same cities were responsible for decisions which resulted in the imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom of several Guru Sahibs and their Sikhs. Religious tolerance and acceptance was the rule of the Banda's day, which sadly seems all too foreign in post-9/11 realities. Consider as a case in point that New York, and several other American cities, are barring the construction of Mosques out of fear of "Muslim extremism."

Banda's journey as a true Sikh clarifies the doctrine of "here and now". For his deeds were that of a mortal, legendary accomplishments not rhetorical or magical. Over seven stormy years (1709-1716), Banda's expedition encompassed from his first

meeting with the Guru, to capturing Sarhind, to the embrace of his own death as a final, poignant act of total submission. Banda's journey is the best model available of how, despite imperfections, by becoming Guru-oriented, one can achieve excellence against formidable powers and incredible odds. Over 700 Sikhs under the leadership of Banda embraced death rather than desertion or disloyalty. This is testimony to his values and charisma.

Although there is much about Banda's legacy to praise, we see that his deeds have not always been canonised positively. Such is the risk of any individual who takes a courageous stand against absolute power. The stories will spin out of control, rumours will grow in the shadow of truth, and the leader risks corporeal and character assassination to the fullest. Sikhs must understand and evaluate their leaders on the basis of Sikh doctrine, not any propaganda war that plays with the public mind, to borrow Noam Chomsky's words. These campaigns to smear the public recollection are not new. They happened to the "General" in early eighteenth century and the "Jarnail" in late twentieth century. Their total devotion to the Guru's mission was reason enough for the state at the time to put its mighty machinery into motion to destroy them.

The *raison d'être* for Sikhs is to fight any religious and political domination. That is what the Ten Nanaks actively pursued, so too the inspired Sikhs of the Guru, including Banda! He prepared the coming generations of Sikhs for future conflicts: Sikhs warring with Afghans, Persians and the Mughal Empire to safeguard South Asians; dark times when murders of Sikhs in the thousands were legally sanctified. Even multiple desecrations of Darbar Sahib did not deter the Sikhs, who drew on the inspiration of Banda to continue challenging the state in highly mobile guerilla bands. Ratan Singh Bhangu captures this attitude quite aptly: "They are not subservient to anyone; they are either purely sovereign or in a state of rebellion." In these acts of great bravery and commitment, political power was captured by courageous Sikhs for the common people, not for any single clan or tribe. Thus, the Guru's pluralistic vision of society was, and shall again be realised by conferring equal political, economic, social and civil rights to the people.

Which brings us back to the tasks of today, in light of the inspiration of this great historical figure—the true tercentennial commemoration of Banda Singh Bahadur's establishment of the Khalsa Raj is possible if the Sikhs actively pursue the following course: firstly, remain focused on the Sikh vision of 'Begampura' by filtering out the noise of divisiveness. Then, adopt zero tolerance for racist and sexist behaviour in all spheres of participation and influence, be it in the home, the school, the gurdwara, or the workplace. Finally, Sikhs must stand up with strength and grace for those under-represented issues and peoples that include, but are not limited to, eradicating poverty, alleviating conflicts—be they driven by ethnicity, religious persecution, or gender discrimination—ensuring human rights, protecting the environment and championing rights and concerns of immigrants everywhere.

Thus, in the final analysis and synthesis, only one question remains: *are you ready to be Guru's Banda?*

Harinder Singh
Co-founder of the Sikh Research
Institute, San Antonio, Texas.

The Battle Of Chapar Chiri,



The Khanda, which vanquished the enemy on the battlefield of Chapar Chiri,

Right from the invasions of Mahmood of Ghazni in the 11th Century to the beginning of the 18th Century, there have been many battles fought throughout Indian history but in all these battles, the people of India were defeated and their culture sought to be destroyed. Till the battle of Chapar Chiri that is, which was fought between the Khalsa and the Mughal forces in May 1710, under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur flying the banner of *Kesari Nishaan Sahib*. The Mughal forces were defeated and for the first time in Indian history, an indigenous Republic established on the 'land of the five rivers'. This is the only battle over the span of seven centuries in which the indigenous population were victorious and therefore, this should be regarded as the first War for Indian Independence.

Chapar Chiri is the local pronunciation of Chhappar Jhiri, which means 'the pond with a cluster of trees' (small forest). The area around Chapar Chiri villages

was a jungle with numerous ponds. Thus this area was known as Chhappar Jhiri in earlier times. Today there are two villages, named Chapar-Chiri Kalan and Chapar-Chiri Khurd, situated close to each other on the Banur-Kharar road near Landran and behind the Swaraj factory. These villages are typical of any small Punjabi village with few pucca houses, devoid of any attributes. But these small villages are located within a historic battlefield, which paved the way for the first Khalsa republic. The historic and strategic mound (sand dune) from where Banda Singh Bahadur himself directed and commanded the Khalsa forces has mindlessly been leveled by builders and colonisers, in the name of the 'State'. Somehow, about one hundred and fifty acres of land remained uncultivated. This was not necessarily owing to non-availability of water but because the local people believe that this is the land where martyrs had shed their blood for the glory of their faith and nation. Perhaps owing to fear of curse of the martyrs,

22 May 1710



as seen today 300 years later.

no one has tried to exploit this land, the battleground remaining a barren area for centuries. The present Government of Punjab is now exploiting the area.

The identification of Chapar Chiri as the historic battleground was first given by William Irvine in his work *The Later Mughals*. He refers to the anonymous fragment of a *Farrukhshiyarnama* which states that the battle was fought near Chapar Chiri villages. These villages, marked on sheet 48 of the Indian Atlas, are about 16 miles (25 km) northeast of Sarhind on the Patiyali Rao and about 10 miles (16km) north by west of Banur.

Although the battle fought in this area was for over the course of only one day, yet in reality, it was a war which had begun with the sack of Samana in the November of 1709. From that victory over Samana upto the victory at Chapar Chiri, there were numerous battles which were fought by the Khalsa

against the Mughals, including the battles of Samana, Ghuram, Shahbad, Kapuri, Sadhura and Banur. All these battles were preparatory to the final assault on, and victory over, Sarhind. Wazir Khan had made no attempt to recover these towns, did not even send any reinforcements to the rulers of these cities. Banda Singh Bahadur's ultimate aim was to defeat Wazir Khan and to take over his province, Sarhind. Kaithal, Samana, Sadhaura, Shahbad and Banur were the major military and administrative locations of the government at Sarhind. These military posts were actually the bulwark of defence for Sarhind, the capital of the province. By defeating and destroying the forces at these posts first, Banda Singh Bahadur wanted to break the backbone of Sarhind and so reduce Wazir Khan. These were the early victories of Banda Singh Bahadur and messages were conveyed to the Sikh masses to prepare for major military expeditions.

Writing about these battles, Gokul Chand Narang, the first modern historian on Banda Singh Bahadur, states that "small as these victories were, they served to encourage the followers of Banda and attracted thousands to his flag by the time he advanced upon Sarhind itself". Giani Gian Singh states that all these victories infused a new spirit in the minds of the Khalsa and "the heavens resounded with their victorious war cries". The contemporary Muslim historian Khafi Khan writes that "in two or three months time, four to five thousand horsemen and seven to eight thousand warlike footmen joined Banda Singh. Day by day their numbers increased and abundant money and material came into their hands. Soon 18-19,000 men-in-arms had assembled under the leadership of Banda Singh, who raised aloft the standard of plunder and persecution". Khafi Khan goes on to say that numerous villages were laid waste and Banda appointed his own police officers and collectors of revenue. As a consequence, Wazir Khan was crippled before the main attack and remained concealing himself in the fort. The Khalsa under the generalship of Banda Singh Bahadur were advancing towards Sarhind like a flood. The battle of Chapar Chiri was culmination of the Khalsa revolution.

The date of the battle is given in the 'Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla' as 22nd May 1710 (24th Rabi-ul-Awwal, 1122 Hizri). This date is also supported by William Irvine, Rattan Singh Bhangu, Sohan Singh, Gurdev Singh Deol and Ganda Singh in the original edition of *Banda Singh Bahadur*. The two armies came face to face in the fields around the villages of Chapar

Chiri, one led by Wazir Khan and the other by Banda Singh Bahadur. The Sikhs came in large numbers from Majha and Doaba after defeating the enemy at Kiratpur and Ropar and joined Banda Singh Bahadur in the fields around the villages. There were great rejoicings in the camp of Banda Singh on the arrival of these Sikhs. The Khalsa Dal anxiously looked forward to this holy crusade against the condemned city of Sarhind and its evil Governor.

On the other side, Wazir Khan had now to ultimately face the Khalsa Dals. He was on the defensive. As the Khalsa Dals began to encircle Sarhind, Wazir Khan came out with his forces to forestall the linking of the two Dals and advanced towards Chapar Chiri to prevent the Khalsa Dals from linking up. But there was rapid movement of the Khalsa Dal directed by Banda Singh Bahadur and they reached the area before Wazir Khan's arrival, with



The location of the sand mound in Chapar Chiri from where Banda Bahadur directed the battle.

Banda Singh Bahadur positioned himself on a high sand mound in middle of the battlefield. On his right, Bhai Baj Singh was commanding the Khalsa forces and on the left was Bhai Fateh Singh. Dharm Singh, Karam Singh, Aali Singh, Maali Singh and Sham Singh were commanding the centre. Though the Khalsa Dals had little armoury and ammunition as compared to the overwhelming Mughal forces, yet they were determined to destroy the enemy. Their willpower and determination were their true strength. They had come to devastate Sarhind and there was no hesitation in the eager ranks of the Khalsa Dals.

his long line of artillery, multiple rows of elephants, mounted gunners, archers, lancers and swordsmen at the front, to the left and the right, flaunting the innumerable columns of well-drilled soldiers. Besides, he had gathered *ghazis* in large numbers, all of whom had solemnly pledged to do or die for Islam. Wazir Khan himself was the general in command, the Nawab of Maler Kotla on his right and Diwan Sucha Nand on the left. Rulers of the Bhatti clan of Boha, Budhladha, Ranian and Raikot were also at the centre. Thus, in strength and resourcefulness, Wazir Khan was on a very strong footing indeed.

Then the Khalsa initiated the battle. At dawn, they attacked the enemy with their inspired exclamations *Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal!* The Mughal artillery opened fire and wrought tremendous havoc among the forward Sikh ranks who sallied forth enmasse towards the enemy and in spite of the very heavy losses they sustained in doing so, entered the heart of the Mughal forces. Then began ferocious hand-to-hand combat in which the Khalsa was unbeatable on the battlefield. In the course of a few hours, there were heaps of the dead and dying. It has been written in *Ahwal-i-Salatin-i-Hind* that "the Sikhs came face to face with the Muhammadans, rapidly discharged their muskets and quickly reduced the battle to a hand-to-hand contest. Commanders of the Muhammadans and some of their men fought bravely, heaps of bodies of the infidels (Sikhs) fell to the ground, piled head upon head and body upon body, and there was noise on all sides of the field of the battle like that of doomsday. However, at last the whole of the Muhammadan army was destroyed".

A contemporary Muslim writer, Muhammad Qasim, who was in the Punjab at that time and who witnessed the battle with his own eyes, records details of the battle of Chapar Chiri in these words, "A great battle occurred twelve *Kurohs* (*Kos*) from Sarhind. The army of Islam, showing exemplary bravery, tasted martyrdom after obtaining repute in the field of valour. Especially was heroism displayed in this battle by Sher Muhammad and Khwaja Ali, Afghans of Kotla Maler, who in this Sarkar were masters of a host and commanded much trust. After severe fighting, they stood firm like the pole star within that very circle and surrendered their lives to the Creator; you may say they attained goodness and good name in that field of valour. When the chiefs of the army, by the will of God, were sent to their deaths, Wazir Khan, despite his old age, weakness of hand and foot, and the decline of strength of the body, strove to shoot arrows and encourage his companions. But once the boat of hope is destroyed by an accident, it cannot thereafter be set to sail by the strength of the arm of any of the professional captains of the world of stratagem. At last, the wicked infidels extended their victorious hand for the plunder of the Mughal army and the seizure of the commander's elephant. Treating the corpse of that martyred *saiyed* (Wazir Khan) with every visible indignity they could devise, they had it suspended from a tree." (see following *Ibratnama*)



The original Jhand tree, 300 years later, at Chapar Chiri.

A Sikh writer of the nineteenth century, Rattan Singh Bhangu, gives another interesting account of the battle, which almost corroborates the contemporary accounts but with the difference of interpretation. He writes that "After getting information about the war camp of Banda Singh's forces, Wazir Khan's forces launched an advance, his army led by formations equipped with heavy and medium guns, and followed



Bhayee Sikandar Singh with S. Harinder Singh of Mohali, visiting the battlefield.

by large contingents of infantry formations. Adopting a calculated military strategy to wage war against the Sikhs, the camel-loaded guns and light handguns provided cover from one flank. Approaching Banda Singh's camp, they opened such a volley of gun fire "as if a hailstorm was let loose on earth from the skies". All the cannons, light guns and long-muzzle guns opened fire together, which formed the total arsenal of Wazir Khan's Mughal army. There was such a chain-firing of bombs from their side that they mutilated and tore through the trunks of big trees. Bullets were fired with such ferocity as lashing rain that one could neither sit, nor stand or lie down on earth. So much din and dust was raised by horse's



The board in the forest of Chapar Chiri today.

hoofs, that there was pitch darkness even during the day time. So many sparks flew out from the firing of canons and guns as if glow-worms were glittering around in the pitch dark night. The whole battle field was engulfed in a thick pall of smoke, as the guns sent out balls of smoke and fire after explosion. Soon enough, the Khalsa Singhs roared and attacked the Mughals as a lion attacks a flock of deer in a dense forest. Those commanders of the Mughal forces who confronted the Khalsa were slaughtered on the battlefield".

At the climax, Banda Singh Bahadur, flanked by Baj Singh and Fateh Singh came in front of Wazir Khan and on seeing him, "he roared like a lion and sprang upon him like a bolt from the blue".

"O sinner, thou are the enemy of Guru Gobind Singh, thou hast shown Him no respect, but on the

'Tazkiratus-Salatin Chaghata'

Details of the battle of Chapar-Chiri as written by Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan in his 'Tazkiratus-Salatin Chaghata':

"A large number of persons belonging to the class of sweepers and tanners, and the community of banjaras and others of base and lowly castes, assembled around him (Banda Singh) and became his disciples. The person (Banda Singh) gave himself the title of *Fath Shah* (Patshah). First, he ravaged the township of Sadhaura and after that he destroyed and burnt a large number of villages and towns and having killed the Muslim inhabitants and their families, he headed towards Sarhind. Wazir Khan had since long been holding the faujdari of that place; he was descended from Wazir Khan Akbar Shahi.

He (Wazir Khan) came out for a distance of 8 Kurohs from Sarhind and a fierce battle and heavy slaughter took place, and his (Wazir Khan's) principal officers were killed. He too was driven by his sense of pride to engage these faithless heretics (Sikhs) and so tasted the drink of martyrdom. His son, relatives and friends and the pirzadas (men of mystic families) of Sarhind, along with their families, fled towards the capital (Delhi). These rebels who were as numerous as ants and locusts, reached Sarhind in a twinkling of the eye, and collected about rupees two crores in cash and goods from the effects of Suchanand, Wazir Khan's *peshkar* (clerk) and other Muslims of this place. They (Sikhs) left no stone unturned in inflicting insult and humiliation and burnt that beautiful town and its good buildings. They strengthened its fort and turned their attention to other towns and villages".

contrary hast put to death His innocent children, and thereby committed grievous and unpardonable crime, the punishment for which I am now going to deal thee. Thine army and thy country shall be destroyed at my hands." Banda Singh Bahadur then struck off Wazir Khan's head with one blow of his sword. Sher Mohamad Khan and Khwaja Ali of Maler Kotla were also killed. Immediately after their fall, confusion arose in the Muhammadan ranks and the Mughal army

turned its back, abandoning the battlefield in favour of the victorious Khalsa who fiercely followed them in retreat. Khafi Khan writes that “not a man of the army of Islam escaped with more than his life and the clothes he stood in. Horsemen and footmen fell under the swords of the infidels (Sikhs), who pursued them as far as Sarhind.” In the words of William Irvine, “The baggage was plundered, the elephants captured and the body of Wazir Khan dishonoured and hung from a tree.” This *jhand* tree remains standing in the grounds of the Guru Nanak Public School adjacent to the fields of battle.

According to Rattan Singh Bhangu, after capturing Wazir Khan, first a sharp wooden peg was thrust in his behind and then his dead body dragged behind oxen upto Sarhind. Alarm spread through the streets of Sarhind, an old and prosperous town inhabited by wealthy bankers and traders and many well born Mohammadans of the learned class. Those who could do so, fled – one of the first being Wazir Khan’s eldest son who, leaving all his father’s treasures behind him, escaped to Delhi with his family. After a feeble defence which lasted just a few hours, Sarhind was taken. Everyone who for want of carts or other conveyance, had been left behind, was taken prisoner. CH Payne writes that “the Sikhs entered Sarhind, which was plundered, massacring many of the inhabitants and wreaking terrible vengeance on the murderers of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh.” According to Mohammad Qasim, “troop after troop of unfeeling sweepers surrounded the city in the manner of a thorn bush enclosing a flower garden and laid their insolent hands on people’s possessions and proceeded to dishonour both the small and the big.”

Next came the turn of Diwan Sucha Nand Khatri, who had incited the Governor Wazir Khan not to have mercy on the innocent Sahibzadas by saying that these young sons of Guru Gobind Singh were “but the young ones of a snake and hence should be done away with before they are capable to strike”.

The Diwan was captured while collecting his wealth and trying to escape with impunity. But he could not elude vigilance of the Khalsa who had come with the explicit object of punishing him and his mentor Wazir Khan. The Khalsa put a ring in his nose and passing a rope through it, led him like a bear from street to street and house to house, begging for mercy.” At every house, he was slapped on the face and his head struck with a shoe. Ultimately, he

succumbed to the extreme pain which this process had caused him. His son was also killed along with other family members. This was done only to show the world that such was befitting punishment of the person who had abetted the butchering of two innocent children even while others had wished for their release. Muhammad Qasim, a contemporary historian writes in his *Ibratnama* about the ill-fate of Diwan Sucha Nand that “they (Sikhs) specially targetted the goods and houses of Sucha Nand, chief clerk (*Peshkar*) of the late Wazir Khan. You may say, he had set up these for this day, so that the flower garden may become the ground for growth of thorn bushes and paradise turn into the nursing ground of



Herdsmen in today's Chapar Chiri.

vile crow...what has been heard from trustworthy persons of that area is that this unjust, noxious, raw man (Sucha Nand) at the time of government of the martyred Wazir Khan had withheld no cruelties from being inflicted upon the poor and had laid every seed of tumult for his own advantage and so he reaped the fruit of it all.”

In the report sent to Emperor Bahadur Shah was that “some people said that Wazir Khan’s son and son-in-law were also killed and some others said that they

were captured alive". Many of Wazir Khan's associates were killed and wounded even as the Sikhs occupied Sarhind. Banda Singh Bahadur collected the *nazrana* of rupees two crores from the wealthy of the city. It was reported in the news given in 'Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla' that "it was ascertained from the bankers that the tehsil of Doaba yielded no taxes. The Sikhs soon realised the state share of the produce and took it to Dabar (Mukhlispur), the place of their camp."

On a particular day, they loaded 300 wagons and none obstructed their way. When the Emperor came

city virtually empty and why would the Khalsa Dal wait for that to happen? Actually, the Khalsa forces reached the city immediately after victory on the battlefield and surrounded the city from all sides. This fact is reported in the statement of a contemporary writer Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan. He writes that "these rebels (Sikhs) who were as numerous as ants and locusts, reached Sarhind in a twinkling of the eye and collected about rupees two crores in cash and goods from the effects of Sucha Nand his (Wazir Khan's) *peshkar* (clerk) and other Muslims of this place. They left no stone unturned in inflicting insult and humiliation and burnt down that beautiful town and its good buildings."

It is quite true that Sarhind was a unique city of those times. Geographically, its location was very strategic. It was situated midway between Delhi and Lahore on the Grand Trunk road. Being a major trade centre for diamonds and other jewels in Asia, it had become a veritable repository of riches during the times of the Mughals although its prominence in history dates back to the time of Firoze Shah Tughlak. Therefore,

during the balmy days of the Mughal Empire, Sarhind had superseded even Lahore and Delhi in growth. The rates of land were higher in Sarhind than these two cities. For centuries, its riches had been growing. Beautiful gardens had been laid out; strong forts, elegant *havelis* and lofty palaces constructed. Emperor Jahangir liked the place so much that he selected the city for his residence. He had air-cooled palaces constructed in the midst of Aam-khas-Bagh, known at that time as Bagh-Ii-Hafzi. All these buildings fell to Banda Singh Bahadur after the battle of Chapar Chiri.

But the city of Sarhind did not tempt or motivate the Sikhs to rule; on the contrary, it reminded them of the tortures and sacrifices of their Guru's young sons. In view of such grief-stricken memory, Banda Singh neither saw the superficial beauty of the gardens nor of the palaces. The idea of making this city his



to know about the destruction of the city and about Wazir Khan, he remarked that Wazir Khan "should not have been involved with the Sikhs if he was not prepared to face them". The Emperor's remarks were expressed by a mansabdar of great splendour and dignity who went to see the Emperor. Through him it was discovered that the Emperor had said that Wazir Khan had died in vain and squandered the state revenue. If he did not find himself in a position to fight against the Guru (Banda Singh), he should "not have engaged in fighting".

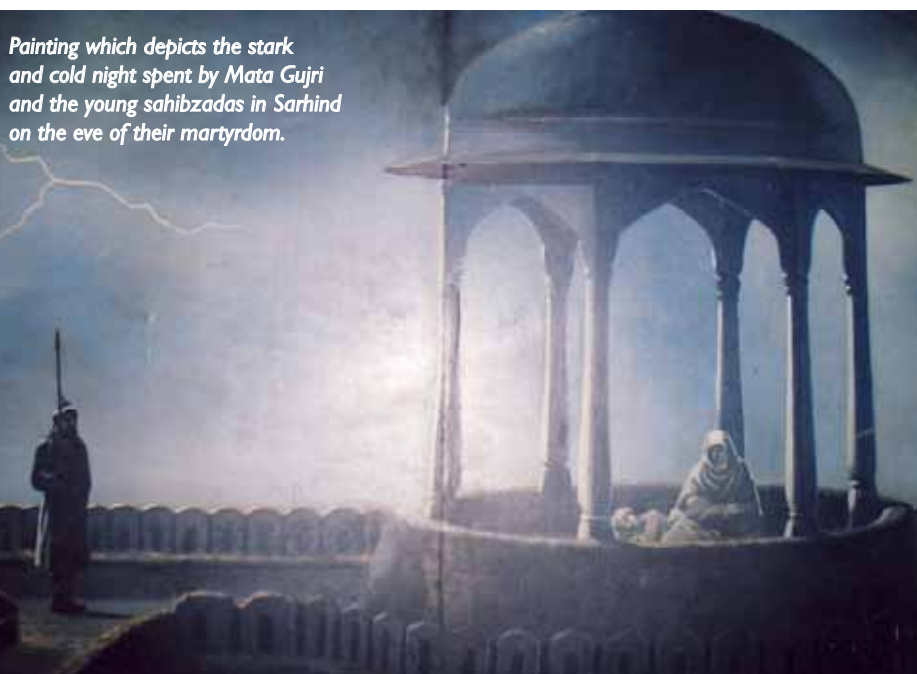
The Khalsa Dal, after achieving the historic victory in the battlefield of Chapar Chiri, immediately moved into the city of Sarhind so that nobody could escape. The version that the Khalsa Dal entered Sarhind only after two days of the victory is unlikely as within these two days everybody could have escaped, leaving the

headquarters was repugnant to the Khalsa. Instead, the Sikhs cut down the gardens, ravaged the forts and destroyed the *havelis* and palaces. The Sikhs' anger was not extinguished even after such devastation. They resolved that they would not leave even a single brick in its place which was the symbol of Mughal establishment. To fulfill this they symbolically took two bricks and struck them against each other. This process continued for a long time even after the victory at Sarhind. Thus literally, whosoever visited Sarhind, would take two bricks in their hands, strike these against each other and throw the same either in the Satluj if he went towards the west, or in the Ghaggar if he went towards the east. The Khalsa also ploughed the ruins of the city with donkeys. To plough with donkeys was, and is till this day, considered the ultimate insult to a place.

SM Latif writes about destruction of the city, although somewhat exaggerated, "he (Banda) commanded it to be fired, and all the inhabitants put to death. While the city was in flames, the followers of this fanatic carried on the work of carnage in the most diabolical spirit. They slaughtered the inhabitants indiscriminately without regard to age or gender. They butchered, bayoneted, strangled, hung, shot down, hacked to pieces and burnt alive every Mohamadan in the place. Nor was this all. The dead too were made to contribute their share towards gratifying the rage of these voracious vampires." This statement, without any doubt, is greatly exaggerated. At Sarhind today remain all the mosques and tombs which are in the same good condition, as they did 300 years ago. "The mausoleum of Ahmad Shah," writes Gokal Chand Narang, "the most magnificent of all such buildings, still stands as it did before the battle and is I think sufficient evidence of the wild exaggerations in Latif's statement." The Punjab State Gazetteer also accepts these views by writing that "the ruins of Sarhind contain the mausoleum of Mujjaddid Alif Sani, which is a fine building to which the

Muhammadans in general and the nobility of Kabul in particular pay visits as a place of pilgrimage."

So, the allegations about the desecration of mosques are totally unfounded and Latif's statement is not to be implicitly taken. It should be noted that whatever the ruler of this city had done with Guru Gobind Singh's innocent sons, the heinous crime could not be forgotten or ever completely avenged. Whatever the Khalsa had done in the city after their victory over its evil ruler was quite in the fitness of things. The destruction of the Mughal establishment was the only



Painting which depicts the stark and cold night spent by Mata Gujri and the young sahibzadas in Sarhind on the eve of their martyrdom.

way to justify any action that might have been taken against the two tyrants, Wazir Khan and Sucha Nand.

Banda Singh Bahadur did not allow Sarhind to enjoy peace, whose ruler had ill-treated his Guru. Had Banda Singh desired, he could have easily used this once beautiful city as a capital and centre of his State. But it appears that he did not want to construct any palaces on the cremation ground of his Guru's sons – such was the strong sentiment of the Khalsa.

Some historians, such as Karm Singh and Ganda Singh, have tried to take away the responsibility of the devastation of the city of Sarhind from Banda Singh Bahadur by providing the excuse that it was done only by brigands who had entered his army with the object of loot and plunder. However, this is a wrong perception. In such manner these



Mosque and Gurdwara at Chapar Chiri.

historians have undermined the leadership of Banda Singh by suggesting that he had such robbers in his army. If Banda Singh was not able to protect the cities conquered by him from such robbers then there could not be any meaning on the utility of law and order established by him in place of the Mughal administration.

Certainly the Sikhs destroyed Sarhind because the need for avenging was smouldering in their minds ever since the two young sons of Guru Gobind Singh were bricked alive and the Guru's mother put to death here by its Governor. The Khalsa had the opportunity to teach a lesson to the rulers of Sarhind. The lesson

it to Baba Aala Singh of Patiala in lieu of a nominal price. Baba Aala Singh also did not establish his headquarters here, rather made Patiala as the capital of his State.

The fact is that Banda Singh Bahadur had complete control over his army and there were no 'brigands' in it. He had a well-disciplined army under his command. This army was so much devoted to the cause that its only objective on the battlefield was destruction of the enemy. The baptised Khalsa was its backbone, an army of saint-soldiers who repeated the name of the Lord on their lips with the intent of war in their hearts. The Army was in fact, comprised of true and loyal Sikhs who once had sat at the feet of Guru Gobind Singh Himself and had been touched by the promethean fire which animated the great Guru. They rallied around Banda Singh Bahadur in a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice as well as carried on the crusade against the enemies of their faith and movement. Instead of looting and plundering, hundreds of them sold off all that they owned, purchased arms and flocked to the new leader with a determination either to win the fight or to attain martyrdom. Banda Singh Bahadur infused such spirit into the hearts of these Khalsa saint-soldiers that even the



Well maintained entrance to the mausoleum of Mujjaddid Alif Sani at Sarhind today.



Sewadar and grandson at Chapar Chiri.

most well-armed and trained soldiers of the Mughal armies could not stand against them. His personal magnetism, his undaunted courage and extraordinary valour was infused into these saint-soldiers, who were close to him. Such a well-knit body of dedicated and devoted soldiers could not be deceived by brigands or opportunists.

Notably, only the government offices, places, forts and havelis of the Turkish nobility and of the Qazis and Ulemas were destroyed or plundered. No other house was touched and no innocent was killed at Sarhind. No mosque was destroyed and certainly no dead body was dug out from graves! The credit goes to the Khalsa forces who saved these monuments. If the brigands were out of control then how could these tombs and mosques survive till today? Banda Singh Bahadur's priority was to protect all religious places of Muslim society. He destroyed only their political establishment. He carried out dignified funeral of those Muslim soldiers who were killed in the war. No Mughal soldier was burnt, rather they were buried with due respect.

This was the first victory of Indians over their foreign masters since Islamic rule had been established in the eleventh century. This victory was achieved under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur in May 1710. There were to be far reaching implications of this victory. Firstly, Mughal rule was destroyed in the province of Sarhind which had then stretched from river Sutluj to the Jamuna and from the Shivalik hills to the deserts of Rajputana. According to Muhammad Qasim "all territory from the Sutlej river which is popularly called Ludhiana river, up to Karnal, passed under the government and control of that infidel (Banda Singh)." In this large area, people's rule was established as the Khalsa Republic. Banda Singh Bahadur was Head of this Republic. Bhai Baj Singh was appointed the Governor of Sarhind with Ram Singh and Aali Singh of Salaudhi as his deputies. Rattan Singh Bhangu in *Panth Parkash* gives very interesting details of the administration of Sarhind which was established



'Raj Karega Khalsa': Gurdwara at Chapar Chiri.

‘Ibratnama’

Mohammad Qasim’s Account Of the Battle Of Chapar Chiri In ‘Ibratnama’

When the news reached His Highness Wazir Khan, Faujdar of Chakla Sarhind, he rode out with the troops he had with him, to punish this evil rebel force. A great battle occurred twelve kurohs from Sarhind. The young men of the army of Islam, showing exemplary bravery, tasted martyrdom after obtaining repute in the field of valour. Especially was heroism displayed in this battle by Sher Muhammad and Khwaja Ali, Afghans of Kotla Maler, who in this sarkar were masters of a host and commanded trust. After much fighting, they stood firm like the Pole Star within that very circle and surrendered their lives to the Creator. When the chiefs of the army, by the will of God, were sent to their death, Wazir Khan, despite his old age, weakness of hand and foot, and the decline of the strength of the body, strove to shoot arrows and encourage his companions. But once the boat of hope is destroyed by an accident, it cannot thereafter be set to sail by the strength of any of the professional captains of the world of stratagem. At last, the wicked Infidels extended their victorious hand for the plunder of the (Mughal) army and (the seizure) of the commander’s elephant. Treating the corpse of that martyred Saiyid (Wazir Khan) with every visible indignity they could devise, they had it suspended from a tree.

With such malevolence, they marched on the city of Sarhind. When the news of this calamity reached the city, all alertness and action deserted the luckless officials and the helpless citizens (*ri’aya*). Wazir Khan’s own eldest son did not bother about (his father’s) treasure and hoard, but, taking the young and old of his household with him, took the road to Shahjahanabad (Delhi). Everyone who within that short time abandoned goods and property and took to exile, with every humiliation and dishonour, at least saved his own life. Anyone who got involved in thoughts of gathering his goods, or searching for mounts for carriages, or (other) various designs, fell prisoners at the cruel hands of those wicked Infidels. Troop after troop of unfeeling sweepers surrounded the city, in the manner of a thorn-bush enclosing

a flower garden and laid their insolent hands on people’s possessions and proceeded to dishonour both the small and the big.

They specially plundered the goods and houses of Suchadanand (Sucha Nand), Chief Clerk (*Peshkar*) of the late Wazir Khan. You may say, he had gathered and set up these for this day, so that the flower-garden may become the ground for the growth of thorn bushes and Paradise turn into the nursing ground of the vile crow! Praise be to God, in the court of the Divine Avenger, a helpless ant can be the cause of the death of the man-killing snake, and an impotent and powerless gnat can bring about the destruction of a bloodthirsty elephant. What has been heard from trustworthy persons of that area is that this unjust, noxious raw man in the time of government of the martyred Wazir Khan had withheld no cruelties from being inflicted on the poor and had laid every seed of tumult for his own advantage; so he reaped the fruit of it all. Otherwise, persons who were guarded by God’s protection, scorned their own large treasures and fled with their honour intact. Some, by changing their clothing, remained concealed in that city and stayed safe from the oppressive hand of that tyrannical crew. The harm that came to persons and places and honour and dignity, without precedent, a feeling of sadness and civility does no permit one to record; it is well known to contemporaries and eyewitnesses. In short, that flood, which overthrew the foundations of the honour of a whole world, left nothing undone in destroying that city and the inhabited places of that neighbourhood. So far as possible, they did not let anyone else retain arms, horses, other goods and chattel of chiefship. They called upon most people to adopt their own disreputable faith; some willingly, and others under compulsion, obeyed. A Jat called Baz Singh, one of the wretches from pargana Haibatpur, belonging to the suba of the Panjab, had the accursed turban-tail of pseudo-chiefship tied on his head to assume the subadari of Sarhind, appoint officers over the parganas, and carry out destructive activities. He waited for the coming of warriors from the void”.

by Banda Singh Bahadur. According to him, "after defeating the Mughals at Chapar Chiri, the Singhs entered Sarhind. Their contingents were led under the command of Sardar Baj Singh who belonged to the Bal sub-caste of the Jat Sikhs and was resident of Mirpur Patti village in Amritsar. He was appointed as the custodian of Sarhind by Banda Singh who handed over all the captured treasure to him. All the four brothers, including Baj Singh, were the "bravest of the brave"; while two of them looked after the civil administration of Sarhind province the other two acted as the personal bodyguards of Banda Singh. They were given charge of the entire province of fifty two *parganas* and instructed to deal with all administrative affairs of the state. Aali Singh of Salaudi was appointed as the deputy custodian and given charge of revenue collections from the province. Bhangu goes on that "the Hindus were given various positions in the administration. The Muslims managed to save their lives by hiding themselves. Sardar Baj Singh used to mount his horse by placing his foot on the head of a Turkish official of the old establishment as a step ladder. He ordered elimination of the Turkish hierarchy from the entire state of fifty two *parganas*. Thus, he got the entire Sarhind Province liberated in a flash which then had a population of thirty-six lakhs".

This version of Bhangu was also corroborated by a contemporary writer. Muhammad Qasim. According to him "a Jat called Baj Singh, one of the wretches from pargana Haibatpur Patti, belonging to the *Suba* of the Punjab, had the accursed turban-tail of pseudo-chiefship tied on his head to assume the Subadari of Sarhind, appoint officers over the parganas, and carry out destructive activities".

After appointing his officers in the state, Banda Singh Bahadur consulted with the intelligentsia to issue Khalsa coins and seals. After due consultation it was decided to issue the coins and seals in the names of the Gurus. The coins and seals issued by Banda Singh Bahadur had the following inscriptions:

*Sikka zad bar Har do alam tegh-i-Nanak vahib ast.
Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-i-Shahan Fazal-i-Sacha Sahibast.*

"With power of the sword, which was provided by Guru Nanak is struck the coin in the two worlds. The victory is of Guru Gobind Singh, who is the King of Kings and a true Lord."

The reverse of the coin had the following words in praise of an ideal state (Amritsar) and the great Akal Takhat:

*Zarb ba amaan dehar musawarat Shehar.
Zinat-al- Takhat-i-chalsa mubarak bakhat.*

"Struck in the city of peace, illustrating the beauty of civic life and the ornament of the blessed throne of the Khalsa."

He also introduced an official seal for his state documents and letters. It contained the following inscription expressive of his deep sense of devotion and loyalty to his Gurus:

*Deg o tegh o fateh o nusrat bedrang.
Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

"By the blessings of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh achieved the victory over the enemy and started ever giving, charity (*langar*) for the poor."

Such was the tradition established by Banda Singh Bahadur and no Sikh ruler after him could ignore it. Every Sikh ruler had to follow the spirit of these inscriptions on the coins struck by Banda Singh. It is easier to follow tradition than establish it. Banda Singh Bahadur was the leader who established these impeccable traditions of Sikh history. He taught the Sikhs that the "true state could be established by the power of their own arms."



*S Jora Singh, the Sarpanch of
Chapar Chiri Khurd, May 2010.*

With such achievements, it is clear that Banda Singh Bahadur was the first leader to place before the Sikhs the manifestation of Khalsa nationalism, to teach them "how to sacrifice themselves willingly at the altar of the nation". "Such revolution" under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur was in no manner a transitory military affair; it was a full-fledged war against Mughal imperialism for emancipation of

their Fatherland from the shackles of oppressive and tyrannical rule. Although the struggle was initially for avenging the tyranny of Wazir Khan, it took little time to make open declaration of its intent to replace the Mughals as sovereign power in the Punjab. The active support which Banda Singh received from the downcast, the poor peasants, herdsmen and *Vanjaraas* made the social struggle aspect of the conflict sufficiently clear.

The Jagirdari system was abolished and tillers of the cultivating lands were made masters of their lands. This marked a revolutionary change in the social order of the Punjab and led to the emergence of simple, but worthy peasants as a potent force in political life

is the only one who owns the land. Let us abolish the *jagirs* and *mansabs* and protect the cultivators. Therefore, get the *jagirdars* and *mansabdars* out of their estates, occupy the land, distribute it among yourselves, cultivate it and protect your Republic." The people obeyed Banda Singh's declarations and ejected the *Jagirdars* from their *Jagirs* and thus became the masters of their lands. Resultantly, large estates were distributed into small holdings in the hands of the peasants. These agrarian changes ameliorated the lot of the poor tillers to a great extent.

Such inspired declarations and policies of Banda Singh Bahadur attracted the lower strata of society and people rushed to join Banda Singh's crusade. William



The Jhand tree (centre) from which Wazir Khan's body was hung after the battle of Chapar Chiri : It is within the compound of a public school. (photo by Malkiat Singh).

of the state. There were large *Jagirs* in the area that stretched from the Ghaggar river to the Jamuna and the *Jagirdars* were responsible for the payment of fixed land revenue from the peasants under them. They extorted from the peasants for any amount that they wished. The result of this forcible extortion was reduction of poor peasants to virtual slavery. Banda Singh encouraged the peasants to rise against the landlords and to get their lands distributed among themselves. As Banda Singh declared, "There are no *Jagirs* and *jagirdars*; there is no *mansab* and *mansabars*; *zamin* belongs to the zamindar who cultivates it. Tiller

Irvine's statement is quoted to illustrate the rising of the lower strata of society: "In all the *parganas* occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger of leather-dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian system, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda Singh) when in a short space of time he would return to his birthplace as its 'ruler', with an order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well-born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arriving there, they stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his orders."

Such was the first such people's revolution in history of the world, eighty years before the French Revolution. Banda Singh's crusade against the tyrannical rule of the Mughals in fact 'revolutionised' the minds of the Punjabis, something which historians mostly fail to take note. The common masses were told to stand up against tyranny, to live and die for their fundamental rights. Banda Singh Bahadur acted as a beacon light for all times to come. The idea of a Republic was given which became a living aspiration, working in their minds like the Divine Will. The Punjabis then struggled ruthlessly against the Mughals and the Afghans during the eighteenth century to achieve this goal. Defeating their enemies in the long and bloody struggle of six

decades that followed, they successfully established their own rule in the land of the five rivers, in the seventh decade of the eighteenth century.

Such astonishing achievements of Banda Singh Bahadur quickly earned for the Sikhs great prestige and martial reputation which had never before been associated with them. From the military point of view too, this had a significant impact on the Mughal might. Banda Singh Bahadur had broken the myth of Mughal invincibility. The tillers of the land and the untouchables of Indian society had fought the high born soldiers for their emancipation. Man to man, the saint-soldiers of the Guru had proved their mettle.

It may firmly be stated that Banda Singh Bahadur was the leader who practised Sikh principles in his policies as well as in his day-to-day life. What was established and preached by Guru Nanak was consolidated by Guru Gobind Singh in creating the Khalsa. It was Banda Singh Bahadur who achieved those objectives for whose fulfillment he was commissioned by Guru Gobind Singh.

The Guru was the spirit and Banda Singh Bahadur the body. When the spirit, with the incitation of amrit, entered the body of Banda Singh Bahadur, it resulted in a revolution. When Banda Singh came to the Punjab there occurred a revolution and the Khalsa State was established on the ruins of the once mighty Mughal Empire. The mission of Banda Singh Bahadur's crusade "was nothing less than liberating the country from Mughal rule" and for this he fought continuously for eight years. His struggle "had been for a national awakening, which first released the spirit of the people and then stirred them to a political consciousness, welded them together to resist tyranny and oppression."

Three centuries later, the world owes much to Banda Singh Bahadur, the great saint-warrior.

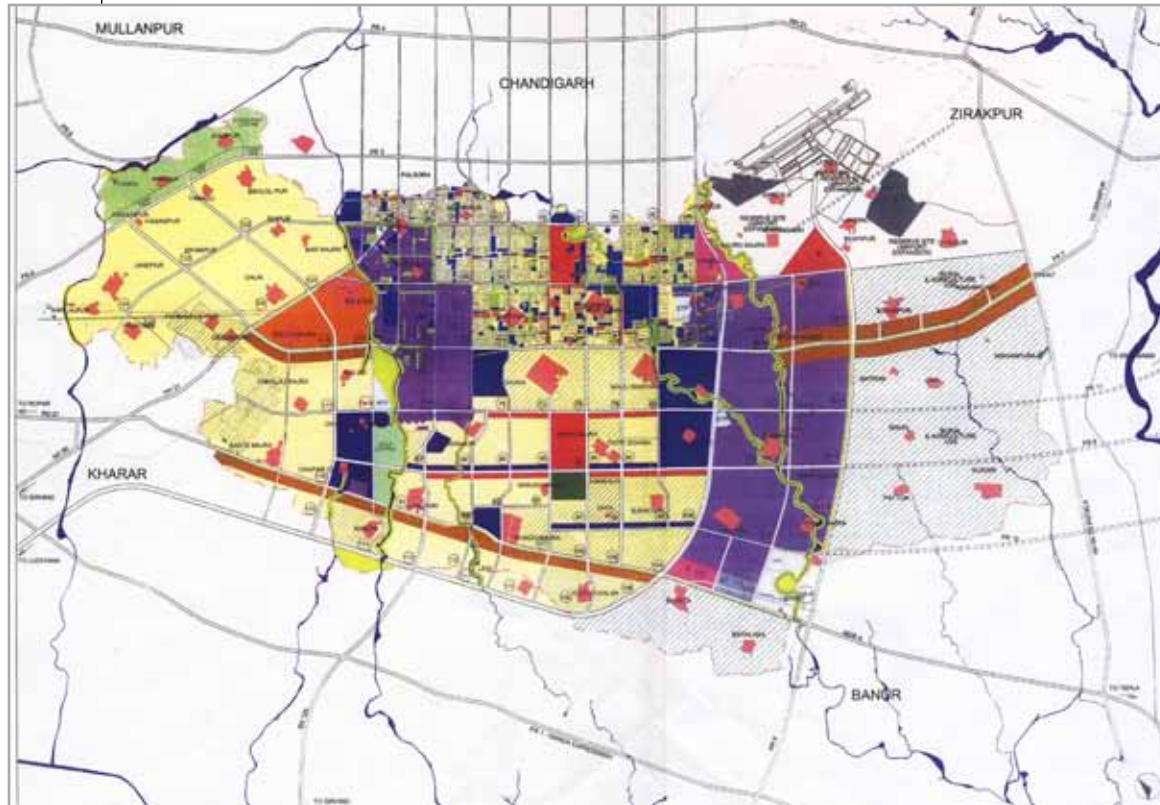
Dr. Sukhdial Singh



An original Khanda, recovered from the battlefields of Chapar Chiri and now kept at the Gurdwara Sahib there.

(Photo by Malkiat Singh)

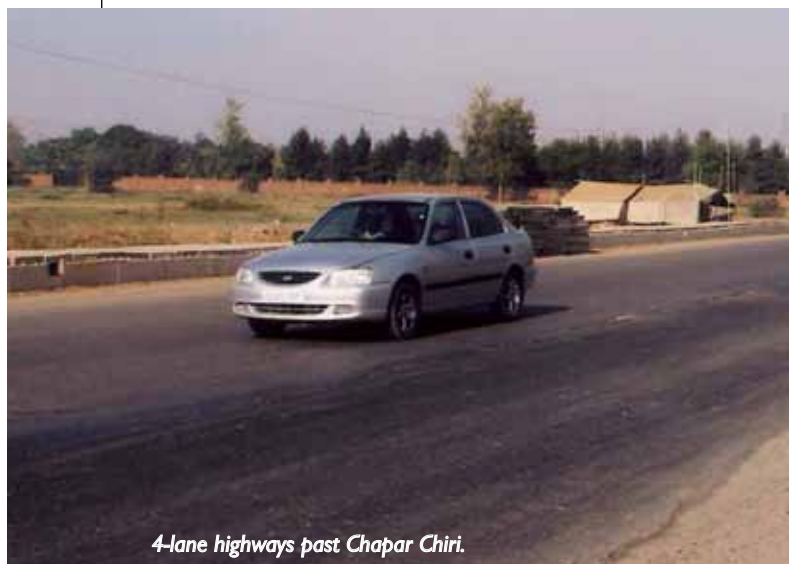
The Price of Progress : Obliteration of the Battlefield



The master plan, converting hundreds of square kilometres into new townships and industrial areas.



International aircraft right above Chapar Chiri.

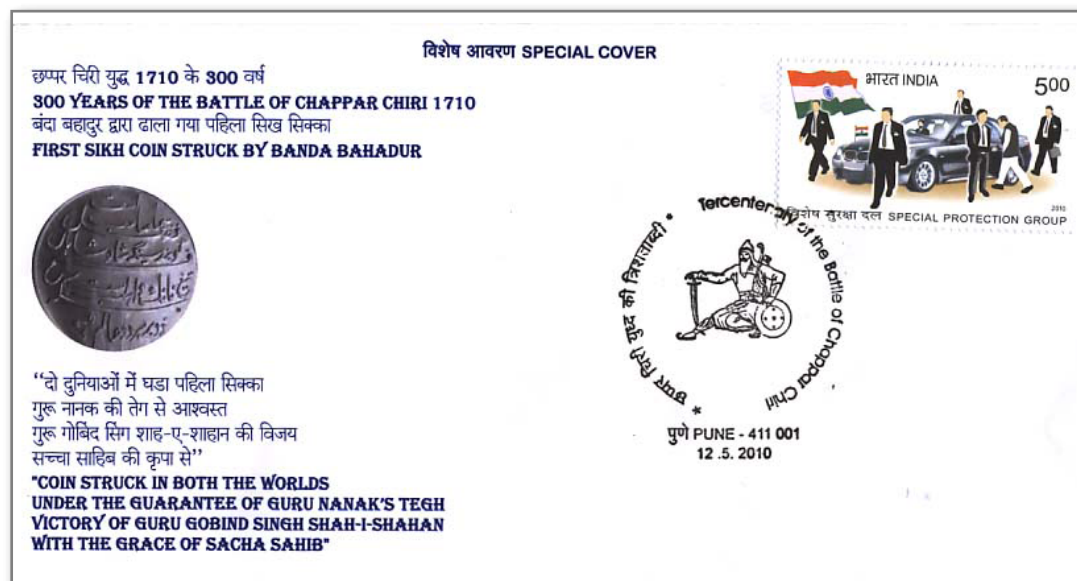


4-lane highways past Chapar Chiri.



Multi-storied apartments on the edge of Chapar Chiri fields.

Commemorating The Battle Of Chapar Chiri



Significantly, Banda Bahadur was remembered 300 years later in Pune, at a simple function at the GPO, on 12 May 2010, with the release of a 'special philatelic cover'. Curiously, the function had earlier been "cancelled" because the Dy Director General, Department of Posts, New Delhi felt that, "as the battle of Chapar

Of the epic battles fought by Banda Bahadur, that on 12 May 1710 was at Chapar Chiri when Banda Bahadur met the might of the Mughal Empire in the forests near the modern town of Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Mohali, Chandigarh. Following the ferocious battle, he slew the *faujdar* of Sarhind in a straight battle. The event was observed in the Punjab as *Fateh Divas* (Victory Day) in June 2010. Beginning at Nanded, the *Fateh March* covered 2,400 km and reached Mohali. Another march from Rajouri, his birthplace in Jammu also reached Amritsar.

After defeating the Mughal forces, Banda Bahadur established a secular government which returned the land to the tiller, proclaimed freedom of worship, cleared to carry out one's profession and stopped forcible marriages even while recovering abducted women for return to their families. At the time that Shivaji Maharaj was fighting for Swaraj in Maharashtra, Banda Bahadur fought for Swaraj in the North. Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem 'Bandi Bir' extolling Banda's heroism in captivity. But, does Banda belong to a region? Which region? Kashmir, Punjab, Maharashtra, all can claim Banda Bahadur! Heroes fighting for the country's freedom belong to the whole nation. Banda and his band of fighters broke the invincibility attached to the Mughal armies and emboldened people to fight for their freedom and their way of life.

Chiri took place in Punjab and its relevance is in Punjab not Maharashtra, hence the special cover on Banda Bahadur may be released in Punjab!" The approval given by letter for release of the cover was thereafter cancelled. The matter was then taken up at the highest level and the order was annulled enabling the cover to be released by Brig. DS Choudhry (retd) where Vijay Dixit, PJ Lewis philatelists and Air Cdr Raghbir Singh were present among others.

Are we as Indians restricted to our place of birth or regions to observe or commemorate historical or social occasions? As the strongest unifying force in the country, the postal department has unfortunately attempted to regionalise a historical occasion and deny its observance in Pune and that too by one of its senior officers in Delhi! Why did the DDG interfere with the authority of the Chief PMG Maharashtra, who had given permission on a matter which could only lead to greater appreciation of historic battles in other states?

The special cover shows the first Sikh coin which was the model for later Sikh coins. The Persian writing reads:

"Coins struck in both the worlds
Under the guarantee of Guru Nanak's teg
Victory of Guru Gobind Singh Shah-i-Shahan
With the grace of Sacha Sahib."

The cancellation shows Banda Bahadur in armour.

The First Sikh Coin

The very first Sikh coin was struck by Baba Banda Bahadur in 1710; these silver rupees were unique as neither the ruler's name nor title or portrait appeared on the coin. Instead they were inscribed with couplets which paid tribute to the glory of the Gurus. The verse on the obverse later came to be known as the Nanakshahi couplet and Sikh coinage itself came to be known as Nanakshahis or money of (Guru) Nanak.

Obverse: *Sikka Zad Bar Har Do Alam Fazl Sachcha
Sahib Ast Fath-i-Gur Gobind Singh
Shah-i- Shahan Tegh-i -Nanak Wahib Ast*

Translation: Coin struck in the two worlds [spiritual and secular]

By the grace of the true Lord, Nanak, the provider

Of the sword [power] by which Guru Gobind Singh

King of Kings is victorious.

Reverse: *Zarb Khalsa Mubarak Bakht
Ba-Aman Ud-Dahr
Zinat At-Takht
Mashwarat Shahr
Sanah 2 or 3*

Translation: Struck at the Refuge [presumably Lohgarh] of the world

The Council City,

The Ornament of the Throne,

Of the Blessed Fortune of the Khalsa

Year 2 or 3

These coins were minted after Banda Bahadur's victory at Sarhind and a new calendar was established by the Sikhs starting with year 1. These silver rupees carried the regnal years 2 and 3 which pertain to this new era and in all probability, from the honorific names given to cities at the time; these coins were minted at Banda's stronghold at Lohgarh. The new coinage carried a message to all Sikhs; they had the blessings and support of the Gurus. They could take on their Mughal oppressors without fear of defeat or be forced to renounce their faith. Thousands of Sikhs were tortured and executed as they refused to convert; this was Baba Banda Bahadur's fate a few years later in 1716. The Mughals seeing what significance these coins had for the Sikhs, banned them and anyone caught



*Shah Alam Bahadur, Lahore Mint.
Year AH 1122 – AD 1710.*



Detail, with khanda and kirpans.

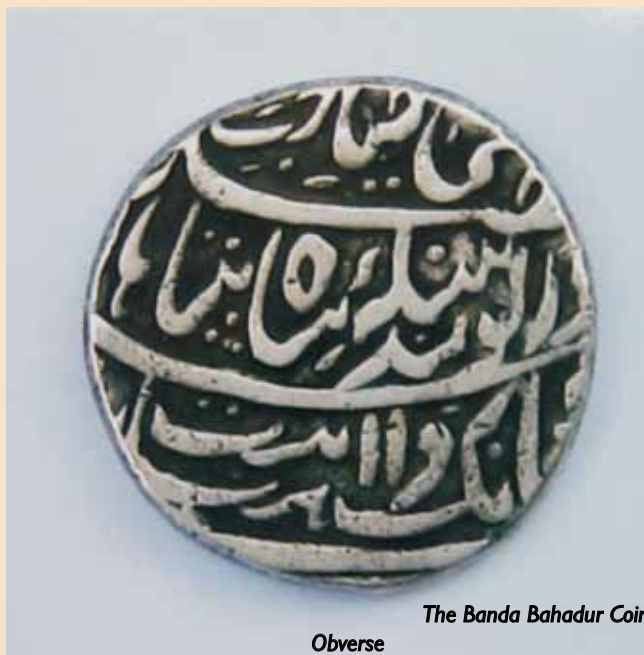
possessing one was executed. A few samples survive today, showing us the spirit of the eighteenth century Sikhs, who believed that with the help of the Gurus they could never be vanquished.

Another interesting silver rupee which gives one an insight into the very essence of the Sikh persona is surprisingly a Mughal coin belonging to Emperor Shah

Alam Bahadur (1707- 1712). In 1710, Baba Banda Bahadur, along with his forces sought blessings at Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar before marching towards Lahore. Here, on outskirts of the city, a fierce battle with the Mughals raged on for many days. During this time the Sikhs managed to put a Khanda on some of the Shah Alam coins of the Lahore Mint. The sheer audacity of this action was felt all the way to the Mughal capital; the outraged Emperor with his ample resources made preparations to proceed for the Punjab. On hearing this, Banda abandoned his siege on Lahore and got back to defend his territories, leaving behind some Mughal coins with a Sikh emblem for posterity.

Jyoti M. Rai

Jyoti Moolgavkar Rai is a renowned numismatist and specialist on coins of the Sikh period. She co-authored the 'Empire of the Sikhs'-Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with Sardar Patwant Singh.



Obverse



Reverse

The Banda Bahadur Coin (from the Saran Singh collection)

The Meteoric Trail of Banda Singh Bahadar



Baba Banda Singh Bahadar appeared in Sikh history for a relatively short moment of time (1708-1716) but (after the Sikh Gurus) influenced it more significantly than any other single individual. He led a historic turn in the Sikh movement, the emergence of Sikh sovereignty.

The idea of Sikh sovereignty originated with Guru Gobind Singh himself, but destiny was for Banda to materialise this. Under Banda's leadership, the Sikh nation took the direct acquisition of political power for the first time in their turbulent history. Banda played his part dramatically, like a shooting star and the Sikhs were to consolidate such power only by the late 18th century.

The Sikhs swiftly occupied most of the major centres of Mughal power spanning the region from

Delhi and Lahore, in a flash. According to Mirza Muhammad, the author of *Ibratnama* (1719), all territory from Thanesar to the banks of the river Sutlej came under the control of Sikhs at one stroke.

What created such a stunning overturn of history? And what led to the rise of Banda Singh Bahadar? That actually is the enigma of the man and his mission.

In 1705, Wazir Khan, subedar of Sarhind and his allies had besieged Anandpur and lured Guru Gobind Singh into leaving his fortress through deception. Then, the Kotwali of Sarhind saw brutal killing of the young sahibzadas and tragic death of Mata Gujri. Wazir Khan and his peshakar Sachidanand saw no blood on their hands and felt no burden on their conscience. Five years passed. They dismissed any reports of appearance of another Guru of the Sikhs as mere rumours. Kaithal, Sonapat, Sadhaura and Samana then quickly passed into Banda's hands. Now Wazir Khan saw him advancing to Sarhind. For him, this was reality now, no more a figment of imagination, nor a faint shadow on the dusty plains of south eastern Punjab. He rushed to stall his advance at Chapar Chiri (May 1710). His alliance faced a crushing defeat and the Sikhs occupied Sarhind, to annihilate it from the face of the earth.

What made this possible? Was revenge the only driving force? But the Sikhs did not take a pause after victory at Sarhind. What inspired them to continue the tide? Perhaps they saw themselves as on the path of righteousness. This sense of being on the right side of justice combined with the lofty legacy of the Khalsa that defined itself through its relationship with the sword, but only as protectors of the weak. Banda had much religious experience before he met Guru Gobind Singh. He had imbibed enormous religious-magical arts from his various teachers. But only from Guru Gobind Singh could he learn that real religion lay in protection of the weak and the harmless, who suffered at the hands of ruthless powers. Sarup Singh Kaushish, compiler of *Guru ki Sakhian* (1790) based on Bhatt account books recorded the Guru's words thus:

Tumhe bade dere Hind ka pata nahin jahan sainkre hazaran mazloom nirdosh kohe ja rahe hain, main kewal tera dhian dilane ke lye jahan dere vich aya han.

Banda Singh Bahadar completely immersed himself in the mission of Guru Gobind Singh.

Protection of the weak required rebellion against brutal rule. The Guru blessed Banda to lead such rebellion (*Dillion lag kar danga machavo/Punjab prabt sab dhur machavo:Prachin Panth Parkash*). He sent him to the Punjab along with five chosen Sikhs, being Bhai Binod Singh, Kahn Singh, Baj Singh, Ran Singh and Daya Singh (*farishtadanash sue Punjab karad/maye panj singhani azad marad: Amarnama of Dhadi Nath Mal*). Banda approached the wider Sikhs diaspora in the Punjab through the mediation of established Sikh leaders like Mohan Ke, Bahlo Ke, Bhagtoo Ke and Bhai Rupe Ke (his letter to Bhai Param Singh, Dharam Singh for joining him at Kharkhauda is still preserved with the family).

In some manner, Banda resembled the Great Guru and some even thought of him as a reincarnate. Persian official accounts mentioned him as 'Goroo'. He was seen as an authentic extension of the Sikh 'mission' in body and spirit (*Bande ko satgur im kahi /aur mayan talwar hai vahi:Prachin Panth Parkash*).

Kesar Singh Chibber, author of *Bansawalinama* (1769) also affirms this:

Bande kahia; tarwar hai uhi, mayan aur hai chadia

While this made him popular among the Sikhs, his mesmerism added to his mystery not only among the masses, but among the Mughals as well. Sikh and Persian sources are in agreement on the portrayal of his 'supernatural' image. In the words of Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan, author of *Tazkiratu's Salatin Chaghata* (1724) 'it was repeatedly represented to the Emperor that "the ill fated wretch was greatly expert in magic and sorcery". (145.eds. J.S.Grewal and Irfan Habib: 2001).

As to why Banda could draw vast mass support may be explained by people's belief in some millenarian dream, the prophecy of *Kalaki Avtar* coming true to destroy the 'rule of Turks'. With faith, they sold their belongings, left their homes and joined Banda who claimed to have established *satjug* (*"asan satjug vartaya hai:hukumnama to sangat of Jaunpor"*). How Banda saw himself in God's own scheme of things is evident from his last talk with Itimaduddaula Muhammad Amin Khan. Khafi Khan records his response thus:

"In all religions and sects, whenever disobedience and rebellion among mortal men passes all bounds, the great avenger raises up a severe man like me for the punishment of their sins and due reward of their works" (459. Elliot and Dowson. Vol.VII :1964)

While he saw his success as part of some divine scheme, at the same time what is possible was the fact that he drew his power from the support of a wide range of masses be they Jats, Banjaras, Lubanas, Khatris, Gujjars and even many Muslims, all who joined his movement.

Banjaras were first to join. (*Pahlon Singh Banjare rale /far hath barche bail lad bhale: Prachin Panth Parkash*). Guru Gobind Singh sent Banda in the caravan of Bhai Bhagwant Singh Naik who travelled from Nanded to Punjab.

Banjaras supported him in more than one way. Many sold off their properties, abandoned their homes, bought arms and took part in the struggle. Others extended financial and provisional support. Banjaras were always present near army camps. They gave provisions to Sikhs during the siege of Lohgarh (December 1710). They carried weapons along with grain to Sikh hideouts in the hills (162:Muzaffer Alam:1993).

Not surprisingly, Bahahdar Shah thereafter displayed excessive ruthlessness towards them. Many of them were captured and buried alive according to his command (*chihal nafar banjara Nanak-prastan, az navah Multan vagera-dar chabutra kotwali rasida. Agar muslman shwand bihatar, vila bikushand. Barz rasid ki az kufr barghasht namishwand.hukumshud- bikushand. Oct 11, 1711:Akhbarati- Darbari-Mualla*!).

Banjaras gave indispensable support to the Sikhs in their struggle against Mughals. Being suppliers to the Mughal army, they always had inside information on official plans, and kept watch on the movement of armies. Possessing information and means of transport, they could communicate with speed. In such manner, they were the lifeline, eyes and ears of Sikhs.

Lubanas were also among the earliest to join the movement. They offered financial and logistic support (*aye lubane lag gayee lar dayo daswandh un kayee hazar: Prachin Panth Parkash*).

The Jats who formed majority of Khalsa Singhs under Guru Gobind Singh, responded swiftly to the *hukumnamas* of Banda Bahadur. Jats of Malwa joined him without a second thought.

The Sikhs of Lahore had to avoid the check posts on roads and river passages. They travelled through

the Shivalik hills and gathered at Kiratpur Sahib. Here again, trader Sikhs Kishora Singh and Pishora Singh fed them for several days. Jats formed the major contingent of combatants. While in power, Banda made favourable arrangements for the cultivators and is believed to have given lands to them. Banda predominantly led the uprising of Jat zamindars (139. Muzaffer Alam:1993) but they were primarily village level zamindars (145.Muzaffer Alam:1993).

The Khattris supported Banda in more clandestine manner as they had significant presence in the administrative and revenue service of the Mughal political system. At the same time they constituted the earliest membership of the Sikh Panth which was an open fact and known to the state. Majority of them were known as 'Khulasa Sikh' as distinct from Khalsa Sikhs. While they supported Banda with finance and provisions (Divan Hardy of Royal camp was prominent among them), they did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives too. The case of Gulab Singh Khattri, who passed off as Banda at Lohgarh (Dec 1710), should not be seen as an isolated event. His sacrifice helped Banda to escape.

The Khattris thus faced indiscriminate persecution for their avowed support to Banda Bahadur. Bahadar Shah issued a general proclamation: *ki reeshe Hinduan urdu mualla yaksar trashand* (beards of Hindus in royal camp should be shaven off); Khattris formed majority of them. They faced humility in public when barbers accompanied by officials shaved their beards in the streets. According to Khafi Khan, some men of name and position rather committed suicide to save the honour of their visage (425.Elliot and Dowson, Vol.VII:1964).

While Khattris formed the elite minority of Banda's supporters, mass support came from so-called lowly classes, and this was well reciprocated. Under Banda, the Dalits tasted power for the first time. His association with the so-called lowly classes was a persistent concern in all official reports. Contemporary accounts by Hadi Kamawar Khan, Muhammad Shafi Warid and Khafi Khan confirm that Banda appointed these as revenue collecting officials and encouraged inter-dining among the so called high and low classes.

According to Muhammad Shafi Warid, author of *Mirat-i-Waridat* (1734), if a lowly sweeper or cobbler, "more impure than whom there is no caste (*qaum*) in Hindustan", went to attend on that rebel, he would be appointed to govern his own town and would return with an order (*sanad*) of office of governance in his hand. The moment he stepped into a town, or village, all the gentry and notables went out to receive

him (162:eds.J.S.Grewal and Irfan Habib:2001). The author hints at this social revolution credited to Banda with such examples: a sweeper sat with a raja of great status, and they felt no hostility to each other(161: above quoted). Perhaps it was the *satyug*, that Banda was referring to in his *hukumnamas*.

Although all Persian accounts vilify him as "a villain of Muslims", there are numerous reports which contradict this. On 28 April 1711, Bhagwati Das wrote to Bahadar Shah that five thousand Muslims had joined "the worshipper of Nanak at Kalanaur" and they are enjoying their religious freedom while with the Sikh Army. ((98.Ganda Singh:1990) On 15 February 1711, one Pir Muhammed Bhatti is said to have shouted 'Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru' at the court.(165. Muzaffer Alam: 1993) This may be an isolated incident, but it surely contradicts what was promoted as Banda's anti- Muslim image.

Banda was also helped by some hill principalities, who had all the time been enemies of Guru Gobind Singh. Probably, they had reconciled themselves to the emergence of Sikh power and a weak centre at Delhi?

The Gujjars of Saharanpur also joined Banda's struggle, claiming themselves to be Nanak Panthis. Besides, Bairagis and mendicants who accompanied royal armies on the move also acted as spies for Banda.

That Banda could mobilise support from such diverse social-religious groups for his struggle against the Mughals is one significant factor for his success. But if his success was sudden, his decline was even faster. What made him strong, made him vulnerable too. He succeeded in shaking the Mughal rule in Punjab, but this action compelled the Emperor and his formidable power to shift their attention towards the Punjab. They immediately sought to fill the political vacuum which had come about as result of their preoccupation with the Deccan since Aurangzeb's time. Banda drew his strength from the appeal of religious sentiment but in the longer run, this confined his support base to Sikhs and provoked more than one attempts of *jehad* against him.

Persian chroniclers portray Banda's eventual downfall as a source of great relief for the Muslims. Among his support groups too, alienation set in fast. The Khattris' alienation was quite visible as the Jats had apportioned the lion's share for themselves, leaving little for others. Anarchy was affecting trade, thereby directly impacting on Khattri commercial interests which became vulnerable soft targets. They could not sustain their zeal for Banda's radicalism. On the other hand, forces which opposed Banda, consolidated themselves, alliances against him grew larger and

broad. Banda was clearly in the sway of historical movements which he interpreted as divine forces.

But these forces acted very fast, presented themselves as an iron hand of armed struggles. All armed struggles suffer from the inevitability of 'schism'. Amongst those who fight against the state, there is always present a microscopic minority which yearns for temporary suspension of the struggle or even compromise with the state. When and ever the state is able to identify and win over such a minority, the movement's days can be numbered. The Sikh movement under Banda Bahadur proved no exception. The Mughal Empire, under Farrukh Siyar (1712), with the help of Abdus Samad Khan, was able to identify this minority which constituted Kahan Singh Trehan and Binod Singh Bhalla who readily accepted Mughal 'patronage' for the sum of Rs. 500 per day. They stationed their troops at Baghbanpora, Lahore and when Banda attacked Lahore, they repulsed him. (*Lahore bachai foot singhan Banda dayo bhajhae:Prachin Panth Parkash*). When Banda extended his hand for reconciliation, they rejected it.

While in Gurdas Nangal (December 1715), Banda made a desperate call for more troops in a letter to Bhai Mani Singh:

*Guru Fateh, man jog bhai jio.
Veri ne bada jabardast ghera ghatyo su.
Anaj pani di koi amad nahin.
Pariwar bahut muskal main hain.
Niane roi jat hain.
Sikh sangatan no sitabi hathyar deke bhejna.
Kisi vakat ka bharosa nahin.
Bunge sahib ardas karni.
Khalse di fateh hogue.
Asan antam samay tak joojhne ka nem kitosu.(8.
Sukhdial Singh:2003)*

When the Sikhs at Amritsar became aware of Banda's sufferings during the siege, they decided to join him immediately, cancelling all differences. But Kahan Singh did not permit them. Giani Gian Singh clearly writes:

*Singh chadan hit the bhaye tayre
Kahan singhadik ne hatkare
Tehan Bhalle Sodhi Bedi
Bat mel ki inhun chedi (2012.Sri Guru Panth Parkash.
Vol.IV:1999)*

While the Sikhs were ready to march, Kahan Singh and others (probably Binod Singh) dissuaded them. Tehan (Kahan Singh) and Bhalla (Binod Singh) dismissed the proposal of reconciliation with Banda.

The prevalent theme that both of them were present in Gurdas Nangal and Binod Singh left it because he wanted an open battle against Mughals, is plain fiction created by Bawa Sarup Das Bhalla (Mehma Parkash:1776) and accepted by almost all major historians. The Kahan Singh Binod Singh duo was not with Banda in Gurdas Nangal but, to the contrary, were in the service of Farrukh Siyar.

But how did they make these Sikhs believe that they were right and Banda was wrong? They deserted him, joined the Mughals, secured privileges, acted as agents of state to persecute Bandai Sikhs—they abandoned Sikh movement's fundamental goal, yet could emerge as the leaders of so called *Tatva Khalsa* or "real Khalsa"!

They succeeded because they exploited some fault lines which had existed between Banda Bahadur and the Khalsa panth. Most significant among these was Banda's attempt to introduce ritual innovations (*Fateh Darshan*) and eating taboos. Sikhs saw it as clear departure from Khalsa Rehat. They also became suspicious of two of his real, or imaginary, ambitions: one, to be the sole claimant of political power, two, to be the eleventh Guru of Sikhs. Whether Banda really saw himself as a guru or patshah is not clear, but this surely provided lethal propaganda material in the hands of his opponents.

On the other hand, Bawas propagated their *sahibzada* status, which granted them natural recognition of the Sikhs. For legitimacy of their actions, they used Mata Sundari's name (reference Sarup Das Bhalla). Their real objective was to enjoy patronage of the Mughal state while not losing their status as natural leaders of Khalsa panth. The so-called *Tatva Khalsa* arose out of this dual, but contradictory, agenda. *Tatva Khalsa* thereafter dominated Sikh historical scholarship for a long time. Rattan Singh Bhangu, Giani Gian Singh, Bawa Sarup Das, Kartar Singh Klaswala, Bhai Vir Singh, Ganda Singh, Harinder Singh Mehboob, have all acted as its apologists but Sikh history is waiting for the honest interpretation of both Banda Singh Bahadar and the *Tatva Khalsa*.

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LOHGA

Its Place in the first Sikh State, 1710-1714

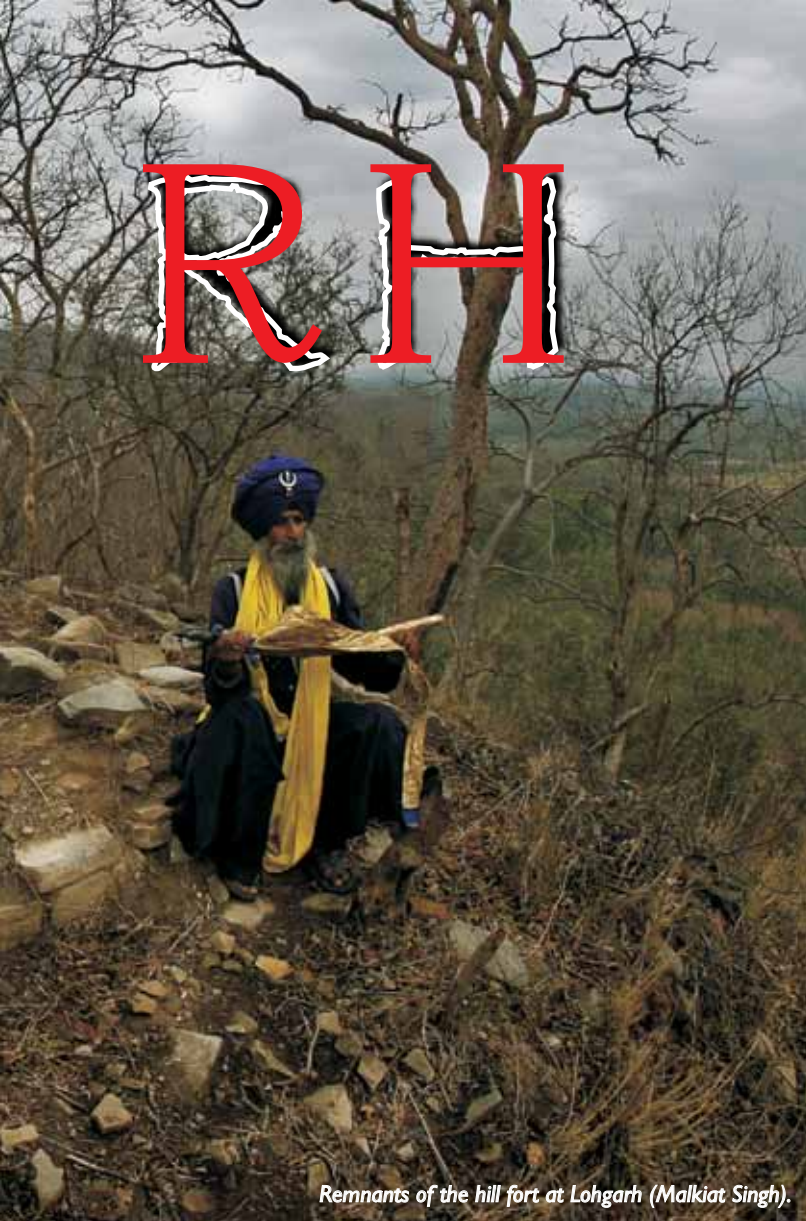
"If Bahadur Shah had not quitted the Deccan, which he did in AD 1710, and marched towards Panjab with all his imperial forces, there is every reason to think the whole of Hindustan would have been subdued by these invaders (Sikhs)."

Lt. Col. M. Malcolm

Guru Gobind Singh, while in the Deccan in 1707, realised that his negotiations with Bahadur Shah, the Mughal emperor were not fructifying owing to the hostility of the entire Mughal Court. He also realised that hindrance may be placed in his way in case he chose to move his camp back to the Panjab. Guru Gobind Singh so selected Banda Bahadur, a Bairagi, to go to the Panjab accompanied with five advisors and some soldiers duly authorised with *Hukamnamas* (Guru's edicts) for the Sikhs to join Banda Bahadur to reclaim the lost territories of Anandpur. Ganda Singh and Hari Ram Gupta are

not correct in stating that a farewell darbar was held in Nander by the Guru in which Banda was declared the commander of Sikh forces and was given a flag and a drum besides the Guru's own weapons and escorted by Khalsa army about five miles from the camp; this is without any contemporary evidence. Such a function would certainly have not gone unnoticed by the Mughal camp and necessary steps to forestall the move would have been taken. Whether Banda was baptised or not by the Guru or he was ordered personal purity and chastity are historical fiction without any contemporary or authentic evidence. Banda and his men moved out from Nander in September 1708 surreptitiously and taking circuitous routes, avoiding detection by the highly elaborate Mughal spy system and reached Panjab in late 1709 when the distance of 1600 kms under normal circumstances would have been covered in 3 months in easy stages of about 20 kms per day.

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Remnants of the hill fort at Lohgarh (Malkiat Singh).

When Banda Bahadur arrived in Namaul he began contacting the Sikhs of the Malwa, Majha and Doaba through letters and the Guru's Hukamnamas. Banda Bahadur became aware of the massacre of Satnami's men, women and children under Aurangzeb's orders, virtually wiping them out of existence and this had greatly distressed him. From October 1709 till May 1710, Banda Bahadur suppressed the dacoits of Namaul and made his presence amongst the local residents. He raided the treasury at Bhiwani and distributed it amongst his followers, occupied Hissar and attacked the government treasury at Sonapur. He again seized the government treasury at Kaftha. Next he attacked and subdued Samana, the hometown of the executioner of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the administration thereof was given to Fateh Singh. Important towns and large villages occupied by Muslim Ranghars including Kunjpura, Ghuram, Thasha Darula, Shahbad Markanda and Sadhura were subdued. Samana and Sadhura were the two large towns with fortified *havelis* and strong walls surrounding them. A large number of

soldiers held by zamindars with their militias, were maintained here. Usman Khan, the chief of Sadhura had destroyed the entire family of Pir Budhu Shah, with such vengeance that the dead bodies were burnt and no grave of the Pir or any member of his family was allowed to be erected.

The subjugation of Sadhura by Banda was motivated primarily by the persecution of Pir Budhu Shah and his family, who had helped Guru Gobind Singh in the battle of Bhangani against the Mughals. Sadhura is said to be a corrupted version of Sadhu-wara, the place of Sadhus which was a holy place at the time of Buddhist ascendancy. Another hard battle was at Ropar against Khizar Khan and his Afghan and Ranghar associates. The Sikhs got some timely help from men who came from the north-east and defeated the Mughals and Afghans next morning. Banda Bahadur then moved to Banur and also subdued Malerkotla. In order to arrange financial and military resources for his movement, he, on principle, raided the state treasuries and rich landlords and the popular belief has been that the Banda Bahadur even robbed the robbers.

His main battle was against Wazir Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, who was the guiding force of the forces of Mughals and Hindu hill rajas against Guru Gobind Singh in the battle of Anandpur in 1704 and the execution of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. The battle of Sarhind was fought on 12 May 1710 in the fields of Chapar Chiri, twenty miles short of Sarhind. The battle for Sarhind city was fought and won a few days later. Wazir Khan was killed along with thousands of his officers and troops. The area of Sarhind province yielding an annual revenue of 52 lakhs was the largest with 28 parganas. Baj Singh was made its Governor and Aali Singh his deputy. Banda Bahadur gave all the spoils collected from Sarhind to Baj Singh for its distribution amongst the Sikh volunteers. Banda Bahadur subdued Morinda, visited Kiratpur, Anandpur and Amritsar, eventually defeated the Governor of Lahore but thereafter moved back to the Shivalik hills to consolidate his territories.

Almost all historians dealing with Sikh history of the period have stated that after Banda Bahadur had subdued the Suba Sirhind and nearby territories, he set up his headquarters at Lohgarh, a small fortress in the Lohgarh Haripur reserve forest area, very close to the plains of Haryana and maintained this as his state capital. The account of Lohgarh by some leading historians is as follows:

William Irvine, in around the first decade of twentieth century, states that the Guru's (Banda) headquarters were not at Sadhura but in the nearby hills called both Mukhlispur and Dabar. Here there was a hunting lodge built by Shah Jehan, twelve miles

away from Mukhlispur. Islam Khan, son of Sher Khan Sur (1545-1553) began to build a strong fortress named Pawagarh. It was left unfinished but later restored and extended by Banda Bahadur. It is half-way between Nahan and Sadhura and close to Som choe, also called Lohgarh choe. At Lohgarh, Banda tried to assume something of a regal state. He was 'Sacha Padshah' or veritable sovereign and his disciples were all Singhs (lions). Coins struck in the name of new sovereign and a new form of greeting "Fath daras" was started.

Karam Singh, a Punjabi scholar, wrote *Banda Bahadur* and *Banda kaun see* (Who was Banda?) around close of first decade of twentieth century. He states that Shah Jahan ordered Mukhlis Khan to construct palaces and a fort in this scenic place, now called Lohgarh, which remained a *Shikargah* till Bahadur Shah's time. Banda conquered the surrounding areas, repaired the fortress and made it his capital. Banda stayed here and was called *Sacha Padshah*. He stated that later there were no signs left of any fort and there was only a small pond where animals now drink accumulated rain water.

Ganda Singh (1935) accepted the treatise of William Irvine that Banda Singh assumed regal status. He chose the fort of Mukhlispur as his capital and a base depot for his future military operations. It was a strong hill fort half-way between Sadhura and Nahan but neglected and in disrepair. After Banda Singh occupied it, the fort was soon repaired and named as Lohgarh. He had a large army of devoted followers, with accommodation for them and 'palaces' to live within.

Hari Ram Gupta states that the main aim of Banda was to punish Wazir Khan and conquer Sarhind after which it was time to consolidate his material and territorial gains. He also wanted to study the military resources of Sarhind and was anxious to see what steps the imperial Mughal government would take against him. Hence the location of a big fort at Sadhura and the small fort at Lohgarh was apparently part of Banda's military strategy. He kept a larger force at Sadhura and smaller force at Lohgarh. This fort stood on a hill top. Two *kuhls* (springs) water channels flowed at its base and supplied water. The fort was repaired and put into a ready state of defence. The name of Mukhlispur was changed to Lohgarh and it became the capital of the first Sikh state. He struck coins and issued orders under his own seal.

While describing the siege of Lohgarh in December 1710 by the imperial forces under emperor Bahadur Shah, Hari Ram Gupta has alluded that the fort of Lohgarh was very small and there was no space for the storage of large quantities of grain and fodder etc.

Muzaffar Alam states that after he (Banda) had established his seat at Lohgarh, he was virtually a King

and called himself *Sacha Padshah*. He had conquered many territories and issued coins and *Hukamnamas* and governed there through his deputies.

However, the above mentioned accounts given by William Irvine, Karam Singh, Ganda Singh and Hari Ram Gupta, major historians of the early 18th century are greatly incorrect, full of fable and fiction, when compared with the actual site locations at Sidhuara and Lohgarh. Their statements that he lived in regal style and took the name *Sacha Padshah* is incorrect. *Sachha Padshah* was the title for the Sikh Gurus only and no individual, howsoever important, has ever attempted to use it for himself. Banda Bahadur raised the outer walls of Lohgarh fortress twice when he occupied it and these walls were twice demolished by the Mughal forces when Banda Bahadur left and moved into the Hari Pur forest reserve. There were no buildings raised within this small fortress. There were three small ponds, duly lined to preserve water collected therein. When the troops lived in and around Lohgarh, Banda Bahadur stayed at a nearby hill which named Sitaragarh.

That Banda Bahadur stayed a little distance away from his troops at Sitaragarh was for important tactical reasons. This was a hill some four to five hundred feet higher than Lohgarh, and commanded a strategic view of the entire long valley through which the Mughal forces would march to reach Lohgarh. Midway on the right side of the valley on the hill, some war drums were kept. When men at outposts would sight marching Mughal soldiers, they would beat drums *nagaaras* to alert troops in Lohgarh to prepare for war. This was the very tactical use of the Sitaragarh post. Curiously, between Lohgarh and Sitaragarh there is an acoustic phenomenon: words spoken at Sitaragarh when facing Lohgarh are clearly heard in Lohgarh and the replies given from Lohgarh are clearly heard in Sitaragarh. Such phenomenon conforms to the wave theory of light propounded by Christiaan Huyens (1629-1695), a Dutch astronomer and founder of the wave theory of light but this phenomenon is equally applicable to sound waves and is noticed in some forts of Rajasthan. Banda Bahadur came to know of this phenomenon which has also been observed by the author during his visits to Lohgarh and Sitaragarh.

Persian manuscripts including *Ibratnama* by Muhammad Qasim, *Tazkirat-i-Salatin-i-Chughtaiya* by Hadi Kamwar Khan, *Mantakhabu-I-Iubab* by Khafi Khan and *Mir-at-i-Waridat* by Muhammad Shaft Warid have given accounts of battles fought by Banda Bahadur at Sadhura and Lohgarh against the Imperial armies, but have not dwelled on Lohgarh as being 'capital city' of the emerging Sikh state. They have however given an account of the hill top on which Banda Bahadur used to reside and was named by him as Taragarh or Sitaragarh.

After his occupation of Sarhind and the surrounding areas, Banda Bahadur was expecting that Emperor Bahadur Shah with his imperial forces would in all likelihood march on the Panjab. At that time the sparsely equipped and untrained Sikh army would not be in a position to withstand onslaught of the Mughals. Being a great strategist, Banda Bahadur thus chose the Lohgarh-Sadhura axis to confront the Mughal attacks, and after giving stout battle, he would tactically move to the Hari Pur reserve forests where the Mughal armies were most reluctant to pursue. In Sadhura, Banda Bahadur raised a mud fort on a mound and dug out a trench all around, the earth being used to put up the fort wall with water from nearby streams used to fill the trench. At four corners of the fort, he raised four turrets of about 40 ft height made of *pucca* bricks which became his observation posts to watch for arrival of Mughal armies and their manoeuvres. There was a prevalent feeling amongst the Mughal forces that Banda Bahadur had occult powers which greatly enhanced his power against his enemies and the Mughal forces remained terrified of these mysterious, if imagined, powers of Banda Bahadur.

Emperor Bahadur Shah arrived at Sadhura with his Imperial force of over one hundred thousand soldiers, to which were added the militias of various governors of Lahore, Jammu and other zamindars. All initial attacks on Sadhura were defeated by the Sikhs as long as provisions of fodder, food and ammunition lasted. Sikh troops from Sadhura and Lohgarh also carried out nocturnal raids on the Mughals. The Imperial forces then changed their tactics, obtained wooden ladders to scale walls of the mud fort of Sadhura and after repeated onslaughts, took over 3 watch towers and demolished them. The 4th watch tower was fiercely defended by the Sikhs and could not be taken. This watch tower remains standing today, having escaped demolition by the Mughal forces in the subsequent attacks in 1713. (This watch tower has also escaped notice of the Archeological Survey of India but the tower is getting into disrepair with encroachment on both sides).

The Mughal forces, led by Emperor Bahadur Shah himself camped on the Som Nadi within sight of Lohgarh as over 60,000 Mughal troops surrounded Lohgarh fort. The Sikhs fought the Mughal forces from their place of advantage and did a lot of damage, but their stock of fodder and grain was eventually exhausted. When the Mughal forces observed that all was quiet, they entered Lohgarh fort but found it empty. In fact, the Sikh army had moved out into the thick forests the previous night.

Bahadur Shah was disgusted and greatly disappointed over the escape of Banda Bahadur and in wrathful words stated "the jackal has escaped from the grasp of so many ferocious dogs". Bahadur Shah then withdrew from Lohgarh and went on to Lahore

where soon he developed signs of insanity. He died on 28 February 1712. After the death of Bahadur Shah, civil war broke out between his sons in which various Mughal governors joined one side or the other. Banda Bahadur took advantage of this chaos, recaptured Sadhura and Lohgarh and repaired the forts for stronger defence against the Mughals. Jahandar Shah, who succeeded Bahadur Shah, was a weak emperor and was soon defeated and killed in February 1713 after which Farrukh Siyar became the emperor.

Farrukh Siyar took an offensive posture and sent his best generals including Samad Khan to subdue the Sikhs and Sadhura was again besieged. Banda held his ground for the next six months. When he ran short of supplies, he withdrew his army to Lohgarh in early October 1713 and from there moved into the hills along with his army. Mughal writers have recorded that Abdul Samad Khan destroyed the Sadhura fort after its evacuation by the Sikhs. He then moved his troops to Lohgarh and besieged the hill fortress. This is the second time that the defensive strategy of Banda Bahadur succeeded when facing the might of the Mughal imperial army, vastly superior in number and munitions and continued to deny them their objectives. Lohgarh fort was once again destroyed, this time to its foundations. Today no ruins of buildings are to be found and only base foundations are visible on the ground (see lead picture).

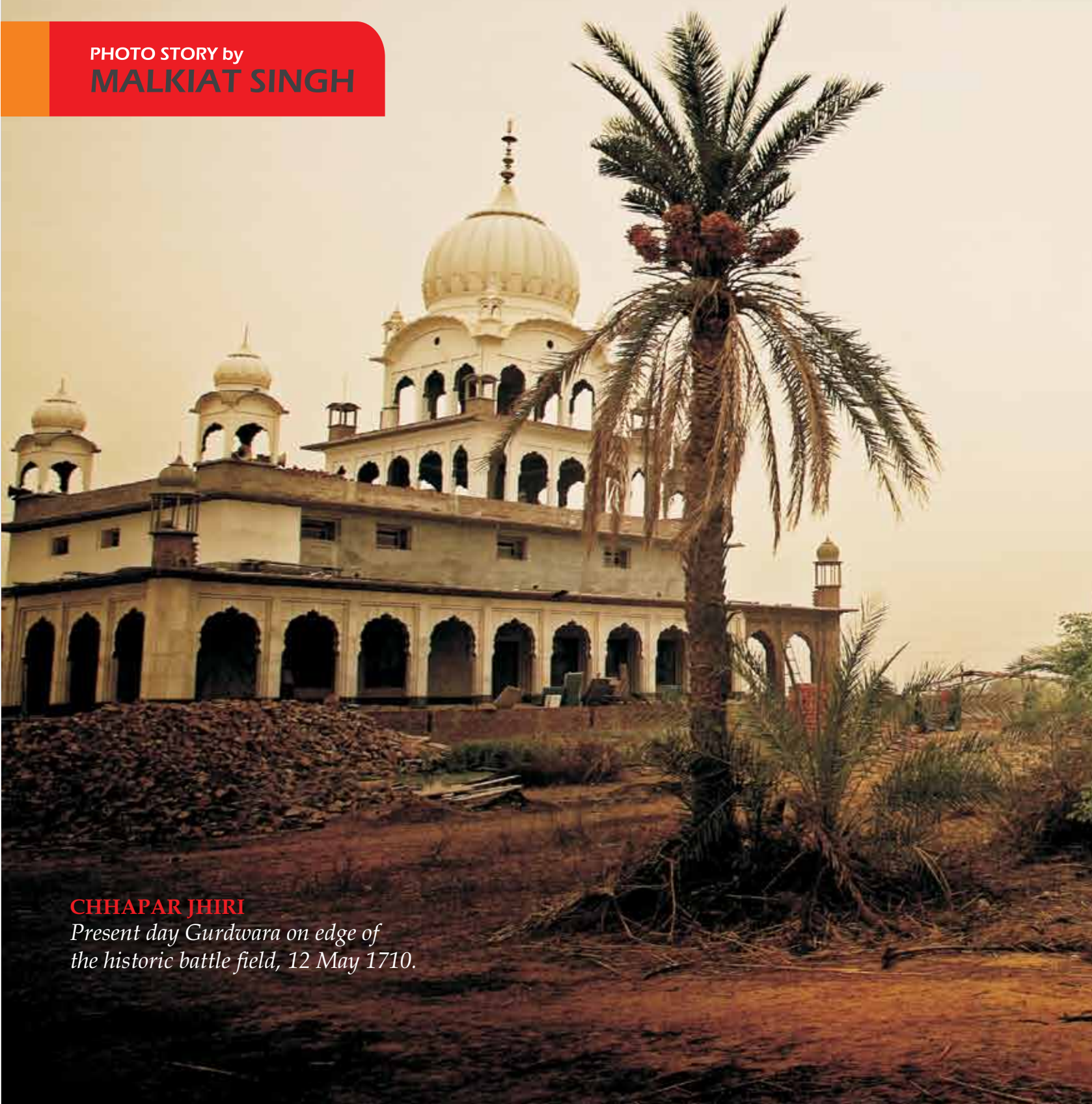
For over four years, Banda Bahadur took on the might of the Mughal Empire. Banda Bahadur was quite aware that his ill-equipped followers could not fight an open war with the massively equipped Mughal armies with their artillery, cavalry and trained infantry, far superior in numbers and material resources. Banda Bahadur prevailed in his military strategy from early 1710, making maximum use of natural resources besides the elements of surprise attack and the unmatched bravery of his faithful followers. He had located a *garhi* or small fortress that was raised by Mukhlis Khan and named Mukhlispur on the spur of low hill which had two running streams on both sides, providing both water and some protection from assault. It was used for hunting wild animals by Mughal nobility. Till Banda Bahadur used this to take on the might of the Mughal Empire.



Surinder Singh

LORE of BANDA

PHOTO STORY by
MALKIAT SINGH



CHHAPAR JHIRI

*Present day Gurdwara on edge of
the historic battle field, 12 May 1710.*

SINGH BAHADUR



MAP NOT IN SCALE

Places in northern
India associated with
BANDA SINGH BAHADUR
after the blessing of
GURU GOBIND SINGH
at Nanded, in the Deccan.

JAMMU

GURDAS
NANGAL

KALANAURE

BATALA

RAHOW

SARHIND

CHHAPAR
JHIRI

MUNYMAJRA

BURAIL

CHHAT
BANUR

NAHN

SITARAGARH

SADHAURA

LOHGARH

MUSTAPHABAD

SAMANA

GHURAM

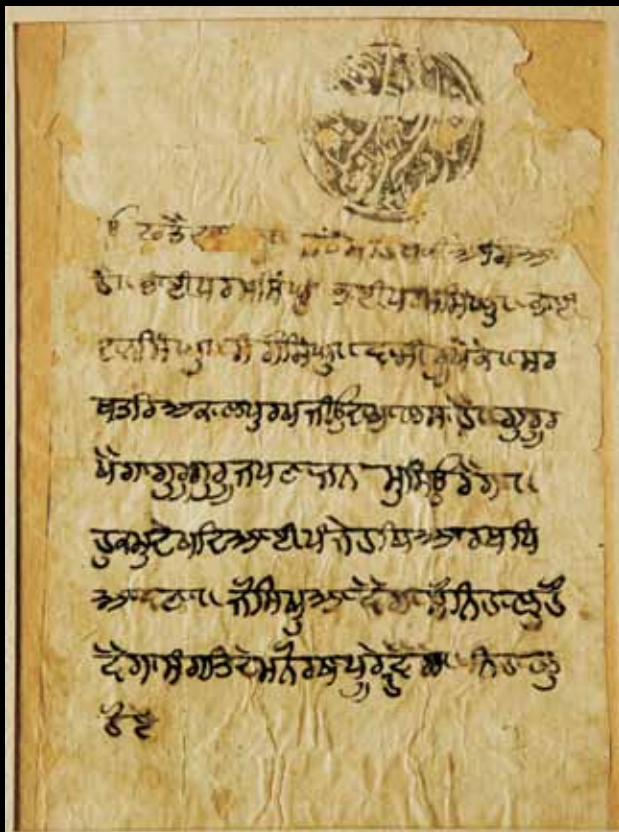
SHAHBAD

KAITHAL

SONIPAT

MEHARAULI

Hukamnama by
Banda Singh Bahadur
to
Bhayee Rupa ji



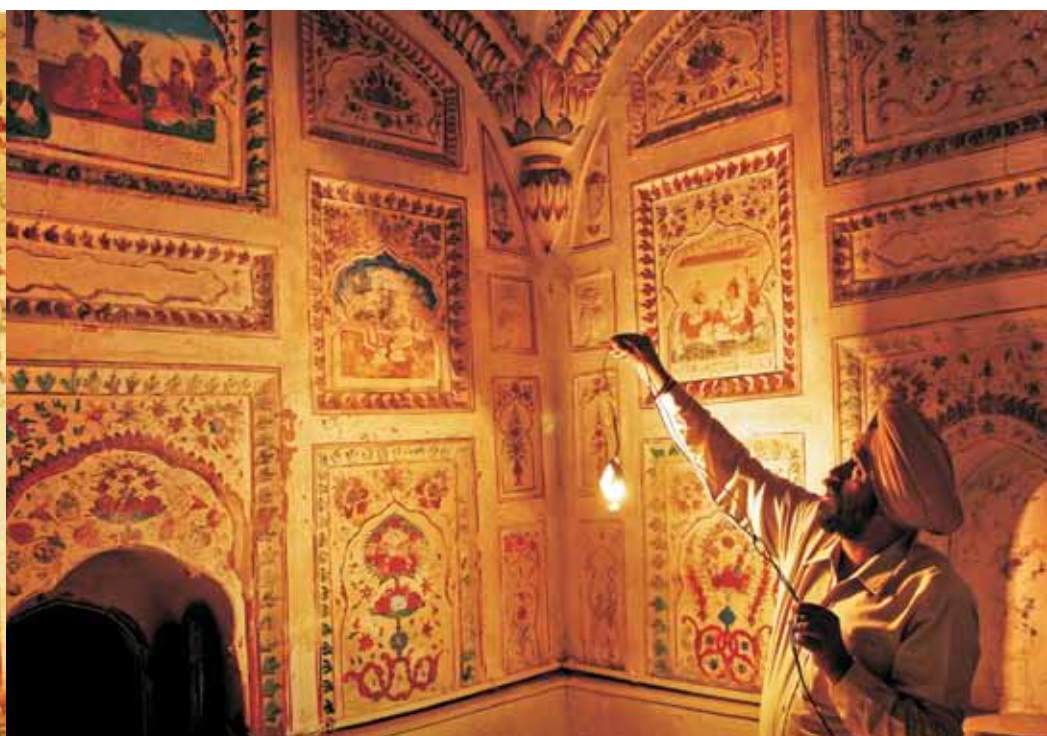
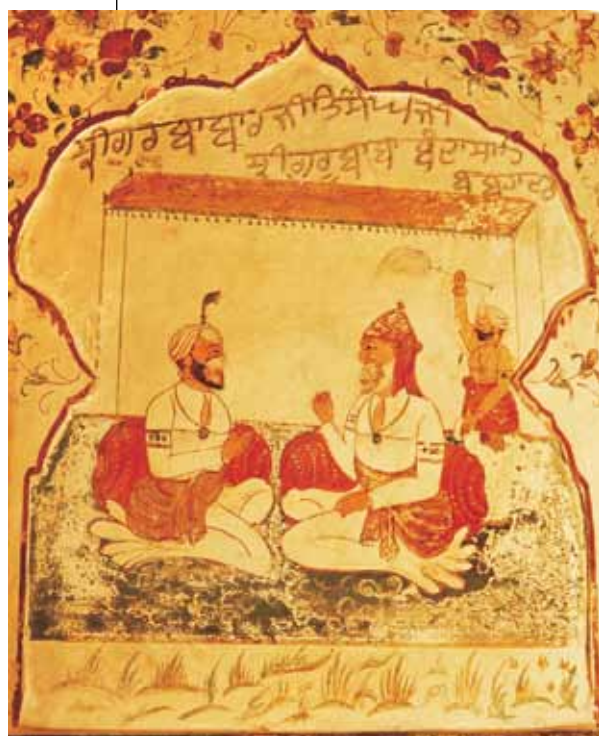
**Bhayee Buta Singh ji
with Puratan Shastra
at Bhayee Rupa ji
village.**





Banda's abode for a year

From 1713-1715, Banda Singh Bahadur stayed in the Jammu hills at a place now called Dera Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. He waited for a favorable opportunity to strike for the independence of his people and for re-establishment of his power. No details of his activities from October 1713 to February 1715 are available except that he solemnised a marriage with Sahib Kaur, daughter of a Khatri of Wazirabad. The picture of the Gurdwara was taken on 11 September 1932.



Wall paintings inside
Dera Baba Banda Singh Bahadur
at Riasi [Jammu].

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

JAMMU [Riasi]



*Baba Jatinder Pal Singh Sodhi
with puratan handwritten granth
at Darbar Sahib Dera Baba Banda Singh Bahadur.*

Wazirabad, city of Banda's in-laws
*Photograph of an old structure in the city of
Wazirabad. His wife Sahib Kaur is said to
have belonged to this place. This picture of
the city was taken on 4 April 1932.*

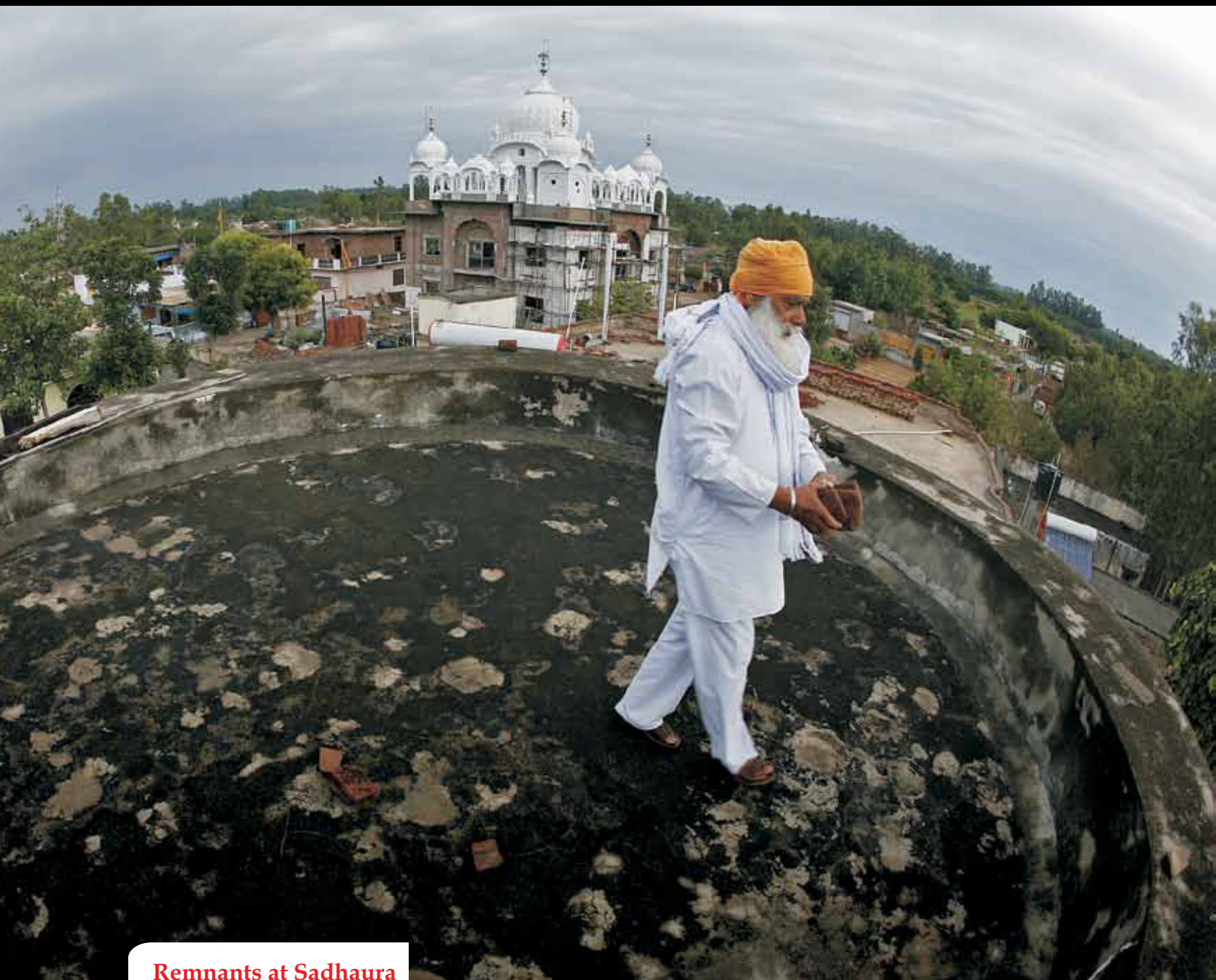




Battle of Sadhaura [1709]

Sadhaura is a modified form of Sadhu-wara, or the abode of Sadhus which in days of Buddhist ascendancy was one of their holy places. During the expedition of Banda Singh Bahadur, Sadhaura was ruled by Usman Khan who was notorious for the oppression of his subjects. He was the same man who had tortured to death the great Muslim saint Pir Budhu Shah whose family members and followers were also tortured because they fought on behalf of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in the battle of Bhangani against the Hindu hill chiefs. Their bodies were not allowed to be buried in accordance with Islamic rites, but were burnt upon Usman Khan's orders. After occupation of the Sadhaura town, Banda Singh Bahadur made entrenchments close to the town for concentrating his troops from where the Sikhs fought the Mughal army in 1710 and 1711.

SADHAURA



Remnants at Sadhaura

The Sadhaura mud fort constructed by Banda Singh Bahadur did not have very high walls. It had four burjs (defence towers) at four corners to watch for the arrival of enemy forces. During the battle of 1712, Sikhs retreated to Lohgarh fort leaving this fort in the hands of the Mughals, who demolished it except for this burj. The glory of the fort has been lost with time, as heritage preservation is given ever lower priority by each passing generation.

SITARAGARH /



Mud Fort of Sitaragarh

There is no fort at Sitaragarh, only remains of a thatched hut with stone walls which Banda Singh Bahadur used to survey the entire area and the position of Mughal troops. The top of Sitaragarh is a kilometer away from the Lohgarh fort, but to this day, words spoken from Sitaragarh can be heard at Lohgarh and vice versa owing to some acoustic phenomenon.

/ LOHGARH



Remnants of Lohgarh Fort

The Sikhs made fifty two defensive entrenchments around the Lohgarh fort. These entrenchments with small supporting walls were made in a manner that each supported the other. Enemy forces moving up the hillock to the fort received deadly fire throughout their advance, from every entrenchment. The fear of Sikhs kept the Mughal commanders and their forces long at bay. Remains of the fort still exist in the forest area. Lohgarh was the Khalsa Raj's headquarters whereas Mukhlispur was the 'capital city'.

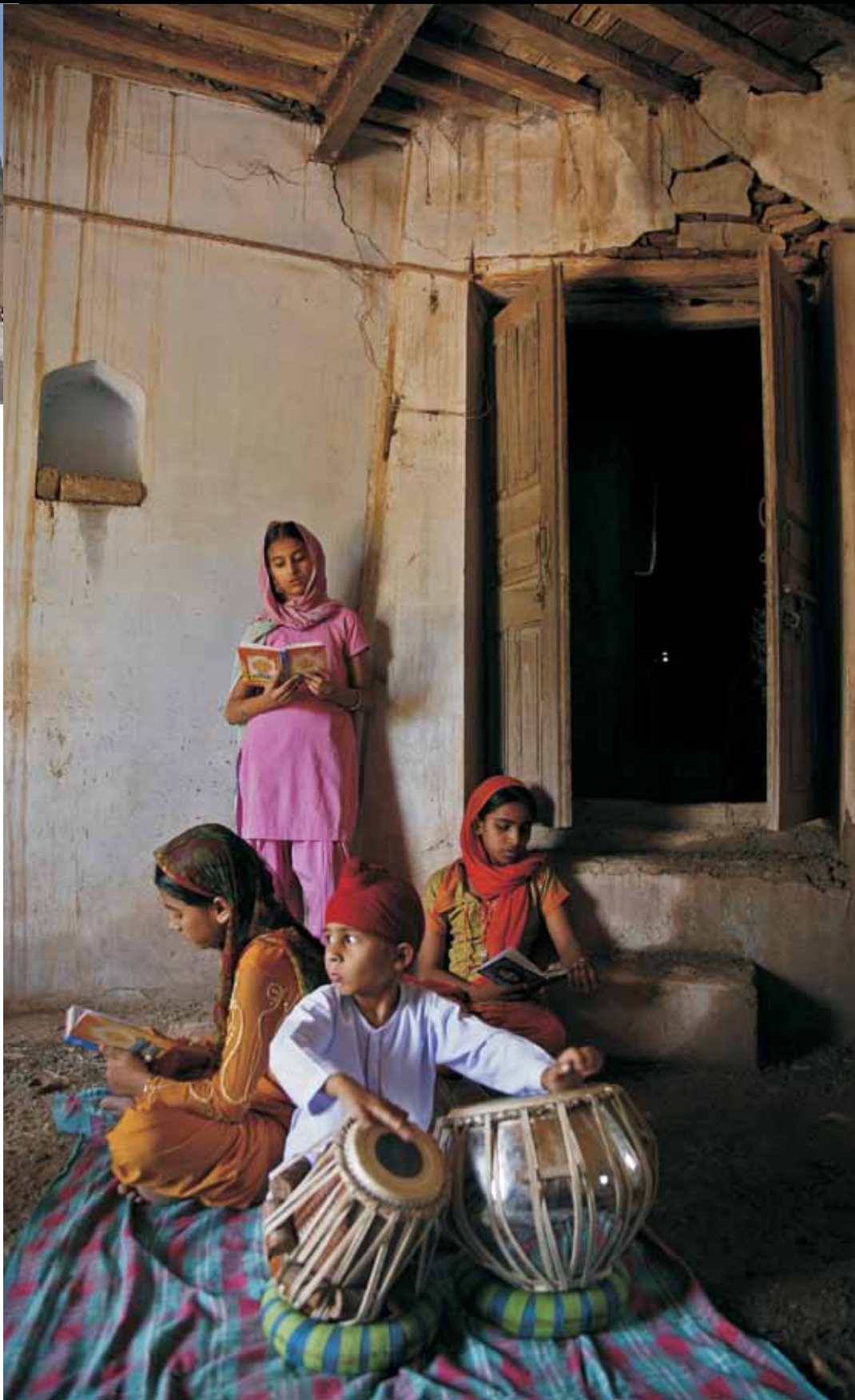
BURAIL



Locating Burail Fort

Hidden in the dense 'concrete jungle' of Chandigarh, Burail fort still has some traces left. During Banda Singh Bahadur's short stay near Burail, the Khalsa army under Banda was approached by locals of the area to complain that their daughters were being forcibly taken away by the faujdar of Burail Fort for 10-15 days before sending them back. They requested the Khalsa army to capture the fort and get them some relief. The fort was captured and the faujdar killed.

Inside view of the Burj today, now under the Gurdwara Qila Sahib Burail.



LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

MANIMAJRA



Manimajra Fort [Chandigarh]

Old structure Gurdwara Manji Sahib

is situated at Manimajra near Chandigarh. Gurdwara Manji Sahib is where Mata Raj Kaur [who was the wife of Baba Ram Rai] stayed. Guru Gobind Singh visited Manimajra village, now a holy place.

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

SARHIND



Haveli Diwan Todar Mall

Diwan Todar Mall was a wealthy merchant of Sarhind, who on 13 December 1705 performed cremation of the martyred younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Zorawar Singh aged about 6, Fateh Singh aged about 9 and their grandmother, Mata Gujari.



Intact Naqshbandi Dargah

After Sarhind was captured and Wazir Khan killed, Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadur demolished almost the entire city of Sarhind, which is said to have spread across 50 square miles at that time, except for this Dargah. It was the headquarters of the orthodox Muslim theologian Sheikh Ahmad Shah Sarhandi. Despite all the provocation and role of Naqshbandi's in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib and younger Sahibzade of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, the Dargah was not touched by the Khalsa army in 1710. Sparing of Dargah speaks greatly of Sikh ethics and their respect for religious places.



Capturing Sarhind Fort

After defeating and killing Wazir Khan at Chhapar Jhiri, the Khalsa army attacked the Sarhind fort and after a fierce battle the Khalsa flag was finally hoisted on it. The battle of Sarhind is considered to be the first major battle fought and won by the Sikhs against the Mughal Empire.

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

CHHAT-BANUR



Gurdwara at Chhat

*Children playing around the tunnel
which was connected underground to
Jama Masjid of Banur.
[7 km from Chhat]*



Memories of Chhat Banur

On his mission to encircle Sarhind before the final assault, Banda Singh captured Chhat, near Chandigarh and a Sikh Amil was posted there. There were also complaints from the Hindus of the area that they were being greatly harassed by the rulers. Chhat is close to Banur where Banda Singh was awaiting Sikh troops from Majha to join him before he was to make the final assault against Wazir Khan. While the Mujhail Sikhs were fighting against the Afghans of Maler Kotla, Banda Singh Bahadur marched upon Banur and occupied the same. The Sikhs were very jubilant and Banda Singh's army marched a few miles to link up with the Sikh forces coming from Ropar.



Jama Masjid at Banur

*Maulana with his kids standing on the roof of the tunnel which was connected underground to the Gurdwara of Chhat .
[7 km from Banur]*

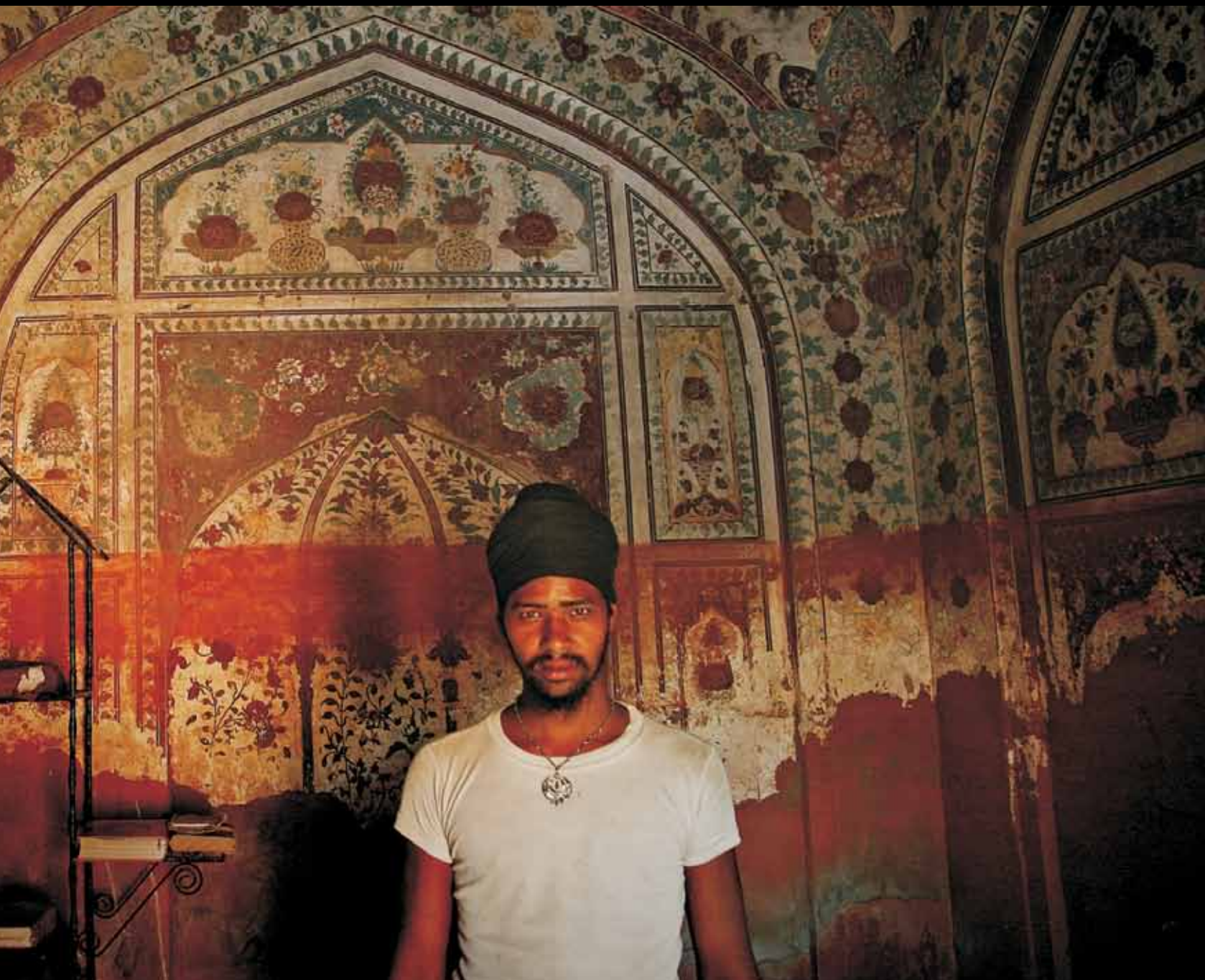


Battle of Kalanaure [1715]

The Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadur reappeared in the plains from the direction of Jammu and marched towards Kalanaur. Suhrab Khan, the faujdar of Kalanaur and others collected a large force of mercenaries, religious zealots and levies from the parganas of its neighbourhood. But with the very first blow from the Sikhs, they were scattered to the winds. Some fled from the battlefield, most died in combat.

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

KALANAURE



*Wall paintings inside the
Jama Masjid at Kalanaure today.*

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

GURDAS NANGAL



The Last Battle of Banda [1715]

The Battle of Gurdas Nangal proved to be the last of Banda Singh Bahadur. Chroniclers detail how Banda retreated to the village of Gurdas Nangal and built defences around the large walled mansion. Historians are amazed at the valour and fighting skills showed by the Sikh warriors to keep the opponents at bay for months. Even after surrounding that small mansion, the Mughals did not dare to enter it for the fear of the Sikhs and their leader. It was finally due to lack of provisions and arms, the Mughals finally were able to capture Banda Singh Bahadur. History records how Sikhs stood their ground till their last when all means were exhausted and they were left with no supplies inside



the mansion. Despite Banda Singh Bahadur being captured along with his fellow men, this battle is known for its long drawn out defence of the mansion against the Mughals whose strategy was to exhaust the Sikhs and not engage them in direct combat.

The mound (theh) of Gurdas Nangal, where Banda Singh Bahadur fought his last battle against the Mughals.

*Within the gate
Gurdwara Shahidi
Asthaan Baba Banda
Singh Bahadur.*

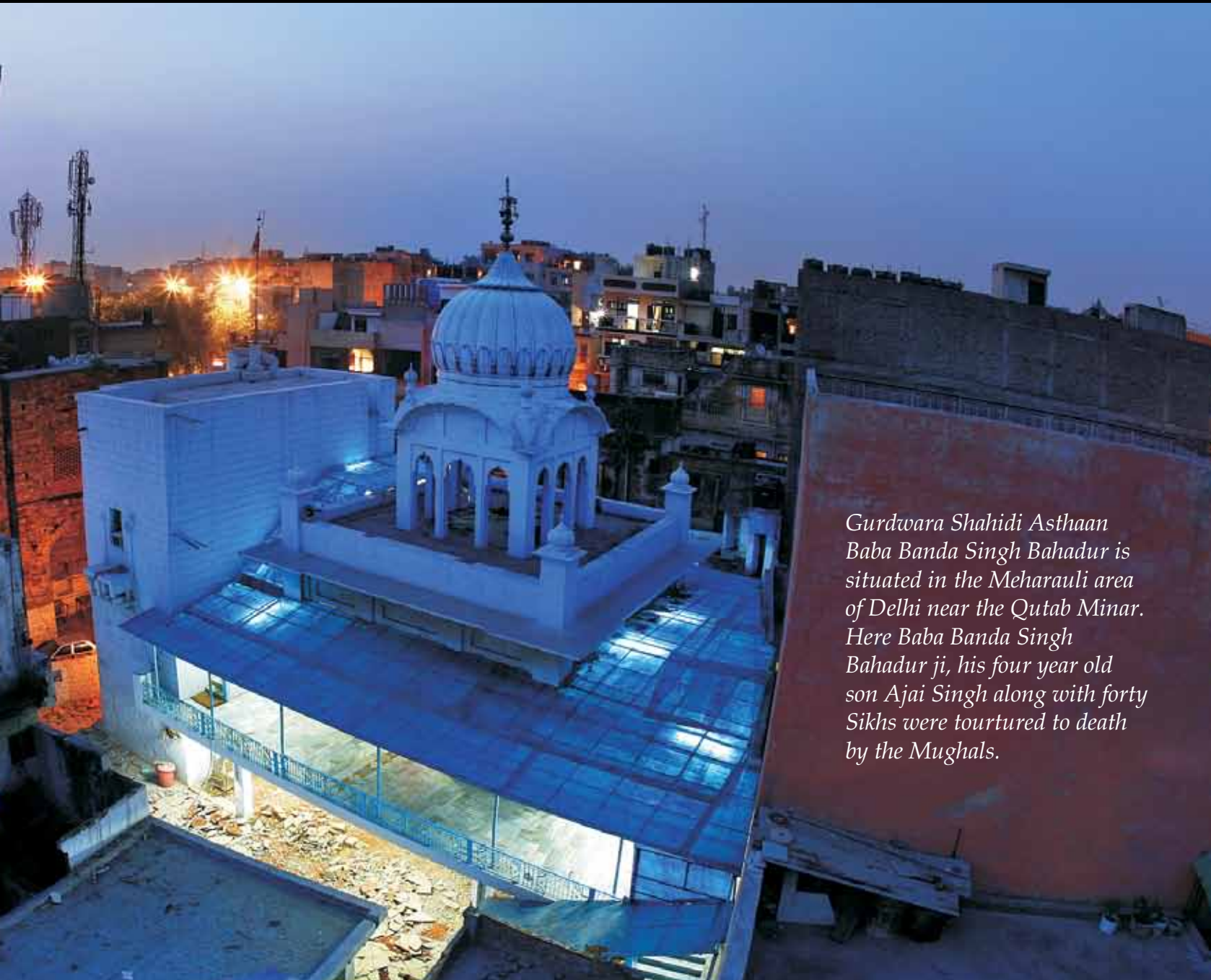


MARTYRDOM : End of a Mission

The fate reserved for Banda Singh Bahadur is too excruciating for mortals. On 19 June 1716 when the sun had risen "about three spears on the sky," Banda, his son Ajai Singh along with other Sikhs (Baj Singh, Ram Singh, Fateh Singh, Ali Singh, Gulab Singh and others) were led out of the Delhi fort where they had been confined. Banda was seated on an elephant and twenty six Sikhs in chains marching behind him were taken through the streets of Khwaja Qutab-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki. Here, Banda was paraded around the tomb of the late emperor Bahadur Shah. Thereafter Banda was dismounted and while seated on the ground was offered the usual choice: Islam or death. The unparalleled disciple of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib chose physical death over death of conscience. Then Banda's four-year old son, Ajai Singh, was placed in his father arms to be

LORE OF BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

MEHARAULI



Gurdwara Shahidi Asthaan Baba Banda Singh Bahadur is situated in the Meharauli area of Delhi near the Qutab Minar. Here Baba Banda Singh Bahadur ji, his four year old son Ajai Singh along with forty Sikhs were tortured to death by the Mughals.

killed by him; naturally he refused. Consequently, the executioner hacked the young Singh joint by joint with a long knife, dragged out his quivering heart and thrust it into the mouth of his father, the Guru's Banda. Annals of history find no such account where a warrior didn't react at all for familial gains and remained faithful to his ideals and values. Then it was Banda's turn. A butcher's knife removed his right eye and then the left. Next his left foot was cut off and his hands were severed from his body. Banda's flesh was torn with red-hot pincers; he was decapitated and hacked to pieces limb by limb. Banda Singh Bahadur remained calm and serene amidst these barbaric tortures, completely absorbed in the Guru's Grace and Waheguru's Glory.

The Vedic Prophecies



Advent of Guru Nanak, nine following Gurus and the Granth Sahib

As a senior, retired Air Marshal has written incredulously: "I had no idea that the advent of Guru Nanak and the ten Gurus, culminating in the eternal Guruship bestowed upon the Sri Guru Granth Sahib had been repeatedly foretold in the ancient Vedas, thousands of years before 1469!"

Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh Faith, was born in Nankana Sahib near Lahore in 1469 and breathed his last in 1539 at the age of 70. He was endowed with extra-ordinary spiritual powers from a very young age. The biographies on his life are replete with strange episodes of these miraculous occurrences.

As with many other universally known Prophets, he did not undergo any formal education. On the very first day of his admission into the village school, he expounded a beautifully worded revelation in verse and set it to a classical musical measure (*raga*)

describing the various stages of life, interposed with a plethora of poignant Divine directions, every stanza starting with each letter of the Hindi language alphabet. The teacher then went over to his father and told him that instead of teaching Nanak, he had received through his noble young son, a profound lesson from God, on how best he the teacher could function better. This was remarkable indeed.

There were 9 other Gurus (Prophets) that consecutively followed his lineage, all receiving Divine revelations but only under his name **Nanak** without attributing any such revelatory passages to their own names. This culminated in the 11th—the last and eternal Guruship bestowed on the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), which has been called the **Mona**, meaning the **silent** Guru, being in book form, as recorded in the ancient Hindu and other such contemporary resources, the **Vedas**. Guru **Nanak** was one of the few,

if not the only prophet who travelled widely outside the country of his birth, throughout the then known world. Recorded in some detail are the four marathon trips mostly on foot, which he embarked upon in the four cardinal directions, the North, South, East and the West. To the North he scaled the Himalayan Ranges to enter deep into the Tibetan regions. To the East he went all the way into Burma now known as Myanmar, and to the South right down to the tip of the Indian sub-continent and onto Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and lastly to the West through Afghanistan and Iraq to Saudi Arabia entering Mecca and beyond into parts of Turkestan and the southern reaches of Russia. He left behind rare relics and other such signs, which have now been uncovered to prove the authenticity of his far flung travels.

Before he passed on, he is credited to have had millions of followers within the ranks of the Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists and those with no previous religious leanings. On his demise there was a tussle between his Muslim and Hindu devotees as to who should claim his body for the usual burial and other such rites. It is recorded that the two parties agreed on a simple formula, to place a row of fresh flowers on either side of his body, one to belong to the Muslims and the other to the Hindus, and that whichever side the flowers would remain fresher the next day, that side party would be eligible to claim his remains. When the following day arrived, the flowers on both sides were as fresh as ever, but the body had disappeared to merge into and become one with the elements!

Perhaps more than any Prophet in history Nanak's coming on Earth was predicted profusely and with uncanny accuracy. This has been revealed after long and arduous research into the ancient doctrines many dating thousands of years before his actual birth. These are numerically listed below for ease of reference, not necessarily in chronological order. The Vedas and Puranas in which these direct references have been found recorded, are known to be amongst the oldest chronicles in the world. These references are as under:

✠ In the Hindu epic the **Rig Veda**

(i) In Mandala 7, Ush 5, Mantra 5 and Chapter 6

"Bee chakram prithoi aishai ta khestraah Vishnu mansai das sayaan throvaah so asaya keeryo janaas oeroo khashatra so janama chakaar (8)"

meaning

"when in the world the sinful ways will be on the rise and noble behavior will vanish, as the disappearance of the moon when on its wane on the darkest night, there will appear Vishnu as a prominent Prophet from the Kshatriya Clan and will manifest in consecutive form through 10 Prophets to bring back the ways of virtue to the ailing world."

(ii) In the same Vedas, in another part even the name Nanak and the clan he belongs to is recorded thus

"Sri Nanak gureng vareng saklaath heythoo. Heitha samasth jagathaa va veithee kaetheng"

meaning

"For the preaching of religious ways and the earning of good karma, there will manifest Guru Nanak from the clan of the Veithees"

(iii) At another position in the same Vedas is entered under Mandala 1 Soothak 5 and in the 7th Mantra thus

"Eeth eethei Vishnu reinn chakramei threihaa nathathei patham"

meaning

"The Prophet in the Kali Yuga will manifest three attributes. As an Avtar propounding Truth, as a Householder establishing family life and at the same time be a Raja Yogi"

✠ The **Yajur Veda**

In the **Yajur Veda** too the Prophet in the Kali Yuga will manifest three main characteristics thus

"Vishnu bee chakrageih treithaa neikthei patham samudhseiaa paaeh serei swahaa"

meaning

"Vishnu will appear again, manifesting three main characteristics, Avtarhood, Householder family life and be a Rajah Yogi as well"

Although in the above two quotations the name of Nanak does not directly appear, reference to being a householder family man, would point to him because he was among the first few Avtars (prophets) who was married and begetting children. Incidentally in Hindu mythology, Vishnu is the primordial Godhead Prophet, who incarnates on Earth taking many differing forms and the ensuing names thereto.

✠ In the Bhavekhath Purana

"Baaavekhath" means "future foretelling". There are numerous places in this famous Hindu epic where the advent of Guru Nanak is directly alluded to. These instances are listed:

(i) *"Theraa bhaareng thereshtwah keli krethem maha krethya. Aeveng vae tharam parchaariang bhavekhthee thaa kalau. Thatha vei loka rakheiaartheng maleishana naas heithwei paschmeithheng subh theisay vath wensei chei Nanaka naam nach rekhiaang brahem geaanaik manas bhavekhet kaloe skunth thatar verth kaleaah har (35)."*

meaning

"In the Kali Yuga when goodness in the world is deteriorating there will appear a Prophet from the Beithi clan named **Nanak** who from birth will be endowed with extra-ordinary spiritual power. He will preach on the nobility of life and the eradication of the sinful ways"

(ii) In another portion of this book the following short cogent quotation supplies further pertinent information on the advent of **Nanak**

"Guru thaa Brahma, Guru raa Vishnu, Guru raa dev maheshra saakhyaar Parbrehem Thasmei Nanak nameh"

meaning

"The Guru of the prophets, Brahma, Vishnu and Shivji is God almighty himself. This very Creator will manifest itself as a human in the form of one whose name will be **Nanak**.

Note the clarity and explicitness in which the coming of Nanak is predicted.

(iii) Further down in this book is recorded the following detailed assertiveness about Nanak and the type of mission and work he shall perform. It appears to emanate from the Godhead itself.

"The Kali Yuga shall dawn on Earth with radical manifestation of destruction of Karma and Dharma to such an extent that every situation shall be coloured by sinful activities. At that distressful moment, the Creator shall send down a spiritual luminary in the form of **Nanak** from the Khatri clan. He will spread the message of **Naam**, the Holy life Force, by introducing the primacy of meditation and thus washing clean the sinful ways by the waters of love."

Note the beautiful and comprehensive description of the happening.

(iv) There is yet another quotation from this same Bhavekhath Purana indicative of Nanak and the 9 prophets that consecutively followed his lineage:

"When in the world there is the deterioration of noble Dharma, then Vishnu will re-incarnate through 10 Prophethoods and will preach on the universal and omnipotent value of NAAM (Holy Life Force)"

✠ In Dhigvajeh Purana

"During the reign of the 8 Muslim rulers, Vishnu will incarnate in 10 human forms and after them will appear a (*mona*) **Silent** Guru (meaning the SGGS, the Sikh Scripture) who will only respond where the response is solicited."

The word SILENT is of great importance - it refers to the Sikh Scriptural Book (SGGS). This is the first time in the history of Religion that a Sacred Book was elevated to the status of a Prophet. Unlike a Prophet in body form with the inherent capacity to make utterances, a Book has to be categorised as being basically 'Silent'. This is indeed a startling revelation, pinpointing the coming into the world of a (*mona*) Silent Guru, thousands of years before the actual occurrence.

The eight Muslim Rulers were 1. - Sultan Lodhi, 2. - Babar, 3. - Humayun, 4. - Akbar, 5 - Jehangir, 6 - Shah Jahan, 7 - Aurangzeb, 8 - Bahadur Shah, These were precisely the Rulers in India during the period in which the 10th Sikh Guru came into being. This further emphasises the authenticity of the revelation and the happening.

✠ Through *patanjali* : the great Indian (Hindu) Sage Patanjali, one of the top Indian Yogis of old, came 2180 years before Guru Nanak. In his Ashram while lecturing on the Prophets of the Kali Yuga, the Iron Age, he singled out Guru Nanak as the one who will be outstanding. When asked what will be his prime mantra, He replied,

"Wahyanti karyanti jathputi athak etwaha brahamadeya, teisah Gur et WAHEGURU"

meaning

"He will use a unique single syllable mantra which has not been utilised before at any Age or Era. This will be **Waheguru**."

Waheguru mantra, which means “Lord of Wonderment” was popularised by Guru Nanak and all the nine other Sikh Gurus that followed him.

✠ In Vishnu Purana

In the *vishnu purana* there is recorded an interesting dialogue between Vishnu and a famous Rishi Umbreek. Vishnu is said to have informed Umbreek that he will once again take birth in the *Kali Yuga*. The Rishi then enquired about when will that be and what will be your name then? Vishnu replied that this will happen when the *Kali Yuga* has proceeded for 4500 years and that I will take birth in the Shatri Sooraj Bansi clan, when I will be named, **Nanak**.

In this same Purana it is further recorded: -

*“Sri Nanak santang saageaami
Sri asech, sri asech, sri asech, sri asech”*

meaning

“Sri **Nanak** will once again appear in the world in a variety of incarnations; this is for sure, this is for sure, this is for sure.”

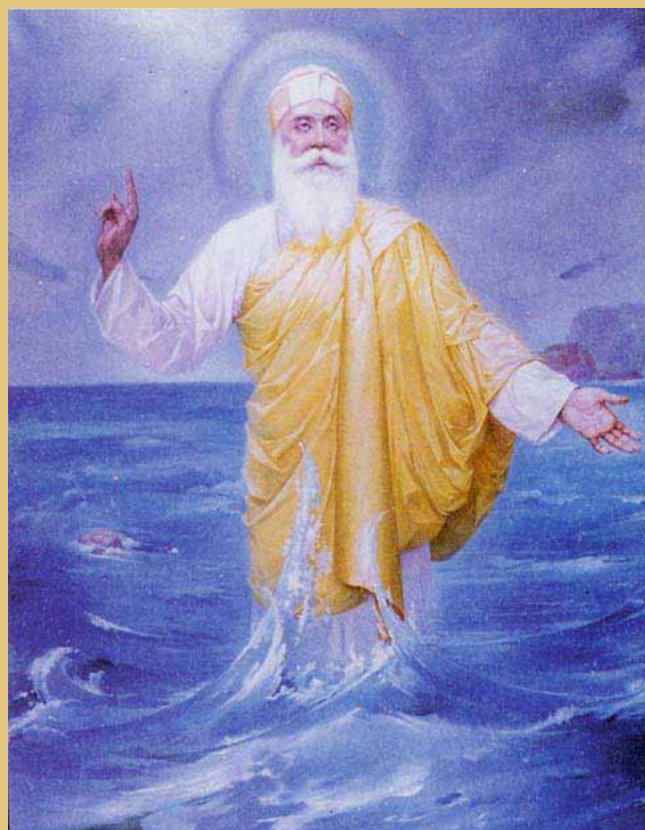
From the above it is evident that Guru Nanak must have had the largest number of premonitional references to his coming compared to the advent of the other Prophets in all the various Ages and Epochs. Thus the Prophet Guru Nanak’s advent into the world is indeed of millennial significance in even the coming future times.

Nanak

The word Nanak is a combination of two Sanskrit terms. ‘Na’ and ‘Anak’. The meaning attached to these words is “Not-but-One”. The message conveyed by the Guru’s name and the education imparted by him through the Sacred Scriptural verses, usually commence with the words “*Ik Oengkar*”. This phrase too means Non-but-One. One God only.

Mool mantra

There is a very interesting episode in Guru Nanak’s illustrious life. When he was still very young, he took a dip into the river alongside his house for his regular morning ablutions, but this time he disappeared into the waters, missing for two days and nights. On the third day he re-appeared from the water with the following Verse on his lips, which is now called



the Mool Mantra (the primordial Mantra), which appears at the commencement of every Chapter and sub-Chapter in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sacred Scripture of the Sikhs. It is one of the most comprehensive definitions of God and is amongst the most powerful of all the world’s Mantras.

This is how the Mool Mantra reads in its original version.

*“Ek Oengkaar Satnaam Karta purekh Nirbhau Nirvair
Akaal Moorat Ajoonee Sai- Bhang Gurparsaath”*

meaning

“The True One and only Omnipresent Immortal Essence of Reality. The Creator, the Omniscient and Omnipotent, the Incomprehensible (the fearless). Before all Beginnings and after all Endings. Beyond Time, Space and Form (and enmity). Free from the cycle of Births and Deaths, the Self-manifested. The Loving Merciful Enlightener (Realised with His Grace through total Submission to His Will).”

Bhai Kirpal Singh Gill

*Extracted from a Paper presented at the Assembly of
World Religions in Washington DC, November 1997*

The Continuing Reality

*G*uru Gobind Singh's work is best understood as the fulfillment of Guru Nanak's revelation. Explaining the purpose of his life in the *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh stated:

*For this purpose was I born,
Understand all ye pious people:
To uphold righteousness, to protect those worthy and
virtuous,
To overcome and destroy the evil-doers.*

Guru Gobind Singh had set himself against oppression and intolerance. He did not fight for any territory or worldly power, nor against any religion or sect. Among his admirers and followers were Muslims as well as Hindus. Many staunch followers of Islam had aligned themselves with him against the imperial armies. Two of the sons of Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim divine, and many of his disciples sacrificed their lives in the battle of Bahangani fighting on the Guru's side. The Muslim ruler of Malerkotla, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, had raised a strong protest against the execution of Guru Gobind Singh's two minor sons at Sarhind. Thus people of different faiths were attracted to the Guru whose teaching was that all men were equal and that, though the outer forms differed, the fundamental truth was always the same.

The Sikh organisation had taken on the semblance of a State during Guru Gobind Singh's days. But amidst all the splendour, he maintained puritanical



standards of simplicity in his personal life. Guru Nanak had struck a gentle note, but no one could mistake its implacability towards injustice and hypocrisy - Guru Gobind Singh's response to the situation he was confronted with was in keeping with that disposition.

All the Gurus shared the same light. This belief is central to the Sikhs' understanding of their history. Guru Gobind Singh himself says in his *Bachitra Natak*: "He who knoweth this reality [of the Ten Gurus being one entity] captureth the truth. Without knowing this, one remaineth in illusion." Bhai Nand Lal, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, perceived this truth and sang in his Persian couplets:

Nanak is the same, as is Angad. The same is the virtuous and glorious Amar Das. Ram Das is also the same; the same is Arjan. The same is the noble and excellent Hargobind; the same is Har Rai to whom are transparent this world and the next. The same is exalted Har Krishan who fulfilleth the desire of every luckless one. The same is also Guru Tegh Bahadur. From the same light is Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh is the same as Nanak.

Guru Nanak has been a continuing reality, an abiding presence. All succeeding Gurus bore witness to this fact; so did the community which was developing under their care. Of this subtle relationship and the pervasive influence of Guru Nanak there is interesting contemporary testimony which authenticates the Sikh belief that all the Ten Gurus embodied the same light and worked for the implementation of truths revealed by the First, Guru Nanak. This belief is not a matter of reading history backwards. As has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, Satta and Balwand, the minstrels contemporary of the Second, Third and Fourth Gurus, sang in verse, preserved in the Guru Granth of Guru Nanak's revelation manifesting itself in the successors. This is exactly how Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of the Fifth Guru, perceived the phenomenon of spiritual succession in the forming Sikh tradition.

Mobid Zulfiqar Ardistani, a contemporary of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Gurus, lends authenticity to the testimony of Bhai Gurdas and his predecessors and specifically refers to the current Sikh belief that he who recognises not Guru Arjan the same as Guru Nanak apostatises himself.

Guru Gobind Singh wrote in *Bachitra Natak*, "Nanak assumed the body of Angad ...afterwards, Nanak was called Amar Das, as one lamp is lit from another. . . The holy Nanak was revered as Angad. Angad was recognised as Amar Das. And Amar Das became Ram Das...When Ram Das was blended with the Divine, he gave the Guruship to Arjan. Arjan appointed Hargobind in his place and Hargobind gave his seat to Har Rai. Har Krishan, his son, then became Guru. After him came Tegh Bahadur."

This oneness, this unity of the Gurus came home to the Sikhs through their belief in the presence of Guru Nanak in them. For the Gurus themselves, this presence was a constant reality, an inspiration and the norm in the exercise of their spiritual office. They wrote sacred verse in the name of the First Guru. All their hymns in the Guru Granth bear the *nom de*

plume of Nanak. Thus we have the compositions of Nanak I, Nanak II, Nanak III, and so on. They have a remarkable correspondence of tone and concept; in both utterance and deed, later Gurus, Nanaks themselves as the Sikhs believe, were acting out the intuition received from Guru Nanak.

The memory of Guru Nanak was in this manner operative in subsequent Sikh development. The interplay of the original impulse and the exigencies of contemporary historical environment set the course of this evolution. Challenges arose. New situations demanded and elicited new answers. Points of transfiguration were reached and worked out; yet it is possible to discern in this process a basic harmony and continuity attributable primarily to the ever-present Nanak legend. Each of the successor-Gurus contributed towards evolution of the creed and civil organisation of the community in accordance with the spirit of teaching inherited from Guru Nanak and the existing historical factors.

Guru Gobind Singh sealed the line of personal Gurus and passed on the succession to the Holy Book, the Guru Granth. He declared to the Sikhs at the time of his passing that the Word as embodied in the Granth would be the Guru after him. "The Guru's spirit" said he, "will henceforth be in the Granth and the Khalsa. Where the Granth is with any five Sikhs as representing the Khalsa, there will the Guru be."

For Sikhs the Guru Granth has since been the Guru. Through it Guru Nanak lives on in the Sikh faith and tradition as a reality transcending time and space. This awareness of the continuing presence of Guru Nanak has been of crucial importance to the Sikh community as a whole as well as to its members individually. It has been an impelling factor in their history and has given them unity and a sense of purpose. Singly and in groups they practise this presence daily when, in their homes and in congregations in the gurdwaras, they conclude their morning and evening prayers said at any other time as part of personal piety or of a ceremony with the words: *Nanak nam charhdi kala tere bhane sarbatt ka bhala*—In Nanak's name we pray! May Thy name, Thy glory, O God, be ever in the ascendant, and, in Thy Will, may peace and happiness come to one and all in the world!

Extracted from "The Heritage of the Sikhs"
by Harbans Singh

Ahead of the Times

How much of Sikhism do we Understand?

As a Sikh permanently settled in Switzerland, observing events affecting Sikhs in India and elsewhere, I wonder more and more whether the Sikhs of today are really fit for Sikhism. I get the feeling that the message of the Sikh Gurus is so oriented to liberation from all kinds of superstitions, rituals, baser instincts and basic follies that today's Sikhs are just not intellectually up to a level where they can understand its full import. The message embodied in Sikhism is so universal, humanistic and elevating that it can only be imbibed and practiced by very strong individuals, capable of rising above basic human instincts like prejudice, envy, racism and ignorance.

Banda's role as India's pioneering land reformer needs more ample consideration on its own

I feel that the Gurus were way ahead of their times - with their universal and egalitarian message which had to be understood by the masses which ostensibly then converted to their teachings. Different social groups became Sikhs for different reasons but, leaving aside a tiny committed kernel, most of them seem to have converted

to Sikhism for reasons other than having full grasp of the philosophical message being preached by the Sikh Gurus. The Jats seem to have become Sikhs in large numbers during the 17th and 18th centuries, but appear to have done so more to establish a privileged status as land holding gentry than out of loyalty to the principles inherent in the Gurus' teachings. In the Hindu caste system, Jats would have remained classified as Shudras, notwithstanding their desperate efforts in manufacturing vaunted genealogical trees for themselves, showing them as descendants of Luv and Kush of Ramayana fame! Even a so-called former Sikh

High Priest has propounded this thesis in recent times. One only needs to see young Jats, mostly without turbans, sporting beards seemingly mown with lawn mowers, wearing designer brand clothes, mouthing a very approximate English syntax, preening around in most Punjab towns to realise that they are materially well situated but are miles away from any basic understanding of the message of the Gurus.

Pride, vanity, absence of intellectual curiosity and aggressive posturing seem to be the main characteristics of Jat Sikh society not only in the Punjab but also in foreign countries today. This is not to suggest that non Jat Sikhs are any better. However, we shall come to that later. Jat Sikhs constitute the major group in Sikhism, therefore, they are being considered before the others.

Pioneering Reform

Banda Singh Bahadur shattered the traditional land holding patterns in Punjab by taking land away from established non-Sikh landholders and redistributing it to smaller peasant proprietors, mostly Jat Sikhs, or those who subsequently became Sikhs because of this fact. Banda's role as India's pioneering land reformer needs more ample consideration on its own. I get the subjective feeling that a large number of Jats became Sikhs in this period not because of any understanding of the essentials of Sikh philosophy handed down by our Gurus but for sheer economic gain. They had a good chance of earning title to lands by becoming followers of Banda Singh. Their physical attributes made them good fighters. Their experience of tilling the land made them good farmers. They provided the emerging Sikh society with the means to fight oppression from ruling cliques and feed itself by producing staple diet items in Punjab. They surely deserve the encomiums showered on them in later times. But did they grasp the Guru's spiritual message? I honestly do not know. Was attachment to the Guru's message the principal factor in their becoming Sikhs in such large numbers? In my opinion, the jury is still out on this.

Sikhism's Backbone

The advantages to Jats in becoming Sikhs are obvious. From a low social status in Hinduism, they acquired a privileged social status in Sikhism, reaching climax in the empire constituted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. By becoming Sikhs, they acquired titles to their land holdings under Banda Singh Bahadur. They were able to mask their traditional penchant for robbery, plunder and aggressive posturing in the garb of a liberation struggle being carried on by Sikhs against genocidal political authorities. The consolidation of their social and political status continued even after the premature collapse of the Sikh Empire in 1849.

The British conducted an uncanny policy of *divide et impera* (divide and rule). In this context, they selected the Jat Sikhs as one of their favoured "martial races", recruiting them in the British Indian Army in numbers absurdly out of proportion to their numbers in the total population. They cleverly used their patronage by conferring titles of Sardar Bahadur, Sir etc on rich collaborators who were more loyal to the British Crown than to their fellow Indians. French collaborators who collaborated with the Nazis during 1940–45 were either shot or ridiculed after the Germans were expelled from France. Jat Sikh collaborators who aided the colonial power against their own people were honoured with titles, land grants and other privileges like an elite education in chosen schools like the Aitchison College in Lahore. Collaboration with foreign invaders was a badge of honour in India rather than an eternal stigma as it should have been, especially in Sikh society based on values taught by the Sikh Gurus. This should in no way take any merit away from the thousands of Jat Sikh participants in the freedom struggle but hardly any of them are part of the ruling political and social Jat Sikh elite dominating Punjab politics and society even today. A lot of the so-called Sikh elite of today are direct descendents of collaborators, toadies of the British. No amount of chest thumping posturing and splurging of wealth should be allowed to mask this basic historical fact.

As for non Jat Sikhs, it seems to me that the Khatri originally became Sikhs also because it gave them an even more privileged status than they had in Hindu society since they could claim kin with the Sikh Gurus, all from Khatri families. It is ridiculous to classify Sikh Gurus as Khatri since they had risen much above such petty classifications. It is equally ridiculous to

consider *bhagats* like Sant Kabir Ji, Bhagat Ravi Das Ji as belonging to lower castes. Any person considering such elevated souls as belonging to such or such caste, high or low, reveals his or her own limitations rather than a proper grasp of the message being conveyed by them. Those who grasp the message of the Sikh Gurus and Bhagats find it impossible to understand how Sikhs can continue to be mired in the shackles of casteism, which is totally antithetical to Sikh philosophy.

In this context, Khatri Sikhs considered themselves as the apex of Sikh society. They vaunted the fact of their kinship to the Sikh Gurus. The Hindu caste society had placed them below the Brahmins. They sought the spot of being the elite of Sikh society. Even some the off-spring of the Sikh Gurus were not immune to jostling for the top spot. The first, second, third, fourth sixth and seventh Sikh Gurus set aside their children or their eldest son in favour of outsiders to the family or younger sons as their successors. The influence of Khatri Sikhs diminished with the large scale entry of Jats into the Sikh fold in the 18th century but till then they pretty much ruled the roost in Sikh society. Even today, it is not rare to see them preferring their own caste kin as marriage partners for their children. Some of the Sodhis, for example, go about preening themselves as direct descendants of the Sikh Gurus, totally forgetting the message of equality preached by their own ancestors.

Most Sikhs today do not even have any proper understanding of their own Gurus' teachings

The social prestige

It appears to me that even the non Khatri, non Jat Sikhs were attracted to Sikhism more by the temptation of improving their social lot compared to what they were getting in Hindu society than by genuine understanding of and attachment to the Guru's message of sublime equality. But even they did not get rid of their caste attachments when it came to marriage. This group of Sikhs are as mired in ritualism as the other Sikh social groups. They have acquired a reputation as sharp businessmen,

cutting corners for profit. There is the stereotype of such Sikhs going to the Gurdwara early in the morning to rub their noses at the doorstep before going over to their shops to fleece their customers with all sorts of unsavoury practices. How can we reconcile their practices with the story of Guru Nanak Sahib getting fixed on “*Tera, tera, tera*” while doling out foodgrain rations to customers while working at the shop in Sultanpur Lodhi ? The Guru’s message of unflinching adherence to ethics and morality in every aspect of the life of a Sikh does not find true reflection in the business practices of this category of Sikhs. Posturing seems to have gained the upper hand over substance.

Raw deal to Guru-ke-bete

The Mazhabi Sikhs have got the rawest deal of all with the evolution of Sikh society after the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Tenth Guru said “Rangreterey Guru

ke betey” (Rangretas are the sons of the Guru). We today have the sad spectacle of Mazhabi Sikhs being obliged to have their separate Gurdwaras because they are not allowed to participate as equals at the Gurdwaras controlled by other “castes”! This paradox should make any true Sikh react with fury but does not seem to be even creating a ripple. Even in places like the UK, separate Gurdwaras seem to have been set up for Mazhabi

Sikhs. This total negation of the Gurus’ teachings is a direct reflection of the theme being developed in this article that—most Sikhs today do not even have any proper understanding of their own Gurus’ teachings. If they did, there would have been a massive social upsurge against the treatment reserved for Mazhabi Sikhs.

A Sikh fully conscious of and living his or her Gurus’ teachings simply could not tolerate such social injustice. A true Sikh should see Waheguru Almighty’s image in each and every being, let alone in every Sikh. In such an awareness scenario, an affront to a Mazhabi Sikh should be considered as an affront to Waheguru Himself since every being is in His image. If this sounds far fetched and

theoretical, this just goes to prove that the message of our Gurus is far ahead of us in time. Will we ever get to that stage in time? Will we ever get to the stage where we shall start to actually implement the Guru’s message in our everyday lives is an open question. Dr. BR Ambedkar was keenly interested in Sikhism as an alternative to Hinduism for his Dalit followers. A minute examination of Sikh social reality showed him that it did not conform to the Gurus’ message. How many people in the present day Sikh leadership are actually trying to redress these social injustices, leaving aside political hypocrisy being spewed about by all political parties to garner Sikh votes?

Even talking of *Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs, Mazhabi Sikhs* is an oxymoron for any Sikh imbued with the true essence of our Gurus’ message. We can only talk of the *Gurus’ Sikhs*, nothing else. However, even a casual look around Sikh society today in India and overseas establishes that it is anything but this. The fact that a large majority of Sikhs continue to revel in their caste tags shows that they have the outward form of Sikhism without understanding an iota of what its basic message is. Even the outward form is now difficult to distinguish since large numbers do not even keep unshorn hair or tie a turban, both absolute necessities demanded by the Tenth Guru. Many Sikh women keep the *karva chauth* fast. *Aartis* are done on a regular basis. Dowry is widely prevalent, as is female infanticide, an absolute horror. A low profile lifestyle, full of gratitude to Waheguru the Almighty at all times, has been shunned in favour of a high profile materialistic lifestyle, flaunting wealth. Historical gurdwaras are being destroyed by *Kar Sewa Babas* with impunity, wiping out centuries of architectural heritage in favour of marble spattered mausoleum-like structures. This is supposed to be *sewa*!

A British historian, Lord Acton, wrote in 1891, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. With reference to contemporary Sikh society, ignorance is bliss and absolute ignorance is total bliss! This is what I feel when I see modern day Sikh marriage ceremonies, *bhog* ceremonies or other manifestations of Sikh social behaviour. People with long flowing beards behave no better than clean shaven “Sikhs” flaunting thick iron *kadas*, *Khanda* symbols on their T shirts and *Khalistani* slogans on their cars. They do not have the strength

of obeying their tenth Guru's injunction to keep the five symbols of the Khalsa but go around posturing as the crusading knights of Sikhism! Dante Alighieri wrote the "Divine Comedy". Were he today to write about Sikh society, he might give his writing the title "Hilarious Comedy".

Identity is not for barter !

A major damage being caused by present day Sikhs in contact with non-Sikh societies is the distortion of Sikh religious requirements that they communicate to others. I have never understood why people who abandon the basic tenets of the Gurus' teachings feel this desperate need to flaunt themselves as "good Sikhs". It is almost as if they feel that Sikhs alone have the patent on being good human beings, which, obviously, is nonsensical. *Maanas ki jaat sabhey ekey pahchanbo* said our Gurus, so where is the matter of Sikhs identity, such people confuse the needs of their personal comforts with the requirements of Sikhism. They ask for proof of this in a laboratory! Anyone seeking experimental proofs in any religion has lost it! It is a matter of faith and personal enlightenment, not of laboratory experiments. As more and more Sikhs emigrate to overseas countries, more and more of them mask their personal penchant for comfort as a doctrine of their religion. This creates confusion in the minds of non-Sikhs about what exactly Sikhism stands for.

I am convinced that the root cause of Sikh social morass today is the basic fact that large majorities of various social groups embraced Sikhism, not because of being convinced about its message, but because of relative social advantages that they sought out of it. This was true in the time of our Gurus and this is true today. This is why most of them were not able to transmit a living heredity to succeeding generations. One of the finest compliments I ever received in my life was when a Muslim industrialist, the head of one of the biggest industries in Pakistan, told me after a personal meeting in Lahore that I should convey his sincere regards to my parents who had managed to transmit such a strong set of values to their son who, in spite of being married to a Swiss Caucasian woman and living in Switzerland, had not abandoned his identity. More importantly, the son had not attempted to justify the needs of his own personal comfort or ambitions by distorting the message of his religion. I conveyed this message to my mother last year just before she passed away.

My interlocutor told me that he travels frequently to the Indian Punjab and nothing saddens him more than seeing swathes of Sikh youngsters belonging to families of his Sikh friends who have abandoned their identity and their mother tongue. This is the view of an educated Muslim about contemporary Sikh society.

The sublime message is for living

Of course, there is a microscopic minority of Sikhs who live out the Gurus' sublime message in their daily lives. Such people do not go around broadcasting this fact from rooftops. The irony is that those who know, do not speak and those who speak do not know! In the middle of swirling Sikh ignorance and cupidity, the Gurus' message remains a beacon of shining light, waiting for those who understand its import, not just for Sikh society but for the whole of humanity.

To end on an optimistic note, when Kaliyuga gives way to a better epoch, the sublime message of the Sikh Gurus in the form of their teachings might just be better understood and actually practiced in their daily lives by Sikhs who would then rise above casteism, dowries, drunkenness, drugs, ritualism, corrupt ignorant leaders, heritage-destroying sant babas, rampant female infanticide, braggadocio instead of intellectual ability and pride in stupid behaviour. This is not going to happen in my lifetime. I sincerely hope that it happens some day. Till then I remain convinced that the essence of the Sikh Gurus' message is so spiritually elevating that most present day Sikhs are just not capable of comprehending its liberating thrust, leave aside actually putting it into practice in their daily lives.

The Gurus' message remains a beacon of shining light, waiting for those who understand its import, not just for Sikh society but for the whole of humanity.

Jogishwar Singh
Switzerland

'Raj Karega Khalsa'

Need Of A New Perspective



Photo courtesy : Fiona Aboud, who is working on a multimedia project on 'Sikhs : An American Portrait'.

At the tercentenary of Guru Gobind Singh's birth, three biographies were sponsored by different institutions in the country: one by Professor Harbans Singh was published by *Guru Gobind Singh Foundation*, another by S. Gopal Singh was published by the *National Book Trust of India*, and the third by Dr. J.S. Grewal and Dr. S.S. Bal was published by the *Panjabi University*, Chandigarh. All the three biographies are presumably still being read but more recent research has brought some dimensions of Guru Gobind Singh's life into sharper focus.

We are familiar with the *Raj Karega Khalsa* couplet in the Sikh national anthem but only recently has it clearly been known that this couplet became current in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh, Himself. The MS 770 in the Library of Guru Nanak Dev University

contains a copy of the *Tankhahnama* which is generally attributed to Bhai Nand Lal. It is dated 1718-19, and has been argued on the basis of its detailed analysis that there is feature of this work (actually called *Nasihatinama* in MS 770) to show that it was written after the time of Guru Gobind Singh. In fact the original composition can be placed between 1699 and 1705.

This 'minor' discovery has very important implications. It provides the most explicit contemporary evidence that the objective of the Khalsa was to establish political power. Rattan Singh Bhangu's assertion that the Khalsa was created as a sovereign entity from the very beginning makes a lot of sense in this context. Furthermore, the activity of Banda Singh Bahadur acquires new significance.

The task assigned to him was not vengeance but the establishment of Sikh rule. That explains why within two years of Guru Gobind Singh's death a coin was struck to declare the sovereignty of the Khalsa. The inscription on this coin is

Sikka zad bar do alam tegh-i Nanak wahib ast

Fateh Gobind Singh Sha-i shahan fazl-i Sachcha Sahib ast

The sword of Nanak provided the strength for striking a coin in both the worlds. The triumph of Guru Gobind Singh, the king of kings, was an expression of the grace of the True Master. No individual member of the Khalsa is mentioned anywhere, not even Banda Singh Bahadur, in those coins of 1711 and 1712. There is a reference on the reverse, in fact, to the collectivity of the Khalsa. Equally appropriate for the Raj of the Khalsa is inscription on the seal of 1710:

Deg-o teg-o jateh-o nusrat bidirang

Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh

"The gifts of grace in charity, power, and triumph are received from Guru Nanak by Guru Gobind Singh (and by the Khalsa from the Gurus)". When Captain Murray asked Ratan Singh Bhangu as to who gave sovereignty to the Sikhs, his reply was simply "Guru Nanak". The basis of power is spiritual. The exercise of political power is subject to ethical principles. Guided by Sikh ideology, politics becomes a noble activity.

Another dimension closely related to the idea of *Raj Karega Khalsa* is at the court of Guru Gobind Singh. It symbolised piety and splendour. The metaphors of kingship, *takht*, *sikka*, *taksal* and *khazana* in relation to God and the Guru appear in the bani of Guru Nanak and remain a recurrent feature of Sikh sacred and quasi-sacred literature. The visible symbol of this 'kingship' was the court of Guru Gobind Singh. His biographers have noticed the presence of poets and men of letters at his court. However, recent research clearly indicates that there was a great literary upsurge at the time of Guru Gobind, directly and indirectly patronised or inspired by him. The *bani* of Guru Gobind Singh was the core of this literary upsurge.

The historians of art even today do not talk of a 'Sikh' school of painting. But quite a few known illustrated *Janamsakhis* and illuminated scriptural texts indicate clearly that the Gurus and the Sikhs had begun to make use of the art of painting quite early. The *Goindwal Pothis* contain illuminated folios, and so does the *Kartarpur Pothi*. Artists are said to have been patronised by Guru Hargobind.



Nishaan Sahib at Fatehgarh Sahib (Sarhind).

The contemporary portraits of Guru Tegh Bahadur show clearly that the art of painting was patronised by him. The contemporary portraits of Guru Gobind Singh leave no doubt that good artists of the times worked at Anandpur under his direct patronage. Not only the court but also the religious concerns of Guru Gobind Singh were of fundamental importance. His *bani* reinforces the unity of God as the only object of worship, and the unity of Guruship. His deep interest in the Granth is evident from the recensions he got prepared at Damdama in Anandpur in the 1680s and 1690s for sangats outside the Punjab. As a logical culmination of the idea of Shabad-Guru he declared the eternal bani to be the Guru in future. This enunciation became the basis of the doctrine of Guru-Granth which has remained current in Sikh history from the early eighteenth century to the present day. Similarly, the syndrome of '*Gur-chela, chela Guru*' of the Vars of Bhai Gurdas, which was based on Guru Nanak's decision to



Panj Pyaaras in Manhattan.

install Lehna as Guru Angad in his lifetime, culminated in Guru Gobind Singh's enunciation that the Sarbat Khalsa would be the Guru after him, and it became the basis of the doctrine of Guru-Panth.

The institution of the Khalsa transformed the Sangat of the earlier Gurus into the *Waheguruji ka Khalsa*. The primary connotation of the Khalsa was direct affiliation with the Guru. This carried the implication that the mediacy of the Masands was removed and their followers were directly linked with the Guru. In other words, the *melis* or *sahlangis* of the Masands became the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. Any person who regarded a rival claimant to Guruship as 'Guru' could not to be regarded as Khalsa: therefore, the successors of Prithi Chand, Dhir Mal and Rani Rai were excommunicated. The Khalsa were to have no association with them. Fresh initiation through baptism of the double-edged sword (*khande di pahul*) turned a Khalsa into a Singh who kept his *kesh* unshorn, bore arms and fought for right causes in general and for the establishment of Khalsa Raj in particular. Those of the Khalsa who did not take *pahul* were known as Sahajdhari. They believed in the ten Gurus and the Guruship, the Granth and the Panth. However, Guru Gobind Singh's preference for the baptised 'Singh' resulted in the course of

the eighteenth century in equating the Khalsa with the Singh and the virtual eclipse of the Sahajdharis. The non-Singhs at the end of the eighteenth century were the erstwhile non-Khalsa dissenters and the various orders of the Udasis who did form an integral part of the Sikh social order. This was a measure of Guru Gobind Singh's success.

Contrary to general impression, all the important *Rahitnamas* were composed in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh: the *Uttar-Prashan* of Bhai Nand Lal, the *Tankhahnama* attributed

to him, the *Rahitnama* attributed to Prahlad Singh, the *Sakhi Rahit Patshahi* 10, the *Prem Sumarag Granth*, and the core of the *Rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh. These *Rahitnamas* emphasise the ideal of equality among the Khalsa in religious, social and political matters; lay down what is right belief, right practice and right conduct; underlines social commitment of the Khalsa as a fraternity of householders; a universal fraternity and underscore the ideal of *par-upkar* or the service not only of the Khalsa but also of others. These *Rahitnamas* strongly recommend an active care for the unprivileged, the poor, the hungry and the naked. For the Sikh in political power, nothing is more important than impartial justice.

We can see that Guru Gobind Singh created a rich legacy on the basis of inheritance from his predecessors: the exclusive worship of Akal Purkh, the doctrines of Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth, the egalitarian order of the Khalsa, the ethics of personal and public integrity, the ideal of Khalsa Raj and the rule of justice, promotion of social welfare, creation of literature and patronage of the arts. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Khalsa tried to give tangible form to this rich legacy, with an abundant measure of success.

Prof. JS Grewal