

GURU GOBIND SINGHJI AND BABA BANDA SINGH: EXPLORING HISTORY AND MYSTERY BEFORE NANDED (HYDERABAD) IN 1708

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ABSTRACT

In popular accounts of Sikh history, the meeting between Guru Govind Singhji and Baba Banda Singh Bahadur at Nanded has been shown as chance meeting without any previous background. It has been shown like unhistorical almost mythical happening without any care for background details. There are certain references in Gurmukhi historical literature which suggest that the meeting at Nanded was the first meeting and it was not a chance meeting either. Guru Gobind Singh Ji had blessed Madho Das Bairagi earlier also and their meeting at Nanded was destined for a bigger historical role for Madho Das, later Baba Banda Singh Bahadar.

KEYWORDS: *Guru, Rehatnama, Nanded, Sikh, Khalsa. Bairagi.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to find whether any long term background existed behind the meeting between Guru Gobind Singhji and Baba Banda Singh Bahadar at Nanded (September 3rd 1708) or it was as much unplanned, accidental and dramatic as narrated by various historical works. Historians, so far have remained unsuccessful to show any evidence clearly stating Guru's motives behind coming to Nanded. What exactly brought Guru Gobind Singhji to Nanded, when he had distanced himself from Bahadar Shah at Burhanpur? Nanded, at the same time is witness to three happenings, one, Bahadar Shah's departure to Hyderabad, two, Banda Singh Bahadar's departure to Punjab to punish the sinners of Sirhind, three, Guru Gobind Singhji attacked by Pathan visitors resulting in to his death remembered as Sachkhand Gaman in the Sikh chronicles. This makes the question of Nanded very important and if we trace the possibility of a long term connection between Guru Gobind Singhji and Baba Banda Singh, it may partially reveal the mystery of Nanded as well.

All traditional accounts record a dramatic meeting between Guru Gobind Singhji and Baba Banda Singh at the banks of Godavari in Nanded on September 3rd 1708. This is too well known to be reproduced here. Was it their first ever encounter? There are accounts, somewhat mystical, which believe that during his stay at Talwandi Sabo, Guru Gobind Singhji affirmed that a 'Banda' shall be there to fight against the Mughal state. These works also mention that he had meetings in camera with the Guru. This account, that needs scrutiny from a trained historian's view point, comes from Chaupa Singh's Rehatnama and Kesar Singh Chibber's 'Bansawlinama

Dasan Patshahian ka.'At the same time, it can be mentioned that Bhai Chaupa Singh attended Guru Gobind Singhji since his childhood and Sikh tradition remembers him as Guru's 'Khidava'.

And Kesar Singh Chibber's grandfather Dharam Chand Chibber was Guru's accountant. This is a reason that their works should be treated with care and caution as well. One can see the great influence of pauranic tradition, yet the traces of history cannot be dismissed.

Kesar Singh Chibber believes that Baba Banda Singh stayed at a thakurduara near today's Haryana villages Sehri Khanda and Nirban then inhabited by Toor, Chauhan and Jats. Guru Gobind Singhji met him there and held meeting in camera and gave him a responsibility but asked him to remain underground for nine months and nine days. (Padam ed. 1997:182-184) Once the given time was over (muddat karar poora aye hoia), he came out and made contact with the Lubana Banjaras and started preparing for rebellion (ibid:198). He does not mention anything about the Guru's meeting with Baba Banda Singh at Nanded or Burhanpur. This belief that Guru Gobind Singhji had a secret meeting with Baba Banda Singh much earlier is based on Chaupa Singh's account.

Chaupa Singh, who recorded one of the earliest codes of Sikh conduct, mentions that Guru Gobind Singhji foretold his meeting with Baba Banda Singh:

“ ik samay Dalle Berar Sahib pasahun puchia, ji sache patshah, (Lakhi Jungle vich 1761 sammat maghi de mele upper darbar lagya hoya hai si, das chaupa singh pas kharota si- Aye Sache Patshah, chaar Sahibzade chaare dev lok nu tor shade, ik vi na rakhya. Ihu panth kiske aasre theharefa, panth da vaali kaun hosi? Turkan nal ver hai Turak Panth nal arhnage... Turak dahade hain. Ta bachan hoya:

Dalla, aage manji nahin si rakhni. Dasan jaamian da bachan si. Es vaaste masand kadh shode, peeche saade matan aapu Guru ban behan.

Guriayee Sarbat Khalse di te asra Guru ke sabad da atai vali purukh. Te chirian pason baaz tudavne hain, balu bhagvati da hosi. Te zor Turkan da bhan shaddia hai. Ik Banda bhejange, ver le shaddange. Turkan nu apne damanu luhvange. Te panth vich puritan singh shastardhari hosan jo judh rakhange. (Padam ed. 1991: 127)

Rai Dalla asked that when will this Banda come? And who will be this Banda? Guru told that Banda shall be an ascetic. He will emerge nine months and nine days after Guru's departure to Sachkhand: Banda ik sadh hosi. Asaade asware kitian nau din nau mahinian pichon pragat hosi.

Chaupa Singh writes that Guru met an ascetic Bairagi in 1763 Sammat month of Vaisakh and had a meeting in camera: so jaanida hai, Sahib pooran purikh ji, sammat 1763 Visakh de mahine ik ateet sadhu Biaragi nu milke us nal kunj goshe gallan kitian hain. Aage usdi uh jane. (ibid: 127)

Chaupa Singh also mentions another mystical meeting of Guru and an unknown ascetic in the middle of a winter night in Sammat 1763. He says that Guru was taking rest and he also fell sleepy when an ascetic emerged suddenly. He produced a paper before Guru. He saw it and asked Dharam Chand to write something on it. Guru put his seal on the paper and asked the ascetic to wait for more than two years, and till then he should stay at Mandakini under Malager in Jognidhi's hut. The ascetic took this paper and disappeared. Guru did not reveal the identity or

purpose of visit of this unknown ascetic: Mama ji benati kar puch rahe ju ih kaun si ,kithon aya, kis bhejia hai par Sahib na dasya. (ibid: 131)

This accounts is mystical, but it suggests towards the possibility of some earlier meetings of Guru Gobind Singhji with Banda. At the same time it is important because it claims that Baba Banda Singh was predestined to play his role in Sikh history after the departure of Guru Gobind Singhji.

Third account, that proves that a larger background existed between Guru's meeting with Baba Banda at Nanded is 'Guru ki Sakhian' compiled by Sarup Singh Kaushish and narrated in Bhat-akshari script. This is much less mystical than the Chibber kins. This work claims that Baba Banda came into Guru's contact in Kankhal in 1695.it narrates Guru's words:

Madho Das, asan se teri jan pachan ek dapha Rikhikes Hariduar me hui thi. Os samay tusi ek sadhuan ki mandali me si. Jis mandli ka mukhia Aaughar Nath jogi Nasak tirath wala si. (Garja Singh and Padam 1986:186)

This is what Guru Gobind Singhji had confided with Jayat Ram Dadupanthi at Naraina: Jayat Ram ! hum usai pahalae se janate han. Oh pirthame Hariduar Kankhal ke mukam te mila tha.(ibid:183)

After this is mentioned to him, Madho Das remembers his Guru Lonia's words that predicted that one day; Guru Gobind Singh shall come and change his life forever:

Mere Guru Lonia Das kaha tha ik sama tere te aisa aveaga ki tere dere me ek esa raj jogi ayega jo teri sakti cin lega. (Ibid: 186).

While these accounts clearly indicate that the meeting between Guru and Banda was not the meeting between strangers, three things can be seen at work. One, sense of urgency, two, sense of secrecy and three, the idea that Banda was predestined to be Banda of Guru and the leader of rebellion. This sense of urgency is revealed by Guru himself in response to Jayat Ram's observation about Madho Das. According to Sarup Singh Kaushis, Guru responded to him in these words: hum oske asram me jaroor jainge. Hamara bairagi se jaroori kam hai. (ibid:183)

About the sense of secrecy, Chaupa Singh writes that Guru had secret parleys with a Bairagi in sammat 1763. Kesar singh chibber also confirms that a meeting between Guru and banda was held in camera. (Padam ed. 1997:183)

If we look at the content of meeting or the purpose of meeting, it can be said that Guru Gobind Singhji was convinced strongly about Baba Banda Singh. There was something that Guru saw in him, that neither Sikh panth, nor Sikh scholars or historians could see. What was this that remains unexplained so far? While majority of accounts of meeting describe that Banda Singh was given the task to avenge the sins of Sirhind, Sarup Singh Kaushis mentions a broader ideological cause of fighting against injustice. He narrates Guru's words to Baba Banda Singh:

'Me tujhe jagane ke lye yahan aya hun..dekh, yeh tin char janwar marne se to dera bheta gaya, tumhe bade dere Hind ka pata nahin yahan senkre hazaran mazloom nirdosh kohe ja rahe hain,me tera dhyani dilane yahan tere dere vich aya ha,'(Garja Singh and Padam 1986: 187)

Now coming back to the question of Nanded, how does it explain the course of events that were unfolded after this meeting? Burhanpur developments acted as prelude to Nanded events. At Burhanpur Guru Gobind Singh Ji received a letter from Bhai Mani Singh at Amritsar (ibid:185). The copy and the content of this letter is unknown to historians so far. In response to this letter Guru asked the majority of his camp to leave for Punjab. He sent Mata Sundari and her adopted son Ajit Singh Palit to Delhi. Burhanpur stay was significant for his meeting with two ascetics Lonia Sidh and Jayat Ram. Both discussed the case of Madho Das Bairagi with Guru Gobind Singhji. It indicates that the Guru was in close contacts with the Bairagi establishments and he was creating a visible distance from the camp of Bahadur Shah. The management committee of Gurdwara Badi Sangat, Burhanpur and Vir Singh Bal believe that Guru met Banda at Burhanpur:

Dohira Nirpada nakh Buranpor aye GurBhagawan/Tapi tir birajaya Bande
ke asthan/Chaupai: Tapi tir bag ik aiso/ Surpat ke nandan ban jase/Bande
ko asam tho jahan/Prapatbhaye Sri Gur tahan(Bal 1986:179)

VirSinghBal makes a radical point that Banda left for Punjab and Guru proceeded to Nanded.

‘Banda kino Sikh tab Tegh Bahadurnand/ Panch ban de yo kahyo maro jaye Sirand/
De sar panch kaman dai Gur BandahiMadar des pathayo/ Sang daye kashu Singh
Sri Gur roklaho chit vakalayo/ Ho asvaar Sri Gur tan chin aap Nadere rah sidhayo .(ibid: 180)

This is a weak evidence but it indicates that the idea of Banda began to be discussed at Burhanpur itself and while going to Nanded Guru Gobind Singh Ji was coming closer to Banda and creating distance from Bahadur Shah. At the sometime, He chose to stay away from Bahadur Shah’s surveillance system which had always shadowed him in the form of disguised devotees. It is very much possible that Bahadur Shah’s informers took notice of these developments.

Guru Gobind singhji arrived at Nanded in the last month of rainy season. In one of his meetings with the emperor on the banks of Godawari, he tossed a diamond in to the river. Emperor had presented this diamond to him few seconds earlier. He clearly showed him what he thought of wealth that was never in shortage for him. (Official reports mention about the enormous wealth Guru left behind him). In mundane form, it was a message to Bahadur Shah that peace in Punjab cannot be bought with this; the only price for peace in Punjab was justice! And once again, justice required laying hand on the sword, because all other means had failed.

Now, Nanded presented a curious picture while Bahadur Shah was waiting at Nanded to march against the rebellion of Kam Bakash at Hyderabad, Guru Gobind Singh Ji was preparing Banda Bahadur to lead a rebellion in Punjab. The developments at Guru’s dera at Nanded reached Bahadur Shah’s camp at regular interval even after he had left Nanded for Hyderabad. It means that Guru’s camp and household at Nanded was under royal surveillance. In this case the role of Pathans who attacked Guru Gobind singh ji becomes evident. They visited and attacked Guru the same evening, when Guru had seen Baba Banda Singh off to Punjab. There is great probability that Bahadur Shah at Nanded and Wazir Khan in Punjab were aware of what was happening at Guru’s dera in Nanded, and the plans of sending Baba Banda Singh were not a secret matter for them. Let us see what happened at Guru’s dera at Nanded on the night of October 5th 1708.

Once the Pathans saw that Guru Gobind Singh's advance guard led by Baba Banda Singh had left Nanded, they were quick to conclude that he should not be allowed to join it at any stage. Same evening, they came very late. According to Sarup Singh Kaushish:

“tandekchalejanekeuprantisidihunrehrasjike path ke pashchatdo pathan Guru jike pas aye.”

(Garja Singh and Padam 1986: 189)

It means that they could not afford to wait till the next day. They remained in Guru's presence till late night:

“In does Pathanakesath Guru Jikobatchitkarte do gharian rain batit hoi gayee. (ibid:189)

This suggests that these two Pathans were neither ordinary persons, nor strangers or new comers. That is why they were permitted to hold parleys with Guru in his chamber till late in the night. The talks (batchit) that continued for an hour at night was not of casual nature. It can safely be assumed that they were secret messengers of Bahadur Shah (and agents of Wazir Khan) who still made sure that Guru does not open a new front at Punjab while he himself is at Hyderabad. They had mandate from Bahadur Shah to keep an eye on Guru and mandate from Wazir Khan was to assassinate him.

The news of attack on Guru and consequent death of Jamshed Khan was reported to Bahadur Shah at Zafarabad on 28 October (after 24 days, that is that attack took place on the night of 4th October and news was out by 5th morning) he ordered that his son be given mourning robe. (Ganda Singh ed. 1967: 70) (this verifies that Jamshed Khan was messenger of Bahadur Shah)

The news of death of Guru Gobind Singh reached Bahadur Shah at Zafarabad on 30 October. (after 24 days). He ordered that Guru's son be given robe of mourning on account of death of his father (ibid)

Guru's last rituals took place on 17th October. On 11th November matter of Guru's property was brought before Bahadur Shah (after 25 days).

This evidence leads to the possibility that Baba Banda Singh's departure from Nanded to Punjab and the fatal attack on Guru Gobind Singhji were not accidental, but show the traces of conspiracy by Mughal officials. Hari Ram Gupta has already indicated towards this possibility in his hypothesis 'Killed by court conspiracy'. He believes that the emperor halted at Nanded for seven weeks as long as the Guru was there. He left the place and crossed river Godavari in 4 or 5 hours after the Guru's last breath (Gupta 1973:239-40) His hypothesis is based on a different date given by Irvine in Later Mughals, that is October 7th as the date when Bahadur Shah left Nanded and proceeded to Hyderabad. Actual date, when Bahadur Shah left Nanded, was September 26th, that is twenty-fifth of Assu month, as given by Sarup Singh Kaushis. Conspiracy was there, but it was not as bare and indiscreet as put by Hari Ram Gupta.

What remains unclear so far that how and when did Baba Banda Singh receive the news of attack on Guru Gobind Singhji, and how did he react to this? Probably he immediately went underground and emerged in Kharkhauda. Rest is history.

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