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Banda Singh Bahadur: The Ascetic Who Toppled a Mughal Governor

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Banda Singh Bahadur: The Ascetic Who Toppled a Mughal Governor

Practice: 6 MCQs
Banda Singh Bahadur was a wandering ascetic who led the first big Sikh uprising against the Mughals.

This lesson follows his rise, his win at **Sirhind**, his state at **Lohgarh** and his end in Delhi in 1716.

- **Names:** Lachman Dev, then Madho Das, then Banda Singh Bahadur.
- **Guru:** met Guru Gobind Singh in the Deccan in 1708.
- **Victory:** beat Wazir Khan near **Sirhind** in May 1710.
- **Capital: Lohgarh**, with his own coin and seal.
- **End:** caught at Gurdas Nangal in December 1715; executed in June 1716.

Contents

1. Who he was
2. The fall of Sirhind
3. The state he built
4. The Mughal reply
5. Gurdas Nangal
6. Delhi, 1716
7. The sack of Sirhind
8. How exams test this
9. 4 understanding checks
0. Related Articles

1. Who was Banda Singh Bahadur, and how did he become a Sikh commander?

He was a wandering ascetic who became the leader of the first Sikh uprising against the Mughals.

He is known by several names. His birth name was **Lachman Dev** (also written Lachmi Deo). As an ascetic he was called **Madho Das**, and as a Sikh he became **Banda Singh Bahadur**.

He met **Guru Gobind Singh** in the Deccan in **1708**. After that meeting, he was sent north to Punjab. He died in Delhi in **1716**.

1.1 Where did he come from?

One old account says he was born in **October 1670**, in a Rajput family of **Rajauri** in the Poonch region. The family later called him Lachmi Deo. As a young man he became a **Bairagi**, a wandering ascetic.

He joined a monastery near Qasur, south of Lahore, and took the name Narayan Das. In time he travelled to the Deccan as a pilgrim. There he met the Guru and became his follower.

Other books give other details of his early life. Sources differ on his birth place and on the story of his youth. The safe exam line is that he was a Bairagi ascetic before he met the Guru.

1.2 What did the Guru give him?

Sikh tradition says the Guru handed him **five arrows**, a war drum and a flag. He was named the leader of an armed Sikh mission to Punjab. He was also told to carry letters to the Sikhs there, asking them to join him.

The old Persian court record gives a different picture. It says the man was sent off secretly from the Deccan to Hindustan. It adds that letters went to the Punjab telling the Sikhs their Guru was dead. The same letters said the Guru would return with power.

1.3 Why did Sikhs rush to join him?

The Guru had died in 1708, and his followers were grieving. They wanted a leader to avenge the death of his young sons. Banda gave them one.

The old record says he first appeared at **Kharkhoda**, about 35 miles west of Delhi. Local villagers had followed the Guru earlier. They believed in the new leader and wrote to Sikhs in every direction.

About **500** armed men gathered. They marched on **Sonepat**, north of Delhi, and beat the local commander. This easy win brought more men to his side.



Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716), Sikh military commander. Public domain painting, via Wikimedia Commons.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive)
- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com)

2. How did Banda Singh Bahadur take Sirhind?

He beat the Mughal governor of Sirhind in open battle. Then he took the town. This was the first big Sikh victory over a Mughal provincial power.

The governor was **Wazir Khan**. Sikhs hated him because he was blamed for the death of the Guru's two youngest sons. Banda made him his main target.

2.1 How big was his army?

It grew fast. One old writer says the army began with 4,000 to 5,000 men on ponies and 7,000 to 8,000 on foot. It then rose to 19,000 and, in the end, to about **40,000** well-armed men.

The old record says most came from lower-caste Hindu families. The numbers come from one chronicler and may be too high. Treat them as a sign of speed, not an exact count.

2.2 Where and when was the battle?

The two armies met on a plain north-east of Sirhind. Different books name different places: Banur, Alwan Sarai and Chappar Chiri. **Chappar Chiri** is the name exams use.

The date is also disputed. The old Persian record converts to **22 May 1710**. Many modern books say **12 May 1710**. Sources differ, so learn both and look at the options in the question.

2.3 How did the fight go?

Wazir Khan was nearly 80 years old. His army had cannon and elephants. At first the Sikh line broke and ran.

Then Banda sent a group around to strike the Mughal rear. The runaway Sikhs turned back and charged, shouting **"Sacha Padshah"** and **"Fath Darshan"**. The Mughal line cracked. Wazir Khan was shot dead.

2.4 What happened to Sirhind after the battle?

Sirhind was taken after about two days. A Sikh officer was named its governor. Sources differ on his name: one old record says **Baj Singh** and another says Bar Singh.

The treasure of Wazir Khan fell to the winners. One chronicler puts it at two crore rupees. That is an old estimate, so treat it with care.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 2)
- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 2)

True or false: Banda Singh Bahadur was born with that name.

3. What kind of state did he build?

He tried to rule like a king. He made a fort his capital, struck his own coin and gave out posts. These steps matter because they show a real state, not just a raid.

3.1 Why was Lohgarh his capital?

Lohgarh, the “Iron Fort”, stood in the hills about **12 miles north-east of Sadhaura**. Its walls were pierced for muskets and carried small cannon. The hills around made it hard to attack.

3.2 What did the coin and seal say?

Banda took the title **Sacha Padshah**, meaning “True Sovereign”. His followers were all called **Singhs**, or lions. They greeted each other with the words “Fath Darshan”, meaning “may you see victory”.

His coin copied Mughal style. One side praised Guru Gobind Singh and the “sword of Nanak”. The other side named Lohgarh as the city of coinage. His letters carried a seal praising “sword, pot and victory”.

The coin did not carry the emperor’s name. That was a bold political signal.

3.3 What was his land reform?

Modern accounts say he ended the **zamindari** system in the lands he held. Peasants who tilled the land became its owners. This is the idea most often praised in textbooks.

The old Persian record says little about it. So treat the reform as a point from later Sikh and modern writing, and remember that the state was short-lived.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 3)
- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 3)

True or false: Banda Singh Bahadur's capital was the hill fort of Lohgarh.

4. How did the Mughals fight back?

The new emperor, **Bahadur Shah I**, came north himself. He left Ajmer on **27 June 1710** and reached the Sadhaura area in late **November 1710**. He wanted the revolt stopped before it spread.

4.1 What happened at Lohgarh?

On **10 December 1710** imperial troops drove the Sikhs off the small hills and closed on the fort. By midday the Mughals were at the walls. Many Sikhs died, and the camp was plundered.

Banda was not caught. He escaped into the hills. The fall date differs by book: sources differ between November and December 1710.

4.2 Why did the uprising not end?

Banda came back. By 1713 he had rebuilt a fort at Sadhaura. **Abdus Samad Khan** was made governor of Lahore in February 1713 with orders to destroy him.

The Mughals besieged Sadhaura. Food ran short, and the Sikhs slipped away to Lohgarh. Then they fled into the hills before a shot was fired. Mughal reports of the fall of Sadhaura reached the court on **9 October 1713**.

4.3 Did Sikh raids continue after that?

Yes. In August 1714 a Sikh force of about 7,000 attacked the town of **Rupar** on the Sutlej. The defenders held out and the Sikhs retreated.

Later the Sikhs plundered towns near Batala and Kalanaur. Banda then took a stand at **Gurdas Nangal**, near Gurdaspur, with about 10,000 men.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 4)
- Bahadur Shah I: The Oldest Man Ever Crowned a Mughal Emperor (mcqquestion.com)

Think it through: why did Banda put no emperor's name on his coin?

A Mughal coin named the emperor. Banda's coin named the Gurus instead. It said that he ruled in the name of the Sikh Gurus, not the Mughal throne. That was a bold signal of a rival state.

5. How was Banda captured at Gurdas Nangal?

The Mughals starved him out. In March 1715 the court sent a sharp warning to Abdus Samad Khan and ordered more nobles to join him. Banda held an earthen fort at Gurdaspur, in the Bari Doab, about 44 miles north-east of Amritsar.

He flooded the ground around the fort by cutting the canal. Mud then slowed the Mughal horsemen. The siege still lasted about **eight months**.

5.1 How did the siege end?

Food ran out completely. The Sikhs ate grass, leaves and bark. Many fell ill. When the leaders asked for terms, Abdus Samad Khan refused. Banda gave up without any terms.

The old record dates the surrender to **17 December 1715**. Many modern books say **7 December 1715**. Sources differ on the day, but both agree it was December 1715.

5.2 What did the Mughals find inside?

Very little. The list of captured arms shows about 1,000 swords, 180 matchlocks, 173 bows and 114 daggers. The treasure was a few gold ornaments, 23 gold coins and a little over 600 rupees.

The finding tells a clear story. The man who had challenged an empire for years held very little wealth at the end.



Five dates in the story of Banda Singh Bahadur. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 5)

- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 5)

True or false: Banda was captured when Lohgarh fell in 1710.

6. What happened to him in Delhi?

He was taken to Delhi as a prisoner and executed in **1716**. The Mughal court wanted the whole city to see the end of the revolt.

6.1 How was he paraded?

The procession entered Delhi on **10 March 1716**. The road from Agharabad to the palace was lined with troops. Banda sat in an **iron cage** on an elephant, dressed in a gold court robe and a red turban.

Behind him walked or rode about **740** Sikh prisoners. Crowds filled the streets. The prisoners looked calm, and the court writers noticed it.

6.2 Why did the Mughals not spare him?

The Mughals saw him as a rebel who had killed a governor and set up a rival state. A public end was meant to warn others. Court records say life was offered to those who would convert, and the prisoners refused.

His wife and young son were taken from him first. The old record says his son was killed in front of him. We will not describe the rest here.

6.3 When was he executed?

Executions of the other prisoners began on **15 March 1716**, at about 100 a day for a week. Banda himself was put to death later, at the shrine of Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, near the tomb of Bahadur Shah I.

The old record gives **19 June 1716**. Many modern books give **9 June 1716**. Sources differ by ten days. All agree it was June 1716, in the reign of **Farrukhsiyar**.



The three names of Banda Singh Bahadur in order. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 6)
- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 6)

Think it through: why did the Mughals not spare him after the siege?

He had killed a governor and set up a rival state. The court wanted a public end as a warning to others. So the Mughals chose a parade and an execution in Delhi.

7. What do we really know about the sack of Sirhind?

Sources disagree strongly. The old Mughal court chroniclers describe a plundering of the town that lasted about four days. Mosques were damaged and many people were killed. These writers were hostile to the Sikhs.

Later Sikh and modern writing says the picture is too one-sided. Court bulletins written weeks after the victory say Banda forgave a local landlord and kept him in post. About a dozen mosques and tombs built before 1707 still stand there.

7.1 How should a student handle this in an exam?

Do not repeat the extreme claims on either side. Learn the safe facts. Banda killed Wazir Khan and took Sirhind. Mosques and tombs of that age still stand there. Accounts of the sack differ.

If an option says he “completely destroyed” the city or “spared” it, treat it with suspicion.

Sources:

- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 7)
- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 7)

True or false: Banda Singh Bahadur was executed in Delhi in June 1716.

8. What do exams ask about Banda Singh Bahadur?

Examiners like precise facts. Know these:

- **Names**: Lachman Dev, then Madho Das Bairagi, then Banda Singh Bahadur.
- **Meeting**: Guru Gobind Singh, Nanded, 1708.
- **Battle**: Chappar Chiri, near Sirhind, 1710. Wazir Khan was killed.
- **Capital and coin**: Lohgarh; coin issued in the name of the Gurus, not the emperor.
- **Land reform**: zamindari ended in his lands.
- **Capture**: Gurdas Nangal, December 1715, after about eight months.
- **Death**: Delhi, June 1716, under Farrukhsiyar.

Sources:

- Banda Singh Bahadur (mcqquestion.com) (section 8)
- The Later Mughals, volume 1, by William Irvine (Internet Archive) (section 8)

Your understanding checks

Your 4 quick checks Answered 0 of 4 · Correct 0
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Practice: 6 MCQs

Practice MCQs

1. Banda Singh Bahadur killed which Mughal governor in the 1710 battle near Sirhind?

A. Zain-ud-din Ahmad Khan

B. Zakariya Khan

C. Wazir Khan

D. Abdus Samad Khan

See answer ↓

2. What was the name of the hill fort that Banda Singh Bahadur made his capital?

A. Sadhaura

B. Gurdas Nangal

C. Rupar

D. Lohgarh

See answer ↓

3. Which Mughal emperor marched north in person against Banda Singh Bahadur in 1710?

A. Farrukhsiyar

B. Aurangzeb

C. Jahandar Shah

D. Bahadur Shah I

See answer ↓

4. Banda Singh Bahadur's last stand, ending in his capture in December 1715, was at which place?

A. Lohgarh

B. Sirhind

C. Gurdas Nangal

D. Samana

See answer ↓

5. In whose reign was Banda Singh Bahadur executed in Delhi in June 1716?

A. Bahadur Shah I

B. Jahandar Shah

C. Farrukhsiyar

D. Muhammad Shah

See answer ↓

6. Banda Singh Bahadur's coin did NOT carry the name of the Mughal emperor. Whose name did its verse praise instead?

A. Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh

B. Bahadur Shah I

C. Banda Singh himself as emperor

D. Wazir Khan

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The answer is **Wazir Khan**. He was the faujdar, or military governor, of Sirhind. He was about 80 years old and died in the battle. Sikhs blamed him for the death of Guru Gobind Singh's young sons. Why the others fail: Zain-ud-din Ahmad Khan took over Sirhind after Wazir Khan fell. Abdus Samad Khan and his son Zakariya Khan fought Banda later, in 1713-1715. Memory hook: Wazir Khan fell, then Sirhind fell. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** The answer is **Lohgarh**, meaning Iron Fort. It stood in the hills about 12 miles north-east of Sadhaura. Banda struck coins in its name. Why the others fail: Sadhaura was a town and fort nearby. Gurdas Nangal is where he was caught in 1715. Rupar is a town on the Sutlej that Sikh forces attacked in 1714. Memory hook: Lohgarh means Iron Fort. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** The answer is **Bahadur Shah I**. He left Ajmer in June 1710 and reached the Sadhaura area in the winter. Imperial troops closed on Lohgarh in December 1710, but Banda escaped into the hills. Why the others fail: Aurangzeb died in 1707. Jahandar Shah ruled only in 1712-1713. Farrukhsiyar was the emperor when Banda was executed. Memory hook: Bahadur Shah stormed the fort but missed the man. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** The answer is **Gurdas Nangal**, near Gurdaspur in the Punjab. Mughal forces under Abdus Samad Khan besieged the fort for about eight months. Food ran out and Banda gave up. Why the others fail: Lohgarh fell in 1710 and Banda escaped. Sirhind was his great victory of 1710. Samana was an early target in 1709. Memory hook: Gurdas Nangal means the last siege. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** The answer is **Farrukhsiyar**. Banda was paraded into Delhi in March 1716 and put to death in June. Sources differ on the day, 9 or 19 June. Why the others fail: Bahadur Shah I died in 1712. Jahandar Shah ruled for under a year. Muhammad Shah came to the throne in 1719. Memory hook: Banda escaped one emperor and fell to another. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** The answer is **Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh**. The verse speaks of the sword of Nanak and the grace of the true Lord, and it names Guru Gobind Singh. Leaving out the emperor's name was a bold political sign. Why the others fail: Bahadur Shah I was the emperor Banda was defying. Wazir Khan was the governor he killed. Banda took the title Sacha Padshah, but the coin honoured the Gurus. Memory hook: his coin honoured the Gurus, not the emperor. ↑ Q6

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