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## Identifying the Date of Banda's Arrival in Haryana

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### Abstract

*In the then Sarkar of Delhi of the Suba Shahjahanabad, there occurred a thing of great historical importance when in 1709, Banda Veer Bairagi appeared in a village identified as Sehri Khanda near Kharkhoda in the Dastur of Sonipat. The date of his arrival still remains a thing to be fixed. In the light of historical evidences available and collected from oral tradition through interviews conducted, this paper is an effort to identify it as some day in the first half of February, 1709.*

### Keywords

*Suba of Shahjahanabad, Sarkar of Delhi, Dastur of Sonipat, Kharkhoda, Nanded, Guru Govind Singh, Banda Bairagi, Lakhi Jungle, Shekhawati, Bagar, Pallu Pherna, Sehri Khanda, 5<sup>th</sup> day of Ramzan of 1120 Hizri, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1708.*

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## Identifying the Date of Banda's Arrival in Haryana

The state of Haryana is known as a geographical area nearest to Delhi covering it from three sides. Prior to the formation of this state form Punjab in 1966\*, it was an essential part of that province. It had been so since the rule of East India Company.\*\* Before the advent of the British in 1803, the geographical area covered by the presently Haryana State was comprised of the portions of the two Mughal provinces of Agra and Delhi which had been so since Akbar's reign. The *Ain-i-Akbari*<sup>1</sup> mentions it well.

In the *Suba* of Shahjahanabad and again in its *Sarkar* of Delhi, there occurred a thing of great historical importance when in 1709, a brave person had appeared in a village in the Sonipat<sup>2</sup> *Dastur* of *Suba* and *Sarkar* of Delhi. He had few but extraordinarily brave followers along-with him<sup>3</sup>. Coming here, either he himself declared or the local people themselves had taken him as their own Guru<sup>4</sup>. As a matter of historical fact, there are evidences to this effect that it was Guru Govind Singh; their Guru, who had promised them to come in the ensuing year to lead them and they had been ordered to join him with their weapons. Quoting a piece of contemporary work, a historian writes<sup>5</sup>:

“The dates of arrival of Banda to ‘the town of Kharkhoda’ and to the village where he appeared are not mentioned in any of the contemporary sources. The term used as the town of ‘Kharkhoda’ seems fit to get the location of the main site of the village where he had to be operate from. The village’s name as well as the date remain still a question of further investigation.”

William Irvine, one of the greatest historians of 20<sup>th</sup> century dealing in Modern Indian History, writes<sup>6</sup>:

“Suddenly there appeared in the town of Kharkhoda, thirty-five miles west of Delhi, a man who gave himself out to be Guru Govind Singh.”

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\* 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1966.

\*\* Form the Treaty of Surjianjangaon held on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1803 to the Declaration of Queen Victoria by the Governor. General Lord canning at Allahabad on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1858.

He further writes<sup>7</sup>:

"The *Zamindars* of the village where he appeared had become several years before this time followers of Guru Govind Singh and known his appearance. As the pretender had copied Govind Singh's exterior, and resembled him in features, these *zamindars* believed in him, adopted his cause and words in all directions to the Sikhs telling them that their lost leader had returned to earth."

Coming at the village near the town of the Kharkhoda, Banda Veer Bairagi was ready to execute his plans full of bravery though till then he was carefully keeping himself hidden.<sup>8</sup> It was his strategy. There are certain evidences in the *Prachin Panth Prakash* and also in the '*Banda Bahadur*' on whose bases Ganda Singh, another historian of the last century, thus describes<sup>9</sup>:

"Robberies and thefts were not uncommon in those days; and Banda Singh\* was advertised as a man of wealth, gangs of dacoits hovered round his camp. But they were soon driven away by his companions and he passed on to the Bagar territory unmolested. He had so far been quiet and had followed the policy of non-interference in the affairs of others. This, however, could not continue for long. Bagar\*\* in those days was notorious for occasional visitations of professional dacoits. One day he was informed that a gang of dacoits was marching upon the village where he was stationed, and that the residents were deserting their hearths and homes to take refuge in the neighbouring jungle. He encouraged them to stand against the marauders. But the village *Panches* were too tired to entertain any such idea. Fearing lest the whole population should catch the contagion of their city fathers, Banda Singh locked them up in a house and marched out the head of a small band of Sikhs to oppose the robbers. His attack was so sudden, bold and severe, that they were thrown into confusion and, without a second thought, they took to their previous plunders. Their leader was captured. All who came to his rescue were either killed or driven back. Now the villagers too were emboldened to strike a blow in their defence. Banda Singh released the *Panches* and ordered the pursuit of the robbers who were chased to their very homes in a neighbouring village."

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\* Applying the research methodological methods, no traces ever have been found to accept this 'Banda Singh' as his name. 'Banda', 'Banda Bairagi' and more popularly 'Banda Veer Bairagi' are the words known as his name.

\*\* For the Bagar tract, please see: *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, XIII, pp. 149-50..

Identifying the place of Banda's arrival in Haryana, the authors of this article had taken interviews and ample amount of field work and again correlating the facts thus obtained with the literary sources, they are of the opinion that the place was the village of Sheri, popularly known as Sehri-Khanda in the present day *tehsil* of Kharkhoda. In this context, the following paragraph is worth mentioning<sup>10</sup>:

"It lies in the present day *tehsil* of Kharkhoda in the district of Sonipat in Haryana state of India. The oral tradition of history still preserves the evidences enfocussing the facts relating to Banda Bairagi's shelter and site for his further campaigns which includes the suppression of the Ranghar dacoits and military expedition on the Faujdar of Sonipat. This is the village from where Baba Banda Bairagi launched his military expeditions those resulted not only in successful execution of Wazir Khan, the *Faujdar* of Sarhind but also in making a kingdom founded yielding a revenue worth of 32 lacs of rupees per annum."

To identify the time of Banda's arrival at Sehri-Khanda needs some answers to a set of questions relating to his departure from his *Math* at the Godavari River's bank at Nanded.<sup>11</sup> The date of Afghan's attack on Guru's persona and the days of his treatment and finally the date of Guru's *balidan*. As a matter of methodological process adopted for historical investigation, it would be accurately better to have the lieverage of day-to-day entry of Banda's travelogue if existed. But unfortunately and quite naturally, the Banda's party was on a secret mission to north that could not had any written record at all.

He was leaving Deccan for north and a number of conditions were already applied to, whose first and foremost was to travel never ever disclosing their identity until the time had come after reaching the place. So, though research methodologically a researcher had to seek and investigate other sources than a travelogue. Fortunately, the Mughal empirical system might be a source because of the presence of the Mughal Emperor Bhadur Shah and his train whose part had been the Guru's party itself upto Nanded. What mentioned in the *Bahadur-Shah-nama* about 'Govind Singh Nanak's death is worth mentioning. Quoting William Irvine, the authors of an article write<sup>12</sup>:

The *Bahadur-Shah-nama* records it 5<sup>th</sup> Ramzan, 1120 (17<sup>th</sup> November, 1708). It also records that a report was made to the Emperor, "as to the disposal of the movable property left by Guru Govind Nanak."

In this context, William Irvine on an evidence from the *Chahar Gulshan* of Rai Chatarman tells about an apparently adopted son of Guru Govind Singh. He writes about the disposal of Guru's movable property<sup>13</sup>:

"It was of considerable value, and according to rule ought to be confiscated. The Emperor, with the remarks that he was not in want of the goods of a *Darvesh*, ordered the whole to be relinquished to the heirs."

The date of Guru Govind Singh's *balidan* mentioned in the *Bahadur-Shah-nama* is 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month of *Ramzan* of the Lunar year of 1120 *Hizri*<sup>14</sup> that corresponds to 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1708. A Sikh tradition mentioned in the *Sakhi* Book also tells that it was happened on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of some Lunar month<sup>15</sup>. These evidences are quite enough to locate Guru's *Balidan's* date as 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1708.

As it is clear that there was a gap of few days between the incidents of the Afghan's attack on the Guru's body and his *Balidan*, it is natural that this time period might be taken at least of two weeks. It means that the Afghan had attacked somewhere in the last week of October 1708 or in the first week of November 1708. If the departure of Banda's party from Nanded to the north was an event of one of two weeks before, then Banda's departure can be fixed somewhere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> week of October, 1708.

A common traveller journey's time those days from Deccan to Delhi is generally assessed three months if the journey in general caravan. It should be finished somewhere in January. But a journey from the left bank of the Chambal in the district of Dholpur to Delhi *via* Agra was essentially to be avoided. Both the cities of Agra and Delhi were the imperial capital cities and travelling through them was definitely an invitation to a high risk for a party having secret plans. Naturally Banda Bairagi had to take diversion towards further left direction and passing through Alwar and Jaipur territories was a naturally safe journey and it had been done so. Its evidence is there in the history of Banda's arrival. It is recorded that he came in the Sonipat area through Bharatpur<sup>16</sup> territory and then through the 'Lakhi Jungle' where there were the dacoits who were very much interested to loot Banda's property as he was apparently looking like a rich man. But it was Banda's brave followers' alertness that they could never get a chance. They could not dare to attack the party. The evidence of Lakhi Jungle and also of travelling *via* Bagar (Shekhawati) gives a clear cut evidence of Banda Bairagi's journey not *via* Agra and Delhi

but through Rajputana territories that would take a time period of few more weeks. If this be taken a period of four weeks then the date of Banda's arrival in Haryana can be fixed somewhere in first or second week of February 1709.

For the geographical area of North as well as of the Malwa, it is a thing of particular eliminating value that the rainy session is a worse one to travel through. Generally the trade and commerce were kept held because no transportation could be possible due to the higher water level of the stream of the rivers. Again, particular marshy lands were observed along with the trade routes therefore approximately for four months rainy session starting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June used to make trade routes impossible to travel. This is the reason that in Indian history, in the provinces covered by this area no war is observed. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June to the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of October, was a period of full inactivity.

Therefore, it can be assumed that Banda's party would have started their journey after the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of October.

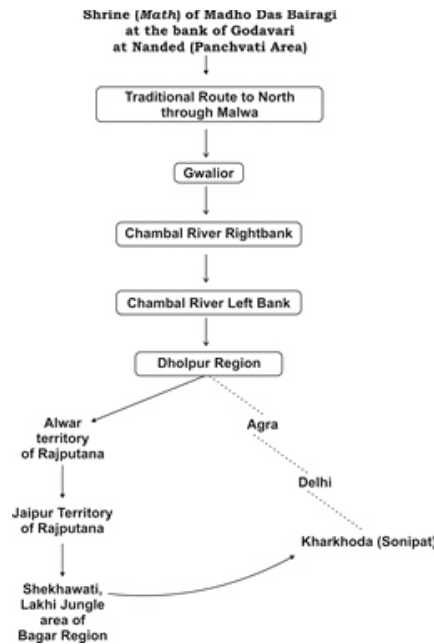
Reaching at the village near Kharkhoda, he had started planning for a start up. Within a period of few months, he gained a reputation of the saint sepyo.<sup>17</sup> At a proper time the number of men reaching him for his blessing had increased and thus the rainy season was over.

In the winter, he was popularly known and taken as Guru Govind Singh himself. One day, the villagers were afraid of the dacoits' night attack and had been planning to vacate the village and go to jungle<sup>18</sup> for a safer hiding place till the night was over.<sup>19</sup> Banda, the Guru called the village-*panches* and assessing them as cowards, he had locked them up;<sup>20</sup> and called his followers to be ready for resisting the looters in the coming night. All happened as planned. Baba Banda's party caught a number of dacoits along with their *sardar*<sup>21</sup> for whose release, the bands of robbers tried their best but failed.<sup>22</sup> It was at dawn that in each skirmish, the robbers were beaten and driven away.<sup>23</sup> The sun-rise was an occasion of joy when the robbers' chiefman, with tied hands was in public and was recognized as the headmen of Ranghers of the town of Kharkhoda<sup>24</sup> who told the exact location of the '*mall*' looted in the previous robberies.<sup>25</sup> With all folded hands the robbers' *sardar* was paraded in the streets.

Actually, that show was fantastic. The villagers who showed cowardness previous evening were now emboldened seeing their Guru's power. A rumour to the effect that Guru was nobody but Guru Govind Singh himself who had come through incarnation was

again high rated among the general Hindu public. Lots of people in 'jatthas' began to come and join the Guru.

On the other hand, the Muslim Rajputs, i.e., the Ranghers of Kharkhoda approached the higher Mughal imperial officers.<sup>26</sup> The *Faujdar* of Sonipat was approached but the Baba was not unaware of the events.<sup>27</sup> Banda on the same day attacked the Mughal *Faujdar* and had defeated him bitterly.<sup>28</sup>



All the wealth recovered from both the places was generously distributed by Banda in the general public who were assisting his cause with men and weapons. In this context, what a historian and his researchers remark is worth mentioning<sup>29</sup>:

“After this episode full of bravery, he [Banda] proclaimed himself the protector of poor and helpless against all professional robbers and official tyrants. In return ‘milk’ and ‘curd’ ration were the commodities the people could offer. The custom of ‘*Pallu Pherna*’ was observed that meant the Baba was the protector of the *ilaqa* or the geographical area under his control.”

In this context what Khafi Khan records<sup>30</sup> can be summarized as below:

“In two or three month’s time nearly five thousand horse and eight thousand foot joined him. The number of his troops was increasing daily, and great body was falling into his hands. Soon after about nineteen thousand men armed and equipped took to

plunder and persecution. The matters came to such as pass that from thirty to forty thousand infidels served under his banner. Then he issued orders to the imperial officials to submit and retire from their posts.”

Thus a calculation of the time bracket of nearly first to second week of February in the year of 1709 A.D. seems fit to accept a period of Banda’s arrival in Sehri Khanda village of Haryana. This seems more accurate in the light of the evidences mentioned and discussed above. On these basis next few months was a duration of Banda’s war preparations at large.<sup>31</sup> He mobilized the Hindu masses in the same sprite what Guru Govind Singh had claimed as one of his main aims and objectives that had been narrated in his own couplet as follows:

“Chidiyan te mei baaz ladaun, Geedad ko mei sher banaun!  
Sawa lakh se ek ladaun, tab Govind Singh naam kahaun!!”

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8. Ganda Singh, *op. cit.*
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14. *Ibid.*



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16. Ganda Singh, *op. cit.*, p.19.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Interview*, 31-08-2018, Dr. Raj Singh, a direct descendant of the followers of Bairagi Asthal of Mahant Kishor Das, Sehri Khanda, Kharkhoda, Sonipat, Haryana; Dr. Angiras (Senior), Dr. Ashutosh Angiras and others, during National Seminar-cum-Penal Discussion on 'Contribution of Bairagi Sect to Indian History, Culture and Literature (Part-2), Organized by the Sanatan Dharma (LAHORE) College, Ambala Cantt. Haryana on 31-08-2018; [Ganda Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 22].  
*Interview*, 22.09.2023, Col. Yogendra Singh, Rohtak, Haryana; Dr. Kuldeep Dutta, Cardiologist, Dehradun, Uttarakhand; Dr. Raj Singh, and more than 50 other persons residents of village of Sehri Khanda, Kharkhoda, Sonipat, Haryana;  
*Interview*, 03-11-2018, Some more than 200 persons, while the first author was conferred on the *BANDA VEER BAIRAGI AWARD* by then Shri Manohar Lal Khattar, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Haryana, at Sehri-Khanda, Kharkhoda, Sonipat, Haryana.  
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