

## Bandi Bir - The Captive Hero

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (ORIGINAL IN BENGALI) FROM HIS BOOK KATHA  
(LEGENDS)- TRANSLATOR: RAJAT DAS GUPTA@

\* First published in Punjab & Sind Bank house Journal: July ,Sept. 1998.

@ 319 Neelkamal Apt, Block BD 44, Rabindra Palli, P.O. Prafulla Kanan Krishnapur,  
Kolkata 700101. Email: rajarch@cal3.vsnl.net.in

**Translator's note:** Dr. Kirpal Singh's article 'Injustice to Banda Singh Bahadur (SR- October '04 issue) will raise eyebrows among Bengalis. The poem 'Bandi Bir' on Banda Bahadur is a much celebrated poem by Rabindranath Tagore, along with several others on the Sikhs. The Bengali literati hold Banda Bahadur as an ever resplendent icon of Sikh heroism by virtue of this poem which has a sound historical base. Attempts to devalue him cannot dislodge Banda from our high esteem. Tagore had the rare ability to perceive - and effectively convey - to his audience the essence of the great men's mission to serve as inspiration for the posterity, instead of confounding them by hyping the trivia that inevitably crop up in their life's journey. On the other hand, many pundits are found to miss the wood for the trees in their attempt to grapple such personalities who do not yield to the conventional measures. I don't think evaluation of at least some of the stalwarts in Sikh history vis-à-vis Sikhism, inter alia, can be complete without a reference to Tagore. The following translated poem was published earlier, as indicated above, and now its publication in THE SIKH REVIEW will surely transmit its message to a much wider audience.

On the banks of the five rivers,  
Uprise the Sikhs spontaneous;  
With hair coiled above their head  
Inspired by the mantra their Guru spread  
Fearless and unyielding.....  
'Glory to Guruji'- thousands of them  
Resound the horizon;  
At the rising sun of the dawn  
The Sikhs stare with deep emotion  
With new awakening.

'Alakha Nirranjan'  
The war cry of the rebellion;  
Let loose their chivalry;  
On their ribs clank swords luminary;  
In wild joy was Punjab's insurrection  
'Alakha Nirranjan'.  
There came a day,  
Thousands of hearts were on their way  
Without any binding or fear,  
Life and death at their feet slaves mere;  
There on the banks of those rivers  
The tale of that day still shivers.

At the tower of the Delhi palace,  
Where the Sikhs are apace –  
Badshazada's drowsy spell  
Time and again they quell;

Whose voices there, the dark sky tear?  
Whose torches set the horizon afire?

On the banks of the Rivers Five,  
For supreme sacrifice was their dive,  
Unleashed there was the flood  
Of the devotees' blood.  
Thousands of souls did part –  
From thousands of hearts torn apart  
For destination divine in their lark-  
The heroes putting their sacred blood mark  
On the forehead of their motherland  
There around those five rivers so dear and grand.

In the Mughal and Sikh battle  
Their embrace to each other throttle  
Like the fight between the eagle and snake,  
Deep bruises one to the other did make.  
In the fierce fight of that day-  
In blood craze 'Din Din' the Mughals bay,  
'Glory to Guruji'- was the Sikhs' commotion  
In their divine devotion.

At the Gurudaspur castle  
When Banda was captured amidst all bustle  
In the hands of the Turani troop,  
As if a lion fettered with his group;  
To capital Delhi they were taken,  
Alas, at Gurudaspur Banda was beaten!  
The Mughal soldiers march ahead,  
Kicking up the road dust in sneer,  
Hoisting the Sikhs' chopped head  
At the blade of their spear.  
Follow them Sikhs seven hundred,  
Tinkles their chain,  
Throng people on the road widespread,  
Windows open- a glimpse they fain,  
'Glory to Guruji'- the Sikhs roar,  
For fear of life they are not sore,  
Sikhs with the Mughals to-day  
Stormed the Delhi road all in gay.

Started the scurry,  
For lead in the carnage was their hurry;  
They lined up at the dawn  
Defiant till their execution.  
'Glory to Guruji'- was their slogan  
Until they were done.

Thus over a week,

The arena turned bleak;  
With seven hundred lives gone-  
Upon the martyrs' immortalisation.  
On the last round of cruelty  
Banda was ordered by the Kazi  
To kill his own son  
At ease to be done.  
In mere teens was the boy,  
With hands tied thrown as a toy  
Into the lap of Banda and without a word  
He drew him close to his heart.  
For a while he put his hand on his head,  
Just once kissed his turban red.  
He then draws his dagger,  
Whispers in the child's ear-  
'Glory to Guruji- fear not my son'  
A virile in the boy's face did burn –  
In his juvenile voice the court did ring  
'Glory to Guruji' as he did sing.  
With his left hand Banda held the boy,  
With right struck the dagger in his ploy.  
'Glory be to Guruji' – was all he did implore,  
As he took to the floor.

Silence fell in the court;  
Guruji's inspiration still not abort.  
Then, with tongue red-hot  
Banda's body was pieced apart;  
A word of moan he uttered not  
And all in calm did he depart.  
As stopped his heart throb  
Witnesses closed eyes- silence choked pin-drop.

