

Baba Lakhishah Banjara and Ethical Courage in Seventeenth-Century India — Subaltern Agency, Religious Freedom, and the Making of Sikh Historical Memory

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Abstract

Historiography of early modern India often prioritises emperors, saints, and institutions as central to religious conflict and tolerance. This focus overlooks how ordinary individuals' moral choices have shaped major events. This article centres on Baba Lakhishah Banjara, a 17th-century brave Naik from the Banjara merchant dynasty, and directly argues that his courageous actions in ensuring Guru Tegh Bahadur's dignified cremation after the Guru's 1675 execution under Mughal policy exemplify subaltern moral agency. These actions not only demonstrated civil courage but also profoundly influenced Sikh identity, intercommunal relations, and India's religious heritage. In total, this article advances historical discussions on resistance, religious freedom, and subaltern moral agency.

Keywords: Baba Lakhishah Banjara, Sikh martyrdom, Mughal India, civil courage, religious freedom, and subaltern history

1. Introduction

Religious freedom and moral duty are important themes in Indian history. The subcontinent has a long history of navigating diverse religious identities, from ancient systems valuing dharma to medieval meetings of faith groups. Scholars have focused on emperors, saints, and institutional leaders as principal agents shaping tolerance or repression. While these approaches highlight political and doctrinal advancements, they often obscure the moral interventions of ordinary individuals who maintained religious continuity under hardship.

India was a crossroads of imperial authority, religious diversity, and local moral norms during the Mughal Empire. Under Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707), religious rules became more stringent, with the reintroduction of the jizya, legal orthodoxy, and closer supervision of religious leaders. Sikh history changed with the 1675 execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur—a pivotal moment for religious freedom, conscience, and moral sacrifice.

Sikh historiography has exhaustively analysed the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur; however, there has been comparatively less scholarly focus on the immediate responses following his execution. The Mughal government wouldn't let people cremate their bodies in public. This was not only an administrative action but also a symbolic one intended to obliterate collective memory and ritual dignity. (Bhai Lakhi Rai Banjara, 2025) Cremation is very important in Indian religious traditions because it means closure, reverence, and spiritual continuation. Preventing this rite further expanded political authority into moral and cultural domains. The Mughal Emperors' Religious Policy (Britannica, 2025).

At this time, Baba Lakhishah Banjara, the Banjara commercial group, intervened. He showed moral resistance by tearing down his house so the Guru's body could be burned. He accepted personal danger and loss, without

seeking public recognition or institutional help. His act preserved Sikh funeral traditions and ensured Guru Tegh Bahadur's death was remembered, not erased by government rules.

This article's central argument is that Baba Lakhishah Banjara's actions exemplify civil courage displayed by a non-elite, subaltern figure. Unlike acts of martyrdom or organised opposition, his nuanced and planned intervention was motivated by moral responsibility rather than political ambition. By analysing this event, the article challenges India's historical narratives focused on elite actors and underscores the significance of subaltern ethical action in preserving religious pluralism.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This article pursues three aims that reflect its core argument. First, it situates Baba Lakhishah Banjara's actions within the sociopolitical landscape of 17th-century Mughal India. Second, it shows how his deed embodies subaltern agency through the frameworks of moral resistance and civil courage. Third, it analyses how his act shaped Sikh communal memory, the formation of sacred spaces, and India's evolving moral history.

2. Review of Literature

Sikh historiography has thoroughly examined the life and martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, particularly with the defence of religious freedom. Foundational writings highlight the Guru's defiance of religious coercion and his advocacy for the rights of Kashmiri Pandits, interpreting his execution as a moral position rather than a political uprising (Grewal, 1998; Singh, 2004). These studies place martyrdom in the context of Sikh religious beliefs that stress conscience, sacrifice, and resisting injustice.

Much writing discusses doctrinal and institutional changes, especially Sikh identity under Guru Gobind Singh. There is little critical analysis of what happened after the execution, particularly logistical issues with cremation and memorialising the dead. Figures like Baba Lakhishah Banjara appear briefly, and their moral significance is not deeply explored. McLeod (2009) discusses Baba Lakhishah Banjara's role in the Guru's cremation and portrays the event as historically accurate, setting it apart from later devotional stories. Even yet, the focus is still on the Guru and not on the devotee's part in keeping the ceremony going.

Aurangzeb's rule is controversial among scholars. Early histories cast him as intolerant, while newer studies examine his governance and regional differences (Eaton, 2000). However, his policies prioritised religious compliance and imperial supremacy. Grewal (1998) puts Sikh-Mughal relations in context by saying that the Sikh Gurus were considered as more than just spiritual leaders; they were also seen as political and social leaders. The goal of Guru Tegh Bahadur's death was to quell dissent and show that the empire was strong. Grewal also talks about efforts to curb ritual commemoration, which shows that Mughal control went beyond the physical.

Mughal-centric historiography often frames resistance in binary terms—rebellion against submission—thus constraining the theoretical framework for covert ethical interventions exemplified by figures like Baba Lakhishah Banjara.

Subaltern Studies and Non-Elite Agency: The rise of subaltern studies was a turning point in South Asian historiography since it showed how marginalised populations had power. Guha and Chatterjee contend that history cannot be comprehended exclusively via elite activities; quotidian resistance and ethical decisions also influence social outcomes. Subaltern studies have primarily focused on peasant movements, colonial resistance, and nationalist politics, although their concepts are also relevant to the early modern period. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement exemplifies subaltern moral agency—engagement beyond formal power structures, motivated by ethical conviction rather than political mobilisation.

Few studies examine Sikh history or early modern religious protest from the subaltern perspective. This gap necessitates reevaluating actions such as Baba Lakhishah's within a framework that acknowledges ethical conduct as historically relevant.

Philosophy and sociology define civil bravery as the ability to do the right thing when faced with injustice without using violence or trying to get attention. Civil disobedience is usually done by a group of people and is meant to be confrontational. Civil courage, on the other hand, is silent, situational, and personally costly. Employing this framework to analyse Indian history unveils novel insights. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's deeds show what this group stands for: moral clarity, discretion, and sacrificing for the greater good. His opposition did not directly oppose the Mughal state; however, it significantly undermined the state's efforts to obliterate religious memory.

This idea is supported by Indian philosophy, notably dharma. Ethical responsibility is frequently a personal obligation, independent of governmental authority. This is how Baba Lakhishah acts. **Sacred Space, Memory, and Institutionalisation:** Scholars of religious studies underline that sacred spaces are not merely passed down from one generation to the next; they are also created through historical action and memory. The change from a

cremation place to Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib is an example of this process. It began as a personal sacrifice and became a place for Sikhs to memorialise their loved ones.

Most of the current research on Sikh sacred geography focuses on how it relates to doctrine and pilgrimage networks. Nonetheless, the participation of non-elite players in the establishment of these locales remains under scrutiny. Recognising Baba Lakhishah Banjara's contribution deepens our understanding of the development of sacred institutions from ethical conduct rather than merely from formal authority.

Identified Research Gap: The evaluation of the literature reveals three significant shortcomings: There is insufficient focus on non-elite moral figures in Sikh and Mughal history. The civil courage framework is underutilised in early modern Indian history. Theoretical work on ritual preservation as resistance is lacking. This essay addresses these gaps by analysing Baba Lakhishah Banjara as a historical figure whose specific actions preserved religious traditions, shaped collective memory, and reinforced pluralism. The argument reinforces how subaltern agency and moral decisions contributed to these outcomes.

3. Results and Discussion of the Study

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Civil Courage, Dharma, and Moral Agency of the Subaltern

To understand the historical significance of Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement, it is necessary to utilise an analytical framework that goes beyond conventional binaries of resistance and surrender. Traditional historiography sometimes conflates resistance with overt revolt, protest, or martyrdom, thereby limiting the conceptual framework for suppressed, ethically motivated actions occurring outside official political movements. This study uses a theoretical framework from many fields that combines the ideas of civil courage, dharma-based ethical obligation, and subaltern moral agency to look at what Baba Lakhishah Banjara did.

3.1.1 Civil Courage as Ethical Action

Civil courage refers to morally driven actions undertaken by individuals who confront injustice or moral violations, despite personal risk, without the specific intention of garnering public recognition or fostering community mobilisation. Civil disobedience is typically organised, public, and confrontational, whereas civil courage is often private, contextual, and driven by an individual's conscience.

In political theory and sociology, civil bravery explains how people fight against authoritarian systems by doing everyday things that are morally right. These activities might not bring down governments directly, but they do make coercive power less moral. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement fits this model nicely. His action did not directly challenge Mughal authority, nor did it involve extensive mobilisation. Instead, it coped with a specific moral crisis—the loss of ceremonial dignity—by making a planned personal sacrifice.

This difference is quite critical. By enabling the cremation of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Baba Lakhishah did not resist the state *per se*, but rather its attempts to control memory, ritual, and moral meaning. We can think of opposition as moral preservation instead of political confrontation when we have civil bravery.

3.1.2 Dharma and Moral Duty in Indian Thought

Indian philosophical traditions give us another way to think about Baba Lakhishah's actions. The concept of dharma, denoting moral duty grounded in moral order, has consistently emphasised that individual responsibility supersedes adherence to unjust authority. In classical, mediaeval, and early modern Indian philosophy, dharma is not something that needs to be approved by the government. Instead, it is a duty based on moral truth, social responsibility, and conscience.

From this point of view, Baba Lakhishah's participation could be considered a dharmic act. He put moral duty ahead of his own safety, losing money and putting his political career at risk. This duty was not just an idea; it was real: making sure people died with respect, keeping the ceremonies running, and standing up for the moral stand that Guru Tegh Bahadur took to safeguard religious freedom.

This dharmic framing also explains why the act wasn't violent or hostile. In this tradition, ethical responsibility excludes aggressiveness and control; it encompasses activities that align with moral truth, even when such efforts imply high costs.

3.1.3 Subaltern Moral Agency

Subaltern studies have emphasised that marginalised groups and individuals are not merely passive recipients of historical events but active participants who shape outcomes via everyday actions. While a considerable segment of this literature has focused on peasant movements and colonial resistance, its conceptual frameworks are also pertinent to early modern religious history. Baba Lakhishah Banjara shows how subaltern moral agency works, which is when a non-elite person does something morally just without being part of an institutional power structure. He was not a leader in religion or politics. His capacity to act derived not from his position, rank, or coercive authority, but from his ethical convictions and strategic acumen.

This is different from historical stories that centre on elites and give most of the power to kings, priests, or organised groups. This study highlights Baba Lakhishah's involvement, demonstrating that ethical action in Indian history frequently emerges in marginal social circumstances, particularly when institutional frameworks fail to maintain moral standards.

3.1.4 Putting the Framework Together

Civil bravery, dharma, and subaltern moral agency all work together to provide a strong framework for interpreting Baba Lakhishah Banjara's actions. It was more about values than politics, what he did. More about giving up something for yourself than protecting an institution. Not aggressive, but rather quiet and peaceful. Important in history, even though it was quiet. This framework allows us to go beyond hagiography and mythology, placing the experience within broad analytical discussions about resistance, ethics, and historical action.

3.2 Historical Context: Aurangzeb's India during the Mughal Era

3.2.1 The Mughal State in the 17th Century

The 17th century was the height of the Mughal Empire's power and the beginning of issues with its structure. (Decline of the Mughal Empire, 2021) The Mughal Empire was well-organised and owned a lot of land. It relied on a sophisticated structure to collect revenue, run the military, and present its beliefs as legitimate. (Britannica, 2025). Religious policy was a big part of this legitimacy since it affected how the state dealt with different religious groups.

During the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, the Mughal state put more importance on Islamic legal principles and moral discipline. Even while there were still distinctions across regions and the administration was focused on getting things done, imperial rhetoric began to equate political power with religious allegiance more and more. This transformation had a big effect on communities where religious leaders had social power (Richards, 1993).

3.2.2 Aurangzeb's Religious Policy

Debates and Consensus: Historians are still fighting about what Aurangzeb's religious views were. Some people think that his policies were a break from the Mughal pluralism, while others think they were a continuation of how things had been done previously. Most experts agree on three points, even though they don't all agree on everything: More laws concerning how people can show their religion, especially for powerful groups (Bagga, 2006). More concern about allegiance and conflict, presented in terms of religion. Employing symbolic means (e.g., ritual constraints) to assert power. The reinstatement of jizya and the scrutiny of religious leaders were not merely economic or theological actions; they were administrative tools intended to strengthen imperial governance. (Richards, 1993)

3.2.3 Sikh–Mughal Relations Before 1675

The Sikh Gurus and the Mughal monarchy were no longer on good terms. In the past, interactions included living together and recognising each other. But by the middle of the 17th century, everyone in society knew about Sikh institutions. Gurus were more than just spiritual leaders; they also ran community life, which made them more visible to the imperial government.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was a moral authority because he travelled, taught, and campaigned for freedom of religion. He had an impact on more than just the Sikh community. This exposure made the empire suspicious, especially since religious opposition was seen as a sign of political instability at the time. (Nangia, 2025)

3.2.4 The Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur

The execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Delhi in 1675 was a well-planned display of imperial power. It was designed to highlight what happens when you don't follow the state's religious standards. But the state didn't stop with the death sentence. People who tried to stop public cremation were more worried about controlling memory, symbolism, and moral interpretation. (Nangia, 2025)

In Indian religions, not being cremated is a serious moral failure. It takes away the dead person's dignity and keeps the community from remembering them together. The Mughal government tried to prohibit cremation so that they might have more political power in moral and cultural areas. (HistoryDiscussion.net., 2023).

3.2.5 Space, Surveillance, and Risk in Mughal Delhi

Delhi was the capital of the empire, and people were always watching what was going on there. People in the city were keeping an eye on religious events, especially those that were outside the law. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's decision to act in this situation made things far more dangerous. He set fire to his own house, which was not only a personal sacrifice but also a clever decision because of how Mughal power worked in that area. It took advantage of the lack of clarity in the administration without beginning a conflict, which showed that it was well aware of the political climate.

3.2.6 Historical Importance of the Context

This historical context reveals how crucial Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement was. His behaviour was not an isolated moral gesture but a deliberate response to a hostile political context. He made a moment that was meant to be forgotten into one that would last forever by keeping ceremonial dignity alive during a time of surveillance and repression.

3.3 Baba Lakhishah Banjara's Intervention: Ritual Resistance and Doing the Right Thing

3.3.1 The Moral Crisis After the Execution

The Sikh community was startled both politically and morally when Guru Tegh Bahadur was put to death in 1675. In Indian religious thought, funeral rituals, particularly cremation, are intrinsically associated with dignity, remembrance, and spiritual continuity. The Mughal state's purported attempt to hinder or restrict the public cremation of the Guru's remains represented an encroachment of political authority into the moral and ceremonial domain.

The Mughal Empire had these kinds of restrictions before; not letting people have burial ceremonies was a method to display control. The state tried to keep memory, interpretation, and meaning alive by taking care of the body after death. In this case, Sikh followers were attempting to find out how to react emotionally or theologically, as well as how to protect moral order when institutions were either hostile or too scared to act. Baba Lakhishah Banjara is an important historical figure at this time of moral decay.

3.3.2 The Act of Cremation as Historical Evidence

Critical Sikh historiography consistently records that Baba Lakhishah Banjara retrieved the Guru's body and arranged for its cremation by deliberately setting fire to his own residence, allowing the ritual to occur under the guise of an accidental blaze. The absence of this occurrence in Mughal administrative records is neither surprising nor methodologically problematic. Acts of secret resistance, especially those that remain undetected, are rare in official records.

The historical veracity of this incident is substantiated by its repeated appearance in independent Sikh historical narratives and by its validation by prominent historians such as Grewal (1998), McLeod (2009), and Singh (2004). These writers make an essential distinction between the main act—private cremation by self-sacrifice—and later devotional extensions. As a result, the focus remains on activities that have been historically verified, rather than on supernatural or symbolic claims.

3.3.3 Ritual Resistance: Conceptualising the Act

Baba Lakhishah Banjara's action can be analytically construed as ritual resistance—the preservation of religious practice as a kind of ethical disobedience. Ritual resistance works within the moral and cultural framework of a group, unlike physical insurrection or public protest. It doesn't seek to get rid of authority; it wants to stop authority from taking away meaning.

Baba Lakhishah battled against the Mughals' desire to make Guru Tegh Bahadur's death a show of punishment by making sure he was cremated. The ritual changed death into martyrdom, punishment into sacrifice, and coercion into moral testimony. In this way, cremation was a way to fight back against the might of the state. This difference is quite critical. The Mughal state could carry out executions, but it didn't have the ability to explain the moral consequences of doing so. Baba Lakhishah's action made sure that the meaning stayed with the Sikh community.

3.3.4 Personal Sacrifice and Risk Assessment

We need to look at Baba Lakhishah Banjara's sacrifice in terms of both money and people. He lived in a Banjara trading community, so he considered his home to be more than simply a place to live. It was also a location to keep items, a source of income, and a sign of stability. In the short term, it would have meant losing money straight away and being less safe in the long run. (Bhai Lakhi Rai Banjara, 2025) The risks were very significant, even higher than the chance of losing goods. If you help make a religious figure that was condemned, you might be considered as going against the emperor's orders, which could have you imprisoned or killed. So, the choice to act meant that the person was willing to take a big personal risk (Habib, 1999).

This risk assessment backs up the idea that Baba Lakhishah's actions were brave in a respectful way. He didn't do anything without thinking about it beforehand or to garner attention. He made a moral choice based on what he thought was right, even though he knew what would happen.

3.3.5 Silence, Discretion, and Strategic Action

An important feature of Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement is that he is quiet. There was no statement, protest, or organised action that went along with the deed. Not talking here wasn't giving up; it was a plan. Baba Lakhishah made sure the process succeeded by making the cremation look like an accident and decreasing the

risks of repression.

This decision sets ritual resistance apart from other types of resistance that historians usually talk about. It suggests that moral behaviour in authoritarian environments often operates through invisibility rather than direct confrontation. Silence helps to keep morals safe. These methods are historically important because they show how communities deal with tyranny not only via heroism and death, but also by planned, morally sound acts that stop oppression from getting worse.

3.3.6 Moral Motivation vs. Political Intent

It is important to separate Baba Lakhishah Banjara's moral motivation from political rebellion. There is no evidence that he acted to undermine Mughal authority or to incite coordinated insurrection. Instead, he stepped in because it was the appropriate thing to do: to maintain honour and dignity, to make sacrifices, and to keep ceremonies pure.

This distinction is crucial for the analysis. If you think of the act as a political uprising, you could not appreciate its moral grounding correctly. Baba Lakhishah's protest was not against the state itself, but against the moral violation of forbidding cremation. This type of action, based on morals, makes traditional conceptions of resistance more complicated and pushes historians to see moral obligation as a separate historical force.

3.3.7 The Shift from Private Action to Collective Memory

Baba Lakhishah's deed was private and clandestine, yet its repercussions were public and enduring. The successful cremation made it possible for the Sikh community to remember Guru Tegh Bahadur as a martyr instead of a victim who was silenced. Over time, this memory became part of the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, which was built on the site of the cremation. This transformation illustrates a big pattern in how history is remembered: private moral actions can have effects on public institutions. What began as a discreet initiative ultimately evolved into a significant element of the Sikh sacred landscape.

Sikh history does not overlook Baba Lakhishah's role in this. People remember what he did not as a heroic effort but as a moral service, which fits with the Sikh focus on humility and moral duty.

3.3.8 Ritual Resistance and Sikh Ethical Tradition

Baba Lakhishah Banjara's actions are very much in keeping with Sikh moral ideals, which stress seva (selfless service), sacrifice, and moral duty. In Sikh tradition, doing the right thing is more essential than possessing power. In this context, Baba Lakhishah's social marginality enhances, rather than diminishes, the ethical importance of his contribution.

His action also foreshadows later events in Sikh history, when opposition slowly combined moral conviction with disciplined action. Baba Lakhishah did not engage in militarised opposition; instead, his involvement contributed to the establishment of the moral ideals that subsequently defined Sikh identity.

3.3.9 Analytical Importance

From a historical point of view, Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement goes against a number of common ideas: That disagreement must be public to be historically significant. That moral action requires institutional authority. That ceremony is only a symbol and doesn't mean anything politically.

This research elucidates the operation of ethical action at the intersection of religion, culture, and power by highlighting ritual resistance. Baba Lakhishah's intervention did not alter Mughal policy; it significantly influenced Sikh history (HistoryDiscussion.net, 2023).

3.4 *Inter-Community Solidarity, Holy Space, and Institutional Memory*

3.4.1 From Private Sacrifice to Sacred Geography

Historical memory is preserved not just through writings and beliefs but also through spatial contexts. The transformation of the site of Guru Tegh Bahadur's cremation into Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib exemplifies how individual ethical efforts can establish an enduring sacred landscape. What began as a humble intervention, necessitated by political circumstances, ultimately evolved into one of the most significant Sikh temples in Delhi.

This alteration highlights a very crucial point: sacred places are not just passed down or declared; they are made through activities that give them meaning at a certain moment and place. In this case, the act of cremation, which was made possible by Baba Lakhishah Banjara's sacrifice, turned a moment of intended destruction into a place of remembrance. The spatialization of memory made sure that the moral meaning of sacrifice would persist beyond the political environment that tried to extinguish it.

3.4.2 Institutionalisation of Memory in Sikh Tradition

Institutional memory refers to the methods by which communities preserve, communicate, and formalise

historical meaning through established frameworks. Gurdwaras are places of prayer and a storehouse of historical knowledge in the Sikh religion. The establishment and subsequent recognition of Rakab Ganj Sahib incorporated the narrative of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom—and the ethical intervention that enabled its commemoration—into the institutional framework of Sikhism (Bagga, 2006).

Importantly, Sikh historical memory does not forget the contributions of people who were not part of the elite. The temple is largely about the Guru, but Sikh traditions about the place also show how important Baba Lakhishah Banjara is. This all-encompassing memory shows a complete Sikh moral framework that values seva (selfless service) and humility, recognising moral behaviour regardless of social or economic status. From a historiographical point of view, this goes against theories of institutional memory that prefer elite founders or doctrinal authorities. Instead, it shows how ordinary individuals can do bold things that help organisations develop.

3.4.3 Space, Power, and Counter-Memory

When looked at in the light of Mughal authority, the spatial aspect of Rakab Ganj Sahib becomes even more important. The shrine is near the imperial areas of Delhi and sits on property that has been closely observed and controlled in the past. Its existence is an example of what memory studies experts call “counter-memory,” which is a story that stays strong even when the government tries to erase it.

The Mughal empire tried to stop ceremonial remembering, but the Sikh community wrote memory into the city. This spatial inscription altered the dynamics of power: the state could momentarily govern bodies, although it could never permanently dictate meaning. Sacred space became a way for people to keep up their moral opposition over time.

3.4.4 Inter-Community Solidarity as Lived Practice

Baba Lakhishah Banjara's action is an example of ethical solidarity between communities, and it is vital for Sikhs to remember. As a member of the Banjara trading community, which is made up of people from many socioeconomic classes and jobs, he backed a Sikh religious leader without being told to do so by the government or the community. This action shows a practical pluralism based on shared moral values instead of official alliances.

There are many examples throughout Indian history of different groups working together, but these stories are usually eclipsed by ones that centre on conflict or separation. These stories get deeper when Baba Lakhishah's account shows that moral duty often went beyond community lines, especially when things were tough. This unity was not just an idea or a speech; it was shown by real sacrifice. Baba Lakhishah placed his life and property on the line to show that he believed in fairness and dignity that extended across social and religious barriers.

3.4.5 The Banjara and Ethical Networks

The Banjara people have always been a collection of individuals who moved around and traded with people from different places, cultures, and social groups. This movement made it easier for people to depend on each other in practical ways and build ethical networks that elite chroniclers often missed. (Chavhan, 2023) Baba Lakhishah's involvement can be understood in the larger context of relational ethics, which are shaped by things like mobility, exchange, and shared vulnerability. Such networks were very important in cities like Delhi, where different groups of people met every day under the watchful eye of imperial power. In this scenario, behaving ethically was not just a personal choice; it was also a part of relationships in society that valued trust, giving back, and moral duty.

3.4.6 Ritual, Memory, and Group Identity

Ritual is an important aspect of how a group sees itself. Baba Lakhishah made sure that Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice would be fulfilled in a traditional way by permitting him to be cremated. This would have lasting meaning for the whole society. Without ritual closure, martyrdom can turn into an unresolved trauma. With ritual, it becomes a way to teach morals and build identity. The following institutionalisation of memory at Rakab Ganj Sahib made this process stronger. Pilgrimage, storytelling, and group worship keep the site's moral lesson alive: that sacrifice and service, not coercion, defend religious freedom and dignity (Bayly, 1988).

3.4.7 Pluralism Beyond Policy

A lot of scholarly material about pluralism is about how the government works, like laws, decrees, and how things are done. These things are significant, but Baba Lakhishah Banjara's biography exposes another side: pluralism as a moral way of life. His decision was not predicated on legal protection or imperial leniency; it arose from a moral conviction expressed in difficult circumstances. The difference between these two things has a big effect on how we think about plurality in Indian history. This story shows that pluralism has been kept alive from the bottom up by everyday acts of bravery, solidarity, and moral duty, rather than being seen as a top-down

system.

3.4.8 The Lasting Importance of Sacred Space

The continuous importance of Rakab Ganj Sahib in modern Sikh life shows how powerful ethical memory can be when it is based in space. People can pray, learn about history, and think about morality at the memorial. It reminds individuals that their dignity often depends on the courage of those who undertake things without expecting praise or recompense. The site tells a moral story about the lives of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Baba Lakhishah Banjara, focusing on both martyrdom and moral duty.

3.4.9 Analytical Implications

This section presents three points about analysis: Ethical behaviours, not only religious rules, have historically established sacred areas. Institutional memory can protect the agency of marginalised groups by challenging historical narratives that focus on the elite. Inter-community collaboration is an essential element of India's pluralistic tradition, expressed through lived experience rather than merely via policy. These claims support the main point of the article, which is that the moral fortitude of regular people has had a big impact on India's religious and moral framework (Bagga, 2006).

3.5 Comparative Points of View, Modern Importance, and Discourse

3.5.1 Comparative Perspectives on Ethical Resistance in Indian History

Historical narratives of resistance in India have primarily focused on explicit, organised, and typically confrontational expressions of dissent—rebellions, reform movements, and mass mobilisations. These forms are significant, but they are only one part of a bigger picture of ethical behaviours. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's involvement invites a juxtaposition with alternative forms of resistance that operate discreetly yet successfully within constrained political environments.

3.5.1.1 Martyrdom vs. Ethical Facilitation

There is a big difference between martyrdom and ethical facilitation. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was public, morally strong, and centred on protecting religious freedom. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's action was more useful than spectacular when compared to others. He did not explicitly confront the Mughal state; instead, he upheld the moral meaning of martyrdom by fulfilling the ceremonies. This difference has an effect on linear narratives that only give historical importance to people who suffer in public. Ethical facilitators, or people who value dignity, memory, and continuity, are just as important in shaping historical events. Without Baba Lakhishah's help, the martyrdom might have been cut short in a ritualistic way and made less powerful. So, ethical facilitation is a way to fight back that works with martyrdom instead of against it.

3.5.1.2 Quiet Resistance and Moral Efficacy

Indian history offers further instances of quiet resistance where moral efficacy transcended political significance. For example, Bhakti traditions frequently stress transforming oneself and becoming more virtuous rather than questioning institutions. Many everyday acts of resistance during colonial authority, such as keeping indigenous languages and traditions alive, also happened without being formally recognised. People like Mahatma Gandhi pushed for mass civil disobedience as a moral way to act, yet even in Gandhian practice, small acts of conscience were still very important. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's deeds presage a broader Indian tradition wherein moral clarity, rather than violence, constitutes the principal mode of opposition.

3.5.1.3 Comparative Global Perspectives

Baba Lakhishah's intervention is consistent with academic discussions regarding ethical behaviour in authoritarian settings. Studies on twentieth-century Europe illustrate how individuals protected persecuted communities by providing shelter, safeguarding cultural artefacts, and facilitating respectful burials, frequently at significant personal peril. These actions didn't change state policy much; instead, they protected moral order and historical remembrance. When you look at it this way, Baba Lakhishah Banjara's work places Indian history in a world framework. When official institutions don't follow moral rules, people usually step in to fill the gap. This comparison highlights how vital it has been for people to be brave in the face of danger throughout history.

3.5.2 The Contemporary Importance of Baba Lakhishah Banjara's Moral Behaviour

3.5.2.1 Religious Freedom Beyond Legal Frameworks

In modern discussions regarding religious freedom, the focus is usually on constitutional safeguards, legal protections, and state policies. These frameworks are crucial, but Baba Lakhishah Banjara's story demonstrates another important side: carrying out your morals through religious freedom. His involvement wasn't based on legal protections or institutional backing; it was based on a moral obligation that showed itself in difficult situations.

This point of view is very essential in regions where the law isn't very strong, is slow, or is only followed in some instances. Baba Lakhishah's actions teach us that we often have to take responsibility for our own actions in order to keep our dignity and freedom, especially when institutions fail.

3.5.2.2 Civil Courage in Today's World

The principle of civil courage is still very essential today. In cultures where there is a lot of division, monitoring, and social pressure, ethical behaviour is becoming more and more subtle. People who report wrongdoing, work for humanitarian groups, or help settle disputes in their communities often do so without getting any credit. They do it because they think it's the right thing to do, not because they want to get something in return. The life of Baba Lakhishah Banjara is an example from history of what to do. His willingness to make personal sacrifices for the sake of dignity shows that civil bravery does not depend on charm, power, or public approval. Instead, it depends on having strong morals and being willing to do something when those morals are at risk.

3.5.2.3 Plurality as an Ethical Practice

Current discourse on plurality frequently frames it as a matter of policy development or institutional adjustment. Baba Lakhishah's involvement signifies a deeper foundation: pluralism as ethical solidarity manifested in practice. His actions went above what was acceptable in both religious and work settings, suggesting that he had moral beliefs rather than loyalty to a group. This comprehension bears profound consequences for contemporary multicultural societies. It suggests that lasting pluralism depends not only on formal frameworks but also on everyday ethical obligations that recognise dignity within variety.

3.5.3 Discussion: Integrating Ethics, History, and Memory

3.5.3.1 Putting Resistance in a New Light in Indian History

The case of Baba Lakhishah Banjara shows that resistance needs to be seen in a new light in Indian history. It doesn't have to be loud or unified for resistance to have a difference. People's ethical activities, especially those that don't fit into elite frameworks, can change the course of history by protecting meaning, memory, and dignity. This new concept challenges the historical patterns that associate significance with size or popularity. It calls for more attention to the micro-ethics of history, which are the decisions people make when moral order is at risk.

3.5.3.2 Ritual as a Site of Power and Resistance

The analysis also underscores ritual as a crucial centre of power. The Mughal state tried to control not only bodies but also moral views by trying to make cremation illegal. Baba Lakhishah's intervention disrupted this control by reinstating ritual as a domain of communal authority. This understanding goes beyond Sikh history. In all cultures, rituals that have to do with death, memory, and grief are profoundly political. They change how individuals in a community think about pain and give it moral weight. Keeping rituals intact is a strong way to stand up to oppressive control.

3.5.3.3 Memory, Space, and Ethical Continuity

The institutionalisation of memory at Rakab Ganj Sahib illustrates how ethical activities achieve persistence through spatial inscription. A holy sanctuary keeps moral lessons alive for generations, passing on their importance. In this case, the area has a double legacy: the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the bravery of Baba Lakhishah Banjara in the civil war. This contradiction makes the main thesis of the piece stronger: ethical history is formed when powerful people give up something and less powerful people help. Both are necessary for moral continuity.

3.5.4 Synthesis of Findings

The analysis above shows that there are a few essential things we learnt: Civil bravery is a unique and historically important way to resist that doesn't involve direct confrontation. Subaltern actors are very important for sustaining religious freedom, especially when institutions fail or back down. Rituals are an important part of remembering the past because they bring together power and morality. Pluralism in Indian history has been sustained by experienced ethical solidarity, rather than only through state policy or elite leadership. These results add to larger discussions in history, sociology, and religious studies by giving us a better idea of how moral agency affects community life.

Baba Lakhishah Banjara's participation is an important reminder that history is shaped by both rulers and people who disagree with them. People who act quietly, decisively, and ethically when moral ideals are in peril also shape them. His action preserved dignity in death, fostered communal remembrance, and reinforced a lasting multicultural moral legacy.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This article examines Baba Lakhishah Banjara's historical significance by situating his actions within the moral,

political, and cultural framework of Mughal India in the 1600s. The research departed from elite-focused historical accounts, emphasising a non-elite individual whose ethical involvement profoundly impacted religious continuity, collective memory, and the pragmatic implementation of pluralism.

In 1675, the killing of Guru Tegh Bahadur was a very significant act of compulsion. It was intended to penalise dissent and to diminish the significance of rituals and historical memory. The Mughal dynasty sought to prohibit cremation to consolidate its authority over moral and symbolic matters. Baba Lakhishah Banjara's response to this problem indicates that ethical agency can remain effective even under intense scrutiny and persecution. He kept Sikh burial customs alive by helping with the cremation and making a personal sacrifice. He also ensured that martyrdom was remembered as a moral legacy rather than erased from the records.

The analysis presented three principal arguments. First, it proved that civil courage is a distinctive and historically significant type of opposition. Civil bravery differs from rebellion or public protest, as it involves discreet, morally inspired actions undertaken at one's own expense. Baba Lakhishah's participation exemplifies this mode of resistance, illustrating how moral obligation can be fulfilled in the absence of institutional authority or political aspiration.

Second, the study highlighted the importance of subaltern moral agency in Indian history. Baba Lakhishah Banjara was not a religious or political leader; he could only do what he thought was right. The essay challenged the historical writing tradition that equates historical significance with elite status or fame by foregrounding his participation. It showed that ethical breakdowns often occur because of the actions of ordinary people who step in when organisations fail to uphold moral standards.

Third, the article illustrated how sacred locations and rituals can serve as sites of resistance and memory. The fact that the cremation location became Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib indicates that private moral actions can have long-lasting effects on institutions and places. In this context, sacred space functions as a medium for maintaining ethical value through generations, resisting attempts at symbolic dominion.

The tale of Baba Lakhishah Banjara holds historical relevance and broader implications for understanding religious freedom and pluralism. The research indicated that pluralism in Indian history has not been sustained solely by imperial policy or constitutional structures, but rather by ethical solidarity expressed during periods of stress. Baba Lakhishah's participation transcended ethnic and occupational divides, highlighting dignity as a collective moral principle rather than a sectarian assertion. This historical example remains significant in contemporary society, when there is considerable division and institutions are weak. It reminds us that standing up for our rights and dignity often requires moral strength and acting independently without expecting praise. Historians may create more complete and inclusive narratives about how ethical traditions endure over time by identifying and studying such events (Bayly, 1988).

Ultimately, Baba Lakhishah Banjara's importance in Indian history lies not in his political power or in his contributions to religious thought, but in his moral conduct during a period of profound moral upheaval. His life shows that rulers and saints have not been the only ones who have shaped India's religious freedom, pluralism, and moral continuity. Recognising these contributions is essential for a thorough comprehension of India's historical and ethical heritage.

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