CHAPTER-VII

PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN IN HISTORY AND TRADITION

One’s physical body is home to the soul. Hence the physical appearance of man is superficial as the body will perish but the soul will move on.\(^1\) Gender is thus, an external, a secondary factor. The soul constituting a human body is independent of any kind of a worldly classification. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, therefore stresses upon the union of this soul with God. Sikh history proves that whenever the Sikh community faced severe challenges including the struggle for its own existence and survival, the Sikh community as a whole presented a united front right from its formation, development, establishment and upto its present form. Amongst all this, Sikh women have contributed extensively both individually and as a group. It would be grave injustice if the contributions of such women go in vain. Therefore the participation of these Sikh women, are referred to time and again, as ideal to serve as inspiration for the others. This chapter provides brief character sketches relating to the contributions of these female members of the Sikh society, who were truly exceptional in their efforts to play a constructive role in the foundation and evolution of the Sikh Panth. It is to be noted here that writers who have only recently attempted at presenting short accounts on the lives of some prominent Sikh women, have largely eulogized the role of these Sikh women and most of such narratives are not validated enough. The reason cited is lack of authentic available information on the contributions of these Sikh women. Various accounts present them as role models for the rest of the female members of the Sikh community to follow.

MATA TRIPTA

In the late sixties of the fifteenth century, there was a small village in the Shiekhupura District named Talwandi, situated in the midst of dense forests and wasteland. To distinguish this village from the other villages by the same name, people began calling it Talwandi of Rai Bhoe, after the name of its founder. Later on this village

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was to be blessed with the founder of the Sikh religion.² Mata Tripta, was wife of Mehta Kalu, a resident of this village and mother of Guru Nanak.³ Tripta’s personality comes into prominence in view of the nature of her husband, Mehta Kalu, who has been described as a man of the world with parsimonious habits. His thriftiness earned him to become a man of substance but it also made him avaricious, unsociable and bitter of tongue. It is said that very few of his neighbours actually liked him, although, outwardly, they all showed respect towards him. The brunt of Kalu’s somewhat rustic nature was largely born by Tripta, who on the other hand, has been described as his ‘comely wife’. Daughter of one Rama of Chahanwala in the Majha country, situated between the Ravi and the Beas rivers, she was a complete contrast to her husband and was gifted with a sympathetic, generous nature, mild, gentle and extremely soft-spoken. She was devoted to her husband, inspite of his faults and patiently put up with his outbursts of temper and made it a point to never contradict him in any manner. It was this attitude of self-abnegation and self-effacement of the mild-mannered Tripta that ensured, more or less, a smooth domestic life, though occasional quarrels continued taking place.⁴

In 1464, Mehta Kalu and Tripta were blessed with a daughter, who was born in the house of her maternal grand-parents which was a common practice and hence was named, Nanaki. The birth of a daughter is said to have disappointed Kalu who became even more rude in his dealings with his wife. Therefore, like typical hindu women of the age, Tripta started following strict religious regimens so that the Gods may be pleased and bless her with a son. The Gods granted her wish and after five long years, on the third day of the light half of the month of Baisakh, of A.D. 1469, was born her illustrious son, Guru Nanak. This time Tripta had not been sent to her parental home and Nanak was born at Talwandi Rai Bhoe. The mid-wife, Daultan, announced his birth sometime after midnight and said that there was something very unique about the new-born, for instead of crying, he had at the time of his birth, ‘the laughing voice of a wise man joining a social gathering’, and also had a ‘halo round his head’. When Daultan first held him in her arms, the first sound made by the infant was like that of a person who appeared to be

half-laughing and half-speaking. These revelations by Daultan no doubt created anxiety regarding the divine nature of the new-born.\(^5\) Thus the first ones to realize the potential and the unique nature of the newborn were women; Daultan and Tripta, who immediately felt the saintliness of Guru Nanak.

The birth of Guru Nanak is said to have lessened the quarrels between Tripta and Kalu who now began showering love and affection on their only son.\(^6\) Quickened by the twin influence of his mother and his neighbour, the Sayyid, Guru Nanak became a precocious child by the age of five. He became interested in the *Shastras*, the *Koran*, and the muslim lore. His heart would melt on seeing anyone in misery and would often carry from home articles of food and clothing and bestow them upon the needy.\(^7\) Guru Nanak’s absorption in God worried his parents, which was natural as he would often abstain from eating and drinking in contemplation of the divine. At times he would hide himself in the forest, deliberately avoiding contact with people, and spend time in conversation with his favourite *Sadhus* and *Faqirs*. He thus became a laughing stock for the villagers and inspite of his father’s taunts, he continued to follow the dictates of his own mind.\(^8\)

Although Kalu found it extremely difficult to put up with his son’s wayward behaviour and rejection of a majority of social norms, Tripta on the other hand maintained poise and equilibrium in dealing with both Kalu and Guru Nanak. Amongst all this, her daughter Nanaki, was her constant companion and support. Kalu left no stone unturned in trying to absorb his son in mainstream social life, but Tripta saw the futility of these attempts and instead unconditionally showered love and affection upon him. Sarjit Singh Bal in his work maintains that an extremely cordial relationship existed between Tripta and her daughter-in-law Sulakhani, who was received into the family as a prized possession.\(^9\) Even Simran kaur, in her book states that Tripta was very supportive towards Sulakhani.\(^10\)

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 19.
\(^7\) Ibid, p. 20.
\(^8\) Ibid, p. 30.
\(^9\) Ibid, p. 31.
MATA SULAKHANI

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha’s *Mahan Kosh*, states that Sulakhani was born in the village Pakhoke, district Gurdaspur to Moolchand Chand Khatri and Mata Chando. Her father was a pious Chona Khatri merchant, who was the tax collector (Patwari) of his village. The year of her birth is not given, but on the basis of her year of marriage, one can guess that it was around 1473. The writer states that she was born with "super characteristics," but does not elaborate further. He does mention that she was named Sulakhani. There is no information regarding her early life.\(^{11}\) According to Sahib Singh, Guru Nanak and Sulakhani were engaged on Visak 5, 1542, vs, and the marriage took place on Harh 24, 1544 vs. Guru Nanak was 18 years old at the time of marriage and Sulakhani must have been about 14.\(^{12}\) Sulakhani is also referred to as Mata Choni.\(^{13}\) She was married off at an early age due to the prevalent custom of child marriage. The marriage was truly unique in its own way as Guru Nanak defied many of the social rituals and ceremonies and had the wedding solemnized his way. It is said that his marriage party consisted of people belonging to various castes, which is said to have offended the bride’s father.\(^{14}\)

But the marriage did not turn his mind towards mundane matters. Although he got engaged in worldly tasks for some time, his heart was never in them and his family began noticing this change. Nanak was nineteen when his wife came to live with him. For some time she succeeded in turning his attention towards herself and two sons were born to them, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das, three years later. They also probably had a daughter or daughters who died in infancy. Then Guru Nanak’s mind went back to spiritual problems and he once again sought the company of wandering hermits for guidance.\(^{15}\)

Guru Nanak lived the life of a house-holder and advocated practice of the same through his teachings, yet when he left home and family to undertake *Udasis*, thus

\(^{11}\) http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matasullakhnij.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930.

\(^{12}\) *Loc.cit*.


staying away for long intervals, he drew support from Sulakhani who understood his mission, and instead of creating obstacles in his way, found solace in his happiness. Her role in the foundation and development of *nouveau* practices initiated by Guru Nanak cannot go ignored. These included her contribution in the *Langar*, a practice, which later on became the identification mark of Sikhism. Moreover, for a long period of fourteen years, during the *Udasi* of Guru Nanak, she raised her two sons, at Nankana, managing house-hold expenses from agricultural income.\(^{16}\) She lived virtually the life of a single mother, in the long absence of her husband, which was not an easy task in those days of social control. In Sulakhani’s case, she did not have much choice in following the path chosen by her husband. She did not try influencing Guru Nanak, accepting him the way he was, supporting him like a rock, and not only following but also practically living his ideals and teachings. She was an epitome of peace, grace, dignity and devotion. Though Guru Nanak was away on a mission, yet his was a close-knit family even during his absence. Through these tough times Sulakhani had the support of Guru Nanak’s family, his parents and his sister.

**BIBI NANAKI**

Nanaki, the elder sister of Guru Nanak, was born in 1464, at her maternal grandparents home and therefore named Nanaki, meaning a girl born at her maternal grandparents home. *Nanke* in Punjabi means the place of one’s maternal grandparents.\(^{17}\) Nanaki, like other girls of her age was given adept training in various house-hold chores by her mother Tripta. It goes without saying that her brother born five years after her was named Guru Nanak after her.\(^{18}\) The first five years of Guru Nanak’s life were spent mostly in the company of his elder sister, Nanaki.\(^{19}\) Their love for each other is reinforced throughout the *Janamsakhis*.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bebenanakiji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930 BebeNanakiJi.
Nanaki saw the traits of a great saint in Guru Nanak, right from his early childhood. She regarded him not as her Veer (brother) but as a Peer (a messenger of God). She often shielded Guru Nanak from her father who nurtured great expectations from his only son. She could often be found acting as a catalyst between her practically inclined father and her spiritually occupied brother, Guru Nanak. She was the biggest support of her mother and later on her sister-in-law, Sulakhani, Guru Nanak’s wife, who had only Nanaki to turn to in troubled times, following Guru Nanak’s absence for long periods from his family.

Nanaki was married to Jai Ram, a revenue officer at Sultanpur, in the service of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi. It was on her behest that Jai Ram arranged for a suitable job for Guru Nanak in the Nawab’s service. She further helped him in settling at Sultanpur alongwith Sulakhani. It is said that Jai Ram was more than happy to have Guru Nanak at Sultanpur, as he knew that this was what Nanaki wanted more than anything else. Further, Nanaki and Jai Ram advised Guru Nanak to bring his wife from Batala and begin the life of a Grihista (house-holder) after he had performed his duties as a storekeeper to everyone’s satisfaction. Various accounts mention the intense love that existed between Guru Nanak and his sister, there are exaggerations of the episodes that have supposedly taken place between the two.

However, most of these works are in agreement that it was Nanaki who had given Guru Nanak money to buy his first Rabab. She inspired him to sing Shabads. Nanaki assisted Guru Nanak in maintaining social ties in a cordial way. Nanaki breathed her last in November 1518, and Guru Nanak was by her side during her last moments, at Sultanpur. He even performed her last rites. Guru Nanak did not visit Sultanpur after Nanaki’s death.

Nanaki is referred to by scholars as the first disciple of Guru Nanak and thus the first Sikh member of the community. The sources of information regarding the life and life-stories of Guru Nanak are the Janamsakhis, which are full of exaggerations, which

provide contradictory details regarding the occurrence of certain episodes in the life of Guru Nanak. These *Janamsakhis* are themselves not in agreement over many issues contained in them. Regarding the female members of Guru Nanak’s family and their role and contribution in Guru Nanak’s endeavours, we have to depend upon these very *Janamsakhis* for information. There are no other historical sources mentioning the same. As a result, very little information is available on these women of Guru Nanak’s family. Apart from the *Janamsakhis*, their life-sketches are largely constructed from local hearsay and oral tradition.

**MATA KHIVI**

Khivi was born in 1506 to Karan Devi and Bhai Devi Chand Khatri. Her father was a shopkeeper and moneylender, and was a popular man in the neighbourhood. She inherited all his finest attributes of generosity and congenial spirit. She was married in 1519, when she was 13 years old. Khivi was married to Lehna for 20 years before he became the second Guru of the Sikhs. There is historical evidence that she had four children. Dasu, the eldest was born in 1524. Bibi Amro was born in 1532, followed by Bibi Anokhi in 1535 and son Datu in 1537. The family was content and doing well. As the wife of one of the town’s richest men, Khivi must have enjoyed a great deal of respect. Her life was one of luxury and pleasure. Life would have gone on this way, had it not been for her coming under the influence of Mai Bhirai, who told her about Guru Nanak’s teachings. At approximately the same time, Lehna also heard of the Guru through Bhai Jodha, one of Guru Nanak’s earliest disciples. Lehna was a seeker of truth, and his curiosity was aroused. In 1532, shortly after the birth of his first daughter Amro, Lehna set out for his annual pilgrimage. On the way, he broke his journey at Kartarpur to see the Guru. On listening to Nanak speak, Lehna begged to be allowed to stay and become his disciple. He had found the truth he had been seeking, and would never again stray away from it. He served his master with the greatest devotion. He busied himself, sweeping the visitor’s quarters, washing their clothes and helping with the most menial work in fields. As his knowledge and understanding of the new teachings grew, so did the Guru’s affection and approval of his disciple. This created a problem for the Guru’s sons. Increasingly they grew jealous of Lehna, and took no pains to conceal their dislike. Without a doubt, this kind of stress and strain would have been very difficult for Lehna’s
wife to deal with. There are no records of her thoughts or feelings or how she handled the situation.27

Khivi, is the only lady to be mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib, page 967, in one of the hymns composed by Balwand:

“Balwand Kheevi nek jan jis bauhtee chhaao patraalee.
Langar daulat vandeeai ras anmrit kheer ghiaalee.”

Its literal translation being that according to Balwand, Kheevi, the Guru’s wife, is a noble woman, who gives soothing, leafy shade to all. She serves food in the common kitchen abundantly, nectar-sweet rice-pudding mixed with clarified butter.28

Khivi helped in creating a new social consciousness in Sikh women. She was a wise advisor for her sons on spiritual and social matters. When Guru Angad Dev entrusted Guruship to Guru Amar Das, she unhesitatingly accepted her husband’s decision and even tried convincing her angry sons to accept their father’s verdict as the office of Guruship commanded tremendous responsibility and they weren’t capable of bearing it.29 When Guru Angad Dev passed the succession to Guru Amar Das, his son Datu was very disappointed. Encouraged by some of his friends, he tried to declare himself the rightful heir. He took his following and they sang hymns by themselves. Khivi was quite upset. When Datu developed headaches, she was able to persuade him that his responsibility was too much for him. Seeking a cure for her son’s headaches, Khivi took her son back to Guru Amar Das. All was forgiven. Datu’s headaches disappeared and Sikhism was spared another schism, thanks to Khivi’s intervention.30

She was a kind but strict mother. Khivi created love for the Guru’s hymns in her daughter, Amro, who memorized many of Guru Nanak’s hymns. It was listening to her

27 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiiviji.html?9676663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1ftee8930.
28 Sawan Singh, Op.cit, p. 17 :

olqebj eh tko

edfl phltor slk q? nlyh phltzw ylth By e iB fi; j p[sh SkT] gq[kbbh..

berfo d’T[sh tzhm? o f k[lq[kpl ylfo flkddh..

r[i]yq e’ w[y T[sh/ wBw[y Eh]/ go[lbb.. g]? ep[b] yzw Bkfb iAk xlb wodh xlbh..

wle[k ylth yj; j j/B r’l T[mlkdd..e..

30 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiiviji.html?9676663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1ftee8930.
singing of Guru Nanak’s hymns that made a devout idol-worshipper like Guru Amar Das denounce such futile practices and adopt the new faith as preached by Guru Nanak and carried ahead by Guru Angad Dev. When Guru Angad Dev assumed Guruship in 1539, she along with him accepted the new faith whole-heartedly and participated in the further development of Guru Nanak’s ideals, and teachings, by Guru Angad Dev. Khivi successfully continued the responsibility of community kitchen started by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. In fact, service in the Langar was her life’s mission. Since Khadur was situated at the riverbank and so many travelers took food from the community kitchen. This kitchen proved very useful in the spread of Sikhism rapidly. In fact, Langar is a unique and integral part of Sikhism and credit for keeping it alive goes to Khivi. While Guru Angad Dev spread Sikhism in congregations (Sangat), she was doing the same in the community kitchen. The expenses were met out of the offerings of the Sikhs. Khivi shouldered multiple responsibilities during her life-time and thus set a personal example by performing exemplary service in consolidating the new faith. Khivi did much more than work in the kitchen. She created a loving atmosphere for all whom she came in contact with. According to Mohinder kaur Gill, Khivi learnt to break the limitations imposed upon the female sex by the society as she along with other women lived without the Purdah and performed self-less service in the community kitchen (langar). Dignity of women as advocated by Guru Nanak, was practically demonstrated by Khivi, who became the first woman in the evolving Sikh faith to preach women’s emancipation after 1539.

Khivi, thus, in her own dignified way was successful in breaking the age-old social practices which were largely responsible in creating social imbalances. Khivi’s work in the field of women’s reform paved the way for Guru Amar Das to continue the work further, who vehemently opposed social injustices like Sati and Purdah. Seeking inspiration from Khivi’s untiring efforts, others followed suit and took interest in public

32 Ibid., p. 19.
33 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiviji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930.
34 Mohinder Kaur Gill, Eminent Sikh Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 31.
35 Loc.cit.
36 Loc.cit.
service. Since Guru Angad Dev had vowed never to take any money from the offerings made by the pilgrims. The Guru made jute ropes in order to earn his livelihood and Khivi helped him in his labour. Khivi lived for thirty years after Guru Angad Dev’s death. During this time she continued serving the community. She had the distinction of meeting five Gurus. Khivi died at Khadur in 1582, and the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, himself attended her cremation.

BIBI AMRO

Born in 1532, at village Khadur near Amritsar, to Guru Angad Dev and Mata Khivi, she received her early education directly from her parents. She was taught to read and write in the Gurmukhi script, which had been revised and simplified by her father, Guru Angad Dev. Many sacred hymns were learnt by her and according to the *Bansavalinama*, she knew the *Sidh Gosht* by heart. Amro was gifted with a melodious voice and was multi-talented. She was married to Bhai Jasoo son of Manak Chand of Basarke village. As was the custom of the day, she was sent to live with her husband's family. Her father encouraged her to continue doing kirtan and to preach Sikhism to all that she came in contact with. Guru Amar Das who was her husband's uncle was impressed by her sweet melodious voice when he heard her singing shabads (holy hymns). It was she who first introduced him to the teachings of Sikhism. As his interest grew, it was she who sent him to her father to learn more about these teachings. Guru Amar Das was so deeply influenced by Guru Angad Dev, that he became a devout Sikh, so much that Guru Angad Dev announced him as his Successor. Thus Guru Amar Das, the third Guru got to his destiny of becoming a Guru through Bibi Amro.

Years later, when Guru Amar Das gave structure to the Sikh nation and organised his preachers into 22 teaching districts, he placed Bibi Amro in-charge of one of these districts that he called Manji. The person occupying Manji was the Sikh preacher appointed by Guru Amar Das. It was an administrative position, with full responsibility for the equality and content of the preaching. She also would have the responsibility of

38 *Ibid*, p. 35.
collecting revenues and making decisions for the welfare of her diocese. Her manji or diocese included Basarke, her husband's village, which was also their home. It is the direct result of the efforts of Bibi Amro and other Sikh preachers that Amritsar today is synonomous with Sikhism.\textsuperscript{41}

Amar Das became a devout disciple of Guru Angad Dev, who impressed by his self-less service and interest in the teachings of Guru Nanak, later on nominated Guru Amar Das as his successor thereby ignoring the claims of his sons to the Guru’s office. It was through Amro, that Guru Amar Das became the third Guru of the Sikh faith.\textsuperscript{42} Amro served with utmost devotion and sincerity in her right as head of the \textit{Manji}, and preached the basic tenets of Sikhism.\textsuperscript{43} A man-made pond has been constructed close to the village, Basarke, named \textit{Bibi Amro Da Talab} meaning ‘Tank of Bibi Amro’, in her loving memory.\textsuperscript{44} Amro would wake up in the ambrosial hours of the morning, bathe and recite hymns taught to her by Guru Angad Dev, esp. the \textit{Japji Sahib}, and then go about her daily chores.\textsuperscript{45} Her recitation of the \textit{Bani} and pious qualities were appreciated by the entire village of Basarke.\textsuperscript{46}

Amro and her younger sister Anokhi, were given the same religious as well as literary training by both their parents themselves alongwith their brother’s \textit{Datu} and \textit{Dasu}. Her faith in the Guru’s hymns touched upon one and all. Within the confines of home, family and community, she carved a niche for herself. She played an important role in the early spread of Sikhism, being the head of a \textit{Manji}, her jurisdiction included Basarke, and a few surrounding villages. Moreover, a tank constructed in her rememberance is in itself proof enough that her efforts did not go un-noticed but on the other hand, her being a woman, and too of medieval Punjab, did not prevent her from achieving her mission.

\textsuperscript{41} http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bibiaamro.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885e90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930.
\textsuperscript{43} Gagan Aneja, \textit{Great Sikh Women}, Chandigarh, 2007, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 82.
Mansa Devi

In the year, 1502, Mansa Devi was married to Guru Amar Das, at the age of sixteen. Since there is virtually no available information regarding the birth or early childhood and education of Mansa Devi, on the basis of details known only after her marriage, her birth year is approximately fixed as somewhere between 1482-1485.\(^{47}\) It is further assumed that since Guru Amar Das’s father, Tej Bhan, was a rich landlord and trader, Mansa Devi’s father Devi Chand Behl, also must have been quite well-off. The wedding took place at village Sankhara, situated at a distance of about sixty miles from Guru Amar Das’s village, Basarke. It is also assumed that Mansa Devi had a thorough knowledge of Gurmukhi.\(^{48}\)

Guru Amar Das became Guru at the age of eighty-four and Mansa Devi at that time had grown old too, but, she alongwith her family willingly moved to Goindwal from Basarke, obeying the wish of Guru Angad Dev, who had instructed her husband to do so. At Goindwal, Guru Amar Das took charge of the construction of Goindwal nagar on the banks of river Beas. Mansa Devi helped the Guru in this noble task but also assisted in the construction of the *Baoli* (well) and seeking inspiration from her, other women too came forward to perform *karseva* (voluntary and free service). The tradition of serving in the *Langar* was carried forward too, keeping in line with the role performed by the earlier Guru Mahals.\(^{49}\)

His *Manji* sytem was a novel practice adopted for the spread of Guru Nanak’s message and in this new method of preaching the doctrines of Sikhism, women were made an integral part. The Guru is said to have established seventy-two small seats and twenty-two big seats for women preachers, for propogation of religion. Names of two women preachers, *Matho Murari* and *Sanchan Sach*, are known. He is also known to have given seventy-two sub-seats (*Panguda*), to women.\(^{50}\) *Pangudas*, were small cradles, in which infants were put to sleep. While swinging these cradles, the women preacher’s appointed by the Guru would narrate tales relating to the lives of the Gurus to their

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\(^{50}\) *Ibid*, p. 41.
neighbours. Guru Amar Das’s daughter Bhani too was appointed as the head of these seventy-two Manjis.\footnote{Mohinder Kaur Gill, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 42.}

The evil of Sati and the plight of widows had reached deteriorated the society to such extent that it made Guru Amar Das realize the futility and injustice of these practices towards women. Guru Amar Das in a very strict manner voiced his opinion against these evil practices. Even the Purdah (veil) was attacked by him. Perhaps the inspiration came from a woman herself, in the form of Mansa Devi, who being his wife was able to influence him to take a stand against these unjust customs. The Guru did his best to enforce the changes he had been advocating. An order was issued that no woman should come to the Guru’s congregation veiled and even asked his followers to stop practicing Sati, gave the widows an equal right to live with dignity and honour, and even their re-marriage was sanctioned. Although women’s upliftment was made an agenda in his teachings by Guru Nanak, it was Guru Amar Das who gave this agenda a concrete form.

**BIBI BHANI**

Bhani is introduced as a noble lady, by Sawan Singh in his book, \textit{Noble and Brave Sikh Women}. Daughter of Guru Amar Das and Mansa Devi, she was also affectionately called Mohini, by the Guru. Born in 1533, at village Basarke, near Amritsar, she was also the wife of Guru Ram Das, mother of Arjun, grandmother of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and great grandmother of Guru Gobind Singh. She is regarded as a symbol of service.\footnote{Sawan Singh, \textit{Noble and Brave Sikh Women}, Amritsar, 2005, p. 23.}

She was married on 18 February 1554 to Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das), a Sodhi Khatri belonging to Lahore, then in Goindval rendering voluntary service in the construction of the Baoli Sahib. After marriage, the couple remained in Goindval serving the Guru. From Goindval Bhai Jetha was deputed by the Guru to go and establish a habitation (present-day Amritsar) on a piece of land gifted, according to one version, by Emperor Akbar to Bibi Bhani at the time of his visit to Guru Amar Das. Three sons, Prithi Chand (1558), Mahadev (1560) and (Guru) Arjan Dev (1563) were born to her. A popular anecdote mentioned in old chronicles describes how devotedly Bibi Bhani served her father. One morning, it is said, as Guru Amar Das was absorbed in meditation, Bibi
Bhani noticed that one of the legs of the low wooden seat on which the Guru sat was about to give way. She at once put forward her hand to support the stool. As the Guru ended his devotions, he discovered how her hand was bleeding from the injury it had sustained. He blessed her saying that her progeny would inherit the guruship. Bibi Bhani died at Goindval on 9 April 1598. Guru Arjan Dev was the first Sikh Martyr. Guru Arjan Dev compiled Guru Granth Sahib by collecting all the writings of Gurus before him and installed it at Golden Temple, which is now The Guru Granth. Guru Arjan Dev completed the construction of Golden Temple. Bhani stood by her husband’s decision to consider merit over relations in choosing the next Guru and thus keeping in with the tradition started by Guru Nanak.

Bibi Bhani and Bhai Gurdas, a devotee of Guru Arjan Dev, foiled the conspiracy of Prithi Chand. After the death of Guru Ram Das, Bibi Bhani helped her son, Guru Arjan Dev, in every activity undertaken by him and advised him. She even persuaded Guru Arjan Dev to remarry after the death of his first wife. Bhani died in Tarn Taran in 1598 at the age of 65. Guru Arjan Dev had a well constructed in her memory at Tarn Taran. It is still known as the Well of Bibi Bhani. She can be called an embodiment of service, truth, endurance, obedience, and humility. Moreover, she headed a family of seven martyrs.

On the event of Guru Arjan’s torture and martyrdom, she gave the much needed moral support to his wife and eleven year old son, Guru Hargobind. This personal loss and tragedy, was perceived by her as God’s will. She was instrumental in instilling in the young Guru Hargobind values of courage, bravery and sacrifice along with spirituality. Bhani very efficiently balanced her duties both towards her parental home and in-laws house. Domestic circumstances never came in the way of her serving her father religiously even after her marriage. She maintained a strict watch when Guru Amar Das was in meditation, so that he couldn’t be disturbed. According to tradition, Guru Ram

http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bibibhani.html?967663c5d8b854ce6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930.

Loc.cit.


Das used to sell fried grams at the time of her marriage to him. She willingly helped him in his profession and didn’t seem to mind the financial status of her in-laws. Bhani always upheld the path of truth and was a staunch follower of the tradition of the Sikh Gurus. More than a mother, she was a companion to her youngest son, Arjan.\textsuperscript{58}

**MATA GANGA**

There is very meagre information on Ganga, wife of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, in historical writings of the Sikhs. After many years of her marriage to Arjan, she had a son, who was named Guru Hargobind, with the blessings of Baba Buddha.\textsuperscript{59}

Popular tradition has many a interesting story to tell about how Ganga was initially admonished by the revered Bhai Buddha for having come to him displaying her status and pride. Guru Arjan Dev, who himself was an embodiment of humility and self-less service to humanity, then advised his wife to visit Bhai Buddha once again and seek his blessings, this time behaving humbly. Ganga, is said to have done as told, and Bhai Buddha blessed her that an illustrious son would be born to her, who would not only become the sixth Guru but also a great military genius.\textsuperscript{60} Probably because of her rich origins, there are references to her being less humble in comparision to the other Guru Mahals.

Her father was Kishen Chand and mother Dhanwanti. Being married for 14 years, since 1579, Guru Hargobind was born in 1595. Even during the long wait for a child, she constantly reminded herself of the boon granted to her mother-in-law, Bhani, that Guruship would remain in her family. Her being childless however, made her bear the brunt of people’s nasty remarks. Prithi Chand’s wife, Karmo, never lost an opportunity to insult and hurt the sentiments of Ganga, over her being childless. One of the characteristics of Ganga’s personality emerging out of these poupular episodes from her life as Guru Mahal is that she would repeatedly complain to the fifth Guru about her being wronged by his brother’s wife. The Guru himself being above these material

\textsuperscript{59} *Ibid*, p. 34.
thoughts would guide her to inculcate patience and perseverance, which she eventually did.61

Prithi Chand, had been pleased that the Guru couple was childless and therefore began eyeing the office of the fifth Guru for his son, Meherban, who was liked by Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Hargobind’s birth shattered the dreams of Prithi Chand who now wanted to kill the newborn. Apparently to safeguard the infant child from the evil intentions of Prithi Chand, Guru Arjun Dev directed his wife, Ganga to proceed to a village called Wadali, near Amritsar. Guru Hargobind was born at Wadali, and the task of protecting him from any danger, was taken up by the village chaudhary, Heme. Mata Ganga stayed with her little son at Wadali, until further orders from Guru Arjan.62 Prithi Chand’s attempts to kill Guru Hargobind at Wadali were foiled by the sixth Guru himself. Seeing this, Guru Arjan Dev asked them to return to Amritsar.63 Prithi Chand continued devising schemes of dispensing Hargobind but met with failure each time.64 Surely this must have been a difficult time for Mata Ganga, who along with Guru Arjan left the safety of their son in the hands of the Almighty Lord.65 At the time of Guru Hargobind’s arrest by Jehangir, Mata Ganga, led the Sikh congregation inspiring them constantly to be firm in their cause, and have faith in God as Guru Hargobind would return safely.66 Mata Ganga breathed her last in 1618, at Bakala, after reciting the Sukhmani Sahib. As per her wish, Guru Hargobind immersed her ashes in the river Beas, after performing her last rites.67 Mata Ganga is fondly remembered as a loving and compassionate woman who was greatly liked by the Sikh congregation.68 Gangasar, in the Kartarpur area of Jalandhar, reminds us of Mata Ganga till date.69

62 *Loc.cit.*
63 Ibid, p. 120.
64 Ibid, p. 121.
65 Loc.cit.
68 Loc.cit.
69 Ibid, p. 125.
MATA DAMODRI

Damodri, wife of Guru Hargobind, was born in 1556, in Dalla village. Her father was Narain Dass and Bhai Vir Singh in his works names her mother as Prem Dai. On the event of her wedding, the village women knit Phulkaris and Dushalas as a wedding gift for her.\textsuperscript{70} Her grandfather Bhai Paro, was a devout follower of the teachings of Guru Nanak, so much so that Guru Amar Das acknowledged in him qualities which could possibly make him a Guru.\textsuperscript{71} Narain Dass had only two daughter’s, the eldest being Ramo, followed by Damodri, both of whom were well-educated by him.\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Suraj Parkash}, describes in detail the wedding ceremony of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.\textsuperscript{73} They were aged eleven and nine years at the time of their engagement and their marriage was solemnized after about two months, in the year 1662.\textsuperscript{74} The historic tradition of conducting marriages by Anand Karaj began with the marriage of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.\textsuperscript{75} Marital as well as social responsibilities fell upon Damodri at a very early age of ten years. With the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guruship passed over to her husband, Guru Hargobind.\textsuperscript{76} New challenges that arised before the entire Sikh community, brought out the skills of Damodri, who faced these adversities with great fortitude and courage.\textsuperscript{77} Guru Hargobind’s adoption of the \textit{Miri-Piri} policy initially confused the Sikhs, the mughals misinterpreted it and many approached Damodri asking her to influence her husband to think again about the warrior spirit which he was aiming at introducing into the Sikh community. But Damodri, like her predecessors had full faith in the religious and ideological transformation being brought about by the sixth Guru and asked his followers to bestow upon him the same trust.\textsuperscript{78} The young Guru Hargobind

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Loc.cit.}
girded two swords around his waist; one to symbolize spiritual power and the other temporal.  

During Guru Hargobind’s arrest by Jehangir, Damodri alongwith Mata Ganga, led the Sikh congregation from the forefront. After eight years of marriage, Damodri and Guru Hargobind had two sons, Gurditta and Ani Rai and a daughter Viro. On Guru Arjan Dev’s torture and subsequent martyrdom at the hands of the mughals, she kept her composure and made the young Guru Hargobind realize the intensity and true meaning of the sacrifice made by his father. The same qualities of upholding truth and living a virtuous life were also instilled in Hargobind by her. It was Guru Hargobind, who on becoming the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, brought about transformation of the developing Sikh community by adopting the *Miri – Piri* policy. She is therefore considered an example of confidence and humility. Damodri spent twenty-five years of her married life in Guru household efficiently contributing to the culture and heritage of the Sikhs. She died in 1631, at village Darauli, in Ferozepur, where her elder sister Ramo lived. Guru Hargobind was the first Sikh Guru to enter into a polygamous relationship as he also had two more wives names Nanaki and Maha Devi. Kahn Singh Nabha in his *MahanKosh* mentions that Guru Hargobind had entered into marriage three times.

Little is known about Nanaki, apart from the fact that she had three sons and Guru Tegh Bahadur were one of them. Suraj Mal was the son of Maha Devi and Guru Hargobind.

**MATA NANAKI II**

Nanaki, wife of sixth Guru Hargobind, was the mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur. She was the daughter of Hari Chand of Bakala and the marriage took place in 1660. Her marriage to the sixth Guru took place during the life-time of, Bibi Bhani, but Guru Arjan Dev could not attend their marriage on account of his martyrdom. Due to the early challenges faced by Guru Hargobind, on becoming the Guru, Nanaki mostly led an

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unsettled life, shifting between Amritsar, Kiratpur and Baba Bakala, as the sixth Guru was himself involved in a conflict with the mughals led by Emperor Jehangir. Guru Hargobind faced a series of domestic tragedies during his last days which saddened him immensely. In a short span, three of his sons died, including Gurditta, whose son Dhirmal turned against his grandfather, over the issue of succeeding him as the next Sikh Guru. Dhirmal regarded his accession to the Gurugaddi as his birth right. The Guru could not decide his successor for a long time. He had two sons living; Suraj Mal, who showed little interest in Sikh affairs, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was too withdrawn in himself to be entrusted with the leadership of the rapidly growing community. Finally, Guru Hargobind chose Gurditta’s second son, Har Rai, to succeed him as the seventh Guru. After the death of Guru Hargobind in March 1644, Dhirmal and his family became arch rivals of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Things became so worse that Nanaki had to save her son and family from Dhirmal’s enmity. According to tradition, Nanaki would keep vigil over the meditation room in the basement, where Tegh Bahadur would meditate, and not allow anyone to disturb him. Nanaki inspired Guru Tegh Bahadur to meditate. In adverse circumstances she kept her faith in God and reconciled in God’s wish. Being Guru Hargobind’s wife, she had learnt to live life bravely not giving in to the evil motives of her rivals. It is said that she had to face extremely tough conditions and not so good a living standard during her life-time.

MAHA DEVI

Khushwant Singh in his AHistory of the Sikhs, refers to the third wife of Guru Hargobind as Marwahi. The wedding took place in 1672, and Daya Ram Marwah of Mahdayali, was the father of Maha Devi. The Gurbilas Patshahi 6, gives an account of the birth of Maha Devi, also known as Marwahi. The writer of this Gurbilas mentions her mother as Bhagni, who was a pious lady. They are stated to have been extremely wealthy.

91 Ibid, p. 47.
92 Ibid, p. 36.
but childless and Maha Devi was born after they were blessed by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. Maha Devi’s parents then decided to marry their daughter to the Guru’s son, Guru Hargobind, a wish that was accepted by the Guru house. Maha Devi is described as a very beautiful young girl with fine facial features. The venue of the wedding was decorated with real diamonds and pearls, according to traditional sources. At this venue, a Gurdwara was constructed, known as Chutala Sahib. On her arrival at the Guru’s house in Amritsar, Maha Devi not only received a warm welcome from Mata Ganga, but was also equally loved by the two other wives of Guru Hargobind. She adopted to the changes that her marriage brought along. She became an integral part of the system of Langar under the able guidance of Mata Ganga. In 1674, she gave birth to a son, who was named Suraj Mal, who was later on imparted both religious education and military training along with the other children of Guru Hargobind. Maha Devi completely shouldered responsibilities at the time of Viro’s marriage, who was the daughter of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.

Maha Devi did approach Guru Hargobind with a proposal to make her son Suraj Mal the seventh Guru of the Sikhs, but Guru Hargobind refused to do so as he felt that Suraj Mal was too inclined in worldly affairs and the Guru’s office needed someone who could perform supreme sacrifice and for this, he had chosen Har Rai. Maha Devi humbly accepted the Guru’s orders.

Maha Devi and her son Suraj Mal spent the rest of their life at Kiratpur, where she breathed her last in 1702, one year after the death of Guru Hargobind. Maha Devi spent her last days in prayer and worship. Bibi Kaulan a staunch devotee and disciple of Guru Hargobind worked selflessly. The Guru recognizing her dedication got constructed the Holy tank at Kaulsar at Amritsar.

95 Mohinder Kaur Gill, Eminent Sikh Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 58.
96 Ibid, p. 59.
97 Ibid, p. 60.
98 Loc.cit.
100 Ibid, p. 65.
101 Ibid, p. 66.
102 Loc.cit.
BIBI VIRO

Viro, was born in 1615, at Amritsar to Guru Hargobind and Damodri.\textsuperscript{104} During a conversation with Mata Ganga, the young Hargobind was given the blessing of having a son by his mother, but, the Guru thanking her for the boon requested her to grant him the boon of having a daughter even if he had five sons of his own.\textsuperscript{105} Guru Hargobind truly believed that every home must have a daughter and therefore with the birth of Viro, the Guru’s happiness is quoted in many Sikh accounts. \textit{Gurbilas Patshahi 6}, endorses this by stating that Guru Hargobind himself had asked his mother, Ganga, to bless him with the birth of a daughter.\textsuperscript{106} Alongwith his other children, the education of Viro too was personally supervised by the Guru. He stressed on the inculcation of value-based teachings, which were willingly imbibed by his daughter.\textsuperscript{107} Viro was loved by all in the family, as she was the only daughter of the Guru and the only sister of her five brothers; Gurditta, Suraj Mal, Ani Rai, Atal Rai and Tegh Bahadur.\textsuperscript{108} She was married to Sadhu Ram, son of Dharma Ram and Nand kaur, in the year 1629, in village Jhabal, district Amritsar.\textsuperscript{109}

Sadhu Ram and his family were of humble origins and did not match the status and assets of the Guru’s family but the Guru was intent on marrying his daughter to the simpleton, because of his goodness, a decision which was willingly accepted by Viro, although her mother Damodri did have certain initial inhibitions about the match, but was convinced by Guru Hargobind eventually.\textsuperscript{110} While sending her to her husband’s house, Guru Hargobind himself advised her to seek happiness in her husband’s wish. He also told her to respect everyone visiting her home especially elders.\textsuperscript{111} Damodri too gave her parting advise, by telling her to wake up early preferably before sunrise and cater to her new responsibilities in an efficient way, without giving any scope to anybody to make a complain.\textsuperscript{112} Damodri further asked her to follow the path of righteousness always and to

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Loc.cit}, \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 110-111.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Loc.cit}.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Loc.cit}.
live a dutiful life. Sadhu Ram, the Guru’s son-in-law was an embodiment of humility.\textsuperscript{113}

The marriage ceremony took place according to \textit{Anand karaj} rites and Guru Hargobind told the Sikh congregation that witnessed this wedding about the importance of the \textit{Anand Karaj} marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{114}

Five sons were born to Viro and Sadhu Ram, Sango Shah, Gulab Chand, Jeet Mal, Ganga Ram and Mohri Chand, who proved to be very virtuous and brave.

Sango Shah and Jeet Mal later became martyrs while fighting the battle of Bhangani (1688) with Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh, himself has described their supreme sacrifice in his \textit{Bacchittar Natak}.\textsuperscript{115} Viro passed down what she had herself imbibed from her parents, gave her sons a good upbringing, made them realize the importance of laying down their life for the common good of the larger community and rise above selfish interests. Viro proved to be a worthy daughter of her father and was dedicated to the cause initiated by Guru Hargobind and propelled by Guru Gobind Singh.\textsuperscript{116}

**MATA KISHAN KAUR I**

Kishan Kaur was born in the well-to-do family of Daya Ram, of Anoop city, Bulandshahr, U.P. Daya Ram, a businessman by profession was also a faithful follower of Guru Hargobind. It was during one of his religious tours to Uttar Pradesh that Guru Hargobind agreed to the matrimonial alliance of his grandson, Har Rai with Daya Ram’s daughter, Kishan Kaur. After her marriage, Kishan Kaur shifted to Kiratpur and adapted to her new role. She very aptly managed the Gurdwara, at Kiratpur. She is referred to as a humble lady. Her son Har Krishan was only five years old when Guru Har Rai died, at a young age of thirty-two years. The responsibility of rearing her son thus fell upon her. She faced the situation in a dignified manner. On being summoned by the mughal

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid}, p.115.
emperor, Aurangzeb, Har Krishan was accompanied by his mother Kishan Kaur to Delhi. The child Guru of the Sikhs got infected with small-pox and left for heavenly abode.  

BIBI ROOP KAUR  

Roop Kaur was the adopted daughter of Guru Har Rai. Various kinds of unjust practices had established a string hold in the society in the name of religion. It was during this particular period that the heinous crime of female infanticide assumed vast dimensions. People had their own ways of doing away with the girl child. Roop Kaur was one such girl child whose life was not only saved but who later on went on to set an example for other women to follow, on being rescued from a dust-bin during her infancy by Guru Har Rai. He brought her home and she was lovingly welcomed by all in the Guru’s family. The destiny of a girl child discarded by her parents was totally transformed by the Guru, thus setting a personal example in front of society. Roop Kaur later on achieved tremendous success in education. She truly imbibed the virtues of the Guru house and became one with the Guru’s family. Guru Har Rai reared her like his own daughter, naming her Roop Kaur.  

Roop Kaur had great respect for her father and naturally incorporated the teachings of Sikhism under the Guru’s influence. She was married to Khemkaran of Pasroor, the chief town of a district in Sialkot. She later had a son called called Amar Singh. The descendants of Amar Singh are presently settled in village Dyalpur, in Patiala. Various portions of Roop Kaur's handwritten Pothis are available at Gurdwaa Manji Sahib at Kiratpur, in the custody of Sardar Babur Sigh, Granthi of The Gurdwara. This Pothi is the work of Bibi Roop Kaur. According to Babu Singh, this Pothi was believed to have been written by Roop Kaur as a personal copy. The appropriate date of writing this Pothi has been fixed at 1661, soon after the death of Guru Har Rai.
Roop Kaur’s unique and interesting contribution lies in her writing down each and every word that was uttered by her father, Guru Har Rai, in its original form without being subjective. She thus left behind a legacy for the coming generations of the Sikh community, which could have an objective insight into the ideals and personality of their eighth Guru. She wrote in beautiful handwriting.\textsuperscript{122}

She has even provided the details of the manner in which Sikhs must recite their daily prayer, \textit{Ardaas}. Roop Kaur is regarded as the first truly literate woman amongst the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{123} It is said that she referred to the teachings of Guru Har Rai as the teachings of the \textit{Guru} without naming him alongside as was the accepted pattern in Sikh writing, as the teachings of the earlier Gurus are indicated by the respective \textit{Mohalla}.\textsuperscript{124} A handkerchief given by Guru Har Rai to Roop Kaur and \textit{Sakhis} from a \textit{Pothi} of the \textit{Japji Sahib} are preserved at Kiratpur.\textsuperscript{125} Roop Kaur was instrumental in conveying the religious discourses held between Guru Har Rai and the Sikh congregation by way of writing down everything that transpired.\textsuperscript{126} The Sikh congregation sought the Guru’s advice on many issues which were satisfactorily dealt by the Guru Har Rai. On one such occasion, the \textit{Sangat} wanted to know from the Guru, as to how one could differentiate between good and bad actions. The Guru answered this query by asking them not to be inclined towards women, other than their own.\textsuperscript{127} This is reflective of the Guru’s attitude towards women which is known to us only through the writings of Roop Kaur.

\textbf{MATA GUJRI}

Gujri, wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was born in Kartarpur, Jalandhar, in 1619, to Lal Chand and Bishan kaur. As was the custom in those days, she was married off at an early age to the ninth Guru in March 1632, at kartarpur by \textit{Anand Marriage} rites.\textsuperscript{128} Kirpal Chand, who led the Sikh forces engaged in battle with the Mughals, was her brother.\textsuperscript{129} Guru Tegh Bahadur was in the initial years known as Tyag Mal and it was at

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 127-128.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 128.
\item \textit{Loc.cit.}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 131.
\item \textit{Loc.cit.}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p.133.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Kartarpur that he received the title Tegh Bahadur from Guru Hargobind, who was impressed by the brave manner in which Tyag Mal had fought against the mughal forces, that had attacked Guru Hargobind at Kartarpur in 1635. Gujri too was a witness to this battle and was duly impressed by her husband’s martial skills.\textsuperscript{130} After the death of Guru Hargobind in 1644, Guru Tegh Bahadur along with his mother, Nanaki and wife, Gujri, shifted residence from Kiratpur to village Bakala, near Amritsar, where they stayed for twenty-one years managing on the income got from some land owned by them.\textsuperscript{131} Some other writers however state that Guru Tegh Bahadur lived at Bakala for twenty-six years.\textsuperscript{132} Guru Tegh Bahadur and his family got a underground cell dug up, due to extremely hot climatic conditions. It was here in this cell, known as Bhaura, that Guru Tegh Bahadur meditated religiously, many times undergoing self-imposed solitary confinement. In such severe circumstances Gujri assisted her husband in all his religious and spiritual endeavours.\textsuperscript{133}

Guru Gobind Singh, in his \textit{Bachittar Natak}, describes this rigorous penance undertaken by his parents.\textsuperscript{134} Guru Tegh Bahadur became the ninth Guru of the Sikhs in 1664, settled at Kiratpur, bought some land after a year and named it as Chakk Nanaki, after his mother, which later on came to be famous as the town of Anandpur. The Guru began his religious tours for the purpose of propagating Guru Nanak’s faith and it was during his visit to Assam, that during a brief halt at Patna on the way, that keeping in mind that his wife was pregnant that he asked them to stay there and it was in Patna that Guru Gobind Singh was born in 1666, after thirty years of his parents marriage.\textsuperscript{135} Gujri was so overjoyed that she performed charity on the event of her son’s birth.\textsuperscript{136} In 1671, Gujri accompanied by her brother Kirpal Chand, returned to Punjab, and while on their way made a brief stop at Lakhnaur near Ambala, where a well was constructed, \textit{Mata}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] Sawan Singh, \textit{Noble and Brave Sikh Women}, Amritsar, 2005, p. 27.
\item[131] \textit{Ibid}, p. 28.
\item[133] Sawan Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 28:
\begin{verbatim}
  sks wko nby noloXk. jfjX ir jXkBk jXk_ fB i coh nby eh jthk.
  sk sk/ gqjzFv r/od/tk. fB gqjG ip ndfj: jw jwhk. sp jw iBw eh[ wj] bhwhk_ x2
\end{verbatim}
\item[136] \textit{Loc.cit}.
\end{footnotes}
Gujri Da Khooh, to commemorate her visit.\(^{137}\) Guru Tegh Bahadur came into conflict with the mughals while supporting the Kashmiri Pandits, which led first to his arrest by the mughals, followed by his torture and martyrdom, in 1675.\(^{138}\) When the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur was brought to Kiratpur, by Jaita, Nanu and Adda, three Sikhs who managed to escape with the Guru’s head, Gujri bowing before the Guru’s head wished to lay down her life in the same manner as the Guru, a wish which later on came to be fulfilled.\(^{139}\) Guru Gobind Singhabecame the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, as he had been nominated by Guru Tegh Bahadur.\(^ {140}\)

The young Guru Gobind Singh was reared like a prince, educated and well-trained in the art of warfare. Gujri began preparing him for the mission that he was to lead.\(^{141}\) Between 1675-1684, they lived at Chakk Nanaki, from where Gujri issued Hukamnamas, to the Masands, who had become very corrupt and began amassing great wealth and landed assets. She dealt with them strictly ordering them to mend their ways, at the same time addressing them in a simple language.\(^{142}\) In her Hukamnamas, she also instructed the Sikh Sangats to follow the path led by Guru Gobind Singh and have full faith in his efforts.\(^{143}\) In 1704, Gujri alongwith her younger grandsons, Zoravar (aged 8) and Fateh (aged 5), got separated from the rest of the family at Sirsa while trying to cross the river Sutlej which was flooded. Due to the treachery of Gangu, who once used to serve in the Guru’s kitchen, the Governor of Sirhind arrested the trio and were confined at a place known as Thanda Burj, the Cold Tower, which a summer resort of the mughal officers. Without any warm clothes on her, eighty-year old Gujri could not stand the coolness. She anticipated the danger that lay ahead and began infusing courage and confidence in the minds of her young grandsons and asked them to be prepared for sacrificing their lives for the cause of the community. She narrated to them inspiring

\(^{138}\) *Ibid*, p. 28.
\(^{142}\) *Loc.cit*.
stories from the lives of the earlier Sikh Gurus and asked them to face the adversities bravely.\textsuperscript{144}

On refusing to convert to \textit{Islam}, both Zorawar and Fateh were buried live in a wall. The children accepted martyrdom rather than bringing disgrace to the community. Gujri was proud of their sacrifice and died of shock, in deep sorrow of their death.\textsuperscript{145} Due to this, many Sikh writers also consider her as the first Sikh woman martyr.\textsuperscript{146} The three were given a dignified funeral by a businessman, Todar Mal, who purchased some land from the Mughal Governor by paying him an enormous sum, for cremating the dead bodies. Later on, Gurdwara \textit{Jyoti Sarup}, was built here. A Gurdwara was also built at the place where Gujri spent three days in imprisonment at \textit{Thanda Burj}.\textsuperscript{147} The sacrifice of Gujri is unparalleled in Sikh history. She was a shy and an humble person. She was known for her radiant beauty and tradition tells us of the close bond between Guru Tegh Bahadur and her, so much so that Guru Tegh Bahadur was always concerned about her well-being and happiness, a fact known from many of the \textit{Hukamnamas} issued by him. In one such \textit{Hukamnama}, he directs the Sikh Sangat to look after his \textit{Mahal} (Gujri), during his absence.\textsuperscript{148} Gujri displayed extraordinary leadership skills in all tasks that were undertaken by her, be it within or outside the home.

\section*{MATA SUNDRI}

There is great dilemma among the writers of Sikh history regarding the marriage of Guru Gobind Singh. While a few scholars of Sikh studies state that he had practised polygamy by marrying thrice, some others refute this theory by asserting that the stories revolving around the tenth Guru’s being married three times is totally baseless. However, these conflicting scholars so unanimously accept Sundri as the wife of Guru Gobind Singh. She is believed to have been known as Jito in her parental home and was given the name Sundri, by her mother-in-law Mata Gujri, on account of her beauty.

According to some others, Sahib Kaur was not the Guru’s third wife. In 1699, the Guru while founding the Khalsa Panth had asked her to stir \textit{Patashas} in the Holy

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Sawan Singh, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Simran Kaur, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.137.
\item \textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid}, p.133.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Sawan Singh, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 32.
\end{footnotes}
water, *Amrit*. As Guru Gobind Singh is recognized as the spiritual father of the Khalsa, Sahib Kaur is to be recognized as the spiritual mother of the Khalsa and not as his wife. People not conversant with the *Amrit* ceremony mistakenly assume that Sahib Kaur was the wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Just as Guru Gobind Singh is regarded as the spiritual and not biological father of the Khalsa, Sahib kaur too is to be viewed as the spiritual mother of the Khalsa. A majority of Sikh scholars do maintain that the Guru did have three wives of whom his first wife was Sundri.

Sundri, born in 1667, was the daughter of Ram Saran Das, a well-to-do Khatri of Lahore. When Sundri came of age, Ram Saran Das approached Mata Gujri and her brother, Kirpal Chand with a marriage proposal for Guru Gobind Singh. The alliance was accepted and the marriage was fixed. However, the tenth Guru wished to get married at Anandpur itself, and not Lahore, as it was customary for the groom’s family to solemnize the wedding at the bride’s residence, which in this case was Lahore. Since, Ram Saran was unwilling to change the venue, the Guru assured him that a new city of Lahore would be built about fifteen kilometers from Anandpur, before the wedding day. Thus, the tenth Guru found a new Lahore, which was named as *Guru Ka Lahore*, and the marriage took place with great royalty and grandeur. The *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, describes the newly settled *Guru Ka Lahore*, as a bustling town full of activity.

Guru Gobind Singh completed a major part of his literary works at Anandpur and Sundri was admiringly witnessed the Guru providing the final touchés to his literary pursuits while simultaneously being involved in armed conflicts with the hilly rajas and the mughal forces. It was in her presence that the Guru had completed writing *Krishan Avtaar, Akal Ustat, Chandi Charitar* and *Sri Bhagoati Di Var*. Sundri even had the fortune of hearing a part of *Chandi Di Var*. The eldest son of Guru Gobind Singh, Ajit Singh was Sundri’s son while Jujhar, Zoravar and Fateh were born from Mata Jito. During the later phase of Guru Gobind Singh’s battles the Guru’s family led an unsettled life and during one such ensuing

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149 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matasundariji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a9b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930.
152 *Ibid*, p. 66.
153 *Loc.cit.*
battles, Sundri lost her son Ajit Singh who alongwith Jujhar Singh became martyrs, while the Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh attained martyrdom at Sirhind. Alongwith this, came the news of Mata Gujri’s death. The family witnessed a series of personal losses but put up a brave front as had been Guru tradition since the coming of Nanak.\textsuperscript{154} Sundri now settled at Ajmeri Gate, Delhi, separated from the Guru, who was busy in military warfare, continued to lead Sikhs in the Guru’s absence, from Delhi.\textsuperscript{155} In 1723, she adopted a boy of five years, and named him Ajit Singh.\textsuperscript{156} Guru Gobind Singh, however, warned her against this step, as he revealed to her that her adopted son would be the source of her troubles in future, a warning that wasn’t seriously taken by Sundri, who later on renounced Ajit Singh, severing all ties with him, when he defected from teachings of Sikhism and disgraced her a great deal.\textsuperscript{157} After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Sundri passed the remaining forty years of her life completing the tasks initiated by the Guru, leading the Panth in difficult times.\textsuperscript{158}

The first challenge before her came in the form of Banda Singh Bahadur, who had become immensely powerful and was beginning to speculate the possibility of assuming Guruship. Sundri issued a \textit{Hukamnama} dealing with the errant Banda Singh Bahadur in a strict manner. He was asked to mend his ways or denounce Sikhism.\textsuperscript{159} The Sikhs consequently came to be divided into two groups; the Tat Khalsa (followers of the Khalsa) and Bandai Khalsa (followers of Banda Singh Bahadur).\textsuperscript{160} Bhai Mani Singh became her guide and companion during this time advising her on matters concerning the Sikh Panth. It was on her behest that Bhai Mani Singh was given the responsibility of collecting the writings of the tenth Guru, which were in the possession of some Sikhs living in different parts of the country. As a result, the \textit{Dasam Granth} was compiled, the main forces behind it being Sundri and Mani Singh.\textsuperscript{161} The \textit{Dasam Granth} in its present form is shrouded in great controversy. Sundri spent the first half of her life putting up a

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\textsuperscript{154} Mohinder Kaur Gill, \textit{The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism}, New Delhi, 1995, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Ibid}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Loc.cit}.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Ibid}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Ibid}, p. 70-72.
\end{flushright}

181
brave front during the part of the military pursuits of Guru Gobind and the later half of her life guiding the Sikh Panth, through the same.162

Sundri was a disciplinarian, principled, bold and fearless and never compromised in Panthic matters. She led the Khalsa from her home at Ajmeri Gate, Delhi, where her Haveli exists till date.163 Sundri during her lifetime prevented the demolition of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, which in turn shows the stand taken by her against the oppressive mughal rule.164 Sundri regarded the entire Sikh community as her children, thus acting on the advice of Guru Gobind Singh.165 She took to the propogation of Sikhism and its teachings in a serious manner alongwith Bhai Mani Singh, encouraging him to teach the Sikhs critical appreciation and meaning of Sikh doctrines. Bhai Mani Singh started the Gurmat Institute at Delhi and later another one at Amritsar, which exists even today in Sattowali street. Sundri also got more handwritten copies of the Guru Granth Sahib prepared.166 Her Hukamnamas provide valuable insight into the nature, character and personality of the serene mother. In one such Hukamnama, addressed to the Sikhs at Patna, she asks them to donate twenty-five rupees towards the marriage of a needy Sikh’s daughter. In other Hukamnamas sent by her, she constantly urges the Sikhs to send donations for the community kitchen, a tradition which continued to flourish even under testing circumstances.167 It was her constant effort to work for unifying the defections emerging within the Sikh Panth. Through her Hukamnamas, she advises the Sikhs to bridge their differences for the welfare of the Sikh community.168 One of her Hukamnamas, reflects that in case of a dispute arising among the Sikhs, they turned to Sundri for resolving it. This shows that they had faith in her sense of justice and therefore came to her instead of approaching the government. This brings out her impartial nature.169

163 Loc.cit.
164 Ibid, p. 74.
165 Loc.cit.
167 Loc.cit.
168 Loc.cit.
Sundri spent her last days until her death in 1747, in deep meditation, often in front of Guru Gobind Singh’s weapons. As per her wishes, her body was cremated near the cremation site of Guru Har Krishan.\textsuperscript{170}

**MATA JITO**

Although there is great controversy among historians regarding the marital status of Jito, the second wife of Guru Gobind Singh, there are no historical records implicative that Sundri and Jito were the same and not two different wives of the tenth Guru.\textsuperscript{171} The origin of this controversy perhaps lies in the fact that there are almost no references anywhere in the prominent writings of the Sikhs regarding Guru Gobind Singh’s marriage with Jito.\textsuperscript{172} There is a greater controversy as to whether Guru Ka Lahore, i.e., founding of a new city of Lahore was undertaken at the time of the Gurus marriage with Sundri or Jito.\textsuperscript{173} Jito was the daughter of Harijas, a Subhikkhi Khatri of Lahore. The betrothal took place in 1673.\textsuperscript{174} Three sons, Jujhar Singh in 1690, Zorawar Singh in 1696, and Fateh Singh in 1699. From early childhood, Jito devoted herself to the task of instilling in the young boys a religious fervour for fighting against injustice and narrated to them soul-stirring tales of the martyrdom of their grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Her sons alongside with their elder brother, Ajit Singh, went on to bring glory to the Sikh religion by sacrificing their lives but not giving in to the policy of religious conversion followed by the Mughals.\textsuperscript{175} Through oral tradition, it is known that Jito had great love for gardening and personally supervised the maintenance of the garden at Anandpur. She also had good knowledge on a variety of flowers.\textsuperscript{176} She died in 1700 and her funeral rites were performed by Guru Gobind Singh himself at Agampur, in Anandpur. A gurdwara is built here in her memory.\textsuperscript{177} The tragic turn of events leading to

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{173} Loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{174} http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matajitooi.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930.
\textsuperscript{176} Loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, p. 86.
the subsequent martyrdom and death of five members of the Guru’s family, took place after her death.\textsuperscript{178}

**SAHIB KAUR**

Sahib Kaur was the daughter of Ram Bassi, a resident of Rohtas, on the banks of the river Jhelum, now in Pakistan. Rohtas was famous for its greenery and Guru Nanak is said to have visited this village on his return from Kabul.\textsuperscript{179} Her father was an ardent devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and as a result, religious atmosphere prevailed at their home, which largely influenced Sahib Kaur from early childhood. She had inherited humility, values of love and sacrifice, and devotion to God and was deeply influenced by the thoughts contained in the Holy Scriptures from her formative years. Legend states that Ram Bassi and some residents of Rohtas, approached the tenth Guru with a marriage proposal of his daughter Sahib Kaur for the Guru, and in case the Guru did not accept the marriage proposal, he would keep his daughter unmarried. Guru Gobind Singh did yield to the demand, but the Sikhs regard Sahib Kaur as the ‘virgin mother’ as it is believed that only a platonic relationship existed between, Guru Gobind Singh and Sahib Kaur, his third wife.\textsuperscript{180} At the time of the founding of the *Khalsa Panth*, at Anandpur, by Guru Gobind, Sahib Kaur stirred the *Patashas* into the Holy *Amrit*. Thus, she was bestowed with the honour of becoming the ‘mother of the Khalsa’. After the Guru’s death, Sahib Kaur alongwith the Guru’s other wife Sundri, settled at Delhi and supervised the activities of the newly found Khalsa. Sahib Kaur too issued *Hukamnamas*, (religious edicts), for the purpose of guiding the Sikh sangats from time to time. Through these edicts, issued in the name of the *Khalsa*, she inspired the Sikhs to indulge in selfless service of humanity and to provide monetary assistance for the cause of *Langar*, which had now developed into a full-fledged system feeding thousands of people everyday.\textsuperscript{181} In all, there are eight *Hukamnamas* credited to her.\textsuperscript{182} While instructing Sahib kaur to live in the company of Mata Sundri at Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh gave her five arms and the

\textsuperscript{181} *Loc.cit.*
seal with which he used to sign the Hukamnamas as memoirs.\textsuperscript{183} Sahib Kaur died at the age of sixty-six, in 1747, at Delhi.\textsuperscript{184}

**MAI BHAGO**

Mai Bhago was the daughter of Mallo, son of Pero Shah who was the younger brother of Langha, a Dhillon Jatt, who had converted to Sikhism from Islam, during the time of Guru Arjan Dev. Born at her ancestral village of Jhabal in present-day Amritsar district of the Punjab, she was married to Nidhan Singh Varaich of Patti, who was a staunch Sikh by birth and upbringing.\textsuperscript{185} Mai Bhago herself grew up in a devout Sikh family, where the Sikh heroic tradition was instilled in her from childhood itself. Her father’s life of courage and fortitude made a lasting impression on her and she was inspired in turn.\textsuperscript{186} She showed keen interest in the use of armaments and was also trained in their use.\textsuperscript{187} According to some historians, she always carried a long Sang (sword – a kind of spear which is used to cut shrubs and trees) with her.\textsuperscript{188}

As a young girl, she had heard about the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the wars fought by Guru Hargobind, martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and his companions; Dayala, Mati Das and Sati Das. Mai Bhago saw the grave injustices being inflicted against the Sikhs by the tyrannical rulers. She was blessed with a well-built body and was tall heighted, which proved advantageous for her to pursue her dream of participating in a battle along with the other Sikhs.\textsuperscript{189} The time came when about forty Sikhs deserted Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur and refused to fight in the Battle of Muktsar and returned home. They had gone to the extent of refusing to acknowledge him as their Guru henceforth. When Mai Bhago learnt of this shameful development, she took it as a challenge to support the Guru. On their return, the forty deserters were labelled ‘cowards’ by the village women. The women belonging to the families of these forty deserters, boycotted them and took a tough stand against their treachery. These men realizing their

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\textsuperscript{183} Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 149.  \\
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, p. 150.  \\
\textsuperscript{185} http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/maibhago.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1f0ee8930.  \\
\textsuperscript{186} Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 110.  \\
\textsuperscript{188} Loc.cit.  \\
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mistake went back to the Guru, apologized and promised in writing that they would lay down their life but not flee again.\textsuperscript{190}

A fierce battle was fought at Muktsar in 1705, between the Gurus forces and the mughals, wherein these forty Sikhs and Mai Bhago led from the front. The Sikhs eventually went on to win the battle.\textsuperscript{191} Two brothers of Mai Bhago died while fighting this historic Battle of Muktsar.\textsuperscript{192} She had already lost her husband and therefore after the sacrifice of the brothers, she decided not to return to her village but instead spend the rest of her life in the Guru’s service.\textsuperscript{193} Guru Gobind Singh himself praised Mai Bhago for her bravery and righteousness. She had expressed her wish of becoming a saint-soldier in the Guru’s entourage, which was granted and thus she was enlisted as a member of the Guru’s bodyguards. Mai Bhago accompanied Guru Gobind to Damdama, Agra, and Nanded in Maharashtra, where she lived until the Guru’s death, after which she started propogation of Sikh teachings, and settled at Bidar, which is 150 kms from Nanded.\textsuperscript{194} She died at Bidar, in 1708.\textsuperscript{195} A Gurdwara was built at Bidar in her loving memory about ten kilometers from the main Gurdwara, called Nanak Jhira. Recently, a Gurdwara in her remembrance was also constructed at Delhi, which is managed by women.\textsuperscript{196} There is not much information about her early life, for instance, the date of her birth is not recorded, neither is there any reference to her mother. She is however, believed to have lived through the time of five Sikh Gurus, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.\textsuperscript{197}

Her meeting with Guru Tegh Bahadur, is the only one recorded, whom she had visited with her parents, at Anandpur.\textsuperscript{198} She became Bhag kaur after her baptism.\textsuperscript{199} Mai Bhago’s name is synonymous with bravery and courage, which continues to inspire Sikhs

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Loc.cit}.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Loc.cit}.
\textsuperscript{196} Mohinder kaur Gill, \textit{Eminent Sikh Women}, New Delhi, 1999, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Loc.cit}.
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Loc.cit}.
all over the world even today.\textsuperscript{200} Her strength both spiritual and physical makes her truly exceptional. Bhai Vir Singh, calls her the light of the Sikhs who guided the Sikhs in times of distress just as the ‘Pole Star’ guides lost travelers.\textsuperscript{201}

SADA KAUR

Guru Gobind Singh gave a definite identity to the new creed as envisioned by Guru Nanak and moulded by his predecessors. Amidst other pioneering leads, the Khalsa Panth, saw the simultaneous transition wherein its female members, eventually climbed the rungs of social hierarchy one at a time, from being essentially homely; confined within the house and performing duties related to their role as mother, sister, wife, etc., to gradually moulding themselves to the needs of the time and adopting military, leadership and political roles. From leaders of their homes, such gritty women became leaders of their clans. With the coming of Sada Kaur, the image of women in Sikhism undergoes a complete transformation as women begin to emerge in the forefront, showing signs of total independency.

With Guru Gobind Singh’s death in 1708, the Sikhs who were gradually becoming a separate community with their own script, scripture, places of worship and traditions, spearheaded a movement of resistance against Mughal tyranny. Their first success came in 1709, under Banda Singh Bahadur, who led an army of untrained peasants, thus defeating the Mughal armies, subsequently occupying a large portion of eastern Punjab. Banda Singh Bahadur’s success was however short-lived and in 1715, was forced to surrender. Banda Singh Bahadur’s, alongwith over seven hundred of his followers was arrested and brought to Delhi and beheaded.\textsuperscript{202} For a short period, the Sikhs disappeared as a political force from the Punjab, and the invasions of Nadir Shah in 1739 and Ahmad Shah Durrani between 1747-1769, followed, during which Sikhs led a largely unsettled and insecure life, but took a tough stand in protecting the hounour of the Sikh faith.\textsuperscript{203} During these years of struggle against the Mughals and Afghans the Sikhs simultaneously designed a political system of their own.

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{201} Mohinder Kaur Gill, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 120.
\bibitem{203} \textit{Ibid}, p. 18.
\end{thebibliography}
They formed bands called Misls (a derivative taken from the Persian word, Misal, meaning ‘like’ or equal), under a head called Misldar chosen by virtue of his courage and ability. The Misls grew larger as the area in which they operated increased. A major portion of Punjab came to be divided amongst them and they began offering protection to the people in their respective zones on payment of protection tax called Rakhi. Twelve such Misls came into existence with a fighting force of about seventy thousand horsemen. In due course, the Misldars became petty barons and their Misls, private armies. Out of these five Misls emerged as the most powerful ones, the Bhangis, Kanhayas, Phulkias, Ahluwalias and the Sukerchakias. The organization of the Sikhs into these twelve Misls was a temporary arrangement in order to meet the challenge of foreign invasions. Ranjit Singh, the ruler who by his tact and diplomacy victoriously emerged as the unifier of these warring Misls and thus created a united Punjab, thereby becoming the first ruler to set up a sovereign Sikh State, belonged to the Sukerchakia Misl. Sada kaur, his mother-in-law, had inherited leadership of the Kanhaya Misl, after the death of Jai Singh, chief of the Kanhaya Misl.

Sada Kaur was born in 1762, at Ghalaughara. Daughter of Dasaundha Singh Gill, Sada Kaur, was married to Gurbakhsh Singh, son of Jai Singh, leader of the Kanhaiya Misl. As the Afghan invasions receded, conflicts broke out among the Sikh Misl chiefs. Maha Singh Sukkarchakkia, (father of Ranjit Singh), helped by Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katoch, attacked Jai Singh in 1785. A fierce battle took place at Achal, about 6 km south of Batala, which was the seat of the Kanhaiyas. Jai Singh was defeated and his son, Gurbakhsh Singh, husband of Sada Kaur, was killed. The bereaved, yet farsighted, widow Sada Kaur, persuaded her father-in-law, Jai Singh, to offer the hand of her only daughter, Mahtab Kaur, to Ranjit Singh, the five-year old son of Maha Singh Sukkarchakkia. Maha Singh died in 1792 and Ranjit Singh became chief of the Sukerchakia Misl. His marriage was solemnized in 1796, with Sada Kaur’s daughter, Mahtab Kaur. Sada Kaur accompanied her daughter to Gujranwala after the wedding. She became one of the members of the triune regency, which managed the affairs of the Sukerchakia Misl, as Ranjit Singh was too young to rule on his own. The

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205 Loc.cit.
other two members were Raj Kaur (popularly known as Mai Malvain) mother of Ranjit Singh, and Diwan Lakhpat Rai, his minister. Mai Malvain and Lakhpat Rai were removed from the scene by death, the latter having been killed in an expedition against the warlike Chatthas. Sada Kaur was now the only one of the triumvirate left to guide and counsel Ranjit Singh. Being by now head of the Kanhaiya misl, she provided him with material help as well. She helped him to occupy Lahore defeating the Bhangi chiefs, Mohar Singh, Sahib Singh and Chet Singh, from whose misrule the citizens had sought the Sukkarchakkia Sardar to rescue them. Lahore fell to the joint command of Ranjit Singh and Sada Kaur on 7 July 1799. Supported by his mother-in-law, Ranjit Singh made further acquisitions and assumed the title of Maharaja on 11 April 1801. In the campaigns of Amritsar, Chiniot, Kasur and Kangra as well as in his expeditions against the turbulent Pathans of Hazara and Attock, Sada Kaur led the armies side by side with Ranjit Singh. But both were strong personalities and mutual clashes began to occur. The marriage of Sada Kaur's daughter to Ranjit Singh, however, was not a smooth one. Mahtab Kaur's first born, Ishar Singh, died in infancy. On his return from the Sutlej campaign in 1807, Mahtab Kaur gave birth to twins, Sher Singh and Tara Singh. But since Ranjit Singh had already married again, he proclaimed his son born from his alliance with his second wife, also Raj kaur, sister of the chief of the Nakkaï misl, as the heir apparent. This soured the relations between the Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh, as Sada Kaur was extremely ambitious for her grandchildren. Sada Kaur now opened secret negotiations with Sir Charles Metcalfe and Sir David Ochterlony to secure herself the status of an independent Maharani. She further offended the Maharaja by not attending the heir apparent's marriage in 1812. She did not allow even her grandsons, Sher Singh and Tara Sirigh, to join the ceremonies. Ranjit Singh started making inroads into the Kanhaiya territory lying on the other side of the River Beas. The breaking point finally came when on Sher Singh's attaining majority, Ranjit Singh insisted that Sada Kaur hand over the administration of her estates to him. Sada Kaur refused and threatened to seek the protection of the British in the Sutlej territory and hand over to them the town of Vadnhi, located to the south of Sutlej which Ranjit Singh had conquered and transferred to her in 1808. The Maharaja cajoled Sada Kaur into visiting Lahore, where she was kept under strict surveillance. Once she managed to escape in covered litter, but was found and
brought back. Her territory and the wealth of the Kanhaiyas lying at Atalgarh (Mukeriari) were confiscated. Batala was granted as a jagir to Sher Singh while the rest of Sada Kaur’s estates were placed under the governorship of Sardar Desa Singh Majithia.\textsuperscript{207}

Sada Kaur comes out as an extremely ambitious woman, who from the beginning entered into an alliance with Ranjit Singh and in turn gave him military and financial assistance, was her wish to see her grandsons as the heirs of the Sukerchakkia Misl.\textsuperscript{208} On the other hand, she could utilize the alliance to safeguard and even advance the interests of the Kanhayas.\textsuperscript{209} The Kanhayas became a means towards achieving this end for him.\textsuperscript{210} Ranjit Singh too followed the policy of winning over the stronger Misl by forming either matrimonial or friendly alliances, in order to secure their loyalties, whereas the weaker Misl were easily captured by his forces.

Sada Kaur was well-known for her bravery, diplomacy and far-sightedness. On her husband’s death on the battle-field, she donned the garb of a soldier and went on to fight the same battle, winning it as a tribute to her late husband, Gurbaksh Singh.\textsuperscript{211} By way marrying off her only daughter, Mahtab Kaur to Ranjit Singh, she took the first step towards ending the enemity between the Kanhaya and the Sukerchakkia Misl. Sada Kaur then assumed leadership of not only the Kanhaya Misl but also the Sukerchakkia Misl, on account of Ranjit Singh being a minor.\textsuperscript{212} Sada Kaur was instrumental in providing a united front against the Afghan invasions of Lahore led by Shah Zaman, the grandson of Ahmad Shah Durrani.\textsuperscript{213} Sada Kaur died in 1832, at the age of seventy.\textsuperscript{214}

**RANI JIND KAUR**

Jind Kaur, the most controversial yet remarkable woman, from Sikh history, was the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who is known to have married sixteen

\textsuperscript{207} http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranisadakaur.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930.
\textsuperscript{208} Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh; Maharaja of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid, p. 155.
Popularly known as Rani Jindan, she was the daughter of Sardar Manna Singh, an Aulakh Jat, who hailed from a small village Chachar, district Gujranwala, now in West Pakistan. Jind Kaur was born in 1817, in her native village. Apart from being extremely beautiful, she combined great personal charm, with the characteristic strength of a man. Her marriage to the Maharaja was an interesting one, as she was symbolically married to the an arrow and a sword of Ranjit Singh, in 1835, as Ranjit Singh was too old and ill to arrive at the wedding himself. She alongwith her son Dalip Singh, lived practically in oblivion until 1843, as they were greatly neglected by Ranjit Singh. Dalip Singh’s accession to the throne raised the position of Jind Kaur to that of a Dejure regent, thus enabling her to play a prominent role in Sikh history. Being the mother of the minor Sikh Sovereign, she came to be known as the ‘Mai’ or the ‘Queen Mother’, as she was the only surviving widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Jind Kaur was the brain behind the rising of 1848-49 against the British authorities. Being famous for her intelligence and intrepid spirit, Jindan was one of the few persons who was intensely disliked and also feared by the British. Rani Jindan played a conspicuous role in the Punjab politics after her son’s elevation to the throne of Lahore kingdom. The British entered into a treaty known as the treaty of Bhryowal with the Lahore kingdom in December 1846, which made them, virtual masters of the Punjab. They had not only excluded the Rani from participating in the negotiations which led to the signing of the treaty but also of all share in the government of the Lahore Kingdom. She was also removed from the Regency Council, which was to conduct the administration during the minority of Maharaja Dalip Singh. She therefore, hatched a plot to murder the British Resident and the members of the Regency Council who collaborated with the British. Prema, an old retainer of Gulab Singh, along with some other persons were to execute the plan. The plan however failed but the British could not take action against the Rani for lack of evidence. But they wanted to get ride of her and imposed restrictions on her

218 Ibid, p. 10.
219 Ibid, p. 11.
220 Loc.cit.
movements. The chiefs of the Lahore Darbar were forbidden to see her. Jind kaur was sent to Sheikhpura, twenty miles from Lahore.

The Queen had by this time, become a symbol of national dignity. She continued to urge the freedom fighters back in the Punjab to continue their struggle dauntlessly. Through her trusted band of servants, she sent letters and messages to Dewan Mul Raj, Sardar Chattar Singh and Raja Sher Singh, the chiefs of the rebellion. When the British came to know of the secret designs of the Rani, they transferred her to the Chunar fort on 6 April 1849. On the same evening, she escaped from the fort in the guise of her attendant and proceeded towards Nepal. The British Government, confiscated all her jewels and other property at Benaras and allowed her to stay in Nepal on a monthly pension of one thousand rupees. While in Nepal, Rani Jindan, secretly plotted for the expulsion of the British from the Punjab. She wrote letters to influential people both inside and outside Punjab to rise once again against the British. In the rising of 1857, she found a fresh opportunity to stimulate a rising in the Punjab. She however was unsuccessful in her motives due to the vigilant British Government, which was closely monitoring her actions. Largely disillusioned, the Rani ultimately wished to see her son Maharaj Dalip Singh, who was then staying in England as a Christian gentleman. Her health was shattered and she became almost blind. The British Government allowed Dalip Singh to come to India and to take his mother along with him to England. She went to England to stay with her son Maharaj Dalip Singh. Jind Kaur, stayed in a separate house in England till her death in 1863. As per her last wishes, Dalip Singh brought her body back for cremation to India, but was disallowed by the Britishers to perform the last rites in Punjab. He therefore cremated her body at Nasik and returned to England. Popularly known as Jindan, she was, the last Sikh sovereign of the Punjab. On becoming regent, she had to fight many internal problems initially. Jind Kaur with her sheer will-power and determination guided matters of administration and came up with their solutions. She gave a tough fight to the British who were bent upon conquering Punjab

221 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranijindian.html?967663c5d8b854cebeb695a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1f68e8930.
222 Loc.cit.
and making it a part of the British Indian dominions, but were finding it difficult only due to the power and influence of Jind Kaur.

In December 1846, Maharani Jind Kaur surrendered political power to the council of ministers appointed by the British: Resident after the treaty of Bharooval. The Sikh Darbar ceased to exist as a sovereign political body. The regent was dismissed with an annuity of Rs 1,50,000 and "an officer of Company's artillery became, in effect, the successor to Ranjit Singh." Maharani Jind Kaur was treated with unnecessary acrimony and suspicion. She had retired gracefully to a life of religious devotion in the palace, yet mindful of the rights of her minor son as the sovereign of the Punjab. Henry Lawrence, the British Resident at Lahore, and Viscount Hardinge both accused her of fomenting intrigue and influencing the Darbar politics. After Bharooval, Hardinge had issued instructions that she must be deprived of all political power. In March 1847, he expressed the view that she must be sent away from Lahore. Jind Kaur died at Kensington, England, on 1 August 1863.  

A critical overview of Maharani Jind Kaur reflects many shades of her charismatic personality. Her passions overmastered her ability to reason, blurred her vision and made her adopt a course of action that was largely wayward and lacking statesmanship. She lacked patience, tact, caution and an ability to manoeuvre political events and situations to her advantage. However her shrewd political moves at times found both admiration and concern from the British too. Her influence with people, her shrewd understanding of the local politics and secret British plans, her dexterity in wielding the pen, her amazing ability to act with energy and spirit, and above all, her intense desire to rule were in the eyes of the British constituted grave menace to their authority in the Punjab.

ANUP KAUR

Preachings of the Sikh Gurus revolutionized the lives of many, irrespective of the social distinctions of the times, including prevailing gender biases. Women who were hitherto living a veiled life now began contributing in manifold ways to the sustainence

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224 http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranjindian.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fnee8930..
226 Ibid, p. 36.
of the Sikh community, which was under constant threat of facing extinction at the hands of the mughals. One such Sikh woman to have played a valiant part in the Sikh struggle against the mughals was Anup Kaur.\textsuperscript{227} Anup Kaur was born in 1690, at Jaloopur Khere, a village near Amritsar. Her father Lachhman Das Sodhi, was an ardent follower of Guru Tegh Bahadur and became Lachhman Singh on being baptized by the tenth Guru. At the age of five, Anup Kaur accompanying her parents migrated to the Holy city of Anandpur. They were very close to the Guru’s family and due to this she soon became the play-mate of Guru Gobind Singh’s sons. She eventually came to be treated as a member of the Guru’s household. Anup Kaur acquired religious education and became literate in Gurmukhi in the company of Guru children. Under their influence she took great interest in religious values too.\textsuperscript{228}

Anup Kaur motivated other girls and formed a group which started learning fencing and other types of martial sports and arts, alongwith horse-riding. Anup Kaur became well-versed in the art of self-defence. In a battle between the Sikh forces and the hilly chiefs, Anup Kaur and her group of trained girls participated and the victory of the Sikhs in this battle increased their confidence and determination further. When the fort of Anandpur was besieged by the Mughal Governor of Sirhind and the hilly chiefs, Sikh girls under the leadership of Anup Kaur, took responsibility of looking after the Guru family and supplying food from the community kitchen to the Sikh soldiers. They even assisted the Sikh soldiers in battle. However, the Mughals treacherously convinced Guru Gobind Singh to evacuate the Fort of Anandpur, following which they were attacked and in the onsuing confusion the Guru’s family got separated. Anup Kaur too got sepearated from the Guru’s family in this confusion and in her effort to reach the place where the tenth Guru was, she alonwith her companions was attacked and later arrested at Malerkotla by its chief and two hundred mughal soldiers. Although she had put up a brave front, her arm got injured due to a fall from horseback. The Chief of Malerkotla, on being told off her bravery expressed his desire to marry her. As the marriage approached, Anup Kaur took to severe meditation in the jail premises. She ultimately, killed herself, unwilling to convert by way of marriage. She was quietly buried as per Islamic rites.

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 39-40.
However, Ganda Singh’s research highlights that her grave was later on dug up on the orders of Banda Bahadur, who got her body cremated as per Sikh rites.\footnote{Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 40-42.} Anup Kaur truly met a heroic death, which makes her a Sikh woman martyr.

**BASANT LATA**

Basant Lata, was the maid-in-waiting of Mata Sundri, wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Basant Lata died while upholding her own faith, honour, human-rights and the honour of the Sikh faith.\footnote{Ibid, p. 43.} In the confusion that prevailed on the event of the evacuation of the Anandpur fort by Guru Gobind Singh, she got separated from the Guru’s wife Mata Sundri, while accompanying her. On attaining consciousness, Basant Lata found herself surrounded by Mughals and was arrested. The Mughal Chief wanted to take her as his wife and tried to lure her by offering her the status and riches which she would command on marrying him. Basant Lata, like Anup Kaur, stabbed herself, thus becoming immortal forever, rather than succumbing to the wishes of the Mughal Chief. The Chief asked his Hindu servant to conduct her last rites according to Sikh rituals. This incident has been described by Bhai Vir Singh, in a poem, from his book, *Kalgidhar Chamatkar*.\footnote{Ibid, 40-45.} Sacrifices of many a Sikh women have faded into oblivion over the centuries, which in no way implies that such sacrifices have been in vain. While a few Sikh women contributed from the forefront, many others silently bore the torture and atrocities of the oppressive mughals and later the barbaric Afghans.

**HARSHARAN KAUR**

Harsharan Kaur was a baptized Sikh woman, who met the Guru, when he reached her village after his departure from Chamkaur. Her whereabouts are not known, but Bhai Vir Singh in his *Kalgidhar Chamatkar*, names her as Sharan Kaur.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 46-47.} She enquired about the two elder Princes from the Guru, to whom she had been a nursing sister, and was informed about their martyrdom. On learning this, she made it her mission to cremate the bodies of the Guru’s martyr sons alongwith the other Sikh soldiers who
had been martyred in a similar way. Armed and disguised as a Muslim woman, she entered enemy camp in the battle-field and on locating the bodies, immolated them, standing alongside. This invited the wrath of the Mughal soldiers, who threatened her with dire consequences if she did not reveal her true identity and motives. Harsharan Kaur stood amongst them, bearing all kinds of torture and insult, without speaking a word. Mughal soldiers irked at her behaviour pushed her into the flames, leading to her martyrdom on 23rd December, 1704.

SUSHIL KAUR

Sushil Kaur, wife of Banda Singh Bahadur, was the daughter of Uday Singh the ruler of Chamba, who offered her hand in marriage to Banda Singh Bahadur, at her behest. The marriage took place in 1711, according to Sikh rites. After baptism, she was formally induced into the Sikh faith. Historians describe her as the ‘Goddess of love’. According to Macauliffe, ‘She had large eyes, her limbs were graceful and delicate.’ In 1712, a son was born to Banda Singh Bahadur and Sushil kaur, who was named Ajit Singh. Since Banda Singh Bahadur was involved in his military campaigns against the Mughals, Sushil Kaur took charge of the upbringing of Ajit Singh alongwith community responsibilities like the running of the common kitchen (Langar). Ajit Singh was brought up in a war-like atmosphere. Alongwith the other Sikhs, Sushil Kaur put a brave front during the eight month long siege at Gurdas Nangal, near Gurdaspur. After the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur, Sushil kaur and her son were captured and taken to palace of the Mughal Emperor, Farrukh Siyar, at Delhi, where she was pressurized to embrace Islam. Her son, Ajit Singh was tortured, killed and cut to pieces, but she did not give in to the wishes of the enemy. Sushil Kaur, set a brave example by laying down her life for the Panth. She died in the same manner as Anup Kaur and Basant Lata, stabbing herself in the chest, on June 20th 1716.

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234 Loc.cit.
235 Ibid, p. 53.
236 Loc.cit.
237 Ibid, pp. 52-53.
238 Ibid, pp. 54-55.
BAGHEL KAUR

Women faced various types of socio-religious injustices during the medieval times, and during the Sikh period of struggle, both the mughal army and the Afghans crossing all moral and ethical parameters began abducting girls, adding further to their exploitation. While victims of such mughal atrocities generally reconciled to their fate, some took a tough stand. One such brave woman was Baghel Kaur.

Baghel Kaur, a newly-wed Hindu girl was abducted on way to her in-laws home, since the marriage party accompanying her was unarmed and therefore could not resist the mighty Afghans. The bridegroom approached some Sikhs, who had seeked shelter in the forests and requested them to help him in freeing his abducted wife. He was baptized and on becoming a Sikh, was named Teja Singh. Together they raided the same plunderers and rescued the captive ladies. Teja Singh’s wife was found too, but being in a miserable condition, wanted to commit suicide. The Sikhs and Teja Singh advised her against doing so. She was baptized and named as Baghel Kaur. Baghel Kaur started wearing a turban and always carried a long sword with her.

She began accompanying the Sikh soldiers in their fight against injustice. Baghel Kaur lived in the dense forests of Kahnuwaan in district Gurdaspur, alongwith the Sikh soldiers, led by Nawab Kapur Singh. On one occasion, a fight ensued between the Sikhs under Nawab Kapur Singh and the Afghans, in which Baghel Kaur and other Sikh women fought bravely. Baghel Kaur accompanied the Sikh forces against the Afghans on many occasions putting her life and honour in danger. Sikhs persuaded her and her companions to stay back in the village but these brave women refused to do so and instead said that they had vowed to die fighting for the Panth. She even saved other innocent women from the clutches of the Afghans. Moreover, she strongly protested against the inhuman treatment meted out to women and children in Mir Mannu’s camps, during her detention in one such camp. Even under arrest, she managed to slap and injure a soldier when he tried to misbehave with her. She alongwith other Sikh women refused

240 Loc.cit.
241 Ibid, p. 57.
242 Loc.cit.
243 Ibid, p. 58.
244 Ibid, p. 59.
to convert into Islam by way of marriage. Baghel Kaur was subsequently tortured and killed for her boldness and unwillingness to submit.\textsuperscript{245}

**NIRBHAI KAUR**

Nirbhai Kaur, aged twenty-two, six feet tall with a well-built body, was a religious minded Sikh woman. Her father Jangbahadar Singh, head of the army of Sodhi Wadbhag Singh, had taught her horse riding and use of arms. Being brave herself, she inspired many other girls to face the tyrant Afghans courageously.\textsuperscript{246} Nirbhai Kaur faced many afghan attacks and even rescued many young and newly-wedded girls from the enemy camps. She even managed to escape from the camp of the Governor of Jalandhar, with another captive girl.\textsuperscript{247} She secured her fiancé Harnam Singh’s assistance in rescuing the other women held forcibly in the enemy camp and successfully got them released, killing many afghan soldiers in the attempt.\textsuperscript{248} Nirbhai Kaur avenged the deaths of innocent people who had been brutally killed in the Afghan attack on Jalandhar. Eventually, in 1757, she married Harnam Singh and continued assisting the Sikhs in their mission to save themselves from loosing their identity.\textsuperscript{249}

**RAJINDER KAUR**

Rajinder Kaur, a remarkable Sikh woman of her times, possessed many virtues. Grand-daughter of Baba Ala Singh, the famous ruler of the Patiala State, Rajinder Kaur was the only child of Bhuma Singh. She was married in childhood at the age of thirteen, to Tilok Chand, Chief of Phagwara, near Jalandhar. Since Tilok Chand died in his youth, Rajinder Kaur assumed responsibility of managing the family estate, which consisted of about two hundred villages. She is therefore addressed as *Rani* meaning Queen.\textsuperscript{250} According to Hari Ram Gupta, she was an able commander, who once marched with a force of three thousand troops to Patiala against its ruler, Hari Singh who had defeated her cousin Amar Singh and acquired the State of Patiala from him. Rajinder Kaur launched a ruthless campaign against Hari Singh, defeating him and reinstating her

\textsuperscript{247} *Ibid.*, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{248} *Loc.cit*.
cousin Amar Singh as the ruler of Patiala. Amar Singh also received a heavy tribute from Hari Singh. Once again in 1781, the State of Patiala faced internal dissensions leading to its disintegration, but Rajinder kaur with help from the Maratha Chief Dhar Rao, recovered the lost territories of the State and re-established Sahib Singh’s (minor son of Amar Singh) rule. In 1790, the Maratha general Rana Khan advanced towards Patiala with a huge army. Rajinder Kaur once again saved Patiala from the Marathas, by paying a huge tribute to the Marathas.²⁵¹

Rajinder Kaur had to face many internal conspiracies and intrigues from the Royal family of her maternal home, Patiala. Sahib Singh, its ruler foolishly believed the conspirators and thus showed disrespect towards Rajinder Kaur. All her priviledges were also withdrawn. Ingratitude and disgrace towards her selfless service for her State, Patiala, led to a deterioration in her health and later to her death in 1791.²⁵²

SAHIB KAUR II

Sahib Kaur belonged to the Royal family of Patiala. Daughter of Amar Singh, ruler of Patiala and Raj kaur, she was born in 1773 and was well-adept in leadership and diplomacy. In 1780, she was married away in childhood to Jaimal Singh, son of Haqiqat Singh of Ghanaiyya Misl. Since her brother Sahib Singh, was a minor at the time of his accession, the State affairs were managed first by his grandmother Rani Hukman and the Prime Minister Nanu Mal, then by Rajinder Kaur, who was the cousin sister of Amar Singh and later by his sister Sahib Kaur.²⁵³

Unable to manage the State on his own, Sahib Singh sought help from his sister who willingly conceded on the condition that none would interfere in her administration. She was appointed as Prime Minister by the minor ruler. Sahib Kaur being well-educated and far-sighted, proved worthy of her Office. Being an able administrator, a brave general and an intelligent diplomat, she efficiently managed her multiple duties. On assuming office, she dealt strictly with the problems faced by the Patiala State, dismissing corrupt officials, subordinated the Chiefs who refused to pay tribute and ensured that taxes and other dues were collected from the defaulters. Sahib Kaur got two new forts constructed

²⁵² *Ibid*, p. 68.
and conducted tours of the State regularly to stay in touch with the people. She successfully led the Sikhs against Maratha invasion led by Nano Rao and inflicted upon the maratha army a crushing defeat.²⁵⁴

Sahib Kaur not only defended her own kingdoms, both her maternal home as well as that of her in-laws from internal intrigues and foreign invasions, but also provided military aid to those who sought her help. To a great extent she even foiled the attempts of George Thomas, an Irish adventurer, who was keen on embarking upon a policy of territorial expansion, after creating an independent State for himself at Hansi, now in Haryana. Thomas attacked Bhag Singh, ruler of the Jind State, a neighbour of Patiala. Sahib Kaur saw this invasion as a potential threat to the independence of Patiala as Jind State was a neighbouring State. Bhag Singh asked the other Sikh rulers to help him fight the Irish invader. Sahib Kaur at once left to assist him against the wishes of her brother Sahib Singh, ruler of Patiala. The combined Sikh forces found it difficult to face the Irish troops who were not only well-armed with artillery but also better equipped. However, peace was established and a Treaty was signed between Thomas and the Sikhs, under which it was decided that each party would remain in possession of its territories held before the siege of Jind. Every Sikh Chief except Sahib Singh was in favour of accepting the terms. Sahib Kaur persuaded him to oblige but later finding him unyielding, signed the Treaty on behalf of the State of Patiala. This enraged Sahib Singh who in turn ordered her arrest and imprisoned her at Patiala. Sahib Kaur appealed to Thomas for help who marched against Patiala and got her released. However, she was once again imprisoned and detained in the fort of Patiala by her cruel-minded brother. Sahib Kaur is believed to have been murdered in 1799, while in imprisonment.²⁵⁵

Kahn Singh Nabha in his Mahan Kosh, states that Sahib Kaur made sincere efforts to defend and expand her brother’s estate. Even Mohammed Latif, a historian analyses the fact that the Maratha defeat was on account of Sahib Kaur’s participation in the battle-field and her leadership qualities.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 71-72.
²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 73.
SHAMSHER KAUR

Shamsher Kaur, daughter of a Brahmin priest along with her sister, had been abducted by Ali Beg and his men. They were rescued by a band of Sikhs led by Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, on her father’s request to the latter. On their return to their village the girls were snubbed by their villagers and Shamsher Kaur, the eldest among the two approached the Sikh Chief Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and appealed before him to become a part of the Sikh community. Both the sisters were baptized and willingly they adopted the Sikh way of life. Shamsher Kaur learnt Punjabi, horse riding and use of arms. She was more intelligent and quickly acquired these skills in comparison to her younger sister Ram Kaur. They were later married off to two suitable Sikh soldiers.257

Giani Trilok Singh writes that Shamsher Kaur was one of the many brave Sikh women who sacrificed their lives and thereby participated in the military, social and political levels of the various stages of the growth and development of the Sikh religion.258 In 1785, differences arose between the Chiefs of Ghanniya and Sukerchakia Misls, in which Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, agreed to help the Sukerchakia Chief Mahan Singh, and was in return promised that his lost territories would be handed over to him after the battle. Shamsher Kaur and her husband insisted on accompanying Jassa Singh Ramgarhia to this battle that was fought at Batala. Jassa Singh won the battle and was so impressed by the bravery of Shamsher Kaur that she was given the overall command of maintaining five villages around Hansi. Adorning male garb, she started governing her small kingdom efficiently, becoming a popular ruler within a short time. It is said that she did not tolerate injustice towards women and punished the oppressors. Shamsher Kaur rescued a Muslim girl Razia from Mohammad Ali who was chief of the village kot Ali Khan, near her area.259 A fierce battle ensued as a result of this between the Mughal forces led by Ali and the Sikhs under the command of Shamsher Kaur and her husband. Shamsher Kaur won the battle and severed the head of Mohammad Ali. Her own husband was badly injured, succumbing to his injuries eventually. She died fighting the Marathas who wanted the territories under her possession. Shamsher Kaur fought against them but

could not resist their might. Shamsher Kaur is a popular figure in traditional Punjabi folklore.\textsuperscript{260}

**SHARAN KAUR**

Sharan Kaur/Sharni, was born in a Hindu family settled in North-West Punjab, where the Afghans were in majority. Her father was a shopkeeper. At the age of sixteen, she was married to Jagat Ram. Her story is similar to that of Baghel Kaur. Just like her, Sharan Kaur too was abducted from her bridal procession while on way to the groom’s house. As Hari Singh Nalwa was the Governor of this province, employed in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, her husband approached him for help. Hari Singh saved Sharan Kaur from the band of dacoits. On being rescued safely, Sharan Kaur wished to be baptized and became a Sikh.\textsuperscript{261} She first served in the community kitchen and later was trained to become a female spy. Due to her bravery and intelligence, she was able to perform her duties as a spy efficiently, braving many odds and bringing valuable information to the camp of Hari Singh Nalwa. Hari Singh Nalwa died in 1837 and it was Sharan Kaur who brought the news of his death to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She is remembered in Sikh history for her selfless service and expertise at espionage.\textsuperscript{262} It is stated that during the Battle of Jamrud, the fort of Jamrud had been surrounded on all sides with Mahan Singh and his band of 600 men stranded inside, by the Afghans. One wall of the fort had been destroyed and their was no water inside. In order to survive the ordeal an urgent message was to be delivered to Hari Singh Nalwa for assistance. Sharan Kaur voluntarily offered to deliver the message to Hari Singh Nalwa, who was in Peshawar at that time. In the disguise of a dog, She set off on her mission and quietly made her way through the Afghan battalions and reached Peshawar and delivered the message to Hari Singh Nalwa, thereby saving a large band of Sikh soldiers.\textsuperscript{263} Giani Amar Singh in his novel on Sharan Kaur, portrays her as a warrior woman. His novel makes an attempt to present a life-sketch of her contributions to the Sikh community

\textsuperscript{261} *Ibid*, pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{262} *Ibid*, pp. 81-81.
\textsuperscript{263} Vanit Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa; Champion of the Khalsa* (1791-1837), Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2009, p. 268.
during the period of Sikh struggle. She is stated to have fought bravely against the Mughals in the Battle of Jamraud. 264

KISHAN KAUR II

Kishan Kaur contributed in the field of social work, facing all kinds of social odds and criticism from the section of society that was rigid towards change. She wholeheartedly devoted her life to the service of the community. Born in 1856 to Suba Singh and Mai Sobhan of Lohgarh, a village in Ludhiana, she was well-versed in Gurmukhi, Gurbani and also had sound knowledge of Sikh history. She was married to Gurnam Singh of Kaunke village. She led her life as a widow after her husband’s death in 1902 and her children too had expired before her husband.265 In 1903, she became a baptized Sikh at Nanded, devoting herself to the preaching of Sikhism and its ideals of equality and service to humanity.266 She played an active part in the Akali Movement started by the Sikhs, to control their Gurdwaras from corrupt priests known as Mahants. She strongly protested against the anti-Sikh behaviour of these Mahants. Kishan Kaur volunteered in helping the Sikhs in this noble cause accompanying them and administering first-aid at times and sometimes collecting ration for them.267 She even acted as a Sikh spy and gave eye-witness accounts of British atrocities inflicted upon innocent Sikhs, which greatly embarrassed the British government. She was charged with espionage, prosecuted and sentenced to four year’s imprisonment in May 1924, along with her associates. She was released in 1928. Meanwhile the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.) gained control of the Gurdwaras in Punjab and this organization bestowed upon her a rare honour from the Akaal Takht, by giving her the title of ‘Mata’. Kishan Kaur built a Gurdwara in her village and spent her last days there. She died at the age of ninety-six in the year 1952.268

266 Loc.cit.
267 Ibid, pp. 84-85.
268 Ibid, p. 86.
HARNAM KAUR

Harnam Kaur was a selfless social worker who pioneered in the field of education. She was probably the first Sikh woman protagonist who made serious attempts towards the development of female education in Punjab.\textsuperscript{269} She was born to Bhawan Das and Ram Dee, in a village in the Firozepur district of Punjab. She took her elementary education from priest of the village Gurdwara. In 1882, a Gurmukhi school for boys, was started at Firozepur by Takht Singh, another social worker. Encouraged by its success, he offered to start another one for girls, an idea that was approved by the Singh Sabha, but was hesitant about it being managed by a bachelor. Harnam Kaur whose name was Juini was approached to help Takht Singh in administering the girls school. Her parents agreed and the school was started in 1892. Takht Singh became the Manager of the school and Harnam Kaur, its teacher. They were paid around eight rupees a month. In 1893, she was engaged to Takht Singh and the marriage took place after a year. After her baptism in 1901, she was named Harnam Kaur. They jointly devoted themselves to the cause of education.\textsuperscript{270}

They quit from their respective jobs in 1900 on account of the management’s interference and internal politics and began teaching privately. Braving all kinds of financial odds, the couple gave practical shape to their dream of opening the Chief Sikh Girls School (The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya), in 1901. It was run in a house with a leaking roof and three students on its roll. In 1904, they took a loan and started a boarding school for girls. Girls belonging to poor families and even widows were given free boarding and lodging. This inspite of the fact that the school did not receive any Grant-in-aid from the government. Harnam Kaur as Superintendent of the Boarding house run it as a family. She zealously tended to their needs. According to her educated girls must use their knowledge and expertise foremost in efficiently managing their homes. Harnam Kaur advocated simplicity as an essential virtue. Women were to become positive contributors to the society.\textsuperscript{271}

\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 88.
Apart from formal and moral education, religious education and singing of sacred hymns was a daily feature of the school. The school syllabus also included the imbibing of skills like needle work and embroidery. In 1909, the school bagged the first prize in the All India Exhibition of Embroidery held at Lahore. The school achieved great success under their twin leadership. The school’s Progress Report of 1915, written by the Lt.Governor of Punjab stated, *I am happy to note that the school has also a department for training the lady teachers. I congratulate the Founder’s of this Institution and the Sikh Community on the wonderful and unique success of the Institution.*” In the same year, S. Sardul Singh Kaveeshar, a prominent Sikh leader wrote on visiting the school, *It was indeed very unfortunate that I did not come earlier to this place. I was at my wit’s end to decide whom to admire most, the worker or the work.*” According to information provided by him, the school’s total student strength at that time was 312, out of which 210 were boarders. A competent staff consisting of both the sexes existed numbering 45. The Institutions property was worth rupees two hundred thousand. The school published a monthly magazine, *Punjabi Bhain*, to propagate female education. The School had a well-maintained library, which was started in 1901, in the memory of Bhai Ditt Singh. Harnam Kaur started the *Istri Satsang*, a women’s religious society, which used to held its weekly meetings on every Wednesday.272

Harnam Kaur made it her mission to serve the people to the best of her ability. Her motto was:

*The food should not fall short, The guest should not turn back.*
*The wealth should not amass, The business should not slack.*

Harnam Kaur, an ordinary and simple woman of medium height made it her life’s mission to raise the status of women. She died in 1907, entrusting her husband with the responsibilities left incomplete by her. Takht Singh remarried Agya kaur after her death who in turn was also sincerely devoted to the cause of female education.273 The movement of female education in Punjab, thus began under the dynamic leadership of Harnam Kaur, who with support from her like-minded husband, Takht Singh, left no stone unturned in bringing women to the forefront by equipping them with the right education. She was probably one of the earliest one in Sikh history to realize the

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importance of carrying out the much needed reforms in women’s emancipation. Her efforts can very well be compared to those of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitri Phule who pioneeringly led the campaign of female education from Maharashtra, thereby becoming role models for others to follow from the rest of India. Both Phule and his wife and Harnam kaur and Takht Singh proved that a dream nurtured for the benefit of mankind can be given a practical shape by devotion to the cause, sincerity and hardwork inspite of functioning within meagre sources of income, facing innumerable hardships and sometimes even facing social ostracism.

**BALBIR KAUR**

Balbir Kaur participated in the Akali movement started by the Sikhs in late eighteenth century for gaining control of their Gurdwaras from the corrupt Mahants, who were indulging in many immoral practices in the name of Sikhism and under the cloak of managing Gurdwaras. These Mahants were in turn being shielded by the British Government. Therefore the Sikhs had to face opposition from two quarters, one from the Mahants and secondly from the British government. Matters became so worse that on one occasion the British interrupted the recitation of *Akhand Path* (which is to be recited from its beginning to its end continuously) by the Sikhs for the restoration of their ruler Ripudaman Singh’s rights. Ripudaman Singh, the ruler of Nabha was targeted by the British since he started supporting the cause of the Sikhs. British interference in their religious ritual resulted in a strong opposition from the Sikhs, which eventually led to a war between a band of Sikhs and the British. These Sikhs declared they would march from Amritsar to Jaito, where the *Akhand Path* would be recited. The first batch of martyrs left Akal Takht on February 9, 1924. Women too participated in this march in large numbers and Balbir Kaur alongwith her two year old son led these women volunteers. The Sikhs realizing that the services of women would not be required ahead in the march requested them to return and the women followers agreed to do so, except Balbir Kaur, who was adamant to accompany the Sikhs in their movement to cleanse the Gurdwaras from Mahants. She wasn’t even for once scared of facing the fully armed british army waiting for them equipped with machine guns. The leader of the

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275 *Ibid*, p. 94.
Sikh congregation again requested her to return but she was firm in her decision to face the approaching danger.²⁷⁶ Sikhs marched ahead and on reaching Jaito, they were brutally attacked by the British. Both Balbir Kaur and her infant son were killed in the ensuing fight but Balbir Kaur before her death bravely resisted the fierce british attacks. With a bullet hitting her in her forehead and tremendous loss of blood due to the injury, Balbir Kaur reached the Gurdwara, thanking God for helping her fulfill her mission. Balbir Kaur attained martyrdom, becoming immortal in the pages of Sikh history.²⁷⁷

Quite a few Sikh historians do brush upon the contributions of Sikh women in history citing lack of appropriate sources as the reason for not being able to do suitable justice to this previously uncharted field of Sikh studies. Mohinder Kaur Gill and Doris R. Jakobsh also support the above view. Although this is true to a certain extent, some other writers have attempted to gather information on the prominent Sikh women in history and tradition and weave a presentable reflection of them. These works include Sawan Singh’s *Noble and Brave Sikh Women*, Simran Kaur’s *Prassidh Sikh Beebiyaan*, Gagan Aneja’s *Great Sikh Women*, Harjit Singh’s *The Warrior Princess I & II*, and Karam Singh’s *Adarshak Singhvia*. These writers mainly repeat the same information and do not differ much. They do not provide a detailed account of these various Sikh women in one place. This chapter attempts, therefore, to give an account of the life and the episodes from their lives that have made them immortal in the pages of Sikh history as a whole, focusing upon their uniqueness. The works mentioned above have been extremely useful in analyzing the role played by these prominent Sikh women in their contemporary society.

Mata Tripta’s contribution in more than one way in rearing the young Guru Nanak and becoming the first teacher of the world’s greatest teacher. Nanaki, his sister on the other hand was Guru Nanak’s primary inspiration. Sulakhani gave him strong moral support by efficiently playing the part of his better half. Traces of leadership and women’s foray into community politics began with the contributions of Mata Khivi, Bibi Amro, and Bibi Bhani. Mata Ganga and Mata Gujri provided the Sikhs with the highest

values of sacrifice and selfless nature by setting personal examples. Leading educators of
the Sikh Panth were Bibi Bhani and Roop Kaur. Mata Sundri without any doubt became
one of the earliest Sikh women to assert her independence who took the reigns in her own
hands after the tenth Gurus death, ably guiding the Panth during the period of turmoil.
Mata Jito, Guru Gobind Singh’s second wife, sacrificed her sons for the welfare of the
Sikh community and Sahib Kaur, was an epitome of values. For those who contend that
the Sikh women did not play an effective role in the period of Sikh struggle first against
the mughals and then the afghans, there is a decent list of heroic Sikh women participants
beginning with Mai Bhago, Anup Kaur, Basant Lata, Harsharan Kaur, Sushil Kaur,
Baghel Kaur, Nirbhai Kaur, Shamsher Kaur, and Sharan Kaur, in addition to many others
whose names have gone down the bylanes of history un-recorded. Roles played by the
Sikh women from the background finally got recognition with a few of them assuming
total control of their estates, thereby becoming their undisputed rulers. Establishment of
Sikh rule saw the diplomacy and tact of Sada Kaur, Jind kaur, Rajinder Kaur and Sahib
Kaur. In the field of social work and pioneering female education, Kishan kaur and
Harnam Kaur led the others from the darkness of ignorance towards the light of
knowledge which was to be acquired through formal education. Even in the Akali
Movement, women did not hesitate to put in their share. Prominent female names that
figure in the Akali Morchas are those of Kishan kaur and Balbir Kaur. There is hardly
any arena left where one finds the Sikh women taking a backseat. Although not often
referred to, their contributions no doubt speak for themselves.