CHAPTER V

WOMAN AND THE SIKH GURUS
The Sikh Gurus worked for the social uplift of women who, by and large, had been neglected, discarded and considered inferior to man in the Indian society. They condemned 'Sati', 'Pardah' and infanticide, the social evils of the times, and advocated equal status for woman and her active participation in all spheres of life. They were ardent champions of widow remarriage.

It has been very difficult to define the true status of woman in the ancient Indian society owing to the ignorance of original Sanskrit texts both 'Sruti' and 'Smriti', which contain the laws, customs, and traditions of the period. The most authoritative book on this subject is the Rig-Veda which is the product of the highest, religious thought which shaped the entire course of Hindu philosophy. There is sufficient evidence available in it to prove that woman was held in high esteem and was treated on a par with man in the attainment of knowledge, both temporal and spiritual. The birth of a daughter was welcomed and there is no evidence to show that she was considered unwanted. The Rig-Veda contains 'Suktas' and hymns which were uttered by 'rishis' and women seers.

known as 'rishikas' and 'Brahma-vadinis', who had the highest degree of spiritual enlightenment. The important women seers whose hymns are available in the Rig-Veda are Romasa, Lopamudra, Apta, Kadru, Visva Vama, Ghosha, Juha, Vagamohrini, Paulomi, Jarita, Sradha-Kamayani, Urvashi, Sarnaga Yami, Indrani, Savitri and Deva Yani. Women seers whose hymns are included in the Sam-Veda are Nodha, Akrishtabhasha, Sikatanivarari and Ganapayana.

It is referred to in the Yajur-Veda and the Atharv-Veda, that women, like men, were eligible for a life of education and of the discipline of Brahmacharya. They married after the completion of this period. The Atharv-Veda refers to girls who led a life of disciplined studentship and Brahmacharya, marrying only in the second Ashrama.

In the Vedic Period, both wife and the husband took part in the performance of religious ceremonies and offered prayers and sacrifices together. In fact, these ceremonies were considered incomplete and ineffective without the wife's participation in them. The husband and the wife were, thus, considered complementary halves of one whole and so had equal rights to spiritual life and discipline. Thus the Rig-Veda

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accorded the highest social status to woman. These traditions were followed in the later times. The *Upanishadas* refer to the continuance of these traditions.

The *Rig-Veda* refers to a society based on monogamy and was patriarchal. The wife was given an honoured place in the house as mistress of the household where she looked after her aged father-in-law and mother-in-law, her husband's brothers and sisters. Marriage was considered a sacred link and widows were not allowed to remarry. The institution of monogamy is a testimony to the fact that respect and high social status were given to women. They were not secluded in the society. They could move freely in the company of their husbands. They participated in public life, occupied a prominent place in social gatherings, lending charm to them by their graceful dress and pleasing manners. There was no 'purdah' or life of seclusion. The grown-up maidens had the freedom of movement and there are references of love-marriages existing in the society.

Woman is referred to as 'Jaya' in the *Aitareya Brahmana*, i.e. a second mother of man. The *Brihadaranyak Upanishad* refers to the rituals performed by a person, praying for the birth of a daughter who should grow up into a learned lady or a

5. Majumdar, R.C., Dr Pusalkar, A.D., *The Vedic Age*, p.390.
Pandita. Boys and girls received education together both in home as well as in the institutions of higher learning. The Brahman girls were educated in the Vedas, while the Kashitriya girls got training in the use of bows and arrows. But even in those days, there was bifurcation of studies between men and women. Fine arts, like music, dancing and painting were especially encouraged in the case of girls, and men were considered unfit for these accomplishments. There was no purdah and the girls led a free life. They had a decisive voice in the selection of their husbands and got due share in the property of their fathers. It was not necessary for every woman to marry. The Vedic traditions were continued in the later Vedic times. The *Grave Sutras* as an equal with her husband at religious ceremonies, which fact testifies to the equal rights of women with men in the performance of the highest religious ceremonies. The great grammarian, Panini, in his book *Ashtedhyavl*, mentions about women's going in for regular Vedic studies like men. Learned ladies of those days worked as teachers. Women had other careers open to them, apart from a mere literary career. In the Epic period, the women were given a due place and respect in society. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that women should be honoured, because most of the virtues of men depend on women and because

all pleasures and enjoyments also depend upon them. They are said to be the deities of prosperity and pivots of the social organism. The Barhut sculptures represent skilful horse-women in the army. Patanjali, the author of Mahabhashya (a masterpiece), used the 'Saktiki' formation to indicate women spear-bearers. Megasthenes refers to Chander Gupta's body-guards of Amazonian women and women-hunters. Kautilya refers to women archers. Poets like Malidasa, Bana and Bhavabhuti gave exalted ideas of womanhood. Manu also wrote many slokas in which he pleaded for the happiness of and respect to women. He has mentioned in his slokas that the gods rejoice where the woman is held in high esteem.

In spite of the great respect being given to women, there is ample evidence available in the old Hindu texts to prove that women were considered inferior and subordinate to men and were gradually losing their place of honour. Even in the Rig-Veda, it is clearly stated that woman is weak-minded and unworthy of being trusted. Indra himself said that a woman's mind was not disciplined and sound. Urvashi herself admitted the nature of her own sex in her conversation with royal sage Pururava that there could be no lasting friendship with the women-folk, as their hearts were the hearts of hyenas.

7. Munshi, K.M., Sr, Majumdar, R.C., Dr Pusalkar, A.D., Dr, The Age of Imperial Unity, p.564.
In the later period of the Dharma Shastras, the status of woman declined further. They lost their ancient place of grace and honour. Even Manu wrote certain slokas in which they were regarded as morally low creatures. He says: "It is the nature of women to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females. For women are able to lead astray in this world even a learned man and make him a slave of desires and anger". Manu advocated that women should be considered inferior to men and dependent upon them. According to him she should be under the tutelage of her parents in her adolescence, under the control of her husband in her youth, when married, and should be dependent on her sons after the death of her husband. The Mahabharata is more outspoken in condemning women. "There is nothing that is more sinful than women. Verily, they are the roots of all evils". The discourses of Bhishma are full of attacks on the opposite sex. He says, "There is no creature more sinful than woman. Woman is a burning fire. She is the sharp edge of a razor. She, is verily, all these in a body". Even in the Epic and later Epic literature she is referred to as whimsical, as are the leaves of a lotus flower, as sharp as the edge of a sword and as unsettled as the blast of a storm. The faces of

10. Indra, Professor, The Status of Women in Ancient India, pp.112-21.
women are like flowers, their words are like the drops of honey and their hearts are like sharp razors; the interior of them no one can know. There is none whom a woman sincerely loves. She, for serving her purpose, does not hesitate to kill even her husband, children or brothers. The birth of a daughter in the family was not considered a source of pleasure; rather there was general gloom and depression. A verse of Atharva-Veda echoes the general desire for the birth of a son and not for a daughter. "The birth of a girl grant it elsewhere, here grant a boy." It is, therefore, not surprising that the birth of a girl was not considered a source of rejoicing, whereas the birth of a son was considered auspicious, and was celebrated with rejoicings and merry-making.

Dr Abinasha Chandra Das, the eminent Indian writer on the Rig-vedic culture, while writing on the conditions prevailing in Ancient India, has given very useful information regarding the status and position occupied by women in ancient times. He says that women captured in war from rival clans, or otherwise, were forced to enter matrimonial alliances, were kept in subjection and treated more like chattels than human beings. They were virtually treated as slaves. Their husbands had complete control over them. There can be no doubt that in the early stages of civilization, their position was more or

less like that of the slaves. The position improved only in the Aryan Age when they were treated with respect and were allowed the choice of their husbands and enjoyed equal freedom with men in all matters, social and religious. Equality and freedom evoked highest virtues in the women of the Rigvedic period and lifted society to a high state of culture.

Buddhism kept up the traditions of Brahmanical religion and accorded an honoured place to women in social life. They were admitted to the order of nuns known as 'Bhikshuni Sangha', which provided them with ample opportunities of social service, avenues of culture and contact with public life. This order of nuns served as a nursery which produced many learned women and some of them became teachers of junior nuns because of their proficiency in the sacred texts. Some of these Buddhist nuns played a prominent role in the work of early Buddhist reformation. Those who entered the order were known as 'theries'. There is a reference to thirteen such 'theries', especially referred to by the Buddha for their spiritual merit. The birth of a female child was not considered a curse. The Buddha is said to have admonished King Pasenadi of Kosala for his sorrow on the birth of a daughter. A female child, 0 Lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male.

Widows were not attended with hardships. They were not excluded from domestic festivities. They had the right to inherit property and they could join the order of nuns.

But there is sufficient evidence available in the Buddhist literature to prove that the Buddha considered women incapable of higher achievements and was opposed to their admission to the order, and he reluctantly gave permission to the forming of an order of nuns. Mahapajapati, the foster-mother of Lord Buddha, requested him many times to initiate her into the order to attain spiritual bliss. Her cause was represented by Ananda, who asked the Master why he was not inclined to admit women to the order. The Buddha told him, "Enough, O Ananda; let no woman retire from household and take the state of homelessness". While giving his views about women to Ananda, he asked him not to see a woman, not to talk to her, if perchance he happened to see her; not to lose wits, if perchance he happened to talk to her. The Buddha was not in favour of their inclusion in the Buddhist order and when he reluctantly agreed, he said that Buddhism would not stay for long. This shows the fears which the Buddha had in his mind about the women-folk.

Jainism also allowed women to join the fold, to take to the life of asceticism and to liberate their souls from the grinding wheel of Karma.\textsuperscript{14} The Jain women were placed on

\textsuperscript{14} Indra, Professor, \textit{The Status of Women in Ancient India}, pp. 254-56.
an equal footing with men as far as religious pursuits and achievements were concerned. They could also become an 'acharya' and they could even obtain the last two stages of an 'arhata' and a 'siddha'. The five stages were not denied to them. However, very few women of strong determination and physique could endure the hard life of an ascetic. Though they were not denied any particular privileges as enjoyed by men and were exactly like male ascetics in their form, yet they had their own marks of inferiority. It is clear from the Jain Sutras that their general status was looked upon as inferior to that of men. Besides, in the Jain law-giving Tirthankaras, it is mentioned that woman is not only inferior to man in the religious field but even in secular spheres. In spite of these references, the Jain women had a voice in family affairs and had legal rights of inheritance and of managing their domestic affairs independently. They were considered co-actors with their husbands and had ample rights to their fathers' property. To the widows, Jainism gave a place of honourable self-respect. Though there was very little change as far as social position of women was concerned, yet the Jains, by allowing women equal spiritual opportunities with men and admitting them to the religious order, considerably helped the women-folk in maintaining their religious position in the society.
With the advent of the Muslim rule in India, the position of women in India greatly deteriorated.15 The continual invasions by the Muslims led to the breakdown of social institutions and to the dislocation of political structure and ruination of the economy of the country. Many social problems cropped up in the wake of these upheavals, which had a depressing effect on the social life of the people, especially of women. The sense of insecurity and fear, which came in the wake of these invasions and the system of 'purdah' enforced by the Muslims on their women-folk, pushed the Indian women back into the secluded confines of domestic life and totally eliminated them from public life. Educational facilities, which were provided to women in the Hindu Period, disappeared as the nunneries and monasteries which were the centres of great learning were demolished during the Muslim Period. Islam advocated the superiority of men to women. It is mentioned in the 'Auyats' that God has made man superior to woman, and when a Muslim dies, his property should be divided among his sons and daughters with a ratio of two shares for the sons and one for the daughters. It is further mentioned that it is ordained that Muslim women should observe purdah and should go covered from head to foot, so that they may be easily recognized as Muslim women.

In case they do not go out veiled, they would go to hell. The Prophet said that once he saw hell and saw that most of its inhabitants were women. According to Islamic traditions, they are not allowed to sit along with men in 'masjids' (mosques) and to offer their prayers. These traditions naturally had a very demoralizing effect on their general position in the society and relegated them to the background. However, the position of women in the south did not deteriorate much owing to settled conditions there. Education was widespread and there were a number of women poets, both in the regional languages and in Sanskrit, such as Ganga Devi, the author of the Epic Madhura Vijayam (Fourteenth century), and Vajji, the Karnataka poetess.

Nevertheless, in the field of administration, India produced notable women such as Rudramana, the Kakateya Queen, of whom Marco Polo speaks and Razia Begum (Thirteenth Century). But the general state of the Indian women was not satisfactory and they led a life of seclusion and purdah which was mostly observed by higher classes. Polygamy was permissible. Another social evil which existed was the 'Sati' system, according to which the women were required to burn themselves along with their husbands' corpses on the pyres. Women were generally excluded from succession to property and this led

to their dependence on men. The system of joint family, in a way, considerably helped them in mitigating the effects of social seclusion, economic dependence and lack of schooling facilities which were provided by this institution. In a nutshell, the position of the women deteriorated.  

**CONTENTIONS OF THE SIKH GURUS**

Sikhism worked as a potent force to advocate the cause of the emancipation of Indian womanhood. It was a protest against the social evils and tyranny prevalent in the society, and a plea for equal status for women with men in all spheres of life. The Sikh Gurus repudiated the old beliefs of woman's being inferior to man and condemned the social evils of 'purdah,' 'Sati' and infanticide. They were in favour of their complete freedom and active participation in public life and told the people that it was unfair to consider women-folk as Sudras or low-castes as it was they who gave birth to men. The hymns of the Gurus bear out emphatically the views expressed above:

> From women is our birth;  
> in the women's wombs are we shaped.  

> Women are our friends,  
> and from women is the family.  

> If one woman dies, we seek another:  
> through women are the bonds of the world.

O why call woman evil,
who giveth birth to kings?

From woman is a woman;
without woman there's none;

Nanak: without a woman is the One True Lord alone. 18

Var Asa, Salok, M.I

Our mothers, fathers, sons
are all the creation of the Lord.

He the Lord Himself hath bound us with their bonds. 19

Guri, M.IV

18. ਜੀਵ ਨੀਂਸਾ ਜੀਵ ਨੀਂਸਾ ਜੀਵ ਭਗਤ ਸੀਪਾਰ
ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਜੋ ਜੋ ਸੰਤ ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਮੇ ਤੈ ਖੇਤਰ ਮੱਠਪੀ ਪਹਿਚ ਪਹਿਚ ਪਹਿਚ
ਜੋ ਜੋ ਜੀ ਪੁਰਾ ਕਿਸਾ ਕਿਸਾ ਕਿਸਾ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਕਵਿਤਾ
ਬਖ਼ਚੀ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਨਿਹ ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣਾ
ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਜੋ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਬੰਦ ਬੰਦ ਮੂਲਕ ਮੋਹਰ 1, ਪੇ: 473

19. ਭੂਣਾ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ ਭੂਣ
ਬਖ਼ਚੀ ਜੀ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ ਵੀਜ਼ਾ
ਬੰਦ ਬੰਦ ਮੂਲਕ ਮੋਹਰ 4, ਪੇ: 494
According to Guru Nanak, woman gives birth to man and possesses all virtues. She is superior to all members of the family. The Ghrist Ashram is the best ashram, in which one can attain mukti by doing 'kirt' and sharing one's earnings with others willingly. Once Guru Nanak on the 'Shivratri' festival visited Batala where he came across a group of sadhus. Their leader, Bhangarnath, seeing Guru Nanak in worldly clothes asked him why he had become a householder again after having left his home. It seemed that he was a loser in his shop; that is why he had become a sadhu, and now, when he had collected wealth and had followers, he had again become a householder. He further told him that as it was not possible to get butter from spoilt milk, he could not attain mukti (salvation) as he had again fallen into the same sink of worldly affairs which he had renounced.

Guru Nanak told Bhangarnath that it was not fair for him to speak ill of the 'ghrist' (householder's life) and the mother, who was a symbol and a pivot of the 'ghrist' and who had given him birth. The 'ghrist' which he was criticizing was providing him his daily needs, viz. food, clothing and even money for 'sulfa' (the essence of hemp) for smoking. How could 'ghrist' which served him so well could be bad? He told him further that if one did 'kirt' (labour) and served whosoever

came to him, one could find the 'Gyanmarg' and thus could attain mukti.

The Sikh Gurus, who were practical in their outlook towards life, preached against ascetism and renunciation. They considered it a negative and defeatist outlook to run away from the world. They were of the opinion that 'ghrist' was the best ashram (mode of life) as it regulated their lives and 'karmas' (actions) in the right direction. They were of the conviction that a householder with his good actions and repetitions of God's Name could obtain 'mukti'. Thus they were able to create among their followers love for the worldly life which had been spurned and condemned by the old Indian thought. The Guru gave a true perspective of the 'ghrist ashram' to the people. The Sikh Gurus lived as householders.

One cannot get salvation merely by leaving the world. 21

Yoga is neither in the patched coat, nor in the yogis staff, nor in the besmearing of oneself with ashes.

21. नै मर्दनविव मर्दनविव ो मर्दनविव
   छित्त खरिवि अवर्रकाव

   कृत अमृत भाग 1, प: 469
Nor in wearing the earrings,
nor in close-cropping the head,
nor in blowing the horn.

If one remaineth detached
in the midst of attachments,
one attaineth to the (true) state of yoga.

One becometh not a yogi by mere talk.

If one looketh upon all the creation alike,
one, is acclaimed as a true yogi.

Yoga is not in abiding among the tombs
or crematoriums, nor in entering
into a pseudo-trance.

Yoga consists not in roaming the world,
nor in bathing at the pilgrim-stations.

If one remaineth detached in the midst
of attachments then, verily,
one attaineth to the (true) state of yoga.
The self-willed abandon their homes
in a fit of despair and they beg at
the doors of others:

They shrink from their duty towards
their household, being instructed
not by the true Guru, and so, they
are caught in the whirlpool of an
evil mind. 23

Rag Maru, M.I

By meeting the Guru, one's hunger
is satisfied; by wearing (a mendicant's)
garb, it is still not.

One is afflicted by pain and beggeth
from door to door and hereafter one
is punished all the more. 24

Var Wadhans, M.III

One abandoneth one's kindreds becoming a
sanyasin, but the mind craves and craves;

And one's desires are still not till
he vanquiseth them through the Guru's
Word and thus attaineth peace. 25

Bilaval, M.IV

23. अजपुर ताप्श चयु जिन विकुल रचव पे जूल जैं
किन वह कहे मिखतु ते के कुटि ज्यूकर जूत जैं
विजयु उह भो पाय वल ज्यूभेत देवें

उषा अष्ट्र भाग 1, पृ: 1012

24. दिन मे जूह पीठे बन निगवा ते बचात
सर्वा ते के जुग में यह दुत डुत जुगात

उषा बरवैम भाग 2, पृ: 587

25. अन्न विचक महम घरामा,
रितु नितु भजु जिले त दिनही

विचक भाग 4, पृ: 835
One can achieve salvation by repetition of 'Nam', while enjoying the pleasures of this world. 26

Var Guiri, Var, V

Woman, who is the pivot of the 'ghrist' ashram has been considered a helping hand to man in the achievement of mukti. She has been referred to as one who provides the maximum comforts to man.

According to the Vedas and the general opinion of the people, woman helps a man in achieving salvation and provides him with the maximum comforts of life.27

Bhai Gurdas, Var, V

The Sikh Gurus, who were the upholders of the cause of woman in the society, preached that there was no difference between a son and a daughter. They were against female infanticide and told the Sikhs not to have any relations with such people as indulged in such a heinous crime. It is referred to in Bhai Bala-wali-Janam Sakhi. 'Sakhi Kanya Parthaiy' that Guru Nanak considered it a great evil and spoke against the killing of daughters.

26. \( \text{ਬ੍ਰਤ ਸਮੰਚੀ ਕੋਟੀਵੇ ਪੁੱਤੀ ਦੇਵੀ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਗਦੇ} \)
   \( \text{ਰਾਮੀਅਂ ਸੋਨਫੀਆਂ ਪੋਹੀਆਂ ਭਰਦਾਲੀਆਂ ਬੀਜੇ ਦੇਵੀ ਭੁਜਾ ਦੇ} \)
   
   
   \( \text{ਰਾਮ ਕੁਲਵੀ ਭਾਸ਼ 5, ਪੈ: 522} \)

27. \( \text{ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਕਰੀ ਵਿਚ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ} \)
   \( \text{ਬੇਸ਼ ਇਸਤਮਾਲ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਏ ਸ਼ਵੀ ਦੇਵੀ} \)
   
   \( \text{ਧੀ ਤਰਕਸ਼ੀ ਭਾਸ਼ 5, ਪੁ਷ਟੀ 16} \)
Those who kill their daughters
cannot attain mukti. 28

Rahat Nana, Bhai Desa Singh

The faithful should forsake relations
with a man who kills his daughter.

One should not depend on the
earnings of one's daughters. 29

Rahat Nana, Bhai Chaupa Singh

The Sikh Gurus preached against the system of 'purdah',
which they considered an imprisonment for women. They
advocated equal rights for them and asked women to come out
of 'purdah' and sit side by side with men in the gurdwaras
and offer prayers. They instructed women not to observe
'purdah', as it was of no use. They further asked them not
to imitate those women who had been observing 'purdah' after
the fashion of Muslim women.

The Gurus considered the practice of Sati as
amounting to forced suicide. They considered that those women
who burnt themselves along with their dead husbands were not
the real satis. The real satis were only those who kept their
dharma and lived keeping fresh the memory of their husbands.

28. दोस्ति वह कह जय ने हो हे दोस्तिर जय ने

विद्यालय अधी ऐश निम

29. देह निक्ष जोक त भर्त, दोस्ति वह रज त बैले,

लेखन आ योग त अनि

विद्यालय अधी ऐश निम
Those who burn themselves on the pyre of their husbands are not the real satis.

Nahak says, the real satis are they who live and die in the memory of their husbands and always remain calm and contented with their lot.

Var Suhi, M.III

Those who are the embodiments of obedience and loyalty, modesty and grace, they don't fall into trouble at any time.

Those who consume themselves and pine away in the memory of their departed husbands will get a place of honour in the court of the Lord.

Gauri, M.V

30. 'Mujhse dheeng o aapko aashiqi ne bhariya dihla larti
    sath se mujhse larkhini ni kalahe beeti bari
    bi ne mujhse larkhini poot kripya dihla
    meethi meethi aushadhi kihur dhoon ki maanarti

    Var Maurya, M.III, p: 787

31. 'Achha dharm nitite bhiru bhaksebhu aaye sardas
    jist saaj rehna anusah

    Balqis Ji Kaurbanyi, M.V, p: 185
How can a woman be true sati, unless she possesses self-control. 32

_Gauri, Kabir_

If one could get salvation by burning oneself, then why can't satis get salvation who burn themselves along with their dead husbands.

If one could get salvation by living underground and in sewers, why cannot the snakes who live in the holes get salvation. 32

_Akal Ustat, Guru 10_

It is mentioned in the _Prem Sumarg_ that a woman whose husband dies at an early age, should remain calm and contented and not lose self-control, and should always remember the Guru. The same is applicable to men; they should not keep illicit relations with other women, but should marry according to their choice. 34

**IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN THE TIMES OF THE GURUS**

The Sikh Gurus gave due regard and honour to the women-folk and preached that they were the symbol of domestic

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32. रिल में मद मर देंगे होर मह विश्व देखुने निकट सीता
    क्षुद्री अक्षीर नी जो, प: 328

33. अर खै नए हेतु वाह िह बहु लव
    बुध दे बली देवे अस्तित्व क उन दे
    अथ आर्याड्य उपन्यास 10

34. Randhir Singh, Bhai(ed.), _Prem Sumarg_, p.46.
harmony and happiness, social cohesion and unity. They took an active part and keen interest in running the institution of the langar which provided practical training in high ideals of equality, love and service as preached and practised by the Gurus. The wives of the Sikh Gurus also took an active part in the running of and serving the common kitchen; thus setting examples of service for other women of the society. The Sikh women were deeply religious with a staunch faith in the Almighty. They were intelligent, far-sighted, having a keen insight into human nature. When the Khalsa was created by Guru Gobind Singh, the 'Khanda-ka-Pahul' was administered both to men and women alike. It had its desired effect in infusing a new spirit into them, and they became bold and brave and fought side by side with men against the enemy. The helpless and the dependent were transformed into fearless, courageous and self-reliant, independent souls. The Sikh history is replete with the examples of such women who were deeply religious and devoted to the cause of truth. They were intelligent and alert with a keen spiritual insight and were imbued with a spirit of social service and sacrifice. They rose equal to the occasion in the defence of their honour and prestige, of their hearths and homes, and thus carved an honourable place for themselves in the annals of the Sikh history. Prominent among them were
the followings:

Guru Nanak's sister, Bibi Nanaki, was a lady of high calibre and spiritual insight. She was very perceptive and she understood and appreciated the urges and aspirations of her brother Nanak. She is the first great woman in the Sikh History and Guru Nanak himself held her in high esteem.

Another great figure in the galaxy of celebrated Sikh women is Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad, who transformed the life of Guru Amar Das. It was she who brought him in the fold of Sikhism. 35

Next comes Bibi Bhani who shaped Sikh History in her own way with her self-effacing service to her father, Guru Amar Das, who made her husband, Bhai Jetha, later known as Guru Ram Das, as his successor. It was a milestone in Sikh History. Her life of dedicated service is a perennial source of inspiration to all women of the Punjab. 36

Another illustrious figure is that of Mata Gujri, who occupies a very important place in the Sikh History. She was an embodiment of supreme sacrifice and such examples are rare in the history of the world. While Guru Gobind Singh was hardly nine, her husband sacrificed his life at Delhi for the sake of dharma (righteousness). It was something unique on

her part that she did not utter a single depressing word at the time of the departure of her husband for Delhi. It was because of her training that Guru Gobind Singh at such a tender age suggested to his father that he should sacrifice his life for the sake of 'dharma'. She passed through all the ordeals and hardships which Guru Gobind Singh underwent and she always remained with the Guru as a source of inspiration, till the whole family was separated and she was imprisoned in the Fort of Sirhind along with her two grandsons, the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, who embraced martyrdom at Sirhind.

When the executioner came to carry away her grandsons to Governor Wazir Khan, Mata Gujri with great presence of mind, bade them farewell, with instructions not to bow down before the enemy nor feel intimidated by his threats, nor to succumb to temptations offered by him, thereby bringing disgrace to the illustrious names of their father and ancestors. The 'Sahibzadas' went to the court in high spirits with their heads hold high. Mata Gujri had infused such a high spirit into them that even the enemy was surprised to see their fearlessness. 37

Another great woman was Mata Sahib Kaur, one of the wives of Guru Gobind Singh, whom he had made the symbolic

37. Wasakha Singh, Sant, Malwa Itihas, pp.470-71.
mother of the Khalsa brotherhood in the absence of her own offspring because of the vow of celibacy taken by the Guru. His marriage to her had taken place under peculiar circumstances and was not consummated. She had had the unique honour of having participated along with her husband in the creation of the Khalsa—the fraternity of saint-soldiers. 38

Guru Gobind Singh gave the baptism of the sword "Khande-ka-Pahul" to men and women alike. The baptism of the sword infused a new spirit into their minds. There are many examples in the annals of Sikh history to prove the valour of Sikh women.

Bibi Deep Kaur, a devoted Sikh lady, on her way to Anandpur to see the Guru, came upon a band of Mughal soldiers in the jungle. She gave them a terrible fight and saved her honour by killing them. Guru Gobind Singh was very happy when he came to know of it and said that she was really the pride of womanhood. 39

Another remarkable woman was Mata Bhag Kaur who performed a deed of great significance by inspiring the deserters who had left the Guru in the lurch in the battle of Anandpur. They rallied round her and marched back to assist the Guru. On their way they were intercepted by the

Mughal forces and engaged in battle at Kudran near Muktsar. All of them fell fighting against heavy odds. Mata Bhag Kaur was also wounded in the fight. Guru Gobind Singh was a witness to their heroic deeds. Mata Bhag Kaur's role was epoch-making in the Sikh History. 40