

NOBLE & BRAVE SIKH WOMEN

Sawan singh

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(Short biographies of twenty noble and
Brave sikh women.)

By
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Noble and Brave sikh women

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Dedicated to

To the Noble and Brave Sikh women
who made the sikh nation proud.....

Introduction

Once I had a chance to address a group of teenage girls, born and educated out of the Punjab, about the sacrifices and achievements of the Sikh women. I explained to them, with examples from the lives of noble and brave Sikh ladies, that those ladies did not lag behind Sikh men in sacrificing their lives for their faith. I narrated to them the bravery of Mai Bhago and social service rendered by Bibi Harnam Kaur. They were surprised to learn about the sacrifices of the Sikh women in the Gurdwara Liberation Movement. They wanted me to name an English book that should contain short biographies of about twenty such women, but those biographies should be based on history, and not fiction. I could not think of any such book off hand and promised that I would find one.

I contacted many friends in India, U.S.A., Canada, and U.K to find such a book, but could not find any. I was told by a friend of mine in Delhi that there was such a book named "Eminent Sikh Women" by Mrs. M.K. Gill, but was out of stock. I was shocked that in our male dominated society Sikh women were not being paid due attention. Consequently our young girls born and educated out of the Punjab have nothing in writing to show them their golden heritage. They know very little about their religion and culture. Most of our priests and preachers in our Gurdwaras don't know English, so these girls mostly avoid attending Gurdwara functions, as their Punjabi vocabulary is not sufficient. Future of our community is linked with these girls who will be bringing up next generation. I decided to take up this project.

I serve every Sunday in a huge library containing about 4,000 books at the Sikh Center (Gurdwara) Orange County, Santa Ana, (CA.) I selected some books from the library, which could help me in my project. I procured a few catalogues from different booksellers from different places. I was surprised to find that there were not many books dealing with brave and noble Sikh women. Most of such books were novels in Punjabi, each about the life story of a particular lady. The present generation needs some literature based on facts and not fiction, but short biographies to the point.

I am thankful to Akal Purakh that with my humble efforts I have been able to write short biographies of twenty noble and brave Sikh women. Six of them are closely related to the Sikh Gurus. Bibi Nanki's status in Sikhism can be safely compared to that of Mother Mariam in Christianity and that of Bibi Khudejai in Islam. Mata Khivi, Bibi Amro, and Bibi Bhani have maintained Sikh traditions and spread Sikhism. Their nobleness is remarkable. Mata Gujri's sacrifice and her bringing up of her two young grandsons have helped to continue the tradition of sacrifice in Sikhism. Mata Sundri guided the Sikhs for forty years at a critical time against heavy odds.

Bibi Rajinder Kaur and Bibi Sahib Kaur both belonged to the royal family of Patiala state. Their bravery in the battlefields and their skills in administration saved the state from being ruined. Mata Kishan Kaur and Bibi Balbir Kaur took part and suffered in the Akali movement for the control of Gurdwaras. Bibi Balbir Kaur even sacrificed her own life and that of her innocent child in this movement. Bibi Harnam Kaur has done wonders to spread female education among the Sikh women a hundred years ago. Mai Bhag Kaur has proved that Sikh women can lead and organize the Sikh men and win battles. Women martyrs of Shahid Gunj of Lahore like Bhghel Kaur cannot be found in the literature of many religions. Bibi Sharan Kaur and Bibi Shamsher Kaur have proved their skills in the battlefield and in administration. Bibi Anoop Kaur, Bibi Shushil Kaur,

Bibi Harsharan Kaur, Bibi Basan Lata and Bibi Nirbhay Kaur have faced odds and sacrificed their lives to save their honor and faith.

I have tried my best to, remain, as far as possible, near history and avoided mythology. Every character has a historical background and the period to which she belongs has been mentioned. I hope it would inspire our young girls and women and create in them love for their religion. After reading this book, they will feel that they belong to the community of noble and brave people, and will feel proud of their golden heritage. May God help me in my this labor of love!

My thanks are due to the persons who donated books to the above-mentioned library. I am thankful to my friends who gave me their valuable suggestions and encouraged me to write this most needed book. I am all praise for my young grand daughters and grand sons who typed this book. May they live long and enjoy healthy life! I am highly thankful to S .Hardev Singh Shergill and S. Gurpal Singh Khaira for proof reading and suggestions.

I request my worthy readers to read it and share with other interested readers. A book left on shelf is a stone. I shall be thankful if they point out my mistakes and send their suggestions. I shall feel obliged if they pray for my health so that I may continue writing. In the end I am most thankful to God who gave me strength to finish this noble job.

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Bibi Amro

Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad Dev, the second Master and Mata Khivi, was the noble woman who deserves the credit of attracting Amar Das, an idol worshiper, to Sikhism and showing him the way to become Guru Amar Das, the 3rd Master. Thus she was an indirect instrument in the development of Sikhism.

She was born in 1532 at village Khadur near Amritsar. She had two brothers, Dassu and Datu, and one younger sister named Anokhi. She received her early education directly from her parents. Guru Angad Dev taught her, along with the other children, to read and write in Gurmukhi script, which he had revised and simplified. She also learnt many sacred hymns from her father. Writer of the Bansawali Namma writes that she had learnt by heart sacred hymns like 'Sidh Goshat'. She had been gifted by nature with a sweet voice. In short, she was a talented girl.

When she came of age, she was married to Bhai Jasoo son of Bhai Manak Chand, a well-known religious minded person of village Basarke, about eight miles from Amritsar. Bhai Gurdas also belonged to this family. Bibi Amro's parents encouraged her to continue singing sacred hymns and to preach Sikhism. Giani Gian Singh, writer of Panth Parkash, writes on page 84 that she was a religious minded and virtuous lady. (Dharmatam Gun Roop Lapeti). Writer of Suraj Parkash also certifies the fact that devotion had manifested itself in the body of Bibi Amro. She was an ideal daughter in law who spent her time in meditation, household affairs and service of her in laws.

Amar Das, real brother of Bhai Manak Chand and her husband's real uncle, lived in the house next to her. He was attracted to the sacred hymn (Shabad) of Guru Nanak sung by her in her sweet melodious voice early in the morning when she was churning curd. He was in a receptive mood and in search of a Guru. The sacred hymn touched his heart. Two last lines from this hymn written on page 990 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib along with their meaning are given below:-

bhaeiaa munoor ku(n)chun fir hovai jae gur milai thinaehaa ||
eaeek naam a(n)mrith ouhu dhaevai tho naanuk thrisuttas dhaehaa ||

(Copied from www.sikhithemax.com)

The mind turned into rusted iron is again transformed into gold if it meets with the (philosopher's stone of) the Guru.

He blesses the mortal with the Ambrosial Name of the One Lord, and then, O Nanak, cease therewith (the wanderings of)the mind..

He approached Bibi Amro through her mother in law, Bibi Bhago, and wanted her to repeat that hymn once more. She hesitated, but being encouraged by her mother, she sang it once again. Ram Das asked her who composed it and where he lived. She said, "It was composed by Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Guru, the predecessor of my father. I have learnt it from my father, Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru who lives at Khadur". She also explained to him the meaning of the whole hymn. His interest grew so much that he wanted to learn more about Sikhism. He asked her to take him to her father. She did not want to go uninvited and more over she had been there only a few days ago. On being asked by her mother in law, she accompanied Amar Das to Khadur the next day.

Amar Das was 62 and Guru Angad Dev was only 37 at that time. In spite of that Guru Angad Dev stood up out of respect to embrace Amar Das as he was the uncle of his

daughter's husband. Amar Das fell at the feet of Guru Angad Dev and said, " I have come not as a relative, but as your disciple and follower". Amar Das became a devoted Sikh and Guru Angad Dev made him his successor, ignoring his own sons. Thus through Bibi Amro, Guru Amar Das got the chance of becoming the Guru and leading the Sikhs . This also raised the prestige of Bibi Amro in her family.

Some writers have written that Guru Amar Das had made Bib Amro in-charge of one of his 22 teaching districts called Manjis (cots). It means that such a person would sit on Manji while the other Sikhs sat on the ground and listened to his/her preachings. He/she guided the Sikhs of his/her area in religious matters and accepted their offerings for the Guru. This appointment can be compared to the position of Bishop in the Christians Church. Bibi Amro's district included Basarke, her husband's village, and surrounding few villages. It is due to the efforts of Sikh preachers like Bibi Amro that Sikhism spread so rapidly in that area.

There is a tank (man made pond) near the village Basarke and it is called Bibi Amro Da Talab (Tank of Bibi Amro). It reminds everybody that a noble soul, Bibi Amro who occupies a special place in the Sikh History once lived there.

Bibi Anup Kaur

The Sikh Gurus not only preached for the equal status of women, but also revolutionized their social life. History is full with examples where women who did not step out of house without covering their faces, performed wonderful daring deeds in life. After being baptized, they faced the enemy courageously and preferred death to an immoral comfortable life. Life story of martyr Anup Kaur is a golden example worth narration.

She was born in 1690 in village Jalopur Khere, near Amritsar. Her father's name was Lachhman Das Sodhi. In those days, Sodhis were divided in two opposite groups. One group favored Guru Tegh Bahadur for Guruship, while the other group led by Dhir Mal claimed that Guruship belonged to them. Many members of the Sodhi dynasty, like Lachhman who favored Guru Tegh Bahadur, left the central Punjab to avoid daily bickering and friction, and settled far away at Anandpur.

Anup Kaur was only five years old when her parents migrated to Anandpur. She was an attractive, every happy, sweet-tongued and beautiful girl. She used to play with Sahibzadas (Guru Gobind Singh's sons) and was liked by Mata Sundri. Anup Kaur spent most of her time with the Sahibzadas and was treated like a member of the Guru family. She acquired religious education and learned reading and writing Gurmukhi in their company. In 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh created Saint- soldiers, she along with her father who was now named Lachhman Singh was also baptized. It brought a wonderful change in her life and she rapidly grew physically as well as spiritually. Now she was regular in the performance of her daily prayers and visited Gurdwara daily.

She collected other baptized girls and started learning fencing and other martial arts. They also used arms like sword, shield and spear. These girls also learned horse riding. This armed group under Anup Kaur was well versed in self defense and became famous in the area. Anup Kaur with her group took part in the battle with the Sikhs against the hill chiefs. Victory in this battle created self-confidence among the young girls. The hill chiefs requested the Mughals at Delhi for help.

As desired by Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor, governor of Sirhind along with governor of Lahore and the hill chiefs besieged the Anandpur fort with a huge force. The Sikhs met the Mughal forces with fire from their guns. Sikh girls under the leadership of Anup Kaur played a very important part in this battle. They took responsibility of looking after the Guru's family and taking the cooked food from the common kitchen to the Sikh soldiers in their trenches. They also helped in fighting wherever the Sikh soldiers needed help and showed feats of bravery.

The siege continued for some days. The governor of Sirhind assured the Guru for the safety of all if the fort was vacated. The Guru did not rely on this assurance, but he knew that the effective defense was impossible owing to lack of food and other supplies. So the Guru agreed reluctantly to vacate Anandpur on the night of 20th December 1704. Anup Kaur's group took care of the Guru's family. The assurance proved false and the Sikhs were attacked outside the fort. Sikh soldiers and girls under Anup Kaur continued their march towards the rivulet Sirsa while fighting the enemy.

While crossing the flooded Sirsa, Anup Kaur was separated from the Guru's family in confusion. After crossing the river, she met five Sikh soldiers who told her that Guru Gobind Singh fought a battle with the Mughal forces at Chamkaur where the two elder Sahibzadas died fighting and the Guru had left Chamkaur. She was also told that

the younger Sahibzadas were arrested at Sirhand. They all started towards Sirhand, but on their way they met a patrolling party of the Mughal soldiers. In the fight with them two Sikh soldiers were killed and Anup Kaur was injured, but the Mughal soldiers took to their heels. Anup Kaur came to know from someone that Mata Gujri and her two younger grandsons had been martyred, so they started to find the Guru.

They were on their way when the chief of Malerkotla state with two hundred soldiers surrounded them. Anup Kaur's companions died fighting but Anup Kaur's horse stumbled, she fell down and broke her arm. She was arrested and taken to Malerkotla. When the chief came to know that the young charming girl was Anup Kaur about whose bravery he had heard a lot, he decided to marry her and instructed his soldiers to treat her respectfully and get her arm treated.

She saw through their trick and realized that she would be forced to embrace Islam and marry the chief. She was a helpless prisoner, but she made up her mind to commit suicide to save her faith and honor. At Malerkotla she was under strict watch. Her maid servants told the chief that she was always meditating and remained in a serious mood. The chief persuaded Anup Kaur to marry him as there was no other way for her to save herself. He also promised her a comfortable life in the royal palace, but she refused. One day he called the Kazi (Muslim cleric) to forcibly convert and marry her, but they found only her dead body as she had thrust a dagger into her chest. She was buried quietly according to the Muslim rites.

Professor Ganda Singh, on the basis of his research, writes that Banda Singh Bahadur was moved to hear her pathetic story. When he marched upon Malerkotla in 1710, he said that last remains of this brave Sikh lady should not be allowed to rot in a grave. He was not opposed by anybody as the chief of the state had fled before Banda Bahadur reached there. He did not destroy Malerkotla as its chief had advocated mercy for the younger Sahibzadas at Sirhind. Body of Anup Kaur was exhumed and cremated according to Sikh rites as desired by Banda.

Thus the martyr Anup Kaur who sacrificed her life at the altar of her faith and chastity was given a decent cremation she richly deserved. She had not embraced Islam and had died a Sikh. She is still remembered respectfully by the people of the area and her sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Baghel Kaur

A newlywed Hindu girl was returning along with her groom and the marriage party to the village of her in-laws when some Mughal soldiers abducted her and looted her dowry. Her groom and the members of the marriage party who were unarmed were beaten and made to flee. They complained to the Muslim chief of the area, but he did not care and said, "What does it matter if our soldiers enjoy her for a few days? I shall see that she is returned to you as soon as I find a clue of her." Her husband was disappointed and turned to the forest to meet the Sikhs and appeal to them.

In those days, Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India again and again and the Mughal Empire at Delhi and the governor of Lahore had become very weak. Abdali looted Indian cities, forcibly took beautiful Hindu ladies with him, but the Sikhs attacked his army when he was going back to Afghanistan. They recovered the property he was taking with him, and got the ladies, that he was forcibly taking, released. They fought a guerrilla war and slipped back into the forest before they could be caught.

The groom met some Sikhs in the forest. They consoled him and baptized him. Now he was named Teja Singh. One night, a party of Sikhs along with Teja Singh, attacked the same party of plunderers and taught them a lesson. Teja Singh's wife, who was in a miserable condition, was also rescued from them. She wanted to commit suicide, but was dissuaded from doing so. She was encouraged to live and was baptized. Now she was named Baghel Kaur, who wore a turban and not a scarf on her head. She always had a long sword with her. Many ladies like her lived in the wilderness near the pond of Kahnuwan in the company of the Sikhs.

In the wilderness, Baghel Kaur and her party met a few more Sikhs known to Teja Singh. They planned to attack a patrolling party of the Muslim soldiers and snatch their horses and arms for the newcomers. When they reached the village, they found that the soldiers were armed, but asleep. Baghel Kaur and her companions took some guns and two horses from the soldiers and left the village before the soldiers were awake. They killed only those soldiers who resisted them. Baghel Kaur and the party reached back safely and met their companions who were anxiously awaiting them.

All left the pool of Kahnuwan (District Gurdaspur). They had to cross a dense forest and thorny bushes grown on the bank of the river Bias. In fact, these dense, thorny bushes served them as a fort as the Mughal soldiers were afraid of crossing them. Inside this dense forest, the Sikhs had cleared some area and lived in tents there. They lived on the ration they could bring from outside, meat of the animals they hunted, and whatever edible they could find in the forest. After a long journey, they met their companions who were there with their leader Nawab Kapur Singh. He exhorted the gathering to be ready to fight against aggression for the sake of justice..

Mir Mannu was the governor of Lahore. His minister Kaura Mal was sympathetic towards the Sikhs, but after the death of Kaura Mal, Mir Mannu turned his attention to finish the Sikhs. He was a tyrant and bent upon converting Sikhs to Islam. He used every possible punishment to subordinate the Sikhs, who had left villages and started living in thick forests. In those days, Sikhs used to say, "Mir Mannu is our sickle and we are his grass blades. As he cuts, more than two hundred times we grow."

Abdali consulted Mir Mannu and sent a challenge to the Sikhs to come out of the forest and fight face to face. Nawab Kapur Singh accepted the challenge. The next day, four thousand Sikhs with a few hundred Sikh ladies, including Baghel Kaur, divided

themselves in two parties and, riding on their horses, entered the field, fully armed, with sword and spears. They were opposed by 10,000 Pathan forces. At the end of the day, 500 Sikhs became martyrs, but the Pathans suffered a heavy loss. Second day, Baghel Kaur with a few other ladies fought so bravely and courageously that it would be remembered for ever. In the evening the Pathan army had to retreat, but in the confusion that prevailed Baghel Kaur and four other ladies were separated from the Sikh forces.

These ladies reached a small village, cooked their food and slept on the ground. Turn by turn, one of them remained awake to look after the horses and the arms. They got up before daybreak, performed their morning prayer and started. Soon they found fifty enemy soldiers of a patrolling party coming towards them. Five of them proceeded towards Baghel Kaur and her party. They did not realize that they were going to face a tough enemy. They planned to capture them and marry them. All of a sudden, Baghel Kaur came forward and cut the sword of the first soldier with her sword. In the meantime, a companion of her injured him with her sword when he was returning to save himself from the second attack. Another soldier attacked Baghel Kaur with his spear, but her friend checked his attack with her sword and injured him. Now the injured soldiers started returning to their party to seek help. In the mean time Baghel Kaur and her companions rode away to the thick forest to meet their companions. All the Pathan soldiers started chasing Baghel Kaur and her friends. A Sikh watchman informed the other Sikhs in the forest about the coming Pathans. At once, the Sikhs came out and killed the Pathans in a few minutes. Three Sikhs were also killed in this fight. Sikhs persuaded Baghel Kaur and her companions to stay in the village but the brave ladies refused, wanted to stay with them, and die fighting.

Mir Mannu was a notorious bigot. He massacred Sikhs and proclaimed a reward of twenty-five rupees per Sikh head. He killed no less than thirty thousand Sikhs. He ordered that any Sikh lady found anywhere should be caught and forced to embrace Islam. Baghel Kaur wanted to save a few ladies who were still in the village and could not leave because two of them had small children. One night Baghel Kaur disguised herself and went back to her village to save the three Sikh ladies who were hiding in the house of a Muslim girl friend. She contacted them at midnight, encouraged them to accompany her early in the morning and leave for the thick forest on the other side of the river Beas.

After a short nap of two hours, she along with three Sikh ladies and two children left the village at 4am. Four soldiers who were sleeping outside the village saw them and followed them to the river bank. Baghel Kaur asked the two ladies to cross the river along with their children and herself along with the third lady faced the soldiers. She thrust her spear in the chest of the first two soldiers who came forward before they could attack her. One of her companions tried to attack the third soldier, but his spear injured her arm before she could attack. Baghel Kaur gave her horse to her injured friend and asked her to cross the river at once. Baghel Kaur took the horse of the injured soldier and fought against the remaining two soldiers bravely and fearlessly. The soldiers as well as Baghel Kaur were injured and bleeding. She took courage and in the twinkling of an eye crossed the river on her horse. Now all the four ladies with two children started on their horses and soon they were out of sight of the soldiers who were chasing them. After covering a long distance the party reached the destination and met a party of the Sikhs.

Plight of the Sikh ladies detained in the camps of Mir Mannu was miserable. They were tortured and kept thirsty and hungry as they refused to be converted to Islam. Every one of them was allotted a small millstone to grind a fixed quantity of wheat. It was ordered that the children of these ladies be snatched. One soldier threw a child up in the air and the other killed him with his spear before he could touch the ground. The dead bodies of these children were cut into pieces and the ladies were garlanded with those pieces. Pieces of flesh of the children were thrust into the mouth of their mothers. In spite of all that, none of the ladies cried or yielded to embrace Islam. Once this horrible scene stunned Mir Mannu. When he reached the palace after visiting the camp, he did not talk to anybody. It seemed he repented. He left for hunting with only four soldiers. While he was hunting, his horse was scared, ran very fast and jumped so high that Mir Mannu could not control it. He fell down, and his feet got entangled in stirrup. Mir Mannu's cries further scared the horse and it ran faster. It was dragging Mir Mannu and none could stop it. Mir Mannu was badly injured and died in the forest.

Mir Mannu's tragic and sudden death had emboldened the Sikhs and they were settling in their villages. A group of Sikhs, under the command of Baghel Kaur, attacked the Lahore camp at midnight, killed 25 Muslim soldiers who were unprepared, and got the captive ladies released and escorted them to a safer place. After Mir Mannu's death, his queen invited Ahmad Shah to help her and capture the Sikhs. At this time, Baghel Kaur was living in her village along with her four-year old son and her husband. She wanted to save the ladies who were forcibly being taken to the camp. She asked her husband to take the child and leave for the forest. She herself started to rescue the ladies being taken forcibly by the Muslim soldiers. She saw one such lady who was being taken to the camp, but Baghel Kaur did not slip away. All of a sudden, she injured with her spear the two soldiers who were taking the lady, but she was caught by their companions. Now she herself was a captive with the other ladies in the camp.

Every lady in the camp was given a piece of bread. Some injured and hungry ladies were lying half-dead on the ground and their children were crying for food. Baghel Kaur gave her own piece of bread to the crying children and she remained hungry. The ladies in the camp were whipped, insulted, and taunted by the soldiers so that they might embrace Islam to get rid of this hell. Baghel Kaur protested against ill treatment, but she was ordered to grind wheat for the whole night without rest.

At midnight, the camp-in-charge sent for Baghel Kaur, but she refused to move out. The drunken soldier caught her by the wrist and dragged her. She took courage and slapped the soldier. She took his sword, which was tied to his belt, and injured him. The other ladies came to her help and the soldier had to run away. In the morning, all the ladies were assembled at one place, and the camp-in-charge told them that anyone who agreed to marry a soldier of her choice would be set free and allowed to lead a happy and prosperous life. Baghel Kaur stood up and said that none would agree to be converted as their own religion was dear to them and they would die rather than lead an immoral life of a coward. Her bold and frank talk made the camp commander speechless.

She was taken to a pillar so that her hands should be tied and then whipped to death. On her way to the pillar, she took courage, pushed the soldier who was taking her to the pillar and snatched his sword. Now the whole camp was surrounded by the other soldiers and many ladies were murdered. Baghel Kaur fought bravely, but was killed by armed

soldiers who were surrounding her. Next day, about 8000 Sikhs attacked the camp at midnight, killed the camp commander and freed the captive ladies.

Mai Bhago

In her childhood, Mai Bhag Kaur was called Bhag Bhari, which means “fortunate”. On being baptized, she was named Bhag Kaur. In the Sikh history, she is known as Mai Bhago. She was born in a well known village, Jhabal, near Amritsar. She was the daughter of Malo Shah, son of Bhai Pare Shah. Her grandfather and Pare Shah’s brother, Bhai Langaha, had served under Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind. Bhai Langaha had helped Guru Arjan Dev in the construction of Harmander Sahib and was one of the five Sikhs who accompanied Guru Arjan Dev when he went to Lahore for martyrdom. It shows her two generations were closely involved with the Sikh Gurus.

As a young girl she had heard about the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the wars of Guru Hargobind, injustice done to the Sikhs and their harassment by the Mughal army. These left a deep impression on her tender mind. Sad news of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and his companions —Bhai Dayala, Bhai Mati Das, and Bhai Sati Das – touched her heart. She made up her mind to stop such injustice and violence against the Sikhs. She had inherited from her family ideals of bravery and courage. Faith, truth, and fearlessness were her ornaments. She had a well built body and looked like a soldier. She, along with her family, visited Guru Tegh Bahadur twice. She also visited Anandpur with her father in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and was baptized along with other members of her family. She wanted to stay there to learn the martial arts and become a saint soldier, but her father brought her back because she was a woman and women did not take part in the Sikh army in those days. However, she longed to join the Sikh army and started learning the art of warfare and horse riding from her father. She made a top knot of her head hair and covered it with a small turban. She had a spear in one hand, sword in the other, a shield on her shoulders and other small arms in her belt. She had fiery eyes on her bright face. In the beginning she aimed at small bushes outside the village with her small spear. Then she started piercing trees with her spear and learnt horse riding. Soon she became a staunch saint soldier. She was married to Bhai Nidhan Singh of village Patti near Amritsar.

She came to know that some Sikhs of her area had deserted Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib and renounced his guruship in writing. The Mughals had betrayed Guru Gobind Singh and the governor of Sirhind was planning a big attack on Guru Gobind Singh at village Dina where he was staying after the Battle of Chamkaur. She could not hold herself, as she was zealous to serve the Guru. Boiling with rage, and moved by love for the Guru, she, the great heroine, said to her husband, “Guard up your lions and let us lay down our lives for the Guru who has sacrificed his father, mother and four sons for the Sikh faith. We must not sit idle when innocent lives are being bricked alive.” She was determined to wipe out the badge of infamy from the face of her area. She, along with her husband, went from village to village and told the people the reality of deserters to them. Ladies of the deserters did not talk to them when they came back, cursed and taunted them. These ladies dressed themselves as soldiers and wanted to proceed with Mai Bhago. She said to the deserters, “Guru Ji has sacrificed his family and comforts for our freedom. We must stand up and protect our rights and faith. We should not hide ourselves like cowards. Everybody has to die. Why not die like a brave person? If you don’t join me, I shall take a party of women and die for the Guru.” She exhorted the ladies not to entertain the deserters and not to allow them to enter their houses. Her sharp and frank

words pricked the conscience of the deserters and awakened their souls. She challenged their vanity and made them regret. She displayed manly spirit and courage. They, along with their leader, Mahan Singh, marched to help the Guru and seek his forgiveness. They got armed and they took the oath to die fighting and not to retreat from the battlefield. They meant to make amends for the apostasy.

On their way, they came to know that the Guru was camping at the lake of Khidrana, near Mukatsar. In those days, the whole area was a desert and the full control of the lake was very important for the fighting forces. They were also informed that the Mughal forces, under the command of the governor of Sirhand, were proceeding towards the Guru. Mai Bhago and the party decided to check the army proceeding towards the Guru. They realized that the Mughal army was huge and they were only forty. She thought of a plan and asked the Sikhs to spread their white shirts on the bushes so that they look like tents of the Sikh forces. A shrine called Gurdwara Tambu Sahib, or the Place of Holy Tents, stands on that spot even to this day. They raised slogans of Sat Sri Akal – Bole So Nihal to overawe the enemy. A bloody battle with the Mughal forces took place and Mai Bhag Kaur fought in the front lines. The mercenary soldiers could not face the devoted Sikhs. The Guru from the mound near the lake supported the Sikhs with showers of arrows. The army generals took to their heels and retreated to save their lives. They even left their wounded and dead soldiers back. It happened in 1705.

After the battle, the Guru came down from the mound and found that every member of Bhag Kaur's party was either dead or wounded. He took care of them. Mai Bhag Kaur was lying badly injured. She was treated and soon she recovered fully. Bhai Mahan Singh was dying when Guru Ji reached him. Guru Ji put some water in Bhai Mahan Singh's mouth and said to him, "I am proud of you all. What is your last wish?" Mahan Singh requested the Guru to forgive all the deserters and restore the snapped relationship so that they might die in peace and obtain salvation. The Guru agreed before Mahan Singh could breathe his last. The city of Mukatsar (Pool of Immortalization) was built at that place. 'Mukat' or 'Mukti' means salvation and 'sar' means a pool. These forty Muktas are remembered daily in the Sikh prayers (Ardas). Later on, a Gurdwara was built at the site of the cremation of these martyrs. A great fair is held every year in January in memory of the Guru's arrival there and redemption of the disunited. Pilgrims come from all over the country and attend that function.

The Guru praised the bravery of Mai Bhago. She told the Guru how the forty deserters had fought bravely and laid down their lives. The Guru asked her to go back to her village as her husband and brother had also died in that battle. She expressed her desire to become an active saint-soldier and stay in the service of the Guru. Her wish was granted and she stayed with the Guru as a member of his bodyguards. She accompanied the Guru to Damdama Sahib, Agra, and Nanded, a city in the South of India, and lived there until the Guru left this world. After the Guru's death, she left Nanded for Bidar, an important city nearby. She lived there for some time and preached Sikhism. She died at Bidar. There is a Gurdwara built in her memory near the main Gurdwara Sachkhand at Nanded. Her spear is still preserved at the Gurdwara along with the arms of Guru Gobind Singh.

She was a symbol of bravery and courage. Her life story and skill in organization against odds will always be a milestone in Sikh history. Her example inspired many brave Sikh ladies to face death with honor. She is really the Joan of Arc of Sikh history.

Bibi Bhani

Bibi Bhani has a unique place in the Sikh history. She is the noble lady who was daughter of a guru (Guru Amardas), wife of a guru (Guru RamDas), mother of a guru (Guru Arjan Dev), grandmother of a guru (Guru Hargobind), great grandmother of a guru (Guru Tegh Bahadar) and great, great grandmother of a guru (Guru Gobind Singh). Out of love, a young girl is called Bibi, but out of respect and love, Bhani is mentioned in the Sikh history, as Bibi, whether she is daughter or mother. She was a symbol of service.

She was born in 1533 at village Basarke near Amritsar. She was the youngest daughter of Guru Amar Das so her parents loved her a lot and also called her Mohini (attractive). From her very childhood, she spent a lot of time in meditation and in the service of her father. She served her father like a disciple. In the Sikh history, she is known as an embodiment of service. It is said that she took special care that her father is not disturbed in his meditation and she served him at the cost of her own health. She was a devoted daughter of her father. Her cheerful, innocent and calm face attracted everybody. She also loved solitude and simplicity.

When she grew up, her parents started looking for a suitable match for her. Her mother, Mansa Davi, wanted her husband to be as devoted to service and as humble as she was. They decided to select Jetha who sold roasted grams and also served selflessly in the common kitchen. Bibi Bhani also, like a devoted daughter, willingly accepted the selection made by her parents. Macauliff writes that a Sikh of Guru Amar Das brought some jewelry and precious clothes for Bibi Bhani so that she should use them at the time of her marriage, but she refused and said that this money should be spent for the common kitchen that serves the needy irrespective of his/her caste or creed. This shows her simplicity and love for the poor. She was married in the beginning of 1553. She served Bhai Jetha not only as a husband but also as a saint. She was so contented that she never complained about the poverty of her in-laws. She kept serving her father even after her marriage, as her in-laws were local. She continued doing her worldly duties along with the service of her father. Her husband continued serving in the common kitchen even after his marriage. The common kitchen at the time of Guru Amar Das was well known in the world. Emperor Akbar was so impressed with the humble service and the food served in the kitchen that he granted land of a few villages revenue-free to Bibi Bhani.

Bhai Jetha became Guru Ram Das, the fourth master in 1574. They had three sons, Prithi Chand, Maha Dev, and Arjan Dev. Prithi Chand was arrogant, lazy, and dishonest, but still wanted the guruship after his father. He wanted that his mother should recommend him for guruship. She advised him that the decision made by his father would be on merit and she remained neutral. When Guru Arjan Dev was selected for guruship, Prithi Chand misbehaved with his father. Bibi Bhani snubbed Prithi Chand and admonished him. She said to him that the decision made by his father was impartial. This has been the tradition from the time of Guru Nanak. She also said, "Your father was also selected on the basis of his service and humility." Bibi Bhani always stood for truth.

Her eldest son, Prithi Chand, was ignored due to his haughty nature and the youngest one, Arjan Dev, was made the fifth Guru by his father. Prithi Chand claimed that he was the fifth Guru and through his agents collected the offerings of the devotees before they could see Guru Arjan Dev. He, thus, tried to fail the common kitchen run by Guru Arjan Dev. Bibi Bhani and Bhai Gurdas, a devotee of Guru Arjan Dev, foiled the conspiracy of Prithi Chand and the common kitchen continued as usual.

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 persuaded Guru Arjan Dev to remarry after the death of his first wife. It seems Guru Arjan Dev has mentioned her blessings and advice in one of his hymns given on page 496 of Guru Granth Sahib. It is being given below:

poothaa maathaa kee aasees || nimukh n bisuro thumu ko har har sudhaa bhujuhu jugudhees
||1|| rehaao ||

sathigur thumu ko hoe dhaeiaalaa su(n)thusu(n)g thaeree preeth || kaapurr path purumaesur
raakhee bhojun keeruthun neeth ||2||

a(n)mrith peevuhu sudhaa chir jeevuhu har simuruth anudh anu(n)thaa || ru(n)g thumaasaa
poorun aasaa kubehi n biaapai chi(n)thaa ||3||

bhuvur thumuaaraa eihu mun hovo har churuna hohu koolaa || naanuk dhaasoun su(n)g
luputtaaeiou jio boo(n)dhehi chaathrik moulaa ||4||3||4|| (copied from www.sikhitothemax.com
Here 'th' stands for s and 'dh' for d .)

O son, this is your mother's hope and prayer

that you may never forget the Lord, even for an instant. May you ever remember the
Lord of the Universe!. ||Pause||

May the True Guru be kind to you, and may you love the Society of the Saints!. May the
preservation of your honor by the Supreme Lord be your clothes, and may the singing of
His Praises be your food!

So drink in forever the Nectar. May you live long, and may the meditative remembrance
of the Lord give you infinite delight! May joy and pleasure be yours; may your hopes be
fulfilled, and may you never be troubled by worries.!

Let this mind of yours be the bumblebee, and let the Lord's feet be thy lotus flower. Says
servant Nanak, attach your mind to them, and blossom forth like the songbird, upon
finding the raindrop. Every mother should give such blessings to her children.

When King Jahangir summoned Guru Arjan Dev, she encouraged him to face the
difficulties boldly. When Guru Ji was tortured and the news of his martyrdom reached the
family, she maintained her composure and did not let her daughter-in-law, Guru Arjan
Dev's wife, and 11 year-old grandson, Hargobind, lose heart. She advised them to abide
by God's will. She encouraged her grandson to face the new situation bravely.

She left this world in 1598 at the age of 65 at Tarn Taran where she was serving the
lepers. Guru Arjan Dev had a well constructed in her memory at Tarn Taran. It is still
known as the Well of Bibi Bhani.

We can safely call her the embodiment of service, truth, endurance, obedience, and
humility. She will always be remembered for the unique service rendered by her to her
father. She has the distinction of being the mother of the first Sikh martyr, Guru Arjan
Dev, great-grandmother of the second Sikh martyr, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and great-great-
grandmother of Guru Gobind Singh, who sacrificed himself and his four sons for the sake
of justice. Thus she belongs to a family whose seven members were martyred. My head
bows in her memory.

Bibi Balbir Kaur

Movement for the liberation of Gurdwaras from the control of corrupt priests (Mahants), protected by the British, had awakened the Sikhs and they began to assert their religious independence through non-violent efforts. The British rulers gunned down many participants of the movement and arrested thousands to suppress them. This short life story of Bibi Balbir Kaur will show that the Sikh women also did not lag behind their brothers, and willingly sacrificed themselves and their children by taking part in the movement in a non-violent way. Their joint struggle forced the British to yield.

The ruler of Nabha state (now part of the Punjab), Ripudaman Singh, had a soft corner for the movement mentioned above and was an independent minded ruler. His activities deeply troubled the British. He was not on good terms with the ruler of the Patiala state. The quarrel between them could be easily settled by imperial arbitration, but the British officials forced the ruler of Nabha to abdicate. This forced abdication led to a strong agitation among the Sikhs.

British officials of the Nabha state forcibly dispersed a meeting of the Sikhs who had gathered in the Gurdwara Gangsar at Jaito, a city in the Nabha state. The British officials also interrupted Akhand Path (continued recitation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib for forty eight hours) started by the Sikhs to pray for the restoration of the rights of the ruler, Ripudaman Singh. This incident led to a strong agitation by the Sikhs who could not tolerate the interference in their right to worship freely. This was an open challenge, which the S.G.P.C. (Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) or supreme body for the management of the Gurdwaras with its headquarters at Amritsar, accepted. It had already liberated Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib (the birthplace of Guru Nanak) and the Golden Temple at Amritsar. It had also won the struggle against the government at Guru Ka Bagh near Amritsar.

A state of war was declared and a band of martyrs started from Akal Takhat, Amritsar to Jaito to start the Akandh Path there. Every member of the band took a pledge to remain non-violent at any cost and to sacrifice his/her life if attacked. At first a band of 25 volunteers left Amritsar daily for Jaito, but they were forcibly stopped by the administration of Nabha from entering the Gurdwara. Many of them lost their lives, but the result was not satisfactory.

Now the S.G.P.C. decided to send five hundred people daily, and the first batch of martyrs left the Akal Takhat on February 9, 1924. Every one of them took a pledge to remain non-violent if fired or tortured, and to start the Akhand Path at the Gurdwara at Jaito on February 21, 1924. The number of volunteers was much more than required and thousands were asked to wait for their turn. Ladies were not allowed to proceed with the band, but they insisted to participate in such a holy endeavor. They succeeded to accompany the band on their plea that they would cook food on the way. Bibi Balbir Kaur, with her two year old son, was the leader of the women volunteers.

The first batch of five hundred left Amritsar under the echoes of “Jo Bole, So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal.” Everyone was garlanded and they were in high spirits. Thousands had gathered to wish them success. This non-violent march of unarmed batch was a unique event being watched by the whole world. Organized in rows of four, these saint-soldiers proceeded from Amritsar on foot reciting “Sat Nam Waheguru.” At their first rest stop, the local Sikhs honored the batch, served them and took care of their food and other necessities.

After the first stop, it became clear that the services of the ladies for cooking food would not be required. The leader of the band asked them to return. Others agreed, but Balbir Kaur wanted to continue the march with her brave brothers and did not return. When the leader asked her to go back, she, with tears in her eyes, said, “Brother, don’t stop me from participating in this noble struggle. I am not afraid of death. I request you to let me proceed with my brothers.” The leader did not want to break her heart, and reluctantly permitted her, keeping in view her utter display of self-sacrifice.

She was a beautiful lady of 22 years and full of youth. Her determination and feelings of selfless service were visible on her face. She looked like a goddess of purity and sacrifice. Her innocent two year old child was a source of amusement for every member of the party. When the group reached near the destination, the leaders stopped and said, “The British forces are ready to face us with machine guns. I request the accompanying congregation to return. Only those permitted by the Akal Takhat should proceed further and others should return ,and wait for their turn.” Some returned while others found hidden routes. They planned to join the band to seek martyrdom when the firing would start. Bibi Balbir Kaur, with her son did not adopt any hidden route and continued to march with the other members of the party.

When the leader came to know that the Bibi was marching with the band, he stopped, came to her and said, “Sister, there is real danger of firing ahead. You should not continue further.” She replied with folded hands, “Dear brother, don’t stop me, I am also a baptized one and shall deem myself fortunate if I am martyred along with 500 brothers. Our Gurus have bestowed equality to women. This is sacrilegious that I should not be allowed to proceed further. If you are worried about my child, let him serve the community. He cannot get a better chance in life.” Saying these words, she hugged the child and could not talk further due to tears in her eyes. The leader persuaded her to return and other members of the party also pressured her to go back. She did not budge from her decision to march to death with the others. Her persuasive arguments and her burning desire for sacrifice forced everybody to accept her plea. Even the leader was forced to accept her decision.

Saint-soldiers, with their yellow flag fluttering in the air again started their march, under the command of their leader, with faith in their mission. Their brave faces projected calmness. Every one seemed fully prepared for sacrificing his life. People of every faith welcomed them on their way and served them with sweets and milk. Flowers were showered upon these living martyrs.

But as soon as the party entered the boundary of the Nabha state, it was warned by the state police and the British forces not to proceed forward. The saint-soldiers did not stop and continued their march. When they reached near the city of Jaito, they were welcomed with the shower of bullets. Still they continued the march while meditating Sat Nam Waheguru. None showed his back. There was blood everywhere. It appeared that they were playing Holi (festival of colors) of blood. Many fell on the ground, but courageously rose immediately and continued the march. Some of them died on the spot and received martyrdom.

Bibi Balbir Kaur continued her march hugging her child. With a smile on her face, she was waiting for the bullet she had eagerly waited so far. Suddenly a bullet hit her in her forehead. Her face was covered with blood. She did not stop and continued the march while her innocent child played with the flowing blood on her face. A stray bullet struck the child in her arm. The bullet pierced the child through his ear. The child died in an instant. She kissed his forehead and placed his dead body along with the other wounded and killed. Saying, "O God, Take back Your charge temporarily entrusted to me," she rushed forward along with the members of the band, encouraging them to face the bullets bravely. Her face turned yellow for the loss of blood, and her steps were unsteady, but she kept her pace with others. After reaching the Gurdwara she bowed her head to God and thanked Him for giving her a chance to reach there.

The bullets had not stopped raining. Suddenly a bullet hit straight her chest and pierced her body. This bullet was the message that she had been waiting eagerly. Her body fell on the ground, but her soul left to join her child. Her cherished desire was fulfilled. Her bloody face showed peace and courage.

The agitation continued for twenty-one months and many bands of five hundred each followed one another. In the end, the British government yielded, and the Sikhs completed not one but one hundred and one Akhand Paths in that Gurdwara. Balbir Kaur became immortal and her heroic deed is mentioned in many books. In fact, such sacrifices created a new life amongst the Sikhs in those days.

Bibi Basant Lata

A short biography of Bibi Basant Lata will prove that Sikh woman can successfully face all kinds of critical and risky situations. They can undergo the worst torture, shun attractive temptations and sacrifice their lives to save their faith, honor and rights. Sikh women like Sikh men are equally good saint- soldiers.

Basant Lata, a baptized Sikh woman, had no living relative. She spent her time in the service of Mata Sundri and her family at Anandpur. Service was the only mission of her life. She treated every member of the family like her own dear and near one. She was happily living under the shelter of Mata Sundri. She also treated Basant Lata like her sister and loved her from the core of her heart.

Guru Gobind Singh reluctantly evacuated the fort at Anandpur at the dead of night 20-21 December, 1704 on a written assurance of Aurangzeb for safe evacuation. This assurance proved false and the Mughal forces under Wazir Khan attacked the Guru and the party before they could cross the river Sirsa. It was raining and a swift wind was blowing. The river was in spate. In the midst of rain, cold, darkness and fierce fighting, complete confusion prevailed among the Sikhs. Mata Sundri and Mata Gujri with the princes were being carried in palanquins, duly protected by the Sikhs. Basant Lata was walking along. Mata Sundri asked Lata many times to sit in the palanquins. Basant Lata, out of respect, did not like to sit with the Mata and kept on walking in the dark.

In utter darkness and confusion, she stumbled and fell down. After a while when she got up, her companions had gone far away. She found herself surrounded by a few Mughal Soldiers. She gave them a good fight, but could not face the armed soldiers and was arrested. Soldiers decided to present her as a gift to their chief. They took her to the chief's home and presented her to him. She said to the chief, " I'm a baptized maid servant of Mata Sundri. My faith is dearer to me than my life. I know how to sacrifice my life at the altar of my honor. It would be better for you if you leave me so that I may join my party".

The chief did not listen to her and offered her a comfortable and respectful life as his senior queen. He also showed her precious ornaments which she could use after becoming his queen". She did not agree and refused his offers flatly. The chief was attracted to her and ordered that she should be tortured till she agrees. The soldiers threatened and tortured her. She was kept hungry and had to grind wheat for 24 hours at a stretch.

She was dead tired and the chief was hopeful that now she would agree to marry him. He tried to allure her with his sweet talk, but failed. As he turned his face, she secretly took his dagger from his belt and quickly thrust it into her chest. She died in no time and there was nothing but her dead body and blood lying on the floor. Now the chief realized that she meant what she said. He was all praise for the brave Sikh woman. He did not want that the people should know about it. He was also afraid of the Sikhs. He called his Hindu servant and asked him to cremate her secretly according to the Sikh rites.

The servant asked his wife to give the dead body of Basant Lata a bath. She found a piece of written paper in her pocket. It was a letter by Basant Lata to Mata Sundri intimating her that her dear Lata sacrificed her life to save her honor and faith with the

hope to meet her in the next world. Lata also requested Mata Sundri to forgive her mistakes, if any, committed by her during the service. .

Mata Gujri

Mata Gujri was the first Sikh Martyr lady in the Sikh history. She is also distinguished by being the wife of a martyr (Guru Tegh Bahaar), mother of a martyr (Guru Gobind Singh), grandmother of four martyr Sahibzadas (Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh, and Fateh Singh), sister of a martyr (Kirpal Chand) and aunt of five martyr sons of Bibi Viro, sister of Guru Tegh Bahadar.

Mata Gujri was born to Bhai Lal Chand and Bibi Bishan Kaur, a pious couple, at Kartarpur, near Jullundur in Punjab. Tyag Mal (Great Sacrificer) visited Kartarpur with the marriage party of his elder brother, Suraj Mal. Gujri's parents were attracted to Tyag Mal and engaged their daughter to him. Her marriage took place at Kartarpur in 1633 as child marriage was the custom in those days.

She won the appreciation of every member of the Tyag Mal's family after marriage. A historian has written, "Like Bridegroom, like bride." People said "Gujri is by destiny made worthy of Tyag Mal in every way." She was a noble soul, beautiful, cultured, sweet tongued, humble, ever happy, tender hearted , devoted wife and daughter-in-law. It was at Kartarpur in 1635 that she herself saw her husband fighting bravely against the Mughal forces that had attacked Guru Hargobind who was so much pleased with the Tyag Mal's bravery that he conferred on him the title of Tegh Bahadur (Lord of the Sword). By which name he came to be known in history afterwards.

From Kartarpur Guru Hargobind moved to Kiratpur near Anandpur. After the death of Guru Hargobind in 1644, Tegh Bahadur with his mother and wife shifted from Kiratpur to village, Bakala near Amritsar where the family stayed for twenty-one years. The family owned some land there and lived a comfortable life on its income. The family had a cell dug into the floor to avoid oppressive heat of the summer. Tegh Bahadur meditated in the cell (Bhaura) in solitude when free . Mata Gujri performed the humble duty of a devoted housewife and served her husband and mother-in-law.

In 1664 when Guru Tegh Bahadur was installed the ninth Guru, he along with his mother, wife and some followers went to Hari Mandar at Amritsar to pay his respect and from there he went to Kiratpur. In 1665 Guru Tegh Bahadur purchased a large tract of land and founded a new town, Chakk Nanki, named after his mother. Now it is called Anandpur Sahib (Abode of bliss). The family left for east India to spread Sikhism and avoid intrigues of selfish and frustrated relatives.

When the party reached Gaya, a famous city, Ram Singh, a Rajput prince, requested Guru Tegh Bahadur to accompany and help him negotiating a settlement with the king of Assam, a state in the East, as Ram Singh was assigned this job by Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor. The guru agreed, left the family at Patna, Bihar state, in the care of his brother-in-law, Kirpal Chand and his devotees, and himself accompanied Ram Singh. On his way to Assam Guru Tegh Bahadur wrote letters to his followers at Patna to take special care of Mata Gujri and the family. It shows that Mata Gujri was dear to her husband. In 1666 Mata Gujri gave birth to Gobind Rai, Guru Gobind Singh of later days, at Patna and the happy news was conveyed to Guru Tegh Bahadur when he was on tour. Gobind Rai was born after thirty three years of Mata Gujri's marriage, so everybody was overjoyed. Now Mata Gujri was busy caring for the child Gobind Rai .She distributed

alms among the poor and thanked God for fulfilling her long cherished desire. Guru Tegh Bahadur returned to Patna in 1670 and after a few days stay at Patna, he returned to the Punjab leaving the family at Patna as his son Gobind Rai was still young and the conditions in Punjab were unsettled. In due course of time, the family with Bhai Kirpal Chand left Patna and on the way stayed for a few days at Lakhnaur near Ambala with the brother of Mata Gujri in 1671. A well at Lakhnaur called, Mata Gujri Da Khuh, still commemorates her visit. The whole family reached Chakk Nanki in 1671 and was received by the people with open arms.

A deputation of the Pandits of Kashmir complained to Guru Tegh Bahadur against the policy of their forced conversion to Islam adopted by the Governor of Kashmir as desired by Aurangzeb in 1675. At that time 8½ years old Gobind Rai appeared there and asked the cause of the sadness of the visitors. The guru replied that the nation needed a holy man to sacrifice his life to save these Pandits from forcible conversion. Gobind Rai exclaimed, "Revered father, there cannot be a holier person than you." The guru was struck by these remarks of his child. He told the Pandits that they should tell the governor that if Guru Tegh Bahadur was converted first, they would follow.

The Guru nominated Gobind Rai as a successor as he knew that his end was near. In July, 1675 Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested for supporting the Pandits. He along with three companions was taken to Delhi for the supreme sacrifice. Mata Gujri showed great courage at the time of parting. During his absence, she slept on the floor, took food once a day, and prayed. Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed and his companions were tortured to death in Delhi in November 1675 as they refused to give up their faith. She bore the ultimate trial with fortitude.

A Sikh named Jaita picked up the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur secretly at midnight and brought it to Guru Gobind Rai at Chakk Nanki. Mata Gujri kept calm treating it as the will of God. Now she took the responsibility of managing the affairs as Gobind Rai was very young. She brought him up like a prince, arranged for his education, and military training. Thus she prepared him for the great mission ahead. From 1675-1684 the whole family stayed at Chakk Nanki. Her letters written to Masands (Preachers who preached in their respective areas and collected offerings for the Guru.) during this period show that she was very strict with the dishonest Masands. Her wording of the letters shows that she was kind hearted but determined to set things right.

She celebrated the marriage of Gobind Rai in 1677 with Jito, whom she named Sundri with great enthusiasm. In 1699 when Gobind Rai decided to create a nation of Saint Soldiers and demanded five Sikhs who could offer their heads to him. This was more than many could endure. Some of them went to complain to Mata Gujri. She consoled them and remarked that her son could not kill his Sikhs. At that time, she was grandmother and encouraged her grandson to be baptized. When Guru Gobind Singh abolished the institution of Masands and punished the notorious ones, some of them approached Mata Gujri to interfere. She refused as she knew the nature of corrupt Masands.

In December 1704 Guru Gobind Singh had to vacate the fort at Anandpur due to the prolonged siege by the Mughal troops. Mata Gujri with her younger grandsons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, ages 8 and 5 respectively, was separated from other members of the family while crossing the rivulet Sirsa which was in flood. The three of them were led by their cook, Gangu, to his village, Saher, near Ropar. At night, he stole

their bag containing money. When it was pointed out to him, he showed ignorance and protested for being blamed. He informed the village headman. Mata Gujri and her grandsons were arrested, and were taken to the governor of Sirhind who confined them to the fort known as Thanda Burj, the cold tower. It was a summer resort for officers but most uncomfortable for eighty years old lady and two children without any warm clothes in the month of December. Mata Gujri foresaw what was going to happen to them. She advised her grandsons not to give up their faith under any circumstances. She told them how their grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur had sacrificed his life and preferred death to conversion. She also related to them the sacrifice of Guru Arjan Dev and prepared them to face the governor boldly and not to bow before him.

Governor Wazir Khan was the bitterest foe of the Guru. He was biting his lips in rage for his failure to capture the Guru. He was determined to exercise his power on little children. The children were summoned to the court. They refused to bow before the governor and uttered "Waheguru ji ki Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh." He was annoyed and threatened to torture them if they did not embrace Islam. Both of them refused to give up their faith. They were given twentyfour hours to think and promised many gifts and comfortable lives if they agreed. They were warned that they would be bricked alive if they refused. When they told Mata Gujri all, she kissed them and advised them to remain steadfast in their faith. Next day the governor made the tempting offers again but they rejected all of them. They wer ordered to be bricked alive. The chief of Malerkotla state, Sher Muhammad Khan, who was present there pleaded for them, but of no avail. \

When they were being bricked alive, in anger they pushed down the temporary structure built in mud and bricks. Therefore they were beheaded on December 27, 1704. When Mata Gujri was told about the martyrdom of her grandsons, she thanked God for giving them a dignified death. She closed her eyes and breathed her last meditating. She kept the tradition of Sikhism and gave her body singing Gurbani without any complaint. Thus she attained martyrdom on the same day as her grandsons. These days there stands a Gurdwara Fateh Garh Sahib.

Todar Mal, a rich business man, cremated the three dead bodies by purchasing the land at a huge price. Gurdwara, Joti Sarup, was erected later on at that place where the Sahibzadas were beheaded. Two tombs in white marble for the Sahibzadas were built within the four walls while the one dedicated to Mata Gujri is on the ground floor. It shows the grandmother is still watching her grandsons. At Fateh Garh Sahib near Sirhind, there is a shrine called Gurdwara Mata Gujri (Thanda Burj). Here she spent the last three days of her life. Every year, devotees from far and near come to pay homage to her memory in the last week of December.

The life story of this unforgettable lady, Mata Gujri, is a lighthouse for the generations. Her name is uttered with respect as she preferred faith to a comfortable life. Due to her teaching and upbringing, her young grandsons set an example for others. We Sikhs owe our existence to her. She continued and emphasized the institution of martyrdom in Sikhism.

Bibi Harnam Kaur

The Sikh women always have been and will be the backbone of their community. Their selflessness lies second to none in the world. The life story of Bibi Harnam Kaur, a selfless pioneer in the field of female education, is one shining example.

She was born to Bhai Bhawan Das and Bibi Ram Dei in a village in the Ferozepur district of the Punjab state. Her original name was Jiuni. Her father was a religious minded person who became the head of a seminary after the death of his religious leader, Sadhu Ram Das. She was mature in childhood and by the age of six, she had read many religious books like Punj Granthi. She studied Punjabi from a priest in a Gurdwara.

Bhai Takhat Singh, a devoted selfless worker in the field of education, had started a Gurmukhi School for boys under the Singh Sabha (Sikh Society). In Ferozpur city in 1882. He offered to open a school exclusively for girls. The Singh Sabha liked the idea, but was hesitant to let it be run only by a bachelor. To overcome this difficulty, Jiuni's parents were approached to allow their daughter to help Takhat Singh for running the girl School. They agreed and the school was started in 1892. Bhai Takhat Singh was the manager and the Bibi was the only teacher. Neither of them was paid more than eight rupees per month. She was engaged to Bhai Takhat Singh in 1893 and married the next year. She was baptized in 1901 and named Harnam Kaur. The couple worked wholeheartedly, but due to intolerable and undue interference of the management community which was suffering from internal dissensions, they quit service in 1900, and continued to teach privately.

Now the couple wanted to start a Chief Sikh Girls school (The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala), but financial problems surrounded them. They did not lose heart, sold their ornaments and unnecessary articles, and started the school with determination and faith in God in 1901. It was a name- sake of a school run by a couple in a thatched dripping house with only 3 students on its rolls. The following year teaching of English was also started. Bibi Harnam Kaur persuaded her husband to open a boarding house for girls. They had to take loan to purchase land to build the boarding house which started in 1904. This facility was rarely available in those days.

Parents from far and wide got their daughters admitted in the school. The school did not charge any tuition fee. It also did not receive any grant from the state as many conditions were attached with the financial help. Girls belonging to poor families and widows were given free boarding and lodging. It was run on donations collected from well to do Sikh families. The school was treated as important as the Khalsa College, Amritsar which also started up to 8th grade at the same time.

Bibi Harnam Kaur worked as superintendent of the boarding house and along with her husband lived there. The boarding house was run on family lines and she treated the boarders like sisters and served them like mothers. It is said she washed the feet of girls with warm water when needed. She also gave head baths to the young girls and washed their clothes also. Boarders did not want to go to their homes even during vacation.

According to Bibi Harnam Kaur, founder of the school, the aim of the school was that an educated girl should prove of the greatest use to her house, she should be religious and chaste, devoted to the service of her husband and children, a perfect mother and a virtuous wife. Simplicity is a virtue she should love. She should be a useful member of

the society. Religious education and singing of sacred hymns with the help of musical instruments was a daily feature of the school. Needle work and embroidery were also included in the school syllabus. In 1909 this school stood first in the all India exhibition of embroidery held at Lahore.

Due to the devotion and sincere efforts of the couple, the school progressed by leaps and bounds. The earliest authentic report about the progress of the school was written by the following: two well-known personalities of the state. In 1915 the Lt. Governor of Punjab visited the school and remarked "I'm happy to note that the school has also a department for training the lady teachers. I congratulate the founders of this institution and the Sikh community on the wonderful and unique success of the institution." In the same year, S. Sardul Singh Caveesher, a prominent Sikh leader, visited the school and wrote "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 him, the strength of the school at that time was 312 and 210 of them were boarders. The school was successfully preparing the students for High and Proficiency in Punjabi classes of the Punjab University. There was a competent staff of 45 persons belonging to both the sexes. The property of the institution was worth about two hundred thousand rupees. The school started publishing a monthly magazine, Punjabi Bahen (Sister) to propagate the female education. The school had a good library which was started as early as 1901 in memory of Bhai Dita Singh. Bibi Harnam Kaur had also started, Istri Satsang, a women's religious society, which held meetings every Wednesday.

It was really a wonderful development if we keep in view the period, about 100 years ago, when people did not like to send girls outside their homes. In those days education for girls was mostly carried out at home and it was described as domestic education. At some places priests in Gurdwaras taught only to read and write in Gurmukhi. Mostly girls were assigned the job of making dung cakes, cooking, spinning, cleaning utensils, plastering walls, taking food to the fields and picking cotton pods. Early marriage was prevalent.

This was all possible due to the untiring efforts of Bibi Harnam Kaur whose only ambition in life was to serve the people to the best of her ability. Motto of the couple was:-

The food should not fall short

The guest should not turn back.

The wealth should not amass.

The business should not slack.

She was an ordinary woman of middle height and very simply dressed. The only sign of superiority lay in her firm gait, and in her ambition to raise the status of women. Her main stay was her faith in God and her sole aim was to work honestly for female education, and she enjoyed this noble work. She was dedicated to the Goddess of education. She was all humility, courtesy, painstaking, preserving, and selfless. She possessed a deep insight in the character of girls. Her face was expressive of energy and determination. She was a personification of motherly love and service, and a model of simplicity. A true incident from her life as given below will prove it.

Some village folk entrusted to her a baby girl. She had at that time a child of her own on the breast. On the arrival of the starved baby, the kind Bibi brought it up

on her own milk and trusted her own baby to the milk from the market. S. Sardul Singh Caveeshar met this girl who stood weeping before the photo of the Bibi. She(the girl) told him her life story.

Bibi Harnam Kaur passed away in the prime of her life in 1907. Her solid and unprecedented work of far reaching consequences was continued by her life partner and co-founder of the institution Bhai Takht Singh who remarried Bibi Agya Kaur . She was also devoted to the cause of female education. Bhai Takhat Singh on whom the community conferred the title of 'Living Martyr' also left this world in 1937, but the institution is still one of the best private schools in the state. His daughter Mrs. G. Parmpal Singh, a student of this school, headed the Punjab Education Department and retired about thirty year ago.

Although Bibi Harnam Kaur did not live her full life. she left a permanent monument in the shape of Chief Sikh Girls School, Ferozepur City, due to which she will be remembered for ever. She helped to raise the status of women and tried to emancipate them from the old shackles and prejudices. She really tried to make our homes a heaven. She and her husband deserve to be called the architect of our community. They proved how devoted persons can work wonders with meager resources and unfavorable circumstances. It is due to her efforts that the Sikhs are ranking high among the Indian communities as far as the percentage among them of the educated women is concerned.

Bibi Harsharn Kaur

Bibi Harsharn Kaur was a brave Sikh woman who gave her life to fulfill her obligation. She faced odds and did not allow dangers to stand in her way. She is well known for responding to the call of her duty ignoring her safety. Bhai Vir Singh in his book *Kalghidhar Chamatkar Part V* named her Sharan Kaur..

Guru Gobind Singh with his two elder sons, five beloved ones and thirty-five other Sikhs, forty-three souls in all reached Chamkaur, a village sixteen kilometers from the river Sirsa, which they crossed on 21st December 1704. Realizing that the enemy was in front and in the rear, they occupied a mud-built double-storied house there. The next morning they were besieged by thousands of Mogul soldiers. Two under aged princes, Ajit Singh, and Jujhar Singh (still in their teens), and thirty-five of the remaining Sikhs laid down their lives fighting bravely at the altar of faith and freedom before the night fall when the fight ended. The Guru himself took part in the battle, and killed, and wounded many.

Now the Guru was left with only five Sikhs who told the Guru that at that moment they were the Guru and he was the Khalsa. They ordered him to escape in the interest of the community. Three would accompany him and the remaining two would stay behind to continue the fight. Pressed by the repeated humble requests of the five Sikhs, the Guru was obliged to leave the place under the cover of darkness at midnight. Three Sikhs also left one by one. It was decided that they would meet in the garden near Machhiwara. Tired Moghul soldiers were also resting in darkness in the surrounding area.

After leaving Chamkaur, the Guru reached a village where Harsharn Kaur, a baptized Sikh lady, lived. She recognized the Guru, bowed before him and asked about the princes and the other Sikhs. She had been a nursing sister to the princes. The Guru told her about their martyrdom. Hearing this, she made up her mind to cremate the dead bodies of the princes and other Sikhs. She realized that it was her moral duty to give these martyrs a decent cremation even if it cost her life.

She disguised herself as a Muslim woman, armed herself and secretly started for the battle scene. On reaching there, she saw that the Moghul soldiers were enjoying a sound sleep in their tents as they had been burying their dead soldiers throughout the day and were tired. She gathered all the dead bodies of the Sikh martyrs at one place. She collected sufficient dry wood and bushes, and piled them high. She placed all the dead bodies on the pile, prayed with tears in her eyes, and set them on fire. Flames of fire woke the sleeping soldiers. They ran to the scene and were disappointed to find that there was no dead body left. Now they could not show the identities of their victims and thus earn prizes and honors from their superiors.

In the light of the fire, they were surprised to find a woman. They asked her who she was and from whence she came. She did not speak, as she did not want to tell a lie. She stood without any sign of fear. They threatened her, but nothing could make her speak. When they saw that she had a sword in her hand, they became furious and one of them fired at her and injured her seriously. Now two soldiers lifted her and threw her body along with her sword in the fire. Thus she, too, obtained martyrdom on 23rd December 1704. Her soul met her martyred brothers. Her sacrifice is narrated many times.

Mata Khivi

Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad Dev, is the only lady whose name has been mentioned in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. She has been highly praised in one of the hymns composed by Balwand and entered in Guru Granth Sahib at page 967. It goes like this:

buluvu(n)dd kheevee naek jun jis buh^uthee shhaao puthraalee ||
lu(n)gar dhoulath vu(n)dde^eai rus a(n)mrith kheer ghiaalee || (Copied from www.sikhitothemax.com Here 'th' stands for s and 'dh' stands for d.)

Balwand says that Khivi, the Guru's wife, is a noble woman, who gives soothing, leafy shade to all.

She distributes the bounty of the Guru's Langar; the kheer – the rice pudding and ghee, is like sweet ambrosia.

Mata Khivi, daughter of Bhai Devi Chand, a shopkeeper in village Sanghar, in district Amritsar was born in 1506. She inherited the finest attributes of generosity and congenial spirit from her father. She was married in 1519 to Bhai Lehna who became Guru Angad Dev afterwards. She was a sweet tempered lady who stood with Lehna in weal and woe. After listening to one of the hymns of Guru Nanak, Lehna decided to see Guru Nanak. Bhai Lehna left his followers when he was taking them to the mountains for idol worship and stayed with Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. People taunted Mata Khivi and remarked that her husband had deserted her and had become a hermit. She kept her cool and said, "I shall be happy to live as my husband wishes me to live."

When Bhai Lehna was sent back by Guru Nanak to look after his family at village Khadur, Bhai Lehna stayed with his family for a short period and again wanted to go back to Guru Nanak. Mata Khivi requested him to stay with the family and promised that she would not disturb his meditation. He did not agree and she bade him farewell with a smile. She single handedly looked after her little children for seven years (1532-1539) when Lehna was with Guru Nanak. She is known as a very devoted wife in the Sikh history. She embraced the new faith wholeheartedly. She never complained nor did anything to deter her husband from his objectives.

She was a kind, humble, but strict mother. She created love for the Guru's hymns in her daughter, Bibi Amro, who memorized many hymns of Guru Nanak. After her marriage, Bibi Amro sweetly sung one of the hymns, which persuaded Amardas to seek the blessings of Guru Angad who was nominated by Guru Nanak, the composer of the hymns. Now he gave up running after gods and goddesses at riverbanks. So the credit for turning Amardas to Sikhism also goes to Mata Khivi who with her sweet tongue attracted many to Guru Nanak's teachings. Once her sons, Datu and Dasu, chased and teased Amardas before he was nominated as the third master. She took both of them to Amardas and said, "I know the fault of my sons is very serious but be kind to forgive them."

In 1539, Bhai Lehna became Guru Angad Dev and started preaching Sikhism by meditating Naam. Now the whole family lived together at Khadur. As the above mentioned hymn shows, Mata Khivi successfully continued the responsibility of community kitchen started by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. Balwand has highly praised her sweet nature and management of Langar, in fact, service in the Langar was her life's mission. It was served with equal respect without the distinction of cast, creed or color. Khadur was situated at the riverbank and so many travelers took food from the kitchen

before or after crossing the river. 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 Mata Khivi. While Guru Angad spread Sikhism in congregations (Sangat), she was doing the same in community kitchen where sweet dishes were also served to everyone. Its expenses were met out of the offerings made by the Sikhs. Guru Angad Dev did not live on the offerings of the Sikhs. He earned his living by twisting coarse grass called Munj into strings used for making a cot. Thus she took the double responsibility of her household and the community kitchen with a smile.

When Guru Angad Dev decided to select Amardas as the third Guru, Mata Khiwi accepted the decision willingly and did not raise the question of the right of her sons. When Guru Angad said, "I know you approve of my decision in this selection, but think of your sons as well." She said, "They are proud of being Guru's sons, be kind to them, and show them the right path." This shows her obedience to her husband's decision and her impartiality. Datu, the elder son, did not yield. She admonished him and said, "The decision of your father is based on merit and there is no room for any favoritism or partiality. Your father also got Guruship on the basis of merit. This is the tradition in Sikhism." She never supported the arrogant Datu and bowed before the decision of her husband. She created a loving atmosphere for all whom she came in contact with. She helped her husband in establishing the infant Sikh community.

She lived for thirty years after her husband's death. During these years also she continued to serve the community. She had the distinction of meeting the five Gurus. She breathed her last at Khadur in 1582 and the fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev, himself attended her cremation. In brief, she was a devoted, noble, religious and very wise lady of sweet tongue and temper. She will always be remembered for making the tradition of community kitchen everlasting. Every Sikh should be proud of her and acknowledge her important contribution.

Mata Kishan Kaur Kaonke.

Like Sikh men, Sikh women are equally good saint- soldiers. Their unparalleled sacrifices are remembered by Sikhs in their daily prayers. Short biography of Mata Kishan Kaur will reveal that Sikh ladies are also good social workers and they can face all kinds of critical and risky situations. In spite of their family and personal limitations, they can accomplish a lot in the fruitful service of the community.

Mata Kishan Kaur was a brave Sikh woman of the last century whose life was devoted to the service of the community. Kaonke is the name of the village in Ludhiana district where her husband lived and where she also spent most of her life. So, Kaonke is added after her name. She was born in 1856 to Sardar Suba Singh and Mai Sobhan of village Lohgar, Ludhiana District. She learnt Gurmukhi Script, Gurbani and Sikh history from the Sikh priest of her local Gurudwara. She was a religious minded girl, even in her childhood. When she grew up, she was married to Sardar Harnan Singh of village Kaonke. He joined the army as a soldier and died in service in 1902. She had two sons and one daughter, but as a luck would have it, all the three died before their father's death. Thus, she was left an issueless widow. Rather than feeling lonely and bearing the curses of being a widow, she spent the rest of her life in the service of her community.

In 1903, she went to Nanded in the south of India and stayed there for some time at Gurudwara Sach Khand built in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh. She was baptized there and started tying a turban. She devoted herself to preach Sikhism and practice the equality of men and women and the so-called low castes and high castes.

When she returned from Nanded(Hazoor Sahib), she found that her husband's brother had illegally taken possession of the land that belonged to her. When her oral requests and social pressure of the villagers failed to make her brother-in law see reason, she alone went to her field and asked her brother-in law to leave the field. Seeing her alone, he did not leave the field and made a vulgar joke. She was a brave and courageous lady. She did not hesitate and slapped him hard on his face. He ran away as he was guilty of misbehavior and saved himself from another slap by that upright woman. She took over possession of her land. This incident raised her prestige in the village.

When Sikhs started their movement to take control of their Gurudwaras from the corrupt priests (Mahants), protected by the British, she joined the Sikhs as an active worker. In 1920, the priests at the Golden Temple did not accept the offering of the so-called low cost Sikhs. She was among those who protested this anti-Sikh behavior of the Mahants. Observing the mood of the protesting Sikhs, the Mahant and his supporters fled away from the Gurudwara and the Sikhs took the control.

In 1922, Sikhs started a non-violent movement against the Mahant to take possession of Guru ka Bagh(Park) near Amritsar. Bands of non-violent unarmed Sikhs who proceeded towards the park were beaten and even run down by the mounted policeman favoring the Mahant. They even broke the bones of Sikhs under the hooves of their horses. Mata Kishan Kaur and her party took in their hands, service of the injured Sikhs. They took them to the hospitals and nursing homes. She administered first aid to

them and took care of them. She even hit a policeman in the face as he taunted her when she was looking after the injured Sikhs. The guilty policeman slipped and perhaps he did not mention to anybody.

Non-violent unarmed Sikhs continued their protest and bore the atrocities. Hearing of this, Father C. F. Andrews, a Christian missionary came to Guru Ka Bagh to verify the facts. After seeing the inhuman behavior of the British officers and tortures committed by them on the innocent Sikhs, he exclaimed, "I see hundreds of Christs being crucified by the Christians themselves." This statement forced the state government to yield and permitted the Sikhs to take control of the Guru Ka Bagh.

In 1922, the Sikhs protested against the forced abdication of the ruler of the Nabha State, now a part of the Punjab. Sikhs of the state held a meeting in the Gurudwara Gang Sar, at Jaito, a city in the Nabha State, to protest against this forced abdication and started an Akhand Path(non-stop recital of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for 48 hours). The state and British forces interrupted the Akhand Path and imprisoned the Sikhs present there. Mata Kaonke was a member of the volunteer force that collected the ration for the besieged Sikhs and served them.

A band of 500 Sikhs was sent from Akal Takhat(Immortal Throne) in Amrisar to Jaito to recommence the Akand Path at the Gurudwara. Every member of the band took pledge to remain non-violent and bear the atrocities with a smile. The first band was to reach the Gurudwara and recommence the Akhand Path on February 21, 1924. Everybody new that the band would be handled brutally by the state police Mata Kaonke dressed herself as a Jain woman and moved into the police camp and the Gurudwara. She collected intelligence about the police plans and preparations. She informed the band of martyrs. On the basis of her information, the leader of the band changed his course and proceeded towards Gurudwara Tibbi Sahib instead of going to Gurudwara Gang Sar. State police also reached there and barred entry even to that Gurudwara.

The police opened fire on the band, killing some and injuring many. Mata Kishan Kaur, with her associates, attended to the wounded. The police secretly disposed of the dead bodies and removed some of the injured to some secret place. It did not give correct information about the dead or injured Sikhs to the people. Mata Kishan Kaur who had seen all this made the facts public. Her details embarrassed the government. The secret police traced her and charged her with espionage. She, along with her associates was prosecuted and sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment in May 1924. In 1925, the government yielded and a Sikh body S.G.P.C(Shromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee) took over the control of the Gurudwara from the Mahant.

When Mata Kaonke was released in June 1928, she went straight to Akal Takhit to thank God for giving her strength to serve her community. She was accorded a warm welcome at Amritsar. The role of honor was bestowed on her from the Akhal Takhit. There, she was given the title of Mata. Every Sikh praised her courage and sacrifice. She built a Gurudwara at her village and spent the rest of her life there preaching Sikhism. She died at the age of 96 in 1952.

Bebe Nanki

In the Punjabi language, out of respect, elder sister is called Bebe. Bebe Nanki was the elder sister of Guru Nanak. She has a special place in the Sikh history. She played an important role in the spread of Sikhism. She was the first disciple of Guru Nanak and so she is considered one of the prominent women in the Sikh history.

She was born in 1464, five years before Guru Nanak to Mata Tripta and Mehta Kalu who lived at Talwandi, now called Nankana Sahib in Pakistan. She was born at the house of her maternal grandfather, Ram Ji, of village Chahal, district Lahore. Her maternal grandfather and grandmother loved her a lot and named her Nankian, which means house of maternal grandparents. By and by the word Nankian was changed into Nanki.

Her uncle, Lalu Ram, was issueless. He loved her from the core of his heart and played with her. She also loved him very much. She was brought up in a lovely atmosphere in the house of her father who was a well to do revenue officer in the village. Her sharp features, round mouth, and cheerful face attracted everybody. Her mother taught her cooking and other household chores. She helped her mother in her daily household responsibilities. In fact, her mother's training made Nanki adept in the household. She had a sweet tongue and was very popular with everybody she came in contact with.

She was only five years old when her brother, Nanak, was born in 1469. He was named after her and people said Nanak of Nanki. She was overjoyed to have a baby companion and started babysitting in the absence of her mother. As Nanak grew, she played with him, took him shopping and looked after his comforts.

Right from his childhood, Nanak's keen mind would not accept all groundless rituals and superstitions. Bebe Nanki was the first who recognized that Nanak was not an ordinary child, but a man of God. She was the first follower of Guru Nanak. She stood between Nanak and her parents when they got mad with him and told them to recognize the true worth of Nanak. For her, Nanak was not only her brother (Veer) but also her Guru (Peer). When Nanak went to the river to take bath and did not return for two days, people thought he was drowned in the river, but she said that Nanak had taken birth to save the people and ferry them across this world, he cannot be drowned at all.

She was married at the age of eleven in 1475 to Bhai Jai Ram, a revenue officer at Sultanpur under Nawab Dault Khan Lodhi. Early marriage was the custom those days. Five years after her marriage, when she started living with her husband, Nanak felt her separation so much. He did not take interest in worldly affairs and remained busy in meditation. Bebe Nanki was also longing for the company of her brother, Nanak. She prevailed upon her husband to find some job for Nanak at Sultanpur so that she can enjoy his company also. Consequently, Bhai Jai Ram got Nanak employed as storekeeper under the Nawab of Sultanpur in 1485. Thus she played the role of an elder sister to settle in life her younger brother.

Now Bebe Nanki and her husband planned to get Nanak married so that he may have his independent life. They were successful for finding a suitable match, Mata

Sulakhni, for Nanak and with the consent of all concerned, the marriage was celebrated in 1487. The marriage party left Sultanpur for Batala, Distt Gurdaspur and came back to Sultanpur. After marriage, Nanak started living separately at Sultanpur. He was provided a big house by his sister. It shows how Bebe Nanki willingly performed the part of an elder sister by helping her younger brother. This tradition of elder brother or sister helping the younger one is part of our culture even today. It also shows the sisterly love that Bebe Nanki cherished for her brother. Guru Nanak also has expressed this type of love in one of his hymns given on page 935 of Guru Granth Sahib wherein he says when brother (soul) departs, sister (body) burns in separation.

Bebe Nanki had a very good and cordial relation with her sister in law, Mata Sulakhni, and helped her in bringing up her sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Chand. She rather adopted Sri Chand as she herself was issueless. She even looked after her necessities and let her not feel lonely. Once, Sulakhni's mother interfered and complained to Bebe Nanki that her brother was not keeping his wife happy. Bebe Nanki admonished her and convinced her that there was nothing to grumble. Thus, Nanki was also a great help in the family life of Nanak.

When Nanak got his accounts checked to the satisfaction of everybody, he planned to start on his missionary work to spread his message in the world, she assured him that she will look after his family in his absence and did not discourage him. In fact, the idea of depicting devotion to God in musical notes was due to the inspiration given by Bebe Nanki. She knew the musical talent of her brother and persuaded Mardana to accompany her brother. She also bought him a Rebab (musical instrument with strings) for him. This tradition of recitation of hymns with the help of musical instruments is still prevalent in Sikhism and has played a big role in the preaching of Sikhism. We cannot forget her role in the spread of Sikhism. She removed all obstacles which hindered Guru Nanak from preaching his mission.

When Guru Nanak spent many years in preaching his religion all over the world, Bebe Nanki took care of his parents, wife, and her nephews during Guru Nanak's absence. This is a good example of our culture how brothers and sisters prove main pillars of help to each other. These values are a part of our culture and credit goes to Bebe Nanki.

At the end of his second tour when Guru Nanak returned to Sultanpur, Bebe Nanki was not feeling well and asked him to stay for a few days. She breathed her last in a few days and Guru Nanak performed her funeral rights. She lived at Sultanpur for about forty years. A tree planted by her provides shade to the people still. There is also a well, which she had constructed for the people. Really, everybody can be proud of a sister like Bebe Nanki. She was the first disciple of Guru Nanak and the first one to perceive the holiness in Guru Nanak's person. There is no doubt that the first Gursikh was none other than Bebe Nanki. Like a wise daughter, she explained the Guru's mission to her parents and sheltered Guru Nanak from their anger. She treated her brother like God and played an important role in the mission of Guru Nanak. We cannot forget her role in the spread of Sikhism. Contribution of Bebe Nanki in the spread of Sikhism is really unique and praiseworthy. Bebe Nanki's status in Sikhism can be safely compared to that of Mother Merriam in Christianity and to that of Bibi Khudejai in Islam.

Bibi Nirbhai Kaur

Nirbhai Kaur was a fearless and baptized girl of 22. Her father, Jangbahadar Singh, head of the army of Sodhi Wadbhag Singh, had taught her horse riding and use of arms. She treated herself as a brave soldier and had forgotten that she was a girl and not a boy. She was armed whenever she left the house. She was in the prime of her youth, about 6 feet tall having a well built body and a bright face. She was religious minded and never missed her daily prayers. She also helped her mother in household affairs. She was the only daughter of her parents who loved her a lot. In fact, she had the nature of a soldier.

Her girl friends were afraid of Afghan soldiers, but she always told them that they could not live like cowards and they would have to face these tyrant invaders. Once she was returning late at night from the house of a girl friend where she had gone to participate in a singing party held before a marriage. On her way back, she met two drunken Pathan soldiers who ordered her to stop. Before stopping, she drew her sword and cut the right arm of the soldier who stepped towards her. Seeing this, the second soldier ran away. Her sword was still red when she reached home. Her father praised her for her bravery and presence of mind.

Sodhi Wadbhag Singh was the chief of the territory of Kartarpur, near Jullundhar and proprietor of land worth a lot of revenue. He was also a respectable religious guide of the Sikhs and in charge of Gurdwara Tham Sahib, built by the Fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev. Sodhi was informed by Janhan Khan, commander-in-chief at Lahore that an Afghan soldier, who was coming from Sirhind to Lahore, was killed by somebody in the territory of Kartarpur. He compelled Sodhi to produce the culprit at once. Sodhi could not find the culprit. Jahan Khan ordered the governor of Jullunder to finish Sodhi Wadbhag Singh and loot Kartarpur after killing all those who refused to embrace Islam. In fact, Jahan Khan was under instruction from Abdli to crush the Sikhs as they always harassed him when he returned after looting Delhi.

The governor of Jullunder, with a large force, attacked Kartarpur at midnight and burnt most of the city. Sodhi, who had a small army, was caught and shut in a room. Even the 250 years-old sacred Gurdwara, Tham Sahib, was not spared and burnt to ashes. In the meantime, some soldiers brought four young girls and presented to the commander as a gift. Their clothes were torn. It seemed that they had fought with the soldiers to save themselves.

The soldiers reported that one of the girls, whose hands were red with blood, had killed two soldiers and was caught after a great struggle. The lustful and sexual commander praised the beauty of the girls. He said to one of them who seemed very angry, "What is your name?" He also tried to touch her cheeks. She thundered and asked him to keep away his hand. She told him that her name was Death of the Enemy, who was standing in front of her. A soldier admonished her to behave if she wanted to live. She fearlessly replied that the Death did not want to live. The governor was surprised to hear that these Sikh girls called themselves daughters of Death and they could use arms and kill a person to save himself or herself. He ordered that all the four be taken to his camp as he would like to enjoy their company at night. The girls were helpless as they had been unarmed.

The governor started towards the city to inspect the destruction, massacre of the citizens, and the property looted. There were a number of dead bodies. Some persons were being thrown in the fire. At the same time, a soldier came on a horse and informed the governor that Sodhi, along with his head of the army, had escaped on horseback. The governor and some soldiers chased Sodhi, but they failed to catch him. When they were coming back, they saw one young girl, taking another young girl on her horse, leaving the camp. Her horse was running so fast that the soldiers sent to chase her failed to trace her.

The governor saw that one of the soldiers deputed to watch the girls was lying dead at the door of the camp and the other was bleeding profusely. The bleeding soldier said to the commander, "One of the girls who told that her name was Death jumped over the soldier, snatched his sword, and killed him in the twinkling of an eye. When I went to catch her, I was also injured. The other soldiers were away at a distance. When they came to our rescue, the girl had put another newlywed girl on one of our horses and had disappeared."

It was Nirbhai Kaur who after killing a soldier and injuring another had taken with her one of her girl friends. She with her girl friends was attending the marriage of one of them when the marriage was disrupted and the house was set on fire. She along with her girlfriends was caught and presented to the chief. On her way, Nirbhai Kaur met her fiancé, Harnam Singh, a young baptized Sikh of twenty-four. She told him the whole story and asked for help to rescue her remaining two friends from the chief. He told her that her father had left with Sodhi Wadbhag Singh and her mother was burnt alive when her house was set on fire by the invading soldiers. She was red with rage on hearing all this and made up her mind to take revenge for all the atrocities.

At midnight, she and her fiancé turned their horses towards the camp. Reaching there, they found that all the watchmen were enjoying a sound sleep. They had eaten to their fill and drank a lot to celebrate their victory. She and her fiancé left the horses and her girlfriend at a distance from the camp and walked towards the camp. As they reached near the camp, they heard the cries of a girl. It meant that she was being forced by the chief to sleep with him. Harnam Singh tore the cotton wall of the camp with his sword and they entered the camp from the back. They saw that the chief was throwing the girl on his bed and she was struggling to save herself. At once, Nirbhai Kaur cut the arm of the chief with her sword and, before he could come to his senses, she cut his head and separated it from his body. Another girl was lying unconscious. Harnam Singh carried her and Nirbhai Kaur put the whole camp on fire with the help of the camp lamp. Now all the soldiers were awake and there was confusion everywhere. Fire was spreading to the other camps and everyone was trying to save himself.

Now all the five rode on horses and disappeared in the thick forest before they could be chased. They took rest for a few hours under a tree. At daybreak, they cooked whatever vegetables they could find in the fields and saved themselves from hunger. Nirbhai Kaur's girl friends wanted to accompany them, as they were afraid that their families would not accept them because they had spent some time with the chief. They started towards the hills, as they were sure that other Sikhs would be there. At Anandpur, they met Sodhi Wadbhag Singh and Jang Bahadur Singh. Here the girl friends of Nirbhai Kaur were baptized to fulfill their desire.

Adina Beg, ex-chief of Jullunder, had revolted against Jahan Khan, the present chief, and was passing his time in those hills. He told Sodhi Wadbhag Singh that he was ready

to attack Jullunder if the Sikhs agreed to help him. Sodhi Wadbhag Singh approached the Sikh chief, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who agreed to the proposal. Now a huge force of Adina Beg, with the help of the Sikh forces, attacked Jullunder. The Jullunder chief gathered a large force and ammunition, but was defeated. Jullunder was destroyed and Nirbhai Kaur's desire of taking revenge was fulfilled. It all happened in December 1757. Nirbhai Kaur was married to Harnam Singh. Her three friends were also married to young Sikh soldiers of their choice.

Bibi Rajinder Kaur

Griffin. Sir Lepel writer of the *The Rajas of the Punjab*, writes “Rani Rajinder Kaur was one of the most remarkable of her age. She possessed all the virtues which men pretend their own, courage perseverance, and sagacity, without any mixture of the weaknesses which men attribute to women.”

She is called Rani (Queen) as she was the granddaughter of Baba Ala Singh, the famous ruler of the Patiala State. She was the only child of her father Bhuma Singh, who died in 1742 when she was only four years old. She was brought up by her grandmother Rani Fatto. In 1751, she was married at the tender age of 13 to Tilok Chand, chief of Phagwara, a city near Jullundur. Her husband died in the prime of his life and she became in charge of the family estate consisting of about two hundred villages. She managed it efficiently.

In 1765, Baba Ala Singh was arrested by Ahmad Shah Durran as Baba had failed to pay his tribute regularly and Durrani wanted to collect the whole amount in one installment. The Baba was taken to Lahore. Rajinder Kaur went to her grandfather and offered to pay the amount to secure his release. But, the Baba refused to accept the offer saying it was not proper to take money from the daughters of the family. Later on, his wife managed to get him free.

In 1778, Amar Singh, the ruler of the Patiala state was defeated by Hari Singh, chief of Sailba. Rajinder Kaur could not tolerate the humiliation of Amar Singh, her first cousin, who had invited help from his relatives. She had also a grudge against Hari Singh who had eloped with a lady of her family. According to Hari Ram Gupta, a well known historian, she was a great commander. With a force of 3000 men, she marched from Phagwara to Patiala. She ravaged the country of Hari Singh and her supporters falling on her way. Hari Singh was defeated and had to pay a large tribute to Amar Singh.

Amar Singh was succeeded by his six years old son Sahib Singh in 1781. During his minority, his grandmother Rani Hukman appointed Nanum as his Prime Minister, but the situation of the state was delicate. It was a complete mess and there were intrigues and conspiracies all around. The state could have been disintegrated into small states, but was saved by able and faithful Nanum Mal. He was also severely wounded in an engagement. The ladies of the imperial household put him into prison in 1783 and got themselves busy in plundering the treasury. Sikh chiefs seized as many villages of the state as they could.

Rajinder Kaur could not tolerate the ruin of her parental state. She collected a force, hurried from Phagwara to Patiala, set free Nanum Mal and restored him to his old position in 1785. She and Nanum Mal, with the help of Dhar Rao, Maratha chief recovered the lost territory of the state and reestablished Sahib Singh's rule. The Maratha chief was given a huge amount with thanks for his help.

In 1790, another Maratha general Rana Khan advanced towards Patiala and demanded eight hundred thousand rupees as tribute. Bibi Rajinder Kaur could not tolerate this, but knew that the state could not defeat the huge Maratha army. At the head of a military guard, she along with Nanum Mal visited the Maratha camp. She induced Rana Khan to retire and promised to pay the amount after personally settling the amount

with his chief Mahadiji Sindhia who was camping at Mathura. She marched as far as Mathura where she was treated most respectfully. She settled the amount with the Sindhia and came back.

In the absence of Rajinder Kaur and Nanum Mal, other ministers and chiefs poisoned Sahib Singh's mind against them. Foolish Sahib Singh played in their hands. Nanum Mal's dismissal was followed by the fall of Rajinder Kaur due to the conspiracies of intrigues of the palace. She returned from Mathura after four months and wished to see Sahib Singh, who declined a meeting. All her privileges were withdrawn. All her previous esteem and respect were gone. This ingratitude for her most selfless service to the state broke her heart. Thus, disgraced, she became ill at Patiala and after a brief sickness died in 1791. She suffered greatly from the stupidity of Sahib Singh and left his world in despair.

Bibi Sahib Kaur

Sahib Kaur was a woman of remarkable leadership and diplomacy. She belonged to the royal family of the Patiala state ruled by a Sikh ruler. Patiala is now a part of the Punjab state and is a district headquarters. She was born to the ruler of the state, Amar Singh, and his wife Raj Kaur in 1773. She is also called Rani which means queen. She was beautiful, extraordinary intelligent, and brilliant. She could read and write Punjabi. She knew horse riding and the use of arms as she was taught these arts in her childhood. She was baptized in 1779 and became a Singhni. In those days, the custom of early marriage was prevalent so she was married to S. Jaimal Singh son of S. Haqiqat Singh of Kanehia Misal (group) in 1780 with great pomp and show. It is said that her marriage party consisted of twenty thousand members.

Her younger brother, Sahib Singh, became the ruler of the state after the death of their father in 1781 when he was only six years old. According to historians, he was coward, lazy and stupid person. During his minority the state was saved from disintegration by his grandmother, Rani Hukman and his clever prime minister, Nanu Mal. The state was in a complete mess and there were intrigues all around against both of them. After the death of Rani Hukman the state received such a terrible shock as could wreck it. Subordinate chiefs of Patiala began to declare independence. Sahib Singh dismissed Nanu Mal and took control of the state in his own hands, but failed to control the palace intrigues.

In 1791 Sahib Singh invited his sister Sahib Kaur, who was living with her husband in Gardaspur, and appointed her as his prime minister. She accepted the appointment on the condition that none would interfere in her affairs and she would be at liberty to select her assistants. As the subsequent events will prove, she was a good administrator, a brave general and an intelligent diplomat. She managed her affairs in the office as well as in the battlefield most successfully. She possessed all the manly virtues like bravery, perseverance and sagacity without any mixture of womanly weakness. She appointed S. Tara Singh as her deputy and dismissed corrupt officials. She used her iron hand, subordinated the chiefs who did not pay their tribute and collected the due taxes. She also constructed two new forts and toured the state to keep in touch with the people.

Soon she came to know that his cousin had imprisoned her husband. She hurried with a strong force to help her husband. After a sudden and forceful attack, she not only liberated her husband, but also restored to him the property under dispute and returned to Patiala.

Marathas were advancing from the west India as the Mughal kingdom at Delhi was crumbling. Nano Rao, a Maratha chief, wanted to subordinate the Patiala state and sent his agents to demand tribute. Sahib Kaur won over his agents who went back and reported that the Sikh chiefs were very powerful and he should not challenge them. He did not hesitate and planned to attack. Sahib Kaur also called a meeting of the Sikh rulers of Jind, Nabha, and Kalsian states for consultation. They were not in favor of a fight, but Sahib Kaur exhorted them and told them the consequences of subordination. They agreed to face the Marathas unitedly. Sahib Kaur sent a strong reply and warned the Marathas that if they advanced she would face them in the battlefield. She with an army of seven thousand left Patiala to face the enemy. Before starting, she addressed her chiefs and

soldiers, and said, “I have taken a pledge that I will not return without defeating the enemy. Would you tolerate a young lady to be killed while fighting and leave the battlefield in disgrace?” She stood with a naked sword and continued to prepare her chiefs and soldiers mentally. Her speech and display of heroism touched the heart and pride of her soldiers and chiefs.

The Maratha chief, at the head of twelve thousand men, met the Sikh forces under Sahib Kaur in the battlefield of Mardanpur. In the fierce battle, the Sikhs lost one-third of their army while the enemy lost half of his army. Sahib Kaur personally took part in the battle and killed Ranjit Rao, a brave Maratha chief, in a one-on-one fight. The fight continued till evening, when the soldiers retired to their camps. Sahib Kaur and her chiefs met at night and planned for the next day. They were afraid that the Maratha army would get reinforcements soon. They decided to attack them at midnight. The Marathas were taken by surprise, left the battlefield and ran back.

In 1796, at the time of the great Kumbh Fair at Hardwar, a famous pilgrim station, a dispute arose between two groups of saints – the Gosains and the Udasis. Sahib Singh, who with his followers was camping nearby, took the side of the Udasis. Sahib Kaur was away in the state. She came to know of it, rushed with reinforcements, and saved the situation.

The ruler of Nahan, a hilly state, had friendly relations with the Patiala state. The ruler could not control internal disturbances in the Nahan state so he sought the help of the Patiala state in 1796. Sahib Kaur, with a force of one thousand, rushed to Nahn, about eighty miles from Patiala, and restored peace. The ruler of Nahn presented her with a tall and strong elephant that she kept for her own use.

George Thomas was an Irish adventurer, who had carved out for himself an independent state at Hansi, now in Haryana state. He was keen to expand his territory. He attacked Bhag Singh, ruler of Jind state and laid siege to Jind. Bhag Singh asked the other Sikh rulers and chiefs for help. Sahib Singh adopted delaying tactics, but Sahib Kaur, a woman of masculine and brave spirit, put pressure on Sahib Singh. He flatly refused and forbade her to go for help. She replied that if Jind was captured, nobody could save Patiala for long. She collected troops and left Patiala without the approval of her brother. On the way, many other Sikh chiefs joined her.

Thomas opposed them with heavy artillery fire and the Sikhs had to retreat. In the beginning of 1799, Sahib Kaur collected nine thousand Sikh troops under her command and attacked Thomas’ strongholds. She cut his supply lines. Her bravery inspired others and the number of her forces increased. After a blockade of one hundred days, Thomas retired from Jind, and hurried back. The Sikh forces pursued him, but had to retreat when Thomas attacked them while they were sleeping. When they returned to Jind, they were scolded and taunted by Sahib Kaur for their cowardice. She said that she would take the field personally to show them how to fight. They felt humiliated and resolved to conquer or to perish.

The Sikhs again attacked Thomas, who offered peace terms that each party should remain in possession of its territories held before the siege of Jind. Every Sikh chief except Sahib Singh was in favor of accepting the terms. Like a wise politician, Sahib Kaur tried her best to persuade her brother to agree to the peace terms, but he, being a stubborn man, did not agree and Sahib Kaur signed the treaty on behalf of the Patiala state. This enraged Sahib Singh, who was also instigated by his wife against Sahib Kaur.

He arrested Sahib Kaur and imprisoned her at Patiala. She appealed for help to Thomas, who marched to Patiala. He had to fight Patiala forces on his way and consequently, both sides suffered heavily. When he reached near Patiala, the weak-minded Sahib Singh yielded, accepted the peace terms, and released his sister.

Sahib Singh was extremely vindictive and possessed a cruel nature. He again imprisoned Sahib Kaur in the fort of Patiala. She managed to escape and went to the fort at Sangrur. She was again caught and imprisoned. It seems she was murdered during her imprisonment in 1779, in the prime of her life. This was the tragic end of the Joan-of-Arc of the Patiala state. Her role was the noblest and the best. In character, in bravery, and in statesmanship, she occupies the first-place in Sikh history. In independent India, she would have proved the best Prime Minister. Thomas called her a man and not a woman. Bhai Kahn Singh, author of Mahan Kosh, writes that she made unique efforts to save and expand her brother's state. Mohamad Latif, a famous Muslim historian, writes that the Marathas defeat was due to the fact that Sahib Kaur herself took part in the battlefield and thus exhorted her army. There is no doubt that Sahib Singh would not have survived as the ruler of Patiala but for the help of his brave and self sacrificing sister. Her biography is a lighthouse for the coming generation.

Bibi Shamsheer Kaur

An aged Brahmin (Priest) came crying to Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia at Hansi now in the state of Haryana. The priest told him that Ali Beg, the chief of Hissar, while hunting came to his village and forcibly took his two daughters. He said that he begged and cried a lot, but none of the villagers came to his rescue. The chief also turned a deaf ear to his request and said, "How can I leave such beautiful and young girls? Get me two other beautiful and young girls and take yours." The priest, who was weeping bitterly, said, "I am losing my eyesight and I would commit suicide if I could not get back my daughters. You are the shelter of the shelterless. Kindly take pity on me." The Sardar consoled him and promised that his daughters would be returned to him if they were alive.

At nightfall, the Sardar took a party of Sikh soldiers, rode towards Hissar and surrounded the fort at Hissar within three hours. At that time, Ali Beg was drinking while some slave girls were dancing. The Sikh soldiers broke the door of the fort and challenged Ali Beg. In the ensuing battle, three Sikh soldiers died while Ali Beg was injured and many of his soldiers were killed. Ali Beg appealed for mercy and handed over not only those two girls but three others who were also abducted by him. The Sardar took pity on the queens of Ali Beg and conceded to their request not to kill Ali Beg. He returned to Hansi before dawn. He did not loot the fort, but warned Ali Beg to behave in the future.

The Sardar called the priest and said, "Take your daughters to your village and marry them after finding suitable matches. I can help you financially if you desire." The priest thanked the Sardar for saving his daughters from a devil, but expressed his fear that if he took his daughters to his village, none of his relatives would have any dealings with him as the girls have lived in the company of Muslims and taken their food. The Sardar encouraged the Brahmin and said, "Take the girls with you. I also shall try to find some suitable match for the girls and arrange their marriages." The Brahmin unwillingly agreed and left for his village.

After a week, the priest came back weeping to the Sardar. On being asked, he said, "None in the village is willing to talk to me. They want me to leave the girls to Ali Beg or he would attack the village and abduct the girls again, whenever he finds a chance." The elder daughter, Shamo, said to the Sardar, "Sardar Ji, I will never go back to the village and live among cowards. Our father has been crying since he left you. Kindly let us live here." The Sardar said to the priest, "I shall treat these girls as my daughters and marry them when I find suitable matches. They can live among the families of my soldiers and take food from the common kitchen. You may go to your village."

A new environment and society changed the life of the young girls. They adopted the dress of Sikh girls and their food habits. They served in the common kitchen, prayed with others, and started to learn using arms. Shamo was more intelligent than Ramo. She was quick to learn reading Punjabi, horse riding, and the use of arms. On their request, both the sisters were baptized. The elder one was named Shamsheer Kaur and the younger

one, Ram Kaur. The Sardar proposed two soldiers for the girls and with the consent of all concerned, they were married.

It was the period of feudalism and big landlords like Ali Beg ruled over certain territories under their control. Might was right. Sikh Sardars like Jassa Singh in the Punjab were also divided into eleven groups called Misl. Every group was headed by a Sardar and controlled certain area. Sardar Jassa Singh was the head of Ramgarhia misal, ruled over area surrounding Batala in the Punjab. He was defeated by the Sardars of Kanhiya, Shukarchakia and Ahluwalia misls and had to flee to Hansi, far away from his territory in 1778. He conquered a large area near Hansi where he saved the two girls of the priest.

In 1785, differences arose between the chiefs of Kanhiya and Shukarchakia misals. Sardar Mahan Singh of Shukarchakia misls invited Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia to the Punjab and promised him to get back his lost territory if he helped him defeat chief of the Kanhiya misl. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia grasped this golden opportunity to get back the lost territory and honor. Shamsheer Kaur and her husband insisted on accompanying him to help him against his enemies. Jassa Singh wanted them to stay back and supervise his area, but he yielded when Shamsheer Kaur insisted on going with him.

In the fierce battle at Batala, Shamsheer Kaur fought like a brave and loyal soldier, and it resulted in the victory of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. He was so pleased with the active part taken by Shamsheer Kaur that he bestowed upon her five villages near Hansi and asked her to go back with a few soldiers and look after the area so that tyrants don't bother the innocent. She thanked the Sardar for his blessings and with her husband started for Hansi. She dressed like a male soldier and was known as Shamsheer. Many did not know that Shamsheer was a female. She was a kind and popular ruler of her small kingdom and preached Sikhism. She set right many dacoits and bad characters. She never tolerated female depression and was very popular among the people of the area. The poor thought that God had sent her to save them from the tyrants.

Mohammad Ali, chief of the village Kot Ali Khan in that area, was a lustful young man who secretly planned to forcibly marry Razia, the young daughter of his servant, Haider. Razia and her parents did not like it as Mohamed Ali already had many wives. Razia and her mother left the village at midnight to save themselves from the chief. When the chief came to know of it, he took Haider to task and told him that he was getting a bad name as his daughter and wife had left the village. He ordered him to present them as he wanted to marry Razia. Haider said, "Sir, you have already many wives. We cannot spoil the life of our daughter by marrying with you and my daughter also does not like it." The chief did not listen and ordered his men to arrest him and put him in the prison. He sent his soldiers to find Razia and bring her and her mother to him. They found the ladies and brought them back to the chief.

Razia was thirsty and requested the soldiers to let her take a watermelon from the field near by. They agreed and allowed her to take a water melon. In the meantime 20 Sikh horsemen with their leader appeared on the scene and asked the soldiers about the ladies. The soldiers told a lie, but Razia told them the real story. The leader, Shamsheer Kaur, ordered the soldier to leave the ladies, go back and tell their chief to release Razia's father or the chief and his whole family will be killed. The soldiers surrendered their arms and went back to their chief. Shamsheer Kaur took Razia on her own horse, gave her

mother a separate horse and with her soldiers left for Hansi. She took both the ladies to her house. When she changed her clothes, the ladies were surprised to find that their savior was a lady.

Mohammad Ali did not release Razia's father. One night when he was busy in drinking and watching the dance of a beautiful girl, his watchmen cried that enemies had surrounded them. At once, Shamsheer and her soldiers climbed the tree near the walls of Mohamad Ali's house and raised slogans of long live Shamsheer . Mohammad Ali and his soldiers were taken aback when the Sikh soldiers with their leader jumped into the house from the tree. Those who resisted them were killed. Mohammad Ali drew his sword, but soon his sword was broken and he surrendered. He handed over the keys of the prison. Shamsheer rescued Razia's father and brought him to her headquarters. She set Mohammad Ali free when he requested for forgiveness and promised not to repeat such actions in the future.

Ali could not tolerate this insult. He held a meeting of the Muslim chiefs of the area and said "It is a matter of shame that a Sikh lady should rule over us. She has a lot of money in her fort. If you help me, we can catch her. You may take the money and leave her for me" They agreed and brought their forces to help him. They had about 3,000 mercenaries. Shamsheer and her husband left the fort and faced them in the open so that they might not be surrounded in the fort. There was a lot of bloodshed and many from both sides were killed. Ali challenged Shamsheer to come forward and fight one to one. She raised the slogan of Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal and with a stroke of her sword cut the right arm of Ali. With the second stroke ,she separated his head from his body .Her husband was also badly injured in the battle. Now the remaining Muslim soldiers took to their heels. Her husband could not recover in spite of the available treatment and breathed his last. She treated it as the will of God and did not cry.

Now she was left alone, but she did not lose heart. Next year, Marathas from the west India conquered Agra and after subduing many petty chiefs, they sent a message to Shamsheer to hand over her territory to them and leave her fort. They had an army of many thousands, but she had only one thousand soldiers. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia or any other Sikh chief could not help her as they were far away. She decided to prefer death to subordination. She with her soldiers fought bravely against the enemy. Many soldiers from both sides died fighting. It is said that her dead body had about thirty injuries. Her name is still mentioned in folklores and old persons of the area remember her with respect.

Bibi Sharan Kaur

Sharan Kaur, whose original name was Sharni, was born in a Hindu family in the northwest of the Punjab where more than ninety percent of the population was Pathan or Afghan. Her father was a petty shopkeeper. As soon as she became sixteen years old, she was married to a young man, Jagat Ram, of a nearby village. After a happy marriage, she left, along with her groom and the marriage party, to the village of her in-laws. As the bridal procession was passing through a thick forest, a party of armed goons attacked the party. They ordered them to surrender the cash, valuables, and the bride. The helpless party was unarmed and requested the dacoits to take everything, but leave them with the bride. Their request was rejected and they were forced to flee, leaving the bride in her palanquin. She cried and begged them to let her go with her groom. The dacoits dragged her out of the palanquin and presented her to their chief. He said, "Detain her for the time being. I would like to marry such a beautiful and charming young girl."

The poor groom was disappointed and depressed. He did not want to go to his village and become the laughingstock of the whole village. It was the first half of the nineteenth century and Hari Singh Nalwa was the governor of the Pathan province. He was the bravest general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who bestowed on him the title of Nalwa, as he had single-handedly killed a (Nul) lion. Before the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Pathans and Afghans from the west of Punjab had invaded and looted India for eight centuries. It goes to the credit of generals like Hari Singh Nalwa that these invasions were stopped forever. He ruled the rebel Pathans of that region so fearlessly, courageously and wisely that Pathan parents used the name of Nalwa to scare their children to keep them quiet.

An idea struck Jagat Ram and he went straight to Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa at Jamrud where he was building a fort. He complained to the Sardar that his bride was forcibly taken away by a few dacoits. When the Sardar was listening to his complaint, he observed that two strangers were standing near the door of his court and were listening attentively to everything the groom was saying. He suspected that those persons were helpers of the dacoits. He ordered loudly, "Put this coward behind bars. One who cannot protect his wife deserves no help or mercy. Persons like this fellow are a burden on society and disgrace to the community." The two suspects were very glad to listen to all this and at once left to tell everything to their leader. Hari Singh saw through their game and ordered a few Sikh horsemen to accompany the husband of the abducted woman and secretly follow the two suspects who were satisfied that the game was over.

The suspects (spies) reached their destination and told their leader about the reaction of the Sikh Sardar. They were still talking joyfully and enjoying their victory when the Sikh horsemen surrounded them and ordered them to disarm themselves. The dacoits were taken aback and outnumbered. The Sikh soldiers brought the dacoits, the booty, and the bride to Hari Singh Nalwa. When the Sardar asked the bride her name, she said, "I hate my old name. But for your help I would have committed suicide. Now I am under your 'Sharan' (protection) so I would like to be called Sharan Kaur. Her dowry, including her ornaments, was returned to her and she was asked to accompany her groom to her in-laws. The bride and the bridegroom requested the Sardar to allow them to live there like soldiers, as they did not want to live like cowards among the cowards. They wanted to live and die as brave Sikhs and work for their fellowmen.

On their insistence, they were baptized and allowed to stay there. She served in the community kitchen and her husband, who was named Jagat Singh after being baptized, was enlisted in the army. The Sardar observed the couple for a few days. One day, he said to his army officer, "Sharan Kaur seems to be brave and intelligent. I think she can become an excellent spy. Train her to become one." Her training was started immediately and in a few months she picked up the art of spying.

Once she was sent to find out the strength of the Pathan forces that were planning to attack Jamrud. She disguised herself as a Pathan girl and professed that the Sikhs had murdered her brother. She wanted to see the Pathan chief to seek help and share with him the secrets of the Sikh army. She met the Pathan chief, wept, and told him that the Sikhs had a huge army in the Jamrud fort and they had killed her brother mercilessly. The chief thanked her for the information and assured the girl to take heart that the Sikhs would be chased out of Jamrud. He also told her about the Pathan strength. She suddenly leaned forward as if she were about to faint. As the chief rose to support her, she took out her handkerchief and pressed it to his nose. As he became unconscious, she stabbed him and walked out secretly. She reached Jamrud before the Pathan soldiers could catch her. She was awarded a medal for serving the Sikh Empire with distinction.

The Jamrud area was surrounded by Pathans who were unfriendly towards the Sikhs. Once, Hari Singh Nalwa fell seriously ill at Jamrud. When the Pathans came to know that Nalwa was seriously ill and could not take part in the battle, they rebelled against his rule and surrounded the fort. To show that he was hail and hearty, the general appeared at the upper story of the fort so that people could see him. Seeing him, the rebels returned, but one of them aimed his gun at Nalwa and shot him. Unfortunately, Nalwa was hit badly and died the next day on April 30, 1837. His death was kept secret, but everyone in the fort was depressed and tense as there was no one to replace Nalwa. Sharan Kaur did not lose heart and encouraged the Sikh army. She said, "This is not the time to be scared or worried. Let us face this critical moment bravely. Drop me behind the fort by a long rope. I shall disguise myself as a Pathan woman and reaching Pashawar, I shall see that the news is conveyed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh as early as possible."

Brave Sharan Kaur reached Peshawar by walking and running the whole night through the dense forest. Quickly she took a few horsemen and rode with them to Lahore as fast as they could. She reported the whole story to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was very sad to learn the news of the death of his best general, who had strengthened the Sikh Empire. Seeing that the situation was serious, he at once left to punish the rebels. As soon as the rebels came to know that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had reached with a huge reinforcement, they surrendered and promised to behave. Sharan Kaur, with her husband, returned to Lahore with Maharaja Ranjit Singh where he bestowed honor on her. This was the most glorious moment in her life.

The shy helpless bride, Sharan Kaur, was transformed into a brave saint-soldier after her baptism. She is known as the bravest woman in the Sikh history. Her bravery saved the Sikh kingdom from being dismembered. She will always be remembered for her selfless service and excellent espionage.

Bibi Shushil Kaur

Sikhs have been fighting for saving their individual existence since long. Sikh women have not lagged behind their men in this holy battle. They have also suffered inhuman tortures at the hands of bigots like Mir Mannu. They were kept hungry and forced to grind grain by working heavy stone mills. To break their wills and high spirits, their children were thrown up in the air to fall back on sharp blades of spears in their presence. Pieces of their children's dead bodies were put up as a necklace around the necks of their mothers, but these great women bore this all without even a sigh on their lips. Writers have not done justice to them. While many writers have praised the achievements and sacrifices of Banda Singh Bahadur, only a few have mentioned the sacrifice of his wife, Bibi Shushil Kaur. Her short biography will reveal that her sacrifice was also important.

In 1708, Banda Singh Bahadur was instructed by Guru Gobind Singh to carry on the national struggle in the Punjab, guide the Khalsa and to punish the oppressors. With the blessing of the Guru, Baba Banda Bahadur left Nander, South India, for Punjab and started his job in right earnest. In 1710, he conquered a large part of the Punjab including Sirhind. The governor of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, murderer of the younger two princes (Sahibzadas). Was killed in the battle and the Mughal army was defeated. Banda organized the Sikhs and established the first Sikh state with its capital at Lohgarh, near the hill state of Nahan, now a part of Himachal state, in the beginning of 1710. He struck coin in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and issued orders under his own seal. He realized Guru Gobind Singh's dream of political sovereignty. He can safely be called the first Sikh ruler. Huge Mughal forces from Delhi and Punjab besieged the fort of Lohgarh. Banda and his men escaped to the hill states as they were not able to withstand a long siege.

He conquered many hill states. When he reached near the hill state of Chamba, its ruler, Uday Singh, did not want to fight and offered Banda to marry a princess. Banda said to the ruler, "Why do you offer a princess when I have never made any such demand from you or from any other body?" The ruler said, "It is the desire of the princess. She does not like the hill chiefs who have sided with the Mughal chiefs. Moreover, she has heard of your courageous fight against the oppressors. She is also determined to join you in your fight to achieve your mission. ." After consulting his companions, and satisfying himself about the statement of the ruler, Banda agreed and the marriage was solemnized according to the Sikh rites in the beginning of 1711.

She was baptized and named Shushil Kaur. Macauliffe, a famous writer of the Sikh history, writes, "she had large eyes, her limbs were graceful and delicate." Historians have described her as the very image of the God of love. After a few more conquests, Banda along with Shushil Kaur and some Sikhs retired to the hills and settled at a lonely place on the Bank of the river Chanab, in the Jammun state. It was called Dera (encampment) Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. In the beginning of 1712, a son named Ajit Singh was born to Shushil Kaur. Off and on Banda visited different parts of the Punjab to conquer new areas or to restore order and returned to his headquarters.

Now Bibi Shushil Kaur nursed her baby, Ajit Singh, and served her husband. Many Sikh Soldiers and Banda's followers visited the Dera daily. She was also in charge of the Langar (common kitchen) at the Dera. She knew that her husband might leave any

time for the plains to fight some battle. She used to listen all about these battles. Ajit Singh was brought up in this war like atmosphere. She prayed for Banda's success whenever he left the Dera for fighting injustice and thanked God when he returned after suppressing the rebels. She also wished to accompany Banda Singh to help him, but Banda Singh did not agree.

In the beginning of 1715, when Banda Singh and his Sikhs marched towards Kalanaur, near Gurdaspur, he took Shushil Kaur and Ajay Singh with him as she insisted on accompanying him. After conquering Kalanaur, they marched towards Batala which was also captured after a bloody battle. Shushil Kaur was watching these battles and was mentally preparing herself to sacrifice his life if required. Mughal chiefs of the Punjab and Delhi under orders from the Emperor besieged Banda Singh and his Sikhs with a huge force in an enclosure at village Gurdas Nangal, near Gurdaspur.

The siege continued for eight months. Banda Singh and his men fought against heavy odds and held their ground with courage. Their provision had run out as they were attacked suddenly. They had to live on grass and leaves. Bibi Shushil Kaur did not lose heart. She with her innocent child faced these odds boldly. Banda Singh along with his family and famished soldiers, who had survived, was taken prisoners in December, 1715. They were brought to Lahore and from there to Delhi. They were humiliated, but there was no sign of sorrow or dejection on the face of anyone. Shushil Kaur was satisfied that she was with her husband at that time when death seemed to be sure. She was meditating and praying to God to give everyone courage to face death boldly.

At Delhi Bibi Shushil Kaur with her child was separated from the other prisoners and taken to the palace where other queens lived. The Mughal Emperor at Delhi, Farrukh Siyar wanted to marry her, so she was not tortured. She was provided with all the comforts. Other queens and maid servants were instructed to induce Bibi Shushil Kaur to embrace Islam and enjoy her life. She was promised high position among the queens and expensive jewellery, but she refused. To discourage her, she was told that 100 Sikh soldiers were being murdered daily because they also refused to feel sorry and embrace Islam. Hearing this, she felt encouraged and hated her life in the palace. She was told that her lovely child would also be killed mercilessly if she did not agree to be converted. She replied without any fear, "Do whatever you like. Neither I nor my innocent son would like to be converted. We, Sikhs, are not afraid of death". According to the court reporter, Mohammad Suffi, next day the offer of making her royal queen was repeated to her, but she remained firm and said, "Time of our death is fixed and none but God can prolong our life. My religion is dearer to me than my or my son's life".

According to the same reporter, after two days, she was told that her husband had embraced Islam and he wanted her to follow him. She understood that it was a lie and said to the messenger, "You are telling a lie. Prove it by taking me to my husband". At last, they ordered her to give them her child. She understood that the end of her four years old child's life had reached. She was a helpless prisoner and could do nothing. She kissed and hugged her dear son, overcame her sentiments and handed him over to them.

Next day She came to know from a reliable source that the executioner had hacked the child to pieces with a long knife while the child was sitting in the lap of his father. Quivering heart of the child was thrust into the mouth of his father. She also heard the confirmed news that Banda Singh was also cut to pieces. Hearing all these bad news, she thanked God that everyone had been firm in his faith. She was calm and nobleness of

her features was visible. She was again induced and pressured to agree to conversion and marry the Emperor. Her maids thought that she would agree as there was none left to support her. When this self-respecting woman realized that his honor was in danger, she decided to end her life. She followed the example set by Bibi Anup Kaur, found a deggar and thrust it into her chest at midnight. She became a mortal on 20th June, 1716. Her soul joined her husband's and her son's souls.

Mata Sundri

The worthy consort of Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sundri, was a distinguished guide of the Sikhs for 40 years after the death of the tenth Master, her husband. As her life story will reveal, she was the champion of truth and high values. She courageously faced a life full to the brim with misery and stood fast in leading the followers of her husband at a critical time. She has the foremost rank in the Indian women leaders.

Her original name was Jito. In those days brides were given a new name by their in laws after the marriage So she was named Sundri after marriage. She was born in Lahore in 1670. Her father, Harjas Subhikhi, was a respected rich man of Lahore, capital of the Punjab. Out of respect, we call her Mata (mother) Sundri. Her father was head of a clan, so she was brought up in the lap of luxury and enjoyed the life of a happy child. Nothing is known about her schooling, but her literary taste shows she was well educated.

Her father started searching for a suitable match for her, as early marriage was the custom in those days. He was a devotee of Guru Tegh Bahadur and had seen Gobind Rai during his visits to Anandpur .He selected the young Gobind Rai as his would be son –in-law. He approached Mata Gujri, mother of Gobind Rai, and his maternal uncle, Kirpal Chand with the proposal. They agreed and accepted the proposal. Harjas wanted that the marriage should take place at Lahore. Gobind Rai did not like the idea in view of the prevailing circumstances and assured Ram Saran that he would establish a new city at a distance of 10 miles from Anandpur before marriage. Consequently, a new city called Guru Ka Lahore or New Lahore was built by Guru Gobind Rai. Historians write that the hustle and bustle of this new Lahore was commensurate with the old Lahore. It still exists under the same name, but now it is only a village. It is said that the wedding of Mata Sundri surpassed in grandeur all other marriages solemnized in the families of the Gurus. This new city seemed to be a lovely gift for the bride to welcome her. This marriage took place in 1677, but the 'Muklawar' ceremony was performed after some years..

In 1685 the whole family left for Nahan, a hill state nearby, at the invitation of the king of Nahan. Mata Sundri was now a beloved member of the Guru's family. She saw her husband giving military training to his followers. It was a new experience for her. After a few months, Guru Gobind Rai shifted to Paonta, on the bank of the River Yamuna. Here he built a fortress. Sahibzada Ajit Singh was born here in 1689. The Guru had fifty-two poets in his court and created some of his literary works here. Mata Sundri assisted her husband in every possible way in his compositions. Here, Guru Ji fought the battle of Bhangani and defeated the hill chiefs. Mata Sundri was deeply impressed by the bravery of her husband and his soldiers. These happenings prepared her for the challenges that were to follow.

Now the family shifted to Anandpur. Here were born the Sahibzadas – Jujhar Singh in 1690, Zoravar Singh in 1696, and Fateh Singh, in 1699. They were lovely children and were looked after by their mother and grandmother, Mata Gujri. In 1699, Gobind Rai created saint-soldiers by baptizing his followers; he himself got baptized by the five beloved ones and was called Gobind Singh. Mata Sundri remained by the side of her husband. She sweetened the water of 'Pahul' at the creation of the Khalsa. She was highly impressed and happy seeing the army of the Khalsa undergoing military instructions.

From 1701 to 1704, Anandpur was attacked by the hill chiefs and the Mughal forces, but Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs repulsed every attack and defeated the enemy. Mata Gujri, sometimes, yielded to the requests of some weak-hearted Sikhs, asked Guru Ji to give up the conflict with the enemy and vacate the fort, but Mata Sundri never agreed to this proposal. She was a bold and inspiring lady, who showed no sign of weakness. In 1704, Guru Gobind Singh agreed with the Sikhs to vacate the fort on the assurance by the Mughals that none would be harmed, but it proved to be a false assurance and a great crisis befell. As soon as the Sikhs vacated the fort, they were attacked. It was decided to send Mata Sundri with Jawahar Singh and Dhana Singh to Delhi. It is said that they covered the distance of two hundred miles in disguise. Mata Gujri, with her two younger grandsons, left for Sarhind with a servant. Guru Ji, with his two elder sons and forty Sikhs, left for Chamkaur. This was a period of great anxiety for Mata Sundri who faced it bravely. At Delhi, she stayed in Jawahar Singh's house in Ajmeri Gate. It was here that she learnt the news of the martyrdom of the four Sahibzadas and her beloved mother-in-law. The elder two were martyred while bravely fighting against the Mughal forces. The younger two were bricked alive by the chief of Sarhind as they refused to be converted to Islam. Mata Gujri also breathed her last at Sarhind.

In the meantime, Guru Gobind Singh reached Damdama Sahib in District Bhatinda after encountering many hardships and dangers. It was here that Mata Sundri met Guru Gobind Singh after covering a long distance from Delhi. She wanted to confirm the news of the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas from their father who said, "I have sacrificed four sons for the Sikhs. It does not matter if four have died as we have been blessed with thousands of sons." She was consoled on hearing these words and did not complain about the loss of comforts and Sahibzadas. She stayed there and served her husband, who was engaged in literary pursuits. Her stay at Damdama Sahib was short as Guru Gobind Singh left for the South India on the invitation of Aurangzeb. She along with Bhai Mani Singh, returned to Delhi.

In the meantime, Aurangzeb died and his son, Bahadur Shah, requested Guru Gobind Singh to help him against his younger brother, Azam Shah. After a fierce battle, Bahadur Shah won, thanked the Guru for his help, and took the Guru to Delhi where he stayed as a royal guest. Here Mata Sundri brought her five-year-old adopted son, Ajit Singh, to Guru Gobind Singh. Seeing the boy, the Guru said, "This child will be the cause of your troubles, be cautious." Mata Sundri could not give up her affection for the boy. As Ajit Singh grew up, he proved a nuisance and created many enemies. He decorated himself with the Guru's arms, which were held in high esteem by Mata Sundri. She snubbed him for his misbehavior, but he attacked her with his dagger. His rude behavior and murder of an innocent beggar led him into trouble with the Moghal government. Like a coward, he gave up his faith and cut his long hair. Mata Sundri was annoyed and refused to see him ever again. Overwhelmed with grief, she left for Mathra as the ruler of Mathra was known to her. She stayed there for a short period and returned to Delhi. On her return she started living in a new house built for her by her followers there. Mata Sundri College for Women, run by the Sikhs of Delhi is housed there these days.

Guru Gobind Singh went from Delhi to the south, where he left this world in 1707. Now Mata Sundri took the responsibility of guiding the Sikhs. She contributed in many ways to fulfill her responsibility till her death. She maintained the unity among Sikhs during very difficult times. Now the Sikhs were divided in two groups. Followers

of Banda Singh Bahadur, known as Bandai Khalsa, and the remaining known as Tat Khalsa (Pure Khalsa) were ready to kill each other at Amritsar. There was a possibility of bloodshed. She sent Bhai Mani Singh to Amritsar as head priest and asked him to settle this dispute. As he was respected by both the parties, the dispute was resolved peacefully. Moreover, all the Sikhs had a deep respect for Mata Sundri and had a firm belief in her impartiality. The credit of preserving the unity among the Sikhs goes to Mata Sundri. She foiled attempts made by her adopted son and others to declare themselves the eleventh guru of the Sikhs. If she had not intervened, a lot of Sikh blood would have been shed and the community would have been weakened..

She undertook another important task started by Guru Gobind Singh. She encouraged Bhai Mani Singh to teach the Sikhs critical appreciation and the meaning of Gurbani. He started the Gurmat Institute at Delhi and later at Amritsar. This is still continuing at Amritsar in street Sattowali. Teaching Gurmat in those adverse circumstances was not an easy job. She also saw that more copies of handwritten Guru Granth Sahib were prepared.

In 1779, a lady with her child, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, came to see Mata Sundri and left the child with her. The child grew up under her loving care. She groomed him as a saint soldier. When he grew up, he was sent to Nawab Kapoor Singh for further training. He was also given some arms used by Guru Gobind Singh and blessings by Mata Sundri. With her blessing and training, he became a leader of the Sikhs and was known as Badshah (King). It shows Mata Sundri's house was a haven of refuge for the needy.

Edicts (Hukumnamas) written by her to the Sikhs in different parts of India provide us with good evidence concerning her life. In those edicts, she often addresses the Sikhs as her beloved sons. Her language is overflowing with love. In one edict, which is addressed to the Sikhs at Patna, she asks them for twenty-five rupees to be given at the marriage of a needy Sikh's daughter. This shows her concern for the needy. In another edict, she advises to bridge the differences among her followers. It proves that she was very much concerned about the unity among the Sikhs. In most of the edicts, she asks her Sikhs to send money for running of the common kitchen. It shows she continued the tradition of the common kitchen. These edicts also show that she was loved and respected by the Sikhs. One edict shows that Sikhs sent some gold for the wife of her adopted son.

In her old age, she remained absorbed in meditation. She used to sit in meditation in front of the weapons of her husband. Before her death, she sent weapons of Guru Gobind Singh to Akal Takhat at Amritsar. She breathed her last in 1747 at Delhi. According to her desire, her body was cremated near the cremation site of Guru Harkrishan Sahib, the eighth Master. The small room where the Mata lived is still kept as it was. A Gurdwara was constructed by S.Baghel Singh at this place, when he conquered the city. Now this Gurdwara is being managed by the Gurdwara management committee of Delhi.

None can deny the fact that Mata Sundri, the serene Mother, completed most of the works left unfinished by the Tenth Master. When the time required, she did not hesitate and shouldered the leadership of the Khalsa courageously. She was the epitome of selflessness and austerity. She did not waver in the face of misfortunes. Her contribution to the Sikh community is much more than the contribution of any other Sikh lady. She was a champion of truth and high values. She disowned her faithless adopted

son and did not save him from the death punishment although she could have done so as she was respected by the Mughals. She will always shine like a star and guide the people to the right path. She was an ideal woman. I bow my head as a mark of respect before the greatness of her soul.

Photo of the Author

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