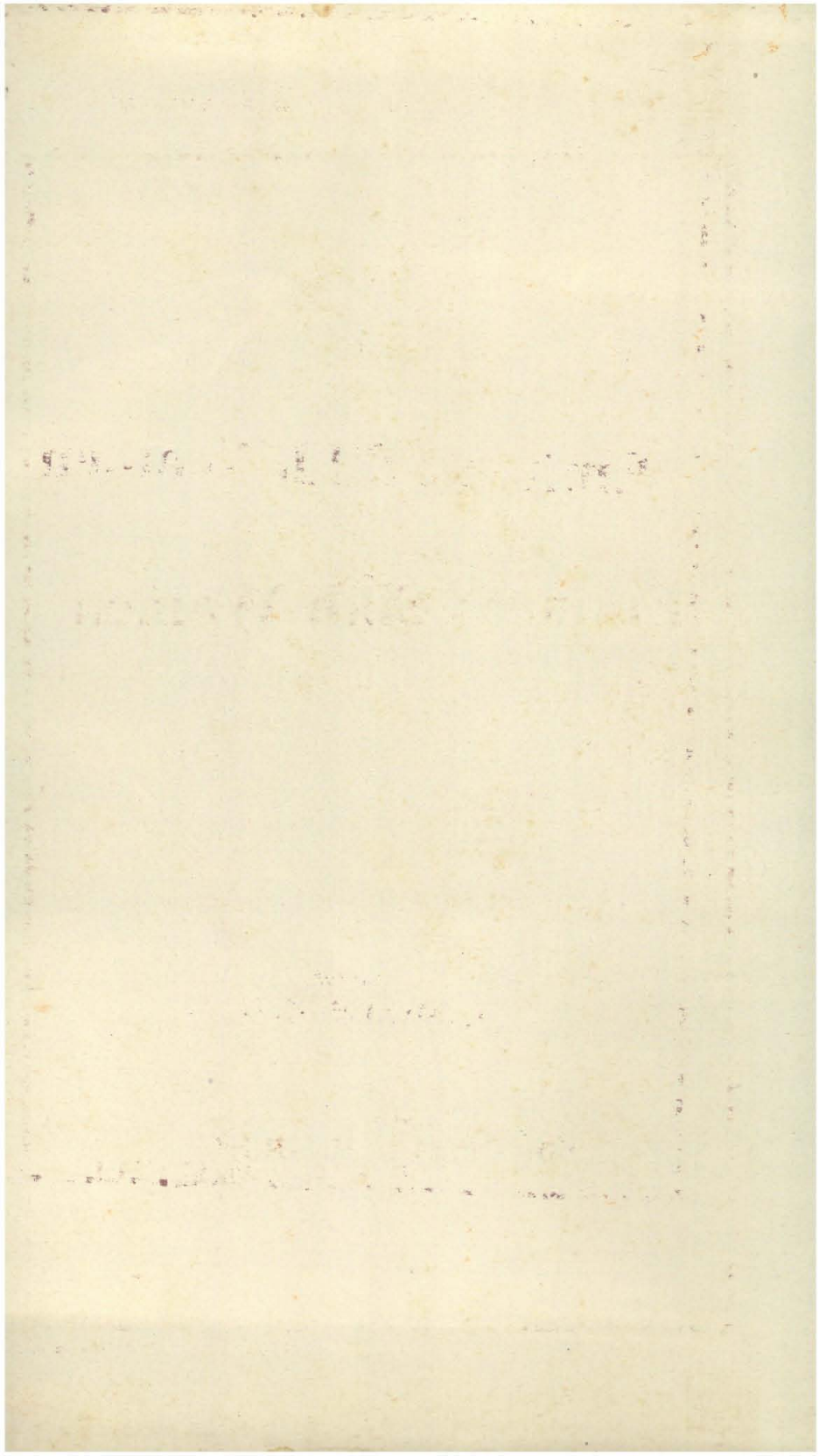


Eminent Sikh Women

Editor
Dr. (Mrs.) M. K. GILL



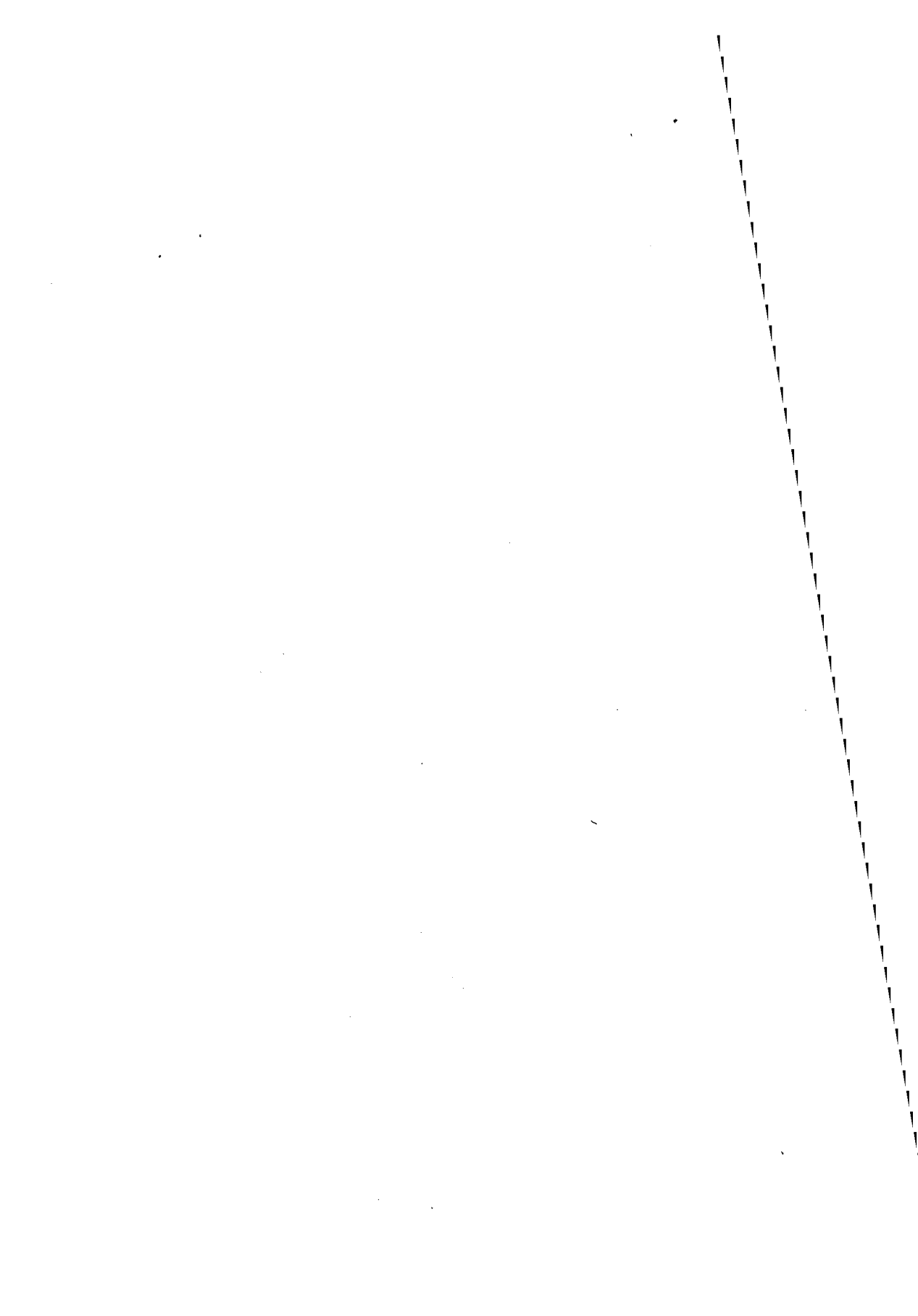
Dedicated
to
the embodiment of chastity
MATA CHAND KAUR

EDITOR'S OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Mata Sundri Ji	Punjabi
Guru Mahal Gatha	Punjabi
Punjab Dian Beer Nariaan	Punjabi
Mata Sundri Dharam Moorat	Punjabi
Guru Mahal Te Hor Bibian	Punjabi
Das Guru Mahal	Punjabi
Dharam, Samaj Te Nari	Punjabi
Mata Sundri, Parivar Te Nikatvarti	Punjabi
Sister Nivedita (Tr. from English)	Punjabi
Mata Sundri Ji	Hindi
Guru Mahal Gatha	Hindi
Mata Sundri: Dharam Chetna	Hindi
Das Guru Mahal	Hindi
Sikh Dharam Aur Nari	Hindi
Dharam, Samaj Aur Nari	Hindi
Mata Sundri Ji	English
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The Guru Consorts	English
Eminent Sikh Women	English
Religion & Women	English
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PREFACE

MATA Sundri College has been celebrating Mata Sundri Memorial Day every year since 1983. One extension lecture on one of the *Guru Mahals* (consorts of Gurus) is prepared in printed form and distributed among the *Sangat* (congregation) and students on this historic day. To mark the Silver Jubilee of the College in 1992, a book '*Das Guru Mahal*' was published in Punjabi, Hindi and English. The publication of this book gave birth to certain new issues, for example, the acceptability of the concept of ten *Guru Mahals*.

The Eighth Guru left for his heavenly abode in childhood only. I always used to justify, and emphasise, the fact that Mata Sahib Kaur was the mother of Khalsa. Another suggestion received during this period was that work should be done on those *Guru Mahals*, whose life histories had not been researched into till date. After a lot of contemplation I have come to the conclusion that there are three *Guru Mahals* whose lives still need to be researched into. They are:

1. Mata Damodri (*Mahal* Sixth Guru),
2. Mata Maha Devi (*Mahal* Sixth Guru), and
3. Mata Jeeto (*Mahal* Tenth Guru).

In my search for suitable intellectual writers, I humbly approached Dr. Bhajan Singh and Dr. Harbans Singh Chawla and requested them to write some papers on *Guru Mahals*. Respecting my wishes, they prepared two papers on Mata Damodri and Mai Bhago, respectively. However, the lack of material available on Mata Maha Devi posed a problem, which Mrs. Sukhjeet Kaur, Reader, Department of Punjabi in our College, helped me resolve with her timely co-operation. That is how the work could be completed on the 13 *Guru Mahals*, and the credit for this goes to my learned friends and well-wishers. It is essential to furnish details of 13 *Guru Mahals* here:

1. Mata Sulakhani (*Mahal*; Guru Nanak Dev)
2. Mata Khiwi (*Mahal*; Guru Angad Dev)
3. Mata Mansa Devi (*Mahal*; Guru Amar Dass)
4. Mata Bhani (*Mahal*; Guru Ram Dass)
5. Mata Ganga (*Mahal*; Guru Arjun Dev)

6. Mata Nanki (*Mahal*; Guru Har Gobind)
7. Mata Damodri " "
8. Mata Maha Devi " "
- 9.*. Mata Kishan Kaur (*Mahal*, Guru Har Rai)
10. Mata Gujri (*Mahal*; Guru Tegh Bahadur)
11. Mata Sundri (*Mahal*; Guru Gobind Singh)
12. Mata Jeeto " "
13. Mata Sahib Kaur " "

During the publication of the book '*Das Guru Mahal*' many teachers of our College were inspired to write articles on various *Guru Mahals*. The articles on Mata Gujri and Mata Sahib Kaur were written by Miss Iqbal Kaur (Punjabi Deptt.). It is important to note here that the article on Mata Maha Devi could be completed with the joint efforts of Mrs. Sukhjeet Kaur and Mrs. P. Amrinder Singh. After being inspired by Mrs. Sukhjeet Kaur's unstinted efforts, Mrs. P. Amrinder Singh wrote another article on Mata Jeeto also. In this way, work on the life sketches of 13 *Guru Mahals* could be compiled.

It has been my endeavour to collect and disseminate the available information, for successful completion of this work. The articles in this book have not been listed chronologically, instead they have been serialised according to the order of *Guru Mahals*. While going through all this, I felt that although *Guru Mahals* have contributed a lot for the success of the mission of the Gurus, the hard struggle and efforts put in by their women relatives and followers can not be ignored. The House of Gurus was glorified due to their untiring efforts, too.

Contribution of Bebe Nanki to the success of the mission of Guru Nanak Dev, role of Mai Sabhrai who was the paternal aunt of Guru Angad Dev, and the contribution of Mai Bhago to the history of the Tenth Guru are quite interesting and important. When Guru Nanak Dev used to undertake missionary tours, it was Bebe Nanki who looked after and supported the Guru's family by making the atmosphere congenial. Guru Nanak's father had some materialistic expectations from his son. Elder sister Nanki gave moral support to her father as well as love and cooperation to brother Nanak. In this way, the loneliness and the sadness in the hearts of members of her parental family were dispelled.

The propagation of mission of the Gurus required persons of high calibre and integrity. None of the Gurus compromised with any incompetent or corrupt officials. History testifies that even though Bibi Bhani had the

* There is some controversy regarding the *Mahals* of Guru Har Rai, but all intellectuals agree that Mata Kishan Kaur was the mother of Guru Harkishan.

- blessing for retaining the *Guruship* in her family only, still Guru Amar Dass had a minaret (*Chabutra*) built by Guru Ram Dass to test his own devotion. He was installed as Guru only after successfully clearing this test. Guru Amar Dass had acquired this custom of testing as part of tradition. History proves the fact that when Datoo and Dasoo, the two sons of Guru Angad Dev, could not perfect themselves according to the training and test of their father, the lineage of *Guruship* (seat of power) was passed on to Guru Amar Dass. Both the sons opposed this decision, which gave rise to a tense atmosphere. When Guru Nanak Dev blessed Guru Angad Dev with *Guruship* even his sons could not accept it without protest. So much so that Mai Sabhrai had to keep the crowning of Guru Angad Dev a secret for almost six months. It is evident that everybody had ultimately bowed devotedly before the decision of the Guru for passing on the lineage of *Guruship* to the most deserving disciple. The women related to family of the Guru supported these decisions whole-heartedly, thus giving evidence of their limitless faith.

Mai Bhago's name figures on top amongst the great women who sacrificed selflessly during the time of the tenth Guru. The tenth Guru was engaged in battles for quite a long time. When his Sikhs got tired of fighting, the Guru did not accept their request to stop the war. Then these war-battered, disillusioned Sikhs wrote a note of dissent (*Bedava*) as a last resort. It was Mai Bhago who helped the Sikhs in getting this note of dissent torn to pieces. It was Mai Bhago who appeased the aggrieved Sikhs and became a bridge between the Guru and his disciples, sorted out their differences and reunited them. She became so absorbed in the service of her Guru that she never went back home, rather accompanied the tenth Guru to Nanded and served him untiringly throughout.

While researching on *Guru Mahals*, we have also concentrated on other women disciples of the Gurus. The life-sketch of Mai Bhago is so impressive that it has become an appropriate subject for research by Dr. Harbans Singh Chawla, Reader in History Deptt of Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College (Morning). I am greatly indebted to him.

It will be appropriate to discuss briefly about the edited papers presented in this book. This book comprises of two parts: The first part is dedicated to *Guru Mahals*, and the second part deals with life-sketches of women associated with families of the Gurus. I would like to comment on them in brief.

The first paper in this book has been prepared by Dr. Harbans Singh Chawla. He has taken the perspective of an astute historian. He not only analyses the dates, years and events but, like a learned scholar, elucidates

them in a balanced manner. He first established that Mata Khiwi was endowed with divine qualities. She fulfilled all her familial responsibilities sincerely, with the result that her husband Guru Angad Dev could follow the spiritual path without any distraction and became one with God.

When there was a transformation in Guru Angad Dev's life, he left Goddess worship and joined Guru Nanak Dev's devotees. On this occasion, Mata Khiwi cooperated completely with her husband. When the Guru decided to live at Kartarpur instead of Khadur Sahib, Mata Khiwi undertook the responsibilities of her whole family. She accepted the change in her husband's life with great equanimity. It became a part of her daily life to obey her husband's command.

Mata Khiwi had to face a difficult situation when Guru Angad Dev selected Guru Amar Dass as the right heir to *Guruship* instead of their sons. There was no hesitation in her mind while accepting her husband's decision, but, instead she unbiasedly tried to convince her sons that *Guruship* was matter of great responsibility and that they were not capable of bearing it. The service of her Guru (husband) was more important to her than the indulgence in her children.

When her husband became the Guru, she accepted the responsibility of organizing *langar* (free kitchen). She unchained all the shackles of obsolete social norms and dogmatic values. Discarding the tradition of *pardah* she like men, served the congregation and pilgrims throughout the day. The food served in *langar* used to be so delicious that Bhattas - Satta and Balwand could not help appreciating it. It was amazing that both her sons had ridiculed the rightful heir to *Guruship* - Guru Amar Dass. Dasoo, being the elder son, staked his right to *Guru Gaddi* and in fact set up his own seat of power (*gaddi*). Guru Amar Dass left the town for some time and went to stay at Basarke. On the other side, Datoo had developed severe headache problems. Mata Khiwi took both her sons to Guru Amar Dass and he blessed them by touching their heads with his hand. In this way, Dasoo's protests and headaches vanished. But the other son Datoo reached Goindwal and in jealousy kicked Guru Amar Dass in front of the whole congregation. After that his leg started aching. Again, time turned its tide and the fifth Guru arrived at Khadoor. Mata Khiwi earnestly prayed and requested the Guru to forgive her son, and thus Datoo was relieved of his aches by the spiritual grace of the Guru. It is evident that Mata Khiwi always accepted the Gurus as embodiments of God. She knew about the worldliness of her sons, had them pardoned by the Guru and reunited them with the house of Gurus. Not only her own sons, she was able to inspire many others with devotion

towards the house of Gurus.

The second article in this book is about Mata Mānsa Devi, prepared by the Editor. Mata Mansa Devi played a very important role for the welfare of the society. The emphasis was laid on the problems, especially relating to women-folk like *pardah*. Seclusion for women was essential in those days. In case of death of her husband a woman had to go around in the garb of a widow and many a time she had to burn herself alive on the pyre of her husband. Sikh history hints that Mata Mansa Devi used to go on pilgrimage and could visualise the inconvenience of child widows. They neither were welcomed in in-laws' houses nor at parents' houses. They were compelled to live on charity at holy places. Mata Mansa Devi, being an elderly lady, had brought these evils to the notice of her husband. Resultantly, efforts were made to put an end to all the three evils connected with the women.

The third article in this book is about Mata Damodri, by the famous historian-novelist Dr. Bhajan Singh. He clearly establishes that in Sikh history there is a lot of contradiction regarding events, years and dates. Similarly, a lot of legends are associated with the Gurus and miracles performed by them. However, on the other hand such miracles have been condemned in Sikhism. Mata Damodri was the wife of Guru Har Gobind, mother of Baba Guruditta and grandmother of Guru Har Rai. She was the eldest daughter-in-law of the fifth Guru. Her grandfather, Bhai Paro, was a devout follower of Guru Nanak Dev. She got married in 1605 A.D. Her father's name was Bhai Narain Dass and her mother was Premdei. She was born in 1596.

During the marriage of the sixth Guru, his father (fifth Guru) arrived at Sultanpur Lodhi from Dalla Village. Many new rites were performed during this marriage. It was considered necessary to call upon the elders and their presence was considered auspicious in the ceremony. That is why the marriage procession started from Amritsar to reach Tarn Taran. From there it went to Khadoor and reached the family of Guru Angad Dev. From there they went to Goindwal and sought the blessings of Baba Mohan. And finally from Goindwal they reached village Dalla. The congregation at Dalla village welcomed the marriage procession by reciting a hymn. Till today this tradition of '*Milni*' is observed by the Sikhs. The Sikh custom of *Anand Karaj* also started from this marriage and has become an inseparable part of Sikh culture.

Mata Damodri had to face a severe crisis just a year after her marriage. Her father-in-law, Guru Arjan Dev, was summoned to Lahore by Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and was severely tortured culminating in his death. One

cannot describe the extent of despair and sadness that must have prevailed in the atmosphere at that time.

Mata Damodri prepared the sheaths for two swords of *Miri* and *Piri* (valour and spirituality) which were worn by Guru Har Gobind. In preparing these sheaths, Mata Damodri's service is highly appreciated.

When the sixth Guru organised his army, built a *Takhat*, and started accepting horses, weapons and uniforms as gifts, Mata Damodri never expressed any surprise at the changed scenario, rather inspired common masses to come in the Guru's fold.

After five years of her marriage, when her husband was imprisoned in Gwalior fort, she faced the situation with great equanimity and maintained the tradition and sanctity of *Hari Mandir*. She is the only *Guru Mahal* who had witnessed the initiation of a revolution in Sikh history. She contributed all her mental and physical faculties for the mission of the Guru and thus co-operated with her husband at every step.

Mrs. Sukhjit Kaur has prepared the fourth article, on Mata Maha Devi. The first point highlighted in this paper is that there was very scanty material available about Mata Maha Devi. Her life-sketch could be deduced from the events of the life of Guru Har Gobind.

The spiritual movement took a revolutionary turn in Guru Har Gobind's life time. The Guru got the *Akal Takht* constructed. He fought against the Mughals. He got a fort built and he adorned his head gear with *Kalgi* (Pume). He had tamed a falcon which would sit on his hand, performed many miracles and adorned the swords of *Miri* and *Piri*. All this is a symbol of worldly power. The Guru was the greatest *Shah* (King).

Mata Maha Devi was the youngest *Mahal* of the sixth Guru. Sikhs being believers in a formless Guru, could not get converted to *Yugal* (couple) worship. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons why Sikh historians have written only scantily about *Guru Mahals*.

The third marriage of Guru Har Gobind was solemnised with Mata Maha Devi, daughter of Bhai Daya Ram Marwah of Mandiyali village. That is why Sikh historians call her Marwahi also. Mata Maha Devi was the apple of her parents eyes because she was born long time after their marriage. Since Mata Maha Devi was born with the blessings of the fifth Guru, her parents had decided at her birth itself, that if a girl child was born, she would be betrothed to Guru Har Gobind. It was by God's grace that a girl-child was born in Bhai Daya Ram's family and at the right opportunity he got Marwahi married to Guru Har Gobind. (Mata Maha Devi gave birth to a son named Suraj Mal).

Mata Maha Devi was greatly respected in the entire family. Because of

her sweet and generous nature she got adjusted in the family. She was very much attached to Bibi Veero. Sikh history testifies to the fact that at the time of Bibi Veero's marriage, the Mughals fought the third battle with the Guru. During this crucial period, Mata Maha Devi carried out the responsibility of Bibi Veero's marriage very deftly.

Being an expert at managing things, Mata Maha Devi used to provide a graceful touch to every event in the household. When the sixth Guru was released from the fort of Gwalior, there was happiness all around in Amritsar. Mata Maha Devi was in the forefront of arranging *Deepmala*, among other events. Even at Baba Guruditta's marriage she proved her mettle. When the circumstances changed and the Guru came to Kiratpur, Mata Maha Devi used to be solely responsible for the management of *langar*: Mata Maha Devi was quite the social type. She was charming and gracious. After the death of the sixth Guru, she devoted herself entirely to Guru worship.

The fifth article, on Mata Gujri, is by Miss Iqbal Kaur. The primary concept of this paper is that Mata Gujri is the first woman martyr connected with Sikh history.

Mata Gujri was born in Kartarpur and her father's name was Bhai Lalchand Khatri. His youngest son Bhai Kirpal Chand is known as *Mama Kirpal Chand* in Sikh history. He dedicated his whole life to the house of Gurus. Bibi Gujri was married to Guru Tegh Bahadur at Kartarpur. Her in-laws family was quite well-known in those days. Her husband, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was a saint-soldier of his father, Guru Har Gobind.

Times do change. Due to political reasons the whole family had to shift from Amritsar to Kiratpur. Baba Guruditta's son, Guru Har Rai, was the son of her elder brother-in-law. He was given *Guru gaddi* at Kiratpur. Compelled by circumstances, Mata Nanki also came to Baba Bakala along with Guru Tegh Bahadur and Mata Gujri. All three of them lived at Baba Bakala for about 26 years.

Mata Gujri's husband started meditating in Bhora Sahib and Mata Gujri and Mata Nanki busied themselves with either serving him or meditating. Service and meditation were the only solace for both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Guru Har Rai handed over the *Guru gaddi* to his son Guru Har Kishan. After serving the *sangat* for about two and a half years, in his last days, he indicated towards Baba Bakala, with the result that *Guru gaddi* was bestowed on Guru Tegh Bahadur. At the proper time Makhan Shah Lubana also gave the call of 'Discovered the Real Guru' and so Guru Tegh Bahadur attained *Guruship* at the age of 44.

Times changed, but there was no respite from enmity of the Mughals.

The Guru, along with his family left Kiratpur for Anandpur and from there he reached Patna. Here the ninth Guru was on missionary tours most of the time. Mata Gujri and her mother-in-law, Mata Nanki, stayed at Patna. It was here only that Mata Gujri gave birth to a divine child. After some time, on one of his missionary tours, Guru Tegh Bahadur reached Anandpur and the child Gobind Rai along with his mother and grand-mother also arrived there where they were welcomed heartily.

Once again the times changed. Mata Gujri's husband got ready to sacrifice himself for the protection of a fundamental right of the Hindus. Mata Gujri settled the marriage of her only son in consultation with her brother *Mama* Kirpal Chand. However, her husband could not attend this wedding. The Mughal authorities observed the ways and means of the Guru's family and became jealous of them. Their revengeful moves increased against the Guru's family. Because of this increased enmity, the tenth Guru had to leave Anandpur. On the way, Mata Gujri, along with her two grandsons, got separated from the family. Their old cook deceived them by getting them arrested. As a result the younger sons of the tenth Guru (*Sahibzadas*) had to face the wrath of cruel fate. Grandma Mata Gujri played a wonderful role at that time. She instilled courage in her grandsons by narrating legends about their ancestors and made them fearless. They sacrificed themselves bravely but never consented about changing their religion.

Mata Gujri's whole life was full of struggle. She was a witness to the martyrdom of her husband, and also grandsons. She dedicated and sacrificed her whole life for the pious cause of religion.

The sixth article, on Mata Jeeto, has been written by Mrs. Sukhjeet Kaur. The basic concept of this paper is that along with the tradition of Gurus, there was established a tradition of *Guru Mahals* as well, and each *Guru Mahal* contributed her share. Mata Jeeto was the second consort of the tenth Guru.

During Guru Har Gobind's time the peaceful spiritual movement took a revolutionary turn and the Guru became a symbol of both spiritual as well as, worldly powers. The same tradition was carried on by the successive Gurus. One controversy to which this paper points out is that Mata Jeeto and Mata Sundri were not the names of the same person. However, after discussing extensively about it the writer has concluded that both the *Guru Mahals* are distinct separate personalities and both have their '*Samadhis*' at different places:

The author is of the view that in those times people used to give the hands of their daughters/sisters to relate themselves to the Gurus' families. Mata Jeeto's marriage was solemnised under the supervision of Mata Gujri

and *Mama Kirpal Chand* at *Guru Ka Lahore*.

Mata Jeeto gave birth to three *Sahibzadas* (except *Sahibzada Ajit Singh*). She had deep love and regard for her husband. She would herself prepare a garland of flowers and offer it to *Guru Gobind Singh*, when he used to go to attend the congregation. *Mata Jeeto* was very kind-hearted. She used to get so engrossed while praying that the congregation at times called her a *Yogin*. *Mata Jeeto* died very young. After her death, the *Guru's* family was always in the thick of a struggle.

Second part of this book is dedicated to contributions made by the women related to the *Gurus* families. They have contributed richly to enhance prestige of the house of *Gurus* and to ignore it will be very unfair to these women.

The first paper of this section, and the seventh article of the book, has been prepared by the editor herself. *Bebe Nanki* played a very important role in her brother *Nanak's* life. The first concept of this paper is that these women are addressed in two ways - the first is '*Bebe*' and the second is '*Bibe*'. '*Guru Mahal*' is the word used for consorts of *Gurus*.

This paper is not aligned towards historical values. Its main purpose is to project the cultural values of those times and to recognize the contribution made by *Bebe Nanki*.

Bebe Nanki was five years older to *Guru Nanak*. Her role was that of a childhood friend and companion and of an elder sister. Being the eldest child in the family she always acted responsibly and provided security and help to her parents.

Bebe Nanki has acted as a bridge between her parents and her brother, as also the family of her brother and his relatives. She took complete care of her sister-in-law and nephews while her brother could carry on with his missionary work without any worries. She used to cooperate with her brother in his mission also. On the other hand she used to convince her brother that his family was well looked after and comfortable.

The eighth article, on *Mata Sabhrai*, is the contribution of *Mrs. Harjinder Kaur*. *Mata Sabhrai* was the paternal aunt of *Guru Angad Dev*. She was a woman of exceptional qualities and a great soul who always remained engrossed in service and meditation. She had a lot of love for her nephew *Guru Angad Dev*. When *Guru Angad Dev* took the spiritual path it was *Mata Sabhrai* only who could look after his needs and make proper arrangements as per his wishes.

Bibi Sabhrai was a very serious woman, who never had any hesitation in sacrificing her life for the propagation of the *Guru's* mission. After the

death of Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Angad Dev stayed at her residence for about six months. She never disclosed about his Guruship as also his secret residence during this time. It is clear that Mata Sabhrai acted according to needs of the time and provided full cooperation and service to the Guru. The tense situation thus became peaceful because of the wise actions and sincere endeavours of Mata Sabhrai.

The ninth article, related to Mai Bhago, has been written by Dr. Harbans Singh Chawla. This paper establishes that Mai Bhago is the first warrior-heroine of the Punjab.

Mai Bhago's role starts the moment her village-brothers wrote a note of dissent (*Bedava*) against the tenth Guru's leadership. *Bedava* means the individual does not accept the leadership and the leader or the Guru has no claim over the individual. These Sikhs were, in fact, tired of wars and refused to fight any longer and returned to their native places.

Mai Bhago filled them with so much of zeal and enthusiasm that they returned to the tenth Guru and fought very valiantly under his leadership. This was Mai Bhago's greatest contribution that she was able to mend the snapped link between Sikhs and the Guru, which anybody else could not have done. This was an historical event after which no Sikh ever dared disobey the Guru. Mai Bhago taught them to be ever-ready for sacrifice if the Guru so demanded.

Another fact was established along with this that if any Sikh wants to break off from the Sikh *panth*, he will do so in writing. He will not renege secretly. History testifies that when differences cropped up between Mata Sundri and Baba Banda Bahadur, then the Mata told him to either accept the dictates completely or send a written note that he did not want to follow that path. This made clear the fact that all those following Sikh dictates should be determined people; they will follow the Guru completely and those who wanted to differ will stay away.

This fact can be explained in this manner that it was very essential that the new generation should be ingrained the qualities of truth and sincerity. Therefore, all this explanation became very necessary. Mai Bhago's most important contribution has been that she saved the *panth* from disintegration by instilling in the Sikhs the right emotions.

Mai Bhago proved the bravery in its real form, which sprang from the Guru tradition, that there was essentially no difference between a *Singh*, and a *Kaur*, in Sikh society. A *Kaur*, just like a *Singh*, can fight the war and serve the Guru. Mai Bhago, through her example, delivered the message to live life with integrity and truthfulness.

It is appropriate to conclude that *Guru Mahals* and other blessed women contributed whole-heartedly in the practical implementation of the Gurus' mission. They co-operated fully in completing the various tasks initiated by the Gurus from time to time. They suffered and struggled but never questioned their Guru. In case of any protest, or contradiction, they supported the Guru and not their own progeny. The *Guru Mahals* only could ignore their children, as compared to any modern woman who would support her child in case of any dispute between father and child. By showing this cultural direction, the *Guru Mahals* have, in fact, blessed the Sikh *panth*. They have shown to the Sikhs that it is always essential to support truth and goodness.

The life sketches of Bebe Nanki and Mai Sabhrai bring out the roles of friends and comrades played by these great women. Mai Bhago's role is exemplary. It was necessary for the Khalsa to obey the commands given by the *Guru*. Mai Bhago was like the Mother Earth on whose surface the *Guru*'s mission was tested. She was quite intense in meditation and had a great spiritual personality. She had great self-confidence due to which she could unite even the deserted Sikhs with the *Guru*.

The tenth *Guru* had witnessed the result of his teachings in his life time. The women did not lag behind in the national integration planned by him rather, along with men, they showed great confidence in the battle field. They had an unflinching devotion to save others.

Through Mai Bhago the tenth *Guru* proved that women were not confined only to their household but could even sacrifice themselves when the need arose.

The role of Mata Sundri College has been that of a stage only. The articles on *Guru Mahals* are prepared and shared with the readers on this platform. However, it does not have the capacity to get books published for the propagation of the mission and distribute these among the masses.

S. Gurdip Singh of Himala Publishers has taken the responsibility of getting these books published. The readers, who receive the books, will always remain grateful to Himala Publishers.

In the end I thank all the contributors and offer my special gratitude to them for the hard labour they have put in.

M. K. Gill



MATA KHIWI

MATA Khiwi was the first Sikh preacher who emerged from the traditional confinement of Indian household and liberated the women leading them to freely participate in the *langar maryada* initiated by Guru Nanak. She set an example for the coming generations. She is the only woman whose name has found an honourable mention in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. She was the respected wife of Guru Angad Dev. It was due to Mata Khiwi's daughter Amro's association that the Mata had come closer to *Gurmat* (Guru Nanak's household). Again it was her (Amro) inspiration that had brought (Guru) Amar Dass closer to *Guru Gharana*. Due to his tireless services to his Guru, he became one with Guru Angad Dev and Guru Nanak. The Mata always inspired her children to adopt a noble path. Whenever she saw that they were going astray, she exhorted them to leave that path because by treading on it they would gain nothing except frustration and humiliation. She was the mother of not only Khadoor Shaib, but of the entire *Panth*. The contribution of the Mata to the Sikh history will always be remembered reverently.

Mata Khiwi was born in 1506 at Sanghar in Tarn Taran tehsil of district Amritsar to father Devi Chand Khatri and mother Karam Devi. Bhai Devi Chand was a shopkeeper and a money-lender. He was a popular man in the neighbourhood. He was well-known for his integrity and generosity. She imbibed these qualities from the congenial surroundings she was brought up in. When she was due for marriage, Mai Varai suggested Bhai Pherumal's son Bhai Lehna as the prospective groom. Bhai Devi Chand visited Khadoor Sahib on business often and was well acquainted with the family of Mai Varai. At the same time Mai Varai being the so-called sister of Bhai Pherumal, was familiar with his family. Mai Varai's father Takhat Mal was the headman of the inn of village Matta, and Bāba Pheroomal was employed with him. Bibi Khiwi was married to Bhai Lehna in A.D. 1519 (Samat 1576). During this time the Lodhis (1451- 1526) were in power in Northern India and Behlol Lodhi was the Emperor (1451-1489). His son Ibrahim Lodhi ruled from 1517 to 1526. Guru Nanak had not yet reached Punjab after his tour of West India. Over Kabul, Babur was the ruler and after strengthening his power, was planning to conquer India.

In connection with some business activities some misunderstanding had arisen between Bhai Pheroomal and Bhai Takhat Mal. Bhai Pheroomal left Matta di Sarai, came back to village Sanghar and made Khadoor his permanent residence.

Firstly, he started business at Hari Ka Patan and then opened a shop at Khadoor. Bhai Lehna also joined his father in his business which became quite prosperous due to their integrity and good behaviour. When in 1526 Bhai Pheroomal died, the entire burden of the family fell on Bhai Lehna. In the beginning Bhai Lehna was a worshipper of the Goddess. Every year he would accompany his father to visit the Devi at Jawalamukhi. After the death of his father this practice continued up to 1532. He took pilgrimages to Jawalamukhi, during which his son Dasu (1524) and his daughter Bibi Amro (1532) were born. The other two children Bibi Anokhi and son Datu were born in 1535 and 1537, respectively. The household affairs of Bhai Lehna and Mata Khiwi were thus running quite peacefully.

Changes in the Life of Bhai Lehna

The political conditions changed after Babur had defeated Ibrahim Lodhi in the Battle of Panipat in 1526 and established the Mughal rule. Guru Nanak Dev by then had finished his *Udasis* (tours) and finally settled down at Kartarpur. His preachings on the principles of humanity and his revolutionary thoughts were the talk of the day throughout Punjab. During these days Bhai Lehna had learnt *Japji* from a Sikh, Bhai Jodha, who used to recite it and decided to visit Kartarpur while going for *Devi Darshan*. Then Bhai Lehna revealed his thoughts to his wife (Mata Khiwi). She nodded in assent and said that the house where you get peace is fortunate and she could have no objection.

Bibi Khiwi's First Renouncement

In 1532 when Bhai Lehna met Guru Nanak Dev the yearning was so intense that he stopped his pilgrimages to Jawalamukhi. He felt that his search for truth was fructified. And his wandering for so many years had come to an end. At last he had attained peace of mind. He decided to settle down in Kartarpur. He told his fellow pilgrims to tell the people at Khadoor about his decision.

One can imagine what the condition of Mata Khiwi would have been on hearing this bit of news, specially when Datu and Bibi Amro were still very young. One can only wonder at it. (According to historians Bhai Lehna lived at Kartarpur from 1532 to 1539).

At this stage it has become imminent to discuss certain things. Firstly, when Bhai Lehna was preparing himself to be acceptable to Guru Nanak and his way of life, Mata Khiwi was shouldering the responsibility of the family, to enable him to transcend to the heights achieved by Guru Nanak. Bhai Gurdas has written in his 38th 'Var' and 20th 'Pauri'.

*"Sat Gur Nanak Deo Hai Parmesar Soi
Guru Angad Guru Ang te Joti Jot Samoi"*

(There is hardly any difference between Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Angad Dev).

Secondly, when in 1532-1539 Bhai Lehna was staying at Kartarpur, he did not renounce his house, nor did he break ties with Khadoor. Such examples are plenty in number, that he used to come to Khadoor occasionally and he shared those achievements with the people of his village. In this way he was enlightening those people. Mata Khiwi had learned the basic principles and the sermons of Guru Nanak from her husband, and she had watched closely the changes in his life. When some local people came back from Kartarpur they informed Mata Khiwi "Bhai Lehna" has settled at Kartarpur with Guru Nanak *Tappa*, devoted himself completely and given up the idea of returning, what will you do now?" Mata Khiwi was bold enough to say that "If he wears the robes of a *fakir*, I will invariably adorn rags. I will gladly accept whatever condition he keeps me in". The people who were jealous of her turned pale to hear this. It seems that in the mind of Mata Khiwi this thought of *Gurbani* was uppermost:

*Je sukh dehe ta tujhe araadheen
Dukh bhee tujhe dhiyaeen*

"If you (oh, God) bestow happiness and in adversities also I shall remember you."

- **Suhi Mohalla 4**

Guru Angad Dev has also expressed the qualities of a noble wife as under:

*"Ja-n sukh ta-n soh raveo, dukh bhi samaleo,
Nanak kahe saheleeo, aeon kant milawa hoey"*

(In prosperity remember you, oh God and in adversity also I take your shelter, Nanak says, "Oh wise female in this way you can achieve nearness to your Swami - God).

Mata Khiwi had followed this principle of abiding by the *Hukam* (obedience) and feel happy. She was devoted to her husband Bhai Lehna fully.

In Sikh history she has been regarded as *pati premun* (husband's

devotee). She never entered into any controversy with him. So much so that when Guru Angad Dev had decided to pass on *Guru Gaddi* to (Guru) Amar Dass instead of his sons, Mata Khiwi had not raised any objection. She had bowed before the order (*Hukam*) of her husband and made her sons agree by making them understand that their father's decision was perfectly right, as they were unable to shoulder such a heavy responsibility of *Guru Gaddi*. Thus, she had preferred her husband's decision (*Hukam*) over blind love for her sons.

Thirdly, when Guru Angad Dev shifted to Khadoor and took over the responsibility of *Guru Gaddi*, Mata Khiwi took charge of the *langar* (community kitchen).

Now it has to be visualized that what was the motto in the view of Mata Khiwi which had persuaded her to give it an ideal shape. My guess is that during 1532-39 she might have come to Kartarpur with her husband Bhai Lehna several times and there she might have seen and understood the traditional concept of *langar* and *sangat*. At Kartarpur she might have taken part in doing service in the community kitchen. That is why when the responsibility of *guru gaddi* fell on her husband's shoulders she had gladly accepted to take the responsibility of the *langar* and look after the *sangat* which used to visit Khadoor Sahib. Mata Khiwi might have also learnt to break the limitations imposed on the female sex by the society in the olden days in the open and peaceful atmosphere. There the females were allowed to live without *pardah* and do service in the community kitchen (*langar*). The dignity of females about which Guru Nanak Dev has written in his *Gurbani*, its practical demonstration was initiated at Kartarpur. Mata Khiwi became the first preacher of women's liberation after 1539. There is no doubt that Mata Khiwi was the first example of bringing liberation to the women folk initiated by Guru Nanak Dev. It was Mata Khiwi who had helped in breaking the practice of old customs and prepared the women to work side by side with the men-folks in the restructuring of the society discarding the *pardah* system observed by women. Such a bold step could be taken in the 16th century only by Mata Khiwi. The Mata had thus paved the way of complete independence (*Puran Azadi*) for the Sikh women. Later on Guru Amar Dass had done a lot of work in this direction. He had intensively opposed customs like *pardah* and *sati*. He had saved the women from the tyranny of men.

Whereas the period from 1532 to 1539 had brought a change in the life of Bhai Lehna, Mata Khiwi also got influenced by those changes. She learnt the philosophy of Guru Nanak from her husband. She had learnt much of that while staying at Kartarpur. It was due to that reason that she did not find any

difficulty in sharing the duties of her husband. When Bhai Lehna was elevated as 'Angad' by Guru Nanak he was asked by the latter to go to Khadoor. Mata Khiwi enquired from Guru Angad Dev about his order for her. She was blessed by Guru Angad Dev telling her "that when his benevolent Guru (*Dāta*) ordered him to distribute the wealth of '*Shabd*' (God's Name) then food came in your share. You distribute fearlessly". Mata Khiwi set an eternal example by discharging her duty in an appropriate manner. Sata-Balvand while describing this incident in "*Rām Kali War*" praised the Mata's nature in the following words : -

*"Balvand Khiwi nek jan, Jis bouhti chhao patrali,
Langar doulat vandiey, ras amrit kheer ghiali;
Gur Sikhan de man ujle, manmukh thiey parali;
Pae Kabool Khasam naal, Jan ghal mardi ghali
Mata Khiwi Soh soi jin goe uthali."*

While interpreting this *pauri* (stanza), Bhai Sahib Singh writes that "She ! (Guru Angad Dev's wife Mata Khiwi) like her husband is noble. (It means that in her proximity one gets peace and bless).

In the above *pauri* (stanza) Balvand has stated three points regarding Mata Khiwi: (1) She was very noble and good natured. (2) She would give comfort to everyone around, and (3) in her devotion and service there was strength and determination like that of a man.

A writer has praised the community kitchen run by Mata Khiwi as "Mata used to prepare the '*langar*' with devotion. Those who used to take its *prashad* would enjoy the taste of milk. There was a talk of the town that those who had an opportunity to enjoy the food in the Mata's *langar* did not like to take food at their own houses, because of its delicious taste. Residents of nearby villages used to bring vegetables, ghee and wheat for the *langar*. From the time of Guru Nanak Dev this practice of earning with one's own labour and share the proceeds with others was being followed. Sometimes soldiers used to stop at Khadoor while going to Lahore from Delhi. They also used to take their meals in the *langar* of Mata Khiwi. Throughout their journey they used to praise the Mata for her good motherly behaviour. This good and homely treatment of the Mata was helpful in spreading the religion.

Khadoor was situated on the Grand Trunk Road leading from Delhi to Lahore. That is the main reason of Humayun's stay at Khadoor when he had fled away after losing the battle against Sher Shah Suri at Chausa (1539 A.D.) and then at Bilgam (Kanoj in 1540). He had also broken his journey at Khadoor to have blessings of Guru Angad Dev.

The Guru was busy teaching children the Gurmukhi script. He did not pay any attention to Humayun, who felt dishonoured and unsheathed his sword. Guru Nanak's house (Guru Angad Dev) which never bowed before emperors, raised his head and told Humayun, "Where was your this sword, which you want to use against the *Fakirs*, when you had fought against Sher Shah Suri". Humayun felt ashamed on hearing the Guru's remarks. He then left for Lahore where he was expecting to receive help from his brother Kamran.

When Guru Angad Dev used to teach children Punjabi language the Mata, very often, prepared sweetened food. Guru Angad Dev loved the children very much. People got inspiration from the Mata's tireless service, and they started taking interest in public service. Bhai Mani Singh has made a special mention of Bhai Kidara and Bhai Jodh in his "*Bhagat Mala*". Bhai Mani Singh has written that Bhai Jodh used to live in the presence of Guru Angad Dev, and prepare food for the visitors promptly. When (Guru) Amar Das came to visit Guru Angad Dev for obtaining his grace he also started social service by carrying water and cleaning utensils in the *langar*. Mata Khiwi became an ideal before the Sikhs of Guru. When Guru's wife could serve them after giving up ego, then how could they feel shy of *Samaj*?

It was due to service in *langar* that untouchability had vanished in Sikhism and sense of equality had developed. Brahmins and caste Hindus had opposed tooth and nail this ideology of equality. They (Brahmins) even did not like the freedom of women-folk allowed in Sikh brotherhood. Bibi Amro was responsible for bringing Guru Amar Das closer to Guru's house and Mata Khiwi was feeling proud of the fact that she was the mother of Bibi Amro, who followed in the foot-prints of her wise mother and father and brought awakening among the Sikh people.

Bibi Amro got married to Bhai Jasoo of Baserke village. Bhai Jasoo was the son of Bhai Manak Chand and nephew of Guru Amar Das. The intelligent mother had made her daughter understand three points while sending her to her in-laws (i) Recite Gurubani before starting her daily work. (ii) Obey her mother-in-law and father-in-law. (iii) Not to go to her parents home unless she received a call from them. Sehrai has mentioned in his novel "*Akath-Katha*" that whenever Bibi Amro came to visit her parents Guru Angad Dev used to send her back with worldly things and a lot of Gurubani. Bibi Amro used to distribute a lot of flavour of Gurubani. It was creditable on her part that in the village Basarke the plant of *Guru Sikhi* (Sikh way of life) got nurtured, blossomed, spread and flowered. One day (Guru) Amar Dass got so much inspired to hear Gurubani from Bibi Amro that he immensely desired

to see and pay his homage to Guru Angad Dev. Bibi took him to Khadoor. Guru Angad Dev received (Guru) Amar Dass respectfully.

Devoted Wife

Mata Khiwi used to get up early in the morning, take her bath, recite Gurubani and then started her daily routine. During the day she served the pilgrims coming from various places. She used to attend upon the *langar* and then make arrangements for their boarding. Guru Angad Dev had vowed never to take any money from the offerings made by the pilgrims. He would make jute ropes for earning his livelihood. Mata Khiwi also helped him in his labour. The children were taught to consider the money offered in the Gurudwara as people's fund and to be used only for their requirements. They were expected to make their own living.

The Mata used to look after her husband who would eat only *Chappatis* made of barley. Once when Guru Angad's toe was wounded she stayed up several nights to take care of it. She was completely and truly devoted to him. She had adopted this *shalok* as a part of her life

*"Aap gavae sewa kare taan kichh paye maan
Nanak jis nu laga tis mile laga so parvan".*

Guru Granth Sahib, p.474

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MATA MANSA DEVI

MATA Mansa Devi was the consort of the third Sikh guru, Guru Amar Dass. Guru Amar Dass got the seat of Sikhism in old age. Therefore it is evident that Mata Mansa Devi also must be quite old at that time. It is obvious from the life history of Guru Amar Dass that he used to go on long religious trips. Being religious minded, he attached great importance to giving alms and bathing at religious places. During those days because of scarcity of means of transport, people used to travel in groups. In one such group of pilgrims, his consort Mata Mansa Devi, must have accompanied him. They shared the difficulties and pleasures together during such long pilgrimage. During the course of pilgrimage, they used to pitch camps on the way at many places to rest. At the same time they used to study the style and culture of local people around them. The couple thus gained a lot of insight and experience.

Their marriage took place in the year 1502. Mata Mansa Devi was 16 years old at that time and it can safely be assumed that she was born between the years 1482-1485. Generally, historians do not throw much light on the lives of consorts of the Gurus. Whatever little information is available it is only pertaining to their lives after marriage. We do not get any information therefore about Mata Mansa Devi's childhood and education. History is devoid of such vital facts.

Guru Amar Dass's father was a rich landlord and a trader. He was quite well-off. It can be assumed that Bhai Devi Chand Behl, father of Mata Mansa Devi, must also have held good position in society. Bhai Tej Bhan (father of Guru Amar Dass) must have married his son in a family of equal status. Guru Amar Dass was a resident of village 'Basarke', district Amritsar, and his marriage took place at village 'Sankhara', at a distance of 60 miles. This distance was quite a bit during those days and they must be visiting these villages in connection with their normal trading activities. It is evident from this fact that Mata Mansa Devi was born and brought up in a rich family. Naturally she must be educated and considering the prevailing circumstances must have a thorough knowledge of Gurmukhi language.

Mata Mansa Devi gave birth to two sons - (Baba) Mohan and (Baba) Mohri - and two daughters - Dani and Bhani. Bhani was the eldest daughter and she had the privilege of later being Guru's consort, Guru's mother and Guru's grand mother. She was quite calm, composed and kind-hearted woman. The Guru used to go to Haridwar for a few months every year leaving Mata Mansa Devi behind to look after the family affairs. She bore all the family responsibilities without complaining till the Guru's return and this shows her broad- mindedness. She was always busy looking after her children, family and fulfilling social obligations. This also shows her quality of selfless service. Also, Guru Amar Dass, at the age of 52 years, went to Khadur from Amritsar to serve Guru Angad Dev and sometimes he used to stay there for the whole year. But Mata Mansa Devi never complained about his absence. She made *Guru Bani* as her way of life. Her conscience was satisfied that her husband was engaged in Guru's service. She discharged all the duties like an obedient wife. This is a fine example of following God's wishes. She gave ample proof of her intelligence and patience by happily carrying out all her duties.

Guru Amar Dass was 72 years old when he devoted himself fully to the service of Guru Angad Dev. For twelve long years he used to bring a pitcher full of water from river Beas for the Guru's bath every day. He attained *Guru Gaddi* at the age of 84. At that time his wife also had grown quite old, when she attained the status of Guru's consort. Before this she was just a common mother like others. According to the wishes of Guru Angad Dev the Guru took over charge of the construction of Goindwal Nagar on the banks of the river Beas. His family also moved from Basarke to Goindwal. Thus both the Guru and the Mata made great contribution towards the development of Goindwal. It is obvious that she was quite at home with selfless service to the people. She helped the Guru in the building of *Baoli Sahib* (well). Under her leadership many other women also contributed their bit during the *kar-sevu* (free labour). On the one hand the Mata used to look after the preparation of *langar* according to guru tradition and on the other she helped in the *kar seva*. She used to serve free meals (*langar*) with pleasure to the *kar sevaks* and herself took the task of cleaning utensils.

According to tenets of *guru-ka-langar* (community kitchen) all devotees, rich or poor, have to sit together on the floor in a row reciting *satnam-vaheguru* until food has been distributed to every one. Thus she used to serve *langar* to all with great faith and enthusiasm.

The Mata played an important role in the upliftment of women. Being a woman she could very well understand the plight of the widows of that

period. In those times widows were forced to shave-off their heads and were turned out of their homes. These hapless ladies often took shelter in religious places. As stated earlier she used to draw the attention of the Guru towards the plight of such women in society. The Guru was a great personality in those days. He drew people's attention to this social evil and aroused awareness in the society with the result that even today such cruelties are not inflicted on women in the Punjab. Neither their heads are shaved nor are they thrown out of their homes. Generally, widows are remarried so that they can lead a normal life.

The Mata also discussed with the Guru another social evil prevailing in those days, *Sati pratha* (burning of widows). *Sati pratha* was common in Rajasthan and many other states. According to this custom a widow used to burn herself alive at the pyre of her deceased husband. In a way she was forced to this act by the society. There were many reasons for this evil; firstly, that a widow may not become legal heir to her late husband's property; and secondly she should not fall prey to the evil desires of other men of the family as in such cases there were more chances of adultery in the society. To get rid of all the subsequent problems, *sati* was considered an appropriate action. The Guru opposed this social evil and mentioned it in his religious verses. A woman who burns herself at the pyre of her husband is not a *sati* but real *sati* is the one who bears her bereavement and dies spiritually. In his verses the guru has defined ideal social behaviour of married couples. "An ideal couple is not the one that sit together but the one who remain two bodies in one soul".

Thus whenever the Mata pointed out any social evil or social custom to the guru he used to criticize that as if it was a part of his life style. He deplored this custom of *sati* in very strong words, that is why this custom has no place in Sikhism.

One day the Mata drew the Guru's attention to another social evil *Parda* (veil). She told the Guru that women were doing social service hand-in-hand with men but their greatest problem was the veil. With veil on their faces, their efficiency got diminished and they suffered from inferiority complex. The Guru was against this custom. So he had given instructions that no woman should come with her face veiled in his *kirtan durbar* (religious congregations). Women started obeying his command and gradually this custom came to an end. Voice against veil was first raised by the Mata.

Guru Nanak Dev was the first one to give equal status to women in society in his poetical work, called *asa-di-war*. Following the very tradition Guru Amar Dass said that upliftment of women was necessary for upliftment

of society. Not only did the Guru remove these evils but he also encouraged the role of women in propagation of religion. It was evident that the couple enjoyed complete one-ness in deeds and thoughts and they often discussed social problems freely. The Mata had a lot of experience. She not only discussed the problems but also helped in finding their solution. There is, however, no doubt that the final solution of the problems rested with the Guru.

Guru Amar Dass appointed women preachers for the first time. It is said that the Guru established 72 small seats (*pidha*) and 22 big seats (*manji*) for women preachers. These were big and small centres for propagation of religion. He honoured two women with these centres. They were 'Matho Murari' and 'Sanchan Sach'. He also gave 72 sub-seats (*panguda*) to women.

Guru Amar Dass chose a poor and simple man as life partner for his daughter. Under such circumstances any mother would have been worried about her daughter's future but the Mata did not worry at all and respected the wishes of her husband, who knew that the same poor young man would one day become the fourth Guru and will work for the welfare of the world. Guru Amar Dass's choice of the son-in-law and the Mata's joyful acceptance of the same points to the Guru's and Mata's cohesiveness. Both had great faith in God and so left everything in God's hands. They neither worried about the future of their daughter nor about the poor financial condition of their son-in-law.

Following Guru Angad Dev's orders (Guru) Amar Dass moved from Khadur to Goindwal. He called his family to Goindwal also which included his daughter Bibi Bhani and son-in-law Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Dass). *Panguras* were cradles in which small children were put to sleep. While moving these cradles the women used to tell their neighbours tales related to the lives of the gurus. In this way they helped in making roots of religion stronger and transmitting it to the coming generations. The Mata contributed a lot in this field. Bibi Bhani is a solid proof of inheriting these assimilated values from her mother. She served her father selflessly and thus created history. When she became the consort of Guru Ram Dass she gave ample proof of her co-operation. When she became the mother of her son Guru Arjun Dev, then too she helped and gave *advice* to him in all his work. Guru Amar Dass got volumes (*Sanchian*) of Gurubani compiled by his son Bhai Mohan. Later on while compiling Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Arjun Dev got possession of these volumes (*Sanchian*) from Baba Mohan from Goindwal. The Mata is solely responsible for building up of Goindwal township and

Baoli Sahib. She created history by doing *kar seva* in their construction.

Mata Mansa Devi was broad-minded and kind. This can be assessed from the way she cultivated the habit of service in her daughter. This was the reason why she and her colleagues (*Sangat*) were absorbed in the *kar-seva* of Baoli Sahib. Bhai Jetha also used to spend his day doing *kar seva* and selling roasted gram in the evening to earn his living. Thus the whole family did a lot of free service.

In brief it can be said that Mata Mansa Devi played an important role in Guru Amar Dass's mission to spread Sikhism and introduce social reforms. She raised her voice against social evils relating to women. Her contribution in these reforms is admirable. Particularly in an age when women were confined to the house, she did a commendable job in freeing women from these shackles and made their lives respectable.

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MATA DAMODRI

IT is true that we have still not become aware of the importance and proper maintenance of our glorious history. Many reasons can be attributed to it. My point of view is that we have never so far felt intensely that history is a part and parcel of religion. That religion which leaves rich heritage of sacrifice, bravery and service for its posterity can never die. No tyrant usurper can make such community a prey of his Machiavellian political designs.

The religions which have understood these facts have recognised the immense importance of such treasure and at the same time tried that their youth should also know about it. Another main reason for our irresponsibility in this field is that politics and political atmosphere has left an indelible stamp on our thinking. Any person, no matter how good, intelligent or progressive he may be, if he belongs to the opposition (other party) we will also oppose him. We never appreciate or value his achievements rather we will try to cover up the weaknesses and appreciate even a stupidity provided the person belongs to our group. This faulty policy has never left us with open avenues for historical research.

In our lifetime we celebrated the fifth centenary of Guru Nanak Dev in 1969. At that time several Sikh scholars and many universities wrote and published books on Guru Nanak Dev. However, till date, we have many queries about his travels and also whether he was born in the month of *Kartik* or *Baisakh*?

If, however, many intellectuals concede that he was born in *Baisakh*, then why don't we celebrate his birthday in this month? There is further conceptual contradiction, when on the one hand we repeat the *Sakhi* (Gospel) of Sister Nanki making *rotis* on *tawa* (iron skillet) and readily believe that by some divine premonition Guru Nanak arrives at his sister's home at exactly the same moment; and on the other hand we spread the teachings of Guru Nanak that performing miracles is apocalyptic and nobody has the right to interfere with the law and harmony of the Nature and Cosmos.

One can cite more examples of our ignorance and lack of consideration.

If any effort has been put in to chronicle history then there are few records pertaining to the lives of the Gurus. The *Guru Mahals* (spouses of the Gurus) have been vastly ignored by the historians. Many lame excuses are put forward. Our society is male-dominated and all energies are channelled to highlight the role of men-folk; the positive role of women-folk has been highlighted by only a few scholars. However, it is a well known fact that women have played a pivotal architectural role in designing the future of all castes, creeds (family) and religions.

In the last few years, our attention has been drawn to this significant aspect. With a positive social wave gaining momentum an International Day for Women is commemorated and celebrated so that the positive role of women in society is highlighted and discussed in detail every year. Similarly, *Guru Mahals* has also been a subject of the writer's pen for the last few years. In this field Mata Sundri College of New Delhi has played a vital role under the able guidance and constructive participation of its Principal, Dr. Mohinder Kaur Gill, who has set aside one day each year to commemorate Mata Sundri Memorial Day. This day is celebrated by presenting a well-researched paper on the consorts of Gurus and getting it published later.

I would now like to express my views based on the facts collected from the life history of Mata Damodri and also her great contribution to the history. Mata Bhani has been bestowed with the most significant status amongst the consorts of the Gurus. She was the daughter of Guru Amar Dass, wife of Guru Ram Dass, mother of Guru Arjan Dev and the grand mother of Guru Har Gobind. In the same manner, Mata Damodri was the wife of Guru Har Gobind, grand-mother of Guru Hari Rai, great-grand-mother of Guru Harkishan and just like a mother to Guru Tegh Bahadur. She was the first daughter-in-law of Guru Arjan Dev.

Family Background

Mata Damodri's grand-father, Bhai Paro, was a shining star of Sikh history with total devotion, service and commitment. He followed the path shown by Guru Nanak Dev in such a way that Guru Amar Dass once commented that there was a possibility of his attaining the light of Guru Nanak.

However, with folded hands Bhai Paro requested the Guru to let him remain a true Sikh as he enjoyed being that. Bhai Sahib Doctor Vir Singh has described this incident in one of his writings. He writes, "Village Dalla of district Sultanpur has given birth to a great man called Bhai Paro, in whom Guru Amar Dass saw the light of true God and *Guru gaddi*. However, that

true Sikh, with all his humility and devotion asked only for Sikhism and he was blessed with that”.

Bhai Santokh Singh has also described the same incident in his book “*Suraj Prakash Granth*”. According to him Guru Amar Dass blessed him and said that one day his family will be associated with the family of the Guru. This blessing was realised when Guru Arjan Dev accepted the matrimonial alliance of his son Guru Har Gobind with a daughter from this family named Bibi Damodri, and the Guru himself took the marriage party to village Dalla in 1605. Many Sikh historians have recorded this event.

Village Dalla is situated at five kilometers distance from Sultanpur Lodhi. The residents of this village had first met Guru Nanak Dev, when on the insistence of his sister he had come from Rai Bhoi Ki Talwandi to Sultanpur and worked there in the treasury and preached Sikhism at the same time. Many people of village Dalla embraced Sikhism at that time. One of them was the father of Bhai Paro. When Bhai Paro came to have a glimpse of the second light of Guru Nanak Dev, i.e., Guru Angad Dev, at Khandoor Sahib he just stayed there. Bhai Paro was present when the time came for Guru Angad Dev to merge with the Divine Light and while answering one of the questions he announced that the third Guru will be Guru Amar Dass. Writing about the life story of Guru Angad Dev, Bhai Vir Singh writes that after listening to his disciples the Guru told Bhai Paro that after him Guru Amar Dass will be the next Guru. He will be an embodiment of Himself only and the disciples could find an obvious *Darshan* of His true self and in addition, His support and love and compassion, shall sustain Sikhism.

After this Bhai Paro started going to Goindwal for the glimpses of Guru Amar Dass. At least twice a week he used to go to Goindwal after crossing the river on his horse. He never cared for the deep, or fast flowing, waters of the river.

In the village whenever any *Kirtan* (religious congregation) took place participation of Bhai Paro’s family was a must. His sons, grandsons and all the women-folk of his house visited Goindwal. Thereafter they started visiting Amritsar for *Darshan* of Guru Ram Dass. When the *kar sewa* of *Amrit sarovar* (pool of nectar) began, and Guru Arjan Dev started constructing *Hari Mandir* in the centre of *Amrit Sarovar* then Bhai Narain Dass came here as the chief of the family along with the *sangat* of village Dalla.

Birth and Childhood

A girl child was born to Bhai Narain Dass of Dalla village in 1556 AD.

She was named Damodri. Many historians have not mentioned the name of Damodri's mother. Bhai Vir Singh in his writings 'Life Profile of Guru Har Gobind Sahib' mentions the name of Damodri's mother as Prem Dai. When parleys about Damodri's marriage were being held, then the women of the village used to knit *Phulkaris* and *Dushalas* for offering them to Prem Dai and used to say, 'If you accept our gift as the dowry of your daughter we will consider it as a blessing'. Similarly, Bhai Vir Singh has mentioned Prem Dai's name in his writings many a time.

Bhai Narain Dass and Prem Dai had two daughters. The elder was called Ramo and the younger one was known as Damodri. Ramo was married to Bhai Sain Dass of Daroli village. As there was no male member in the family, Bhai Narain Dass decided to settle Bhai Sain Dass in Dalla village itself. Every year both the families jointly went to seek Guru's *Darshan*. Bhai Narain Dass educated both his daughters very well. They were also given religious education. Historians have mentioned that both the sisters had by nature sweet temperament and heartfelt of praise for their master.

Due to *Nam-Simran*, reverence for their masters, and by Nature's gift also the faces of both the sisters used to glow divinely.

Engagement And Marriage

Bhai Narain Das, along with his family, had visited Amritsar in 1605, one year after the original holy book *Adi Granth* was consecrated, to witness the glory of *Guru's Darbar*. At that time a priest of Tehsildar Chandulal belonging to Lahore had come with the proposal of marriage of his patron's daughter with Sri Har Gobind, at the court of Guru Arjan Dev. It was also, however, known that Chandulal was earlier dissatisfied with this proposal as he felt that this would be a mis-match between the palace and the hut. Later on, he reconciled on his own and sent his personal priest. The Sikh *Sangat* (congregation) pleaded to the Guru not to accept this proposal by a boastful Chandu. Guru Arjan Dev agreed to what his *Sangat* said and the event became talk of the town, especially the announcement by the Guru that henceforth all future marriages will be within the Sikh community only. In the same congregation, Bhai Narain Das, after consulting his son-in-law Sain Das, and after obtaining his consent, proposed to the Guru with folded hands the marriage of Prince Har Gobind with his daughter Damodri. He added, if the Guru accepted his humble proposal, he shall feel highly liberated. Guru Arjan Dev readily accepted the proposal and the ceremony of engagement was performed immediately. Bhai Narain Das adorned the forehead of (Guru)

Har Gobind with vermilion (*tilak*) of engagement as per the custom. The whole congregation expressed their heart-felt joy upon this pure union of the two families.

At the time of engagement, (Guru) Har Gobind was ten years old and Damodri was of nine years. According to Bhai Santokh Singh, "After the very next day of the ceremony, Bhai Narain Dās appealed to the Guru to hasten the process of marriage." Guru Arjan Dev laughingly said, "Narain Das, let two months pass. By the month of *Magh*, we shall come to Dalla to perform the ceremony of marriage. Now you can go to your house and prepare for that event."

Sardar Randhir Singh wrote in "*Punjabi Duniya*", (June/July 1953) that the marriage of Sri Har Gobind and Damodri took place in Dalla village on the 9th day of *Magh*, the year 1662 (according to Hindu Margsheersh year). Guru Arjan Dev proceeded from Amritsar to Dalla village with his son's *barat* (marriage procession)." In "*Suraj Prakash Granth*", Bhai Santokh Singh has described this wedding in lucid detail.

This historic wedding had many new and unique things to its credit. The marriage procession of (Guru) Har Gobind, led by Guru Arjan Dev, started from Amritsar and the first halt was at Tarn Taran. The members of Guru Angad Dev's family joined them at Khadur, after that they went to Goindwal where Baba Mohan blessed them. After visiting the historical places, they went to Sultanpur Lodhi. Reciting holy hymns they spent two nights like this on their way, and from there the family of the Guru reached village Dalla. The people of Dalla village had made arrangement for their welcome. From one side came the marriage procession reciting holy hymns and from the other side came the residents of the village in the same form. The whole village very respectfully escorted the *barat* and made arrangement for its stay.

Bhai Narain Das asked, with folded hands, as to what type of canopy should be erected for the marriage. Guru Arjan Dev immediately replied that since it was meeting of two souls, so they should start a new tradition. He told them that the holy Granth containing divine teachings (*Bani*) was ready and it was respectfully opened for "*Parkash*", each morning, at the Harimandir. He told them to have that Granth sacredly opened up at that place also and it was thus that the tradition of *Anand Karaj* (auspicious event) with recitation of four *Shalokas* (*Lawans*) and other hymns, was started.

On the occasion of this marriage, the residents of Dalla village profusely thanked Guru Arjan Dev that he had blessed them by making a daughter of their village a member of his family. He had blessed them with his *Darshan*,

and so he should also bless them with some other souvenir of his visit.

Dalla village used to suffer a lot from scarcity of water, so they requested him to do something about it. Guru Arjan Dev had a well (*Baoli*) dug up, and a Gurdwara built in the name of Mata Damodri.

Only a short time after her marriage Mata Damodri had to face some serious difficulties. Hardly a year had passed when the Mughal Emperor Jahangir sent for her father-in-law, Guru Arjan Dev, to Lahore and announced that he may never return from Lahore, so the *Gurugaddi* was then assigned to Guru Har Gobind. By offering a coconut and a coin of five paise, Guru Har Gobind was then made the sixth Divine Light of Guru Nanak Dev. So Daimodri's husband was now the Guru of Sikhs also and the ten years old Damodri now became Mata Damodri for the whole Sikh congregation. The devotion, love, commitment and wisdom with which she performed this responsibility was appreciated and praised all over. When the time for Guru Har Gobind arrived to sit at the assigned place of *Guru Gaddi*, i.e., the Akal Takht, opposite the Hari Mandir, the leader of "*Miri-Piri*" (Spirituality and Valour) commanded that two shoulder straps should be made, so that he could wear two swords next to his body. The Mata's wisdom is clearly reflected in the way those two straps (*Gatras*) were made for him to wear his two swords.

Guru Arjan Dev was severely tortured in Lahore. He was made to sit in a big pot full of boiling water and after that he was told to sit on a hot skillet, and then made to stand in the cold waters of River Ravi. It was a period of great crisis for the whole Sikh world. There were many new adversities before Mata Damodri also. However, she faced them all with great fortitude and courage. She faithfully obeyed her husband, Guru Har Gobind, and contributed her mite fully in each and every plan.

Many weak-minded Sikhs got nervous and confused when Guru Har Gobind announced that he was forming an army consisting of Sikhs (or a Sikh army). He also announced that he would gladly accept good quality weapons and horses of good breed into the Guru's treasury. Those weak persons thought that this was a direct confrontation with the then government. Many Sikhs came to the Guru's house and entreated with Mata Damodri to let the Guru understand how the Mughul government was going to misinterpret it and also requested her to not let him take the path of direct confrontation. Mata Damodri had full faith in her Guru. She said that let God's will be done. She told them that Sikh religion needed some radical awakening, and her husband was trying to do exactly the same.

Five years after her marriage, she faced another challenge, when

Emperor Jahangir called Guru Har Gobind to Delhi for a dialogue and imprisoned him in Agra. After announcing a prolonged punishment he confined him under house-arrest in the fort of Gwalior. Mata Ganga had Mata Damodri with her, and both of them faced the whole situation with courage and fortitude. Mata Damodri's service and contribution is worth mentioning at this point.

Mata Damodri was blessed with a child after eight years of her marriage. She had two sons - Baba Guruditta and Shri Ani Rai. Bibi Veero was their daughter. Baba Guruditta was born in 1613, Bibi Veero in 1615 and Ani Rai in 1618. These dates have been mentioned by Prof. Sahib Singh in "The History of Guru". About the birth of Baba Guruditta another noteworthy historian, Prof. Kartar Singh, mentions in the "History of Sikhs" that he was born in 1617 in his maternal aunt's village. This village is in district Ferozepur. He was adept in both spiritual field and in worldly knowledge. He was also a fearless warrior. To fulfill the wishes of his father he joined the commune of "*Udhasi*" tradition which was run by Baba Sri Chand. Sister Veero was two years younger to Baba Guruditta. When she grew up she was married to a youth called Sadhujec. She gave birth to five brave sons adept in both religion and warfare. They all participated in the Battle of Bhangani with the tenth Guru where they came out in flying colours.

Ani Rai was born in the year 1618, in Amritsar. He was a great ascetic, who used to spend his time in *Nam-chanting*. He didn't marry throughout his life. He died in Kiratpur Sahib.

Mata Damodri had a profound influence on her children. Her children inherited the same good qualities as hers. Like their mother they were extremely patient. Mata Damodri proved herself to be the first wise and expert teacher for her children.

Mata Damodri spent 26 years of her married life in the Guru household and contributed richly to the cultural heritage and glory of Sikhs. In 1631 A.D. the Mata breathed her last at her elder sister Ramo's village Darauli in Ferozepur district.

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MATA MAHA DEVI

IN Sikh religion the wife of the Guru is remembered as *Guru Mahal* or Mata. The youngest wife of Guru Har Gobind was Mata Maha Devi. Even prior to Mata Maha Devi, there was a great tradition of *Guru Mahals* which is our heritage, glory and prestige. But when we look into Sikh history we find that the historians have given a detailed account of the lives of the Gurus. However, they have remained silent regarding the domestic lives of the Gurus and the contributions of their wives. In Sikh history the account of Mata Maha Devi is very brief. Whatever description we find is not direct but in relation to some important incidents which took place during that period.

Old story writers and historians have accepted Mata Maha Devi as the youngest wife of Guru Har Gobind. We also accept this view. We will try to give an account of the personality of Mata Maha Devi with whatever material is at our disposal.

The birth of Guru Har Gobind took place in the family of Guru Arjun Dev through Mata Ganga with the blessing of Baba Budha at Amritsar.

The founder of the Sikh *Panth*, Guru Nanak Dev, and the Gurus after him, considered family life as the noblest way of living. They did not invite confrontation with the contemporary rulers. But on the other hand tried to improve the social and political conditions of that time through *Bani*. Guru Arjun Dev compiled the *Bani* of the previous Gurus in the form of Guru Granth Sahib. But the Emperor of the time did not like all that. He was worried on account of the increasing popularity of the Guru. Later on, however, he extended the hand of friendship towards the Guru.

In India, at that time Jahangir was the Mughal Emperor. Chandu was one of his minions. He sent a *pandit* to the Guru for the alliance of his daughter. Guru Arjun Dev accepted this proposal but his followers at Delhi did not approve of this relationship. As a result the Guru refused this alliance. Chandu considered it as a great insult. He instigated the Mughal Emperor to call the Guru at Lahore where he became a martyr.

On account of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev, there was wide-spread

anger among the Sikh community, specially in the family of the Guru. Guru Har Gobind, with great determination, decided that he will make the Sikh religion and Sikhs powerful. On one side he was engaged in spiritual pursuits but on the other side he prepared the Sikhs with arms to face the worldly powers.

From the Akal Takht he made the Mughals realise the power of his authority. *Nishan Sahib* (the Sikh flag) was hoisted and *Hari Mandir* was now called as *Sacha Darbar*. He did not compose any *Bani* as the previous five Gurus had done but instead organised army and constructed forts. In ordinary life, Emperor is considered as the symbol of worldly power but *Sacha Padsha* or true Emperor, was the symbol of spiritual power also. In other words Guru was neither less than any worldly ruler nor was he separate from God. This is the reason why the Guru had laid more emphasis on God rather than the ruler. He used to put *Kalgi* over his head, hold a '*Baaz*' (falcon), used to travel on a horse, keep two swords made of diamonds and was called the master of '*Meeri*' and '*Peeri*'. As in the imperial *darbar* judicial courts were held to give justice to the people, similarly the Guru from Akal Takht started settling disputes and to give justice. Thus he established a parallel government along with the Mughal Emperors.

While studying Sikh history we learn that Guru Har Gobind, who was also called the Master of *Meeri* and *Peeri*, had more than one wife, which was also one of the signs of his royalty. Historically he had three wives. All Sikh historians have accepted it. All the three wives also gave birth to his children.

Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha in his great epic gave description of the Guru's marriages. He also says that the Guru married three times (page 165).

The first marriage took place according to Indian calendar in 1661 at Dalla with Damodri, daughter of Bhai Narain Das. The second marriage was held in 1660 with Nanki, daughter of Bhai Hari Chand of Bakala. The third marriage was performed in 1672 with Maha Devi, daughter of Bhai Daya Ram of Mandiyali.

In order to know about any of the Gurus, one can attain knowledge from his compositions or the compositions of the contemporary poets or from '*Sau Sakhi Granth*'. But the Gurus who have composed *Bani* had never mentioned any thing regarding their wives or their domestic life. As far as Guru Har Gobind is concerned he did not compose any *Bani*. Historians or story-writers when they have mentioned about *Guru Mahals* it is in the context of some incident rather than as a person.

As Sikhism has the distinction of believing in formless God, so the

tendency to worship the spiritual life-partners of the Gurus could not develop. This is the reason that the wives of the Sikh Gurus could not get the same status as those of the Gurus unlike in other Indian religions where God and Goddess are worshipped together, e.g., Gori-Shankar, Sita-Ram, Radhe-Sham, etc. This is the reason that the historians also neglected *Guru Mahals*.

Guru Har Gobind's third marriage was held in 1672 with Maha Devi daughter of Bhai Daya Ram Marwah of Mandyalji. Bhai Daya Ram was Khatri by caste and his *Gotre* was Marwah. It is for this reason that many Sikh writers called her as Mata Marwahi. Kavi Mohan in his work "*Shri Guru Bilas - Patshahi VI*" has given an account of the birth of Mata Maha Devi. He writes that the name of Bhai Daya Ram's wife was Bhagni. They did not have any child even after many years of their marriage. Their family members had learned since a long time that Guru Arjun Dev had redressed the sorrows of many people. During that time there was a Guru Sikh whose name was Bhai Kidara of Mendra town, who was suffering from *Hanjira* disease. He touched the shoes of the Guru and was cured of his disease. This story was told to Bhai Daya Ram Marwah. Marwahs were deprived of having children. When they learnt about this incident their regards and faith towards the Guru became even stronger. Bhai Daya Ram's wife Bhagni was a pious lady. There was no dearth of wealth in the house. Only they did not have any child. They were depressed on account of not having a child. Kavi Mohan has given a beautiful account of the state of mind of this couple.

Both Bhai Daya Ram and Mata Bhagni became "*Sewaks*" of the Guru. They decided to attain a child through the Guru's blessings only. Those who talked about the Guru glory told Bhai Daya Ram that in case Bhagni gives birth to a daughter they should give away that girl to Guru Arjun Dev's son Har Gobind.

It was during that time that Guru Har Gobind on his mission of spreading Sikh religion, was returning to Amritsar from Kashmir. On his way back he broke journey at Mandyalji. Because the birth of the girl was with the blessings of Guru Arjun Dev, and they had already decided regarding her marriage, so Bhai Daya Ram, along with other people, requested the Guru to accept his good looking and humble daughter. During those days, child-marriage was in vogue. Sikhs used to feel greatly honoured by having family ties with the Guru's family. They used to consider it as a matter of great social prestige. Bhai Daya Ram Marwah belonged to a respectable family. At that time Maha Devi was only 11 years of age and the Guru was 18. The Guru had brilliant personality. He was wearing royal attire. Maha Devi was also

beautiful and she had fine features. All over she was known for her beauty. The Guru accepted the request of Bhai Daya Ram Marwah and the people who came along with him. Bhai Daya Ram considered himself very fortunate. The whole atmosphere became jubilant. Bhai Daya Ram and Mata Bhagni started making preparations for "*Shagun*".

The people of Mandiyali were very happy. They congratulated the parents, and started singing songs. Preparations for marriage were started.

The 4th of *Sawan*, Sunday, auspicious day of the marriage of Bibi Maha Devi and Guru Har Gobind had arrived. The place, where the actual marriage ceremony was to be performed was decorated with diamonds and pearls. Maha Devi was dressed as bride and the Guru as bridegroom. Band was played, fire-works were displayed. The Mandiyali village people were very happy. On 11th *Sawan* 1672 (according to Indian calendar) the marriage ceremony was concluded. At the place where the marriage took place a Gurudwara was constructed which is known as "*Chutala Sahib*". It was at this place that Bibi Maha Devi became *Guru Mahal*. At the time of departure, mother-in-law Bhagni requested the Guru to bring Maha Devi sometimes to Mandiyali village and to give his *darshan* also. She also gave some parting advice to her daughter. Then the Guru along with *Palki* of Mata Maha Devi proceeded for Amritsar. On his way, the Guru took shelter under a *Beri* tree. When they reached Amritsar Mata Ganga welcomed the youngest bride of her dear son with all the *Shaguns*. Although Mata Maha Devi was the youngest wife of the Guru but Mata Ganga gave her a respectable position in the Guru palace. She always remained affectionate towards her as Maha Devi herself was very social and friendly. With her good behaviour she not only won the heart of her mother-in-law but also of her two elder co-sisters (Guru's two other wives). With them she had very loving relationship. Both of them also established affectionate bonds with her. Now she was no more an ordinary woman. She was the wife of Guru Har Gobind. Spiritually, mentally, and physically she was blessed with a peculiar personality. Now her social responsibility had also increased.

Mata Maha Devi's heart was also filled with love. She had come to live in an atmosphere which had its special discipline. Here every one was engrossed in worship. Mata Maha Devi also started worshipping in a similar manner. On account of her sweet and patient nature she soon became part of the family. Mata Ganga was a sensible mother-in-law. Her behaviour with the three wives of the Guru was the same.

As a consequence the entire atmosphere in the house was peaceful. The Lord of *Meeri* and *Peeri* used to respect those who read and listened

to *Gurubani*. This was known to Mata Maha Devi. She used to recite *Jupji* all the time. When the Guru visited his *Mahals* he was very pleased to see that everyone was engrossed in *Gurubani*.

Mata Maha Devi saw the system of *Langar* in the *Guru Ghar* which was started by Mata Sulakhni and by now it had become an institution in itself. After her whosoever had come as *Guru Mahal* had taken up the responsibility of serving in '*langar*'. Mata Maha Devi also, under the guidance of Mata Ganga Devi, made herself a part of the *langar* system. Where as the Guru had given the responsibility of collecting *daswand* (1/10 of income) to the *masands*, the responsibility of *langar* was of Mata Maha Devi.

In 1674 Mata Maha Devi gave birth to a son at Amritsar. He was named Suraj Mal. Suraj Mal's elder brother Baba Guruditta was born through Mata Damodri. After the birth of Suraj Mal, Mata Maha Devi was given great respect from all sides. Her love towards her husband, the Lord of *Meeri* and *Peeri*, also greatly increased. With great love and care she started upbringing the child. Along with her son, she also loved other children of the Guru family. Guru Har Gobind gave his children education of *Gurubani*, religious books, military training and also taught horse-riding. Guru Har Gobind had five sons: (i) Baba Guruditta (ii) Baba Suraj Mal (iii) Baba Ani Rai (iv) Baba Atal, and (v) Baba Tegh Bahadur. He also had a daughter. Her name was Veero, and Mata Maha Devi had special love for her. During the wedding of Veero Mata Maha Devi more than any one else shouldered responsibility. The Guru went for four wars. During that period Mata Maha Devi along with Mata Ganga, Mata Damodri and Mata Nanki lived in Amritsar and spent time in prayers.

The third battle started at the time when preparations for the marriage of Bibi Veero were being made. On the other side there was bitter feeling spreading fast between Mughals and the Sikh Guru. The reason for this was that the Guru had hoisted a flag at Akal Takht which showed his independence. An intense struggle took place between both the sides. Eventually the Guru was imprisoned in the fortress of Gwalior. Mata Maha Devi, Mata Ganga, Mata Damodri and Mata Nanki accepted the will of God but at the same time prayed for his well-being and waited for his arrival.

When in 1676, after getting the release of 52 Rajas, the Guru left the fort of Gwalior for Amritsar, it was *Deepawali* day. To celebrate his arrival the whole town was illuminated. There was special atmosphere prevailing in the *Guru Mahal's* house. Mata Maha Devi, like other wives of the Guru, was anxiously waiting for her husband. The Guru first went to *Hari Mandir* and

then to *Akal Bunga*. The Sikh *Sangat* received his *Darshan*. After that he visited his *Mahals*. Mata Maha Devi was the last to get his *Darshan*. She was so happy at the Guru's return to Amritsar that she could not control herself. From morning till evening she waited and then only her long waiting was over. She did not only consider the Guru as her husband, but also her Guru and *Saccha Patsha*. When at night, *Hari Mandir* was illuminated and fire works were lighted Mata Maha Devi's happiness knew no bounds.

At Amritsar, the Guru took up the work of reorganising the town, the *Sarowar Parikarma*, *Bag*, *Guru ka langar*, and *Akal bunga* where a well was dug. At that time Mata Maha Devi along with Mata Damodri and Mata Nanki co-operated with the Guru so that the whole task was carried out smoothly. To preach Sikh religion the Guru travelled through the entire Punjab. He acquired sufficient amount of wealth and clothes. The provisions were sent to Amritsar, as the marriage of Bibi Veero was approaching near, where Mata Maha Devi and Mata Nanki took care of them.

During this period, the Guru's relations with the rulers became tense. Mughal troops attacked Amritsar. The Guru was prompt in making appropriate defence policies. Visualising the intensity of war, the Guru instructed Bhag Singh to take *Guru Mahals* to Ramsar. They did not take anything with them, thus the whole house was left as it was. Mata Damodri was upset because the marriage of her daughter Veero was to take place. Mata Nanki and Mata Maha Devi consoled her and said they should have confidence in the words of the Guru which he had uttered earlier to the Mata that these "Sweets Turks will eat". The words of Guru cannot be untrue. They should leave this place in peace.

When according to the orders of the Guru, Mata Marwahi, Mata Damodri and Mata Nanki reached Ramsar in carriages and *dolis*, they discovered that they had left Bibi Veero at Amritsar. They sent *sewaks* to bring Bibi Veero. Only two days were left for the wedding of Bibi Veero. The Guru gave orders that all of them should go to Jhabal. Three of the Guru's wives reached Jhabal. In these two days the Guru fought the fourth battle and then went to Jhabal. After reaching there they made preparations for the marriage. The *barat* came at night and in the morning the auspicious wedding took place. The place where the marriage was to be performed was decorated with diamonds, pearls and other precious stones. From that time that place was called "Manak Chowk" Jhabal.

After this the events took place in rapid succession. The Guru was to go to Daroli, where Mata Damodri had passed away. The Guru sent Bhai Guruditta, Mata Nanki and Bhai Tegh Bahadur along with Guru Granth Sahib

to Kartarpur. Bhai Surajmal and his mother Mata Marwahi and other members of the family were sent to Kiratpur. Before all this Mata Ganga had already left for heavenly abode. Now there was no body to give the same affection to Mata Mahadevi. The Guru was so much involved in spreading of Sikh religion that he did not visit Amritsar and Kiratpur that often.

It was a great desire of Guru Har Gobind that spreading of the Sikh tenets should be done in a peaceful manner. The morale and confidence of the followers of Sikh religion should be raised. Their thoughts should be made independent and pure. On account of many wars which took place this task of the Guru was many times disrupted. When the wars were over he again used to involve himself in the spread of religion and benevolence to people. The festival of Baisakhi was celebrated at Kiratpur by the Guru. At Kiratpur a *dewan* was organised and *langar* was distributed. During his stay there, the Guru got four wells, *Dharamsalas* and some buildings constructed. The *dewan* of Baisakhi was held. People had come from distant places. An atmosphere of happiness and joy was prevalent everywhere. Mata Marwahi and Mata Nanki were also present there. Suraj Mal was also there who had then become a handsome youth. The Guru asked Suraj Mal to sit by his side. At that time, among the *sangat*, Premchand got up and made a proposal for the marriage of his daughter with Suraj Mal. When the Guru gave his acceptance, Premchand gave a *Chhuara* (fruit) to Suraj Mal. At that time Mata Marwahi felt ecstatic. On this auspicious occasion, she donated many things to charity. An atmosphere of prosperity was prevailing in the house. After that invitations for the wedding were sent far and wide. Preparations for marriage were started. The entire responsibility was given to Bhai Bidhia. The news of the marriage of Surajmal was sent to Mata Marwahi's parents.

After that preparations for *Barat* were made. Mata Marwahi herself dressed her son as bridegroom. The *Barat* reached Prem Chand's house where all the guests were honoured and welcomed. During this time Mata Marwahi and her mother Bhagni were very happy. The Guru gave due respect to his father-in-law and mother-in-law. Thus Mata Marwahi expressed her happiness on the occasion of the marriage of her son.

When in 1698 Guru Har Gobind decided to give *Guru Gaddi* to Guru Hari Rai, Mata Maha Devi requested the Guru to give *Gaddi* to Suraj Mal. Guru Har Gobind told her that Suraj Mal was more inclined towards worldly affairs. Her children will be called *sarkar* and they will never face any difficulty to obtain anything. But for the *Guru Gaddi* extreme sacrifice was needed. When Mata Marwahi heard the Guru's reply she accepted his wishes with humility.

Mata Marwahi was an integral member of *Guru Mahal*. She always acted in accordance with the atmosphere of that place and led a simple and religious life. She was fortunate to live with Guru Har Gobind and to look after Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Hari Rai. She helped Mata Nanaki to bring up Guru Tegh Bahadur. During the marriage of Suraj Mal, a proposal for the marriage of Guru Tegh Bahadur came from Bakala with Bibi Gujri. Mata Marwahi was fortunate enough to be present at this occasion also.

Guru Har Gobind made arrangements for the stay of Mata Marwahi and Suraj Mal at Kiratpur. It was in Kiratpur that on 6th *Chet* 1701 that the Guru passed away. After that Mata Marwahi spent her life in prayers and worship. In 1702 she also breathed her last.

Their son Suraj Mal's children were called Anandpuri Sodhi. While Mata Maha Devi had the status of *Guru Mahal*, in relationship she was also the mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grand-mother of Guru Hari Rai and great-grand-mother of Guru Harikishen.

Mrs. SUKHJIT KAUR
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MATA GUJRI

SIKHISM has a unique and long tradition of sacrifices made by the Sikh Gurus. The contribution of women belonging to their household has, somehow, been ignored or neglected by historians. Their contribution, however, cannot be denied. We are all aware of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur. But we remain ignorant of the contribution and sacrifices of his courageous wife, made at the home front. A careful study thus becomes necessary of Mata Gujri's life and times.

(Mata) Gujri's birth took place at Kartarpur, district Jalandhar, in a Khatri family. Her father was Lal Chand Subhikya, and mother Bishan Kaur. They had another child, a son called Kirpal Chand. The entire family were devout followers of the Sikh Gurus. Like all children, (Mata) Gujri's childhood was happy and care-free. It took a great deal of courage to be a Sikh follower in those days. Lal Chand's greatest desire was to see his son as a soldier in Guru Har Gobind's army and his daughter married to Guru Tegh Bahadur. Consideration on the matter began in the family. Bhai Lal Chand presented his proposal to Guru Har Gobind which was accepted. Guru Tegh Bahadur got engaged in Amritsar and was married in Kartarpur, according to Bhai Santokh Singh.

While he bade his daughter farewell, father Lal Chand gave valuable advice to (Mata) Gujri about married life. As she was about to depart her little brother began to cry. As was the custom, he accompanied his sister to her new home. Later Kirpal Chand stayed on there to become a soldier in Guru Har Gobind's army.

In her new home, (Mata) Gujri was welcomed with all the rituals and customs appropriate for the occasion. Guru Har Gobind distributed sweets and gifts to the local entertainers. Clothes and sweets were also given to the poor and orphans.

(Mata) Gujri's in-laws resided in Amritsar. At the time Guru Har Gobind accepted the seat of the Sikh gurus, the entire family lived with the Guru in the palaces. It was here that (Mata) Gujri began her married and family life. The Guru palaces were great centres of activity and excitement. Devotees

from long distances came to pay their respect in the form of several gifts and pledging their services. The women of the family had little work as it was attended to all the time by serving women. Everything was available in abundance. In this luxurious, comfortable and secure atmosphere (Mata) Gujri spent the early years of her married life. Mata Nanki, the mother-in-law, was greatly pleased to see her beautiful young daughter-in-law become part of the family.

Meanwhile, (Prince) Tegh Bahadur was being trained to be a soldier under the careful eyes of his father. He was skilled in sword-fightery, horse-riding and became absolutely strong physically. His mental growth was not neglected and he spent a great deal of time in prayers and meditation. He grew into a handsome youth at the tender age of 20. His face glowed with divine light. He was an incredible combination of saint and soldier which prompted Guru Har Gobind to call him saint-soldier.

There was a deep bond of love between Sri Tegh Bahadur and Bibi Gujri. Both had steady, impressive personalities, deeply respectful of all elders. Sri Tegh Bahadur took charge of the army under the guidance of the Guru and Bibi Gujri was trained as an efficient housekeeper by Mata Nanki.

However, this near perfect life could not last forever. Political compulsions forced the entire family, including Bibi Gujri, to leave Amritsar. She had to leave the place she had entered as a young bride; had turned into a woman from a young girl. The family followed Guru Har Gobind to finally reach Kiratpur where they settled down. It was here that Guru Hari Rai was placed on the *Guru Gaddi* and decided to stay on after Guru Har Gobind's departure for heavenly abode. The circumstances forced Mata Nanaki to go back to her parents village Bkala alongwith the son and daughter-in-law. Guru Tegh Bahadur's grand-father Bhai Narayan Das arranged a house for his daughter Nanki and her family. The entire Sikh community of Bkala used to queue up to see the Guru-son, (Guru) Tegh Bahadur.

This was a challenging time for the daughter-in-law Mata Gujri. She had to start life anew, minus the comforts of her formal life. Tegh Bahadur devoted all his time to worship and meditation. He meditated in the basement floor, night and day. Mata Gujri contributed tremendously to this effort of her husband who did *tapasya* for 20 years. Alongwith assisting her husband she herself devoted time in prayer and worship. She was ordered by her husband to enter the basement only with food and water which Bibi Gujri obeyed. She would grind the flour herself to make *chapatis* for her husband. During this time Guru Hari Rai's Sikh followers would bring a message from him and Gujri's brother, a soldier in the army, would let him meet his Sikhs.

Because of his intense meditation Tegh Bahadur began to be called *Tegha Mastana*.

Guru Hari Rai while explaining *jyotijot* to Guru Har Kishan established him on the *Guru Gaddi*. Guru Har Kishan worked for upliftment of the people for about 2 years. While relinquishing his physical self at Delhi he took a coconut, five paise in his hand and raised his arm high and circled it thrice. He called out Baba Bkala. The attention thus became focussed on Bkala. Mata Nanki encouraged (Guru) Tegh Bahadur to believe that Guru Har Kishan had left him in charge of the Sikh community and therefore he should break his *tapasya* and meet the people. (Guru) Tegh Bahadur, however, refused to take over an ornamental responsibility. In the following confusion several residents of Bkala declared themselves as the next Guru. However, the crisis soon came to an end. Makhan Shah, acknowledging Guru Tegh Bahadur as first among Sikhs, hailed "Guru is found". Consequently Sri Tegh Bahadur became Guru Tegh Bahadur and presented himself to his followers. He took over the Guru seat at the ripe age of 44. He was soon acclaimed far and wide.

This was a turning point not only in Sikh history but also for Mata Nanki and Bibi Gujri. The dark basement where the Guru did his *tapasya* became an important religious point. Devotees from far off came to visit this place. In the house *langar* began to be made. The twenty six years of hardship were finally over and once again happy days had come back. Mata Gujri's heart rejoiced to see the acclaim and respect accorded to her husband. But once again this period of happiness was short-lived. Jealousy drove Dhirmal to not only grab Guru's house but shoot him too. Moreover, dissenters closed the door of Hari Mandir for the Guru. Even at Kiratpur there were protests against the Guru. Seeing the discontent Mata Nanki and Mata Gujri moved once again this time to Anandpur where they bought a piece of land. The hatred against them, however, spread here too and finally the Guru had to leave Punjab altogether. They decided it was time to propagate Sikhism in other parts of the country. Thus the Guru with his mother and followers reached Allahabad. Here the people welcomed them with open arms. It was here that Mata Gujri's desire for a child began to be fulfilled. She became pregnant. After a while they shifted to Banaras and from there to Patna. The Guru, to further propagate Sikhism, left for Assam. Gujri under the protection of Mata Nanki stayed on at Patna to await the arrival of the newborn. This happened in 1725/1666 AD. A unique child was born. A wave of excitement and delight swept the land as Gujri became Mata Gujri. She missed her husband sorely at this time who got the message in Assam. He returned to

Patna after 4 years and then the rituals of child birth were performed. The son was named Gobind Rai. The Guru once again left his family to go back to Punjab. Mata Gujri stayed on to oversee the upbringing of her son. Then the day came when Mata Nanki, Mata Gujri and Gobind Rai were welcomed in Anandpur. Sikh devotees were exuberant. The family rejoiced at the return of happy times. They did not lack anything. Mata Gujri had her husband, Mata Nanki, her son, and devout Sikhs ready to serve them.

Like always, this state of bliss was also short-lived. There was another wave of unhappiness. The rigid and theocratic policy of Aurangzeb created a tense atmosphere. Kashmiri Pandits appealed to Guru Tegh Bahadur to undertake the protection of *tilak, janju*, which he promised and left for Delhi. Before he departed, he made Mata Nanki responsible for the welfare of his wife and son. This was a testing period for Mata Gujri which she faced with courage.

In the house only Mata Nanki and Mata Gujri remained with Gobind Rai. Gobind Rai tried to maintain the spirits of his mother and grandmother. Mata Gujri waited anxiously for some news of her husband. However, this time they had parted for the final time. Guru Tegh Bahadur became a martyr in 1675 at Chandni Chowk in Delhi. He sacrificed his life for the protection of Hindus. The brutal executors cut off his head. It was an act that made Nature tremble. A storm swept the land. Taking advantage of the prevailing chaos Bhai Jaita managed to escape with the separated head to Anandpur. Despair and grief had overwhelmed Anandpur. Covered with cloth, slain head was kept on a big plate. The Sikh community paid their last respects. It was Mata Gujri's destiny to witness this day. The blessed head she had seen as a proud soldier on which she had seen the divine halo, the same head she now saw in a martyr's covering. The sight made her heart tremble in terrifying grief. Her last meeting with her husband was through his separated head. The whereabouts of the martyred body remained unknown. It was later discovered that a Sikh Lakhi Banjara had cremated the body in Delhi.

This incident was a turning point in history. The Mughal forces laid siege to the Anandpur Fort. The forces of the Guru fought them valiantly. However they were cut off from the outside world with no supplies to replace the diminishing ones. The Sikhs urged Guru Gobind Singh to abandon the fort and escape; he refused. He asked his soldiers to mislead the opposition with false promises. The few Sikhs approached Mata Gujri to plead their cause. She could not bear the exasperation and fear of her Sikhs. She asked her son to comply with their wishes. At first the Guru refused but constant appeals of his mother could not remain unheeded for long. Thus compelled.

the Guru, with his followers, four sons, and Mata Gujri left the fort on a cold wintry night of December, 1671. The Mata loathed to leave this land; but it was imperative to do so in order to save the lives of their Sikhs and soldiers.

Historic records reveal that when the Sikh community, with Guru family, reached the shores of Sirsa river, they were attacked by the Mughal forces. There was complete despair and confusion. The river lay ahead, the Mughal forces pursued them and it was bitterly cold. Panic reigned supreme. The Guru ordered everybody to cross the river. The river was already flooding and had a very strong current. A few Sikhs drowned while a few others managed to escape. In this chaos Mata Gujri and two of her grandsons were separated from the group. On the horrible night the two young boys with an old grand mother began walking on strange lonely road. They never complained about the rough roads, or of exhaustion. They were separated from their family with only an old grand mother to guide and protect them.

In such circumstances they met a Brahmin, Gangu. He had served as cook in the community kitchen of the Guru. The three of them were greatly relieved to see a familiar face. Gangu took them to his house. It never takes long for a man to turn traitor. He was aware of the riches Mata Gujri had on her and also the state award he would receive on handing them over. He first robbed the Mata and then reported their whereabouts to Subedar Vazir Khan. He then sent the unsuspecting three to the Subedar's house. Zoravar Singh was 7 years old and Fateh Singh 5 years old. This brutal Subedar imprisoned them in a minaret. This incident is a shameful act in history. Vazir Khan intended to please the Emperor by converting children of the Guru into Muslims. Mata Gujri had an inkling of his plans and what the future would be. She began to prepare her grandsons for the coming painful event. Great was Mata Gujri who had to prepare her grandsons for death. She taught them that they could become martyrs but never forsake their religion. The children were to be presented in the court. The old grandmother reminded them of the sacrifices of their grandfather and other ancestors. She was aware that she may never see these children again. The court was ready. The two children with courageous shouts of '*Akal Purkh*' entered the court. Vazir Khan asked them to become Muslims. The children answered they would rather die. Vazir Khan was furious. He tried to bribe them with good food and drinks, even land. But to no avail. The two children were ready to die. They were undeterred by the false information of their father's death and sacrifice of the brothers. The children had been well trained by their grandmother. Their innocence moved several persons present to press for their release. Brutal killer Munshi Sucha Nand said the children should be

crushed as they were sons of a snake. The Nawab of Maler Kotla defended the innocent boys opposing any kind of torture.

However, on the day brutality overpowered any remaining humanity. Vazir Khan declared his verdict; they were to be buried alive in a wall. The process began. As the wall began to rise, Vazir Khan kept repeating his command. But sons of Guru Gobind Singh could not forsake their religion. It was the Almighty's wish. Accepting this they upheld the Sikh tradition of martyrdom.

When this news reached Todar Mal he went to Vazir Khan's house with a thousand *mohars* to somehow get the children released. It was too late. Todar Mal bribed officers to get the Mata released. An imprisoned Mata had spent the time in great anxiety. A weeping Todar Mal gave her the news. Hearing the gruesome story the Mata collapsed, never to recover. She had died in grief. She had no more interest in a world where wealth, power, insignificant though, could result in such a ghastly death of her two innocent grandsons. The moment she had been separated from her family she had a premonition of the coming events. She witnessed happy and extremely sad times as the wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and the mother of Guru Gobind Singh. She had witnessed important changes in Guru household, from Guru Har Gobind to Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh. She was about 80-85 years old when she died. Her life stands without parallel among the women of Guru household. She saw first her husband, then her grandsons sacrificed for the cause of religion. The minaret where Mata Gujri was imprisoned with the young grandsons is now called Mata Gujri's *Burj*. In Fatehgarh where the bodies of Sahibzadas were brought is called *Vishramgarh*. Mata Gujri's last rites were performed in *Jyoti Saroop Gurudwara*.

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MATA JEETO

BHAI Vir Singh has rightly pointed out that the historians were keenly interested in writing the Sikh history but were not particular about its upkeep. Scope of their writings is limited to the description of the life and times of the ten Gurus. The Guru history is by and large silent about the wives of the Gurus. When we study history of the Gurus we find wives of the Gurus laid the foundation stone of the so-called "palace" of Sikh religion. On the one hand the Gurus, with the spiritual power, were leading the people on the right path and on the other hand wives of the Gurus were helping in achieving this goal by creating congenial atmosphere. Consorts of the Gurus were confined to the four-walls of the house. Gradually, along with the tradition of Guru, *Guru Mahal* (wives of the Gurus) tradition also assumed the form of an institution. Each and every *Guru Mahal* fulfilled her responsibility towards this institution.

At the time of Guru Gobind Singh, founder of *Khalsa Panth*, the Mughal Empire was very powerful. Politically it was an age of turmoil and confusion. Guru Gobind Singh on the one hand was the spiritual leader, on the other hand he was *Patshah* symbolising temporal power. He was known as saint-soldier (*Sant-Sipahi*) and fit to rule (*Raj Yogi*). It has been rightly said about him:

"Sajjan Sachcha Padshah Sir Sahawan de Shah."

(He is the king of kings and is the real temporal king).

Normally a king has been regarded as the symbol of temporal power but true king (*Sachcha padshah*) symbolises both temporal and spiritual power. Guru Gobind Singh has been described as a true king.

Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth incarnation of Guru Nanak and on the other hand "*kalgi dhar padshah*" was the symbol of pomp and show. The tenth Guru had beautiful *Kalgi* at his head, hawk sitting on his hand, diamond-studded sword, blue horse, military costumes, fort of Anandpur and *Ranjit Nagara*. All these were symbols of power but he had strictly obeyed the tenets of Nanak Panth and believed in modesty.

"Garibi Gada Hamari, Khanna Sagal Rainchuri."

The tenth Guru had more than one wife which also symbolises temporal power. A number of historians, keeping in mind the tradition of not having more than one wife in the Sikh religion, are of the opinion that Guru Gobind Singh had not married twice. According to them his first marriage was with Mata Jeeto, her maiden name, which was changed to Sunder Kaur after her marriage. In this context it is important to note that there is no tradition of changing maiden name of any consort of previous Sikh Gurus. The maiden names of Mata Sulakhni, Mata Khiwi, Bibi Bhani, Mata Ganga, Mata Kishan Kaur, Mata Nanki and Mata Gujri were not changed after their marriage. Therefore, what could have prompted Guru Gobind Singh to have changed Mata Jeeto's name to Sunder Kaur is not clear. Even if we accept the view that Mata Jeeto and Mata Sundri were one and the same person, how is it that both had different parents and had different birth places? How could there be two separate 'Angeetha' (cremation places) of one wife? One is known as Mata Jeeto's and the other as Mata Sundri's cremation site. I want to draw the attention of these historians to the following facts.

Mata Sundri was cremated at Gurdwara Bala Sahib. In my opinion as Gurdwara Sis Ganj, Bangla Sahib, Bala Sahib, Keshgarh, Hari Mandir, etc., are great symbols of their reality, similarly the cremation sites of Mata Jeeto and Mata Sundri prove without any doubt that Mata Jeeto and Mata Sundri are two different personalities. The description about the wives of the Guru we get in the writings of the Guru, and those of contemporary poets or in the *Sakhis*. But these brief references we get in context to some incidents only and not as details of a person.

In the Guru history the name of Mata Jeeto is associated as a consort of Guru Gobind Singh. In *Bachitar Natak*, there is no reference to the marriage of Guru Gobind Singh. In *Guru Shobha*, Senapati has briefly mentioned about the marriage of Mata Jeeto but has again omitted the date on which this marriage was solemnized. We get references to the controversy associated with Mata Jeeto in the account of contemporary chroniclers, i.e., Kesar Singh Chhibar in *Bansawali Nama*, Bhai Santokh Singh in *Guru Pratap Suraj Granth*, Gyani Gyan Singh in *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, Bhai Kesar Singh in *Guru Pranali*, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha in *Mahan Kosh*. Besides these Sikh historians Bhai Vir Singh, J.S. Grewal, S.S. Bal and Macauliff have also referred to it.

There is a reference to Mata Jeeto's marriage in Pyara Singh Padam's work titled *Gobind Sagar* and Hansraj Rahbar's *Rashtar Nayak Guru Gobind Singh*. Although the exact date of the marriage has not been given by these historians but they agree to the fact that the marriage of the tenth

Guru with Mata Jeeto was solemnized at the new city known as New Lahore. Kesar Singh Chhibar in *Bansavali Nama* writes:

*"Othe nagar Lahore hanwaya, Aan Sikhan nun wich hasaya,
Samvat Saitran Sou beeta Bittali, Mata Jeeto Beeahi thi es Challi".*
(*Bansavali Nama p.124*)

There has been a good deal of controversy among modern historians regarding Mata Jeeto, whether she was the first or second wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Ancient historians regard her as the first wife but Prof. Harbans Singh in his book titled "*Guru Gobind Singh*" regards Mata Sundri as the first wife which has been supported by Dr. M. K. Gill in her book titled "*Mata Sundri - a biography*". According to Dr. M. K. Gill, Mata Sundri was the first wife because she gave birth to the eldest son, Sahibzada Ajit Singh at Paonta Sahib.

As has been already pointed out Guru Gobind Singh lived in an age of turmoil and political confusion and as such the history of the Guru passed through several hands. Most probably this could have been one of the reasons as to why we lack detailed material about the consorts of the Guru and that New Lahore was established at the time of the marriage of Mata Jeeto or Mata Sundri.

Ancient historians regard Mata Jeeto as the first wife and we also agree with this view. At the time of her marriage, the tenth Guru had established New Lahore near Anandpur. We do get references to the marriage of Mata Jeeto in the account of contemporary chroniclers, though detailed information is lacking about her life.

Considering Mata Jeeto as the member of the family of the tenth Guru, an attempt has been made to throw some light on the personality of the Mata.

Life Sketch

Mata Jeeto was born in a well-to-do Harijas Subhikhi Kshatriya family in Lahore. The contemporary chroniclers are silent about her date of birth. Any- how a guess can be made from the date of her marriage with the Guru. In the Sikh history we get the reference of Mata Jeeto only when she was married to Guru Gobind Singh. At that time child marriage was in vogue. The tenth Guru had ascended on *Guru Gaddi* at a very young age. His impressive personality attracted many but only a person socially and economically well off could dare to put forward the proposal of marriage. Mata Gujri and his maternal uncle Mama Kirpal Chand were getting many proposals of marriage through the *masands*.

In Punjab the tradition of celebrating festivals had started from the time of the third Guru. During the time of tenth Guru devotees from far and wide came to Anandpur to have a glimpse of the Guru. Bhai Ram Saran, the father of Mata Sundri, had also come to Anandpur and was deeply impressed by the personality of Guru Gobind Singh. He had regarded him as a suitable match for his beautiful daughter. He had put forward the proposal of marriage before Mata Gujri and Mama Kirpal Chand. They accepted the proposal and made it clear that the ceremony of *Anand-Karaj*, i.e., solemnization of marriage, will take place at Guru Ka Lahore near Anandpur instead of Lahore. It was acceptable to Bhai Harjas also, the father of Mata Jeeto. He fixed the date of marriage with Mata Gujri and Mama Kirpal Chand and both the families started preparations for the marriage.

Mama Kirpal Chand was given the charge of building the new city. *Hukamnamas* were issued to the devotees. Merchants and businessmen were invited to settle in the new city and were given financial help. Bhai Santokh Singh was greatly impressed by the gaiety of the new city and he commented,

*"Guru Ko Lavpur basay mahana,
Ja Kah Lai baiihe dhan dhaana".*

Within a few months New Lahore became populated. Preparations of the marriage had started. The marriage took place with much grandeur and splendour. Perhaps this was the first and last marriage in the family of the Guru. Bhai Harjas was very happy. Accompanied by all relatives he reached New Lahore a few days before the marriage. The new city picked up the glamour of a prosperous city and he was feeling proud of the tenth Guru. He made all arrangements for a befitting reception.

On the auspicious day, 23rd of *Haar*, Mata Gujri's loving son, along with the marriage party, left Anandpur for New Lahore, where they were accorded a warm welcome. *Anand-Karaj* took place the next day. Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Jeeto were taken to a grand house, built under the supervision of Mama Kirpal Chand, known as Guru's Palace. At Anandpur Mata Gujri, along with other women folk was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the bridal couple. With great joy and enthusiasm she blessed the wedded couple.

Mata Jeeto attained youth from childhood in the Guru's house. She began to look after Mata Gujri in the same way as the latter had looked after her mother-in-law Mata Nanki. Mata Gujri was very happy that Guru Gobind Singh had spent most of his life time at Anandpur Sahib. Mata Jeeto helped Mata Gujri in the household work and also looked after the devotees.

The institution of *masand* was established by Guru Ram Dass to preach the teachings of Guru Nanak that every Sikh even while leading a family life should earn his livelihood with hard labour and recite the name of God. During the time of Guru Arjun Dev a person was called *masand* who led his life according to values of Sikhism. Slowly and gradually with the passage of time the *masandship*, like *Guru gaddi*, became hereditary. The *masands* used to collect offerings from the people on behalf of the Guru, preach the religion and earn their livelihood through hard labour. Some of the *masands* became corrupt and began to keep the money collected by them from the people and started leading a luxurious life. The hilly Rajas had one *masand* named Cheta. Guru Gobind Singh had an opportunity to meet him. Cheta was frightened that the Guru had come to know of his evil designs. He appealed to Mata Jeeto that he should be forgiven for his misdeeds. Mata Jeeto therefore requested the Guru that he should be pardoned. Bhai Vir Singh in his book entitled "*Kalgidhar Chamatkar*" has depicted Mata Jeeto as a great woman.

Brought up in affluence amidst the hustle and bustle of a big city like Lahore, after marriage Mata Jeeto lived at Anandpur, where on the one hand she had the guidance of an intelligent mother-in-law Mata Gujri and on the other hand had great genius Guru Gobind Singh as husband. After some time Guru Gobind Singh founded a new city known as Paonta and gave final shape to his future plans. It was here at Paonta that Mata Sundri gave birth to Sahibzada Ajit Singh. After some time Mata Gujri and Mata Jeeto, along with Mata Sundri, returned to Anandpur. During the next ten years he completed some of his important literary works here. During the same time Mata Jeeto, gave birth to three sons (*Sahibzadas*); 14th March 1690 Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, 17th November 1696 Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and 25th February 1699 Sahibzada Fateh Singh. They were brought up at Anandpur. At the time of the birth of the Sahibzadas at Anandpur joy and gaiety returned to the city again and this was regarded as the golden age. The Rajas in the hills were apprehensive of militarization plans of the tenth Guru. He had built forts, possessed elephants, horses, gold, silver and valuable jewels. He had a large number of his devotees and 52 poets adorned his court. Hundred *mands* of flour was daily kneaded in the kitchen known as *Guru ka langar*. Mata Jeeto and grandmother Mata Gujri enjoyed the moments having the Sahibzadas sitting in their laps.

Mata Jeeto was a great lady. She gave birth to worthy sons who at a very young age, following the footsteps of their grandfather, sacrificed their life for the sake of religion. In the battle of Chamkaur, Jujhar Singh, along with

his eldest brother Ajit Singh, became martyrs. Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh were entombed alive at Sirhind. These sacrifices earned her the epithet of the "mother of martyred sons".

Mata Jeeto, while on the one hand was great as a mother on the other hand was great as a wife too. She spent her whole life in the service of the Guru. She adorned him much more than a husband. She had in her heart immense love and affection for him. Every morning when the tenth Guru would leave for the *darbar* at Keshgarh, Mata Jeeto would put a garland of flowers around his neck by getting the same from Kesar Singh gardener. Early morning she used to cook *langar* for the Guru and rest of her time was spent in meditation and looking after the Sikh devotees. She loved flowers and had good knowledge of the variety of flowers. One day gardener Kesar Singh had come to the Mata with a special collection of flowers. She had a word of praise for him. The gardener told her that the flowers had been grown by the younger gardener who worked very hard to earn his livelihood. He was named Sohina and his wife, Mohina. They had a long cherished desire to have a glimpse of the Guru and beg his pardon for their sins. It is said that the Mata talked to the Guru about Sohina and Mohina. Taking permission from him, she herself went to their hut to see them. Mohina touched the feet of the Mata. She was surprised to see the Mata. She respectfully made her sit and started singing. The Mata had already heard the *Kirtan* of Mohina and was pleased to listen to it again. When the Mata was about to leave, Sohina entered his hut. Mohina narrated the whole incident and said the Mata was really a kind-hearted woman that she had herself come to the house of the poor. After a few days the Mata sent a message through Kesar Singh that they should grow jasmine for a garland to be offered to the tenth Guru on his birthday. Sohina and Mohina grew jasmine in the winter. When flowers were ready a saint named Roda Jalali plucked all the flowers one night for presenting these to the Guru. In the morning when Sohina and Mohina saw the flowers missing from their garden, they fainted out of shock. On the other hand when Roda Jalali presented flowers to the Guru, he commented that these flowers were but two broken hearts. The tenth Guru left his throne and went to Sohina and Mohina, kept their heads in his lap and uttered these words.

"Utho mere lal darshana nu kharid lo".

Repeatedly reciting these words the Mata and other devotees reached there. The Mata massaged the hands and feet of Mohina. They regained their consciousness and the tenth Guru said:

"Khariddaro darshan lai lo"

There the Mata came to know that Sohina and Mohina belonged to a rich family of Raipur and were famous for their *Kirtan*. They worshipped the God named 'Thakur'. Every day they used to bring water from the well for giving bath to their God and then do the meditation. One early morning they were bringing water from the well. A wounded Sikh had asked for water. They did not pay any heed to his request and left because if they would give some water to him, the water would become unholy. The dying Sikh had given them the curse that you will not get *darshan* of the God. When Sohina and Mohina returned home they failed to concentrate on their prayers. They were upset. They were eager to have glimpses of the Guru because they knew that the deceased was the Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru was residing at Anandpur. They were informed about the arrival of the Guru at Raipur. Therefore they waited on the road since morning but in the evening they were informed that the Guru had arrived from the other side of the road. They were shocked for not having the glimpses of the Guru. Ultimately they decided to sell off their house and take up work in the garden of the Guru at Anandpur. Their long-cherished desire was thus fulfilled and they were happy thereafter.

Mata Jeeto was interested in meditation and musical recitation of devotional hymns (*Kirtan*). The Mata was regarded as a saintly woman by her devotees. She herself used to offer a garland of flowers to the tenth Guru and made Sohina and Mohina to offer the same. In this way she really stood for the oppressed. Bhai Vir Singh in his book "*Kalgidhar Chamatkar*" has highlighted the spiritual aspect of the Mata's personality.

The Mata was lucky as a wife who had spent her whole life in the service of her husband. The year 1699 stands out as a red letter in the life of the Mata because in this year the tenth Guru laid the foundation of *Khalsa Panth* at Anandpur. It was in this year that Mata Jeeto gave birth to a son named Sahibzada Fateh Singh.

In 1699, on the day of *Baisakhi*, in Keshgarh at Anandpur, a special congregation of the Sikhs was held. Disciples were invited from all over India. The '*Panj Piyaras*' were picked up and were turned into Singhs after baptizing them with *Amrit*. According to some historians, when the Guru was preparing *Amrit* he had used *Khanda*, a bowl of iron called *Lohe Ka Bata* and sacred water of Sulej. *Patasus* were added to it afterwards. There has been a good deal of controversy as to who added *Patasas* to the sacred water. It is an admitted fact that Mata Jeeto brought *Patasas* for sweetening of *Amrit*.

The tenth Guru served *Amrit* to the *Panj Piyaras*, one by one, and then requested them that "*Amrit di-dat mainu Vee Chhaka Deo*. Therefore, they

served *Amrit* to Guru Gobind Singh. The contemporary poet of Guru Gobind Singh has described this incident as follows: •

“Waho Waho Gobind Singh, Aape Guru Chela”.

After the Guru was baptised, Mata Gujri, Mata Jeeto, Mata Sundri and Sahibzadas Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh and Zorawar Singh were baptised. The fourth son Sahibzada Fateh Singh was born after this great event in the same year. Every day *Amrit* was prepared and a large number of Sikhs were baptised. People were happy in Anandpur and the family of the Guru was also leading a peaceful life. The Mata served the devotees with great love and affection. She herself took pains to serve them. The Mata died in 1700 A.D. She was lucky that smilingly she had taken leave from her husband and *Sahibzadas*. She was given a bath and dressed like a newly wedded bride, before she was cremated. The tenth Guru had prayed that her soul may rest in peace.

Sikh devotees and Mata Gujri, Mata Sundri and the four Sahibzadas were in attendance. The tenth Guru performed the cremation of Mata Jeeto at Agampur in Anandpur. A Gurdwara on the said site has been built in the memory of Mata Jeeto.

After the death of Mata Jeeto, a battle with the Mughal forces of Lahore started at Anandpur. The family members were separated from each other. Thus in the end if we have a glance at the life sketch of Mata Jeeto and the Sikh history as such, one feels that Mata Jeeto along with Guru Gobind Singh played an important role but unlike the other consorts of the Guru she had never issued *Hukamnamas*. She had spent her life peacefully at Anandpur.

(Mrs.) SUKHJIT KAUR

Tr. (Mrs.) Amarjit Kaur

BEBE NANKI

BEBE Nanki was born in the year 1464 A.D. Her father's name was Kalu Ram and mother's Tripta. Kalu Ram's family was small comprising of two children - Bebe Nanki and Baba Nanak. Bebe Nanki was five years older to her brother.

Kalu Ram lived in a small town Talwandi, in district Lahore (now called Nankana Sahib). He had a younger brother Lalu Ram. The latter did not want to marry and lived with Kalu Ram. On Bebe Nanki's birth her parents were of course very happy, but her paternal uncle (*Chacha*), Lalu Ram was overjoyed. Both uncle and niece, adored each other and Lalu Ram spent hours playing with Bebe Nanki and often brought toys and goodies which delighted her. She too was very attached to him. Listening to her childish prattle enthralled him. Thus Nanki grew up amidst lot of love and affection. Her fair, glowing face with its divine radiance, impressed every one who saw her. Kalu Ram was the village *Patwari* and everything was in plentiful, leaving each member of the house happy and satisfied.

As she grew up, she helped her mother in the daily household chores. Bebe Nanki would bring water from the well, stitch clothes, wash utensils and cook food. Whenever her mother fell ill she would shoulder total responsibility of the house very skilfully. In those days it was a matter of pride for the girl to have complete mastery of the household work and mothers imparted this skill to their daughters very earnestly. Expertise in household work was the true beauty of a girl. Realising the fact that her daughter was now no longer a child, Mata Tripta taught the young one everything about the house. She would motivate her by logically explaining the true value of work. Work was a blessing, she used to tell her daughter. It kept one healthy, sharpened appetite, and the mind became joyous, she explained to her young daughter.

When Bebe Nanki was five years old she was blessed with a brother in 1469 A.D. The whole day she would enjoy the sweet company of her younger brother and loved to play with him. As she was Nanki, the little one was named Nanak. The tie between the brother and sister was full of love and affection and she did everything that would make a small child happy and well cared for. They were both apple of the eye of their uncle, Lalu Ram. He was ever-smiling and light-hearted while his elder brother was just the

opposite in his nature. Bebe Nanki was totally involved with his younger brother and she adored him. Time and again she would kiss his tiny hands and spend hours narrating stories to him. A small golden ring was put in the finger of her younger brother. She always followed him wherever he went and displayed great concern for him.

Right from the beginning Nanak was the quiet type and serious-minded. He would never react strongly to anything and always looked pensive with a gentle smile on his face. Nobody had ever seen him fight with his siser, Nanki.

To answer Nature's call, one day, the child Nanak went to the fields to ease himself. On the way he met a *sadhu* asking for some alms. Nanak quickly removed his golden ring for charity and even gave the *sadhu* his iron mug (*Garvi*). But the thought of his father's wrath made him shudder and he hid himself behind a bush. When Nanak did not return home for quite sometime his father set out to look for him. Bebe Nanki also followed him. On seeing him hiding behind a bush Kalu Ram held his arm tightly and asked about his whereabouts. The little Nanak stood in stunned silence, and his father noticed that the gold ring was not there. He asked Nanak about it. Still he stood in silence. Now Kalu Ram could not control his anger, and gave him a tight slap on his cheek, which almost made him cry in pain. By now Bebe Nanki had also reached there. Seeing all that her heart bled with sorrow. She wept bitterly and with folded hands pleaded to her father to spare her brother and beat her instead. Seeing this Kalu Ram's anger subsided slightly. Bebe Nanki immediately took her little brother home, washed his face, and caressed his tender cheek again and again to lessen his pain and even played with him to divert his mind from the sad incident.

Time passed by. Bebe Nanki was also growing up into her early teens. Everybody in the house was discussing about a suitable match for her when someone suggested Jai Ram. He was the son of a *Patwari*, Parmanand. Jai Ram lived in a town called Sultanpur. Jai Ram had two sisters and one younger brother. His father died when they were quite small. Sharp witted Jai Ram picked up his father's work and continued his occupation of a *Patwari*. One day he had come towards Sultanpur for some work of land measurement. Rai Bular was well acquainted with Bebe Nanki's family and felt Jai Ram to be the right match for her. Kalu Ram was also happy about it and finally within a few months the wedding took place. Bebe Nanki was eleven years old then.

The child Nanak paid all due respects to his brother-in-law. Nanki dressed as a bride was an unusual sight for Nanak. In those days brides

never wore make-up like today. Heavy jewellery was enough to adorn a bride. Brother Nanak had mixed feelings towards his sister's appearance. He sometimes appreciated her in the bridal attire and sometimes found her very odd. The marriage took place with all pomp and show. Bebe Nanki was given *Rijas* also - a two and a half metre brand new khadi cloth. In those days these were given to the manual labourers of the girl's in-laws' village. This showed respect for them and also that the bride was like their daughter now, in fact daughter of the the whole village. By and by Bebe Nanki won over everyone's heart with her sweet ways. She mingled very well with her sisters-in-law and brother-in-law which gave great happiness to her mother-in-law.

But Bebe Nanki's absence left a void in her brother's life. He missed her tremendously, and always looked sad. Seeing this Kalu Ram told him to bring Nanki home for some time. In Sultanpur, Bebe Nanki was overwhelmed to see her brother. Jai Ram also warmly welcomed him and took him around the village. Everyone who saw Nanak was attracted to his divine beauty. One found peace and solace by talking to him as his manner was so soft and polite.

After a short stay Nanki returned to Talwandi along with her brother. Everyone was overjoyed.

Yet Kalu Ram and Lalu Ram were deeply anxious about Nanak's state of mind when his sister was gone. They kept thinking of a way out by which Nanak could live with his sister for some time at least. The idea of Nanak not being in the house saddened Mata Tripta, but the prospect of seeing him happy was consoling. Still she wondered on what basis he would accompany Nanki.

Jai Ram had got promoted to Mal Officer from *Patwari*. In connection with some work he went to Nanki's village. He met his in-laws with great love and affection. He met Rai Bular who was glad to see him happily married.

Jai Ram had now come to take Nanki to their house. After a short visit to her parents home, the bride is finally taken to her in-laws house by her husband. So according to this custom he had come to take her back. One day, as he sat chatting casually with Kalu Ram he noticed that he seemed to be unhappy about something. On asking, Kalu Ram explained to him about Nanak's disinterest in all the worldly affairs. He was all the time found sitting quietly, as if pre-occupied with something, Kalu Ram complained to Jai Ram. Mother Tripta and Lalu Ram also joined him in the conversation. Everyone had the same worry - how to involve Nanak in some gainful occupation so that he would settle down in life. Jai Ram gave a patient hearing to his in-laws and assured them that he would do the needful. They also told him that Nanak was deeply attached to his sister and her absence had further

quietened him.

Now Bebe Nanki's parents had prepared her mentally for the final separation from them. Before she and her husband left for Sultanpur, Jai Ram went to meet Rai Bular. The latter also wanted to see Nanak happy and told Jai Ram of Nanak's saintly nature, which was in constant conflict with the worldly nature of his father. Sometimes Kalu Ram even scolded Nanak as he spent most of his time in meditation. Rai Bular explained this to Jai Ram and told him to find a suitable job for Nanak. So it was finally decided that after a month or so Jai Ram would take Nanak with him to Sultanpur. Meanwhile Rai Bular would discuss this with Kalu Ram also. After meeting Rai Bular, Jai Ram and Nanki bid farewell to Kalu Ram and his family. Bebe Nanki, who never wanted to leave Nanak alone, assured him that very soon he would be called to Sultanpur.

Nanak was now totally lost within himself. He went wherever he found the company of saints and *sadhus*. He loved to sit silently in prayer and meditation and never showed any enthusiasm for any work. Absolutely exasperated with such behaviour, Kalu Ram went to Rai Bular and poured out his heart to him. Rai Bular was prepared for this and immediately gave him a letter for Jai Ram to be given to Nanak who would then go to Sultanpur. In Sultanpur, he was given a warm welcome by Nanki and Jai Ram.

Nanki perceived Nanak not only as a brother, but, like Rai Bular, to be a very divine and saintly soul. In her free time she often mentioned events of Nanak's life to Jai Ram - those events which really showed Nanak to be outstandingly pure and Heavenly. She respected Nanak immensely. The letter of Rai Bular was given to Jai Ram who was already thinking along those lines. Nanki further emphasized to her husband about Nanak's job. Within a few days Jai Ram spoke to Nawab Daulat Khan who appointed Nanak as the incharge of accounts (*Modi*) in his *Modi Khana* - a shop where government officers were given ration and provisions.

At dawn, Nanak would go to the Vaieen river, near Sultanpur, and after his bath sit down in prayer. He would come back at day-break. Nanki would be waiting for him and serve him a hearty breakfast of hot *parathas*, with lots of butter and butter milk. After this Nanak would leave for work. In the evening he would again sit in prayer before having his dinner. Nanki was very happy to see her brother usefully occupied and intimated this to her parents also. They, too, were overjoyed. Now, as any other sister, Nanki wanted to see her brother happily married. She expressed this desire to her husband, who never wanted to deny anything to her. Actually it was Nanki's goodness and sweet nature which had won everybody's heart, including her

husband's, who never ignored her demands. He told her about Mool Chand, a *Khatri* by caste and a *patwari* by occupation. He lived in district Gurdaspur's village *Pankhian*; and was prepared to marry his daughter to Nanak. Bebe Nanki was very thrilled to hear this and sent this news to her parents also.

One day, one man approached Jai Ram and told him that his brother-in-law Nanak was giving free ration to all the poor people (*Fakirs*). If there was any loss in the *Modi Khana*, it was Jai Ram who would be fined, he warned him. At night, Jai Ram spoke to his wife Nanki. But Nanki had complete faith in her brother and immediately told Jai Ram there could be no losses as long as her brother was the *modi* and that the accounts should be scrutinized. The idea of her husband suspecting her brother was unbearable for her. Within a few days, the accounts of the past three months were settled and there was a profit of Rs. 135. Nanki was very happy and began to praise Nanak endlessly. Her brother went on with his usual manner and continued to help the poor and hungry. People were astonished to see the *Modi Khana* make profit despite the fact that Nanak gave so much *Khairat* (donation) to the poor. There was some Heavenly blessing (*barkat*) in his hands - God-given gift.

At last the auspicious day of her brother's engagement also dawned. Nanak's parents came to Sultanpur. All rituals, auspicious ceremonies (*Shagans*) were performed and a lot of money was given to the poor. But Bebe Nanki was the happiest person. She felt nice to think that her brother respected her and obeyed her wish of getting married. At that time Nanak was eighteen years old. With all gaiety and celebrations the marriage took place. With his glowing face Nanak sat on the horse, wearing *sehras* (golden threads which cover face of the bridegroom). The *barat* left for Batala. Rai Bular and Daulat Khan also accompanied the *barat* which had a Heavenly splendour about it. After a few days it came back with Bibi Sulakhni's *Doli*. Bebe Nanki wanted the *barat* to go to Sultanpur but because of her parents sentiments it first went to Talwandi. Over here everyone was overjoyed. Rai Bular was very happy. After some days as per the custom, Sulakhni, the bride, went to her parents' house and Nanak left for Sultanpur to resume his duties. After five years Sulakhni and Nanak finally came to Sultanpur. Now Bebe Nanki told Nanak to have a separate home, an independent establishment and felt very happy to see the couple settling down. Soon, her brother was blessed with two sons - Sri Chand was born in 1494 A.D. and Lakhmi Das in 1496 A.D. Seeing her brother's house full of happiness and prosperity Bebe Nanki always thanked the Almighty for His kindness.

One day, Bebe Nanki was approached by her sister-in-law Sulakhni's mother Chand Rani. They both were in an angry mood and told her that Nanak stayed out for nights together. Even when he came back he hardly spoke to his wife. Bebe Nanki gave them a patient hearing and then calmly answered their allegations. She reasoned out that at least he did not speak harsh words, and on the whole gave her no problem. There was everything aplenty in the house, and she too always respected Sulakhni. Listening to her, the two ladies were pacified and went home quietly.

Now with the passage of time, Nanak's sadness also grew. Bebe Nanki was constantly nagged by a fear - what if her brother left the house. She knew that even though Nanak had settled down to work, got married and had a family, but his mind was elsewhere. Only she knew of his inner state of mind. At last her fears came true. One day Nanak never returned home after his usual bath in the river Veieen. There was utter commotion and a rumour spread that he had fled because of losses in the *Modi Khana*. Jai Ram was sent for by Nawab Daulat Khan. The latter sent some one to look for him and at last he was found. Accounts were settled and there was again a profit of Rs. 760. The Nawab was overjoyed and wanted to give this money to Nanak but he declined the offer saying that money was useless for him. He also told the Nawab to appoint some one else instead. Leaving everything behind he set out as a *fakir* (Sadhu). This news reached Sulakhni's parents who told all sorts of things to Bebe Nanki. Bibi Sulakhni had already expressed her anguish. Jai Ram was also getting irritated with people's remarks about his wife's brother. It seemed as though the whole world was against Bebe Nanki's dear brother, and she stood all alone to confront them. But still she had a deep inner faith in her brother's divine powers and perceived him as the highest of saints.

Now Nanak was in a state of *Vairag* (divine love). Mardana joined him with his *Rabab* (musical instrument) and Nanak in his Heavenly notes recited *shabads* from *Gurbani*. Bebe Nanki now knew that he was completely immersed in divine love and could not be stopped from his divine quest. One day Nanak, along with Mardana, came to meet Bebe Nanki. With great courage she told her brother that if he wanted to go out to satisfy his divine strivings he could do so. She re-assured him that she would look after his family. But with folded hands she told him never to forget her. Nanak, now in the younger brother's capacity, told her with great reverence that whenever she would remember him he would come. The thought of separation pained Bebe Nanki and made her cry. Nanak silently watched her tears flow and then infused courage in her by saying that since she had taken the responsibility of his family, Heavens would be pleased and God who cares for the entire universe would protect her. Nanak went to far off lands to preach his

teachings. Bebe Nanki cared for his family with great tenderness. Nanak went far and wide and spent a long time away from home. Bebe Nanki was extremely good natured and very fond of children. Though she herself was childless she cared for every child in the village. Whenever any child fell sick she immediately nursed him. But her brother's absence had made her quite sad, and quiet. The whole day, engrossed in work, she remembered him. After a long time away from home when he came back from his first *Udasi*, (long journey) he first of all went to meet his sister. She was overwhelmed and on her instructions he went to meet his parents also.

Bebe Nanki was the first one to recognize her brother's true inner light. During childhood so many times she took the beating from her father, but never let the little brother be thrashed. On her advice only he joined the *Modi Khana*, and only she inspired him to get married, and settle down. When he went out she played a very supportive, protective role towards his family. Though Guru Nanak for many years travelled widely to preach he never renounced his family. In his last days he settled down at Kartarpur with his family. This proves the fact that he never got entrapped within the narrow limits of his family only. Rather he cared for, and loved, the whole world and found happiness in service of humanity at large.

Bebe Nanki played a very major and important role in the life of Guru Nanak. As a child she played with him, acting like a child herself. She always protected him from their father's wrath. Even after getting married his welfare was of utmost importance to her. She even gave him money to buy his first *rabab*. This had a deep philosophical meaning - it shows that it was she who first of all recognized his deep, insatiable thirst for the Divine Master, and not Guru Nanak's inability to buy a *rabab*. She inspired him to sing *Shabads* and respected Mardana a lot, as she knew he was always there with her brother. They both (Guru Nanak and Mardana) stayed together till almost the end of their lives. She cared for his family when he went out for his *Udasis* and on returning asked him to meet their parents also. Thus it was she who helped Guru Nanak in maintaining social ties in a cordial way.

Towards Bebe Nanki's end, Guru Nanak was by her side in Sultanpur. She died in 1518 A.D. in the month of November. Guru Nanak left for his Heavenly abode after 19 years of Bebe Nanki's death. He performed her last rites. Both brother and sister were engrossed in the purest of the pure brother and sister ties throughout their lives and valued each other's thoughts. Bebe Nanki always held her brother in a lot of esteem and respect and thought of him as very God-like in his nature - a very Divine *Atma*. Bebe Nanki made a distinguished contribution in spreading Guru Nanak Dev's religion. Her endeavours towards this end till today remain unparalleled.

MAI SABHRAI

A study of the Sikh history reveals that it is a record of saints and soldiers. These qualities are not restricted to men-folk only but distinguished women also contributed to it equally. On one side we have the composed and serene Mata Sulakhni, Mata Khiwi and Mata Bhani who made sacrifices, on the other hand we have "militant like" Mai Bhago and Bibi Anoop Kaur, whose workfield was not only limited to their houses but they participated in the battlefield also.

An extensive research of the history of any period shows that it gives a clear perspective, and focusses on certain people primarily because of their undisputable contribution. Such personalities are prominently mentioned in the history of their community because of their noble deeds. There is ample evidence to pay homage to them. But certain people, despite their contributions, are rewarded only with a casual mention, not detailed accounts of their lives. Such people have neither contributed too much to glorify their name nor too little that they can be neglected. Sikh history is a witness to such female personalities. Only vague references and allusions, and not much authentic information is available about the women in the Sikh history except about a few Guru consorts and some distinguished women characters.

It would not be out of context or inconsistent to say that Mai Sabhrai is one such historical female character. There is only a passing reference about her. There is not much delineation of her personality. According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, the writer of *Mahan Kosh*, "She was the wife of a Jat Mahima, of Khatri caste. She was one of the tireless devotees of Guru Nanak Dev. She dedicatedly served Guru Angad Dev with enthusiasm and promptitude. She offered him food which was without salt and ghee as per his wishes. Many authors named her as Sabhrai or Veera".

Her name itself is meaningful as she was imbibed with virtue of being the fortunate. According to the Indian heritage, especially in the Punjabi culture, the name of the girl child denotes her divine qualities, the attributes which constitute her character, and sometimes the good wishes for her future

prosperity. The women were embellished with such remarkable names. To substantiate the fact, we can see that the name Mata Sulakhni symbolically conveys that she was endowed with the strength of character, the name of Mata Khiwi, dedication. She was upheld as an ideal wife and one who was always involved in the service of her husband. Mata Bhani implies surrender to the will of God. Similarly word Sabhrai, or Satrai, means auspicious. She proved her name by virtue of this quality.

Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha has mentioned Satrai as "the paternal aunt of Guru Angad Dev, the sister of Baba Pheru who is called Pherai also, whose marriage was solemnised in the village Khadur".

As expressed earlier the word Sabhrai in itself means a distinctive characteristic. It is used as an adjective many a time in *Gurbani*.

1. "Apne Kant Piyari Sa Sohagan Nanak Sa Sabhrai".
2. " Sa Kulwanti Sa Sabhrai, Jo Pir Ke Rang Savari Jiyo".

Bhai Bhama has described the above-mentioned words as one to be used for the prime lady. The above-quoted lines denote such a meaning. She is fortunate to be a married woman and loved by her husband, i.e., 'Satbhrai' - one who is the epitome of all virtues. There is another meaning of this word which signifies her as the lucky sister of seven or more brothers. Brothers are supposed to be the symbol of prosperity and strength. In *Gurbani*, the words husband, the house of in-laws, the house of one's parents - all are used to signify the divine attributes, but yet they symbolically give an insight into the worldly and mundane ways also.

History is mute on the subject regarding the life, date of birth, and birth place of Mai Sabhrai. There is no authentic version in Sikh history to determine these facts. Giani Gian Singh in his *Tvarikhe Guru Khalsa* has not mentioned her while discussing Guru Nanak Dev. But in the *sakhi* (story) about the meditation of Guru Angad Dev she is mentioned as the one who served him for several years with full dedication. We would deal with this aspect in detail later.

A guesstimate about her early life can be made as she was the sister of Baba Pheru - the father of Guru Angad Dev. Baba Pheru's ancestral village was "Matey ki Sra", in district Ferozepur. Guru Angad Dev was born in this village. It is assumed that perhaps she was also born in the same district. Evidently this view has weightage as her ancestors lived in this same village. Later it was abandoned and it merged with a nearby village which was named

"Nagai Ki Sra".⁽¹⁾ Professor Kartar Singh is of the opinion "Baba Pheru was a rich and serene man. He was the accountant of the head of the village and also the treasurer of a Muslim in Ferozepur and possessed a shop of his own too. He was honest in his dealings and a man of pleasant disposition. He was doing well in his business. He was a consummate devotee of Devi and used to make pilgrimage to the shrine of Devi every year".⁽²⁾ On the basis of information on the life of Baba Pheru, it can be estimated that she must have been a devotee of Devi in her early years. It is ascertained that later she felt inclined towards the Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Nanak Dev. Perhaps after her marriage to a Jat Mahima of Khatri caste, she was influenced by the Guru as she had shifted to Khadur. Baba Pheru also settled down in Khadur as he had got fed up with the behaviour of his Muslim employer at Ferozepur. So he left "Matey Ki Sra"⁽³⁾ That's how fortunately the entire family came in contact with the Guru family. The Mai contributed a lot for the spiritual upliftment of Guru Angad Dev. She derived immense pleasure in serving him.

Principal Satbir Singh has described her as the daughter of Takht Mal and the sister of Pherumal. She got married in 1504.

After a brief description of her family lineage we would use the account of Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha as the main base to determine her role in training Guru Angad Dev as the heir to the *Guru gaddi*. She prepared him for a simple and disciplined life. It reveals her endeavours to serve him ardently. She was the very epitome of devotion. Contrary to her role as a paternal aunt, she served him food without ghee and salt, keeping in mind the same higher motive that her nephew was the next Guru Nanak, that is, the successor to Guru Nanak's *Guru Gaddi*. Though there was plenty of ghee and milk available in those days, she did something contrary to the prevalent convention of the time (as normally the aunts showed their affection to their nephews by offering tasty food with lots of ghee). When the Guru expressed his desire to have bland food so that he could meditate deeply, she readily agreed to it and raised no objection as she thought it was rightly required as a training for the future Guru. This was a mute sacrifice made by the paternal aunt for the character-building of the Guru.

Baba Lehna settled down in Kartarpur after coming in contact with Guru Nanak Dev. He devotedly served Guru Nanak Dev for many years and came upto his expectations. Guru Nanak Dev offered him the *Guru Gaddi* in his life time only because of the selfless service rendered by him. It was a unique incident in which the Guru offered the *Guru Gaddi* to his disciple after reciting his evening prayers (*Rehras*). He declared him the next Guru and bowed his head before him. This episode has been narrated in detail in

"*Satey-Balvandi Var*". Surprisingly, the other distinguished personalities present on this occasion are not mentioned in it. According to Prof. Sahib Singh this ceremony of *Guru Gaddi* was performed on 2nd September, 1539 when Guru Angad Dev was almost 35 years of age⁽⁴⁾. But according to Prof. Kartar Singh it took place on 14th June 1539.⁽⁵⁾ After that Guru Nanak Dev left for his heavenly abode on 7th September, 1539. Both the historians agree on this particular incident. The period, between when the *Guru Gaddi* was bestowed on Guru Angad Dev and when he actually took charge of it, is extensively described as being spent with Mai Sabhrai. Hence the account of it is elaborately discussed in history. In order to understand these years of his life it is significant to ascertain the time at which the *Guru Gaddi* was given to him. Baba Budha was the witness to it. Perhaps the Mai was also present because she frequently used to visit Kartarpur to meet, and seek blessings from, Guru Nanak Dev. The Mai found it difficult to stay in Khadur since Guru Angad Dev had started residing in Kartarpur.

The Mai had infinite faith in, and reverence for, Guru Nanak Dev. Consequently he blessed her that she would always live with Guru Angad Dev. There is a non-availability of the necessary details of this episode of the blessing of the Mai by Guru Nanak Dev. It can be assumed that such a word of honour Guru Nanak Dev could have given her only at the time of *Guru Gaddi* ceremony. Most probably the Mai had expressed her desire to stay with her nephew Lehna (who was now famous as Guru Angad Dev). That is why Guru Nanak Dev acceded to her wishes as he was impressed by her devotion. Perhaps then Guru Nanak Dev bid Guru Angad Dev to return to Khadur soon after he had bestowed on him the *Guru Gaddi*. Whatever the reasons might have been of his returning to Khadur, Khadur certainly became the hub of Sikh activities.

After his separation from his Guru, Guru Angad Dev was in extreme despair. As he had accompanied the Mai back to Khadur, he made her aware of his anguished feelings and expressed his desire not to be disturbed by any visitors in his cell. He declined to meet, or interact with, people. He did not want his presence in Khadur to be made known to anybody. He remained confined to his cell for meditation and doing prayers for months while the Mai looked after him.

After about six months Guru Nanak Dev left for his heavenly abode. The Sikh community, under the leadership of Baba Budha, was in search of Guru Angad Dev but all in vain. Suddenly one day it struck them that Guru Nanak Dev had given a strange promise to Mai Sabhrai. Soon they rushed to meet her. Sarup Das Bhalla has expressed it as, "They all thought of meeting Bhirai

as Baba had given her a promise that he would always remain with her".⁽⁶⁾ The Mai did not disclose his whereabouts as per his request. Still Baba Budha could perceive the presence of Guru Angad Dev in that house. He entered the house from the back door so as not to disobey the orders of Guru Angad Dev. Ultimately the Guru was found by Baba Budha. Soon after he accepted the responsibility of *Guru Gaddi* on 5 March, 1596.

Poet Santokh Singh in his *Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* has mentioned the Mai while describing this episode. After his separation from Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Angad Dev's desire to remain aloof was unquestioningly wise. Guru Angad Dev settled in Khadur. He refused to meet anyone. He had taken a vow to abstain from speech".⁽⁷⁾ After receiving the message of Guru Nanak Dev's demise the Guru directed the Mai to build up a concrete wall in order to close the entrance to his cell. He was in desolation. The Mai humbly obeyed his directions which is described in *Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* as "Bhirai got the entrance closed with a wall knowing the inclination of the Guru. Then she got the wall plastered".⁽⁸⁾

More detailed narration of it is the same as that in *Mahima Prakash*. It is speculated as to how a human being could have remained engrossed in meditation in closed doors for such a long period. It is contrary to the law of Nature. It can be safely presumed that perhaps the writer wanted to convey the message that the Mai agreed to get a wall erected as desired by the Guru because he did not want anyone from outside to know of his presence in Khadur, so that he could continue with his meditation undisturbed. It seems he must have remained in a cell. Presumably there was an entrance from where he must have been coming and going out of that room to perform the daily routine and to carry out the basic needs of life. It is in relation to this period a mention is made that he used to take his meals without any salt or ghee. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha has not touched this episode.

Principal Satbir Singh has elaborated on this incident. According to him, "When Guru Nanak Dey visited 'Sanghar' (near Khadur Sahib) on his first pilgrimage, Mai Virai had requested him to visit her house. On her persistence the Guru gave her an assurance that he would stay with her for a long time when it was appropriate. After that only, Guru Angad Dev resided with Mai Virai and implored her to keep this information a secret. She obeyed his orders and did not disclose about his arrival to anybody. She was an obedient lady who lived true to her name. She complied with his requests as she had been taught by the Guru that you remain unattached and not indulge in materialistic pleasures though living in this world. Attainment of God should be through contemplation on his attributes and through knowledge

of the Supreme and by loving Him, always keeping a pleasant continence. She always uttered these words "one should ever be in love with God, have infinite faith in him, the submission to God's will should remain the cardinal feature. Accept His will and not let the calamities and crises have an adverse effect. Then one would always feel close to Him".

Then the writer describes how the Guru came out of his hideout the very day the Mai left for her heavenly abode. Guru Angad Dev got a well dug in her memory in village Khadur.

All the above-mentioned episodes throw light on the contributions of the Mai and help us to evaluate her achievements. She was a great, enlightened soul and played an eminent role. This is proved by the fact that she was present when Guru Angad Dev was granted the *Guru Gaddi* and also she was the one blessed by Guru Nanak Dev. She performed a very significant and far-reaching role in Guru Angad Dev's life - during the period in which he meditated after getting the *Guru Gaddi*, and before he emerged out of his cell. As a true Sikh he was going through a lot of mental and emotional trauma after his separation from Guru Nanak Dev. This kind of crisis often leads to the spiritual upliftment of a person. During this period he remained in meditation. It was a trying period for him. She was the one who was perpetually with him and with her unrelenting efforts created the right atmosphere of quietude and harmony. She also helped him to live a life of austerity and abstinence. The fervour and devotion with which she performed her responsibility, and her role, is remembered with reverence.

(Mrs.) HARJINDER KAUR

Tr. (Mrs.) Ruby Kapoor

Foot Notes :

1. "*Dharm Pothi*" No. 7, 8: Prof. Kartar Singh, M.A.; page 53.
2. "*Jeevan Vartant Shri Guru Angad Dev*", Prof. Sahib Singh; page 16.
3. "*Dharm Pothi*" No. 7, 8: Prof. Kartar Singh, M.A.; page 52.
4. "*Mahima Prakash*" : Sarup Das Bhalla; Second Edition; page 6.
5. "*Guru Pratap Suraj Granth*", fifth edition, pp. 340-341.
6. "*Kudarti Noor : Jeevani Shri Guru Angad Dev*", p. 53-58

MAI BHAGO

THE tradition of military valour is an integral part of the Sikh way of life. In a sense Guru Nanak can be considered the first protagonist of this tradition in the Punjab. The people of the Punjab, who for centuries had been shackled in political, cultural and mental slavery, were inspired by him to change their servile and degraded way of life.⁽¹⁾ The sixth Sikh teacher, Guru Har Gobind, like his predecessors, endowed his followers with a strength of character, which enabled them to pursue the path of duty and justice. Bureaucratic despotism had rendered the people fearful. In order to dispel this fear, Guru Har Gobind urged them to take up arms and even trained them in their use.⁽²⁾ Later, his grandson, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the '*Khalsa Panth*' which was based on a unique "Warrior-Saint" creed. This amalgamation of "*Bhakti*" and "*Shakti*" gave rise to a community of people, who are known in history for their ideology of sacrifice and martyrdom. Mai Bhago was the first Sikh woman representative of this tradition. In fact Dr. Hari Ram Gupta has called her the 'Joan of Arc' of Sikh history.⁽³⁾ Unfortunately historical sources pertaining to her are extremely limited. But despite this lacuna, she remains alive, in the folk traditions of the Punjab, to this day.

In order to draw Mai Bhago's life-sketch, we have to be familiar with the era of Guru Arjun Dev (AD 1584-1606). *Majha*, in the Punjab, was the main area where Guru Arjun Dev delivered his sermons. His teachings influenced the people of *Majha* and a large number of them adopted Sikhism as their new faith. One such person who became part of the Sikh fold was Abul Khair (Abul Khan).⁽⁴⁾ The members of the Sikh community were associated with the *Sultani* cult.

Abul Khair had five sons - Justriya, Binna, Sundar, Pero Shah and (Bhai) Langah.⁽⁵⁾ During Guru Arjun Dev's time Bhai Langah had contributed comprehensively towards the construction of Hari Mandir. In fact Guru Har Gobind's daughter Bibi Veero's marriage ceremony was solemnised in Bhai Langah's *haveli*.⁽⁶⁾ Pero Shah, Bhai Langah's brother, was also a devotee of the Guru house. Bhai Mallo (Mallu Shah), Pero Shah's son, had joined Guru Har Gobind's army and taken part in several campaigns against the

Mughals.⁽⁷⁾ Mai Bhago was Bhai Mallo's daughter. Mai Bhago grew up in an intensely devout Sikh household where the Sikh tradition of valour was inculcated in her right from the childhood. Her father's life of courage and fortitude left a deep impression on her. Somehow, categoric information about her is not available. For instance, neither her birth date nor her mother's name is known. She is believed to have lived through the time of five Gurus (Guru Har Gobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh). However, historically, her only recorded meeting is with Guru Tegh Bahadur whom she visited in Anandpur, along with her parents. She really imbibed the Sikh concept of "*Bhaya Kahu Ko Det Nahi, Nahi Bhaya Manat Aan*". According to some historians Guru Gobind Singh baptised (*Amrit Pan*) her to the Sikh faith after the battle of Muktsar and changed her name to Bhag Kaur. It seems that she was so overwhelmed by Guru Gobind Singh's towering personality, that on *Baisakhi* day in A.D. 1699, she, along with hundreds of children, women, young and old, also volunteered to be baptised (*Amrit Pan*) to the Sikh faith. She was so devoted to Guru Gobind Singh that when her fellow villagers refused to accept his Guruship (that is, wrote the *Bedava*), she forcefully challenged them and proceeded towards Dhab of Khidrana, to participate in a campaign against the Mughals.⁽⁹⁾

(Bibi) Bhago's childhood name was Bhag Bhari but she was affectionately called 'Bhago' and it is through this name that she is known in Sikh history. Though details about her early education are not known but it is believed that, like her father, she showed keen interest in armaments and was also trained in using them. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh and a contemporary historian Shingara Singh contend that Mai Bhago always carried a long *sang* (sword) on her person. (*Sang* is a sort of spear which is used to cut shrubs and trees).⁽¹⁰⁾ In medieval times, a woman dressed as a man and bearing arms was an unusual sight. This, however, was not an isolated happening and was indicative of events to come. After Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom, the atmosphere in the Punjab had become very charged and the people had started to rebel against subjugation of all kind.

Though Bibi Bhago had visited Anandpur several times, her actual participation in a military campaign was only in the battle of Muktsar as this is the only recorded evidence.

Available sources are not categoric about her marital status and thus the subject has assumed a polemical nature. Certain lines in poet Bhai Santokh Singh's composition "*Guru-Pratap Suraj Granth*" hint that she was perhaps married :

Sun Mai Bhago Sachiri, Kul Nehar, Susrar Ubari.⁽¹¹⁾

Even Bhai Vir Singh in his '*Kalgidhar Chamatkar*' acknowledges her married status. He writes that when the Sikhs had turned their backs to the tenth Guru (*Bedava*) she told her husband, "Singh ji let us go and lay down our lives for the Guru". Her husband, also a follower of the Guru, agreed with her whole-heartedly. Bhai Vir Singh claims that Mai Bhago's maiden home was Jhabal but is not sure about Patti being her married home place.⁽¹²⁾ According to him, she was a tall, well built woman. This courageous woman was always a source of inspiration for her brethren in the rough terrain of the battlefield.⁽¹³⁾

On the other hand Bhai Kahan Singh's book "*Mahan Kosh*" makes no reference to her marital status.⁽¹⁴⁾ But this does not prove that she was unmarried. According to the *Sakhi Pothi* she had gone to the Guru to seek his blessings for a male child, but on seeing the Sikhs fighting valiantly on the battlefield, she decided to give up her feminine garb and became a "*Fakirni*" (wanderer) instead.

Putan Karan Aayi Ve Piri, Suthan Lah Lai Fakiri⁽¹⁵⁾

However, these sources do not throw any light on her husband's activities, that is, whether he participated in the battle of Mukatsar or not. Contemporary sources tell us that subsequent to the battle of Mukatsar, Mai Bhago, along with Guru Gobind Singh, went to the Deccan but do not yield any information about her husband.

Gyani Pratap Singh contends that Mai Bhago was married in village Bhure. But this contention is wrong as even the inhabitants of Bhure village reject this view. Another viewpoint claims that she was married in village Sur Singh which is eight miles from Jhabal.⁽¹⁶⁾ On examining all the theories it seems that Bhai Vir Singh's contention that her husband's home was in Patti, seems to be the most plausible.

"*Twarikhe Guru Khalsa*" of Gyani Gyan Singh refers to Mai Bhago as Sahibzada Zorawar Singh's wet-nurse. This claim however has not been substantiated by historical evidence.⁽¹⁷⁾

Guru Gobind Singh founded the '*Khalsa Panth*' on *Baisakhi* day in the year A.D. 1699. This event subsequently led to tumultuous changes in the Punjab's social, cultural, religious and political milieu. By introducing the institution of *Khanda-Bata* he tried to break the all-prevailing caste-system which had stratified the society for centuries. He also instituted the tradition of "*Kesh*" and "*Kirpan*". In order to accentuate community feeling amongst the Sikhs, he added '*Singh*' after the name of every male Sikh and '*Kaur*' after

every Sikh woman's name. He further asked the Sikhs to abstain from smoking and drinking. Guru Gobind Singh himself partook 'amrit' from the baptised Sikhs and henceforth formulated a tradition by which only five baptised Sikhs could offer "amrit" to others. Soon, some 80,000 people became members of this new way of life.⁽¹⁸⁾ (As has been mentioned earlier Mai Bhago was one of those who had volunteered to be a *Khalsa* on *Baisakhi* day in the year A.D. 1699).

The rise of the '*Khalsa Panth*' did not go down well with the chieftains of the hill states and the Mughal rulers at the centre. They apprehended trouble and decided to crush this nascent movement. After A.D. 1699, Guru Gobind Singh fought several wars against the Mughals and the hill rulers, prominent among them were the battles of Anandpur, Chamkaur and the war fought on the banks of river Sirsa. These incessant wars, unleashed a volley of heart-rending hardships on the Guru. He was separated from his family in a most gruesome manner. His older two sons were killed in battle while the younger two were bricked alive in Sirhind on the orders of the *Subedar* of that town.

During the battle of Anandpur some Sikhs from the *Majha* region abandoned the Guru through '*Bedava*'. The situation in the fort was becoming extremely grim. The number of Sikhs being killed was steadily rising and the food supply had also started to dwindle. To cease hostilities, the Mughals and the hill chiefs offered a formula. According to them, if Guru Gobind Singh surrendered his arms he would be allowed to leave the fort safely. The small number of Sikhs, present in the fort, persuaded Guru Gobind Singh to leave the fort as per the Mughal suggestion. He finally left the fort on 20th December, 1704.⁽¹⁹⁾ But the Mughal generals went back on their word and brutally attacked the Guru's unarmed family and followers. The Guru proceeded towards Ropar through Kiratpur. On reaching Sirsa, his whole family got separated from each other. His two older sons, along with forty other Sikhs, reached Chamkaur Garhi. Here the fierce battle of Chamkaur was fought in which all the forty Sikhs and the two *Sahibzadas* were killed. The Guru left Chamkaur and reached Machhiwada. From Machhiwada he went on and after passing several places - Lali, Rampur, Alamgir, Jodh, Lame Jatpure, Salyani, Takht-Pura, Masel - he finally reached village Deene. From here Guru Gobind Singh wrote an historical letter to Aurangzeb, which is known as *Zafarnama*. This letter was highly critical of Aurangzeb's regime and also spelled out the reasons for the Sikh uprising against the Mughal establishment.⁽²⁰⁾

On leaving village Deene, Guru Gobind Singh travelled extensively. He went to the fort of Mana, Bhadod, Jalal, Dayalpura, Bhagta, Patto, Jaito, Dhilvan, Kotkapura and finally reached Khidrana Di Dhab (Mukatsar). During his travels, a number of people joined his cause and he was able to build a powerful army. The Guru was aware of the fact that the Mughal army of the Sirhind province was on his heels. In order to halt their march, he decided to fight a pitched battle with them near Dhab. This was his last battle against the Mughals and is known in history as the Battle of Mukatsar. Mai Bhago took part in this battle. She put up a courageous fight but was grievously injured. This battle was fought on 8th May, 1705.⁽²¹⁾

Return of Sikhs who had written Bedava

During the battle of Anandpur some Sikhs from *Majha* had turned their backs to the Guru's cause. But when they went back to their villages they were reprimanded by their women-folk -- wives, mothers and sisters. The women accused them of being cowards. The mothers said, "It would have been better to be childless than to have had sons like you". The sisters exclaimed, "We would have been proud of you, if you would have laid down your lives on the battlefield". The wives claimed "being widows would have made them happier".⁽²²⁾

Jhabal's Bibi Bhago was foremost amongst the women who had expressed their revulsion at the *Majha* Sikhs' behaviour. As a contemporary poet has written:

*Majhe vich Jhabal di Rahen Valli
Anakh Putli Ek Si Mai Bhago
Sachi Singhni Ruh Dasmesh Ji di,
Sri Saheb Devaji di Jae Bhago
Sun Sun Kartoot Bedawiyani di
Akh Soch Andar Neewin Pai Bhago
Fer oh Bhaji Pindo Pind Puji
Ag Josh di Navi Maghai Bhago
Gal Gal Kardi, Jave Josh Bhardi
Suti Birta Fer Jagai Bhago
Tut Aaye Bharavan De Hal utte
Jave Akhiyo Neer Bahayi Bhago
Jutha Jod Litta ina Dina Andar*

Gal Apni Rakh Vakhai Bhago
Teer Zamla Da Lak Todne Nu
Luk Banh Maidan Vich Aayi Bhago
Jithe Char Bedaviye Kare Kathe
Uthe Akhdi Hor Vi Lod Laiye
Chalo Guru Tou Tutiyo, Var Jana
Fer Nal Dashmesh De Jod Laiye
Muh Mod, Jarwa Zalma De
Gayi Hoi Sikhi Bero Mod Laiye
Desh Dubde Tayi Bacha Laiye
Zulm Zabar Vali Bedhi Bodh Laiye
Jinhan Dhon Marodi Ae Lisiyan di,
Aayo unhan di dhon Marod Laiye.
"Teer" Gandiye Guru De Nal Rishta
Nale Sangal Gulami De To'd Laiye.⁽²³⁾

According to a contemporary historian, Mai Bhago, in order to make up for the betrayal of the *Bedava* Sikhs, mounted a horse, collected some Sikhs (both former *bedava* ones and new recruits) at Vahir - Jhabal or Patti and proceeded towards Malwa. On learning that the Mughal army was chasing the Guru, they decided to block the passage of the advancing Mughal troops. ⁽²⁴⁾ This contingent (*Jatha*) of Sikhs was led by Mai Bhago and Sardar Mah Singh of Ratola village (district Amritsar). The numerical strength of the Sikhs was poor, and in order to conceal their limited number, they covered the bushes with sheets, to give the impression of a powerful cantonment. Guru Gobind Singh had stationed himself on a high hillock near Khidrana KJ Dhab and had unleashed a shower of arrows at the Mughal army. Sardar Mah Singh and his compatriots fought with fortitude and courage. Mai Bhago took part in this war. Dressed as a man, riding a horse, she seemed to be a reincarnation of Maha Chandi. She fought with exemplary valour and felled many Mughal soldiers with her 'Sang'. However, while fighting she was severely injured. The Mughals had not anticipated this Sikh offensive. Moreover, the inhospitable heat and water scarcity of Bhatinda sapped their remaining strength and they fled from the battle place. This war fought at Khidrana is known as the "Battle of Mukatsar". It was here that Guru Gobind Singh blessed the martyred Sikhs, tore the *Bedava* paper and re-established ties with the Sikhs who had left him. This rapprochement was brought about

by Mai Bhago.

The British historian Macauliffe has written the following regarding the Majha Sikhs:

"They were joined by a heroine named Bhago who through zeal for the Sikh cause, had donned men's attire and vowed to suffer death if necessary on the blood stained field of danger on behalf of the Guru". "The woman Bhago fought heroically in their ranks, disposed of several of her Muhammadan opponents and transmitted her name as an Indian heroine for the admiration of future generations....."⁽²⁶⁾

While the Guru was blessing the slain Sikhs, he was informed about an injured woman soldier. She was carried to the camp-site (*Dera*) where her wounds were treated. On regaining consciousness she revealed to the Guru about how she had collected and united the Sikhs at Khidrana.⁽²⁷⁾ According to *Sakhi Pothi* she remained constantly by Guru Gobind Singh's side and along with ten other Sikhs constituted his personal security. She was universally respected. She kept a long *Sang* on her person.....brought together the estranged.....⁽²⁸⁾

Aftermath of the Battle of Mukatsar

As revealed in the *Sakhi-Pothi*, subsequent to the Mukatsar war, Mai Bhago became part of the Guru's entourage. When, after Aurangzeb's death, the Guru went to the Deccan with Bahadur Shah, Mai Bhago accompanied him. After Guru Gobind Singh's death, she stayed on in the Deccan and made an effort to spread his message in Abchal Nagar (Nanded) and Bidar. She herself died at Bidar. At Abchal Nagar there is a bastion named after her.⁽²⁹⁾

It is not clear how long Mai Bhago lived after Guru Gobind Singh's passing away. The editor of '*Sachkhand*' magazine Nirvair Singh Arshi, in his '*Katha-Sach Khand*' has stated the following about Mai Bhago: "After the Guru left for his heavenly abode, Mai Bhago went to Bidar and there in Bala Rao and Rustam Rao's village,⁽³⁰⁾ Janvada, preached the Sikh way of life. And it was here after some years that she left this world. In other words, Janvada village was the last place where Mai Bhago lived.

An unsavoury controversy

Bhai Santokh Singh in *Suraj Prakash* has written that after the Battle of Mukatsar Mai Bhago started to live in the nude. But after being convinced by Guru Gobind Singh she started to wear clothes and became a permanent member of his contingent (*Jatha*) :-

Milee Muktasar Bhago Mai
Vadhi Priti Gur Mahi Adhikai
Rahibe Lagi Digambar Soi
Laaj Kan Lokan Ki Khoi
Katha Veda Mein Jiski Ahe
Naam Gargi Nagan Su Rahe
Param Hansani Bad Avadutta
Tin Bhago Gur Dig Avdhutta
Garvi Saang Haath Mahi Dhare
Sada Anand Aik Ras Thire
Ketik Maas Nagan Jab Rahi
Aik Din Dekh Nikat Gur Kahi
Suni Mai Bhago Sachiari
Kul Nahar Sasurar Ubari
Parmhans Avastha Pai
Tuj Ko Dosh Na Lage Kadai
Rahen Digambar Tujh Ban Aayi
Aik Rass Briti Bhai Livlai
Tan Hanta Sab Ride Binashi
Payo Param Roop Abinashi
Jau Sang tu Rahet Hamare,
Pahri Kach Laghu Sir Dastare
Upar Cheer Chadra Leyo
Deh Achadahu Same Beteje
Sun Gur Hukam Maan Tin Leena
Vastr Sharir Achadan Keena
Kar Mahi Saang Sada Gahi Rakhe
Rahe Sang Guru Ke Abhilakhe ⁽³¹⁾

Gyani Gyan Singh was also influenced by Bhai Santokh Singh's writings and wrote, "*Gadodhiy Sadh* and Mai Bhago used to roam around. One day, on seeing her nude state, the Guru told her that staying nude was not indicative of any spiritual greatness and that one should never give up the right conduct. Mai Bhago was convinced by the Guru's argument and donned her clothes."⁽³²⁾

It seems Macauliffe was also influenced by Bhai Santokh Singh and Gyani Gyan Singh's critique of Mai Bhago. He wrote:

“The woman who remained with the Guru after the battle of Mukatsar in a fit of devotional abstraction tore off her clothes and wandered half-naked in the forest. The Guru restrained her, gave her the *Kachh*, or Sikh drawers, and allowed her again to wear man’s costume. She attained a good old age and died in Abchal Nagar (Nanded) revered by the Sikhs as a saint”.

In the Sikh religion, the concept of living in a state of nudity to attain spiritual salvation does not exist. Also there seems no reason for a person of Mai Bhago’s dignity to adopt this way of life. Bhai Santokh Singh’s *Suraj Prakash* does not reflect any *Gurmat* philosophy. Other sources clearly reveal Mai Bhago to be a woman of righteousness and substance. She was a devout Sikh and under no circumstance would have gone against the *Gurmat* philosophy. Therefore she could not have adopted the concept of nudity *vis-a-vis* spiritual attainment.

Mai Bhago’s Character

Mai Bhago was a stoutly built, tall woman with a broad face. Her unmitigated strength, both spiritual and physical, made her an exceptional woman. She forged a sense of unity among the Sikhs and also showed exemplary valour in the battlefield. She attributed this strength to Guru Gobind Singh.⁽³⁴⁾ She was inspired by Guru Har Gobind to lead the life of righteousness and sacrifice. She was an accomplished horse-woman and could skilfully use weapons. It seems that the tradition of wearing a turban amongst a section of Sikh women was probably started by Mai Bhago. She was fortunate to have the perennial blessing of Guru Gobind Singh.

Bikse Sat Guru Baak uchara.

Bhalo manorath Tain Urdhara

Janam Maran Te Ab Chute Jehen

Lok Laj ko Tyagan Kainhe.⁽³⁶⁾

Bhai Vir Singh has called her the light of the Sikhs who like the ‘Pole Star’ guided the lost travellers :-

Tu Chanan, Sagar Ghar Chanan

Rasta Khunjan Valeya Nu

Tu Bedi Vat Paar Laga Ditta

Tu Minar, Munara Chanan

Tu Pandhiya Da Tara.⁽¹³⁷⁾

Mai Bhago, to date, remains a source of inspiration for the Sikh women. Right through the crisis-ridden 18th century, that is from the rise of the Sikh

misls, Rani Sada Kaur, Rani Sahib Kaur, Maharani Jindan, till date, she has been the beacon of light and inspiration for the Sikh women and the world in general.

Mai Bhago : Some Reminiscences

Mai Bhago remains alive in the minds of the people of the Punjab, as a symbol of courage. Her area of activity included village Jhabal (district Amritsar) Mukatsar, Janwada (Bidar), Abchal Nagar (Hazoor Sahib), Nanded and Delhi.

Till recently there was no memorial to commemorate her in village Jhabal. (Earlier there was only one Gurudwara at Nanak Chowk, dedicated to Bibi Veero). However, some prominent Sikhs of the village like Sardar Atma Singh, Sardar Amar Singh, Dr. Upkar Singh and Principal Shingara Singh, with the help of Baba Kharak Singh, laid the foundation of a Gurudwara in the memory of Mai Bhago on 6th June, 1981. The architect of this Gurudwara was Engineer Amar Singh. The present hall is 74 feet long and 30 feet wide. In front of the Gurudwara's veranda is a water tank. Recently the Gurudwara has been linked to the village bus-stand, by a 44 feet wide road.⁽³⁸⁾

Though in Mukatsar itself no separate memorial is dedicated to Mai Bhago, nevertheless, Gurudwara Shahid Ganj *Tooti Gandhi* and *Tibi Sahib* can be considered symbols of the Mukatsar battle. Bhai Maha Singh and his friends lost their lives in this battle. This battle will also be remembered because of Mai Bhago's noteworthy military feat.⁽³⁹⁾ Every year on *Maghi* Day, a *Diwan* is held here.

Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha has written in the *Mahan Kosh* that there is one '*Bunga*' of Mai Bhago at Abchal Nagar (Hazoor Sahib).⁽⁴⁰⁾ Now a new building has come up next to the *Buhga*. The Gurudwara itself is made of marble. It has three *chabutras*, one named after Bhai Daya Singh, the second after Bhai Dharam Singh and the third after Mai Bhago. The Gurudwara is called '*Samadhis* Mata Bhago, Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh. This Gurudwara is situated on the right side of the Gurudwara Hari Mandir (*Sach-Khand*). The *Mahants* have controlled the *Bunga* for generations. These *Mahants* are called "*Bungai*".⁽⁴¹⁾

Mai Bhago contributed to the spread of Sikhism. She preached mostly in Bidar and after a while she died in Janwada Ki Gadhi in the house of Rustam Rao and Bala Rao. A beautiful Gurudwara in her memory stands today in the village Janwada whose original name is '*Tap Sthan*' and is 10 kilometres from Nanak Jhira.⁽⁴²⁾ Gurudwara Nanak Jhira and at Janwada have been under the

cloud of dispute. The High Court verdict, however, was in favour of the Sikhs and today these Gurudwaras are commemorative spots in memory of Guru Nanak Dev and Mai Bhago.

Some years back a Gurudwara in Mai Bhago's name was built in Delhi (Prabhat Road, Karol Bagh). This Gurudwara is run by women, who hold a weekly *satsang* here.

Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha claims that one of Mai Bhago's weapon (*Fala*) can be found in Guru Gobind Singh's arms collection kept at Hazoor Sahib.⁽⁴³⁾ He does not agree with some historians' contention that the weapon is an '*Ashtabhuji*'. Some of her weapons can also be found at *Bunga Mata Bhago, Nanded*.⁽⁴⁴⁾ As has been mentioned earlier this *Bunga* is on the eastern side of the Hazoor Sahib Gurudwara building.

Today the Sikh community is going through a painful turmoil. Moral degradation and greed are all pervasive. The ethically sterile leaders of the *Panth* can be pulled out of this quagmire of depravity only by some one like Mai Bhago.

Battle-related Details

Bhai Swarup Das Koshish's book "*Guru Ki Sakhiyan*" is considered a reliable source for certain events related with Guru Gobind Singh's life. *Guru Ki Sakhiyan* gives the following information about Mai Bhago and the Battle of Mukatsar.

1. Mai Bhago was married to Bhai Nidhan Singh Varaich.
2. Two of Mai Bhago's brothers - Sardar Bhag Singh and Sardar Dilbagh Singh - accompanied her to Mukatsar.
3. 'Mata Bhag Koira' received a bullet injury in her left thigh.
4. During the battle of Mukatsar forty Sikhs were killed. When three amongst them, that is Bhai Rai Singh, Bhai Sunder Singh and Bhai Maha Singh, were dying Guru Gobind Singh himself went to them, quenched their thirst and wiped their faces with a handkerchief. Bhai Rai Singh had made the request to destroy the *Bedava* paper. Out of the three, the first to lose his life was Bhai Sunder Singh. All three died on 30th Posh, 1762 Samvat which happened to be a Sunday. The Guru had given these forty Sikhs the boon of *Mukti*.
5. Mai Bhago's husband and two brothers probably perished in this war. As a result, Mai Bhago instead of going back to her native

village, adopted the creed of 'Fakiri' and joined the ranks of Guru Gobind Singh's army.

6. The martyred Sikhs were cremated in the early hours of the first day of *Magh*, after the recitation of 'Asa Di Var'. The Guru himself conducted the 'Solah' prayer and the *Ardas*. Cries of 'Sat Sri Akal' resounded in the sky. After invoking the name of *Wahe Guru*, the Guru lighted the funeral pyre. Thereafter 'Karah-Parsad' was distributed.
7. After some time, Bhai Langar Singh Harike Kalana built a martyrs' memorial here.

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1. Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal has expressed this fact in his composition 'Nanak' in the following way:

*Phir uthi Aakhar Sada,
Tohid Ki Punjab se.
Hind Ko Aik Marde Kamil Ne
Jagaya Khuab Se.*
 2. Bhai Gurdas mentions Guru Har Gobind in the 48th *Pauri* of *Var I* in the following way:

*Panj Pyale, Panj Pir,
Chatam Pir Baitha Gur Bhari,
Dal Bhanjan Guru Surma,
Wad Jodha Bahu Paropkari.*
 3. Dr. Hari Ram Gupta 'History of Sikh Gurus', p.220.
She was considered a saint by the Sikhs. She is the 'Joan of Arc' of Sikh history.
 4. Surjit Singh Gandhi, "History Of The Sikh Gurus", p.558.
 5. Principal Shingara Singh 'Itihasik Virtant Pind Jhabal Te Mai Bhago', p. 40.
 6. Bhai Gurdas, in the 11th *Var* of the 22nd *Pauri*, writes that Langah was a resident of Patti and his caste was Dhillon:

*Patti Andar Chaudhari,
Dhillon Lal Langah Suhandu.*
- Bhai Mani Singh in "Sikhon Ki Bhakta Mala", p.96 records the

impressive work done by him - "Bhai Lal and Langah Chaudhari, residents of Patti, are Dhillon by caste. They paid obeisance to Guru Arjun. At that time Amritsar was being built and they, driven by religious fervour, helped in its construction both monetarily and by doing physical labour.

7. Satbir Singh, 'Guru Har Gobind', p.83.
8. Shingara Singh, Ibid, p.40.
9. Ibid
10. Ibid, pp.41-42 and look up 'Suraj-Prakash', and *Mahan Kosh*, p.683.
11. *Guru Pratap Suraj*, pp. 6037 and 6044-6046.
12. *Hawala*, Shingara Singh. Ibid pp. 42.
13. Bhai Vir Singh, 'Kalgidhar Chamtkar' pp.200-201.
14. '*Mahan Kosh*', p.683.
15. Uttar Singh Bhadod, '*Malwa Desh Ratan Di Sakhi Pothi*', pp.56-57.
16. Shingara Singh, Ibid pp.42-43.
17. Gyani Gyan Singh, '*Twarikhe Guru Khalsa*', p.1027.
18. Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, '*Sikh Itihas*', pp. 82-83.
19. Kartar Singh, '*Sikh Itihas*', pp. 418-419.
20. Satbir Singh, '*Sada Itihas*', p.382.
21. Kartar Singh writes - "The Guru fought his last battle against the Mughal forces on May 8, 1705. The fighting was as hard as before but this time the royal forces were defeated.

Cunningham also ratifies this fact "Here in Mukatsar, a number of Sikhs managed to assemble and the Guru was able to defeat the armed forces who were pursuing him.

See "*Sikh Itihas*" (Punjabi translation) p.84. According to Satbir Singh the date of this battle was 18th April, 1705.

See - "*Sada Itihas*" p.378. Harbans Singh in his book "Guru Gobind Singh" p.79, gives the date of this war as 26th December, 1705. But in our view-point the date given by Kartar Singh is more plausible because due to water scarcity and intensive heat the Mughal army had fled the battle field.

Bhai Sahib Singh also gives the date for this war as 1705. See 'Life

History, Guru Gobind Singh' pp.171-172.

22. Vidhata Singh 'Tir', *Dashmesh Darshan*, pp.512 to 516.

23. Ibid, p.516.

24. Shingara Singh - ibid, p.43.

25. Preetam Singh Safeer, 'The Tenth Master', pp.102-107.

26. Macauliffe - 'The Sikh Religion' Vol. VI, pp. 212-213.

27. 'Kalgidhar Chamtkar', pp.200-201.

Kartar Singh, *Dashmesh Prakash*, p.456.

28. *Sakhi Pothi*, ibid, pp.56-57.

29. *Mahan Kosh*, pp.683.

"Kartar Singh Dhillon" Book IV : Mai Bhag Kaur, dressed in male dress remained in the Guru's service to the end. She used to guard the Guru's bed along with ten other Sikhs. When the Guru died she went to Bidar. She lived there till the end of her life (p.114).

30. The Guru was instrumental in getting these two brothers freed from the Satara Jail. Today, Gurudwara Guptsar in their memory stands at Manmad.

31. *Ansu* 22 to 41, p.6086.

32. Gyani Gyan Singh, 'Twarikhe Guru Khalsa'. p.1053.

33. Macauliffe, ibid, p.213

*Nagn Phirat Jo Paiye Jog,
Ban Ka Mirag Mukti Sabh Hog,
Kya Nage Kya Badhe Cham,
Jab Nahi Chinis Aatam Ram.*

(*Guru Granth*, p.324)

34. Kartar Singh, Klaswalia in '*Shri Dusht Daman Prakash*', gives the following dialogue between Guru Gobind Singh and Mai Bhago :-

*Ghor Machya Jang Mein Rahi Lad-di,
Toli Varinyan Di Ek Dhanvdi Ai.
Mein Gher Ghati Jandi Pesh Koi na,
Kita Aapnu Yaad Jatavandi Ai.
Teer Aoan Lage Ek Saar the,
Toli Variya Di Ghabrandi Ai.
Kuch Mare Te Jaan Bacha Gaye Kujh
Mehar Aap di Mainu Bachaondi Ai
Vari Sankade mar gaye Palan Andar,*

Tuhadi Shakti Kala Varataundi Ai.

Gai Madad Hoi Kartar Singha

Fauj Variyon Di Har Khanvadi Ai (p. 683).

35. Preetam Singh Safeer in the 'The Tenth Master' writes: Mai Bhago, it may be noted, had tied a turban on her head. Following her example even today many Sikh women knot their hair in the middle of their head and wrap a turban. (p.106).
36. *Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, p. 6045, En1, Anshu 13, No:11.
37. '*Kalgidhar Chamatkar*', pp. 200-201.
38. Shingara Singh, *ibid*, pp.54-57.
39. Mehar Singh, '*Bharat Vich Gurdware*' pp.60-61 and Surinder Singh, Johar, '*The Sikh Gurus and their Shrines*', pp. 280-283.
40. *Mahan Kosh*, p.683 and Gyani Gyan Singh, '*Twarikhe Gurdwariyan*', p. 261.
41. Shingara Singh - *ibid*, p.50
42. *Ibid*, pp.49-50.
43. *Mahan Kosh*, *ibid*, p.683.
44. Nirvair Singh, 'Arshi', editor, '*Sach Khand Patr*', *Katha Sach Khand Rachna*, pp.24-25.

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