

RECONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITIES FROM SIKH LITERATURE (1500-1920)

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SUPERVISOR

DR. SULAKHAN SINGH
Professor
Department of History
Guru Nanak Dev University
Amritsar

SUBMITTED BY:

PARMAR NIRAPJIT
Research Scholar
Department of History
Guru Nanak Dev University
Amritsar



**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY
AMRITSAR
2010**

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the thesis entitled **Reconstructing Gender Identities from Sikh Literature (1500-1920)**, being submitted by Parmar Nirapjit in fulfillment for the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, is a record of candidate's own work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. The matter embodied in the thesis has not been submitted earlier for the award of any other degree.

Date :

Dr. Sulakhan Singh
Professor

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the thesis entitled **Reconstructing Gender Identities from Sikh Literature (1500-1920)**, is entirely my own work and all the ideas and references have been duly acknowledged.

Dr. Sulakhan Singh
Professor
Department of History
Guru Nanak Dev University
Amritsar

Parmar Nirapjit

PREFACE

Women's issues have always created a deep urge in me to prod deeper into their problems and the manner in which these problems are faced by them. Women since ages are addressed as the weaker sex and it becomes ironical that apart from a section of the male population, majority of the women themselves support this view. In building gender attitudes of people religions play a major role. The scope of the Sikh religion covers almost every aspect of an individual's life. Hence, a dire need was felt to delve into the literature of the Sikhs and dig out information that may even remotely be related in any manner whatsoever to the gender ideology of the Sikhs. Though this study went through its initial teething problems, eventually questions regarding the nature of this research work acquired clarity. The research work is based primarily on the fundamental question arising in our minds, "What is the Status of Sikh Women within the Sikh religion?" A host of subsequent questions arose and resulted in the birth of this study. Thus began the process of reconstructing the gender history of the Sikhs for the period, 1500 to 1920 CE. For this purpose, all available literature on the Sikhs has been analysed both objectively and critically.

For the purpose of reducing ambiguity and providing meaning and utilitarian value to the study, all possible and related aspects of Sikh literature have been reviewed, analysed and inferences have been drawn taking into account the historical value of the literary sources assessed. Chapter I as an introductory chapter traces the origins of the Sikh religion, its historical developments and the projection of gender in Sikh historiography. Chapter II portrays the gender notions of the Sikhs as reflected in the Guru Granth Sahib, Varan Bhai Gurdas, the Janamsakhis, Dasam Granth and the Gurbilas literature which constitute the early Sikh literature. Chapter III discusses the gender issues and concerns arising from the Hukamnamas and Rahitnamas, while the next Chapter charts the formation of gender identity from Sikh historical literature (1750-1920). Women issues in popular Sikh literature and journalism for the period 1890-1920 are taken up in Chapter V. Gender ideas and insights in Sikh Rahit Maryada are sought in Chapter VI. Since the entire work revolves around the role, status and identity of the Sikh women, Chapter VII is devoted wholly to the role played by the prominent Sikh women

in Sikh history and tradition. Towards the completion of Chapter seven, the picture was clearer than before. Sikh women definitely have a history, which is reflected through the writings of the Sikhs, both sacred and secular. This is not a tall statement being made but a fact that has been unearthed after painstaking investigation and study of literary and scholarly works.

Chapter VIII summarises the study undertaken and draws valid conclusions emerging as a result of analyzing the available primary and secondary sources. The need for undertaking the study also arose from an inherent dearth of scholarly and historical writings on the Sikhs in general and on the role and status of Sikh women in particular, information on which was hitherto scattered in bits and pieces. A need to present a wholistic perspective on the gender relations of the Sikhs was the reason behind the proposed research work.

In the completion of this work, many individuals and institutions have provided me with their expertise, guidance and support. I have been extremely fortunate to be able to create for myself a group of well-wishers, who became my greatest source of inspiration and encouragement and who also had tremendous faith in my abilities as a researcher. For all this and much more which I may be unable to express in words, I thank my Supervisor, Dr. Sulakhan Singh, who considered me apt enough to undertake this scholarly work and constantly strived to make me work to the best of my abilities and capabilities. I am also grateful to the Librarian and Staff of Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, as well as the Librarian and other Staff of the Library of the Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, the Sikh History Research Department situated in the premises of Khalsa College, Amritsar; the New Book Company, Jalandhar; Capital Book Depot, Chandigarh; the English Book Shop, Chandigarh; and the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh for providing me with a calm, serene and peaceful environment alongwith their library facilities. I thank the Librarian and other Staff of Dr. Balbir Singh Sadan, Dehradun, as well as of Trimurti Bhawan, New Delhi and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid Section, Punjabi University, Patiala for providing me with their valuable resources. I also thank K.G. Graphics, Amritsar for their whole hearted co-operation during the process of type-setting of this thesis. I am equally indebted to Prof. Balwant Singh Dhillon, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru

Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, for his valuable suggestions, guidance and information that was truly enlightening.

I consider myself fortunate to be born in a family of well-educated and well-bred intellectuals, whom I thank for influencing me throughout. With great reverence, I dedicate this research work to my late maternal grandfather, Sardar Kabul Singh Jaswal, whose faithful observance of the Sikh Rahit in his day-to-day life earned him a spot-free reputation and tremendous respect. Deeply indebted I am to my mother, Surinder Kaur, for re-enforcing my wobbling faith and patience and for inspiring me to work hard. People who deserve special mention for their unconditional love and support are my family members, Mrs. Davinder Mann, Manpal Kaur, my brother Harmanjeet Parmar, Sahibpreet and Advocate Manjeet Singh Saroya, my husband and soulmate for being there for me always in thick and thin. I am also thankful to my friends, Daljeet Kaur and Amrit Kaur, Research students, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my father, S. Baljeet Parmar, whose literary talents and pursuits I have inherited.

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, define a Sikh, but do not include the term 'Sikhism'. However, various interpretations of this religion are found on the web. Sikhism is defined as "a belief system which blends Hindu traditions with Islamic monotheistic traditions, based in India and Pakistan."¹ According to the India and Pakistan Mission Study Guide, "founded in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak, Sikhism believes in one God and rejects idol worship and caste. Guru Nanak started free community kitchens where his followers could eat together, regardless of their caste affiliations. In the Sikh concept of God, the sovereign God makes his will known to human beings, even though he does not appear in person. Though Karma, the law of the consequence of human actions, is at work, one can align oneself with God's Will and with God's help can attain salvation. Worshiping the True Name or God is the quest of the religion. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is the holiest shrine of Sikhism."² As per the Word Net Search, "Sikhism consists of the doctrines of a monotheistic religion founded in Northern India in the sixteenth century by Guru Nanak, thus combining elements of Hinduism and Islam."³

Khushwant Singh has expressed his view of Sikhism and Sikh history in these words, "The story of the Sikhs is the story of the rise, fulfillment and collapse of Punjabi nationalism. It begins in the later part of the 15th century with Guru Nanak initiating a religious movement emphasizing what is common between Hinduism and Islam and preaching the unity of these two faiths practised in the Punjab. By the beginning of the 17th century, the movement crystallized in the formation of a third religious community consisting of the disciples or *Sikhs* of Nanak and the succeeding teachers or *Gurus*."⁴ Many more interesting interpretations of 'Sikhism' are found which have been quoted here. Sikhism founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive Gurus in

¹ regentsprep.org/Regents/global/vocab/topic.cfm.

² new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

³ wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn.

⁴ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.viii.

fifteenth century Northern India, is the fifth largest religion in the world.⁵ This system of religious philosophy and expression has been traditionally known as the Gurmat (literally *the Counsel of the Gurus*) or the Sikh Dharma.⁶

It may be noted that the word ‘Sikh’ etymologically meaning “learner” or “disciple” is not the name of a race or nationality or caste, but a term signifying the follower of a religion. The Sikh religion differs, as regards the authenticity of its dogmas, from most other great theological systems. The Sikh Gurus employed the vehicle of verse.⁷

The principal belief of Sikhism is faith in *Waheguru*—represented using the sacred symbol of *Ek Omkar*, the one universal God. Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through disciplined, personal meditation on the Name and message of God. A key distinctive feature of Sikhism is a non-anthropomorphic concept of God, to the extent that one can interpret God as the Universe itself. The followers of Sikhism are ordained to follow the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus, or enlightened leaders, as well as the holy scripture entitled the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, which includes selected works of many devotees from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds. The text was decreed by Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, as the final Guru of the Khalsa Panth. Sikhism's traditions and teachings are distinctively associated with the history, society and culture of the Punjab. Adherents of Sikhism are known as Sikhs (*students* or *disciples*) and number over 25 million across the world. Most Sikhs live in the state of Punjab in India and, prior to the country's partition, millions of Sikhs lived in what is now known as the Punjab province of Pakistan.⁸ The Sikhs, a small and well-knit community are a unique people in the religious civilization of the world. Practical and progressive in their outlook, they are deeply attached to their faith. Religious belief is their living impulse and the mainspring of their national character and history.⁹

⁵ Adherents.com, *Religions by Adherents*.

⁶ Khushwant Singh, *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*, Oxford University Press, India, 2006, p.15.

⁷ M.A. Macauliffe, H.H. Wilson, Frederic Pincott, John Malcolm, Sardar Kahn Singh, *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, Susil Gupta India Private Ltd, Calcutta, 1958, p.1.

⁸ Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formation*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2001, p. 88.

⁹ Narain Singh, *Our Heritage*, The Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, n.d., p. 2.

The Sikh religion has been acclaimed as the faith of the new age. It is truly the answer to the problems of the modern man.¹⁰ It is basically a religion of action and human freedom.¹¹ The meaning of 'Religion' itself has been very well put forth by Gurnam kaur, in her work, *The Sikh Perspective of Human Values (1998)*, wherein she writes that Religion is the basic commitment of man to God. The main concern of religion is to show him the way to reach His reality. It is concerned with the soul of man. Religion seeks to enlighten man about the real meaning of His existence. Thus, it is the response of the whole person, an acceptance and commitment to whatever he takes to be of ultimate value in existence.¹² The author's perspective of religion goes a long way in formulating our understanding of Sikhism.

Similarly, Rajkumari Shanker, in her article, "Sikhism and Women", quotes W.C. Smith to point out that "Sikhism is the evolved product of subsequent centuries, a complex system of beliefs and practices. Nanak had preached a vision, the organizations and institutions came later."¹³ She further elaborates, a monotheistic tradition Sikhism believes that God can be known only through personal experience of mystical union. Repudiating ritualism, the Sikhs aspire to realize the experience of God through Bhakti (devotion) under the guidance of a Guru. They reject the Hindu caste system and the religious authority of the Brahmins. The Sikhs are disciples of their ten Gurus (teachers) beginning with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). Guru Nanak thus founded a new religious community or Panth within the larger Hindu fold.

Now, Sikhism can, with the fullest justification, claim to possess the gospels of its founders in their original purity. The glory of Sikh religion is its universality, which cannot brook sectarianism or narrow loyalties in any shape or form. It was intended by its founders to become the heritage, not of any particular group of people, but of the whole

¹⁰ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1995, p. ix.

¹¹ Source – Wikipedia, (Internet Website).

¹² Gurnam Kaur (ed.), *The Sikh Perspective of Human Values*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, 1998, Patiala, p. ix.

¹³ Rajkumari Shanker, "Sikhism and Women", Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in Indian Religions*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.113.

mankind.¹⁴ The advent of Sikh religion represents a well-mark and decisive development in the evolution of Indian religious consciousness.¹⁵ Khushwant Singh, in his inevitable style, gives a far appropriate direction to the understanding of Sikhism. In his view, “every new religious movement is born out of and shaped by existing faiths, and like offspring bears likeness to them. Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known each other for a period of nearly nine hundred years. But once it had taken birth, it began to develop a personality of its own and in due course grew into a faith which had some semblance to Hinduism, some to Islam, and yet had features which bore no resemblance to either.”¹⁶

According to A.C.Bannerjee, “Sikhism is not primarily a philosophical system. Guru Nanak, it has been said, ‘seperated pedantic philosophy from religion’ and treated it as ‘less a matter of intellect than of spirit’. This does not mean, of course, that Sikhism has no philosophy or that the intellect can be entirely eliminated in understanding Guru Nanak’s teachings. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas represent the rational and philosophical trend in the interpretation of Sikhism. Guru Nanak’s compositions tell us about God, His nature and attributes, and His relation with man and the universe. Instead of drawing authority and inspiration from any revealed scripture he depends upon his own mystical experience to explain the nature of Truth and the ‘True way’ which leads to salvation. The manner of his exposition – simple, lucid, often related to man’s daily experience – and the poetic flavour of his language appeal primarily to the heart and leave little scope for learned controversies on abstract issues in which scholars, Hindu and Muslim, found special pleasure in his days. He wanted to transfer religion from centres of scholasticism to common men’s homes; he wanted men to love God without taking the aid of barren metaphysics.”¹⁷

Taimur’s invasion in A.D. 1398 was the end of organized government in Northern India. Local governors openly rebelled against the Sultan of Delhi and declared

¹⁴ Narain Singh, *Our Heritage*, Amritsar, p.1.

¹⁵ Sunita Puri, *Advent of Sikh Religion : A Socio-Political Perspective*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1993, p. ix.

¹⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume I : 1469-1839*, New Delhi, 2004, p.17.

¹⁷ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Guru Nanak and His Times*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1971, pp.149-150. See also; Inderpal Sekhon, *Bengali Historiography on Guru Nanak and His Mission*, 2007, M.Phil. Dissertaion, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2007.

themselves as independent monarchs. Thus, the work done by the Sufis who had preached tolerance towards Hinduism and of the Hindu Bhaktas who had advocated a sympathetic understanding of Islam was undone. Political turmoil affected the religious practices of the masses. Hence in Khushwant Singh's view, "the birth of Sikhism cannot be studied in isolation as it was a result of the rapidly changing religious and political climate of the fifteenth century Punjab".¹⁸

Guru Nanak emerged on the scene amongst such political chaos and anarchy, thereby describing the turbulent times through the medium of his writings. The Sikh Church was further built and strengthened by his successors, from Guru Angad Dev to Guru Gobind Singh. Endorsing this view, Sulakhan Singh writes, "Sikhism as a new dispensation was born out of Guru Nanak's intense religious experience as well as his sharp response to his contemporary socio-religious and political milieu".¹⁹

He further states that under the successors of Guru Nanak, the Sikh institutions further grew in terms of number and influence. Guru Angad Dev not only modified the Gurmukhi script but also made it more popular among his contemporaries. Thus, it acted as an effective instrument to the making of the Sikh Scripture. Guru Amar Das gave further impetus to the growth of the Sikh Panth by adding the institution of *manjis* (bedstead) i.e. the centers primarily meant for missionary work. The holder of the *manji* was called the *manjidar*. Moreover with a view to the growing needs of the Sikh community Guru Ram Das added a new dimension to the institutional developments of the Sikh faith by appointing the *masands* (from Persian word *masnad*) meaning an authorized or commissioned missionary of the Gurus who now were directed to collect offerings or the *Daswandh* (the tithe or one tenth of the earnings) from the Sikhs and to deposit the collected amount to the Guru's treasury. As with the passage of time, the *masands* grew corrupt, hence the institution was ultimately abolished by Guru Gobind Singh.²⁰

The above narrative is very lucidly summed up by Sulakhan Singh, wherein he says that the institution of the Order of the Khalsa (the pure ones having direct relation with the Guru) founded by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi day of 1699 C.E. was

¹⁸ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol.1, 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, p.28.

¹⁹ Sulakhan Singh, "The Adi Guru Granth Sahib : An Embodiment of Sikhism and Its Institutions", *Souvenir*, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, 2004, p. 151.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 123.

primarily meant to serve the cause of the righteous against injustice or favour the cause of the good against evil as envisaged by the Guru himself. The undying spirit of the Khalsa and its symbolism, undoubtedly, has played a very crucial role as a great catalyst or the driving force in the history of the Sikhs and their religion even at times of very odd eventualities. The force that even now works behind all this and several other institutions of the Sikhs is the noble spirit and the message of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.²¹

The Sikh community was born in the fifteenth century in northern India with the birth of Guru Nanak, a Hindu of the Khatri caste, writes Doris R. Jakobsh.²² Ever since the sixteenth century, the Sikhs have evolved their faith with distinct features which occupies unique place in the socio-religious life of the people in North India especially the Punjab.²³ Sikhs are known for their wanderlust, for their love of adventure and their land hunger. They are a small community numerically but, with their ready mobility, they make good international showing. In all places, they are immediately recognizable by their turbans and beards. These are signs of their religious faith – an essential part of their way of life. Wherever they might be, they try to adhere to their own distinctive manner. But, what is especially interesting is the importance they attach to their religious beliefs, customs and form. Their religion is for them the strongest cementing force. It defines their character as well as their individuality. Sikh identity, in its profoundest meaning, religious.²⁴ Similarly, Daljeet Singh upholds that Sikhism is a revelatory religion. Its bedrock is the revelation that came to Guru Nanak and his nine successors, who conveyed it in simple and melodious verses to the suffering humanity. The word of the Gurus became the bond between the Gurus and their Sikhs (Shish) or disciples.²⁵ Elsewhere he writes that, Sikhism means two things, firstly that there is a level of Reality higher than the empirical Reality we experience with our normal senses. Secondly, that this higher Reality reveals itself to man and enlightens him. In other words, God is both transcendent and immanent and man can be in tune with his immanence. Therefore, in

²¹ Sulakhan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 153-154.

²² Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History : Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 22.

²³ Sulakhan Singh, *Heterodoxy in the Sikh Tradition*, ABS Publications, Jalandhar, 1999.

²⁴ Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1983, p.1.

²⁵ Daljeet Singh, *Essays on the Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir and the Integrated Logic and Unity of Sikhism*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, p. 1.

order to understand Sikhism, these fundamentals have to be kept in mind. In Sikhism, religion means living a life of love.²⁶

The essence of Sikhism is in its belief that the world is real, God is interested in the world, practice of virtues is the way to God, man's spiritual assessment depends on his deeds in this world, acceptance of householder's responsibility, equality of women, brotherhood of man, work is a part of man's religious duty, sharing one's income with one's fellow beings, participation in all walks of life and use of force in aiding righteous causes is sanctioned.²⁷

Sikhism, is essentially, and more than anything else, the religion of the Numenon and throughout the voluminous Sikh scripture, consisting of approximately 30,000 hymns, there are not many hymns or pages of this book, when it is not asserted through repeated statements, literary similies and allusions, that the essence of true religious theory and practice, is the *Name*. Sikhism is definitely not a history-grounded religion, i.e. the truth, the validity of Sikhism does not depend upon any event that has occurred in history, as is the case with other religions, for example-Islam, Christianity and Judaism.²⁸ It is a religion of the way, i.e. something that must be lived and experienced rather than something which may be intellectually grasped and declared. True, there can be no practice without the dogma. Sikhism, therefore, has its doctrines, its dogmatic stand, its view of reality, its view of the nature of man, and their inter-relationship, but it lays primary stress on the practice, the discipline, "the way which leads to" the ceasation of suffering as the Buddha formulated it.²⁹

Thus, the religion Sikhism, teaches a religious discipline, which is in essence a practice which includes the technique of *bhakti*, the supreme training of the emotions in the service of one supreme end, and a socio-politically active life, motivated not by the little ego of the individual but by an individual self, which is yoked to the universal self.³⁰

²⁶ Daljeet Singh, *Essays on the Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir and the Integrated Logic and Unity of Sikhism*, pp. 88-89.

²⁷ Daljeet Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 89.

²⁸ Sirdar, Kapur Singh, *Sikhism-An Oecumenical Religion*, (ed.Gurtej Singh), Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1993, p. 36.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 94.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 102.

1. SIKHISM AND ITS TENETS :

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the essence of the entire philosophy of the Sikh way of life. It is a commentary on the prevalent contemporary religious understanding. It aptly reflects the then religious philosophies.³¹ The holy scripture of the Sikhs, guides them and all humanity to live harmoniously and peacefully with one another.

Available Sikh Literature in its varied forms provides us with invaluable evidence on the religious beliefs and practices of the Sikhs. The backbone of Sikh philosophy is the Guru Granth Sahib, followed closely by the Janamsakhis and the Varan Bhai Gurdas. The very foundations of the Sikh church lie in the teachings of Guru Nanak, who was a great visionary of his times. Guru Nanak's writings are commentaries on the contemporary society of his times. The origins of Sikhism lie in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. His life and teachings challenged many of the religious beliefs and practices of his time.³²

Sikhism traces its beginnings to Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469. With the life of Guru Nanak the account of the Sikh faith begins, all Sikhs acknowledging him as their founder. Although his life is sketchy his teachings can be positively known. Elaborating further McLeod writes, "Nanak emerged as a religious teacher belonging to the Sant tradition of Northern India."³³ In the message he delivered, lay the seed of a vital thought stream, which moulded a new community of men. Attempts have been made to split Guru Nanak's doctrine into various strands and to trace their origin to precedent schools of thought. In order to understand Guru Nanak fully, one has to look at the totality of his tenets and at what impact it made on history. In this perspective, Guru Nanak emerged historically the founder of the Sikh faith. Guru Nanak's ideals signaled a new departure in contemporary religious ethos. Sikh tradition in continuum bears witness to the divine quality of Guru Nanak's intuition. To a society torn by conflict, he brought a vision of common humanity – a vision which transcended all barriers of creed and caste, race and country. He reminded men of their essential oneness.³⁴ The Sant tradition was a

³¹ A.C. Katoch, *Guru Granth Sahib*, Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, 2007, p. 76.

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_tenets_of_Sikhism

³³ W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp.2-3.

³⁴ Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 1.

part of the Bhakti movement which arose against the religious orthodoxy of the time. In this regard, Guru Nanak's teachings are purely circumstantial, a response to the foolish, meaningless practices, blind-faith, customs and increasing hold of the Brahmins over people's lives adding further to their woes. Their emphasis was more on the concept of one God. McLeod states, "religion for the Sants was wholly inward and inwardly they meditated on God."³⁵

Guru Nanak laid the foundations of a new religion and started a new pattern of living. Guru Nanak disapproved of the worship of idols because people tended to look upon them as God instead of symbolic representations. Guru Nanak believed that God was *Sat* (both truth and reality), as opposed to *Asat* (falsehood) and *Mithya* (illusion). A good Sikh therefore must not only believe that God is the only One, Omnipotent, and Omniscient Reality, but also conduct himself in such a way towards his fellow beings that he does not harm them; for hurtful conduct like lying, cheating, fornication, trespass on a person or on his property, does not conform to the truth that is God. This principle is stated categorically by Guru Nanak in the opening lines of his most celebrated morning prayer, the *Japji*, and in the *Mul Mantra* or the basic belief of Sikhism. Guru Nanak believed that the power that was God could not be defined because God was *nirankar* (formless). All of the descriptions of God were consequently admissions of an inability to define him. Despite the difficulty of definition, Guru Nanak used a variety of names for God. He was the Father (*Pita*) of all mankind; He was the Lover (*Pritam*) and Master (*Khasam*) of his devotee; He was also the Great Giver (*Data*). The attribute he usually ascribed to Him was that of the True Creator (*Sat Kartar*) or the True Name (*Sat Nam*).³⁶

Sikhism believes in equality of all humans and rejection of the caste system. Living one's life, while carrying out the responsibilities of worldly life, and not withdrawing from it, is encouraged. For Sikhs, initiation into the *Khalsa* strengthens their identity and also signifies the Sikh teaching of equality. The Sikhs are required to follow the teachings of their Guru and serve him, with weapons if necessary. W.H. McLeod emphasizes that his analysis, "concerns the theology of Guru Nanak and not the theology of Sikhism as the two are largely but not completely coterminous and at one important

³⁵ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 163.

³⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 39-40.

point there is divergence. For modern Sikhism the scripture exists as a channel of communication between God and man, but obviously this could be no part of Guru Nanak's theology. It must be understood, however, that this doctrine, its significance notwithstanding, is no more than a supplement to the teaching imparted by Guru Nanak. The theology of Guru Nanak remains the substance of Sikh belief."³⁷

i) THE NATURE OF GOD :

*Ek Oankar Sati namu Karata purukhu nirabhau niravairu akal
murati ajuni saibhan gur prasadi.*³⁸

"God being the same for everyone, but only his destiny is awakened on whom is His grace and His grace comes to all who seek it through service, humility, by dying to themselves, and yet living so that God's purpose in creating life be fulfilled."³⁹ The starting point of one's study of Guru Nanak's religion must be his concept of God which is expressed in brief and apparently simple words of the *Mul Mantra*.⁴⁰

McLeod quotes Principal Jodh Singh in illustrating the *Mul Mantra*, "The being is One. He is eternal. He is immanent in all things and the sustainer of all things. He is the Creator of all things. He is immanent in His creation. He is without fear and without enmity. This being is not subject to time. He is beyond birth and death. He is himself responsible for His own manifestation. (He is known) by the *Guru's grace*."⁴¹ The *Mul Mantra* greatly elucidates the concept of the **Unity of God**, which is the very foundation of the Sikh tradition.

Undoubtedly the credit of giving a new approach in the form of a realistic and independent thought process, goes to Guru Nanak, who through the powerful medium of his sermons continues to lead us from darkness towards light till today. Guru Nanak's God was one. He was a strict monotheist, not willing to accept the theories of re-incarnation which were largely prevalent in the society of his time. One finds his teachings being based on the spiritual concept of God. Therefore it became obligatory for a true Sikh to believe in

³⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 163.

³⁸ *Loc.cit*.

³⁹ A.C. Katoch, *Guru Granth Sahib*, Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, 2007, p. 85.

⁴⁰ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Op.cit*, p. 150.

⁴¹ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, pp. 163-164.

the Oneness of God without any doubt, consider him Omnipotent and Omniscient and thereby follow the path of truthful and rightful living. He called the supreme being simply *Ikk* (One), without a second, who is eternal, infinite and all-pervasive. He is not limited by time. He is perennially self-existent and is the source of love and grace. He is both *Nirguna* and *Saguna* i.e. He is with attributes as well as without attributes. Yet, he is formless. He is never incarnated, nor can any image retain him.⁴² Nanak further put forth the Ideal of Man's life as purity among the world's impurities.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. In Sikhism, God—termed *Vāhigurū*—is formless, eternal, and indescribable: *nirankār*, *akāl*, and *alakh*. The beginning of the first composition of Sikh scripture is the figure "1"—signifying the Oneness and universality of God. It states that God is omnipresent and infinite, and is signified by the term *Ek Omkar*. The Sikhs believe that prior to creation, all that existed was God and his *Hukam* (Will or Order). When God willed, the entire cosmos was created. From these beginnings, God nurtured "enticement and attachment" to *Māyā*, or the human perception of reality.⁴³

While a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, Nanak described God as not wholly unknowable. God is omnipresent (*Sarav Viāpak*) in all creation and visible everywhere to the spiritually awakened. Guru Nanak stressed that God must be seen from "the inward eye", or the "heart", of a human being: devotees must meditate to progress towards enlightenment.⁴⁴ The idea that God is transcendent and also immanent places Guru Nanak's monotheism in a category different from monotheism in Islam. Guru Nanak's God is indeed a God of *Grace*.⁴⁵

ii) UNCONDITIONAL SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL :

The door to salvation is opened by God's *Grace*, *Nazar*, *kirpa*, *Parsad*, *Daya*. Those who meditate on Him with single mind receive His *Grace*. What He gives is given in accordance with His Will. *Man* is initially dependent upon Divine pleasure for spiritual regeneration.⁴⁶

⁴² Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 12.

⁴³ new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁴⁴ *Loc.cit.*

⁴⁵ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Op.cit.*, pp. 155-156.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 156.

Guru Nanak did not approve of ascetic isolation or torturing of the flesh as a step to enlightenment. He, in fact, rejected all outward forms of piety. In his view, pilgrimages, fasts and ascetic practices were of no avail. The first step towards enlightenment is the apprehension that the Transcendent is the only Ultimate Truth. This apprehension must be accompanied by intense love of God, utter self-surrender to Him and complete faith in His Hukam or Will. Thus, one realizes the reality and frees oneself from the bondage of ego.⁴⁷

God is both the Creator and the Sustainer according to Guru Nanak. God does not merely create. Having brought the world into being, he watches over it and cares for it. For Nanak, God is a participant in the life of the universe which He has established, watching, directing and upholding.⁴⁸ God, the One, is Brahma, Visnu and Siva. The Creator and Sustainer is also the Destroyer and the Recreator.⁴⁹ God is both Sovereign and Eternal. Although the World is unstable and impermanent, God himself is not.⁵⁰

Guru Nanak also refers to God as *Ajuni*, One who is unborn and non-incarnated. The *Japji*, endorses this view by stressing that God is beyond death and transmigration.⁵¹ God is Formless and Ineffable, i.e., He can never be incarnated and therefore cannot be present in an idol.⁵² He is Immanent, meaning He is beyond human perception and understanding.⁵³ McLeod thus sums up, 'God the omnipotent and omniscient is also God the omnipresent'.⁵⁴

According to Sikhism, the goal of life for a person is to progress on a spiritual scale from *Manmukh* or "self-centered", to *Gurmukh*, or "God-centered". In the view of McLeod, the person who fails to discern the nature of the divine order is a *Manmukh*. His loyalty is to himself, to the wayward impulses of his own *man* instead of to the voice of the *Guru*. In contrast to this pattern, is that of the *Gurmukh*. The *Gurmukh* hears and obeys the *Guru's* word; the *Manmukh* ignores it. Offered truth, freedom and life, he chooses instead falsehood, bondage, and death, for such is the fate of the man who has

⁴⁷ Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 13, 14 and 15.

⁴⁸ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 169.

⁴⁹ *Loc.cit.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 170.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 171.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 172.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 173.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 174.

not purged *Haumai* from his *Man*.⁵⁵ *Gurmukh* implies the qualities of humility, selfless service, adhering to the teachings of Guru and not being a recluse.⁵⁶

iii) ELIMINATING THE *HAUMAI* / EGO :

The Sikh faith admits man's material happiness to be as important as his spiritual liberation. Guru Nanak attaches greatest importance to moral conduct, including perseverance, chastity, wisdom, self-control, patience and obedience to the Will of God.⁵⁷ McLeod substantiates, in unregenerate man, the dominant impulse is that of *Haumai*, which determines the pattern of his life. Instead of leading a man to release and salvation, his *Haumai* will invariably stimulate affections which can only bind him more firmly to the wheel of transmigration.⁵⁸ Although the usual translation of *Haumai* is 'Ego', its other possible translations are 'Self' and 'Self-centredness'.⁵⁹

Guru Nanak's teachings are founded not on a final destination of heaven or hell, but on a spiritual union with God which results in salvation.⁶⁰

The goal of man, as prescribed by Guru Nanak is union with God. This union is to be achieved stage by stage. Nanak formulates five stages of spiritual development; each of them is called a *Khand* or 'realm'. The first called, *Dharam Khand*, represents the realm of *Dharam* or Law. Here the emphasis is on the performance of Duty. Men are judged by thought and deed; the Court of God is adorned by the elect. The second is called *Gian Khand* or the realm of Knowledge. Acquisition of Knowledge weakens self-centredness. The third stage, called *Saram Khand*, is differently translated; as the realm of Happiness or Spiritual Endeavour or Surrender. Here beauty is resplendent. The fourth stage is called *Karam Khand*, or the realm of Action, where 'effort is supreme' and 'nothing else prevails'. *Sach Khand*, or the realm of Truth, is the fifth and final stage. There dwells the Formless One Who watches His Creation.⁶¹

The chief obstacles to the attainment of salvation are social conflicts and an attachment to worldly pursuits, which commit men and women to an endless cycle of

⁵⁵ W.H. McLeod., *Op.cit.*, p. 184.

⁵⁶ Singh Harbans, *Op. cit*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁵⁸ W.H. McLeod., *Op.cit*, p. 182.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 183.

⁶⁰ new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁶¹ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Op.cit*, pp. 166-67.

birth, a concept known as *Reincarnation*. *Maya*, defined as Illusion or "Unreality", is one of the core deviations from the pursuit of God and Salvation: people are distracted from devotion by worldly attractions which give only illusive satisfaction. However, Guru Nanak emphasised *Maya* as not a reference to the unreality of the world, but of its values.⁶² In Sikhism, *Maya* implies that the visible world is real but is not permanent. Attachment to this transitory world is the greatest barrier between *Man* and Truth. For him there is a choice, worldly enjoyment or Union with God. One who yields to *Maya* is caught in the cycle of transmigration; his chains are not cut asunder.⁶³

In Sikhism, the influences of ego, anger, greed, attachment and lust—known as the *Five Evils*—are believed to be particularly pernicious. The fate of people vulnerable to the Five Evils is separation from God, and the situation may be remedied only after intensive and relentless devotion. Guru Nanak described God's revelation—the path to salvation—with terms such as *Naam* (the Divine Name) and *Shabad* (the Divine Word) to emphasise the totality of the revelation. He designated the word *Guru* (meaning *Teacher*) as the voice of God and the source and guide for Knowledge and Salvation. Salvation can be reached only through rigorous and disciplined devotion to God. Guru Nanak distinctly emphasised the irrelevance of outwardly observations such as rites, pilgrimages or asceticism. He stressed that devotion must take place through the heart, with the spirit and the soul.⁶⁴

Avtar Singh, in his *Ethics of The Sikhs*, believes that in order to understand the moral standard in Sikhism, we need to understand the problem of morality, envisaged therein. According to Guru Nanak, each person, in his empirical existence occupies himself with a narrow and limited view-point. This narrow view-point, is referred to by Guru Nanak as *Haumai* (I-Am-Ness), a feeling of superior Self-Ego, indicated in a narrow or too limited point of view.⁶⁵

iv) REMEMBERING THE DIVINE NAAM :

A key practice to be pursued is *Naam Simran* : remembrance of the divine Name. The verbal repetition of the name of God or a sacred syllable is an established practice in

⁶² new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁶³ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Op.cit*, p. 165.

⁶⁴ new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁶⁵ Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2006, p. 25.

religious traditions in India, but Guru Nanak's interpretation emphasised inward, personal observance. Guru Nanak's ideal is the total exposure of one's being to the Divine Name and a total conforming to Dharma or the "Divine Order". Guru Nanak described the result of the disciplined application of *Nām Simran* as a "growing towards and into God" through a gradual process of five stages. The last of these is *Sach Khand (The Realm of Truth)*—the final union of the spirit with God.⁶⁶ For Guru Nanak, the key to liberation lay in the *Naam*. By meditating on the *Naam* and all its aspects, the believer would progressively find liberation. By the regular practice of *Naam Simran*, a person would achieve a final harmony of spirit in which the endless wheel of death and rebirth would be stilled, and the soul would find ultimate peace. This was the message preached by Guru Nanak to all who could hear him. It was one which required no separation from worldly life and which could be followed by any person, regardless of present caste or past deeds. Above all it was wholly internal, a discipline to be followed without any assistance from sacred persons or sacred things. The only requirement was regular meditation. *Naam Simran* meant the simple repetition of meaningful words, such as *Satnam*, 'True is the Name' or the popular modern name for God, *Waheguru*. It could involve the singing of hymns glorifying the *Naam*, or simply could be deep meditation within.⁶⁷

In fact, Sikhism has often been called the *Naam Marg* or the way of *Naam*. The basic definition of *Naam* as contained in *Sukhmani* and other hymns in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, has been given by Daljeet Singh in the following way :

- (i) *Naam* sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, in short, it is all-encompassing. *Naam* emancipates those who accept it in their heart. He, on whom is His Grace, is yoked to *Naam*, and he reaches the highest state of development.
- (ii) *Naam* is the creator of everything. To be divorced from *Naam* is death. *Naam* gives form to everything and through *Naam* comes all wisdom or light.
- (iii) *Naam* extends to all creation.
- (iv) *Naam* is the 'Nine Treasures' or nectar. It permeates the body.
- (v) *Naam*, the immaculate, is unfathomable. How can it be known? *Naam* is within us.

⁶⁶ new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/

⁶⁷ Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, 1983, p. 16.

The doctrine of *Naam* gives a clear clue to the understanding of Sikh theology and Sikh history. It also vividly explains the ten Gurus attack on the socio-political institutions of their times, their martyrdoms and military preparations and struggle with a view to create new socio-political organizations and institutions.⁶⁸ In the words of Guru Nanak himself, ‘those who are dyed in the *Naam* suffer neither burden nor illusion. Repeating the name of God is extremely profitable; the fearless one is really in one’s heart’. An analysis of the ‘theological’ imagery of Guru Nanak’s *Bani* indicates that he addressed himself to petty traders, artisans and bond-servants of the moneyed magnates as well.⁶⁹

There is a great stress on *Naam-Simran* (meditation on the Divine Name of God and the Word), which is considered superior to everything else, including *Sewa* (Selfless-Service), Charity and Sacrifice. The gospel of *Naam* is the pivot of Sikh monotheistic theology. The gospel of *Naam* is considered as the gospel of God-realization and self-perfection through the *Joga* of *Jap*, *Simran* or *Naam* or constant Oneness with God.⁷⁰ In Guru Arjan Dev’s view, *Nam-Simran* (*Naam Japna*), which is the spiritual discipline par excellence is the first practical step on the journey that leads to the acme of human development and is one of the fundamental principles of Sikhism.

v) SELFLESS SERVICE TO HUMANITY / *KIRAT KARO* :

In Guru Nanak’s view, the Ideal of life was to be purity among the world’s impurities. Therefore, Guru Nanak did not approve of ascetic isolation or torturing of the flesh as a step to enlightenment. His ideal was to have the detachment of a yogi while living among one’s fellow beings – *Raj Men Jog* (to achieve Enlightenment in civic life).⁷¹

Guru Nanak stressed *Kirat Karō*: that a Sikh should balance work, worship, and charity, and should defend the rights of all creatures, and in particular, fellow human beings. They are encouraged to have a *Chardi Kala*, or Optimistic view of life. Sikh teachings also stress the concept of sharing (*Vand Chakko*,) through the distribution of free food at Sikh gurdwaras (*Langar*), giving charitable donations, and working for the good of

⁶⁸ W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ Daljeet Singh and Kharak Singh (eds.), *Sikhism, Its Philosophy and History*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1997, pp. 37-38 & 55-56.

⁷⁰ Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History From Sikh Literature*, ABS Publications, Jalandhar, 1988, p.13.

⁷¹ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. 1, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 41-42.

the community and others (*Seva*).⁷² Guru Nanak also laid special emphasis on *Seva* or Self–abnegating deeds of Service. By humble and devoted service one purified one’s body and mind. This was to serve as the right way of living for a truly religious man.⁷³

The Universal characteristics of Guru Nanak’s teachings have been aptly described by Khushwant Singh, wherein he states, “Nanak is still remembered in the Punjab as the King of Holy men, the Guru of the Hindus and the Pir of the Mussalmans.”⁷⁴ Guru Nanak was a teacher not of his own wisdom. He preached, what, he said, had been taught by the Lord himself.⁷⁵ The Sikh doctrine thereby consists of the affirmation in it of the opposites, the synthesis of the Worldly and the Outworldly, of the Temporal and the Spiritual. Effectual religious devotion was made in it compatible with the ordinary duties of life.⁷⁶ W.H. McLeod, refers to Guru Nanak’s beliefs as his theology, for the whole of Guru Nanak’s thought revolves around his understanding of the nature of God.⁷⁷ He further elaborates that this theology is not, of course, set out in any systematic form. Guru Nanak’s writings bear witness to his experience of God and the characteristic expression of that experience is the hymn of praise which it engenders.⁷⁸

vi) GURU—THE SPIRITUAL PRECEPTOR OR GUIDE :

Almost all religions of the world believe in the necessity of a Guru. The Sikh Gurus do not proclaim themselves as incarnations of God. In the words of Guru Ramdas, “The Sikh who follows the Gurus teachings will become one with the Guru. No difference will be felt between the Guru and the Sikh.” A Sikh is therefore, expected to have complete faith in the Guru. Again, Guru Nanak does not want the disciple to have blind faith in the Guru. At the same time, one cannot understand the significance of the Guru’s teachings, until one practices them.⁷⁹ Guru Nanak attached a lot of significance to the role of a Guru and even Sikhism endorses the doctrine of the *Guru*. Considerable

⁷² [1///new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/](http://new.qbgm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/)

⁷³ Harbans Singh, *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Khushwant Singh, *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*, India, 2004, p. 37.

⁷⁵ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, 2008, p. 148.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 149.

⁷⁹ Gurmukh Nihal Singh (ed.), *Guru Nanak, His Life, Times and Teachings*, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 15-17.

emphasis is laid upon his role as the communicator of Divine Truth. According to Teja Singh, a *Guru* is a particular personality, a creative and perfect personality who stands as guide and exemplar.⁸⁰ It is the Guru who communicates the *Sabad* to the disciple. It is the Guru through whose instruction the love of the *Name* is instilled into one's mind. Without the Guru's guidance no one can attain release (*Mokh, Moksha*) or Salvation. This is a familiar theme in Guru Nanak's hymns. Guru Nanak lays down the qualifications of Guruship: Take him as Guru who shows the path of truth; who tells you of the One of whom nothing is known; who tells you of the divine world' In Guru Nanak's view, he (Guru) is a guide and teacher, mediator and intercessor, but not a Divine Master. Elsewhere, he equates the Guru with God. Absolute surrender to the Guru in spirit and unquestioning obedience are to him in practice are the essential duties of every Sikh.⁸¹ Sirdar Kapur Singh, in his, '*Sikhism, An Oecumenical Religion*', writes that the meaning of the word 'Guru' was taught by Guru Gobind Singh himself, to Bhai Mani Singh, as claimed by him, as "*Go* meaning inertia, matter, nescience and *Ru* meaning the principle of light that illumines consciousness. *Guru*, therefore, means nothing less than the Divine light implicit in every human heart progressively revealed to him through a proper cultivation of his religious intuition."⁸²

vi) OTHER SIKH IDEALS AND INSTITUTIONS :

The Bhaktas had only paid lip service to the ideal of a casteless society. Guru Nanak took practical steps to break the vicious hold of caste by starting free community kitchens (*Guru Ka Langar*) in all centres and persuading his followers, irrespective of their castes, to eat together. Guru Nanak's writings abound with passages deploring the system and other practices which grew out of caste concepts, particularly the notion held by Brahmins that even the shadow of a lower caste man, on a place where food was being cooked, made it impure.⁸³

⁸⁰ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 197.

⁸¹ Anil Chandra Bannerjee, *Op.cit*, pp. 158-60.

⁸² Sirdar Kapur Singh, *Sikhism-An Oecumenical Religion*, Gurtej Singh (ed.), Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1993, pp. 41-42.

⁸³ Khushwant Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. 1, New Delhi, 2004, p. 43.

Nanak thus attached prime significance to inculcation of values, most important of these being patience (*Sahaj*), performing one's duty selflessly (*Kirat Karo*), and the concept of sharing, work, worship and to give away in charity (*Vand Chakko*). According to Guru Nanak, there is no general rule applicable to everyone; each person should discipline himself according to his physical capacity and temperament. Guru Nanak wanted common men to lead a real spiritual life and combine themselves in a social pattern which will give rise to toleration for the views of others and a general desire to work for the welfare of the whole mankind.⁸⁴

The Guru Granth Sahib consists very largely of devotional hymns, arranged on the basis of *Ragas* (musical modes) further sub-divided into various sub-sections on the basis of authorship. At the beginning is a long series of aphorisms called the *Japji*, which every Sikh is supposed to know by heart, and it is recited early in the morning daily. This is believed to be the work of Guru Nanak in his old age. Following the *Japji* is the *Asa Di War*, which is also mostly a collection of Guru Nanak's sayings, and which is for additional use in the morning. Then comes the *Rahiras*, (hymns by Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev), which is to be recited in the daily evening service. It is regrettable that many Sikhs do not and cannot now learn and memorize the Guru Granth Sahib which is written in a special dialect called Gurmukhi, with which many are not familiar. Those teachers who find its teaching attractive should remember that it is the fruit of hybridization between Islam and Hinduism, and that through Islam, Guru Nanak and his followers found contact with Hebrew ideas of God, and also with that peculiar blend of Moslem and neo-Platonic piety called Sufism.⁸⁵ Anyway, one cannot ignore the freshness and originality of the theology of Guru Nanak and his successors.

2. MAIN SIKH HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS :

Tradition and politics have played capriciously with the date and place of Guru Nanak's birth. He was born in the month of April, that is what modern research has conclusively established at Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan. Guru Nanak did not plan his renunciation. He had a mission to fulfil, but he did not have to give up the world for the sake of it. He travelled far and wide in pursuit of his mission. From references in his

⁸⁴ Gurmukh Nihal Singh (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ A.C. Bouquet, *Sacred Books of the World*, Penguin Books, Great Britain, 1967, pp. 314-316.

hymns connected with the various places he visited, the monuments commemorating his visits to those places and the old biographies, one can form a fairly comprehensive idea of his travels which took him to foreign lands such as Arabia, Ceylon and Tibet. During these journeys Guru Nanak visited places of pilgrimage sacred to the Hindus, the Muslims and the Buddhists. Seeing the futility of meaningless customs, rituals and practices being followed in the name of these religions, he made it his mission to bring out the essence and purity of religion, which had become more a matter of superstitious dogma and ritual. True religion, according to him, consisted in love of God and love of man. He made use of music in the propagation of his mission. His simplicity of manner and the universality of his teachings appealed to the hearts of men. A new way of life opened to those who accepted him as their teacher. Repudiation of caste and ritualism was the first distinguishing feature of this new order.⁸⁶

Sikhism is rooted in a particular religious experience, piety, and culture and informed by a unique inner revelation of its founder, Guru Nanak (1469–1539). It evolved in response to three main elements. The first of these was the ideology based on religious and cultural innovations of Guru Nanak and his nine successors. The second was the rural base of the Punjabi society. The third significant element was the period of Punjab history. All three elements combined to produce the mutual interaction between ideology and environment in the historical development of Sikhism.⁸⁷ The foundations of the Sikh faith were laid by Guru Nanak and his teachings. Indeed with the seeds sown by the first Guru, Sikhism was to grow manifold under the vision, far-sightedness and able guidance of the later Gurus.

Guru Nanak was the first popular leader of the Punjab in recorded history. Even when the number of his actual disciples was not perhaps very great, the number of those belonging to other communities who paid homage to the ideal of “there is no Hindu; there is no Mussalman,” was considerable. It was this ideal which gave birth to Punjabi consciousness and to Punjabi nationalism.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of The Sikhs*, Asia Publishing House, Delhi, 1964, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁷ "<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html>">Sikhism - The Origins And Development of Sikhism

⁸⁸ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. 1, New Delhi, 2004, p. 48.

J.S. Grewal opines that a rigorous analysis of the compositions of Guru Nanak reveals that there is hardly anything in contemporary politics, society or religion that he finds commendable. For a rational conceptualization of his position, it may be suggested that the entire social order had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of Guru Nanak because it had lost its support from the prevalent religious ideologies; it was neither 'Hindu' nor 'Muslim'. A new religious ideology was needed to become the basis of a new social order. His denunciation of contemporary practices and beliefs is only an inverted statement of his positive ideals. Guru Nanak was thoroughly familiar with the politico-administrative arrangements made by the Afghan rulers, particularly in the Punjab. This familiarity, reflected in the use of metaphors by him.⁸⁹ The underlying element in the teachings of Guru Nanak, is egalitarianism. He professes universal equality, the right of spiritual advancement and a true democratic approach to be followed by one and all.

The way of life adopted by the disciples of Guru Nanak was somewhat different from that of the Hindus or the Muslims from whom they had sprung. Since Guru Nanak had emphasized the role of truthful companionship (*Sat Sang*), his disciples naturally interpreted it as being constituted of those who accepted Guru Nanak as their Guru. The breakaway from the parent communities started in the Guru's lifetime. It began with a different place and a mode of worship. The Sikh no longer chanted Sanskrit *Slokas* to stone idols or murmured the Arabic of the Koran while genuflecting towards Mecca; he sang the hymns of Guru Nanak in his own mother-tongue, Punjabi. He ate with his fellow Sikhs at the Guru's kitchen, which he helped to organize by collecting rations and in which he took turns to serve as a cook or scrubber of utensils. All this resulted in building a community of people who had more in common with each other than with the communities to which they had belonged.⁹⁰

At the age of fifty-two, Guru Nanak returned from his travels to settle down at Kartarpur, on the banks of Ravi, and once again took upon himself the duties of everyday life. He worked on the farm and morning and evening, held congregations and recited the sacred hymns. Kartarpur became a place of pilgrimage for his followers. Here he organized *Langar* (free community kitchen), for his Sikhs, and also for all those who,

⁸⁹ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs Of The Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 28.

⁹⁰ "<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html>">Sikhism - The Origins And Development Of Sikhism

forgetting the distinctions of caste, sat down in a row, (*Pangat*) for a meal. The missionaries appointed by the Guru in different parts of India to propagate his mission, brought timely reports of their work and offerings collected. Kartarpur thus became the centre of the Sikh faith, which was gradually developing the characteristics of an organized church. In 1539, at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak passed away, leaving behind his spiritual successor, Guru Angad Dev, and a large number of followers scattered all over India and in other lands.⁹¹

With the appointment of one of his followers as his successor by Guru Nanak, the line of prophetic succession continued until the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh character and organization thus developed under the ten successive leaders, each emphasizing a particular lesson, truly exemplified in his own life, or contributing a new national trait rehearsed under the stress of changing times and environs.⁹²

During the period of the ten Gurus (*Preceptors*), three key events took place in the evolution of Sikhism. The first was the establishment of the first Sikh community at Kartarpur in west Punjab during the last two decades of Guru Nanak's life. To ensure its survival, Guru Nanak formally appointed a successor before he passed away in 1539. Thus, a lineage was established, and a legitimate succession was maintained intact from the appointment of the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev (1504–1552), to the death of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs. The second event was the compilation of the canonical scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib* in 1604 by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606). It provided a framework for the shaping of the Sikh community. The third was the founding of the institution of the *Khalsa* (pure) by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, an order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline.⁹³

Guru Angad Dev (1539-52) had come to Kartarpur as a seeker. He was then known as Lehna and had spent many years in the worship of Goddess Durga. On one occasion, he heard Bhai Jodha, sing the hymns of Guru Nanak and was so deeply touched that, on his next pilgrimage to the Goddess's temple, he halted at Kartarpur, to meet the

⁹¹ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 22-23.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁹³ "<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html>">Sikhism - The Origins And Development Of Sikhism

Guru. This meeting became the turning point of his life. It put an end to all his quest and journeying. He discovered in the Guru's word, the truth and solace he had been seeking and found joy in offering him, his devoted service. Bhai Lehna, imbibed the spirit of Sikhism and impressed everyone so greatly, by his piety and nobility of character that Guru Nanak chose him as his successor in preference to his own sons. He embraced him and called him, 'Angad', i.e. part and parcel of his own being. Thus, "Guru Nanak's light blended with Guru Angad Dev's". Guru Angad Dev carried forward Guru Nanak's work, and the Sikh movement developed in his time, a more specific character. He popularized the Gurmukhi script, which had been introduced by Guru Nanak and had the latter's hymns and life-stories written in the same script. This was the beginning of the religious literature of the Sikhs. The institution of *Langar* established by Guru Nanak, gained importance as an instrument of a far-reaching social revolution.⁹⁴

Guru Amar Das, was born before day on the 14th of the light half of Baisakh, in the Sambat year 1536 (1479 A.D.). He lived partly by agriculture and partly by trade. At the age of twenty-three, he was married to Mansa Devi. Guru Amar Das was a devout believer in the Vaishnav faith, and used to fast every eleventh day. He always thought that human life was passing in vain and he longed for the guidance of a religious teacher to make it profitable. Guru Amar Das then seriously began his search for a Guru. One day, he heard the dulcet chanting of the Guru's hymns by Bibi Amro (Guru Angad Dev's daughter), who lived in his brother's house. On hearing the hymn, Guru Amar Das was so deeply absorbed in devotion that he wanted to meet the Guru. Thus Guru Amar Das, found his Guru.⁹⁵

As a result of his service and dedication Guru Angad made him his successor. Guru Angad Dev sent for five copper coins and a coconut, bathed Guru Amar Das, clothed him in a new dress, and installed him in the Guru's seat. Bhai Buddha affixed to his forehead, the tilak of Guruship. Thus, was Guru Amar Dass, regularly and solemnly

⁹⁴ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p.12. See also; Sarita Rana, *Life and Works of Guru Angad Dev (1504-1552 A.D.)*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2008.

⁹⁵ M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vols. I & II, Low Price Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 30-32.

appointed Guru Angad's successor.⁹⁶ Guru Amar Das (1552-74), expected every visitor to partake of the food in *Guru Ka Langar*, before seeing him. Emperor Akbar, who had once come to meet him, had to eat out of the common kitchen like any other pilgrim. A distinctive contribution of the third Guru to the growth of the Sikh organization was the establishment of twenty-two *Manjis* (dioceses), covering several parts of India, to preach the mission of Guru Nanak. Upliftment of Women, was the aim of the social reforms he introduced. He severely denounced, in particular, the customs of *Purdah* (Veil) and the custom of *Sati* (Self-Immolation by a widow, on the funeral pyre of her husband).⁹⁷ He presented the ideal of personal service.⁹⁸ He breathed his last in the month of Bhadon, Sambat 1631 (1574 A.D.), after a spiritual reign of 22 years.⁹⁹

Guru Ram Das (1574-1581), was the third Guru's son-in-law. He proved a true and devoted disciple and achieved such perfect kinship with the Guru that the latter nominated him as his successor. For seven years Guru Ram Das guided the destinies of the new faith. He founded the town of Amritsar which in course of time became the centre of Sikh religion and the most flourishing trading city of Northern India.¹⁰⁰

Before his death in 1581, Guru Ram Das chose his youngest son, Arjan, as the Successor Guru. The principle of nomination was upheld, but it was restricted to the family of Guru Ram Das. Guru Arjan Dev was only eighteen years old at the time of his nomination.¹⁰¹ He was the first of the Gurus who laid aside the rosary and the garb of a faqir and dressed himself in costly attire and converted the saintly *Gaddi* of his pious predecessors into a princely rostrum. He kept a numerous retinue, fine horses and elephants and lived in splendour. He was an energetic and aspiring Guru and his aims were high. He organized the Sikhs into a community and devised measures for extending his spiritual authority. His first consideration was to ascertain whether the teachings of

⁹⁶ M.A. Macauliffe, *Op.cit*, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 24-25.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 25.

¹⁰¹ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 54. See also, Amrit Kaur, *Guru Arjan Dev and The Foundation of New Urban Centres*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2010; Reeta Grewal, *Polity, Economy and Urbanization in Early 19th Century Punjab*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1983.

the great Guru Nanak were equally suited to the multifarious religious denominations and societies that then existed. He attempted to raise the followers of Guru Nanak in the scale of society, and, with a view to uniting them by one common religious tie, he gave them a religious code, which they held in the greatest veneration. In this code, he incorporated the sayings and verses of Guru Nanak, the compositions of his predecessors, and his own, and the choicest literary productions of other religious reformers of those times, whose memory was still fresh in the minds of the people. This code he called the “Granth”, or the Holy Book, and it was handed over to the Guru’s successors with an assurance that all it contained was pure and binding on all true disciples. A copy was kept in the *Harmandir*, or Holy temple, and recited each day to the crowds who came to bathe in the sacred tank. Hymns were sung in praise of the Lord by bands of musicians and the incidents of the life of Guru Nanak were repeated with great fervour. Thus a new spirit was infused into the minds of the followers of the Guru. He organized a system of charity and appointed delegates, or deputies, for the purposes of collecting it from his followers throughout the country. These contributions, or offerings, from the faithful were collected in all districts by means of the deputies abovementioned and presented by them to the Guru in an annual assembly.

Thus, were the Sikhs accustomed to a regular system of government and having been formed into a community, gradually developed into a real power. To increase the commonwealth, Guru Arjan Dev also sent his disciples to foreign countries for the purposes of trade, dealing principally in Turkistan horses. He completed the construction of the grand tank at Amritsar, and built the *Darbar Sahib* popularly called *Harmandir* in it. Another tank was built at *Taran Taran* in the Amritsar district.¹⁰² The death of Akbar brought a sudden reversal in the policy of the state towards the Sikhs. The new Emperor, Jahangir, disapproved of the growing popularity of Guru Arjan Dev.¹⁰³

Within eight months of Akbar’s death in October 1605, Guru Arjan Dev died the death of a martyr at the end of May, 1606, tortured by the new emperor’s underlings at Lahore.¹⁰⁴ In the twenty-five years of Guru Arjan Dev’s ministry, the seed sown by Guru

¹⁰² Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjab From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time*, Eurasia Publishing House (Pvt) Ltd, 1964, New Delhi, pp. 253-54.

¹⁰³ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 2004, p. 59.

¹⁰⁴ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 61.

Nanak blossomed into its fullness. The death of Guru Arjan Dev was a turning point in the history of the Punjab. He had brought the Hindu and Mussalman together in creating a scripture where both were represented and in raising a temple whose foundation was laid by a Muslim and a superstructure built by Hindus and Sikhs. He was a builder of cities and a merchant prince who brought prosperity to all communities. Guru Arjan Dev's blood became the seed of the Sikh Church as well as that of the Punjabi nation.¹⁰⁵

J.S. Grewal, calls the accession of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, as 'transformation of the Sikh Panth', while Khushwant Singh, refers to the same as 'the call to arms'. With the sacrificial death of Guru Arjan Dev, the Sikhs gathered around the eleven-year old Guru Hargobind and the two veterans, Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas, ready to avenge the death of their Guru.¹⁰⁶ Alarmed at the increased meddling of the government into Sikh affairs, and particularly with the death of his father while in custody, Guru Hargobind styled his Guruship as a combination of the religious and political; not only did he represent the religious concerns of the Sikh Panth, he also wore arms, a symbol of his temporal power.¹⁰⁷

The young Guru Hargobind took the seat of his father with two swords girded around his waist: one to symbolize spiritual power and the other temporal. He made it known to his Sikhs that thereafter he would welcome offerings of arms and horses instead of money. He retained a body of soldiers and spent much time in martial exercise and hunting. He built a small fortress, *Lohgarh* (the Castle of Steel) in Amritsar. Across the Harmandir, he built the *Akal Takht* (the Throne of the Timeless God), where, instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and, instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests. The Guru's abode did infact become like that of the Emperor. He sat on a throne and held Court. He went out with a royal umbrella over his head and was always accompanied by armed retainers. With Guru Arjan Dev, the title *Sachha Padshah*, was only honorific, with Guru Hargobind it became a reality as far as the Sikhs were concerned. He was *Miri Piri da Malik* (the Lord of the Spiritual and Secular domains). For the first few years,

¹⁰⁵ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History-Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, 2003, New Delhi, p. 36.

little notice was taken of the change in the complexion of the Sikh organization. But as the number of the Guru's retainers increased, local officials began sending reports to the Emperor. Since the fine imposed by on Guru Arjan Dev had not been paid, there was legal justification to proceed against his son Jahangir. Jahangir ordered the arrest of Guru Hargobind and the disbandment of his private army. The Guru spent a year or more in imprisonment at Gwalior. He resumed his martial activity as soon as he was released, only a little more discreetly.¹⁰⁸

Guru Hargobind combined the qualities of a warrior, a saint and a sportsman. While Guru Nanak abstained from animal food, Guru Hargobind had no such inhibitions. He was the first Guru who organized a military system, and, arming his followers, made them buckle on the sword, and prepared them for action on the field. He was induced to resort to arms in order to chastise his enemy and was able to avenge himself as he thought best. Guru Hargobind surpassed his predecessor in splendour and state. He maintained a large establishment, which he was enabled to do by the daily increasing income derived from the offerings which were now collected in the form of tithe from the faithful throughout the country, under the system introduced by Guru Arjan Dev. He had eight hundred fine horses in his stables, and kept a numerous, gorgeous and well-equipped retinue. He built the town of Hargobindpur on the banks of the Bias, to serve, in case of an emergency, as a place of retreat.¹⁰⁹

In the fifteen odd years between his release from Gwalior and Jahangir's death in A.D. 1627, Hargobind consolidated his spiritual and temporal hold on the community. He traveled through the Punjab into Uttar Pradesh as far as Pilibhit. He then went northwards into Kashmir. All along the routes of his travels he had temples built and appointed missionaries who could initiate the converts into the pacifist faith of Nanak and the martial mission of Hargobind. On his way back to Amritsar, he accepted from the Raja of Bilaspur a gift of a plot of land lying between the foothills of the Himalayas and the river Sutlej. Here he built himself a retreat which he named Kiratpur (the abode of praise).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁹ Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjab, from the remotest antiquity to the present time*, New Delhi, p.255.

¹¹⁰ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 64-65.

Conscious of the strength and resources of the ruling power and his own comparative weakness, the sixth Guru, retired to the jungles of Bhatinda, south of the Sutlej, to avoid a further encounter with the imperial army. Here he converted great crowds to the faith of Guru Nanak.¹¹¹ With the death of Jahangir and the accession of Shah Jahan in A.D. 1627, the Guru's real troubles began. However, Guru Hargobind infused in his followers, the confidence that they could challenge the might of the Mughal Emperor. Great numbers of peasants answered the call to arms. Guru Hargobind chose Gurditta's second son, Har Rai, to succeed him as the seventh Guru. Guru Hargobind died peacefully at Kiratpur in March 1644.¹¹²

Guru Har Rai, on succeeding the apostleship, established himself at Kiratpur, on the banks of the river *Sutlej*. He was a quiet and contented man, affable in his habits, and with no taste for war. The military spirit of the Sikhs, which had been so much fostered by Guru Hargobind, continued to flourish in his time, for although the Guru took particular care not to meddle with politics, circumstances were not wanting under which the Sikhs were compelled to exert their power and energy to strengthen factious feuds.¹¹³

Guru Har Rai's seventeen years of ministry were not marked by any spectacular events. Although he had inherited a militant tradition and a small army, he was a man of peace. He loved to hunt, but only to bring back wild animals for his private zoo at Kiratpur. He hated to hurt any living thing. Before his death, Guru Har Rai, had proclaimed the succession of his five-year old son, Har Krishan.¹¹⁴

The investiture of Guru Har Krishan did not suit Aurangzeb, who wanted to play a decisive role in the affairs of the Sikhs. He summoned the infant Guru to Delhi with the intention of arbitrating between his claims and those of his elder brother, Ram Rai. After some hesitation, Guru Har Krishan arrived in Delhi and Aurangzeb was content to have both the claimants under his surveillance. Guru Har Krishan, was however, stricken with small-pox. Before he died, he indicated to the people, that the next Guru was not to be

¹¹¹ Syad Muhammad Latif, *Op.cit*, p. 256.

¹¹² Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 66-67.

¹¹³ Syad Muhammad Latif, *Op.cit*, p. 257.

¹¹⁴ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 69.

either Ram Rai or Dhirmal, both of whom had been eagerly pressing their claims, but an older man living in the village of Bakala.¹¹⁵

After the death of Guru Har Krishan, dissensions arose among the Sikhs as to the succession to the office of *Sat Guru*, or Spiritual Leader. Tegh Bahadur, son of Guru Hargobind, had established himself at Bakala, near Goindwal, where two factions arose, one supporting the claims of Guru Tegh Bahadur, according to the will of the last Guru, and the other supporting the faction of the Sodhis, who had set up a Guru of their own. Ram Rai, a nephew of Guru Tegh Bahadur, remained at Delhi and aspired to be the next Guru.¹¹⁶

It was quite clear that by his dying words “Baba Bakale”, Hari Krishen had meant his grand-uncle, Tegh Bahadur, who had been living in the village ever since the death of his father Hargobind in 1644. Tegh Bahadur was a man of retiring habits who did not wish to fight for his rights. But, his very reluctance to press for recognition turned the Sikh masses in his favour. However, he had to face a lot of opposition from detractors in the path to Guruship. He was compelled to retire into the wilderness and bought a hillock near the village of Makhawal, five miles north of Kiratpur, and built himself a village, where he could be away from his contentious relations.¹¹⁷

Before the end of 1665, Guru Tegh Bahadur left Makhawal to establish contact with some of the Sikh centres (*Sangats*) in the Mughal provinces of the Gangetic plain. He left his family at Patna to be looked after by the local Sikhs, before he moved on with his mission. It was here in Patna that his son was born on December 22, 1666. In the first five or six years of his pontificate, Guru Tegh Bahadur traveled more than any of his predecessors after Guru Nanak. In 1673, Guru Tegh Bahadur moved out of Makhawal, to impart his message of reassurance to peasants and Zamindars in the province of Delhi. The Guru was making a public demonstration of his convictions at a time when the emperor was bent upon discouraging such demonstrations. A delegation of Kashmiri Brahmans met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Makhawal in May, 1675, with a woeful tale of religious persecution in the valley of Kashmir by its Mughal governor. After a deep reflection on the situation, Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to court martyrdom to uphold his

¹¹⁵ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 70.

¹¹⁶ Syad Muhammad Latif, *Op.cit*, p. 258.

¹¹⁷ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 70-71.

beliefs. In July, 1675, he nominated his young son Gobind Das as the successor-Guru and moved out of Makhawal. He was arrested soon after he entered the Mughal territory in the *Pargana* of Ropar and kept in custody for nearly four months in the *Sarkar* of Sirhind before he was taken to Delhi in November, 1675. In Delhi, he was asked to perform a miracle as the proof of his nearness to God. He refuted the idea that occult powers were a proof of one's nearness to God. As a result, he was asked to accept Islam. Guru Tegh Bahadur refused to accept Islam, and was publicly beheaded in Chandni Chowk, the main market-square close to the Red Fort, on the 11th of November, 1675. Guru Tegh Bhadur's supreme sacrifice in the cause not only of his own faith but also in the cause of freedom of conscience in general was admired by his son and successor. Metaphorically, he protected the sacred thread (*Janju*) and the sacred mark (*Tilak*) of the men of faith.¹¹⁸

The first decade of Guru Gobind Singh's pontificate was rather uneventful. Growing into manhood, he received literary and religious education, and also training in the use of arms. He inspired his young companions and followers to take interest in martial activity.¹¹⁹ Guru Gobind Singh drew the sword while he was still at Paonta. Like his grandfather Guru Hargobind, he let it be known that he would welcome offerings in arms and horses; and, more than the offerings, he would welcome able-bodied men willing to join his crusade. However, his military preparations greatly alarmed the hilly rajas, who came into an armed conflict with him and his followers in the future. They did not like the growing power of the Guru in their region, nor, what appeared to them as an even greater danger, the increased subordination of the lower castes, who had begun to turn to the casteless fraternity of the Sikhs for leadership. When threats failed to dislodge the Guru, the chiefs tried to eject him by force. A series of historic battles ensued which changed the course of Sikh history.¹²⁰

In this struggle, the Mughals became involved too. The Guru had also to deal with the internal dissensions within the Panth and therefore, decided to bring about some changes in the organization of the Sikhs. Before giving practical shape to these ideas, Guru Gobind Singh decided to abolish the institution of *Masands* which had become a

¹¹⁸ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 70-72.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

¹²⁰ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. 1, 2004, pp. 7-78.

fertile cause of disruption in the community.¹²¹ Next he gathered a huge crowd of his followers at Anandpur, where he announced that the *Panj Piyare* (Five Beloved Ones), baptized by him, would be the nucleus of a new community he would raise which was to be called the *Khalsa*, or the Pure.¹²² The turbulent period that followed this baptismal ceremony did not give the Guru much time to explain the significance of the symbols, he made obligatory for his followers. By doing this, Guru Gobind Singh wanted to raise an army of soldier-saints who would wield arms only in a righteous cause, as would saints if they were so compelled. He gave the institution of Guruship a permanent and abiding character by vesting it in the immortality of the Guru Granth Sahib and in the continuity of the *Khalsa Panth*. Being the author of so many traditions, he was particularly conscious of the danger of his followers imposing divinity on him. The only change Guru Gobind Singh brought in religion was to expose the other side of the medal. Whereas Guru Nanak had propagated goodness, Guru Gobind Singh condemned evil. Sikh chronicles maintain that the baptism of twenty thousand Sikhs at Anandpur was followed by baptisms all over Northern India. After this, Guru Gobind Singh had to prepare himself for the more serious trouble which he knew lay ahead of him. The trouble he had anticipated was not long in coming. The hill rajas approached the Emperor and warned him of the growing power of the Guru. Aurangzeb ordered the *Subedars* (district governors) of Sirhind and Lahore to help the rajas destroy the Khalsa.¹²³

After making a journey into the Deccan, Guru Gobind Singh settled at Nanded on the banks of the river Godavari, in 1707. After Aurangzeb's death the government was led by the new Emperor, Bahadur Shah. A few days later Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed and badly wounded by an Afghan. On October 7, 1708, he breathed his last. He did not nominate any individual as his successor. The decision taken by Guru Gobind Singh did not abolish Guruship itself but personal Guruship. The position of the Guru was henceforth given to the *Khalsa* and to *Shabad-Bani*.¹²⁴

Thus ended, at the young age of forty two, an amazing character in the history of the human race. He assumed secular and spiritual responsibilities not for only his

¹²¹ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 82.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 83.

¹²³ *Ibid*, pp. 83, 86-89, 91.

¹²⁴ J.S. Grewal, *Op.cit*, pp.79-80.

immediate followers, but for human freedom in general, for man's dignity and his right to his personal beliefs and ways of life. The Guru created not only a community of warriors, but men, who would, even during war-time, never forsake God, and whose victories would be for the sake of Dharma, and not for self-glory or greed. Although, the Guru fought and won many battles, he never claimed the fruits thereof. He infused a democratic spirit into the khalsa brotherhood.¹²⁵

The two hundred years between Guru Nanak's proclamation of faith (A.D. 1499) and Guru Gobind Singh's founding of the Khalsa Panth (A.D. 1699) can be neatly divided into two almost equal parts. In the first hundred years the five Gurus pronounced the ideals of a new social order for the Punjab. The second period of a hundred years saw the development of traditions which supplemented this social order. The sixth Guru was the first to appeal to arms, the tenth put the army on a regular footing. The movement also found its martyrs and heroes : Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh wore the crown of martyrdom; Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, the *Halo* of heroism. The movement had its inner core consisting of nearly a hundred thousand baptized Khalsa, and a much larger number of close associates among the Sahajdari Sikhs.¹²⁶

Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606), the fifth Guru, played a role in the Sikh movement consistent with his place in the numerical order. The work of the first four Guru's was preparatory. It assumed definite form in the days of Guru Arjan Dev, who gave to Sikhism its scripture, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib and a central place of worship, the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. He thought, by example, non-violence in thought and deed and adherence to truth in face of the hardest trial. The later Guru's expounded the tenets of Sikhism as embodied in the Holy Granth and inculcated the principle of sacrifice laid down by Guru Arjan Dev. He thus marked the central point in the development of the Sikh religion.¹²⁷ The first task Guru Arjan Dev undertook was the completion of the Amritsar tank. Sikhs came from all over the country to join in the work of digging. This kind of voluntary labour of love called *Sewa*, or Service, is considered by the Sikhs an act

¹²⁵ Gopal Singh, *A History of the Sikh People* (1469-1988), Allied Publishers Pvt. Limited, New Delhi, 2005, p. 326.

¹²⁶ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 96-98.

¹²⁷ Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of The Sikhs*, Delhi, 1964, p. 25.

of highest merit and virtue. The Guru also started extending the town of Amritsar, then called Ramdasapur after the name of the founder, Guru Ram Das.¹²⁸ He then set about compiling a sacred book for the faithful. Messages were sent to Sikhs all over the country to collect and pass on to him the hymns of his predecessors. Since the Guru's had traveled extensively, their compositions lay scattered all over the country. Some committed to writing by their followers and handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. The Guru also collected songs and hymns of other Indian saints, both Hindu and Muslim, which were in keeping with the spirit of the new faith. He incorporated in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, compositions of Muslims such as Sheikh Farid and the so-called Shudras such as Ravidas. Guru Arjan Dev was himself a great poet. He added to the sacred volume his own hymns full of divine love and deep human sympathy and awareness. These hymns were arranged according to *Ragas*, or musical measures.¹²⁹

The inauguration of the *Khalsa* was the culmination of the canonical period of the development of Sikhism. The most visible symbols of Sikhism known as *the Five Ks*—namely uncut hair, a wrist ring, a short sword, a comb for the topknot, and breeches—are mandatory to the *Khalsa*. Guru Gobind Singh terminated the line of personal Gurus before he passed away in 1708, and installed the Guru Granth Sahib. Thereafter, the authority of the Guru was to vest in the Holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and the corporate community itself.¹³⁰

Harbans Singh in his "Heritage of the Sikhs" views the developments in eighteenth century Punjab, as a period of great political upheaval and turmoil. It witnessed a prolonged drama of constant battle, foreign invasion and internal conflict. Warring powers, such as the Mughals, Marathas and Afghans, strove with each other for supremacy. Their mutual fighting produced conditions of utter confusion and anarchy. The Mughal authority in the Punjab had begun showing signs of weakness soon after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, and the subsequent perplexity and disharmony continued until 1799, when Ranjit Singh, occupied Lahore and laid the foundations of a peaceful state.

¹²⁸ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹³⁰ "<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html>">Sikhism - The Origins And Development Of Sikhism

For Sikhs this was a time of grim trial and of supreme moral exaltation which accrued to them because of their heroic fight for their faith and their perseverance in meeting the challenge of a sustained and fierce persecution. To crushing their existence the Mughal rulers had, in fact, vowed themselves. The Sikhs on their part matched the situation with a rare power of endurance and resolution. They sanctified this period of their history with deeds of unparalleled sacrifice and courage and the Sikh character presented in this testing time its noblest aspect. In the strife that was forced upon them lay seed of their subsequent political ascendancy and they were able to set up their authority in the Punjab after vanquishing their persecutors. History records a high and unusual tribute to Sikhs' qualities of courage and integrity during this period of harrowing oppression.¹³¹

The period of eight years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh in October 1708, is essentially centred around the activities of Banda Singh. He was conferred the title *Bahadur* by Guru Gobind Singh.¹³²

The Sikh leader who presaged a troublous century's daring chain of events was Banda Singh Bahadur. From Nanded, where the last of the Sikh prophets, Guru Gobind Singh, had died, he came to the Punjab armed with the Guru's blessings and with a drum, a banner and five arrows as emblems of the authority the Guru had bestowed upon him. He issued *Hukamnamas*, or Edicts, to Sikhs in the Punjab calling upon them to join him. His object was to attack the town of Sirhind where two of Guru Gobind Singh's sons had met with a cruel fate at the hands of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor. Seizing Samana and Sadhaura, Banda Singh Bahadur reached Sirhind on May 14, 1710, and occupied the town routing the army of Wazir Khan. Baj Singh, one of Banda Singh's leading companions, was made the governor of Sirhind. Banda Singh Bahadur thus laid the foundation of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. He assumed the style of royalty and struck coin in the name of the Guru. Banda Singh Bahadur's rule, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Punjab. With it began the decay of Mughal authority and the demolition of the feudal system it had created. Banda Singh Bahadur abolished the Zamindari system and made the tillers masters of the lands they had been

¹³¹ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 45.

¹³² Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1997, pp. 424-425.

cultivating for their landlords. This marked a revolutionary change in the social order in the Punjab and led to the emergence of peasants as a potent force in the political life of the country. Banda Singh Bahadur's increasing influence roused the ire of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, who journeyed northwards from the Deccan to punish the Sikhs. Instructions were issued to the Subadars of Delhi and Oudh and the other Mughal officers to march towards the Punjab. Prohibitory laws against the Sikhs were passed. The massive imperial force drove the Sikhs from Sirhind and other places to take shelter in the fort of Lohgarh in the submontane region. Further reinforcements arrived and they invested Banda's hilly retreat. Sikhs were reduced to rigorous straits. They killed their horses for food and when they could stand up to the enemy any longer, they made a desperate nightly sally to escape into the hills of Nahan. However, the Sikhs fought back with more determination than before. Sikhs came out of their mountainous haunts to recover their lost territories and occupied once again Sadhaura and Lohgarh. Farrukh Siyar, who came to the throne of Delhi in 1713, launched against them the sternest proceedings that political authority stirred with a fanatical religious zeal could devise. They were hounded out of the plains of the Punjab and their main column, under Banda Singh Bahadur, was subjected to a most stringent siege at the village of Gurdas-Nangal was the epic of purest heroism in face of heavy odds. The supplies having run out, the Sikhs suffered grave hardship and lived on animal flesh which they had to eat raw, for there was no fuel to make a fire. For eight long months, the garrison resisted the siege under these gruesome conditions. The royal armies at last broke through and captured Banda Singh Bahadur and his famishing Sikhs. Nearly three hundred of them were killed on the spot. The rest, along with Banda Singh Bahadur, were taken to Lahore, and, thence to Delhi. The cavalcade of the imperial capital formed a most awesome spectacle. Besides, 740 prisoners in heavy chains, it comprised seven hundred cartloads of the heads of decapitated Sikhs with another 2,000 stuck upon pikes.¹³³

Ganda Singh, in his preface to 'Life of Banda Singh Bahadur', writes that the case of Banda Singh Bahadur, presents, perhaps, the strangest array of difficulties and paradoxes in the whole range of Sikh biography.¹³⁴ Ganda Singh further states that the

¹³³ Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 46-49.

¹³⁴ Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Bahadur*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2006, p. xii.

character of Banda Singh Bahadur, was full of ever-readiness for the emancipation of his oppressed and persecuted countrymen and an unflinching devotion to the Guru and his religion. Apart from this, many misunderstandings have gathered round his person as a result of the fruitful imagination of some writers. Every act of cruelty, which their fertile imagination could invent, has been ascribed to him. Ganda Singh believes that he was a far different man from what he has been represented to be. The scanty records of the contemporary Muslim histories, there being literally no contemporary Sikh records available on the subject give little information as to many qualities that he possessed, 'but he is allowed, on all hands, to have been a man of undoubted valour and bravery, and the coolness, with which he met his death.' It would seem how sagacious Guru Gobind Singh was in selecting such a man for carrying on his struggle for the independence of his people. Indeed Banda Singh's conversion from an inert ascetic into 'a commander of the forces of the Khalsa' was nothing short of the Guru's miracle. Nor did Banda Singh Bahadur betray the trust reposed in him by his Holy Master. Ganda Singh goes on to quote McGregor's *History of the Sikhs*, 'Banda was a fanatic and so resolved was he to fulfil the orders of Govind Singh, that he became the terror of the whole Punjab as well as the districts on this side of the Punjab'. In spite of all the power that he commanded, he is not recorded to have used force in his missionary work. In his zeal for the emancipation of the persecuted and down-trodden, he earned the blessings of the poor and the destitute whose cries had not been heard by any one for centuries past. He raised the lowest of the low to the highest positions under his government. The untouchables and the unapproachables, the so-called sweepers and pariahs, were raised to the position of rulers. In matters of Government, he introduced one of the greatest fiscal reforms in the country by abolishing the Zamindari system of the Mughals which had reduced the cultivators to the position of slaves. With the establishment of Banda Singh Bahadur's *Raj*, the actual cultivators of the soil became the proprietors of their holdings, and the oppression resulting from the old system was for ever eradicated from the Punjab. In his personal conduct as a Sikh, he was, throughout, a devoted follower of Sikhism, and his faith in the Gurus remained unshaken. At the Zenith of his power, his inscription on his seal and his coins is an everlasting monument of his over-flowing devotion to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, whom he proclaimed to be the fountains of his *Deg* and *Tegh*, or Plenty

and Power. With the exception of his '*Fateh Darshan*' and the celebration of his marriage, there is nothing in the whole history of his life to warrant the allegations levelled against him by some prejudiced Sikh and non-Sikh writers.¹³⁵

Next to the Guru, Banda Singh Bahadur was the first person to place before the Sikhs practical demonstration of staunch nationalism, and to teach them to sacrifice themselves smilingly at the altar of the Khalsa.¹³⁶ He was the first man to deal a severe blow to the intolerant rule of the Mughals in the Punjab. Although it was forty years after his death that the capital of Lahore was occupied by the Khalsa and a regular Sikh *Badshahat* was declared, with Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as *Padshah*, it was Banda Singh Bahadur who laid the foundation of the Sikh Empire in 1710. Banda Singh Bahadur was one of the most remarkable men that India has produced in the eighteenth century.¹³⁷ It can be said in that under Banda Singh Bahadur, the serfs of the Punjab had their first taste of freedom from their Mughal masters, though only for a brief period. This was the first real blow to the organized exploitation of the Punjab. It laid the foundation for the real conquest of the Punjab by the Sikhs, forty years later.¹³⁸ The gruesome death of Banda Bahadur left the Sikhs leaderless for a time. They could not believe how a man of his daring, sacrifice and near-miraculous deeds could come to such a tragic end. The shock was too overwhelming for some who, it appears, tried to explain it away by attributing his ultimate failure (if one may call it such) and brutal death to his having abandoned the true path of Guru Gobind Singh. This naturally led to a schism in the community, Banda Singh Bahadur's immediate followers, now called 'Bandais', defending their hero to the hilt.¹³⁹

June 1716, marks the end of a short but glorious chapter in Sikh history. It also marks the beginning of a critical phase, when the Sikhs were almost wiped out in existence. After Banda Singh Bahadur, the Sikhs had nobody who could rally their

¹³⁵ Ganda Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 237-42. See also; Kiranjit Sandhu, *Banda Singh Bahadur (1708-1716)*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1983.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 256.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 256-57.

¹³⁸ Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Chandigarh, 1997, p. 447.

¹³⁹ Gopal Singh, *A History of the Sikh People (1469-1988)*, Allied Publishers Pvt. Limited, New Delhi, 2005, p. 359.

divided and disheartened groups into any sort of a united force.¹⁴⁰ For a quarter of a century after the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, vigorous persecution of the Sikhs was continued under the government of Abdus Samad Khan and his son and successor Zakariya Khan 'Khan Bahadur'. Driven out of towns, caught and massacred in their villages, hunted down like wild beasts in the jungles, and burnt to death in their hiding places in the Punjab, they were forced to take refuge in the eastern and north-eastern hills, in the Lakhi jungle tract of the Malwa Districts and in the sandy deserts of Bikaner.¹⁴¹

According to Harbans Singh, every fresh adversity imposed on the Sikhs only stimulated their will to survival and self-assertion. A commanding figure who led them through this dark and exilic period was Nawab Kapur Singh, the founder of the Dal Khalsa. By his bold example and wise leadership, he welded the Sikhs into a strong fighting force and implanted in their minds the vision of an independent state. He was the true embodiment of Sikh character forged by the alchemy of a fiery ordeal and enjoyed unique esteem for his spirit of courage, sacrifice and religious devotion. When, in pursuance of peace, an offer of Nawabship and a *Jagir* for the Sikhs came from the Mughal Government, he was unanimously chosen by the Sikhs to receive the title on their behalf. Nawab Kapur Singh then undertook to consolidate the disintegrated fabric of the Sikh organization. The whole body of the Khalsa was formed into two sections, Buddha Dal (Army of Veterans) and Taruna Dal (Army of the Youthful). The former was entrusted with the task of looking after the holy places, preaching the Guru's word and inducting converts into the Khalsa Panth by holding baptismal ceremonies.

Nawab Kapur Singh was himself the in-charge of this section. The Taruna Dal was the more active division and its function was to fight in times of emergency. Nawab Kapur Singh's personality was the common link between the two wings of the Dal Khalsa. He was universally revered for his high character. Later on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, as leader of the Dal Khalsa, occupied Lahore in 1761. He was proclaimed by the Sikhs the *Sultan-Ul-Qaum*, or King of the Nation. Meanwhile the Taruna Dal rapidly grew in strength and soon numbered more than 12,000. To ensure efficient control, Nawab Kapur

¹⁴⁰ Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Chandigarh, 1997, p. 448.

¹⁴¹ Ganda Singh, *Op.cit.*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2006, p. 268.

Singh split it into five parts, each with a separate centre. Each batch had its own banner and drum, and formed the nucleus of a separate political State. The territories conquered by these groups were entered in their respective papers at Akal Takht to avoid any conflict or confusion. From these documents (or *Misls*) the principalities carved out by them came to be known as Misls. Seven more groups formed subsequently and, towards the close of the century, there were altogether twelve Sikh Misls ruling between them.

The *entente* with the Mughals did not last long and, before the harvest of 1735, Zakriya Khan, the subadar of Lahore, sent a force and occupied the *Jagir*. The Mughal Government once again pursued its policy of persecution with greater vigour and thoroughness. To cut off the Sikhs from their chief source of inspiration, the Amritsar temple was taken possession of and guarded by the military to prevent the Sikhs from visiting it. Sikhs began living in exile in the Shivalik hills, Lakhi jungle and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. Many a heroic tale of the daring adventures of the Sikhs is recounted, the most dramatic and valorous being that of Mehtab Singh of Mirankot and Sukha Singh. Alarmed by such acts of bravery, the Subadar of Lahore, Zakriya Khan, sent a strong force under Samad Khan to seek out the Sikhs. When the latter heard that Samad Khan was pursuing them, they came out to fight openly the tyrant who was responsible for the torturous killing of Bhai Mani Singh, the revered Sikh divine. Samad Khan was killed in the action and the Mughal force suffered a severe reverse. Nawab Kapur Singh now made a plan to capture Zakriya Khan but unfortunately his plan failed. The Buddha Dal once again crossed the Sutlej and marched right upto the vicinity of Delhi.¹⁴²

The Sikhs attacked and pursued the Persian invader, Nadir Shah, in the early months of 1739, as he was returning home after a hearty plunder of Delhi and the Punjab. Meanwhile, Zakriya Khan carried out his policy of repression with redoubled zeal. A pitiless campaign of manhunt was started. Sikhs' heads sold for money and the Mughals offered a prize for each head brought to them. This difficult period is full of countless deeds of heroism and sacrifice. To encompass the destruction of the defiant race, the Mughal governor of Lahore and his minister, Lakhpat Rai, launched an all-out campaign and set forth with a large army. The Sikhs, on their part, put up a determined fight, but

¹⁴² Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 55-56.

were overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy and scattered with heavy losses. They were chased into the hills and hunted down. More than seven thousand Sikhs lost their lives.¹⁴³

So indiscriminate and, considering the total Sikh population in those days, so extensive was the killing that the campaign is known in Sikh history as the First *Ghalughara*, or Holocaust. In 1748, a section of the Dal Khalsa, under Charhat Singh, grandfather of Ranjit Singh, gave chase to the fleeing troops of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Afghan Invader of India. The other, at the instance of Nawab Kapur Singh, decided to march towards Amritsar. Nawab Kapur Singh entrusted the command of this campaign to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. For a quarter odd a century, Nawab Kapur Singh had led the Sikhs through most trying and difficult times. Few men had ever to contend with heavier odds; few ever engaged in such an unequal fight. Yet, striving valiantly against strenuous circumstances, he step by step built up the sovereignty of the Khalsa and by the time he retired, he had conferred on the Dal the lineaments of an independent State. In the midst of this life-long preoccupation with war and fighting, he maintained an irreproachable ethical standard and was universally esteemed for his devout character and heroic spirit.¹⁴⁴

From 1708, when Banda Singh Bahadur set out for the Punjab, to the end of 1768, the Sikhs had been locked in a life and death struggle, first with the Mughal power, and then with the powerful Afghan invader. It had taken them 60 years of blood and toil and an unshakeable faith in their ultimate success (*Raj Karega Khalsa*), to emerge finally as masters of their own destiny in the land of five rivers.¹⁴⁵

Ahmad Shah Durrani's repeated invasions brought further chaos to the Punjab and added to the perplexities of the Delhi kingdom. In the dissipation of the authority of the Mughal Government, the Sikhs had the opportunity of extending their influence and assuming power as successors to the Muslim rule in Northern India. But before this culmination was reached, they had to pass through another terrible ordeal of fire and blood. By their stern and obstinate opposition to Ahmad Shah Durrani and constant

¹⁴³ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁵ Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Chandigarh, 1997, p. 48.

harassment of his armies and his vice-regents in the Punjab, they had earned the direst wrath of the Afghan Emperor who came out more than once pledged to exacting vengeance and scourging the entire sect. Before Ahmad Shah Durrani launched his onslaughts against them, the Sikhs had been through another spell of hideous tyranny and persecution at the hands of the Governor of Lahore. Mir Mannu (1748-53) proved a worse foe for the Sikhs than his predecessors, Zakriya Khan and Yahiya Khan, and started the witchhunt with even greater fierceness and severity. Sikhs (men, women and children) were apprehended from wherever his soldiers could lay their hands on them and brought to Lahore for daily executions. So ruthless was Mannu's campaign against them that his name passed into contemporary folk-tradition. The Sikhs called him their "sickle" which mowed them mercilessly. "But the more the sickle mows, the more we multiply", they sang, defiantly. The Sikhs were especially the target of Ahmad Shah Durrani's sixth excursion into India. News had reached him in Afghanistan of the defeat, after his withdrawal from the country, of his general, Nur-ud-Din Bamezei, at the hands of the Sikhs who were fast spreading themselves out over the Punjab and had declared their leader Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, King of Lahore (1761). To rid his Indian dominions of them once for all, he set out from Qandahar. Marching with alacrity, Ahmad Shah Durrani overtook the Sikhs as they were drawing into the Malwa after crossing the Sutlej.¹⁴⁶

Surprised by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Sikhs threw a cordon round those who needed protection, and prepared for the battle. In this formation and continuing their march, they fought the invaders and their Indian allies desperately. The Sikh Sardars, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Charhat Singh, Karora Singh, Hari Singh and Nahar Singh, led their forces with skill and courage. Near the village of Kup, six miles from Malerkotla, about 15,000 Sikhs lay on that ghastly field at the end of a single day's action (February 5, 1762). In this battle known in the Sikh history as *Wadda Ghalughara*, or the Great Killing, was also lost the volume of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib. Even such a disaster as had overtaken them at Kup caused no despondency among Sikhs. Within four months of the *Ghalughara*, the Sikhs had inflicted a severe defeat on the Governor of Sirhind. Four months later, they were

¹⁴⁶ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 59.

celebrating Diwali in Harmandir which Ahmad Shah Durrani had demolished, and were fighting with him again a pitched battle forcing him to withdraw from Amritsar under the cover of darkness (October 17, 1762).¹⁴⁷

Although the Punjab was claimed to be part of the dominions of Ahmad Shah Durrani who had his nominees, they were helpless witnesses to the changing fortunes. While a batch of Sikhs remained in Amritsar under the leadership of Charhat Singh to cleanse the Holy tank and rebuild the temple, destroyed and desecrated by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the rest of them went about establishing their own *Thanas* and fortresses in the country. These acquisitions were then recorded in the *Misl* of each Sardar at Akal Takht at Amritsar. The Sikhs thus liberated the Punjab from foreign rule inch by inch and became symbols of India's honour and independence.¹⁴⁸ The Sikhs crossed the Sutlej under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They took a bloody vengeance on Bhikhan Khan of Malerkotla for the part he had played in the *Ghalughara*. The Sikhs now had a free run of the country and they ranged abroad unchecked obtaining surrender of far-flung provinces. The Sukkarchakkias, the Nakais, the Kanhaiyas and the Ramgarhias returned to the north of the Sutlej. They took the Jullunder Doab and advanced towards Lahore.¹⁴⁹

The Sikh insurrection in the Punjab caused grave dismay to Ahmad Shah Durrani. He planned yet another crusade. Ahmad Shah Durrani started from Afghanistan at the head of a strong army in the month of October, 1764. The Sikhs, following their usual tactics, withdrew out of the invader's way retiring to their jungle haunts. He reached Lahore and on December 1, 1764, attacked Amritsar which he had destroyed and polluted several times before to gratify his own malice and to seal the source of Sikhs' religious and moral replenishment. A small batch of thirty Sikhs stood their lives to protect their holy shrines.¹⁵⁰ The Sikhs resumed their territories and reasserted their authority in the country. On Baisakhi day, (April 10, 1765), barely a fortnight after

¹⁴⁷ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 63.

Ahmad Shah Durrani had left, they took counsel at Amritsar and resolved to capture Lahore.¹⁵¹

The fear of his Indian Empire falling to the Sikhs continued to obsess Ahmad Shah Durrani's mind and he led out another punitive campaign against them. This was his eighth invasion of India. The Sikhs had recourse to their old game of hide-and-seek. They vacated Lahore, but faced squarely the Afghan general, Jahan Khan, at Amritsar, forcing him to retreat, with six thousand of the Durrani soldiers killed.¹⁵²

The outcome of the unequal, but bitter, contest lay clearly in favour of the Sikhs. The ageing Ahmad Shah Durrani had realized that his Indian dominions were at the mercy of the Sikhs and he bowed to the inevitable. His own soldiers were getting restive and the summer heat of the Punjab was becoming unbearable. He, at last, decided to return home, but took a different this time to avoid molestation by the Sikhs. As soon as Ahmad Shah Durrani retired, the Sikhs reoccupied their territories. The entire country between the Indus and the Jamuna owed Sikh supremacy. Twelve Sikh independencies, known as *Misls*, had formed in this process of Punjab's emancipation. The Ahluwalias, who derived their title from the village in which their leader Jassa Singh was born, held territory in the neighbourhood of Kapurthala in the Jullundur Doab and some villages in the Majha such as Sarhali, Jandiala, Bundala, Varirowal and Fatehabad. The Bhangis, Jats of the Dhillon caste, owned Sialkot, Gujrat, Multan, Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Lahore. The Ramgarhias who took their name from Ramgarh (originally, Ram Rauni), the Sikh fort at Amritsar, had in their possession Qadian, Batala and Sri Hargobindpur, in the Bari Doab, and Miani, Sarh and Urmur Tanda, in the Jullundur Doab. To Singhpurias, Virk Jats, belonged Jullundur and the villages of Banur, Ghanauli, Manauli and Bharatgarh, in the Malwa. The Sukkarchakkias possessed Gujranwala and parts of Pothohar and the Kanhaiyas the pargana of Batala. The Shahids, Sandhu Jats, descendants of honoured martyrs such as Baba Deep Singh, had their possessions in the present districts of Ambala (pargana of Shahzadpur), and Saharanpur, in Uttar Pradesh. The Nakais ruled over the country south of Lahore between the Ravi and the Sutlej and the Dallewalias, under Tara Singh Ghaiba, held Rahon, Mahatpur, Nawanshahar and

¹⁵¹ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁵² *Loc.cit.*

Phillaur, in the Jullundur Doab. The Nishanwalas, the standard-bearers of the Khalsa army, had their centre at Ambala. The Karorsinghias, adopting the name of their leader, Karora Singh, a Virk Jat of Birkian, took Hoshiarpur and the surrounding district. The Phulkias embraced the territories of Patiala, Sirhind, Nabha and Jind.¹⁵³

What compelled these Sikh confederacies to selflessly united and zealous action was their faith in the common destiny of the Khalsa. Any call for a Panthic cause was joyfully answered and greatest sacrifices willingly made for its realization. Their living conviction that the Guru had invested them with moral and temporal dignity and charged them with the duty of liberating the country imparted an element of philanthropy to their extremely dangerous and heroic adventure. This brave new spirit created a revolutionary impulse in the country. The Sikhs thus gave a new direction to the course of Indian history. When Shah Zaman, the grandson of Ahmad Shah Durrani, reached Peshawar on January 30, 1799, harassed and plundered by the Sikhs on his homeward journey after his Indian adventure, history had taken a decisive turn. No more Muslim invaders came to India from the north-west as had been happening for more than a thousand years. Though the times were troublous and uncertain and the Misaldar Sardars engaged in endless fighting, they preserved in their territories “good order and a regular government”.¹⁵⁴

Themselves victims of the worst kind of religious tyranny, the leaders of the Sikh *Misls* established a just and humane rule. They treated the Muslims with tolerance and made no distinctions among their subjects on grounds of caste or religion. In times of distress they helped them alike. In 1783, when the Punjab was struck by a severe famine, the Sikh chief continued their *Langars* to feed the poor and the needy.¹⁵⁵

It is a great pity that no contemporary records of the Sikhs in the form of dispatches, diaries, letters or news-sheets like those of the Marathas are available. The reason being that the sword had been the sole standby of the Sikh Sardars of the eighteenth-century and their followers who had not had the time and opportunity to learn the use of pen. Since the time of Emperor Bahadur Shah (1707-12), they had been under an official ban. They were not only outlawed but, according to an Imperial order of Emperor Bahadur Shah, they were also to be killed at sight wherever found. The order

¹⁵³ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 66.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 67.

was repeated by Emperor Farrukh Siyar in 1716, after the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur. This persecution of the Sikhs continued with more or less rigour for over forty years and ended only in November, 1753, with the death of Mir Mannu during whose time movable columns were dispatched from the provincial headquarters at Lahore to hunt them down like wild beasts, and prices were fixed for their heads. During this period, they had to leave their homes and seek shelter in hills, jungles and deserts and they had to struggle hard for their very existence. Their Gurdwaras and stock books were all burnt down. It was only in the Malwa districts, south of the Sutlej, that they had some repose. But there too they had no facilities for education. The Sikhs had also no Brahmans and Kayasths to work for them as writers. The Muslims in those days were opposed to them as a class. No Muslim scholar or poet, therefore, recorded their history. The result was that the Sikhs of the eighteenth century only *made* history, they had no time to write it.¹⁵⁶

The man who liquidated the warring misls, nurtured the consciousness of regional nationalism to forge a unified kingdom, and harnessed the restless energy of the Punjabis to conquer neighbouring countries was Ranjit Singh Sukerchakia.¹⁵⁷

The principalities the Sikhs had carved out were integrated into the sovereign State of the Khalsa by Ranjit Singh. Born heir to one of these confederacies, he had the foresight to visualize a united Sikh kingdom. By his superior military genius and political acumen, he succeeded in integrating the existing states and in joining the people of the Punjab into a strong nation. Ranjit Singh was born at Gujranwala, now in Pakistan, on November 13, 1780, in a family which had distinguished itself by its warlike exploits. His grandfather, Charhat Singh, struck against Ahmad Shah Durrani's armies several times and renowned as a fearless fighter. Ranjit Singh belonged to the Sukkarchakkia Misl. Ranjit Singh, meaning the Victor of Battles, proved truly representative of his character and forestalled his career of conquest and victory.¹⁵⁸ Ranjit Singh became the master of Lahore on July 7, 1799, and his rule brought relief and security to the people

¹⁵⁶ Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani : Father of Modern Afghanistan*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1959, pp. ix, x.

¹⁵⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1 : 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, p. 187.

¹⁵⁸ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 68.

after years of disorder and trouble.¹⁵⁹ As Ranjit Singh's power grew, many of the Sardars acknowledged his authority. Establishing his position in Lahore and the surrounding districts, he set out to conquer the more distant parts. One of his earliest adventures was towards Jammu. The ruler of the state gave in without a fight. Narowal, Sialkot and Dilawargarh were other places which fell to Ranjit Singh during his campaign. On Baisakhi day, 1801, Ranjit Singh was crowned as the Maharaja of the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh had won over the Kanhaiyas and Nakais by marriage and taken Lahore from the Bhangis. He made friends with the Ahluwalias, through their chief, Fateh Singh, who was invited by him to go with him to the Holy Sikh Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran. Thus, Ranjit Singh, accompanied by Fateh Singh, overran the north-west districts and annexed territories beyond the Jhelum. His next target was the important province of Multan. The governor, Nawab Muzaffar Khan, surrendered without a fight and pledged loyalty to the Sikh ruler. The Nawab of Jhang fought back, but was defeated. He laid down arms and was allowed to retain possession of his district. In 1803, at Amritsar, Ranjit Singh held a military Durbar in which he conferred ranks and honours on his nobles and generals.¹⁶⁰

Ranjit Singh had been a keen observer of the progress of the British in India and their victories over the Marathas and other Indian powers. He attributed their superiority to the exact discipline of their soldiers, and wanted to give his army the same kind of training. By his wise policy, persistent care and by example of his own courageous action and bravery, made his army powerful and efficient. He succeeded in building a strong infantry. He also employed a number of foreigners, some of whom had served as officers in Napoleon's army. However, as a result of Ranjit Singh's intercession between the Marathas and the British, the Marathas got back a large part of their territory, which had come under British occupation. In 1807, Ranjit Singh annexed Kasur to his kingdom.¹⁶¹

On September 12, 1808, T.C. Metcalfe, a young British officer, was sent to Ranjit Singh's court with an offer of friendship. He expressed his government's desire to have friendly relations with him and presented to Ranjit Singh the draft of a treaty. Ranjit Singh rejected the treaty and agreed to the friendship on the condition that the British

¹⁵⁹ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 70.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 71.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 72-73.

would recognize his authority over the Sikh country to the south of the Sutlej. A new treaty was presented to Ranjit Singh based on the terms first offered by the British and the proposals made by Ranjit Singh. Thus the Treaty of Amritsar was signed on April 25, 1809. It provided that the British Government would count the Lahore Durbar among the most honourable powers and would in no way interfere with the Sikh ruler's dominions to the north of the Sutlej. Both governments pledged friendship to each other. The Treaty of Amritsar settled the southern limit of Ranjit Singh's kingdom.¹⁶² Having once made up his mind to comply with the terms offered to him, Ranjit Singh lost no time in recalling his troops to the Punjab, and on April 25, 1809, the treaty was signed. It was by no means a bad bargain for the Sikh ruler; for though forced to abandon all hope of Cis-Sutlej supremacy, he had the enormous advantage of knowing that, from that time forward, he would never be called upon to defend his eastern frontier. For that his sole guarantee was the word of the British Government; but the character of the recent negotiations had taught him that that word was to be relied upon. He loyally abided by the terms of the treaty, and from the moment he signed it he became the firm and devoted friend of the paramount power.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, the Sikh conquest of Peshawar ended the long sequence of invasions from the north-west. In 1819, Ranjit Singh made an elaborate plan to attack Kashmir which was still under Afghan control. Ranjit Singh successfully carried out his conquest of Kashmir.¹⁶⁴

The spirit of stern religious discipline and sacrifice which had supported Sikhs through a critical period of their history and led them to power and glory was dimmed in the pomp and grandeur of sovereignty. Ranjit Singh's death, in 1839, left a deep hiatus. The Khalsa lost the leader who had by his commanding personality, foresight and tact provided a central point for their national aspirations and secured them the status of a sovereign people. The British had by then taken practically the whole of India, except the Punjab and Sind and their empire bordered on the southern confines of the Sikh State. The process of British expansion, which had temporarily been halted by the Sikhs who had built up a strong bulkwark in the Punjab, was, after the death of Ranjit Singh, again

¹⁶² Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 74-75.

¹⁶³ C.H. Payne, *A Short History of The Sikhs*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, Edinburgh, Dublin, New York, And Bombay, year of publication not given, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶⁴ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 81.

set on its inexorable course. All these factors combined to weaken the Sikh kingdom. Intrigue and murder became rampant and a tragic fate overtook the country of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The *d'enouement* of this pathetic drama was provided by the Anglo-Sikh wars which resulted in the annexation of the Punjab to the British dominions.¹⁶⁵

The British were watching the happenings in the Sikh State with more than a neighbour's interest. They saw their opportunity in the confusion and disorder that prevailed, and, disregarding their treaties of friendship with the Sikhs, they started implementing their plans of subjugating their country. Even when Ranjit Singh was alive, symbolizing in his person the unity and glory of the Sikh's kingdom and their desire to live in peace with their neighbours to the south of the Sutlej, the British had secretly coveted his territories.¹⁶⁶ Lord Dalhousie proclaimed annexation of the Punjab on March 29, 1849. His Foreign Secretary, Henry M. Elliot, arrived at Lahore to obtain the signatures of the members of the Council of Regency and of the minor king, Maharaja Duleep Singh.¹⁶⁷ The Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the British to the chance of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Gulab Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh, they had fought the Britishers squarely, and maintained their manly demeanour even in defeat. In this mood it was easier for them to be reconciled with the British after normalcy was restored.¹⁶⁸

As long as Maharaja Ranjit Singh was alive, the British kept their distance. They coveted the territories of the Sikh nation, but although they had conquered the rest of India, they dared not move against the mighty Ranjit Singh. After his death, the crafty British had annexed Punjab, but in spite of the treachery and betrayal of the Dogras and the Purbias, it was no easy walk for the British. They had to fight eight bloody battles against the *Khalsa* army before they could annex the Sikh kingdom. The battles fought at Mudki (1845), Ferozeshahr (1845), Aliwal (1846), Sabraon (1846), Buddowal (1846),

¹⁶⁵ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 105.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 128.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 129.

Ramnagar (1848), Chellianwala (1849) and Gujrat (1849) were the bloodiest battles the British had fought in their entire history.¹⁶⁹

By the middle of the seventeenth century the distinctive doctrine and characteristics of Sikhism had become embodied in a community whose unhappy relations with the Muslims had generated a militarist strain. Guru Gobind Singh gave the name of Singh (“Lion” or “Champion”) to his followers to signify that henceforth all should be soldiers. This was appropriate, for by the end of the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire was disintegrating and its successors, including the Marathas and the British, vied with each other for power. It was at this crucial nexus of time that Ranjit Singh was born, in 1780, in due course emerging as the leader of the Sikhs. That the religious and military vitality of the Sikhs survived the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire is in no small measure due to this dynamic person. Quick to learn from others (especially the British, whose disciplined infantry he admired) Ranjit Singh embarked on a policy of expansion, absorbing the principalities of his fellow Sikhs and Muslim enemies: the Punjab, Kashmir and Multan fell and the Afghans of the Peshawar Valley and Trans-Indus plains acknowledged his rule. Statesman and soldier, by 1823 he ruled over a formidable empire which had been created by the best-armed military machine in Indian history. But, Ranjit Singh never achieved his aim of further enlarging his territory by conquering the Cis-Sutlej states. As early as 1808 the British prevented him from doing so. The British presence had been confirmed by the middle of the 18th century; they were to stay and thenceforth successfully proved themselves the most powerful of the successor states to the Mughal Empire. Ranjit Singh instinctively realized the danger posed by the British; however, there was no showdown in his day. He chose restraint rather than confrontation and the outcome of the Anglo-Sikh wars after his death is a commentary on the wisdom of that decision. Ranjit Singh was, in a sense, the victim of lost opportunities over which he had no control. It is doubtful if even he, with all the military skills at his disposal, could have withstood the increasing strength of Britain, with her massive resources of men, money and technology. There is reason for toying

¹⁶⁹ Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Chandigarh, 1997, p. xxi.

with the idea that this great leader was born too late in the history of India to realize his full potential.¹⁷⁰

Ranjit Singh was a characteristic product of the Sikh tradition, and was also the leader, who had come to deliver the goods. Thus the emergence of the Khalsa Raj under him was neither an accident nor a freak of history. It was a unique historical phenomenon, the outcome and the flowering of a prolonged struggle for capturing political power, and must be understood in its true perspective. Bir Singh, a contemporary of Ranjit Singh, in his poetical composition, *Bara Maha Guru Gobind Singh Ji Ka*, refers to the period of socio-political turmoil gone through by the peasant soldiers or the *Singhs*, who had become *Sardars* (rulers) with the Guru's grace.

Ranjit Singh found the Punjab strife-ridden and chaotic, a loose confederacy of powerful *misl* chiefs, lacking the corporate spirit, and indulging in petty intrigues and dissensions. In the absence of a strong central authority, the State had become a prey to the Afghan invaders on the one hand and to the Maratha and the British designs on the other. Ranjit Singh brought out the *Misl* chiefs into submission, fired his people with a corporate zeal and led them from victory to victory so as to galvanise a whole people with a sense of collective triumph. He rose to be the ruler of a powerful state extending from Tibet to Sind and from Khyber pass for ever, thus putting an end to the tyranny and oppression of the sub-continent. It has been acknowledged that in fulfilling his ambitions, Ranjit Singh used the barest minimum of force necessary. In Sikhism, the inward and the outward, the spiritual and the empirical, are inextricably interwoven. Ranjit Singh, thus, built his rule on religious foundations. Ranjit Singh did not proclaim Sikhism to be the State religion, nor did he make any conscious efforts to propogate his own religion. His catholicity of religious outlook was reflected in his according due respect to all religions.¹⁷¹

It is evident that in all aspects of its functioning and administration, Ranjit Singh's rule was in sharp contrast to the rule, not only of his contemporaries, but also of many modern secular administrations. His rule, being a product of the Sikh tradition and

¹⁷⁰ Hasrat Bikram Jit, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh—A Saga of Benevolent Despotism*, published by the author at Hathikhana, Nabha, Punjab, India, 1977, pp. v, vi.

¹⁷¹ Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, "Sikh Rule And Ranjit Singh", *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1997, pp. 484-486.

ethos, was outstandingly humane, liberal and tolerant towards his people, including his erstwhile opponents and enemies. His rule was, undoubtedly, benign and fair, and why it was so, is explained by the background of the whole-life religious thesis and ethos which conditioned and influenced it, and of which Ranjit Singh was a shining product. The phenomenon of Ranjit Singh is not just a rule of a monarch. It demonstrates very clearly the role and impact of a whole-life or *miri-piri* religion on the society of its times.¹⁷²

3.SIKH HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE ISSUE OF GENDER STUDIES:

The study of the Sikh past is deeply conflicted, riven by polemics over the boundaries of the community, debates over the transformations enacted by colonialism and migration beyond India, and heated exchanges over the status of the discipline of history itself as a way of understanding Sikh community and its experiences. While Sikh studies does not possess the lengthy genealogy that characterises the study of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, does not receive the media attention afforded to Islamic studies since the Rushdie affair and lacks the financial resources and institutional support that Jewish studies enjoy in Europe and North America, it has emerged as a lively and contested academic field. A critical examination of Sikh studies highlights several fundamental intellectual and political issues, allowing us to explore the encounter between faith and scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and academic disciplines, and the fundamental epistemological questions that trouble historians.¹⁷³

Sikh historiography is dominated by a series of ongoing and intense debates over important events, the veracity of key sources and the origins of certain practices. Many of these exchanges are of great intellectual and cultural significance for Sikhs, especially where the origins of Sikhism, the composition and provenance of key texts (most notably the *Guru Granth Sahib* and *Dasam Granth*), and key markers of Sikh identity (such as the 'five Ks' and turban (*pagri*)) are concerned. Robust exchanges over such issues absorb much of the energy of scholars working on the Sikh past and as a result there have been relatively few attempts to explore the fundamental assumptions

¹⁷² Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, "Sikh Rule And Ranjit Singh", *Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1997, pp. 488-499.

¹⁷³ Tony Ballantyne, "Looking Back, Looking Forward : The Historiography of Sikhism", *New Zealand Journal Of Asian Studies*, 4, 1, June, 2002, <http://www.nzasia.org.nz/downloads/NZJAS-June02/Ballantyne.pdf>, p. 5.

that shape Sikh studies. Those that do exist, typically either present a narrative of the sub-discipline's development or explore the supposedly fundamental rifts between 'western critical scholarship' and understandings of the Sikh past produced from within Sikh communities.¹⁷⁴

McLeod, who quickly established himself as the most influential modern historian of Sikhism, introduced a new methodological rigour and interpretive strategy into the study of the Sikh past: textual criticism.¹⁷⁵ McLeod's textualist approach transformed understandings of Sikh history and established a new analytical framework.¹⁷⁶ Macauliffe's *The Sikh Religion* (six volumes, 1909) created a vision of Sikh scripture and history that has remained tremendously influential within the Sikh Panth. Macauliffe insisted that Sikhism was a distinctive religion and that its history was characterised by a constant battle against Hinduism.¹⁷⁷

In urging a move towards a mobile and transnational history of Sikhism, Tony Ballantyne, encourages historians of Sikhism to increasingly engage with broader debates in history, anthropology, sociology and gender studies. This is not to suggest that Sikh studies should shift its focus from addressing the Panth, but rather it is a call for what we might term 'Janus-faced' scholarship, which is attentive both to the historical questions that interest Sikhs and the epistemological, methodological and theoretical debates that animate humanities scholarship more generally. By recovering the complex cultural traffic and diverse encounters that have moulded the Panth, such an approach is not only more in keeping with recent directions in cross-cultural historiography but also recognises that although the Panth is united by its devotion to the Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Sikhs occupy diverse cultural locations and articulate a multiplicity of identities. Recognition of the cultural exchanges and hybridised social patterns borne out of the inequalities of colonialism and the upheavals of migration necessitate the creation of new historiographical visions and forms of practice. With the recent celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa and 150th anniversary of British annexation, it now

¹⁷⁴ Tony Ballantyne, *Op.cit*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 25.

seems a good time to begin to explore the possibilities that such an approach to the Sikh past might offer.¹⁷⁸

The issue of gender studies is thus a fast-emerging trend in the genre of Sikh studies in the present times. Off late, it has greatly attracted the attention of many a Sikh scholar primarily due to the versatility of research work involved and also due to the challenges it puts before the researcher. In case of Sikhism as a modern religion, the issue of gender equality and the question of women's entitlements have become serious concerns today. The role and status of a woman was perhaps first outlined in the Sikh scripture compiled in 1604 CE. For the Sikhs, it became obligatory to treat women as equals principally and gender discrimination was not allowed. But, it has been noted that there is a dearth of writings on women in Sikhism, but an even greater paucity of the analysis of gender status within the Sikh tradition. As gender history is regarded as 'hidden' history, the process of defining and contextualizing gender in Sikh history have almost been ignored. Thus, in the given writings of Sikh history, the scholars have either slightly touched upon or almost entirely neglected the issue of presenting a historical analysis of women's identity, role and status within the Sikh tradition. Only recently, a few attempts have been made in this direction during the past years. We hardly find any serious work that exclusively deals with gender reconstruction from the Sikh literature as well as the history of gender relations as they had been operating on the scene of Sikh history. Hence, the scope of the present study has been purposely confined to the reconstruction of the gender issues from the Sikh literature from 1500 to 1920 CE. The period covers different genres of the Sikh literature representing different phases of Sikh history. This uncharted field of study is likely to add a new dimension to the Sikh historiography in particular and the historiography of the Punjab in general. Moreover, it is hoped to enhance our understanding of the gender aspects of the Sikh tradition before and after the advent of the British in the Punjab. Thus, due place has to be given to the gender studies in the field of Sikh historiography. Available writings on Sikh history and religion do not deal with gender perceptions of the Sikhs. Historiography of the Sikhs

¹⁷⁸ Tony Ballantyne, *Op.cit*, p. 29. For details, see Tony Ballantyne, *Texture of the Sikh Past ; New Historical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

may be thus studied from the perspective of scholars dealing with Sikh history and religion in general, and gender history of the Sikhs in particular.

According to Tony Ballantyne, a critical examination of Sikh studies highlights several fundamental intellectual and political issues, allowing us to explore the encounter between faith and scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and academic disciplines and the fundamental epistemological questions that trouble historians.¹⁷⁹ The Internalist scholars prioritise the internal development of Sikh 'tradition', rather than the broader regional, political and cultural forces that shape the community from the outside. The vision of the Sikh past emerged out of the intense struggles within the Sikh Panth, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Pamphleteers, editorialists, and social reformers forwarded conflicting visions of the boundaries of the community and the Panth's development in the hope that by clearly defining the community's past they would be able to cement their own vision of the community's present and future. History writing was a crucial tool for the rival factions of the Singh Sabha movement which flourished throughout Punjab after it was initially established in Amritsar (1873) and Lahore (1879).¹⁸⁰ Historical texts produced by Tat Khalsa historians rested on two narrative strategies. Firstly, they evoked ideal types, historical role models who embodied the ideals of the Khalsa. They looked back for a more distant Sikh past, a past untainted by colonialism, for proper Sikh heroes. The second key element of Tat Khalsa historical narratives was an insistence on the dangers posed by Hinduism.¹⁸¹ They strictly believed that only a return to the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib* and the strict maintainence of the *Rahit* (Code of Conduct) would prevent Hinduism from engulfing Sikhism altogether.¹⁸²

This normative tradition of historical writing was consolidated in the early twentieth century by the likes of Bhai Vir Singh and after Partition it was increasingly professionalised by a new generation of scholars, most notably Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh. Both of these authors wrote what we might term 'corrective histories', works that challenged interpretations of Sikhism popular outside the community (such as the belief

¹⁷⁹ Tony Ballantyne, *Op.cit*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 5.

that Nanak's teachings were essentially syncretistic) and disputed evidence that indicated diversity in Sikh identity and practice within the historical record. This corrective approach is most obvious in Ganda Singh's edited collection of European accounts of Sikhism, where his glosses and footnotes not only correct European misapprehensions, but also rebut European claims that Sikhs engaged in practices that contravened the injunctions of the *rahit*. In the late 1960s this normative tradition faced its first serious challenge with the publication of W.H. McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. He introduced a new methodological rigour and interpretive strategy into the study of the Sikh past: textual criticism.¹⁸³

McLeod's textualist approach transformed understandings of Sikh history and established a new analytical framework that has been extended by a younger generation of scholars.¹⁸⁴ It is possible to identify five divergent approaches to the Sikh past – the Internalist, the Khalsacentric, the Regional, the Externalist and the Diasporic.¹⁸⁵ While N.G. Barrier's work has been central in shaping our understanding of Sikh politics in the colonial era, Harjot Oberoi has produced the most sophisticated cultural analysis of social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Oberoi's critics have frequently identified him as a member of a 'McLeodian school', failing to recognise the fundamental epistemological and methodological break that Oberoi's work makes from the textualist tradition and McLeod's strict empiricism.¹⁸⁶

Where the Tat Khalsa tradition developed out of an urbanized late nineteenth century Punjabi elite that was receptive towards colonial education and western disciplines, the Khalsacentric tradition repudiates the authority claims of disciplines like history, sociology, anthropology, women's studies, and religious studies.¹⁸⁷ Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, for example, has asserted that 'a proper study of religion ... is beyond the domain of Sociology, Anthropology and History', while Sukhmander Singh has argued that '[m]ethodologies relevant to Christian ideology where scriptures developed as a result of history and culture, [are] inapplicable to Sikhism where scripture is revelatory

¹⁸³ Tony Ballantyne, *Op.cit*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

and authenticated by the prophet himself.’ It follows on from this that Sikhism can only be understood from a ‘Scriptural’ basis.¹⁸⁸

J. S. Grewal has consistently grounded his explorations of Sikhism in the history of Punjab. Of all the historians working on Sikhism, Grewal has published the most widely on Punjabi history more generally and his research consistently foregrounds the importance of the region’s geography, its institutions and political structures, its economic fortunes and its cultural ethos. In light of this insistence, his work typically uses a broader range of sources and deploys a range of approaches, (from literary analysis to discussions of political economy) in teasing out the multi-faceted nature of Sikh history. For J.S. Grewal, Sikh history is a dynamic story of the shifting relationship between this community and its regional environment.¹⁸⁹

Externalist Approaches: Sikh Identity as a Colonial Product; A smaller group of historians have privileged imperial power relations over regional structures as they emphasise the centrality of colonialism in the making of Sikhism.¹⁹⁰

Popular Hinduism, Macauliffe argued, was like a ‘boa constrictor of the Indian forests....it winds round its opponents, crushes it in its fold, and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior.’ Sikhism was threatened with this same fate: ‘the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is...inevitable without state support’.¹⁹¹

An overview of the analysis done by Tony Ballantyne of Sikh historiography does reveal the total neglect of Women’s studies in general. Most of the writings on Sikh history and tradition do not deal with gender perceptions of the Sikhs. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh in their **Short History of The Sikhs (2006)**, occasionally refer to the role and position of women in the Sikh religion. Although the life-sketch of Guru Amardas is discussed in great details, there is a only a brief mention of the Guru’s efforts towards the prohibition of Sati and the wearing of the veil (purdah) by the women and his attempts at women’s emancipation in general. Similarly, Khushwant Singh, in his **History of The Sikhs, Vol.1, 1469-1839 (2004)**, has given only a passing reference to the practices of

¹⁸⁸ Tony Ballantyne, *Op.cit*, p. 10.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 21.

Sati and Purdah, as being vehemently opposed by the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das. Piara Singh and W.Owen Cole, in their **Sikhism – Beliefs and Practices (1999)**, just highlight various socio-economic evils, especially those which lowered the position of women in society. Issues like adultery, marriage rights, dress code, ethics, the concept of God as male/female are taken up and discussed in details.¹⁹²

Apart from this, some scholars of Sikh religion and culture too have made a few references to the gender issues in their works. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, in his **The Sikh Culture (2002)** and **Who Are The Sikhs**, has eulogized the role of women in Sikhism. This recent work follows the same conventional approach towards the presentation of Women's history in Sikhism. Guru attitudes are taken as the backbone to measure the degree of equality enjoyed by the Sikh women since the origin of Sikhism.¹⁹³ Apart from scholars of religious studies, some sociologists, anthropologists and historians have shown keen interest in the recently emerging trends in the field of Sikh studies. They include W.H. McLeod, J.S. Grewal, Doris R. Jakobsh, Nikky Guninder kaur and Mohinder kaur Gill. The renowned historians of the Sikhs like W.H. McLeod and J.S. Grewal, have made very little contribution to the field of gender studies in Sikhism. Although their writings focus on the various aspects of Sikhism, they have not done any exclusive study on the Sikh women and their role and position in Sikh history and religion. McLeod in his essay on **Gender and the Sikh Panth** published in **Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society (2007)**, has clearly stated that gender in Sikh studies has only recently attracted the attention of scholars because so far, Sikh scholars have greatly ignored their historical development. A general scarcity of women on the historical scene is notably observed by the author. Bethinking his own works over the past two decades, W.H. McLeod has forged some of his own writings, which he terms as invaluable collections addressing some major issues concerning the Sikhs. Scrutinizing the fundamental difference between historical sources and tradition, he quarries into the issue of Sikh Identity. Thereupon various facets of Sikh society like observance of caste, the place of women and wearing of the turban are explored. There is also an extensive discussion on Sikh art and literature. McLeod notes that a span of 500 years of Sikh

¹⁹² W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, *Sikhism, Beliefs and Practices*, Adarsh Enterprises, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 69, 70, 115, 120-22, 134, 142, 147-150, 205, 206.

¹⁹³ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *Who Are the Sikhs*, The Sikh University Press, 2007, pp. 23, 27.

history, consists almost wholly of 500 years of the doings of men. Sikh history essentially is men's history. Even contemporary Sikh institutions today are strongly male-dominated. McLeod takes up the question of gender within the Sikh Panth simply to raise it as a question and to evoke responses from those who are entitled to provide the answers. The essay concludes on the note that the place of women in Sikhism is favourably situated in comparison with practically all examples drawn from the western experience. He upholds this as a case in theory and largely also in practice.¹⁹⁴

J.S.Grewal in his *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* (1993), discusses gender status and its role in Sikh historical perspective. Issues of Guru Nanak's attitude towards patriarchy and its implications for the gender relationship have been discussed entirely on the basis of his own compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib. In general, Sikh scholars do assert that Guru Nanak stood for complete gender equality. In Grewal's view, the subject of gender status and its role in Sikh historical perspective has not been explored in depth. In his "Sikhism and Gender" in *Lectures on Sikh History, Society and Culture of the Punjab* (2007), he conceptualizes gender in Sikhism as a balance between the norm of equality and the demands of a patriarchal family.¹⁹⁵

Doris R. Jakobsh in her *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (2003), analyses the development of gender ideals under the Sikh Gurus and their adaptation and transformation by the new intellectual elite in the colonial period.¹⁹⁶ Doris's work is regarded as one of the first to chart the history of gender construction in Sikhism. The study views both male and female ideals and the ways in which these were informed by notions of gender in Victorian Britain. It also examines the development of novel ritual identities.¹⁹⁷ Apart from raising pertinent questions, the study focuses mainly on the political, social and religious structures of the colonial realm,

¹⁹⁴ W.H.McLeod, "Gender and the Sikh Panth", *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, pp.191-196; See also, Brian Caton P., "Gender and Sikh Studies", *Sikh Review*, 49(10), Oct., 2001, pp. 44-48.

¹⁹⁵ J.S. Grewal, "Sikhism and Gender", *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, pp. 335-353; See also, J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1993.

¹⁹⁶ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History, Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, from front cover of book.

¹⁹⁷ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, from front cover of book; See also, Parmar Nirapjit, "Relocating Gender in Sikh History ; Transformation, Meaning and Identity", *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, (18th-20th March, 2006), p. 451.

from the perspective of gender construction. Firstly, it focuses on the Singh Sabha reform movement spearheaded by British educated Sikhs in the late 19th & early 20th centuries. The Singh Sabha reform movement, aimed at resurrecting the ‘purity’ of Sikhism as it existed during the golden age of the Guru period. These reformers armed with western education and Victorian ideals tried to reinterpret tradition, according to their own needs and visions. Secondly, it analyses the development of gender ideals under the Sikh Gurus and their adaptation.¹⁹⁸ This study looks at both male and female ideals and the ways in which these were informed by notions of gender in Victorian Britain. Finally, it also examines the development of novel ritual identities, exploring the educational initiatives, meant to produce reformed Sikhs, unadulterated by popular traditions. In this way, the author challenges current understandings of the inclusion of women in the ritual formations of the Sikhs. On the whole, the work is an attempt to attract students and scholars of gender studies, the Sikh religion and South Asian colonial history, as well as general readers interested in a historical understanding of the role of women in Sikhism.

This scholarly work is a major contribution to an uncharted field of research as it attempts to pursue questions regarding the correlation between historical knowledge and gender relations on a broad scale, particularly during the era of colonization when the Singh Sabha movement came to the fore. It refers to the development of the early Sikh tradition with special reference to the gender reconstruction. In the traditional historical accounts of the Sikhs, there is little evidence that women were in any way active participants in the developing community.¹⁹⁹ With reference to the intellectual developments in India and those within the social, cultural and religious milieu in Britain before and after the conquest of India, the author has clearly brought out that gender construction in Britain played an important role in policies developed in India by the British.²⁰⁰ The 19th century Victorian ideals laid emphasis on ‘manliness’. Men “were to be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth, while

¹⁹⁸ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, p. 4; See Poonam Arora, “Role of Singh Sabha Movement in Promotion of Female Education in Punjab”, *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, (26th session 1994), pp. 206-214.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

women, from the sanctuary of the home were to nurture their husbands and children and to uphold society's values".

Doris also traces the development of Sikh religious ideology from its origin to its present day beliefs and practices. The author is also of the view that feminist historiography is based on the notion that each aspect of reality is gendered. It seeks to determine how the categories of female and male are historically constructed over time. It moves beyond a timeless, biologically determined understanding of gender to a construct that is fluid and constantly changing. With reference to the educational enterprise of the Singh Sabha movement, the author states that the Sikh reformers elucidated and in some cases modified the prevailing understandings of gender during the 19th and 20th centuries. Here, the distinct minority status of the Sikhs vis-à-vis other religious communities in Punjab is of particular importance in this discussion of gender construction. Reforms in terms of gender came to be pivotal to the discourse surrounding the power dynamics of the period. For the Sikhs, educational progress, particularly the education of females, became the common goal uniting various factions. An overview is presented regarding the missionary endeavour, Sikh orthodox tradition and reform initiatives among the Sikhs in the field of female education. She then goes on to describe the efforts of the Tat Khalsa in conducting reforms. They spread the educational ideals through the various mediums at their disposal; tracts and newspapers, which were especially utilized to spread their objectives. Education came to be intricately entwined with the upliftment of women and with the notion of nation-building.

The authoress strongly believes that gender is a fluid construct, and therefore, in essence gender constructs are evolutionary, they emerge and develop with the shifting needs of the community within which they unfold. They are also susceptible to the forces surrounding them, be these political, economic, social, or cultural. The Guru period of the Sikh community came to be transformed by its own needs and constituencies. Thus, a patriarchal value system was firmly established throughout the Guru period. With the British raj came well-defined conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Victorian assumptions about race, religion, gender, as well as economic and political designs, played an important role in the process of Sikh gender construction. Sikh reformist gender ideology during colonial times did not originate with the Sikhs, but largely due to the efforts of social reform organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj.

Similarly, the ‘civilized’ dominant male construct of the Singh Sabha reform movement necessitated a ‘civilized’, educated, though secondary, female construct. The promotion of female education was adopted by women as the most effective means to enhance their position.²⁰¹ With the ushering of a new era, began the participation of the Sikhs, both male and female, in India’s nationalist struggle against the Raj.²⁰² **Sikhism and Women : History, Texts and Experience**, Edited by Doris, is about Sikh Women's social and religious lives and experiences.

Similarly, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh’s **The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent (1993)**, deals with the issue of God’s gender.²⁰³ Some scholars have merely eulogized the role of women in Sikhism. One such book authored by Mohinder Kaur Gill, **Role and Status of Women in Sikhism (1995)**, represents the perspective of a Sikh woman in relation to her role and status in Sikh history and religion. Gill has tried to evolve the image of an ideal Sikh woman having complete privileged equal status to man in all aspects. Although there are references to heroic and other notable Sikh women, but no adequate substantiation has been made. A policy of religious appeasement is followed throughout the book, glorifying the efforts of the Sikh Gurus and their respective Guru Mahals. She holds these two factors as solely responsible for elevating the status and position of women in Sikhism. It is further believed that the attitude of Gurus towards women is more important than the availability of material regarding Guru Mahals.²⁰⁴ The present work is thus an insiders view-a Sikh study conducted by a Sikh woman on Sikh women.

Sociologists who have made some attempt in the area of gender studies have also contributed greatly by way of their published works. In this context, Paramjit S. Judge and Gurpreet Bal’s edited work, **“Reconstructing Identities : Society through Literature”**, is a collection of essays, which deal with various issues, for example, the formations of religious and gender identities in the writings of the nineteenth century

²⁰¹ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History, Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 238.

²⁰² *Ibid*, p. 239. (a) *Sikhism and Women : History Texts and Experience* (ed. Doris R. Jakobsh), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010.

²⁰³ Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

²⁰⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1995, p. 5; See also, Gurpreet Bal, "A 19th Century Woman Poet of Punjab : Peero", *Indian Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Sage Publication India, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 183-200, Parmar Nirapjit, "An Overview of Mohinder Kaur Gill's Role and Status of Women in Sikhism", *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, (16th-18th March, 2007).

woman poet – Pero and a similar approach is adopted to reconstruct gender and religious identities from the first Punjabi novel, *Sundri*.²⁰⁵ Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma's **Sikhism and Women (1996)**, may also be cited here. The research articles in Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma's edited work, highlight the importance of Sikh women in the broader context. It also discusses the multi-farious aspects of Sikh faith and Sikh women. The volume partly gives the impression of being a study of the history of Sikhs and their attitudes towards women. The authors have arrived at conclusions after careful analysis of Sikh philosophy and verses of the Guru Granth Sahib on one hand and relating them to the study of gender within Sikhism on the other hand.²⁰⁶

Some general and specific gender studies have been conducted by the scholars of Indian and World religions. For example, Jean Holmes and John Bowker, editors of **Women in Religion (1994)** deal with the part the women have played in religious institutions. It deals with what part women can and/or do play in religious institutions; how relevant religion is to their general role in society; and the significance of cultural influences for attitudes to women within the religious traditions. Addressing important issues of the day, this series examines how each of the eight major religions approaches a particular theme.²⁰⁷

Similarly, Rajkumari Shanker in Arvind Sharma's edited work, **Women in Indian Religions (2002)**, highlights a comparative approach to portray the position of women vis-à-vis their respective religious ideologies.²⁰⁸

T.V. Sathyamurthy, editor of **Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India (2000)**, provides an understanding of gender perspectives in the broader context of contemporary India. Gender is viewed from a political perspective. India's struggle for independence and the constitution accorded an important place to the rights of women. But the progressive thrust of national independence was not sufficient to dispel gender blindness in India. The patriarchal and hierarchical social structures have institutionalized the subordination of women. In recent years, women have focused

²⁰⁵ Paramjit Singh Judge and Gurpreet Bal (eds.), *Reconstructing Identities : Society Through Literature*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2008; See also, Shaiharyar, "Punjabi Di Pahili Shairara : Peero Preman", *Ajoke Shilalekh*, 1997, Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri*, Bhai Vir Singh Sadan, New Delhi, 2005.

²⁰⁶ Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma (eds.), *Sikhism and Women*, Published by Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1995.

²⁰⁷ Jean Holm and John Bowker (eds.), *Women in Religion*, Printer Publishers, London, 1994.

²⁰⁸ Rajkumari Shanker, "Women in Sikhism", in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in Indian Religions*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 108-133; See also, Harbans Singh, "Status of Woman in Sikh Religion", *Sikh Courier*, 9(3), 1978, pp. 22-24.

attention on their position in society as a political issue, even though this has by no means led to a transformation of hidebound political practices. Gender truly cannot be seen in isolation because women carry multiple identities with them 'as members of vertically antagonistic socio-economic groups'.²⁰⁹ Not only this, some scholars have tried to construct gender, caste and class in the colonial Punjab. **Clamping Shutters and Valorizing Women : Tensions in Sculpting Gender Identities in the Colonial Punjab**, an article by Kamlesh Mohan, published in **Punjabi Identity in a Colonial Context (1999)**, focuses on recasting gender identities, roles and relations between man and woman and the ideologies of social reform movements. In the colonial Punjab, patriarchal ideology continued to dominate the perception of gender relations. In the context of reconstituting patriarchy, the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha's model of 'moral' and 'spiritual' woman became relevant. The existing unequal gender-relations further helped in the exclusion of women from ownership or control of means of production prevalent in the pre-colonial agrarian structure. Although not directly dealing with the status of the Sikh women, the article reflects upon the general conditions prevalent in Colonial Punjab regarding the construction of gender and gender identity formation.²¹⁰ Anshu Malhotra's **Gender, Caste and Religious Identities; Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab (2002)**, examines the development and transformation of the caste factor and its impact on gender relations, which encouraged a re-examination of women's role and place in society.²¹¹

General articles are also being written perhaps under the influence of recent feminist or Women Liberation Movements. Many of the recent studies in the form of articles, eulogise the contributions of women in Sikhism. Alice Basarke, has authored a few articles dealing with the issues of gender in Sikhism. Her articles attempt to create an interest among historians to record 'Women's History'. They also stress on the importance of conducting serious, scientific research in this regard. Elsewhere, she also traces the tradition of female participation in the Panth from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. In her opinion, even after 500 years, Sikh women are no better off than their counterparts in

²⁰⁹ T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

²¹⁰ Kamlesh Mohan, "Clamping Shutters and Valourizing Women : Tensions in Sculpting Gender Identities in the Colonial Punjab", *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp.163-200.

²¹¹ Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities—Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

other communities. Any study on Sikh women would be largely incomplete without understanding the basic philosophy of the Sikh religion, according to Basarke.²¹²

Prabhjot Kaur on the other hand, deals with the issue of the Women's Liberation Movement in the global context, and believes that the modern day problems affecting today's women can be solved by resorting to the 'Gurmat'. She writes from a feminist perspective and goes on to list the main reasons why the women are lagging behind in the professional sector, in comparison to the men.²¹³ Harveen Sachdeva Mann in her article argues that Sikhism is generally regarded as an egalitarian religion, committed to the equality of sexes, but, recent fundamental rhetoric clearly reflects the entrenchment of a dominant patriarchy and the consequent paradigmatic construction of women as dependent.²¹⁴

²¹² Alice Basarke, "Where are the Women?", in *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, (ed.), Kharak Singh, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1996, pp. 260-265; See also, Alice Basarke, "Her Story : Sikh Women in History", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, Institute of Sikh Studies, Jul.-Sept., 1998, pp. 30-40.

²¹³ Prabhjot Kaur, "Significance of the role of Women in Society", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. IV, Issue 4, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Oct-Dec, 2002, pp. 48-52; See also, Prabhjot Kaur, "Women's Liberation Movement and Gurmat", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Apr.-June, 1997, pp.76-80, Prabhjot Kaur, "Sikhism and Women", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Jan-Mar, 1998, pp. 100-103, Prabhjot Kaur, "Sikh Dharm Vich Istri Da Sthaan te Yogdaan", *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, (ed. Kharak Singh), Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1996, pp. 478-488.

²¹⁴ Harveen Sachdeva Mann, "Religious Fundamentalism and the Twice-Fragmented Narrative of Gender in Contemporary Punjab", *Jouvert : A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Loyola University of Chicago, 2000 (<http://social.chass.nseu.edu/jouvert/v4i2mann.htm>.); See also, Birendra Kaur, "Project Gender Justice", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. IX, Issue 3, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, July-Sept., 2007, pp. 74-81, "The Better Half(?)", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. V, Issue 3, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, July-Sept, 2003, pp. 48-55, Jaswant Singh, "Status of Women in Sikhs", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. III, Issue 4, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Oct-Dec, 2001, pp. 41-42, Harpreet Singh, "Rakhri : A Symbol of Oppression against Women", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. III, Issue 4, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Oct.-Dec., 2001, pp. 82-84, Masood Akhtar Zahid, "Gender Stereotyping and Colonial Schools in the Punjab, 1882-1902", *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 153-161.

CHAPTER-II

GENDER REFLECTIONS IN EARLY SIKH LITERATURE

1) GURU GRANTH SAHIB :

*By the Grace of the One Supreme Being, of the True Name, the Creator, Devoid of Fear and Enmity, Immortal, Unborn, Self-Existent and the Enlightener.*¹

Guru Granth Sahib, is the sacred scripture of the Sikh faith. 'Granth' a Sanskrit word, implies a book and 'Sahib' represents the Sikh mode of expressing respect and veneration. The Guru Granth Sahib contains the sacred compositions, in the form of short pieces of poetry, of the Gurus of the Sikh faith, upto the time of Guru Arjan, its compiler. The compositions of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, were added by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, a little after 1680. The language of the Granth is partly Punjabi, and alternates with medieval Hindi of the Braj variety, which had come to be adopted as the medium of philosophical – religious thought over Northern India. The Holy Guru Granth Sahib is written in the Gurmukhi script, and has a considerable volume of sacred and secular literature.²

Teja Singh, states that the Guru Granth Sahib, is not only the most authentic and the holiest scripture of the Sikhs, but it also introduces the spirit of the Bhakti movement in India and reveals the quest and mystic experience of man to reach the high domain of God. The first western scholar to translate some portions of the Guru Granth Sahib was E. Trumpp. He was followed by Macauliffe and Prof. Teja Singh. Complete translations of the Guru Granth Sahib have been published by Gopal Singh, Manmohan Singh and G.S. Talib. Some other scholars like Nihal Singh Suri, Khushwant Singh, Sohan Singh, Jodh Singh and Tarlochan Singh, too, have translated selected portions of the Guru

¹ Teja Singh, *The Holy Granth (Sri Rag To Majh)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, Patiala, 1985, p. 1.

² Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith)*, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 1-5.

Granth Sahib into English.³ According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been the living voice of all prophets and preceptors.”⁴

Arnold Toynbee, in his foreword to *Selections From The Sacred Writings of The Sikhs*, Writes that the Guru Granth Sahib is part of mankind’s common spiritual treasure and the Sikhs’ perpetual Guru (spiritual guide) .⁵

Preparation of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib :

The Sikhs consider the Guru Granth Sahib as the highest authority within the community and it plays a central role in the Sikh devotional and ritual life. Sikh belief in the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib is based on two fundamental assumptions: that its text is revealed and hence immutable and unchangeable, and that answers to all religious and moral questions are available in it.⁶

History of the Sikh scriptural tradition can easily be traced back to the spiritual ministry of Guru Nanak, whose religious experiences form the very core of its origin. An analysis of his writings reveals that he intensely felt himself to be an intermediary of God to proclaim His Will. Responding to the Divine call, he set out to preach his mission to the people of different lands. Lastly, he settled at Kartarpur and founded a religious centre known as *Dharamsala* where he taught the basic tenets of his faith to the people around him. During the itineraries (*Udasis*) and his stay at Kartarpur, whenever Guru Nanak felt inspired by God, he composed hymns in various *ragas* or metres. Upon his death, there existed a single codex of his codex of his *Bani* which he bestowed on his successor Guru Angad Dev, upon the latter’s accession to Guruship.⁷

Guru Nanak’s writings left an indelible imprint on the subsequent growth of Sikh scriptural tradition. It provided powerful stimulus to his successors to add new hymns to the received text. Though Guru Angad Dev’s writings, are not much in size but his pontificate marked the next stage in the development of Sikh scribal tradition. His real

³ Teja Singh, *Op.cit*, p. ix.

⁴ Sarup Singh Alag, *An Introduction to Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Sarup Singh Alag (Publisher), Ludhiana, 1997, p. 155.

⁵ Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Op.cit*, p. 9.

⁶ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 4.

⁷ Balwant Singh Dhillon (ed.), *Studies on Guru Granth Sahib*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2004, pp. 1-2. See also; Balwant Singh Dhillon, *Early Scriptural Tradition ; Myth and Reality*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1999.

contribution lies in the fact that he standardized the Gurmukhi letters and popularized their use for scribing the sacred writings of the Sikhs. At his demise, he bequeathed the *Pothi* in his possession to his successor, Guru Ram Das.⁸ Guru Amar Das not only enriched the Sikh scriptural tradition but also took a keen interest to preserve its sanctity. The third Guru, took upon himself to educate the Sikhs about the pseudo-Guru and his writings. It is known through contemporary sources that Bulla Pandha was one of the leading scribes at the Court of Guru Amar Das, who had dedicated himself to scribe the *Pothis* of *Bani* for circulation among the Sikh *Sangats*.⁹ Under the leadership of Guru Amar Das, we see the updating of the *Guru Harsahai Pothi*, and from this point onward the expansion of the Sikh text seems to become an extraordinarily sensitive indicator of the evolving concerns of the community. The *Goindwal Pothis* were compiled during the time of Guru Amar Das and contained the complete corpus of hymns of the first three Gurus. The addition of the hymns of the *Bhagats* from all levels of the social hierarchy to the sacred Sikh text was rooted in Guru Amar Das's belief in the continuous nature of revelation and in an emphasis on the comprehensiveness of the Sikh community.¹⁰

Although Guru Ram Das was actively involved in the organizational set-up of the Sikh Panth under Guru Amar Das, he was well-versed in the scribal tradition that had developed under his predecessor. On his part he introduced new *ragas* and metres to the scriptural text which reflect his poetic genius. He further reaffirmed that only genuine hymns of the Sikh Gurus were acceptable. Besides the *Pothis*, Guru Ram Das had taken initiative to prepare lectionaries (*Gutkas*) for the personal use of Sikhs, in which authenticated texts for liturgical purpose had been arranged. Well before the succession of Guru Arjan Dev, the Sikh *Sangats* had installed in the *Dharamsalas* a standardized corpus in some kind of uniform order.¹¹

The phase of expansion of the Sikh community, under the leadership of Guru Arjan Dev, corresponded with another updating of the scriptural text. According to traditional sources, Guru Arjan Dev borrowed the *Goindwal Pothis* from the Bhallas at Goindwal and to their contents added his own hymns and those of his father to produce

⁸ Balwant Singh Dhillon (ed.), *Op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁹ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁰ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

an expanded Sikh text. The manuscript he compiled is at present in the custody of Karamjit Singh Sodhi at Kartarpur, a town founded by Guru Arjan Dev in 1593.¹² Guru Arjan Dev covered a large span of human experience during his twenty-five years of Guruship and composed 2218 hymns, which makes him by far the largest contributor to the scripture.¹³ The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur also revived the earlier tradition of writing sacred hymns. The writing of new hymns created the need to update the contents of the existing sacred corpus recorded in the *Kartarpur Pothis*. MS 1192, is the first document manifesting the expansion of the sacred text at this point in history.¹⁴

The Guru Granth Sahib consists of approximately 3,000 hymns of carefully recorded authorship. Over 2,400 of these hymns were written by the six Gurus who lived between 1469 and 1675 in the Punjab. The remaining hymns are attributed to fifteen or so bards associated with the sixteenth century Sikh Court in the Punjab and fifteen non-Sikh saint poets known in Sikh tradition as the *Bhagats* (literally, “devotees”), who lived between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries in the northern and northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent.¹⁵

The text of the Guru Granth Sahib is divided into three parts. The opening section is liturgical and includes three daily prayers. The *Japji* (Meditation) by Guru Nanak consists of thirty-eight stanzas and two couplets. The *Rahiras* (Supplication) contains nine hymns, four composed by Guru Nanak, three by the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das and two by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. The *Sohila* (Praise) consists of five hymns, three by Guru Nanak, and one each by Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan. The Sikhs recite the *Japji* at sunrise, the *Rahiras* at sunset, and the *Sohila* at the end of the day just before going to sleep. The hymns in the main body of the Guru Granth Sahib are divided into thirty-one separate subsections created according to the musical mode (*Raga*) assigned for their singing. Each subsection begins with hymns of four stanzas (*Chaupadas*) and goes on to include hymns of eight stanzas (*ashtpadis*), four stanzas of six stanzas each (*Chhants*), and other longer compositions containing a sequence of

¹² Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, p. 15.

¹³ Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib : Canon, Meaning and Authority*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 11.

¹⁴ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

couplets and stanzas (*vars*). The final section of the Guru Granth Sahib is composed of miscellaneous hymns not set in any musical mode. These compositions include couplets authored by Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Kabir, Farid and a set of panegyrics (*Sawaiye*) by the bards. The text closes with the *Ragmala* (Garland of musical modes), a hymn of twelve stanzas grouping *Ragas* prevalent in the medieval Indian system of music into six families.

The language of the hymns recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib has been called “*Sant Bhasha*”, a kind of lingua franca used by the medieval Saint poets of northern India. But the broad range of contributors to the text produced a complex mix of regional dialects. The Sikh Gurus themselves used Punjabi in many of their hymns, but like other contributors they also used elements of *Apabhramsha* (a later dialect of Sanskrit), *Braj Bhasha* (the language of the Braj region around Mathura), *Hindui* (the language spoken around Delhi), and a heavily Persianized Punjabi. All this makes the Guru Granth Sahib, a rich repository of dialects that were prevalent in medieval northern India.¹⁶

The Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world, which was compiled by one of the founders of a religion himself and whose authenticity has never been questioned. The Guru Granth Sahib, as we find it today, is not arranged subject-wise, but according to the musical measure in which a hymn is meant to be sung in. There are in all 31 such measures (*or Ragas*), namely, Sri, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Devgandhari, Bihagra, Vadhans, Sorath, Dhanasri, Jaitsiri, Todi, Bairari, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Gound, Ramkali, Mali Gaura, Maru, Tukhari, Kedara, Bhairo, Basant, Sarang, Malhar, Kanra, Kalyan, Parbhati, and Jaijaivanti. Most of the Sikh Gurus were themselves great musicians, masters of the classical style. Guru Nanak always kept the company of a Muslim drummer, Mardana, who played on the rebeck while Guru Nanak sang to large audiences. Guru Arjun Dev himself was a great vocalist and an instrumentalist. And as the whole Guru Granth Sahib is written in poetry of the highest order, both music and poetry have formed an inseparable part of the Sikh ritual and the Sikh cultural pattern, and runs through the blood of every man and woman of this aesthetic faith.¹⁷

¹⁶ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.xviii.

The Guru Granth Sahib contains, besides the writings of the Sikh Gurus, compositions of almost all the medieval Hindu Bhaktas, like Kabir, Ramanand, Ravidas, Surdas, Sain and Bhikan from U.P.; Jaidev from Bengal, Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand from Maharashtra; Pipa and Dhanna from Rajasthan; and Beni who was popular all over Northern India. The writings of five Muslim—Baba Farid, Bhikhan, Satta, Balwand and Mardana are also incorporated in the Granth.¹⁸ It also contains the writings of eleven Bhatts - Mathra, Jalap, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Bhal, Kulh Sahar, Nal, Kirat, Gayand, Sadrang.¹⁹

Essence of The Guru Granth Sahib :

It reflects the tolerant spirit of Sikhism.²⁰ The Sikh Gurus declared that true religion consisted of only two things, love of God's Name and purity of conduct. Religion, according to the Gurus, is not a set of doctrines, but a clean way of life dedicated to God.²¹ The Holy Guru Granth Sahib, with all the variety of its contents, is a corporate entity and has to be interpreted consistently in the light of the over-all teaching of the Gurus.²²

Although Sikhism accepts the Hindu theory of Karma and life hereafter, it speaks of the possibility of rising above the maze in which life, death and rebirth go on, independent, as it were, of human volition. Human actions determine the subsequent forms of life to be assumed after death. It thus advocates that by righteous living and grace it is possible to escape the vicious circle of life and death and attain salvation. God being an abstraction, godliness is conceived as an attribute. The way of acquiring godliness or salvation is to obey the will of God. The means of ascertaining God's will are largely rules of moral conduct which are the basis of human society. Godliness being the aim of human endeavour, the lives and teachings of the Gurus are looked upon as aids towards its attainment. Guru Amar Das carried out a vigorous campaign against the practice of Sati, thereby he brought about the emancipation of women from social

¹⁸ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. xviii.

¹⁹ <http://www.sgpc.net/sikhism/guru-granth-sahib.asp>.

²⁰ Teja Singh, *The Holy Granth (Sri Rag to Majh)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, Patiala, 1985, p.xxiii.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. xxiii.

²² Teja Singh, *Op.cit*, p. xxiv.

oppression and religious cruelty. Through the Guru's teachings, men began to see and realize the worth of Women, and so the women began to receive the respect and honour they deserved.²³

According to Trumpp, the Guru Granth Sahib, is the treasury of the old Hindi dialects. Besides, it is a source-book for compiling a socio-cultural history of North India of the medieval time. Its idioms and proverbs have become the stock-in-trade of every Punjabi for all occasions, no matter what his religion, profession or place of residence.²⁴

Women related quotes from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib :

In the present scenario, it is not possible to completely and flawlessly comprehend the deteriorating and degenerating socio-economic, political and cultural environments of that particular period in our history, of which the Sikh Gurus and other prominent saints of that time were contemporaries. Anarchy prevailed on account of recurrent invasions starting first with Babur and ending with Ahmad Shah Durrani. North India therefore witnessed decades of violence, bloodshed and an unstable society emerged as a result. It was the age of tyrannical oppressors and barbaric invaders, whose most common and most vulnerable targets were the women. The society in turn got more rigid, thereby imposing social taboos which had to be adhered too. Amongst all this, although the men being better placed in the social hierarchal set-up had to bear the brunt of this socio-political instability, for the women at every step was an acid test. Blind faith and superstition ruled over rationality. The Sikh Gurus tactfully dealt with the issues misleading the people and successfully managed to create awareness and consciousness in a society engulfed with darkness. Gender issues probably weren't given as much importance as they command today. The custom of child-marriages leading to early widowhood, purdah system, the practice of Sati, prohibition of widow-remarriages, all existed as a vicious circle. They were born out of blind faith, hearsay and lack of education; both among the men as well as the women. Male and female duties in society were very clearly defined and non-performance or failure in the performance of these duties could mean facing severe punishments and in extreme cases, even social ostracism. Sociology is replete with these details. Recently, the most severe attack on the non-

²³ Teja Singh, *Op.cit*, p. xxvi.

²⁴ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. xix.

availability of historical material related to gender issues amongst the Sikhs has come from Doris R. Jakobsh, a non-Sikh scholar, who in her, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History – Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, (2003), is critical of the attitude of the Sikh Gurus with regard to the issues concerning women in contemporary society. Lack of historical material regarding women's studies is also lamented upon by her. However, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, is replete with numerous instances where the women are referred to either directly or indirectly.

In explaining the position that women occupy, Sikhs invariably turn to the Guru Granth Sahib.²⁵ Reacting sharply to many of the baseless allegations of Doris, J.S. Grewal, in his, *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, drills through the point that Guru Nanak brings in the question of gender, in connection with the idea of impurity.²⁶

“The love of gold and silver, women and fragrant scents, horses, couches, and dwellings, sweets and meats—these are all lusts of the flesh. Where in the heart can there be room for the Name?”²⁷

(SGGS, p. 15)

Some of the practical manifestations of *maya* are set out in the extract quoted above from *Siri Ragu* 4. Wealth, women, sons, power, status, worldly honour, comfort, food—these are the attractions which the world extends and which call forth man's lust, greed and pride. These are the allurements which stimulate his evil impulses and so lead him into the trap.

“The woman of Merit scatters Merit; the one without Merit writhes in distress.
If she wants to seek her Lord, (let her know that) He wouldn't be Met through falsehood.

²⁵ W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 192.

²⁶ J.S. Grewal, *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, Patiala, 2007, p. 111.

²⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 186 :

f;oh okr[wj;bk e ..

o;[;[f]Bk o;[o[glk ekwfD o;[gowb eh tk;[..

o;[x'V o;[;/ik wzdo o;[whmk o;[wk;[../s' o; ;oho e/ e? xfn Bkw fBtk;[..e..

There is neither the boat, nor raft, about; how will one go across the River where our Lord Abides?"²⁸ (SGGS, p. 17)

"Attachment to progeny, wife is poison
None of these at the end is of any avail."²⁹ (SGGS, p.41)

"O my father, gift away to me the Dowry of the Lord's Name.
Let the Lord be my Wear, His Glory my Beauty, that my Task be accomplished.
Blessed is the Lord's Worship; the True Guru has blessed me with it.
In all lands, nay, in all Universe Pervades the Glory of the Lord; the Gift of the Lord's (Name) is matchless;
All other Dowry displayed by the self-willed is false egoism and vain show.
O my father, bless me with the Dowry of the Lord's Name."³⁰
(SGGS, p.79)

"Shed thy Lust, Anger, Falsehood, Slander, Ego and love of Maya;
Shed thy lust for the woman; and attain, within the dark world, to God, the Immaculate.
Shed thy pride and thy attachment to thy sons and wife, and thirst for Desire, and be Attuned to thy Lord.

²⁸ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, Vol. 1, p. 21 :

f;oh okr[wj;bk ¢ ..
r[Dtzsh r[D thEo? nT[r[Dtzsh M{fo .. i? b^Vfj to[ekwDh Bjfwbhn? fgo[e{fo ..
Bk p/Vh Bk s[bjVh Bk gk]hn? fgo[d{fo ..¢.. w/o/ mke[o g{o/ syfs nv'b[..
r[ow[fy g{ok i/ eo/ gk]hn? ;ku[ns'b[...¢.. ojkT[..
²⁹

Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender In Sikh History—Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 11 :

f;fo okr[wj;bk 4 ..
g[s[ebs[w'j[fpy[j? nzfs p/bh e'h Bj'ff]..¢.. ojkT[..
³⁰

Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.71:

f;ohokr[wj;bk ¢ ..
jfo gqG w/o/ p;kp[bk jfo d/tj[dkB[w? dki'.. jfo egV' jfo ;Gk d/tj[fis[;to? w/ok eki'.. jfo jfo Grsh eki[;j/bk r[fo ;fsr[fo
dkB[fdtkf]nk..
yzfv toGzfv jfo ;'Gk j'h f]j[dkB[B ob? obkf]nk..
j'fo wBw[ly dki[fi ofy fdykbff] ;[e{V[njzeko[eu gki'..
jfo gqG w/o/ p;kp[bk jfo d/tj[dkB[w? dki'.. ¢..

Nanak : the True one Cometh into thy mind, and, through the True Word, thou Mergest in the Lord's Name."³¹ (SGGS, p. 141)

In the words of Guru Amardas, a woman who lives a virtuous life in her parent's home attains an abode in the home of her in-laws.³² (SGGS, p. 162)

The concept of human equality is best brought out by the following quote from the Guru Granth Sahib, which sums up the entire debate on the issue of gender equality.

"Among all the women and men, Lord's Light permeates."³³
(SGGS, p. 223)

"The whole day the Egocentric is concerned with vain desires :
At night, he is overwhelmed by sleep and all his nine organs are out of tune.
He is overpowered by his woman and obeys her like a bond-slave.
How impure and foolish is such a being?
Him, the vicious one, lust infests and obeys he implicitly the command of his woman.
But he, who follows, the lead of the Guru, is True and Pure.
The Lord Himself Creates men and women; it is the sport of the Lord alone.

³¹ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. 132 :

wj**bk** ॥ ..
gojfo ekw e'qX M[m[fbzdk sfi wkff]nk njzeko[u[ekt?..
sfi ekw[ekfwBh w'j[si? sk nziB wkff]fBoziB[gkt?..
sfi wkB[nfGwkB[gqhf[s ;[s dkr sfi fgkn; nk; okw fbt bkt?..
BkBe ;ku wfB t; ;ku ;pfd jfoBkfw ;wkt? ..॥..

³² Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 2, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 2001, p. 545 :

rT[Vh p?okrfD
wj**bk** ॥..
g?jhnV? fdB ukfo j? jfo jfo fbfy gkff]nk.. ;'Gktzsh Bkfo j? r[ow[fy r[D rkff]nk..
g/teV? r[D ;zwb? ;kj[o? tk;[gkff]nk..

³³ *Ibid*, p. 737 :

rT[Vh wj**bk** ॥..
Bkoh g[oy ;pkjh b']h..॥..

Says Nanak : “O Lord, all this is Thy Creation and good is all that Thou createst.”³⁴ (SGGS, p. 304)

Kabir whose writings are an integral part of the Guru Granth Sahib, categorically states that he considers women as equals.³⁵ (SGGS, p. 327) Kabir also lays great stress upon the virtues of chastity and faithfulness to be imbibed by one and all by considering these twin values as indispensable in women.³⁶ (SGGS, p. 328)

“For the love of silver and women the fool is entangled in duality and forgets the divine Name.”³⁷ (SGGS, p.416)

In McLeod’s view, Sampad (riches) is certainly one of the primary manifestations of *maya* in Guru Nanak’s works, but so to is *Kaman* (woman). Other temptations receive less emphasis, but obviously they are not to be regarded as negligible.³⁸ Both Doris in her, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History-Transformation*,

³⁴ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.296 :

;kok fdB[bkbfu nfnk wBw[fyj'o/ rBk..
oksh T[x? dfpnk Bt/ ;s ;fG fyBk..
wBw[yk d? ffo i'r nwo[j? fBs d/tfj Gbk..
i'r dk nkfy nk g[oy[ewktd/ ;/ ngfts nw/X ybk..
ekfw ftBkg/ e[;X Bo ;/ i'r g[fS ubk..
fSr[o e? nkfy n? i' ub? ;' fsg[oy Gb Gbk..
i'ok g[oy fG nkfg T[gkf]nB[jfo y/b fG fyBk..
;G s/oh pDs pDktDh BkBe Gb Gbk.. e..

³⁵ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 2, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 2001, p. 1095 :

rT[Vh epho ih..
ojkT[..
J/e Gkfj d/yT[;G Bkoh..fenk ikBT[j eT[B fgnkoh..e..

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 1095-96, Kabir :

rT[Vh epho ih..
fpB[;s ;shj]f e? ;/ Bkfo..gzfvs d/yj[fod? phukfo..l..

³⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 186 :

nk;k wjBk e..
efBe ekwBh j/s[rtkok.. d[fpXk bkr/ Bkw[ft;kok..

³⁸ *Loc.cit.*

Meaning and Identity, and McLeod W.H., *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society*, assert that Sikh history consists almost wholly of 500 years of the doings of men. Further in McLeod's view, the interpretation that we place upon Guru Nanak's *Var Asa shalok* may have been a little naïve. On close thought, it may be concluded that the inference that the position adopted by Guru Nanak comes very close to the situation commonly argued as ideal today.

Regarding the Plight of Women and the miseries faced by them by way of Babur's invasion;

The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,
And were parted with vermillion,
Have been shorn with cruel shears;
Dust has been thrown on their shaven heads.
They lived in ease in palaces,
Now they must beg by the roadside,
Having no place for their shelter.
Glory unto Thee, O Lord of Glory,
Who can understand Thy ways, O God?
Surely Thy ways are strange and Thy dispensation!
When these whose heads are shorn were married,
Fair indeed seemed their bridegrooms beside them.
They were brought home in palanquins carved with ivory.
Pitchers of water were waved over their heads
In ceremonial welcome, Ornate fans glittered waving above them.
At the first entry into the new home,
Each bride was offered a gift of a lakh of rupees;
Another lakh when each stood up to take her post in her new home;
Coconut shreds and raisins were among the delicious fruits,
served to them at their tables.
These beauties lent charm to the couches they relied on.
Now they are dragged away, with ropes round their necks;
Their necklaces are snapped and their pearls scattered.
Their beauty and wealth were once their greatest assets,
Their beauty and wealth are their greatest enemies now;
Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced them .
God casts down, God exalteth, whomsoever He Will.
Pursuing worldly love and sensual pleasure,
If these folk had taken heed to the future,
Need they have been reduced to such plight?
The Princes of Hindustan have lost their heads.

Desecration and desolation follow in the footsteps
 Of the Great Moghal, Babar,
 None, none in Hindustan can eat his supper in peace.³⁹
 (Rag Asa, SGGS, p. 417)

“As the woman has her periods, month after month,
 So does impurity abide in the mouth of the Impure, and continually
 they are scorched

³⁹ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 3, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 2001, pp. 1382-1384 :

okṛ nḱ;k wjḃk ;
 n;Ngdhnk xo[£
 ਯਃ;ਫਸ੍ਰ[੦ ਗ੍ਰ;ਕਫ਼ਦ ..
 ਫਿਭ ਫਿਫੋ ;ਯਿਭ ਗ੍ਰਹਨਕ wKrh ਗ੍ਰਹਿ ;zX[੦[..
 ;'ਫੋ eksh w[zBhnਭBq rb ਫਿਫੁ nkt? XਫਿV..
 wjḃk nzdਫੋ j'dhnk jਿਫਿਭ ਪਿਫਿਭ B ਫwਭਭBq jਦਿਫੋ..੬..
 nkd/;[pḱpḱ nkd/;[..
 nḱਫ਼d ਗ[੦੬s/੦k nzs[B ਗ੍ਰਹਿਨਕ ਏਫੋ ਏਫੋ d/੬[t/;..੬.. oḱkT[..
 idj[;hnk thnḱjhḱnḱ bḱV/ ;ਯਿਭ ਗ੍ਰਹਿ..
 jhv'bh uਫਿV nḱjhḱnḱ dzd ੬zv ehs? ੦ਫ਼ਿ;..
 T[goj[gḱDh tkohn? Mb/ ਫਿMwਏਭ ਗ੍ਰਹਿ; ..੬..
 ਫਿਏ[b੬[bਯਿਭBq ਪਫਿਮhnḱ b੬[bਯਿਭ ੬V/hnḱ..
 roh S[jko/ ੬KdhnK wḱDਭBq ;iVhnḱ..
 ਫਿsBq rਫ਼bਫਿ;beḱ ਗ੍ਰਹਿਨਕ s[NਭBq w's ;੦hnḱ..੬..
 XB[i'pB[d[ਫਿ] t?੦h j]/ ਫਿਯਿਭBq ੦੬/ ੦/r[bḱਫ਼]..
 d[sk B' c[੦wḱਫ਼]nḱ b? ub/ gਫਿs rḱਫ਼]..
 i/ਫਿs;[Gḱt? d/ ਫਿਫਨḱ]h i/ Gḱt? d[ਫਿ] ;iḱਫ਼]..੨..
 nr' d/ i/ u/shn? sk eḱਫ਼]s[ਫwਭ? ;iḱਫ਼]..
 ;ḱjK ;[੦ਫਿs rḱਫ਼]hnḱ oḱਫ਼r swḱ;? uḱਫ਼]..
 pḱpotḱDh ਫਿcਫੋ r]h e[ਫਿ]੦[B ੦'Nh ੬ਫ਼]..
 ਫਿਏBqḱ ੬੬s ੬[nḱ]hnਫਿਫਿਏBqḱ g{ik iḱਫ਼]..
 uT[e/ ਫਿT[ਫਿzdtḱDhnḱ ਫਿਏT[ਫਿNe/ eਯਿਫ਼ Bḱਫ਼]
 ੦ḱw B eḱj{ u/ਫਿsT[eਯਿਫ਼D B ਫwਭ? ੬[dkਫ਼]..੧..
 ਫਿਫਿਏ xਫੋ nḱਫ਼ਿ nḱgD? ਫਿਫਿਏ ਫwਫ਼b ਗ[ਫਿ] ;[੬..
 ਫਿਏBqḱ]/j' ਫਿਯਿਭhnḱ ਪਫਿ ਪਫਿ ੦'ਫ਼ਿਫ਼ d[੬..
 i'ਫਿs;[Gḱt? ;' ੬hn? BḱBe ਫਿਨḱ wḱB[੬..੬..

Pure are not they who bathe their bodies :
 Pure, Nanak, are they in whose mind dwells He, the Lord.⁴⁰
 (SGGS, p. 472)

Guru Nanak openly chides those who attribute pollution to women because of menstruation and asserts that pollution lies in the heart and mind of the person and not in the cosmic process of birth :⁴¹

“If pollution attaches to birth, then pollution is everywhere
 (for birth is universal).
 Cow-dung (used for purifying the kitchen floor by hindus)
 and firewood breed maggots;
 Not one grain of corn is without life;
 Water itself is a living substance, imparting life to all vegetation.
 How can we then believe in pollution, when pollution inheres within
 staples?
 Says Nanak, pollution is not washed away by
 Purificatory rituals;
 Pollution is removed by true knowledge alone.”⁴² (SGGS, p. 472)

⁴⁰ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.466 :

wj**bk** ¢..
 fT[i'o{f;oBktDh nkt? tko' tko..
 i{m/ i{mk w{fy t;? fBs fBs j'fj y{nko..
 ;{u/ j'fj B nkyhnfj pjfB fi fgzvK X'fj..
 ;{u/ ;j'h BkBek fiB w{fB tf;nk ;'fj.. ¢.. gT[Vh..
 s[o/ gbK N/ gT[D t/r jo ozrh jow ;tkfonk..
 e'm/ wzvg wkVhnk bk'fjnk p?m/ efo gk;kfonk..
 uhi eofB w{fB Gktd/ jfo p[MfB Bkjh jkfonk..
 efo c[owk'fj; yk'fjnk t/fy wjbf's woD[ft'fonk..
 io[nkjh i'p'fB jkfonk..¢\$..

⁴¹ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf>.

⁴² Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.466:

;b'e wj**bk** ¢..
 i'efo ;{se[wzBhn? ;Gs? ;{se[j'fj. i/s/ dkD/ nzB e/ ihnk pkM[B e'fj..
 g'fj**bk** gkDh fT[j? fis[jfonk ;G[e'fj.. ;{se[feT[efo oyhn? ;{se[gt? o'fj..
 BkBe ;{se[J/t Bk Tso? frnkB T[sko/ X'fj.. ¢..

Guru Nanak points out the meaninglessness of the belief in sutak,
and instead makes impurity inhere in moral evil.
The Mind's sutak is avarice, the Tongue's falsehood;
The Eyes' sutak is the coveting of the body of another's woman
and his wealth;
The Ear's sutak is pleasure in hearing slander:
Through such defilement, Nanak, men and their souls are dragged
bound to the city of Yama.⁴³ (SGGS, p. 472)

The notion of impurity (*Sutak*) to which the Brahmin attaches crucial importance is rejected by Guru Nanak. Impurity is everywhere: inside cowdung, in wood, in every grain, and even in water, which is the source of life. Impurity enters the kitchen itself. The only way out is to discard the very notion through proper awareness. The impurity of the mind is avarice; impurity of the tongue is falsehood; impurity of the eye is to look at another women (other than one's wife) with lust; impurity of the ear is to listen to slander. Human beings caught in these impurities are bound for hell. The whole idea of *Sutak* is an illusion. Birth and death occur through God's will. Things created by God to eat and drink are pure. They who realize this are free from the superstition of *Sutak*. Food, water, fire, salt and ghee are regarded as holy; when the Brahman eats them, they turn into offal. What deserves to be denounced is the mouth that does not utter the Name and partakes of food without devotion to the Name.⁴⁴

The most researched quote from the Guru Granth Sahib, is invariably by Guru Nanak from his *Asa di Var*.⁴⁵

“From the woman is our birth; in the woman's womb are we shaped.
To the woman are we engaged; to the woman are we wedded.
The woman is our friend, and from the woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another : through the woman are the
bonds of the world.
Why call woman evil who gives birth to kings and all?

⁴³ Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith)*, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1982, p. 60 :

wj|bk ¶..

wB ek ;{se[b'Gj? fjt|k ;{se[e{V[.. nyh ;{se[t/yDk go fsqnk go XB[o{g[..

ezfB ;{se[ezfB g? bk|f|spkoh ykfj.. BkBe jz;k nkdwh pX/ iw g{fo ikfj.. ¶..

⁴⁴ J.S. Grewal, *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, p. 110 :

⁴⁵ Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith)*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 61 :

From the woman is the woman; without the woman there is none;
 Nanak : without the woman is the One True Lord alone.
 The fortunate and gracious, pearl-like, mouth that utters the
 Lord's Praise.
 Is luminescent, Nanak, and it sparkles in the True Court.⁴⁶
 (SGGS, p. 473)

However, there can be no reproduction without women, and there can be no humanity without reproduction. Human beings are conceived by women; men are betrothed to women and marry them; new generations are born; if one woman dies, man seeks another. Why should they be denounced who give birth even to *Rajan*? God alone is independent of women. They who sing his praises are fortunate; their countenances are bright in God's court.⁴⁷ These utterances are held to summarise completely the attitude of all Sikhs to the place that women occupy and it would seem to maintain complete equality for women with men, not just for the Sikh but for everyone. Guru Nanak's words certainly carry us well beyond the conventional view of his time or, for that matter, the present time as well. The other Gurus, too, in McLeod's view support the stand taken by Guru Nanak, opposing such practices as dowries, seclusion and female infanticide as reflecting unmistakably the view held by Indian society in general of the place held in that society occupied by women.⁴⁸ The views of the Sikh Gurus were vastly ahead of those of their contemporary society or at least (assuming we are not in the business of apportioning praise and blame) they were vastly different from them.⁴⁹

Harinder Kaur Sekhon, in her article, *Equality, History, Status of Women in Sikhism*, affirms that the secondary status of women was unacceptable to Sikh philosophy. Women were recognized as the spiritual equals of men and Guru Nanak understood and appreciated the unifying role of women in society and worked for their

⁴⁶ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.467:

Gzfv izwhn? Gzfv fBzwhn? Gzfv wzrD[thnkj[... Gzvj[j't? d'sh Gzvj[ub? okj[...]

Gzv w[nk Gzv Gkbnh? Gzvj[j't? pzXkB[... ;' f'eT[wzdK nkyhn? fis[izwfj okikB..]

Gzvj[jh Gzv[T[gi? Gzv? pkM[B e'f].. BkBe Gzv? pkjok]/e' ;uk ;'f]..]

⁴⁷ J.S. Grewal, *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, Patiala, 2007, p. 111.

⁴⁸ W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 192.

⁴⁹ Harinder Kaur Sekhon, "Equality, History, Status of Women in Sikhism", *Internet Source*, p.1.

emancipation. Sikh scripture categorically states that man and woman together make society a composite and well-balanced whole; the two are complimentary to each other and should not be viewed as a threat to one another.⁵⁰ The Guru reprimands those who consider women as inferior to men. He sees them as active partners in advancing goodwill, general happiness and the collective moral values of society. This declaration definitely requires women to be placed in high esteem.⁵¹

“Worldly love that we behold is insincere.
Wife, friends to their own pleasure are all attached.”⁵²
(SGGS, p.536)

In the words of Guru Tegh Bahadur;

“Woman, associates , progeny, mounts, wealth, even lordship of the earth, All these are false, evanescent : Devotion to God alone will abide.”⁵³ (SGGS, p. 631)

In Doris’s opinion, numerous passages in the scripture associate woman with *maya*, that which is sensual as opposed to spiritual.⁵⁴

“O man, what evil understanding hast thou harboured?
Thou art engrossed in the pleasure of other men’s women and in slander, and the Pervading God, thou, worshippest not”.⁵⁵
(SGGS, p. 632)

⁵⁰ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf>.

⁵¹ J.S. Grewal, *Op.cit*, p. 124.

⁵² Sarup Singh Alag, *An Introduction to sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Sarup Singh Alag, Ludhiana, 1997, p. 38 :

d/ttzXkoh wjBk Í.

irs w? M{mh d/yh gqshh..

ngB/ jh ;[y f;T[;G bkr/ fenk dkk fenk whs..e..ojkT[..
⁵³ *Loc.cit* :

dkok whs g{s oE ;zgfs XB g{oB ;G[wjh..

nto ;rbfwfynk]/ ikBT[GiB[okw[e' wfj..e..

⁵⁴ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 4., Amritsar, 2001, pp. 2072-2073 :

;ofm wjBk g..

wB o/ eT[B e[wfs s? bhBh..

go dkk fBzfdnk o; ofuT okw Grfs Bfj ehBh..e..ojkT[..
81

“Engrossed with other’s wealth and other’s women, he passes his life in vain”.⁵⁶ (SGGS, p. 633)

Guru Tegh Bahadur recurrently stresses on the role played by women in distracting an individual from treading on the spiritual path. The futility of human relationships is brought about in this passage written by the ninth Guru in the Holy Granth.⁵⁷ (SGGS, p. 633)

On page 634, of the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur , while addressing the reader as a dear friend tries to drill through the fact that the ones we love and depend upon greatly are actually the ones to desert us in crisis.⁵⁸

In order to convey their message, the Sikh Gurus make reference to a woman of bad repute in the following quote from the Guru Granth Sahib:

⁵⁶ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, Vol. 4, p. 2076 :

go XB go dkkok f;T[ofuT fpoEak iBw[f;okt? ..l..

⁵⁷ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, Vol. 4, p. 2077 :

;’ofm wjBk ©

Jj jfr whs B d/fyT e’fj..

;rb jrs[ngB? ;[y bkrfT d[y w? ;zfr B j]h..l..ojkT[..

dkkok whs g{s ;BpzXh ;ro/ XB f;T[bkr/..

ip jh fBoXB d/fjT Bo eT[;zr[Skfv ;p Gkr/..l..

ejAT[ejk f:nk wB pT[o/ eT[fjBf;T[B/j[brkfjT..

dhBk BkE ;eb G? GziB iw[ske’fp;okfjT..e..

;[nkB g[SftT[GjT B ;[XT[pj[s[isB[w? ehBT[..

BkBe bki fpod eh okyj[Bkw[s[jkoT[bhBT[..E..©..

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 2079-80 :

;’ofm wjBk ©..}

gqhs w ikfB b/j[w/B wkjh..

ngB/ ;[y f;T[jh ir cAkfXT e’ ekj{ e’ Bkjh..l.. ojkT..

;[y w? nkfB pj[s[fwfb p?ms ojs uj{ fdf; x/o?..

pgfs gfo ;G jh ;zr[Skfvs e’T{ B nkts B/o?..l..

xo eh Bkfo pj[s[fjs[ik f;T[;dk ojs ;zr bkrh..

ip jh jz; sih fj eAkfjnk gq/s gq/s efo Gkrh..e..

fj jpfX e’ fpT[jko[pfBT j? jk f;T[B/j[brkfjT..

nzs pko BkBe fpB[jfo jh e’T{ ekfw B nkfnk..E..le..lE©..

“They, who turn their back upon the True Guru, find no place or room of refuge.

They wander from door to door like a divorced woman of bad character and evil reputation.”⁵⁹ (SGGS, p. 645)

Guru Amardas vehemently criticized the barbaric practice of Sati and his writings from the Holy Granth bear testimony to this fact. He writes that a woman who utters the name of God with her mind, body and mouth is pleasing to the Lord. Apart from this, no other rules are laid for the profession of the Sikh faith by women. The only criteria is single-minded devotion to God. The egalitarian status of the Sikhs within the Sikh Panth is further reinforced by Guru Amardas, when he writes that the *Guru (Lord)* equally loves all Gursikhs, like his friends, sons and brothers.⁶⁰ (SGGS, p. 648)

“Like a wicked woman, they go from house to house with an impure mind”.⁶¹ (SGGS, p. 651)

“Deluded foolish female ! Why blame on God ?”⁶² (SGGS, p. 695)

Although the hymn is addressed to his wife, its message is universal. God, it is said never does anything wrong or bad. Since the fault lies in us, therefore, it is improper to blame God for everything that goes wrong because pain and pleasure are the result of our own deeds and doings. Bhagat Trilochan tries to impress upon his wife that one must face the consequences of one’s deeds. The only way to save oneself from them is to ever remember God with complete devotion. This can save man from all kinds of bondage. God’s grace and remembrance of his name are the only means to wash off the Karmic effects.⁶³ Bhagat Namdev too considers women as equally worthy of the Grace of God.⁶⁴ (SGGS, p. 693)

⁵⁹ Manmohan singh (tr.), *Op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 2116 :

i' j'sr[o s/ w[jfco/ fsBk mT[o B mkT[..*fiT[S[NfV xfo xfo fco? d[jukofD pdBkT[.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2126 :

r[o fyk f]e' fgnko[r[o fwsK gqsk Gkjhnk..

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 2138 :

Tfj xfo xfo fcofj e[;[X wfB fiT{ XoeN Bkoh..

⁶² Sarup Singh Alag, *Op.cit*, p. 55 :

XBk;oh pkDh GrsK eh fsqb'uB y' j'sr[o gq;kfD..

BkokfjDfBdzf; ekfj G{bh rtkoh.. d[feqs ;[feqs Eko' eow[jh.. ojkT[..

⁶³ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. 2269 :

jfo ek pkrok Bku? fgzXh wfj ;krok..l..ojkT[..

Guru Nanak understood the plight of those women who were robbed of their chastity and honour by the mughal soldiers.

“Jaisi Main awai Khasam ki bani taisra kari gian ve Lalo!
My cherished Beloved, I speak what the Lord prompts me to utter.
Babur has descended upon India with the wedding party of lust,
And forcibly demands surrender of India’s womanhood.
Decency and the Law have hidden themselves;
And evil is strutting about in triumph.
Mohammadan and Hindu priests are discarded,
and Satan is making marriages.
The Mohammadan women mutter the Koran,
and invoke their God in this hour of distress.
So also are in panic the women of Hindu faith and the lower castes.
Nanak, blood is the theme of the hymnal for such a wedding;
Blood is also the saffron paste to suit it.
In this city of corpses, Nanak sings praises of the Lord, and
proclaims His Law.”⁶⁵ (SGGS, p.722)

It is to the third Guru, Guru AmarDas, who succeeded Guru Angad Dev in 1552, that both scriptural and popular sources attribute a shift towards the inclusion of women in the Sikh panth. It is to him that tradition credits a definitive criticism of society beyond that of religious ineptitude; much of this criticism is directed towards the situation of

Bkuzsh r'gh izBk..

⁶⁵ Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith)*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 97 :

fsbzs wjBk j ..
i?;h w? nkt? y;w eh pkDh s?;Vh eoh frnkB t/ bkb' ..
gkg eh izR b? ekpbj[gkf]nk i'oh wzr? dkB[t/ bkb' ..
;ow[Xow[d[f] Sfgyb]/ e{V[fco? gogkB[t/ bkb' ..
ekihnk plwDk eh rb Eeh nrd[gV? ;?skB[t/ bkb' ..
w[;bwk Bhnk gVf] es/pk e;N wj eofj y[dkf] t/ bkb' ..
ikfs ;Bksh j'fo fjdtkDhnk j/fj Gh b/y? bkf] t/ bkb' ..
y{B e/ ;fjb/ rkthnfj BkBe os[ek e[z{ t/ bkb' ..
;kfjp e/ r[D rkt? wk; g[oh ftfu nky[w;'bk ..
fifB T[gk]h ozfr otkjh p?mk t/y? t/fy fje/bk ..

women in society.⁶⁶ Sikhism strongly condemns the practice of ‘*Sati*’, alongwith female infanticide and dowry.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf>.

“They are not called Satis, who burn themselves with their husband’s corpses.
 Nanak, they are known as Satis, who die with the sheer shock of separation.
 They too are known as satis, who abide in modesty and contentment, Who wait upon their Lord and rising in the morning ever remember Him.
 The wives burn themselves in the fire with their husbands.
 If they heartily love their spouse, then suffer they great bodily and mental pang ever otherwise.
 Nanak if they love not their husband, why should they burn themselves in fire?
 Whether the husband be alive or dead, such wife remains far away from him”.⁶⁸ (SGGS, p.787)

Equal rules and high standards of morality have been set in the religious scripture of the Sikhs for both men and women by way of references made towards the ideal relationship between a husband and wife.

“They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together.
 Rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies”.⁶⁹ (SGGS, p. 788)

“The love of worldly valuables is like the love of an accursed, ugly, unchaste she-sorcerer”.⁷⁰ (SGGS, p. 796)
 The fourth Guru, further brought out the egalitarian concept in the following

verse :

“Women and men and all the men and women have welled up from the one Lord, the Enemy of pride.”⁷¹ (SGGS, p. 983)

⁶⁸ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 5, Amritsar, 2001, pp. 2563-64 :

;b'e[wj'bk £ ..

Gh ; ;shnk ikDhnfB ;hb ;zs'y ojzfb .. ;t'fB ;k]h nkgDk fBs T[fm ;zwbzfb ..£..

ezsk Bkfb wj/bhnh ;/sh nfr ibkfb .. i/ ikDf fgo[nkgDk sk sfB d[y jkfb ..

BkBe ezs B ikDBh ;/ f'eT[nfr ibkfb .. Gkt? ihtT{ e? woT[d{oj[jh Gfi ikfb ..£..

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 2567 :

wj'bk £..

gB fgo[]/fj B nkyhnfB pjfb fjem/ j'fj..J/e i'fs d[f] w{osh XB fgo[ejhn? ;'fj..£..

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2592 :

f'pbktb[wj'bk l..

wkffnk w'j[XoeNh Bkfo .. Gz{Vh ekwfD ekwfDnkfo ..

⁷¹ *Ibid*, Vol. 6, p. 3224 :

The mother's position is further elevated by the following hymn by the reverend Saint Namdev :

“Blessed, blessed thou art, O Mother Devki, on whose home was born the Lord, the Master of wealth”.⁷² (SGGS, p. 988)

Sikhism introduced the concept of God as Mother and Father. The fifth Guru reinforces the high status given by the first Guru to women.⁷³

“Thou art my Father : Thou art my Mother :
Thou art the Blesser of my vital breath and of my Soul.
Thou art my Master : I am Thy Servant, O God :
Yea, without Thee, there is not another for me.
O God, Bless me with this Boon,
That I hymn Thy Praises ever and forever more.”⁷⁴ (SGGS, p.1144)

“The blind-man abandons his own, and has an affair
With another's woman. He is like the parrot, who is
Pleased to see the simbal tree, but at last dies Clinging to it.”⁷⁵
(SGGS, p.1165)

Sikh Gurus declared that marriage is an equal partnership of love and sharing between husband and wife, who merely sit together. Married life is celebrated to restore to woman her due place and status as an equal partner in life.⁷⁶

⁷² Bkoh g[oy[g[oy[;G Bkoh ;G[]/e' g[oy[w[ro/ ..
Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, Vol. 6, p. 3242 :

gfB gfB s{ wksk d/teh ..
fij frqj oj]hmk etbkgsh ..e..
⁷³ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smpublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf>

⁷⁴ Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 4, New Delhi, p. 1093 :

G?oT[wjBk Í ..
s{ w/ok fgsk s{j? w/ok wksk .. s{ w/o/ ihn gqkB ;[ydksk ..
s{ w/ok mke[o]jT[dk;[s/ok .. s[M fpB[nto[Bjh e' w/ok ..
efo feogk eoj[gqG dkfs .. s[woh T[;sfs eoT[fdB okfs ..e.. ojkT[..
⁷⁵ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smpublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf> :

G?oT[
Bkwd/T[ihT[xo[e
xo eh Bkfo fsnkr? nzXk .. go Bkoh f;T[xkb? XzXk ..
i?;/ f;zpB d/fy ;{nk fpr;kBk .. nzs eh pko w{nk bgNkBg ..e..

⁷⁶ <http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf>

The fifth Guru asserts,
 “The Lord is my Protector, my Mother and Father, through whose meditation one comes not to grief”.⁷⁷ (SGGS, p.1183)

“He, the Lord, is my Mother, Father and Kinsman and my mind is blessed with His Bliss”.⁷⁸ (SGGS, p.1226)

“The wife and husband greatly love each other and meeting together, they increase their love still more”.⁷⁹ (SGGS, p. 1249)

“Between wife and husband there is great love, sitting together they hatch evil designs”.⁸⁰ (SGGS, p.1250)

2) VARAN BHAI GURDAS :

Bhai Gurdas Bhalla is a figure of considerable importance in early Sikh history. The date of his birth is not known, but he is said to have been a nephew of the third Guru, Amar Das.⁸¹ Bhai Gurdas was one of the prominent Sikh personalities, who contributed massively to the interpretation and dissemination of the message of Gurbani. He was a contemporary of Guru Arjan Dev and worked as an amanuensis of Guru Granth Sahib. He was well-versed in the vedic and Islamic tradition. He was equally proficient in the contemporary languages like Punjabi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Braj and Persian. Though an eminent scholar, he mastered the message of Gurbani and transmitted it both through his missionary tours of the different parts of the country and also by writing it down. His major compositions are Varan and Kabitt Savaiyas. The Varan is his basic composition which carries in it the message of Gurbani. Various topics of the Gurbani are taken up by

⁷⁷ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, Vol. 7, p. 3900 :

p;zs[wjbk ..ੴ..

gqG oytkb/ wk]h pkg .. ike? f;wofD Bjh ;zskg ..ੴ..

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4042 :

;kor wjbk Í..

wks fgsK pzXg;? ;]h wfB jfo e' nfbkd..

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4122.

fj;soh g[oy? pj[gq]fs fwfb w]l[tXkf]nk..

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4124 :

gT[Vh..

fj;sqh g[oy? nfs B/]l[pfj wzd[gek]nk..

⁸¹ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 14.

him such as God, Man, Nature, Gurmukh, Manmukh, Nadar, the Sikh way of life, practical aspect of Gurbani, the concept of human responsibility towards other fellow beings and the prominent contemporary Sikhs at the time of the Sikh Gurus.⁸² The Varan of Bhai Gurdas are originally in Punjabi.⁸³

These writings are considered the best specimens of Sikh literature and philosophy.⁸⁴ He was privileged to be associated with Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind.⁸⁵ The year S.1636 (A.D. 1579) is given as the date of his admission by Guru Ram Das to the Sikh community and for a number of years he worked as a missionary in Agra.⁸⁶

Bhai Gurdas became greatly influenced by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru in 1579 AD. He received his early education under the guidance of Guru Amar Das. Bhai Gurdas travelled to far away places like Agra, Lucknow, Burhanpur, and Rajasthan to spread Guru's word under the direction of Guru Amar Das. He returned to Punjab after the death of Guru Ram Das. He had the opportunity to study and observe Sikhism closely in the company of Guru Arjan Dev Ji. This was a very difficult time for the fifth Guru and a period of great challenges and difficulties for the Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas was the first custodian of the Akal Bunga (Akal Takhat Sahib). During the time of Guru Hargobind, Bhai Gurdas went to many far away places like Kabul, Kanshi, Banaras, to spread the message of the Guru. The Sikh congregation was so impressed by Bhai Gurdas that they erected a Gurdwara in his memory in Kabul.⁸⁷

When Guru Arjan decided to compile and prepare a Holy Granth for the Sikh devotees, he chose Bhai Gurdas to assist him in this noble cause. Guru Arjan Dev sifted and scanned the available material with the help of Bhai Gurdas, who was the sole aide of the Guru in compiling the Guru Granth Sahib, which was very meticulously prepared. This copy of the Guru Granth Sahib written in the handwriting of Bhai Gurdas is preserved till today with the family of the Guru's descendants at Kartarpur in the present

⁸² Gurnek Singh (ed.), Surinder Singh Kohli (tr.), *Bhai Gurdas—The Great Theologian, His Life and Work*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, p. iii.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. iv.

⁸⁴ http://www.searchgurbani.com/main.php?book=bhai_gurdas_vaaran&action=index.

⁸⁵ Gurnek Singh(ed.), Surinder Singh Kohli (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. v.

⁸⁶ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p.14.

⁸⁷ http://www.searchgurbani.com/main.php?book=bhai_gurdas_vaaran&action=index.

Jalandhar district of Punjab.⁸⁸ None of his own works were included in the scripture which he transcribed, but his *Vars* are traditionally regarded as ‘the key to the *Guru Granth Sahib*’ and his compositions are specifically approved for recitation in Sikh gurdwaras.⁸⁹ Bhai Gurdas also contributed in the excavation of the sacred pool at Amritsar. Guru Hargobind entrusted the construction work of the Akal Takht, in front of Harmandir, to Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Buddha, the two most revered Sikhs of the time. Bhai Gurdas was also appointed by Guru Hargobind to teach his young son, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ancient classics. He offered *Ardaas* at the time of Guru Arjan Dev’s wife; Mata Ganga’s death in 1621, and also at the time of Bhai Buddha’s death in 1631.⁹⁰

He thereby performed both the religious and social duties assigned to him by the Gurus. His exposition and interpretation of the Sikh tenants is unparalleled till today.⁹¹ Bhai Gurdas was the first ever Sikh theologian who not only expounded the doctrines and concepts of the Gurbani but also preached the messages imparted by the great Gurus for the humanity at large.⁹² Bhai Gurdas was a great scholar of Persian and Sankrit and of comparative religion. He was an exceptional poet, unparalleled in history.⁹³

According to Jodh Singh, Bhai Gurdas may be rightly termed as the first exponent of Sikh way of life rooted in the original lines of the Holy Scripture he had worked on as an adept amanuensis with Guru Arjan Dev.⁹⁴ Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, in his *Mahan Kosh*, opines that no Code of Conduct (Rahitnama) is of more importance than the works (Varan and Kabitts-Savaiyas) of Bhai Gurdas.⁹⁵ He was a scholar well-read in Indian philosophy and Indian culture.

His comments on all the Vedas and the six schools of Indian philosophy are glaring examples of his erudition. He shows the practical superiority of Gurmat which is enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.⁹⁶ He is equally critical about the ritualistic worship

⁸⁸ Gurnek Singh (ed.), Surinder Singh Kohli (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. vi.

⁸⁹ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, 1999, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Gurnek Singh (ed.), Surinder Singh Kohli (tr.), *Op.cit*, p. vi.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. vii.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. viii.

⁹³ http://www.searchgurbani.com/main.php?book=bhai_gurdas_vaaran&action=index.

⁹⁴ Jodh Singh, *Varan Bhai Gurdas : Text, Transliteration and Translation*, Vol. 1, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2004, p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Jodh Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 20.

and particularly the belief in good and bad omens based on auspicious and inauspicious time and events.⁹⁷ In his Varan, he has explained the doctrinal terms and aspects of Gurbani in view of showing their clarity, usefulness and sophistication.⁹⁸ Sikhism is a distinct religion that has its own metaphysics, sociology and epistemology. Bhai Gurdas also accepts it as a separate and original religion.⁹⁹ There is no mention anywhere of the marriage or any other family and progeny related details of Bhai Gurdas. It is therefore almost assumed that Bhai Gurdas was a celibate.

He, however, very much appreciated the part played by women in both social and religious life. He had an enormous respect for them and in one poem, refers to them as “being a gateway to salvation”.¹⁰⁰ (*Var 5, Pauri 16*) This *Pauri* is entirely devoted to the Woman. Gender egalitarianism is very aptly brought about by Bhai Gurdas.

“In her mother’s home the girl is fondled and dearly loved by parents. Among the brothers she is a sister and lives (joyfully) in the full fledged families of the maternal and the paternal grandfathers. Then offering ornaments and dowry etc., and by spending lacs of rupees she is married. In her father-in-law’s house she is accepted as the married wife. She enjoys with her husband, eats variety of foods and always remains bedecked. From a temporal and spiritual point of view, a woman is half of man’s body and assists him to the door of deliverance. She assuredly brings happiness to the virtuous.”¹⁰¹

The above stanza highlights that Bhai Gurdas rejected the then prevalent view, that women were temptresses and seducers of men. In turn, he insisted that men should regard women as their equal, not only in respect but also in consideration, and that they are not merely sex objects to be exploited. All male members were instructed to regard women as either mother, sister or daughter depending on their age, except one’s wife. All

⁹⁷ Jodh Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Hymns From Bhai Gurdas’s Compositions*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1996, p. xiii.

¹⁰¹ Jodh Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 156 :

g/teV/ xfo bkv[bh wkT{ ghT{ yoh fgnkoh. ftfu fGoktK G?BVh BkBe dkde ;gotkoh.
byK you ftnkjhn? rjD? dki[;ki[nfs Gkoh. ;kj[oV? xfo wzBhn? ;Dysh gotko ;Xkoh.
;y wkD? fgo[;iVh Sshj G'iB ;dk ;hrkoh. b'e t/d r[D[frnkB ftfu noX ;ohoh
w'y d{nkoh. r[ow[fy ;y cb fBjuT[Bkoh.

kinds of sexually perverted behaviour were strongly denounced as both anti-social and irreligious.¹⁰² A woman's transition from a girl to womanhood is to be accorded utmost respect as she is regarded as the equal of her spouse in both virtue and wisdom.

Further reference is made by Bhai Gurdas to the sorry plight of widows wherein their mere sight is regarded as a bad omen. It clearly reflects the superstitions prevalent in the society of those times, whose intensity was such that it made a scholar like Bhai Gurdas to not only comment upon it but to also criticize the custom. It is superstitious to draw good or bad omens from meeting a widow, a bare headed man, water, fire, sneezing, breaking wind, hiccups, lunar and week days, lucky-unlucky moments and going or not going in a particular direction.”¹⁰³

Prostitution too has been condemned in the subsequent lines of the same *Var* and stanza where Bhai Gurdas writes that if a woman behaves like a prostitute and does everything to please everybody, how can she be loved by her husband. The *Gurmukhs* who reject all superstitions enjoy happiness with their Lord and get across the world-ocean.¹⁰⁴

In, *Var 5, Pauri 10*, once again illicit relationships are condemned along with the prevalent custom of Sati and other vices. Deluded by them (priests), people worship departed heroes, ancestors, Satis, deceased co-wives, tanks and pits, but all this is of no avail. They who enjoy not only the Holy congregation and the Word of the Guru, die and are born again and rejected of God. It is the follower of the Guru, i.e. *Gurmukh* who wears (God's name as his) diamond necklace.¹⁰⁵

Var 6, Pauri 8, highlights the sanctity given by Bhai Gurdas to the institution of monogamy, by way of description of the characteristics of a knowledgeable person. Having one woman as wife he (the Sikh) is a celibate and considers any other's wife his

¹⁰² Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Op.cit*, p. xiii.

¹⁰³ *Loc.cit* :

tbSb eoh ft;tk; by pj[u[yh fēT[ot? Gskok.

r[ow[fy ;[y cb[gko T[skok.. (*Var 5, Pauri 8*)

¹⁰⁴ Jodh Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 148 :

Blfo g[oy[gkDh nrfB fSe gd fjev h toskok.

fEfs tko Gdqk Gow fd;k;{b j;k ;?;kok. (*Var 5, Pauri 8*)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 150 :

efo eos{fs e[;[s ftfu gkf] d[bhu/ r?D uzd'D/. i'X im/o/ wzBhnfB ;shnkA ;T[s N'GVh N']/.

;kX;zrfs r[o ;pd ftD[wfo wfo izwfB djh ftr]/. r[ow[fy jho/ jkfo go]/.. (*Var 5, Pauri 10*)

daughter or a sister....In the congregation of such people anybody could become authentic as well as respectable.¹⁰⁶

Once again in the same *Var*, *Pauri* 12, infidelity is criticized. Worthy of praise are the hands of such a Sikh who by coming in touch with Guru becomes indifferent to worldly materials and lays not his eyes on another's wife or property; who loves another Sikh and embraces the love, devotion, and fear of God; and who effaces his ego and does not assert himself.¹⁰⁷

The need to respect women and hold them in high esteem is brought out in *Var* 29, *Pauri* 11, wherein Bhai Gurdas outlines the fundamental duties of a Sikh. According to Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh ought to treat beautiful women of others as his mothers, sisters, and daughters. Out of infatuation for his son, wife or family, he should not betray and deceive anyone.¹⁰⁸

The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas differ in form from those of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. His *Vars* accord more with the customary form, a heroic ode of several stanzas (*Pauris*), but no *Shlokas*.¹⁰⁹

A scriptural scholar par excellence, Bhai Gurdas's writings reflect and lament greatly on the socio-religious, economic and political situations of his times. His deep

¹⁰⁶ Jodh Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 169 :

J/ek Bkoh ish j]h go Bkoh Xh G?D tykj?.
go XB[;{no rkf] f]T[weo{j fjzd{ w[;bwkD?.
xo pkoh r{o f]yk ;{sq wb w{sq f]vkD?.
gkopqjw[g{oB pqjw[f]rnkB[f]XnkB r{o f]y f]RkD?.
;kX;zrfs fwfb gfs gotkD?.. (*Var* 6, *Pauri* 8.)

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 173 :

f]eofs f]tofs efo Xow dh jEj[d/ e? Gbk wBkt?.
gko[; gof; ngof; j]f] go sB go XB[j]E B bkt?.
r{o f]y r{o f]y g[i e? Gkf] Grfs G? GkDk Gkt?.
nkg[rtkf] B nkg[rDkt?.. (*Var* 6, *Pauri* 12.)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 198 :

d/fy gok]hnkA uzrhnkA wktkA G?DkA XhnK ikD?.
T[; ;{no[T[; rkf] j? go XB fjzd{ w[;bwkD?.

g[sq ebsq e[Nzp[d/fy w'j/ w'f] B X'f]fXCKD?. (*Var* 29, *Pauri* 11.)

¹⁰⁹ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 14.

knowledge and understanding of contemporary happenings and their intensity forced him to quote the practicalities and harsh realities of life in his writings. His close association with the Gurus too is a well-known fact which may have further prompted him to go ahead and draw a realistic picture of the society and its degenerating standards, particularly showcasing the position of women, who were till then not active participants of the society. Sikh scholars and historians are of the view that there is very little mention of women and their role and status in Sikh studies but a close analysis of historical and scriptural evidence available will reveal that the above claim is not wholly true. There are references which need to be sifted and portrayed appropriately.

3) HAGIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

(I) The Janam Sakhis :

JANAM SAKHI, i.e. life story, is the term used to designate traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak. Several *Janam Sakhi* traditions have evolved, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From small beginnings these traditions rapidly expanded and diversified, supplementing the early nucleus with additional anecdotes and interpretative discourses. The *Janam Sakhis* constitute a substantial corpus of both narrative and exegesis. Their language is mostly Punjabi and their script almost always Gurmukhi. The connotation of *Janam Sakhi* is life-story or a biography. In Sanskrit, *Janam Sakhi* would broadly mean ‘the evidence of the divine mission of the Guru.’¹¹⁰ The *Janam Sakhis* present unanimous testimony concerning details of his birth, parentage, and family connections, and there is unanimity concerning the general outline of his life story.¹¹¹

McLeod refers to the *Janam Sakhis*, as hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, each consisting of a series of separate incidents, or chapters, entitled *Sakhis* or *gosts*. Although these incidents are normally linked in a chronological sequence, the order is frequently erratic and in a few cases it is totally absent. The script used for all the important *Janam Sakhis* is Gurmukhi, and the language used is either Punjabi or the

¹¹⁰ Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, Patiala, 1996, p. 337.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 339; See also, Gurbachan Kaur Kahlon, *Social, Religious Conditions as Reflected in the Janamsakhis in The 17th Century*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1981.

composite dialect called *Sadhukkari* or *Sant Bhasa*. These *Janam Sakhis* are considered as largely unsatisfactory sources of study on account of being based on legend and hear say and an underlying historical element.¹¹² However for the purpose of research and advanced studies in Sikhism, these *Janam Sakhis* are relied upon, since they present vast details on the personal life as well as the philosophy of Guru Nanak.

The first *Var* (*Pauris*, 23-45) and the eleventh *Var* of Bhai Gurdas, (*Pauris* 13-14), highlight a number of traditions of the Guru period and thus is a primary source of Guru Nanak's life.¹¹³ In his introductory note, Surinder Singh Kohli, mentions that amongst all the *Janam Sakhi* traditions available, *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala*, occupies an important place and unparalleled popularity.¹¹⁴ He lists the various *Janam Sakhis* in their respective order and describes each one of them in brief.

The *Janam Sakhis* of the *Bala*, or *Bhai Bala* tradition deserve notice, not because they possess any intrinsic reliability, but because of the immense influence they have exercised in determining what has generally been accepted as the authoritative account of Guru Nanak's life. Throughout the nineteenth century, until the discovery of the *Puratan* manuscripts, the authority of the *Bala* version was unchallenged.¹¹⁵ This version is however considered as least trustworthy by McLeod.¹¹⁶ This *Janam Sakhi* was composed on the instructions of Guru Angad.¹¹⁷ This *Janam Sakhi* has 267 life stories of Guru Nanak.¹¹⁸

Miharban *Janam Sakhi* was written at the behest of Manohar Das Miharban, son of Prithi Chand and grandson of Guru Ram Das. McLeod calls it the most neglected *Janam Sakhi*.¹¹⁹ This *Janam Sakhi* offers much more extensive interpretations of the scriptures which it quotes.¹²⁰ This *Janam Sakhi* has 153 life stories of Guru Nanak.¹²¹ The

¹¹² W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 8.

¹¹³ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Janamsakhi Prampara*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, 2005, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Surinder Singh Kohli (ed.) Jagjeet Singh (Asst.ed.), *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala*, Publication Bureau, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1990, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Op.cit*, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹²¹ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Op.cit*, p. 11.

term **Puratan Janam Sakhis**, or 'Ancient *Janam Sakhi*' refers to a small group of *Janam Sakhis*, which are clearly from a common source which has never been found. It is, however, generally used with reference to the composite work which was compiled by Bhai Vir Singh and first published in 1926. The two most important versions of the Puratan *Janam Sakhis* are the *Colebrooke* and *Hafizabad* versions. The first of these was discovered in 1872 by Dr. Trumpp, while examining the Gurmukhi manuscripts in the possession of the India office Library, London. The manuscript had been donated to the Library of East India House by H.T. Colebrooke, probably in 1815 or 1816, and is accordingly known either by his name or as the *Valaitvali Janam Sakhi*, (the *Janam Sakhi* from overseas.) The second version of the same *Janam Sakhi* had been acquired the previous year in the town of Hafizabad by Bhai Gurmukh Singh of Oriental College, Lahore. Gurmukh Singh passed on the manuscript to Macauliffe who divided off the individual words and had it lithographed at his own expense. The version was designated as the *Hafizabad Janam Sakhi* and is also referred to as *Macauliffe-vali Janam Sakhi*.¹²² This *Janam Sakhi* has 57 sakhis in it.¹²³

The *Gyan Ratanavali*, or *Mani Singh Janam Sakhi*, attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, which has suffered from neglect. This *Janam Sakhi* is held in high esteem because its author Bhai Mani Singh was approached by some Sikhs with the request that he should prepare an authentic account of Guru Nanak's life.¹²⁴

Commenting upon the reliability of these *Janam Sakhis*, Mcleod is of the view that they may be regarded as examples of hagiography and any inclination to treat them as biographies will distort both our understanding of Guru Nanak and our appreciation of the true value of the *Janam Sakhis* themselves.¹²⁵ This *Janam Sakhi* has approximately 117 anecdotes of Guru Nanak.¹²⁶

Presenting his opinion on the use of *Janam Sakhis* as sources of information on the life of Guru Nanak, Khushwant Singh says that the material on which the present-day biographies of Guru Nanak are based is most inadequate from a historian's point of view.

¹²² W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, pp. 15-16.

¹²³ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Op.cit*, p. 14.

¹²⁴ McLeod W.H., *Op.cit*, pp. 24-25.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹²⁶ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Op.cit*, p. 13.

The first attempt to write a biography was made more than fifty years after Nanak's death and, although many people who had known the Guru personally were alive at the time, little attempt was made to record their impressions. Therefore, many other biographies, or *Janam Sakhis* (literally, birth stories) as they are known, were written. We do not know who wrote the first one, nor on what material it was based. The styles of these *Janam Sakhis* clearly show that they were written (with the exception of the biography of Bhai Mani Singh) by semi-literate scribes for the benefit of an wholly illiterate people. They abound with stories of miracles performed by the Guru; they contradict each other on material points; and some were obviously tampered with to suit the interests of those who had been left out in the succession to Guruship. Their contents are further vitiated by the Guru's own compositions in the *Guru Granth Sahib* and by the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. However, it is asserted that the *Janam Sakhis* cannot also be ignored altogether.¹²⁷

Sakhi 23 of the *Puratan Janam Sakhis*, is set in a land called Kauru, or Kavaru, a land ruled by female magicians. They tried everything to enchant Mardana and Guru Nanak. When their efforts failed, Nur Shah, the queen, herself came and on being unsuccessful once again, the women submitted to the divinity of the Guru.¹²⁸ The *Puratan Janam Sakhis*, refer to Guru Nanak's mother but she is not named.¹²⁹

Except the *Miharban*, almost all the *Janam Sakhis*, include this *Sakhi*, which describe the Guru's visit to a country ruled by female magicians. There is variation found in the accounts but the essence of the story is the same. All maintain that Mardana, who went ahead of the Guru to beg for food, was put under a spell by one of these enchantresses and turned into a sheep. When the Guru went in search of him efforts were made to work magic on him also, but to no effect. The women eventually acknowledged his superior power and made their submission to him.¹³⁰

According to McLeod, although the *Sakhi*, may be outrightly rejected as a wonder story, it no doubt leads to the assumption that the land *kavaru*, being referred to

¹²⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1999, p. 299.

¹²⁸ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 41.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 101.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 110.

might be Assam (*Kamrup*), which was a famed home of the Tantras, and the magic described in the *Sakhi* has been taken as a description of tantric practices.¹³¹

McLeod, goes on to analyse this *Sakhi* in great details, both challenging and rejecting it. He clarifies that in the first place, Kamrup was not ruled by women, during the period of Guru Nanak's lifetime, as the rulers of both Eastern and Western Kamrup were men and not women. Moreover, the possibility of a kingdom within Kamrup being ruled by women is also ruled out. A very interesting fact brought out here by McLeod here is that Matrilineal descent was a feature of Khasi and Garo society, but it was not one which produced queens or chieftainesses. As a result of this custom, women inherited not power or property, but such inheritances descended through them to their sons.¹³² McLeod further rejects this *Sakhi*, on the ground that stories concerning *Stri-des*, (the land of women), were already very popular long before Guru Nanak's time, but it does correspond closely to the *Stri-des* of puranic and tantric legend. Regarding the location of the occurrence of this particular *Sakhi*, The India Office Library manuscript B-40, gives the land an unspecified location 'beside the ocean', the *Gyan-Ratanavali* places it in the south country immediately before the crossing to Ceylon, and the *Puratan* and *Bala* versions set it in kauru or Kavaru. Miharban and Bhai Gurdas omit it altogether.¹³³

McLeod's analysis brings to light a few amazing facts. One, that the people of the time were no doubt fascinated with the idea of an all-woman government, definitely a Utopian thought, secondly inheritance rights still vested in the hands of the men, but, the women did have some amount of an influence in deciding the inheritor. Thirdly, these women were no ordinary ones but supposedly had magical powers, and hence were in a position to at least challenge a Guru of the stature of Guru Nanak. The earliest visible traces of matriarchy are found in this *Sakhi*.

Sakhi 11, of Miharban *Janam Sakhi*, briefly describes the marriage of Guru Nanak, who was betrothed to the daughter of Mula, a Chona (Khatri) of Batala, at the age

¹³¹ *Loc.cit.*

¹³² W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit.*, p. 111.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 112.

of 16. In *Gosht* 22, his wife's name is given as Ghumi.¹³⁴ The name of Guru Nanak's sister also is not recorded.¹³⁵

Bhai Bala Wali Janam Sakhi, mentions Guru Nanak's exemplary love for his sister, Nanaki. It is popularly believed that the Guru physically transported himself within seconds, whenever his sister Nanaki expressed her desire to see him.¹³⁶

The *Puratan Janam Sakhi* refers both to Guru Nanak's sister and wife but does not provide their names. The Guru's father-in-law is named as one Mula, a Chona Khatri and Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand are mentioned as the sons of Guru Nanak. The *Miharban Janam Sakhi*, states that Nanak's mother was Tipara and that his wife was Ghumi. His sister is not mentioned but plainly indicated in reference to Jai Ram as Guru Nanak's bahanoi (brother-in-law). Once again, names of his wife's father and sons are given. The *Gyan Ratnavali*, names his mother Tripata, and Nanaki as his sister. Guru Nanak's wife is referred to but not named. The *Bhai Bala Janam Sakhi*, provides the maximum details on the family life of Guru Nanak, whereby his mother is Tripata, maternal grandmother is Bhirai; Mother's brother-Krisna; sister-Nanaki; wife-Sulakhani; wife's mother-Chando Rani; etc.¹³⁷

The *Adi Sakhis* or the 'First collection of *Sakhis*' were discovered by Mohan Singh Dewana of Punjab University, Lahore, in the University's Library. This happened at some unspecified date prior to the partition of India in 1947. A *Janam Sakhi* manuscript which recorded a version different from any of the extant traditions was discovered and Mohan Singh Dewana named this collection as the '*Adi Sakhis*'. However, Mohan Singh Dewana did not make a complete copy of the manuscript and efforts to trace it made in early 1969 proved unsuccessful. In the meantime, however, four manuscript copies of the same collection had been located on the Indian side of the border by Professor Piar Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala, and in October 1969 Piar Singh published a printed edition of the text. The name '*Adi Sakhis*' is considered misleading as it implies a precedence which in fact, the *Janam Sakhi* does not possess. Therefore the theory that the *Adi Sakhis* represent a 'first' collection must be rejected.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54.

¹³⁶ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 167.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 102-103.

However, the *Adi Sakhis* in their earliest extant forms are the products of a continuing process of expansion. The only possible information that can be asserted through the original *Adi Sakhis* collection is that they must have been compiled during the seventeenth century; and secondly, that it incorporates material from earlier sources.¹³⁸ Apart from other valuable contents, the *Adi Sakhis* contain information on the birth of Guru Nanak, his betrothal and Guru Nanak's visit to the country ruled by women.¹³⁹

The ***B40 Janam Sakhi*** or the *B40* manuscript (so called because of the number which it bears in the India Office Library catalogue) is perhaps the most important of all extant *Janam Sakhis*. This is partly on account of the quality of its illustrations; partly because of the unusually specific information which is provided concerning its origins; but chiefly because it is the most representative of all *Janam Sakhis*, in terms of its content. It is like all *Janam Sakhis*, a composite product. Oral and written sources have both been used by its compiler.¹⁴⁰

It is the oldest extant manuscript of the Punjabi language. The year of its completion is 1733 A.D. and the *Janam Sakhi* manuscript has 57 paintings.¹⁴¹

The *B-40 Janam Sakhi* also portrays the betrothal and marriage of Guru Nanak.¹⁴² The *B-40 Janam Sakhi* names Kalu as Guru Nanak's father in *Sakhi* no.2a.¹⁴³ There is also reference to Guru Nanak arriving in a country ruled by women in *Sakhi* no.22, where the women of the kingdom changed Mardana into a ram.¹⁴⁴ The *B-40 Janam Sakhi* provides a valuable insight into the peaceful society of that time as the compiler of this *Janam Sakhi* lays stress upon the belief in the Guru's mystical presence within the *Sangat*.¹⁴⁵

(II) Dasam Granth :

In very simple terms, the *Dasam Granth*, is hypothetically, a collection of the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh. According to Macauliffe, Bhai Mani Singh

¹³⁸ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, pp. 31-32.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 278.

¹⁴¹ Surjit Hans (ed.), *B-40 Janam Sakhi; Guru Baba Nanak Paintings*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, n.d., p. 5.

¹⁴² W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 230.

¹⁴³ Surjit Hans (ed.), *Op.cit*, no standard pagination.

¹⁴⁴ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 230.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 265.

compiled the compositions and translations of the tenth Guru, and of the bards who were associated with him. Subsequently the composition was known as the Granth of the tenth Guru (*Dasam Granth*) though this title was not given by Bhai Mani Singh.¹⁴⁶

Authorship of the Granth is debatable and controversial till date, therefore certain portions of the Granth are not generally relied upon by the Sikh historians. This is reasonable because after the execution of Bhai Mani Singh, Sikhs took the volume to Talwandi Sabo, as several learned Sikhs resided there. On analysis, it was found that many of the tales and translations in the volume, as at present found, ought not to have been included in it, for they are of Hindu origin, not fit for perusal and none comparable with the hymns contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikhs therefore maintained that the *Hikayat* or Persian tales, and the whole of the *Triya Charitar*, or stories illustrating the deceit of women, should be omitted, and included in a separate volume, which may be read, not for a religious purpose, but for the entertainment and delectation of the public.¹⁴⁷

The compilation can be conveniently divided into four parts: mythological, philosophical, autobiographical and erotic. The *Pakhyan Charitar* and the *Hikayats* are fables of the wiles of women in a corrupt and decadent society. The stories are not original and abound with erotic passages.¹⁴⁸

The *Dasam Granth* consists of the *Bachitra Natak* (Play Marvellous), *Gian Prabodh* (consciousness of Knowledge), *Shabad Patshahi X* (Verses of the Tenth Sovereign), *Sastra Nam Mala* (The Necklace of the Names of Weapons), *Pakhyan Charitar* (Tales of Deceit), *Zafarnamah* (The Letter of Victory), *Hikayat*, comprises of stories in Persian language, written in Gurmukhi characters.¹⁴⁹ It also contains *Chandi Charitar*, *Ramavtar* and *Krishnavtar*. *Pakhyan Charitar* (Tales of Deceit) covering 7555 verses of Charit Kavya, is the largest composition in the *Dasam Granth*. “Patshahi X” is mentioned at the very beginning of the work as the signature title. The 404 tales may be divided into categories such as tales of the bravery, devotion, or intelligence of women,

¹⁴⁶ M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V&VI, Satvic Media Pvt. Ltd., Amritsar, 2000, p.260.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 260.

¹⁴⁸ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Vol.I, 1469-1839*, 1999, p. 313.

¹⁴⁹ Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1992, pp. 516-517; See also, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, “Sikhism (Women)”, *Encyclopaedia of Women and World Religion*, (ed.), Serinity Young, Macmillan Reference, New York, 1999, Vol. 2, pp. 904-07.

78 in number, of the deceitfulness and unscrupulousness of women, 269, of the deceitfulness of men, 26.¹⁵⁰

The *Akal Ustat* is a poetical composition by Guru Gobind Singh in the *Dasam Granth*. About one-third of the poem is a satire on false methods of worship. It presents a mixture of devotional lyrics and philosophical reflections.¹⁵¹

The Guru's *Akal Ustat* (Praise of the Immortal), rejects the belief that a widow who cremates herself with her husband's corpse obtains salvation. "If salvation be obtained by burning oneself in the fire, why should not the Sati and also the serpent which liveth in hell be saved?" If salvation were obtained by dwelling beneath the earth, the snake which dwelleth in the nether regions should also be saved.¹⁵² On the one hand, we have a singular instance of the Guru denouncing and condemning the socially cast injustices on women of the period.

Elsewhere in the *Dasam Granth*, there are 404 tales, with themes of love, sexual intrigue and violence.¹⁵³ Regardless of whether its authorship can be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh or not, the work is of considerable importance in understanding gender construction in the immediate post-guru period, writes Doris R. Jakobsh.¹⁵⁴ With respect to the portion of the *Dasam Granth* most directly concerned with females, *Charitropakhian*, we find a male-authored text tailored to a male audience presenting a male assessment of females.

Does Doris here mean to say that the section of the *Dasam Granth* devoted entirely to the wiles of women and their miserable projection in print, indicates the position of women in contemporary society, more than the equality and superior aesthetics and morality advocated by the Guru Granth Sahib. For her, authorship of the *Dasam Granth* is not at all important, what is important is the rude mockery that the women are subjected to within the *Dasam Granth*. There are conferences and symposiums being held in the present times to equate the Guru Granth Sahib alongwith

¹⁵⁰ Harbans Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 517.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵² M.A. Macauliffe, *Op.cit*, p. 275.

¹⁵³ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History-Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45. (a) *Sikhism and Women : History, Texts and Experience*, (ed. Doris R. Jakobsh), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, p. 57.

the *Dasam Granth*, and various arguments are being put forward strongly in favour of holding the two at par with each other. But history rejects all kinds of religious fanaticism and therefore scholars, historians and students of Sikh studies do not believe in the claim of some religious sections that the *Dasam Granth* is indeed a work of Guru Gobind Singh. It is both strange and ironical that the *Dasam Granth*, inspite of being shrouded in controversy, is firstly considered at par with the Guru Granth Sahib by some and secondly, it is being highly revered and respected by the same group, although it is not only unfair and unjust to place it in the same league as the Guru Granth Sahib, in the absence of adequate proof in its favour.

According to Khushwant Singh, the most disputed writings in the *Dasam Granth* are the erotic portions in the *Pakhyani Charitar*. There is enough evidence in the text itself to prove that these portions were not written by Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁵⁵

It is most unlikely that the Guru as the spiritual leader of his people would have ever allowed his name to be associated with a composition of the type of *Pakhyani Charitar*. His lofty character and the value he set on Spartan living do not go with the prurience of the kind found in some of the passages of the *Dasam Granth*. The conclusion arrived at by the scholar here is that much of the writing of the *Dasam Granth* is from the pen of poets other than that of Guru Gobind Singh. The only portions that can with some certainty be ascribed to him are those which he, during his own lifetime, exhorted his followers to recite as parts of their prayer or read in the performance of ritual such as baptism. Some of the compositions may have been his but any categorical assertion on the subject would be hazardous.¹⁵⁶

The *Janam Sakhis* are considered as hagiographical accounts, with no historical proof regarding their whereabouts to support them and similar is the case with the *Dasam Granth* and the debate over its authorship, the *Gurbilas* Literature also suffers more or less the same fate, which leaves us with just one standard work in the Sikh religion, the Guru Granth Sahib. It is not only a source of true knowledge but in a great way the perhaps the only authentic source, which advocates egalitarianism in all aspects of man's life, the humanity at large is addressed throughout the Guru Granth Sahib, where a true

¹⁵⁵ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1999, p. 315.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 316-317.

Sikh is asked to rise above the distinctions of caste, creed, colour, customs, traditions, sex, religion, etc, in short the concept of Universal brotherhood being advocated today has its origins in the Guru Granth Sahib.

(III) Gurbilas Literature :

In the seventeenth century we see the scope of Punjabi literature expanding in several ways. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, each a masterpiece of Punjabi poetry, have been seen by Sikh scholars as the key to the Guru Granth Sahib. It is true that Bhai Gurdas sings of Sikh beliefs and practices but he sings also of the Sikh Panth. In fact the social and cultural life of the region finds ample space in his *Vars*. A new form of Punjabi literature took shape in the seventeenth century: the *Janamsakhi*. Among many other things, the *Janam Sakhis* represent the earliest examples of Punjabi prose which is remarkable for its simplicity and economy of expression. The Sufi poets carried forward the literary tradition of Shaikh Farid and Shah Husain. Damodar Gulali, a writer of the Multan region, composed the folklore of Hir as a piece of secular literature to be sung by minstrels for all Punjabis; Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh.¹⁵⁷

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, apart from some new *Janam Sakhis*, we come upon *Gurbilas* literature, starting with *Sainapat's Gursobha* in the early 18th century and culminating in the classic works of Bhai Santokh Singh and Ratan Singhm Bhangu, both completed in the 1840's.¹⁵⁸ The eighteenth and nineteenth century historiography in the '*Gurbilas*' literature provides accounts of how the Gurus and their closest disciples embedded the scripture in courtly symbolism and stipulated models for a future ministry that would evoke imaginaries of the text as a worldly sovereign. For contemporary Sikhs, these textual references legitimize the careful choreography of their actions in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Descriptions of what the Gurus did in the past function as prescriptions for proper handling of the text in the present.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.southasiapost.org/2005/20051231/culture.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ J.S. Grewal, "Origin of Punjabi Language, Literature and Culture", *South Asia Post*, Issue 6, Vol. 1, December 31, 2005, (excerpt taken from Internet link-<http://www.southasiapost.org/2005/20051231/culture.htm>.)

¹⁵⁹ Kristina Myrvold, "Personifying The Sikh Scripture, Ritual processions of the Guru Granth Sahib in India", Jacobsen Knut A., *South Asian Religions on Display : Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*, Inc.Netlibrary, Routledge, 2008, pp.142-143. (taken from Internet link-<http://books.google.co.in/books?id=oIucumd5CNEC>).

The *Gursobha* or *Gurbilas* are basically the accounts of Guru Gobind Singh. Although they are in biographical form, it would be wrong to refer to them as biographies. The *Gursobha* of *Sainapat* was the first to be composed immediately after the death of Guru Gobind Singh and before the establishment of the Sikh rule under Banda Bahadur. Towards the end of the 18thc, the *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi* by Sukha Singh, once again dealing with the life and works of Guru Gobind Singh. The *Gursobha* advances the cause of redemption by recording the miraculous events of the life of Guru Gobind Singh, who according to it was born to redeem the earth of all evil.¹⁶⁰

The *Sri Gursobha* by *Sainapat* was written in 1711, almost immediately after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The work apart from mentioning the battles of Guru Gobind Singh also refers to him as 'God'.¹⁶¹ Facts regarding his physical appearance and his military genius is aptly described.¹⁶² The theological importance of the *Khalsa* is also underlined.¹⁶³ The *Gursobha* become a *defacto* manifesto of Sikh rule in the 18thC.¹⁶⁴ The Udasi stamp is partially visible in Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi*, written in 1797.¹⁶⁵ *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi*, provides explicit details of the historical importance of the vision of Guru Nanak.¹⁶⁶

The *Gur Sobha* or "*The Splendor of the Guru*"—as a form of historical representation, suggesting reasons for the importance of the representation of the past as history within Sikh discursive contexts. The text in question provides an account of the life, death, and teachings of the last of the ten living Sikh Gurus or teachers, Guru Gobind Singh. The article argues that the construction of history in this text is linked to the transition of the Sikh community at the death of the last living Guru whereby authority was invested in the canonical text (Granth) and community (Panth). As such a particular rationale for history was produced within Sikh religious thought and intellectual production around the discursive construction of the community in relation to the past and as a continuing presence. As such, the text provides an alternative to modern

¹⁶⁰ Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History From Sikh Literature*, ABS Publications, Jalandhar, 1988, p. 245.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

European forms of historical representation, while sharing some features of the "historical" as defined in that context. The essay relates this phenomenon to a broader exploration of history in South Asian contexts, to notions of historicity that are plural, and to issues particular to the intersection of history and religion. Later texts, through the middle of the nineteenth century, are briefly considered, to provide a sense of the significance of Gur Sobha within a broader, historically and religiously constituted Sikh imagination of the past.¹⁶⁷

The *Gurbilas* form of writing like the *Janam Sakhi* form, was used by writers to put forth ideas that were unknown to the original works in that genre. The *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* and *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* are two important and contemporary works of this kind. The authorship of *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, attributed to Koer Singh is also debatable. Written in the mid-eighteenth century, it is based on the 'Bachittar Natak' and Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi*. This work is heterodox in nature. According to it Goddess (Devi) asked for the creation of the Khalsa.¹⁶⁸ Guru Gobind Singh, here is portrayed paradigmatically as a hindu incarnation.¹⁶⁹

'Women, people, land and money are faithful to none', writes the author. Regarding this, Surjit Hans maintains that such ideas would have been simply suicidal and silly for the Sikhs to hold in the middle of the eighteenth Century.¹⁷⁰

Believed to have been written by Sohan Kavi in 1718 A.D. is another equally important work, the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi*. Guru Hargobind here is portrayed in the image of Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁷¹ It is also observed that the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi*, is of negligible importance as a source of information on the life of Guru Hargobind. The author of this *Gurbilas* projects Guru Hargobind a 19th C lay enthusiast of Sikh shrines seeking cures for petty ills of life.¹⁷²

It also projects Baba Buddha as a great Sikh.¹⁷³ The *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* is an excellent corpus of evidence on the nineteenth century rituals of the Sikhs about the

¹⁶⁷ <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118501960/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>.

¹⁶⁸ Surjit Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 267.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 268.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 269.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 270.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 271.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 272.

Guru Granth Sahib, the ceremonies at Harimandir Sahib, and the rites of birth, marriage and death.¹⁷⁴ Surjit Hans infers that the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* can be sub-titled, 'Magic and the Decline of Religion'.¹⁷⁵

Gurbilas as a literary genre is unique in Sikhism. The genre tries to explicate the political programme of the community in terms of Sikh theology. It is a challenge of Sikh politics of today and its exponents. We can define our politics either theologically or rationally. To do it in either of the ways leads what is "less fortunate".¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Surjit Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 272.

¹⁷⁵ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁷⁶ Surjit Hans, in his review of W.H. McLeod's, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, Spectrum Supplement-The Tribune, Sunday, September 8, 2002.

CHAPTER-III

GENDER ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN HUKAMNAMAS AND RAHITNAMAS

Hukamnamas :

Hukamnama, is a compound of two Persian words *Hukm*, meaning *Command* or *Order* and *Namah* meaning *Letter*.¹ McLeod's *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* defines the *Hukamnama* as a 'Letter of command'. Literally, these were documents sent from the time of Guru Hargobind to Sangats or individuals, giving instructions or requesting assistance.² The Hukamnamas are an important source of Sikh history. Most scholars consider them a valuable source of evidence on the life and mission of the Sikh Gurus. They throw light on the organization of the Sikh congregations and also provide invaluable insights on a number of issues related to the Sikh Panth.³ The first Hukamnama from the Akal Takht was issued by Guru Hargobind himself. This Hukamnama directed the Sikhs to wear arms for self defence. Since then, many Hukamnamas have been issued. In 1998, a very important Hukamnama was issued regarding the respect that should be shown to Sri Guru Granth Sahib.⁴ Currently, the word also applies to edicts issued from time to time from the five *takhats* or seats of high religious authorities for the Sikhs.⁵

From the very beginning, tremendous amount of religious importance has been attached to the *Hukamnamas* issued by the Sikh Gurus. These *Hukamnamas* were both received and obeyed by with great religious fervour and respect by the Sikh congregations assembled in the Gurudwaras to whom they were addressed and read out aloud. Sikhs considered adherence to these *Hukamnamas* as their religious duty. The *Hukamnamas* were issued for a variety of reasons from time to time, such as those relating to the Guru's kitchen, donation to run religious centres, in order to cater to the

¹ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php?title=Hukamnama>.

² W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, p.107.

³ <http://www.bagchee.com/books.php?id=47677>.

⁴ http://satkar.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=34

⁵ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php?title=Hukamnama>.

needs of the Sikh congregation, for the purchase of arms and ammunition, instructions about preaching, reconciliation between dissident factions, communication between the Guru and his Sangat, or in happier times, invitations to meet the Guru and warnings to the Masands, etc. Over a period of time, these *Hukamnamas* acquired historical value alongwith religious significance.⁶

Many of the *Hukamnamas* which were lost during the period of Sikh struggle could have been useful in the writing of Sikh history.⁷ During the times of the Sikh Gurus, many faithful Sikhs would get copies of the Guru Granth Sahib handwritten and carry them along while coming to meet the Sikh Guru. They would then humbly request the Guru to leave their hand-written impression on a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurus did not write their names on it but obliged their followers by writing either “Ik Omkar Gursat”, “Ik Omkar Satguru Prasad”, “Ik Omkar Gursat”, etc. These came to be known as ‘*Nisans*’ (memoirs of the Gurus).⁸

All *Hukamnamas* were originally written in Punjabi, in Gurmukhi characters. Those of Guru Hargobind and also most of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s are believed to have been written in their own hand.⁹ The *Nisans* and *Hukamnamas* of the ninth Guru constitute a fresh source of evidence regarding his life and work. The *Nisan* is primarily a special piece of writing in the Gurus own hand carrying the authority of the Master and on that account is a sort of a seal on epistles. The *Nisan* thus helps in authentication of epistles.¹⁰ The *Hukamnamas* of the ninth Guru are found to be useful in many respects.¹¹

Hukamnamas also provide specimens of Punjabi prose of the 17thC.¹² On the one hand these *Hukamnamas* largely and strongly exposed corruption amongst the *Masands* and on the other hand, urged the people to make direct offerings to the Guru. Further these *Hukamnamas* also throw light on the economic conditions of the different

⁶ Ganda Singh (ed.), *Hukamname*, Guru Sahiban, Mata Sahiban, Banda Singh and Khalsa Ji De, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

⁹ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php?title=Hukamnama>

¹⁰ Fauja Singh (ed.), *Hukamnamas, Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib*, (Punjabi, Hindi, English), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, p. 34.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 35.

¹² Ganda Singh (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 36.

parts of the region. *Hukamnamas* also reflect upon the close relationship that existed between the Guru and his Sikhs, as the Guru calls them by name.¹³

Regarding the *Hukamnamas*, they do not in any way reflect gender biases and at the same time also do not tackle the issue of gender. However, in one of his *Hukamnamas* issued to the Sikh sangat at Patna (*Hukamnama no. 15*), Guru Tegh Bahadur instruct them to take good care of his family and lodge them in a big and decent mansion.¹⁴

Hukamnamas were also issued by Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Devi, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. They were the first women to wield religious authority and this authority was placed in their hands by the Sikh sangat. Their instructions were followed with equal zest and fervour by the Sikhs as they had obeyed the instructions of their Gurus. This is also the first instance of formal delegation of power to its female members by a religious community. Although Sikh women had been associated with the institution of *Langar* since the age of Guru Nanak, issuance of *Hukamnamas* by Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Devi, brought them into the stream of decision-making.

Rahitnamas :

RAHITNAME plural of Rahitnama (*Rahit* = conduct, stipulated conduct or way of life; *Name*: letters, writings, manuals) is a term used in Punjabi in reference to a genre of writings specifying authentic way of life for a Sikh. These writings, enunciating conduct and behaviour in accordance with the principles of the Sikh religion contain instructions regarding personal and social behaviour, applicable especially to those who have been admitted to the Khalsa brotherhood through baptism. Sikhism laid as much stress on correct personal conduct as on the purity of mind. Guru Nanak for whom truth is synonymous with God recognizes the sovereignty of conduct (*SGGS*, 62). “His conduct will alone be pure who cherishes Him in his heart,” says Guru Nanak in another of his hymns (*SGGS*, 831). And “rahini, i.e. conduct moulded in accordance with shabad, is the truest conduct” (*SGGS*, 56). Rahit as right thinking and right action is also distinguished

¹³ <http://www.info-sikh.com/PageG8.html>.

¹⁴ Fauja Singh (ed.), *Hukamnamas, Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib*, (Punjabi, Hindi, English), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, p. 97 :

e'jh ntb jt/bh j't/ pVh j't? fs; w' ephb/ jwko/ oyD? ;zrfs e/ r[o{ o[irko w'
poefs eo?rk ;/tk eh t/bk j?.

from rahit as outward formal appearance by Guru Arjan, Nanak V: “(The misguided one) acts differently from the rahit he proclaims; he pretends love (for God) without devotion in his heart; (but) the Omniscient Lord knows all and is not beguiled by external form” (SGGS, 169). Besides these general statements, more specific instructions for the moral guidance of a believer are found throughout the Sikh scriptures.¹⁵

The *Rahitnamas* are manuals of Rahit principles, spelling out what a Sikh may do and what he should avoid. They are, in other words, works which claim to record the *Rahit* as it was delivered by Guru Gobind Singh at the founding of the Khalsa order. Several *Rahitnamas* exist, out of which six deserve close analysis, says McLeod. Two are attributed to Nand Lal, and one each to Prahilad Rai (or Prahilad Singh), Chaupa Singh, Desa Singh and Daya Singh. In addition to these there are later *Rahitnamas* such as the *Prem Sumarg* and two *Rahitnamas* set in the *Sau Sakhian*.¹⁶ The *Rahit*, according to McLeod, is the code of belief and conduct which all members of the Khalsa are required to obey.¹⁷

The literature containing the rahit can broadly be divided into three categories; the textual source which includes Sikh scriptures, other approved Sikh canon, and hukamnamas; the traditional Sikh history including janamsakhis, gurbilases and Guru Gobind Singh’s own announcement not to have a personal successor and to pass on the guruship jointly and permanently to the Guru Granth Sahib and the Panth (Khalsa Brotherhood). The textual sources with such precepts as can be extrapolated from them are accepted as general constituents of the Sikh rahit. Among the sources of traditional Sikh history, the most important are the utterances traced directly to the Gurus, especially Guru Gobind Singh who laid down, at the time of the inauguration of the Khalsa in 1699, rules of conduct and introduced regulations to confer upon his followers a distinct identity. However, these sources do not, strictly speaking, belong to the genre known as *Rahitnamas*.

Bhai Nand Lal and some other Sikhs contemporary or near-contemporary with Guru Gobind Singh compiled the first *Rahitnamas*. The chief Khalsa Diwan’s Gurmat Prakash Bhag Sanskar (Amritsar, 1915), Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee’s

¹⁵ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>.

¹⁶ W.H. McLeod, (ed.), *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, pp.127-128.

¹⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p.4.

Sikh Rahit Maryada (Amritsar, 1950) and the English translation *Rahit Maryada : A Guide to the Sikh Way of Life* (London, 1971) are the modern versions of *Rahitnamas*. The authorship and dates of composition of some of the latter-day *Rahitnamas* are disputary, interpolations are not ruled out, either. Most of these works are ascribed to Sikhs closely connected with Guru Gobind Singh; they are in some instances described as dictated or authenticated by the Guru himself.¹⁸

Three of Bhai Nand Lal's works fall in the category of *Rahitnamas*. *Rahitnama* Bhai Nand Lal, in *Sadhukari* verse, is in the form of a dialogue between the poet and Guru Gobind Singh during which the latter expounds the rules of conduct laid down for a Gursikh or true follower of the faith. The penultimate verse (22) of the *Rahitnama* indicates that this dialogue took place at Anandpur on 5 December 1695, i.e. before the creation of the Khalsa.¹⁹ This *Rahitnama* is of two stanzas and is written in Punjabi.²⁰ Also known as *Sakhi Rahit Ki*, was possibly written in the mid 1730s. It gives an impression of peaceful times, which are not easily reconciled with the middle years of the eighteenth century.²¹

Sakhi Rahit Ki clearly talks about the treatment of women, wherein there are contradictory views, on the one hand, it says, "never trust a woman", and on the other, asks not to cast lecherous eyes on the women of another man's family.²² In addition the *Rahitnama* provides general instructions to be followed by the Khalsa Sikhs and deals in detail with the daily discipline expected of all Sikhs.²³ The *Rahitnama* stresses upon the importance of the performance of the daily prayers (*Nitnem*) by the Sikhs.

The *Tanakhah-nama* of Bhai Nand Lal consisting of 62 couplets, was composed after the creation of the Khalsa and is in question-answer form.²⁴

It deals directly with rules and injunctions, especially those breach of which attracts a religious penalty, *tankhah* in Sikh terminology. Punishment prescribed in this *Tankhahnama* is neither corporeal nor pecuniary, but consists in Guru's displeasure or

¹⁸ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>.

¹⁹ *Loc.cit.*

²⁰ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *The Making of the Sikh Rehatnamas : The Sikh Code of Conduct*, Hemkunt Publishers (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2008, p. 11.

²¹ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 91.

²² *Ibid*, p. 92.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 93.

²⁴ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *Op.cit*, p. 17.

imprecation. Besides religious and moral practices of a general nature, it alludes to rules of personal and social etiquette, even of personal hygiene. The last verse of *Tankhahnama*, which the Sikhs usually recite in unison after *Ardaas*, contains the well-familiar litany, *Raj karega khalsa*.²⁵ The *Tanakhahnama* lays down rules of conduct to be religiously followed by a Sikh of the Khalsa, relating to the duties and privileges of the Khalsa, doctrine and devotion, dress and outward appearance, bathing and personal hygiene, crimes and misdemeanours, social relationships, charity, Sangat, Guru Granth Sahib, rituals, preparation of Karah Prasad, preparation and consumption of food, weapons and warfare, dangers of being in the company of false teachers, attitude towards Hindus, attitude towards Muslims, and some sundry prohibitions.²⁶ Regarding gender issues and concerns, the *Rahitnamas* very openly, though briefly, discuss the attitudes to be developed towards women by a member of the Khalsa.

In McLeod's view, the issue of the sexual morality of the Khalsa is strongly emphasized and an equally strict message regarding the same appears in this *rahitnama*.²⁷ "Do not look with lustful eyes on women who enter the sangat. A Khalsa must not have sexual relations with any woman other than his wife. Do not visit a prostitute, nor show affection for another's wife."²⁸ A Sikh is further warned against marrying off one's daughter to a non-Khalsa Sikh. "Accept no price for your daughter's or sister's hand."²⁹ The *Prahlad Rai Rahitnama*, was written by Prahlad Rai, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh. He was a renowned scholar who translated 50 Upanishads into vernacular

²⁵ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>.

²⁶ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs Of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 83-86.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 87.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 84; See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *The Making of the Sikh Rehatnamas*, 2008, pp. 20-21 :

fsq: okr ;[fD fus bk]/ ;[Dj[bkb ;' iw g[o ik]/..Eo..

fsnkrh p;s rfjD i' eo? fPB fsq:k nkgDh ;i i' Xo?..Ee..

go f;sqh f;T[A Bj[z brkt? ej/ r'fpzd f;zx t[j f;y Bk Gkt?..Ee..

ykb;k ;fj wkB i' fsnkr? ykb;k ;fj i' gosqhnk s/ Gkr?..Ee..

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.85; See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 18 :

Xh G?D ek g?;k ykfj eo/ r'fpzd f;zx gZe/ iw ykfj..Ee..

language on the instructions of Guru Gobind Singh. This *Rahitnama* is believed to have been written after the birth of the Khalsa at Nanded.³⁰

The *Prahlad Rai Rahitnama*, describes the nature of the Khalsa, while simultaneously laying down the rules of behaviour for a Khalsa Sikh. A strict instruction given here is to never visit a prostitute. Sikhs of the Khalsa are further restrained from dealing with the Minas, followers of the Masands, those who cut their hair or those who kill their daughters.³¹

Female infanticide is introduced for the first time and Khalsa Sikhs should have no dealings with those who practice it, writes McLeod.³² Existence of female infanticide amongst the Sikhs is provided adequate support by this *Rahitnama* and the fact that the *Rahitnamas* denounced it strongly indicates the stand taken by the religion against gender discrimination. Status of a woman is upheld in Sikhism by outright condemnation of the practice of female infanticide.

Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh presents in prose, to begin with, the rules of conduct as coming from the lips of Guru Gobind Singh himself; in this case the author is the first among the Panj Piare.³³ According to McLeod, amongst all the *Rahitnamas* this is perhaps the most difficult one to analyse.³⁴ Issues relating to marriage, are discussed here and the Sikhs are instructed not to marry their daughter's and sister's outside the Khalsa Panth. Polygamy, adultery and prostitution are strictly denounced.³⁵

Rahitnama Hazuri, also called *Rahitnama Bhai Chaupa Singh*, is the most elaborate statement of rules of conduct for the Sikhs. Its authorship is traditionally ascribed to Bhai Chaupa Singh Chhibbar, who had been in attendance upon Guru Gobind Singh since his (the Guru's) childhood. The work was, according to internal evidence,

³⁰ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 59.

³¹ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, pp.88-89; See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 62 :

whDk n"o w;zdhnk w'Bk e[V'h i' wko.j]f]f;Zy tosB eo? nzs j]f]rk y[nko..!..

³² W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs Of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 90.

³³ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>.

³⁴ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 122.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.126-127; See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, pp. 54, 56 :

nBzd fpBAk fpnkj Bk eo' .

l' ;okX fptkj pqkjwD ;' eokt/, r[o{ eh ohs Bk ;' sBykjhmk j? .

f;zy e' f;zy g[sqh djh ;[Xk ;[Xk fw b ikf] . djh GkdDh e' n]f w[y nwh u[nkf] .

authenticated by Guru Gobind Singh on 7 Jeth 1757 Bk/5 May 1700. Of the 1800 injunctions contained in the *Rahitnama* the main ones are: A Sikh should regularly say his Nitnem, and be always alert in attending to his duty and earn his living by the labour of his hands; he should have no dealing with Minas, Masands, Ramraias, the shaven ones, and with those who practise female infanticide; he should not drink liquor; he should never be parted from the five, viz. *Kachchh* (shorts), *Kes* (hair), *Kirpan* (sword), *Bani* and *Sangat*, he should not use nor deal in tobacco and should not give his daughter in marriage to one who smokes; he should regularly set aside *Dasvandh* or tithe, and he should not trade in *Pothis* or manuscript copies of Gurbani. A special feature of *Rahitnama Hazuri* is a section devoted to Sikh women. The *Rahitnama* contains a classic catalogue of Sikh characteristics and virtues. However, the extant texts of the *Rahitnama* are adulterated and contain injunctions which are in conflict with approved Sikh teaching.³⁶ The *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* favours a wider Sikh understanding rather than the distinctively Khalsa mode. It addresses the injunctions to the loyal Gursikh rather than to a specifically Khalsa Sikh.³⁷ Female infanticide is not only condemned once again, but others are instructed not to have any dealings with anyone who has committed this unpardonable offence. Various aspects of sexual morality are also discussed.³⁸

Regarding the treatment of women, it is said, “A Gursikh should never trust a woman, neither his own nor another’s. Never entrust a secret to them. Regard them as the embodiment of deceit. Never keep company of women belonging to another man’s family. Never touch the feet of any woman other than one’s own mother. Never eat food left by a woman. Never curse a respectable woman nor use weapons against any of

³⁶ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>; See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 26 :

r[o{ ek f;Zy ezfBnkA Bk wko/, e[Vh wko Bkb Bk tos/.

ezfBnkA dk g?;k Bk yk]/. Bksk r[o{ e/ f;Zy Bkb eo/.

See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 28 :

u'oh :koh Bk eo/. i{nk Bk y/v/.

See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 30 :

f;Zy e/ ;zeN e' i:A s:A eoe/ d{o eo/. r[o ek f;Zy, wVQh, w;hs, wZ[bkA, ekih, pqkjd nkfd B{ edh Bk wzB/ g{i/.

See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 34 :

fptkj w/A :k nZr/ fgZS/ t/tk ek swk;k d/y/ ;' sBykjhknk.

³⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs Of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 95.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 99.

them.”³⁹ Marriage rites similar to those listed by the other *Rahitnamas* are also given in the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*. The *Rahitnama* goes on to discuss in detail the duties of women, her role in cooking and serving food, their role in religious matters and their social relationships. These in turn are given in a detailed form by W.H. McLeod in his *Sikhs of the Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*. Infidelity is severely condemned.

A Gursikhni is to imbibe high moral and social character, not indulging in the ordinary vices which generally mar the personality of women. She is not to be abusive, obscene or violent at any cost. Complete hygiene both personal and of the surroundings is to be maintained by a Gursikhni while cooking and serving food. She should have bathed properly before saying her daily prayers. Regarding her social behaviour, a Gursikhni is not to interact with men who are not a part of her own family. She is not to intermingle with malicious women and stay away from gossiping. Social contacts with the Five Reprobate Groups (*Panj Mel*) are also to be avoided.⁴⁰

In McLeod’s view, although the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* is unique in allocating a lengthy section to the duties of female members of the Khalsa, the author staunchly upholds patriarchy. Initiation can never be conferred on women.⁴¹ However, the extant texts of the *Rahitnama* are adulterated and contain injunctions which are in conflict with approved Sikh teaching. The presence of strong Puranic element and the influence of the Devi cult are some of the other possible corruptions in the extant texts.⁴²

Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh is admittedly a late-18th-century work. It is in the form of a long poem of 146 couplets and short four-line stanzas. The poet states that he had lived in Bunga Maralivala at Amritsar where Sardar Jassa Singh (Ahluvalia) has also lived for a long time. From there, in old age, he visited Patna. During his travels after that, he once in a dream was ordered by Guru Gobind Singh to write down a code of conduct for the Sikhs. Bhai Desa Singh lays particular stress on the following points: a Sikh must receive the rites of the Khalsa by ceremony of the double-edged sword; should devote himself to *Bani* and refrain from backbiting and slander; should use *Waheguruji Ki Fateh* as the form of

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, pp. 108-109; See also, Gurpreet, *The Historical Analysis of Sikh Rehat Namas*, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1989.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁴² <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>.

salutation and greeting, should recite regularly ordered texts; should treat all women other than his wife as daughters or mothers; must maintain the five symbols of the Sikhs.⁴³ It is in poetry form and has 146 couplets.⁴⁴ This *Rahitnama* underlines the significance of the *Rahit*. Once again issues of female infanticide, prostitution, adultery, and sexual morality are discussed. Respect is to be shown towards treatment of women.

Doris in her *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, analyses only the *Chaupa Singh Rahit Nama*, with regard to the issue of gender. In general, her observation on the six *Rahitnamas* is that they consist of an extensive amount of information pointing to an increased differentiation between women and men in the Sikh community. She further observes that the rules outlined for the Guru's Sikhs make it increasingly clear that women simply were not included in the 'regular' discipline outlined for the Khalsa. Notions of impurity, which the earliest Guru had strictly censured, were here also associated with women, as was scepticism with regard to the credibility of women. Penance was also required by a man who ate food left over by a woman. According to her, the *Rahitnamas* give the impression of widening the gulf between male and female Sikhs through subtle ways.⁴⁵

Among Sikhs, *Rahit* means a discipline which they are required to follow in their daily life. It represents their life-style and is an index of their world-view. *Nama* means a writing or a manual. *Rahitnama* is, therefore, a codified statement of Sikhs' conduct in life. It is supposed to be a comprehensive list of do's and don'ts, prescribing how a follower should respond or behave in particular situations. While all the Gurus had

⁴³ <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Rahitname>. See also; Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 38 :

e[Vh wko nkfdj?A i/s/. wB s/ d{o fsnkr' s/s/.

See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 40 :

go p/Nh e' p/Nh ikB?. go f;sqh e' wks pykB?. ngBh f;sqh ;' os j]h. ofstkb r[o ek f;zx ;]h.

See also, Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 40 :

w[;bh v{wfd d{sh u/bh. ftGukofD i' fco/ f]e/bh. nto i[nZm toD eh Bkfo.

f]B ;' f;zx B eo/ fgknko. fgknko eo/ j't/ e[bjkBh. skAs/ f]Be' si? frnkBh.

See also, Kapoor Sukhbir Singh and Mohinder Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 44 :

u"gl]h.. go Bkoh i[nk, n;Zs, u'oh, wfdok ikB. gkAu n?p :/ irs w/A si/ ;[f;zx ;[ikB.

oD w/A ikf] B epjz[Gki/. fdqVQ_efo SZsqh Xow ;[rki/.

⁴⁴ Sukhbir Singh Kapoor and Mohinder Kaur Kapoor, *The Making of the Sikh Rehatnamas : The Sikh Code of Conduct*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History : Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 46-47.

stressed virtuous conduct in religious life, Guru Gobind Singh is credited with having said, "He alone is my Sikh who follows the *Rahit*. In fact he is the Master and I am his disciple." Extensive references to man's conduct in Gurbani and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas show that a distinct Sikh way of life had emerged by the end of the 17th century, with emphasis on internal as well as external *Rahit*. According to Guru Gobind Singh, "He who sports *Kes* without the *Rahit* of *Pahul*, Is a fool and an imposter; I will not see him. He is a sinner, And he should drop his 'garb'." The guidelines were perhaps not put together in a systematic manner. In 1699, however, when Guru Gobind Singh launched the Khalsa Order, promulgation of detailed injunctions for the initiates to follow was an imperative need. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that some kind of *Rahitnama* was drafted. This was all the more necessary, since large numbers of disciples had to be initiated through the Amrit ceremony by several teams or Jathas of *Panj Piaras*, and uniformity of injunctions had to be ensured. This assumption is shared by all scholars including Piara Singh Padam and W.H. McLeod. Unfortunately, no such record is traceable. All the extant manuscripts of *Rahitnamas* date back to a later period, although most of them claim to have been commissioned or approved by Guru Gobind Singh himself. *Chaupa Singh's Rahitnama* is no exception. Its extant versions have been dated between 1740 and 1765 CE.⁴⁶

The *Rahit* involves both a belief as well as a perspective as for more than three centuries most Sikhs have regarded the *Rahit* as absolutely central to their faith.⁴⁷

The *Rahit* thus becomes an integral part of the daily life of a devout Khalsa Sikh. In McLeod's view, the *Rahitnamas* represent the normative standard of Sikh belief and behaviour. They do not project the beliefs of an ordinary Sikh, nor do they describe the ordinary Sikh's way of life. The *Rahitnamas* however supply what their authors regarded as the ideal standard for a Khalsa Sikh.⁴⁸

Regarding gender issues and concerns in the *Rahitnamas*, it is to be remembered that since the *Rahitnamas* were a by-product of the creation of the Khalsa Panth in the eighteenth century, they do reflect the generally held social views of the time, one being that the men must fight and women should stay at home. In the late nineteenth century,

⁴⁶ <http://www.sikhism.us/hard-talk/76-the-chaupa-singh-rahitnama.html>.

⁴⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of The Khalsa : A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

with the development of the Singh Sabha movement, women's claims to be regarded as fellow-members of the Khalsa largely fell on deaf years.⁴⁹

J.S. Grewal's article "Sikhism and Gender" is written mainly in response to the allegations made by Doris R. Jakobsh in her book, "Relocating Gender in Sikh History; Transformation, Meaning and Identity", regarding Gender issues within the Sikh Panth. In the context of the Sikh *Rahitnamas*, Grewal is of the opinion that the view taken by Jakobsh is partial and therefore, misleading.⁵⁰ Regarding the negative images of women portrayed in certain places, Grewal says that the images of outcaste women are used only contextually for a moral message; to regard evil-mindedness, cruelty, slander and wrath as untouchable.⁵¹

Referring to Doris's analysis of the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*, as being a reflection of the attitudes in the tales of 'wiles of women' and that women were not included in the 'regular' discipline outlined for the Khalsa; Grewal goes on to say that this injunction does not imply that religious life was not open to Sikh women.⁵² Spiritual life was open to women.⁵³ Doris further goes on to label women as 'secondary' Sikhs, which is only due to lack of proper analysis of the *Rahitnama* as a whole for gender relations. An indepth analysis would lead to the argument that women remained respectable members of the Khalsa social order as much as of the earlier Sikh social order.⁵⁴

For an investigation of the attitudes and behaviour of Sikh chiefs in the eighteenth century, Purnima Dhavan argues that despite the egalitarian emphasis discernible in the creation of the Khalsa, in fact 'the eighteenth century Khalsa chiefs were no more egalitarian than the other new warrior groups of the period'. Dhavan discusses the masculine norms exemplified within eighteenth century texts, such as *Rahitanamas* (Codes of Conduct). The code of masculine honour (*Izzat*), which was at potential risk from women, grew stronger and the proportion of Sikhs from the Jat caste also grew. In Dhavan words, 'notions of caste and honour were tightly woven together and the honour of a Sikh

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ J.S. Grewal, "Sikhism and Gender", *The Sikhs; Ideology, Institutions and Identity*, New Delhi, 2009, p. 210; Parmar Nirapjit, "Gender Issues and Concerns in Hukamnamas and Rahitnamas : An Overview", *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 14-16th March, 2009, pp. 182-192.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 209-210.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 212.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 213.

⁵⁴ *Loc.cit.*

ruler 'was particularly symbolized by the protection and exchange o two repositories of his family's honour-women, and the turbans worn by its men'.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Doris R. Jakobsh and Eleanor Nesbitt, "Sikhism and Women : Contextualizing the Issues", *Sikhism and Women : History, Texts and Experience*, (ed. Doris R. Jakobsh), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 26-27.

CHAPTER-IV

GENDER IDENTITY FORMATION IN SIKH HISTORICAL LITERATURE (1750-1920)

1) Kesar Singh Chhibber's 'Bansavalinama' :

With the hymns of Guru Nanak at its core, Sikh literature developed in two key ways: the doctrinal and the historical. Exegetical literature emerged from the belief that Sikh sacred hymns manifest the divine revelation, and that the foremost obligation of the members of the community was to understand and follow the theological and social ideas enshrined in them. Historical literature responded to the need to know how the Gurus actually lived out the contents of their teaching. These two strands in early literature developed as the Sikh tradition matured.¹ Chhibber's *Bansavalinama Dasan Patishahian Ka* (Genealogy of the ten masters), is the first attempt to write a comprehensive history of the community and includes information about the compilation of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.² In the early decade of Sikh rule we come upon the *Bansavalinama* of Kesar Singh Chhibber and the *Mahima Parkash* of Sarup Das Bhalla, the former written in 1769 and the latter in 1776.³

These works are the earliest major writings of the eighteenth century. Both the writers had a common connection with the Sikh Gurus through their ancestors and their search for patronage after the establishment of Sikh rule. Their approach to the past changes with the change in their purpose. They were familiar with the *Bani* of the Gurus, the *Janamsakhis* and also with the work of Sainapat. Both the works are written in verse and appear to have been influenced more by the *Janamsakhi* form than by the biographical *Gurbilas*.⁴ Kesar Singh Chhibbar belonged to the family of Chaupa Singh. His ancestors joined the Sikh community in the mid-seventeenth century and became influential members of the Sikh court in subsequent years. After the Sikh evacuation of Anandpur in 1704, the family lived in Delhi and Amritsar, eventually returning to their original home in Jammu in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Chhibbers had first-

¹ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 18.

² *Ibid*, p. 19.

³ Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History From Sikh Literature*, Jalandhar, 1988, p. 281.

⁴ *Loc.cit.*

hand knowledge of events in Anandpur, and their stay in Amritsar must have exposed them to the traditions regarding the early Sikh history in Central Punjab.⁵ *Bansavalinama* is a very personal document.⁶

It is a poeticized account of the lives of the Gurus by Kesar Singh Chhibber. The term *Bansavalinama* means a genealogy. Another term used in the text is "kursinama" which is Persian for "genealogy." But, strictly speaking, this work is not a genealogical table. It is a rapid account, in rather incipient Punjabi verse, of the ten Gurus and of Banda Singh Bahadur and some other Sikhs. Description of historical events and mythological elements occasionally overlap in this work. Its peculiar feature is the wealth of chronological detail it contains about the lives of the Gurus and the members of their families. But the reliability of the dates recorded by the author is not established.⁷ The *Bansavali*, comprising 2,564 stanzas, is divided into fourteen chapters. The first ten deal with the Ten Gurus. There is a chapter each on Banda Singh Bahadur, Jit (Ajit) Singh, adopted son of Mata Sundri, and Mata Sahib Devan. The last chapter of the work, narrates the persecution suffered by the Sikhs at the hands of the ruling authority and their will to survival. A point especially stressed is about the bestowal of Guruship on the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh before he passed away. He also mentions some other prescriptions for the Sikhs in the manner of *Rahitnamas* or Manuals of Sikh Code. But some of his assertions are not in conformity with Sikh belief and teachings.⁸ The author has tried to prove the superiority of the Brahmans even among the Sikhs which may be due to his own Brahman ancestry. In any case, this is contrary to the principles of Sikhism which rejects caste.⁹ Chhibbar's picture of Sikh history is one of 'confusion'.¹⁰ Hans further points out that Kesar Singh had inculcated love for scholarly pursuits in his childhood in the court of Guru Gobind Singh's widow, Mata Sundri, of the Sikhs.¹¹

⁵ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, p. 144.

⁶ Surjit Singh Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 281.

⁷ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bansavalinama_Dasan_Patshahian_Ka.

⁸ *Loc.cit*.

⁹ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁰ Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History From Sikh Literature*, Jalandhar, 1988, p. 281.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 282.

J.S. Grewal writes that the Chhibber's *Bansavalinama* has brahmanized the tradition, maintaining that Chhibber's interest is primarily in 'the lives', which would explain his interest in the chain of kinship as well. According to Rattan Singh Jaggi, Chhibber's work does not possess any poetic merit; it consists of mere versification rather than poetry. At places it acquires the tone of a *Rahitnama*. Chhibber's purpose in writing the *Bansavalinama* is not clear. Chhibber is said to have resorted to the Puranic tradition and tended to relate the Sikh Gurus to that tradition. Moreover the contents of the *Bansavalinama* reveal that its author was possibly a religious man but not a man of letters. Despite its title, the *Bansavalinama* cannot be treated as a work of genealogy. Through this work Chhibber wanted to reveal his knowledge of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh tradition. In an attempt to make his work inclusive rather than selective, he tended to relate everything that he knew, from hearsay or from texts. The heterogeneity of his work appears to spring from his desire to reveal his knowledge as a mark of his nearness to the Gurus and his understanding of their message.¹²

The author forbids Sikhs to accept converts from the Muslims.¹³ Kesar Singh Chhibber lives existentially on the fringes of Sikh faith and Sikh history. Committed neither to a principle nor a party, the author, paradoxically gives a realistic picture of the 'confused' state of Guruship after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Chhibber goes on to say that Banda was Guru for nine years, Ajit Singh, for sixteen years and Mata Sahib Devi for twenty five years.¹⁴ At the onset gender issues are not faced by the author. No insight is given into the plight of women of the period or general problems faced by them. However, names of the prominent women belonging to the family of some of the Gurus are provided.

For example, Mata Banarasi is named as Guru Nanak's grandmother. His wife is named as Mata Sulakhani.¹⁵ Mata Ganga was the wife of Guru Arjan and the names of Guru Hargobind's four wives are given as Mata Madodari, Mata Nanaki Lamma, Mata Mahadevi Marwahi and Mata Kaula. It is also mentioned in the *Bansavalinama* that Bibi

¹² J.S. Grewal (ed.), *The Khalsa, Sikh and Non-Sikh Perspectives*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 60-61.

¹³ Surjit Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 284.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 284-285.

¹⁵ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, pp. 62-63.

Viro, born to Mata Nanaki Lamma, was the only daughter of Guru Hargobind.¹⁶ Regarding Guru Gobind Singh, Chhibber's interest in genealogies is virtually replaced by his interest in the chronology of the events in Guru Gobind's life.¹⁷ General references are also found towards Mata Sahib Devi, Mata Sundri and Mata Jito.

Chhibber draws a clear distinction between *Sikhi* as a religious faith and the practice of *Varna-Dharma* in the social sphere. Consequently, the ideal of equality gets shorn of all its social meaning. The *Varna* theory reintroduces the principle of inequality. The Sikh tradition of on single ethical principle for all its members is negated by Chhibber. Portraying the Khalsa as a political spearhead of the goddess, he appears to present an anti-thesis of the Khalsa as an egalitarian socio-political and moral order based on the monotheistic concept of Divinity. Grewal further states that Chhibber consciously or unconsciously makes a consistent and earnest attempt at brahmanizing the Khalsa tradition.¹⁸ Kesar Singh Chhibber is probably the first example of a 'psychological' author seeing things during his period, which the ordinary, normal men of faith would have missed. That is why his testimony on the eighteenth century Sikhs can be regarded as very remarkable indeed.¹⁹

2) Sarup Das Bhalla's 'Mahima Parkash' :

Chhibber's account is followed by Sarup Das Bhalla's, *Mahima Parkash* (the Rise of Glory) written in 1776. The primary source of information for the writer must have been oral tradition, which was used creatively to construct their understanding of the compilation of Sikh scripture. The two centuries between the compilation of the Sikh text and the writing of these accounts were politically tumultuous and resulted in shifts in the centre of Sikh power from the town of Amritsar in the central Punjab to Anandpur in the Shivalik hills, and then back to Amritsar.²⁰ Sarup Das Bhalla was more closely connected with the Sikh Gurus than Kesar Singh Chhibber. He was a descendent of Guru Amar Das.²¹ Since the middle of the sixteenth century, Bhalla's family lived in Goindwal, and

¹⁶ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁹ Surjit Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 285.

²⁰ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 18.

²¹ Surjit Hans, *Op.cit*, p. 285.

his ancestors must have been immersed in the traditions regarding the early history of the community.²² His purpose in writing this work was to glorify his religiously distinguished ancestry in particular, and to celebrate the descendants of the Gurus in general. Sarup Das Bhalla is keen to establish the 'sacred' status of his ancestors, and thereby his own, in the eyes of his contemporaries, particularly the Sikh rulers.²³

The accounts of the compilation process of the *Guru Granth Sahib* are somewhat more detailed in the *Mahima Parkash*. Bhalla considers the creation of the sacred text as inevitable to the new community's growth. He presents the creation of the sacred text as part and parcel of the organic development of the early community. Bhalla further states that Guru Gobind Singh commanded the community to recognize the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the Guru, and that the only way Sikhs could ever communicate with the ten Gurus was by reading the *Guru Granth Sahib*.²⁴ One of the basic idea of the work also is that the descendants of all the Gurus deserve to be honoured and patronized by the Sikh rulers. According to Hans, Sarup Das Bhalla, has neither a theological understanding of the 'detractors' nor a socio-historical insight into the role of the 'rivals' in Sikh history. His subscription to family sanctity incapacitates him even to see the problem. He has no idea of the most 'historical' Guru Gobind Singh. He underlines neither the significance of the foundation of the Khalsa nor the battles of Anandpur and their importance. He only stresses on the importance of the '*Rahit*'. Sarup Das Bhalla writes in the *Janamsakhi* genre. He also misunderstands the Sikh concept of *Kaliyuga*. The incompatible choice of a form along with a limited family purpose makes the *Mahima Parkash* 'a fat book of thin verse'. Its historical significance is negatively outstanding. It marks the paradox of Sikh rule which betrays the vision of Guru Nanak, while seeking its origins in it.²⁵

With many important events being ignored, it is not surprising that these accounts chose to remain silent on the role of women in society, either on purpose or reference to this section of society was not considered worthy of any mention at all. However, amidst all the criticisms they derive, these accounts do throw valuable light in the re-construction of Sikh history in general.

²² Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, p. 144.

²³ Surjit Singh Hans, *Op.cit*, pp. 285-286.

²⁴ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Op.cit*, pp. 20-21.

²⁵ Surjit Singh Hans, *Op.cit*, pp. 286-287.

3) Bhai Santokh Singh's 'Nanak Prakash' :

McLeod refers to Bhai Santokh Singh as the most prominent of all Sikh hagiographers. He wrote in a mixture of Punjabi and Braj. He was strongly influenced by the heretical ideas of the Hindalis and by the Vedantic doctrines of the Udasis and Nirmalas, but earned considerable popularity owing to the fact that he covered the complete range of Gurus.²⁶ Bhai Santokh Singh had connections with some of the old Sikh families which played a prominent role in the politics of the times.²⁷ Bhai Santokh Singh, a great Sikh poet of the early nineteenth century has a number of monumental works to his credit. Two of his noteworthy works are the *Sri Guru Nanak Prakash* and the *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*. The latter is a sequel to the former. It narrates the history of the Sikh Gurus as well as the life of Banda Bahadur. Bhai Santokh Singh was a contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and therefore gives valuable insights into the life and times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.²⁸

Bhai Santokh Singh lived from 1788 to 1843, a period which saw the rise of Sikhs to political eminence in the Punjab.²⁹ Santokh Singh's *Nanak Prakash* and *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* are in the form of a *Katha*. He wrote in the literary tradition of the age. His commentary and his works on history have Vedantic elements. His merit lies in Sikh historiography. He surpasses Sarup Das Bhalla of *Mahima Parkash* and Kesar Singh Chhibber's *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*.³⁰ Santokh Singh was a linguist, a scholar, a theologian, a poet and a good prose writer – an awesome combination for any age. He was well-versed in Indian and semitic religious traditions.³¹ *Nanak Prakash*, a work in *Janamsakhi* mode on Guru Nanak was compiled in 1823 A.D. It adopts largely the narrative pattern of the *Bala Janamsakhi*, wherein the whole account of Guru Nanak is narrated by Bhai Bala at the request of Guru Angad.³²

²⁶ W.H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 187-188.

²⁷ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 90.

²⁸ Sabinderjit Singh Sagar, *Historical Analysis Of Nanak Prakash by Bhai Santokh Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1993, p. 5.

²⁹ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 89.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 90.

³² Sabinderjit Singh Sagar, *Op.cit*, p. 21.

Bhai Vir Singh edited this work in 1927.³³ An account of Mata Sulakhani and her parents is given in canto 29 of *Nanak Prakash*.³⁴ Bhai Santokh Singh has an orthodox faith in Sikhism.³⁵ Information is provided on the various aspects of social life of the early nineteenth century Punjab. A major part of this work relates to people and their attitudes.³⁶ It includes information on the class composition, religious life and social relations between hindus and muslims, occupations, economic conditions of the people, beggary, food, customs, medicinal science, geography, political life of the Sikhs and also reflects the intellectual conditions of the period.³⁷

Amongst the occupations existing during the time, the occupation of dancing girls is mentioned, who were in great demand at the time of marriages. It is stated that this profession was looked down upon by the society. At one place, the performers of *Ras* are roundly abused for their license.³⁸ There is a mention of both a class of servants as well as the institution of slavery, in the early nineteenth century. Women were an integral part of both these professions. There is reference to poor parents selling their children, and at times even grown up girls were sold. They had to obey their masters in every respect. Another interesting aspect is that these slaves were also given away as dowry.³⁹ The parents of a girl were considered 'poor' in comparison with boy's parents.⁴⁰

The condition of women is stated as being quite oppressive. The poet laments to God as to why he created women on earth. A woman was the most exploited creature in the society and her exploitation was anthropologically sanctioned. The welfare of a woman lay in being a slave of man. Women were served food after the men in marriage ceremonies. The status of a girl's family was considered as indicative of her status too. The image of women in *Nanak Prakash* is repulsive. She was visualized as nature which is illusion and led a man to nescience.⁴¹ Regarding the sexual portrayal of women, their description in the *Nanak Prakash*, to some extent bears the impact of *Treya Charitra* of

³³ Sabinderjit Singh Sagar, *Op.cit*, p. 22.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 88.

³⁷ *Loc.cit*.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 94.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 96.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 99-100.

the *Dasam Granth*.⁴² Marriage ceremonies are described in great details in the *Nanak Prakash*. Set social standards made a social evil like dowry a burden on the girl's family.⁴³ Patriarchal family set-up existed wherein a father as head of the family was totally authoritarian.⁴⁴

Santokh Singh's work is a continuation of the literary tradition of the times. His interest in factual elements makes *Nanak Prakash* an account of Guru Nanak's life. He lacks narrative skill and creative imagination.⁴⁵ Hierarchy of religious communities also means their social and political hierarchy.⁴⁶ His picture of contemporary nineteenth-century Punjab is partial. A major part of the social evidence of the work is related to the rituals and ceremony of the Sikhs as he seems to be less concerned about the dynamism of social life. Overall the work lacks the vision of the author.⁴⁷

Bhai Santokh Singh composed his *magnum opus*, the *Gurpartap Suryoudai Granth*, also known as the *Suraj Prakash*. He probably started work on it in 1834. According to the evidence of Gopal Singh Sadhu, who was a student of Bhai Santokh Singh, he was distrusted and derided by the Hindu population of Kaithal when he was composing the *Suraj Prakash*. Apparently this work was composed in an atmosphere of extreme hostility and under tremendous stress. His son, Ajai Singh, who was brahmanically inclined is believed to have compelled him at sword-point to include the Durga episode in the *Suraj Prakash*. The work was completed in 1843.⁴⁸ In a variety of ways, the author brings out the continuity of the new Order of the Khalsa with the earlier teaching of Sikhism. One aspect of the creation of the Khalsa is the restoration of the pristine purity of the faith.⁴⁹

4) Rattan Singh Bhangoo's 'Panth Prakash' :

S. Rattan Singh Bhangoo's family is originally from village Mirankot in Amritsar district. The grandfather of S. Rattan Singh Bhangoo was Bhai Mehtab Singh

⁴² Sabinderjit Singh Sagar, *Op.cit*, p. 101.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ *Loc.cit*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 130-131.

⁴⁸ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 92.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 97.

Bhangu s/o S. Hara Singh.⁵⁰ The book was born out of the desire of the 19th Century British colonisers to examine whether the Sikh political power in Punjab was legitimate. Sensing that danger, Rattan Singh Bhangoo took upon himself the task of proving that the Sikh political power was perfectly legitimate. He begins by reiterating the basic Sikh theory of polity. It must be considered authentic because it is in accord with the religious text and coming from Rattan Singh Bhangoo, who himself belonged to the ruling aristocracy, it perhaps also represents its thought on the subject.⁵¹ Numerous examples of martyrs are given in the *Guru Panth Prakash*.⁵²

Rattan Singh Bhangoo expounds his own philosophy or metaphysics of martyrdom.⁵³ According to Rattan Singh Bhangoo, the fact and the concept of martyrdom were central to the Khalsa tradition.⁵⁴

Rattan Singh Bhangoo's only available work, is *Pracheen Panth Prakash*, which traces the Sikh history right from Guru Nanak to Sikh Misl. In the few introductory pages, he gives a short description of the ten Sikh Gurus, but in the main work he deals in detail with the Sikh Misl. Most of the episodes described by him in the *Pracheen Panth Prakash* relate to his own family and can be regarded as first hand information and contemporary evidence of the facts. The *Pracheen Panth Prakash* is therefore, one of the most important and useful sources on the Afghan-Sikh struggle for supremacy in the Punjab, during the eighteenth century. Though some dates are disputable, yet his work is a valuable contribution towards major events of the Sikh history of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵

The *Panth Prakash* upholds the supremacy of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and Rattan Singh Bhangoo nowhere talks of the *Dasam Granth*.⁵⁶ Rattan Singh Bhangoo completed his work, the *Guru Panth Prakash*, in the Bunga of Shiam Singh at Amritsar in 1841. Bhai Vir Singh chanced upon a copy dated 1858 that appeared to have been prepared in haste.

⁵⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rattan_Singh_Bhangu

⁵¹ <http://www.keertan.org/2007/06/siri-prachin-panth-parkash-part-i-by-rattan-singh-bhangu/>

⁵² J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 113.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁵⁵ Datta Amaresh, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Vol.I, (Internet Source-
http://books.google.co.in/books?id=ObFCT5_taSgC&pg=PA439&lpg=PA439&dq=Panth+Prakash+by+Rattan+Singh+Bhangu&source=bl&ots=mUC15vFUrl&sig=t6WspR9gzxiDqiaNTl4AU8I9JNM&hl=en&ei=2IzYSbm_BsiIkQWQvLnLBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6#PPA439,M1)

⁵⁶ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 116.

He corrected what he regarded as the mistakes of the copyist and published it in 1914. He came upon another manuscript of 1866 and used it to make improvements in the second edition in 1939. He gave the title *Prachin Panth Prakash* to his work, probably because the *Panth Prakash* of Giani Gian Singh was already known to the readers of Punjabi.⁵⁷ Regarding the editing of the *Panth Prakash* by Bhai Vir Singh, Harinder Singh writes that there is no denying the fact that Rattan Singh was not a competent poet. Bhai Vir Singh felt that Bhangoo as a poet needed some help in removing mistakes and superfluous words. The author, Rattan Singh Bhangoo, has used a number of words which are not helpful in the smooth flow of rhythmic poetry.⁵⁸ In an attempt to correct the metre, Bhai Vir Singh has spoiled the poetic form at several places.⁵⁹

Not only action but also sentiments, beliefs, ideas and emotions come into play to make the *Prachin Panth Prakash* a rare kind of document. It embodies an understanding of the Khalsa tradition by a respectable member of the Khalsa who was deeply religious in his feelings and acutely political in his outlook on the world.⁶⁰ There is scanty information on the composition of the Sikh society during the period of Sikh struggle but women's issues are not addressed even by this work. It may be concluded here that there is no information about the views of these authors on gender issues.

5) Giani Gian Singh's Works :

Giani Gian Singh is regarded as a forerunner in giving certain important and specific information to us concerning various aspects of Sikh history.⁶¹ Giani Gian Singh was born in the year 1822 in the family of Sardar Bhag Singh to Mata Desaan in Longowal, a famous village in Punjab.⁶² Giani Gian Singh claimed descent from the brother of Bhai Mani Singh Shahid, Nagahia Singh. He learnt Gurmukhi in his village from Bhai Bhola Singh and Sanskrit from Pandit Atma Ram. He was gifted with a melodious voice and recitation of gurbani earned him popularity in the village. At the age

⁵⁷ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 104.

⁵⁸ Harinder Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh's Editing of Panth Prakash by Rattan Singh Bhangoo*, Ph.d Thesis, Department Of History, Vol.I & II, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1990, p.xLvi.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. Lii.

⁶⁰ J.S. Grewal (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 119.

⁶¹ Sukhdial Singh, *Historical Analysis of Giani Gian Singh's Writings*, UICS (P) Ltd., Jalandhar, 1996.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 18.

of twelve, he was taken to Lahore by his maternal uncle, Karam Singh, who was a Subedar in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Dhanna Singh Malvai introduced him to the Maharaja who employed him to recite the Sukhmani Sahib to him every morning.⁶³

During his tours to different places in India, he commenced writing *Sri Guru Panth Prakash* popularly known as *Panth Prakash* in 1865.⁶⁴ Giani Gian Singh was launched on his own distinguished career as a writer with the publication in 1880 of his *Panth Prakash*, a history of the Sikhs in Braj verse. He now planned another ambitious work, the *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, which was to be published in five parts. The first three parts were lithographed in 1892 by Baba Rajinder Singh, proprietor Guru Gobind Singh Press, Sialkot. Urdu editions of these three volumes entitled *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, *Shamsher Khalsa* and *Raj Khalsa*, respectively, were also published.⁶⁵

Thus, his works serve as a transitional stage of writing history in prose, as prior to him only the poetic form of writing was in vogue. In fact, the Sikhs started writing their history in prose only from the days of Giani Gian Singh. He was the first to write the history of the Sikhs under the title of *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* in three volumes in Gurmukhi prose.⁶⁶ The *Panth Prakash* and *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* are the most important but not the only works of Giani Gian Singh. His other books are: *Suraj Prakash Vartak*, an abridged version in prose of Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*; *Ramayan Bhai Mani Singh Ji Di*; *Twarikh Amritsar (Urdu)*; *Twarikh Lahore (Urdu)*; *Patit Pavan*; *Gurdham Sarigrah*; *Bhupendranand*; *Itihas Bagarian* and *Ripudaman Prakash*.⁶⁷ *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* a voluminous prose narrative delineating the history of the Sikhs from their origin to the time when they lost the Punjab to the British. The author, Giani Gian Singh (1822-1921), claimed descent from the brother of Bhai Mani Singh, the martyr, who was a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh. The work is divided into five parts *Janam Sakhi*, *Dasan Guraan*, *Shamsher Khalsa*, *Raj Khalsa*, *Sardar Khalsa*, and *Panth Khalsa*.⁶⁸

In the first part the author presents biographies of the Ten Gurus and sketches the evolution of the community culminating in the emergence of the Khalsa. The second

⁶³ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Giani_Gian_Singh

⁶⁴ Sukhdial Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Giani_Gian_Singh

⁶⁶ Sukhdial Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁷ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Giani_Gian_Singh

⁶⁸ *Loc.cit*.

part deals with the career of Banda Singh Bahadur, the sustained struggle Sikhs waged against the Mughals in face of fierce persecution, their reorganization in the form of the Dal Khalsa and the running battle between Ahmad Shah Durrani and the Sikhs. The third part describes the rise of the twelve Misl or independencies and of the sovereign kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and ends with the annexation of the Punjab by the British. The fourth part contained accounts of Sikh principalities which did not form part of Ranjit Singh's kingdom. The fifth part treats of Sikh sects, Gurdwaras and preaching centres. As Giani Gian Singh himself relates in the book, he spent more than fifteen years collecting information, mainly verbal. His sources were his own elders, Nagahia Singh, Raghu Singh and Bakhta Singh who had served Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh Bahadur and the eighteenth-century Sardars such as Nawab Kapur Singh and Baba Ala Singh. Besides, he travelled extensively in quest of materials. Two of the older works he admits to having made use of were those by Ratan Singh Bhangu and Bute Shah. He received encouragement from his mentor, Tara Singh Narotam, a Nirmala scholar, and completed in 1867 his first work, the famed *Panth Prakash* which was a connected history of the Sikhs in Punjabi verse. The *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* was its expansion in prose.⁶⁹

The *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* can be studied under two parts, namely, mythical or unhistorical and historical events for a better understanding.⁷⁰ His motive in indulging in mythical writings seems to be to uphold Sikh Guruship.⁷¹ Giani Gian Singh, is one of the first writer to initiate the writing of Sikh history from a historical perspective. One of the chief merits of the *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, is the detail given as regards the years of the birth and death of all the Sikh Gurus, from Guru Angad Dev to Guru Gobind Singh.⁷² Although this work contains numerous mythological, traditional and unhistorical references, the fact remains that it is very informative and as such can be used as a reference book for a study of the early nineteenth century Sikh history.⁷³

⁶⁹ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Giani_Gian_Singh

⁷⁰ Sukhdial Singh, *Historical Analysis of Giani Gian Singh's Writings*, Jalandhar, 1996, p. 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 41.

CHAPTER-V

WOMEN ISSUES IN POPULAR SIKH LITERATURE AND JOURNALISM (1890-1920)

Historical writings of the Sikhs have time and again stressed greatly on the origin and development of the Sikh religion, thereby un-intentionally ignoring the plight of its women members in general. Perhaps the root cause behind the neglect in duly referring to the contributions of Sikh women lies in the traditions that continued from the medieval Indian society of which Punjab was an integral part. Reform initiated would have definitely incurred the wrath of its population and perhaps this became the primary reason behind the slow introduction of the much needed reform process as concerns the status and role of Sikh women. Historical accounts however do not entirely ignore their contributions to the growth of the Sikh community which was fighting its own battles of survival. One has to scan all types of literature available on the Sikhs in order to analyze objectively the role played by the female members of this brave community, proving an equal match to their male counterparts in facing all kinds of challenges.

Sikh women have been emancipated over the centuries just as their counterparts in the rest of India, the only difference being that there are very few references to the exact manner in which their liberation was brought about. The reasons could be many. Many Sikh historians, both at the national as well as on an international scenario contend that details concerning the participation of Sikh women have been largely ignored but in reality on browsing through the various sources available at hand, we can gather bits and pieces and effectively construct the role played by the female members of the Sikh community in its development and sustenance. Popular Sikh literature and journalism in Punjab came with the coming of the Press in India, during the British rule. Although the Press became an effective medium of transporting the patriotic feelings of the people to the British government, this very Press also played a constructive role in exposing the socio-religious and economic evils of the time, thereby creating an awareness amongst the population and enabling them to 'think', most importantly, resulting in an increase in their ability to question and reason, something that they had forgotten to make effective use of over the years.

This awakening had its influence first on the Punjab and the Sikhs, who were by this time fairly settled, living a stable life with their own rulers and their own government, until the British occupation of Punjab in 1849. Meanwhile the Press continued its role of stirring the people's minds and hearts thus initiating the much needed reforms in society, religion, politics and education. By the early 19th century, political leaders realized how powerful an instrument the periodicals were for spreading ideas. Many of them began to produce their own papers to propagate their ideas and influence people. A new force was detected in society, namely, the force of public opinion. Consequently, the journalism of the period was largely political in nature and thus the impression, justifiable to a great extent, was created that journalism was an adjunct of politics.

Emperor Asoka's pillar inscriptions and rock edicts in different parts of the Mauryan Empire during 3rd century B.C. are considered examples of imperial political communication to the informed and literate section of the population. Ashoka used the Prakrit language in his communication on ethics and morals as evidence by his inscriptions. The learning languages were confined to high casts, the aristocracy, priests, army personnel and landowners. Another feature of communication in ancient India was the emphasis placed on oral and aural systems. Writing was done on palm leaves using a style, but the written documents were considered too scared to be touched or used by the lower classes. The ruling class used certain methods for coding, transmitting and decoding messages secretly through the network of spies to information about neighboring enemies. According to historians of journalism, news was collected in a well-organized manner under Akbar the Great. In 1574, Akbar established a recording office that helped later medieval historians to gather materials for chronicles. The first printing press arrived in India on 6th September 1556 and was installed at the college of St. Paul in Goa. First printed newspaper of India was in English edited and published by James Augustus Hicky, an employee of East India Company. It was named Bengal Gazette which came out on 29th January 1780. Soon many other weeklies and monthlies such as Indian Gazette, Calcutta Journal, Bengal Harakaru, and John Bull in the East came out during the 17th and 18th century. Digdarshan was the first Indian language newspaper.

The famous Raja Ram Mohan Roy also brought out periodicals in English, Bengali and Persian. Some of Roy's papers were Sambad Kaumadi a Brahminical Magazine, Mirat-ul-Akhbar, Bangadoota and Bengal Herald. Although Maharaja Ranjit

Singh encouraged the development of Punjabi journalism, the earliest newspaper in Punjabi was a missionary newspaper. The first printing press in Punjab was established in Ludhiana in 1809.¹

The publication of tracts and newspapers by Sikhs in alignment with revolutionaries from Europe and North America created a significant political crisis for the British government in India. Even Sikh politicians in exile continued fuelling the freedom movement via their writings. So much so that such fiery journalism forced the British to ban such vernacular material. Organizations and public meetings in London stimulated some of the earliest Sikh nationalist publications. Many such meetings were also religiously attended by Sikh students. Pamphlets came to be distributed among Sikh troops and farmers urging them to join in the struggle against the Britishers. This movement slowly started creating an impact even among the Sikh diaspora, particularly in North America.²

California became an important centre of Sikh associations and literary activity. In the early 1900's, Punjabis in San Francisco acquired a Printing Press and renamed it *Yugantar Ashram*. The movement produced revolutionary cells throughout East Asia and India. It also resulted in the publication of a controversial newspaper, the *Ghadr*, meaning *Mutiny* or *Rebellion*, (which was initially started in Urdu, and later also in Punjabi and Hindi). The first issue of *Ghadr* was published in 1913, its articles confined to the British rule. The *Ghadr* mainly preached a message of revolution.³

The works emanating from Sikh centres emphasized the economic and social conditions of the people of India, hoping to generate sympathy and foreign help from the powerful nations.⁴ Oppressive British policies were exposed along with the British policy of *divide and rule*.⁵ Although theoretically addressed to the Indians, much of this literature pertained to the Punjab and the Sikhs. Apart from discussing specific problems affecting the Sikhs, articles attempted to stir Sikh spirits by repeatedly emphasizing their

¹ <http://blog.crjayaparakash.com/?p=285>.

² Joginder Singh, "The Sikhs and Their Literature", *The Sikh Resurgence*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, 1997, p. 99; See also, "Women Education and Sikh Reformers : A Study of Sikh Newspapers and Periodicals in the Early 20th Century", *Journal of Regional History*, Vol. VII, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001, pp. 79-86, Rupinderjit Kaur, *Punjabi Women and The Indian Freedom Struggle (1919-1947)*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001.

³ *Ibid*, p. 100.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 102.

symbols and self-image. The British government in retaliation to such public outburst adopted a variety of tactics to meet threats from hostile writers. Ordinances were passed between 1908 and 1911, by the British Government of India to halt the flow of revolutionary propaganda.⁶ Particular interest was paid to the Sikh publications on account of the major role played by the Sikh army within the Indian army.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Government of Punjab, possessed several laws affecting its control of literature judged as inflammatory or seditious.⁸

According to N.G. Barrier, printed books and newspapers constitute a major set of unused material. Although Punjabi and Sikh literature generally declined after 1849, there is indication that the Sikhs were writing on virtually every subject. By 1910, there were over twenty Sikh newspapers and journals, supplemented by the work of scholars and publicists such as Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Babu Teja Singh Overseer and Bhai Vir Singh. Sikh intellectuals organized the Khalsa Tract Society and the Panjabi Prachar Sabhas, which in turn institutionalized the spread of Sikh literature in the Gurmukhi script.⁹

Out of these many newspapers, periodicals and journals published during the Victorian era, some did take up the task of drawing the attention of the common man towards the social issues particularly towards the general plight of women. Indian women and all aspects of their life came to be compared with that of the European and the Western women, especially the British women. Tremendous comparisons arose and it was found that these women were living two extreme lives, the Indian woman still trapped in age-old shackles of myth and superstition, while women from the developed countries of the world had no doubt a life of equal rights. What arose as a mere observation eventually assumed the form of the growth of the feminist movement in India, with social reformist organizations like the Brahmo Samaj, Prathana Samaj, and

⁶ Joginder Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 102.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 103; See also, Indu Bala, *Women and Socio-Religious Reforms (Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj)*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001, Paramjit Kumar, *Social Institutions in Punjab*, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1997.

⁸ N.G. Barrier, *Banned Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India ; 1907-1947*, Manohar Book Service, New Delhi, 1976. p. 46; See also, N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature : A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals (1849-1919)*, Manohar Book Service, New Delhi, 1970.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 220-221.

the Arya Samaj having spread their branches all over the country. The Singh Sabha effectively carried out this multifarious role of liberating the women of Punjab, by focusing on their education. It was strongly felt that in order to emancipate the Sikh women, education was to play a key role. The Press was used as an effective medium of communicating their ideas and rationale behind the reforms being brought about, thus reaching a vast majority in a short time. Results were encouraging. Amritsar became the main centre from where the vernacular Punjabi newspapers, journals and periodicals came to be published, some of which were printed daily, some others became weekly publications, fortnightly and so on. These had a deep impact in moulding the thought process of the people of Punjab and making them abreast of the changes happening around them. Alongwith articles relating to the freedom movement, writers also highlighted the conditions that prevailed in the society in the form of poems and satire. Large number of Punjabi poets wrote on various issues during this period, adopting numerous themes and writing in various genres. They provide a meaningful evidence on the society and culture of the period.¹⁰

Punjabi literature produced between 1750-1850, has not yet been explored for reconstructing the socio-cultural history of the Punjab.¹¹ Punjabi literature produced during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is remarkable in the history of the Punjab. A bulk of this literature is in verse and some of the best poets of Punjab belonged to this period.¹² The story of *Puran Bhagat* had to be proverbially instructive to generalize social truths. For example, in this story, a son is the crown of the family, a wife—of the home, a king—of his subjects and clouds of the earth. Again a son, is regarded as a must to perpetuate the family, a banker, one who upholds family honour and a spiritual guide to secure redemption. Subscribing to Hindu beliefs and practices, Salvahan's marriage with Luna has to be justified. When Luna, hesitates to marry Salvahan on account of her low caste, a danger to his Khatri caste, the latter tells us that there is no harm in seizing gold, knowledge and a low caste woman. In *Raja Rasalu*, to

¹⁰ Daljinder Johal Singh, *Society and Culutre as Reflected in Punjabi Literature (1750-1850 A.D.)*, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1985, p. i.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. ii; See also, Jatinder Sandhu, *Attitude of Arya Samaj Towards Other Communities in Punjab*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1997.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 22.

clean a sword is take blood, a house fed extensively on pulses brings defeat in the field and a woman kept indulgently is a source of distress.¹³

During Ranjit Singh's reign, Jat Sikhs, comprising a bulk of the Khalsa army, had the advantage of reverting to their traditional occupation at any time. There are indications of the existence of social hierarchy among the Jats at the village level. The Jats attached great importance to property in land. The size of landholding was the basis of one's social status. It figured prominently during matrimonial alliances among those who were financially well-off. A Jat with a large holding also had more power and prestige as he had more labourers and menials attached to his family. These developments therefore led to the attachment of great significance to the number of male members in a family among the peasant proprietors as they were a source of strength for the family in farming as well as in the feuds fought. Sons also brought dowry, due to which a family's social and financial status was further enhanced. In contrast, birth of a girl-child was viewed as a liability, especially among the poor classes. As a result, female infanticide came into vogue.¹⁴

Economic conditions of Jat farmers had serious implications on their marriage arrangements and customs as well. Though there may be exceptions, there is indication that the chances of marrying their boys were rendered hopeless on account of small land holdings. They readily paid bride money to the parents of the girl, thus encouraging selling of daughters, resulting in wide age-differences between the marriage partners. The custom of widow re-marriage called *Karewa* also prevailed among them. There was also a marked difference between the Jats and Khatri, in so far as their social standing and values were concerned.¹⁵ A Khatri *sahukar* (money-lender) being economically well-off could spend enough on the dowry of his daughter. Infanticide was rare among them. Unlike Jat farmers, their profession did not require numerous male members for the purpose of collective labour in a family. They did not favour the idea of widow re-marriage and viewed such a custom with contempt.¹⁶ Meanwhile female infanticide was carried out by the village *dai's*, by administering poison with the first feed to the newly born girl.¹⁷

¹³ Daljinder Johal Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 206.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 207.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 224.

Certain kinds of social etiquettes and rules came to be determined by the traditions of the family and also by the interfamilial relationships. Adherence to certain norms of affinal ties was so imperative that the girl's parents were forced to be humble. A daughter's right in her parents home was constantly validated through the gifts she received on her occasional visits after marriage. Adjustment of a bride in her in-laws house depended much on the dowry she brought along. The primary concern of the mother's therefore became to train their daughters to adjust to their life after marriage. For the young wife the dictates of the mother-in-law and the sister-in-law became a constant source of pain and grief.¹⁸

A woman's life came to be confined within the four walls of the house with all kinds of relatives regulating her behaviour and making decisions for her. She had practically no say in her own house-hold matters and moreover she came to be judged on the basis of her efficiency in pleasing the members of her family. A good wife was considered as one who could cook, sew clothes and spin. It was only on the basis of her adjustment with her husband's family that the prestige of her parental home could be ensured. Adultery was considered as one of the greatest sins. According to Qadir Yar, a writer, it was regarded as unpardonable even after one's death.¹⁹

Warris Shah, another poet, considers a husband's longevity as the ideal blessing for a wife. According to him, shoe-beating was the only proper punishment for a gadding wife.²⁰ Many of these poets do express the significance of marriage as a social regulator. Family integrity and chastity of women was the primary concern. Marriage was being governed by kinship rules. A liason earned a social odium. A grown-up married girl became a source of constant pain to her parents, leading to the practice of child-marriage. More than everything else, marriage was sacramentally indissoluble. According to Nijabat, divorce was viewed with great contempt. Infidelity became a matter of social dishonour among people of respectable classes. People largely did not favour re-marriage of widows. Divorce was not feasible even among the agrarian classes. Amongst all this, dowry existed pre-dominantly.²¹

¹⁸ Daljinder Johal Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 270-272.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 272.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 273.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 274-275.

Birth of sons called for great rejoicing and feasting whereas a daughter's birth generally passed off unnoticed. Celebration of a son's birth on one hand led to mourning of a daughter's birth on the other. Regarding the custom of 'Sati', there is only one known reference by Jaffar Beg about the queens of Ranjit Singh becoming Satis, after his death.²² Apart from this there are no reported cases of Satis in Punjab, esp. among the Sikhs. All this and much other information regarding the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political life of the people of Punjab in general and also the Sikhs in particular can be re-constructed by an analysis of the records available to us in the form of newspaper articles, periodicals, journals and pamphlets duly preserved at the *Sikh History Research Department*, Khalsa College, Amritsar. Although most of them are now in a torn condition, they nevertheless transport a researcher into the era in which they were published. These contemporary records stressed largely on the freedom movement and the issues addressed by the freedom fighters, contemporary movements that began in Europe, Russian influences on Indian politics, etc.

One such article published in the *Jungi Azadi*, mentions the participation of the women of district Amritsar, village Ladewal and Havelian, who belonged to the *Aap Rakheya League*. These women came together and made effective use of a trait they had acquired during their school days to provide monetary assistance to the drought affected people of Bengal. The women of these villages sowed some rice and donated the proceeds of this sale towards the noble cause. This self-less gesture of social service created an excitement among the rest of the Bengalis, who came forward in large numbers to make more such donations towards the Bengal Relief Fund and thus play their part in lessening the woes of the drought victims.²³

The *Civil Military Akhbar*, published from Quetta, was a weekly newspaper. An article published in this newspaper, in the year 1907, refers to the social work undertaken by a women's organization, *Istari Sudhar Sabha*, based in the province of Jammu, was had been actively functioning since the past one year. This Sabha was started by Shrimati Pandita Jivan Mukta Ji. A *Jod-Mela* was successfully organized for a week. Around

²² Daljinder Johal Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 292-293; See also, G.S. Dhillon, *Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement on the History of Punjab*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972.

²³ Teja Singh Satantar (ed.), *Jungi Azadi*, 3 GeB/ fly/ nkgD/ phi/ XkB : phphnK B/ pzrkb czv ftu d/ fds/, 8th November, 1943, p. 5.

thirty-five women had given monthly donations to the Sabha. Pradhan of this Sabha was Sardar Kishen Singh Maktu. It was due to the efforts and initiative of his wife that the Sabha had flourished. Due to her efforts, that monthly donations were collected. Donation collected amounted to rupees eighty-four, out of which rupees fourteen were spent on religious expenses and the remaining seventy rupees were deposited in the Sabha fund. Apart from this the Sabha collected some more donations which were spent on various tasks like celebration of Diwali, Puranamshi and the Gurpurab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Avtaar Dharan, Baisakhi celebrations and on conducting the marriages of orphaned girls. The Sabha was organized every Wednesday in the premises of Gurmat Kanya Pathshala, during which discourses were held on the topic of betterment of women's conditions in society. One such lecture was given by Shriamti Gyan Kaur, wife of Sardar Chanda Singh, who had been invited as the Chief-Guest on the occasion. A yearly Report of the Sabha was presented by Shrimati Pandita Jivan Mukta. After the presentation of the yearly Report, students of the Gurmat Kanya Patshala are said to have presented a programme of *Shabd* recitation, which inspired thirty more women to join the Sabha as members. Following this, seventy two girls from the Gurmat Kanya Patshala, who had passed their yearly examinations, were awarded prizes and monetary incentives. Prizes were also awarded to widows who had been receiving their education on the basis of donations received from this Sabha. Women teachers of the Sabha also received prizes from Sardar Sadhu Singh, a Forest Officer of Baluchistan.²⁴

Another article published in the same newspaper's September issue urged the women to imitate the foreign women. The article's writer clarifies that he does not want the Indian women to blindly copy the Western women in matters of dress, external appearance or smoking and drinking or dance and party like them but to follow them in matters of education and inculcating a spirit of forward thinking and questioning attitude. He wants them to sift good from bad giving the example of a swan and a crow.²⁵

On 8, January, 1910, a poem published in the *Civil Military Akhbar*, describes in detail the values and parting advice being given by a father to his daughter on the eve of her wedding. Being a lengthy poem it addresses each and every aspect of a woman's

²⁴ *Civil Military Akhbar*, fjsq;h ;[Xko ;Gk iwz{, Quetta, June 8, 1907.

²⁵ *Civil Military Akhbar*, Quetta, fB;zr r'fonK dh oh; eo', September 16, 1909, p. 2.

duty after marriage and reflects the idealism that is thrust upon the bride-to-be. On the eve of her marriage, the girl is reminded of the superior expectations that her in-laws family would have from her and how she must fulfill their expectations failing which her life would go astray.²⁶ Newspapers of the later era stress more on the need to educate women and the importance of equipping them with all types of education.

The *Khalsa Samachar*, published from Amritsar, following the Russo-Japanese war, tells of how the Japanese Government worried over their short height were advised to marry taller women by their elders as a solution. The article links this Japanese dilemma to the Indian context, by proclaiming that on the one hand the Japanese are seeking solutions for increasing their height and on the other hand, we have pushed our women to the darkest corners of ignorance. The writer stresses on the need to increase our mental development. This darkness and ignorance of the womenfolk could be dispelled only by education. Our women were to be encouraged to realize the worth of education. Educating Sikh women meant educating the Sikhs.²⁷

Another Punjabi weekly organ of the Sikhs, *Punjabi Darpan*, in one of its news clipping lays stress on the need to educate the women of Hindustan in the science of medicine (*Hakimi*). Information is provided to those interested in seeking admissions to this profession by listing Lord Hardinge Women's Hakimi College in Delhi, as the institute providing this course exclusively for women. However, the main drawback here is that as the medium of instruction followed by the Lord Hardinge Women's Hakimi College is English, many women are not able to benefit from its services.²⁸ (*Punjab Darpan*, Amritsar, Wednesday, January 10, 1917.) Another article from the same newspaper, *Punjab Darpan*, refers to a Report submitted by the Vidayak Committee and Prabandhaks of the Pathshalas. One of the observations made by a scholar in the Report is quoted here. The scholar notes that on seeing the condition of women, one can infer the level of development reached by

²⁶ *Civil Military Akhbar*, Quetta, Xh Bz{ 'jo/ xo s'oB t/b/ fgsK tb'f; fynk, January 8, 1910, p. 4.

²⁷ *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, f;sqh f;y;k, 17th June, 1908.

²⁸ *Punjab Darpan*, Amritsar, f;sqh nK B{z jehwh dh ftd:k, Wednesday, January 10th, 1917; See also, Raj Singh, *Female Education in The Punjab (1921-1947)*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2007.

the community (of the Sikhs) as a whole. The Sikh Vidayak Committee also feels a dire need to review the state of female education in general.²⁹

With Russian influence in particular and western influence in general looming over the Indian scenario in the early 1900's, social reformists were concerned about their implications on the Indian women. Even the Sikhs viewed these changes with a lot of apprehension. Happiness was expressed over the event of the women of village Kairon, having come to Amritsar to spread the wave of improving the conditions of women. Serious objections were raised over the wearing of western clothes by women of this area, especially wearing of Russian style clothes. It was held that blind imitation of western culture spoiled communal harmony and such behaviour on the part of women was not sanctioned by the Sikh religion.³⁰

Another social evil considered as an integral part of the traditional Indian society comes into focus in the contemporary Punjab of the early twentieth century, the practice of buying and selling women. Although there is an indirect reference to this practice by way of a play advertisement in the same issue of the *Punjabi Darpan*, it does highlight the existence of one of the most heinous social crimes against women, despite a ban on this practice by the government. The advertisement states that the play is being staged to help in creating an awareness amongst people, by enacting the lawful action that should be taken against those who indulge in the buying and selling of women, an evil commonly practiced in the hilly areas of Punjab.³¹ Though one could successfully construct many unknown facets of Sikh women's history, these immemorial marvels in print are mostly found in a torn condition.

The Khalsa Advocate, dated 15th July, 1904, adopts a tough stand against the practice of dowry and lavish expenditure incurred at the time of marriages.³² Similarly *The Khalsa Advocate*, dated 29th April, 1905, states that the Singh Sabha prohibited the use of *purdah*.³³

²⁹ *Punjab Darpan*, Amritsar, ##f;sq|nK B{z fe; gqeko dh ftd:k dh bV j?\$\$, Wednesday, February 21, 1917, p. 3.

³⁰ *Punjab Darpan*, Amritsar, ##f;sq|nK Bz{ ;[XkoB dk :sB\$\$, Wednesday, June 6, 1917, p. 3.

³¹ *Punjab Darpan*, Amritsar, Wednesday, June 6th, 1917.

³² *The Khalsa Advocate*, Lahore, July 15th, 1904, p. 6.

³³ *The Khalsa Advocate*, Lahore, April 29th, 1905.

Istri satsang, (issues available–April 8, 1904 to March 25, 1909), is a newspaper dedicated to the cause of women. Passing references are made to the problems faced by women and their status. Excerpts from the *Gurbani* are given in detail and there is reference to the performance of prayer by women. Elsewhere hymns from the *Gurbani* are taught. Development of female education and the condition of widowed women is also mentioned by way of yearly Reports and articles. Major stress of this newspaper is on the Sikh religion, its values, rules and regulations. Another newspaper *Nayak*, (issues available–December 8 1920 to January, 1922), traces the independence movement in India and the participation of its people in it. References to the organization of some conferences of the time are also found. *Panth Premi*, (Available issues – June 18, 1928 to May 25, 1929), provides a gist of the times. It mentions the conditions of the Gurdwaras and the related laws passed for Gurdwara reformation. It also carries news related to the independence movement, highlights the role of Sikh martyrs and the contributions of the philosophers of the Khalsa Panth. There are brief notes also on the Simon Commission. The Sikh Educational Conference of Sargodha is stated coupled with some advertisements. *Sacha Dhandora*, (available issues – August 31, 1909 to November 2, 1935), refers to the new developments within the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the issue of Gurdwara Sheesh Ganj Sahib.

It also describes the Punjab State Conference and the Shimla Resolution, gives information about Gandhi's Round Table Conference and the British. The Satyagraha movement is also discussed. In addition one finds some illustrations and advertisements in the newspaper. The *Khalsa Samachar* (Available issues – May 27, 1908 – September 14, 1950), discusses various aspects of the religion of the Sikhs, its problems and development. Along with the *bani* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, it also gives religious and moral discourses to the Sikhs. It also refers to the Gurdwaras and their importance in the life of the Sikhs. Reports of the Sikh educational conferences are also published. There is also a list of books on the Sikh religion and history. Political, social and other information is also found along with advertisements.

Various issues of the *Khalsa Akhbar* (Published from Lahore) highlight the importance of female education, and the urgent need to involve them in the mainstream affairs of both society and religion. The *Khalsa Akhbar* dated 6th November, 1886 states that education of women is extremely necessary both for the development of the Sikh

community as well as for the growth and advancement of the Sikh religion.³⁴ The same newspaper in its issue dated 4th August, 1888 underlines once again the need of female education.³⁵ In order to explain the importance of female education, male members of the society are addressed through the article.³⁶ Moreover another article considers man as a complete without the company and support of a woman and thus the male members of the society cannot fulfill their worldly obligations by not giving the women their due.³⁷ The *Khalsa Akhbar* dated 23rd February, 1900, stresses on the need of rising above caste and such other considerations at the time of solemnising marriages.³⁸ The *Khalsa Akhbar* recurrently emphasizes the importance of female education in Punjab as being indispensable for the betterment of the Sikh community.³⁹

The *Punjab Darpan* (Issues available - August 30, 1916 to September 14, 1950), published recurrent news clippings on the Europe and the World War and its effects. It also reflected upon the impact of the World War on the Indian political and social scene. Reports and proceedings of the Sikh Educational Conferences were published by the *Punjab Darpan*. Development of the Arya Samaj movement in Punjab is accompanied by some editorials and advertisements. Another newspaper, titled *Beer*, (Available issues–May 16, 1911 to December 7, 1924), was published in Punjabi from Amritsar, carrying many articles relating to the political scenario of the time, developments within the Khalsa Panth, advertisements, etc. A Punjabi newspaper titled

³⁴ *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, ##dHlaig dl,Ddtbj sg ;iPia\$\$@ 6th November, 1886, p. 5 :

h[fiq[li: b]f dwifj wi' l]c[s[l s[ug ba[Rpaq fpitJ s[dya dry dHla+g dltIj sj Rpqjhj s[r' a[l]c[s[l sg qjHg WgWgbJ s[dya dry Wg drsIj ba[LpF b]yji s[rv f+[i' m

³⁵ *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, ##dHlaig dl,Ddtbj sg v'C\$\$@ 4th August, 1888, p. 4 :

duaVj l]c[s[l]g Fij b,u wv vCdwbJ sg fChjHg a[;'i s[Gs[hV Rpl Vjv'G l'rJ dh,lj Fg dHla+g dltIj r,v dZl]V Vhk s[Gs[Ij dHM bjt' dw dHla+g dl,tIj sg wpN ;iPia Vhk lqNs[m

³⁶ *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, 6th November, 1886, p. 3 :

dul f+wji dHw b,t s[h'S \$a[qVp<t wjSj hp.sj] ba[dHw WJh h'S[a[vp.uj hp.sj]@ dHlg f+wji dHla+g bVfC% h'S[Vjv b]sqg Vgq rdhLg bioja b,Zj qPit dedSIJ uJsj] m

³⁷ *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, 27th October, 1899, p. 7 :

vCwg Rph rlaP] u' bfVg Rpqij fi fhp.y w[fpit sj b,Zj dh,lj b]tIj uJsj] dula[dWVJ dHh f+jSg bfVj l.ljiw w.q fPij Vhk wi lwsj dHl rla[dHlsj dWVj dwl[Vdq,a a[qji lp,BVj HgLri sg l.ljiw qVp<tg dl+LBg s[b,DZ[dh,DI[sj zja wiVj] u' qhJ tPVg Ij Ziq zjag w.q] m

³⁸ *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, 23rd February, 1900, p. 5 :

blk wHg dl>zJ sgbJ vCwgbJ b>VqagbJ s[zik uJsgbJ s[t ih[hJ bi wHg dl,tIj s[fp,a+ y.e[upbjV ba[drs:jVj } wpbjl[dxis[fMs[hJ fi.aP us blk dHlsj wjiV fp,As[hJ as H[h[lpSs[hJ dw l]cg uja sj wHg b]sqg Vhk dqdvbj!!!!!!!!f>o bfVg RpVag sj VqPVj s[t]ej as b]Lj f[Gsg] dw b,De[rZV vHg Fg IaV wi]ej m

³⁹ Inderjeet Singh, *Giani Dit Singh : Jivan, Rachna Te Vichardhara*, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2009, pp. 293-294.

Bharat, (Issues available- March 25, 1917 to April 8, 1917), was published weekly, carrying religious, political and educational information, focusing on the Sikh Women Educational Conferences, and celebration of various festivals.⁴⁰

Education in the Punjab on the advent of the British rule cannot be said to be in a flourishing condition. The Sikh form of education (Vernacular Education in Gurmukhi), may be said to have been in its infancy, but Gurmukhi was of yet to be develop.⁴¹ The Educational Despatch of 1854 placed the subject of female education under the care of the Supreme Government and the matter recieved due attention at the hands of the local government all over India.⁴² The educational experiment of the British Government in India was carried on by the Education Department under the Provincial Government and in doing so, many problems of various kinds were encountered in the Punjab.⁴³ Regarding the type of education imparted to the women, it was almost entirely of a religious or semi-religious character.⁴⁴ By the turn of twentieth century, the Sikh reformers realised that only educated women could play an important role in the propagation of Sikhism; transmitting its ethical and moral values to the Sikh children and youth. To achieve this objective, they debated the pattern of curriculum for women education through their newspapers and periodicals. Prominent among them were the *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar (1899); the *Khalsa Advocate*, Lahore (1901); *Istri Satsang*, Amritsar (1904); *Istri Samachar*, Quetta (1908); *Punjabi Bhain*, Ferozepure (1907); *Istri Sudhar*, Amritsar (1924); *Phulwari*, Amritsar and Lahore, (1924); *Akali*, Lahore (1920); *Pritam*, Mintgomery and Lahore (1922); and *Fateh*, Lahore (1927).⁴⁵

Majority of these newspapers are found in the Punjabi language which had a wide reach, being vernacular in nature. Another feather in their cap was the printing of these newspapers from Amritsar, Punjab. Therefore they had a wider audience and

⁴⁰ Kumari Hema, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Old Newspapers and the Magazines* (1904-1988), in *Sikh History Research Department of Khalsa College, Amritsar*, Ph.D. Thesis, Dept. of Library and Information Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001.

⁴¹ H.R. Mehta, *A History of The Growth and Development of Western Education in Punjab (1846-1884)*, Languages Department Punjab, Patiala, 2003, pp. 12-13; See also, Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *The Sikh Reference Book*, Edmonton, Canada, 1997.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 71.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Joginder Singh, "Women Education and Sikh Reformers : A Study of Sikh Newspapers and Periodicals in the Early 20th Century", *Journal of Regional History*, Vol. VII, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001, p. 79.

scholarly contributors. On reading these newspapers one is awestruck at the manner in which these newspapers performed their duty of making the people abreast of facts and just not information. One finds them following the principle of fearless journalism both in theory and in practice. Alongwith political, social, economic and other current events, women's issues have also been tackled by them. A large scale movement for the empowerment of Sikh women began from Punjab with full support of these newspapers. Organisations of the Singh Sabha became the foremost in leading the cause of the emancipation of Sikh women using the medium of education. It becomes quite interesting to note how women stepped full-fledgedly into a life and society beyond the four walls of the home starting first by entering schools. Singh Sabha reformers had a tough time convincing their families to allow them to attend school.

The Sikh Educational Conference promoted the 'cause' of the Punjabi language and female education. These became the main concerns of the Sikh Educational Conference, inaugurated in 1908 in Gujranwala.⁴⁶ Thus began a movement of educational renaissance in Punjab. The Conference soon became a great source of inspiration for the Sikhs. Schools were opened in quick succession throughout Punjab. In addition to these schools, over two dozen Punjabi libraries and literary associations also came to up.⁴⁷

Apart from promoting communal harmony, the Sikh Educational Conference worked not only for the education of boys but also for girls, for whom a large number of schools and colleges were established. The much needed incentive, in this case, was provided by two of the greatest advocates of women's education and promoters of the Conference; Bhai Takht Singh of Ferozepur and Baba Nihal Singh of Kairon. The impetus given by these veterans helped in furthering the noble cause of women's emancipation in Punjab. The conference also played an important role in the advancement of physical education and also triggered a revolutionary awakening among the masses.⁴⁸ Papers presented at the various sessions of Sikh Educational Conferences

⁴⁶ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History; Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Ganda Singh (ed.), *The Singh Sabha and Other Socio-Religious Movements in the Punjab (1850-1925)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, p. 69; See also, Govinder Kaur Sidhu, *A Historical Study of the Development of Female Education in Punjab since 1849*, Department of Education, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1985, (unpublished).

⁴⁸ Ganda Singh (ed.), *Op.cit*, pp. 70-71.

made due reference to the glorious legacy of female education among the Sikhs.⁴⁹ Besides laying emphasis on women's reform amongst the Sikhs, promotion of the study of Punjabi language and literature was equally important on the agenda of these conferences.⁵⁰ Karamjit Singh's study highlights in general the status and role of women in the history of Punjab, especially during the nineteenth century. The period of study is divided into three different phases, 1800-1839, 1839 to 1849 and 1849 to 1900, in order to understand not only the changes that took place in their position and status from time to time, but also to highlight the significance of their role in the polity and society of the nineteenth century. The impact of social evils on the position of women in the medieval period is discussed along with the efforts made by the socio-religious reform movements supported by British legislation and liberalisation towards the emancipation of Sikh women.⁵¹ The writer is of the view that various socio-religious evils like the caste system, *purdah*, female infanticide, early marriage in turn leading to early widowhood, treatment of widows, polygamy etc. lowered status of women in society.⁵²

Other sources of popular Sikh literature in the form of pamphlets, periodicals and journals of the study period were not available for research as they have been destroyed during the Operation Blue Star from the Sikh Research Itihaas Board, Golden Temple premises, Amritsar. Female education began in Punjab from Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepur. However, a visit to the Bhai Takht Singh Library situated within the school's premises, revealed that much of the valuable literature had perished in a flood. The remaining documents which were saved from the flood were then deposited with the Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, which has now become the only source of reviewing contemporary literature.

⁴⁹ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, p. 152.

⁵⁰ Ganda Singh (ed.), *Op.cit*, p. 71.

⁵¹ Karamjit Singh, *Status and Redemption of Women in Punjab*, Pre-submission paper for Ph.D., Department of History, Punjabi University, Patiala, n.d., p. 1.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 2.

CHAPTER-VI

GENDER IDEAS AND INSIGHTS IN SIKH RAHIT MARYADA

Rahit Maryada means "To live in the constant remembrance of death." It is a code of conduct for living. "Reh," from the verb "reheanaa," means to continue, or to live. Adding "it," it means "lifestyle." "Mar" is derived from the verb "marna," to die, and "yad" means remembrance; thus, "maryada" means "the remembrance of death." A more common translation is simply a code of conduct for living. The Rahit Maryada is made up of techniques and tools to help maintain the consciousness of the Sikh, who is to live like the lotus, with roots entrenched in the mud of the world, but with the flower of consciousness floating upon the surface, pure and spotless.¹ Kahn Singh in his encyclopaedia, *Mahan Kosh*, defines the *Rahit* as the systematic statement of Sikh principles; the way of life lived in accordance with the principles of the Sikh religion.² The *Rahit*, defines what a Khalsa Sikh should believe and how he should behave.³

The *Rahit* is the Khalsa way of life, the code which (in atleast a rudimentary way) practically all Sikhs should observe. It is the system of belief and distinctive behaviour which all who formally undergo Khalsa initiation together with those who informally accept the code are expected to observe.⁴ Traces of earliest *Rahit* can be seen in the teachings of Guru Nanak and consequently it underwent substantial changes and emerged in its evolved form under the subsequent Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh, while formally establishing the Khalsa Panth, did give his followers a *Rahit*, a guiding torch to help them tread upon the ideal way of life. The *Rahitnamas* following the emergence of the Khalsa Panth , further took this a step ahead.

¹ <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/cdb661ad2c7ac234872565b7007b33b3!OpenDocument>.

² W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society*, New Delhi, 2007, p. 105.

³ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 108.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, is to be taken as a key to the Sikh spiritual and social philosophy.⁵ The *Rahit Maryada* reaches far into the personal life and psychology of the individual Sikh. It also exerts a powerful impact upon the character of the community as a whole. Historically, the individual was lifted out of a state of superstition, ignorance and fear, out of the adherence to empty rituals, out of a restrictive caste system from which there was no escape or elevation, and out of a society which was succumbing to the forces of tyranny and oppression. The individual Sikh was uplifted to a shared equal status, sharing a reverence for One God, the Supreme Creator of all the creation, and an awareness of kinship with every other living creature. S/he was given a right and a means to relate to God in an individual, personal relationship. S/he was given a way to experience God through righteous conduct in the world. S/he was given a way to become aware of God within her or himself and in all of Creation. And finally, s/he was given the means by which s/he could effect change in society and help the downtrodden humanity to lift itself up and fight against oppression and religious persecution.⁶ The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* is a product of the *Tat Khalsa*'s quest for consistency and for its conviction that Sikhs definitely are not Hindus.⁷ The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, is thus a late nineteenth-century source of the *Khalsa Rahit*. Influenced by contemporary patterns of thought (patterns which reflected in considerable measure the rationalizing influence of the British) the scholars of the *Tat Khalsa* undertook an extensive purging, supplementing, and reordering of the received *Rahit*. The *Rahit*, must thus be viewed as an evolving system, one which began to emerge during the earliest days of the Sikh tradition. It thereafter continued to develop formally (in accordance with deliberate decisions) and informally (in response to internal influences and external pressures).⁸

The role of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in Sikh worship continued to expand during the nineteenth-century, and it attained a systematized form in the authoritative Sikh code

⁵ *Sikh Rahit Maryada : The Code of Sikh Conduct and Conventions*, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, 2006, p. i; Parmar Nirapjit, "Gender Issues and Insights in Sikh Rahit Maryada", *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 19-21st March, 2010 (in press).

⁶ <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument>.

⁷ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 112.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 113.

of conduct (*Sikh Rahit Maryada*) produced in the middle decades of the twentieth century under the auspices of the SGPC.⁹ Nonetheless, the *Guru Granth Sahib* sets forth a view of spirituality that rejects asceticism of any kind and instead mandates an effective fulfillment of the routine obligations of our lives within society. Liberation is attained by living actively as an individual who is also part of a family and a community and is guided by a strict code of ethical conduct (*acharRahit*) built on the values of hard work, charity, and service to humanity.¹⁰ The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, the standard manual of Sikh doctrine and behaviour, begins by defining a 'Sikh'.¹¹ Gender issues are briefly, but importantly discussed in the later chapters of the S.G.P.C. published *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. Regarding the *Sadharan Path* (Completion of normal intermittent reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib*), the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, writes that every Sikh, man, woman, boy or girl, should learn Gurmukhi to be able to read the *Guru Granth Sahib*.¹² The tenth chapter of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, deals with specific issues like female infanticide, sexual morality and freedom vested with the female members of the Panth as regards wearing of a turban by them. It is categorically stated that a Sikh should not kill his daughter; nor should he maintain any relationship with anyone who has indulged in this heinous crime.¹³

Another man's daughter is to be regarded as one's own daughter and another's wife is to be viewed as one's mother. Sexual relations are to be kept with one's wife alone. A Sikh woman is to follow similar standards of sexual morality.¹⁴ A Sikh woman is instructed not wear a veil, thus the custom of observing *Purdah* is discouraged

⁹ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹¹ W.H. McLeod, *Op.cit*, p. 135.

¹² *Sikh Rahit Maryada; Op.cit*, p. 17 :

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 24 :

¹⁴ *Loc.cit* :

jo ffe;Zy;f;ZDh, pZu/ pZuh B{ r[ow[yh gVQe/ ;qh r[o{ r qzE ;kffp ih dk gkm eoBk f;ZyDk ukjh]/.
r[o{ ek f;Zy ezfBnk Bk wko/; e[Vh-wko Bkb Bk tos/.
go p/Nh e' p/Nh ikB?. go f;sqh e' wks pykB?. ngfB f;sqh ;'A of; j]h.
offstzs f;zx j? ;'jh. f;/ sokQA f;Zy f;sqh nkgD/ gshpos Xow 'u oj/.

here. As far as tying of a turban is concerned, though it is mandatory for a Sikh to wear a turban, a woman is however given voluntary choice in this matter. She may or may not tie a turban.¹⁵ Another debate going around in Sikh studies revolves around the issue of Sikh nomenclature and the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, categorically states here that a Sikh boy is to add the suffix ‘Singh’ and a Sikh girl, the suffix ‘Kaur’ to his/her name respectively.¹⁶ The contents of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* had far-reaching effects, particularly with regard to Sikh female identity. What had during the early years of the twentieth century remained an ill-defined, disjunctive, and even cryptic endorsement of Sikh female nomenclature, had by this time been transformed to the level of *prescription* for Sikh females and fundamental to their very identity. In the new code, the appellation ‘Kaur’ as a specific Sikh *Symbol*, was for the first time officially sanctioned.¹⁷ The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, takes a clear stand against the socio-religious evils like dowry, child-marriage, polygamy, infidelity and prohibition of widow-remarriages.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, prescribes marriage of a Sikh girl only to a Sikh male without consideration of caste or sub-caste. It prohibits child-marriage, permits widow-remarriage and enjoins that a Sikh marriage must be performed under Anand marriage rites. The Anand Marriage Act of 1909, gives legal recognition and validates marriages solemnized following this ceremony. A formal engagement or betrothal ceremony takes place usually at the boy’s residence where a few near relations of the girl go with some gifts, which are to be simple in nature and not very lavish or expensive.¹⁸ Alongside

¹⁵ *Sikh Rahit Maryada; Op.cit*, p. 24 :

f;Zy.f;sohnkA bjh godk ikA x[zv eoBk T[Zfus BjhA.

f;Zy.f;soh d;sko ;ikj/ ikA Bk ;ikj/, d't/A mhe jB.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25 :

bVe/ d/ BkT[A.fgS/ 'f;zx' ,pd ns/ bVeh d/ BkwfgZS/ 'e"o' ,pd brkfj)nk ikt/.

¹⁷ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History – Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 231.

¹⁸ <http://www.sikh.net/SIKHISM/AnandKaraj.htm> :

f;Zy f;ZyDh dk ftnkj, fpBkA iks-gks, r's ftuko/ d/ j'Dk ukjhj/. f;Zy dh g[Zsoh dk ftnkj f;Zy Bkb jh j't/. f;Zy dk ftnkj 'nBzd' ohsh Bkb eoBk ukjhj/. bVeh bVe/ dk ftnkj pugB ftZu eoBk fttofis j?. bVe/ ikA bVeh dk ;zi'r g?;k b? e/ Bk eo'. f;f;soh dk Gosk ekb-tZ; j' ikt/, T[j ukj/ skA :r to d/y e/ g[Bo ;zi'r eo bt/. f;Zy dh f;soh wo ikt/ skA T[; bjh Gh f]j' j[ew j?. nkW jkbskA ftu f;Zy B{z f]e f;soh d/ j[zfdnkA d{ik ftnkj BjhA eoBk ukjhj/.

Singh Sabha educational objectives, an equally important and perhaps an even far-reaching goal was the displacement and reorganization of tradition, particularly women's traditions, including rituals, identity-markers and rites. One important example of this process was the passing of the Anand Marriage Act of 1909. The name of the marriage rite was taken from 'Anand' meaning 'the song of joy' composed by Guru Amar Das at the birth of his grandson. Initially, marriages solemnized by the Anand marriage rite were associated with the Namdhari and Nirankari Sikhs. Gradually, over a period of time the Anand Marriage Act came to represent Sikhism's distinction from the wider Hindu culture more than any other single entity during the reform endeavour of the Singh Sabha Movement.¹⁹ However, the Singh Sabha reformers had to launch a vigorous campaign in order to procure legal sanction for the Anand Marriage Act, which eventually became a Law in 1909. Within a comparatively short time, Anand Karaj had become the standard form for Sikh marriages, a testimony to the determination of the reformers and to the influence which they had acquired.²⁰ The Anand Marriage Act is monogamous. Marriage ceremony is the same for the legally divorced, widows and widowers. Payment or acceptance of dowry is discouraged.²¹

Regarding the participation of Sikh women in religious and other ceremonies of the Panth, a woman is authorized to act as an officiant in baptism and other ceremonies.²² The six baptized Sikhs who are to administer the ambrosial baptism, may include Sikh women writes the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. The only condition here is that they must have taken bath and washed their hair.²³ Article XXIV (d), of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, states that any man or woman of any country, religion or caste who embraces Sikhism and solemnly undertakes to abide by its principles is entitled to ambrosial baptism.²⁴

¹⁹ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, p. 79.

²⁰ W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 1.

²¹ Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *A Book of Sikh Studies*, National Book Shop, New Delhi, 2005, p.188.

²² *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, *Op.cit*, p. 43.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 34 :

²⁴ *Loc.cit* :
gzi nzfwqs SekD tkb/ gzi fgnko/ 'u f;zxDhmkA Gh j' ;edhmkA jB. fJBQkA ;kfonkA B/ e/;h f;BkB ehsk j't/.

jo d/; jo wiQp s/ iksh d/ jo f;soqh g[o; B{z nzfwqs SeD dk nfXeko j?, i' f;Zy Xow rqqjD eoB 's/ T[; d/ n;{bkA T[go uZbD dk gqD eo'.

The Rahit Maryada reaches far into the personal life and psychology of the individual Sikh. It also exerts a powerful impact upon the character of the community as a whole. Historically, the individual was lifted out of a state of superstition, ignorance and fear, out of the adherence to empty rituals, out of a restrictive caste system from which there was no escape or elevation, and out of a society which was succumbing to the forces of tyranny and oppression. The individual Sikh was uplifted to a shared equal status, sharing a reverence for One God, the Supreme Creator of all the creation, and an awareness of kinship with every other living creature. S/he was given a right and a means to relate to God in an individual, personal relationship. S/he was given a way to experience God through righteous conduct in the world. S/he was given a way to become aware of God within her or himself and in all of Creation. And finally, s/he was given the means by which s/he could effect change in society and help the downtrodden humanity to lift itself up and fight against oppression and religious persecution.²⁵

The Code of Conduct was directed towards the creation of an ideal Sikh society, consisting of men and women of a high noble character.²⁶ Doris writes that the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, was finally recognized as the definitive statement of conduct for Sikhs, and has remained so to this time. The contents of the *Maryada* had far-reaching effects, particularly with regard to Sikh female identity.²⁷

²⁵ <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument>.

²⁶ <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/6903fd89fbfb72b5872565b7007b33c1!OpenDocument>.

²⁷ Doris R. Jakobsh, *Op.cit*, p. 231.

CHAPTER-VII

PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN IN HISTORY AND TRADITION

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

MATA TRIPTA

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

¹ Gagan Aneja, *Great Sikh Women*, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, 2007, p. 18; See also, Suvira Jaiswal, "Women in Early India : Problems and Perception", *Indian History Congress*, Proceedings of the 42nd Session, Magadh University, Bodhgaya, 1981, pp. 54-60.

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

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

² Sarjit Singh Bal, *Life of Guru Nanak*, Publication Bureau, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1984, p. 15.

³ Gagan Aneja, *Op.cit*, p. 26.

⁴ Sarjit Singh Bal, *Op.cit*, pp. 16-17.

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

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

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

⁵ Sarjit Singh Bal, *Op.cit*, pp. 17-18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁰ Simran Kaur, *Prasiddh Sikh Beebiyan*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2005, pp. 42-45.

MATA SULAKHANI

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's *Mahan Kosh*, states that Sulakhani was born in the village Pakhoke, district Gurdaspur to Moolchand Chand Khatri and Mata Chando. Her father was a pious Chona Khatri merchant, who was the tax collector (Patwari) of his village. The year of her birth is not given, but on the basis of her year of marriage, one can guess that it was around 1473. The writer states that she was born with "super characteristics," but does not elaborate further. He does mention that she was named Sulakhani. There is no information regarding her early life.¹¹ According to Sahib Singh, Guru Nanak and Sulakhani were engaged on Visak 5, 1542, vs, and the marriage took place on Harh 24, 1544 vs. Guru Nanak was 18 years old at the time of marriage and Sulakhani must have been about 14.¹² Sulakhani is also referred to as Mata Choni.¹³ She was married off at an early age due to the prevalent custom of child marriage. The marriage was truly unique in its own way as Guru Nanak defied many of the social rituals and ceremonies and had the wedding solemnized his way. It is said that his marriage party consisted of people belonging to various castes, which is said to have offended the bride's father.¹⁴

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

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

¹¹ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matassullakhniji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930>.

¹² *Loc.cit.*

¹³ W.H. Mcleod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p.203.

¹⁴ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p. 52; See also, Bhajan Singh, "Mata Sulakhani", *The Guru's Consorts*, (ed. Mohinder Kaur Gill) Radha Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

¹⁵ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 30-31.

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

BIBI NANAKI

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

¹⁶ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, pp.54-55. See also; Malhi Satnam Kaur, "*Role of the Prominent Sikh Women in History upto 1863*", M.Phil Dissertation, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1988.

¹⁷ Sarjit Singh Bal, *Op.cit.*, p. 153.

¹⁸ Sawan Singh, *Noble and Brave Sikh Women*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, 2005, p.13.

¹⁹ Sarjit Singh Bal, *Op.cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bebenanakiji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930BebeNanakiJi>.

Nanaki saw the traits of a great saint in Guru Nanak, right from his early childhood. She regarded him not as her *Veer* (brother) but as a *Peer* (a messenger of God). She often shielded Guru Nanak from her father who nurtured great expectations from his only son. She could often be found acting as a catalyst between her practically inclined father and her spiritually occupied brother, Guru Nanak. She was the biggest support of her mother and later on her sister-in-law, Sulakhani, Guru Nanak's wife, who had only Nanaki to turn to in troubled times, following Guru Nanak's absence for long periods from his family.

Nanaki was married to Jai Ram, a revenue officer at Sultanpur, in the service of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi. It was on her behest that Jai Ram arranged for a suitable job for Guru Nanak in the Nawab's service. She further helped him in settling at Sultanpur alongwith Sulakhani.²¹ It is said that Jai Ram was more than happy to have Guru Nanak at Sultanpur, as he knew that this was what Nanaki wanted more than anything else.²² Further, Nanaki and Jai Ram advised Guru Nanak to bring his wife from Batala and begin the life of a *Grihista* (house-holder) after he had performed his duties as a storekeeper to everyone's satisfaction.²³ Various accounts mention the intense love that existed between Guru Nanak and his sister, there are exaggerations of the episodes that have supposedly taken place between the two.

However, most of these works are in agreement that it was Nanaki who had given Guru Nanak money to buy his first *Rabab*. She inspired him to sing *Shabads*. Nanaki assisted Guru Nanak in maintaining social ties in a cordial way.²⁴ Nanaki breathed her last in November 1518, and Guru Nanak was by her side during her last moments, at Sultanpur. He even performed her last rites.²⁵ Guru Nanak did not visit Sultanpur after Nanaki's death.²⁶

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

²¹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 14-15.

²² Sarjit Singh Bal, *Op.cit*, 1984, p. 37.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 39.

²⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 98.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 98.

²⁶ Gagan Aneja, *Op.cit*, 2007, p. 30.

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

MATA KHIVI

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

wife to deal with. There are no records of her thoughts or feelings or how she handled the situation.²⁷

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiviji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

²⁸ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 17 :

okwebh eh tko
okfj pbtzfv sEk ;s? v{fw nkyh pbtzv yhth B/e iBfi;[pj[sh SkT[gsqkbbh..
bzrfo dT[bfs tzvhn? o;[nzfwqs[yhf0 fcnkbbh..
r{of:yk e/ w[y T[ib/ wBw[y Eh]/ gokbbh.. g]? ep{b[y;zw Bkfb iAk xkb wodh xkbbh..
wksk yhth j[;fj ffb r'fj T[mkbbh..£..

²⁹ Gagan Aneja, *Op.cit*, p. 33.

³⁰ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiviji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

singing of Guru Nanak's hymns that made a devout idol-worshipper like Guru Amar Das denounce such futile practices and adopt the new faith as preached by Guru Nanak and carried ahead by Guru Angad Dev. When Guru Angad Dev assumed Guruship in 1539, she along with him accepted the new faith whole-heartedly and participated in the further development of Guru Nanak's ideals, and teachings, by Guru Angad Dev.³¹ Khivi successfully continued the responsibility of community kitchen started by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. In fact, service in the *Langar* was her life's mission. Since Khadur was situated at the riverbank and so many travelers took food from the community kitchen. This kitchen proved very useful in the spread of Sikhism rapidly. In fact, *Langar* is a unique and integral part of Sikhism and credit for keeping it alive goes to Khivi. While Guru Angad Dev spread Sikhism in congregations (*Sangat*), she was doing the same in the community kitchen. The expenses were met out of the offerings of the Sikhs. Khivi shouldered multiple responsibilities during her life-time and thus set a personal example by performing exemplary service in consolidating the new faith.³² Khivi did much more than work in the kitchen. She created a loving atmosphere for all whom she came in contact with.³³ According to Mohinder kaur Gill, Khivi learnt to break the limitations imposed upon the female sex by the society as she alongwith other women lived without the *Purdah* and performed self-less service in the community kitchen (*langar*). Dignity of women as advocated by Guru Nanak, was practically demonstrated by Khivi, who became the first woman in the evolving Sikh faith to preach women's emancipation after 1539.³⁴

Khivi, thus, in her own dignified way was successful in breaking the age-old social practices which were largely responsible in creating social imbalances.³⁵ Khivi's work in the field of women's reform paved the way for Guru Amar Das to continue the work further, who vehemently opposed social injustices like *Sati* and *Purdah*.³⁶ Seeking inspiration from Khivi's untiring efforts, others followed suit and took interest in public

³¹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 18.

³² *Ibid*, p. 19.

³³ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matakhiviji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

³⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 31.

³⁵ *Loc.cit.*

³⁶ *Loc.cit.*

service.³⁷ Since Guru Angad Dev had vowed never to take any money from the offerings made by the pilgrims. The Guru made jute ropes in order to earn his livelihood and Khivi helped him in his labour.³⁸ Khivi lived for thirty years after Guru Angad Dev's death. During this time she continued serving the community. She had the distinction of meeting five Gurus. Khivi died at Khadur in 1582, and the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, himself attended her cremation.³⁹

BIBI AMRO

Born in 1532, at village Khadur near Amritsar, to Guru Angad Dev and Mata Khivi, she received her early education directly from her parents. She was taught to read and write in the Gurmukhi script, which had been revised and simplified by her father, Guru Angad Dev. Many sacred hymns were learnt by her and according to the *Bansavalinama*, she knew the *Sidh Gosht* by heart. Amro was gifted with a melodious voice and was multi-talented.⁴⁰ She was married to Bhai Jasoo son of Manak Chand of Basarke village. As was the custom of the day, she was sent to live with her husband's family. Her father encouraged her to continue doing kirtan and to preach Sikhism to all that she came in contact with. Guru Amar Das who was her husband's uncle was impressed by her sweet melodious voice when he heard her singing shabads (holy hymns). It was she who first introduced him to the teachings of Sikhism. As his interest grew, it was she who sent him to her father to learn more about these teachings. Guru Amar Das was so deeply influenced by Guru Angad Dev, that he became a devout Sikh, so much that Guru Angad Dev announced him as his Successor. Thus Guru Amar Das, the third Guru got to his destiny of becoming a Guru through Bibi Amro.

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

³⁷ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 33.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 35.

³⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 19; See also, Shashi Bala, "Women and Worship-The Sikh Perspective", *The Sikh Review*, May, 2003, pp. 32-39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

collecting revenues and making decisions for the welfare of her diocese. Her manji or diocese included Basarke, her husband's village, which was also their home. It is the direct result of the efforts of Bibi Amro and other Sikh preachers that Amritsar today is synonymous with Sikhism.⁴¹

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

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

⁴¹ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bibiamro.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

⁴² Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁴³ Gagan Aneja, *Great Sikh Women*, Chandigarh, 2007, p. 35.

⁴⁴ *Loc.cit.*

⁴⁵ Simran Kaur, *Prasiddh Sikh Beebiyan*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 82.

MANSA DEVI

In the year, 1502, Mansa Devi was married to Guru Amar Das, at the age of sixteen. Since there is virtually no available information regarding the birth or early childhood and education of Mansa Devi, on the basis of details known only after her marriage, her birth year is approximately fixed as somewhere between 1482-1485.⁴⁷ It is further assumed that since Guru Amar Das's father, Tej Bhan, was a rich landlord and trader, Mansa Devi's father Devi Chand Behl, also must have been quite well-off. The wedding took place at village Sankhara, situated at a distance of about sixty miles from Guru Amar Das's village, Basarke. It is also assumed that Mansa Devi had a thorough knowledge of Gurmukhi.⁴⁸

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

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

⁴⁷ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 41.

neighbours. Guru Amar Das's daughter Bhani too was appointed as the head of these seventy-two *Manjis*.⁵¹

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

BIBI BHANI

Bhani is introduced as a noble lady, by Sawan Singh in his book, *Noble and Brave Sikh Women*. Daughter of Guru Amar Das and Mansa Devi, she was also affectionately called *Mohini*, by the Guru. Born in 1533, at village Basarke, near Amritsar, she was also the wife of Guru Ram Das, mother of Arjun, grandmother of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and great grandmother of Guru Gobind Singh. She is regarded as a symbol of service.⁵²

She was married on 18 February 1554 to Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das), a Sodhi Khatri belonging to Lahore, then in Goindval rendering voluntary service in the construction of the Baoli Sahib. After marriage, the couple remained in Goindval serving the Guru. From Goindval Bhai Jetha was deputed by the Guru to go and establish a habitation (present-day Amritsar) on a piece of land gifted, according to one version, by Emperor Akbar to Bibi Bhani at the time of his visit to Guru Amar Das. Three sons, Prithi Chand (1558), Mahadev (1560) and (Guru) Arjan Dev (1563) were born to her. A popular anecdote mentioned in old chronicles describes how devotedly Bibi Bhani served her father. One morning, it is said, as Guru Amar Das was absorbed in meditation, Bibi

⁵¹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 42.

⁵² Sawan Singh, *Noble and Brave Sikh Women*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 23.

Bhani noticed that one of the legs of the low wooden seat on which the Guru sat was about to give way. she at once put forward her hand to support the stool. As the Guru ended his devotions, he discovered how her hand was bleeding from the injury it had sustained. He blessed her saying that her progeny would inherit the guruship. Bibi Bhani died at Goindval on 9 April 1598. Guru Arjan Dev was the first Sikh Martyr. Guru Arjan Dev compiled Guru Granth Sahib by collecting all the writings of Gurus before him and installed it at Golden Temple, which is now The Guru Granth. Guru Arjan Dev completed the construction of Golden Temple.⁵³ Bhani stood by her husband's decision to consider merit over relations in choosing the next Guru and thus keeping in with the tradition started by Guru Nanak.

Bibi Bhani and Bhai Gurdas, a devotee of Guru Arjan Dev, foiled the conspiracy of Prithi Chand. After the death of Guru Ram Das, Bibi Bhani helped her son, Guru Arjan Dev, in every activity undertaken by him and advised him. She even persuaded Guru Arjan Dev to remarry after the death of his first wife.⁵⁴ Bhani died in Tarn Taran in 1598 at the age of 65.⁵⁵ Guru Arjan Dev had a well constructed in her memory at Tarn Taran. It is still known as the Well of Bibi Bhani. She can be called an embodiment of service, truth, endurance, obedience, and humility. Moreover, she headed a family of seven martyrs.⁵⁶

On the event of Guru Arjan's torture and martyrdom, she gave the much needed moral support to his wife and eleven year old son, Guru Hargobind. This personal loss and tragedy, was perceived by her as God's will. She was instrumental in instilling in the young Guru Hargobind values of courage, bravery and sacrifice alongwith spirituality.⁵⁷ Bhani very efficiently balanced her duties both towards her parental home and in-laws house. Domestic circumstances never came in the way of her serving her father religiously even after her marriage. She maintained a strict watch when Guru Amar Das was in meditation, so that he couldn't be disturbed. According to tradition, Guru Ram

⁵³ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bibibhani.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

⁵⁴ *Loc.cit.*

⁵⁵ Gagan Aneja, *Great Sikh Women*, Chandigarh, 2007, p. 39.

⁵⁶ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/bibibhani.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

⁵⁷ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 26.

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

MATA GANGA

There is very meagre information on Ganga, wife of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, in historical writings of the Sikhs. After many years of her marriage to Arjan, she had a son, who was named Guru Hargobind, with the blessings of Baba Buddha.⁵⁹ Popular tradition has many a interesting story to tell about how Ganga was initially admonished by the revered Bhai Buddha for having come to him displaying her status and pride. Guru Arjan Dev, who himself was an embodiment of humility and self-less service to humanity, then advised his wife to visit Bhai Buddha once again and seek his blessings, this time behaving humbly. Ganga, is said to have done as told, and Bhai Buddha blessed her that an illustrious son would be born to her, who would not only become the sixth Guru but also a great military genius.⁶⁰ Probably because of her rich origins, there are references to her being less humble in comparison to the other Guru Mahals.

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

⁵⁸ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

⁶⁰ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Beebiyaan*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 118.

thoughts would guide her to inculcate patience and perseverance, which she eventually did.⁶¹

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

⁶¹ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, pp. 117-118.

⁶² *Loc.cit*.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 120.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁶⁵ *Loc.cit*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 125.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁶⁸ *Loc.cit*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 125.

MATA DAMODRI

Damodri, wife of Guru Hargobind, was born in 1556, in Dalla village. Her father was Narain Dass and Bhai Vir Singh in his works names her mother as Prem Dai. On the event of her wedding, the village women knit Phulkaris and Dushalas as a wedding gift for her.⁷⁰ Her grandfather Bhai Paro, was a devout follower of the teachings of Guru Nanak, so much so that Guru Amar Das acknowledged in him qualities which could possibly make him a Guru.⁷¹ Narain Dass had only two daughter's, the eldest being Ramo, followed by Damodri, both of whom were well-educated by him.⁷² *Suraj Parkash*, describes in detail the wedding ceremony of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.⁷³ They were aged eleven and nine years at the time of their engagement and their marriage was solemnized after about two months, in the year 1662.⁷⁴ The historic tradition of conducting marriages by *Anand Karaj* began with the marriage of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.⁷⁵ Marital as well as social responsibilities fell upon Damodri at a very early age of ten years. With the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guruship passed over to her husband, Guru Hargobind.⁷⁶ New challenges that arised before the entire Sikh community, brought out the skills of Damodri, who faced these adversities with great fortitude and courage.⁷⁷ Guru Hargobind's adoption of the *Miri-Piri* policy initially confused the Sikhs, the mughals misinterpreted it and many approached Damodri asking her to influence her husband to think again about the warrior spirit which he was aiming at introducing into the Sikh community. But Damodri, like her predecessors had full faith in the religious and ideological transformation being brought about by the sixth Guru and asked his followers to bestow upon him the same trust.⁷⁸ The young Guru Hargobind

⁷⁰ Gagan Aneja, *Op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁷¹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p.46. See also; Bhajan Singh, "Mata Damodri", *Eminent Sikh Women*, Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 48.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁷⁶ *Loc.cit.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ *Loc.cit.*

girded two swords around his waist; one to symbolize spiritual power and the other temporal.⁷⁹

During Guru Hargobind's arrest by Jehangir, Damodri alongwith Mata Ganga, led the Sikh congregation from the forefront. After eight years of marriage, Damodri and Guru Hargobind had two sons, Gurditta and Ani Rai and a daughter Viro.⁸⁰ On Guru Arjan Dev's torture and subsequent martyrdom at the hands of the mughals, she kept her composure and made the young Guru Hargobind realize the intensity and true meaning of the sacrifice made by his father. The same qualities of upholding truth and living a virtuous life were also instilled in Hargobind by her. It was Guru Hargobind, who on becoming the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, brought about transformation of the developing Sikh community by adopting the *Miri – Piri* policy. She is therefore considered an example of confidence and humility.⁸¹ Damodri spent twenty-five years of her married life in Guru household efficiently contributing to the culture and heritage of the Sikhs. She died in 1631, at village Darauli, in Ferozepur, where her elder sister Ramo lived.⁸² Guru Hargobind was the first Sikh Guru to enter into a polygamous relationship as he also had two more wives names Nanaki and Maha Devi. Kahn Singh Nabha in his *MahanKosh* mentions that Guru Hargobind had entered into marriage three times.⁸³

Little is known about Nanaki, apart from the fact that she had three sons and Guru Tegh Bahadur were one of them. Suraj Mal was the son of Maha Devi and Guru Hargobind.⁸⁴

MATA NANAKI II

Nanaki, wife of sixth Guru Hargobind, was the mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur. She was the daughter of Hari Chand of Bakala and the marriage took place in 1660.⁸⁵ Her marriage to the sixth Guru took place during the life-time of, Bibi Bhani, but Guru Arjan Dev could not attend their marriage on account of his martyrdom. Due to the early challenges faced by Guru Hargobind, on becoming the Guru, Nanaki mostly led an

⁷⁹ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, p. 63.

⁸⁰ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit.*, p. 53.

⁸¹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 34-35.

⁸² Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 54.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 57.

⁸⁴ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, 1469-1839, New Delhi, 2004, p. 51.

⁸⁵ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 57.

unsettled life, shifting between Amritsar, Kiratpur and Baba Bakala, as the sixth Guru was himself involved in a conflict with the mughals led by Emperor Jehangir.⁸⁶ Guru Hargobind faced a series of domestic tragedies during his last days which saddened him immensely. In a short span, three of his sons died, including Gurditta, whose son Dhirmal turned against his grandfather, over the issue of succeeding him as the next Sikh Guru.⁸⁷ Dhirmal regarded his accession to the *Gurugaddi* as his birth right.⁸⁸ The Guru could not decide his successor for a long time. He had two sons living; Suraj Mal, who showed little interest in Sikh affairs, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was too withdrawn in himself to be entrusted with the leadership of the rapidly growing community. Finally, Guru Hargobind chose Gurditta's second son, Har Rai, to succeed him as the seventh Guru.⁸⁹ After the death of Guru Hargobind in March 1644, Dhirmal and his family became arch rivals of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Things became so worse that Nanaki had to save her son and family from Dhirmal's enmity. According to tradition, Nanaki would keep vigil over the meditation room in the basement, where Tegh Bahadur would meditate, and not allow anyone to disturb him.⁹⁰ Nanaki inspired Guru Tegh Bahadur to meditate.⁹¹ In adverse circumstances she kept her faith in God and reconciled in God's wish. Being Guru Hargobind's wife, she had learnt to live life bravely not giving in to the evil motives of her rivals. It is said that she had to face extremely tough conditions and not so good a living standard during her life-time.⁹²

MAHA DEVI

Khushwant Singh in his *AHistory of the Sikhs*, refers to the third wife of Guru Hargobind as *Marwahi*.⁹³ The wedding took place in 1672, and Daya Ram Marwah of Mahdayali, was the father of Maha Devi.⁹⁴ The *Gurbilas Patshahi 6*, gives an account of the birth of Maha Devi, also known as Marwahi. The writer of this *Gurbilas* mentions her mother as Bhagni, who was a pious lady. They are stated to have been extremely wealthy

⁸⁶ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 35.

⁸⁷ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 67.

⁸⁸ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit.*, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 67.

⁹⁰ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit.*, p. 36.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 36.

⁹³ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 51.

⁹⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 57.

but childless and Maha Devi was born after they were blessed by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. Maha Devi's parents then decided to marry their daughter to the Guru's son, Guru Hargobind, a wish that was accepted by the Guru house.⁹⁵ Maha Devi is described as a very beautiful young girl with fine facial features.⁹⁶ The venue of the wedding was decorated with real diamonds and pearls, according to traditional sources. At this venue, a Gurdwara was constructed, known as *Chutala Sahib*.⁹⁷ On her arrival at the Guru's house in Amritsar, Maha Devi not only received a warm welcome from Mata Ganga, but was also equally loved by the two other wives of Guru Hargobind.⁹⁸ She adopted to the changes that her marriage brought along. She became an integral part of the system of *Langar* under the able guidance of Mata Ganga. In 1674, she gave birth to a son, who was named Suraj Mal, who was later on imparted both religious education and military training along with the other children of Guru Hargobind. Maha Devi completely shouldered responsibilities at the time of Viro's marriage, who was the daughter of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.⁹⁹

Maha Devi did approach Guru Hargobind with a proposal to make her son Suraj Mal the seventh Guru of the Sikhs, but Guru Hargobind refused to do so as he felt that Suraj Mal was too inclined in worldly affairs and the Guru's office needed someone who could perform supreme sacrifice and for this, he had chosen Har Rai. Maha Devi humbly accepted the Guru's orders.¹⁰⁰ Maha Devi and her son Suraj Mal spent the rest of their life at Kiratpur, where she breathed her last in 1702, one year after the death of Guru Hargobind.¹⁰¹ Maha Devi spent her last days in prayer and worship.¹⁰² Bibi Kaulan a staunch devotee and disciple of Guru Hargobind worked selflessly. The Guru recognizing her dedication got constructed the Holy tank at Kaulsar at Amritsar.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 58.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 60.

⁹⁸ *Loc.cit.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 66.

¹⁰² *Loc.cit.*

¹⁰³ D.S. Dhillon and Baljinder Singh, "Bibi Kaulan in Sikh Chronicles", *The Panjab Past and Present*, April, 1990, Dept. of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, Vol. XXIV-I, April, 1990, pp. 46-48.

BIBI VIRO

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

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

¹⁰⁴ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Beebiyan*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ *Loc. cit.* ;*hb ykB ezfBnk fjejt? . g[soh fpB ir rqjs ftr]/ .*

¹⁰⁷ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 111.

¹¹⁰ *Loc. cit.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 113.

¹¹² *Loc. cit.*

live a dutiful life. Sadhu Ram, the Guru's son-in-law was an embodiment of humility.¹¹³ The marriage ceremony took place according to *Anand karaj* rites and Guru Hargobind told the Sikh congregation that witnessed this wedding about the importance of the *Anand Karaj* marriage ceremony.¹¹⁴

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

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

MATA KISHAN KAUR I

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

¹¹³ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 114.

¹¹⁴ *Loc.cit*.

¹¹⁵ *Loc.cit*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.115.

emperor, Aurangzeb, Har Krishan was accompanied by his mother Kishan Kaur to Delhi. The child Guru of the Sikhs got infected with small-pox and left for heavenly abode.¹¹⁷

BIBI ROOP KAUR

Roop Kaur was the adopted daughter of Guru Har Rai. Various kinds of unjust practices had established a string hold in the society in the name of religion. It was during this particular period that the heinous crime of female infanticide assumed vast dimensions. People had their own ways of doing away with the girl child. Roop Kaur was one such girl child whose life was not only saved but who later on went on to set an example for other women to follow, on being rescued from a dust-bin during her infancy by Guru Har Rai. He brought her home and she was lovingly welcomed by all in the Guru's family. The destiny of a girl child discarded by her parents was totally transformed by the Guru, thus setting a personal example in front of society. Roop Kaur later on achieved tremendous success in education. She truly imbibed the virtues of the Guru house and became one with the Guru's family. Guru Har Rai reared her like his own daughter, naming her Roop Kaur.¹¹⁸

Roop Kaur had great respect for her father and naturally incorporated the teachings of Sikhism under the Guru's influence. She was married to Khemkaran of Pasroor, the chief town of a district in Sialkot. She later had a son called Amar Singh.¹¹⁹ The descendants of Amar Singh are presently settled in village Dyalpur, in Patiala.¹²⁰ Various portions of Roop Kaur's handwritten *Pothis* are available at Gurdwaa *Manji Sahib* at Kiratpur, in the custody of Sardar Babur Singh, Granthi of The Gurdwara. This Pothi is the work of Bibi Roop Kaur. According to Babu Singh, this Pothi was believed to have been written by Roop Kaur as a personal copy. The appropriate date of writing this Pothi has been fixed at 1661, soon after the death of Guru Har Rai.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 36; See also, Bhagat Singh, "Mata Kishan Kaur", *The Guru's Consorts*, (ed. Mohinder Kaur Gill), Radha Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

¹¹⁸ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p.126.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2005, p.127; See also, *Sri Satguru Ji De Muhen Dian Sakhian* (ed. Narinder Kaur Bhatia), Narinder Kaur Bhatia, Amritsar, 1978.

¹²⁰ *Loc.cit.*

¹²¹ Narinder Kaur Bhatia (ed.), *Sri Satguru Ji De Muhen Dian Sakhian*, Narinder Kaur Bhatia, Amritsar, 1978, pp. 14-15.

Roop Kaur's unique and interesting contribution lies in her writing down each and every word that was uttered by her father, Guru Har Rai, in its original form without being subjective. She thus left behind a legacy for the coming generations of the Sikh community, which could have an objective insight into the ideals and personality of their eighth Guru. She wrote in beautiful handwriting.¹²²

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

MATA GUJRI

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

¹²² Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p.127.

¹²³ *Ibid*, pp. 127-128.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 128.

¹²⁵ *Loc.cit.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 131.

¹²⁷ *Loc.cit.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.133.

¹²⁹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 67.

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

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

¹³⁰ Sawan Singh, *Noble and Brave Sikh Women*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 27.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹³² Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 133.

¹³³ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 28 :

sk s wks w[o nby nokXk.. pj[fpfX i'r ;kXBk ;kXk.. fsB i' eoh nby eh ;/tk..

sk s/ GJ/ gq;zfB r[od/tk.. fsB gqG ip nkfj; w[fj dhnk.. sp jw iBw eb{ wj bhnk..ੴ..

¹³⁴ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p.136.

¹³⁵ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 28.

¹³⁶ *Loc.cit*.

Gujri Da Khooh, to commemorate her visit.¹³⁷ Guru Tegh Bahadur came into conflict with the mughals while supporting the Kashmiri Pandits, which led first to his arrest by the mughals, followed by his torture and martyrdom, in 1675.¹³⁸ When the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur was brought to Kiratpur, by Jaita, Nanu and Adda, three Sikhs who managed to escape with the Guru's head, Gujri bowing before the Guru's head wished to lay down her life in the same manner as the Guru, a wish which later on came to be fulfilled.¹³⁹ Guru Gobind Singh became the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, as he had been nominated by Guru Tegh Bahadur.¹⁴⁰

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

¹³⁷ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 39.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p.136.

¹⁴⁰ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 29.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹⁴² *Loc.cit*.

¹⁴³ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 137.

stories from the lives of the earlier Sikh Gurus and asked them to face the adversities bravely.¹⁴⁴

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

MATA SUNDRI

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

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

¹⁴⁴ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p.137.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.133.

¹⁴⁷ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p.135.

water, *Amrit*. As Guru Gobind Singh is recognized as the spiritual father of the Khalsa, Sahib Kaur is to be recognized as the spiritual mother of the Khalsa and not as his wife. People not conversant with the *Amrit* ceremony mistakenly assume that Sahib Kaur was the wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Just as Guru Gobind Singh is regarded as the spiritual and not biological father of the Khalsa, Sahib kaur too is to be viewed as the spiritual mother of the Khalsa.¹⁴⁹ A majority of Sikh scholars do maintain that the Guru did have three wives of whom his first wife was Sundri.

Sundri, born in 1667, was the daughter of Ram Saran Das, a well-to-do Khatri of Lahore. When Sundri came of age, Ram Saran Das approached Mata Gujri and her brother, Kirpal Chand with a marriage proposal for Guru Gobind Singh. The alliance was accepted and the marriage was fixed. However, the tenth Guru wished to get married at Anandpur itself, and not Lahore, as it was customary for the groom's family to solemnize the wedding at the bride's residence, which in this case was Lahore. Since, Ram Saran was unwilling to change the venue, the Guru assured him that a new city of Lahore would be built about fifteen kilometers from Anandpur, before the wedding day. Thus, the tenth Guru found a new Lahore, which was named as *Guru Ka Lahore*, and the marriage took place with great royalty and grandeur.¹⁵⁰ The *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, describes the newly settled *Guru Ka Lahore*, as a bustling town full of activity.¹⁵¹ Guru Gobind Singh completed a major part of his literary works at Anandpur and Sundri was admirably witnessed the Guru providing the final touchés to his literary pursuits while simultaneously being involved in armed conflicts with the hilly rajas and the mughal forces. It was in her presence that the Guru had completed writing *Krishan Avtaar*, *Akal Ustat*, *Chandi Charitar* and *Sri Bhagoati Di Var*. Sundri even had the fortune of hearing a part of *Chandi Di Var*.¹⁵²

The eldest son of Guru Gobind Singh, Ajit Singh was Sundri's son while Jujhar, Zoravar and Fateh were born from Mata Jito.¹⁵³ During the later phase of Guru Gobind Singh's battles the Guru's family led an unsettled life and during one such ensuing

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matassundariji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

¹⁵⁰ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 62-63.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 63.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 66.

¹⁵³ *Loc.cit*.

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

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

¹⁵⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 66.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 67.

¹⁵⁶ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁷ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁸ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 70.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 70-72.

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

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

¹⁶² Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 73.

¹⁶³ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁵ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁶⁶ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁷ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁶⁸ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁶⁹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 78.

Sundri spent her last days until her death in 1747, in deep meditation, often in front of Guru Gobind Singh's weapons. As per her wishes, her body was cremated near the cremation site of Guru Har Krishan.¹⁷⁰

MATA JITO

Although there is great controversy among historians regarding the marital status of Jito, the second wife of Guru Gobind Singh, there are no historical records implicative that Sundri and Jito were the same and not two different wives of the tenth Guru.¹⁷¹ The origin of this controversy perhaps lies in the fact that there are almost no references anywhere in the prominent writings of the Sikhs regarding Guru Gobind Singh's marriage with Jito.¹⁷² There is a greater controversy as to whether *Guru Ka Lahore*, i.e., founding of a new city of Lahore was undertaken at the time of the Gurus marriage with Sundri or Jito.¹⁷³ Jito was the daughter of Harijas, a Subhikkhi Khatri of Lahore. The betrothal took place in 1673.¹⁷⁴ Three sons, Jujhar Singh in 1690, Zorawar Singh in 1696, and Fateh Singh in 1699. From early childhood, Jito devoted herself to the task of instilling in the young boys a religious fervour for fighting against injustice and narrated to them soul-stirring tales of the martyrdom of their grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Her sons alongwith their elder brother, Ajit Singh, went on to bring glory to the Sikh religion by sacrificing their lives but not giving in to the policy of religious conversion followed by the Mughals.¹⁷⁵ Through oral tradition, it is known that Jito had great love for gardening and personally supervised the maintainence of the garden at Anandpur. She also had good knowledge on a variety of flowers.¹⁷⁶ She died in 1700 and her funeral rites were performed by Guru Gobind Singh himself at Agampur, in Anandpur. A gurdwara is built here in her memory.¹⁷⁷ The tragic turn of events leading to

¹⁷⁰ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁷¹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 77.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁷³ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/matajitoji.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

¹⁷⁵ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁷⁶ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

the subsequent martyrdom and death of five members of the Guru's family, took place after her death.¹⁷⁸

SAHIB KAUR

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

¹⁷⁸ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁹ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p.144.

¹⁸⁰ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 38.

¹⁸¹ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁸² Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 150.

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

MAI BHAGO

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

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

¹⁸³ Simran Kaur, *Op.cit*, p. 149.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/maibhago.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930>.

¹⁸⁶ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 110.

¹⁸⁷ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁸ *Loc.cit*.

¹⁸⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 48.

mistake went back to the Guru, apologized and promised in writing that they would lay down their life but not flee again.¹⁹⁰

A fierce battle was fought at Muktsar in 1705, between the Gurus forces and the mughals, wherein these forty Sikhs and Mai Bhago led from the front. The Sikhs eventually went on to win the battle.¹⁹¹ Two brothers of Mai Bhago died while fighting this historic Battle of Muktsar.¹⁹² She had already lost her husband and therefore after the sacrifice of the brothers, she decided not to return to her village but instead spend the rest of her life in the Guru's service.¹⁹³ Guru Gobind Singh himself praised Mai Bhago for her bravery and righteousness. She had expressed her wish of becoming a saint-soldier in the Guru's entourage, which was granted and thus she was enlisted as a member of the Guru's bodyguards. Mai Bhago accompanied Guru Gobind to Damdama, Agra, and Nanded in Maharashtra, where she lived until the Guru's death, after which she started propagation of Sikh teachings, and settled at Bidar, which is 150 kms from Nanded.¹⁹⁴ She died at Bidar, in 1708.¹⁹⁵ A Gurdwara was built at Bidar in her loving memory about ten kilometers from the main Gurdwara, called *Nanak Jhira*. Recently, a Gurdwara in her remembrance was also constructed at Delhi, which is managed by women.¹⁹⁶ There is not much information about her early life, for instance, the date of her birth is not recorded, neither is there any reference to her mother. She is however, believed to have lived through the time of five Sikh Gurus, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁹⁷

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

¹⁹⁰ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁹¹ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁹² Simran Kaur, *Op.cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁹³ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁹⁴ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁵ Gagan Aneja, *Great Sikh Women*, Chandigarh, 2007, p. 59.

¹⁹⁶ Mohinder kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh Women*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 122.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 110.

¹⁹⁸ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁹⁹ *Loc.cit.*

all over the world even today.²⁰⁰ Her strength both spiritual and physical makes her truly exceptional. Bhai Vir Singh, calls her the light of the Sikhs who guided the Sikhs in times of distress just as the 'Pole Star' guides lost travelers.²⁰¹

SADA KAUR

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

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

²⁰⁰ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 51.

²⁰¹ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Op.cit*, p. 120.

²⁰² Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh; Maharaja of the Punjab*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2001, p.17.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 18.

They formed bands called *Misls* (a derivative taken from the Persian word, *Misal*, meaning 'like' or equal), under a head called *Misldar* chosen by virtue of his courage and ability. The *Misls* grew larger as the area in which they operated increased. A major portion of Punjab came to be divided amongst them and they began offering protection to the people in their respective zones on payment of protection tax called *Rakhi*. Twelve such *Misls* came into existence with a fighting force of about seventy thousand horsemen. In due course, the *Misldars* became petty barons and their *Misls*, private armies. Out of these five *Misls* emerged as the most powerful ones, the Bhangis, Kanhayas, Phulkias, Ahluwalias and the Sukerchakias.²⁰⁴ The organization of the Sikhs into these twelve *Misls* was a temporary arrangement in order to meet the challenge of foreign invasions.²⁰⁵ Ranjit Singh, the ruler who by his tact and diplomacy victoriously emerged as the unifier of these warring *Misls* and thus created a united Punjab, thereby becoming the first ruler to set up a sovereign Sikh State, belonged to the Sukerchakia *Misl*. Sada kaur, his mother-in-law, had inherited leadership of the Kanhaya *Misl*, after the death of Jai Singh, chief of the Kanhaya *Misl*.

Sada Kaur was born in 1762, at Ghalughara.²⁰⁶ Daughter of Dasaundha Singh Gill, Sada Kaur, was married to Gurbakhsh Singh, son of Jai Singh, leader of the Kanhaiya *Misl*. As the Afghan invasions receded, conflicts broke out among the Sikh *Misl* chiefs. Maha Singh Sukkarchakkia, (father of Ranjit Singh), helped by Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katoch, attacked Jai Singh in 1785. A fierce battle took place at Achal, about 6 km south of Batala, which was the seat of the Kanhaiyas. Jai Singh was defeated and his son, Gurbakhsh Singh, husband of Sada Kaur, was killed. The bereaved, yet farsighted, widow Sada Kaur, persuaded her father-in-law, Jai Singh, to offer the hand of her only daughter, Mahtab Kaur, to Ranjit Singh, the five-year old son of Maha Singh Sukkarchakkia. Maha Singh died in 1792 and Ranjit Singh became chief of the Sukerchakia *Misl*. His marriage was solemnized in 1796, with Sada Kaur's daughter, Mahtab Kaur. Sada Kaur accompanied her daughter to Gujranwala after the wedding. She became one of the members of the triune regency, which managed the affairs of the Sukerchakia *Misl*, as Ranjit Singh was too young to rule on his own. The

²⁰⁴ Khushwant Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 19.

²⁰⁵ *Loc.cit*.

²⁰⁶ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Beebiyan*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 155.

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

brought back. Her territory and the wealth of the Kanhaiyas lying at Atalgarh (Mukeriari) were confiscated. Batala was granted as a jagir to Sher Singh while the rest of Sada Kaur's estates were placed under the governorship of Sardar Desa Singh Majithia.²⁰⁷

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

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

RANI JIND KAUR

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

²⁰⁷ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranisadakaur.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930>.

²⁰⁸ Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh; Maharaja of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 25.

²⁰⁹ *Loc.cit.* See also; Giani Trilok Singh, *Maharani Sada Kaur*, Khalsa Sahit Sadan, Amritsar, 2005.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹¹ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Beebiyan*, Amritsar, 2005, p. 151; See also, Indrani Sen, *Women and Empire ; Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900)*, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad, 2008.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

times.²¹⁵ Popularly known as Rani Jindan, she was the daughter of Sardar Manna Singh, an Aulakh Jat, who hailed from a small village Chachar, district Gujranwala, now in West Pakistan.²¹⁶ Jind Kaur was born in 1817, in her native village. Apart from being extremely beautiful, she combined great personal charm, with the characteristic strength of a man.²¹⁷ Her marriage to the Maharaja was an interesting one, as she was symbolically married to the an arrow and a sword of Ranjit Singh, in 1835, as Ranjit Singh was too old and ill to arrive at the wedding himself.²¹⁸ She alongwith her son Dalip Singh, lived practically in oblivion uptil 1843, as they were greatly neglected by Ranjit Singh.²¹⁹ Dalip Singh's accession to the throne raised the position of Jind Kaur to that of a *Dejure* regent, thus enabling her to paly a prominent role in Sikh history. Being the mother of the minor Sikh Sovereign, she came to be known as the 'Mai' or the 'Queen Mother', as she was the only surviving widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.²²⁰ Jind Kaur was the brain behind the rising of 1848-49 against the British authorities. Being famous for her intelligence and intrepid spirit, Jindan was one of the few persons who was intensely disliked and also feared by the British. Rani Jindan played a conspicuous role in the Punjab politics after her son's elevation to the throne of Lahore kingdom. The British entered into a treaty known as the treaty of Bhyrowal with the Lahore kingdom in December 1846, which made them, virtual masters of the Punjab. They had not only excluded the Rani from participating in the negotiations which led to the signing of the treaty but also of all share in the government of the Lahore Kingdom. She was also removed from the Regency Council, which was to conduct the administration during the minority of Maharaja Dalip Singh. She therefore, hatched a plot to murder the British Resident and the members of the Regency Council who collaborated with the British. Prema, an old retainer of Gulab Singh, along with some other persons were to execute the plan. The plan however failed but the British could not take action against the Rani for lack of evidence. But they wanted to get ride of her and imposed restrictions on her

²¹⁵ Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *Maharani Jind Kaur* (The Queen Mother of Maharaja Dalip Singh), National Book Shop, New Delhi, 2003, p. 1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²²⁰ *Loc.cit.*

movements. The chiefs of the Lahore Darbar were forbidden to see her.²²¹ Jind kaur was sent to Sheikhpura, twenty miles from Lahore.²²²

The Queen had by this time, become a symbol of national dignity. She continued to urge the freedom fighters back in the Punjab to continue their struggle dauntlessly. Through her trusted band of servants, she sent letters and messages to Dewan Mul Raj, Sardar Chattar Singh and Raja Sher Singh, the chiefs of the rebellion. When the British came to know of the secret designs of the Rani, they transferred her to the Chunar fort on 6 April 1849. On the same evening, she escaped from the fort in the guise of her attendant and proceeded towards Nepal. The British Government, confiscated all her jewels and other property at Benaras and allowed her to stay in Nepal on a monthly pension of one thousand rupees. While in Nepal, Rani Jindan, secretly plotted for the expulsion of the British from the Punjab. She wrote letters to influential people both inside and outside Punjab to rise once again against the British. In the rising of 1857, she found a fresh opportunity to stimulate a rising in the Punjab. She however was unsuccessful in her motives due to the vigilant British Government, which was closely monitoring her actions. Largely disillusioned, the Rani ultimately wished to see her son Maharaj Dalip Singh, who was then staying in England as a Christian gentleman. Her health was shattered and she became almost blind. The British Government allowed Dalip Singh to come to India and to take his mother along with him to England. She went to England to stay with her son Maharaj Dalip Singh. Jind Kaur, stayed in a separate house in England till her death in 1863. As per her last wishes, Dalip Singh brought her body back for cremation to India, but was disallowed by the Britishers to perform the last rites in Punjab. He therefore cremated her body at Nasik and returned to England.²²³ Popularly known as Jindan, she was, the last Sikh sovereign of the Punjab. On becoming regent, she had to fight many internal problems initially. Jind Kaur with her sheer will-power and determination guided matters of administration and came up with their solutions. She gave a tough fight to the British who were bent upon conquering Punjab

²²¹ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranijindian.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1fee8930>.

²²² *Loc.cit.*

²²³ Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *Op.cit*, p. 31; See also, Coralie Younger, *Wicked Women of The Raj ; European Women Who Broke Society's Rules and Married Indian Princes*, HaperCollins Publishers India, New Delhi, 2008.

and making it a part of the British Indian dominions, but were finding it difficult only due to the power and influence of Jind Kaur.

In December 1846, Maharani Jind Kaur surrendered political power to the council of ministers appointed by the British Resident after the treaty of Bharoval. The Sikh Darbar ceased to exist as a sovereign political body. The regent was dismissed with an annuity of Rs 1,50,000 and "an officer of Company's artillery became, in effect, the successor to Ranjit Singh." Maharani Jind Kaur was treated with unnecessary acrimony and suspicion. She had retired gracefully to a life of religious devotion in the palace, yet mindful of the rights of her minor son as the sovereign of the Punjab. Henry Lawrence, the British Resident at Lahore, and Viscount Hardinge both accused her of fomenting intrigue and influencing the Darbar politics. After Bharoval, Hardinge had issued instructions that she must be deprived of all political power. In March 1847, he expressed the view that she must be sent away from Lahore. Jind Kaur died at Kensington, England, on 1 August 1863.²²⁴

A critical overview of Maharani Jind Kaur reflects many shades of her charismatic personality. Her passions overmastered her ability to reason, blurred her vision and made her adopt a course of action that was largely wayward and lacking statesmanship. She lacked patience, tact, caution and an ability to manoeuvre political events and situations to her advantage.²²⁵ However her shrewd political moves at times found both admiration and concern from the British too. Her influence with people, her shrewd understanding of the local politics and secret British plans, her dexterity in wielding the pen, her amazing ability to act with energy and spirit, and above all, her intense desire to rule were in the eyes of the British constituted grave menace to their authority in the Punjab.²²⁶

ANUP KAUR

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

²²⁴ <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/greatsikhwomen/ranijindian.html?967663c5d8b854ceb6b95a09b3ca5885=90e52d4fd4c30205863583e1feee8930..>

²²⁵ Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *Op.cit*, pp. 48-49

²²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 36.

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

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

²²⁷ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 39.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

However, Ganda Singh's research highlights that her grave was later on dug up on the orders of Banda Bahadur, who got her body cremated as per Sikh rites.²²⁹ Anup Kaur truly met a heroic death, which makes her a Sikh woman martyr.

BASANT LATA

Basant Lata, was the maid-in-waiting of Mata Sundri, wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Basant Lata died while upholding her own faith, honour, human-rights and the honour of the Sikh faith.²³⁰ In the confusion that prevailed on the event of the evacuation of the Anandpur fort by Guru Gobind Singh, she got separated from the Guru's wife Mata Sundri, while accompanying her. On attaining consciousness, Basant Lata found herself surrounded by Mughals and was arrested. The Mughal Chief wanted to take her as his wife and tried to lure her by offering her the status and riches which she would command on marrying him. Basant Lata, like Anup Kaur, stabbed herself, thus becoming immortal forever, rather than succumbing to the wishes of the Mughal Chief. The Chief asked his Hindu servant to conduct her last rites according to Sikh rituals. This incident has been described by Bhai Vir Singh, in a poem, from his book, *Kalgidhar Chamatkar*.²³¹ Sacrifices of many a Sikh women have faded into oblivion over the centuries, which in no way implies that such sacrifices have been in vain. While a few Sikh women contributed from the forefront, many others silently bore the torture and atrocities of the oppressive mughals and later the barbaric Afghans.

HARSHARAN KAUR

Harsharan Kaur was a baptized Sikh woman, who met the Guru, when he reached her village after his departure from Chamkaur. Her whereabouts are not known, but Bhai Vir Singh in his *Kalgidhar Chamatkar*, names her as Sharan Kaur.²³² She enquired about the two elder Princes from the Guru, to whom she had been a nursing sister, and was informed about their martyrdom. On learning this, she made it her mission to cremate the bodies of the Guru's martyr sons alongwith the other Sikh soldiers who

²²⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 40-42.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 43.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 40-45.

²³² *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.

had been martyred in a similar way.²³³ Armed and disguised as a Muslim woman, she entered enemy camp in the battle-field and on locating the bodies, immolated them, standing alongside. This invited the wrath of the Mughal soldiers, who threatened her with dire consequences if she did not reveal her true identity and motives. Harsharan Kaur stood amongst them, bearing all kinds of torture and insult, without speaking a word. Mughal soldiers irked at her behaviour pushed her into the flames, leading to her martyrdom on 23rd December, 1704.²³⁴

SUSHIL KAUR

Sushil Kaur, wife of Banda Singh Bahadur, was the daughter of Uday Singh the ruler of Chamba, who offered her hand in marriage to Banda Singh Bahadur, at her behest.²³⁵ The marriage took place in 1711, according to Sikh rites.²³⁶ After baptism, she was formally induced into the Sikh faith. Historians describe her as the ‘Goddess of love’. According to Macauliffe, ‘She had large eyes, her limbs were graceful and delicate.’ In 1712, a son was born to Banda Singh Bahadur and Sushil kaur, who was named Ajit Singh. Since Banda Singh Bahadur was involved in his military campaigns against the Mughals, Sushil Kaur took charge of the upbringing of Ajit Singh alongwith community responsibilities like the running of the common kitchen (*Langar*). Ajit Singh was brought up in a war-like atmosphere.²³⁷ Alongwith the other Sikhs, Sushil Kaur put a brave front during the eight month long siege at Gurdas Nangal, near Gurdaspur. After the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur, Sushil kaur and her son were captured and taken to palace of the Mughal Emperor, Farrukh Siyar, at Delhi, where she was pressurized to embrace Islam. Her son, Ajit Singh was tortured, killed and cut to pieces, but she did not give in to the wishes of the enemy. Sushil Kaur, set a brave example by laying down her life for the Panth. She died in the same manner as Anup Kaur and Basant Lata, stabbing herself in the chest, on June 20th 1716.²³⁸

²³³ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 47.

²³⁴ *Loc.cit*.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 53.

²³⁶ *Loc.cit*.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 54-55.

BAGHEL KAUR

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

Baghel Kaur, a newly-wed Hindu girl was abducted on way to her in-laws home, since the marriage party accompanying her was unarmed and therefore could not resist the mighty Afghans. The bridegroom approached some Sikhs, who had sought shelter in the forests and requested them to help him in freeing his abducted wife. He was baptized and on becoming a Sikh, was named Teja Singh. Together they raided the same plunderers and rescued the captive ladies. Teja Singh's wife was found too, but being in a miserable condition, wanted to commit suicide. The Sikhs and Teja Singh advised her against doing so. She was baptized and named as Baghel Kaur.²³⁹ Baghel Kaur started wearing a turban and always carried a long sword with her.²⁴⁰

She began accompanying the Sikh soldiers in their fight against injustice.²⁴¹ Baghel Kaur lived in the dense forests of Kahnuwaan in district Gurdaspur, alongwith the Sikh soldiers, led by Nawab Kapur Singh.²⁴² On one occasion, a fight ensued between the Sikhs under Nawab Kapur Singh and the Afghans, in which Baghel Kaur and other Sikh women fought bravely. Baghel Kaur accompanied the Sikh forces against the Afghans on many occasions putting her life and honour in danger. Sikhs persuaded her and her companions to stay back in the village but these brave women refused to do so and instead said that they had vowed to die fighting for the *Panth*.²⁴³ She even saved other innocent women from the clutches of the Afghans.²⁴⁴ Moreover, she strongly protested against the inhuman treatment meted out to women and children in Mir Mannu's camps, during her detention in one such camp. Even under arrest, she managed to slap and injure a soldier when he tried to misbehave with her. She alongwith other Sikh women refused

²³⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 56.

²⁴⁰ *Loc.cit*.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 57.

²⁴² *Loc.cit*.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 58.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 59.

to convert into Islam by way of marriage. Baghel Kaur was subsequently tortured and killed for her boldness and unwillingness to submit.²⁴⁵

NIRBHAI KAUR

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

RAJINDER KAUR

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

²⁴⁵ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 61.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 62.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

²⁴⁸ *Loc.cit.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 65.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 66.

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

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

SAHIB KAUR II

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

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

²⁵¹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 67.

²⁵² *Ibid*, p. 68.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 69.

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

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

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

²⁵⁴ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 70.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 71-72.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 73.

SHAMSHER KAUR

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

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

²⁵⁷ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 74-75.

²⁵⁸ Giani Trilok Singh, *Bahadur Shamsher Kaur*, Khalsa Sahit Sadan, Amritsar, 2005, pp. 3-4.

²⁵⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p.76-77.

could not resist their might. Shamsheer Kaur is a popular figure in traditional Punjabi folklore.²⁶⁰

SHARAN KAUR

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

²⁶⁰ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p.78.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 79-80.

²⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 81-81.

²⁶³ Vanit Nalwa, *Hari Singh Nalwa; Champion of the Khalsaji (1791-1837)*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2009, p. 268.

during the period of Sikh struggle. She is stated to have fought bravely against the Mughals in the Battle of Jamraud.²⁶⁴

KISHAN KAUR II

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

²⁶⁴ Giani Amar Singh, *Bahadur Sharan Kaur*, Chattar Singh and Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, 2001, p.1. (Harsharan Kaur is sometimes also referred to as Sharan Kaur).

²⁶⁵ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 83.

²⁶⁶ *Loc.cit.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 84-85.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 86.

HARNAM KAUR

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

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

²⁶⁹ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit.*, p. 87.

²⁷⁰ *Loc.cit.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 88.

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

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

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

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

²⁷² Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 89.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 90.

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

BALBIR KAUR

Balbir Kaur participated in the Akali movement started by the Sikhs in late eighteenth century for gaining control of their Gurdwaras from the corrupt Mahants, who were indulging in many immoral practices in the name of Sikhism and under the cloak of managing Gurdwaras. These Mahants were in turn being shielded by the British Government. Therefore the Sikhs had to face opposition from two quarters, one from the Mahants and secondly from the British government. Matters became so worse that on one occasion the British interrupted the recitation of *Akhand Path* (which is to be recited from its beginning to its end continuously) by the Sikhs for the restoration of their ruler Ripudaman Singh's rights. Ripudaman Singh, the ruler of Nabha was targeted by the British since he started supporting the cause of the Sikhs. British interference in their religious ritual resulted in a strong opposition from the Sikhs, which eventually led to a war between a band of Sikhs and the British. These Sikhs declared they would march from Amritsar to Jaito, where the *Akhand Path* would be recited. The first batch of martyrs left Akal Takht on February 9, 1924. Women too participated in this march in large numbers and Balbir Kaur alongwith her two year old son led these women volunteers.²⁷⁴ The Sikhs realizing that the services of women would not be required ahead in the march requested them to return and the women followers agreed to do so, except Balbir Kaur, who was adamant to accompany the Sikhs in their movement to cleanse the Gurdwaras from Mahants.²⁷⁵ She wasn't even for once scared of facing the fully armed british army waiting for them equipped with machine guns. The leader of the

²⁷⁴ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, pp. 92-93.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 94.

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

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

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

²⁷⁶ Sawan Singh, *Op.cit*, p. 94.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 95-96.

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

CHAPTER-VIII

CONCLUSION

Writings on Sikh women are a plenty, all dealing with various issues concerning them, some raising new issues, while others attempt at sympathizing with their plight, while some glorify them and place them on a platonic pedestal. Emotions and subjectivity largely rule the writings of Sikh scholars and historians when it comes to penning down the contributions of Sikh women in Sikh history. These writings can broadly be divided into two categories : those which glorify and thereby elevate the status of the female members of the Sikh community and those which paint the actual picture, the truth behind their portrayal. Exaggerations are a common feature regarding the status of the Sikh women within their religion. Again there is a vast difference in the writings of Indian scholars and western scholars of Sikh historiography. One such recent study titled, *Relocating Gender In Sikh History : Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, by a western scholar, Doris R. Jakobsh, attempts at charting the gender history of the Sikhs, largely influenced by western ideals rather than ideals of the Sikh religion. It is more a critique of the Sikh customs, traditions and culture. On the other hand, Mohinder Kaur Gill's, *Role and Status of Sikh Women*, projects a one-sided perspective on gender relations of the Sikhs, largely exaggerating and glorifying Sikh women.

Writings by western scholars reflect the ideology of the West influenced by the new thought process which emerged in the late nineteenth century due to the socio-religious reformation which in turn became a global phenomenon. Writings on the Sikhs by Indian writers, especially the historians of the Sikhs are based largely on matters of faith. It is this faith and religious fervour, even loyalty towards one's religion that becomes the ruling factor behind the end-products in the form of religious histories being penned down. This does not imply that reason and argument are amiss from these writings. As a result, many new researches are being undertaken on the hitherto not tread upon paths of Sikh history. One such arena is the field of gender and the Sikh approach towards it. Apart from direct and indirect references found in the annals of Sikh historical writings, many articles have also been written on the issues relating to Sikh women. Over the past few years, recasting of gender history within Sikhism has created quite a flutter and attracted great deal of attention from scholars and historians writing on Sikh history. Coupled with the study of these historical writings, a thorough analysis and review of the

sources of Sikh history in the form of sacred, secular and popular forms of the literature of the Sikhs, helps us to package a logical and rational construction of the gender history of the Sikhs. Sikh literature provides us with the required parameters to measure the degree of empowerment attained by the Sikh women over a history of 500 glorious years.

During the course of this study, many interesting revelations, facts and findings have come to light. An effort has been made to re-define the role, status and place that the Sikh women occupy within their religion. A number of issues concerning them have come to the forefront majority of which do not have any sanction from the Sikh scriptures and yet are being religiously and blindly followed till date. An overall review of the literature of the Sikhs helps in identifying various issues concerning Sikh women over the period of the rise and growth of the Sikh community, attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards the female members of the community, role of Sikh reformers and the general rules and idealistic standards set by the Sikhs for their female counterparts. A historical analysis of all kinds of Sikh literature written during the fifteenth century to the early twentieth century, helps us peep into the gender ideology of the Sikhs.

The *Guru Granth Sahib*, does not support both the practice and profession of inequality of any kind both in theory and practice. Even during the process of the compilation of this Holy Book by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, contributions received for inclusion in the *Guru Granth Sahib* were scrutinized. Contributions which were biased or reflected women in a poor way were outrightly rejected by the fifth Guru. By way of their writings included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur, project their respective views stressing on the qualities and values to be inculcated by women. Guru Nanak's attitude towards women was shaped by his personal observances and experiences, through what he saw was happening around him. Guru Nanak simply reacted to the injustice inflicted by the society and the world upon its members, both male and female. His writings do reflect his gender perspective. The highest goal for man was achieving salvation for which one had to forego all kinds of bondages. Therefore Guru Nanak himself lived and preached a detached life. Detachment here is to be seen in the context of detachment from worldly and materialistic entanglements surrounding man. Guru Nanak refers to women as part of this entanglement. One of the issues condemned by Guru Nanak, is the notion of female impurity again on account of the superstition involved behind such irrational thinking. Guru Nanak also reinforces the fact that both men and women suffer as a result of their misdeeds.

Guru Amar Das through his writings emerges more as a social reformer. While Guru Nanak focuses on spirituality, Guru Amar Das takes a firm stand on transforming the society. Amar Das speaks outrightly against discrimination and social injustice. Gender issues are addressed directly by the third Guru. The woman who utter's the name of *God* with her mind, body and mouth is pleasing to the *Lord*. A woman who devotes her energies on the path of *God* is truly liberated and uplifted by the *Lord* himself. Only single-minded devotion to the *Lord* is stressed upon. The egalitarian status of the Sikhs within the Sikh religion is further reinforced by Guru Amar Das, when he writes that the *Guru (the Lord)* equally loves all the Gursikhs, like his friends, sons and brothers. On the other hand, the third Guru also brings out the not so desirable qualities that women generally possess, via the use of adjectives like 'wicked woman', 'evil woman', 'an impure woman' and 'a woman of ill conduct'. Here the qualities are highlighted and not gender. The third Guru writes that a woman who lives a virtuous life in her parent's home attains an abode in the home of her in-laws. Guru Amar Das launched a vigorous campaign against *Sati*, probably one of the reasons why this practice could not become widely prevalent in Punjab. The third Guru was also the first one to lobby for the inclusion of women as active members of the *Panth* and recruited women as missionaries for the preaching of the Sikh faith. He outlined an ideal form of relationship between a husband and wife and prohibited adultery.

Five Sikh Gurus have outrightly spoken on gender issues, clarifying their perspective towards gender in their own literary style. Guru Nanak being predominantly a socio-religious reformer, not surprisingly attempts to uplift the status of women through his *Bani*. The third, fourth, fifth and ninth Gurus follow him in this endeavour. Sikh literature progresses alongwith the developments in the Sikh religion. Beginning with the earliest writings of the Sikhs as contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, a definite pattern is found in the writings of the Sikh Gurus. While Guru Nanak exposes the caste and class follies, also making a note of the generally pitiable state of the women, Guru Amar Das adopts a reformist attitude, the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das brings out the not so desirable qualities that women are generally known to possess and Guru Arjan Dev in his *Bani* addresses the *Lord* as his protector, and parent. For the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, love for a woman other than one's own is one of the greatest sins. Any other form of love except that of the *Lord* is insincere, an illusion. From the saints who have merely touched upon the issue of gender, we find Namdev, Kabir and Trilochan voicing their thoughts on the role of the ideal woman, her qualities and virtues and the fact that she is an equal in

the eyes of *Lord*. Many a time in these writings one comes across conflicting ideas regarding the nature of women as portrayed by these writers. Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das both adopt a reformist attitude towards women and do accept them as an integral part of the society, religion and culture, whereas Guru Ram Das and Guru Tegh Bahadur bring out the vices of women in particular but at the same time advocate equality before the *Lord*. Guru Arjan Dev accords a parental and brotherly status to the *Lord*. The saints too somewhere voice nearly the same emotions, shifting their approach from the non-virtuous to stressing more on virtues and idealism to be imbibed by women. In short one can safely infer that there is a definite indication in the *Guru Granth Sahib* that women ought to be virtuous, ideal and chaste with single-minded devotion and love in order to make a place for themselves in *God's* abode. The same is also advocated for the men. Loyalty towards one life partner has been recurrently advocated through the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The *Varan* of Bhai Gurdas, refer to women as being as 'gateway to salvation'. Gender issues addressed by Bhai Gurdas are condemnation of the custom of dowry, prostitution, superstitions related to women, infidelity and the sorry plight of widows in society. Monogamy is advocated and women are considered equal to men in both virtue and wisdom.

Seventeenth Century accounts in the form of *Janamsakhis*, the *Dasam Granth* and the *Gurbilas* literature on the whole remain silent on gender issues. The *Dasam Granth* contains controversial writings on women, which are almost unanimously refuted by Sikh scholars and writers. 'Akal Ustat' a poem from the *Dasam Granth* rejects the view that salvation can be attained through the practice of *Sati*. The *Janamsakhis* and the *Gurbilas* literature merely provide the names of some of the female members of the Guru families.

Late 17th Century accounts, such as the *Hukamnamas* and *Rahitnamas* also provide information on gender relations of the Sikhs. The *Hukamnamas* do not reflect any kind of gender biases. *Rahitnamas* condemn adultery, prostitution, dowry, female foeticide and infanticide, polygamy, and violence against women. On the whole the *Rahitnamas* deal with the issue of sexual morality and marriage-related issues.

Eighteenth and early nineteenth Century accounts are the *Bansavalinama* and *Mahima Parkash*. The *Bansavalinama* provides us with the names of the women belonging to Guru families, but gender issues are not discussed. The *Mahima Parkash* is wholly silent on issues concerning the role and status of women. The *Nanak Prakash* mentions the existence of female slaves, selling of girls and gifting of women as part of

dowry. Other early nineteenth Century accounts like the writings of Giani Gian Singh and Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Panth Prakash*, also do not refer to gender issues.

Popular Sikh literature and Journalism which developed during the period, 1890-1920, took up the cause of women's empowerment foremost on their agenda of social reform. The Press took up the cause of female education and also highlighted the general plight of women in society. The Singh Sabha effectively carried out the task of focusing on the education of Sikh women in order to emancipate them. Other issues like son preference, considering a girl child as a liability, payment of bride money and selling of daughters, wide age differences between marriage partners, female infanticide, domestic violence, child-marriage, Sati and widow remarriages have also been raised. Newspapers of the period lobbied for the participation of women in social service, urging the local women against imitating foreign women and their culture, urged women to nurture a questioning attitude, encouraged the organization of religious gatherings by Sikh women and upheld the concept of an Ideal woman.

The *Rahit Maryada* of the Sikhs, provides an equal access to the Holy scripture of the Sikhs, the *Guru Granth Sahib* to both Sikh men and women. Wearing of a turban is a matter of voluntary choice for Sikh women. Equal participation rights are accorded to Sikh women in religious affairs and performance of religious ceremonies. Practice of female foeticide/infanticide, adultery, Purdah, dowry, child-marriage, polygamy, infidelity are prohibited. The *Rahit Maryada* advocates monogamy and the remarriage of widows.

An overall historical analysis of the literature of the Sikhs shows that gender issues highlighted by the various forms of Sikh literature generally remain the same, with the exception of the 19th Century accounts insisting on the need of formal education for the empowerment of Sikh women. Very few gender biases are reflected in the Sikh accounts and again these biases hardly change over the period of our study. An inherent urge for the need of a male child is an issue that does not change over the period of the 500 year old history of the Sikhs. Son-preference remains an issue greatly reflecting the existence of gender bias among the Sikhs. Women are to live a virtuous life following high standards of morality and idealism. The literary accounts of the Sikhs no doubt attempt at regulating the behaviour and character of the female members of the *Panth* in accordance with the dictats of the Sikh community. Sacred accounts of the Sikhs consider women as part of worldly attachment, materialism and entanglements. Although the Sikh scriptures do not promote inequality of any kind between men and women, yet followers of the Sikh faith continue to

recognize these differences instead of adopting an egalitarian approach. Gender bias exists among the Sikhs, only the degree to which it is practised may vary.

The literature of the Sikhs, all through the various stages of its development exposes the impotency of the blind observance of the socio-religious evils handed down from one-generation to another. And since women are the ones facing injustice, Sikh scriptures do recognize and condemn the oppression of women at the hands of society. The *Guru Granth Sahib* reflects a universal outlook and frames guidelines for both men and women to follow. Therefore idealism rules supreme in all forms of Sikh literature. Women in order to be worthy of the Lord's mercy and love are instructed to live a virtuous life. In the chapter on Prominent Sikh Women in History and Tradition, it is found that these women led their lives piously, putting into practice the ideals and tenets of Sikhism. One thought clearly emerging from all forms of the religious literature of the Sikhs is that even a modern and progressive religious sect of the Sikhs is not free of social taboos and dogmas. Oppression of women stems up from the insecurities of men and this oppression assumes barbaric proportions from the tightening of this patriarchal control. Religious writings of the Sikhs strongly advocate the inculcation of moral and spiritual values among its members, irrespective of gender. Good actions invite positive re-enforcement while undesirable actions lead to sorrow and suffering, is the underlying element of the teachings of Sikhism. Consequently the importance of good actions and abstinence from evil deeds and vices are discussed and gender is only used as a medium of expression. The role and status of Sikh women, like their counterparts in other religion, were conditioned by multiple factors such as identity, socio-economic status and the political context.

In the wake of the present controversies surrounding the practice of Sikh faith, wherein women are not being involved in the mainstream religious affairs, it may be stated that these taboos imposed are a result of the excessive and recent politicization of the Sikh faith and that the religious literature of the Sikhs does not reflect any such bias to be adopted. It is with deep regret that one may duly infer that Sikh women are found missing from the political, administrative and religious affairs of the Sikhs. It is therefore imperative on our part to revert back to the pages of our sacred, secular and popular literature and embark upon a process of self-discovery to reconstruct the position of the Sikh women within their community and faith, and abreast them of their role and responsibilities as active members of the Sikh Panth. It may also be inferred that although Sikh women are theoretically at par with their male counterparts, in practice they end up becoming mere followers and seldom as members.

APPENDIX I
ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS FROM GURU FAMILIES

NAME	MOTHER	FATHER	BROTHER (s)	SISTER (s)	YEAR OF MARRIAGE	HUSBAND	DAUGHTER (s)	SON (s)	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	YEAR OF DEATH	GENRE
Tripta		Rama of Chaliawala				Mehta Kalu	Nanaki	Nanak				Ideal Sikh woman
Sulakhani/ Mata Choni	Mata Chando	Mool Chand Khatri				Nanak		Sri Chand Laxmi Das	1473	Pakhoke		Emerged as a strong and independent woman
Nanaki I	Tripta	Mehta Kalu	Nanak			Jai Ram			1464		1518	Ideal Sikh woman
Khivi	Karan Devi	Bhai Devi Chand Khatri			1519	Angad	Amro Anokhi	Dasu Datu	1506		1582	Only Sikh woman to be mentioned in the Adi Granth
Amro	Khivi	Angad	Dasu & Datu	Anokhi		Bhai Jasoo			1532	Khadur		Displayed leadership qualities
Mansa Devi		Devi Chand Behl			1502	Amardas	Bhani Dani	Mohan Mohri	Approx. bet. 1482- 1485			Had thorough knowledge of Gurmukhi
Bhani/Mohini	Mansa Devi	Amardas	Mohan & Mohri	Dani	18th February, 1554	Ramdas		Prithicha nd Mahadev Arjan	1533	Basarke	9th April, 1598	A symbol of self-less service
Ganga	Dhanwanti	Kishen Chand			1579	Arjan		Hargobind			1618 at vill. Basarke	A loving and compassionate woman
Damodri	PremDai	Narain Dass		Ramo	1662	Hargobind	Viro	Gurditta, Ani Rai		Village Dalla	1631 at vill. Darauli in Feroze-pur	Exhuberated great confidence and humility
Nanaki II		Hari Chand			1660	Hargobind		Tegh Bahadur				Ideal Sikh woman

Maha Devi/ Marwahi	Bhagni	Daya Ram Marwah		1672	Hargobind	Suraj Mal		1702 at Kiratpur	Ideal Sikh woman
Viro	Damodri	Hargobind	Gurditta Ani Rai Tegh Bahadur & Suraj Mal	1629	Sadhu Ram	Sango Shah Gulab Chand Jeet Mal Ganga Ram & Mohri Chand	1615	Amritsar	Ideal Sikh woman
Kishan Kaur I		Daya Ram			Har Rai	Har Krishan			Ideal Sikh woman
Roop Kaur (Adopted daughter of Har Krishan)					Khemkaran				Highly educated and pious lady
Gujri	Bishan Kaur	Lal Chand	Kirpal Chand	March, 1632	Tegh Bahadur	Gobind Singh	1619	Kartar- pur	First Sikh woman to be a part of the Sikh struggle against mughals
Sundri		Ram Saran Das			Gobind Singh	Ajit Singh	1667	1747	Issued Hukamnamas and assumed leadership of the Sikh Panth after the death of Guru Gobind Singh
Jito		Harijas		1673	Gobind Singh	Jujhar Singh Zorawar Singh & Fateh Singh		1700	Played a significant role in the Guru house-hold
Sahib Kaur		Ram Bassi						1747 at Delhi	Participated in the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh at Ananadpur

APPENDIX II
HEROIC SIKH WOMEN

NAME	MOTHER	FATHER	BROTHER(s)	SISTER(s)	YEAR OF MARRIAGE	HUSBAND	DAUGHTER(s)	SON(s)	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	YEAR OF DEATH	GENRE
Mai Bhago/ Bhag Kaur		Mallo								Jhabal	1708 at Bidar	First Sikh woman to fight a formal battle (Battle of Muktsar)
Anup kaur		Lachhman Das Sodhi							1690	vill. Jaloopur Khare, near Amritsar		First Sikh woman to be well-versed in the art of self-defence
Basant Lata												Sacrificed her life to uphold the ideals of the Sikh Panth
Harsharan Kaur/ Sharan Kaur											Dec 24, 1704	Brave Sikh woman martyr
Sushil Kaur		Uday Singh				Banda Bahadur		Ajit Singh			June 20, 1716	Brave Sikh woman martyr
Baghel Kaur						Teja Singh (a baptized Sikh)						Brave Sikh woman martyr
Nirbhai Kaur		Jang Bahadar Singh			1757	Harnam Singh						Brave Sikh woman martyr
Shamsheer kaur				Ram kaur								Brave Sikh woman martyr
Sharan kaur/ Sharni						Jagat Ram						Brave Sikh woman martyr

APPENDIX III

SIKH WOMEN RULERS

NAME	MOTHER	FATHER	BROTHER(s)	SISTER(s)	YEAR OF MARRIAGE	HUSBAND	DAUGHTER(s)	SON(s)	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	YEAR OF DEATH	GENRE
Sada kaur		Dasaundha Singh Gill				Gurbaksh Singh	Mehtab Kaur		1762	Ghalughara	1832	Sikh woman administrator
Jind kaur/ Rani Jindan		Sardar Manna Singh				Ranjit Singh		Dalip Singh	1817	vill. Chachar, dist. Gujranwala	Aug 1, 1863, Kensington, England	The first Sikh woman freedom-fighter who played a conspicuous role in the politics of Punjab
Rajinder kaur		Bhuma Singh				Tilok Chand					1791	A great Sikh woman ruler
Sahib kaur II	Raj Kaur	Amar Singh	Sahib Singh			Jaimal Singh			1773		1799	A great Sikh woman ruler

APPENDIX IV

SIKH WOMEN SOCIAL REFORMERS

NAME	MOTHER	FATHER	BROTHER(s)	SISTER(s)	YEAR OF MARRIAGE	HUSBAND	DAUGHTER(s)	SON(s)	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	YEAR OF DEATH	GENRE
Kishan kaur II	Mai Sobhan	Suba Singh				Gurnam Singh			1856	vill. Lohgarh, Ludhiana	1952	A Sikh spy who gave information of British atrocities to the Sikhs
Harnam Kaur/ Juini	Ram Dee	Bhagwan Das			1894	Takht Singh				Dist. Ferozepur	1907	A social worker and a pioneer in the field of education
Balbir kaur												A Sikh woman martyr who participated in the Akali movement

APPENDIX V

GENDER ISSUES IN SIKH LITERATURE (1500-1920)

SOURCE	SIKH GURU	SGGS	VAR	PAURI	NAME OF RAHITNAMA	GENDER ISSUES REFLECTED	GENDER ISSUES IGNORED
Adi Granth	Nanak	15				Women part of worldly attachment	
		17				Path of devotion open to women	
		155				Women referred to as the body's soul	
		155				Women as part of worldly attachment	
		223				Equality of both the sexes before Lord	
		304				Men who blindly obey their women are chided	
		416				Women as part of worldly entanglements	
		472				notion of female impurity/menstruation is ridiculed	
		473				Upholds the reproductive role of women	
		536				Women as part of worldly attachment	
		722				Eye-witness account of the plight of women during the invasion of Babur	
	Amardas	796				Negative qualities in women are stated here	
		162				Concept of an Ideal woman	
		645				A divorced woman is not considered respectable in society	
		648				Path of devotion equally open to women	
		651				Women referred to as being wicked and shrewd	
		787				Condemnation of the barbaric custom of Sati	
		788				Ideal husband-wife relations	
		1249				Ideal husband-wife relations	
		1250				On married life	
	Ramdas	41				Women as part of worldly attachment	
		79				Path of devotion equally open to women	
		141				Women as part of worldly attachment	
		982				Equality of both the sexes before Lord	
	Arjan	71				Family life comes in way of the spiritual progress of man	
		1144				Accords a high status to women	
		1183				Lord addressed as Mother and Father	
		1226				Lord addressed as Mother and Father	
	Tegh Bahadur	536				Women as part of worldly attachment	
		631				Women as part of worldly attachment	

		632		Women as part of worldly attachment	
		633		Women as part of worldly attachment	
		634		Women as part of worldly attachment	
	Namdev	693		Equality of both the sexes before Lord	
		988		Position of a Mother upheld	
		1165		Infidelity and extra-marital relations are condemned	
	Kabir	327		Women as equals	
		328		Concept of an Ideal woman	
	Trilochan	695		Asks his wife to face the consequences of her own actions	
Varan Bhai Gurdas	Bhai Gurdas	5	8	Condemns superstitions attached to women	
	Bhalla	5	8	Condemns Prostitution	
		5	16	Women referred to as being a gateway to salvation	
		6	8	Monogamy is advocated	
		10	5	Condemnation of illicit relationships and Sati	
		10	12	Infidelity is criticized	
		29	11	A Gursikh is instructed to treat women with respect	
Janamsakhis					Silent on the role and status of women
Dasam Granth					Akal Ustati', a poetic composition from the Dasam Granth renounces the barbaric custom of Sati and its practice
Sainapat's Gursobha					Silent on the role and status of women
Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi					Silent on the role and status of women
Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi					Women as part of worldly attachment
Hukamnamas					No gender bias reflected
Rahitnamas					
	Sakhi Rahit Ki			Condemns adultery	
	Tanakah-Nama			Against prostitution, adultery and dowry	
	Prahlad Rai Rahitnama			Against prostitution, female foeticide and infanticide	
	Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh			Against prostitution, adultery and polygamy	
	Rahitnama Hazuri/Chaupa Singh			Against adultery, female infanticide, disrespect towards respectable women, marrying one's daughter to a smoker,	

	violence towards women, initiation rights of women. Patriarchy is upheld alongwith the concept of the Ideal woman	
Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh	Against prostitution, adultery and female infanticide, advocates respect towards women	
Bansavalinama	Provides information on the women of Guru families only	No gender issues discussed
Mahima Parkash		Silent on the role and status of women
Nanak Parkash	Women dancers looked down upon by the society, existence of women slaves, selling of young girls on account of poverty, women slaves given away as dowry and existence of a patriarchal set-up.	
Giani Gian Singh's writings		Silent on the role and status of women
Rattan Singh Bhangu's, 'Panth Prakash'		Silent on the role and status of women
Nineteenth-Century Popular Literature	Son preference, great rejoicing at the occasion of the birth of a male-child, birth of a girl-child viewed as a liability, prevalence of dowry, payment of bride-money and selling of daughters, wide age-differences between marriage partners, practice of female infanticide and child-marriage, against widow-remarriages; low incidence of Sati mentioned	
Newspapers	Participation of women in social service, setting up of schools and education of women, Indian women urged not to imitate foreign women, women urged to develop a questioning attitude, concept of an ideal woman upheld, emphasis on the education of the Sikh woman, mentions the organisation of religious gatherings by Sikh women and condemnation of the practice of buying and selling women.	
Sikh Rahit Maryada	Women have complete access to the Guru Granth Sahib, monogamy is advocated, Wearing of a turban is a matter of voluntary choice for Sikh women, full participation rights are given to Sikh women in the performance of religious affairs and ceremonies, practice and profession of the Sikh faith is open to all, against female foeticide/infanticide, adultery, purdah, dowry, child-marriage, polygamy and infidelity.	

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GLOSSARY

<i>Adi Granth or</i>	:	sacred scripture of the Sikhs compiled by Guru
<i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>	:	Arjan Dev in 1604, containing the compositions of the first five and the ninth Guru and a number of <i>Sants and Sufis</i> .
<i>Ajuni</i>	:	unborn.
<i>Akal</i>	:	eternal; immortal; a term used to describe God.
<i>Akal Bunga</i>	:	Lord's mansion; another name for Akal Takht.
<i>Akal Ustat</i>	:	"Praise to the Timeless One", an unfinished poem attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, included in the Dasam Granth.
<i>Akal Takht</i>	:	the throne of the Almighty, the timeless throne, the highest seat of authority of the Sikh religion; the building erected by Guru Hargobind opposite the Harmandir Sahib.
<i>Akhand Path</i>	:	an 'unbroken reading' of the Guru Granth Sahib : performed by a relay of readers who, reading in turn without intermission, complete the task in approximately forty-eight hours.
<i>Amro</i>	:	daughter of Guru Angad Dev.
<i>Amrit</i>	:	sugar-puff mixed, <i>Bani</i> -consecrated water used in Sikh initiation ceremony; the nectar of immortality.
<i>Anup Kaur</i>	:	a woman of Lahore who unsuccessfully tried to seduce Guru Gobind Singh.

<i>Anand karaj</i>	:	literally, blissful task, the term is used for Sikh marriage ceremony.
<i>Ardaas</i>	:	an important Sikh prayer recited at the conclusion of a service; the word itself means supplication; Petition to God invoking His Grace.
<i>Asa Di Var</i>	:	the most cherished of all the vars in the Guru Granth Sahib appearing on pages 462-75.
<i>Ashtapadas</i>	:	compositions in Guru Granth Sahib, consisting of eight verses.
<i>Bānî</i>	:	hymns or hymnology of the Sikh Gurus in the Guru Granth Sahib.
<i>Babur Bānî</i>	:	‘utterances concerning Babur’; four hymns Composed by Guru Nanak about the devastation Caused by Babur’s army.
<i>Bachitra Natak</i>	:	a term sometimes used for the entire Dasam Granth, but is normally confined to a poetic composition in it attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.
<i>Baghel Kaur</i>	:	a brave Sikh woman.
<i>Bāolî</i>	:	a large well with stairs descending to the level of generally the water.
<i>Bansavalinama</i>	:	‘Genealogy of the ten masters’; first attempt to write the history of the community.
<i>Bandai Khalsa</i>	:	followers of Banda Bahadur.
<i>Bhani</i>	:	daughter of Guru Amar Das; wife of Guru Ram Das and mother of Guru Arjan Dev.

<i>Bhakti</i>	:	‘devotion’, ‘worship’. From <i>bhaj</i> , meaning in a religious context, adoration or loving devotion.
<i>Bhagat</i>	:	saint; man of God; devotee who adores God.
<i>Buddha Dal</i>	:	the army of veterans.
<i>Chandi Charitra</i>	:	two lengthy compositions in the Dasam Granth, both in Gurmukhi Braj, relating the exploits of Goddess Chandi or Durga.
<i>Charitropakhyan/ Pakhyan Charitra</i>	:	a lengthy series of 404 anecdotes in the Dasam Granth, many of which tell of the skills which women bring to the art of seduction.
<i>Chakk Nanaki</i>	:	piece of land bought by Guru Tegh Bahadur and named after his mother now famous as the town of Anandpur.
<i>Damodri</i>	:	the first of Guru Hargobind’s three wives, mother of Gurditta, and the grandmother of Dhir Mal and Har Rai.
<i>Dasam Granth</i>	:	lit. Tenth Book. An anthology of 1422 pages, compiled some two decades after the death of Guru Gobind Singh.
<i>Daswandh</i>	:	tithe or one tenth of one’s income; contribution towards common socio-religious development of society.
<i>Degh</i>	:	the cooking pot/vessel symbolizing the Langar.
<i>Dharma</i>	:	moral or religious duty; that which forms a foundation and upholds, or constitutes law and custom.

<i>Dharam Khand</i>	:	a hymn in the <i>Japji Sahib</i> of Guru Nanak; giving a Description of the earth, our planet, which according to Nanak is a place for practicing righteousness.
<i>Ek Omkar/Oankar</i>	:	it represents unity of God.
<i>Ganga</i>	:	Mata Ganga, wife of Guru Arjan Dev and the mother of Guru Hargobind.
<i>Gian Parbodh</i>	:	a section of the Dasam Granth consisting mainly of stories from the Mahabharata.
<i>Gujri</i>	:	wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur and mother of Guru Gobind Singh, belonging to a Khatri family of Lakhnaur.
<i>Guru</i>	:	‘Guru’ means ‘preceptor’. In Guru Nanak’s view, the Guru or Satguru represented divine presence, mystically apprehended and inwardly guiding the truly devout along the path leading to mukti.
<i>Gurbilas</i>	:	literally ‘the Guru’s pleasure’; a style of hagiography which focussed attention on the heroic qualities of the Gurus (notably the sixth and tenth Gurus).
<i>Gurbani</i>	:	the ‘Revealed Word’; utterances of the Gurus and <i>Bhagats</i> recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib ; the Divine Word received from God.
<i>Gurgaddi</i>	:	throne of Guruship.
<i>Gurmat</i>	:	‘the teachings of the Guru’.
<i>Gurmukh</i>	:	literally, with face towards the Guru. Those whose actions are guided by Guru-consciousness.

<i>Gurmukhi</i>	:	the script in which the Guru Granth Sahib is written. Literally, from the mouth of the Guru.
<i>Gursobha</i>	:	‘radiance of the Guru’, a narrative poem providing rare testimony to the beliefs and practices of the Khalsa in the early eighteenth century.
<i>Gyan Ratnavali</i>	:	a janam-sakhi based on Bhai Gurdas’s Var I, attributed to Mani Singh; an early nineteenth-century product of the Udasi sect.
<i>Haumai</i>	:	self-exaltation; self-centredness; ego; I-am-ness.
<i>Hukam</i>	:	Divine Order; Command of God; Will of God.
<i>Hukamnamas</i>	:	‘Letter of Command’; issued from the time of Guru Hargobind to the Sangats or individuals, giving instructions or requesting assistance.
<i>Janamsākhis</i>	:	a genre of Sikh literature; the biographical account.
<i>Japji</i>	:	bānî of Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Sahib meant for daily prayer or recitation in the morning.
<i>Jivan Mukta</i>	:	‘one who has found liberation while yet physically living.
<i>Jito</i>	:	the first of Guru Gobind’s three wives, married in 1677; mother of Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh, and Fateh Singh.
<i>Jind Kaur/Jindan</i>	:	the youngest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s three wives and the mother of his seventh son, Duleep Singh.
<i>Kalgidhar</i>	:	‘wearer of the aigrette’.

<i>Karma</i>	:	the destiny or fate of an individual generated in accordance with the deeds performed in present and past lives.
<i>Karseva</i>	:	‘work-service’; work which is undertaken without pay for some large task in the service of the Panth.
<i>Kes</i>	:	uncut hair; one of the five Ks.
<i>Khālsa</i>	:	an epithet used for the followers of Guru Gobind Singh, implying direct link between the Guru and the Sikhs.
<i>Khalsa Panth</i>	:	after the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, the Khalsa became rulers of North India and the Khalsa <i>Panth</i> became the Sikh nation.
<i>Khand</i>	:	the five ‘realms’ which Guru Nanak describes in <i>Japji</i> ; stages of developing spiritual awareness.
<i>Khivi</i>	:	a Khatri of Khadur, wife of Guru Angad Dev.
<i>Kirpan</i>	:	sword or sabre which a Khalsa when initiated is enjoined to carry on his/her person always.
<i>Langar</i>	:	a free kitchen open to the public.
<i>Mahima Prakash</i>	:	a Janamsakhi said to have been composed in the middle of the eighteenth century.
<i>Maha Devi</i>	:	the third of the three wives of Guru Hargobind.
<i>Manjis</i>	:	twenty-two seats of religious authority established by Guru Amar Das. These were later abolished by Guru Gobind Singh.

<i>Manmukh</i>	:	literally, face towards self. Guided by one's own mind, rather than by the Guru's advice; self-oriented, irreligious.
<i>Mansa Devi</i>	:	wife of Guru Amar Das.
<i>Masand</i>	:	religious preachers appointed by the Guru to oversee individual sangats or groups of sangats and to collect offerings made to the Guru.
<i>Māyā</i>	:	'illusion, deception', sometimes identified with Durgā as the source of spells, or as a personification of the unreality of worldly things.
<i>Minās</i>	:	the crooked followers of Prithi Chand, the eldest son of Guru Ram Das; one of the early dissent groups in Sikhism.
<i>Miri Piri</i>	:	the Sikh doctrine of combining the spiritual and Temporal aspects of life.
<i>Misl</i>	:	eighteenth century Sikh confederacies which consolidated to form the Sikh nation ruled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
<i>Misldar</i>	:	the sardar in command of a misl.
<i>Mithya</i>	:	illusion; hindu doctrine that this earth is a place of suffering.
<i>Mokh/Moksha</i>	:	liberation of the soul from worldly affairs; freedom from the cycle of birth and death; a state of bliss; union with God.
<i>Mul Mantra</i>	:	the basic belief or the fundamental doctrine of the Sikh faith enunciated by Guru Nanak in <i>Japji Sahib</i> ; the opening words of the Guru Granth Sahib.

<i>Nam</i>	:	the immanent or the qualitative aspect of God; the link between Man and God.
<i>Nanaki I</i>	:	the sister of Guru Nanak.
<i>Nanaki II</i>	:	the second of Guru Hargobind's three wives, the mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur.
<i>Nirmala</i>	:	'spotless'.
<i>Nirguna</i>	:	without 'qualities' or attributes; doctrine of a Formless Akal Purakh.
<i>Nirankar</i>	:	attributeless God.
<i>Nitnem</i>	:	the daily devotional discipline for all Sikhs.
<i>Pagri</i>	:	a turban that is mandatory for all male Kesh-dhari Sikhs, except small boys and optional for women.
<i>Panj Mel</i>	:	the five reprobate groups which members of the Khalsa must swear to spurn.
<i>Panth</i>	:	literally, path or way; Sikh <i>Panth</i> means the Sikh community following the Sikh way of life.
<i>Pangat</i>	:	seated devotees lined up on the floor for a meal from the Guru's kitchen attached to every gurdwara.
<i>Panj Piare</i>	:	literally, Five Beloveds'; the term used originally to refer to the five Sikhs initiated into the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh.
<i>Panguda</i>	:	small cradles in which infants were put to sleep; sub-seats established by Guru Amar Das for the propogation of religion.

<i>Pargana</i>	:	the administrative sub-division of a suba under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
<i>Parsad</i>	:	kindness, grace, favour. <i>Karah Prasad</i> is a consecrated pudding distributed in a gurdwara, symbolizing the Guru's kindness.
<i>Patshahi</i>	:	political sovereignty.
<i>Peer</i>	:	head of a Sufi order; a renowned Sufi.
<i>Pothi</i>	:	book; <i>Granth</i> .
<i>Purdah</i>	:	a veil used by women in the presence of elderly men and strangers.
<i>Rag</i>	:	a series of five or more notes upon which a melody is based; melody.
<i>Rahit</i>	:	Code of belief and discipline which all amrit-dhari Sikhs vow to observe at initiation into the Khalsa.
<i>Rahiras</i>	:	'straight path', bears the meaning 'supplicatory prayer'.
<i>Rahitnama</i>	:	eighteenth century accounts containing the original disciplinary Code of the Khalsa.
<i>Rahit Maryada</i>	:	disciplinary Code of the Khalsa issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.
<i>Raj Karega Khalsa</i>	:	recited at the conclusion of Ardas, it means, 'the Khalsa shall rule and no enemy shall remain. All Who endure suffering and privation shall be brought to the safety of the Guru's protection'.
<i>Rakhi</i>	:	one-fifth of the harvest taken by Misls in return for protection of villages.

<i>Roop kaur</i>	:	adopted daughter of Guru Har Rai.
<i>Sabad</i>	:	Divine Word of the Gurus received from God; Refers to the sacred words appearing in Guru Granth Sahib.
<i>Sachha Padshah</i>	:	‘True King’, a form of address used for God by Guru Nanak.
<i>Sach Khand</i>	:	the chief Gurdwara in Nanded recognized as one of the five takhats, is also known as Sach Khand Hazur Sahib.
<i>Sada Kaur</i>	:	widow of Gurbakhsh Singh, heir to the chieftainship of the Kanhaiya Misl, who was killed in 1782.
<i>Saguna</i>	:	the doctrine that God possesses visible ‘qualities’ or attributes.
<i>Sahaj</i>	:	condition of ineffable bliss which is the climax of Nām simaran; eternal bliss in union with Akal Purakh.
<i>Sahib Kaur</i>	:	the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh, originally called Sahib Devan, designated ‘Mother of Khalsa’.
<i>Sang</i>	:	sword – a kind of spear used to cut shrubs and trees; a weapon carried by Mai Bhago.
<i>Sangat</i>	:	a Sikh gathering; assembly; congregation.
<i>Sardar</i>	:	‘Chieftain’; an eighteenth century title applied to the leader of a misl or jatha.
<i>Sat</i>	:	true/truth. Also used to denote that <i>Waheguru</i> is not an abstraction but a reality.

<i>Sati</i>	:	the burning of a widow on her deceased husband's funeral pyre.
<i>Sat Nam</i>	:	'True is the divine Name'.
<i>Seva</i>	:	'Service'; service to the Guru/community.
<i>Shlok</i>	:	normally a couplet; any short composition contained in the Guru Granth Sahib.
<i>Sidh Gosht</i>	:	'discourse with the Siddhs'. A lengthy work by Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Sahib.
<i>Sukhmani</i>	:	'pearl of peace or peace of mind'; a lengthy poem included in the Guru Granth Sahib, pp.262-96.
<i>Sulakhani</i>	:	wife of Guru Nanak, a Chona Khatri from Pakhoke, Near Batala, and commonly referred to as Mata Choni.
<i>Sundri</i>	:	second of the three wives of Guru Gobind Singh, married in 1684; mother of Ajit Singh.
<i>Swayyas</i>	:	religious text; panegyric, an eulogy; laudation; a form of poetry.
<i>Tanakhahnama</i>	:	an eighteenth century brief Rahitnama in simple Punjabi verse attributed to Nand Lal.
<i>Taruna Dal</i>	:	the 'young army'.
<i>Tat Khalsa</i>	:	'Pure Khalsa'; name given to a section of the Panth which opposed the Sikh leader Banda Singh Bahadur in the early eighteenth century; followers of the Khalsa.
<i>Tripta</i>	:	wife of Kalu and mother of Guru Nanak.

<i>Udasis</i>	:	detachment, sadness; term used by the <i>Puratan</i> Janamsakhis for Guru Nanak's journeys.
<i>Var</i>	:	lengthy poems composed by Bhai Gurdas.
<i>Varna</i>	:	'Colour'; the four groups into which castes are conventionally organized as a hierarchy.
<i>Viro</i>	:	daughter of Guru Hargobind and Damodri.
<i>Waheguru</i>	:	'Praise to the Guru'.
<i>Wada Ghalughara</i>	:	the 'great holocaust'.
<i>Zafarnama</i>	:	the 'Letter of Victory', attributed to Guru Gobind Singh and addressed to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.