

**CONTRIBUTION OF SIKH WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND
IN SIKH HISTORY**

A

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirement of

Award of degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HISTORY

BY

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BATHINDA, PUNJAB

2021

CHAPTER-1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

India is a nation full of diversities. There are people from different religions, languages and races have been living in this country.¹ This refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities that are present in the country. Women are an important part of the society. Nature has given an important role to women. Due to the differences between the men and the women, the society has been divided into two parts from centuries. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. Women have played an important role in the society since the beginning.² Women fulfilled their duties as daughters, mothers and wives throughout her life. During some periods women were known as *devis* in the Indian community.³ Other than this, it has been proven throughout history that women have many different qualities.⁴

In the ancient periods, people used to live in the *jungles*. At that time humans were highly dependent on nature for their survival. The roles of the men and women were defined and definite, so as to fulfil the responsibilities of the family and society at large. Women were the important part of the society. The status of women in the society in Punjab has been highly dynamic i.e. during some periods women were considered as an important part of the family and society to such an extent that they were also worshipped as *devis* in some eras while at other times they had no say neither in the households nor in the society.

In the ancient times, the major role of the women in the society was to give birth to children and take care of them. With passage of time, the social, political, economic and religious development of the society began.⁵

During this period, there was no major difference between the status of men and women within the society. However, during the slave era, some people emerged to be rich and landlords. These landlords usually harassed the

¹ M.K. Gill, *women and religion*, Vijay Publication, New Delhi, 1997, pp-98.

² PardeepKaur, *Nari Narivad and Budh dharam*, Gracious Books, Patiala, 2017, pp-92.

³ *Punjab History Conference*(45th session), March, 15-17, 2013, pp-729.

⁴ Bhai Seva Singh, *Bahadur Singhnia, Khalsa Samachar*, Vazir Hind Press, 1925, pp-5.

⁵ M. Haralambos, *Sociology, Thomas and Perspe*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980, pp-371.

women who worked on their lands.⁶ During the Indus civilization in India, both the genders of the society were equal. Both the men and the women had equal rights. There were no restrictions on the lifestyle, food and clothing of women. It is also believed that during that period women used to bath with milk. The women also participated in the discussions regarding the major decisions of the society. Therefore, it can be said that women had an equal say in the community. However, in the Mehenjodero and Harrappan civilizations of this period, the status of women was greater than that of their counterparts. During this era, the name of the family was related to the name of the woman in the family i.e. it did not have the name of the father. Archeologists have discovered that the people of the Indus civilization worshipped Pashupati Dev and Mata Devi.

Cultures are said to have been started during the Aryan period in India.⁷ During the Vedic period many invaders attacked on India. Due to which the status of women in the society kept on changing frequently.⁸ However, during this period the conditions of the society were favorable for the women i.e. the birth of the girl child was not considered unholy. Women had a say in their marriage and were given the authority to marry who they chose. During this era, the Kings and Queens sat on the thrones together. Women also participated in religious events. Moreover, some female *Rishi muni* also wrote some *Mantars* and *Vedas*. The women of this period were proficient in art.⁹ However, the widows were not allowed to remarry during this period. According to the law, the women were not completely independent but the status of women in the households was appreciable. Women played an important part in the religious activities.

The clothes worn by the people in the Vedic period are majorly divided into three parts. The first were the inner garments which was known as *nevih*, the lower garment called *paridhana* which was pleated in front and these were of various colours and an upper garment called *uttariya*. The clothes of the

⁶ *Women, Peace and Security (4th International Conference)*, Organised by Women Studies Centre, pp-3.

⁷ Muhammad Latif, *Tareekh-E-Punjab*, Sampatrishi Publication, Delhi, 1994, pp-4.

⁸ Giani Atma Singh, *Rani Sahib Kaur*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, pp-3,4.

⁹ *Women, Peace and Security (4th International Conference)*, Organised by Women Studies Centre, pp-3,4.

rich were decorated with gold. Gold jewellery and flower garlands were a common sight in the fares. Both the women and men of this era wore turbans. The common foods eaten in the household of this civilisation included milk, curd, vegetables, fruits, peas etc. Meat was eaten during festivals and on important events. However, salt was not used in this era. The sources of water included the waterfalls and the rivers. Other than this, wells were also dug to provide water to the locals.

The other two important drinks of this period included the *som* and *surah*. *Som* was tree sap which was extracted from the trees from the top of the Himalayan Mountain while *Surah* was an intoxicating drink. Women also performed in singing and dancing on occasions. Therefore, it can be said that women played an important role in the development of this civilization.¹⁰ Hence, women held a high and important position in the Aryan civilization of the *Vedic era*.¹¹

In the later Vedic period, women went to and participated in fares and there is no evidence of *pardha* in this period.¹² However, the status of women had now been related to the males according to the Brahmin *Granth*s of this period.

During this period, wives were considered as partners, daughters were considered unholy while the sons were considered to be of utmost importance. Female foeticide was for the first time mentioned in the *Brahmin Granth*s. Men were allowed to marry on multiple occasions while women were not allowed to marry more than once.¹³ The status of women in the society plummeted during the Vedic period.¹⁴ During this era women were allowed to eat food after their husbands had eaten. Women would not do anything without the permission of their husbands. With the advent of the Mahabharata period, the custom of *sati* had begun. Until the advent of the Upanishads, women were allowed to study the Vedic *granth*s. They discussed with the males about the traditional and spiritual facts. After observing the *Thori Gatha Granth* we can

¹⁰ Ramesh Chandar Hemchandar Rai Chaudhary, *Bharat Da Bhetar Itihas*, Mechmeleon Publishers, India Limited, Haryana Punjab, 1954, pp-121.

¹¹ P.L. Bhargava, *India in the Vedic Age*, Lucknow, 1971, pp-245.

¹² Ramesh Chandar Hemchandar Rai Chaudhary, *Bharat Da Bhetar Itihas*, Mecheleon Publishers, india Limited , Haryana Punjab, 1954, pp-200.

¹³ B.P. Saha and K.S. Behera, *Ancient History of India*, Delhi, 1998, pp-86.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp-86.

conclude that there were some scholars who had deep knowledge about religion in the Mourya period.¹⁵

The Buddhist religion did not have great views regarding the women in the society. The custom of *pardha* had not started by that time. The widows were allowed to remarry and divorces were also allowed during this period. However, the Buddhist religion was against multiple marriage system. They considered women to be the ones who were responsible for one to go to hell. Women were considered less powerful and less intelligent than the males. They were not given equal status as that of the men in the spiritual and religious aspects.¹⁶

The status of women was favourable during the Mourya period. Women were independent during this era. They were employed as servants to the Kings. However, multiple marriages were permitted for example Ashoka had four wives. There were limited observations of the *sati pratha*. The crimes against the women were severely punished. Female artists, actors and dramatists were promoted during this period. The *das pratha* was famous during this era. The people in society in that era believed in superstitions. Multiple marriages were allowed in this community. There is some evidence that the *sati pratha* was prevalent towards the North West of this community i.e. amongst the society of the army personnel.¹⁷ Therefore, the custom of *sati* was prevalent amongst the soldiers. The first evidence of the *sati pratha* was given in the *eran* archive of the 510 A.D. One event of the *sati* was performed by the wife of the army commander of Bhanu Gupta. Other than this Harshwardhan saved his sister who was just about to perform *sati* in the jungles. During this period the pregnant women were allowed to live until the birth of their children. After the birth of their children, the women had to hand over the children to someone else and themselves had to perform *sati* i.e. had to given up their lives in fire.¹⁸ During this era, the women were given the rights of the property of their husbands upon his death if the couple did not have any son. Women were also allowed to sell their *istaridhan*.

¹⁵ Pardeep Kaur, *Narivad and Budh Dharm*, Gracious Books, Patiala, 2017, pp-49.

¹⁶ Harbans singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999.

¹⁷ B.K Aganihotri, *Bharitiye Ihtihis and Sanskrit*, Sunil Sachdev duara parkashan, Ravi Sachdev, Delhi, 1996, pp-78.

¹⁸ P.L. Bhargava, *India in the Vedic Age*, Lucknow, 1971, pp-245.

However, the Hindu women had no right over their father's property. Therefore, they were completely dependent upon their husbands financially. However, the women had rights over the dowry and jewellery received from their parents. This was known as *istaridhan*.¹⁹

The men had the responsibility of fulfilling the wishes of their wives. The husbands of the Hindu women had to take care of the basic needs of their wives before leaving for long trips.

However, the status of the widow was poor. The rich, landlords and the upper classes were allowed to have multiple wives because of their wealth. This led to the promotion of the notion of women as a treasure. The women of the *sudhar* caste had more freedom. While the women of the upper classes did not have the freedom to work or have financial independence.²⁰ The women of the poor households worked in shops to increase the earnings off their respective households. The women of the farmer family in the village helped their husbands in the fields. The women normally had the responsibility to take care of the animals.

The women indulged in singing. There were scarcely any women who undertook for higher studies and if so they were mostly the women of the upper classes. They were educated in Sanskrit. The custom of *sawavmber* i.e. the tradition where a woman chooses her husband also prevailed in the community during this period.²¹

The medieval period of the Indian community witnessed the rise of different cultures. These included the Rajputs, Sultanate, Mughals and the Sikhs. There are many evils in the society during the reign of the Rajputs, but during this period the status of women was favourable. The *pardha partha* was not present in the society. There was no restriction on the education of the children. Some women were eminent scholars and were capable in indulging in debates with other scholars. Some of the famous female scholars of that period include Indu lekha, Morika, Silah, Supadhra, PadamshreeVijeka, Madalsa and Lakshmi. Women were free to choose their husbands.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp-246.

²⁰ Prem Parkash Ola, Nirmal Kumar Aria, *Bhartiye Ihtihās Prambh Se Lekar 1947 A.D.*, Arya Competition Times, 2018, pp-98.

²¹ Ramesh Chandar Hemchandari Rai Chaudhary, *Bharat Da Bhetar Etihās*, Mechmeleon Publishers, Haryana Punjab, 1954., pp-98.

The women of this period were educated and had the knowledge of the *Sanskrit* language. Other than this, they were also trained in painting, singing, dancing and other arts. The women of the upper classes were highly skilled in various arts. They had the knowledge of horse riding, swordsmanship and use of other weapons. The *Joharpratha* existed in the community during this period. Just as the *sati pratha* was a symbol of the affection showed by the women towards their husbands in the medieval period, *Joharpratha* was one such custom of the Rajput society. When the Rajputs were defeated in the battles then all women of their families burnt themselves in fire, so that they were not captured alive by the enemies. The *Johar* performed by the queens of the Kampila and Chander after the defeat of Raja Hamir Dev at the hands of Muhammad Tughlag is quite famous in the history.²² The women died upon the death of their husbands during this period. The men who would leave the battle fields for the fear of the loss of their lives were not well received by their wives. The women also performed on certain occasions by singing and dancing. These occasions acted as a source of entertainment. Both the Rajput men and women wore jewellery. The Rajputs were known for their bravery. The women themselves sent their husbands to the battle fields. The only problem that presided in the Rajput community was that they had internal conflicts. Hence, there was no unity amongst the Rajputs. Some of the evils that presided in the Rajput were female foeticide and early marriages.²³ Other than this, the condition of widows was very poor and they were considered as the bearers of misfortune.

The Hindus were in majority during the Sultanate period. Many battles took place in this era. Many women and children were killed in these battles. The ones who survived were imprisoned and sold as slaves. The Turkish Sultans had an interest in Hindu women. They detached these women their religion and forced them to accept Islam. These Turkish Sultans were known for kidnapping and forcefully taking these Hindu women. It was due the fear of these Turks that the Hindus began marrying their daughters at an early age. The women were not educated in the Hindu community. However, according

²² Babar, *Tajak-E-Babri*, Sang-E-Meel, Lahore, 2006, pp-73.

²³ Alberuni, *Tehkik-Ull-Hind*, Osmania Oriental Publication Bureau, Hyderabad, 1958, pp-29.

to some views, the condition of the Hindus was decent during the reign of the Turkish rulers.²⁴ However, according to the rules of these Sultans, sometimes, the whole family of the person would be killed upon the mistake of one person. The rights of the women were the same as the servants of the house to which she had been married to. The Sultans in Delhi also had a separate place for the women in their castles which were known as *Haram*. However, during this period, *Jajiyā* was not levied upon the women, children and the mentally disabled.²⁵

The women were dependent on men most of the time and for majority of their lives. During the early periods of their lives, women were dependent on the will of their fathers. After marriage this authority was given to their husband. Hence, after marriage women had to obey their husbands. Normally, they would be highly oppressed by their mother-in-laws. It was considered her responsibility to keep her in-laws pleased. If being unable to do so, their lives would become miserable. While in the Muslim families such women were divorced. Other than this, women had the responsibility to take care of the household chores which included cleaning, washing utensils and preparing food. Moreover, in the villages women also had to take care of the feeding and milking the animals. Upon getting old, women would become dependent on their children.

The custom of divorces existed in the Muslim society, on one side it was very easy for a Muslim man to divorce his wife while the wife had no such provisions. The life of the divorced Muslim woman would become very miserable. The main reason for this was that she neither had a place in her father's house nor in her husband's house to live. Hence, most of these women would end up as prostitutes.²⁶

During that era, women were not allowed to live with any other man except their husband. However, women were not prompted to stay away from men because most of the women of the upper classes were kept busy in the kitchen and other household works. While the women of the lower classes i.e. the *sudhars* worked in the fields and took care of the animals. The widows

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp-36.

²⁵ Fauja Singh, *Punjab Da Ihtihās*, Vol-3 (A.D.1000-1526), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014, pp-98.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp-38.

would be given two choices; the first being to die by throwing herself in the fire of the cremation of her husband which was called *sati* and the second being to live the rest of her life alone. These women were forced to do so, so as not to disgrace the names of their dead husbands. Only the elder women were exempted from this custom because they were protected by their sons. According to the *sati pratha*, the women who gave their lives in the fire burning the bodies of their dead husbands were called *sahmarna*. While the women whose husbands died abroad, died holding an item belonging to their husband, upon receiving the message of the death of their husband. Such women were called *anumarn*. The women of the *veshva* caste were professionally singers and dancers in the society. They performed during important occasions like those of marriages, fares, gatherings etc.²⁷

The Hindus were more literate than the Muslims during this era. Due to the lack of education the society was engulfed with superstitions. The Hindus mostly believed in fallacies and delusions.²⁸

During the era of the Mughals, the society was mainly divided in to two parts; the Muslims and the Hindus. As the rulers were Muslims themselves during this period, the Muslim community was given priority. The condition of the Hindus during this period was deprived. They had to pay the religious tax known as *Jajiya* and some other taxes. However, there were many social evils in the Hindu society. Some of which included the caste system, the *pardha pratha*, *sati pratha* and child marriages etc.²⁹

Many tribes accepted Islam during the medieval period. Many changes occurred upon the emergence of the Muslim rule in the country. However, the majority of the people in the country were from the Hindu community. The women, men and children lived together. After marriage, the females were supposed to join her in-laws home. Upon the death of the husband of the woman, the children were raised by the common members of the family.

²⁷ Fauja Singh, *Punjab Da Itihas*, Vol-3 (A.D.1000-1526), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014, pp-244.

²⁸ Bhagat Singh, *Madhkalin Bharat Dia Sansthavah*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, pp-5.

²⁹ Professor Fauja Singh, Principal Teja Singh, *Punjab Da Itihas (1469-1799)*, Vol-1, SBD, pp-79.

They were constituted of both men and women. Slaves were sold and bought to take care of the women residing in the *harams*. The women slaves were divided in to two parts. One was given the responsibility to take care of the household works while the other served the women of the *janankhana*. The Hindu and Muslim communities were united during the reign of Akbar. Badshah Akbar not only married Hindu women but also gave many Hindus important positions in his administration and *Darbar*. Both the men and women of this era wore pieces of jewellery. Most of the women wore jewellery. The clothes of this era were mostly made of cotton, wool and other fabrics. Education was not given much importance during the Delhi Sultanate reign. While in the Mughal period, education was imparted through the *madrassa*. Humayu created a library in Delhi which had books of *Farsi* language. Both the Hindus and Muslims were given education during this period.³⁰

Women were considered to be the property of their father and husbands in Arab. During this period, the Kings kept many women with them.³¹ However, some women also had political power for example the daughter of Shah Jahan had a power in the administration during the reign of her father. Women indirectly played a part in the social, traditional and cultural aspect of that society. Women also participated in singing and dancing. All the decisions in the court of Agra regarding *sati* were taken by Jahangir himself during his rule.³²

Shah Jahan was a stern *Suni* Muslim. He did not marry with Rajput women as his father did. During his reign, only Muslim women were allowed to stay in the *haram*. Shah Jahan had imposed restrictions on the entry of Hindu and Christian women in the *haram*. They married the Hindu women of Bhadauri and Bhimbar after converting them to Islam. The Hindu women who refused to perform *sati* were fined. However, to dodge the fines, these women were allowed to convert to Islam. About four thousand women were forced to

³⁰ Muhammad Idris, *Mughal Bharat, 1526-1717A.D.*, Lok Geet Parkashan, Chandigarh, 1989, pp-3,4,6,7,10,24,35

³¹ Bhagat Singh, *Madhkalin Bharat Dia Sansthava*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, pp-4.

³² Satish Chandar, *Madhkalin Bharat, (Sultanate Se Mughal Kal Tak)*, Ravi Majumdardvara Delhi, 2001, pp-85.

do so. The women that came to the *janankhana* would be converted to Islam and were then married off to the Muslims.

There were many social evils that existed in the society during the rule of the Rajputs. These social evils were ended by Akbar during his reign. First of all, he began his efforts to end the *sati pratha*. Other than this, he gave an order to stop child marriages. He also imposed restrictions on female foeticide. Akbar passed the orders to prohibit the marriages of boys less than 16 years and girls less than 14 years³³

The rights of the Hindu women were taken away after the *RigVed* period. After this, the situation of the women fluctuated with time and was mostly miserable. The freedom of women was taken away. Other than this, their influence on the religious, social and political aspects of the society kept on diminishing. During this period, many members of the Hindu community joined Islam to safeguard themselves from the caste system. Hindus gave preferences to idol worship during this period. The conditional status of the women in the society was highly deteriorated during this period. Many Hindu women were kidnapped and forcefully taken away by the Muslims throughout this period. It was due to this fear that parents started marrying their children at early ages. However, some people married their young daughters to older men in the greed of money. The women of this period normally wore *saree*, *choli* and *lenghas*. While the poor people covered their bodies with a pieces of cloth (*chadhar*)³⁴

As the Hindus and the Muslims lived together, they influenced each other. The connection and conflicts between the Hindu and the Muslim societies led to the birth of a new community named the Sikhs. This new community did not follow the erroneous customs and tradition that presided in both these societies. The main aim of this new community was to form a new society which was free of superstitions, social evils, hypocrisy etc.

This newly formed community ended the injustice towards the women and elevated the status of the women. Women were treated equal to the men in this society. Other than this, multiple marriages were promoted. Women were

³³ Latif, Sayeed Muhammad, *Madhkalin Bharat Da Ihtihis, 1000-1750 A.D.*, Madhan, Patiala, 2016, pp-290.

³⁴ K.M Ashraf, *Life and conditions of the people of Hindustan*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharial, 1967, pp-97.

encouraged to marry men with qualities and moral values. However, this society was against adultery and lust.³⁵ With time, the Sikh religion gained an important position amongst the other religions of the world. This religion was started by Guru Nanak Dev and promoted by his successors. Other than this, various *masands* and *manjidhars* were appointed to preach about the religion to the masses. The beginning of the Sikh religion took place in the medieval period. It gained a lot of support and followers from the Eastern and Western parts of the society. This religion acted as an awakening for the masses. However, during this period, Christianity had a lot of influence in the society but the preachers of this religion had become corrupt. On the other side, Hindus started emphasising on superstitions. This religion began as an effort to eliminate these superstitions from the society.³⁶

The Sikh religion was established by Guru Nanak Dev. He is known as the founder of the Sikh religion. He spent a majority of his life in the service of the people. From Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, this religion played an important role in promoting brotherhood in the community.³⁷ Guru Nanak Dev showed to people the righteous path. Women had no respect for centuries due to the ancient customs prevalent in the society. The status of women was deteriorated to such an extent in that male dominated society that she had to be dependent on the mercy of the men. Therefore, women were not considered equal to men, Even during Guru Nanak Dev's time, women were not allowed to go outside and neither were they treated properly.³⁸ Women had to cover their whole bodies while going outside. Girls were mostly married at young age. Other than this, women were bought and sold just as animals during that period. Men were allowed to have multiple marriages. During that era, the women that performed *sati* were appreciated and on the other side widows were considered wretched. While the Muslims treated the women like objects. These women spent most of their time inside the houses away from the sight of the society. Other than this, the *burka* custom was also prevalent in

³⁵ Karam Singh, *Madhkalin Punjab Di Dharm Chetna*, 300 Khalsa Sajna, Tijhi Shtabadi, 1999, pp-34,35.

³⁶ Bhai Santokh Singh, *Gurpartap Suraj Granth*, Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar, 1990.

³⁷ Principal Teja Singh, Dr. Ganda Singh, *Sikh Itihas (1465-1765)*, Punjabi University Patiala, 2013, pp-1.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp-1,2.

the society. Although, the holy *Quran* had prohibited female foeticide, this practice still continued in the society at that time.³⁹

Guru Nanak Dev emphasised on the importance of respecting women by saying that she not only gives birth to common people but also to Kings, Gurus, *Peers* and other important people. Firstly, he laid emphasis on the respect of women and promoted the equality of women in the society. Guru Nanak Dev gave women the same status the men had in the *sangat*. He also ended the *pardha pratha*. He also raised the status of the widow women asking the society why the women had to suffer after the death of her husband.⁴⁰ Hence, Guru Nanak Dev supported the remarriage of widows. It was due to this reason that the custom of remarrying of widow women became prominent amongst the *Jatt* of Punjab.

The widows were normally married to the elder or younger brother of the deceased husband. This custom was known as *Chadar Pauna* or *Kaleva*.

Guru Nanak Dev said that establishment of a community could not be done without the women however ironically the same society had no respect for women. Guru Nanak Dev accentuated on up lifting every sector of the society because he knew that the development of the all the classes, groups and genders of the society was necessary for the growth of the community. Hence, women are an important part of the society. Guru Nanak Dev attached the respect of women as the morals of the religion.⁴¹ Guru Nanak Dev said that it was not right to disrespect those who give birth to kings, Guru, *peers*, warriors etc. In order to end the status of women as *sudhars*, Guru Nanak Dev said the following:

*'So kyo mandha akiye
Jitt jame rajan//,
Bhand jamiye bandh nimiye
Bhand manganvehah//
Bhande hove dosti bhando chale rah//
Jitt jame rajan//*

³⁹ M.G. Gupta, *Shri Guru Nanak Dev (Bhagti and Atmak Shanti De Punj)*, Sahit Sadhan, New Delhi, 1997, pp-22,23.

⁴⁰ Mahinder Kaur Gill, *Guru Ghar Dia Neehan*, National Book Shop Delhi, 1998, pp-25,26.

⁴¹ Paramvir Singh, Dr. Parduman Shah Singh, *Bharat De Parmukh Dharam*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1992, pp-191.

*Bhand muah bhand bhaliye bhand hova bhadan//
Bandho hi bhand upjhe bhande bhaj nah koye//
Nanak bhande bahra iko sachha soye//*

The above stanza states that the whole world is born through women i.e. kings and all others are born through her. Hence, it would not be right to disrespect her.⁴² Guru Nanak Dev raised the voice against the discrimination against women.⁴³ Guru Nanak Dev taught the member of the Sikh community to stay away from lust and greed. He urges them to focus on praying and undertaking benevolent works. Hence, Guru Nanak Dev not only showed the righteous path to the people but also played a part in the development of the society.⁴⁴ Therefore, the status of women improved with the elimination of the social evils from the community. They were treated as equal to the males. To give a practical display of this equality, Guru Nanak Dev started the *langar* and *pangat pratha* in every *Dharamshala*, where both the genders of the society sat together to eat *langar*.⁴⁵ The customs and traditions started by Guru Nanak Dev proved to be more effective than those started by Kabir and Ramanand. Hence, it can be said that Guru Nanak Dev played an important role in the establishment of respect for women in the society.⁴⁶

Guru Nanak Dev not only thought women as equal to men but also thought that in some aspects she was superior to her counterpart. It is women who give birth to the children. Hence, the development of the society is impossible without the contribution of women. Therefore, it can be said relationships cannot be established without the support of women. Guru Nanak Dev started the tradition of *langar* and *pangat*. The main aim of this custom was to eliminate the discrimination that prevailed in the society on the grounds of gender, wealth, castes, religion etc. This was achieved as the *sudhars*, poor, Hindus, Muslims, rich and upper classes all sat together to eat *langar*. This played an important part not only in giving women the respect they deserved

⁴² Das Vishaka Singh, *Malwa Sikh Ihtihis Vol-1*, Dr.Chatur Singh Jivan Singh, Amritsar, 1983, pp-453.

⁴³ Kushwant Singh, *Sikh History (1469-1988)* Punjabi University, Patiala, 2003, pp-29,30.

⁴⁴ Jasvir Singh Savro, *Sikh Dharam*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1940, pp-28.

⁴⁵ Giani Gian Singh, *Rani Sahib Kaur*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1880, pp-28.

⁴⁶ Professor Brham Jagdish Singh, *Guru Nanak Dev, Jivan, Darshan and Bani*, Raj Kamal, 1890, pp-161.

in the society but also in the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. The status of women was raised as in *langar* both the genders sat together to eat food. This led to the development of respect for women in the Society. Guru Nanak Dev considered all the different classes and religions in the society to be equal. Guru Nanak Dev said the following words

Nah koi Hindu nah koi Musalman,

In order to promote equality and brotherhood amongst the two sections of the community. According to him all members of the society were equal. Therefore, it can be said that Guru Nanak Dev played a vital role in the transformation of the society.⁴⁷

However, some people denoted women as *narinarakdvhari*. Even Bhai Gurdas referred to women as *ardhshiriri* and *mokhdivari*. Nevertheless, women have always been given complete respect in the Sikh religion and have never been discriminated against.⁴⁸ During the previous periods, women mostly stayed indoors. The situation of women was as such that she would enter her husband's house after marriage and would only leave after death. Women were not given any education. However, the Sikh Gurus emphasised on the importance of the participation of women in various aspects of the society.

The true form and qualities of a woman can only be noticed upon giving her an important position. Women play an important role in the conservation of the customs and tradition by passing them on to their children.⁴⁹

However, some of the social evils that Guru Nanak Dev raised a voice against are still present in today's society. The initiative started by Guru Nanak Dev to give respect to women, has not completely been fulfilled even today.⁵⁰

In *Guru Granth Sahib*, Guru Nanak Dev expressed the philosophical form of women. Guru Nanak Dev promoted the equality of women. Women have been expressed in various forms in the *Gurbani* i.e. *nimani*, *augunhar*,

⁴⁷ www.sikhbookclub.com

⁴⁸ Professor Achru Singh, *Sikh Dharam and Jivan Darshan*, Johra Publication Patiala, 2005, pp-223,224.

⁴⁹ Dileep Kaur Brar, *Role of women in the Sikh society*, Seminar, 1985, pp-30,34.

⁵⁰ *Guru Nanak Dev Ji dia sikhia di adunik sandrab vich parshang kartak*, 23rd seminar, 22, 23 November, 2008, Guru Nanak Adhian Vibhag, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp-9.

suchaji, kuchaji and karoop. While in other parts women have been expressed as *gunvanti* by serving her husband and fulfilling other responsibilities throughout her life.

Before Guru Nanak Dev, women were not given respect in the society. The birth of a girl child was considered unholy. Hence, women were not considered to be equal to men.⁵¹

During this period the custom of *sati* was prevalent in the society to a great extent. The main reason of this was that in order to maintain the purity and respect of the husband, it was necessary for the woman to give up her life upon the death of her husband. Hence, the widows had no respect in the society and were considered to be wretched. Widows were neither allowed to remarry nor were they allowed to get dressed or wear ornaments. Hence their situation in the society was very miserable. It was due to this reason that Guru Nanak Dev raised a voice against the *satipratha*. According to Guru, the *satipratha* was the most inhuman custom in the society. Guru supported the remarriage of widows. According to Guru Nanak Dev, widow women had the right to remarry and live their lives happily and with respect and dignity. Guru Nanak Dev denoted women as '*purshdijanni*, i.e. the one who gave birth to men.'⁵²

Eliminating this misconception from the mind of the people, Guru Nanak Dev said that women were not the servant of men but were instead even more superior to them. He added on saying that she should not be considered to be unholy and instead should be referred to as *devi*.⁵³

Guru Amar Das was the third Guru of the Sikhs. He not only established a unique image to the Sikh religion but also undertook many works for the betterment of the society. He also worked for the upliftment of women. Other than this, he parted the members of the Sikh religion from superstitions and also ended the *sati pratha*. Guru Amar Das also saved the people from being exploited by the counterfeit preachers. He also promoted the *langar*

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp-1,4.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp-5.

⁵³ Major Singh, *Panj Pyare and Sikh Bibian*, Parkashak Virsa Sambhal Publication, Ludhiana, 2006, pp-34.

pratha.⁵⁴ During this period, there was no support for the Hindu widow women. They were forced to perform *sati* and give up their lives for the respect of their husbands. Hence, it can be said that women were not independent and did not have a say in the society.⁵⁵ Regarding the women who performed *sati*, Guru Amar Das wrote following lines:

*Satiye eh nah kahianJo mardhia lag jalan/
Nanak satiajaniyan je birhe chot maran/*⁵⁶

According to Guru Amar Das, *sati* meant living the rest of her life in the memory of her husband rather than dying with him. Akbar was influenced by these views of Guru Amar Das. So, he acted upon it to end the *sati pratha*.

*Kantah nal mehelia seti aag jalayeh/
Je jave pir apna tah tan dukh sahao/
Nanak Kant nah JanNi se kyo aag jalaye/
Bhave jivo keh maro duro peh bhajjae/*

The women that were not accepted by their husbands had to face adverse situations. Hence, either they would perform *sati* or ran away it would not have much difference. Therefore, those women who lived their lives in the memory of their husbands had better lives. Promoting the rights of widow women was one of the most important works undertaken by Guru Amar Das.⁵⁷ However, the *pardha* system was still prevalent in the society i.e. women spent most of their lives indoors and while going out they were required to cover themselves. Guru Amar Das considered the *pardha pratha* to be an obstruction to the mental, physiological, and social development of women. In order to eliminate this system, Guru Amar Das gave the orders to allow women to come to *langar* without wearing *pardha*. So, in this way Guru Amar Das prohibited the *pardha pratha* in the Sikh community.⁵⁸

After this order given by Guru Amar Das, the custom of *pardha* was declined amongst the women of the Sikh community. Guru Amar Das also

⁵⁴ Principal Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, *Sikh Ihtihās*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2013, pp-20,21,24,83.

⁵⁵ Gurdev Singh, *Guru Amar Das Jivan Te Bani*, Sangam Publication, Patiala, 2005, pp-51.

⁵⁶ *Adhi Granth*, pp-787.

⁵⁷ Gurdev Singh, *Guru Amar Das Jivan Te Bani*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2005, pp-51,52.

⁵⁸ Baljit Kaur Tulsi, *Jivan Shree Guru Amar Das Ji*, Publication Bureau, Patiala, 2016, pp-18.

started the custom of *anand karj*. This custom is followed amongst the members of the Sikh community during the time of marriages. This is compulsory for the Sikh i.e. those who do not marry according to this custom are not considered as the *Sikhs* of the Guru. This custom was put into action for the first time in the marriage between Bibi Bhani and Bhai Jeta. Hence, this custom became an important part of the religion.⁵⁹ Upon this, two *Brahmins* came to Guru with their grievances regarding this custom. However, the final decision was taken in the favour of the *Gurughar*. Along with this *Lavan* are also read out during marriages in the Sikh religion.⁶⁰

According to Guru, no society can progress without giving a prominent position to the women in the community. It was due to this reason Guru Amar Das promoted the marriages of widows. Therefore, he raised a voice to promote the marriage of widows. Guru Amar Das was strictly against the *sati pratha*. He promoted the rights of the widow women.

Guru Amar Das not only promoted the religious education of women but also appointed some women as *manji dhar*, so as to preach about *Gurmata*.⁶¹

The *Laavan* (hymns which take place during the ceremony) were composed by Guru Ram Das. The core of *Anand Karaj* is the *laavan*, where in *shabads* are sung with the bride and groom circumnavigating the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The ceremony serves to provide the foundation principles towards a successful marriage and also places the marriage within the context of the unity with God. Guru Ram Das composed the four stanzas of the *laavan* to be sung and recited as the core of the *Anand Karaj*. The *laavan* are sung by woman during the marriage. Guru Amar Das also abolished the caste system. Guru lifted the status of woman and gave them equality with men. He strictly prohibited the practice of *sati* (the dying of the wife on her husband's funeral pyre), and the *pardha pratha* etc. Guru

⁵⁹ Gurdev Singh, *Guru Amar Das Jivan Te Bani*, Sangum ,Patiala,2005, pp-32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp-52,53.

⁶¹ Balvir Singh Dil, *Tiji Pathshahi Shree Guru Amar Das Ji*, Parkashak Shree Guru Amar Das Foundation, Ferozpur, 1987, pp-275.

also helped in uplifting the status of women and helped them live their life according to themselves.⁶²

Guru Hargobind said that no man can be successful without the help of a woman. A woman is the person who takes care of a man. Women have the responsibility to take care and impart morals in the children. It is women who transcend on the traditions and customs to the new generations. Guru Hargobind Singh took initiative to ensure equal rights to both the men and women amongst the members of the Sikh community.

Guru Gobind Singh laid the foundation of the *Khalsa Panth*. At an occasion, Guru Gobind Singh prepared the holy water (*amrit*) and then baptized five volunteers. These five men were called as the *Panj Pyare* or the five beloved of Guru. These five men were - Daya Singh, Dharam Singh, Mohkam Singh, Himmat Singh and Sahib Singh. Guru then also got baptized by the *Panj Pyare* by drinking the holy water (*amrit*). Mata Sahib was also present during the creation of the *Khalsa Panth*. Mata Sahib Kaur participated in the *seva* of *amrit-sanchaar* by adding *pataasey* (sugar wafers) to the *amrit*, and was bestowed the honour of the eternal motherhood of *Khalsa Panth*. This also proves that woman should not be considered lower in status when compared to man. Both women and men should be considered as equal in the society without which the development of any community is not possible. At that time, women were considered equal to men only in the Sikh religion. The status of women was still considered to be lower than that of the men in other religions.⁶³

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh introduced the titles of *Singh* and *Kaur* males and females, respectively. All the male Sikhs were to use the name Singh after their forenames and all Sikh woman were to use the name Kaur after their forenames. Since the meaning of the word Kaur means princess, the name acts as a symbol of equality among both man and woman. The use of the name Kaur is one of the several practices that implement the Sikh religion's commitment to equality of gender, a core

⁶² Acharu Singh, *Sikh Dharam and Jivan Darshan*, johra Publication, Patiala, 2007, pp-64, 65.

⁶³ Teja Singh and Professor Ganda Singh, *Punjab Da Ihtihis*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2013, pp-224.

tenet of the faith, *Kaur* symbolizes that a woman is as cherished, politically meaningful, and worthy of the respect as a male.

If there is a person who doesn't use these words, then he was considered as a scamp. The meaning of the word *Singh* is *sher* (Lion) and the meaning of the word *Kaur* is Princess. After some period of time, the Rajput also started to use the word *singh* before their name. After then they replaced the word *sinhu* with *Singh*, so that there can be a misconception on who is a Sikh and who's a Hindu.⁶⁴ In 1699, Anup Kaur became a baptized Sikh.⁶⁵ After taking the *amrit*, both man and woman are considered equal. With which women can even participate and help their brothers to fight in the war. In the Sikh religion, prayers can be initiated and led by both men and women either in the societies or in the Gurdwaras. Many Sikh women have sacrificed their life for their religion. So the sacrifices of women also hold an important position in the Sikh religion which is depicted in the *Ardas*. These are the words that have been written in the *Ardas*:-

Jinhaan singhaan singhaniaan nae dharam heth sees deettae.

These words state that women hold a very unique place in *Sikhism* and it reminds the present generations of the sacrifices made by both men and women for the religion.⁶⁶

The Sikh women are considered to be the back bone of the *Khalsa Panth*. At the time of Guru Nanak Dev, women were severely degraded and oppressed by the society. They were given no education or freedom to make decisions, their presence in the religious, political, social, cultural and economic affairs were non-existent. Women were considered lower in status. Guru Nanak Dev played an important role in uplifting the status of women. Guru Nanak Dev proclaimed that both man and woman are equal. Guru Nanak Dev also said that it is a woman who keeps the race going and women should not be considered cursed and condemned. It is a woman who gives birth to leaders, Kings, warriors, Gurus, *pirs* etc. In the same way,

⁶⁴ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *Sikh Kon Hann?* Sikh University Press, 1999, pp-30.

⁶⁵ Jasbir Singh Sabar, *Sikh Dharam Adhian (Mudhli Jankari)*, Bagh Pehla, Unchitviya kehar, 1984, pp-34,35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp-34, 35.

Guru Gobind Singh also played an equally important role by uplifting the status of women in the community.⁶⁷

The Muslim customs and traditions, promoted the caging of women in the houses. The traditional customs such as *pradha pratha*, *Balvivah* (child marriages) and *sati pratha* made the lives of the women of that period miserable. The customs that were in the favour of women were started by Guru Nanak Dev. The religion (Sikhism) started by Guru Nanak Dev had become widely followed by the time of Guru Gobind Singh. Along with the encouragement of the respect of women, Guru Gobind Singh expressed women as brave, courageous and warriors. In this way, while creating the *Chandi Charit*, Guru Gobind Singh expressed his faith in the bravery and power of women in the form of *Devi*. Therefore it is evident that Guru Gobind Singh not only promoted the equality of women in the society but also acknowledged their superiority in certain fields.⁶⁸

The praise for woman has also been mentioned in the holy book of the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib. A special place of honour for woman is bestowed in the *Gurbani*. Social life is completely incomplete without a woman. Guru Sahib considers that there is a relation between soul and God. Guru Sahib states that the soul of a woman is that of God.

Iss jagg main purkhek hai

Hor sagli naar sabayee

All the social relations are incomplete without the involvement of a woman.⁶⁹ There are many examples of woman who are considered models of service and sacrifice throughout Sikh religion. The Sikh tradition record the names of several of these woman, such as Mata Sundri, Bibi Nanki, Bibi Bhani, Mai Bhago etc. These women have contributed a lot for the Sikh religion.

⁶⁷ Rajinder Kaur, Kamaljit Kaur, *Guru Gobind Singh Ji: Dharam, Sahit and Ihtihis Vich Yogdan*, Saptrishi Publication, Chandigarh, 1975, pp-349.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp-353.

⁶⁹ Jan Sahit Gurbani, *Is Jug Meh Chanan*, Basha Vibag, Punjab University Chandigarh, 2008, pp-125.

CHAPTER-2

CONTRIBUTION OF PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN AND THEIR WORKS

Many women have had a mighty role to play in the development of the Sikh religion. Therefore, many women have been mentioned in the Sikh history for their indispensable efforts for the religion. They have played important role in various aspects of the society for example social, political, religious, economic etc. The Gurus of the Sikh religion promoted the equality and respect of women through out the society at the time when the status of women had highly been deteriorated in the society. The Gurus in doing so imparted confidence in the women, who later went on to play as much a big part in the development of the religion as the men. Women have worked along with the men for the sake of the religion throughout the history of the Sikh community.

A large number of women in today's generation have got encouragement from these Sikh women to excel in all spheres along with the male in the society. Bebe Nanaki is the first name that comes to mind while speaking of the important women in the Sikh religion.¹ Bebe Nanki played an important role in the development and spread of the Sikh religion. Bebe Nanki was born in 1464 A.D in the Chahal village of Lahore, Pakistan. Her mother's name was Mata Tripta and her father's name was Mehta Kaloo. Bebe Nanaki was given the name Nanaki as her brother's name was Nanak.²

She played an important role in the establishment of the Sikh community. Bebe Nanki was the first person who understood that Guru Nanak was a form of God. She considered him to be different from other people in the society. She was five years elder to Guru Nanak.³ Bebe Nanki understood Guru Nanak very well she always knew what was going on in his mind. She was good in reading the mind of her brother. She acted as an unconventional support system for her brother, Guru Nanak. She played an important role in the up bringing of Guru Nanak as his elder sister. She

¹ Giani Bhajan Singh, Giyani Pritam Kaur, *Itihasik Sikh Naria*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 2003, pp-13.

² Harbans Singh, *Sikh encyclopedia of sikhism*, v, E ol-3, Punjab University, Patiala, 2002, pp-184.

³ Fauja Singh's, essay on *A study of paintings of Guru Nanak in "paperson Guru Nanak"*(Punjab history conference proceedings), March 14-15, 1969.

not only helped Guru Nanak in his childhood but throughout his life. As her father had a job in Talwandi Rai, her mother, Mata Tripta brought her here.

Bebe Nanki was 11 years old when she was married to Bhai Jai Rami. Even after her marriage the love for her brother did not lessen any way. She later convinced Guru Nanak to move from Talwandi to Sultanpur.⁴

When the parents of Mata Sulakhni, Mool Chand and Mata Chando Rani came to Sultanpur, she told them that her husband, Guru Nanak did not take care of her and spent all his money in the welfare of the poor. When Jai Ram informed Bebe Nanki about this, she urged her brother, Guru Nanak to pay attention to the need of his wife and respect her.⁵ Although Bebe Nanki did not have any children of her own, she treated the two sons of Guru Nanak Dev as her own. When Guru Nanak went on his religious journeys (*udasia*), Bebe Nanki took care of all his affairs.⁶

Guru Nanak always visited his sister Bebe Nanki whenever he came to Punjab. The rabab was given to Bhai Mardana by Bebe Nanki. Bebe Nanki also served Bhai Mardana who accompanied Guru Nanak in his religious journeys. She gave some clothes, money and told him to tell Guru Nanak to come and meet her. When Guru Nanak Dev came to visit his sister, Bebe Nanki touched his feet and said that she saw God through him. She was the first woman who understood the holy presence in Guru Nanak. Hence she was the first woman to join the Sikh religion. She also recited the *Bani* and the path of *Japji Sahib*.

When others thought that Guru Nanak had drowned in the river Bein, Bebe Nanki told the people that her brother was an immortal soul and had come to this world on a mission. Therefore, he would not leave this world without the completion of the mission. Bebe Nanki supported Guru Nanak Dev in every aspect and hence performed her duty towards the Sikh religion. She encouraged Guru Nanak Dev throughout his life. She also had a lot of faith in Guru Nanak's teachings.

⁴ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Bibian*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1991, pp-48.

⁵ Chetan Singh Bheniwala, *Jivan Katha Guru Nanak Dev Ji*, Senior Lekh, Afsar, Punjab Raj Bijli Board, Patiala, 2013, pp-27, 37, 85.

⁶ Ratan Singh Jagi, *Sikh Panth vishavkosh bhag-2*, Guru Ratan publishers, Patiala, publishing year 1989, pp-1038,1039.

Bebe Nanki is considered to be the woman who laid the foundation of the importance of women in the Sikh religion. She was the first person to understand the holy presence of Guru Nanak. She encouraged Guru Nanak to work for the betterment of the society and show the people the righteous path. Moreover, she also helped and played a part alongside Guru Nanak in the development of the society. Bebe Nanaki was a very calm and composed woman. She helped Mata Sulakhni understand Guru Nanak's holiness and lifestyle i.e. the importance of Guru Nanak Dev's *udasiya*.

Bebe Nanki is the first woman to be honored to witness the growth of the Sikh religion and play a part in its development. Guru Nanak Dev came back from his *udasiya* in 1518 A.D in Sultanpur. Upon reaching here, he understood that his sister was towards the end of her life. So, he decided to stay in Sultanpur. After some day, Bebe Nanki died while reciting the prayers of *Jap ji Sahib*. Upon her death she was 54 years of age. She was cremated by her brother, Guru Nanak Dev.⁷

Mata Kheevi played an important role in the development of the society throughout her life. Mata Kheevi was born in 1506 A.D. She was born to Bhai Devi Chand Khatri and Mata Karan Devi. Her father was a shop keeper. Mata Kheevi was a kind and humble person. She drove happiness by serving the society. She was married to Bhai Lehna, who later went on to be the second Guru of the Sikh.

She was blessed with four children named; Datu, Dasu, Bibi Amro and Anokhi.⁸ The most important contribution of Mata Kheevi to the Sikh religion is her service in the *langar pratha*. She did a lot of reforms in the *langar pratha* and hence administered this custom in a very proficient manner.

Mata Kheevi holds a unique position in the Sikh history. She has been mentioned in the following lines;

Balwand Kheevi nek jan, jis bahut chau padhali

Langar daulit vandiye/ rasu amrit kheer kiali

GurSikha ke mukh ujle, manukhi khiye prali

(Rammkali ki var, Pana-967)

⁷ [Http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/Great Sikh women/Bebe Nanaki](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/Great Sikh women/Bebe Nanaki).

⁸ [Http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/Great Sikh women/Mata khivi](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/Great Sikh women/Mata khivi).

The above lines say that Mata Kheevi distributes the bounty of the Guru's *langar*. The kheer- the rice pudding and ghee is like sweet ambrosia. The faces of the Guru's Sikhs are radiant and bright after eating the *langar*. While the self-willed *manmukhs* are as pale as straws.⁹

Mata Kheevi popularized the custom of *langar* that had been started by Guru Nanak Dev. She used to prepare the food herself and also used to serve it. The *langar* was served both in the morning and the evening and was free for all i.e. anyone could eat *langar* regardless of the religion, caste, color and gender. One wasn't required to pay to eat *langar*.

Moreover, such a custom is not prevalent in any religion even today. It was started to promote unity and equality between the members of the community. Guru Angad Dev further promoted this custom after Guru Nank. Discrimination is prohibited in the *langar pratha*. The name of Mata Kheevi has also been mentioned in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.¹⁰

With the passage of time, Guru Angad Dev became the second Guru of Sikhism. Mata Kheevi held a lot of responsibilities. She also played an important part in the abolition of the *pardha pratha* as she did not cover her face while preparing food. During that period, women were supposed to cover their faces while moving out in the society.

Mata Kheevi started a custom according to which women were allowed to move in the community without covering their faces. This was a historic initiative in the male dominated society. In Sikh religion, both the men and the women sat together to eat *langar* and do *seva* without wearing any *pardha*. Along with the *pardha*, she also opposed the *sati pratha*. Therefore, she played a part in the revolution of the society.¹¹ Mata Kheevi understood that Guru Amar Das was worthy of being the third Guru of the Sikhs, hence she did not question on why the *Gurgaddi* was not given to her children. After the death of her husband Guru Angad Dev, she took over all the responsibilities.¹²

Mata Kheevi played a huge role in the elimination of the *pardha pratha* from the society. She promoted equality between men and women and played a huge part in achieving this objective in the Sikh community, as both men and

⁹ Gagan Aneja, *Great Sikh woman*, unistar, Chandigarh, 2007, PP-32, 33.

¹⁰ M.K. Gill. *The role and status of woman in Sikhism*,. National Book Shop, 1995, PP-31,32.

¹¹ Harbans Singh, Chawla,*Sikh Itihas Vich*,National Book Shoop, Delhi, 1996, PP-48.

¹² M.K. Gill, *The role and status of women in Sikhism*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1995, pp-38.

women were supposed to sit together while eating the *langar* that was prepared by her. The *langar pratha* also acted as an important factor in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

The women in the society were encouraged to work with the men with cooperation in every field. With this, the status of women was elevated in the society. During this period, women excelled in the social, political and religious spheres of the society.

Mata Kheevi's husband, Guru Angad also engaged in washing the utensils and serving the *sangat* in the *langar*. Hence, in this way Mata Kheevi holds an important position in the Sikh history.

Bibi Amro was the daughter of Guru Angad Dev and Mata Kheevi. She was born in 1522 A.D at Khadoor Sahib at Guru Angad Dev and Mata Kheevi's home. She was a very religious woman as she was born at Guru Angad Dev's home. She was married to the son of Bhai Manak Chand and Bibi Bhago, Jasu. Being born in the house of a Sikh Guru, she had the *Bani* memorized. She continued reciting her prayers even after coming in her in-laws home. She continued reciting the following stanzas;¹³

*Bhaiya manur kanchan fir hove je guru mile pinera
Ek nam amrit oho deve cho Nanak tirstas deha*

(Maru Mahala Pehla (110))

Guru Amar Das heard Bibi Amro reciting Bani. He was highly moved after listening to Bani. Therefore, he decided to meet Guru Amar Das.¹⁴ Guru Angad Dev came to visit him as he was his relative. In this meeting Guru Amar Das was given the honuor of *nitaniya de tan niotiya di ott*. This was only possible because of Bibi Amro. She made both her parents and in-laws proud. Guru Amar Das established 22 *manjia* and 52 *peedhe*. Later, Bibi Amro administered them.

Bibi Amro's mother imparted such good morals in her daughter that she won over the support and respect of her in-laws. Today, there is a well in Baserke village in the name of Bibi Amro. This well is also known as *Bibi Amro da khoo*. The greatest contribution of Bibi Amro to the Sikh religion is

¹³ Rajinderjeet Singh Dindsa, *Mahan Sikh Itihas (Batan Sikh Itihas Dian)* Lokgeet Parkashan, Chandigarh, 2014, pp-30.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp-30, 31.

that she spread the word of the Gurbani amongst the women of the Sikh religion. She played an important role in connecting the people of the society to the word of God. It was due to her that women got as much respect as they got at their parent's home at their in-laws home. Bibi Amro connected a large number of people to the Sikh religion. However, there is no information available regarding the death of Bibi Amro.¹⁵

Bibi Bhani was the daughter of the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das. The third Guru of the Sikhs Guru Amar Das had two daughters namely; Bibi Dani and Bibi Bhani. Bibi Bhani was born on the 2nd of February, 1534 A.D. She is considered to be one of the most important women in the Sikh history. She was the only woman through out the Sikh history whose father, husband and sons were Gurus.¹⁶

Bibi Bhani was a very religious woman because of her religious background. Bibi Bhani spent most of her life in the service (*seva*) of the Sikh community. She sacrificed her whole life for the upliftment and promotion of the religion and for the betterment of the society. She took many initiatives to promote goodness in society. Bibi Bhani had the honuor of serving her father, the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das:

*Jadpi sut Sikh seva Guru ki karat sabe man laye/
Bibi Ji pratak isvar lakh sevak adikaye/GGgG¹⁷*

Bibi Bhani undertook various works under herself. She was responsible for the maintenance and administration of *langar* in the *Gurudwara*. Guru gave the orders that the *Sangat* to first eat *langar* before coming to listen to the teachings of the Guru. Bibi Bhani was the head of *langar*. Bibi Bhani not only administered the preparation and serving of *langar* but also cleaning of utensils and responsibility of the *sangats*.¹⁸

Akbar came to Punjab in 1570-71 A.D. He too had to follow the rules set by Guru i.e. he adds to eat *langar* in the *pangat* along with the other Sikh before he could meet with Guru Sahib. He was highly impressed by this *langar*

¹⁵ Harbans Chawla, Guru parivar dian matava, *Guru Patnia ate Guru Putria*, Manpreet prakashan, Delhi, 1998, pp-38.

¹⁶ Interview, Giyani Balwant Singh, Kotha Guru Ka, 9/8/18.

¹⁷ Giyani Gyan Singh, *Shri Guru Panth Prakash*, Language Department , Patiala Punjab, 1970, pp-90.

¹⁸ Punjab history conference (45th session), March 15-17, 2013, proceedings publication bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, pp-749.

pratha. At that time *langar* was prepared by the donations offered by people. Upon visiting Guru Sahib, Akbar was so impressed by this *langar pratha* that he gave the revenue of some villages to Guru for the administration of the *langar*. However, Guru did not approve of this. Therefore, Akbar presented the *jangeer* of twelve villages to Bibi Bhani.¹⁹

Guru laid the foundation of Amritsar at this place.²⁰ *Langar* continued throughout the day at this place. After the death of her mother, Bibi Kheevi, the management of the *manjia* was done by Bibi Bhani. She had very adorable personality. Bibi Bhani Ji's father was in search for a person who had faith in the *Gurghar* to be the husband for his daughter. Both the parent's home and in-laws house of Bibi Bhani were located in Goindwal. Bibi Bhani did not interfere in the prayer of Guru.²¹ This can be proved as once when Guru Amar Das was busy in his prayers Bibi Bhani noticed that one leg of the stool on which Guru was sitting was broken, so Bibi Bhani put her hand at the place of that leg, so Guru could not be distracted while he was praying. When Guru Amar Das finished his prayers, he noticed that Bibi Bhani was bleeding from her hand. Upon seeing this, Guru Amar Das asked her to make a wish. Bibi Bhani asked for the *Gurgaddi* to stay within their family. Therefore, this is why the next seven Gurus were from the same family i.e. the Sodhi family. Bibi Bhani had great respect for her father Guru Amar Das.²²

Bibi Bhani did the *seva* (service) of *langar* in Amritsar.²³ It is evident from the name of Bibi Bhani that she desired for the welfare of the society.²⁴ Guru Arjan Dev had a lot of respect for Bibi Bhani. Guru Ram Das was so impressed by the *seva* of Guru Arjan Dev that he gave the responsibilities of the *Gurgaddi* to him.

¹⁹ Bhai Veer Singh, *Shri Guru Chamatkar, Bhag- Pehla*, Khalsa samajak, Amritsar, January 1980, pp-189.

²⁰ Punjab history conference (45th session) march 15-17, 2013, proceedings, publication bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, pp-749.

²¹ S.S Gandhi, *history of Sikh Gururs*, Gurdas Kapoor and Sons, Delhi, 1978, pp-25.

²² Santok Singh Choramni, Bhai Veer Singh, *Shri Gurpartap Suraj Granth*, Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, 1990, pp-1605.

²³ Sahib Singh, *Jivan Britat Guru Ramdas Ji*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar 1980, pp-58.

²⁴ Balbir singh Dil, Tiji Patshahi, *Guru Amardas Ji*, Guru Amardas foundation, Firozpur shehar, 1987, pp-78.

Upon the death of Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev became the next Guru of the Sikh religion.²⁵ After the death of Guru Ram das, Bibi Bhani took a lot of responsibilities. She helped Guru Arjan Dev in the administration of the religious affairs of the Sikh religion as she was aware of all the works and customs of the *Gurughar*.

Bibi Bhani is a great example to show that women are equal to men in all spheres i.e. women can play an equally important role in taking forward the family line. She showed the women can also handle the responsibility of taking care of their parents. Bibi Bhani was a very determined woman she showed tough character in tough moments. A large number of women have derived inspiration from Bibi Bhani to take up the responsibility of taking care of their parents and handing over the ideologies of the Sikh religion to the next generations.

Bibi Veero was daughter of Guru Hargobind. She was the paternal aunt of Guru Gobind Singh and sister of Guru Teg Bahadur. Bibi Veero was born at Amritsar in 1615 A.D. Her father's name was Guru Hargobind while her mother's name was Mata Damodhari. She was born at the place where Guru Arjan Dev's family lived.²⁶

Guru Hargobind was blessed with a daughter who was named, Veero by Mata Ganga. Mata Ganga said that this child was very lucky to have been born in the family of a Guru. When Bibi Veero grew older, Mata Ganga started looking for a suitable husband for her. She promised Guru that she would look for a capable husband for her daughter. One day she saw a poor person with torn clothes in the *sangat*, upon being asked the person said that he was an orphan.

She gave the proposal of the marriage of Bibi Veero to Guru. Guru rejected the proposal initially but agreed later on. With this, Guru began the preparation of the customs of *saghai*.²⁷ Bibi Veero was a very kind woman. She used to urge women to form groups and join the *sangat*. When Guru went to Kartarpur, Bibi Veero accompanied him along with her family. While she

²⁵ Santokh Singh, Bhai Veer Singh, *Shri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, Punjab, 1990, pp-1694.

²⁶ Giyani Bhajan Singh, Giyani Pritam Kaur, *Itihasik Sikh naria*, National book shop, Delhi, 2003, pp-168.

²⁷ Kavi Churamni Bhai Santokh Singh Ji, *Gurpartap Suraj Granth Satik*, Bhag-5, Prakash- Dr. Chatran Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, 2013, pp-553.

was there she used to take care of Guru Tegh Bahadur. She joined both the Sikh women and children to the *Gurbani*. She encouraged people to engage in social works.

Bibi Veero was a very religious woman because of her family backgrounds. She not only served the *Gurughar* throughout her life but also joined a large number of people with the Sikh religion. She served the *Gurughar* and the *sangat* from her heart throughout her life. She is considered to be one of the most important women in the history of the Sikh religion. She contributed a lot to the Sikh community. She was a very composed and determined woman. Bibi Veero promoted unity and brotherhood through out the Sikh community.²⁸

Mata Ganga was the wife of Guru Arjan Dev and the mother of Guru Hargobind Sahib. She was born to mother, Dhanvanti in the Mau village. Her father's name was Krishan Chand. Mata Ganga was born in a Khatri family. Mata Ganga is known to have been a great mother in the Sikh history. She paid interest in all the works of the *Gurudwara* and in the service of the *gurughar*. Mata Ganga established a well in Kartarpur. In 1657 A.D it was given the name *Gangsar*. Guru Arjan Dev once mentioned that whosoever would bathe in Gangsar would get the reward of bathing in the Ganga River. Mata Ganga was a very kind, selfless and humble woman. She had complete faith in the Sikh religion and God. Mata Ganga went to Baba Budha upon being said to do so by her husband, Guru Arjan dev. Mata went to give him *langar* while walking bare footed. He was highly moved and blessed Mata Ganga by saying that she would give birth to the owner of Miri-Piri. Hence, later Mata Ganga gave birth to Guru Hargobind Sahib.²⁹

Mata Ganga used to persuade the *sangat* to go to Harmandir Sahib. Mata Ganga was very happy when her son, Guru Hargobind embraced the *shastars* and sat on the throne of the Sikh community. Her son changed the traditions that were going on in the *Gurughar* as per the need of the society at

²⁸ www.wikipedia, *Bibi Biro.org.com*.

²⁹ Mahinder Kaur Gill, *Vihar a Guru Mahil, Guru Nari Jivan, Guru Betia Te Nouha*, Arshi publication, Delhi, 1999, pp-45.

that time. Hence in this way, Guru Hargobind Singh took the responsibilities to lead the Sikh community.³⁰

Mata Ganga continued participating in various humanitarian activities even after the martyrdom of her husband, Guru Arjan Dev.³¹

Mata Ganga lived for another 15 years after the death of her husband, Guru Arjan Dev. With the blessing of Mata Ganga, Guru went on to fight in four battles. Mata Ganga not only made her son the owner of *Miri-Piri* but also imparted religious beliefs and benevolence in him. Mata Ganga also served the *sangat* in *langar* but also played a part in the spread of the word and teachings of the *Gurbani* throughout her life.

It is evident from Mata Ganga's life that indulging in *seva* (service) is always rewarding i.e. one's service never goes wasted. She handed her son with the weapons of Miri-Piri, this acted as a source of inspiration for other women of the society as they also encouraged their children to pick up arms in order to protect the community. Therefore, she encouraged Guru Sahib to take up political works along with the religious for the benefit and protection of the Sikh society. Mata Ganga also not only participated in religious activities but also in social, political and economic activities in the society. She understood the need of the moment i.e. she realized that the peace in the Sikh society could only be maintained if the members of the community were willing to pick up weapons to protect themselves. Therefore, the contributions of Mata Ganga cannot be neglected. Her contribution for spread and protection of the Sikh religion are indispensable. She has been a source of inspiration for a large number of women in the society.³²

Mata Gujri was born in 1629 A.D. However, according to some historians, she was born in 1627 A.D. There are a lot of speculations about this date. She was born to mother, Bishan Kaur and father, Lal Chand in a place near Kartarpur Dhoaba, Jalandhar. She faced all the problems in her life with great bravery. She was a very adaptive woman as she changed her self upon as the situations in the society. She had to face a lot of problem and hardships

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp-123,134,135,139.

³¹ M.K. Gill, *role and status of women in Sikhism*, National book shop, New Delhi, 1995, pp-17.

³² [www.http. wikipedia Mata Ganga.Sikh.org.com](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mata_Ganga_Sikh).

through out her life but she never complained. She believed in God's will.³³ She was married at a very young age i.e. at the age of nine years. She was married to the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur. She spent her whole life in the service of the Sikh religion and the *sangat*. She had a brother named Kirpal Chand who led the Sikh forces against the Mughals.³⁴

Mata Nanki advised Mata Gujri and Guru Tegh Bahadur to stay at Bakala. They paid heed to Mata Nanki's advice and went to Bakala. Guru spent most of his time in his prayers while Mata Gujri engaged in *seva*. The first battle between the Sikhs and the Mughals was fought during the time of Guru Hargobind. Mata Gujri raised the moral of her husband, Guru Tegh Bahadur in the battle against the Mughals.

Mata Gujri gave birth to a great personality named Guru Gobind Singh. He became the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh was nine years of age when his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life.³⁵

Mata Gujri spent 26 years of her life in *seva*, *simran* and helping the other people in the society. She spent most of her time reciting the prayers from the *Gurbani*. It was due to the morals that she had imparted in Guru Gobind Singh that he told his father to sacrifice his life for the welfare of the people of a different community. Later, Mata Gujri and the *chotte sahibzaade* were arrested by the Mughals.

They were then imprisoned in the Thanda Burj of Sirhind. She filled such religious spirits in the *chotte sahibzaade* that they did not change their religion upon being told to do so by the Mughals. Therefore, they gave up their lives at such a tender age for their religion because of the morals and ideologies imparted in them by their grandmother, Mata Gujri. She taught them to sacrifice their lives as their grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur and set an example for the people in the Sikh community.

Hence, when Wazir Khan called for the *chotte sahibzaade* in the Mughal courts, Mata Gujri prepared them by adorning a *dastaar* and a *kirpan* (the symbols of a Sikh). She encouraged the *sahibzaade* not to give up in front of Wazir Khan. Mata Gujri told the *sahibzaade* that Wazir Khan would give

³³ Giyani Bhajan Singh, Giyani Pritam Kaur, *Itihasik Sikh, Naria*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 2003, pp-51.

³⁴ Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Eminent Sikh women*, Vijay publications, New Delhi, 1999, pp-67.

³⁵ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Bibian*, Sikh brothers, Amritsar, 1991, pp-136.

them the opportunity to change their religion as they were children. She urged them not to pay heed to what he was saying. Wajir Khan adopted a scheme as he closed the main gate and called the *sahibzaade* through a small window. The *sahibzaades* entered the room with their feet first and then their heads. With this, Vazir Khan understood that these *sahibzaade* were not willing to give up their faith. All this was due to the morals imparted by Mata Gujri in these children.³⁶

In the end the *sahibzaade* were martyred by constructing a wall around their bodies.³⁷ Mata Gujri could not bear the news that the *chotte sahibzaade* had been killed, so she also gave up her life.³⁸ She inspired a large number of Sikh men and women to give up their lives as well as that of their families for the benefit of the religion and the community.

She set an example of patience and humbleness for the Sikh women. She is considered as one of the greatest Sikh women to be mentioned in the Sikh history. She was bestowed with the honour of being the wife, mother and grandmother of those who sacrificed their lives for the Sikh religion.³⁹

Mata Gujri lost her whole family for the welfare of the Sikh community. She is also known as *kurBhania di mata*. She did not show any remorse and believed it to be the will of God. She was a very religious woman and therefore imparted the same religious morals in her grandchildren. Her father, son and grandsons sacrificed their lives at Fatehgarh sahib.

Mata Sundri played an important role in shaping the Sikh society. She was born at Lahore on the 23rd of December, 1667 A.D. Her father's name was Bhai Ram Srah. She was born in a Khartri family. She was later married to the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. Mata Sundri was the second wife of Guru Gobind Singh.⁴⁰

She was the daughter-in-law of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Mata Gujri. Mata Jito was the first wife of Guru Gobind Singh. Mata Sundri and Mata Jito used to live together in Anandpur Sahib. In the month of *Poh* in 1761, Guru

³⁶ Karta Das Visakha Singh, Sant Sipahi Janetpura, *Malva Sikh Itihas*, Bhag-1, Chatar Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, Dujji var-1998, pp-470.

³⁷ Roop Singh, *Pramukh Sikh sakhsiatan*, prakashak sector, Shromni Praband committee, Amritsar, 1996, pp-54,55.

³⁸ Mata Gujari, Sikhi wiki, *free Sikh encyclopedia*, www.Sikh.wiki.com.

³⁹ H.S. Singh publishing house pvt. Ltd, *Junior Encyclopedia of Sikhism copyright*, 1985, pp-66, 67.

⁴⁰ M.K. Gill, *women and religion*, Vijay publications, New Delhi, 1997, pp-45.

Gobind Singh left Anandpur Sahib. Upon this he sent a letter through a Sikh to Mata Sundri asking her to go Delhi. Mata Sundri also accompanied Guru Gobind Singh to Damdama. While living in Delhi, Mata served Guru Sahib. The *sangat* from many different places used to come to visit Guru Gobind Singh in Delhi.⁴¹ Mata Sundri gave birth to Ajit Singh in 1743 A.D. After giving birth to Ajit Singh, Mata Sundri's health deteriorated. Guru Gobind Singh went from Delhi to Lahore and then to Talwandi. When Mata came to know of this, she joined Guru in Talwandi and served him while she lived there. Later, Guru Gobind Singh moved to Nandher.⁴²

When Guru Gobind Singh went to Nandher, Mata Sundri came back to Delhi. Mata sent Bhai Mani Singh for the *seva* of the Akal Takt and to resolve the internal dispute with in the Sikh community.⁴³ A Gurudwara was later constructed at the place where Mata Sundri resided in Delhi. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sundri handled all the responsibilities of the Sikh religion. While Guru Gobind Singh was in Nandher, he baptized a sadhu, who later came to Punjab to fight the oppression of the Sikhs at the hands of the Mughals. Guru Gobind Singh named this sadhu as Banda Singh Bahadur. During this period Mata Sundri was in Delhi.⁴⁴

Guru Gobind Singh had told Mata Sundri that joy and sorrow were both the part of life; hence it wasn't appropriate to ponder over the past. He said that one's fortunes keep on changing and hence a person changes according to the needs of one's religion just as her son fought in the battle and numerous enemies. Guru said that his son had done what every true human should do. His son had sacrificed his life for the good will and upliftment of the needy. Guru further said that his son had earned a place in heaven. When Guru decided to go to Nandher Sahib, he left Mata in Delhi upon the requests of the *sangat* in Delhi.⁴⁵

Mata was very sad after the news of the martyrdom of her son, Ajit Singh. When the *sangat* found out that Mata had lost all her sons and her mother-in-law, they tried to console Mata. Mata adopted a child. Mata raised

¹¹¹ Kartar Singh, *Jivan Katha Gobind Singh Ji*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 1972, pp-203,204.

⁴³ Harjinder Singh dilgiri, *100 Sikh Bibian*, Sikh University press, Amritsar, 2015, pp-39.

⁴⁴ M.K. Gill, *Mata Sundri Ji (Jivni)*, R.S publications, Delhi, 1982, pp-104,105.

⁴⁵ Paramveer Singh, *Mata Sundri and Sakshiat*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2012, pp-107, 108.

this child and gave him the name Ajit Singh. She took this child along herself to Guru.⁴⁶ Later, Ajit Singh was married and continued to live his life alongside Mata Sundri. One day, Ajit Singh wore the *shastar* of Guru Gobind Singh. When Mata Sundri found out about this, she was very disheartened as Guru's *shaster* were considered to be the form of Guru Gobind Singh himself. This event led to friction between Mata Sundri and Ajit Singh. After this event Mata Sundri did not meet with Ajit Singh throughout the rest of her life. Mata Sundri later went to Mathura.⁴⁷

Mata Sundri had a talent which she acquired from Guru Gobind Singh i.e. she was very good at performing *kirtan*. Mata Sundri performed *kirtan* every day. She used to recite the *Bani* of Guru Nanak Dev in such a melodious way that *sangat* would come from places far away to listen to her *kirtan*.⁴⁸

Mata Sundri appointed Bhai Mani Singh as the head *Granthi* of Harimandar Sahib. Mata Sundri spent her whole life working for the benefit of the Sikh religion.⁴⁹ A *Gurudwara* was built at the place in her name where she lived at Delhi.

Mata Sundri also participated in the *langar seva*. She lost her sons but did not show any remorse for that as they had died fighting for their religion. The Sikh women of that period were not selfish and thought of the benefit of the whole community rather than their personal gains. It is due to these reasons that their names serve as examples for the women of today's generation.

Mata Sahib Kaur was the third wife of Guru Gobind Singh. She was born to father, Bhai Rama. She was a Khatri by caste. She was married to Guru Gobind Singh in 1757 A.D.⁵⁰

Mata Sahib Kaur's parents believed that she was born due to Guru's blessing. That is why she was brought in proper manner. Mata Sahib Kaur's father took the proposal of her daughter's marriage to Guru Gobind Singh. Guru rejected the proposal saying that he had already been married twice and also had four sons. However, after being persuaded by the Mata Sahib Kaur's father and the other Sikhs, Guru agreed to marry Mata Sahib Kaur. Although Guru Gobind Singh

⁴⁶ M.K. Gill, *Mata Sundri Ji (Jivani)*, Arshi publications, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1981, pp-70.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp-72,73.

⁴⁸ Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa, *Sikh Kirtan Prampara Vich Yogdan Paun Valia Prasadh Bibian*, Khalsa Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1965, pp-63.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp-21, 22.

⁵⁰ Kartar Singh, *Jivan katha Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, Lahore book shop, Ludhiana, 2014, pp-48.

agreed for the marriage, he said that she would have to live her life as an unmarried woman. Mata Sahib Kaur agreed to this and hence the marriage between Guru and Mata Sahib Kaur took place.⁵¹

Mata entered Guru Gobind Singh's house as *kuara dolah*. Mata Sahib Kaur was sent to Mata Gujri. Vir Sahib Singh was the brother of Mata Sahib Kaur. He also went on to live along with his sister. Guru Gobind Singh already had two wives, Mata Jito and Mata Sundri before Mata Sahib Kaur. Mata Jito had a son named Ajit Singh with Guru Gobind Singh while Mata Sundri had three sons named; Joravar Singh, Fateh Singh and Jujar Singh.⁵²

Seeing the other wives of Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sahib Kaur also wished to have a child. She too had the urge of being a mother. When Guru Gobind Singh found about this, he told Mata Sahib Kaur that the *Khalsa Panth* would live forever and was like a son to him. So, he made Mata Sahib Kaur the mother of the *Khalsa Panth*. Mata Sahib Kaur was delighted after listening to this and she felt as if she had got a son. Therefore, Mata Sahib Kaur was such a mother whose child, the Khalsa Panth, would live forever.⁵³

When Guru stayed at Bhai Ram Singh's residence, Mata Sahib Kaur and Mata Sundri accompanied him. Bhai Ram Singh family served Guru's family throughout their stay.

During this stay, Bhai Ram Singh ate the *parshad* made by Guru Gobind Singh but gave the *parshad* made by Mata Sahib Kaur to the dogs. When Mata told this to Guru Gobind Singh, Guru summoned Bhai Ram Singh and asked him for the reason for his behavior. Bhai Ram Singh answered that Mata Sahib Kaur had no relation with Guru. Upon hearing this, Guru told the whole *sangat* that Mata Sahib Kaur was the mother of the whole *Khalsa Panth*. After this, the whole *Khalsa Panth* began eating the *parshad* made by Mata Sahib Kaur.⁵⁴

Mata Sahib Kaur made the status of women equal to that of the men in the Sikh society. During that period women were considered to be equal to

⁵¹ Roop Singh, *Pramukh Sikh Sakshiyat*, Shromni Gurudwara Prabandak Committee, Amritsar, 1972, pp-65.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp-65,66.

⁵³ Sukhdev Singh, *Khalsa panth di Mata (Mata Saheb Kaur)* Lokgeet Parkashan, Chandigarh, 2009, pp-38.

⁵⁴ Bhai Santokh Singh, *Dasam Guru Chamtkar (Kalgidhar Chamtkar)*. Chatar Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, 32nd edition 2015, pp-539, 540.

men. With the Sikh community was given a new shape. *Khalsa Panth* was an important part of the Sikh religion and Mata Sahib Kaur performed the responsibilities of the mother of the *Khalsa Panth* in a very proficient manner. Mata Sahib Kaur spent the last moments of her life in Delhi.⁵⁵

Mata Sahib Kaur was bestowed with the honour of being the mother of the *Khalsa Panth*. She was the first and the only Sikh woman to be given this honour. She is considered to be amongst the most important women in the Sikh history because of the works she undertook for the development for the *Khalsa Panth*. She supported Guru Gobind Singh throughout her life. She played an important role in shaping the history of the Sikh religion.

Mai Bhago was born in 1645 A.D. Her father's name was Mule Shah. She was married to Nidhan Singh Vichen of the Bhattis. Bhai Nidhan Singh had three brothers. In her childhood Mai Bhago was known by the name Bhag Bari. Mai Bhago was highly influenced by the martyrdom of Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur. She visited the darbar of the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh on multiple occasions. She was filled with the determination to do something for the Sikh community. She wanted to join the army of the Sikh community. Mai Bhago was a very brave woman.⁵⁶ Guru Gobind Singh began baptizing people (*amrit chakona*) on the day of *Vaisakhi* in 1699 A.D. Thousands of people were baptized by Guru during this occasion. Mai Bhago and her husband were also baptized on this occasion. It was during that moment that she was given the name Mai Bhago.⁵⁷ The Jhabal village is known because of the bravery shown by Mai Bhago. She lifted the spirits of the Sikhs of the Majha region of Punjab.⁵⁸

A part of the army of Guru Gobind Singh deserted him in the battle. When Mai Bhago came to know of this she rallied them and persuaded them to join Guru in the battle field. Hence, when Guru Gobind Singh was passing from Majha, Mai Bhago and the part of the army that had deserted Guru meet him at Khidrarna.

⁵⁵ H.S. Singh, *Mata Saheb Kaur*, Vikash Publishing House Pvt Ltd. Junior Encyclopedia of Sikhism, 1998, pp-325.

⁵⁶ Rajinder Singh Dindsa, *Mahan Sikh Istriyan, Batan Singh itihās dian*) Lokgeet parkashan, Chandigarh, 2014, pp-65.

⁵⁷ Simran Kaur, *Prasidh Sikh Bibian*; Singh Brothers, Amritsar 1991, pp-140,141.

⁵⁸ Gurcharan Singh Aulaukh, *Mahan yodhe, Sikh Guru Saheban Te Jarnels*, National book shop, Delhi, pp-64.

These soldiers fought for Guru in this battle. Mai Bhago also took part in the battle disguised as a male. When the battle finished Guru, noticed that the forty Sikhs that deserted him came back. These Sikhs asked Guru Gobind Singh to forgive them. Mai Bhago was injured in this battle. Her wounds were treated later on. The Sikhs emerged victorious in this battle. After this battle, Mai Bhago stayed along with Guru Gobind Singh.

After the battle, the name of Khidarne was changed to Mukhtsar Sahib because of the forty Sikhs that had rejoined Guru in the battle field and freed (*mukhti*) their souls.⁵⁹ Mai Bhago's husband and two brothers were also amongst these Sikhs.⁶⁰ Mai Bhago proved that there was no difference between men and women in the Sikh community. During this battle a large number of Sikh had joined the forty Sikhs who were going to rejoin the army of Guru Gobind Singh.⁶¹ After this battle Guru Gobind Singh went to Talwandi. Mata also accompanied Guru in his journey. Guru resided at this place for about nine months. While Guru was in Talwandi, there was a person named Dalla who feared from being baptized. Mata encouraged him and changed his name from Dalla to Dalla Singh. Mai Bhago used to guard the place during the night while in the day she spent her time in after the *divan*.

After Talwandi, Guru Gobind Singh headed towards the South Mata also accompanied him in this journey. *Mai Da Bunga* has been made in Hajur Sahib in the memory of Mai Bhago. Mai Bhago's weapons, armor and gun is present at this place. *Sangat* in large numbers come to visit this place.

Mai Bhago inspired and has been inspiring the women of the Sikh society to fight against crime and for their rights. After Mai Bhago, a large number of women began participating in the battle. They fought alongside men in the battle field against their enemies. Women began picking up arms in this period. Therefore, it can be said that by then women were equal to men in all the spheres of the society. Guru Gobind Singh spent his last breath in Nander

⁵⁹ Rajinder Singh Dindsa, (*Mahan Sikh Istriyan*) *Batan Singh Itihas Dian*, Lokgeet parkashan Chandigarh, 2014, pp-69, 70,71.

⁶⁰ Bhajan Singh, *sachkand patar*, August 2004, Punjab Tribune, 19.1.2005, pp-70,11.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp-14.

Sahib. After Guru's demise, Mai Bhago went to Bidhar. The *samadh* of Mata was later made here in *Daswadha*.⁶²

Mata Fateh is known by the name Fateh Kaur. Bibi Fateh Kaur was the daughter of Bhai Kahna. She was born in Kaleke in Sangrur. She was put in a pit by her father while she was still alive. A sadhu named Dialdas managed to get this child out while she was still alive.⁶³ He explained to his father that what he had done was a great sin. In 1707 A.D Fateh Kaur was married to Baba Ala Singh. She was mentioned in Baba Ala Singh's folk song as follows;

*Ohi Baba Alla,
Fato de ghar vala,
Jinn vasiye Patiala*⁶⁴

They went on to have three sons named Shardalu Singh, Buria Singh and Lal Singh. They also had one daughter named Bibi Pardhan Kaur. Bibi Pardhan Kaur was married to Bhai Mohu Singh who was also known as Sham Singh. Bhai Sham Singh was from the family of Baba Budha. Bibi Fateh was a very intelligent and brave woman. She is considered to be one of the great women of the Sikh community. She contributed a lot to the political affairs of the Sikh religion.⁶⁵

The battle between Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Marathas took place in 1761 A.D. Aala Singh fought alongside the Marthas in this battle. Ahmad Shah Abdali considered Aala Singh as a traitor and hence arrested him. Aala Singh had helped the Marathas by providing them with food, water and other supplies. Upon being arrested, his wife, Bibi Fateh went to speak with the wazir of Ahmad Shah Abdali. After speaking to the wazir, she agreed to pay three lakh as a fine in order to free Aala Singh.⁶⁶

Baba Aala Singh believed and followed Maul Chand. One day, a poor Brahmin came to Bhai Maul Chand and asked him for help. He asked Bhai Maul Chand to help him with some money for his daughter's marriage. Then

⁶² Sangara Singh, Jabal, *Itihas, Pind labal and Mai Bhago*, Prakashak Gurudwara Prabandak Committee Mata Bhago, 1987, pp-45, 46.

⁶³ Ramesh Chander Dogra, MBE (Urmila Dogra), *The Sikh world An Encyclopedia Survey of Sikh Religion and Culture*, Distribution Pvt Ltd. Kolkata, pp-136.

⁶⁴ Harjinder Singh dilgeer, *100 Sikh Bibian* Sikh University press, Amritsar, 2015, pp-54.

⁶⁵ Gurcharan Singh Aulaukh, mahan jodhe, *Sikh Guru Saheban te Jarnel*, National book shop, Delhi, 1978, pp-112.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp-112.

Bhai Maul Chand took that poor Brahmin to Baba Aala Singh. Baba Aala Singh told Fateh to give the money to the poor Brahmin.

Mata Fateh gave an uncountable amount of money. Maul Chand blessed Mata Fateh by providing her uncountable villages. Mata Fateh took the initiative of providing Langar.⁶⁷ Mata Fateh and the family members of Baba Aala Singh played an important role even after the death of Baba Aala Singh.⁶⁸

Mata Fateh took care of several orphan children. Mata Fateh was a very caring and noble person. She was also successful in freeing her husband. This show that woman not only do work related to home but are also able to take part in political works. After then, women were also able to give their lives or sacrifice for the sake of their families without any fear.

Pradhan Kaur was born in 1718 in the village of Bhador. Her father's name was Baba Aala Singh and mother was Mai Fateh. Bibi Pradhan Kaur was a very spiritual woman. Her marriage took place in Ramdas village which is situated in Amritsar.⁶⁹ She had one child whose name was Roop Singh who died.⁷⁰

The husband of Pradhan Kaur married another woman whose name was Mai Deso. She gave birth to a child named Vadbhag Singh who died 7 years after his birth. Then Pradhan Kaur made his husband marry the third time. The third marriage gave them two children who were boys. Mata Pradhan Kaur treated Sham Singh as her own child even if he was the child of her husband and his third wife. Mata Pradhan Kaur also built a caste for him (Sham Singh). Mata Pradhan Kaur also prepared a tenaille in order to prevent the enemies from doing any damage. Inside the tenaille, there were weapons and a well of drinking water was made. The flow of water also reached the roof so that when there was a fire, the water flowing over the doors could come in contact with fire and extinguish the fire. In order to keep Sham Singh fit, Mata Pradhan Kaur used to give him the milk of deer.

Sham Singh died in 1766. After the death of Sham Singh, Mata Pradhan Kaur started feeling lonely. She then went back to her parents' home in

⁶⁷ Karam Singh historian, *Baba Aala Singh*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 2006, pp-32, 33.

⁶⁸ Sukhdeal Singh, *Shromni Sikh Itihas (1708-1799)*, Sangam Publication, Samana, 2010, pp-318.

⁶⁹ Kirpal Singh, *Life of Maharaja Aala Singh of Patiala and his times*, Khalsa College Amritsar, 1954, pp-166.

⁷⁰ Ratan Singh Jangi, *Sikh Panth Vishavkosh (bhagg-2)*, Guru Ratan Publishers, Patiala, 1989, pp-11, 19.

Barnala. Mata Pradhan Kaur was a well-educated and literate woman. Mata Pradhan Kaur called up Nikka Singh from Amritsar. A rest place was made for him to stay. Mata Pradhan Kaur was given the ownership of 30 villages by his father. Mata Pradhan Kaur lived her life by the income earned from the villages. A well of drinking water was made in the castle.⁷¹ This well was near Patiala and the earning earned from the well-kept providing *langar*. Bibi Pradhan Kaur was very devoted towards *Gurbani*. She used to bring people together by *Gurbani*. Mata Pradhan Kaur died in 1792 in Sekha. There is a monument made in Sekha for the memory of Mata Pradhan Kaur. These words are used to memorize Bibi Pradhan Kaur;

*Naam jape sehi pardhan.*⁷²

Bibi Pradhan Kaur was a fearless woman. She has not only thought about herself but also took care of her family and even help her husband marry three times which is not associated with the woman at that time.

Bibi Rajinder Kaur was the wife of a person belonging to Bhumia caste. She was the granddaughter of Baba Aala Singh.⁷³ In 1739, Bibi Rajinder Kaur married Chaudhary Trilok Chand in village Phagwara.

Chaudhary Singh had two sons named Tirlok Chand and Chuhad Mal. After the death of Chaudhary Singh, his sons became the owners of his wealth and lands. On one hand in 1815 A.D, Adina Beg had the fear that Tirlok Chand may take over the whole area as he was a very powerful and influential person at that time. Moreover, it was due to this fear that Dadh Khan shot a bullet at Chaudhary Singh and killed him. After his death, Rajinder Kaur took care of his duties in an appropriate way.⁷⁴ In 1841, Sahib Singh was still young. The *Sardars* from the nearby areas were trying to capture and take over the region. Sahib Singh took the responsibility to protect the area from the *Sardars* who were trying to capture the area under their leadership.⁷⁵

On returning to Patiala, Bibi Rajinder Kaur found out those who had been effective against the other ministers had now been employed against her.

⁷¹ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *100 Sikh Bibian*, Sikh University, 2015, pp-113, 114.

⁷² Sant Sipahi Janetpura, Sant Visakha Singh, *Malva Sikh Itihas, Bhag-I*, Publishers, Chatran Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, pp-511.

⁷³ Ramesh Chander Dogra, Urmila Dogra, *Survey of Sikh world and encyclopedia of Sikh religion and culture*, VBS publishers, pp-355.

⁷⁴ Karam Singh historian, *Baba Aala singh*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 2006, pp-110.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp-111.

She also noticed that the Raja had been incited to think of her as an enemy whose powers were difficult to contain. He considered her to be too powerful hence his safety and dignity were in question. Moreover, her alliance with Namun Mal meant that she aimed to restore the old order of things.⁷⁶

At first, the proposal of Bibi Rajinder's marriage was offered to the Chabaliye Chaudhary. However, they did not approve of this marriage saying that they had about 105 villages beneath them and hence did not prefer to go on missions far away from their homes. Therefore, Bibi Rajinder was married in the Nushire village to Panu Chaudariya who was the head of 225 villages. She did not have any children throughout her life⁷⁷. However, it cannot be denied that Bibi Rajinder Kaur was a brave, patient and fearless woman.⁷⁸

After that, Rajinder Kaur got sick. In 1791, Rajinder Kaur died and her cremation was done in a state of complete absorption and deep meditation.⁷⁹

Rani Sahib Kaur was born in a rich family of Amar Singh in Patiala. Her mother Raj Kaur gave her birth in 1773. The father of Rani Sahib Kaur, Amar Singh married twice. Amar Singh had two sons and two daughters. Rani Sahib Kaur had only one brother whose name was Sahib Singh.⁸⁰ She was a very beautiful and brave woman and fond of horse riding and ecology. She was taught about *Gurbani* and *Gurmukhi* (the script used for writing the Punjabi language) in her house. She was a religious and spiritual woman. On the other hand, the brother of Rani Sahib Kaur was weak and scared person.

Sahib Kaur married to the son of Sardar Hakikat Singh, Jemal Singh. 20,000 people came in her marriage and a total 7 lakh rupees were used in the marriage. She then became a queen from a princess. Her husband appreciated her in whatever she did and he also allowed her to keep on learning and educating herself. Rani Sahib Kaur got the news that something wrong had happened in Patiala. She took permission from her husband and went to Patiala. Upon reaching Patiala, she found the city is engulfed in chaos. She noticed that the caretakers were the ones robbing the city and its heritage.

⁷⁶ Lepon. H. Griffon, *The Rajas of The Punjab*, language Department Punjab, 1758, pp-66.

⁷⁷ Karam Singh Historian, *Baba Aala Singh*, Lahore Book Shop Ludhiana, 2006, pp-111.

⁷⁸ Avinash Chandar Arora, *Patiala, Rihayat Vich British Sarbochta Da Vikas (1809-1938)* Publication Bureau, Punjabi University Patiala, 1981, pp-21.

⁷⁹ Bhai Aatma Singh, *Patiala shahi gharane dian shurbir devia*, Akali Patarka Press, Mengleshan, Lahore, 1936, pp-74.

¹⁵⁰ Sawan Singh, *Nobel and Brave Sikh Woman*, Amritsar, 2005, pp-67.

Therefore, these corrupt people were expelled from their duties. In their places more hardworking and trustworthy people were given these positions. Reforms for the administration were made within some days. Therefore in this way the administration of the area under Amar Singh was strengthened again.⁸¹

In 1798 A.D Thomas attacked on the city of Jind. Upon this the Raja of Jind asked for help from Patiala's Raja. However, Sahib Singh did not pay heed to this. In 1798 A.D Rani Sahib Kaur went and participated in this battle. She did not receive any sort of help from her brother. However, other *sardars* joined her on her way to the battle field but when George Thomas fired his cannons some of the *sardars* retreated while Sahib Kaur kept on moving forwards. She was a very brave woman as she stood her ground while the other *sardars* fell back.

In 1799 A.D Sahib Kaur attacked on Thomas and won some of his forts. Thomas has mentioned her as a man instead of a woman in the Sikh history.⁸² When the *Kumb Mela* commenced in Haridwar, friction developed between the Sikh *sadhu* and the Hindu *sadhus*. The Hindu *sadhus* attacked on the Guru Granth Sahib with a sword. When Sahib Kaur got this news, she proceeded towards Haridwar with her army. Initially the Hindu *Sadhus* revolted and fought but later on they lost and asked for forgiveness from Rani Sahib Kaur. Therefore, this is how Rani Sahib Kaur maintained the respect of the Sikh religion. This was the second time that she had protected the Sikh community. Rani Sahib Kaur commanded her own army. She was a very brave and selfless woman as she spent her whole life working for the benefit of people of Patiala.⁸³

Khem Kaur was the sister of Baba Aala Singh and the widow of Amar Singh. Her relations with Patiala improved in 1783 A.D. She used various schemes to obtain her objectives.

When the young Raja Karam Singh (1813-1845 A.D) showed disparity in leaving the administration of his kingdom in the hands of his influential mother and Noudha, she was highly disappointed at these turn of events. She

⁸¹ Mahinder Kaur Gill, *Punjab Dian, Bir Narian*, Prakash Vibhag Suchna and Prasarna Matavan Bharat Sarkar, 1981, pp-48, 49.

⁸² Das Vishakha Singh Sant Janetpura, *Sikh Malva Itihas*, Bhai Chatter Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, Dujji Vaar, 1998, pp-515, 516.

⁸³ Aajaeb Singh Dhillon, *Har Nave Suraj Navi Surbirta*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2005, pp-548, 549.

buried herself in the stirring up disturbances in the hope of obtaining some share of the power by placing the younger son, Ajit Singh on the throne of the late Raja Karam Singh. She was the woman who originated the plot against Misr Noudha. There is also a speculation that she was the one who employed assassins to murder Colonel Ochter Long. She had a lot of powerful support behind her back for example she had the support of Jaswant Singh of Nabha. Moreover she was a very crafty woman who had a sharp intellect for politics. She had the desire and thirst for power. She died in 1821.⁸⁴

Mai Desa Nabha was the daughter of Makhan Singh. She was married to the Raja of Nabha whose name was Hamir Singh. In 1775 A.D the Raja Jind, Rajpat Singh attacked on Sangrur. At the end of this battle, he arrested Raja Hamir Chand. Raja Rajpat kept this city surrounded for four months. Rani Desa Nabha stood her ground and did not give up. In the end, Raja Hamir was released by Raja Rajpat Singh.⁸⁵

Raja Hamir Chand died in 1783 A.D. Upon his death the responsibility of the administration of his kingdom were handed over to his son but at that point he was only eight years of age. The responsibilities of the administration of the kingdom were given to Mai Desa until the son becomes major. She took the help of the *bhangi* and *kanya misals* to take back her areas. She won the trust of the English in 1809 A.D. She also helped English in 1814 A.D. Jaswant Singh died in 1840 A.D. After Jaswant Singh's death, Mai Desa's son sat on the throne.⁸⁶ The son of Jaswant Singh bribed the servant of Mai Desa to poison her food. Mai Desa's food was poisoned and hence she died.

Mata Desh Kaur was the daughter of Amir Singh Gujravaliye. She was married in the *Sukrachariye misal* to Bhai Chadhat Singh in 1756 A.D. She gave birth to two children. She had a daughter named Raj Kaur and a son Maha Singh who went on to be a great warrior. Maha Singh was born in 1765 A.D. He later went on to become the leader of his *misal*.⁸⁷

Bhai Chadat Singh died in 1707 A.D. After his death, Mata Desa handled all the responsibilities of the *misal*. At that time, Maha Singh was a

⁸⁴ Giani Amar Singh, *Sikh Itihas Kitho Toh Kithe*, Chatrar Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, 1998, pp-204, 205.

⁸⁵ Bhupinder Kaur, *Status of women in Sikhism*, Shromni Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, 2005, pp-24, 25.

⁸⁶ Harjinder Singh dilgeer, *100 Sikh Bibian*, Sikh university press, Amritsar, 2015, pp-91,92.

⁸⁷ Ratan Singh Jagi, *Sikh Panth Vishavkosh Bhagg-2*, Guru Ratan Publishers, Patiala, 1989, pp-1041.

child and hence could not take care of the responsibilities. Mata Desa took care of all the activities with the help of Jai Singh. She reconstructed the fort that was destroyed by Ahmad Shah Dugni in Gujra vale.⁸⁸

Mai Desa married her daughter to Sahib Singh who was from the Bangi *misal*. While she got her son Maha Singh married to Raj Kaur of Jind. Hence, in 1744 A.D. the *bangi misal* joined the *fulkia misal*.

Mata Desa died in 1778 A.D. After her death, the responsibilities of the *misal* were handed over to her son.⁸⁹

Raj Kaur was the daughter of the King of Jind, Raja Rajput. During that period Sant Gudhar Singh started a movement to prevent the killing of girls in the royal families. One day, as Gudhar Singh was praying in the morning his attention went to Raja Rajput whose wife had given birth to a girl. The grandmother of that child went to bury her in the soil while she was still alive. So, Sant Gudhar Singh went to the Raja's residence. Upon his arrival all the members of the Raja's family went to pay their respects. Sant Gudhar Singh took them to the place where the child had been buried and ordered to be dug out. While digging when the feet of the child became visible she was taken out. Upon doing so, Sant Gudhar Singh said the following words;

Jis te rakha tis mare kavan/

So, in this way the child was saved despite the fact that she was recovered seven days after she had been buried. Sant Gudar Singh blessed this child by saying that this child would go on to give birth to one of the greatest personalities of the Sikh community throughout its history.⁹⁰ So, Sant Gudar Singh said, Raj Kaur went on to give birth to Ranjit Singh in 1780 A.D who went to be the Maharaja of Punjab. At the time of the death of Maha Singh, Ranjit Singh was just a child.⁹¹ So, Rani Raj Kaur had to handle all the responsibilities of the administration of the kingdom and the *misal*. Rani Raj Kaur was assisted by a member of the *Sukracharia misal* and the advisor of Maha Singh, Lakhpat Rai in the disposal of her duties. When Maharaja Ranjit

⁸⁸ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *100 Sikh Bibian*, Sikh University Press Amritsar, 2015, pp-68.

⁸⁹ Giani Sohan Singh Shital, *Sikh Raj Te Shere Punjab*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 1986, pp-27.

⁹⁰ Sahib Singh Arsi, *18th Century da Sikh Itihas*, Aurta Publication, 1987, pp-121.

⁹¹ Visakha Singh Das, Sant sipahi Janetpura, Chatran Singh Jivan Singh, *Malva Sikh Itihas*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, Dujji Vaar, 1998, pp-514.

Singh gained majority, he took all the responsibilities under his control. Later, he died in Lahore.⁹²

Sadha Kaur was born in Raoke Kalon Ferozpur, Punjab. She was born in 1762 A.D to father Damodha Singh in the Dhaliwal caste. She was married at the age of 7 to Gurbhaksh Singh in 1766 A.D. Gurbhaksh Singh was the elder son of Jai Singh. He was from the Kanhaiya *misal*. They gave birth to a daughter who they named Sahibhan Kaur.⁹³

The death of her husband was followed by the death of her father-in-law in 1789 A.D. After the death of her husband, she took up the responsibilities of leading the Kanahayea *misal*.⁹⁴

Rani Sadha Kaur was a very intelligent woman. She was the mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Rani Sadha Kaur played an important role in the establishment of the Sikh rule in Punjab. She married her daughter, Sahibhan Kaur to the son of the leader of the *Sukracharia misal* Maha Singh, Ranjit Singh. In this way the Kanahayea misal got related to the Shukarchakyea *misal*. In 1796 A.D Shah Jaman of Afghanistan attacked on Punjab with an army of 30,000 soldiers. None of the Singh Sardars came in his way but Sardarni Sadha Kaur called up for the whole Khalsa to stand united in order to protect Punjab from these Afghan invaders. Therefore, the Khalsa army commanded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh defeated these Afghans. With this in 1801 A.D, Sardarni Sadha Kaur announced Ranjit Singh as the Maharaja of Punjab.

Other than the above mentioned, there are many other women who have played an important role in shaping the history and destiny of the Sikh community throughout its history. Women had an important role to play in the Sikh religion. Moreover, women have always been considered to be equal to and in some subject even superior to men in the Sikh society. Therefore, in this way there are numerous other important Sikh women that have played a part in the formation and protection of the Sikh religion. Their contributions to the Sikh religion are indispensable. These women act as a source of inspiration for

⁹² Saheb Singh Arshi, *18th Century Da Sikh Itihas*, Aurta Publication, Chandigarh, 1987 pp-121, [www. Sikhiwiki.org.com](http://www.Sikhiwiki.org.com).

⁹³ Kakshi, S.R, Pathak, Rashmi, Pathak, S.R. Bakshi (1 January 2007), *Punjab throughout Ages*, pp-272, 274.

⁹⁴ Roy Kaushik, *Military Manpower, Armies and Warfare in South Asia*, Routledge, 2015, pp-82.

the upcoming generations of the Sikh community especially the women. They played a part in the eradication of various social evils that were a part of the society during their respective periods for example Mata Kheevi played an important part in the eradication of the *pardha pratha*. Other than this, there were many who fought alongside the men in the battle fields in order to protect their community. Amongst these women were Mai Bhago and Rani Sadha Kaur. They were a source of inspiration for the women who wanted to fight in the battle fields to protect their community.

CHAPTER-3

HISTORICAL PLACES OF SIKH WOMEN

The *Gurudwara* is an important and holy place in *Sikh* religion. This place spreads the spiritual waves in all the four directions. A *Gurudwara* is a place of assembly and worship for the Sikhs. A *Gurudwara* is a place where children learn about the ethics and principles of the religion. They also learn customs, traditions, texts and history of the Sikh religion. It is also a place for religious gatherings and ceremonies. People from all faiths are welcomed in the Sikh *Gurudwaras*. These institutes also give insight about the knowledge of God to the people of the Sikh community. Therefore they play an important part in the lives of Sikhs through out their lives.

This place sends out the message of truth, honesty and morality. The word of *Gurudwara* is driven from two words *Guru* and *Dwara* which means *Guru's home*. It can be said to be a way to meet God. The use of the word *Gurudwara* started in the end of eighteen century. The name *Gurudwara* is used to describe the religious places of *Sikhs*. The first Guru of the Sikhs was Guru Nanak Dev. The name of God is recited in the *Gurudwara Sahib*. It helps the Sikhs get their peace of mind. It is compulsory to all the Sikh community to *Parkash* (open their holy book) named *Guru Granth Sahib* in the early morning every day at the *Gurudwara Sahib*. Every *Gurudwara* has a *Darbar Sahib* where the everlasting Guru of the Sikhs, the holy book of the Sikhs, *Guru Granth Sahib* is placed in the *takhat* (an elevated throne), in a prominent central position. Each *Gurudwara* has a *Langar hall*, where people of any religion can eat vegetarian food for free which is served by the volunteers at the *Gurudwara*.

A *Gurudwara* can be identified from a distance by tall flagpoles bearing the *Nishan Sahib*, the Sikh flag. The people of any religion are coming in the *Gurudwara Sahib* are known as the *Sangat*. They come and recite their prayers i.e. by doing *Ardaas* and *Kirtan*. The *sangat* come to the *Gurudwaras* to pray and pay their respect to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. These people follow the principles of *Sikh Gurus*. *Guru Nanak Dev* established the first *Dharamshala* near the side of the Ravi River. Later on, the name of these institutions changed from *Dharamshala* to *Gurudwara*. The people of the Sikh religion follow the principles of *Sikh Gurus*. The symbol of 'feet of *Gurus*' i.e. their respect and wisdom of God are taught about in the *Gurudwara Sahib*.

However, the word *Gurudwara* was not used in the Sikh religion at the time of Gurus. At that time, the word *Dharamshala* was being used. *Guru Nanak Dev* also used this word in the *Gurbani Path* such as *Jap ji Sahib*. This word was also used in the *Veero* of *Bhai Gurdas*. Therefore, during the period of *Guru Nanak Dev*, the word *Dharamshala* was used to describe the religious institutions for the Sikhs.

There were 74 *Dharmshalas* at the time of *Guru Amar Das*. The places where any important event took place or the *Guru* taught about *Sikhism* were later changed in to *Gurudwaras* by Sikhs. In this way, firstly people can feel the presence of God and secondly the next generations can also get information about their religion from the *Gurudwaras*. Along with the Sikh Gurus, the Sikh women have also played an important role in the Sikh religion. Some of the important Sikh women include *Mata Gujri*, *Mai Bhago*, *Mata Sundari*, *Rani Sahib Kaur*, *Rani Sada Kaur* and *Maharani Jind Kaur*. *Gurudwaras* were constructed by the members of the Sikh community at important places i.e. the places of birth of these Sikh women or the places where an important event may have unfolded.¹

The Sikhs continuously sang praises about God, chanted their prayers and ate *langar* in the *Dharamshalas*. The first *Sarovar* was built at *Amritsar* in *Darbar Sahib (Harmandir Sahib, Golden Temple)*. It is built by *Guru Arjan Dev*. The first *Parkash of Guru Granth Sahib* was done in 1604 A.D. *Darbar Sahib* is the prominent pilgrimage site for the Sikhs. It is generally known as the Golden Temple because it has been plated with gold. Later, *Guru Arjan Dev* was martyred and the place where the martyrdom of the fifth *Guru* of the Sikhs, *Guru Arjan Dev* took place is known as *Dehra Sahib*.²

At the time of *Udasiaa* (religious journeys) and *nirmalia* the *Gurudwaras* were also known as *Akhadas* and *Dharmshalas*. During that period the *nirmalas* handled most of the responsibilities of the function and management of the *dheras* and the *dharamshalas*. However, later these *nirmalas* separated their *dheras* and *akhadas* from the *Gurudwaras*.

¹ Jaswinder Singh, *The Gurudwara Act, 1925*, Act no-8, Chawla Publications, Chandigarh, 2009, pp-1.

² *Ibid*, pp-2.

The ideologies of the Sikh religion can be seen in the *Sikh sangat*. The customs of *langar*, *sangat* and *pangat* are followed in the *Gurudwaras* by the members of the Sikh community.³

Baba Buddha was the first person who was given the responsibility of looking after the Sikh *Gurudwaras*. During eighteenth century, the management of the *Gurudwaras* was given to *Baba Buddha Dal*. However, in 1920, the responsibility of the management of the *Gurudwaras* was taken over by the *Sharomani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee*.

The religious place of Sikhs is known as the *Gurudwara*. According to the *Dharam-Sadna* of Guru Nanak Dev, the places where the *parkash of Guru Granth Sahib* is done are known as *Gurudwaras*. Above *Gurudwaras*, there is a high raised flag of Saffron color which is also known as the Sikh Symbol. This flag is known as the *Nishan Sahib*. In the beginning this flag was raised upon the areas where the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Hargobind Sahib visited. It was also considered as the symbol of *Miri-Piri*.⁴

However, although the *Gurudwara* were considered as the religious places for the Sikhs, politics also took place amongst the *sangat* that had gathered in these *Gurudwara* for example the Sikhs discussed political matters during British rule over Punjab in 1849. The British gained control over Punjab in 1849 with this power of *dogaria* came to an end. During this period the leaders of the *Gurudwaras* claimed their rights over the money and other belongings which were donated by the people in the *Gurudwaras*. They were spending that money for their personal use. Hence the distribution of money became a cause of dispute in *Gurudwaras*.⁵

Every religion has its own religious place and leader i.e. a Guru or a peer who helps to show them the righteous path by the help of chanting and praises of their Lord. At the holy places of the Sikh religion i.e. the *Gurudwaras*, both the rich and poor, higher and lower caste people eat free food in *langar*. The main reason for this was to end the discrimination amongst the members of the Sikh community on any grounds.

³ *Ibid*, pp-3, 4.

⁴ *The Gurudwara* <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.

⁵ *Sikhism Talk Helicon Publishing Retired*.

Along with the Sikh Gurus and the great warriors of the Sikh religion, many Sikh women for example Bebe Nanaki, Bibi Kheevi, Bibi Bhani, Mata Sahib Kaur and Rani Sada Kaur have played huge roles in spreading the teachings of the Sikh religion.⁶

The Gurudwara of Bebe Nanki is situated at Sultanpur Lodhi. This *Gurudwara* has been constructed with the efforts of the *sangat* near the *Gurudwara* Hatt Sahib and Bebe Balwant Kaur. Every year, the birthday of Bebe Nanaki is celebrated at this Gurudwara. The ideologies of the Sikh Gurus and the religion i.e. *Sikhi Parchar* is done at this *Gurudwara*. This place is situated at a distance of 26 miles in South–West direction from Jalandhar and 17 miles from Kartarpur in the South–East direction.⁷

One of the *Dharamshala* was built in the name of Babe Nanaki. This place is situated at Sultanpur. Guru Nanak Dev came to live here with his sister, Bebe Nanki. The *parkash* of Shri Guru Granth Sahib is done at this place. This *Dharamshala* is situated in the area of *Shimbhes* a well in the name of Bebe Nanaki was also built at this place. Other than this, there is a banyan tree (*Boharr*) in front of the entrance. The architecture design of this building resembles like those of the Muslim building such as the *haveli*. This house is covered with curtains and different rooms have been built in well-designed manner. The design of this *Gurudwara* Sahib is very rare. During the period of Pepsu, the *Gurudwara* Board handed over the management of this *Gurudwara* Sahib under management board but this attempt did not yield any success.⁸

The *Gurudwara* Bebe Nanki is also known as the Khoo Sahib, Talwandi Choudhriya. This is also the same place where Jai Ram, the husband of Bebe Nanaki did his job.

The history of Bebe Nanaki has an important place in the Sikh religion. This well is famoussly known by the name Khoo Bebe Nanaki, Talwandi Choudhriya. This well comes in the way while traveling from Nankana Sahib to Sultanpur Lodhi. The history related to the well of Bebe Nanki is related to the marriage between Jai Ram and Bebe Nanaki. Their *palki* stopped here as it was their last stop. Upon reaching here Bebe Nanki felt thirsty, so she asked

⁶ [https://on.In Wikipedia.org/wiki>Gurudwara](https://on.In Wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurudwara)

⁷ Jasbir Singh Bhalla, *Sultanpur de Gurdwarea Da Sankep Ihtihis*, Gurudwara Sri Ber Sahib, Parkashak: Manage, Gurudwara Sri Ber Sahib, pp-16.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp-64.

for water from the villagers but nobody gave water to them because of the fear of the Muslims. The villagers could not do any work without their permission. So, the Sikh that had come to attend Bebe Nanki's marriage began digging this well. Then after the digging of this well, Bebe Nanki and the other Sikhs drank water from this well and moved to Sultanpur in the morning. However, the villagers got surprised when they came to know about this in the morning. It is believed that after bathing with water from this well one can get relief from the diseases. Later when Guru Nanak Dev used to come to visit his sister, he used to visit this place after crossing the Beas River. Later the water from this well was also used for watering the fields.⁹

There is *Prabhat Pheri* in relation to the birth of Bebe Nanki. Along with they are also done during programs of *puranmashi*, birth of Guru Gobind Dev and *barsi* of both *Sant* Baba Kartar Singh and *Sant* Baba Tarlokh Singh. A *langar* of tea is provided every Sunday in this *Gurudwara* Sahib. The *langar* is also served on the day of *Masia*. This *Gurudwara* is one of the historical *Gurudwaras* of the Sikh community.¹⁰

Gurudwara Mata Kheevi is situated in Khadoor Sahib. While Guru Angad Dev taught the *sangat* about the word of God, Mata Kheevi provided them with *langar*. *Langar* was served continuously. Mata Kheevi took the complete responsibility of *langar*. The customs of *Sangat* and *Pangat* were started so as to promote equality in the community and end the indiscrimination amongst the members of the Sikh community. All are considered equal in the Sikh religion. Today a *Gurudwara* has been built at this place where *langar* is served 24 hours a day. Khadoor Sahib is a famous historical location for the Sikh community with this *Gurudwara* being the center of attraction.

The *Gurudwara* Sahib is built in a village called Sagharkot. This *Gurudwara* has been built in the memory of marriage between Guru Angad Dev and Mata Kheevi. Various religious ceremonies are conducted in this place on the day of *Puranmashi*. *Nagar Kirtan* is a Sikh custom involving the processional singing of holy hymns through out the community is also

⁹ Jasbir Singh Bhalla, *Ihithasik Gurudwara Ik Survekhan*, Manpreet Prakhan, (Delhi–Jalandhar), 2003, pp-60, 61.

¹⁰ *Ajit* Newspaper, Sunday, 5 May, 2019.

promoted in this Gurudwara. Mata Kheevi served *langar* everywhere throughout her life. She gave a lot of importance to the *langar Pratha* which is still prevalent today.¹¹

Khadoor Sahib is known as the *Nagari of Guru Angad Dev*. This town holds great importance in the Sikh history. Eight Gurus of the Sikh religion visited this place at various moments. This town is about 35km from Amritsar, 20km from Tarntaran, 35km from Kapurthala and 9km from Goindwal.

A well has been built in the Gurudwara Bibi Amro. The old well of Bibi Amro existed in front of entrance of the main building of the complex of Gurudwara *Darbar Sahib*. This well was built by Bibi Amro's father upon her request as water was the need at that time. This well is quite famous even today as *sangat* from far away visit this place to see this well. It is a memorable site in history of the Sikh religion.¹²

Gurudwara Angitah Sahib is located in the Baserke village of Amritsar. This *Gurudwara* was constructed at the place where Bibi Amro was cremated. Bibi Amro was related to the *Gurugharana*. Bibi Amro was the daughter of the second Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Angad Dev in the village, Khadoor Sahib in Amritsar in 1532. Moreover, she was married to the nephew of the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das. She was an indirect but important instrument in the development as well as the spread of *Sikhism*. Guru Amar Das heard the *bani* of Guru Angad Dev from Bibi Amro. Guru Amar Das was quite taken away by the sweet melodious voice of Bibi Amro and he was deeply touched by the meanings within the words while she sang the holy *Shabads* (holy hymns). As the interest of Guru Amar Das grew it was Bibi Amro who sent him to her father to help him learn more about these teachings. Guru Amar Das was so deeply influenced by Guru Angad Dev that he became his devotee. Therefore, Bibi Amro played an important part in the formation of Guru Amar Das as the third Guru of the Sikhs. A *Gurudwara* was later constructed at his place in the memory of Bibi Amro.¹³

A *Gurudwara* has also been constructed at the place where Bibi Veero was married. This *Gurudwara* was constructed in the memory of her marriage.

¹¹ [https://m.facebook.com/photos/Ajit Akbar](https://m.facebook.com/photos/Ajit%20Akbar), 8 May, Samat 550.

¹² [https://on.inWikipedia.org/wiki: >Gurudwara](https://on.inWikipedia.org/wiki/Gurudwara).

¹³ Jasbir Singh Bhalla, *Ihithasik Gurudwara Ik Survekhan*, Manpreet Prakhn, (Delhi–Jalandhar), 2001, pp-52.

Bibi Veero was married to Bhai Sadhu Ram at this holy place. Initially it was decided for the marriage to take place at Amritsar but due to the war between the Mughals and the Sikhs, the location of the marriage had to be shifted to Jhabal. The wife of Guru Sahib, Bibi Damodhri asked Purohit to go to the Malah village to the parent of Sadhu Ram i.e. Nand Kaur and Dharma to start the preparation of the marriage. Therefore, they began the preparations of the marriage and preparation of sweets. One day, the *sangat* came to see Guru. They had not eaten anything and as it was not the time for *langar*, the *langar* hadn't been prepared. So, when Guru came to know of this, he told them to go and eat the sweets. However, Mata Damodhari insisted that the sweets were first to be consumed by the people in the *bharat* i.e. the sweets were to be used in *shagan*. So, when the *sangat* came back to Guru he told them that the sweets were to be eaten by Turks. So, as Guru said the sweets were later eaten by the Turks who attacked that place.¹⁴

This *Gurudwara* is under the administration of the *Shiromni Gurudwara Parbhantak Committee*. It comprises of 17 shops in Jhabal Adda and has been constructed in twelve *kilas* of land.

The *Gurudwara* Mata Ganga is located at Baba Bakala of the Amritsar district. It has been mentioned in the Sikh history that when Guru Arjan Dev was going to Lahore Mata Ganga asked him when they would meet again. Upon which Guru Arjan Dev answered that the next time only their souls would meet. Towards the end of her life, Mata Ganga instructed the Sikhs that her body shouldn't be cremated but instead should be submitted to water. Upon the death of Mata Ganga, her son, Guru Hargobind Singh and the Sikh *sangat* carried the dead body of Mata Ganga, carried in a wooden compartment and took it to the Beas River. Then her dead body was immersed in the waters of the Beas River at about two kilometers from Baba Bakala in deference to her wish of consigning her body to water rather than being burnt. A *Gurudwara* was later constructed in that area in the memory of Mata Ganga which was given the name Shri Bishangarh. She was cremated at the place where her husband, Guru Arjan Dev was cremated. A monument was built in the place

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp-60, 61.

where the last rituals of the cremation of Mata Ganga were done. Later this *Gurudwara* came to be known by the name of Mata Ganga.¹⁵

In the memory of Bibi Bhani, a well was constructed upon her name by Guru Arjan Sahib. This well is known as the well of Bibi Bhani. This well is located in Khadoor Sahib. However, in the beginning the water of this well was salty and wasn't fit for use. So, the *sangat* came to Guru Angad Dev with this grievance. Guru Angad Dev gave the *sangat* a *mohlah* which was put in the well. Upon which the water of the well became fresh and fit for use. Therefore, this is a very old and historically important well. Bibi Bhani is remembered as a symbol of service. In the Sikh history, she is known as an embodiment of service.¹⁶

Gurudwara Chubara Sahib is located at Goindwal Sahib. This *Gurudwara* has been constructed at the place where Shri Guru Amar Das resided. This was the place where Guru Amar Das rewarded Bibi Bhani with the *Gurgaddi* being in her family because of her service. Hence, Guru Amar Das blessed the *Gurgaddi* to stay within the Sodhi family. Guru Ram Das was the husband of Bibi Bhani. He was blessed with the honour of serving the Gurughar.¹⁷

A *Gurudwara* has also been made in Tarntaran (Punjab) on the place where Bibi Bhani served and treated the diseased. Bibi Bhani used to provide *langar* to the *sangat* that were heading to Darbar Sahib and Tarantaran. Upon the demise of Bibi Bhani in 1598, Guru Arjan Dev dug a well at this place in her memory. Later a *Gurudwara* was constructed here and this *Gurudwara* has been providing service to the Sikh *sangat* since 2006.

The *Gurudwara* Bala Sahib has been constructed in the Bhavna Nagar of Delhi. There are many other historically important *Gurudwaras* in Delhi for example Sisganj Sahib, Bangla Sahib etc. *Gurudwara* Bala Sahib has been constructed in the memory of the wives of the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. Therefore, this *Gurudwara* has been constructed in the memory of Mata Sahib Kaur and Mata Sundri. Guru Har Rai and Guru Tegh Bahadur

¹⁵ *Sikh Dharam Vishav Kosh*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2004, pp-65.

¹⁶ Jasbir Singh Bhalla, *Ihithasik Gurudwara Ik Survekhan*, Manpreet Prakhn, (Delhi–Jalandhar), 2001, pp-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp-99.

also visited Delhi. Moreover, *Gurudwara* Bala Sahib has also been constructed in the place where Shri Guru Har Krishan was cremated.¹⁸

Guru Harkrishan spent his last few days at this place and was cremated here. The young Guru Harkrishan moved freely among the people providing healing and solace to the poor, needy and the sick. His work in serving and taking care of the suffering humanity won the hearts of all. People were impressed that the young Guru helped all irrespective of caste and creed.

The *samadh* of Mata Sahib Kaur has been built in *Gurudwara* Mukhal. This *Gurudwara* has now been renovated. This *Gurudwara* is also known as the place where Mata Sundri was cremated. The tomb of Mata Sundri has been erected in the new building of the *Gurudwara*. Moreover, it is also believed that Mati Das and Sati Das were cremated at this very place. This *Gurudwara* is surrounded by a veranda made with a floor of marble. Plants and flowers have been planted in the outer side of the *Gurudwara*. Mata Sahib Kaur told Bhai Mani Singh to compile the *bani* of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. This *bani* was given the name, *Dasm Granth*. Mata Sahib Kaur gave many *hukamname* to the people of the Sikh community. Mata also told the Sikhs to keep the five weapons of Guru Gobind Singh in this *Gurudwara*. Kirtan and the recitation of the *Gurbani* carry on continuously in this *Gurudwara*. Gurburab is celebrated every year in *Gurudwara* Bala Sahib. This *Gurudwara* is located near the Nizamudin railway station.¹⁹

Gurudwara Mata Gujri is one of the *Gurudwaras* in Fatehgarh Sahib. This *Gurudwara* is known by the name Burj Mata Gujri. Three tombs (*samadhs*) have been made in the main fort of Sirhind. One of which is the Thanda Burj. It has been constructed at the highest point in this fort. It is about 140ft tall. It is open in all the four direction so as to allow cold air to pass through during the summers. However, in the winters these breezes are unbearable. According to the history of the Sikh religion, when Mata Gujri and the *chotte sahibzaade* were caught by the Mughals, they were imprisoned in the Thanda Burj.²⁰ The family was on its way towards Ropar but they were betrayed half way by one of their trusted servants, and then captured by the

¹⁸ Balbir Madhupuri, *Delhi De Das Ihtihastik Gurudwara*, Har Anand, Publication, Delhi, 1995, pp-32.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp-36,37.

²⁰ *Gurudwara Parkash, Dharam Parchar Committee*, Amritsar, 2004.

Mughal army. The Thanda Burj was designed in such a way that it could capture the cool night breezes of air passing over the water channels in the hot summer days. In the winter days, the unheated tower offered no comfort to the prisoners inside. Mata Gujri collapsed inside the Thanda Burj and died on hearing the news of the execution of her young grandsons. Much later, *Gurudwara* Thanda Burj of Mata Gujri was constructed at that spot in order to commemorate and honour her brave sacrifice.²¹

During the period of Banda Singh Bahadur i.e. in 1710, the topmost part of this building fell down. It was made as an important religious place for the Sikhs in 1764 A.D. Later it was renovated in 1944 by the *Gurudwara* Fatehgarh Sahib and Jyoti Sarup Sudhar Committee. By 1955-56, the Committee had successfully renovated most of the building leaving out just one wall. This place was established as a memory of Mata Gujri. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is also kept here. There is a small room by the stairs where the *chotte sahibzaade* were martyred by the Mughals after they were captured along with their grand-mother, Mata Gujri. Therefore, this is an important place for the members of the Sikh community because this was the place where the *chotte sahibzaade* martyred their lives for the sake of their religion at a very young age. The *Guru Granth Sahib* has also been kept in this room. The room on the upper floor has been transformed in to the shape of a dome. This dome has been decorated with plates of gold. Other than this, a *langar* hall is also present in this *Gurudwara* where the *sangat* sit together and eat *langar* without any discrimination on any grounds. This *Gurudwara* is surrounded by flowers and other plants on all its four sides. Fares are also set up at this place. So, a large number of people visit this *Gurudwara* during these fares. Sangat from many faraway places come to this *Gurudwara* to pay their respects. The *Gurudwara, Thanda Burj* is one of historical *Gurudwaras* Mata Gujri.²²

The *Gurudwara* Mata Sahib Kaur and Mata Sundri are located at Talwandi Sabo (Takhat Shri Damdama Sahib). Guru Gobind Singh came to Talwandi Sabo in 1706 A.D. He was accompanied by Mata Sahib Kaur, Mata Sundri and Bhai Mani Singh. Dala persuaded Mata to stay at home but Mata

²¹ Tirlochan Singh, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*, National Book Shoop, Delhi, 1967, pp-35.

²² <https://on.in.wikipedia.org/wiki;>Gurdware>.

did not pay heed to him. She set up a camp and stayed at this place. In the beginning a simple room was built in this place which had its entrance in the Western direction. During the *karseva* in Delhi, the face or the main entrance of this room was shifted in the direction of Takht Sahib. This *Gurudwara* is located on the back side of Takht Sahib. There is a *nishan sahib* in this *Gurudwara*. This is one of the historical *Gurudwaras* of the Sikh religion.²³ The golden lined, red colored silk cloth of Mata Sahib Kaur is present with the family of Bhai Dal Sahib along with the other memorable items of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.²⁴

The *sangat* requested Mata to come to Chak Fateh Singh. So, Mata went there. Henceforth, there are some items belonging to Mata which are still present. Some of which include Mata's stool, shoes etc. This *Gurudwara Sahib* has seven entrances and eight windows on the four walls of the building. The Darbar Sahib has six ventilators, out of which three are open while the other three remain closed. The *Sach Khand* is on the left-hand side while there is a store on the right-hand side. The management of this *Gurudwara* is under the control of the *Sharomni Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee*.

Mata Sahib Kaur was given the honor of being the mother of the *KhalsaPanth* at this place. *Palki Sahib* has also been made at Darbar Sahib. This is where *Diodi Sahib* is located. The *Sach Khand* is on its left-hand side. *Akhand Panth* is carried on continuously in this *Gurudwara*. At this place, Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur asked Guru Gobind Singh about the whereabouts of Mata Gujri and the *sahibzaade*. To which Guru Gobind Singh gave the following answer;²⁵

Vardiye char

Putar lakh hazar||

There are two large domes, one *palki* and six other small domes have been constructed on the roof of the *Gurudwara Sahib*. This *Gurudwara* is located 100ft from behind the Takht Sahib. The height of the *nishan sahib* is 85 feet. The purpose of the *nishan sahib* is to make it easy for the *sangat* far

²³ Interview, Jagtar Singh, Kiratpuri Head Granthi, *Takht Shri Damdhama Sahib*, Talwandi Sabo, 3/10/2018.

²⁴ Amarjit Singh, *Sankep Ihtihias*, Takht Shri Damdhama Sahib, Manager Takht Shri Damdhama Sahib, pp-28.

²⁵ Interview, Giani Jagtar Singh, Kiratpuri Head Granthi, *Takht Shri Damdhama Sahib*, Talwandi Sabo, 15/11/18.

away to locate the *Gurudwara*. Other than this, a *langar* hall has also been built where the *sangat* eats *langar*.²⁶

The *Gurudwara* Mata Sundri is located in Delhi. In the beginning, the Mata Sundri haveli was located at this place. This *Gurudwara* is located on the front of the Turkman gate near the Delhi *Darvaja* at the Mata Sundri road. When Mata Sundri came in Delhi, the Sikh *sangat* of this place bought this place and made this Guru Gobind Singh's house. There is a room present even today in this building where the weapons of Mata Sundhar Kaur and Guru Hargobind have been kept. Mata Sundri displayed these weapons every day.

Mata gave the responsibility of the weapons of Guru Gobind Singh to Sevak Jivan Singh while the weapons of Guru Hargobind Singh were sent to the Akal Takhat, Amritsar by Bhai Mani Singh. During the periods of monarchy in Punjab, the responsibility of the maintenance and the functioning of this *Gurudwara* was handed over to the *mahants*. In 1915, the Government wanted to take the land of the *Gurudwara* Mata Sundri under its control but the Sikh *sangat* did not approve of this. The Sikhs stated that the land of this *haveli* was not for sale. Therefore, in 1947, the *Gurudwara* Committee constructed a wall around this *Gurudwara*. However, this land dispute was taken to the court. *Jathedar* Santokh Singh was the owner of the land of the *Gurudwara* by the Nehru Government.²⁷

Gurudwara Saheed Ganj is a historical *Gurudwara* for the Sikhs. In 1967 a college was opened in the name of Mata Sundri near this *Gurudwara*. This place is located towards the front of the Saheed Ganj *Gurudwara* Bhai Taru Singh. Mir Manu became the *subedhar* of Punjab in 1764 A.D. Upon becoming the *subedhar*, he was determined to end the existence of the Sikh community. So, he ordered his soldiers to arrest the Sikhs and execute them at this place. Other than this, this is also the place where the Sikh women were imprisoned.

At the request of Diwan Khodha Mal, the Sikhs helped Mir Manu in the battle. This battle took place in the region of Multan in Punjab. The Sikhs fought alongside Mir Manu in this battle. The *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib

²⁶ Balbir Mahdopuri, *Delhi De Das Ihtihāsik Gurudwara*, Sapt Sindhu, pp-46,47.

²⁷ Giani Bhajan Singh, *Giani Pritam Singh, Ihtihāsik, Sikh Naria*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1982, pp-122, 123.

was done at this place. Later, a *Gurudwara* was constructed at this place. It was due to this reason that the importance of this *Gurudwara* increased. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also came to this place to pay his respect. The management of this *Gurudwara* stayed with the *mahants*. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also donated the *jagir* of some lands to this *Gurudwara* upon his visit. In 1934, the management of the *Gurudwara* went in the hands of the *Shiromni Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee*. Therefore, the maintenance and control of this *Gurudwara* was done by the board. However, although the building of this *Gurudwara* is secure, there is no source of light.²⁸

Gurudwara Mata Sundri is located in Sohrani, Mohali. The responsibility of the *Gurudwara* is in the hands of Kehar Singh. This *Gurudwara* is located in sector number 70. It is near the Mator village. It is believed that during the war of Anandpur Sahib when the family of Guru Gobind Singh got separated, Mata Sundri Kaur and some other Sikhs headed towards Delhi. Baba Nahan Singh was well aware of this area. During the journey to Delhi, Mata Sundri stayed at this place for some time. Later, Mata Sundri Kaur moved ahead towards Delhi while Baba Nahan Singh stayed behind. The *Gurudwara* was constructed on the place where Mata resided. Other than this, a well of that period is also present in that area. Some weapons and clothes of that period are also present in this *Gurudwara*. In the beginning, the *Gurudwara* was built at seven acres of land. However, later the Government bought most of the land due to which now the *Gurudwara* has only about two to three acres of land. Other than this, there are some cooking furnaces in this area which are of the period when Baba Banda Singh Bahadur attacked on Vajir Khan. They were used to prepare food for Banda Singh Bahadur's army. This is also the place where Mata Sundri, Mata Sahib Kaur, Bhai Mani Singh and some other Sikhs stayed while going from Ropar to Delhi.

Another *Gurudwara* was made in the memory of Mata Sundri which is located near the Jamia Masjid. The weapons used in the earlier periods by the Sikhs used to be displayed in this *Gurudwara*. However, they are not present here today. According to some historians, Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur

²⁸ Anita-Surinder, *Tavarhik Lahore-Amritsar*, Parkashan, Premier Publication, Amritsar (Bharat), 1982, pp-101.

stayed at this place while they were on their journey to Delhi. This building consists of three rooms and the road across the house is also very narrow. The street where this house is located is known by the name S.S Street. A well is located on the outer part of this street. However, this well is not used today due to which it has been closed. The inscriptions on this well are on the inner side. The memory of Mata Sundri in this place draws people towards it. This *Gurudwara* is at a distance of one mile from *Gurudwara* Shish Ganj.

Guru Gobind Singh gave his weapons to Mata Sundri, handed over the responsibilities of the weapons of Guru Gobind Singh to Jivan Singh. Today these weapons have been displayed in the *Gurudwara* Rakab Ganj. For the maintenance of the weapons the *jagir* of 10 rupees were given by the leaders of Patiala, 20 by Nabha and 74 rupees by *Puja*.²⁹

A *Gurudwara* has been made in the name of Mata Ganga. The mother of Guru Hargobind, Mata Ganga stayed at this place at the house of a Sikh. She died while her stay in this house. The customs of her cremation were also done at this place. Therefore, a *Gurudwara* has been constructed in the memory of Mata Ganga at this place.

Mata Jito was the first wife of the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. She died on the 5th of December, 1700. She was cremated at Agampur by Guru Gobind Singh. The place where the *degh* of Mata Jito was made was destroyed during the floods in this area. Moreover, all the members of the Sodhi family were cremated at this place. Other than this, the Sikhs of Anandpur Sahib were also cremated in this area. After the flood, the *Gurudwara* Mata Jito was constructed in this place.³⁰

The *Gurudwara* Anadkarj was constructed at the place where Mata Jito and Guru Gobind Singh got married. This event is celebrated every year during the festival of *Basant Pamchvi*. A large number of people gather here who then travel from here to Guru da Lahore. Therefore, in this memory a *Gurudwara* has been constructed at this place. However, the marriage between Mata Jito and Guru Gobind Singh did not take place on the day of *Basant Panchvi*. This was a tradition which was formed afterwards.³¹

²⁹ Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gurshabad Ratnaka*, Mahan Kosh, pp-635.

³⁰ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *Anadpur Sahib*, Sikh University Center, Belgium, 2003, pp-39.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp-88.

The *Gurudwara* Mai Bhago has been made in the memory of Mai Bhago. It is located in the Jhabal village of Tarantarn. The whole management of this *Gurudwara* is in the hands of the local committee. This *Gurudwara* was constructed with the efforts of Sant Baba Khadhak Singh and the other members of the village. The history of the *Gurudwara* is as follows; Chaudhary Abul Kher was a well-known man in the Jhabal village. He had two sons named Malo and Haru. Malo Shah was born to Mai Bhago. Baba Langah was the Sikh of Guru Arjan Dev while Malo Shah was also a devotee of the Gurughar. He had a disease which was cured by Guru.³²

Gurudwara Mai Bhago is one of the historical *Gurudwaras* of the Sikh community. It holds great relevance in the history of this city. During the occasion of Maghi, large number of people pay visit to this *Gurudwara* and bathe in the *sarovar*. At this place Mai Bhago rebuked the Sikhs that had parted from the Guru from the battle field. She rallied them to fight alongside their Guru. After the battle Mai Bhago went to Hazur Sahib along with Guru Gobind Singh. She died in the village of Bidhar about 10km from Nanak Jira. In her memory the *Gurudwara* Mai Bhago has been created at this place.³³

Although there is no historical place in relation to Mata Fattoo, there is a *Gurudwara* which was built in the memory of her daughter, Bibi Pardhan Kaur.

The *Gurudwara* Bibi Pardhan Kaur is about 280 years old. The design of the building and the *sarovar* of this *Gurudwara* are in accordance to the design of the buildings of that time.

The *sarovar* was filled with soil, so when this *sarovar* was clean and dug out it was found that it was made of bricks. These bricks are about 6 inches in length while they were 2 to 3 inches wide. The renovation work of this *sarovar* and the *Gurudwara* is under process. The historically old *sarovar* is being plastered. Other than this, twelve stairs have been constructed in the *sarovar*.

A separate room has been made through a partition for the women. The *sarovar* is surrounded by a wall on three sides. In addition, there is also a *langar* hall in this *Gurudwara* where both the Sikhs and non-Sikhs can gather

³² *Punjabi Duniyaa*, Language Department, Patiala, March-October 2004.

³³ Ajit Akhbar, *DharmTeVirsa*, Magi TeVishes, Somvar, 14 January, 2019.

together without any discrimination of gender, color, class and caste to eat food which is known by the name *langar* in the Sikh religion.

The *langar* hall is also present in this *Gurudwara* so as to provide the *sangat* with *langar*. This *langar* hall is 120-foot-long and 70 foot wide. Four rooms have been constructed across this *langar* hall.

The Angita Sahib is in the interior of the main gate. A neem tree is present along this place. Bibi Pardhan Kaur was cremated here. This place is surrounded by bricks on all four sides. These bricks are about 13 inch long and 9 inches wide. This *Gurudwara* Sahib comprises of 70 Acres of land. The revenue from this land is used for the administration of this *Gurudwara*. There are three gates on the inside of the *Gurudwara*. Other than this, there are eight windows and ventilators so as to allow air to cross throughout.

Nowdays the work of the administration and management of the *Gurudwara* is under the control of the *Sharomani Gurdwara Parabandhak Committee*. This *Gurudwara* is attached to the Baba Ganda Singh *Gurudwara*. The occasion of *puranmashi* is celebrated in this *Gurudwara*. Other than this, the programs of *katha* and *kirtan* takes place every day. A large number of trees have been planted in the area surrounding this *Gurudwara*.³⁴

A *haveli* related to Rani Sada Kaur was located in Amritsar. Although, there isn't much information about it, it was destroyed in 1852 A.D. However, today the Ramgharia School, Moti Lal Nehru Library and the Partition Museum are located at this place. Before this, the *haveli* of Jai Singh was present at this place. After his death his son, Gurbakhash Singh lived in it. However, later this *haveli* was taken over by Rani Sada Kaur.

Sada Kaur helped Maharaja Ranjit Singh on various occasions. After reporting to the English, Maharaja Ranjit Singh kept Sada Kaur in this *haveli* where she died towards the end of 1932 A.D. She was cremated by Kanvar Nohnihal Singh. Her tomb was made near the *Gurudwara Atal Rai*.³⁵

Gurudwara Mushkiana Sahib (*Shaheed Singhnia*) is located in the Mulapur village of Punjab. A large number of *Gurudwaras* are located at this place and *Gurudwara* Mushkiana is one of them. The Mughals tortured the Sikh women and children at this place. The history of this place has been

³⁴ Interview, Harwinder Singh Khalsa, Sharomani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Commette, member.

³⁵ <http://Wikipedia.ranisada kaur.com>

written by Sant Visakha Singh and Sant Krishan pura Kahla in the book *Ilaka Tihadh*. During the reign of Mir Manu, a large number of crimes took place at this place.

The brave Sikh men and women sang the following chant at that time;

*Manu sodi datri,
Asi manu de soi
Jio-Jio manu vadd da,
Asi dune-sovaye hoye*

Mir Manu had set up a tent at the place where the Sikh women were being martyred. The children of these women were cut in to pieces and the women were forced to wear these pieces as garlands in their necks. Upon the excavation done in this place, the skeletons of the martyrs were recovered. These remains were kept as exhibitions for the sangat but later consigned in to the river. The occasion of *Dasvi* is celebrated at this place with great enthusiasm. Moreover, a library is also built at this place.

Many *Gurudwaras* have been made in the memory of various historically important Sikh women. These *Gurudwaras* have been made at either their places of birth or at the places where an important event took place. These *Gurudwaras* act as a source of information of the works done by these Sikh women for their community.

A Gurudwara is also a community center which not only offers the Sikhs with an opportunity to discuss on religious and social matters but also as a source of food and a shelter for the needy. They also act as a source of inspiration to the newer generations especially the women. Along with the Sikh Gurus and the other important Sikh men, many women have played an important role in shaping of the Sikh religion and community.

Their contribution cannot be ignored. Women derive inspiration from these Sikh women to act strong, brave and courageously. They are a source of encouragement for the women today to fight for their rights and to be an equal part of the society. The principle of the Sikh religion states that women have the same soul as that of men and they possess an equal right to cultivate their spirituality. Woman have the equal right to participate in all religious, cultural, social and secular activities such as leading religious congregations, taking part in the *Akhand Path* and performing *Kirtan* and working as a *Granthi*.

Sikh history has recorded the role of women, portraying them as equal to men in devotion, sacrifice, service, as well as bravery. Various examples of women's moral dignity, service and self-sacrifice can be found in the Sikh tradition. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev said that it is a woman who keeps the race going and that we should not consider woman cursed and condemned. The Sikh history records the name of several of these women such as Mata Gujri, Mai Bhago, Mata Sundari, Rani Sahib Kaur, Rani Sada Kaur and Maharani Jind Kaur. The Sikh Women have always been the backbone of the *Khalsa Panth*. The women in the Sikh religion have been of as much important for the community as the males have throughout the history of the community.³⁶

³⁶ Parlad Singh, *Narangvad, Ihtihasuk Guru Astana De Darshan Didar*, Dharam Parchar Seva, 1961, pp-34,35.

CONCLUSION

India is a socially diverse nation where people from different religions, languages and races live. This refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities that are present in the country. Women are an important part of the society. Nature has given an important role to women. Due to the differences between men and women, the society has been divided in to two parts for centuries. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. Women have played an important role in the society since the beginning. Women fulfil their duties as daughters, mothers and wives throughout her life. However, throughout various periods in the Indian society, women have been known as *Vesvas* or *Devis* depending on the conditions of the society at that time. Just as different people in the society have different attitudes and personalities, in the same way women are also different in various aspects.

In the ancient periods, people were known to live in the jungles. At that time humans were highly dependent on nature for their survival. The roles of men and women were defined and definite, so as to fulfil the responsibilities of the family and society at large. Women were an important part of the society. However, the conditions of women in the society has been different in different periods in Punjab i.e. during some period women were given their deserved respect while on other occasions, women were considered to be lower in position to their male counterparts. In the ancient times in India, women were considered to be the equivalent of shoes. Upon doing some research on the conditions and status of women in the society throughout different periods in the society of the nation, one can notice that during the *kabila* era, men and women were considered to be equal and there didn't seem to be any direct social evil directed to the women in the society. During the Indus civilization in India, women were considered to be as important as men in the functioning and development of the society. Both the genders of the society were equal. Both the men and the women had equal rights. There were no restrictions on the lifestyle, food and clothing of women. The women also participated in the discussions regarding the major decisions of the society. Therefore, it can be said that women had an equal say in the community. However, in the Mahendogaro and Harappan civilizations of this period, the status of women was greater than that of their counterparts. During this era, the name of the family was related to the name

woman in the family. During the Vedic period many invaders attacked on India. The status of women in the society fluctuated during this period of attacks in the nation. During this period the conditions of the society were favorable for the women i.e. the birth of the girl child was not considered unholy. Women had a say in their marriage and were given the authority to marry whoever they chose. During this era, the Kings and Queens sat on the thrones together. The women in this period were proficient in arts. Nevertheless, during this period, the widows present in the society were not allowed to remarry.

There is no mention of the *pardha* custom to be prevalent in the society during the later Vedic period. Female foeticide was for the first time mentioned in the Brahmin *Granthas*. Men were allowed to marry on multiple occasions while women were not allowed to marry more than once.

The status of women was favourable during the Mourya period. Women were independent during this era. They were employed as servants to the Kings. Female artists, actors and dramatists were promoted during this period. Multiple marriages for women were allowed in this community. However, the *sati pratha* was prevalent in the society. Women did not have any right in the property of their fathers. However, after the death of one's husband, the rights and ownership of the property and belongings went in the hands of the wife. Women were completely dependent on their husbands financially. In this society, men were allowed to have multiple marriages and women were considered to be as their belongings. The women of the farmer in the villages helped their husbands in the fields after finishing their household chores. Women indulged in singing, dancing and drama. The custom of *sawavmber* i.e. the tradition where a woman chooses her husband also prevailed in the community during this period.

The medieval period of the Indian community witnessed the rise of different cultures. These included the Rajputs, Sultans, Mughals and the Sikhs. There were many evils in the society during the reign of the Rajputs. However, after this period the status of women was favourable in the Indian society. The *pardha partha* was not present in the society. There was no restriction on the education of the children. Some women also became eminent scholars and were capable in indulging in debates with other scholars. The women of this period also had knowledge of the Sanskrit language. The women of the upper classes were highly skilled in various arts. They had the knowledge of horse

riding, swordsmanship and use of other weapons. The *Johar pratha* existed in the Rajput society during this period. Just as the *sati pratha* was a symbol of the affection showed by the women towards their husbands in the medieval period, *Johar pratha* was one such custom of the Rajput society. According to this custom, women gave up their lives in the fire burning the bodies of their dead husbands. The *sati pratha* (custom) was common in this society. Women were also considered the sources of entertainment. Both the Rajput men and women wore ornament. Some of the social evils existed in the society against women during this period including- child marriage of girls, female foeticide and during this period the status of widows in the society was very pathetic as they were considered to be wretched and ill-fated.

Many battles took place in the Sultanate era. Many women and children were killed in these battles. The ones who survived were imprisoned and sold as slaves. The Turkish Sultans had an interest for Hindu women. They forced these women to accept Islam. The Hindus began marrying their daughters at an early age in the fear of the Turks as they would forcefully take these girls along with them if they weren't married.

The Sultans in Delhi had a separate place for the women in their castles which were known as *Haram*. Only women lived in this place. During this period, *Jajiya* which was a tax was not levied upon the women, children, poor and the mentally disabled people. Women were completely dependent on men throughout their lives. In this society, it was very easy for Muslim men to divorce their wives while this was not true for the Muslim women. They had limited rights in the society during this period.

During the era of the Mughals, the *pardha pratha*, *Baal vivah* (child marriages) and the *sati pratha* were common in the society. Women were the equivalent of slaves in this community. The women slaves were divided in to two parts. One was given the responsibility to take care of the household works while the others lived with the women of the *janankhana*. However, during this period, some women also exercised political power. Other than this, a lot of women converted their religions during this period i.e. some women converted from Hinduism to Islam while others converted from Islam to Hinduism. Some women also indulged in trade for example the Mughal Maharanis also sent their ships for trading purposes. However, with time, the

conditions of women in the Hindu community deteriorated with time. The distance of women with the political, religious and social aspects of the society kept on increasing with time. There were some people who wed their young girls to older men in the greed of money.

During this period, a new religion came up in the society with the objective to uplift the status of women in the society. This religion was known as the Sikh religion. The main aim of this new community was to form a new society which was free of superstitions, social evils, hypocrisy etc. This newly formed community ended the injustice towards the women and elevated the status of women. Women were treated equal to the men in the society. The Gurus of the Sikh religion took up various activities and also established new customs for this purpose. It was due to these efforts by the Sikh Gurus that the status of the women in this community improved. During this period, the status of women had deteriorated to such an extent in the society that they were bought and sold just as animals. In such a society, Guru Nanak Dev emphasised for and promoted the equality and respect for women in the society. According to Guru Nanak Dev, women are the pillars of the society and therefore they are important for the development and progress of the society. Guru Nanak Dev emphasised on the importance of respecting women by saying that she not only gives birth to common people but also to Kings, Gurus, *Peers* and other important people. He first of all laid emphasis on the respect of women, promoted the equality of women in the society. Guru Nanak Dev gave women the same status the men had in the *sangat*. Guru Nanak Dev started the *langar pratha* to promote the equality of women. According to this custom, women sat alongside men in *pangats* to eat food in the *Gurdwaras* and *Dharamshalas*. The main aim of this customs was to eliminate the discrimination that prevailed in the society on the grounds of gender, wealth, castes, religion etc. It played an important part not only in giving women the respect they deserved in the society but also in the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. The status of women was raised in *langar* both the genders sat together to eat food. This led to the development of respect for women in the society.

Guru Nanak Dev considered all the different classes and religions in the society to be equal. The Sikh Gurus gave women opportunities to participate in

social, religious and political activities. Guru Nanak Dev also supported the remarriage of widows. According to the third guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das *sati* meant living the rest of her life in the memory of her husband rather than dying with him. In this way, the Gurus saved the women from giving up their lives by performing *sati*. Other than this, the Gurus of Sikh religion, gave equal status to women in religious matters. The *sati pratha* was ended in the Sikh religion by Guru Ram Das. Therefore, during this period women lived their lives as they wished. Moreover, Guru Hargobind Sahib stated that women were the saviours of the whole mankind. Guru Gobind Singh then established the *Khalsa Panth*. With this, Guru Gobind Singh baptised the women i.e. by giving them *amrit* and by doing so he made them equal to men in the society. Women were also given an important position in the *ardas* of Sikh religion. Therefore, it can be said that various efforts and activities were undertaken by the leaders of the Sikh religion to raise the level of women in the society. In Sikh religion, women have been denoted as brave, warriors and courageous. Hence, the Sikhs have had faith in the courage and power of women. Moreover, women hold an important status in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is through women that a society is formed. Therefore, a community is not complete without women.

There have been many great women throughout the history of the Sikh religion. They not only fought for women but for the Sikh society as a whole. Their contributions to the Sikh religion can never be forgotten. They have been a source of inspiration for many other women. Some of these women fought alongside the men in battlefield while some other played a part by spreading and preaching about Sikhism in various areas. These women raised the morale of the women in the society at that time. One such woman was Bebe Nanki. She was the first person to understand the Godly presence in Guru Nanak Dev. She supported him throughout her life. She was the first woman to play a part in the establishment of the Sikh religion. In the same way, Mata Kheevi played an important role in the Sikh society at that time. Mata Kheevi played a vital role in spread of the *langar pratha*. She prepared the food herself and served it to the *sangat*. In this way, both men and women indulged in preparing *langar*. As both the men and women worked together, the status of women in the society improved. Mata Kheevi also ended the *pardha pratha* prevalent in the

society at that time. Before this, women were supposed to cover their faces while preparing food. The *langar pratha* started by Guru Nanak Dev was further promoted and enhanced by Mata Kheevi. Another such important woman of the Sikh religion was Bibi Amro. Being a member of the *Gurughar*, she had a lot of faith in the Sikh religion and the *Gurbani*. It was due to her that Guru Amar Das came to know of the *Gurbani*. Other than this, she played an important part in the preaching of the *Gurbani* and Sikhism. Bibi Bhani is the symbol of service in the Sikh religion. She serves an example to the people today for serving their parents. It was due to this service of hers, that she was awarded with the *Gurugaddi* being in her family. By serving her father Guru Angad Dev, she proved that there is no difference between men and women. Bibi Viro connected people of the society to the Sikh religion and *Gurbani*. It is evident from the history of Mata Ganga that one is always rewarded for one's service i.e. service done by one never goes wasted. She taught her son about the importance of both the religious and political awareness in the society. Her contributions to the Sikh religion have been immense therefore she is one of the great women in the Sikh religion throughout its history. Mata Gujri was one of the bravest and selfless women of the Sikh religion throughout the history of the community. She gave up her whole family for the sake of the religion. It is due to this reason that she is known as *kurbania di mata*. In the end, she also sacrificed her life. Mata Sundri looked after the activities undertaken by Guru Gobind Singh. She also performed *kirtan*. She also sacrificed her sons for the sake of the Sikh community. She was a very strong woman and considered the martyrdom of her sons the will of God.

From here we come to know the power of a woman and the understanding level of her. She was rewarded as the mother of Khalsa. This was such a great honour. It was not a single child but the whole Khalsa of lakhs of brave Sikhs who became the children of Mata. From here we can conclude that one can become great by his good deeds and actions. If heart of a person is pure and he has positive approach towards the society and is of helping nature, it will definitely end up in making the person great. It is the good works of a person that makes him great. Mai Bhago started fighting in the battlefield. She justified the fact that the woman is no less than a man. A woman is equal to man and can fight the enemy with her courage and bravery.

It was Mai Bhago who motivated the Sikh ladies to come in the battlefield to fight the enemy. When the husband of Mata Fatto, Baba Ala Singh was fighting Ahmed Shah Abdali, he was caught because he was helping Marhattya. Mata Fatto was a kind hearted woman. She paid the penalty to the enemy and rescued her husband.

Bibi Pardhan Kaur brought people near to God by motivating them to read Gurbani. She was a brave and fearless lady who married for the sake of the children of her husband. Rajinder Kaur took the responsibility of her husband and fulfilled all the deeds assigned to her in a very professional way. From here, we can conclude that it is not mere men who can take up the responsibilities but women too. Women are no less than men in any field, may it be battlefield too. Women can rise to any occasion and lead the masses whenever and wherever required.

Rani Sahib Kaur took the kingship of Patiala when it was most required. Her brother made the kingship of Patiala a weaker one. He was not a good ruler and people did not feel safe under him. It was Rani Sahib Kaur who took the responsibility of Patiala and lead with full courage. Rani Sahib Kaur herself participated in the war and supported the king of Jind. When George Thomas attacked the army with big tanks, all men resisted in going to front. It was Rani Sahib Kaur who once again led with example and faced the tanks with bravery. She fought with full courage. From here we can consider the fact that women are as brave as men. They don't lag behind men in any case and for the matter of fact, they outplay men in various fields.

Mai Desan too fought the enemy with full courage. She reconquered the areas taken away from her by the enemy. She too was a great example of courage. She reconstructed one of the forts. Queen Raj Kaur took over the responsibility of leading the kingdom after the death of her husband. Since her children were small in age, she herself took the responsibility of leading the kingdom with example.

Sada Kaur was a brave lady. She fought with courage in the battle fields and set an example for the generations to come. She played a vital role in establishing the Sikh rule in Punjab. Hence, we can say that the contribution of the ladies in the past has been of great importance and there has not been a single moment where ladies have lagged behind men. It is very important for

the generations to come to understand the value of the sacrifices of these women. Hence, Gurudwaras are made where these women have led their lives and also memorials have been made where they breathed their last. It is very important for the upcoming generations to understand the value of the women in the past. The regular efforts in promoting the stories of the sacrifices made by these great women will help in creating love and affection for the country and the religion.

Gurudwara is a very sacred and holy place. It can be considered to be a place that acts as a mediator between a human and God. It is this place where a person seems to feel the God. Here only the sayings of Gurus are preached. Earlier, Gurudwaras were called *Dharamshalas*. Then they were renamed as Gurudwara which means home of the Guru. From there on, *Dharamshalas* were renamed as Gurudwaras. The first person to take over the maintenance work of Gurudwaras was Baba Buddha Sahib.

Gurudwara is a religious place of worship of Sikhs. *Nishan Sahib* in Gurudwaras is a mark of Sikhism. During the later days, these religious places even took the shape of political places. Gurudwara Bebe Nanaki is situated in Sultanpur. It is that place where Guru Nanak Dev used to come to visit his sister, Bebe Nanki and stayed there. There is also a well of Bebe Nanki. When Bebe Nanki got married and was on her way to her in laws, a well was dug in the way so that the thirsty companions may drink water. Various events are celebrated here in this Gurudwara and people are made aware about the Sikh history.

Gurudwara of Mata Kheevi is in Khadoor Sahib. It is this place where Mata Kheevi used to prepare langar for the visitors. It was due to *langar* and *Gurbani* that this place became a site of attraction. The Gurudwara has been constructed to mark the marriage of Guru Angad Dev and Mata Kheevi. Here, the event of full moon is celebrated. A well has been made in Khadoor Sahib in the name of Bibi Amro. Due to scarcity of water, this well was constructed.

Gurudwara Angeetha Sahib is constructed in Basarke. It was this place where Bibi Amro recited the sayings of Guru Angad Dev to Guru Amardass. This marks the historical importance of this place.

Another Gurudwara has been constructed in the name of Bibi Veero. It was this mighty place where Bibi Veero was married to Bhai Sadhu Rami.

Gurudwara Baba Banga is situated at Baba Bakala. It is this place where last rituals of Mata Ganga took place. Hence, this place marks a great importance in the history of Sikhism.

There is a well at Khadoor Sahib in the name of Bibi Bhani. This is a very old and historical well. The history says that the water of this well was salty. Guru Angad Dev visited this place and made the water of the well drinkable. Gurudwara Durabha Sahib is situated in Goindwal Sahib. It was the residence place of Guru Amar Das. The place where Bibi Bhani served the ill is situated in Tarantaran Sahib. Gurudwara Bala Sahib is situated in Delhi. There are various other historical Gurudwaras in Delhi. This Gurudwara is constructed in the names of Mata Sunder Kaur and Mata Sahib Kaur. It was this place only where Mata Sahib Kaur wrote *Hukamnamas* for the Sikhs. Gurudwara Mata Gujri is one of the historical Gurudwaras of Fatehgarh Sahib. This place is also known as *Thandda Burj*. It was this place where Mata Gujri got martyred.

Gurudwara Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur are situated in Talwandi Sabo. Mata was given the honour of being mother of Khalsa from here only. Here only Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur came to know about the martyrdom of Sahibzadas.

Gurudwara Shaheed Ganj is a historical place in Sikhism. Many Sikh women were captured here and were martyred later on. Gurudwara Mata Sundri is situated in Mohali. When Mata Sunder Kaur was moving towards Delhi, she stopped at this place on her way. Gurudwara Mata Jeet Kaur is situated at this place. She was cremated here. Sodhi family all the Sikhs of Anandpur Sahib were martyred here only.

Gurudwara Anand Karaj Sahib marks another historical importance in Sikhism. It was this mighty holy place where Mata Jeeto and Guru Gobind Singh got married. Gurudwara Mai Bhago is situated at Jibal. It was this historical place where Mai Bhago reunited the Sikhs who had gone against the Guru. Gurudwara Bibi Pardhan Kaur is situated in Barnala district of Punjab. Bibi Pardhan Kaur was cremated here only and her memorial is set up there itself. The house related to Rani Sada Kaur is situated in Amritsar. Earlier this used to be the house of Jai Singh Kanahaiya. It was inherited by his sons and

later on by Rani Sada Kaur. Ranjit Singh had kept Sada Kaur in this haveli when he questioned the Britishers.

Gurudwara Mushkiana Sahib is situated in Mujhapur village. It marks the cruelty of Mughal forces over Sikh women and children. Mughals firstly showed their cruelty over Sikh women and children and later on martyred them. Along with these Gurudwaras, there are various other Gurudwaras that have been constructed to mark the historical importance of Sikhism. We get to know about the situations of that time period by these Gurudwaras.

Hence, from the above-mentioned events, we can say that the condition of women changed from time to time in history. Sometimes women enjoyed the freedom and luxuries while in another era of mankind, they faced hardships. During the middle age, the condition of women started improving. During the modern era, the condition of woman improved even further. They started participating in all fields like political, religious, economic and social. There have been many great Sikh women such as Bebe Nanki, Bibi Keevii, Mata Sundri, Mata Sahiba, Mai Bhago, Bibi Pardhan Kaur, Sada Kaur etc. Some of these great women influenced the social and religious fields while others marked their great presence in the battlefields.

In the memory of these great women, various Gurudwaras, religious memorials, marks etc have been built. These places make us aware about the situations and conditions of that era. In today's world, woman enjoys the liberty of freedom. It is due to the contribution of those great women of ancient and middle age era who sacrificed their lives for the generations of women to come in next decades and centuries.

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APPENDIX



Gurdwara Bebe Nanki, Sitanpur



Nagarkot Marriage, Guru Angand and Mata Khivi Gurudwara



Langar Hall Mata Khivi Ji





Gurdwara Shri Chubara Sahib Ji



Gurdwara Mata Sundri ji

**CONTRIBUTION OF SIKH WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND
IN SIKH HISTORY**

A

DISSERTATION

*Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirement of
Award of degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HISTORY

BY

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2021

CONCLUSION

India is a socially diverse nation where people from different religions, languages and races live. This refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities that are present in the country. Women are an important part of the society. Nature has given an important role to women. Due to the differences between men and women, the society has been divided in to two parts for centuries. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. Women have played an important role in the society since the beginning. Women fulfil their duties as daughters, mothers and wives throughout her life. However, throughout various periods in the Indian society, women have been known as *Vesvas* or *Devis* depending on the conditions of the society at that time. Just as different people in the society have different attitudes and personalities, in the same way women are also different in various aspects.

In the ancient periods, people were known to live in the jungles. At that time humans were highly dependent on nature for their survival. The roles of men and women were defined and definite, so as to fulfil the responsibilities of the family and society at large. Women were an important part of the society. However, the conditions of women in the society has been different in different periods in Punjab i.e. during some period women were given their deserved respect while on other occasions, women were considered to be lower in position to their male counterparts. In the ancient times in India, women were considered to be the equivalent of shoes. Upon doing some research on the conditions and status of women in the society throughout different periods in the society of the nation, one can notice that during the *kabila* era, men and women were considered to be equal and there didn't seem to be any direct social evil directed to the women in the society. During the Indus civilization in India, women were considered to be as important as men in the functioning and development of the society. Both the genders of the society were equal. Both the men and the women had equal rights. There were no restrictions on the lifestyle, food and clothing of women. The women also participated in the discussions regarding the major decisions of the society. Therefore, it can be said that women had an equal say in the community. However, in the Mahendogaro and Harappan civilizations of this period, the status of women was greater than that of their counterparts. During this era, the name of the family was related to the name woman in the family. During the Vedic period many invaders attacked on India. The status of women in the society fluctuated during this period of attacks in the nation.

During this period the conditions of the society were favorable for the women i.e. the birth of the girl child was not considered unholy. Women had a say in their marriage and were given the authority to marry whoever they chose. During this era, the Kings and Queens sat on the thrones together. The women in this period were proficient in arts. Nevertheless, during this period, the widows present in the society were not allowed to remarry.

There is no mention of the *pardha* custom to be prevalent in the society during the later Vedic period. Female foeticide was for the first time mentioned in the Brahmin *Granthas*. Men were allowed to marry on multiple occasions while women were not allowed to marry more than once.

The status of women was favourable during the Mourya period. Women were independent during this era. They were employed as servants to the Kings. Female artists, actors and dramatists were promoted during this period. Multiple marriages for women were allowed in this community. However, the *sati pratha* was prevalent in the society. Women did not have any right in the property of their fathers. However, after the death of one's husband, the rights and ownership of the property and belongings went in the hands of the wife. Women were completely dependent on their husbands financially. In this society, men were allowed to have multiple marriages and women were considered to be as their belongings. The women of the farmer in the villages helped their husbands in the fields after finishing their household chores. Women indulged in singing, dancing and drama. The custom of *sawavmber* i.e. the tradition where a woman chooses her husband also prevailed in the community during this period.

The medieval period of the Indian community witnessed the rise of different cultures. These included the Rajputs, Sultans, Mughals and the Sikhs. There were many evils in the society during the reign of the Rajputs. However, after this period the status of women was favourable in the Indian society. The *pardha partha* was not present in the society. There was no restriction on the education of the children. Some women also became eminent scholars and were capable in indulging in debates with other scholars. The women of this period also had knowledge of the Sanskrit language. The women of the upper classes were highly skilled in various arts. They had the knowledge of horse riding, swordsmanship and use of other weapons. The *Johar pratha* existed in the Rajput society during this period. Just as the *sati pratha* was a symbol of the affection showed by the women towards their husbands in the medieval period, *Johar pratha* was one such custom of the Rajput society. According to this custom, women gave up their lives in the fire burning the bodies of their

dead husbands. The *sati pratha* (custom) was common in this society. Women were also considered the sources of entertainment. Both the Rajput men and women wore ornament. Some of the social evils existed in the society against women during this period including- child marriage of girls, female foeticide and during this period the status of widows in the society was very pathetic as they were considered to be wretched and ill-fated.

Many battles took place in the Sultanate era. Many women and children were killed in these battles. The ones who survived were imprisoned and sold as slaves. The Turkish Sultans had an interest for Hindu women. They forced these women to accept Islam. The Hindus began marrying their daughters at an early age in the fear of the Turks as they would forcefully take these girls along with them if they weren't married.

The Sultans in Delhi had a separate place for the women in their castles which were known as *Haram*. Only women lived in this place. During this period, *Jajiya* which was a tax was not levied upon the women, children, poor and the mentally disabled people. Women were completely dependent on men throughout their lives. In this society, it was very easy for Muslim men to divorce their wives while this was not true for the Muslim women. They had limited rights in the society during this period.

During the era of the Mughals, the *pardha pratha*, *Baal vivah* (child marriages) and the *sati pratha* were common in the society. Women were the equivalent of slaves in this community. The women slaves were divided in to two parts. One was given the responsibility to take care of the household works while the others lived with the women of the *janankhana*. However, during this period, some women also exercised political power. Other than this, a lot of women converted their religions during this period i.e. some women converted from Hinduism to Islam while others converted from Islam to Hinduism. Some women also indulged in trade for example the Mughal Maharanis also sent their ships for trading purposes. However, with time, the conditions of women in the Hindu community deteriorated with time. The distance of women with the political, religious and social aspects of the society kept on increasing with time. There were some people who wed their young girls to older men in the greed of money.

During this period, a new religion came up in the society with the objective to uplift the status of women in the society. This religion was known as the Sikh religion. The main aim of this new community was to form a new society which was free of superstitions, social evils, hypocrisy etc. This newly

formed community ended the injustice towards the women and elevated the status of women. Women were treated equal to the men in the society. The Gurus of the Sikh religion took up various activities and also established new customs for this purpose. It was due to these efforts by the Sikh Gurus that the status of the women in this community improved. During this period, the status of women had deteriorated to such an extent in the society that they were bought and sold just as animals. In such a society, Guru Nanak Dev emphasised for and promoted the equality and respect for women in the society. According to Guru Nanak Dev, women are the pillars of the society and therefore they are important for the development and progress of the society. Guru Nanak Dev emphasised on the importance of respecting women by saying that she not only gives birth to common people but also to Kings, Gurus, *Peers* and other important people. He first of all laid emphasis on the respect of women, promoted the equality of women in the society. Guru Nanak Dev gave women the same status the men had in the *sangat*. Guru Nanak Dev started the *langar pratha* to promote the equality of women. According to this custom, women sat alongside men in *pangats* to eat food in the *Gurdwaras* and *Dharamshalas*. The main aim of this customs was to eliminate the discrimination that prevailed in the society on the grounds of gender, wealth, castes, religion etc. It played an important part not only in giving women the respect they deserved in the society but also in the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. The status of women was raised in *langar* both the genders sat together to eat food. This led to the development of respect for women in the society.

Guru Nanak Dev considered all the different classes and religions in the society to be equal. The Sikh Gurus gave women opportunities to participate in social, religious and political activities. Guru Nanak Dev also supported the remarriage of widows. According to the third guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das *sati* meant living the rest of her life in the memory of her husband rather than dying with him. In this way, the Gurus saved the women from giving up their lives by performing *sati*. Other than this, the Gurus of Sikh religion, gave equal status to women in religious matters. The *sati pratha* was ended in the Sikh religion by Guru Ram Das. Therefore, during this period women lived their lives as they wished. Moreover, Guru Hargobind Sahib stated that women were the saviours of the whole mankind. Guru Gobind Singh then established the *Khalsa Panth*. With this, Guru Gobind Singh baptised the women i.e. by giving them *amrit* and by doing so he made them equal to men in the society.

Women were also given an important position in the *ardas* of Sikh religion. Therefore, it can be said that various efforts and activities were undertaken by the leaders of the Sikh religion to raise the level of women in the society. In Sikh religion, women have been denoted as brave, warriors and courageous. Hence, the Sikhs have had faith in the courage and power of women. Moreover, women hold an important status in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is through women that a society is formed. Therefore, a community is not complete without women.

There have been many great women throughout the history of the Sikh religion. They not only fought for women but for the Sikh society as a whole. Their contributions to the Sikh religion can never be forgotten. They have been a source of inspiration for many other women. Some of these women fought alongside the men in battlefield while some other played a part by spreading and preaching about Sikhism in various areas. These women raised the morale of the women in the society at that time. One such woman was Bebe Nanki. She was the first person to understand the Godly presence in Guru Nanak Dev. She supported him throughout her life. She was the first woman to play a part in the establishment of the Sikh religion. In the same way, Mata Kheevi played an important role in the Sikh society at that time. Mata Kheevi played a vital role in spread of the *langar pratha*. She prepared the food herself and served it to the *sangat*. In this way, both men and women indulged in preparing *langar*. As both the men and women worked together, the status of women in the society improved. Mata Kheevi also ended the *pardha pratha* prevalent in the society at that time. Before this, women were supposed to cover their faces while preparing food. The *langar pratha* started by Guru Nanak Dev was further promoted and enhanced by Mata Kheevi. Another such important woman of the Sikh religion was Bibi Amro. Being a member of the *Gurughar*, she had a lot of faith in the Sikh religion and the *Gurbani*. It was due to her that Guru Amar Das came to know of the *Gurbani*. Other than this, she played an important part in the preaching of the *Gurbani* and Sikhism. Bibi Bhani is the symbol of service in the Sikh religion. She serves an example to the people today for serving their parents. It was due to this service of hers, that she was awarded with the *Gurugaddi* being in her family. By serving her father Guru Angad Dev, she proved that there is no difference between men and women. Bibi Viro connected people of the society to the Sikh religion and *Gurbani*. It is evident from the history of Mata Ganga that one is always rewarded for one's service i.e. service done by one never goes wasted. She taught her son

about the importance of both the religious and political awareness in the society. Her contributions to the Sikh religion have been immense therefore she is one of the great women in the Sikh religion throughout its history. Mata Gujri was one of the bravest and selfless women of the Sikh religion throughout the history of the community. She gave up her whole family for the sake of the religion. It is due to this reason that she is known as *kurbania di mata*. In the end, she also sacrificed her life. Mata Sundri looked after the activities undertaken by Guru Gobind Singh. She also performed *kirtan*. She also sacrificed her sons for the sake of the Sikh community. She was a very strong woman and considered the martyrdom of her sons the will of God.

From here we come to know the power of a woman and the understanding level of her. She was rewarded as the mother of Khalsa. This was such a great honour. It was not a single child but the whole Khalsa of lakhs of brave Sikhs who became the children of Mata. From here we can conclude that one can become great by his good deeds and actions. If heart of a person is pure and he has positive approach towards the society and is of helping nature, it will definitely end up in making the person great. It is the good works of a person that makes him great. Mai Bhago started fighting in the battlefield. She justified the fact that the woman is no less than a man. A woman is equal to man and can fight the enemy with her courage and bravery. It was Mai Bhago who motivated the Sikh ladies to come in the battlefield to fight the enemy. When the husband of Mata Fatto, Baba Ala Singh was fighting Ahmed Shah Abdali, he was caught because he was helping Marhattya. Mata Fatto was a kind hearted woman. She paid the penalty to the enemy and rescued her husband.

Bibi Pardhan Kaur brought people near to God by motivating them to read Gurbani. She was a brave and fearless lady who married for the sake of the children of her husband. Rajinder Kaur took the responsibility of her husband and fulfilled all the deeds assigned to her in a very professional way. From here, we can conclude that it is not mere men who can take up the responsibilities but women too. Women are no less than men in any field, may it be battlefield too. Women can rise to any occasion and lead the masses whenever and wherever required.

Rani Sahib Kaur took the kingship of Patiala when it was most required. Her brother made the kingship of Patiala a weaker one. He was not a good ruler and people did not feel safe under him. It was Rani Sahib Kaur who took the responsibility of Patiala and lead with full courage. Rani Sahib Kaur

herself participated in the war and supported the king of Jind. When George Thomas attacked the army with big tanks, all men resisted in going to front. It was Rani Sahib Kaur who once again led with example and faced the tanks with bravery. She fought with full courage. From here we can consider the fact that women are as brave as men. They don't lag behind men in any case and for the matter of fact, they outplay men in various fields.

Mai Desan too fought the enemy with full courage. She reconquered the areas taken away from her by the enemy. She too was a great example of courage. She reconstructed one of the forts. Queen Raj Kaur took over the responsibility of leading the kingdom after the death of her husband. Since her children were small in age, she herself took the responsibility of leading the kingdom with example.

Sada Kaur was a brave lady. She fought with courage in the battle fields and set an example for the generations to come. She played a vital role in establishing the Sikh rule in Punjab. Hence, we can say that the contribution of the ladies in the past has been of great importance and there has not been a single moment where ladies have lagged behind men. It is very important for the generations to come to understand the value of the sacrifices of these women. Hence, Gurudwaras are made where these women have led their lives and also memorials have been made where they breathed their last. It is very important for the upcoming generations to understand the value of the women in the past. The regular efforts in promoting the stories of the sacrifices made by these great women will help in creating love and affection for the country and the religion.

Gurudwara is a very sacred and holy place. It can be considered to be a place that acts as a mediator between a human and God. It is this place where a person seems to feel the God. Here only the sayings of Gurus are preached. Earlier, Gurudwaras were called *Dharamshalas*. Then they were renamed as Gurudwara which means home of the Guru. From there on, *Dharamshalas* were renamed as Gurudwaras. The first person to take over the maintenance work of Gurudwaras was Baba Budda Sahib.

Gurudwara is a religious place of worship of Sikhs. *Nishan Sahib* in Gurudwaras is a mark of Sikhism. During the later days, these religious places even took the shape of political places. Gurudwara Bebe Nanaki is situated in Sultanpur. It is that place where Guru Nanak Dev used to come to visit his sister, Bebe Nanki and stayed there. There is also a well of Bebe Nanki. When Bebe Nanki got married and was on her way to her in laws, a well was dug in

the way so that the thirsty companions may drink water. Various events are celebrated here in this Gurudwara and people are made aware about the Sikh history.

Gurudwara of Mata Kheevi is in Khadoor Sahib. It is this place where Mata Kheevi used to prepare langar for the visitors. It was due to *langar* and *Gurbani* that this place became a site of attraction. The Gurudwara has been constructed to mark the marriage of Guru Angad Dev and Mata Kheevi. Here, the event of full moon is celebrated. A well has been made in Khadoor Sahib in the name of Bibi Amro. Due to scarcity of water, this well was constructed.

Gurudwara Angeetha Sahib is constructed in Basarke. It was this place where Bibi Amro recited the sayings of Guru Angad Dev to Guru Amardass. This marks the historical importance of this place.

Another Gurudwara has been constructed in the name of Bibi Veero. It was this mighty place where Bibi Veero was married to Bhai Sadhu Rami. Gurudwara Baba Banga is situated at Baba Bakala. It is this place where last rituals of Mata Ganga took place. Hence, this place marks a great importance in the history of Sikhism.

There is a well at Khadoor Sahib in the name of Bibi Bhani. This is a very old and historical well. The history says that the water of this well was salty. Guru Angad Dev visited this place and made the water of the well drinkable. Gurudwara Durabha Sahib is situated in Goindwal Sahib. It was the residence place of Guru Amar Das. The place where Bibi Bhani served the ill is situated in Tarantaran Sahib. Gurudwara Bala Sahib is situated in Delhi. There are various other historical Gurudwaras in Delhi. This Gurudwara is constructed in the names of Mata Sunder Kaur and Mata Sahib Kaur. It was this place only where Mata Sahib Kaur wrote *Hukamnamas* for the Sikhs. Gurudwara Mata Gujri is one of the historical Gurudwaras of Fatehgarh Sahib. This place is also known as *Thandda Burj*. It was this place where Mata Gujri got martyred.

Gurudwara Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur are situated in Talwandi Sabo. Mata was given the honour of being mother of Khalsa from here only. Here only Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur came to know about the martyrdom of Sahibzadas.

Gurudwara Shaheed Ganj is a historical place in Sikhism. Many Sikh women were captured here and were martyred later on. Gurudwara Mata Sundri is situated in Mohali. When Mata Sunder Kaur was moving towards Delhi, she stopped at this place on her way. Gurudwara Mata Jeet Kaur is

situated at this place. She was cremated here. Sodhi family all the Sikhs of Anandpur Sahib were martyred here only.

Gurudwara Anand Karaj Sahib marks another historical importance in Sikhism. It was this mighty holy place where Mata Jeeto and Guru Gobind Singh got married. Gurudwara Mai Bhago is situated at Jibal. It was this historical place where Mai Bhago reunited the Sikhs who had gone against the Guru. Gurudwara Bibi Pardhan Kaur is situated in Barnala district of Punjab. Bibi Pardhan Kaur was cremated here only and her memorial is set up there itself. The house related to Rani Sada Kaur is situated in Amritsar. Earlier this used to be the house of Jai Singh Kanahaiya. It was inherited by his sons and later on by Rani Sada Kaur. Ranjit Singh had kept Sada Kaur in this haveli when he questioned the Britishers.

Gurudwara Mushkiana Sahib is situated in Mujhapur village. It marks the cruelty of Mughal forces over Sikh women and children. Mughals firstly showed their cruelty over Sikh women and children and later on martyred them. Along with these Gurudwaras, there are various other Gurudwaras that have been constructed to mark the historical importance of Sikhism. We get to know about the situations of that time period by these Gurudwaras.

Hence, from the above-mentioned events, we can say that the condition of women changed from time to time in history. Sometimes women enjoyed the freedom and luxuries while in another era of mankind, they faced hardships. During the middle age, the condition of women started improving. During the modern era, the condition of woman improved even further. They started participating in all fields like political, religious, economic and social. There have been many great Sikh women such as Bebe Nanki, Bibi Keevii, Mata Sundri, Mata Sahiba, Mai Bhago, Bibi Pardhan Kaur, Sada Kaur etc. Some of these great women influenced the social and religious fields while others marked their great presence in the battlefields.

In the memory of these great women, various Gurudwaras, religious memorials, marks etc have been built. These places make us aware about the situations and conditions of that era. In today's world, woman enjoys the liberty of freedom. It is due to the contribution of those great women of ancient and middle age era who sacrificed their lives for the generations of women to come in next decades and centuries.



GURU KASHI UNIVERSITY

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work which is being presented in the dissertation entitled “**CONTRIBUTION OF SIKH WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND SIKH HISTORY**” in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in History in Faculty of Arts, authentic record of my own work carried out during the period from 2016 to 2021 under the supervision of Dr. Daljit Kaur Gill. The matter embodied in this dissertation has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other University/Institute.

Manpreet Kaur

Manpreet Kaur

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This is to certify that the above a Statement Made by the Candidate is correct to the best of my/our knowledge.

Daljit Kaur Gill
Dr. Daljit Kaur Gill
Supervisor 16/8/2024

The M. Phil Viva-Voce examination of **Manpreet Kaur** has been held on **09-04-2021** and accepted for the award of M. Phil Degree.

Daljit Kaur Gill
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is my pleasant duty to express my profound sense of gratitude to all those who helped and encouraged me in completing this Dissertation.

First of all, I am grateful to the God who showed me the path to complete the research work successfully and for everything not be possible to put down in words.

I am greatly thankful to my respected supervisor Dr. Daljit Kaur Gill, who took her precious time out of her busy schedule and spent plenty of time with me in discussing the issues related to my research. This research work has been possible only due to her able guidance. It was only due to the rich information she provided that I could understand the subtitles of this research topic.

I extend my heartiest thanks to the respected Dr. Satnam Singh Jassal, Dean of UCBS&H at Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Research Dean, Dr. kamaljit Singh, Who provided their valuable suggestions and to my history teachers Dr Harpinder kaur and Dr Hardeep kaur.

Besides, I would like to acknowledge profound sense of gratitude to the competent Library staff of Punjabi University, Patiala, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha Reference Library, Patiala, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, State Central Library, Patiala, Public Library, Bathinda and the Language Department Punjab Library.

In addition to I am greatly thankful to my in laws family, husband Simratveer Singh Sandhu and my father in law Tejveer Singh, my mother in law Jaswinder Kaur. Also my father Sarvjit Singh Dhaliwal, my mother Updesh Kaur Dhaliwal and my siblings Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Manpreet Kaur Dhaliwal, Harpreet Kaur Sidhu, Gurpreet Singh Sidhu, who extended all possible help at different time and encouraged me to complete my research work. My daughter Jannatveer Kaur Sandhu gave her precious time out of his study for completing my research work. I extend my thanks to her by my heart with lot of blessings.

I am greatly thankful to my class-mate and my best friend Darshan Kaur who extended all possible help at different times and made my task easy.

At last, I extend my heartiest thanks to my respected parents and my siblings whose affection and blessings gave me the strength that I could reach this goal.

Manpreet Kaur

CONTENTS

Sr. No.	CHAPTERS	PAGE No.
	DECLARATION	ii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
	PREFACE	v-ix
1	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	01-20
2	CONTRIBUTION OF PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN AND THEIR WORKS	21-46
3	HISTORICAL PLACES OF SIKH WOMEN	47-64
4	CONCLUSION	65-74
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	75-82
	APPENDIX	83-85

PREFACE

Introduction and justification

It is historical truth that in ancient times in India, women were given equal rights to men. In that period, no worship was considered completed until someone's wife was not with him. In starting period, during Rajput times females had satisfactory position, but after the emergence of kingdom of Muslims, female's condition started deteriorating. Then they were under the rule of men from their birth to death. *Parda* tradition, *sati* tradition, child marriage, female child killing etc. evils kept females tortured.

Females were considered as a means of entertainment, to fulfill lust or a child producing machine. In Medieval times, Sikh religion came into being. In that society, the trend of having multiple marriages was ended and single marriage ceremony was started. Sikh religion was formed very lately but still it gained a good reputation over others. From Guru Nanak Dev till Guru Gobind Singh it remained to continue and they led people's path our old tradition did not respect women. Till that time, females were sold and bought like animals. That time, widow females were called unfortunate. Muslims thought females do not have any existence but Guru Nanak Dev said that females are great.

In terms of widow re-marriage he said that why life of females should be filled with sadness and gloom. Society cannot be formed without females. From a woman, Man is born, within Woman, Man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generation flourish. Females were promoted to sit and eat together. Women gives birth and nurtures, male gets married to a female as well. She expands society. Food was started serving in a line by making them sit together. So it could bring equality. Some people used to say female is queen of hell. At that time, woman used to stay at home and entered in-laws house and she was taken out only after death. Sikh Gurus triggered female to take part in each field. A female passes her religion, tradition and strem to her family. Guru Amar Das made social improvements. He wiped out Sati tradition, i.e-widow who used to get burnt in her husband pyre cemetery. Guru Amar Das said that which women spent her whole life in the memories of her husband she was called sati actually. He also encouraged females to sit in *langar* without covering the face, so

face covering ritual could be ended. Guru Gobind Singh made them to baptise the holy water just to provide equal right as men. He provided the word Singh to male and Kaur to female and they were recognized as Sikh females who took part in wars aswell. Guru Nanak Dev said that the one who gives birth to kings and queens and other famous people. Guru Amardas provided special place to them. Punjab is a birth place to many *rishi–munis, peer, sant*, Gurus, whose struggle, sacrifices set examples which proved to be way leading for next generations.

How female condition kept improving and deteriorating in the Sikh religion has the description of a lot of females who gave away their lives for Sikh religion like: Bebe Nanaki, she was the first Sikh woman who recognized Guru Nanak Dev as a God.

Mata Khivi contributed a lot for Sikh religion she was Guru's daughter, Guru's wife and Guru's Mother. She made family heritage. Mata Gujari sacrificed her family for the sake of religion. Mai Bhago and Sada Kaur fought in battle field just like men. In their memories there is a Gurudwara or other places where they concerned, which have great importance in our lives. Child Marriage, *parda* traditions were removed and females can spend their lives with respect

Review of Literature:

Dr. Paramvir Singh, wife of 10th Guru Mata Sundri, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2012 from this book we got information about Guru Gobind's wife from Anandpur sahib to Delhi, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Mata Sundri's commemoration, kind of contribution she had made. Khalsa's mother Sahib Kaur contribution also mentioned. From this how Mata Jito and Mata Sundri faced to all problems. This book showed Mata Sundri's interest in *Kirtan*.

Simran Kaur, famous Sikh females, Singh Brother's Amritsar, 1991, from this book we geo to know about female's condition and importance and duties. From this we got information about females of Maharaja about Mata Jito and Mata Sundri and their sons support to Guru Tegh Bhadur, birth of Guru Gobind and his nurture.

Dr. Harbans Singh Chawla, "Mothers, Wife and Daughters related with Guru's family". Manpreet Publication, Delhi. From this book we get information about Mata Jito, Mata Sundari and Shaibzade. Their contributions and relationship to

marriage and their contributor Sikh history.

Dr. Mahinder Kaur Gill, Pujaaaa Pugiaaa Nariaa "Arshi Publisher, Delhi, from this book get information about 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, females. From that, got knowledge about the condition of women during Guru Nanak Dev's period.

Dr. M. K. Gill. Religion and Women (tr. from Punjab) Vijay Publications, New Delhi, 1997. It make us aware about female's contribution in Sikh religion. Also know about their position in Jain religion. Mata Mansa Devi and Mata Sundri are mentioned in that book.

Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgir, 100 Sikh ladies, Sikh University Press, Amritsar, 2015, from this book learn about the 100 sikh ladies and got information about 18th century's females. Their birth place, living standard and what kind of contribution they made most of the relevance to Patiala Kingdom Fateh Kaur, Pradhan Kaur, Rajindar kaur are mentioned in that book.

Giani Gian Singh, Mata Sahib Kaur, Publication Duredu Punjabi University, Patiala, 2011, from this book we know about Mata Sahib Kaur who was the wife of Guru Gobind Singh. It also shows the khalsa's mother it is also mentioned with date of birth and childhood that how she was provided with a lot of sons instead of single son.

Dr. Mahinder Kaur Gill, about Gurudwara's foundation: Vijay Publication New Delhi, 1998, from this book got to know about Guru's Wives, their daughter-in-law sacrifices are revealed. A devotee Gurudwara Sahib named Mai Bhago who contributed a lot in, Gurudwara followers and countless Muktsar's war. Fourty Sikhs gave their resign and went back to their homes. She made them go back and she performed in battle field along with them. She gave a message that there is not any difference between Singh and Kaur.

Bhai Sewa Singh, Bhai Bhadur Singh, Religion Expanders, Amritsar, 1956. From this book we know what is women? Sahib Kaur (Patiala). Dharm Kaur, Sharn Kaur, Mai Bhago, Singh via's courageness. From this Sahib Kaur's Patiala and Haridwar visit and to stop Guru Granth Sahib's disrespect and brought Sikhism there righted.

Dr. Mahinder Kaur Gill Punjab's heroines, Publication Department, Telecast Department India Government, New Delhi, 1981, from this book. Got knowledge

about in male dominating Society females got always second position. Rani Marath's Mata Sahib Kaur is taken from that, Sodi Singh Teja, Giani Gian Singh, Sahib Kaur's life is mentioned as well.

Bishkha Singh Dass, Saint Sipahi Jnaitpura, Malwa Sikh History, Vol-1st, Chattar Singh, Jivan Singh, Malwa's historical memories, apart from that second war, 1998, ten Gurus, Bibi Bhardan Kaur. How fought with Dashm Guru Miracles, Chattar Singh, Jivan Singh, Amritsar, 32 addition June, 2015, 33 addition January, 2017, it has six sections. It tells about Guru Gobind Singh's life, trends Guru Gobind Singh's wars, marriage and Mai Nanki and Bhago, Mata Jeeto and Mata Sahib kaur Published by Amitabh Nagpal for Mac Publishers India limited (Haryana), India, first edition, 1954, it shows about the females social condition during Mughal.

Scope

In Ancient time, the females did not have a good standard. She neither had freedom nor could wander around. They did not have knowledge like today. At that time girl was born to get married at young age. *Pardha* tradition was followed. Female was considered having low standard. *Sati* and dowry systems were prevalent. If someone does not have a son, then there was his wife's right over everything. Widow's condition was pitiful. Women used to take part in art, singing and dancing. Too many evils were there in society *sati* performing was famous and woman was to burn with her husband along with his funeral pyre. Female contribution remained significant in Sikh religion. There is a description of some such females in Sikh religion who sacrificed their whole life for Sikh religion. Bebe Nanaki recognized Sikh religion, some women like Mai Bhago performed bravely against the enemies. There are some other brave women who spent their life for the sake of their religion. After that females started taking part in social, religions, economic, fields and they started fighting for their rights. There are temples and *Samads* in their commemoration.

Now women have right to do any work according to their wish and will. They get equal education. Now she doesn't only work at home but works outside as well earns money and look after the home as well. That is the woman who passes the information from one generation to another one. We receive a good inspiration from Sikh women.

Need of Study

To know their status we had to study their past. If we look at past then we can know that females were so much courageous, bold and brave who are mentioned in the history, whose achievements can be used to inculcate habits in upcoming generations. They have been commemorated by making temples and *shrines*. From that next generation will get path. We know from the examination of this matter what the core of the society is. Society can't be completed without her. No matter what is the caste and religion of the female, she is the core of the society. Why should she be spoken ill of her. Female is the one who takes society further. About the condition of the female can be understood from different time phases: *Arya* time, *Brahmo*, *Mughal* and Sikh times what happened during the times.

Objective

- 1) To study the situation of the female and improvements took place in the life of female.
- 2) Its main purpose is to make women aware about their rights and to bring improvement.
- 3) To make familiar with the particular historical places of Gurudwara.
- 4) To explore Gurudwara and *samads*, which are made in the memories of those Sikh females those attract us towards them and we get to learn from them.
- 5) To describe from that we get to learn about females and about their great works.

Plan of the work Methodology

My research work will depend upon the primary sources and writings of contemporary writers which exist in different University libraries such as Punjabi University, Patiala; Punjab University, Chandigarh; Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and Central Library, Patiala.

Material related to this work is also available in Punjab State Archives, Patiala . Moreover, Public Library Proceeding for example Punjabi Tribune, Ajit newspaper and The Tribune and Journals, Magazine will also assist in accomplishing this work.

Chapterization

The study has been divided into four chapters:

Historical background

In this chapter, describe the past, present and future about the situation of females. Unfortunately, in the past the situation of females was really bad. There was no freedom for females in the past. By the passage of time, due to Sikh religion, female condition has been improved.

Contribution of Prominent Sikh Women And Their Works

In this chapter, describe about Sikh females, which explain the condition of females in the 18th century. Moreover, come to know about contribution of Bibi Nanki, Mata Khiwi, Mata Sundri, Rani Sada Kaur, Maharani Jind Kaur and many others in Sikhism. Bibi Nanki always served Guru Nanak Dev and Mata Khiwi contributed in langar *paratha*. Bibi Bhani was to give a native place so that all family connected to Guru. Rani Sada Kaur played her role in the battlefield. Their community is important to them and they affected society in a good way, she also ended some bad customs like Dowery System, Sati *partha* and Child marriage.

Historical Places of Sikh Women

Gurudwara is made from two words Guru and Dwara which means habitat of sGuru. It is the place which Guru's make it for awareness center. It was known as dharmshala at the time of first five Gurus. Later it came to known as Gurudwara at the time of Guru Hargobind. Dhamdama Sahib Gurudwara is made in the memory of mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur. These places are source of information related to Sikh women and their religion.

Conclusion