

Sikh Religion and Women

*Respect those who endure great pain and
give birth to Kings, Saints and the whole
human race.*

First Edition

2006

1000 copies

G.S.Sidhu M.A

Publisher:.....

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following Sikh scholars who spent their valuable time in reading the manuscript and sent in their suggestions.

1. Professor Gurtej Singh (IAS retired) India
2. Dr. Sarjit Singh Sidhu of Malaysia
3. Dr. Sarbjit Singh Bhaba Atomic Research Centre Bombay (India)
4. Dr. Harbhajan Singh Deol of Patiala
5. Bibi Kailash Puri of London
6. Bibi Paramjit Kaur Vice Principal G.H.G. College Sidhwan Khurd (India)
7. Sardar Balwinder Singh. Editor Sada Virsa Sada Gaurav (India)
8. Sardar Hardev Singh Shergill. Editor, Sikh Bulletin America.
9. Dr, Hardyal Singh Dhillon Derby.

I wish to record my thanks to Mr. Bakhtawar Singh Sehra for preparing the manuscript and making it ready for the press. Master Sutej Singh Sivia (Birmingham) deserves my thanks for designing the title of the book.

I would be failing in my duty if I omit to thank numerous friends and members of the local Sangat (Guru Nanak Sat Sang Gurdwara) who provided a substantial amount of money to see the book in print. Special thanks in this regard go to Bibi Jagdish Kaur Jauhal, Bibi Kirpal Kaur Gorya, Bibi Gurbakhsh Kaur, and Bibi Gursharan Kaur (Birmingham).

S.Jasbir Singh Motay, GS Golar (Tiger European), Mr. Harjit Singh Daffu, Dr. Saini, Satwant Singh Pooni,(London), Sardar Bhagwan Singh Sagoo (Oxford), Mr.N.S Sandhu (Hayes), S.Swaran Singh Panesar and friends (Leeds), Dr.Hardyal Singh

and friends (Derby), and Sardar Gurjit Singh Sahota (Belvedere) contributed significant amounts of money to help publish the book.

Lastly I am indebted to Sikh Community and Youth Service Nottingham who not only sponsored the book but also provided substantial amount for its publication.

G.S.Sidhu
Nottingham
1.1.2006

Opinions

The message of Sikhi is commensurate with the most advanced ideas that thinking humans have ever respected. It is singularly importunate that our modern day pretors have not been able to put them across to the world waiting for good news. This can not be said of Mr.G.S.Sidhu who has authored several books on subjects needing classification. The present work on the ‘status of women in Sikhi’ is an exhaustive study. He has taken good care to be objective and has narrated the story well.It may surprise many but the book is a befitting tribute to the Guru who said, “*It cannot be ascertained whether God is a male or a female*”.This book will be useful to those who want to understand what Sikhi actually preaches on the subject of gender equality.

Prof. Gurtej Singh (retired IAS)
National Professor of Sikhism.
Chandigarh.

Sardar G.S. Sidhu is already well-known in Sikh circles, having authored several books on Sikhism and Sikhs. With his ‘*Women in Sikhism*’ he will probably reach many non-Sikhs as well, especially with the renewed interest in the true place of women in society: hand-in-hand and side-by-side with men. Whilst the Sikh

Gurus gave Sikh women equality with Sikh men in all affairs, in practice the role of women has not been fully appreciated and instead they have been relegated to an inferior status.

Mr. Sidhu puts all the relevant issues into historical perspective, and makes a credible attempt at establishing their role as equals. There are men who would point to Scripture to define the role of women as subservient to men, and thereby justify their actions. Sikh men have no such excuse; Mr. Sidhu makes that abundantly clear with his knowledge of Sikh Scriptures and history. Whilst on certain issues his stance will reflect a personal opinion or preference, and therefore not to everyone's taste, he has put in sufficient facts from history and Scripture to make other issues unassailable. His coverage of women throughout the ages in India is particularly informative. This book is certainly for Sikh women, but even more so for Sikh men.

Dr Sarjeet Singh Sidhu
MBBS, FRCOG, FICS, LLB (Hons.)
Ipoh. Malaysia.

You have really taken a lot of pains to collect so much material regarding the status of women in the past and present, among different communities. You have also put a lot of effort to bring to light the contribution of women in Sikh religion. In fact a mother can be called as a second Waheguru, who does her duty to bring up the child. Her efforts and ability contribute a lot for the development of a child. That is the reason why the Sikh Gurus have put special emphasis on the uplift of women in the society. You have nicely described the contribution of women in the past. Present day generation needs to learn a lesson from history. The women of today have become too timid to protect themselves or are becoming hostile. The propaganda of the T.V. and media is doing a great harm to the family life. Only the preaching of Guru Granth Sahib can save the present day generation.

Dr.Sarabjit Singh.

Bhaba Research Centre,
Bombay 400085
India.

Sardar Gurbacahn Singh Sidhu has dealt with almost all aspects of life associated with women in his book in such a way that it can be truly called a comparative study of religious thought on the subject. The book successfully proves that disrespect of women is a sure passport to the degradation of human civilization. I strongly feel that a Hindi and Punjabi version of this book should be produced at the earliest so that the Guru's message conveyed through this excellent book is available also to those who are not conversant with English.

Balwinder Singh
Editor,
Sada Virsa Sada Gaurav

The Author Brilliantly captures the most sensitive moments of the heart rending agony of the female category of Homo sapiens. It is exceptionally gripping and brilliantly interpreted account explaining the historical growth of the emancipatory sentiments among women since the dawn of civilization. Despite the blessings of saints and sages of all hues regarding the uplift of the status of female folk, the social position of women still remains as desperate and as ridiculous as it ever was in the annals of human history. Only male chauvinism has been responsible for women's enslavement in all social spheres.

The Book records a vivid panorama of historical events created by various denominations for developing equality among sexes. It appears in the form of an extraordinary research work on the gender question that has baffled the thinking minds since ages. It is provocative in the sense that it generates interest among

scholars for further studies in the domain of man woman relationship.

The author deserves appreciation for presenting his viewpoint illuminated with references from scriptures, literary classics as well as from idioms of popular folklore. Written in a simple Style, free from esoteric jargon with thought provoking profundity, the book will leave a progressively everlasting imprint on the mind of the reader.

Dr. Harbhajan Singh Deol

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Patiala-147001, Punjab.**

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Introduction

In 1967 I was at the University of Nottingham, where I came in contact with the writings of Spinoza, for the first time in life. Although I was not fully in tune with what Spinoza wrote, I was greatly impressed by his logic and began to take keen interest in religion. In those days, an article about Sikh women appeared in “The Times”. On reading this article I felt that the author of the article was not fair in his description and assessment of Sikh women. To some extent, the article injured my sentiments as well, and therefore, I sat down to write an article to put things right. It took me the whole night to write the rebuttal but by morning I began to feel that I had simply wasted my time because the Editor may not publish it in “The Times”. The first thought that occurred to me was to oblige my dustbin with companionship but then I decided to send it to Mrs.Wylam, the then Editor of “The Sikh Courier”. Mrs.Wylam lauded the article very much and wrote a letter to me appreciating its contents. She published the article in the issue of Summer-Autumn 1967 of the magazine and persuaded me to keep writing on Sikhism.

The above incident compelled me to set up The Sikh Missionary Society on my first appointment as teacher in Gravesend (January 1968) so that any attacks on Sikhism were repulsed and the facts about Sikhism properly explained. On the 500th birthday of Guru Nanak in 1969, the Society was duly established and this article was re-written and published by The Sikh Missionary Society in the form of a booklet on ‘International day of the women.’¹ Since then it has been published and re-published time and again and has been liked by everybody, especially women. I have now expanded this article into a book and included examples of Sikh women who have played a very significant part in the political and spiritual history and development of Sikhism. Their

¹ Clara Jetkin of Germany organised an International Conference of women on the 8th of March 1910. The U.N.O later recognised 8th March every year as the International women’s day and began celebrating it as such from 1975 onwards.

contribution is enormous. Unfortunately the male dominated society has not cared to acknowledge it and has not paid them the tribute they so richly deserved.

A society owes much more to its women than to men, and, it is commonly believed that 'Behind every successful man is a woman'. Therefore, a society that does not value its women does so at its peril and is likely to suffer sooner or later. If the women are well educated and intelligent, so will their children be and their children's achievements will in turn glorify the nation.

In this book, I have surveyed the status of women in the world and collected some details of Sikh women but I cannot claim that I have exhausted the field. Every inch of the Panjab owes its gratitude to women and every village has a tale to tell. I can only hope that this book will be a spur to some more informed and dedicated writers to dig deep into the Sikh history and highlight the achievements of more women who have escaped my research.

G.S.Sidhu
September 2005

FOREWORD

Women constitute a very significant part of the human race. Unfortunately since times immemorial they have been considered as inferior to the male members of the society for no apparent reason. Great reformers and religious leaders have endeavoured hard to rectify the imbalance and place social relations in the right perspective. Their efforts have brought about some good results but complete success has remained largely elusive.

An article in the British newspaper “Times” acted as a catalytic agent to whet Mr.Sidhu’s interest in this field because he found that the article failed to do justice to the Sikh thought about women and their status in Sikh society. By selecting this subject the learned author has brought us face to face with enormous amount of information and undertaken to record the progress on this issue with detail and clarity.

The book in hand is an excellent piece of research highlighting the impact of different religions on the status of women. It is not always possible to explore every avenue, therefore he has chosen the major religions of the world to compare the Sikh view with Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Vaishnavism. The result is a compact history of the issue with elaboration of the Sikh thought Vis a Vis world theology. His observations are keen and candid leaving the reader spell-bound and inquisitive.

Mr. Sidhu ends the treatise by pointing out the caveats in Sikh elite’s approach to the subject in the field and concludes that a great amount of work still needs to be done to undo the injustice done to the female sex over the centuries. However he is not pessimistic and leaves us with exhortation towards optimism. On finishing the reading one is left thinking “if winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Ram Singh Kular Principal,
Chief Organiser,
Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle,
Model Town.
Ludhiana (Punjab)
23.10.2005

Abbreviations used in this book

RV = Rig Veda
SGGS = Sri Guru Granth Sahib
SRM = Sikh Rehat Marya

Chapter One

Women in social history

“The history of mankind is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the Part of man towards woman”. (Elizabeth Cady Stanton USA 1948)

Ever since the humans began inhabiting this planet men and women have been living together. Their social contact resulted in three legitimate relationships; that of mother/son, wife/husband and child/parent. Men being the bread-winners have always dominated the social order and attached meanings and values to the three relationships. Throughout history, there is hardly any evidence where men passed any derogatory remarks about their mothers or children. There is however, ample evidence to prove that men have criticised the wife/husband or lover/beloved relationship which has given rise to many stereotypes. These stereotypes have been applied loosely and generally to all women. Some of these stereotypes may have been the originators’ own personal prejudices and some may be imaginary. When such remarks are made by philosophers, religious leaders, or socially respected people, they make an unusual impact on society because they are loaded with prestige suggestion.² Over

² Ignorance and bigotry are the main cause of stereotypes. John Fitzgerald Kennedy once said, “Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears.”

thousands of years these stereotypes have marginalized women and degraded their status within our society.

There is no justification in complaining that such stereotypes have never been challenged or counteracted.³ People have from time to time challenged them and expressed contrary views but there are some clichés which have stuck to the status of women like a shadow. The views of Philosophers and religious preachers on this subject all over the world have deeply affected our attitude towards the opposite sex. Their remarks have now become an inalienable part of our folk-lore and social norms.

Women have usually been considered less intelligent, less decisive, less creative, less powerfully muscled, smaller, fickle-minded, and emotional. The Western thinking has been deeply influenced by the wisdom of Socrates and the Eastern by the Vedic/post Vedic sages. The most common argument has been that women are inferior because of natural biological differences which Socrates (470-299 BC)⁴ expressed as follows:

“The courage of a man and that of a woman are not the same. The courage of a man is shown in commanding and that of a woman in obeying”.

In opposition to Socrates, Plato said that women are as good administrators as men. He also said that women can be

³ “Sigh no more ladies sigh no more, men were deceivers ever.

One foot on land and one on sea ,to one thing constant never” (Anonymous)

“pr qUMU v`KrI koeI nhIN g`l kIQI qyrw k`ly dw nhIN ksUr mwhIAw
Pu`l P`ul qy BOirAW vWg iPrnw ienHw mrdW dw irhw dsqUr mwhIAw”
(pRo: mohx isMG)

An excellent film in Hindi titled *Tiryachariter* challenges these stereotypes and goes to prove how innocent women are simply punished by quoting and exploiting the stereotypes against them. The film is produced by well-known actors Om Puri and Nasir-ud-din Shah.

⁴ Socrates was one of the greatest classical Greek philosophers whose ideas influenced the thinking of Christian, Arab, and Jewish scholars of the middle ages. They considered his ideas as “*The sum total of human knowledge*”. Dante Alighieri, the most famous poet of the middle ages, called him, “*Master of those who know*”. Socrates was Alexander’s tutor. He did not leave anything in writing. His ideas were collected and recorded by his followers.

philosophers. It was for this reason that Plato is said to have admitted women in his academy.

Aristotle (died 347BC) was another great thinker who thought that women were less complete; less courageous, and impulsive. He has left a significant imprint on the world philosophy. He called woman “*an erroneous development*” and a “*mutilated male*” and wrote, “*Woman is an unfinished man left standing on a lower step in the scale of development. The male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the one ruler, the other ruled. Woman is weak of will and therefore incapable of independence of character and position. Her best position is a quiet home life in which while ruled by the man in her external relations, she may be in domestic affairs supreme. She is less courageous, weaker, and more impulsive*”.

Another great Greek philosopher Hippocrates calls woman “*A damp, soggy creature*”.

This line of thought found a supporter in Schopenhauer who wrote:’ “*Women have great talent, but no genius for they always remain subjective*”⁵. The British philosopher Chesterfield was a bit mild in labelling women. He said that a woman is, “*an agreeable blunder*”. German Philosopher Whinge went to the extent of proving that a woman has no soul.⁶ But Goethe born in the same country preached that ‘soul’ is woman.

Anatole France has written a lot on how scholars and religious preceptors degraded and condemned women. He says that religious leaders who deny priesthood to women are cowards. They try to escape from women but get entrapped in the end. Among the many examples he gives the example of St. Jerome who left the world and went away into the wilderness but could not get rid of the phantoms of women.

⁵ In “*The World as Will and Idea*”

⁶ They only congregate to bitch an absent member of their group.

Sometimes men have applied religious ideologies indiscriminately to punish women. For example as many as 30,000 women were killed in one year in France alone in medieval times. The fact that they were declared witches and burnt alive only proves how man makes religion a tool to impose his own will. When an ideology becomes thoroughly contemptuous of one half of humanity, the society sinks like lead.

When a stereotype is repeated again and again and is believed by a majority of people it becomes a proverb. Here are some proverbs about women which have been current and in most cases are still current among different nations.

“A girl is merely a weed”.

A Zulu saying

“A house full of daughters is like a cellar full of sour beer”.

A Dutch proverb.

“A girl lets you down twice, once at birth and the second time when she marries”.

A Korean saying.

“The husband is the Lord and the wife is the servant”.

A Japanese saying

“No one is glad when a girl is born/ by her the family sets no store”.

Chinese poet Fu Xuan

“How sad it is to be a woman

Nothing on earth is held so cheap”.

Fu Xuan⁷

“Woman is the confusion of man”.

Chaucer⁸ in ‘Nun Priest’s tale’

“Woman is the weaker vessel”.

Shakespeare

“Woman’s mind and winter wind change often”.

Burns

“A woman’s tongue is the last thing about her that dies”.

Chapman in ‘Widow’s tears’

⁷ Fu Xuan is a well known Chinese poet. The first quotation was published in *Haruko Okano* New York Feminist Press 1955 and the second was printed in *“Woman”* Edited by Arthur Wasely G.Allen & Unwin 1946. In rural China a woman who only bears daughters or is barren can be divorced by her husband. At one time in Babylon if a man killed a woman his wife was killed as punishment. Similarly in Italy before Roman times a man was entitled to kill his wife whenever he liked.

⁸ Chaucer was a well known English poet of the thirteenth/fourteenth century AD.

“A daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother are mere appendages of the human race”.

Richard Steele 1710⁹

“Women, wives and wind are necessary evil”. An English proverb¹⁰

Such trite and threadbare proverbs, which are being taken as embodying concentrated experiences of the human race, can be found in any country and any culture. They have gone deep into the psyche of the women. An Irish woman wrote the following poem which sums up the inferiority complex of a woman.

*“I am Eve, the wife of noble Adam.
It was I who violated Jesus in the past.
It was I who robbed my children of heaven.
It was I who should have been crucified.”*

Anonymous Irish Poem

In France the position of women in society was debated in 1586 AD and the conclusion was that women were created to serve men.

All over the world, preference for boys¹¹ is the established fact. So wide-spread is the greater privilege for boys that anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo referred to it as *“Universal sexual asymmetry”*. (1947)

⁹ As quoted in “Just like a woman” by Dianne Hales P. 4

¹⁰ The English can be called the leaders in condemning women. Here are some more phrases of English.

Woman and a glass are ever in danger.

Woman conceals what she knows not, but what she knows she will blab out.

Women change as often as the wind.

Woman is flax, a man is a fire, the devil comes and blows the bellows.

Woman needs but look on her apron-string to find an excuse.

Woman has a head too small for intellect but just big enough for love.

¹¹ For further information on this issue read *“The burden of girlhood”* By Neera Kuckreeja Oakland Third Party Publishing 1995 OR *“The state of women in the world Atlas”* by Joni Seager London Penguin 1997

In 1983 a survey of forty countries was conducted to assess the attitudes of the people towards these stereotypes of the opposite sex. Surprisingly only two countries preferred the birth of daughters; only thirteen preferred equality between boys and girls, but twenty five countries preferred boys to girls.

Chapter Two

Women in Islam

“Power consists in deciding what stories will be told”.
(Carolyn Heilbrun)

Before the advent of Islam in Arabia, the position of women was pitiful. They were not treated better than animals. They could be bought and sold and used as slaves. There was no limit on the number of wives a man could have. It was a mark of dishonour to have a daughter. Polyandry and polygamy were common and so was Prostitution. Women worshiped various statues some of which were female. Education was denied to women and even killing a woman, especially female infant, was ignored with impunity.¹² Women’s behaviour and movements were strictly controlled and killing for chastity or fidelity was rampant. With the advent of Prophet Muhammad the status of women in Arabia was improved to the extent that they were permitted to read the

¹² Sura LXXXI-8 of the Holy Quran reads, “*And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked for what sin she was slain.*” Sura XVI reads, “*If one of them receives the tidings of the birth of a female, his face remaineth darkened, and he is wroth inwardly. He hideth himself from the folk because of the evil of whereof he hath the tidings, asking himself: shall he keep it in contempt, or bury it beneath the dust.*” It is said that the only occasion when Caliph Osman shed a tear was when his little daughter, whom he was burying alive, wiped the dust of the grave-earth from his beard.

scriptures and were given the right to hold property but complete social parity still escaped them.¹³

Islam set a limit of four wives for the Muslims.¹⁴ *“Marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, or four; but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one”*. (Sura Alnisa 4.3) The rule was enforced strictly on the newcomers to Islam. Ghilan Bin Salam had ten wives but he was made to divorce six of them when he accepted Islam (See Ibn-e-Majha Vol.1 p. 545)¹⁵. As for being equitable, it is nearly impossible so a concession was made. *“And if ye wish to exchange one wife for another and ye have given unto one of them a sum of money take nothing from it”*. (Sura Alnisa 4.20)

“Islam allows the conversion of female slaves into concubines with whom sexual relations are legitimate without the necessity of marriage. Once they have been allotted to their masters they become their property”. (Maulana Maududi quoted in ‘Concept of an Islamic state’ P 112 and Sahi Muslim 3432-34). Marry captives that *“your right hands possess.”*(Sura Alnisa 4.3)¹⁶ *“And there is no sin for you in what ye do by mutual agreement (Sura Alnisa 4.24)”*. A Muslim is not permitted to marry the sister of his own wife

¹³ For further information on this topic Read *“Sikh Religion & Islam”* by G.S.Sidhu

¹⁴ The rule was not always followed in the letter and the spirit of the edict. The classical Muslim Jurist Al Suyuti in his book *‘Nuzhat-al-Mutah ammid’* cites various examples of men marrying more than 80 times. Al Ghazali, the famous Muslim theologian writes that the Prophet’s grand son Hasan had married 200 times.

¹⁵ All books written about Islam or about Prophet Muhammad tell us that the prophet had 9 wives. This concession was specially granted to Him by Allah *“And any woman believer, if she gave herself to the prophet and if the prophet desires to take her in marriage, for thee exclusively, apart from the believer”* (The confederates: 45)

¹⁶ Prophet Muhammad’s wives Safia, Rihana and Juwaria were captives (See *Sahi Muslim* 4292 & *Seerat Rasul Allah* P. 493)

Although not specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran, all Muslims are supposed to undergo circumcision in which the foreskin of the sexual organ is cut off. Some African Muslim countries apply this practice strictly to women as well causing untold misery and pain to girls at the age of puberty.¹⁷

A Muslim man can divorce his wife any time simply by saying, “*Talaq, Talaq, Talaq*”, three times (Sura Baqra 2.229)¹⁸. No argument, no appeal, and no legal recourse are available to the divorced wife. She cannot re-marry her divorced husband unless she has married another man after divorce (Ihya 2.230).

The right of Talaq is available only to men and is denied to women. “*The proportion of rights and powers between male and female, as laid down by Islam, naturally demands that out of the two parties only the former should be entitled to pronounce divorce*” (Maulana Maududi quoted in ‘*concept of an Islamic state*’ page 110). This interpretation of the Holy Quran makes women powerless against men and they cannot have independent thinking. A divorced woman is shamed in society and is stigmatized as used goods causing difficulty in getting re-married.

Polygamy among the Muslims usually leads to bitterness between co-wives and ends in quarrels, and intrigues. The worst sufferers are children. After divorce a male child has to stay with his mother until the age of 7 and a female child until the age of 9.

¹⁷ Women in Egypt challenged female circumcision in the court in 1997. A religious leader named Sheikh Yousuf-el-Badri opposed the move and won the case. Cases of female circumcision have also been recorded among some Muslim Communities in Britain.

¹⁸ There is no limit to the times a person can divorce his wife. One of the Khalifas is said to have divorced 100 wives even though he died young. (See *History of the Panjab* by Panjabi University P. 34) Wives can also be gifted away (See *Life of Muhammad* Vol II page 272-73 By W. Muir also See Sahi Bukhari 264). Tunisia, Turkey, and Iran do not accept divorce given by three counts. UN declaration of human rights reads, “*Men and women, regardless of race, nationality or religion, having reached the age of puberty, have the right to marry and establish families. They have equal rights with regard to marriage, in the marriage, and in the event of dissolution*”. (Article 16)

After this they revert to the father. If the woman married another man before the set period (*Iddat*), she immediately loses all rights to children.

Islam supports family life. The prophet of Islam was married and had children. He is reported to have said, “*Marriage is my way and anyone who dislikes marriage does not belong to me*” but the Quran also says, “*Do not have many wives*”. (Quran 33.52).

Although Muslim women do all the cooking at home, killing of animals for food is not allowed to them. There are certain periods in the Muslim calendar when they observe fasts (known as *Roza*) but a woman is not permitted to observe a *Roza* unless “*her husband is at home and has given his permission*” (Sahi Muslim 2238).

In Islam a male divine force is considered the origin of life. Islam therefore expects complete surrender to a husband under all situations because men are superior to women. Although beating may cause psychological damage leading to low self-esteem, depression and poor self-image, a Muslim husband has the right to beat his wife. “*Men are in charge of women because Allah has made the one to excel the other and because they spend of their property. So good women are the obedient and guard the secret that which Allah had guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart and beat them¹⁹. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great* (Sura Alnisa 4.34). The Quran further states, “*Your women are like tilth for you. Go unto your tilth as ye will*” (Sura Baqra 2.223 Sahi Muslim 3363).

¹⁹ Muslim men have a right to beat women. In this connection read: - 1. “*Wife beating in Islam*” By **Silas** 2. “*Wife abuse in the Muslim community*” By **Kamran Menon**. 3. “*The Saudis*” by **Sandra Mackay** and 4. “*Princess*” By **Jean Sasson**. Also read Hadis Bukhari Vol.7 No.715, Sahi Muslim No. 3512, 3526, 3527, and Abu Dawud Chapter 709 No. 2141, Hadis No. 2142 reads, “*A man will not be asked as to why he beat his wife*”. Sahi Muslim Book 4 No. 2127 tells us that even Prophet Muhammad hit his wife Aisha who herself stated, “*He struck me on the chest which caused me pain*”.

The prophet said, *“If there is evil in something it is in a woman, a house, and a horse. After me there is no greater danger to Islam than the viles of women”*.²⁰

Most Islamic scholars consider that only men make history and that a woman has no business on the political stage. In his *Tafsir* of the Holy Quran the renowned Sunni scholar Ibn Kathir tells us that Prophet Muhammad said, *“A people that choose a woman as their leader will not succeed.....Men have a degree over them”*.(Sura Baqra 2.228).²¹ He is further stated to have said, *“If I were to command anyone to make prostration before another I would command women to prostrate themselves before their husbands”* (Abu Dawud *Kitab-al-Nikah* Book 11 No. 2135).

The Prophet claims to have visited the hell and is reported to have said, *“I was shown the hell fire and that the majority of its dwellers were women who were ungrateful”*. (Sahi Bukhari 28 Vol.I) Abu Saeed Khuddri tells us that the prophet is reported to have said, *“The first rebellion of the children of Israel was brought about by women”*.

“Because of the deficiency of a woman’s mind”, (Sahi Bukhari 826) and *“a habit of betrayal”* (Sahi Bukhari 547) the evidence given by two women is considered to be equal to that given by one man. *“And call to witness from among your men two witnesses. And if two men are not at hand then a man and two women. Of such as ye approve of witnesses. And witnesses must not refuse as they are summoned”*. (Sura Baqra 2.282 Sura Al Nisa 4.177)

²⁰ See Hadis No. 30 and 32 Urdu edition Sahi Bukhari Sheikh Ghulam Ali and sons Publishers Lahore.

²¹ In Pakistan General Zia had started a T.V. Programme named *Al Huda* in which women were openly criticised. It was said, *“Women make men thieves, adulterers, and infidels”*. Pakistani President Ayub Khan had banned women from politics in 1961. Mr. Bhutto reversed this decision in 1973

“Women in state affairs are like monkeys in glass-shops” An English proverb.

Like Christianity, Islam also believes in the story of Adam and Eve (Sura Baqra 2. 33-37), who lived in the Garden of Eden where there was no disease, sickness or death. They were expected not to taste the fruit of a certain tree but on being persuaded by Eve, Adam transgressed and they were both expelled from heaven as sinners. This makes Eve (woman) a temptress. *“Had it not been for Eve, women would never have acted unfaithfully towards their husbands”*. (Sahi Muslim No. 3471).

Adultery is forbidden in Islam and four witnesses are required to substantiate it. This puts women in a difficult situation. For a raped woman it is difficult to produce four witnesses to prove her innocence but perpetrators of rape can be four themselves.²²

“if any of your women are guilty of whoredom bring four witnesses against them from among yourselves, and if they bear witness to the fact, shut them up within their houses till death release them or God make some way for them” (Sura Alnisa 4. 19).

The wife of an adopted son is lawful to be accepted in marriage by the father. Zaid was the adopted son of Prophet Muhammad and his wife Zainab was later married to Prophet Muhammad.²³

Shia Muslims believe that *Nikah-al-Mutah* is permitted in Islam. *Nikah-al-Mutah* is a marriage where a woman is hired for sex for a certain number of days with money or gifts. In Sahi Muslim

²² In 1983 a helpless poor blind girl of 18 named Safia Bibi was employed in the house of a rich Pakistani. She was raped by the rich man. She could not find four witnesses to prove her innocence. Since she was pregnant her adultery was proved. She was given 15 lashes and imprisoned for three months. In addition she had to pay Rs.1000 as fine. Abdul Rahim in his *“Islamic Jurisprudence”* wrote, *“Islam is slithering towards the paganism of Arabia”*. In their book *“Two feet forward one foot backward”* Bibi Kanwar Mumtaz and Farida Shahid wrote, *“Islam is in the grip of idiots and fools”*.

²³ For a fuller explanation of conjugal/sexual proprieties read *“Islam and sexuality”* By Anwar Shaikh published by ‘The Principality publishers P. O. Box 918 Cardiff CF2 4YP

Jabir reports, “*We contracted Muttah giving a handful of dates and flowers in dowry*” (Sahi Muslim No. 3249). Hadis No.52 says, “*With mutual consent any man and any woman can have sexual relations for three nights*”.²⁴

When property is divided “*A male is equal to the portion of two females*” (Sura Al Nisa 4.177 and Sahi Muslim 3933).

Wearing of clothes in Islam is not a matter of personal choice. The women have to cover their faces with a *Burqa* or *Hijab* (veil). “*And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward, and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands....*” (Holy Quran. Light 30 also confederates 434).

The idea behind the *Purdah* (veil) seems to be that women are temptresses and therefore they should conceal themselves from the eyes of men. In other words it means that the weaknesses of men are being blamed on women.²⁵

Purdah was strictly enforced in Pakistan when the law did not allow even teachers to be without a veil. It read, “*Teachers who do not wear the veil would face punishment*”. Nawaz Sharif Government in Pakistan prohibited all institutions from organising cultural programmes or fetes where music was played and/or male and female presenters appeared together on the TV channel.

“*Women are supposed to pray at home and seldom, if ever, go to the mosque.*”²⁶ They cannot utter the call to prayer (*Azan*) nor

²⁴ Muttah is legal and is still practised in Iran.

²⁵ In 1892 Muhammad Shafi called *Burqa*; “*Sign of ignorance*”. Sir Sayyed Ahmed supported him. The Government of Turkey has abolished *Purdah* altogether.

²⁶ ‘*History of religion*’ by E.O.James P.196. “*And stay in your houses.*” (Sura *The clan*: 33.33) It is said that Muhammad Jinah, the founder of Pakistan, used to lock his sister Fatima in a room.

can they deliver a sermon (ʿuq̣ḅw).²⁷ There is nothing more barbaric for women than to be confined at home and not being provided opportunities to share the bounties of nature equally with men.

In the Holy Quran God always addressed himself to males and never to females.²⁸ Injunctions given to women were passed through men. This fact was brought to the Prophet's notice by the female warrior Nusayba. After this some verses were addressed directly to women. After mentioning this fact Mai Yamani writes in her book '*Feminism and Islam*' that "*Women are infantilized in the Quran*".

²⁷ On 18 March 2005 an American woman named Amina Wadood declared that she would lead the Friday prayers. The Muslim priests all over the world were furious. The mosques were closed on her and she conducted the Muslim prayer in a Church which was attended by nearly 100 worshippers including men.

²⁸ The Holy Quran promises luxurious delights in paradise to men. They will receive beautiful nubile virgins (Quran 78:33) and overflowing cups of best wine (Quran 83:25) but women are mentioned nowhere.

Chapter Three

Women in Christianity and Judaism

The status of women among Jews, Christians, and Muslims is the result of the story in their scriptures of Eve who persuaded Adam to commit a sin by eating the forbidden fruit. God became angry and turned Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. This made the female sex responsible for the downfall of man and hence worthy of hatred. It is argued that the centre of sin is Eve (woman) because it was not Adam who sinned but Eve who was instrumental in bringing about the fall of Adam from the Garden of Eden. There is no evidence to apportion the blame for their transgression neither is there any proof that the woman had turned Adam's brain into brawn rendering it unable to think. In spite of this, both of them were turned out of Eden but punishment was meted out only to Eve. She was considered as an agent of Satan for bringing down man. The angry God punished her by saying, "*I shall greatly increase the pain of your progeny, in the birth pangs you will bring forth children, and your craving will be for your husband who will dominate you*". (Genesis 3:16-19)²⁹

In addition to the above it is also believed that a woman was born from the ribs of man (Genesis II 21-25), as an afterthought of God. This gave her a lower social status from the start. The

²⁹ For a comparative study of Sikhism and Christianity read "*Sikh Religion & Christianity*" by G.S.Sidhu

argument is that “*man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man*”. Whatever this turgid argument means it certainly degrades, demoralizes, and discredits women, and makes them subservient to men. Women began to be considered less than men, unable to think like men, and born merely to breed and feed men.

“*The Lord said to Moses set the value of a male between ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels.....and if it is a female, set the value at thirty shekels*”.(Old Testament)³⁰

We will briefly discuss here the status of women in Judaism and Christianity.

(a) Judaism

Some Jewish scholars believe that a part of their religious book *Torah* was composed by a woman (see Exodus 15:20-21). Beruriah, a 2nd Century Talmudic scholar, Imma Shalom (50CE), Dona Gracia Mendes (16th century) were great scholars of Judaism. In spite of this, Jewish women are not permitted to interpret the *Torah*. They can not serve as spiritual leaders-Rabbis, Cantors or seminary Presidents, neither can they hold any public offices. Women are not permitted to wear *Tallit* (prayer shawl) and *Kippah* (Special head covering) and saying of *Kaddish*.³¹ *Bar-Mitzvah* (Son of duty) and *Kabbalat Torah*

³⁰ ‘*Shekel*’ and ‘*Talent*’ were biblical units. A *talent* equals modern 75 pounds (34 Kilograms) and a *Shekel* equals modern 24 Ounces (11.5 grams)

³¹ Judaism has more than one sect. The most outstanding sects are Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Essene, Orthodox, and Liberal sects. What we write here may not be applicable to all sects. The Liberal sect was started by Hon. Lily Montague in 1899. In 1902 it came to be popularly called ULPS. In 1926 she formed the World Union of progressive Judaism. In Liberal Synagogues women are permitted to hold offices and preach religion. According to the Liberal Jews the laws prohibiting women from teaching, preaching, speaking in public, or leading a prayer were designed to keep men free of embarrassment if the men knew less than women (Talmud Meg 23). Whereas traditional Judaism used only male gender for God, the Liberals have started using gender-inclusive language in their liturgy.

(Acceptance of Torah –confirmation) ceremonies are performed only for boys at the age of thirteen and sixteen years respectively.³² When a Jew dies Women are not permitted to go out for funerals. Instead they are supposed to perform *Keriah* (tearing of garments), cover mirrors, and empty the vases and jugs of water at home.

Male (but not female) polygamy is permissible (except among Ashkenazi Jews). Second marriage of a woman is permissible only if she can produce indubitable proof of her first husband's death (difficulties arise when a person is lost at sea or runs away without a trace) or produces a *Get* (Certificate of divorce from a Synagogue). Divorce procedures can only be initiated by the husband (it is based on Deutronomy 24:1-4). These Jewish laws are called "Forbidden degrees". Any child born without meeting the requirements of 'forbidden degrees' is considered *Mamzerim* (bastard) and can marry only another *Mamzer*. A divorced woman cannot marry a *Cohen* (priestly class). The Essene Jews practise celibacy.

According to the Jewish scriptures men and women were created by God differently. Various rabbis have described women as jealous, lazy, vainglorious, gluttonous, garrulous, and prone to occult and witchcraft. Men are advised to be very careful when associating with women. *Talmud* says that if a pious man marries a wicked woman, the man becomes wicked.³³ There are many restrictions on menstruating and postpartum women and in matters of inheritance. "*The glance of a menstruating woman poisons the air. She is like a viper which kills with her glance* (B.Greenberg "*On Women and Judaism*" P.115)

³² Liberal Jews have started *Bat-Mitzvah* (daughter of duty) for girls. Whereas the Orthodox Jews are against homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22), the Liberals tolerate it and oppose banning it.

³³ In Talmud and in rabbinical folklore (Midrashim and Kabbalistic etc) a woman known as Lilith is mentioned. In Ben Sira she is mentioned as Adam's first wife who demanded equality with Adam in all respects, which Adam was not prepared to offer. She was therefore divorced and replaced with Eve. The rabbis refer to her as a Demon or a 'wicked' woman.

Women are discouraged from pursuing higher education or religious pursuits. Their *mitzvohs* (methods of connecting to God) are different.³⁴ There are 613 *mitzvohs* in the *Torah* of which 365 are prohibitive or negative (thou shalt not). The remaining 248 are called active or positive *mitzvohs* (thou shalt) which tell the Jews to perform certain actions. Household chores like cooking, cleaning, serving, raising children, caring for the elderly are considered as worship and religious devotion for women. *Passover* festival (Exodus 12:15) forbids the consumption of *Matzah* (leavened bread) therefore during *Passover* women are forbidden from using wheat. All traces of crumbs and gains of wheat are scrupulously removed from the kitchen and women have to sort through rice grain by grain seven times. This is considered a very devotional prayer. Old women visit graves of their dead ancestors and lay flowers and candles on the tombs during this period.

According to the *halakhah* (Jewish law) Jewish rabbis can wear *talis*, a *kippah*, or a *teffillin* which are forbidden to women. Women have a much diminished role in the *shul* (religious gathering) or the synagogue (Jewish church). Their prayers mainly consist of three *mitzvot* (religious duties) (1) *Nerote*-lighting the candles at home to mark the beginning of Sabbath (holiday- Talmud 23a) (2) *Challah*- Separating a portion of dough from the bread³⁵ and (3) *Niddah*- ritual immersion in water after the end of a woman's menstrual period.³⁶ These three acts are considered to be spiritually meritorious for Jewish women. Over and above this they are also permitted to hear the story of Esther read on *Purim* (Talmud 4a)

³⁴ The general belief is that "man" was created (Genesis 1:27) with dual gender, and was later separated into male and female.

³⁵ This ritual involves symbolic offering of a part of the dough to the priests. Only after performing this ritual is the daily bread baked in the oven.

³⁶ After the end of menstruation the woman has to wait for seven more days. Then she must visit a *Mikvah* where she immerses herself in water and utters certain prayers for ritual purification. The laws of *Niddah* are listed in Leviticus (15:19-30)

The Jewish life is compartmentalized into “what women do” and “what men do”. On *Rosh Chodesh* (the first day of each month) Jewish women are not expected to do any work.

According to the Jewish law men and women must be separated during prayer. The *Torah* scrolls and other religious literature and objects are kept in the men’s section. Usually a *mechitzah* (a partition or a curtain) is placed in front of the women sitting in a second floor balcony at the back of the room. The women cannot see (sometimes can’t even hear) what is going on in the men’s section. If a woman voluntarily presents at the synagogue, her attendance at worship services does not count towards a *minyan* (the 10 people necessary to recite prayers). A woman cannot lead the religious services or join in any vocal participation in prayer. This is explained by reference to Jewish history in which God conveyed His messages only to men like Abraham and Moses. Therefore only men make the laws or interpret the sacred text.³⁷ Some other significant religious rituals are totally barred to women.

The usual prayer of the male Jews is, “*Blessed art thou O Lord our G-d,³⁸ king of the Universe, who hath not made me a woman*” (Fol 5, 6). The corresponding female prayer substitutes the words “*help me in living according to thy will*”. If a virgin is accused of moral turpitude, she is to be punished to death by stoning. According to scripture the Lord advised Moses to “take vengeance on the **midianites**”³⁹ by capturing their women, children and flocks”. When they were captured and brought to Moses and Eleazar on the plains of Moab he was told to “kill all the boys and kill *every woman* who has slept with a man”. (Numbers 31.1-18)

³⁷ For further information read Evelyn Kaye’s “*The Hole in the Sheet*” or H.E.Ghatan’s “*The Invaluable pearl*”

³⁸ The Jews are forbidden from naming God. If they have to write God they write it as G-d. Traditional Judaism addresses the deity only in masculine gender.

³⁹ This was in spite of the fact that Moses’ wife Zipporah belonged to the tribe of midianites.

(b) Christianity

The story of Adam and Eve does not clarify how the population of humans multiplied. God only produced Adam and Eve who produced three sons Cain, Abel, and Seth and no daughters. These three sons then multiplied but where did they get the wives? The Bible simply says, “*When men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them*”. The Bible does not tell us how “*men began to multiply*” without women. It appears that the Holy Bible does not offer the credit of human regeneration to the woman. The Old Testament describes women as unclean and the New Testament calls them a “*Weaker vessel*” in need of male forbearance.

The medieval monks called a woman “*necessary evil*”, “*a sack of dung wrapped in seductive flesh*”, “*a domestic danger and a delectable detriment*”. Based on such stereotypes man began to be considered the image and glory of God and a woman was labelled the glory of man.

Ironically according to the Bible this glory of man if touched by a woman defiles and desecrates man. St. Paul says, “*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me, it is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (Corinthians VII.17.79, 32-38 Matt 19; 11, 12, 29). In the same vein he advises his followers to remain unmarried like him. He says, “*I therefore, say to the unmarried and the widows that it is good for them if they abide as I*”. (Corinthians 6:3,6:8). St. Paul’s argument appears to be that married men and women would not care for God so they had better not marry at all. Perhaps it is the result of this instruction that Nuns remain celibate and in some cases shave their heads to look unattractive.

St. Paul was also against women preaching religion because that would have meant women wielding authority over men. He said,

“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men. She is to keep silent; for Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty”. (Timothy 2:12-15)⁴⁰

Up to the present day women have been restricted from becoming priests or bishops in the Church.⁴¹ They can not lead the congregation in prayers. Christ himself remained unmarried. In spite of all this, the Holy Bible says“, *be fruitful, and multiply*” (Genesis). *“John, the Baptist baptised only men of conscience in water for the remission of their sins and did not baptise a single woman”.* (*First Gnostic Principles of One God one faith* Deluxe printers London NW10 7NR Page14)

Women in Spain were banned by the Christian monks from visiting the Goya frescoes lodged in Aula Dei monastery eight miles from Zaragoza. Goya frescoes were painted in 1774 and depict the scenes of the life of Virgin Mary. Since their inception monks have been denying the women the right to see them. Even the Pope when asked to intervene said, *“It is a matter for the monks to decide”*. It was only in January 1985 that the monks finally relented and agreed to let the women see the pictures of another woman on condition that the women visited the place through a secret corridor unseen by anyone.

Wielding of arms by women has been a taboo in Christianity. Joan of Arc was burnt alive for wielding arms and dressing like a fighter man.

⁴⁰ Also see Deutronomy 22:5 and Leviticus 27:1-14 .These texts have been widely used many times to exclude women not merely from the priesthood but also from many public affairs. “early Christians regarded woman as a temptress because she was responsible for the fall of Adam”(Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol19 P.909 edition 1977)

⁴¹ Although Protestants have now relaxed their rules, the Catholics still deny this right to women. Pope John Paul II was considered to be a very learned and liberal Pope but he too declined to admit women into church as priests.

The Holy Bible forbids adultery, it says, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*”. Against this we read that Lot committed incest with his daughters giving rise to the tribes of Ammonites and Moabites. Incestuous relations are also mentioned in Genesis 20:12 where Abraham married his own sister. In Genesis (38:27-29) Tamar is said to have slept with her father-in-law and given birth to two sons. A father is advised to get married with his own daughter, “*If she is getting along in years, and he feels he ought to marry, he should fulfil his desire. He is not sinning. They should get married*”. (Corinthians 7.36)

In the Old Testament times a woman was regarded the property of her husband. Women had no rights of inheritance. The right of divorce rested only with the husband and no woman could demand divorce from her husband (see Deut 24.1). The wife was supposed to obey the husband in all situations. “*Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body of which he is the saviour. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*”(Ephesians 5:22)

The low status accorded to women is said to have been strongly preached by St. Augustine of Hippo (4th Century AD) who argued that mankind’s original sin was indulgence in sex. In 1549 AD Church of England’s baptism service stated, “*All men are conceived in sin*” and suggested a prayer for getting rid of carnal desires.⁴² In spite of all this St. Valentine is associated with romance and Pope Gelasius declared 14th February each year as St. Valentine’s Day. It is now common knowledge that on this day lewd and sexy cards are exchanged and music stimulates amorous ideas whipping up carnal desires.

Church of England is divided on the question of divorce. Jesus does not seem to have accepted the idea of divorce (Matthew

⁴² In 1980 it was accepted that marriage was for service and comfort.

5.31, Mark 10:2-12)⁴³ but he condemned re-marriage (I Peter 3:1-7). Roman Catholics however consider marriage to be indissoluble⁴⁴ but they do not permit priests to get married. If for any reason the marriage of a couple is annulled, neither party can marry again as long as the other partner is alive.

In Christianity God is usually addressed as “Father”. On September 10, 1978 Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I) spoke to the congregation in the St. Peter Square and said, “*He is our father; even more He is our mother*”. This caused a row. All over the world there were debates about the gender of God and the Pope was severely criticised for considering God as a woman.

A conference was held by high Christian theologians in France in 587AD to determine whether women could truly be considered human beings or not. Henry VIII forbade the reading of the Bible by women. In the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford male and female students were not given the same rights until 1964

⁴³ “I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well with garment”, says the Lord Almighty. (Ephesians 6:5) “Any one who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her”. (Mark 10:10)

⁴⁴ “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Mark 10:9)

Chapter Four

Women in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism

4.1 Women in Vedic Period

In the Vedic period women were given all respect due to them. In the family a wife occupied a dignified place and was regarded as “*Sahdharmni*”. Her active participation was absolutely necessary in all social and religious (RV.viii 31) functions.⁴⁵ No function was considered complete unless attended by women. She moved freely gaily decorated with ornaments in feasts and festivities without any *Purdah* (veil). Widow re-marriage was permissible and there was no restriction on women acquiring education or advancing in spiritual knowledge. A Woman was looked upon as Divine Mother, an embodiment of *Adya Shakti*. The women kept their hair well combed and groomed and wore their hair in plaits (*Chatush-kaprada* RV x, 114.3). A woman was described as “*ruler of the house*” or “*the light of the dwelling*”.

Most marriages usually took place through *Swambar* (A custom wherein a woman publicly and freely offered herself in marriage

⁴⁵ XqR pUjIAMqy nwirAsqU rvMqy qqr dyvqw. The angels visit the place where a woman is worshipped (respected).

to anybody who met the conditions laid down by her (RV. X 27.12). The bride was conveyed from the father's house to her in-laws in a palanquin (RV i 109.2) where she had an honoured place. She had an “*authority over her aged father-in-law, mother-in-law, and her husband's brothers and sisters*”. In one of the hymns a newly married bridegroom says to his bride, “*Act as a queen over your mother-in-law, father-in-law, and brothers-in-law*” Vedic marriage was indissoluble. Child marriage was unknown (RV. 85, 21.2). In the Vedic age, Maharishi Wishvamitter respectfully called a woman jyotisna (ज्योतिष्मन्) which means light. Monogamy was the common practice although those in authority flouted this custom.

Among some sections of the Poor people a woman married the man and brought him to her father's home.⁴⁶ Incest was common among less advantaged people and was socially acceptable.⁴⁷ Rape, adultery, and abduction were common.

Educated women were considered equal to men in all respects. They had full freedom to join in prayer and fight in battles. Education to girls was provided in Vedic Schools (*Charanas*) where the girl students stayed in hostels known as *Chhatri-shala* (RV. 6, 2.8).⁴⁸ There is evidence that some of the authors of the

⁴⁶ See “*Hindu civilization*” by Radha Kumud Mookerji P.74. There is a tribe named *Khas* in Arunachal Pardesh (India). This tribe still retains some of the traditions of Vedic times. The property is registered in the name of the woman and it is the woman who marries a man and then brings him to her home. The woman leads in every affair.

⁴⁷ Brothers and sisters like Ashodha and Pushan, Parukta and Narmada, Nahusa and Viraja, Suka and Pivari are said to have joined in marriage. Brahma married his daughter Satrupa. (Read details in *ihMgU Drm dIAW buJwrqW* By Dr. Ambedkar). Bhai Gurdas also refers to Brahma's incest as “*lokW nuMU smJwieMdw vyK srusqI rUp luBwxw*” There is a lewd discussion about sex in *Mandal 10 Sukat 86* (see Rig Veda Shalokas 10, 11, 13, 14, 23 etc) between *Yam* and *Yami* (Brother and sister). It appears that the number of women in those days was less than that of men and incest was a world wide phenomenon. For example we find that in Egypt Osiris married his sister Isis.

⁴⁸ These schools only taught Vedas to girls of well to do families. In later times the School run by Vedvyasa was very popular. His disciples Aruni and Kalapin had started their own schools.

Vedic hymns were women.⁴⁹ Intellectual women like Apala, Wishwawara, Ghoshla, Lopamudra, and Nivavari are mentioned in the Rig Veda as *Rishis* (guides) with respect as authors of very excellent hymns.⁵⁰ This proves that women contributed to every walk of life and were valued in all fields.

4.2 Post-Vedic period

During the post-Vedic period the excellence of Vedic period degenerated and things began to change. “*It is difficult to realize the actual condition of India under the ancient Hindu Rajas. It is however evident that the Whole continent was a chaos*”.⁵¹ Right from the time of Gautama Buddha (623BC), Buddhism had been strongly opposing Brahmanism and its teachings. In 185 BC the Buddhist king Brihidarth (grand son of king Ashoka) was killed by his Brahman commander Pushiamiter and this brought in further internecine problems. Wars for political and religious supremacy became bloody and destructive.⁵² During this disturbed period women suffered the most because there was nobody to espouse their cause. Their lot became rather contumely.

⁴⁹ For example Maitrey and Gargi etc. Gargi is known to have challenged Yajnavalkya and a thousand other Brahmans to a debate about the existence of God. Another woman Vachaknavi had a long discussion with the Brahmans in the court of King Janaka. Maitrey was regarded as an expert in Hinduism.

⁵⁰ There are references in the Rig Veda like, “This song was made by *Darghatmas*”, “This new hymn was composed by *Nodhas*”.

⁵¹ Wheeler’s short history page 51

⁵² This resulted in the death of nearly 100,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and the destruction of 84000 Buddhist *Viharas* (temples). Later the Greek king Malind accepted Buddhism and caused pogroms and massacres of the Hindus. According to Dr. Ambedkar most of the present day Hindu Temples were once Buddhist *Viharas*.

Sati (Self immolation) began to be considered a religious duty and restriction on child marriage became lax.⁵³ Taittiriya Samhita declared, “A Good woman is worse than a bad man.” Maitrayana Samhita denounced her as ‘untruth’. Dowry became prevalent. Polygamy was made legal and permissible. Women could be loaned out or rented out on payment.⁵⁴ Widows could marry only their husband’s brothers and were excluded from inheritance.⁵⁵

As the population grew and marital relations developed with the vanquished Sudras and other socially diverse groups, new problems began to appear. The Brahmans and the Buddhist religious and political leaders began to devise arbitrary rules and laws of society to keep it in order in their own way. These law-makers, who most often clashed with each other, produced *Puranas*, *Upnishads*, and *Simirities* popularising self contradictory and conflicting ideas in the society.⁵⁶

⁵³ "A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight years of age; if (the performance of) his duties would otherwise be impeded, he must marry sooner." [Manu IX.94]

⁵⁴ King Yayati rented out his daughter Madhvi to his Guru Galav. Galav offered the same girl to three kings in succession. The poor girl ended up with Wishvamitter, gave birth to a son, and was later returned to her father. (see *gurmā pRkws sqMbr* 1999 P.41 S.G.P.C. publication). On the one hand a woman was treated as a toy and on the other woman was worshipped as a goddess (Even now 90% of Hindu gods are goddesses. Most Hindus swear by saying *shuM dyvI dI*)

⁵⁵ A widow is instructed to eat rough dry food and reduce herself to a skeleton “Her hair should be shaved. She shall have to lie on a low couch, receive coarse food, and wear used clothes” (*Nardya Dharamashashtra P. 8*) “A widow who re-marries earns disapproval in this world and is reborn as a Jackal”. (See Manu Smiriti Chapter 10 Shalok 123 and Chapter 5 Shalok 155-157 and 164)

⁵⁶ Although Manu became more popular by writing *Manu Simirti* in which he wrote 27000 verses, Yajnavalkya is considered as more methodical, argumentative, and clear but has written only 1000 verses. Manu allows a Brahman to marry a *Sudra* girl (Manu iii 13), Yajnavalkya condemned it strongly. Manu condemns *Nyoga* (widows involving in sexual relationship with strangers for producing a male child). (Manu ix, 59-68) but Yajnavalkya recommends it. Manu disallows inheritance to a widow; Yajnavalkya considers a widow prime benefactor. Manu is said to have married his own mother Sharadha (See *ihMdu Drm dIAW buJwRqW* by Dr. Ambedkar)

Another *Simiriti* is written by Naradya. In many ways he disagrees with Manu and Yajnavalkya both. He allows *Nyoga* (80.8) and re-marriage (4. 97) but does not admit a widow’s right to her husband’s property. Naradya writes that a king, however devoid of virtue and morality, is still to be worshipped and a woman must similarly worship her husband (see *prakirnaka 20.2*). *Simirities* kept on being produced for many years afterwards. For example even as late as the time of Alau-din Khilji (1314 AD) Chandreshwar wrote a *Simiriti* for which meritorious service he was

Manu is known as the chief law-giver of this period. According to him a woman could not hold property (Manu viii, 416) except gifts (*stridhana*). She was forbidden by Manu (ii 66 and ix 18) from offering Vedic *Srauta* or *Grihya samskaras* (Household ceremonies) or performing sacraments. He considered women subservient to men and lower in status. A woman was supposed to remain under the guardianship of her father, brother, or husband.

*“In childhood, a woman must be subject to her father,
In youth to her spouse.
When her husband dies then to her sons,
And the woman must never be independent”*. (Chapter V laws of *Manu* 148)

Manu considered women impure and disallowed them from listening to the Vedas. He required women to consider their husbands as 'Lords'. The birth of a son was welcome as some one who would be instrumental in achieving salvation for his father but that of a girl was detested and contemptuously referred to as "stone". The woman was supposed to remain house-bound, do house-hold chores, bring up children, and keep household accounts. She was classified as *Sudra*.⁵⁷

Manu made *Vanprastha* (renunciation) and *Sanyasa* (wandering mendicancy) obligatory for Hindus (Manu ix, 11). As a result nearly half the society lived in forests under the guidance of chosen teachers each of whom had his own set of rules.

weighed in gold. Simirities are many in number and their directions contradict one another. 31 of them are usually mentioned and extensively quoted. As late as the reign of Akbar the Brahmins produced "*Allah Upnishad*".

⁵⁷ "The Hindu woman, religiously, is a *Sudra* and is not entitled to the *Gayatri Mantra* (D.P.Mukerjee *Modern Indian Culture* P. 17).Ironically most Hindus worship goddesses.

Brahmans commanded unique power and privilege.⁵⁸ Having become corrupt themselves they did not desist from interpolating spurious hymns in the scriptures (Puranas and Simrities) and inventing unbelievable mythical stories for the gullible people.⁵⁹ They did not even spare their own religious preceptors because this justified their own acts of omission and commission. Shantanu had 100 wives and Lord Krishna was recorded as having 360 consorts. Ravana, the great scholar of four Vedas,⁶⁰ was alleged to have abducted Rama's wife Sita.⁶¹ And later the

⁵⁸ "True was overwhelmed by false. The chaos of Brahmanical religion with all its conflicting theories reached a climax. The period was one of spiritual dryness. Truth had hardened into tradition and morality stiffened into routine. Life became a series of observances. The mind of man moved within the iron circle of prescribed ceremonialism." (**Indian Philosophy** by Dr. Radha Krishan former President of India). "In the course of time (i.e. by about 700BC) a voluminous body of prose literature, *The Brahmanas*, became attached to the four Vedas." (**History of Religions** by E.O. James P. 71). Some well meaning Hindu intellectuals called the Brahmans of their time, "A procession of dogs" (See Chhandok Upanishad or Read गुरुतु नृनक इवचर आिदायन पमनव 217-218)

⁵⁹ For example mother Ganges (Ganges River) was brought down from heaven with the connivance of Lord Shiva in order to purify the ashes of King Sagar's 60,000 sons who had been reduced to ashes by the wrath of a sage. Bhagirath did penance for the sin but could not break the force of Mother Ganges therefore Shiva absorbed the whole river in his matted hair. Hanuman was born of wind and swallowed the sun. August Rishi drank all the water of the oceans. Shiva decorated his hair by putting the moon in his hair like a follower. The Brahmans even strongly preached the ceremony of *Narmedh Yagya* in which a man was ritually slaughtered to please the stone gods. Somebody asked Swami Dya Nand, "Why do you oppose the Puranas? His answer was, "No body likes to eat poisoned food."

⁶⁰ At various places in the *Valmiki Ramayan* Ravana is mentioned as a great scholar and a pious man (See *Valmiki Ramayan* 5.6.13, 5.10.15, 6.10.11) also read *Ramayan* researched by P.H.Gupta page 154.

⁶¹ Bachittar Natak (Now wrongly called Dasam Guru Granth Sahib) refers to this degradation in the translation of Rama Avtar where it says, "dey cIn mInM mcInMq dysM, mhW suMdRI cyrkw cwr kysM" (681) Beautiful women with attractive hair were brought from China and Manchuria to be presented to Rama. Ram Chander himself is recorded as having offered beautiful women to Hanuman for his services. "He offered him many villages, 100 cows, and 16 beautiful virgins" (*Valmiki Ramayan* Sarg 125 Shalok 44). Most historians think Valmik lived in the 4th Century BC. Some others think that he was born in 184 BC.

The wives of Rama and those of his two brothers are also said to have committed *Sati*. "iqhAn kI iesqRI iqh AweI] sMg sqI hvY surg isDweI] (bicqr nwtk 856). This is the first mention of *Sati* during post-Vedic period.

It is not clear when the story of *Ramayan* happened. There is no mention of Ram Chandra or the story of *Ramayana* in the four Vedas. Even the *Shatpath Brahman* composed around 800BC has no mention of it. The first time we read this story is in a Buddhist book named *Dasrath Jatka*

illustrious Pandus are recorded as having staked Daropadi (wife of Arjan) in gambling which led to fratricidal struggle between cousins.⁶² The Kurus insisted on disrobing their own sister-in-law in front of the venerable male members of their family. The once worshipped Rig Vedic warrior god Indra was now shown as a voluptuous adulterer⁶³. It was preached that even religion changes from time to time therefore people should accept what was being preached and not bother to follow old practices and beliefs.⁶⁴

written in the fifth century. Here Rama son of King Dasrath is said to have born and lived in Benares. He married his sister Sita. The rest of the story is the same as we know today. It appears that Valmik changed some details of the story written in *Dasrath Jatka*. Later some other details were changed by Tulsi Das who drew on these sources.

⁶² Refer to Mahabharata (1200 BC?) where the Pandus lost their wife to the Kurus in gambling.

⁶³ According to *Mahabharata* he tried to seduce Ahalya, wife of Gautama “गोष्मत्तुम् अहिलया शिशुपालेण द्युम्ना इन्द्रो लुब्धोऽपि शशिसरिषु इन्द्रो भृशोऽपि मन्त्रोऽपि (पृष्ठा 1344) Indra (son of Dyaus and a cow named Nishtigri), is shown as a lazy god interested only in watching the dances of the beautiful *Apasras*. His only job is to violate the meditation of the truly spiritual gods by sending characterless women to sully their characters and tarnish their reputation. He also controls storms, lightening, and thunder. In later writings he is shown as the ruler of *Swarg* (Heaven). In *Ramayna* he was defeated by Ravana and carried to Lanka. The gods had to sue for his release. Ravana agreed to release him on condition that he was offered immortality in exchange for Indra’s release.

Indra is depicted as gold in colour with arms of enormous length riding a golden chariot drawn by 10,000 horses. He has four arms and usually rides an elephant named *Airavat*. He lives on mount MERU. According to the Brahmins he cut off the wings of the mountains because they were troublesome to him. Numerous beautiful girls (like Rambha, Urvashi and Menaka etc.) dance in front of him to please him .

Brahma is shown as an adulterer (Shiv Puran *sati khand* 2.19). Shivji is shown running completely naked after the wives of the *Rishis* and as a result of this indecency loses his male organ. (Shiv Puran *Kot Ruder* 4.12)

⁶⁴ “The Dharma of Sat yuga, Treta, Dwapra and Kali yuga have been changing. Dharma conforms to the deterioration of man in respective yugas. In Satya Yuga the austerities were the chief thing, Knowledge was the religion of the Treta, Sacrifice was the religion of the Dwapra but Charity alone is the religion of the Kali Yuga” *Manu Simirti Chapter 1 Shalok 85*. This was a trick to fleece the gullible people because only the Brahmins could receive charity. Bhai Gurdas tells us qRyqy C`qRI rUp Dr sUrj bMsI bf Avqwrw] nauN ihsy geI Awrjw mwXw moh AhMkwr pswrw] duAwpur jwv vys kr jug jug Aaud GtY Awcwrw]irgbyd mihM bRhmikRq pUrb muK SuB krm ibcwrw]KqRI Qwpy jujr vyd dKx muK bhU dwn dwqwrw]vYsoN QwipAw isAwm vyd pCm muK kr sIs invwrw]irg nIlubr jujr pIq svyyqMbr kr isAwm suDwrw]iqRhu jugIN qRY Dm aucrw (BweI gurdws)

Brahmans were exonerated from all immoral actions.⁶⁵ Polygamy and polyandry became prevalent.⁶⁶ In time all this became an inalienable part of religion. Child marriage,⁶⁷ restriction on widow re-marriage, abduction, female infanticide,⁶⁸ Sati,⁶⁹ etc.

⁶⁵ bRwhmx bd clx vI pUjx jog hY] (pRwSr smihqw AiDAwie 6). "A Brahman must not be subject to corporal punishment. For him shaving his head or banishing from the town is enough punishment". (*Nardya Dharamshastra* Tr. Julius Jolly P.183) "Later the celebrated Hindi poet Tulsi Das also wrote in the same strain. "syeIey ivpR igAwn gux hInw] sUdr n syeIey igXwn pRbInw"] Brahmins received horses, elephants, cows, corn and even women as payment for their services. There are many references to their greed in Gurbani. Asu dwn gj dwn ishjw nwrI BUim dwn] AYso dwnu inq inqih kIJY (pMnw 973), ArpY nwir sIgw smyiq (pMnw 875).etc.

At this time every married woman had to spend her first nuptial night with a Brahman. The Raja of Gya requested the *Panda* (*Brahman*) to excuse this indignity to his wife but the *Panda* refused and the queen committed suicide. The Namboodripad Brahmins of Calicut raised a hue and cry and became violent when this practice was stopped. They also continued sacrificing animals in the temples which was a camouflage for procuring meat. No Brahmin could be punished for any crime however heinous. Even The British Government of India accepted this and no Brahmin was hanged before 1817 AD.

⁶⁶ Dhitrashtra practised polygamy. He is said to have one hundred wives. As for polyandry the custom is still extant. Among the Khasa tribe of the cis-Himalayan region a group of brothers marry a group of wives and no one of them claims an exclusive right to any one wife. All belong to all. Similarly among the Jaunsari tribe of trans-Himalaya (and also in Nepal) several brothers marry one wife with the eldest having the right to property. The others have only to share the wife provided the joint family continues. If the family disintegrates, the younger brothers get nothing. (See '*Races and culture of India*' by Majumdar Asia publishing house Bombay).

⁶⁷ Child marriage is common in many areas of India even now.

⁶⁸ This custom was prevalent all over India. The Rajputs were notorious because of their social customs and conventions which entailed heavy expenditure on the marriages of their daughters. They continued killing their daughters up to the 19th century AD. It was estimated that nearly 1, 25,000 female babies every year were killed by Khariju families of Gujarat alone. Although the practice was declared illegal by the British Government of India, female infanticide is still carried out here and there. Unfortunately this practice has now received a boost from the technical advances made by modern science by which the sex of an unborn baby can be easily ascertained.

Female infanticide and *sati* were declared unlawful by Lord William Bentinck on 7 December 1829. In the Panjab and Rajputana this law was promulgated in the year 1847.

⁶⁹ *Sati* was fully established in India by the fourth century BC at the time of Alexander's invasion. It was of various kinds. (1) *Sahmaran Sati* was burning with the corpse of the husband. (2) *Anumaran Sati* was immolation with the ashes, remains, clothes, or sword of the dead. (3) *Ma Sati* was practised by burning with the corpse of the son. (For further information see *Glossary of tribes and castes* by H.Rose). Usually a Woman was forced to commit *Sati* to earn merit after death but a pregnant woman or the one with a young baby was not forced. Others lost their rights to property if they declined to die with their husbands. "*Cases are on record where the unwilling victim jumped out of fire, but her half-burnt body was forcibly thrown back into it.*" ("*Main Currents of Indian History* by Majumdar and P.N. Chopra P. 198) According to Prashar Samhita (Chapter 4) a *Sati*

became common practice. Woman became an object of use and abuse and it was preached that a woman's mind is very complex and is full of a bundle of tricks.⁷⁰ A religious scholar named Somprabhusuri wrote, "*Women are fond of three things, Argument, Mascara, and vermilion. Others like milk, son-in-law, and music*".⁷¹

Valmiki Ramayan (the first that was written on the story of Ramayana) tells us that the Hindu Lord Ram Chandra had little respect for women. In the battle with Ravana when Rama's brother Lakshman fell down unconscious, he told Hanuman to stop fighting immediately and rush for the medicine. He is reported to have said, "*Wives do not matter. They are cheaply available everywhere but brothers cannot be obtained.*" (Valmik Ramayan Sarg 101 Shalok 15)⁷²

When the war with Ravana was over, Ram Chandra addressed his wife Sita as follows:

enjoys as many years in heaven as the number of hair on the body of her husband. When a law was being passed to outlaw *Sati*, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the great Hindu leader, opposed it tooth and nail. Full details about *Sati* can be read in *Padam Puran*.

Closely allied to *Sati* was the custom of *Jauhar* practised by Rajput women. When King Akbar laid siege to Chitaur (20 October 1567 to Feb23 1568), Rajput wives, daughters and sisters all burnt themselves on fire and 30,000 of their men folk perished fighting in the sanguinary battle. Akbar was so impressed by the heroism of Rajput defenders (Jai Mal and Fatta) of this siege that he installed their statues at the main gate of the fort of Agra.

Khonds and Kols of Bengal used to offer virgins as human sacrifices to their goddess. This was stopped by Lord William Bentinck through Law.

⁷⁰ qRX icRqrm purSSX Bwgm] (BwgIrQ) (Female mind is too deep to be fathomed by man) .

⁷¹ "qIAh iqMn ipAwrie, kLI,surmw sMDUr]Anie iqMn ipAwrie d`uD,jMvwie au qUr" (somprBUsurI)

⁷² It is said that when Sita was turned away by Ram Chander she came to live with Rishi Balmik at Chitarkoot Mountain. Here she gave birth to two sons Lav and Kush who were trained in fencing and music by Balmik. *Ramayan*, written in Sanskrit, is his masterpiece of excellent poetry.

“Having killed my enemy I have obtained you as war booty. I have once more regained my lost prestige⁷³. People have now witnessed my military might. I came to kill Ravana and to avenge my insult. I did not risk war for your sake”. (Valmik Ramayana Yudh Kand Sarg 115)

Taboos like Sutak/Patak (sUqk/pwqk)⁷⁴ were introduced by the Brahmans which downgraded women’s status still further.

⁷³ Similarly all through his *Ramayana* Tulsi Dass also mentions that the war of Lanka was fought only to restore the family prestige of the Raghus and not to retrieve Rama’s wife (SITA) or avenge her abduction. Rama was so perturbed to have lost his prestige that even the deer of the jungle appeared to him to be taunting, ridiculing, and condemning him. “nwir sihq sB Kg imRg iBRMdw, mwnON mor krq hihN inMdw” Not only this even the wild plants and trees appeared to him to be jeering at him, “sRIPl knk kdil hrSwhIN, nYk nw SMk skuc mn mwhIN”(myry mn ivc rqi Br vI SMkw nhIN hY ik nwrIAL,DqUrw qy kyly myrI hI iK`LI aufw rhy hn)

Although he had tested Sita’s fidelity through fire, Rama turned out his pregnant wife because he could not bear the remarks of an ordinary washerman. As a ruler he could punish the washerman but he did not do so because this would have brought disreputation to him and his family. Eventually when he met his wife in the jungle and realised his mistake, he was afraid of more public banter if he brought her back home. Therefore he thought it better to accept death than to hear people pick holes in his coat. He entered into a stream and like lightning absorbing into the cloud disappeared into the unknown. “kt pRXMq jl mO lX kIno iDAwn AKMf, Xog Xqn kir rwm kih POVXO inj pRHmMf” khy bcn AMqR DXwn pRBU ijaUN dwmnI Gn sON lXO [nB jXiq jXjX jXkwr jXjX jXiq jXqw nB lXo [

The whole family of Rama was scared of public criticism and disgrace. His father Dasrath had given a vow to his wife Kakei. When the later asked him to exile his son and fulfil the vow; Dasrath did not like it but sent his son away simply to avoid inviting public criticism if the vow was not fulfilled. “Apjs hoau jg sujs bswaUN nrk prauN vru sur puir jwaUN[Similarly Rama ate the plums offered to him by a low caste woman (*Bheelani*) and said, “khy rGupiq sunu Bwumin bwqw [mwnON eyk Bgiq kr nwqw [(I only recognize the relationship of spirituality not caste). The same Ram Chandra killed the low caste saint Shambhook because the later’s act of remembering God was bringing in criticism and slander from the Brahmans.(see Uttar kand Valmik Ramayan 74-28 to 76-48)

⁷⁴ *Sutak* means the impurity of a woman who has just given birth. In whosoever’s house a child is born no one can eat or drink with them for eleven days (Brahmans for 11 days, Kashatri for 13 days, Vaish for 17 days, and Sudra for 30 days). At the end of the period the Brahman has to be called to ritually purify the house.

Patak means impurity of a person whose relative has died. “ij`Qy Awpxy sbMDI dw mrxw AQvw pu`qr dw jnm suxy, auQy ausy vyly vgyd pwxI iv`c goqw mwry.” (lGuU Aiqr sMihqw AiDAwie 5). In whosoever’s house the dead man lies, he/she has to cleanse himself/herself for eleven days. It is believed that the departed soul takes on a new birth on the 13th day when a Brahman (*Acharj*) performs obsequies to purify the house. “The soul dwells for some time in paradise and is then reborn into a new body”(Gita Shaloka 41-54)

4.3 Medieval Times

Tulsi Das (15th century), known as the ‘Moon of Hindi literature’ (author of Ramayana), tells us that the inferiority complex had so adversely affected the psyche of the Indian women that they themselves had started considering females as riff raff of society.⁷⁵ Tulsi Das himself considered woman “*Half nectar, half poison*”⁷⁶ and the cause of the downfall of man. It was under such detestation that Tulsi’s phrase “For, गव्वर सुद्र, पसु, न्वरि] पव्कोन क्वव्न क्य आडक्वरि” (Cattle, peasants, Sudras, and women deserve only taunts and rebukes) became a bye word in India.

Many other taboos were also introduced by the Brahmans some of which are being observed even to this day. For example in Ranchi District women cannot touch a plough. If they do, consternation prevails in the village and all have to atone for the woman’s remissness by killing fowls, pigeons, and pigs. Kharias make such woman draw the plough, eat grass, and go round the village begging for alms which later goes to the tribal feast. Todas of Nilgiri do not allow women to touch milk. In some areas reactions also started against the Brahmans and the taboos they introduced. Haihayas of Travancore do not let a Brahman come to their village unless beaten by a bamboo stick and bathed in water mixed with cow dung. In the Panjab elder brothers of the husband and her fathers-in-law are a Taboo for a wife and she is supposed to keep a distance from them.

⁷⁵ ikh ibiD ausqiq kroN qumHwrI] ADm jwiq mYN jvH miq nwrI]ADm qy ADm ADm AiQ nwrI] iqn mhu mYN AiQ mMd gMvwrI] ("rwm icRq mwns" qulsI dws). Tulsi Das, a devotee of Ram Chandra, was born in 1497AD in village Rajpur (District Banda-U.P).His magnum opus *Ram Chrit Manas* (Commonly known as *Tulsi Ramayan*) is a literary masterpiece of great value. He is said to have died in 1623AD at Benares. He was younger than Guru Nanak by 28 years. His other works are not as popular as *Ramayan*.

⁷⁶ Around the 15th century Swami Ramanand is said to have advocated the uplift of women but his disciple Tulsi Das wrote, “God has made woman half poison half nectar.” “ AimX vwir gwryau grl nwir krI krqwr] pRym bYr kI jnin Xug jwnih bu`D n gvwr] (qulsI dws) . One wonders whether the mixture of poison and Amrit would taste like Poison or Amrit! The Pope solved this mystery when he said, “And yet believe me, good as well as ill, woman is at best a contradiction still”. Rabindra Nath Tagore only wrote,” O woman you are half woman and half dream”.

4.4 Modern Times

Although Hinduism has been discarding some of its old practices under the influence of its reformers a widow is still looked upon with indifference. She is not permitted to add *Ahuti* (oblation) into the *Havan Kund fire* (sacrificial fire). In some cases her shadow is considered as in-auspicious. Hindu marriages are conducted with full consultation of horoscopes of the bride and the bride groom. But if the husband dies, the widow is usually blamed as a jinxed woman. As soon as the news of the husband's death is received the wife's bangles are smashed, her frontal mark (ibMdI) is removed, and vermilion is wiped off her hair. Widows have to dress themselves in white clothes and are not permitted to wear ornaments or any make up. Young and newly married girls are prohibited from talking to widows. They are considered unlucky and there are social functions where a widow is not permitted to take part.

Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902AD) is usually credited with denouncing untouchability and raising the status of Hindu women but when swami Vivekananda was asked his views about the treatment of the widows and widow remarriage he replied, "*Am I a widow that you ask me this question? Am I a woman that you ask me that question again and again? Who are you to solve woman's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems.*"(Our women By Swami Vivekananda Advaita Ashrama publication P.51) According to him "*Widow Marriage takes place among the lower classes*". (P.58) Remarriage of tender-aged widows has not been given any serious thought so far.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Remarriage of widows' Act was passed in 1856 AD through the efforts of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar but it did not have the desired effect. Justice Mahadev Govinda Ranade was the greatest supporter of widow remarriage.

Vivekananda quotes Swami Dyananda (1824-1883AD)⁷⁸ and writes, “*Dyananda pointed out that though a wife is absolutely necessary in the sacrifice of the domestic fire, which is a Vedic rite she may not touch the Salagrama Sila or the household idol*”. (ibid P.64) Hindu scholars believe that Brahmacharya is necessary for both sexes. Swami Vivekananda says, “*If religion exalts Brahmacharya for woman, it does exactly the same for man*”. (ibid P. 69)

It is not uncommon or unusual to hear women praying loudly at Ganges saying, “*Give me the next birth as a man*”. Hindu women are not permitted to wear a Janeu (Hindu sacred thread).

4.5 Dev Dasis

Dev dasis⁷⁹ were temple harlots. Young girls were offered at the Hindu temples fully loaded with ornaments to stay there for life. Some even offered their wives to the temples. Dev dasis danced to the deity as a prayer to seek deity’s blessings in producing good crops and plenty of milk. They were usually exploited sexually by the priests and almost in all cases ended up as prostitutes or beggars towards the end of their lives. The Dev Dasi custom is still prevalent in some areas of India.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Basing his opinions on Rig Veda (10-85-45) and Athrav Veda (14-2-18) Swami Dyanand justifies *Nyoga* (sexual involvement of a widow with up to eleven men in order to produce a male child for the salvation of the dead husband) as religiously sanctioned. (See *Rig Vedadebhashya Bhumika*). Nyoga is sanctioned by Rig Veda vide Hymn No. 10 of Sutra 10. (For details of the birth of Hindu gods through *Nayoga* read *srvoqm gRMQ sRI gurU gRMQ swihb* by Swami Ram Tirath Dandi Sanyasi Page 79)

⁷⁹ Also known as Ram Dasis (*rwm dwsIAW*) , Ram Janian (*rwm jxIAW*) or Jognian (*jogxIAW*)

⁸⁰ Although this custom has long since died out in the Panjab, it still persists in the South of India in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. Young girls are offered to Goddess Yellama (in Yellama Temple Karnataka) at the age of 14. Yellama goddess is a blue faced female statue with golden spikes radiating from her hair. In the temple Dev dasis take an oath never to marry and to be available for sex with any priest. The priests usually offer them to rich people for sex and are paid handsomely. The priests also feed pimps who allure older Dev dasis to the

4.6 Buddhism

In the beginning Buddhism permitted women to receive education in religion. Over seventy Buddhist nuns are mentioned to have composed poems which can be studied in *Theragatha*. Most famous of them were Gotami (Buddha's aunt), Mahaprajapati, Tissa, Abhirupananda, Mitta, Khema (wife of king Bimbisara), and Sundrinanda. They were all supposed to have attained *Arhatship* (salvation).

In the fifth year of Lord Buddha's ministry the question of admitting women to the order arose. His widowed mother Mahaprajapati insisted on women being admitted. Buddha thrice refused her request. She followed him everywhere "*with swollen feet, and covered with dust and weeping outside the door*"⁸¹. At last Buddha's companion Ananda assured her of help.

An interesting conversation is recorded as having taken place between Lord Buddha and his disciple Ananda as follows:-

brothels of Bombay, Madras, and Delhi to work as prostitutes. Government of India banned the practice around 1980 AD but it did not stop. In 1991AD a special inspector named Ashok Rodan was appointed in Karnataka to root out this practice. He enlisted 130 under-cover prostitute Dev dasis under Dev dasi Irawa to report on the practice secretly. In 1991 alone 2000 young girls of 14 were initiated on the full moon day into Dev dasis. Recently Dr. Ishwar Gilda warned that unless the practice is stopped, it will accelerate the spread of AIDS in the state. The Government's curb angered priests and farmers who claim that Yellama must be appeased for rains to fall, sons to be sired, and the crops to grow. Two policemen trying to stop the ceremony in Shumnagar District were murdered.

According to the legend a sage ordered his son to chop off the head of his mother because of her unchaste behaviour. The son did so but grafted the head on the shoulders of an untouchable woman Yellama who became a goddess. Pre-pubescent girls are given a good bath, dressed in *Neem tree* leaves (*azdirachta indica leaves*) and ornaments with red and white beads hanging around. They are then marched in a procession to the temple in clouds of turmeric to be offered to the deity as Dev dasis.

Dev dasi custom is still prevalent in Nepal. A four year girl is worshipped as 'Live goddess' and then offered to the temple laden in flowers. Nobody dare oppose this custom and the king of Nepal approves it.

⁸¹ Hindu Civilization P. 255

Ananda: - How should we behave towards women O Lord?

Buddha: - Do not look upon them

Ananda: - But if we do have to deal with them?

Buddha: - Then do not talk

Ananda: - But if talking becomes necessary?

Buddha: - Then keep wide awake.

On the recommendation of Ananda, Lord Buddha agreed to admit women into the order on condition that they must observe eight rules.

One of the eight rules was that the nuns must salute a monk and never abuse or disobey him. They must not visit a place where there were no monks. Buddha thought such “*strict rules were necessary like dykes to check the overflow of a reservoir, but by the admission of women to the church, it would be like a house of more women than men, liable to be broken into by robbers, and where it should have lasted long, for 1000 years, it would last now for 500 years, and not last long*”.⁸²

Like Hinduism, Buddhism too favoured renunciation and advocated retirement into the jungles.⁸³ When the Jain and Buddhist women (especially *Sakya* women) moved into the jungles and founded the orders of nuns, things began to go wrong. The *Maths* (nunneries) soon became the centres of corruption.⁸⁴ In these Nunneries the *Bhikshunis* (nuns) were not independent. They could not take any step without the permission or advice of a leading abbot.⁸⁵

⁸² *ibid* P.255 According to Megasthenes, “*Women were permitted to share in philosophic life*” on condition that they observed complete sexual continence like the monks.

⁸³ “Full of hindrances is house-hold life, a path defiled by passion. Free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things.”(Tevigga Suttana Tr. T.W. Rhys David P.187)

⁸⁴ A nun named *Manavika Chinha* was assaulted by monks. Lord Buddha himself was accused by his opponents of having sexual relationship with *Parivrajika* (popularly known as Sundri).

⁸⁵ The word Bhikshu appears to have originated from Bhiksha (begging). “*In Buddhism woman Bhikshunis are deemed second grade compared to male Bhikshus who are considered senior to them. A male Bhikshu is not supposed to touch and rescue a drowning woman, even If she were his*

Soon women began to be looked upon as bondage and a snare for men. Some even stated that knowledge, discrimination, dispassion, and devotion are difficult for the female sex to attain. They were prohibited from reading the scriptures or to re-marry after widowhood. They began to be treated as *sudras* and looked upon as inferior in spirituality.⁸⁶

The society became corrupt. Vamachara cult (vwm mwrɔg) which had developed by then was the height of corruption. They purchased wives in exchange for cattle and offered them as prizes to competitors who excelled in boxing, wrestling, archery, or races. They openly committed incest and indulged in extreme intoxication.⁸⁷

4.7 Sidh Naths

mother". (Recent researches in Sikhism Panjabi University Patiala P. 17) "The nuns formed a distinct community which was practically subordinate to the community of monks". (Main Currents of Indian history by Majumdar & P.N. Chopra P.28). "The woman Bhikshu even if she were an old entrant in the Bhikshu order was considered junior to a male Bhikshu who joined the order later than she had done". (Essentials of Sikhism by Daljeet Singh P. 186).

⁸⁶ In Buddhist literature we find derogatory remarks about women."

⁸⁷ pIqvw pIqvw punw pIqvw Xwvq igrq nw BU qly Drink and drink until you fall down unconscious. In the 19th century Gulab Das tried to revive this cult and make it current among Guru Nanak's followers. Gulab Singh (later Gulab Das) son of Hamir Singh (born in 1809 in village Rataul near Taran Taran) was a depraved man who drank, danced, used drugs and kept prostitutes. He settled in Village Chatha (c` Twnear Qasur) after retirement from Maharaja Sher Singh's army, declared himself as Guru, donned a Kalghi, named his adopted son Hargobind and his grandson Tegh Bahadur. His cult was vehemently opposed by Nirankaris, Nam Dharis, Maharaja Narinder Singh Patiala, and the British Government but it spread like wild fire throughout the Panjab. He died in 1873 in the lap of a Muslim prostitute Peero and was buried in her grave. His followers were known as Gulab Dasis. Gulab Das wrote a lot. "hm hYN kurwhI kwPr ibgVy Fwih jgq kI rIsw ry] dws gulwb Ajwq Bey hYN iml kr Awpxy mIqw ry" (gulwb cmn ivcoN). He himself preached his Guruship as follows, "AwE shIE rl drSn krIey c`iTAW vwly gur kw] drSn pweIey bl bl jweIey, sYl kry inq Dur kw] nr nwrI sB drSn AwvYN prsy Bvn hujr kw] drSn dws gulwb gurW kw pwey Bwg mQur kw]

The ninth to the twelfth century period is specially known for abhorrence of women. During this period the Naths (Also known as Yogis), who were all misogynists, preached hatred against women.⁸⁸ They considered a woman as ‘*a whip to man’s carnal desire*’ and hence recommended abstinence and renunciation. For example Gorakh Nath, the originator of split-eared Yogis, wrote,

“*Woman defiles the soul, woman destroys vitality.
Woman eats away our body.
This leopard has eaten three worlds,
I, Gorakh, have bound her hand and foot*”.⁸⁹

Gorakh Nath is said to have addressed a *padi*⁹⁰ to his Guru Machchander Nath when the later succumbed to the viles of women. He called women tigresses and wrote, “*O my revered Guru, do not indulge in actions which drain the body of its vital fluid. During the day the tigress captivates our mind and during the night dries up our vitality. A man who lives with a woman is like a tree on the bank of a river, his hope of living a long life is scanty.....The tigress disturbs our sleep, drains the vital fluid and weakens our body. The tigress carefully selects beautiful bodies to eat, says Gorakh Rai.*”

⁸⁸ Nathism is said to have started with Patanjali (150 BC?). It is an off-shoot of Buddhist *Sehajyan* sect. The *Naths* (also known as *Sidhs* or *Yogis*) considered Shankar Nath (also known as Aad Nath) of Nepal as their mystical progenitor and Machchandar Nath as their temporal Guru. *Naths* had to take three oaths to be initiated into the order. (1). I will live on alms and will not follow any occupation (2). I will observe complete celibacy all my life (3). I will not kill (*Ahimsa*). They smeared their bodies with ashes, lived in caves and forests, remained naked, and pierced their ears with earrings. Their hair was usually matted. A staff and a conch (called *Singhee*) were their weapons. They lived by begging from the very householders whom they detested. At one time they were feared a lot in the Panjab and were supposed to have miraculous powers. The leader of the Panjab Sidhs was Gorakh Nath, a follower of Machchander Nath. Nathism has nearly vanished from the Panjab now.

⁸⁹ bwGn ijMd ly bwGn ibMd ly, bwGn hmrI kwieAw] ien bwGn qrY loeI KweI b`Dq gorK rwieAw] (gorK nwQ)

⁹⁰ See Dr. Bharthwal’s Padi No. 43 in ‘*Gorakh Vani*’

Gorakh's disciple Chaurangi Nath (popularly known as Puran Bhagat) was taught to abhor and detest women with the result that he hated *Rani* (queen) Sundran who is said to have committed suicide rather than suffer separation.⁹¹ Another Yogi named Charpat Nath wrote, "*He spent the money and got a cat as spouse. The mother is overjoyed that her son is married. The poor soul does not know that termite has entered the green wood and will eat it away root and branch*".⁹²

4.8 Jainism

The Jain doctrines, as enunciated by Parsva,⁹³ contained only four principles. Wardhman Mahavira (599BC) later added the fifth one which read, "*Thou shalt observe Chastity*". He also brought in further innovation by requiring his followers to discard the use of clothes and remain completely naked.⁹⁴ Mahavira laid more emphasis on asceticism than family life. "*There was a decline in monastic morals during the interval between Parsva and Mahavira (Nearly 250 years)*".⁹⁵

⁹¹ A Nath is required to take a vow not to marry and not even to sit or dine with a woman. (See "*Indian Sadhus*" by G.S.Ghurye P.39). jMgl igAw nw bhuiVAw sMdrW nUM | jogI nhIN jy ikxy dy mIq lokol

⁹² dwm kwF bwGn ly AwieAw] mwaUN khy myrw pUq ivAwihAw] gIli lkVI kau Gun lwieAw] aun fwl mUl cun KwieAw" (crpt nwQ)

⁹³ Parsva Nath is usually considered the 23rd *Tirthankra* of Jainism (24th was Wardhman Mahavir). He was the son of King Ashvasain of Benares. He did not marry and left home at the age of 30. He is said to have attained knowledge at the ripe age of 83. His four principles of Jainism are called *Charayam* (Four oaths).

⁹⁴ Jainis split into two sects. The *Svetambras*, who wear white clothes and the *Digambbras*, who move about as 'sky-clad or naked ascetics. It is usually believed that the former stuck to the instructions of Parsva and the later followed Mahavira (died 546BC).

⁹⁵ Hindu Civilization by Radha Kumud Mookerji P.227

"*Monks would flag nuns. Nuns would flag monks- both parties nearly completely naked. All this in the name of piety.*" ("*Universal Sikhism*" by Dalip Singh. Bahri Publications New Delhi P.59). This was the time when erotic temples like those at Khajuraho, Jagan Nath, Bhuvneshwar and Konark began to be built with women depicted bare-breasted or their gentilia shown prominently. Prurience and lasciviousness ruled the roost. In one of the statues Lajja Gauri's knees are drawn up to the shoulders displaying her private parts. Lord Shiva was depicted as partaking of intoxicants like *Bhaang* (cannabis indica) and the poisonous *Dhatura* (DqUrw) . In the temples of Shilaa Devi

According to Zimmer, the Digambar Jainis looked upon women as inferior and intellectually far behind men.⁹⁶ They believed that a woman can not achieve *Kaivalya* (salvation). According to them there are three requirements for salvation (1) Character, (2) Knowledge, and (3) spirituality. Jainis think that a woman has no Character and therefore salvation is denied to a woman. If she is competent in knowledge and spirituality, then she will be born again as man and only then will she attain salvation by gathering all three attributes. The fact that God created them as women is sufficient to deprive them entering into heaven. They must be born as men to get release from transmigration.⁹⁷

Unlike some Hindu sects who worship goddesses, the Jainis worship Tirthankras (Holy teachers) none of whom was a female.

4.9 Shaivas and Vaishnavas

Ramanuj Shankardeva thought that a woman was full of guile and therefore he called a woman, “*the gateway to hell*” and did not permit women to join Vaishnavism. He called women dirty and believed that a woman’s glance can pollute men. Shankradeva stated, “*Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman’s is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance, and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from*

of Amber/Jaipur and the great Mahakaleshwar mander at Ujjain, liquor is still offered to the goddesses. Caves of Ajanta, Ellora, and Elephanta were created and painted with (in some cases sensual) pictures or sculptures.

⁹⁶ See Zimmer’s *Philosophies of India* P.222/223. Digambras believed that a woman cannot achieve *Kaivalya* (salvation).

⁹⁷ This was in direct contrast to Hinduism where Lord Krishna is recorded as having said, “Anyone who takes shelter in me- even a woman, a merchant, or one who is born in a low family- can approach the supreme destination.”(*Bhagwat Gita* 9.32).However Christianity some times comes closer to Jainism when we read, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of God.” (Gospel of St. Thomas Logo 114)

the company of women". (Recent researches in Sikhism Panjabi University Patiala Page 17)

It is not hard to imagine the irreparable harm done to society by the pernicious doctrine of gender inferiority. Women entertained inferiority complex and servility. They came to be regarded as 'child bearing machines', 'Shoe of a man's foot', 'more poisonous than a nagin (Snake)⁹⁸', and an 'idiot with brain at the nape of the neck'.

4.10 Influence of Hinduism on the Panjab

Medieval Panjabi society was greatly influenced by the Hindus, Jains, and especially by the Vaishnavas. The Sidhs once dominated the Panjab. Their influence on Panjabi society was direct. One may strain every nerve to find any writer of this period mentioning the bravery, wisdom, or sacrifices of women but will find nothing. Most of the writers of this period vied with each other in condemning women. If sexual weakness was the subject she was called *Luna*, if selfishness was to be mentioned she was termed *kakei* and if treachery was the topic, she was called *Sahiban*.⁹⁹

Space does not permit us to evaluate the writings of this period fully. Panjabi poet, Waris Shah, condemned women as

⁹⁸ nwrI kI CweIN prq AMDw hoq BujMg] iqs nr kI khu ikAw gqI jo inq
nwrI ky sMg] mrd dy pYr dI j`uqI, qIvIAW dI m`q gu`q ip`Cy huuMdI
hY, Gr dI cwkr, ij`Qy r`b PylH ho igAw au-Qy iesqrI bx geI ,Byf
ieSnwnI nhIN[AOrq igAwnI nhIN ,ivlws-gu`fI , nrk duAwrI,cil~qr
h`QI etc.

⁹⁹ *Luna* was the step-mother of Puran Bhagat. She showed proclivity towards sexual gratification with her stepson. *Kakei* was the mother of prince Bharata. She wanted her own son to be the king and Ram Chandra, the rightful heir to the throne to be exiled. *Sahiban* loved Mirza but when her brothers came to fight, she treacherously removed the bows and arrows of the sleeping lover and was thus instrumental in having him killed through treachery. Mirza said, "mMdw kIqw eI swihbW, myrw qrkS tMigAw jMf] iqMn sO kwnI imrzy jvwn dI nI mYN idMdw BrwvW nUM PMf" [

‘undependable’,¹⁰⁰ Muqbal called them untrustworthy.¹⁰¹ Chhaju Bhagat called them lethal weapon.¹⁰² Suthra called them “*Well of troubles*”.¹⁰³ A Bhagat named Kanha compared women with paper dolls”.¹⁰⁴ Anyone seeking advice of women began to be looked upon as hen-pecked and untrustworthy. The only job of women was said to be to perpetuate race, do household chores serve the male members of the family and demand no favours.

Poet Chan wrote a complete book titled Triyacharitar (iqrXw cirqr) about women. He writes, “*O Chaand, women are full of villainy, Even their creator God could not understand their nature. A woman is poisonous from head to foot like a cobra. One may survive the hellfire but not a woman’s bite*”.¹⁰⁵

Some writers desisted from condemning women but preached fidelity and abstinence instead of directly attacking women. Baba Sri Chand (Son of Guru Nanak) and Jat Mal Lahori were two such writers.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ vwrS rMn PkIr qlvwr GoVw cwry Qok ieh ikSy dy Xwr nwhIN]

¹⁰¹ “B`T rMnW dI dosqI KurIN iJnHW dI m`q, h`s ky lwauNdIAW XwrIAW ro ky idMdIAW d`s[l`KIN h`Q nw AWvDI dwnSvMdW dI p`q” [

¹⁰² nwrIN qlvwrIN, iek au~jl ibAw iq`KIAW] CjU mwrin ivBcwrIN, ibbykI qy aubry” (C`jU Bgq)

¹⁰³ “DIAW DwV qy pu`qr DwVw rMn d`uKW dw KUH, ies GwxI `coN suQirAw koeI hir jn k`Fy DU] (suQrw)

¹⁰⁴ kwgd kI pUqRI kau qau nw iqrIAw inhwr] “kwgd kI jy hovy nwrI [ivS gMdl iqs jwx ktwrI”] (kwnHw)

¹⁰⁵ cWd qIAN kI jwiq cilqRn hY BrI] qih nw pwieE Byd jih pYdw krI] nK iSK lau ibK BrI su ibsIAwr nwg ijauN] ho qw ko f`isE nw bcih pRly kI Awg ijauN] (cirqr nMbr 8)

¹⁰⁶ igAwn kI godVI iKmw kI topI] jq kw AwVbMd sIl lMgotI] (bwbw isrI cMd) tly jo dyK prweI nwrI, so nr ikvyN nw iQVsI] ^uSbUeI swry j`g AMdr, bwg ievyN hI iKVsI] (bwnI j`t m`l lhOrI) jIqYN iEMdrI soeI sUrW,bl kr Avsr l`gy] smrQ khy iqs mwhxU dw jg iv`c js bhU j`gy” (bwxI smrQ swihb)

During the mediaeval times, frequent foreign onslaughts created insecurity which led to a marked deterioration of the position of women. The aristocrats had sunk very low and those in authority lived a very dissolute life. Hunting, drinking, and association with dancing girls, was a common feature of Govt. employees.¹⁰⁷ Women were murdered on suspicion of petty alleged infidelities. The honour of women was openly bought and sold. With a view to protect the honour of their women folk from invaders the parents deliberately instituted the customs of child marriage, female infanticide, *Sati*, and *Purdah*.¹⁰⁸ Women considered themselves as powerless (Ab1w) and depended for protection on their husbands. Free movement of females was restricted and education of women was discouraged. Girls were considered a liability. This created frustrated, helpless, and pathetic women steeped in ignorance and superstition. Young girls were frequently abducted and sold right up to the coming of the British (1599 AD)

¹⁰⁷ "Aw1Hw KMf" dw krqw Xwgink ies vyly dI pRsiQqI nUM ies qrHW ibAwn krw hY, " ijh kI ibtIAw suMdr dyKI, iqih pih jwie Dry hiQAwr"] History tells us that King Allaudin Khilji abducted Rani Kamla Devi and her daughter Deval Devi (of Dault Abad) and forcibly kept them for himself and his son as wives because they were beautiful. GrdIAW nUM C`f kMjrIAW hMFwauNdy, jg ivc pY igAw eyhw suBweyy] v`fy AKwauNdy AwkV cldy, cmVw kmWauNdy pwie] AsIN KuSwl in`q suxdy Awhy, ku`qw rwj bhwlIey c`kI c`tx jwey] (KuSwl cMd ivBws -iek qwlw). It is a fact that prostitution increased manifold after foreign invasions and brothels appeared here and there in all Indian towns and cities.

¹⁰⁸ *Purdah* came to India with the Muslims. The consent committee report of 1928 says, "*Purdah* was prevalent among the middle and higher orders of all communities but more so among the Muslims. There is evidence to show that the Hindus began concealing their womenfolk since the Mohammedan invasions".

Chapter Five

Women in Sikh Religion and history

5.1 Female morality of the time

In the time of Guru Nanak the moral position of women had deteriorated further and they were being used as chattels. Women themselves had lost all sense of shame and went about selling their bodies hankering after money.¹⁰⁹ Guru Nanak wrote:-
*“Women have become directors in immorality, and men have become hunters. Humility, self-control, and purity have gone to the winds; people eat the uneatable, forbidden food. Modesty has left her home, and honour has taken flight”.*¹¹⁰

This was the result of renunciation and asceticism so assiduously preached by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The so called hermits who had abandoned worldly life not only depended on the charity of the house-holders but also exploited the women folk in their homes and nunneries. Their followers resisted any restraint

¹⁰⁹ iesqrI purKY KitAY Bwau] BwvY Awvau BwvY jwau] (gurU gRMQ swihb pMnW 951) kLI AMdir nwnkw ijMnW dw Aauqwr] puqu ijMnUrW DIA ijMnUrI jorU ijMnW dw iskdwr] (pMnW 556) iesqrI pruKY dwm ihq BwvY ikQwaUN jweI] (BweI gurdws vwr 1) DIAW vycx kuAwriAW PVky, rwj cug`iqAW dw (lok gIq)

¹¹⁰ rMnw hoeIAW boDIAw purs hoey seIAwd] sIlU sMjmu suc BMnI Kwxw Kwju Ahwju] srmu gieAw Gir AwpxY piq auIT clI nwil] (pMnW 1242)

imposed by the religious leaders to up keep morals and openly involved in sexual gratification.¹¹¹ Poet Peeloo describes the later period of degeneration by saying, “*falsehood is common, and not a grain of truth can be found. Good conduct is conspicuous by its absence and criminality flows like rivers*”¹¹².

The Sikh Gurus exposed the hypocrisy and inadequacy of the Sidh yogis, *Sanyasis*, and *digambers*. They attached no importance to renunciation, *Ban Prasth Ashram*¹¹³ or *Sanyas*.

5.2 Contribution of the Sikh Gurus

Guru Nanak (1469-1539AD), was a social and religious reformer, an authoritative eloquent preacher, and a bearer of spiritual message to the world. He undertook to alter the deplorable socio-religious conditions of his times. His contribution to religious thought and social change cannot be easily ignored. He roused and stimulated the elite of his time to address the national problems and shook the national conscience through his powerful message. The present day India, especially the Panjab, bears the unmistakable impress of Guru Nanak’s personality and philosophy. Emancipation of women and the breaking of demeaning distinctions of caste system were two main areas he vehemently addressed. He can be called a powerful guardian-angel of the rights of women, weak and the lowly. Macauliffe sums up Guru Nanak’s contribution as follows:

¹¹¹ jogI igrhI jtw ibBUq] Awgy pwCy rovih pUq] (pMn 951) rMnW nwlON
jo vrjdy cyilAW nUM AYsy gurU kI bMnHky covxy nI [(vwrs Swh)

¹¹² kUV quly pMjsyrIeyN , scu msw iek kvwau] nykIAW lBx nw
BwlIAW, bdIAW dy dirAwau] (pIlU) rwm rhIm khwieMdy iek nwm duie
rwh Bulwxy] byd kqyb BulwiekY mohy lwlc dunI SYqwxy] s`c iknwry
rih gXw Kih mrdy bwmX maulwxy] (BweI gurdws)

¹¹³ Name of a kind of mendicantship preached by Hinduism. Hindus are supposed to leave the house, go to the woods, perform penance, and undergo various kinds of fasts. Its other form is *Sanyasa* originated by Shankracharya and Datatreya.

“In the Guru, the East shook off the torpor of ages and unburdened itself of the heavy weight of ultra-conservatism which had paralysed the genius and intelligence of its people.”

As stated earlier, the position of women before the advent of Guru Nanak was demeaning and derogatory. They had no say in cultural, political, social, and religious affairs. They had no right to independence and were, to all intents and purposes, considered as *Sudras*. Lack of education, male domination, domestic drudgery, prohibitions, and double standards of morality had reduced them into nonentities. *“As a girl, she was under the tutelage of her parents; as an adult, of her husband, and as a widow, of her sons. Even under the liberal rules of Buddhism, a nun, however advanced in the faith, was always subordinate to the youngest among the brethren”*(A.L. Basham as quoted by S.Kapur Singh in *Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh* P.378) .

At the times of foreign invasions deterioration increased manifold and women were always the first to suffer. Guru Nanak had himself witnessed the condition of women at the time of Babar’s invasion (1526 AD). He tells us that not only the Hindu women suffered rape, ravages, brutalities, and indignities at the hands of the Muslim invaders but the invaders did not even spare their own co-religionist Muslim women. He wrote

*“Modesty and righteousness both have vanished.
Falsehood moves about as the leader, O Lalo.
The function of the Qazis and the Brahamans is over.
The Satan now reads the marriage rites.
Muslim women recite the Quran,
And in distress seek God’s intervention O Lalo.
Similar is the fate of women of low or high caste O Lalo,
They sing paeans of blood O, Nanak
And blood does make saffron ointment.*

*In this city of corpses, Nanak proclaims God's praises. (SGGS P. 722)*¹¹⁴

It is clear that the Guru was not concerned with Hindus or Muslims. He raised his voice against the torture, rape, and abduction of all women irrespective of their caste or religion. His concern was for human life and the maltreatment of women.

Women were being pulverized between two stones. On the one hand, foreign invaders trampled their dignity¹¹⁵ and on the other, intellectual Hindus like Tulsi Das, were preaching hatred of women. To add insult to injury, Brahmanical over lordship had woven a very rigid cocoon of restrictions and rituals for a long time.¹¹⁶ Amelioration of the suffering of women seemed well nigh impossible. He first launched a crusade against the prevalent pernicious evils and unnecessary ritual observances so assiduously preached by the Brahmans. Later, he took up other issues including status of women. He detested the idea of female inferiority and wrote: "*The Creator pervades His creation. Whom shall we call low?*"¹¹⁷ He further wrote,

"It is by woman that we are conceived and from her that we are born.

It is with her that we are betrothed and married,

It is women we befriend,

¹¹⁴ "pwp kI jM\ ly kwblhu DwieAw jorI mMgY dwnu vy lwlo"] srmu Drmu duie Cip Kloye kUVu iPrY prDwnu vy lwlo] kwjIAw bwmw kI gl QkI Agdu pVY sYqwnu vy lwlo]muslmwnIAw pVih kqybw kst mih krih Kudwie vy lwlo] jwiq snwqI hoir ihdvwxIAw eyih BI lyKY lwie vy lwlo] (pMnw 722)] Perhaps it was a Panjabi woman who said, "pu`qy jwie kvx gux,Avgux kvx mueyx] jW bwpU kI BoNieVI cMpjie Avryx" (It matters little whether the son lives or dies if his father's land is occupied by the foreign invaders)

¹¹⁵ ijn jIvMidAw piq nhI muieAw mMdI soie (pMnw 1242) Dnu jobnu duie vYrI hoey ijn@I rKy rMgu lwie (pMnw 417)

¹¹⁶ swsqR byd purwx pV@Mqw] pUkwrMqw AjwxMqw (pMnw 1242)

¹¹⁷ mMdw iks no AwKIAY jW iqsu ibnu koeI nwih (pMnw 1381)

*It is woman that keeps the race going.
 When one woman dies, we seek another.
 It is with women that we become established in society.
 Why then call her inferior who gives birth to saints and princes?"
 A woman is born of a woman; none is born without a woman.
 O Nanak only the Lord God is self-existent".¹¹⁸*

In the Indian languages a female is addressed as 'AOrq,' znwnI, jorU, iesqRI, or qINvIN. The Guru gave the females respectable names like 'bIbI jI, (respectable sister)¹¹⁹ and mwqw jI (Respectable mother). This not only gave a psychological boost to the females but also obliterated the invidious social distinctions between virgins, married women, widows, prostitutes, *devdasis*, Concubines, separated women, or *Charan dasis* and considered all women as respectable humans first. Woman was thus placed on par with man in all respects.

At the end of his life Guru Nanak left instructions for his descendant Gurus to continue the struggle vigorously. All the later Sikh Gurus did all they could to raise the social status of women. For example the fifth Guru wrote, "Make good deeds your body and make you faith as strong as trust in your wife. This way you will enjoy all the real pleasures of life with honour."¹²⁰

The sixth Guru when asked about family life and involvement in worldly affairs said, "Children are our gift to the world, money is for sustenance and a woman is our conscience".¹²¹

¹¹⁸ BMif jMmIAY BMif inMmIAY BMif mMgxu vIAwhu] BMfhu hovY dosqI BMfhu cLY rwhu AwsW KI vwr (pMnw 473)

¹¹⁹ It should be noted that the word 'Bibi' was used by the Muslim Kings for their daughters (Prophet Muhammad's daughter was Bibi Fatima). In a way the Guru raised the status of ordinary Indian girls to that of the royal family. Later Guru Gobind Singh followed the same philosophy when he added 'Kaur' (princess) to the names of all baptised Sikh women.

¹²⁰ kwieAw ikrdwr Aaurq XkInw]rMg qmwsy mwix hkInw](pMnw 1048)

¹²¹ p`uqr inSwn hY, pYsw guzrwn hY ,AOrq eImwn hY.

Janet Lant sums up the Sikh Gurus' emancipation of women as follows:

“Each of the Supreme Being Gurus under authority of God gave women equal status. They gained social and religious freedom at a time when the existing religions and society considered women to be property. The false notion that they were inherently evil and unclean was removed. A Woman was no longer regarded as temptation-incarnate. The Gurus exposed the folly of such notions”.

(The Guru Granth Sahib is Divine by Janet Lant P.18)

The ideas preached by the Sikh Gurus more than 500 years ago find full favour with modern psychologists. For example Evolutionary Psychologist David Buss (university of Texas) writes: *“Neither women nor men can be considered superior nor inferior to the other any more than a bird's wings can be considered superior or inferior to a fish's fins or a kangaroo's legs”.*

5.3 Family life

All Sikhs (men and women) were enjoined by the Sikh Gurus to repudiate asceticism and to look upon worldly affairs as necessary part of life. They said there was no need for women to become nuns and neither was there need for human beings to wander in jungles looking for God in streams and stones.¹²² They must marry and enjoy parenthood where lies the godly quality of love. *“The fountain of parents duties is love...herein appeareth the wise providence of God, who by nature hath so fixed it in the hearts of parents, as if there be any in whom it aboundeth not, he is counted unnatural.”*(*Of domestic duties* by W.George P. 498)

¹²² jY kwrix qit qIrQ jwhI | rqn pdwrQ Gt hI mwhI (pMnw 152) | Gt hI BIqir bsq inrMjnu qw ko mrmu n jwnw (pMnw 632)

Family life provides security and warmth so necessary for humans. Again this is where cultural values are fixed and gender roles are imbibed by the members. The norms, attitudes, and behaviour patterns learnt in a family and transmitted through it are the basis of civilization.¹²³ The Sikh Gurus themselves lived a family life and preached that salvation can be achieved easily through living and working in society. “*O Nanak, meeting the True Guru, one comes to know the Perfect Way of life. While laughing, playing, dressing, and eating, he is liberated.*”¹²⁴ “*Such is the holy preceptor’s miracle that even living with progeny and wife, man can obtain state of supreme bliss*” (SGGS 661).¹²⁵ Bhai Gurdas called a householder ‘*Lotus-blossom un-affected by water in which it grows*’¹²⁶

A strict moral code of conduct was prescribed for men and women in Sikhism where the duties of both husband and wife towards each other were defined. For the householder the Gurus left instructions like the following:

*“A true householder must restrain his faculties.
He should beg God for prayer, austere life, and self-discipline.
He should involve himself in good charitable deeds.*

¹²³ It is common among the Punjabis to trace the problems of deviancy and immoral behaviour to some sort of abnormality within the family. It was for this reason that Guru Nanak addressed the Sidh Yogi Bhangar Nath, “*nwnk AwKy BMgRnwQ qyrI mwau kuc`jI AweI] Bwfw Doie n jwiqEn Bwie kucjy Pul sVweI] hoie AqIq igRhsq qj iPr aunhUM ky Gr mMgn jweI] (BweI gurdws)]* All modern psychologists agree that mental abnormalities and juvenile delinquency result from faulty upbringing.

¹²⁴ The Hindus believed, “*pu`qr klqr girHsq myN vsw] mukq nw pweIAY rwm ky dsw*”] The Sikh Gurus said, *nwnk siqgur ByitAW pUrI hovY jugq] hsMidAw KyluidAw pYnuidAw KwvMidAw ivcy hovY mukiq] (pMnw 522)*

¹²⁵ *siqgur kI AYsI vifAweI] puqR klqR ivcy giq pweI (pMnw 661)* “Such is the greatness of the true Guru’s instruction that even surrounded by wife and sons one can achieve salvation.” Similar ideas were preached before him by the Persian saint Zarathustra who wrote, “*The man who has a wife is far above him who lives in continence*”. (Zarathustra.)

¹²⁶ *ijauN jI kMvl Ailpq hY GirbwrI gur isK iqvwhI (vwr BweI gurdws 6.15) GrbwrI jIvn mukiq lihr nhIN Bv loB ivAwpY (EhI 6.18)*

Such a householder is purer than the purest Ganges". (SGGS P.952)¹²⁷

The Sikh Gurus declared a woman to be the pivot of a joint family where her advice is crucial to the betterment of the whole family. The Gurus also categorically stated that the society can become a composite and well balanced whole only if men and women live and work together. They are complementary to each other and one member of society should not view the other as a threat. The Gurus shifted the emphasis from celibacy to fidelity.

Family living, equality, and reliability are natural requirements of life. Males and females are naturally and instinctively orientated to one another and marriage is a socially accepted norm to achieve the end for which God has created them. Furthermore, the purity of a society depends upon the proper regulation of natural impulse which is guaranteed by family life. Family life is also a training ground for social living. It is only through family life that oneness of God and oneness of humanity can be truly realised because this is where we bear each other's burden, practise self denial, and learn to love each other. With the exception of Guru Harkrishan,¹²⁸ all the Sikh Gurus were married.

According to the Sikh Gurus morality is a pre-requisite for spiritual perfection and it is best achieved through living a social life. Spirituality and morality go hand in hand. Therefore those who abandoned family life and resorted to asceticism were condemned by the Guru. He said, "*They renounce the world, abandon family life, and yet go to the householders begging for food and clothes*".¹²⁹ "*You have a craze for women and worldly desires; you are neither a yogi nor a worldly man*". (P.903)¹³⁰

¹²⁷ so igrhI jo ingRhu krY] jpu qpu sMjmu BIiKAw krY] puMn dwn kw kry srIru] so igrhI gMgw kw nIru (pMnw 952)

¹²⁸ He died in his boyhood.

¹²⁹ kwn iPrwie ihrwie tUkw] Gir Gir mWgY iqRpqwn qy cUkw] (pMnw 1348) mnhiT ijs qy mGgxw lYxw duK mnwie] ies ByKy Qwvhu igrho

Sikhism condemns idlers, parasites, beggars and all those who run away from the problems of life. The Guru says, “*He alone has found the right way who eats what he earns through hard work and shares his earnings with the needy*”.¹³¹

According to Sikhism men and women are equal in the eyes of God. Although their functions in life are different, their roles are complementary to each other. True renunciation is mental attitude of detachment which can be obtained only through practice. Guru Tegh Bahadur explains this as follows:

*“O my mind why go to the forests for seeking Him? The Omnipresent is with you. He is with you as is the fragrance in a flower or the image in a mirror. Similarly God resides within you where you should look for Him. The Guru tells us that outside and inside He is everywhere. O Nanak the doubts of mind are dispelled only by introspection.”*¹³²

(a) Woman as mother

There is no greater honour for a woman than to be a mother. A mother’s contribution to society and to the family is great and merits full recognition from the Society. Once a virgin is married, the days of her dancing and larking are abruptly over. From now on her music is the cry of her children, her dance is walking with

Blw ijQhu ko vrswie] (pMnw 587) hoie AqIq igRihsq qj iPr aunhuMuU
ky Gr mMgx jweI](BweI gurdws vwr 1)

¹³⁰ mmqw mohu kwmix ihqkwrI] nw AauDUqI nw sMswrI] 1] jogI bYis
rhuu duibDw duKu Bwgy] Gir Gir mwgq lwj n lwgy] (pMnw 903)

¹³¹ Gwl Kwie ikCU hQhu dyih nwnk rwh pCwixh sy [(pMnw 1245)

¹³² kwhy ry bn Kojn jweI] srb invwsI sdw Alypw qohI sMig smweI] 1
] rhwau] puhp miD ijau bwsu bsqu hY mukr mwih jYsy CweI] qYsy hI
hir bsy inrMqir Gt hI Kojhu BweI] 1] bwhir BIqir eyko jwnhu iehu
gur igAwnu bqweI] jn nwnk ibnu Awpw cInY imtY n BRm kI kweI
](pMnw 684)

them, and her conversation is mostly limited to responding to her children's chatter. Drudgery of domestic work and intermittent delivery of children plays havoc to her beauty and domestic responsibilities wear her down. All her nurtured dreams end up in smoke.

For a child a mother's lap is no less than blissful heaven (mwvW TMFIAW CwvW). It is offered without asking nay even she herself yearns to enjoy offering it. Prophet Muhammad once said, "*Heaven lies under the feet of the mother*". She always gives; seldom ever expecting anything in return. It is our indebtedness to this supreme sacrifice of the mothers that the word mother is attached to all that we hold precious like 'Mother Earth', 'Mother-Tongue,' Maternal instinct,' and 'Mother's milk' etc.

The Sikh Gurus accorded full respect to the mother. There are many hymns in the Sikh scripture where Mother is respectfully mentioned and copiously thanked for her benedictions. The Sikh Gurus fully praise mothers for bringing credit to their families through proper care of their children. "*Blessed is the mother who gives birth*"¹³³. A mother is the first teacher of a child radiating sublimity and intense affection.¹³⁴ God has honoured women by choosing them to bring forth life and multiply the human race. The Sikh Gurus said, "*A married woman is the purest specimen of humanity*" (SGGS P.872).¹³⁵

(b) Woman as sister

¹³³ Dnu jnnI ijin jwieAw DMnu ipqw prDwnu" (pMnw32) "sy DnvMq idsih Gir jwie] nwnk jnnI DMnI mwie" (pMnw 1257) kulu auDwrih Awpxw DMnu jxydI mwie (pMnw 28) kulu auDwry Awpxw DMnu jxydI mwieAw (pMnw 138)

¹³⁴ miq mwqw sMqoKu ipqw sir shj smwXau (pMnw 1397)]

¹³⁵ Dnu sohngin mhv pvIq] qpy qpIsr folY cIq] sohngin hY Aiq suMdrI] pg nyvr Cnk CnhrI] (pMnw 872)

The Sikh Gurus were of the opinion that girls add to the aesthetic sense of a family. The affection between a brother and a sister is ideal.¹³⁶ She casts a sobering influence on the brother which ennoble him. When the brother departs, a sister is the one who grieves the most and suffers great pangs of separation. “*She calls out, Brother, O brother — stay, O brother!*” *But he becomes a stranger. The brother departs for his own home, and his sister burns with the pain of separation*”. (SGGS P. 935)¹³⁷

(c) Woman as wife

It was very necessary in the times of the Sikh Gurus to restore respect to the wives and consider them equal and praiseworthy. Guru Nanak set an example when he began addressing his wife “Parjat” (fulfiller of all desires).¹³⁸ He always addressed his wife lovingly as *prmySr kIey sul`KxIeyN* (My dear blessed Sulakhni). Guru Arjan Dev wrote: “*She is the most noble of all the family. She counsels and advises the elders and Youngers. How blessed is that household, in which she has appeared. In my home she is my leader. She is the ruler and the Guru has made us her courtiers*”(SGGS P.371).¹³⁹ Not only this, the Guru went a step further and said that a faithful woman at home is comparatively much better than a nun. “*A woman expresses special devotion, and has such an agreeable disposition. Her beauty is incomparable, and her character is perfect. The home where she dwells becomes praiseworthy*”.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ *bwbul kY Gr bytVI bwlI bwlY nyih*] (pMnw 935)

¹³⁷ *bIrw bIrw kir rhI bIr Bey bYrwie] bIr cly Gir AwpXy bihx ibrih jil jwie]*(pMnw 935)

¹³⁸ *pwrjwqu Gir Awgin myrY puhp pqR qqu fwlw* (pMnw 503)

¹³⁹ *sB prvwrY mwih sryst] mqI dyvI dyvr jyst] DMnu su igRhu ijqu pRgtI Awie] jn nwnk suKy suiK ivhwie]* “Gru myrw ieh nwiek hmwrI] ieh Awmir hm guir kIey drbwrI (pMnw 371)

¹⁴⁰ *inj BgqI sIlvMqI nwir] rUip AnUp pUrI Awcwir] ijqu igRih vsY so igRhu soBwvMqw* (m.5 pMnw 370)

The Sikhs were restricted from treating women as playthings. They were to consider women other than their wives as daughters, sisters, and mothers depending on their ages.¹⁴¹ The ideal situation was described by Bhai Gurdas when he wrote “*With one wife you are as good as a bachelor*”.¹⁴²

Illicit or extra marital relationships result in disease, disasters, and in some cases death. They were strictly forbidden to the Sikhs. We can now understand how the Guru’s wisdom can save humanity from the dangerous disease of AIDS. Although the Guru does not mention AIDS by name but his description clearly brings out the facts that are now commonly known. He writes, “*For a momentary sexual pleasure he/she will suffer untold pain for a long time. Although these moments are glorious, they lead to a long period of regret*” (SGGS P.403).¹⁴³ The Guru then goes on to describe the type of pain adultery leads to. He writes, “*As is the pain from a cobra-bite, so is the pain an adulterer suffers from adultery*” (SGGS P. 403).¹⁴⁴

The Guru calls a wife `bqIh sulKxI scu sMqiq pUq` (having thirty two qualities) (`pMnw 371`)

¹⁴¹ `dyiK prweIAW cMgIAW mwvW DIAW BYxW jwxy`” (`BweI gurdws vwr 29.11`)`ikAw gwlwieE BUC prvyil nw johy kMq qMU] nwnk Pulw sMdI vwiV iKiVAw hBu sMswru jIau (pMnw 1095) pr iqRA rUpu n pyKY nyqR (pMnw 274). hwtI bwtY nId n AwvY pr Gir icqu n fuolweI (pMnw 939)`

¹⁴² “`Awm hwlqW ivc is`K nMU iek iesqrI dy huMidAW dUjw ivAwh nhIN krnw cwhIey`” (`isK rihq mrXwdw pMjwbI 1998 pMnw 24`) `eykw nwrI jqI hoie pr nwrI DI BYx vKwxY]pr Dn sUAR gwie ijau mkrUh ihMdU muslmwxY]GrbwrI gur isK hoie isKw sUqR ml mUqR ivfwxY]` (`Bw: gurdws`)

¹⁴³ `inmK kwm suAwd kwrix koit idns duKu pwvih] GrI muhq rMg mxvih iPir bhuir bhuir pCuqvwih (pMnw 403)`

¹⁴⁴ `jYsw sMgu ibsIAr isau hY ry qYso hI iehu pr igRhu] (pMnw 403)`

(d) Woman as repository of knowledge

The veteran Sikh poet, Bhai Gurdas, wrote that “*decked with social knowledge and spirituality a woman is the gateway to salvation and harbinger of peace through firm faith*”.¹⁴⁵ For the first time in the history of the world, the Sikh Gurus offered the women equality in worship, equality in society, equality in preaching and freedom of thought and practice. The Gurus expected the Sikhs not to look down upon women as inferior or a source of temptation but as a sensible mentor. They condemned the undignified treatment meted out to women and rejected the idea that women were inherently evil and unclean.

5.4 Celibacy

Celibacy was a cloak for licentiousness and profligacy and the so-called saints, sidhs, monks, and yogis were corrupting the society. ¹⁴⁶ People feared their noised about miraculous powers and did not dare murmur a word against them

The Sikh Gurus called enforced celibacy a sham. They depicted the celibates and escapist *Sidhs* as runaways from social responsibilities and exposed the so-called chaste and celibate Brahmans and Sadhus as follows: “*With bowl in hand, wearing his patched coat he goes about begging and desires pollute his mind. Abandoning his own wife, he is engrossed in sexual desire; his thoughts are on the wives of others*”. ¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ "lok vyd gux igAwn iv`c ArD sRIrI moK duAwrI] gurmuK suKPl inhcau nwrI]5.16]" B.gurdws]

¹⁴⁶ bwhroN gurUu gosweIN suAwmI, AMqr kwm kROD ky gwmI lbwhroN kihqy qiRSnw burI, AMqir loB lihr kI CurI] bwhroN iPrqy bnw kupIn, AMqir pMc AgnI ADIn] (vLI rwm)

¹⁴⁷ hwQ kmMflu kwpVIAw min iqRSnw aupjI BwrI] iesqRI qij kir kwim ivAwipAw icqu lwieAw pr nwrI (pMnw 1013)

*“You smear your outer body with ashes, but deep within, you are filled with darkness. You wear the patched coat and all the right clothes and robes of a mendicant, but you are still egotistical and proud”.*¹⁴⁸(SGGS 1243)

To the celibate nuns he said, *“A woman is like a devoted follower. It is not proper for her to be without a husband”*.¹⁴⁹

5.5 Purdah (veil)

*Purdah*¹⁵⁰ was strictly enforced among women. The Muslims supported it because it is sanctioned by their religion but the Hindus adopted it to hide their daughters, mothers, and wives from the piercing eyes of the foreign invaders. The *purdah* proved ineffective in arresting the lustful glances of men but it certainly made women cowards and they came to be known as *Abala* (Powerless). Guru Amar Das regarded it an instrument of the suppression of modesty and condemned it. He did not allow the queen of Haripur to come to Sangat (religious assembly) unless she removed her veil. He said, *“Away, Away, ladies who crouch in veil”*.¹⁵¹ All those women who followed the Guru’s advice became free and were described as follows;

“False modesty that suppressed is ended

¹⁴⁸ bwhir Bsm lypn kry AMqir gubwrI] iKMqW JolI bhU ByK kry durmiq AhMkwrI] (pMnw 1243)

¹⁴⁹ “iesqRI rUp cyrI kI inAweI soB nhI ibnu Brqwry (pMnw 1268)

¹⁵⁰ A tent-like contraption used by women to hide themselves from the male eyes. It entered India with the coming of Muslims who are instructed by Hadis to wear a *Burqa*. Also see note 23

¹⁵¹ rhu rhu rI bhurIAw GUMGtu ijin kwFY] (pMnw 484) “ isK iesqrI leI prdw jW GuMf krnw au-icq nhIN” (rihq mrXwdw pMjwbI pMnw 21 (2.F)

Now with veil cast off I have started on the way of devotion".
(SGGS P. 931)¹⁵²

The Sikh Rehat Maryada says, “*It is not proper for a Sikh woman to wear a veil or keep her face hidden by veil or cover*” (Article XIX F)

Guru Gobind Singh later instructed the women to learn the use of arms on par with men. He added the word “Kaur” after the names of all Sikh women. The word 'Kaur' is the corrupted form of the word "Kanwar"(the son of a king). This explanation of Bhai Kahan Singh in the Mahankosh (P 353) is symbolically significant because a ‘Kanwar’ can not hide from public and has to be adept in warfare.

The Gurus did not prescribe any special dress code for women as is found in Islam. The only compulsory article of dress is a *Kachhehra* which all Sikhs, men and women, have to wear. Regarding other clothes the Guru instructs that they should be simple. Gaudy clothes which act as a spur to carnal desires should be avoided. The general instruction about the wearing of clothes is

*“Friend, the wearing of clothes may ruin bliss
Avoid the clothes that torment the limbs,
And with foul thoughts pollute the mind”.* (SGGS P.16)¹⁵³

5.6 Sati

¹⁵² lwj mrMqI mir geI GUGtu Koil cli] swsu idvwnI bwvrI isr qy sMk
tLI (pMnw 931)

¹⁵³ bwbw horu pYnxu KusI KuAwru] ijqu pYDY qnu pIVIAY mn mih clih
ivkwr] (pMnw 16)

The custom of *Sati* was snubbed and strictly forbidden by the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak said a true widow is one who leads a pure life after her husband's death. Guru Amar Das (1479-1574AD) condemned *Sati* as follows:¹⁵⁴

*“They are not Satis who burn themselves with their husbands,
Rather they are Satis who die with the mere shock of separation
from their husbands.
And they too are considered Satis who abide in modesty and
contentment.
Who wait upon the Lord and rising in the morning ever remember
him.”*

Again in *Suhi Ki var* the Guru argued

*“Women are burnt in fire with their husbands,
If they appreciate their husbands they undergo sufficient pain by
their death.
If they appreciate them not, why should they burn at all?”*(SGGS
787)¹⁵⁵

He sent *Hukamnamas* (edicts) far and wide asking his followers not to let women commit *sati* or wear veils and to preach vehemently against these cruel customs.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ sqIAw eyih n AwKIAin jo miVAw lig jluin@] nwnk sqIAw jwxIAin@ ij
ibrhy cot mrMin@] BI so sqIAw jwxIAin sIl sMqoiK rhMin@] syvin
sweI Awpxw inq auIT sMm@wluin@ (pMnw 787). *Sati* was first outlawed by King
Akbar in 1547 AD but the custom did not stop. Later persuaded by Raja Ram Mohan Rai, founder
of Brahma Smaj, Lord William Bentinck (1828-35AD) outlawed *Sati* on 7 December 1829 AD
once more. It was outlawed in the Panjab and Rajputana in 1847AD. The latest *Sati* of the 20th
century was Roop Kanwar of Rajisthan. For full information on *Sati* see note under section 4.2

¹⁵⁵ kMqW nwl mhyliAW syqI A`g jlwh, lly jwixh ipr Awpxw qW qn duK
shwih] (pMnw 787)

¹⁵⁶ See Jagjit Singh 'isK ienklwb' page 150

5.7 Sutak/ Patak

It was believed in Hinduism that when a baby is born the woman giving birth to the baby becomes polluted and impure. This was called Sutak (sUqk). Such women were prohibited from entering the kitchen up to 30 days. The Sikh Gurus vigorously condemned this practice and said that impurity does not lie in human birth but in evil tendencies of the mind. The Guru condemned Sutak (sUqk) and said:

*“If pollution attaches to birth, then pollution is everywhere.
Firewood and cow dung sustain life,
All types of grain have life in them
Even the life-giving water is not without life
How can then we believe in pollution, when pollution inheres with
staples?
Nanak says: Pollution cannot be washed away by purification
rituals.
Pollution can only be removed through acquiring true
knowledge”.* (SGGS P.472)¹⁵⁷

5.8 Spiritual/ social discrimination

In the Guru’s time it was generally believed that women were spiritually lower than men. Only men could wear Janeu or take part in Hindu initiation ceremony.¹⁵⁸ Women were classed as *Sudra*. Although such ideas of male superiority were already

¹⁵⁷ jy kr sUqk mMnIey sB qy sUqk hoie(pMnw 472) gMgwidk qIrQ nih jwvYN[sUqk pwqk nwh mnwvYN[jMJU iqlk n Cwpw DwrYN] SrHw ihMdUAW kI nih pwrYN(pMQ pRkwS AiDAwie 85)] AKI sUqku vyKxw priqRX prDn rUp, kMnI sUqk kMn pY lwieqbwrI Kwih (pMnw 472)

¹⁵⁸ This is still the case.

practised in India before the advent of the foreign invaders, they were amplified, justified with reference to the Quran, and enforced by the Muslims. The Quran says, “Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made men superior to the women and because they spend their money on them” (Sura Alnisa 4.34). Even God was presented as male. The Sikh Gurus did not like any type of discrimination. The Gurus said, “All are equal sharers of God’s bounties, no one is an outcaste”.¹⁵⁹

5.9 Gender differences

The Sikh Gurus preached that sex, social status, or race made no difference in spirituality. Guru Ram Das wrote:

*“In all beings is He himself pervasive,
He pervades all forms male and female,
Saith Nanak hidden from gaze He operates,
By the Guru’s guidance manifested”. (SGGS P.605)¹⁶⁰*

The Gurus preached that only ethically and spiritually enlightened pious women can raise great men. Women in general have more spiritual acumen than men.¹⁶¹

According to Sikhism God has no body, no gentilia and hence no sex,¹⁶² He is all-soul and unborn. To label Him as male or female is patently absurd. Similarly one and the same conscious self is

¹⁵⁹ sBy swJIvwl sdwiein qUM iksY n idsih bwHrw jIau (pMnw 97)

¹⁶⁰ siB Gt Awpy BogvY ipAwrw ivic nwrI purK sBu soie] nwnk gupqu vrqdw ipAwrw gurmuiK prgtu hoie(pMnw 605)

¹⁶¹ Guru Tegh Bahadur is reported to have said, “mweIAW r`b rzweIAW” .

¹⁶² God is addressed in Gurbani as father as well as mother. qUM myrw ipqw qUMhY myrw mwqw (pMnw 103)] nwnk ipqw mwqw hY hir pRBu hm bwirk hir pRiqpwry] The Lord is our Father and Mother. We children by the Lord are cherished.says Nanak (SGGS P.882)

present in all beings. We should not think that we are male or female but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and be useful to one another. The Guru even went so far as to address God as husband and himself as His wife.¹⁶³ He said that this fact is understood through intensification of spiritual awareness. The more a mind becomes inward-looking, the sooner the idea of difference disappears. The more a person is spiritually awake the more he transcends the limitations of sex and imbibes the spiritual oneness of humanity.¹⁶⁴

The Guru asked his followers to forget the invidious distinctions of sex and join together in the praise of the Lord. He said, “*Come my sisters and dear friends, clasp me in thy embrace like a friend. Meeting together let us tell the tales of our omnipresent spouse (God). In the True Lord are all merits and in us are all demerits.*”¹⁶⁵ (SGGS P.17)

¹⁶³ ssurY pyeIAY kMq kI kMqu AgMmu AQwhu (pMnw 1088) "hm sh kyrIAw dwsIAw swcw Ksmu hmwrv" (pMnw 729) moih AnwQ grIb inmwnI] kMq pkir hm kInI rwnI (pMnw 394) "his his qyrw vyKx s`jxW,swfy idl dI swdI vo] ie`kw msqI dohW AMdir,ik`Qy nr qy mwdI vo](nnUAW)

¹⁶⁴ purK mih nwir nwir mih purKw bUJhu bRhm igAwnI (pMnw 879) nwrI purKu purKu sB nwrI sBu eyko purKu murwry (pMnw 983), Twkuru eyku sbweI nwir (pMnw 933) "iesu jg mih purKu eyku hY hor sglI nwir sbweI (pMnw 591). The Hindu saint Gargi and the Muslim saint Rabia Basri both preached that sex has no significance. They both remained naked and did not wear any clothes. Rabia used to say, "qwilbaul dunIAW mOAnusaun, qwilbul aukbw muK`nsaun, qwilbulmOlw muz`kraun" (dunIAW dy s`uKW dI ieCw r`Kx vwlw iesqRI hY, surgW dI ie`Cw rKx vwlw Kusrw hY kyvl r`b dI ie`Cw r`Kx vwlw hI mrd hY). Bhagat Meera Bai too ignored sex differences. It is said that when she went to meet the Krishna worshipper Swami Jeevanand at Bindraban, the latter declined to meet her saying that he does not meet women. Meera Bai sent in a question, "Is there a man in Bindraban other than Krishna?" The Swami at once came out to see her. "qvm pUmwn AsI, qvm kumwrv auqw vw kumwrI" You are the woman and you are the man. You are the boy and you also are the girl.(*Svetasvatara Upanisad*)

All Sufi poets of Islam considered themselves as women. For example Ali Haider writes, "hydr mINh krm dw v`sy, qW pl iv`c gulSn QInIN hW myN " Hadaitullah writes, "mYN Kyf KyfW auhdy ieSk AMdr, Srm lwh ky bxI mIMg shIE " Shah Hussain writes, "AsIN burIAW by lokw burIAW, kol nw bhu by AsIN burIAW" Khwaja Farid says, "ieSk qYNfy dI nihr vgy keI qrIAW krmW vwlVIAW] keI koJIAW lMG pwr geIAW qy rovx SklW vwlVIAW".

¹⁶⁵ Awvhu BYxy gil imlh AMik shyLVIAwh] imil kY krh khwxIAw sMmRQ kMq kIAwh] swcy swihb siB gux Aaugx siB Aswh (pMnw 17)

5.10 Discrimination in Education

Education was denied to girls for a very long time. For the first time in the history of India Guru Amar Das (479-1574 AD) not only sanctioned education for girls but also entrusted women with the task of preaching religion far and wide. He appointed 146 persons as missionaries to preach the message of Guru Nanak to the masses. Of them 52 were women who went from place to place attending to spiritual needs of the Guru's followers. Over and above religious instruction, these women missionaries imparted education in 3Rs (reading, writing and elementary Arithmetic) to the peasant women. Considering the prevailing conservative and archaic social climate of the times this initiative of Guru Amar Das was remarkably modern.

Guru Amar Das established 22 *Manjis* (bishoprics)¹⁶⁶ out of which four were held by devout women. Mai Bhago (Bhag Bhari of Kashmir) was appointed in Kashmir and given charge of two bishoprics there. Mai Sewan was appointed in Kabul (Afghanistan). Exposition of Gurbani (ਕੌੜ ਕੀਰਤਨ), Reading scriptures (ਪੜ੍ਹਾਈ), and conducting weddings (ਅਨਮੋਦ ਕਰਾਜ) were all open to them.

Later Guru Gobind Singh offered Amrit to men and women from the same bowl. The addition of patashas (sugar puffs) to *Amrit* by his wife was considered auspicious which, according Hindu rites, would have been branded as desecration and defilement of Amrit ceremony.

¹⁶⁶ Different number of *Manjis* has been given by different writers. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha gives 22 names out of which only one *manji* is jointly held by both husband and wife (Matho Murari). Other writers say that originally no women were appointed but later when the number of preachers went up to 52 there were at least 8 women among them.

5.11 Molestation of women/ shielding unprotected women

Guru Gobind Singh issued instructions (and later Banda Singh further strengthened them)¹⁶⁷ that women captured in battle were to be accorded full respect. In one of the battles of Guru Gobind Singh with the Mughals, some Sikhs captured Muslim women and brought them to Guru Gobind Singh. They said, “*The Muslims kidnap and molest our women. We feel that it should be justifiable, if the Sikhs are allowed to retaliate*”. The Guru’s reply was, “*I have to take the Panth to higher planes, therefore we can not imitate the unworthy and the debased.*”¹⁶⁸

The position of women had been demeaning for a long time but after the death of Guru Gobind Singh it once again became miserable when frequent foreign invaders herded away young girls as booty. They raped, ravaged and outraged their modesty and then sold them in the bazaars of Ghazni, Qandhar, Balkh, and Kabul as slaves. The Sikhs brought such women back.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Ghulam Mohyudin in his *Fatuhnama-e-Samdhi* writes that Banda Singh issued strict orders to his army against molesting women and meted out severe punishments for adultery.

¹⁶⁸ hm ly jwnhu pMQ aucyry *Sau Sakhi*. A similar incident happened in the battle of Nadaun. The Sikhs brought with them the wife of Prince Muazzam as booty and asked the Guru to have at least a glance at her beautiful face. The Guru told the Sikhs not to raise the veil of the woman and ordered them to immediately escort her back to her family.

¹⁶⁹ In April 1763 a Brahman’s wife at Qasur was abducted by the local ruler (Usman Khan).The Khalsa under Sardar Hari Singh Bhangi and Sardar Charat Singh marched from Amritsar to Qasur and brought her back to her parents. The *Begum* (queen) of the Pathan of Bassi Pathana fell into the hands of the Khalsa; Ajit Singh (Guru’s elder son) safely escorted her to her home. Similarly in November 1763 the *Begum and children* of Jahan Khan (Nadir Shah’s General) fell into the hands of the Khalsa. The family was escorted to Jammu unmolested. In his book *Tarikh-e-Panjab* Bootay Shah writes, ‘jy ikDry isMG ikxy kwPly qy h`lw boldy qW auh mrd dy isroN pgVI au~kw hI nhIN sI auqwrdy qy nw hI AOrqW dy gihxy g`itAW jW kpiVAW NUM h`Q ilwauNdy sn [(vw prpwrw v zyvry znW muqilk dsAMdwz n mySvMd). Such examples are many in Sikh history. For further information on this trait of the Sikhs read Burns or Sir Lapel Griffin (Rajas of Panjab page 17).

General Birdwood Commander-in-Chief of Indian army stated in the Council ‘I have no hesitation in leaving my wife and daughter in the care of Sikh soldiers because I know that they will be perfectly safe in the presence of Sikh soldiers.’

In troublesome times, the husbands usually abandoned their wives, mothers, and daughters and left them at the mercy of the invaders. A very popular extant song is still sung by Panjabi women in villages. It describes the anguished feelings of a woman being forcibly abducted by the invaders under the very nose of her husband, father, and brother. In utter helplessness she cries for help from an unknown warrior.¹⁷⁰ The song runs as follows:¹⁷¹

*“O passing knight, none but you can help me.
My father has fallen; my brother is in swoon,
My husband has laughed me away saying he will find another
woman.
O passing knight, I beseech thee, rescue me from the gory
clutches of my tormentors.”*

In 1764-1765 Qazi Nur Muhammad appreciated the Sikhs’ behaviour towards women as follows:-

“They do not plunder the wealth or ornaments of a woman whether she belongs to a well-to-do family or is a maid. There is no adultery among these dogs..... Whether a woman is young or old they call her a Budhya (Respectable) and ask her to get out of the way”. (Jang Nama Qazi Nur Muhammad P. 172-75)¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ These unknown warriors were the Sikhs who had reverted to the jungles. They were usually identified as k`C vwlw (wearer of Kachhehra). An extant song runs CeI CeI rMn bsrY nuMU geI, moVIN bwbw k`C vwilAw (My woman is being force-marched to Basra (Iraq). Be quick O baptised Sikh. Save her honour).

It is on record that once the Sikhs fell upon Ahmed shah Abdali and escorted thousands of abducted women back to their homes. (See *History of the Punjab* by Muhammad Latif P. 316-17)

¹⁷¹ nxd BrjweI cInw CVdIAW POj muZlW dI cVH Aw] hwey vI spwhI jWidAw qyrI gorI nUM kOx Cufw] bwp hmwrw if`g ipAw vIr ipAw gS Kw] kMq hmwrw h`s ipAw krsW hor ivAwh] hwey vy Many such songs are available in Panjabi folk-lore. Space does not permit us recording more. A few more are given in the Appendix.

¹⁷² Also see “History of the Sikhs by Dr. Hari Ram Gupta P. 288-290

Later healthy attitude towards women was vehemently preached in the Rehatnamas (codes of conduct for the Sikhs). *“Treat others’ daughters as your own. Treat others’ wives as mothers. A true Sikh of the Guru will shower all his/her love on his/her spouse.”*¹⁷³

5.12 Re-marriage of widows

Widows lead a very difficult life. The Brahman priests stigmatised them as ill-fated. They were required to dress only in white and not to attend any social functions. In most cases they were compelled to shave off their heads. The Sikh Gurus permitted the widows to re-marry and not to accept the restrictions imposed upon them by the Brahmans.¹⁷⁴ Thus the Guru emancipated women from the taboos and restrictions of widowhood and instructed them to enjoy full freedom in religious, social, and political fields through married life.

5.13 Right of Opinion

Women were offered equality in all respects right from the time of Guru Nanak. They did not have to fight for voting rights as did the women in the west. The fight for improving the social status of women and to confer on them the right of vote started in Europe only in the 19th and 20th centuries and was long drawn out. America gave only limited rights to women in 1920. The Women’s liberation movement of America had to conduct a long

¹⁷³ pr bytI ko bytI jwnY] pr iesqRI ko mwq vKwny] AwpXI iesqRI isau riq hoeI] rihqwn gur kw isK soeI] (rihqnmw BweI nMd lwl) isK rihq mrXwdw pMjwbI pMnw 21 (2.\).

¹⁷⁴ Anand Karj Article 2.14 (J) Rehat Maryada Panjabi Edition 1998

march on August 26, 1970 to ask for equal rights. They called this movement 'Strike for equality'.¹⁷⁵

5.14 Female infanticide

Female infanticide in India has only changed its form. Now the advances in medicine and technology are being openly used to ascertain sex of the unborn child and to abort it if it is a girl. Unfortunately women also subscribe to this sin and many of them are Sikhs. The law has turned an ass.

Female infanticide is condemned in Sikhism. C.H.Payne (P.35) writes, "*Female infanticide, a custom prevalent then and for many years after in the Punjab, was strictly forbidden, as was also the practice of sati; and rules and regulations were enjoined relating to daily worship, marriage, the law of inheritance, and other matters in which the Sikhs had hitherto conformed to Hindu law.*"

The Sikh Rehat Maryada reads, "*The Sikh will not kill the daughters nor shall he give his daughter in marriage into a family where this act is committed*".¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Voting rights were offered to women in New Zealand in (1893), Australia (1902), Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Russia (1917), Canada (1918), Germany, Austria and Poland (1919), U.S.A and Hungary (1920), France (1945), India (1949), Pakistan (1956). Great Britain gave this right in 1918 but only to women over the age of 30 (later in 1928, 30 year restriction was removed). Britain granted property rights to women only in 1875.

The United Nations Convention on political rights of women adopted in 1952 provides that "*Women be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.*" Many Muslim countries, especially those bordering Persian Gulf, still deny voting rights to women.

¹⁷⁶ It is worth noting that at present China and India (comprising 40% of world population) top the list for female infanticide/foeticide. According to a report published in 'The daily Telegraph' dated 22.7.2005 the ratio of males to females in China is 118 to 100 and 15,000 to 20,000 young girls are abducted every year and sold. According to *Bare Branches* published by some American academics 23 million Chinese will go without wives by the year 2020. India is not far behind. According to the census of 1991 the ratio of men to women was 1000 to 888. The Sikhs are also known to have joined the infanticide/foeticide brigade. This will give rise to higher crime rates and political instability. In nature the ratio of births is 105 boys to 100 girls. High male mortality keeps

5.15 Dev Dasis

The Sikh Gurus condemned those people who offered their daughters and wives to the temples. The Guru wrote: - “*He bathes at Kuruk-shaytra during a solar eclipse to wash his sins, but gives away his decorated wife in offering*”.¹⁷⁷ The custom of Dev Dasis was completely forbidden by the Sikh Gurus to their followers.

5.16 Varat (fasting)

There are many fasts in Hinduism which only women are required to undergo. Almost every month has a fast or two. *Sanghera, Ahoee, Santoshi Mata, Maha Lakshami, Karva Chauth, Nauratas, Ekadshi Chaudash* etc. There are many rituals (like floating lamps in water, putting dough plums on bushes etc.) that go with these Hindu Varats. Different foods (like spaghetti, fruit etc.) are prescribed for breaking different *Vrats*. The practice is also sanctioned by the Quran, Torah, and the Bible. The Jews fast for 40 days and the Muslims fast for 30 days (*Roza*)

The Sikh Gurus attached no importance to keeping womenfolk hungry. They condemned such practices as meaningless torture of

this ratio in check but humans are disturbing it. Female infanticide/foeticide is strictly forbidden in Sikhism.

“ieh bVI BwrI h~`iqAw hY, kMiMnAw dw drb lYxw qy kMiMnAw mwrnI pr sMswr ies h~`iqAw ivc lg irhw hY](jnm swKI BweI bwlw). `guris`K kMnXw n mwry, kuVI mwr nwl nw vrqy, kMinAw kw pYsw nw Kwey’ (rihq nwmw BweI cOpw isMG)] isK rihq mrXwdw pMnw 20. Some people call it family planning (pRvwr inXojn) little knowing what family planning means. Real family planning is economic management and sexual restraint. If killing an unborn born child is family planning why is it that a male child is not killed? is`K mq iv`c bytI pu`qr qul hY[kuVI mwr nwl vrqoN krn dw hukm nhIN hY] (gurmiq mwrqMf- BweI kwnH isMG nwBw)

¹⁷⁷ jy Ehu gRhn krY kulKyiq] ArpY nwir sIgwR smyiq (pMnw 875)

the body. The Guru said, “*By starvation one gains nothing but loses the taste of the tongue*”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ AMn n KwieAw swdu gvwieAw (pMnw 467) [AMn n Kwih dyhI duKu dIjY, ibnu gurigAwn iqRpiq nhIN QIjY (pMnw 905) [vrq kreh cMdrwiexw sy ikqY n lyKM (pMnw 1099) [AMn qy rihqw duKu dyhI shqw (pMnw 1348), hmry guru ky isK hYN jyeI, Alp Awhwr vRqI inq syeI] (sUrj pRkwS). The Vrats are usually observed by Hindu women but Mahatma Gandhi also observed long fasts.

5.17 Liberated Women

Relieved from all the unnecessary and unreasonable customs, the Sikh women became the temporal and spiritual supporters of men in all fields. Their spirit was so raised that they never considered themselves as helpless creatures and proved themselves equals in devotion, sacrifice, and bravery. Women began to be considered symbols of domestic harmony and social cohesion and thus transformed themselves from the bane to the boon of society. The moral force they acquired transcended their past and acquired for them a new character as defenders of their faith, honour, and dignity. They developed an independence of spirit and character and acted as a check on the weaknesses of their own husbands. When Guru Tegh Bahadur was refused permission by men to visit the holy of holies at Amritsar, it was women of Amritsar who approached the Guru and invited him irrespective of the refusal of their husbands. At this point the Guru blessed the women and said, “Women know how to love the Will of God” (ਮੁਕੁੰਦ ਕਾ ਕੀਰਤਨ ੨੨੯੯). Thus we see that with the coming of Sikhism women regained their position as men’s equal.

From then onwards they began to take part in religious congregations, perform *Kirtan*, and take part in *Akhand Paath*.¹⁷⁹ They can work as priests and preachers and take part in all social, cultural, political, and secular activities. Women are also the worthy members of the Khalsa and have demonstrated their fighting abilities by taking part in Sikh wars.

It is significant to note that Sikhism, one of the world's youngest religions, accorded women complete equality with men in all spheres of life more than five hundred years ago when no other

¹⁷⁹ See Sikh Rehat Maryada Panthak Rehani Panjabi 1998 article 2.2 edition Page 27. It is worth noting that a Hindu woman is not permitted to read the Vedas and a Muslim woman can't be a priest in the mosque.

religion of the world even thought about it. The Sikh Gurus ensured that women enjoyed equal rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

Once again Sikhism conferred on women the rights and responsibilities they once enjoyed and once again they became the harbingers of bliss in the home (gRih lkSmI)

Sikh women elicited praises from all sources. For example in his *Ram Kali Ki Var* Balvand appreciates Mata Khivi's social service and calls her "very noble" (nyk jn).¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Full one *pauri* (*stanza*) is devoted to Mata Khivi by Balvand. Later Guru Arjan Dev included it in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This shows how the Sikh Gurus held women in great esteem and gratefully acknowledged their contributions in all fields.

Chapter Six

The Western Scene

“East is East and West is West, and ne’er the twain shall meet”
(Kipling)

The index of a society’s cultural and spiritual level can be measured by the amount of respect shown by a society to women. The indicators, among other factors are education, history, religion, folklore, morality, and social customs.

In the East, chastity and virginity are greatly appreciated and religiously guarded. Western Society places comparatively less emphasis on these qualities. This is not to say that there are no virtuous and chaste women in the West but how the society interprets and defines these terms. Another evident fact is that women in the West are more cultured, more educated, free, enterprising, confident, and outspoken where as the Eastern women are comparatively timid, less educated, shy, submissive, meek, modest, docile, dependant, demure, and home-bound, but they are changing fast. Whereas Western women may claim that they are far advanced in intellectuality, they are generally no match for the Panjabi women in morality, sacrifice, self-control, austerity, and spirituality. Women in the west value individualism and independence. To Asian women it may appear selfish because they tend to believe in interdependence and kinship loyalty.

Panjabi women are taught to consider men other than their husband, as their brothers, father-figures, or sons. The same applies to men who are taught that every woman, save their own wife, is a mother or a daughter. This ideal has been dinned into the ears of all Panjabis by the Sikh Gurus and is deeply rooted in their psyche. With relatively few exceptions all Panjabis conform to this norm.

One thing that fulfils womanhood is motherhood. In the East a woman is considered to have sanctified herself through motherhood. The ideal of womanhood in the Panjab, therefore, is concentrated in motherhood where lust and carnality have no place. The idea of womanhood in the West is epitomised in the wife or girlfriend where morbid ideas of sex, rape, sensual-gratification, and extra marital relations predominate. Chastity is considered by the Panjabis as heritage of women and the life of a nation.¹⁸¹

It is not uncommon in the West to come across a woman who would raise eyebrows if told that Panjabi women live with one husband throughout their lives or that the girls remain virgin right up the time of their honeymoon. Most young girls in the West become pregnant while they are still in their teens and it is not unusual to find mothers and their children both attending schools at the same time.¹⁸² According to Panjabi culture this is the lowest depth of morality but for the Western women it is a pleasantry and nothing out of the ordinary.

In the West a woman has become more or less a plaything. When the initial infatuation cools down the lovers get separated. As a result the number of illegitimate children born through illicit and broken relationships is on the increase. It is a commonly known fact that single-parent children growing up without proper parental guidance and emotional attachment usually end up as directionless, destructive, and disgruntled members of society.

¹⁸¹ pr Dn pr qn pr kI inMdw ien isau pRIiq n lwgY (pMnw 674) pr Dn pr dwrw isau ricE ibrQw jnmU isrwwY (pMnw 632) pr Dn pr dwrw pr inMdw ien isau pRIiq invwir (pMnw 379)

¹⁸² In Great Britain teen-aged girls can undergo abortion without letting their parents know about their pregnancy. The law fully safe guards their confidentiality. At the time of writing an English woman (Mrs. Sue Axom) is challenging this practice in the court. Abstinence is not preached by parents, teachers, priests or the law makers in England and is considered an infringement of the girl's birth right to live as she likes.

Such brutal children necessitate increase in police force which in turn becomes a strain on human resources.

All human relations (including romance and marriage) affect the society and the society must have some control over them. Freedom of choice in marriage is a good idea but if the satisfaction of animal instincts is allowed to let loose before marriage, as is the case in the west, the result is evil. Laws have to be framed in such a way that freedom is respected under some parameters. It has taken the human society millions of years to learn to organise itself for the best. All this learning must not be wasted just for pleasing a minority who insist on having their way.

6.1 Western marriages

Marriages in the West are slowly becoming redundant.¹⁸³ It is not uncommon to come across head lines reading:

‘Organisation advocates wife swapping’

‘Communal marriage is no sin’

‘If two people are in love what need is there for marriage?’

‘Living together without marriage is better than all encumbrances of married life’ ‘Abortion should be legalized’

‘Life-long permanence in marriage is neither desirable nor necessary’

“Marriage is a human prison with fetters of despair and frustration.” etc.

Such statements attack the sanctity of marriage under the pretext of liberalism. This sort of liberalism can only be detrimental to society in the long run. Extra marital relationships are common in the West and are looked upon as natural. Permanency, fidelity,

¹⁸³ According to national statistics the number of marriages in U.K. has fallen from around 459,000 in 1971 to just over 286,000 in 2001 and the number of divorces has increased from just over 80,000 in 1971 (peaked in 1993 to 180,000) to 157,000 in 2001. In the year 2001 6% of women and 9% of men over 45 remained unmarried. (See page 31 of National statistics).

faithfulness, and indissolubility have gone with the wind. Sex is considered as a means of enjoyment rather than a God-given gift for procreative evolution of humanity. Uncontrolled sexual orgies are tolerated in law and hedonism is becoming socially acceptable. Such aberrations are slowly leading the society to moral chaos. No well-meaning true Christian, Muslim, Jew, or Sikh can ignore these portents without feeling a tug at his conscience. The age-old well thought out marriage concepts can not be easily brushed aside to make room for such passing whims. To tolerate 'adultery' and still to go on chanting "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" is to say the least meaningless hypocrisy. The advances of science (especially medicine), and the easily available cheap and reliable birth control are going to modify our marriage infrastructure radically and as such the issue demands immediate attention from the political and the religious elite. Those who care and those who carry the responsibility must re-examine the characteristics of marriage and nip the evil in the bud.

There are some who think that marriage is damaging and exploitive because it smacks of class conflict. This line of thought was first floated by Marxist philosopher Engels. He wrote, "*The first class antagonism appearing in history coincides with the development of the antagonism of man and wife in monogamy, and the first class oppression with that of the female by the male sex. Monogamy was a great historical progress. But by the side of slavery and private property it marks, at the same time, that epoch which, reaching down to our days, takes with all progress also a step backwards, relatively speaking, and develops the welfare and advancement of one by the woe and submission of the other.*"¹⁸⁴

These critics argue that marriage is for the people and not for the sake of religion. Therefore people's independence can not be sacrificed to doctrinal regulations to bolster up a destructive

¹⁸⁴ "*The origin of the family*" Engels F. 1902 Charles Kerr Chicago.

institution like religion. The radical elements of this category see nothing good in marriage. If a wife is happy, she is happy because she is conditioned to servility. If a wife is unhappy then they argue, "What else can you expect?" According to them, a wife is a second class citizen who has been brain-washed to think, feel, and act as an inferior creature. She has been denied equality and is inhibited from demonstrating her competence socially and intellectually by a male dominated world. They think that the only remedy is vehement opposition and revolution.

Another group of people do not directly criticise marriage but never the less question the wisdom of regulating and disciplining sexual behaviour. They advocate free sexual relationship before and after marriage and free use of contraceptives and legally available abortion. This group advocates the setting up of nudist clubs.

Such views may have helped the suffragists¹⁸⁵ but they certainly militate against the Sikh view of marriage. The danger from such thinking has been realised by some well meaning people who feel that the Marxist jargon has been dragged too far.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Suffragette movement was started in America by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to demand equal rights with men in education, property rights, voting, and other fields. At that time only men who held property could vote. The first woman convention was held at Seneca Falls N.Y. Their slogans were "*All men and women are created equal*", "*Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God*". The first state that granted the rights in 1890 was Wyoming. By 1920 fifteen other states accepted this right. In England it was Ms Parkhurst who started this organisation in East London. An organisation named "National Organisation of women (NOW)" led the movement for years before their demands were met. Since opponents called women *Bitches* .NOW titled their manifesto, "*Bitches manifesto*". Women's right to property was granted in 1870 by the Property Act. This gave rights only to married women. It was later amended in 1882 and 1887AD.

¹⁸⁶ "*The death of the family*" by D.Cooper 1971 Penguin press London. Also read "*The politics of the family*" by R.D.Laing, Tavistock publications London and "*The future of marriage*" by J.Bernard. Penguin books, Harmondsworth (Middx).

6.2 Divorce in the West

Marriages in the West are based on love and that is why they are called 'Love marriages. True love demands faith and firmness. But what is usually termed love in the West is casually contracted infatuation at an immature age when the young boys and girls have not fully grasped self and social awareness.¹⁸⁷ In most cases it drifts into a situation of sexual exploitation.¹⁸⁸ If it does lead to marriage then it usually ends up in accusations, confrontation, and finally divorce. The figures for divorce given hereunder have been taken from National statistics of Great Britain (page 31-32) and give us the idea of the way things are moving in Britain. Comparison with other countries (divorce rates per 1000 population) for year 2002:

Country	Marriages	Divorces
Belgium	3.9	3.0
Denmark	6.9	2.8
U.K.	4.8	2.7
Portugal	5.4	2.6
Germany	4.7	2.4

The West is now experimenting with the same idea that Wamacharis once preached in India more than 2000 years ago and the Indian society rejected it as harmful. All this is likely to sound the death knell of the concept of marriage unless proper steps are taken at the earliest to counteract this tendency. The national statistics show that the number of non-married women (under 60) cohabiting has increased from 13% in 1986 to 28% in 2001. For the same period the number of men cohabiting has gone

¹⁸⁷ An English proverb reads "Love of lads and fire of chats (chips) is soon in and soon out. In *Psychopathia Sexnalis* Dr. Krafft Ebing writes, "Love unbridled is a volcano that burns down and lays waste all around it. It is an abyss that devours all honour, substance, and health."

¹⁸⁸ According to National Statistics (2005) table 2.10 whereas only 11% males and 13% non-married females co-habited in 1991-92, the number rose to 25% males and 27% females in 2003-2004

up from 12% to 25%.The national statistics also show that the prevalence of cohabitation was the highest for women aged 25-29 and for men it was the highest for those aged 30-34

6.3 Social Trends in Western morality

The western society knows only too well how the unwanted, dispossessed, and abandoned children are swelling the ranks of street louts engaged in destroying property and resorting to murders, muggings and malicious acts of robbery to finance their drug addictions. The following information has been culled from National Statistics of Great Britain (Table 2.17 page 34) for the year 2004.

Percentage of births outside marriage				
Country	1980	1990	2000	2002
U.K. %	12	28	40	41
Sweden %	40	47	55	56
Greece %	2	2	4	4

According to table 2.23 of National Statistics (2005) 72% children adopted in 2003 were born outside marriage.

Teen-age conceptions (year 2002)		
Age	Leading to Maternity	Leading to Abortion
Under 14	179	219
14	729	1154
15	2585	3025
16	7110	5993
17	11649	8323
18	16065	9666
19	18904	10312

Evidently 57221 girls under twenty years now get pregnant and 38693 abortions take place every year and the rate is rising year after year.¹⁸⁹

It is a tradition among the Western countries to legalize something that can not be controlled (for example the drugs¹⁹⁰). From the 5th of December 2005 same sex couples (gays) will be able in Britain to become civil partners legally and will be registered as such for all benefits claimable by legally married heterosexual couples. No wonder if they legalize rape and extra-marital relationships in the near future.

Abortions and unreported venereal infections like AIDS are on the increase.¹⁹¹ The Sikhs living in the West are now a part and parcel of the Western permissive Society and are caught between two cultures. Sooner or later they are going to experience similar problems.

6.4 Honour Killing

In England a phrase has come into use concerning deaths/murders of young Asian girls. They call such cases "Honour killing". Whilst honour killings can never be justified, it has to be remembered that in the Asian mind protecting the chastity of female members of the family is extremely important.

¹⁸⁹ These figures do not include miscarriages, illegal abortions, or abortions arranged out of Britain.

¹⁹⁰ According to table 9.8 of the Natinal Statistics for 2005 the number of drug addicts found guilty of offence increased from 17.9 per thousand in 1981 to 113.1per thousand in 2002. In the same period crimes involving firearms rose from 4,903 to 10,248.

¹⁹¹ Accrding to a BBC report (Broadcast on 16.10.2005) the waiting time for sexual diseases in 1999 in British hospitals was negligible, now (in 2005) it is three weeks. In an NHS clinic for sexually transmitted diseases situated in Sheffield 1500 patients report in one month.Gonorrhoea and syphilis cases are on the increase. Sexual health in Britain is in a dramatic decline and casual sex and promiscuous sexual behaviour have become tacitly acceptable. HIV cases have trebled in 5 years. The British Govt. has earmarked 300 million pounds for 2006 to launch a campaign for educating youngsters in sex.

Pre-marital sex is taboo for everybody especially for a woman. Whatever the reasons for this attitude, it cannot be denied that Chastity, morality, and fidelity bring definite advantages to a society.

The Christian West has learnt little if anything from the biblical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and that is why Western society is getting flooded with unwanted, illegitimate children, and unmarried mothers barely 15 years old. The legal acceptance of same-sex marriage and gay associations only indicate the death-sign of a nation. State and parental control over children's guidance, initial spiritual instruction, and personal morality have been transplanted with sex-education and free sex.¹⁹² Even ministers, teachers, and priests whose duty it is to uphold morality and act as role models, shamelessly engage in pre-marital or extra-marital sex.

Again it should also be understood that although in the Western society young boys and girls choose their own partners, the number of unhappy and broken homes and divorce rate are comparatively higher here than in the Panjab. The women here are trying to become replicas of men and feminine modesty is disappearing. The Sikh women living in the West will sooner or later get affected by the norms and morals of the West. This is something that must engage the attention of Sikh parents and Sikh social and religious organisations now before it is too late.

¹⁹² grbMiq nwrI mdon mqM] blvMq blwq kwrhx] crn kml nh BjMq iqRx smwin iDRgu jnmnh (pMnw 1359) Those who are intoxicated with pride and sex or forcibly commit rape never ever think of God and therefore their lives are wasted like a splinter of straw.(Guru Granth Sahib P.1359) suAwd luBq iemrRI rs pRyirE md rs lYq ibkwirE ry] (pMnw 335) Deluded by pleasures of flesh and involved in sexual gratification you are wasting yourself in sin like an inebriated fool. (Guru Granth Sahib P.335)

Chapter Seven

Contributions of Sikh women

7.1 Women in Sikh History

All through Indian history it has been the practice to eulogize the achievements of men, praise their valour, and sing their ballads but never to acknowledge the contribution of women who consistently and devotedly nurture and build the male members of society into heroes. Their commitment, vision, accomplishments, and sufferings have seldom been the popular themes of literature, history, or folklore. It fell to the Sikh Gurus to give women their due and treat them on par with men. The Sikh Gurus infused in them such a spirit that they became the conscience of men. Take for instance the story of Mai Bhago. How remarkable it is that a village woman took up cudgels to fight and became instrumental in turning a losing battle into a resounding victory.

Sikh Women have played a constructive, significant, and positive role in Sikh history equal to men and yet they haven't won a whisper of recognition from the historians. Although the historians have largely ignored the contributions of Sikh women but the fact remains that women have been equally active in maintaining the integrity and ideals of the Khalsa. The greatest contribution of the Sikh women of that era was to remain in the background and raise their children in the spirit and traditions of the resilient Khalsa, at a time when there was a price on their heads. ¹⁹³ For example the mother and sister of Bhai Taru Singh Martyr were in the forefront for helping the fugitive Sikh fighters

¹⁹³ If one Sikh died two took his place voluntarily. This elicited a remark from a contemporary Muslim writer that in spite of persecution the Sikhs increased, "*Like ants and locusts*" (*Chahar Gulzar-e-Shujai* P. 545). The Sikhs themselves sang, "mMnU AswfI dwqRI AsIN mMnU dy soey] ijauN ijauN mMnU v`Fdw AsIN dUx svwey hoey "]

and always helped them with food and shelter.¹⁹⁴ They were both arrested and taken away to Lahore. The Hindus of Lahore had to pay Rs.100, 000 for their release. It was women who kept the Khalsa alive through infusing the spirit of Sikhism in the hearts of their children.

In the battles fought by the Sikhs the women suffered the most. It is true that Sikh men had to undergo innumerable trials and tribulations but who lost their husbands, sons, bread-winners and life-support? Who consciously chose widowhood, resolutely spurned the glorious offers of their oppressors, received their dear children's innards round their necks, resiliently declined to abjure faith, willingly invited economic insecurity, and single-handedly raised children to continue the fight against injustice? If there had been no resolute and dedicated Sikh women, there would be no Sikhism today. Was it not an easy option for them to abjure their faith, betray the Guru, live in peace, and enjoy the life in the leas?

Sikh women knew the aims of the Khalsa. The spiritual arrow shot by the Guru had pierced deep down into their conscience. Their dedication was not only for themselves and their husbands but for a higher cause. It was the divine spirit, meditative discipline, and wisdom imbued by them from Gurbani and transferred by them into their sons that became instrumental in saving the honour of the Sikhs and the Indians. A Sikh is what a Sikh woman creates him to be otherwise how would a nine year old child (Guru Gobind Singh) willingly agree to lose his father and invite untold problems at his tender age?

The persecution of the Sikhs and especially their women folk had started as early as 1713AD when Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719AD) ordered the arrest and torturous death of Banda Singh. He issued a general edict that Sikhs should be arrested and offered only one alternative "Islam or death". Prices were laid on the heads of the

¹⁹⁴ hY qwrU iSMG dI iek BYx AOr mweI] pIs kUt ky krYN kmweI] Sbd cOkI gur Awpxy kI krYN lso mrny qy nYk nw frYN]

Sikhs and “*Their pretty girls were to be reduced to concubines, and others to be made maid servants. When a Muslim died, his grave was to be dug by the Sikhs or their Hindu sympathisers. For Begar (unpaid labour), in place of cobblers Sikhs were to be employed.*”¹⁹⁵ Abdus Samad Khan was specially appointed to oversee and execute these orders. The Sikhs were harried, hunted, and hounded everywhere. Later, when Zakriya Khan became the Governor of Panjab (1726-1745 AD), it became a regular, daily occurrence, to arrest and butcher the Sikhs. Muin-ul-Malk, Governor of Panjab (1748-1753AD), known as Meer Mannu in Sikh circles was the worst tyrant as far as persecution of Sikh women is concerned. The grit and gumption displayed by Sikh women in the prison of Meer Mannu when neither they nor their innocent children showed any weakness in the face of death, through untold atrocities is exemplary to say the least.¹⁹⁶ Nur Ahmad Chishti tells us that Mannu “*killed thousands of Sikhs*” daily. Once, on the day of Eid, he beheaded 1100 Sikhs¹⁹⁷ in public. Could anything be more painful for Sikh women than to watch and witness the gruesome butchery of their own sons and husbands?

From this period right up to the time of the establishment of Sikh kingdom under Ranjit Singh (1799AD), many Sikh women have displayed bravery but unfortunately very little is known about them. For example when the poor village farmer Dyal Singh died, his young widow so trained her only son in Sikhism that he later became the Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the most revered leader of the

¹⁹⁵ History of the Sikhs by Hari Ram Gupta Volume 2 page 39

¹⁹⁶ Tehmat Khan Miskin, who served as personal attendant of Muin-ul-Malik, Governor of Panjab tells us that Farrukh Siyar was first blinded by the Sayyad brothers and later killed through tortures. (See *Tazkirah*). His grave was later opened in the reign of Sher Singh and the remains were desecrated and completely destroyed by the Sikhs in a moment of religious frenzy (See Lahore Gazetteer P.28). For fuller details see *Kitab-e-Tarikh-e-Panjab* 1812 by Khushwakhath Rai.

¹⁹⁷ See Tehqiqat-e-Chishti Urdu Edition 1906 pages 82,101,648,694 etc for fuller account of his atrocities.

Sikhs.¹⁹⁸ Hari Ram Gupta writes that in November 1799 the wife of Sardar Milkha Singh of Rawalpindi opposed the doughty warrior Shah Zaman (grand son of Abdali) at Rae Kela in a bloody battle. The number of such brave women may run into thousands but unfortunately historians (most of them being male) have not left any records for us.

It is mentioned in Gurbilas Patshahi Dasween that at the time of the siege of Anand Pur fort, the Sikh armies inside suffered from lack of water. The Sikh women organised themselves and secretly carried water into the fort everyday before sunrise. When the enemy got wind they were attacked and many were killed. It is also mentioned that Bhagat Singh's daughter was blown away with a canon ball. Finding her mother sad and depressed, the Guru said, "*Accept the will of God and pray for the Lord's blessings*". The woman later gave birth to Darbara Singh who became the well known leader of the Sikhs.¹⁹⁹ In our own times it was Maharaja Yadvinder Singh of Patiala who publicly honoured his mother by asking her to offer a brooch to the queen of England in 1911 on behalf of the women of India. Again it was he who appointed a woman to be the president of the Governing Council.

7.2 Women in Sikh Politics

Sikh women went to prison in large numbers in the agitation for the freedom of India and suffered unspeakable hardships and indignities. Hari Ram Gupta writes, "*In the struggle for*

¹⁹⁸ gurbwxI iqs kMT GnyrI] huqI is`KxI duie p`K kyrI] jhW Kwlsy lwie dIvwn] jwie krY Sbd cOkI gwn] (pMQ pRkws rqn isMG BMgU pMnw 218) When boy Jassa Singh and his mother sang Shabads in Amritsar on a Baisakhi day, Nawab Kapur Singh was so highly impressed that he asked the young mother to leave Jassa Singh with him.

¹⁹⁹ It was Darbara Singh who was offered the Nawabship (Governorship) by the Government but in all humility he declined to accept it. Later it was offered to Nawab Kapur Singh.

independence the Sikh women played no small part. They were splendid beings. They urged their husbands forward, even taking a part in the struggle themselves. Thus we could behold in them honour, heroism, faith, patriotism and liberty."²⁰⁰ Unfortunately no mention has been made of their names and activities.

Very few people, if any, know that the Gurdwara reform movement was the result of complaints from Sikh women who were molested and even raped by the *Pujaris* of the Gurdwaras. For a long time the women did not speak for fear of being ostracised or stigmatised. The *Pujaris* openly used intoxicants in the Gurdawra precincts.²⁰¹ Some *Pujaris* even watched quail fights in the Gurdwaras. They never washed themselves before reading the Holy Book and called the Gurdwara their shop. Complaints were received from various women and the right-thinking Sikhs were compelled to take some sort of action. For example on 14th January 1921, a woman in Taran Taran, barged into the Diwan beating her breast and complained, "*The Pujaris tied a stone round my son's neck and threw him into the pool (ਸਰੋਵਰ). Then, they molested my daughter inside the Gurdawara. Everyday, they molest and pass nasty remarks on the young girls*". This shook the conscience of the Sikhs and a movement for reform was started there and then. Hundreds of Sikh women became widows, and hundreds lost their sons and brothers in the struggle to free the Gurdwaras. It is estimated that at least five hundred Sikhs died in the *Jaito Morcha* alone. Who can fathom and accurately describe the anguish of these Sikh women?

²⁰⁰ History of the Sikhs by Hari Ram Gupta Volume 2 page 276

²⁰¹ According to Teja Singh (See Essays in Sikhism P.185) a *Pujari* stated in the court, "I am the greatest *Sri Mahant* and I control 300 Gurdwaras. The Government supplies me with two full sacks of *Bhang* every year which I distribute to all Gurdwaras."

Chapter Eight

Spiritual Sikh women

The childhood of every child is greatly influenced by its mother. Guru Nanak's greatness is not entirely his own. Great credit goes to Mata Tripta for the care and consideration she may have showered on her son and the ideas she may have imbedded into the impressive young mind. He may also have benefited from the wisdom and spirituality of his elder sister Bibi Nanaki. We give below brief accounts of some spiritual women who were instrumental in shaping Sikhism.

8.1 Bibi Nanaki (1464-1518 AD)

Bibi Nanaki was born at her maternal parents' village Chahal (District Lahore) in 1464AD. Her maternal grandfather, Ram Ji, was a very pious man. She, being the elder sister of Guru Nanak, was deeply attached to him. Her deep and devoted affection for her brother surpasses all descriptions. She was the Guru's first devotee who considered him a Divine master and therefore became his moral support and mentor. She understood the Guru's mission very well and always inspired and encouraged him. Historians tell us that it was she who offered a *Rabab* (rebeck) to Guru Nanak's life-long companion Mardana for singing the Guru's hymns. This *rabab* always reminded the Guru of his sister's love for him.

It is said that when Guru Nanak expressed a desire to obtain employment to honour his father's instruction, Bibi Nanaki opposed her father's wish, saying that Nanak was meant for a higher purpose. The Guru instructed her by saying, "My dear sister, honest labour purifies the body".²⁰² Later it was at her

²⁰² "byby jI ! ikrq kr KweIAY qW dyhI piv`qr hovY" (jnm swKI).

recommendation that her husband, Jai Ram,²⁰³ secured the white collar job of a store Keeper for Guru Nanak at Sultanpur. Whenever Guru Nanak attended to spiritual pursuits and was admonished by Jai Ram or the Guru's father for ignoring business, Bibi Nanaki always stood by the Guru. When it was rumoured that the Guru had drowned in the River Weien, she did not accept it and was proved true in the end.

The Sikhs have so deep respect for Bibi Nanaki that they usually address her as '*Bebe*' Nanaki meaning 'Mother Nanaki', the highest status given to women in Sikhism. She died in Sultanpur in 1518AD.

8.2 Bibi Basant Kaur

According to Sant Wisakha Singh, Bibi Basant Kaur was the devoted wife of Bhai Mani Singh, The head priest of Harmander Sahib. She was arrested and taken to Lahore along with a group of Sikh ladies. She remonstrated with the torturers and encouraged the fellow captive Sikh ladies to steadfastly adhere to the Sikh faith and not to give in.

8.3 Mata Khivi

Mata Khivi was the daughter of Bhai Devi Chand Khatri of village Sanghar near Khadur. She was married to Bhai Lehna in 1519 AD and was a very noble and spiritually enlightened Sikh woman. When Lehna became Guru Angad, she undertook the duties of organising the Langar (public kitchen) and worked lovingly in preparing and serving food to the needy with utmost joy, humility, and courtesy. She was an embodiment of selfless

²⁰³ Some historians have written that Jai Ram was the son of Parmanand *patwari*. Parmanand was known to Guru Nanak's father Mehta Kalu.

service and her name is reverently mentioned in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib (Ramkali Ki Var) as “extensive was her shade as that of a mighty tree”. She is known for distributing buttered Kheer (rice pudding with butter)²⁰⁴ to all those who came to take food in her Langar. The Guru Ka Langar had become a source of bounty and harbinger of love, equality, and consciousness in her hands.

Mata Khivi had divided the duties between Bhai Buddha, Bhai Jodh, and Bhai Kidara. Kidara was in charge of purchasing provisions, Jodh was to arrange for cooking, and Bhai Budha was in charge of distribution and administration. Mata Khivi herself used to distribute food and the langar was never allowed to run short “qot nw AwvI KtIAih”]

8.4 Bibi Amro

Bibi Amro, the daughter of Guru Angad Dev (the second Guru), has a very special place in the history of the Sikhs. She understood the meaning of Sikhism and was of a very spiritual nature. She was in the habit of getting up early in the morning and reciting Guru Nanak’s hymns with a sweet voice. She was married to Jassu son of Manak Chand, a brother of Amar Das.

Amar Das was a 60 year old *Vaishnav* . He used to observe fasts and visit the Holy Ganges River for a ritual bath every year. Although he had visited the Ganges 19 times, he was still in search of truth and peace of mind which had eluded him so far. One morning, he heard Bibi Amro singing Guru Nanak’s hymns in a very melodious voice. Amar Das felt spell-bound to hear the hymns. Every word of the hymns was sinking deep into his heart and he could not resist listening to it. He was enchanted and completely beatified. Immediately he approached the young bride

²⁰⁴ blvMF KIvI nyk jn, ijs bhuqI CwauN pqRwLI [lMGr dOlq vMfIAY,rs AMimRq KIir iGawLI (pMnw.967)

and enquired about the hymns and their composer. She told him about Guru Nanak and his successor Guru Angad Dev. Amar Das wasted no time. He approached Guru Angad Dev, abandoned the worship of rivers, and goddesses, and came into the fold of Sikhism. Later he became the third Guru of the Sikhs. Bibi Amro proved the efficacy of the Gurus' edict, "Awip jphu Avrh nwmu jpwvhu] (pMnw 290)" (Pray and make others pray to God). She was cremated in Village Basarke

8.5 Bibi Bhani Ji

Bibi Bhani (1534-1581AD) was the younger daughter of Guru Amar Das.²⁰⁵ She was a divine picture of devoted wife, loving daughter, and pious mother. She was born at Basarke on 2nd February 1534. Her name is a bye word among the Sikhs for devotion, humility, and selfless service which she practised right from her childhood.²⁰⁶ She was always dressed in very simple clothes of *Khaddar* (coarse cloth of home-spun yarn-ਕ`ੜ) and never wore any ornaments. M.A Macauliffe writes that when a Sikh brought very good silken clothes for Bibi Bhani, she flatly declined to wear them and recited a couplet from Asa Ki var.²⁰⁷ She advised her well-wisher to put all proffered money on feeding the hungry.

She was married to Jetha Ji (18 February 1553AD). She was an embodiment of selfless service which she had inherited from her father. Jetha Ji was deeply impressed by her service to the Sikh cause and he himself also got engaged in various other activities

²⁰⁵ Some historians think that Bibi Bhani and Bibi Dani were twin sisters.(see Gur Parkash Bansawali- Khalsa College Amritsar)

²⁰⁶ Bwau Bgiq ko qn jn BwnI [According to Professor Puran Singh (Ten Masters P.41) in her childhood Bibi Bhani was very fond of solitude and mystic thoughts.

²⁰⁷ kUVu suienw kUVu rupw kUVu pYn@xhwru] kUVu kwieAw kUVu kpVu kUVu rUpu Apwru(pMnw 468)

extolling the virtues of Sikhism. Later he became the fourth Guru of the Sikhs under the name of Ram Das. Bibi Bhani was the mother of Prophet Guru Arjan Dev, the compiler of Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs and was the grandmother of Guru Hargobind. Guru Amar Das is said to have praised Bibi Bhani by saying, “In the past and the present there has been none other like you, and neither will there be anyone like you in future”.²⁰⁸

Bibi Bhani’s father, Guru Amar Das (1479-1574AD) is the first religious leader in the world history, who appointed women as preachers. Women ran parishes (pIVHIAW) and undertook missionary work. This fact points to the Guru’s acceptance of the fact that women have organisational ability and can be equally effective in reforming the society.

The spirit of devotion, humility, and sacrifice inculcated in the Sikh movement by Bibi Bhani later resulted in the remarkable martyrdoms of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh. It also resulted in the foundation of Amritsar wherein the Scripture of the Sikhs was installed to make the movement eternal.²⁰⁹ She may well be designated the Divine mother of the movement whose imprint on the Sikh Psyche is indelible. Even when her husband had become a Guru she continued working in the *Guru Ka Langar* up till her death.

Bibi Bhani was busy treating the wounds of the lepers in Tarn Taran when she died on 9 April 1598. Her son Guru Arjan Dev had a well dug in her honour which was called Bibi Bhani’s well.

8.6 Bibi Viro Ji

²⁰⁸ qIno kwl ibKY qu`J jYsI] huie n hY, n hovYgI AYsI]

²⁰⁹ It is believed that the land of village Tung, on which Amritsar stands, was purchased by Guru Amar Das in the name of Bibi Bhani.

Bibi Viro ji (born 1605AD) was the daughter of Guru Har Gobind (the sixth Guru of the Sikhs). She was spiritually very advanced and was married to an equally spiritual Sikh Bhai Sadhu of village Malla (District Ferozepore). She had five sons named Gulab Chand, Jit Mal, Ganga Ram, Sango Shah, and Hari Chand. All of them were so trained by her in Sikhism that they all died fighting in the battles foisted by the Government on Guru Gobind Singh. Bibi Viro's grand sons preached Sikhism far and wide and stood as a rock with the later Gurus

8.7 Mata Sahib Kaur (1681-1747 AD)

She was the daughter of Bhai Ram Basi, Rawa Khatri of Basi Rawan of Rohtas (now in Pakistan). She was very beautiful, healthy, humble, patient, and spiritual by nature. She came to meet the Guru with her family and was so much impressed by the spiritual atmosphere and selfless service of the Guru's house that she decided to stay there and not to go back. She was very religious right from her childhood and took a pledge never to eat anything without seeing the Guru.

When the Guru prepared Amrit (baptismal water) for the Khalsa (March 30, 1699), she is said to have sweetened it with sugar cakes²¹⁰. This was a symbolic act of instilling love, patience, modesty, and kindness of female-hood into the strength and valour of the martial order of the Khalsa. Whenever the baptismal ceremony was held Mata Sahib Kaur always attended it and helped the Guru in its organisation. The Chivalry of the Khalsa is the gift of Mata Sahib Kaur.²¹¹ Since then, the Guru designated her

²¹⁰ According to Panjabi University publication "*Mata Sahib Kaur*" the sugar cakes were added to the Amrit by Mata Jeeto Ji because Mata Sahib Devi (Later Sahib Kaur) had arrived at Anand Pur only after the Baiskhi of 1699 AD (in 1701AD) see page 20. Also see *Panth Parkash* of Giani Gian Singh P. 230

²¹¹ Cunningham extols the chivalry of the Sikhs by calling it "*the greatest act of chivalry in the East*" when he mentions that the Sikhs rescued Maratha women from Ahmad Shah Abdali and helped them reach Maharashtra on the horses of the Sikhs. It is like escorting abducted women from London to Moscow.

as the “mother of the Khalsa”. All baptised Sikhs recognize her as their spiritual mother.

After the battle of Chamkaur the Guru reached Damdama Sahib. Here she undertook the work of baptising the inhabitants of nearby villages. She visited Bhagi Bander, Sameer Kot, Chak Bhai, Maur, Bhucho, Bhagu, Bathinda, Mahimay, Bhokhri, and Faridkot baptising hundreds of men and women. It was here that Bhai Tarlok Singh and Ram Singh (of Phool), who had helped in the cremation of the Chamkaur martyrs got baptised. When the Guru left for Deccan, she accompanied him.²¹²

Mata Sahib Kaur wore very simple dress. Along with some clothes of Guru Gobind Singh her simple dress (shirt and breeches)²¹³ can be seen with Bhai Dalla’s descendants of Damdama Sahib.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh she and Mata Sundri settled at Kucha Dilwali in Delhi and guided the Khalsa for 36 years. She attended to social work, Langar arrangements, and general affairs whereas Mata Sundri attended to political guidance of the Khalsa. This is clearly evident from the Hukamnamas written by her to various Sikhs.²¹⁴ The Hukamnamas indicate the clarity of her mind and the affection she had for the Khalsa. They also show that she was a very determined and principled woman. For example, in her Hukamnama written to Bhai Malla and Bhai Bagha, she instructs them to keep chasing the dacoits with all their might and recover the stolen mules and bullocks of the Khalsa.²¹⁵ In another Hukamnama dated 30 December 1734AD

²¹² swihb dyvI rhy nw idhI] clI sMg pRB ky suK gihI] ibnw drSn
Bojn nih krhoN] iehW rhy ikAw kwj svrhoN (sUrj pRkws) drSn kry qW
Bojn Kwvy] nq ins bwsr CuDq ibhwvy (sUrj pRkws ruq 5 AMSU 1)

²¹³ kurqI qy GutvIN pjwmI

²¹⁴ So far only 8 *Hukamnamas* (letters) of Mata Sahib Kaur have been discovered.

²¹⁵ “srkwr kI Kcr jwxI pwvY nwhIN, mujrw hos”

she writes, “Have a well dug for the benefit of the people of Patan. Expenses will be met from the Guru’s treasury”. When Duni Chand tried to create a rift between her and Mata Sundri she issued general instructions to the Khalsa saying, “Consider the Guru’s house as one”. There is one thing common in all her Hukamnamas. She always wrote, “You are my dear son”.²¹⁶

Mata Sahib Kaur was always fully armed and even offered to fight with the enemy if needed.²¹⁷ Such was the respect Guru Gobind Singh showed to Mata Ji that whenever the Sikhs had any complaints they would go either to Mata Gujri or to Mata Sahib Kaur and the Guru always respected their opinions. She loved the Sahibzadas (especially the youngest one) very much. It was she who dressed them daily and looked after their health and well-being.²¹⁸ She also loved young Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Mata Ji was always overjoyed when Jassa Singh and his mother performed kirtan before her and would kiss Jassa Singh many times.²¹⁹ Before the Guru left for his heavenly abode (October 7, 1708AD), he sent her to Delhi from Nanded with five weapons of Guru Har Gobind. She was also given the Guru’s seal. Since Guru Gobind Singh had helped Bahadur Shah in capturing the throne of Delhi,²²⁰ Bahadur Shah is said to have allocated a pension from the Government treasury for Mata Ji.

²¹⁶ “qusIM myry pu`q PrzMd ho] gurU pUrw quswfI pq rKygw] gurUu gurU jpxw jnm svwxw]”

²¹⁷ AwigAw hovy qW gih qrvwrw] lrhu sMg s`qrn jr Cwrw] Awies hoey sWg krDwrI] krhu jMg Bwgy sMg kwrI (sUrj pRkwS)

²¹⁸ According to *Gurbilas* one day she dressed Baba Fateh Singh in Blue, decorated him with three Khandas and a Kalghi and brought him to Guru Gobind Singh’s court. The Guru was extremely pleased.

²¹⁹ swq brs syvw ien kInI mwqw kI mn qn sy] p`uqrW vWg mwqw jI ny rKXo j`sw isMG mn my] (sUrj pRkwS pMnw 1217)

²²⁰ In the battle fought at Jaju (8th June 1707AD) the Guru killed Bahadur Shah’s brother Azam by an arrow and thus secured the throne for him. On 23 July 1707AD, the Guru met Bahadur Shah at Agra and received gifts in thanksgiving from Bahadur Shah. Some historians write that Mata Sahib Kaur declined the offer of pension but Mata Sunder Kaur accepted it on advice from Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Kirpal Chand.

Mata Ji felt extremely sad and lonely after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. It is said that she ate very little and was always engrossed in prayers.²²¹ In 1747AD (at the age of 66) she died in Delhi and was cremated at a place now known as Gurdwara Bala Sahib.

8.8 Mata Gujri (1619-1704 AD)

Mata Gujri was the daughter of Bhai Lal Chand of Kartar Pur (District Jalandhar) and mother of Guru Gobind Singh. She was married to Guru Har Gobind's son Tyag Mal in 1632AD. Mata ji was highly spiritual and patient. Only a few years after her marriage Guru Hargobind got involved in a battle in which Tyag Mal fought so well that Guru Har Gobind changed his name from Tyag Mal to Tegh Bahadur (the valiant fighter). Mohsin Fani tells us that this battle was seen by Mata Gujri from a roof top and along with her female friends she encouraged the Sikh fighters raising their spirits.

Knowing fully well that her husband will not return from Delhi (December 1675 AD) where he had been summoned by the Emperor, she gladly agreed to let him go to espouse the cause of the suffering Hindus who had called upon him to help them against their forcible conversion to Islam. It is important to know that at that time her son, Gobind Rai, was only 9 years old. It was an uphill task not only to bring up and educate Gobind Rai but to face the internal and external dangers lurking all around.

Mata Gujri stayed at Anand Pur from 1675 AD to 1686 AD and worked hard to expose the machinations of the Masands who had started misappropriating the funds sent by the Sikhs to support the

²²¹ jp qp krky idvs ibqvvY] supq Alp,Alp hI KwvY] (sUrj pRRkwS AMsU 15)

Guru's cause and foiled their attempts. When the Guru initiated the Khalsa, she prepared her grandsons herself with love and brought them out to get baptised. It should be remembered that Baba Zorawar Singh was only 4 years old then.²²²In the first battle of Anand Pur Mata Gujri asked Guru Gobind Singh to appoint Baba Ajit Singh as the commander of the army. Mata Sundri objected saying that he was still young. Mata Gujri retorted, "Do not talk of age. The sons of the lions are always lions".²²³

The famous psychologist Sigmund Freud says, "A man's entire personality is formed in the first five years of his life". We cannot forget how Mata Gujri proved the truth of this statement practically. She hardened the resolve of the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh (Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh) to resist the temptations of the Governor of Sirhind who wanted to convert them to Islam. She instructed them to address the courtiers with Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa (Sikh greeting) instead of Aslam-u-alaikum (Muslim greeting) and not to bow their heads to the Subedar (Governor). It was her teaching that kept the young Sahibzadas steadfast in the face of sure and torturous death. There is no example anywhere in the history of the world where 7 and 9 year old children may have gladly accepted to be bricked alive (December 12, 1704 AD) rather than abjure their faith. She was incarcerated in a cold tower at Sirhind. Bitter cold and tortures proved fatal for her and she died on 28th December 1704 AD. This tower is now known as "Tower of Mata Gujri" and is greatly revered by the Sikhs.

Mata Gujri is reverently known as the Mother of a martyr, grandmother of martyrs, wife of a martyr and herself a martyr.

8.9 Mata Sundri

²²² dyh KWfy kI pwhul qyj bFwieAw, zorwvr kr isMG hukm vrqwieAw]

²²³“purwqn ieiqhwisk jIvxIAW” siqbIr isMG pMnw 144

Mata Sundri was the daughter of Ram Saran Kumar of Lahore, wife of Guru Gobind Singh, and mother of Sahibzada Ajit Singh. After the Guru left Anand Pur she and Mata Sahib Kaur reached Delhi. For a brief period she came and met the Guru at Damdama Sahib but did not accompany him when he went to Deccan. After that she stayed at Delhi and looked after her adopted son Ajit Singh.²²⁴

In order to suppress Banda Bahadur and break his power Farrukh Siyar employed not only military power but also diplomacy. He contacted Mata Sundri, who was then (1714 AD) at Delhi. He offered Jagirs for Banda Singh and his colleagues if Mata Sundri could persuade them to lay down their arms. Mata Sundri wrote to Banda Singh what was on offer. Banda Singh knew that capitulation would mean the annihilation of the Khalsa. He therefore dithered. Meanwhile Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur were put under house arrest. Farrukh Siyar thought the Sikhs would do anything to save the honour of the Guru's family. His trick worked the Sikhs were divided into two factions, the Bandai Khalsa who stuck fast to Banda Singh and the Tat Khalsa who under Miri Singh, Binod Singh, Fateh Singh, Sham Singh Naurangawalia and Kahan Singh broke away from Banda Singh with 15000 companions and accepted employment with the Governor of Lahore. In November 1714 AD the Pargana of Jhabal was offered to the Tat Khalsa for their expenses. This was

²²⁴ Ajit Singh resembled Mata Ji's own son of the same name so she adopted him. He belonged to a goldsmith family of Burhanpur. Mata Ji brought him up with loving care and had him married in a good family but one day Ajit Singh donned the Guru's weapons and declared himself Guru of the Sikhs. When Mata Sundri objected he drew out his sword to kill her. Mata Sahib Kaur was very angry and said "nh jvwnI ko Bogn krYN] duK qy Dm hwr kr mrYN] hovY durdSw pur mih qyrI] mrih kUmOq nwir nr hyrI (sUrj pRkws pMnw 3110). Ajit Singh killed a Muslim Fakir named Benawa (by nvw) and threw his corpse in a well. He was ordered to be arrested. He shaved his hair and placing it on a platter offered it to Farrukh Syar in the hope that he will be forgiven. He was soon arrested, tied to the feet of an elephant, and dragged through the streets of Delhi (1718 AD). Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur had to hide themselves in Mathura. Later Ajit Singh's son Hathi Singh declared himself as Guru and removing the name of Guru Nanak from the Dharmshala inscribed his own name instead. He was killed in the prime of his life by the officials. His shrine can be seen in Sabzi Mandi Delhi.

the most difficult time for Mata Sundri who had to communicate with both factions and guide the destiny of the Khalsa.

Since Abad-us-Samad Khan, the Governor of Lahore, was busy in suppressing the rebellion of Hussain Khan Kheshgi of Qasur, Banda Singh thought of attacking Lahore. He marched and camped near Kahali in the hope that the Tat Khalsa would change their mind and join him in conquering Lahore and thus breaking the hold of the Delhi Government in Panjab. He was mistaken. The Tat Khalsa under Miri Singh came out to oppose him at village Ghanayaki. Banda Singh was utterly disgusted and made a hasty retreat. In December 1716 AD Banda Singh²²⁵ was captured alive at Gurdas Nangal. Misery, misfortune, isolation, and distress awaited the Tat Khalsa. Farrukh Siyar gave strict orders to “reduce the Sikhs to pulp”. The Tat Khalsa suffered the most. Even Mata Sundri did not escape the wrath of the Government. Her adopted son Ajit Singh was arrested, tied to the tail of an elephant, and dragged through the streets of Delhi. Later he died when the elephant crushed his head with a foot. Mata Sundri fled to Mathura in disguise. “Her house and property in Delhi were seized by the Muslims.”²²⁶

Mata Ji guided the destinies of the Khalsa after the death of her husband very ably. She appointed Bhai Mani Singh as the Granthi of Harimandar Sahib and issued edicts to the Khalsa from time to time. It is mentioned in history that she tried to collect the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and started a Taksal at Amritsar²²⁷

²²⁵ He was tortured to death near Qutab Minar Delhi. The heart and entrails of his son Ajai Singh were thrust into his mouth. Later his eyes were gouged out with a pointed dagger. His feet were chopped off. A little after this his arms were lopped off. Then his flesh was cut off with red hot pincers. Then his ears and nose were removed. His brain was then blown out with a hammer. This scene was staged in front of Banda's officials Fateh Singh, Gulab Singh, and Ali Singh. They were beheaded on June 10, 1716. Macauliffe (Vol.p.239) gives details and says that by bribing the Mughal officers heavily Mata Sundri succeeded in saving the lives of Kahan Singh and Baj Singh (a descendant of Guru Amar Das).

²²⁶ See Macauliffe Volume V P.254-257

²²⁷ At one time Giani Ameer Singh, the great Scholar of Sikhism was its head. It was situated in Gali Sato(ਸ`ੜੳ ਗਲੀ) of Amritsar.

for the exposition of the Sikh philosophy. She breathed her last in Delhi.

8.10 Mai Bhatti

Guru Gobind Singh and nearly 40 Sikh followers were besieged at Chamkaur. On being requested by his followers the Guru escaped at night and reached Macchiwara. Announcements had been made by the beat of the drum that any Sikh found anywhere should be killed or arrested. The Guru's Muslim devotee brothers Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan disguised the Guru in the garb of a Muslim fakir (*Uchh da pir*) and carrying him in a palanquin reached the village Rajoana. There the Guru rested at the house of Mai Bhatti. It was extremely risky to offer shelter to the Guru who was being searched in every village. Next day Mai Bhatti compelled her two sons to carry the Guru once again in a palanquin and help him reach Tahaliana at Raikot (Ludhiana).

8.11 Mai Bhagbhari

Mai Bhagbhari was a deeply devoted Brahman woman living in Srinagar (Kashmir). As a token of her devotion to the Guru, she decided to produce a garment with her own hands and offer it to the Guru. After some time a silken garment was ready to be offered but the Guru was nowhere near Srinagar. He was hundreds of miles away in the Panjab. The devotee in Bhagbhari was restless and Bhagbhari was determined to offer it only to the Guru in person. The Guru unexpectedly changed his tour programme and headed for Kashmir. On reaching Srinagar, He stayed for one night with his devoted follower Bhai Kattu and early next morning knocked at Bhagbhari's door and asked for the garment. Bhagbhari could not believe her eyes. Her happiness knew no bounds. Old as she was, she soon died and the Guru

converted her house into a place of worship. There now stands an excellent Gurdwara at that place in memory of Mai Bhagbhari.²²⁸

8.12 Bibi Raj Kaur

Female infanticide was common in India and usually well to do people killed their daughters at birth. As soon as a baby girl was born in the family of Raja Gajpat Singh (of Jind State), he had her put in a box and buried. The news somehow leaked to Sant Gudar Singh, who was a great scholar of Sikhism. The Sant hastily reached Badrukha and had the girl taken out. He admonished the family and took the girl away to bring her up. She grew up to be a very spiritual girl and was married to Sardar Mahan Singh (1774AD), who later became the leader of Misl Shukarchakiyan. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the world famous Sikh Maharaja, was born out of this wedlock in 1780 AD

8.13 Bibi Roop Kaur

Nothing much is known about Bibi Roop Kaur's parents and early life. She was found lying on a dung heap by Guru Hari Rai and was named Roop Kaur (Beautiful princess). She was brought up by the Guru with tender love and care and was greatly loved by the Guru's sons Baba Ram Rai and Har Krishan. The Guru provided all comforts and arranged for her education. She grew up to be a very intelligent young girl and mastered Panjabi and Hindi languages.

As she reached puberty, she was married with Bhai Khem Karan of Pasrur (18 miles south of Sialkot- now in Pakistan). In time she gave birth to a baby boy who was named Amar Singh.²²⁹

²²⁸ It is said that Bhagbhari accepted Sikhism on through the devotion of her son Sewa Das who was a Sikh of the Guru. Bhag Bhari's death is supposed to have happened in 1615 AD

In Islam, *Hadis* is considered to be as sacred as the Quran. It contains the sayings and instructions of Prophet Muhammad. Bibi Roop Kaur prepared a Sikh *Hadis*. She noted down every word spoken by Guru Har Rai. At that time her idea was to learn the philosophy preached by the Guru through keeping a daily record, but now it is a valuable collection of the Guru's instructions that have reached us in their purity. This tells us how the Sikhs prayed and how they asked questions and received the replies from the Guru. For example it tells us that at the time of visiting Nankana Sahib, Guru Har Rai slept on the ground all the time of his stay there. At Kirat Pur can be seen a handkerchief of Bibi Roop Kaur, and her book of Japuji. Unfortunately her record has not reached us complete. We have only 492 to 559 pages of her records.

8.14 Bibi Pardhan Kaur Kaur

She was born at Bhadaur in 1661 AD in the family of Maharaja Ala Singh and Maharani Fateh Kaur (popularly called Mai Fatto). She was the only girl in the family. Special arrangements were made by Mai Fatto to impart all sorts of education to her daughter. Like her mother, Bibi Pardhan Kaur grew up to be a Sikh scholar, and a philanthropist. On the recommendation of her aunt (BUAW) Bibi Ram Kaur and Bhai Dyal Singh, She was married to Sardar Sham Singh (a descendant of Baba Budha Ji) who lived at Ram Das (District Amritsar). First Bibi Pardhan Kaur lost her only son and soon after even her husband passed away. She declined to remarry and decided to devote her whole life to Public service.

Maharaja Ala Singh granted her a Jagir (a fief) of Rs. 30,000 a year, but Bibi Pardhan Kaur never used it for her own up keep. She employed a Sikh Scholar Bhai Nikka Singh of village Harika

²²⁹ After partition (1947AD) of the Panjab the descendants of Amar Singh settled at village Dialpura near Banur (India)

(Tehsil Qasur) to preach Sikhism throughout the Panjab. There were no schools in the Panjab so Bibi Pardhan Kaur started her first school in Barnala where Panjabi and Sanskrit were taught along with Sikhism. All expenses, including food, were paid by the Bibi Ji from her own pocket. She started a *Sada Brat* (food at all times) where travellers, poor people, and students could dine at any time of the day and night. This *Langar* was known far and wide. She is herself said to have translated some Sanskrit books into Panjabi one of which is Washisht Puran. It was through her persuasion that Maharaja Ala Singh agreed to pay for the *ashram* at village Khudi known as *Dera* Baba Nikka Singh. Another *Dera* was later started in the name of Baba Rama Singh. She was instrumental in assisting the digging of many wells in Patiala and Barnala areas and started *Dharam Shalas* with Langars attached to them.

It was through her efforts that a devoted Sikh girl named Bibi Veero was married to Bhai Dharam Singh Randhawa, a close associate of Nawab Kapur Singh. Bhai Dharam Singh later stood by Maharaja Ala Singh through thick and thin and Ala Singh used to call him Azam Bhai (Elder Brother).

8.15 Bibi Bhan Kaur Chhiniwal

Bibi Bhan Kaur was the sister of Sant Maghar Singh. She was 7 ft tall and very healthy. She always wore a turban on her head like men and was the leader of her own Gurmat Parchar Jatha. Like her brother she was deeply devoted and spiritually awake and worked day and night to preach Sikhism. As if by Guru's grace she was married to Sardar Bhan Singh of Chhiniwal who was an equally pious and devoted Sikh. She did not like people to get married without getting baptised therefore she started a movement in her area resisting those *Granthies* who conducted weddings of un-baptised Sikhs. She herself baptised 90 couples before marriage and organised women to preach Sikhism in her area.

8.16 Meer Mannu's (1748-1753 AD) Atrocities

The Sikhs were an eyesore for the kingdom of Delhi.²³⁰ Farrukh Siyar, the king of Delhi, knew that the only way to extirpate the Sikhs was to somehow stop the oxygen supply through more and more recruits. He therefore ordered the killing or conversion of all Sikh women and children in the Panjab.

He created an army of 30,000 and vowed to finish the Sikhs once and for all. Punitive expeditions in pursuit of Sikhs went from village to village hunting the Sikhs. *“They took written undertaking from the headmen of villages in their jurisdiction not to allow any Sikh to live there. If there were some Sikhs, they were to be arrested and sent to the neighbouring police station..... Local intelligencers were appointed to report in secret at the nearby police or military posts. Connivance on their part resulted in imprisonment and confiscation of property.”*²³¹ Beautiful women, especially young girls were required to be transported to Lahore in chains. Most male Sikhs (and some women) abandoned their hearths and homes and took refuge in forests but women were the worst hit.

All male Sikhs disappeared into dreadful caves, ravines and dense forests²³² infested with wild beasts and poisonous reptiles but

²³⁰ A Swiss officer Antoine Louis Henri Polier was at that time living in Delhi. Later in 1776 AD he wrote, “Five hundred of Najaf Khan’s (Prime Minister of the Mughal Empire) horse dare not encounter fifty Sikh horsemen”(See *Asiatic Annual Register* 1800 P. 32-34)

²³¹ History of the Sikhs by Hari Ram Gupta Vol 2 p. 40

²³² Jammu, Kangra, Hoshiarpur Hills, deserts of Bikaner and Lakhi Jungle were their favoured hiding places. Miskin, who himself was employed to punish the Sikhs, writes that the Sikhs seldom left their villages without a fight. He mentions the fight at village Damodran (Dadupur near Patti) where the Sikhs held up the army for a month. In the end the Govt. forces took to their heels leaving 300 Badakhshani foot soldiers to be slaughtered by the Sikhs. He further writes, “I was astonished to see three Sikh horsemen were driving away the whole force. I galloped after them for

women suffered the full force of Mannu's wrath. Thousands of Sikh women, and children were arrested and brought to Lahore in chains daily. Women were forced to remain hungry, grind corn for the army, and suffer separation from their babies. Those who disobeyed, resisted, or produced less work than expected, had their children killed in front of them and dressed round their necks. In spite of all this not a single woman or a child wavered in their faith and accepted Islam to save their skins. A group of Sikh women from Majha somehow escaped from a camp and informed the Sikhs in the jungle of Kahnuwan about the atrocities being committed in the Panjab villages. In 1750 AD Kapur Singh, the Chief of Budha Dal, and his 500 stalwarts entered Lahore in disguise and an attempt was made to kill Meer Mannu but he escaped unhurt. Once again in 1753 AD Kapur Singh attacked Lahore and freed all prisoners from Meer Mannu's jail.²³³ Around 1760 AD, the sacrifices and resilience of these valiant women were officially recognised by the Khalsa and they became a part of the daily Khalsa congregational prayer. Even today, these women are remembered in the Ardas (the Sikh congregational prayer) and their sacrifices inspire the Khalsa. They are the pride and the inspiration of the Khalsa. The blood of these martyrs has really become the seed of the Khalsa.

In December 1757AD, Jahan Khan ordered the arrest of Sodhi Wadbhag Singh of Kartarpur. Since Sodhi Wadbhag Singh got wind of his imminent arrest and secretly moved away to village Bahiri (District Hoshiarpur), Jahan Khan's agent Nasir Ali "*pulled down the Sikh temple, polluted it by slaughtering cows and forcibly converted all the Hindu and Sikh women of the place to Islam and sacked the neighbourhood thoroughly*".²³⁴ It is said

one Kos. I came across a large number of men lying dead on the way. But Muhammad Aqil dragged me back after a great resistance. We reached our troops safely." (Quoted by Hari Ram Gupta history of the Sikhs Vol 2 P.284).

²³³ Sardar Kapur Singh died the same year on 7 October 1753. It was a big loss for the Sikhs. Meer Mannu fell from his horse and died soon after him on 3 November 1753

²³⁴ This village and the Gurdwara were founded by Guru Arjan Dev in 1598 AD. This is where the original volume of Guru Granth Sahib can be seen in the *Shishmahal* of Gurdwara Tham Sahib

that here a young girl named Nirbhai Kaur and her mother Didar Kaur gave the invaders a very bloody nose and saved many other women from falling into the hands of the invaders.

It is regrettable that the history of this most turbulent period of the Panjab has not been written from the social point of view. Only main political activities have been recorded and the writers have restricted themselves to the mention of political disturbances only at the seats of authority. The following account of a few villages in the District of Ludhiana is based on a book written by Sant Wisakha Singh ²³⁵

8.17 Torture camps in Malwa

Torture camps were established throughout the Panjab where women and children were assembled and tortured to extract information about their husbands and sons. One such regional centre was established at Mullan Pur in Malwa under Moman Khan.²³⁶ Bands of marauders, freebooters, and looters supported by local officials became instrumental in having the women and children apprehended and brought to Mullan Pur.²³⁷ Hundreds of

which was re-constructed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1833 AD. The Maharaja also set apart the revenues of village Fateh Pur for the maintenance and expenses of this Gurdwara.

²³⁵ "mwlvy dw ieiqhws" By Sant Wisakha Singh. Sant Wisakha Singh has recorded the details which reached him through his ancestors. He authenticated the details through extensive tours. Further details are available in bhwdr isMGxIAW written by Bhai Sewa Singh and Published by SGPC Amritsar 1998.

²³⁶ Mullan Pur is 12 miles from Ludhiana on Ludhiana –Feroze Pore Road (Panjab).

²³⁷ Here now stands a Gurdwara in place of the Mullan's camp. This Gurdwara is called muSikAwxw (place of knotted females). This word may have been derived from Persian muSkIdn which means tying arms with knots. The history of this place titled "isK bIbIAW dw qpoDwm qy kurbwngwh gurdvwrw muSikAwxw ShId isMGxIAW" written by Sant Wisakha Singh is now available in print. The skeletons of women and children (with their hands tied) excavated here in 1962 were seen by the author some years ago. Now they have been cremated to show respect to the martyrs. Some pictures can be seen in the two books of Sant Wisakha Singh mentioned above.

women, with their hands and feet tied with ropes, were brought here daily from as far as Kothala (Malerkotla). Many women resisted physically and accepted death than dishonour. Skirmishes with women happened at Sidh Sar (between Chamkaur and Fatehgarh), Ber, Mahmood Pura, Khosla, and Jhamat. A big battle was fought at Kular (ਕੁਲ੍ਹਵਹ) where the site is still sprinkled with *Maths* constructed in honour of the valiant Sikh female fighters.²³⁸ Another big skirmish took place at Maherna (near Sant Pura) where a Gurdwara still proclaims the bravery and sacrifices of the devoted women. Other places where the Government forces were resiliently opposed are Kalsian, Rai Kot, Hathur,²³⁹ and Badhni. All women collected at Mullan Pur were later marched on foot to Ghalib Kalan²⁴⁰ where they were joined by those brought from Hathur and the surrounding villages. They were then marched to Kot Isa Khan where they joined those roped in from Tihara, Bhundri, Sidhwan Bet and Dharam Kot centres. Here they were loaded on carts like animals and taken away to Lahore. Starvation, distress, despair, humiliation, injured self respect, demolition of their homes and uncertainty of future wore them down but no pain, no hardship, no affliction, or mortification could make them falter. Not one of them is recorded as having accepted Islam which was offered to them in return for abjuring their faith in Sikhism. Many died on their way through starvation and resistance. Worst affected were those with children who were not provided with water in the scorching heat of the sun.

At Lahore it was the usual practice that each batch of the newly arrived women was visited by Meer Mannu in person. He offered

²³⁸ Another pitched battle is said to have been fought by the captured Sikh women between the villages of Nadali and Warpal in District Amritsar where they killed the Police chief and many of his companions.

²³⁹ In Hathur there are old wells known as ਸੜ੍ਹਾਵ ਢ੍ਰਿ ਕੁਹ (wells of the valiant women) where the brave women fell fighting or jumped into the wells to save their honour.

²⁴⁰ At Ghalib Kalan (District Ludhiana) a very fierce battle is said to have been fought by women at a place called ਕੜ੍ਹਵੀ ਢ੍ਰਿ ਕੁਹ (The mound of the merchant woman) where a Hindu lady acted as the leader and led the women to fight. Some jumped into a well. This place is still greatly respected by the village folk.

release in return for accepting Islam or giving clues to the whereabouts of their men folk, who according to him had abandoned them to face ignominious death. Beautiful young damsels were lured with many attractive alternatives but not many accepted the offers and in fact it is recorded that they spurned his offers with derision and spat at him in disgust.

Even a little discussion among women was construed as an attempt at escape and punished severely with beatings. Food and water were scarce. Each woman was given a load of corn to grind for the army. Many succumbed to hard labour or reacted to ill treatment and foul language and were flogged. Their children were catapulted in the air and received on the spear blades. Some even had their children's innards put round their necks for opposing the tormentors physically. All these women martyrs were buried near a Muslim Mosque situated near the present Gurdwara Shahid Ganj Singhian. In 1935 AD the Sikhs claimed this place and demolished the mosque after they won the case in the court. Thousands of corpses and skeletons of children were dug up. Some were found buried in walls in place of bricks.

Chapter Nine

Politician and fighter Sikh Women

The spirit of valour, heroism, and unyielding fighting spirit displayed by Sikh women is perhaps one quality not found in

many other religions. Circumstances of history had forced upon the Panjabis the necessity of women's protection leading to the latter's inferiority. Guru Gobind Singh changed the psyche of the people and ordained that even women must fight to defend themselves like men. This was a revolutionary change and it ushered in a new era. It turned the very dregs of society into the most dauntless and sturdy saint-soldiers. Appreciating this Hari Ram Gupta writes, "A good Jat wife was by no means a lazy creature or devoid of muscle"²⁴¹ Open air, coarse food, and hard village life had given them robust health, great strength, strong arms, stout legs, and pure breath. They soon picked up swords and joined the Khalsa fighting force when needed. Since then Sikh women have never flinched from their duty, never allowed their faith and ardour to be dampened, and always upheld the honour and glory of the Khalsa.

A remarkable incident of valour and statesmanship occurred at Nander Sahib in 1708 AD soon after Guru Gobind Singh's death. The Muslims constantly tried to desecrate the holy shrine built at the place where the tenth Guru had expired. The local Sikhs always gave a fight but being very small in numbers, they eventually began to desert the place. The news reached the Malwa in the Panjab. About two hundred Sikh women volunteered themselves, dressed in saffron clothes, formed themselves into a battalion, and rode to Nander on horse back. On reaching Nander they engaged the enemy in a skirmish and not only defeated the attackers but also captured their drum and banner.

Ahmed Shah Batalwi, in his *Tarikh-e-Panjab*, gives some information about some women fighters.²⁴² He tells us that the wife of Sardar Baghel Singh of Haryana was so brave that as long as she lived, Maharaja Ranjit Singh dared not look at her territory.

²⁴¹ Hari Ram Gupta "history of the Sikhs" Vol2 P. 274

²⁴² See Panjabi edition translation by Gurbakhsh Singh Panjabi University Patiala page 20-21. One Rajinder Kaur is highly praised for her bravery by Ahmad Shah Batalvi. For details of Sikh women's bravery refer to Hari Ram Gupta V.1 page 81

The widow of Tara Singh of Rahon was an excellent administrator. The wife of Gurbakhsh Singh of Ambala was a great politician of the time. Mai Sukhan, widow of Gulab Singh Bhangi ruled Amritsar on behalf of her adopted baby very ably. Jaunsa, wife of Sardar Naudh Singh of Pathankot was very good at political manipulation. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh imprisoned Sardar Dal Singh of Sialkot and besieged his wife Sehjo in the fort of Dilawar Garh, the latter gave such a tough fight that Ranjit Singh had to beg for peace through his agent Kesra Singh. Mai Desu (wife of Hamir Singh Nabha) was a woman of great courage and resolution. During the imprisonment of her husband, she fought and recovered most of her husband's territory which had been seized by the Maharaja of Jind. After the death of her husband (1783AD), she managed the affairs of the state as a regent for her 8 year old son, Jaswant Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's father, Mahan Singh, was only 10 years old when his mother Mai Desan assumed charge of the state and re-built the fort of Gujranwala which had been destroyed by Ahmed Shah Abdali.

Sometimes even the Sikh maid servants displayed valour and courage beyond expectation. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh's relations got strained with his mother-in-law, he sent an army under Mishar Dewan Chand to attack the latter's state. The Mishar captured Batala, Pathankot, and Mukerian but when he attacked Atal Garh, the Maharani's maid offered him a determined resistance for days. All efforts to dislodge her failed. Later she was made to give up through a trick.

In *Hayat-e-Afghani* there is the story of a Sikh woman who was attacked by a Pathan. She knocked him down, seized his sword, and dismissed him contemptuously. The Pathan felt a great sense of shame at his defeat by a woman and asked her to kill him. The woman, instead, gave him his sword telling him never to molest a woman.

Many Sikh women have distinguished themselves as rulers, regents, Governors, administrators, advisors, and excellent warriors. Following is an account of some of them.

9.1 Maharani Fatto (Fateh Kaur)

*“For many years Patiala was under the influence of women of courage, wisdom and activity, such as Rani Hukman, Rani Khem Kaur, Bibi Pardhan Kaur, the grand aunt of Maharaja Sahib Singh and Rani Rajender Kaur of Phagwara”.*²⁴³ We start this section with some remarkable women of Patiala house.

It was a custom throughout India to strangulate the baby daughters at birth. The Sikh Gurus right from Guru Nanak condemned this practice. Mai Fatto’s parents were about to kill her when Bhai Dyal Singh (descendant of Bhai Bhagtu) reached their village Kalayke and declined to dine with Fatto’s father Mr. Maluka unless he spared the life of their baby girl. The girl was latter looked after and brought up by Bhai (later Sant) Dyal Singh and was named Fateh Kaur. She was married to Sardar Ala Singh, founder of Patiala²⁴⁴ and became the Maharani (Queen) of Patiala State but remained indebted to Bhai Bhagtu’s descendants all through her life. She was *“a woman of remarkable address and diplomacy”.*²⁴⁵ She was very wise, politically astute, and a religiously devoted woman and was well read in Sikh history and literature. Whatever was achieved by Maharaja Ala Singh was due to her efforts and advice.

Whenever the Maharaja had to contact the Khalsa Dal, it was Mai Fatto who offered herself for this service. The Khalsa Dal had

²⁴³ “History of the Panjab” Muhammad Latif P. 328

²⁴⁴ Maharaja Ala Singh was born at Village Dhabali in 1691AD. He received instruction in Sikhism from Sant Dyal Das Udasi. He was the founder of Barnala and Patiala. He died in 1765 AD.

²⁴⁵ Hari Ram Gupta History of the Sikhs Vol. 2 page 161

great regard for the Maharani because of her devotion to Sikhism and her relationships with Bhai Bhagtu's family. It was Mai Fatto who persuaded Ala Singh to get baptised as a Sikh from Nawab Kapur Singh at Village Theekriwala.

Taking advantage of the doddering Govt. at Delhi (1759AD) Maharaja Ala Singh conquered Narwana, Kalwan, Dhamtan, and Danaudi etc which belonged to Delhi. The same year he enraged Sadiq Beg, the Governor of Sirhind, by giving shelter to his estranged Diwan Lachmi Das. Thus provoked, the Delhi Government sent Sadiq Beg with a big army to chastise Ala Singh. Just then Ala Singh sent tons of grains to the Marathas fighting Ahmad Shah Abdali at Panipat. This enraged Ahmad Shah Abdali as well. Ala Singh was now in pincers. He was at village Munak when the news arrived of Ahmad Shah's intention to attack Patiala. Maharani diplomatically despatched Bhola Singh and Biram Dhillon to Ahmad Shah to judge his intentions and riding a horse reached Munak along with her grandson Amar Singh. The Afghan troops plundered Barnala but due to Maharani Fatto's timely action Patiala was saved. Ala Singh offered a tribute of Rs.5 lakhs to the invader and signed a friendship treaty. The Dal Khalsa was not happy at this turn of events and according to *Tarikh-e-Patiala* imposed a fine on Ala Singh for bowing to Abdali. This fine was later collected from Ala Singh by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

Mai Fatto is known for serving food to Khalsa Dal with her own hands. She was a philanthropist who helped thousands of orphans and needy people. She was known for her deep faith and piety and was an inspiration for Maharaja Ala Singh. She died in 1830 AD leaving three sons and a daughter named Pardhan Kaur.

Mai Fatto is specially known for her generosity and diplomatic skills. The state of Patiala owes a great debt to this great woman.

9.2 Bibi Rajinder Kaur

Bibi Rajinder Kaur was a lady of great ability. She was the grand daughter of Maharaja Ala Singh. Raja Amar Singh was her cousin. She was married to Chaudhri Tilok Chand of Phagwara.

In 1790 AD Rane Khan, the famous Maratha General, helped Patiala forces repel the attacks of some turbulent local Sikh chiefs on condition that Patiala paid him Rs six lakhs. Nanu Mal, *Diwan* of Patiala, agreed to make payment but later reneged. The forces of Rane Khan started destruction of Patiala property. Bibi Rajinder Kaur immediately reached the Maratha General and assured him that she would make Nanu Mal respect his word. Nanu Mal did not listen to Bibi Rajinder Kaur and once again declined to pay the agreed amount. Bibi Rajinder Kaur, Nanu Mal, his son Devi Ditta and Rai Ahmad of Jagraon were all arrested by Rane Khan and made to march towards Panipat. At Panipat Rai Ahmad escaped through chicanery. Nanu Mal was released to arrange for money but Bibi Rajinder Kaur and Devi Ditta were imprisoned at Mathura as hostages. They were later released only when Nanu Mal eventually made the payment.

In 1791AD Gopal Rao Maratha was occupying Panipat. He was hard up for money and decided to attack Patiala. He wrote to the Maharaja of Patiala to cough up the tribute which amounted to crores of rupees. Bibi Rajinder Kaur took with her *Diwan* Nanu Mal to settle the issue. It was agreed to pay a tribute of 8 lakh rupees. Nanu Mal wanted to leave for Patiala to arrange for payment. Some influential courtiers opposed his departure saying that he was not trustworthy and that he would not return with money. Rani Rajinder Kaur and Nanu Mal were both imprisoned. Gopal Rao sent an army of 10,000 fighters under Ravloji Sindhia and Jiva Dada to chastise the Sikhs. This was supplemented with regiments of soldiers sent by Nawab of Oudh. Rajinder Kaur once again negotiated settlement through the agency of the English and

this time she was successful. Both the Patiala personages were set free. This resulted in English supremacy around Delhi.

Soon after this General Perron decided to attack Patiala. He reached Karnal on 1st January 1799 AD, and summoned Raja Sahib Singh of Patiala, Raja Bhag Singh of Jind, Bhanga Singh of Thanesar and Lal Singh of Kaithal to present themselves with tributes but they declined and made preparations for war. With 10,000 Muslim horsemen provided by Gulsher Khan of Kunj General Perron's position was very strong. He attacked Thanesar. Bhanga Singh escaped to Patiala. Once again, the matter was settled through the parleys conducted by Bibi Rajinder Kaur and peace was restored. Unfortunately Maharaja Sahib Singh did not like this settlement, and instigated by his minister Nanu Mal, declined to meet Rajinder Kaur. She died broken hearted in 1791AD.

9.3 Bibi Sahib Kaur

Bibi Sahib Kaur was the Sister of Raja Sahib Singh of Patiala, daughter of Raja Amar Singh.²⁴⁶ She was married to Jaimal Singh, son of Haqiqat Singh²⁴⁷ (*misl Kanahya*), of Fateh Garh Churian (District Gurdaspur). She is known for her bravery, munificence, and patriotism. At a very early age, she had mastered horse riding, archery, and fencing and was well read in Sikhism. She later became a distinguished administrator and a superb commander. Both she, and her brother Sahib Singh, were baptised by the renowned Sikh leader Sardar Baghel Singh in 1779 AD, at Patiala.

²⁴⁶ Maharaja Amar Singh had three wives. His first wife was Raj Kaur daughter of Chaudhry Ram Ditta Mal of Gagewal. Sahib Kaur was born to this wife and Sahib Singh was her younger brother by two years.

²⁴⁷ Haqiqat Singh was baptised by Nawab Kapur Singh. His son Jaimal Singh was married to Rani Sahib Kaur. Their daughter Chand Kaur was married to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's eldest son Kharak Singh. Chand Kaur was the mother of Prince Nau Nihal Singh.

Raja Sahib Singh was only 9 years old when his father Raja Amar Singh died (1782AD) and he ascended the throne. Sahib Singh was gullible, weak-minded, Peevish, ill-tempered, and ill-prepared for running the affairs of the state.²⁴⁸ He was selfish, conceited, and ungrateful. He never trusted anyone, and depended heavily on his Prime Minister Nanu Mal.²⁴⁹ Nanu Mal was a very shrewd, deceitful, and devious man. To add insult to injury the queens and Sahib Singh's grandmother Hukma interfered too much in the state work. Nanu Mal misguided the young Maharaja and behaved as if he was himself the ruler. He created schism among the courtiers and imprisoned the Maharaja's favourite General Basant Rai against Sahib Singh's advice. Later he invited the Marathas to invade Patiala (1789AD). There was chaos in the state when Nanu Mal died (1792AD). His place was taken by an equally over ambitious trickster Meer Ilahi Bakhsh (of Samana), who was soon murdered by a Sikh right in the Durbar in front of the young Maharaja. The state administration was corrupt and powerful allies were declaring independence. To add insult to injury a famine broke out (this famine is commonly known as *Chaliwan*).

Sensing danger to Patiala state and to her brother, Bibi Sahib Kaur left Fateh Garh with permission from her husband and became the administrator of Patiala. She had great responsibilities on her shoulders. Within a few days of her taking over, the administration improved, forts were repaired, new forts of Ratian and Raj Garh were constructed, and the army was reorganised. She came to know that the Zamindars of Ghanian Baja had

²⁴⁸ In his book "*Downfall of the Rohilas*" Mr. Hamilton writes that Sahib Singh used to have fits of madness. The same is recorded by Hussain Shah in "*Tarikh-e-Hussain Shahi*". According to "*Rajas of Panjab*" he was fickle-minded.

²⁴⁹ Nanumal was a trader (bwxIAw) of Sunam and was not trustworthy at all. He hated the Khalsa Dal and Sikh religion and his policies were not liked by the people. He created distrust between the courtiers and Maharaja's friends and assumed all authority to himself. He removed all Sikhs from the key posts and in their places appointed his own sons and relatives. In spite of restrictions on smoking he used to smoke a *Hukka* (Hubble bubble pipe) in the court which the Sikhs did not like. The people disliked him and sang
 nwnUM m`l dIvwn,dIvwnI kihr dI] swihb isMG nwdwn, g`l nw TihrdI]

rebelled and had burnt Sardar Chuhar Singh of Bhadaur alive²⁵⁰. With 3000 horsemen, she immediately attacked the rebels and restored order. Everybody praised her skill, bravery, courage, and political insight. She had hardly finished chastising the rebels when she heard that her husband Jaimal Singh had been imprisoned by his cousin Fateh Singh. She immediately reached Fateh Garh and defeated Fateh Singh. Fateh Singh died of shame and his territory was annexed by Bibi Sahib Kaur.

In December 1794 AD, Sahib Singh Bedi attacked Maler Kotla. The reason for this attack was that Nawab Sher Khan of Maler Kotla had tried to convert a maid of Mata Sundri to Islam, and after failing in his attempt had killed her by shooting arrows at her. Sahib Singh Bedi asked for her ashes to be handed over to him but Sher Khan's grandson Atta-ulah Khan declined to oblige. Patiala had been on good terms with Maler Kotla so the Nawab appealed to Patiala State for help. Bibi Sahib Kaur had great respect for Baba Bedi so she intervened to settle the issue. The Nawab gave the ashes and a sum of money as offering to Baba Bedi and a truce was signed.

In 1795 AD, Nana Rao Maratha, conquered Kaithal and demanded a tribute from Raja Lal Singh of Thanesar who sought help from Patiala. Bibi Sahib Kaur, a woman of remarkable generalship and diplomacy rode personally with 20,000 troops to oppose 30,000 troops of the Maratha. Maharaja Sahib Singh, Sardar Jassa Singh Kalsian, and Sardar Jodh Singh advised Sahib Kaur to pay tribute and not to fight with the Marathas because the Maratha army was well trained and outnumbered the combined forces of the Sikh Sardars. Bibi Sahib Kaur called them cowards, prayed for death or victory, dressed herself in male clothes, and with a sword in hand led the attack. The two forces met at Mardan Pura. The Sikhs were losing the battle when Bibi Sahib Kaur drew her sword and addressed the soldiers, *"I have resolved not to retreat. It would be a shame for the Sikh nation, if at this*

²⁵⁰ Chuhar Singh was an official of the Govt. of Patiala. He had gone there to collect tribute.

moment; they left a woman, the sister of their sovereign to be slain by their enemies.” Her electric speech rejuvenated the Khalsa and her gallantry threw the Marathas into consternation. Nana Rao lost many men and 50 horses.²⁵¹ Bibi Sahib Kaur came back victorious to Patiala but Sardar Bhanga Singh and Mehtab Singh continued their attacks on Nana Rao and returned only when Nana Rao reached Delhi. Raja Sahib Singh charged the Bibi of insubordination in spite of this glorious victory.

In 1796 AD Raja Karam Parkash of Nahan appealed for help to suppress a revolt. Sahib Kaur reached there and peace was restored. The Raja of Nahan offered a female elephant to Bibi Sahib Kaur in thanksgiving for her help. Raja Sahib Singh objected to receiving gifts independently of the state authority.

The same year Sanyasis, at Hardwar, snatched a copy of Guru Guru Granth Sahib Sahib from the Udasis of the Meehan Sahib group²⁵² and burnt it. This was a great sacrilege to Guru Granth Sahib. Bibi Sahib Kaur could not bear it. She immediately reached Hardwar with an army and attacked the Sanyasis, who gave a fight but suffered 400 deaths and eventually begged the Bibi to spare their lives.²⁵³

In 1797 AD George Thomas having conquered Delhi entertained the idea of conquering the Panjab. He himself writes, “*At length having gained a capital and country bordering on the Seik territories, I wished to put myself in a capacity, when a favourable opportunity should offer of attempting the conquest of the Panjab, and aspired to the honour of planting the British Standard on the banks of the Attock*”. The opportunity presented

²⁵¹ In this battle Sahib Kaur personally killed famous Maratha General Ranjit Rao Maratha who was a known brave man and had fought and won 12 battles before attacking Patiala. Prof. Mohan Singh has written ballad about this battle. We give a few lines in the Index at the end of this book.

²⁵² A Muslim named Khawaja Arjani was converted by Guru Har Gobind to Sikhism and named Santokh Das. His grand son Meehan Sahib led Jathas to Hardwar every year to preach Sikhism.

²⁵³ Read more about this on page 265 of *History of the Sikhs* by Hari Ram Gupta.

itself when Hasan Khan paid Rs 7000 to George Thomas and complained that he had been dispossessed of village Ksohan by Khushal Singh, a courtier of the Raja of Patiala. Thomas immediately took the village and laid siege to Jind threatening Patiala. At this time Shah Zaman had entered the Panjab and was heading towards Delhi. The Sikh chiefs were now caught up between two enemies. Raja Sahib Singh was a weak-minded man. He expostulated with Sahib Kaur not to oppose the English but she did not accept his advice and ordered the armies to attack.

The combined armies of Baghel Singh, Dip Singh, and Hira Nand engaged George Thomas at Narnod. They faced artillery fire from George Thomas for which they had no protection and therefore they had to retreat. Sahib Kaur scolded and taunted her soldiers like Mai Bhago for showing cowardice. She prepared to lead the army herself and demanded a pledge in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib from her commanders, "either to be victorious or perish in the battle". With the help of Gurdit Singh Ladwa, Bhanga Singh, and Mehtab Singh she attacked George Thomas and this time "many of his best men were cut to pieces." He ran away towards Hansi suffering a great loss in men and material. Bibi Sahib Kaur returned victorious.

At this time Sahib Singh Bedi attacked Raikot and began to build a fort at Dugri. Raikot was ruled by 15 year old Rai Ilias²⁵⁴ with help from his mother. Ilias applied to Sahib Singh for help. Patiala army came for help but in the meantime, Ilias asked George Thomas to help. Sahib Singh did not like this, so he changed sides and joined Bedi, who immediately imprisoned Ilias. The Sikh army clashed with George Thomas and defeated him but he plundered Jagraon, Barundi and Thakarwal areas belonging to Ilias. By now, George Thomas was sick of fighting with the Sikhs and had lost his most trusted general, Hopkin.

²⁵⁴ A Rajput named Tulsi Das left Jaisalmer (Rajasthan) in 1323 AD and settled in the Panjab. Here he accepted Islam. His descendant Rae Kalla had conquered Ludhiana, Jagraon, Raekot, Talwandi, Jandiala, Badawal, and Basian and established his rule. Since Ilias was still too young, two widows Nooran and Lachhmi helped him run the state.

He opened negotiations with Bibi Sahib Kaur for peace through his Diwan Udai Chand and a treaty was signed agreeing to let each side retain the territories they ruled before the siege of Jind. Sahib Singh was not very happy to accept this treaty but Bibi Sahib Kaur signed the treaty and the hostilities ceased. Sahib Singh arrested and imprisoned Bibi Sahib Kaur for this impropriety and confiscated her Jagir.²⁵⁵ George Thomas marched towards Patiala, threatened to attack Sahib Singh, and demanded the release of Bibi Sahib Kaur. Sahib Singh released Bibi Sahib Kaur and paid full expenses (Rs.1,35,000) to George as reparation. The gallant lady was now heart-broken at this unjust treatment and died shortly afterwards (1801AD). George Thomas later wrote, Sahib Kaur was “*a better man than her brother*”.

In his memoirs George Thomas writes about Sikh women as follows, “*Instances indeed have not infrequently occurred in which they (Sikh women) have actually taken up arms to defend their inhabitants from desultory attacks of the enemy and throughout the contest behaved themselves with the intrepidity of spirit highly praiseworthy*”.

9.4 Mai Bhago (Bhag Kaur)

Mai Bhag Kaur²⁵⁶ was a woman of exceptional valour, courage, and spirit. She is known as the first Sikh heroine. She was born in a Dhillon family of village Jhabal (Amritsar). Her first name was

²⁵⁵ The charges against Bibi Sahib Kaur were dictated to Sahib Singh by his mother Aas Kaur and his wife Rajinder Kaur. They were (1) she helped Jind against the wishes of the Maharaja. (2) She signed an agreement with George Thomas (3) She stayed at Bherian (her Jagir) without permission. (4) She did not join celebrations at the birth of prince Karam Singh (Son of Sahib Singh) in 1797 AD (5) She wanted to be independent (6) She did not care for Sahib Singh (7) She intended to kill her brother Sahib Singh.

²⁵⁶ This account of Mai Bhago is based on an article published by the SGPC in their September 1999 issue of Gurmat Parkash. See pages 85 to 87

Bhagbhari. Her family descended from Abul Khair, a *Jagirdar* (baron) of repute who had five sons. Although all five sons were followers of Guru Arjan Dev, Baba Langah and Peero Shah were very close to the Guru. Baba Langah held the *Jagir* rendering 3, 00,000 rupees a year.²⁵⁷ He was so devoted to the Guru that even at the time of the Guru's arrest; he went with him to Lahore caring little for his political connections. The Guru's house also trusted this family. At the time of Bibi Viro's marriage, it was Bhai Langah who had invited the Guru to Jhabal and made all arrangements for the wedding. Peero Shah had two sons named Palu Shah and Malu Shah. Bhagbhari was the daughter of Palu Shah. Since the parents had been ardent and devoted followers of the Sikh Gurus, they spared no effort in instilling Sikhism in Bhagbhari right from her early age. She was even provided training in fencing. According to *Itehas Jhabal* (History of Jhabal) she even accompanied her parents to Anand Pur to meet Guru Tegh Bahadur.²⁵⁸ When she grew up she was married with Nidhan Singh son of Des Raj Braich of Patti (Amritsar).²⁵⁹

She was a symbol of virtue, chastity, faith, and courage. She felt very perturbed when she heard that Guru Gobind Singh had to abandon Anand Pur and that Duni Chand and many other Sikhs had come back to their villages after separation from the Guru.²⁶⁰ When the relatives and friends came for bereavement of her father-in-law's death (1705AD), she learnt that the Guru had reached Deena Kangar. She decided there and then to gather an army and reach the Guru for support. She dressed herself in the male clothes, rode a horse, and went from village to village mobilising an army of devoted men and women. Her eloquent

²⁵⁷ ptI AMdr cauDrI iFlon lwlu lMgwh suhMdw (BweI gurdws vwr 11.22)

²⁵⁸ According to *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* Mai Bhago was the nurse of Guru Gobind Singh's son Shahzada Zorawar Singh.

²⁵⁹ See gurU kIAW swKIAW pMnw 160

²⁶⁰ According to Principal Satbir Singh most of these Sikhs belonged to village Riarki (Tehsil Amritsar) and village Nakkay (Tehsil Lahore) (See swfw ieighws Bwg 1 pMnw 309)

speeches touched the religious sentiments of many and in a very short time some 300 supporters decided to march from Patti. Mai Bhago appointed herself to lead them.²⁶¹ They met the Guru at village Rameana and expressed their condolences for the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas and the devoted Gursikhs.

Soon it was learnt that a large army was coming from Sirhind to kill or arrest the Guru. On the intelligence advice of the local Sikhs the Guru directed Mai Bhago's brigade to reach Khidrana and take possession of the only available source of water in Lake Khidrana. He himself camped with his choicest warriors on a mound near the lake. Before Mai Bhago's brigade could reach the lake the armies of Wazir Khan overtook them. A bloody battle ensued in which both sides lost many men. Mai Bhago's brigade lost 40 men.²⁶² Since they had occupied the only source of water for miles, the royal forces deprived of water retreated. Bhai Mahan Singh and Mai Bhago were badly wounded but still alive when the Guru arrived there. Mai Bhago was injured in her left leg. The Guru was very pleased at the sacrifice of the brave Sikhs and called them *Muktas* (liberated). A magnificent Gurdwara marks the place where these valiant Sikhs laid down their lives for upholding righteousness.

From then on Mai Bhago remained in the Guru's camp right up to the end of her life. When the Guru breathed his last at Nander, she moved away to Bider and preached Sikhism in that area. Later she stayed with Bala Rao and Rustam Rao at Janwara where she died. There is a Gurdwara situated next to the main Gurdwara in

²⁶¹ According to Principal Satbir Singh it was Rai Singh who led the detachment of 45 fighters. Rai Singh was Bhai Mani Singh's brother and Mahan Singh was Rai Singh's son.

²⁶² Mai Bhago is said to have lost her husband Sardar Nidhan Singh and her two brothers Dilbagh Singh and Bhag Singh in this battle. Some other historians state that she lost her husband Bhai Nidhan Singh and Nidhan Singh's two brothers Sultan Singh and Dilbagh Singh. (see pRis-D is`K bIbIAW by ismrn kOr pMnw 7).

Nander in honour of this gallant woman soldier. The blade of her spear can still be seen at the Gurdwara Nander Sahib.

9.5 Bibi Sharan Kaur 1

The battle of Chamkaur (December 1704AD) resulted in the death of almost all the 40 followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had shown undaunted courage and endurance in fighting with a big army of the royal soldiers.²⁶³ The Guru had escaped in the night to village Macchiwara on the request of his five beloved ones leaving Sant Singh to lead the fighters. The Mughal soldiers celebrated their victory raising high the severed head of Sant Singh which they thought was the head of Guru Gobind Singh. The dead soldiers of the regular army were buried but the corpses of the Sikhs were left scattered by the royal army to rot so that the surrounding villagers felt the threat of dire consequences of opposing the Government. It was announced with the beat of the drum that the Sikh rebellion had been suppressed and that no body should visit the place of the skirmish for a week. This announcement was also made in village Kharund

The whole day passed. At the dead of next night, a tenacious woman of Kharund, named Sharan Kaur, decided to show due respect to her immortal brothers' supreme sacrifice. It was a cloudy night and the royalists, inebriated with victory and wine, lay snoring in their tents. Sharan Kaur, dressed herself in Turkish overalls and with a lamp in her hand, went around collecting the bodies of the Sikh martyrs with the help of some Sikhs.

There was plenty of dead wood around left for transportation to Delhi for the army to use as fuel. She and her companions transported the bodies one by one to the funeral pyre. This was by no means an easy task because even the slightest noise could have alerted the guards. With folded hands she devotedly offered her

²⁶³ gursnW ich kwry kund ichl nr, ik dh lk brAwXd bro by^br What could 40 hungry men do against fearful odds which attacked unexpectedly?(Zafarnama)

prayers and then lighted the funeral pyre. As soon as the flames rose high, the guards realized their folly. Sharan Kaur tried to escape but was arrested and questioned but she did not respond to their questions. Disgusted at her resilience, the guards speared the valiant woman and threw her body into the flames. Thus died the gallant Sharan Kaur, who could not bear to see the defilement and desecration of the bodies of the Sikh martyrs at the hands of the royalists. The Sikh nation will never forget the courage and determination displayed by this brave daughter of the Khalsa.

9.6 Bibi Sharan Kaur 2

Bibi Sharni was the only daughter of Karam Chand of village Matnian. At the age of 17, she was married to twenty year old Bhim Sain, the only son of Veer Bhan. The marriage party was returning after the wedding to the Bridegroom's village. They had hardly passed by the village Garhi Habib-Ullah when one Allah Ditta forcibly snatched away the bride and insulted the marriage party accompanying the bridegroom. Allah Ditta ordered the men in the marriage party to hold their pigtails, put grass in their mouths, and beg for their life. The bride and the accompanying maid were forcibly abducted and force-marched to Garhi Habib-Ullah. Soon after the news reached Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa who immediately despatched a detachment of 10 Sikhs under the command of Sardar Pahara Singh. The Sikhs took no time in apprehending the culprit and bringing the girls back. Allah Ditta begged for life but Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa did not spare his life.

Bhim Sain and Bibi Sharni both got baptised. Bhim Sain was named Bhim Singh and Sharni became Sharan Kaur. They joined the army of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. It was the time when Sardar Hari Singh was appointed the Governor of Peshawar and a fort at Jamraud was under construction. On the recommendation of Sardar Mahan Singh, the couple were entrusted the duty of spies because they could speak Pashto very well and could easily mix with the Pathans. When Jamraud was under siege and one

side of the fort had been breached by the Muslims fighting for Jihad, only a miracle could save the lives of the entrapped Sikhs who were surrounded on all sides. Bibi Sharan Kaur dressed herself in Yousuf Zaei clothes and stealthily passing through the enemy lines reached Sardar Hari Singh at Peshawar. Sardar Hari Singh hastily gathered his forces and did one of the quickest marches to reach Jamraud. On hearing his arrival, the local militia lost heart and ran away helter skelter. Sharan Kaur survived Maharaja Ranjit Singh but could not bear the destruction of the Sikh kingdom brought about by the Dogra brothers. She left the job and died soon after.

9.7 Bibi Deep Kaur

Groups of baptised Sikhs and their families used to visit Guru Gobind Singh now and then to receive his blessings. A Group of men and women from Majha was on their way to Anandpur. In this group was a baptised young girl of 21 years. The group broke their journey near village Talwan, and this girl went into the jungle to answer the call of nature. Unfortunately the activities of the Sikhs were closely watched by the spies and she fell into the hands of three armed spies. It took no time for the girl to judge the intentions of the men. In the flash of a second she drew her sword and killed two of them, injuring the third one. The noise alerted the Jatha; they dressed the girl's wounds and continued on their journey. The Guru was extremely pleased to hear the whole story and blessed Bibi Deep Kaur. The Sangat was so electrified that at the same place many other girls got baptised.

9.8 Bibi Dharam Kaur

On one pretext or the other the Sikhs were attacked by the rulers of Lahore and they were helped by their stooges who kept them informed of all the activities of the Sikhs. Sometimes the informers ground their own axes through false reports. Sahib Rai

of Naushehra (District Lahore) lost his horses and accused the Sikhs of stealing them. He used the police to attack Sardar Tara Singh of village Dhilwan because the latter did not see eye to eye with him. In this fight a Police officer was killed but Sahib Rai escaped with some wounds.

It is said that a wounded lion becomes more dangerous. Sahib Rai was smarting under this defeat and wanted to avenge the insult. Any excuse was good to kill the Sikhs. In the summer of 1725AD Sardar Bahadur Singh of village Chawinda (Amritsar) was busy in the wedding ceremony of his son when a large army under Jafer Beg of Patti and Sahib Rai fell upon the assembled relatives unexpectedly. The Sikh men took positions to give a tough fight to the enemy and told the women to escape with the bride. The bride however declined to save her life and inspired the women to take up arms. They used every weapon that came to hand and fought bravely. Some women under the command of Dharam Kaur chased the enemy for a long distance. Jafer Beg lost many men in this battle and made good his escape. Four valiant women were badly wounded.

9.9 Bibi Maan Kaur

The Sikhs had lost the battles of Mudki and Feroze Shah to the English with great losses. The remaining forces of the Sikhs were attacked and defeated at Bhundri. Lord Lawrence (commonly known among Indians as *Tundi Lat*) came to congratulate the British soldiers. As he was addressing the army a shot rang in the air. Lawrence was shot through his chest and he died there and then. The shot was fired by Bibi Maan Kaur who was hiding behind bushes. She was arrested and questioned but later released. Beerh Maan Kaur (District Ludhiana) commemorates her memory.

9.10 Mata Kishan Kaur

Mata Kishan Kaur is a rare example of a patriotic Sikh woman. She was born in village Daudhar (Ferozepore) in 1870 AD, and married in village Kaonke Kallan. Wherever the Singh Sabha started their action, Mata Kishan Kaur was there. She actively assisted the Akalis in Gurdwara Ber Sahib Sialkot Morcha, Taran Taran Morcha, Nanakana Sahib Morcha, and Morcha Guru Ka Bagh. When a group of Sadhus tried to capture Akal Takhat, it was Mata Kishan Kaur, Mata Basant Kaur, and Mata Tehal Kaur who stood like a rock in their way and did not let them enter the precincts. Later she joined the Morcha at Mukatsar. When the priests of Mukatsar became corrupt, it was Mata Kishan Kaur, who with the help of five other women took possession of the shrine and expelled the priests.

Her main area of work was to cook and transport food for the Akalis but she also helped the wounded Sikhs fighting for the freedom of India. She was a secret agent of the Akalis. She was arrested many times but this did not dampen her spirit of service. She can be called the hero of Morcha Gangsar Jaito.²⁶⁴

Jathas (batches) of Sikhs were sent by the Shiromani Gurdwara committee to protest against the sacrilege of stopping the Akhand Paath at Jaito by the British. These *jathas* were fired at and many people were killed but the instruction to the *Jathas* was to remain

²⁶⁴ Maharaja Ripduman Singh of Nabha was to ascend the throne of Nabha State on 24 January 1912. He was a very intelligent Youngman of 28 and had been a member of Governor General's Council but since he was associated with national parties clamouring for freedom of India, the British Government found a lame excuse, deposed, and exiled him. William Johnson was appointed administrator of Nabha State. The Sikhs started a movement to have the Maharaja reinstated and started an *Akhand Path* at Jaito. The British arrested all who were involved in the *Akhand Path* and discontinued the reading of the scripture. The Sikhs considered it a sacrilege and started sending *jathas* (batches) of twenty five Sikhs to Jaito to protest non-violently. The *Jathas* were welcome with machine gun bullets and hundreds died. S.G.P.C increased the number of members of *Jathas* from 25 to 50 but the British Govt. did not budge. The movement continued from 21 January 1921 to 27 April 1925 and the S.G.P.C sent 16 *Jathas* to court arrest and imprisonment. *Jathas* also came from Canada (21Feb 1925), Hong Kong (24 Feb 1925), Shinghai (25 July 1925). On 27 April 1925 the Government relented and the Sikhs held 101 *Akhand Paaths* at Jaito. In this Morcha Pandit Nehru, Mr., Panikar, Dr. Kitchlu, Diwan Chaman Lal, and many editors of the newspapers were arrested and jailed up to 2 years for supporting the Sikhs. 40, 000 Sikhs went to jail and 500 lost their lives. Rs.16000 lakhs was paid in fines and forfeitures. 700 Sikhs lost their Government jobs.

non-violent and not to fight. Mata Kishan Kaur did her Ardas at the Gurdwara Bhai Pheru and joined with the Jatha at Zeera. She was an inspiration for all the members of the *Jatha*. At Smalsar she left the *Jatha* and taking with her Bibi Tej Kaur, entered Jaito for intelligence work. They were arrested but released. Coming back they apprised the *Jathedar* of the dangerous situation and the loop holes of the British formation.

She was at the front of the *Jatha* when Mr. Wilson ordered fire. Some one pushed her away and she was saved whereas Sardar Inder Singh, the *Nishan Sahib* bearer, who was next to her, was killed. Later she got herself engaged in helping the wounded comrades. Gurdial Singh was a traitor. He brought a posse of soldiers and had Mata Kishan Kaur and Bibi Tej Kaur arrested for helping the Sikhs and for making fiery speeches. Mata Ji was kept for three months in the fort at Jaito and was later sent to Nabha Jail.

Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, visited Jaito at the time of the morcha. In his diary he records that he was highly impressed by the zeal and sacrifice of Mata Kishan Kaur who was one of the women at the front line of the *Jatha*, leading and encouraging the Sikhs for sacrifice.²⁶⁵

She was kept in Nabha jail for full four years. On her release she was warmly welcomed by the Shiromani Committee and thousands of Sikhs at Amritsar. Giani Sher Singh, Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh, Gopal Singh Qaumi, and Dr. Kitchlu praised her services and bravery. She was offered a *siropao* (robe of honour) by the SGPC. As she returned to her village Kaonke Kallan (Ludhiana), she was warmly received at Jagraon, offered bags of money, and was brought to Kaonke Kallan in a procession. Many Sikh organisations praised her services to the Panth. The SGPC fixed a pension of Rs 10 per month for Mata Ji,

²⁶⁵ See "*Sankhep Itihas Sidhu Bans and Khaandan Atari*" by Giani Hari Singh (page 107).

which she received all through her later life. The rest of her life was spent in preaching Sikhism, promoting education and social reformation. Mata Ji had no children. She died in 1955 at the age of 85.²⁶⁶

9.11 Bibi Maan Kaur (Rameana) and Bibi Balbir Kaur

Bibi Maan Kaur was the daughter of Sardar Waryam Singh and Mata Hukam Kaur of village Rameana (Faridkot). She was of a spiritual bent of mind and was greatly perturbed to learn about the deaths of the Sikhs at the hands of the British at Jaito. She joined the *Jatha* marching to Jaito and met Mata Kishan Kaur. It was she who guided the *Jatha* to Tibbi Sahib because she knew the area very well. Later, she stayed there to serve and feed the wounded Sikhs. She spent most of her time in serving the Sangat at Gurdwara Dela which Sant Sunder Singh ji established in honour of Guru Gobind Singh, who had visited that place.

Another young woman named Balbir Kaur joined the *Jatha* at village Bargari on 21st February 1924. She was at the front of the *Jatha* when a bullet pierced her infant baby. She resignedly laid the baby on the roadside and marched along with the *Jatha* shouting slogans as if nothing had happened. Only a few minutes later she too received a bullet and died.

Such was the fervour among women that when the second *Jatha* of the Sikhs was preparing to leave for Jaito on 28th February, a woman garlanded her husband, said her Ardas and then

²⁶⁶ The author belongs to village Kaonke Kallan and had met Mata Kishan Kaur as a young boy. She was an angelic figure inspiring spirituality in everybody. Wherever she passed in the village people, men and women, fell at her feet. She was very fond of children. Placing her hand on our heads she used to say, "*Dhimak dhimak dheerian*".

addressing her husband said, “*Die for the cause but do not get hit on your back*”.

9.12 Sada Kaur (1762-1832AD)

After the disintegration of the Mughal empire there was political chaos all over India. During this period the Sikhs established twelve confederacies called *misls*. The Shukarchakyas led by Mahan Singh ruled from Gujarat. Kanhayas led by Jai Singh (of village Kanha 15 miles east of Lahore) ruled from Batala.²⁶⁷ Sardar Jai Singh's son Gurbakhsh Singh was married to Sada Kaur (daughter of Dasaundha Singh). Although Sardar Jai Singh had good relations with Mahan Singh and had helped Mahan Singh conquer Rasul Nagar but they soon fell out and fought a battle at Achal where Jai Singh was defeated and his son Gurbakhsh Singh was killed. Sada Kaur, on receiving the news of her husband's death, did not wail but rode a horse and removing the weapons of her dead husband adorned herself as a warrior and proved to be a remarkable General.

After assuming power, Sada Kaur built a fort at village Pujawah. This fort clearly shows her understanding of the strategy of war. At another time, she besieged the valiant fighter Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in Village Miani Owan and gave him a tough fight for two months and twenty days. Only unexpected floods saved the destruction of the Ramgarhia Sardar. In the battle of *Achal* with Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia she is reported to have killed his son Jodh Singh. Again in the battle of Gujarat she killed Shah Zaman's most famous General Ahmed Khan Sharachi and carried his severed head on the point of her sword.

²⁶⁷ Bhatti Rajput Namdev was founding a village and was told that the place was inauspicious. He changed the venue to the present place and called it Wata Lya (ਵਟਵ ਿਲਾਵ) which later came to be known as Batala. Guru Nanak was married in this town. A Gurdwara now stands at the place of the Guru's wedding. Guru Hargobind's son Baba Gurditta was also married here.

Sada Kaur was very astute, masterful, high spirited, bold, shrewd, talented, ambitious, and a remarkably enterprising woman. She pledged her daughter Mehtab Kaur in marriage to Mahan Singh's five year old son Ranjit Singh and buried the hatchet with Sukarchakyas. Mahan Singh died (March 1792) leaving 12 years Ranjit Singh under the protection of Sada Kaur. She brought him up like her own son. Ranjit Singh got married in 1796 AD and his marriage "*brought together two of the most dynamic personalities of the time*". Sada Kaur's farsightedness and artful planning strengthened the two misls and was the basis on which the *Khalsa Raj* was later established. Her wisdom, political acumen, and energy helped Ranjit Singh in his early exploits and somebody has truly said that "*Sada Kaur was the ladder by which Ranjit Singh reached the summit of his power.*"

Ranjit Singh's later fame and glory was, to a large extent, due to the planning, diplomacy, and army help provided by Sada Kaur, which resulted in unifying the divided Sikhs in the Panjab. When Shah Zaman occupied Lahore, most of the Sikh Sardars hesitated to face him but Sada Kaur said that if they did not face the foreigner, she would fight alone. Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh led the attack and defeated Shah Zaman. Later, the Bhangis were dislodged from Lahore by Ranjit Singh through the planning and advice of Sada Kaur (July 7, 1799 AD).²⁶⁸ Sada Kaur helped Ranjit Singh in capturing Hazara, Kashmir and the fort of Kangra. For 36 years she fought many battles and was well known for her bravery and magnanimity throughout the Panjab.

Towards the end of her life her relations with Ranjit Singh became embittered and she was imprisoned at Lahore. She died at Amritsar in December 1832 AD at the age of 70.

²⁶⁸ Shah Zaman had boasted, "*The Sikhs will run away on hearing the noise of the hoofs of my horses*". Rani Sada Kaur called a meeting of the Sikh Sardars and said, "*If you have any little bit of spirit infused by the Guru in you then rise up and face the tyrant. If not then change your clothes with me and go home. I will answer the challenge*". She took Ranjit Singh to Lahore where she later shouted to Shah Zaman, "*Come out O grandson of Abdali and face the grandson of Charat Singh. Let me test your strength*". Shah Zaman dared not fight and left Lahore for Ranjit Singh.

9.13 Maharani Jind Kaur

She was the younger daughter of Sardar Manna Singh Aulakh of village Charh (੮੫੫੯ District Sialkot). Her father was in charge of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's dogs. She was an extremely beautiful woman and became a widow (only two and a half years after marriage) at the young age of 22 (27th June 1839 AD) when her husband Maharaja Ranjit Singh died.²⁶⁹ Her 8 year old son, the last Sikh Maharaja Dalip Singh, was deposed by the British, converted to Christianity (8 March 1853)²⁷⁰ and taken to England (19 April 1854 AD).

An attempt was made to poison the young widow, Jind Kaur, while she was still in power but it failed.²⁷¹ According to Col. Cook, Maharani came to know about the plot and began influencing the Bengal army sepoys for sedition during the second Anglo-Sikh war. It was through her planning that Mul Raj rose in revolt in Multan, Chattar Singh in trans-Indus territories, Sher Singh at Lahore, and hill chiefs led by Mian Ram Singh at Noorpur. She also persuaded Bhai Maharaj Singh and Baba Bikram Singh Bedi to oppose the British.

In 1846 AD, the British Government of India exiled Jindan, and Lord Dalhousie wrote that Jindan had a keen political insight into contemporary history. "*It will be dangerous to allow her back into Panjab*". She was imprisoned at Sheikhpura (18 Aug, 1847 AD), and then Shifted to Benares (14 May, 1848 AD).²⁷²

²⁶⁹ She was the 18th queen of the Maharaja.

²⁷⁰ Lord Dalhousie offered the Maharaja his first Bible. On its first page he wrote, "*To his highness Maharaja Duleep Singh. This Holy book in which he has been led by God's grace to find an inheritance richer by far than all earthly kingdoms is presented with sincere respect and regard, by his faithful friend*".

²⁷¹ *History of the reigning family of Lahore by Major G. Carmichael Smyth 1847 P.127*

²⁷² "It may be more troublesome to keep our bird in its cage on the trans-Sutlej side than on this but we avoid many difficulties by the milder course and the removal to a more distant residence can be adopted or not as necessity may dictate." (Lord Harding's letter to Henry Lawrence 16.8 1847)

According to Mr. G.W.Forrest,²⁷³ *“No worst spot could have been chosen than the sacred city, the centre of the hierarchy of Hindu religious fraternities. The Rani entered into communication with the Maratha Brahmins who resided there and through them with the exiled Peshwa and his retinue at Cawnpore. The centre of conspiracy was transferred from the Panjab to Cawnpore, Benares, and Poona”*. From here Jindan wrote to Raja Sher Singh on 10th January 1849 AD, *“Use towards the Malechhas the same wiles and artifice that they have used themselves and manage by some device to expel them from Lahore- encourage the Hindustanis as much as possible.”*²⁷⁴

On 6 April 1849 AD, she was transferred to Chunar (District Mirzapur). The Maharani disguised (18April 1849AD) herself as a mendicant and escaped to Nepal. She was kept under constant surveillance by the British but she wrote letters to prominent patriotic Sikhs in the Panjab through some Sikh prisoners in Allahabad fort. She had full rolls of the Hindu and Sikh sepoys of British regiments stationed at Allahabad, Cawnpore, and Lukhnow and wrote to them, *“Let your mind be at ease. We are not sitting idle”*.²⁷⁵ It was her desire to see the Sikhs rise in revolt against the British and regain the lost Sikh kingdom and for this she authorised her trusted friends to sell her properties at various places to finance the war. In 1850 AD she wrote to ex-General Kahan Singh’s son to spread the news in Majha that insurrection

²⁷³ G.W.Forrest was the Director of records of the Government of India. After retirement he was commissioned by the Govt. to examine all the records on the Indian mutiny. He produced three volumes in 1912

²⁷⁴ Secret consultation May 26, 1849 No.114 National Archives of India New Delhi. “qyrI bhwdrI dIAW sYnkVy vwr mubwrkW [jdoN q`k svrg Aqy zmIn kwiem rihxgy, lok qyrI bhwdrI dIAW g`lW krngy [pihlI g`l qYnUM aus dr^q dI jvH nUM pu`tx dI hY [ieh g`l quMU iPrMgI nUM szw lw ky kr skdw hYN [ienHW mlyCW dy nwl auhI FMg qrIky vrq lwhOr qoN k`Fx leI jo ieh swfy nwl vrqdy Awey ny[“ihMdosqwnI spwhIAW nUM vI bgwvq krwvaux dI hr sMBv koSS kr [mYN ku`J smW pihlW do bMdy qyry vI Byjy sn ijhVy ik zrUr hI qYnUM iml gey hoxgy [idn rwq myry iKAwLW ivc pMjwb hI rihMdw hY [“

²⁷⁵ Secret consultation October 25 1850 No 41 National Archives of India New Delhi.

in Peshawar was soon going to take place and that they should simultaneously rise up in arms against the British. In 1852AD, she planned to secretly escape to Kashmir with the help of Gulab Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir but this attempt proved abortive. A probe against alleged complicity was ordered by the British against Gulab Singh and Jang Bahadur, the Prime Minister of Nepal. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Napier wrote, *“this is the greatest external danger we have to apprehend, and if it comes the Indian army will need all courage of the troops and all the skill of their leaders”*.

Another attempt was made by the Maharani through Ranbeer Singh of Kashmir, Babu Koer Singh of Bihar, Umar Singh, Beni Madho, Devi Singh, Mehandi Hussain, and Begum of Oudh to cause a revolt against the British. Unfortunately, this too did not materialize. Yet another attempt through Sardar Charat Singh of Amritsar, and Jawahar Singh (brother-in-law of Maharaja Kharak Singh) to foment an all-out offensive against the British did not bear any fruit. Her part in the 1857 mutiny came to light when her servants Chet Singh and Jawala Singh were arrested and produced before the Judge. They admitted that they had been frequenting Panjab during 1857-58 AD and conveying Maharani’s messages to the Sikh prisoners in Allahabad.²⁷⁶

Maharani’s son, Dalip Singh, came from England to meet her at Calcutta (January 1861AD). The Maharani kindled in the young prince’s heart the spirit of hatred and revolt against the British. Within days she wiped his mind of Christianity and elicited a promise from him that he will renounce Christianity and get re-baptised as a Sikh.²⁷⁷ She lost her eye sight soon after and was

²⁷⁶ Secret consultation June 1859 No.17 National Archives of India New Delhi. It was on their statement that Charat Singh and Ram Singh were also punished for carrying out Maharani’s propaganda.

²⁷⁷ Dalip Singh was re-baptised as a Sikh on 25th may 1886 AD through Bhai Roor Singh, Bhai Jawand Singh, Bhai Thakar Singh (son of Dalip Singh’s aunt मवसI) and two other Gursikhs. He wrote to one of his English friends Colonel Boileau that he will meet him face to face in the battlefield in the Panjab.

permitted to visit her son Dalip Singh in London. The Maharani was now frustrated and broken hearted. On August 1, 1863 AD at the age of 46, she died in London at Abingdon House Kingston. The British Government did not permit her body to be brought to India. It was therefore kept in a graveyard until the young Maharaja was permitted to bring her body to India but was not permitted to visit the Panjab. Her body was cremated after about a year (1864AD) on the banks of river Narbda in Nasik near Bombay.²⁷⁸

In a letter dated 20 November 1863 AD, Lord Ellenborough wrote to Duke of Wellington, that Jind Kaur was a man in a woman's body and that she was the only brave person in the Lahore Darbar. Herbert Wedards wrote, "*The Ranee had more wit and daring than any man of her nation*"²⁷⁹.

9.14 Struggle for independence

In the Gurdwara reform movement, the Kuka struggle, and the struggle for independence Sikh women played a very important and significant part. Mai Ind Kaur and Mai Khem Kaur were among those Kuka stalwarts who attacked Malerkotla in 1872 AD. In the Indian struggle for independence, the part played by women cannot be over estimated. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was arrested and imprisoned twice first in Dandi salt march organised by Mahatma Gandhi and latter imprisoned again in 1942 AD for seditious activities. She stood as a rock against the communal award of 1933AD and even suffered lathi charge in Simla. After independence, she became the health minister of India. Bibi Amar Kaur (of Gurdas Pur) was an undaunted freedom fighter. She

²⁷⁸ Princess Bomba (Dalip Singh's daughter) later brought her ashes from Nasik and buried her in Lahore near Ranjit Singh on 27 March 1924. "brson rhw ijn ky sr pr Cqr ey z`rIN, qurbq py nw aunkI SwimAwnw dyKw "

²⁷⁹ "*Annexation of the Panjab and Maharaja Dalip Singh*" by Ivanee Bell Truber London 1882 P.13

hoisted the Indian National flag on the local prison on October 9, 1942 AD, and suffered imprisonment for 16 months. Bibi Harnam Kaur (wife of Hira Singh Bhathal) was arrested in civil disobedience movement of Nabha Satyagraha in 1946 AD, and again courted arrest along with her husband and children. Even in the Jalianwala Bagh massacre, the fiery leaders of women who laid their lives were Bibi Har Kaur (of Lopoke), Bibi Lachhman Kaur and Bibi Bisso (of Sultanwind) lying in the pool of blood along with their follower women martyrs. Many later took part in Panjabi Suba movement.

“In struggle for independence the Sikh women played no small part. They urged their men folk to go ahead in their fight for freedom. They themselves took a great part in the struggle. They possessed well-built bodies, firm determination, heroism, spirit of liberty and patriotism. George Thomas, a contemporary Irish adventurer who had set himself as Raja of Hansi in Haryana, fought many battles against the Sikhs. He paid a great tribute to Sikh women.” Hari Ram Gupta V.2 p. 257

Chapter Ten

Marriage and Divorce

10.1 What the Sikh Gurus inherited

Marriage is a social and biological necessity, a life-long relationship of mutual fidelity, respect, and consideration. It has been solemnised in one form or the other since time immemorial. Humans believe that marriage halves our griefs and doubles our

joys.²⁸⁰ Therefore, society has, since time immemorial, been trying to bring some order in human relations and formulating codes of practice for marriages.

In India the process of social organisation accelerated with the coming of the Aryans. At that time the Indian society suffered its first social division into Aryans and *Sudras* and later into myriads of tribes and castes.²⁸¹ This necessitated differentiation of marriages into Anuloma (AnUloMw) and Pratiloma (pRqIlomw). Anuloma marriage was celebrated only within one caste. Pratiloma marriage was celebrated when a high caste (Usually Brahman) fancied a woman of low caste and insisted on marrying her.²⁸²

When the clash of cultures and contacts of races crystallized social grouping, caste system became rigid and other problems cropped in. A Hindu scholar, Manu, devised, what is now known as the Hindu law, to bring order into society. He differentiated 8 different kinds of marriages as follows:

²⁸⁰ Marriage is more than four legs in a bed. An English phrase.

²⁸¹ Although caste is found mentioned in the *Purusha Sukta* Chapter of the Rig Veda where four *Warnas* (colours) are mentioned, the division was not very rigid. Even otherwise scholars do not all agree that *Purusha Sukta* is the original integral part of the Rig Veda. The names of the *Warnas* mentioned in the Rig Veda and Avesta are 1. Priest (Brahman) 2. Charioteer (Kasatra) 3. Artisan (Visah). The fourth was added later. However it should be noted that this sort of division was also practised in Iran where the division was as follows: 1. Atharvas 2. Rathestas 3. Vastrias 4. Shouyantas. The rigidity of caste is usually known to have developed during the Buddhist period when it was openly challenged by the Buddhists. It should be noted that at that time the division was not a schism of the soul as it is today. It was functional and in this capacity has been practised up to date. For example the Jaiswars of U.P. are Chamars but they have been cooks for Hindus. The Chamars and Telis (oil pressers) of Mirzapur have been and are still agriculturists. Even the Brahmans had such divisions among them (Das Brahmana, Jataka Brahmana, etc. There were ten such classes). Even the Muslims of India are divided into Seyad, Mughal, Sheikh and Pathan (In Bengal the Muslims have 35 different castes who keep social distances.)

²⁸² A Brahman was free to have sex with women of any caste or race. Depending on the caste, race or other factors a Brahman's children could be of 12 different kinds. 1. Auras 2. Khetraraj 3. Dutt 4. Kritram 5. Garautpam 6. Apvidh 7. Kaneen 8. Sahaur 9. Kareet 10. Paunarbhav 11. Saydevat 12. Saudar. (See *Manu Simirti* Chapter 3. 13-14 and 9 shalok 156)

1. Brahma marriage: - Parents invite a learned and virtuous young man and make over their daughter to him along with the dowry of clothes and ornaments.

2. Daiva marriage: - The father of the bride performs a sacrificial ceremony and as payment for his ritual services offers the hand of his decorated and bejewelled daughter to the priest.

3. Arsha marriage: - The father of the bride receives from the young prospective bridegroom a pair of cattle and in exchange offers his daughter in marriage.

4. Parjapata marriage:-The bride is given over to a man of the family's choice to form an alliance of power against an enemy.

5. Asura marriage: - The relatives receive agreed cash from the bride groom and sell their daughter.

6. Gandharva marriage: - This is marriage by mutual choice between the bride and the bride groom. The parents have no say in it.

7. Rakhshasa marriage: - A woman is abducted and later the marriage is sanctified by the Brahman. The invaders had the right to carry away the daughters and the wives of the vanquished enemy and then legalize their marriages with them.

8. Paishacha marriage: - Raping a woman in sleep or in circumstances beyond her control and then making her a lawful wife.

The above division continued in one form or the other right up to the 15th Century AD.

10.2 What the Sikh Gurus left

In Sikhism, marriage is regarded as a sacred bond of mutual help in attaining the heights of worldly as well as spiritual joy. Sikhism believes that we all possess certain talents which we are destined by nature to use most profitably. Most often we are not aware of our talents unless someone needs to point to our latent

qualities of hand, head, and heart. This someone needs to be a person who is sufficiently close and in proximity to our whole self. He/she must be one who cares genuinely about us and is on the look out to help us realize our potential. This significant someone assists us with the emergence of ourselves. A successful marriage can fulfil this task more satisfactorily than anything else.

Again when a talent is discovered (or is already known), it needs nurturing. This needs encouragement, support, and persuasion for its continued growth. This is where the partner with his/her sensitivity, ability, and interest comes in handy for a two-way exchange. It is with some such ideas that the Guru expects the marriage to help the couple achieve the best potential of the human body in spiritual and temporal affairs. Both must feel emotionally and psychologically being recognised, wanted and appreciated. Both must learn the valuable lessons of trust and the ability to give and take, to hurt and be hurt, to forgive and be forgiven.

It is universally accepted that biological differences result due to the production of different hormones in males and females. As a result of this natural fact women are comparatively gentle, patient, perseverant, lovable, humble, cooperative, compassionate, and graceful whereas men are commanding, powerful, resilient, bossy, and self-opinionated. All these (male and female) qualities are required by all human beings for perfection. So both males and females on their own are deficient and incomplete. It is for this reason that in Sikhism a wife is considered as one half of the complete personality of a human being. She is called *Ardhangni* (half). Both husband and wife are to aspire for perfection and therefore they stand a better chance only when both rely on each other and learn from each other as equals.

Unlike the relationship of father, mother, sister, and son etc which are natural relationships, a marital relationship is an acquired relationship emerging out of the institution of marriage. Eastern

religions attach both temporal and spiritual meanings to marriage and consider that the civilized human society must have licence for sense gratification. Marriage, on the principles of spiritual life, is therefore the only accepted channel for restricted sex life. The householder sacrifices or sublimates his/her general tendency towards sense gratification for transcendental life. In Sikhism therefore the ideal marriage is one where two individuals understand each other's nature, ambitions, and perceptions and mould themselves accordingly to achieve both temporal and spiritual glory. The West on the other hand considers marriage only as some sort of social contract which either party can break to dissolve the marriage any time.

10.3 Arranged marriages

Asian marriages are usually called arranged marriages in Britain. This is because the Asian parents are involved in selecting the suitable partners for their daughters. They are reluctant to offer a long rope of free sex or pre-marital sex to their children. The Sikh parents are of the opinion that marriages must take place only between compatible couples. It is their belief that maturity is acquired slowly and any relationship formed before its fruition does not last long. Control, discipline, emotional stability, and self culture must come first before the children take the most important decision of marriage. Children in the West do not usually wait for such time as these human qualities are fully imbedded. Therefore arranged/assisted marriages have been a norm among the Sikhs for a long time.

The Western Sikhs are now changing their attitudes towards purely arranged marriages and are making efforts to assist marriages rather than foist them on their children. Psychological sciences tend to show that the parents have an instinctive awareness of what is best for their children. This innate feeling, if coupled with children's wishes, can be instrumental in bringing about ideal and long-lasting marriages. Love marriages that flout

compatibility are condemned and pre-marital sex is looked upon as a sin. Gay and lesbian marriages are a taboo for the Sikhs. Cloning is a new development about which the Sikh elite have yet to form an opinion in the light of Gurbani.

As for inter-faith marriages, the Sikh Rehat Maryada forbids such marriages for both men and women because such marriages lead to spiritually/culturally confused schizophrenic children.

10.4 Sikhism and Violence

Desperation, frustration, protest, persistent demands, and anger sometimes lead to domestic violence. Instances of wife-beating do indeed sometimes occur among some uneducated Sikhs. Men being physically stronger are usually to blame. This may not be correct all the time but being the head of the family, the buck stops with the husband or the leader of the family. Sikhism forbids violence and preaches mutual discussion and understanding.²⁸³

Quite recently, the burning of brides by husbands and the mothers-in-law has been on the increase in India. It is always the wife who dies never the sister or mother of the husband when the so called stove bursts. This clearly indicates prejudice, bias, and greed for dowry. Modern thinking can not admit discrimination. Justice demands that women must have equal rights. The Sikh philosophy does not permit any violence. It says,

*“Violence, attachment, greed and anger.
All four are rivers of fire.
If one falls in them, one is burnt”.* (SGGS P.147)²⁸⁴

²⁸³ hir nwmY ky hovhu joVI gurmuiK bYshu sPw ivCwie (pMnw 1185)
"isK isKxI iml bhYN crcw krYN Apwr] Bjn isKwvYN puqr ko inq Bj
bwrMbwr"] (sUrj prkws ruq 5 A:24)

²⁸⁴ hMsu hyqu loBu kopu cwry ndIAw Aig] pvih dJih nwnkw qrIAY krmI
lig] (pMnw 147)

“One whose mind is not possessed by ego can overcome violence and greed” (SGGS p.1198)²⁸⁵

10.5 The Ideal Marriage

About an ideal marriage the Guru says:-

*“They are not husband and wife simply because they live together,
Rather they are wife and husband if they have one spirit in two bodies”.* (SGGS P. 788)²⁸⁶

Bhai Gurdas, the interpreter of the Sikh Holy Scripture, says,

*“From the temporal as well as the spiritual point of view, a woman is man’s better half and assists him in achieving salvation. She assuredly brings happiness to the virtuous”.*²⁸⁷

Therefore, marriage is an equal partnership of love and sharing between a husband and a wife. If the husband is the head, the wife is the heart of the family. Both are indispensable for realising the full moral, spiritual, and intellectual potential.

To the egocentric, ill-reputed, and self-righteous woman the Guru says,

²⁸⁵ ijsu mnu mwnY AiBmwnu n qw kau ihMsw loBu ivswry] (pMnw 1198)

²⁸⁶ Dn ipru eyih n AwKIAin bhin iekTy hoie] eyk joiq duie mUrqi Dn ipru khIAY soie] (pMnw 788) mn qU Sudm qU mn SudI mn qn Sudm qU jW SudI [qw ks nw goied bAwd AzIN mn dIgrm qU dIgrI] (hux qU ‘mYN’ hW qy ‘mYN’ qUM hYN [mYN sRIr hW qUM jwn hYN] hux koeI ikvyN khygw ik mYN hor hW qy qUM hor) [(Sms qbryz)

²⁸⁷ lok vyd gux igAwn ivc ArD srIrI moK duAwrI] gurmuk suKPl inhcau nwrI] (BweI gurdws)

*“You have left your home and husband to sleep with another man
This kind of lust cannot satisfy your craving for more and more
pleasure.*

In the end you will cry in desperation”. (SGGS P.89)²⁸⁸

To the profligate husband the Guru instructs:-

*“Sleeping with a woman other than your wife is like sleeping with
a cobra.”* (SGGS P.403)²⁸⁹

Sex outside marriage can in no way be considered a concession to human weakness. Fidelity of husband and wife to each other is a duty to society and any infringement is viewed in Sikhism with disgust.

Child marriage is prohibited. (See Rehat Maryada Anand Karaj 2.4 Panjabi Edition)

10.6 Divorce

The word ‘Divorce’ appears nowhere in the Sikh scripture. Sikhism is one of those few religions where sanctification and inviolability of marriage are considered necessary and permanent as far as is possible. The Sikh ideal is very near to the concept and sanctity of marriage among the Catholics except that the Sikhs do not believe *‘marriages are arranged in heaven’*.²⁹⁰ The Catholics

²⁸⁸ mnmuK mYlI kwmXI kulKxI kunwir] ipru CoifAw Gir Awpwx pr purKY
nwil ipAwru] iqRsnw kdy n cukeI jldI kry pUkwr (pMnw 89)

²⁸⁹ inmK kwm suAwd kwrix koit idns duKu pwvih] GrI muhq rMg mwxih
iPir bhuir bhuir pCuqwvih] AMDy cyiq hir hir rwieAw] qyrw so
idnu nyVY AwieAw] rhwau] plK idRsit dyiK BUlo Awk nIm ko qUMmru
] jYsw sMgu ibsIAr isau hY ry qYso hI iehu pr igRhu (pMnw 403)

²⁹⁰ The oft-quoted lines from SGGS are nwnk sigguru iqnw imlwieAw ijnw Dury
pieAw sMjogu (pMnw 957). By no stretch of intellectual somersaults can these lines be
proven to be applicable to marriage. They refer to jYsw sigguru suXIdw qYso hI mY
fITu]

believe, “marriages are arranged in heaven and solemnised on earth” and that “Those brought together by God should not be separated by man” (Mark 10-9). Sikhism believes that marriages are contracted by the human beings and like any other work of man they too sometimes fail in spite of best efforts. The marriage vows are the cement that binds the couple and a Sikh tries not to dishonour the vows taken in front of His Guru.

The Guru says that the bond of marriage should be so strong that,

*“One must be ready to die for the one whom he/she loves
And he/she considers it hell to live in the world without him/her”.*
(SGGS Page 83)²⁹¹

A divorce is the result of inflated ego. The Sikh Gurus say;

*“The world is suffering from the filth of ego
The moment it touches a person he/she runs after the second”.*
(SGGS P.39)²⁹²

The couple have to apply themselves to control their ego and direct it jointly towards a creative process.

In the Western society the ego is so inflated that the chances of honourable settlement after the differences take root, are nearly negligible. People marry time and again. This has become an inalienable part of their culture. Sikhism attaches moral value to marriage and says:-

*“Even if one marries women hundred thousand times
And acquires kingdom of the whole world;*

²⁹¹ ijsu ipAwry isau nyhu iqsu AwgY mir cliAY] iDRgu jIvXu sMswir
qw kY pwCY jIvxw l(pMnw 83)

²⁹² jig haumY mYlu duKu pwieAw mlu lwgI dUjY Bwie] mlu haumY DoqI
ikvY n auqrY jy sau qIrQ nwie(pMnw 39)

There is no happiness without the blessings of a true spiritual guide.

It only drives one to hell time and again.”(SGGS P.26)²⁹³

Satisfaction is the bi-product of self discipline, honest commitment, and mutual respect. Understanding comes through service, meeting each other’s needs, and keeping human relationship sweet and enjoyable. Sikhism considers that a marriage is not a mundane relationship between two individuals but is a relationship between two souls and two families. Breaking of this relationship is not considered advisable and is not sanctioned by religion. It is a painful and extremely distressing experience which dehumanises the couple. Neither of the two parties enjoys it and a great deal of agony occurs for all involved.

Divorce causes problems between the two families and affects the life of the children who are the worst sufferers because their well-being is intimately connected with the stability of their parents’ relationship. They become hostage to fortune in that they have no control over the factors affecting the vital aspects of their lives. For the sake of children, if for nothing else, the marriage must be made to work.

Despite all efforts of the Sikh parents to help sustain marriages of their children, there are occasions when marriages do break down. Traditionally, breakdown of marriages has been associated with shame, guilt, and disapproval and relatives try to patch up the differences. Compassion, encouragement, better understanding, and commitment to children and binding religious oaths are applied as remedies.

When children contract marriages on their own, as is the case in the West, the involvement of relatives becomes redundant. “Sex

²⁹³ jy lK iesqrIAw Bog krih nv KMf rwju kmwih j ibnu siqgur suKu n pwveI iPir iPir jonI pwih (pMnw 26)

education” which has been introduced in schools and is gathering momentum, will not bring in any better relationships. If anything, it will only have the opposite effect. What is needed is an education for personal marital relationships taking into account the social and psychological impact of the modern age.²⁹⁴ Such education can involve parents, family groups, community, Gurdwara heads, and the elite. Sikhism has the unique responsibility to preach legitimate goals of change. The Sikh elite have to address this issue before it is too late.

The Guru writes,

*“If brass, iron or gold are broken,
The smith fuses them in fire.
If the husband and wife get estranged,
Through children are their bonds forged again.
The ruler when making a demand,
By a levy is placated.
The hungry are satisfied by food
The famine is lifted with rain and overflowing rivers,
In love, through sweet speech comes reunion.”* (SGGS P. 143)²⁹⁵

10.7 Abortion

Abortion and determination of sex of an unborn child are common these days.²⁹⁶ Marriage, as seen by Sikhism is divine and procreation is the main purpose of marriage. Any attempt to

²⁹⁴ For guidance on this issue read “*Marriage, Divorce, and the church*” by J.Dominian.

²⁹⁵ kYhw kMcnu qutY swru] AgnI gMFu pwey lohwrU] gorI syqI qutY BqwrU] puq^ØI gMFu pvY sMswir] rwjw mMgY idqY gMFu pwie] BuiKAw gMFu pvY jw Kwie] kwlw gMFu ndIAw mIh Jol] gMFu prIqI imTy bol] (pMnw 209)

²⁹⁶ Ultra-sound identification of sex of an unborn child has been banned in the Panjab now.

trivialize it is a violation of the vows taken at the time of marriage. The barbaric acts of abortion and foeticide are therefore 'killings' and as such are not sanctioned by Sikhism. The present religious leader of the Sikhs has already issued instructions against these nefarious acts.²⁹⁷

There are certain situations where abortion may be desirable or necessary. For example rape, risk to mother's life, or the unborn child being mentally disabled etc. In such cases the choice lies with the individual. Since the Sikhs are taught to be morally restraint, any extramarital sexual act is a breach of Sikh discipline. In such cases the culprits must suffer the consequences. Clear guidance on these and other such situations like surrogate births is still awaited from the leader of the Sikhs.

10.8 Dowry

Traditionally there has been a custom in the Panjab to proffer voluntary gifts to the departing girl by her parents at the time of marriage. These gifts usually comprised gold, money and utensils, and included beddings, clothes, sheets, and pillows produced by the girl. The tangible gifts thus offered by the parents and near relatives helped the young couple to set up their homes and enjoy the once-in-a-life-time occasion. The dowry also compensated the girl for not inheriting a share from her father's immovable property and enhanced her prestige in the new family. With the coming of consumerism the shape and the intent of the dowry underwent a change. The bride-groom's families transformed dowry into a forced institution and began to demand large sums of money or modern machinery like TV, Cars, Motor cycles, Computers, Tractors and watches etc. This has invariably resulted

²⁹⁷ In the census report of 1991 the number of females per 1000 males in the Panjab was 888 (cities 875). In the census report of 2001 this number went down to 850. Among the Sikhs the ratio is still lower 786 women for 1000 men. If this trend continues, which is very likely because of widespread female infanticide/foeticide and lack of education, then Panjab will soon witness murders, abductions, rapes, and rivalries leading to bloodshed.

in serious socio-cultural problems, harassment, and violence directed at women. If for some reason an Indian marriage becomes unworkable, it is usual to blame the woman. If the bride brings a dowry below the expectations of the in-laws, some unscrupulous people even go to the extent of burning her alive.

The Indian parliament enacted the Prohibition of dowry act in 1961 to curb this nefarious practice. After another fourteen years the Panjab Government in 1975 passed a law stipulating that no young married woman who dies within 7 years of marriage should be cremated without obtaining a no-suspicion certificate from the parents of the deceased. Unfortunately neither the Government nor the political and religious leaders appear to demand strict compliance with the law of the land.²⁹⁸

There are strict instructions against dowry in Sikhism. Sikhism does not believe in dowry where the bridegroom or his family demand monetary or other gifts as a matter of right. Sikh Rehat Maryada forbids such dowry. *“No Sikh should accept a match for his / her son or daughter for monetary considerations.”* (Sikh Rehat Maryada Article 2.12 C Panjabi Edition 1998)

The Sikh Gurus mention the dowry as follows:

*“Father dear with the holy Lord for my wedded spouse
Grant me the dowry of devotion to Him.
Grant me the robes of devotion and other objects of decoration.
That blessed I may feel..... (SGGS P. 78-79)²⁹⁹*

²⁹⁸ In 1995 the number of dowry deaths in the Panjab was 2.6 but in 1996 it rose to 3.3. The national average of dowry deaths of India is 2.4. Nearly 12.4% young girls are abducted every year in the Panjab.(National Crime records Bureau 1998 P.289).

²⁹⁹ hir pRBu myry bwbulw hir dyvh dwnu mY dwjo | hir kpVo hir soBw dyvhu ijqu svrY myrw kwjo (pMnw 78-79) "gurUu jI kihAw BweI bwlw! vfI BwrI hiqAw hY kMinAw kw drb lYxw, kMnXw mwrnI "(jnm swKI)

*“Any other dowry, which the perverse place for show,
that is false pride and worthless gilding.
O' my Father! Give me the Name of Lord God as a gift and
dowry”.* (SGGS P. 79)³⁰⁰

The custom of dowry is mostly supported by women. Although women have so many constraints on them but if all women refuse to accept anything in dowry, the custom will soon disappear.

Chapter Eleven

Lost in ignorance

Although women have been separated from men by nature through allotting them a different biological function, their so-called inferior social position has originated mostly through prejudice and tradition. Among other causes of their neglect one universal cause is the reluctance of men to liberate them. Research into the causes of the so called inferiority of women invariably points to the conclusion that it has been caused by the selfishness and physical domination of males who stand in the way of women making progress. Whatever praises a man lavishes on a woman, it remains a fact that in his heart of hearts, he always

³⁰⁰ hor mnmuk dwju ij rik idKwlih su kUV AhMkwr kc pwjo” (pMnw 79)

feels that he is superior and that freedom for a woman is his prerogative.

It is a common practice in the Panjab these days to distribute sweets, beat drums, and sing songs when a boy is born. A special festival of Lohri is entirely devoted to male births. Boys are treated like princes and it is they who accompany the father on all outings. On the other hand if a daughter is born no celebrations are needed. The whole family, especially women, would show emotions of sadness. Women are the first to call the baby girl a "stone" and lament the birth instead of celebrating it. She is labelled as another's property' (pRwieAw Dn) and a newly born baby boy is called "cMgI cIz". Obviously if a boy is cMgI cIz, a girl is 'mMdI cIz'³⁰¹All this creates a sense of inferiority complex and resentment in the female children when they grow up.

"The socialization of girls within the family is in keeping with the life-long role of subservience and self-effacement that women are expected to play.....They are looked upon as transitory members of the family and learn to appreciate the fact that they are a liability and do not have the same rights as their brothers to the family resources.....Greater limits and prohibitions are put on the female child's freedom of association, communication and contacts."(*Silver Shackles- Women and development in India.* by Mukhopadhyay aitravee Oxford 1984)

From childhood itself the girl grows up with a dreadful feeling of inferiority. It is unfortunate that women themselves have seldom tried to ameliorate their own condition. If anything they have always sided with men to stereotype³⁰² and denigrate female children. After marriage the woman's position becomes all the

³⁰¹ so ikauN mMdW AwKIAY ijqu jMmih rwjwn (pMnw 473)

³⁰² "Sterotyping is dangerous. It leads the public to create social scape-goats and focus on the wrong issues and wrong priorities".(Nancy Nielson Vice President Corporate Communications New York Times)

more worse. All this militates against the philosophy preached by the Sikh Gurus where no distinction is made between a male and a female child.

In the previous pages of this book, we have outlined the ideal philosophical position of Sikh women as stated by our Sikh Gurus. Complete equality with men was guaranteed to Sikh women by the Sikh Gurus. Unfortunately the practice is trailing far behind what our Gurus had visualized. There are two main reasons for this. One reason is the dominance of Hinduism which has influenced all religions that started in India, and the other is the lack of education. We will discuss these two issues here briefly.

11.1 Influence of Hinduism

Dr. Trumpp wrote, *“Hinduism has embraced Sikhism in its folds; the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is, it is apprehended, inevitable without state support”*.

In the same vein Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy wrote, *“While it can legitimately be argued that Guru Gobind Singh had no faith in worship of Durga or Chandi or in any Brahmanical pantheon and that he was using them and the myths and legends connected with them as mere images and symbols.....the fact remains, it seems that over the decades and centuries beginning from the late seventeenth, worship of Brahmanical icons of gods and goddesses and Brahmanical socio-religious practices were entering into the fabric of Sikh socio-religious life slowly and imperceptibly by the back door as it were.”*³⁰³

³⁰³ “Anyk jpujI tIikAW iv`c SwsqRI ivigAwn dIAW DwrnwvW qUV qUV ky BrIAW peIAW hn [... CupI hoeI BwvW ieh sI ividvwn ihMdUAW nUM ieh XkIn Awvy ik ieh gurmuKI dy gRMQ Swsqr Aqy ismRqIAW dy AnukU1 hn”(inrukq SRI gurU gRMQ swihb fwktr blbIr isMG pMjwbI XUnIvristI 1972 pMnw 8)

The reason for this situation is not far to seek. During the 18th Century, Panjab was in turmoil. The Sikh doctrines and socio-religious reforms initiated by the Sikh gurus could not take root because the Sikhs were fighting for survival and prices were laid on their heads. They had to leave their hearths and homes to wander in Jungles and deserts. Their religious institutions were looked after and controlled by the Hindus.

In 1799AD they formed a Sikh kingdom under Ranjit Singh and the Sikhs remained in power for about 50 years. This was the time when Sikhism should have taken a firm root. Unfortunately even during this period, Maharaja Ranjit Singh kept himself busy conquering more and more areas rather than attending to religious and social reforms.³⁰⁴ In 1845AD the British conquered the Panjab

"keI ivcwrvwn qW hux q`k iehI prcwrdy Awey hn ik gurmq qy vydWq isDWqk rUp iv`c iek hI hn [Kws krky inrmlly ivdvwn ies p`K dy vDyry prswrI hn (gurmq ivcwr Dwrw Bgq hIrw isMG nYSnl buk Swp pMnw 58)

³⁰⁴ Ranjit Singh himself (he was uneducated) did not follow the Sikh principles. He used to go for bathing in Ganges every year. In 1806 he went to take a bath at the Hindu holy place *katas*. In 1813 he went to *Jawala Mukhi* to worship the goddess. When he died the last words he said on the suggestion of Dhian Singh's appointed Brahman Gobind Ram were, "Ram Ram" and a copy of Gita was placed on his forehead. 250 *maunds* of *ghi* were sent to the temple of goddess *Jawala Mukhi*. It is also common knowledge that Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to feed 50 Brahmins every month and 100 Brahmins were fed in *Param mandal*. This practice was faithfully followed by Maharani Jindan even after Ranjit Singh's death. Maharani herself acknowledged it in her letter dated 9.6.1847 written to the Resident in protest at discontinuing the practice. In his book *Real Ranjit Singh*, Sayyad Wahid-ud-din writes that the Maharaja even offered *Koh-e-Noor* diamond to the Jagan Nath Puri Temple but the courtiers dissuaded him from doing so. (See *Centenary celebration committee Report* Cawnpore P. 136-37)

Four of Ranjit Singh's queens and five servant girls committed the Hindu custom of *Sati*. Rani Ishar Kaur was forced to commit *Sati*. *Sati* was also observed by the queens of his son Kharak Singh at the latter's death. Two wives of Nau Nihal Singh also committed *Sati*. Again *Sati* was performed in 1843 at the death of Maharaja Sher Singh. It was believed that a woman about to commit *sati* had the power to prophesy. One of the *Satis* at Ranjit Singh's funeral pyre is said to have prophesied to Rani Jindan that the Sikh rule would come to an end and that she and her son would suffer indignities and exile.

"Ranjit Singh used Sikhism for tactical purposes. His commitment to the faith of his birth was only skin deep". (The *Sikhs in History*' by Dr. Sangat Singh). "On his birth and death both Hindu and Sikh ceremonies were performed. Even the heartless ceremony of *Sati*, so strictly forbidden by the Guru, was performed at his death. A pathetic description of the burning of his living queens has

and once again the legal system introduced by them was based on the Hindu personal law.

It is alleged that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was also responsible for female infanticide which was observed almost all over India. “*Maharaja Dalip Singh, the son of Ranjit Singh, said that he had actually seen when he was a child at Lahore, his sisters put into a sack and thrown into the river*”. (*Main Currents of Indian History* by Majumdar and P.N. Chopra P. 224).³⁰⁵

History tells us that when the followers of the Sikh Gurus started re-marriage of widows and the stoppage of *sati*, the Hindu priest class raised a hue and cry. To overcome this difficulty, Guru Ram Das started the custom of Anand Karj, the system of Sikh marriage distinct from the then current Hindu practice. Unfortunately, right up to the present day, the Sikh concepts were neither thoroughly understood nor fully researched and absorbed in daily life of the Sikhs. As a result the Sikh community is still influenced and guided by the general Hindu community of India in most of its social and religious functions. Even though Anand marriage act was passed in 1909AD, Sikh marriages are still registered under the Hindu Marriage Act.³⁰⁶

been given by a French eyewitness, John Martin Honigberger”. (*Philosophy of Sikhism* by Dr. Sher Singh)

³⁰⁵ According to Gibbon’s *Lawrences of the Punjab*”P.124 Bedis were chiefly known for killing girls. John Lawrence sent for the head of the Bedis and ordered him to issue a proclamation to the Sikhs forbidding female infanticide and that if he did not do so he would lose his lands. The chief of the Bedis lost the land but did not issue a proclamation. According to the Administration report of 1849AD “the cause of female infanticide was inability to pay the dowry”. In Jhang and Multan districts (now in Pakistan) young girls used to go to a *Jand* tree and pray, “*jmFI dy drbwr joqW jgdIAW, myrI JolI vIr iKfw mMqW mMgdI AW*”. In the Eastern Panjab the baby girl was made to lick a piece of jaggery and the song was sung, “*guV KweIN qy pUXI k`qIN, Awp nw AweIN vIrW nUM G`qIN*”. And then the tiny life was extinguished forever.

³⁰⁶ Note on Anand Karj: Although the four wedding hymns (*lwvW*) were written by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru, there is no evidence to confirm that they were used as such for marriage by him. They could be used widely only after 1604 AD when the *Guru Granth Sahib* was completed and installed in the Harimander. Even then the copies of the scripture were not as freely available to be used everywhere. The first mention of Anand Karaj therefore occurs only in the *Rehatnama* of Bhai Mani Singh which reads, “*AnMd ibnw ibAwh nw kry [*” The

Although things started changing after the establishment of Singh Sabha movement³⁰⁷ and the publication of Bhai Kahn Singh's Nabha's book "*Hum Hindu Nahin*" (1897AD), the situation is still not ideal. It is not uncommon to find Sikh women, mostly uneducated women, deeply influenced by Hindu customs.

11.2 Lack of education

Bhagtavli (ਭਗਤਵਲੀ) allegedly written by the same author (some think it is spurious) records the remarks made by Guru Gobind Singh where he advises the reciting of Anand Sahib and Asa Ki var and then following the current practice. In Prem Sumarg Part II P.34 (Wrongly ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh by some people) we find similar instructions in addition to going round the fire and pouring ghee in it.

During the Sikh renaissance period Baba Khem Singh Bedi, President of the Khalsa Diwan (1883AD) issued instructions to keep following the Vedic rituals for weddings and deaths. Prior to this Darbara Singh, (follower of Baba Dyal Nirankari) had started Anand marriage on 13 March 1855AD when Bhai Bhola Singh and Bibi Nihali were wedded through Anand Karj Ceremony. Darbara Singh and his followers were branded as deviators, outcastes, and atheists by the Sikh Pujaris and excommunicated. They however quoted Gurbani copiously, discarded expensive rituals, and defended themselves vigorously. Their procedure was as follows: (1) Marriage party to reach the bride's home singing hymns and following Guru Granth Sahib in procession. (2) Dancing girls, drumming and drinking were strictly forbidden. (3) Women folk not to sing lewd songs but shabads from Gurbani. (4) No dowry or rituals to be observed. (See hukmnwmw sRI AkwlpurK jI kw 1856 AD). This procedure was meticulously observed on 15 April 1861AD in Amritsar when the Pujaris of Harimander Sahib and Akal Takhat refused permission and the wedding of Bhai Boota Singh and Bibi Miran Devi had to be conducted in the Dera of Thakar Dyal Singh. Hindu priests all over the Panjab and Pujaris of Darbar Sahib Amritsar were especially up in arms against this so called sacrilege. All the children of those married through Anand Karj were stigmatised as bastards. So much so that in village Natta (Nabha State) the Hindu and Sikh villagers did not let a marriage party enter their village for Anand Karaj. In spite of severe persistent opposition and criticism from the Sikh priests, Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha introduced the Anand Marriage bill in the Imperial Legislative Council presided over by Lord Minto (known for Minto Marley reforms) on 30 October 1908AD. On 22nd October 1909AD the Anand Marriage Act was passed and enacted.

"All marriages which may be or may have been duly solemnized according to the Sikh marriage ceremony called 'Anand' shall be, and shall be deemed to have been, with effect from the date of solemnization of each respectively, good and valid in law" (Anand Marriage Act 1909 article 2)

³⁰⁷ Bhai Vir Singh's novels like *Sundri*, *Satwant Kaur*, *Naudh Singh*, and *Bijai Singh* did a lot to change the trend. The Singh Sabha removed the idols installed in Sikh Gurdwaras and later snatched the Gurdwaras from the corrupt Hindu priests and formed the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

Education not only enlightens the recipient but it also leads to dynamism, economic independence, aspiration, knowledge, and self confidence. Over and above these benefits it brings in social and political awareness, toleration, ambition, and philanthropy. An educated person also tends to be a social worker.³⁰⁸ As for girl's education it is usually said, "You educate a girl, and you educate the whole family".³⁰⁹

The Word *Sikh* literally means a learner or a student. A Sikh is therefore, always a student who must keep on learning. The Sikh Gurus preached that Knowledge leads to liberation and liberation is the condition for growth. Therefore education is absolutely necessary to condition the Sikh mind, imbibe aesthetic sense, master intellectual perception, and develop clarity of the purpose of life.³¹⁰ Along with basic education, the Gurus suggested that their followers should learn through contemplation on the sacred word.³¹¹ Unfortunately this area of Sikhism has not attracted the attention it deserved.

A glance at Sikh history will convince us that the Sikhs have not been able to educate their children, especially girls and have

³⁰⁸ ividAw vIcwrI qW praupkwrI (pMnw 356)

³⁰⁹ When Baba Ram Singh started baptising women he was ridiculed by the priests of Darbar Sahib as *Kachha of women*. Babu Teja Singh Bhasaur offered his life for preaching Sikhism. He founded the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902AD and later Panch Khalsa Diwan in 1907AD. He and his colleagues (including Bhai Randhir Singh and Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha) brought a revolution in Sikhism. At that time the women were baptised with a sword and men with a Khanda. Later Panch Khalsa Diwan supported baptism of women with a Kahnda in the face of protests and opposition from the Chief Khalsa Diwan. They produced a lot of literature on Sikhism, opened a school for girls, and converted many Muslims to Sikhism. Later the SGPC excommunicated Babu Teja Singh for doctrinal misrepresentation.

³¹⁰ mn smJwvn kwrny kCUAk pVIAY igAwn (pMnw 340) AKrI nwmu AKrI swlwh] AKrI igAwnu gIq gux gwh] (pMnw 4) ividAw vIcwrI qW praupkwrI [

³¹¹ isKI isiKAw gur vIcwir (pMnw 465) "gurmuK Sbd vIcwr s`c kmwieAw" (BweI gurdws vwr 19 pauVI 12) Sbdon muVy isKIEN muVy ByK isKI dw Dry" (kysr isMG iC`br- bMswvLI nwmw) Turning away from the Guru's word is turning away from Sikh way of life. Such a person is an imposter looking like a Sikh.

neglected the preaching of Sikhism far too long. Lack of education meant that the Sikhs in general and the Sikh girls in particular could not study their religion. Without educated mothers, the Sikhs would continue to be mired in superstition, ignorance, irreligious and immoral practices.

For a long long time education has been the prerogative of the males. It has been the common belief (and in some areas it still is) that it is not good to educate the girls. Education came very late to the Panjab and it was all the more delayed for Sikh women. The policy of the British of Government of India was for some time geared to the idea of keeping the Indians illiterate. When the first woman's college (1849 AD), named Bethune College, was opened after the name of its founder, the number of students was only sixty and that too only for primary classes.

Dalip Singh, Son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was converted to Christianity in 1850 AD. The then Panjab Government thought it an opportune time to use Panjabi for preaching Christianity to the Sikhs in the Panjab.³¹² A Gurmukhi School was established in May 1851AD by Mr.C.B. Saunders, the D.C. of Amritsar, in a dilapidated building of the Kotwali of Sikh times close to the Golden Temple.³¹³ 65 % students learning Panjabi in this school were non-Sikhs and all males. The motive was challenged by the Sikhs and the school closed in 1859 AD. Mr. Leitner later started the teaching of Panjabi in Oriental college Lahore in 1877 AD.

³¹² Lord and Lady Logan had persuaded Maharaja Dalip Singh to sign a Will. According to this Will one third of his property was to be offered to his nephew Shivdev Singh and the rest was to be spent on preaching Christianity among the Sikhs of the Panjab. (Read *Lady Logan's recollection, camp & court life* 1916) *isKW dIAW j`uqIAW qy is`KW dy hI isr [* Dalip Singh started giving generous grants to missionary schools and organisations. Maharaja Kapurthala himself spent money on opening a Christian Mission in Kapurthala under the influence of his nephew Kanwar Harnam Singh who had become Christian. Training centres were started in Amritsar, Lahore, Peshawar, Kashmir, Dera Ghazi Khan, Haidrabad, and Karachi. Dyal Singh Majithia offered his garden for setting up a Christian Mission. A Missionary school in Amritsar converted Aya Singh, Attar Singh, Sadhu Singh and Santokh Singh (all students) to Christianity. This caused consternation and the Sikhs began to take interest in preaching Sikhism and re-converted the four Sikhs to Sikhism.

³¹³ Its Headmaster was an Englishman.

Interestingly his Panjabi class of 17 boys³¹⁴ was called “*Bhai Class*” and only Guru Granth Sahib was studied. This shows that the attitude of the Government towards teaching Panjabi was step-motherly and actuated by a pernicious motive. The intention clearly was to plant their own trained *Granthies* in the Gurdwaras and preach the corrupted British version of Sikhism to the Sikhs.

At this time the only elite organisation of the Sikhs was the Singh Sabha (started in 1873AD).³¹⁵ Unfortunately its two branches, Singh Sabha Lahore and Singh Sabha Amritsar were locked in domestic inter-Sabha and intra-Sabha ideological controversies. The Singh Sabha could open their first denominational Gurmukhi School in Lahore only in 1880 AD.³¹⁶ Again it was through the efforts made by the Singh Sabha that the Oriental College Lahore was established in 1877AD and Panjabi began to be taught as a

³¹⁴ They were all sons of *Pujaris* and *Mahants* who acted as stooges of the Government. The political establishment had no sympathy with Panjabi or Sikhism. It actually worked against promoting them. At that time Panjabi was taught in *Deras* by some *Mahants* but the Government stopped this by appropriating *Dharamarth* land-grants. This crippled and ruined the *Deras* financially. The first Panjabi school for the Sikh girls was *Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala* founded in 1892AD at Ferozepore by Sardar Takhat Singh and his wife Harnam Kaur. In 1909AD *Vidya Bhandar Ashram* was established by Babu Teja Singh Bhasaur to cater for the educational needs of the Sikh girls. In 1914AD Sardar Nihal Singh (father of S. Partap Singh Kairon) opened *Bhujangan Ashram* in his village. Baba Khem Singh Bedi later started 50 schools in different areas of the Panjab. Khalsa College Amritsar was founded on 5 March 1892AD. Classes started in 1896AD. The first Sikh ladies' conference was held in 1924AD. It was only in 1929AD that the first Sikh girl named Devinder Kaur Grewal received her M.A. degree in Psychology from the Panjab University Lahore.

³¹⁵ At that time Baba Khem Singh Bedi was the self-styled Sikh leader and the Sikhs looked towards him for reforms. Unfortunately he was very conservative. Although he claimed that he was the heir to Guru Nanak he donned *Janeu* and chaired the meetings of Hindu organisations. He faced stern opposition from the educated Sikhs and later joined the Singh Sabha. The majority of Sikhs followed his line. When Prince Charles announced his intention to upgrade the Khalsa college Amritsar into a Sikh University, the Sikhs demonstrated against his visit. The Governor had to cancel the intended visit of the prince. The Principal of the Khalsa College Mr. wadan resigned in protest to register his displeasure against the Sikhs' foolishness. The prince upgraded the Ali Garh Muslim college into Aligarh Muslim University. (See “*ᏉᏉᏉ ᏉᏉ ᏉᏉ ᏉᏉ*” by Inder Singh Ghaga page 59)

³¹⁶ Interestingly Dr. Trumpp, who was later condemned for intentionally corrupting the doctrine of Guru Granth Sahib, supported the idea of teaching Panjabi as the national language of the Panjab. This school was supported by him. Panch Khalsa Diwan demanded in 1917AD that the court language of the Panjab should be Panjabi in Gurmukhi script.

subject and was recognised as school subject throughout the Panjab by the Education Department. As a result the Sikh women began learning Panjabi and soon started their own magazines like *iesqRI siqSMg* (1904), *pMjwbI BYx* (1907), *iesqRI suDwr piqrkw* (1914) *BuJMgx* (1917), *iesqRI jIvn* (1923) and *Pulyrn* (1926). This brought about a revolution of female uplift.³¹⁷

As a result of very long neglect, even now, hardly 20% of Sikh girls reach a high school level, much less a university.

11.3 Equality before law

The year 1991AD was declared the year of the girl child but it changed little if anything. An effort by the Indian Parliament to reserve seats for women in parliament is being continuously thwarted by the male dominated parliament. However, it is a matter of pride that the SGPC has already reserved 30% seats for women in the SGPC general body and has strongly condemned gender inequality. It has also demonstrated practically that women are equal to men by appointing Bibi Jagir Kaur as the first woman president of the Sikh august body known as the SGPC.

The Government of India have now legally granted “*equality before the law*” and “*Equality of opportunity*” for women but a lot more needs to be done in terms of killing the prejudice that has gone deep into the psyche of the society. We must expect at least 50% women in top jobs as educationists, administrators, political leaders, and religious guides. Their glorious image visualized by the Sikh Gurus must be reflected in their bright future.

³¹⁷ ‘Phuleran’ was started by Giani Heera Singh Dard and was edited by Bibi Inderjit Kaur. It was a powerful female spokesman of women. For example in one of its issues it wrote, “*lwhxq hY aunHW lokW auPr ijhVy ies sugMDq PulvwVI nUM nrk-duAwrI AwK ky inMddy hn [auh ik`fy inrdeI qy AikRqGx hn ijhVy eys PulvwVI qoN hI jMmDy hn , ies dI im`TI pRym-sugMDI Aqy TMFI CW iv`c pldy hn pr Pыр v`fy ho ky iesy nUM ju`qI brwbr jwnx lg pYNdy hn.*”]

11.4 The present trends

It is regrettable that many uneducated Sikh girls are still unaware of the requirements of their religion. Instead of worshiping God they worship many gods and goddesses and hanker after the so-called saint *Babas* who are weaning them away from Sikhi. It is not uncommon to come across Sikh women pressing the four supports of the *Manji Sahib* on which Guru Granth Sahib rests. Many puncture their ears and noses, and observe *Vrats*, so clearly forbidden to the Sikhs by the Gurus. Many have shaved their heads. At one time it was a curse to say *mMunI K`uQI* (shaven) but these days it has become a fashion. Rarely ever the girls cover their heads or write *Kaur* with their names.

Recently many have married outside Sikhism and many have started wearing dresses that fail to cover their bodies properly. Sexy dresses like Jeans, tops, midies, backless, sleeveless top, and skirts etc. have driven away the gentle *Shalwar Kameez* and any girl wearing *Shalwar Kameez* is looked down upon as conservative. Drugs, drinking and discos have replaced the traditional social Sikh norms of behaviour.

At one time the profligate rulers made the beautiful women dance before them to whip their carnal desires, now the daughters of respectable families run to bollywood to willingly dance half naked to please the public at large. Every year beauty competitions are held to exhibit the female bodies. Wealthy international companies exploit the women under the garb of *Miss World Competition*. Such competitions have now gone down into schools and colleges up to the village level. Modelling is another popular profession that attracts many girls. Film magnates are rolling in wealth exploiting the glamour of the girls. Singing and dancing groups have popularised permissiveness to the extreme. Very few girls know the traditional domestic chores or the social norms observable in the Sikh in-laws' families. Drinking, smoking, and watching blue films are becoming a fashion among girls.

Some women believe in the effects of eclipses, some feed Brahmans or through them ancestors and some observe *Ekadshi/Purnmashi* etc. There are also those who would not step out from home if somebody sneezes or a cat crosses their path. Some consider certain days of the week as bad. So long as this continues we cannot claim that Sikhism has really taken root. Unless these superstitions are attacked and obliterated we cannot really expect the women of today to act like Mata Gujri or Mai Bhago?

11.5 The wind of change

The momentum caused by the Singh Sabha Movement and the revolution initiated by scholars like Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Gurmukh Singh did not die out completely. It produced some remarkable ladies who did a lot for the uplift of Sikh women. When the husband of Bibi Harparkash Kaur of Sidhwan Khurd (1903-1965 AD) died in 1922AD she diverted all her attention towards education. Starting with a small school she succeeded in establishing an Arts college and a teacher's college for women, both of which are running very successfully. Later from 1957AD to 1962AD she was elected as a legislator for the Panjab Assembly and worked diligently in the Social welfare Board and the *Istri mandal*. She represented India in the peace conference held in Russia in 1958AD and was the first woman to have earned *Padam Shri* from the Govt. of India. It is encouraging to note that Sikh women are now stepping in her footsteps and are working in various fields. They are poets, politicians, painters, academicians, administrators, entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, teachers, writers, and journalists.

Amrita Shergill (1913-41AD) contributed rich contours and colours to her paintings which are being further augmented by Bibi Phoolan Rani. The forceful expression and lyrical power of

poetry reached its height in Bibi Amrita Pritam.³¹⁸ She is the first Panjabi woman to have become the member of the Rajya Sabha and to have been awarded the prestigious *Padma Shri* award by the President of India. As a novelist she is now known world wide with her novel *Pinjer* having been translated in French and other world languages.

Self-less service of the destitutes has found its messiah in Bibi Amarjit Kaur (wife of Shahid Fauja Singh). Service to the victims of International disasters has brought to light the latent qualities of Bibi Balwant Kaur of Birmingham who has offered succour to thousands at the international level. Bibi Dr. Inderjit Kaur is running the philanthropic institution of *Pingalwara Amritsar* (an asylum for the handicapped and the mentally disturbed people) after the death of Bhagat Puran Singh. Similarly Bibi Parkash Kaur head of Bhai Ghanaya movement is doing marvellous work of selfless service in India.

Dr. Kulwant Kaur Head of Mai Bhago Brigade is actively engaged in preaching Sikhism in Mai Bhago's spirit of dedication. The contribution of Dr. Bibi Mohinder Kaur to Sikh theology deserves appreciation. In the same strain Dr. Upinderjit Kaur has highlighted Sikhism and economic development. No less important are the contributions of Bibi Madanjit Kaur and Dr. Kuldeep Kaur of Mohali in the field of propagating the excellence of Gurmat Studies. For preaching Sikhism in the U.K. Bibi Gurdev Kaur head of Sikh Nari Manch U.K has no parallel Bibi Kailash Puri, psychologist is helping young girls in U.K through constructive professional advice.

Sikh girls are also taking an interest in games. Bibi Bachan Kaur Gill is a member of the National Archery Board of Ireland and

³¹⁸ Amrita Pritam wrote 24 Novels, 15 story books, and 23 volumes of poetry in Panjabi and Hindi. She died On 31.10.2005 at the age of 86. Mr. Abdul Kalam, the President of India said, "In her passing away, we have lost a visionary who could see future societal trends, reflected in her writings and poetry". He also said that her writings "often reflected her views on women's emancipation and gender discrimination. In her writings and poetry we find the seeds of stable society in which women are empowered and equal partners in society".

aspires to make her mark in the world events. A bilingual magazine titled 'Kaur's' has recently been launched from Toronto by Roma Kaur, Daljit Kaur and Ishnan Kaur to highlight the achievements and problems of the Sikh women. Over and above this; many other women are actively engaged in doing excellent work in various other fields.

Still there are not many organisations of Sikh women. Some individual women are working hard but active organisations are absolutely necessary to achieve tangible results. Lack of zeal, pusillanimous attitude, timidity, and complacency, have kept Sikh women backward. But things are changing slowly, and it is hoped that the Sikh Women will conquer inequalities, organise themselves and demand the rights so graciously granted to them by the Sikh Gurus. Only a place of pride and dignity can assure them once again to become intelligent, martial, independent, spiritual, and fully disciplined members of the Khalsa.

The Sikh nation must observe introspection and ask, "Are we as Panth really following Sikhism and doing our duty towards Sikh women Or is it a case of *ipdr̄m sulq̄wn bUd* (My father was an Emperor)?.

Appendix

Folk-lore of any language is the true mirror of history. The following popular songs sung by Punjabi women depict the life of the Panjab in the post-Guru period of the 19th century. The reader can imagine the difficulties experienced by the families of the Sikhs who had to wander in the deserts and jungles sometimes for months together. (Refer to sub-heading 5.12)

1 ik`Qy qUM GoVw bIiVAw isMG jI, ik`Qy dI
Aw geI vy muihMm?

au`cy nUM GoVw bIiVAw nIN nwzo,mnW dIAW
mn vy rhIAW]
AMdroN qW k`F dy myry k`pVy nI nwzo
gorIey,
ik`ilEN qW lwh dy nI ikrpwn, mnW dIAW
mn vy rhIAW]
AMdroN nW dyvW qyry k`pVy vy isMGw
vYrIAw
ik`ilEN nw lwhW gI ikrpwn, mnW dIAW mn
vy rhIAW]
dy dy nI dy dy myry k`pVy nwzo gorIey,
ieho hY swfw dsqUr mnW dIAW mn vy rhIAW
]

2 kIhny BYxy suixAW qy kIhny Awx suxwieAw
kIhdw qW rWJw isMG p`qxW qy AwieAw] by
hy
Bwbo dw rWJw isMG p`qxW qy AwieAw
cWdI dI byVI sony vMJ gfwieAw] by hy
p`t dIAW lwsW ny isMG lMGwieAw
byVI qoN c`l isMG bwgy iv`c AwieAw] by
hy
mMigAw sI inMbU AsW AMb cupwieAw
mMigAw jW pwxI AsW du`D iplwieAw] by
hy
bwgy qoN quirAw mwhI mihlW nUM AwieAw
mMigAw sI muuUVHw AsW plMg ivCwieAw,
sIny nwl lwieAw] by hy

3 Awp qW c`ilAW mwhI swnUM lw Jorw vy
ikq ivD ktUM mYN bwl vrys] by hy
in`kw in`kw k`qxw im`Tw im`Tw bolxw
ro ro k`txI mYN bwl vrys] by hy
s`s nUM mW qy shury nUM py smJIN nIN
nwzo gorIey
h`s h`s k`tI qUM bwl vrys] by hy

s`s bxy mW nW, shurw bxy ipauy nW vy
isMGw vYrIAw
ro ro k`txI mY bwl vrys] by hy
nxd nUM BYx smJIN dyvr nUM vIr nI nwzo
gorIey,
Xwd kr kr mYnMU k`tIN qUM bwl vrys] by
hy
nxdW nW BYxW bxn dyvr nW vIr bxdy vy
isMGw vyriAw
gurUu gurUu kr k`tU mYN bwl vrys] by
hy

- 4 AwieAw sI rwqIN cVH sON igAw sbwqIN vy
sWJIAW nw kIQIAW cMnw idl dIAW bwqIN by
] by hy
AwieAW mUMh hnyrHy qur c`ilAW svyry
kI hn AOgx myry isMGw d`s ky qW jweIN]
by hy
AOgx qW iv`c qyry gorIey bQyry nI
myry mgroN surmw ikauN pwieAw nIN nwzo
gorIey] by hy
s`q slweIAW qyrI BYx ny pweIAW vy
s`q slweIAW qyrI Bwbo ny vy vihMI
FoilAw] by hy
ie`ko slweI doNh nYxI mYN pweI isMG jI
qYQoN qW frdI ny hMJUAW DuAweI vy] by
hy

- 5 jy qUM ciVHAW jMg nUM by nIly GoVy
vwilAw
kdI supny `c PyrW pw
myry hQoN nw l~QI mihMdVI vy nIly GoVyy
vwilAw
myry mno nw l`QVy vy cWA
bUhy qy inq aufIkDI vy nIly GoVy vwilAw
kdI Bu`l BulyKy Aw

AwausIAW pwauNdI Q~k geI AW vy nIly
GoVy vwilAw
kdI bwgIN PyrW pw

Ballad of Rani Sahib Kaur of Patiala
Professor Mohan Singh
(Refers to article 9.3)

q`k isMGW NUM inGrdw auh isdkI rwxI [
auqrI hwQI auproN ijauN phwVoN pwxI [
auh bu`kI SIhxI vWgrW DUuh qyg AlwxI [
qusIN isMG gurU dsmyS dy nw ig`l gvwxI [
qusIN bwz aufwrU gzb dy auh icVIAW
FwxI[qusIN ie`k ie`k BwrU l`KW qy ku`J
ZYrq KwxI [
qusW r`j r`j pIqw sohixEN pMjwb dw pwxI
[A`j AMtw rWE mrHty qoN nw kMf lvwxI [
qusIN Awey bcwauNdy vIrnoN l`K BYx
bgwnI [A`j k`ilAW C`f ky BYx NUM nw
lIk lvwxI [

id`qI swihb kOr ny muV h`lw SyrI [A`Dw
mwr iSkwr NUM ikauN FwvoN FyrI [
jy pwxI pIvoN G`ut vI r`q pIvoN myrI [
jy SSqr lwhoN ipMifEN lwho p`q myrI [
auh nwl QkyvyN tu`t ky hoey ny FyrI
[au~T c`lo aunHW qy tu`tIey cvH vWg
hnHyrI [
auh nINd ivg`qy sohixEN hux kro nw dyrI
[muV muV h`Q nhIN AwvxI ieh rwq hnyrHI
]

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