



# Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Women Empowerment

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## **Abstract-**

*In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the contribution of Guru Gobind Singh for the cause of women. It is generally said that a state of society can be judged from the status, a woman occupies in the society. Sikh gurus worked for the upliftment and emancipation of women. According to Guru ji, women being the most important part of the society should be treated with respect. His compositions reveals that he was concerned at the severely degraded and oppressed state of women and preached the message of equality between the two sexes. He raised his voice against women discrimination and social evils like Adultery, Female infanticide, Polygamy etc. It is an attempt to underline how they were encouraged to dream, hope to have spiritual aspiration and fight against tyranny. He freed women from the slavery of men by giving the name Kaur to them. This paper also highlights the famous women during Guru Gobind Singh ji period like Mata Sikh Gujari, Mata Sundari, Mai Bhago etc.*

## **Key Words** -Guru Gobind

Singhji, Women, Social evils, Kaur, Mata Gujari, Mata Sundari, Mai Bhago

In order to appreciate the contribution of

sikh gurus for the cause of upliftment of women, it is better to examine the general condition of women during the medieval period. The position of woman was different in different ages. With the advent of the Muslim rule, the status of woman degraded. They had no individuality of their own. They were treated as slaves. They were considered as an object of man's sexual satisfaction. Many social evils in the society cropped up like female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, sati system, polygamy, pitiable condition of widows etc. Young unmarried girls were carried off by the members of the ruling class. To save their daughters from this evil, the parents adopted two methods - they either killed their newborn daughters or married them at the age of 5 or 6. These methods gave birth to new evils - female infanticide and child marriage respectively. The birth of a girl child was considered a source of misery. The condition of widows was miserable. They were forced to die with the funeral pyre of their husband. Although the

widower could remarry ,the widows could not remarry or enjoy the pleasures of life . Polygamy was prevalent in the society."One wife, One Man" applied only to women and not to the men. In the religious field, they were not allowed to read or study the holy scripture. They were denied access to education. The women had no identity of their own . Further ,the ideals of asceticism and Renunciation also had their impact on the status of woman .The attraction of the female was considered to be a temptation .She was called a seducer .Thus ,we find condemnation of woman in this period .In this period of injustice with woman , we find her receiving full respect in SGGS .

### **The Nine gurus and the status of women**

All the Sikh Gurus worked for the social upliftment of women. The Sikh gurus have great reverence for women .In SGGS , there are many Hymns which show that women are given due respect in it. In many religions, God has been addressed as father. However, in Sikhism, God has been addressed as motherland father. Guru Arjun dev ji, raised the status of woman by using the feminine name given to God [mother ] before the name

of the father. God is the mother as well as father.

"Thou Lord ,art my mother and thou my father, husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies"

There are 3 concepts in Sikhism which lay great importance to women.

1. The woman is equated with nature or Kudrat or Prakriti which is a Feminine
2. The Earth or the Dharti is referred to as a Mother
3. Sangat enjoys a great place in Sikhism. Sangat comes from the word Samiti which means " Daughter of God."

The Sikh Gurus have made abundant use of Feminine symbols in Sikh Scriptures and day to day life. The Sikh Gurus have used poetry as the medium of Communication. The poetry of the Gurus were not called 'Guru Vak' which is Masculine but 'Gurbani' which is Feminine.

Guru Nanak Dev ji, father of Sikhism, was the first to start, a social reform Movement as he raised a strong voice in favour of social equality of women. In his hymns, particularly, ASA DI VAAR and many other hymns enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak dev ji strongly advocated respect and equality for women. The principle of equality was followed and propagated by successive Gurus, in the Sikh Galaxy.

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, there are several verses which shows that women is given due respect. Infact, there is no other scripture in the world which gives so much importance to the women that separate banis present the character and virtues of a women.

Guru Nanak dev ji has considered. Air as the Guru; water as the father and the Earth as the womb of Mother where everything needed by the mankind is produced. In Fact, it is the essence of Nanakian philosophy and is given at the end of JAP.

Guru Nanak dev ji advises to practice righteousness for peaceful life and to save this (Mata Dharat Mahat) for coming generation of the humanity. The earth, as a place, to practice righteousness has also been explained by Guru Nanak dev ji in the stanza 34 of Jap. The tradition of condemnation of women was seen during Guru Nanak's period. In this period of injustice with women, We find her receiving full respect in SGGS.

Guru Nanak dev ji said in Asa di Vaar, "Why call her bad who gives birth to the kings."<sup>2</sup>

Guru Nanak dev ji emphasized that man must Accept respect and protect the rights of every women. He also emphasized on the equality of both man & woman. In one of his verses, he said "there is only one male that is almighty God, rest all are females."

Guru Nanak dev ji not only praised women in his verses but also tried her to arise out of slumberness. Guru Nanak dev ji said, "Jaag Salondriye." Wake up, o you sleeping women. It was a slogan to wake up the

women not only towards her rights but also towards her womanhood that she had forgotten due to years of exploitation. In SGGS, we find many banis which explains the various qualities a women should possess.

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Guru Nanak dev ji raised a strong voice in favour of **social equality** of women. In "Asa di Vaar" and many other hymns of SGGS, Guru Nanak dev ji advocated respect and equality for women. The principle of equality was followed by successive Gurus. In SGGS, equal importance is given to Mother & father.

"Wisdom is the mother & contentment is father" and "great is the mother that gives birth to child and great is the father"<sup>3</sup>

Guru Nanak dev ji said, "Sikhi does not teach you to raise your hand on a woman it teaches you to respect them"<sup>4</sup>

Sikhism also preaches that equal respect should be given to women.

"In the earth and in the sky, do not see any second. Among all the women and the men. His light is spinning."

Advocation of women Rights in SGGS in prize of women Guru Nanak Units

"From the women is an birth, in the woman's womb are we shaped;

To the woman we are engaged, to the we are wedded;

The women is our friend and from women is the family;

Through the women are the bonds of the world;

Why call women evil who given birth to the leader of the world?

From the women is the women, without women there is name."<sup>5</sup>

The Sikh Gurus worked for the upliftment and emancipation of the women..The Sikh Gurus not only provided ideological basis in their hymns for the socio-religious rehabilitation of women but also undertook several widespread and practical steps in this direction. They gave women the same place as was given to men in Sikh institutions like Sangat ,Langar, Manji etc. They raised their voices against the social evils that were prevalent in the society. They strongly condemned Sati system,Purdah system,pitiable condition of

Widows,Polygamy etc. They advocated equality of women and men.

\_During the period of Sikh Gurus, the custom of **sati** was prevalent in India. The women used to burn herself with her husband on the funeral pyre after his death. It was a kind of suicide where woman was forced to die against her wishes. Guruji denounced Sati and advocated widow Remarriage. He declared that a true Sati is one who bravely bears the shock of separation with virtues (husband).

"Do not call them 'satee', who burns themselves along with their husband's corpses. O Nanak, they alone are Satee, who die from the shock of separation."<sup>6</sup>

During the period of Sikh Gurus, **girl infanticide** was also prevalent. The Sikh Guru preached that there was no difference between a son &a daughter . Girl infanticide was also condemned by our Gurus. The Sikh Gurus gave specific instructions that no one of their disciple will indulge in female infanticide. Guru Hargobind ji, the sixth Sikh guru, requested his mother to pray for the birth of a daughter. Guru Har Rai, the Seventh Guru, when found an abandoned baby girl, he brought her home, adopted her and brought her up like his own daughter . Sri Guru Granth Sahib condemns this evil social practice.

"If a Brahmin kills a cow or a female infant, and accepts the offerings of an evils person, he is cursed with leprosy and

criticism; he is forever and ever filled with egotistical pride.”<sup>7</sup>

‘**Dowry**’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘Dos’ which means ‘to give, to offer.’ The gifts, money or estate given to the bride at the time of marriage, came to be called ‘Dowry’. The custom of dowry has been prevalent in all times and cultures, in one or the other form. The third Guru, Guru Amardass, spoke against dowry system. Guru Amardass ji condemned the display of dowry in strong words:-

“Any other dowry which the self-willed offer for show is false egoism and worthless display of self”<sup>8</sup>

SGGS, thus, condemns the sati, dowry and female infanticide. It also stands in favour of **widow remarriage**. Keeping in view, the pitiable condition of a widow, the banis inspires the Hindu society for their (widow’s) reforms.

Guru Nanak devji says

“The widow who sells her body for money can never be satisfied till she is united with her husband.”<sup>9</sup>

. All the sikh gurus advocated to reform the condition of **widows**. They inspired the Hindu society to allow widow to remarry. In SGGs, it is said If a young widow, under the impact of lust, surrenders herself to another person, she can never have the full satisfaction. She should take another husband and pass her life in full satisfaction. “Just as a widow gives her body to another person, under the impact of lust and Maya, she can never have a satisfaction without a husband.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, there is no ban on widow Remarriage in Sikhism .

In Guru Granth sahib we find many hymns which shows that our Gurus were against **Polygamy** . Sikhism upholds monogamous ideal of marriage . Sikhs are required by their religion to be loyal to their spouses. In Sikhism, even celibacy has been redefined in terms of chastity . Sikhism directs its followers to be sincere to their to their wives, and look at all other women as if they were their mothers, daughters and sisters”<sup>11</sup>

There are Two kinds of the Writings which Guru Gobind Singhji wrote which help the Historians in writing the History relating to his period. First is his poetical compositions preserved in the Holy Dasam Granth and Second is his Hukamnamas or Letters addressed to his followers. These writings throw flood of light on his views on women. Sikh women played a significant role during Guru Gobind Singh's time. He **advocated equality of men and women in all walks of life**. When he was quite young, the administration of the Guru's darbar and the affairs of the Sikh community were conducted by his mother, Mata Gajari, as is clear from some of her letters- Hukamnamas available to us. Infact guru ji felt that no person was purer than the wife and the mother. Even during the initiation ceremony of the Khalsa, the respect was shown to Mata Sundari who put Patatas in the holy water [amrit] prepared for Baptism. Emphasizing this aspect of equality, the

Guru, at the time of the birth of Khalsa, had declared, "From now onwards you shall be One another a Bhai [brother]. Work and not the Birth shall determine the place of each in society. You shall treat the womenfolk equal to men in every way."

He brought women on an equal footing with men. They were thus Baptised in the same way as men. Their obligations also remaining same as of men. A woman was allowed to read and interpret the Scripture. She was given the right to participate as well as lead religious congregations. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, thus, freed women from the slavery of men.

The symbolic value of Guru Gobind Singh's bestowal of the Kirpan to women, as well as to men, is immense. This outstanding revolutionary act imbued women with the potential for security, confidence and self-defense—a potent form of independence and liberation which is especially amazing when viewed in a historical context where male 'protection' of women often morphed into outright ownership.

In Dasam Granth Guru Ji has used terms like Lok Mata, Chandi, Bhagauti, Bhavani [Mistress of all prosperity], Kalika [The Eternal Divine Might] and Chamunda. Guru Ji has constantly used these terms as the synonyms for the Lord as symbolised in the might of the Sword Of Righteousness, which is drawn to protect faith and truth against Evil. Thus Guru Ji has used Feminine term for the The Lord. Chandi is a terminology of Brahmgyan which was used in past by many

poets but Guru Gobind Singh explored real definition of Chandi ie. Formless, Eternal, countless garbless etc. Sikhs do not worship any Durga devi, Chandi devi or Bhagwati devi, nor Chandi means any Devi or Hindu deity. Chandi become the embodiment of strength and might in female form and was described in all her majesty and glory. The chandi is thus, a story of a woman story surpassing the might of a man.

'Lok Mata'—Else where God is characterised as Purusha or the Father—creator is emphasized. He is both Father and Mother, in contradiction to an imagined Father [Shiva] and Mother [Shakti]

The opening verses of the Ardas reads:

Ardas- EK Onkar Waheguru ji ki Fateh. Shri Bhagauti ji Sahae. Var Shri Bhagauti ji ki Patshahi Dasvin.

Meaning—God is One. All Victory is of the Wondrous Guru. May the respected Shri Bhagauti [ Divine Mother] help us! Ode of the respected Shri Bhagauti recited by the Tenth Guru.

Pritham Bhagauti Simari Kai Gur Nanak lain dhiai.

First Call up Bhagauti [The Divine Mother] in your mind, then meditate on Guru Nanak.

He sought her blessings for the completion of the Holy Granth Sahib.

Kirpa kari hum par Jag Mata, Granth Kara Puran Subh rate.<sup>12</sup>

The woman is given the name Kaur, meaning Princess. In Sikhism this title eliminates discrimination based on

"Family Name"[which denotes a specific caste].A Sikh women is an **individual in her own right**.She does not have to take her husband's name and is Kaur till her death.Guru Gobind Singh did not see any distinction between the Khalsa,men or women could keep the 5 K's. Infact Kaurs are the Brave Daughters of Guru Gobind Singh ji and mata Sahib kaur ji.Kaurs are pride of khalsa. Guru Gobind singh ji made it mandatory for all Sikh women to use the surname Kaur.

Guru Gobind singh ji raised his voice against **Female infanticide**.He issued orders forbidding the Khalsa having any association with those that practised Female infanticide and Sati.

- He should not mix with those who kill their daughter,and keep his mind always busy in gurbani and keep the 'Waheguru' in his mind and greet everybody with 'Waheguru ji ki Fateh.'

- He should consider the Daughters of others as his own and be contented with his wife.
- He should not kill his daughter nor should believe in caste distinctions.
- A Gursikh should not take wine,kill his daughter or mix with those who kill their daughter.<sup>13</sup>

Guru Gobind singh ji raised his voice against **adultery**.

"Conveting other woman is playing a dagger in disguise.Such an indulgence is a virtual death.Such a man deserves the death of a dog."<sup>14</sup>

During Guru ji Period many Muslim captured sikh women in battle and took them as prize booty and raped them.But Guru ji prohibited sikhs from doing such acts.He was of the view that sexual misconduct was inexcusable.This prohibition of Guru ji made the Khalsa maintain a high character both in times of war and peace.In 1807,the Sikh soldiers crossed swords with Jahankhani, the General of Ahmed Durrani,near sialkot.The Afghan general ,fearing a defeat,fled away to Peshawar,leaving a large no.of muslim women who fell into the hands of the sikhs.The Sikhs escorted the Muslim women safely to Jammu.This noble conduct is in consonance with the tradition laid down by Guru Gobind singh ji<sup>15</sup>.The respect of women especially Muslim Ones,captured during war,became a special feature of Khalsa.In the Sikh code of conduct,marrying a Muslim woman was considered a sin.It was this code of conduct of Sikhs which was responsible for the high character of the Misaldars during the 18th century. In that age of moral laxity,the character of Sikhs was exemplary.

According to Rattan singh Bhangoo,the author of immortal Panth Prakash,the Sikhs led their First expedition to Kasur in 1760 at the request of a Brahmin whose wife had been carried away by the Nawab of Kasur.The Brahmin appealed to the Khalsa in such a way that an expedition was led to Kasur.Kasur was conquered and the wife of the Brahmin was recovered and restored to her husbands.

Such high character displayed by the Sikhs was due to Guru Gobind Singh's teachings which have been fully reflected in the history of Khalsa.<sup>16</sup>

Guru ji issued 52 Hukamnamas ie a set of instructions in Sikhism, set by Guru Gobind Singh ji in Nanded, in 1708. These edicts sum up the ideal way of life of the Khalsa and serve as the code of conduct for the Khalsa Panth. are some hukamnamas which shows the views of Guru ji for women.

For example, Other than your wedded wife, consider all women as your mothers and sisters. Do not indulge in carnal martial relationships with them..

Pakhian Charitra of Istri Charitra or tales of women : There are 404 stories, illustrative of the character and disposition of women. These stories occupies 446 pages or nearly half of the Granth. The name of Sham occurs as the writer of One or more of them. There was reason for these stories. He wanted to warn his followers of the wiles of women. The Guru knew that man's weakness at a young age is woman. Many young men were recruiting themselves in the Guru's army. The Guruji wanted to check their tendency towards women. 78 stories are devoted to the intelligence, bravery and devotion of women, 269 stories depict wiles and ruses of women, 28 stories discuss man's deceit and cunning in relation to women, 10 stories deal with the folly of drinking, opium eating and gambling and many describe folk tales.<sup>17</sup>

Guru ji believed in leading a monogamous life. Some writers say that

Guru ji had three wives- Mata Jito ji, Mata sundari ji and Mata Sahib ji. Sahib Devi lived the life of celibacy. Its true that Guru ji was idealist in his outlook and believed that marriage was a sacrament. We know that polygamy becomes an evil when sex motive or sex indulgence is its basis. guru ji had great control over his physical desires. He was the man who sacrificed his all for the sake of God. He married thrice only under the forced circumstances. Mata Gujari and his maternal uncle Kirpal chand exercised great influence over him.

- The guru often spoke to the Sikhs that, "Love your own wife and be devoted to her alone, Do not share another woman's bed, even in a dream as love of this kind is like a dagger that destroys.
- Banda Bairagi was sent by the Guru ji to the Punjab to continue the work left unfinished by him there. One of the special instructions to him ,at departure, was that he should remain continent, as otherwise, his courage, glory and influence, were likely to depart.
- Once a Muslim lady fell in the hands of the sikh soldiers during the course of war. She was brought to the Guru in Palki. The Guru ji asked Sikh soldiers whether any of them had molested or ill treated her in any way.

All these instances shows that Guru ji had great regard for woman and forbade his



followers from having evil eyes on other woman<sup>18</sup>

Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin records that when Anandpur was under siege and supplies to the Sikh had been blocked, it was the ladies who took the responsibility of supplying them water from the river Sutlej. Without bothering about the raining bullets, they would start before dawn to supply water to the Sikhism the fort. It was recorded that the daughter of Bhai Bhagat singh was killed during One such firing.<sup>19</sup>

The Sikh place of worship at Nanded was the victim of constant inroads of Mohammedans from Deccan and the Sikhs felt hopeless. They began to desert the place. The news reached Malwa in Punjab. About 200 Sikh women volunteered themselves to go and protect it. They formed battalion and marched to South on horseback. On reaching there, they engaged the enemy in a sharp skirmish lasting for many hours and drove out the Mohammedans<sup>20</sup>

There is a incident during Guruji period which shows that there should be no gender discrimination. Bhai Alam Singh asked the Guru that he had Once said that Khalsa will henceforth baptize his sons and daughters. Bhai Alam Singh requested the Guru to tell him how it should be done. The Guru replied that a Sikh must take the child, whether son or daughter to the dharamsala for the purpose, when the child was Ten days old.....After the Amrit was ready, the baby boy or girl should be administered five drops of Amrit and the Sikh greeting be repeated five times. The

mother of the baby should respond five times with the same greeting. This all speaks of equal status of women in Sikh tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Guru Gobind singh ji like his predecessors strongly supported family life. He denounced asceticism as much as formal rituals. He did not regard woman as hurdle or obstruction on the path of ultimate goal of Self-realization. According to him to regard a woman a 'temptress' or 'seductress' 'unclean' was totally incorrect. Guru gobind singh ji life in itself a source of inspiration to the Sikhs. He himself led householder life and sacrificed his whole for the Truth.

Let thy own house be a forest,  
Thy heart the anchorite,  
Eat little, sleep little,  
Learn to love, be merciful and  
forbear,  
Be mild, be patient<sup>22</sup>

The Sikh women in Indian History are famous for their Courage, Valour, Work And honesty. They are the symbol of womanhood-Mata Bhagwati Durga in her human form as if fighting the evildoer and protecting the helpless and the oppressed.

Here are some of the outstanding and exemplary contributions made by some of the courageous women of Sikh faith who were dedicated, devoted, and committed to truth, justice, and righteousness.

**Mai Bhago-** Her original name was Bhag kaur. After baptism, she was called Bhag kaur. In Sikh History, she is known as Mai Bhago. She was a famous warrior saint, who had fought alongside Guru Gobind singh ji.



Mai Bhago also known as Mata Bhag kaur was a Sikh woman who led Sikh soldiers against the Mughals in 1705. She killed several enemy soldiers on the battlefield. She is considered a saint by Sikhs. She was the brave woman who shamed the 40 deserters to return to the battle of Muktsar. She was the sole survivor of the Battle of Muktsar. She was later honored for her bravery by being made a bodyguard of the Guruji. She accompanied Guruji to Nanded and continued to serve the 10<sup>th</sup> master with great devotion. She died at Nanded.

**Mata Gujari**- She occupies an important place in the Sikh History. She was the wife of Guru Teg Bahadur and Mother of Guru Gobind ji. She was an inspiring force behind her husband Guru Teg Bahadur ji and her son Guru Gobind Singh ji. It was her upbringing that her grandsons displayed such a strong determination in their faith. She was an embodiment of supreme sacrifice. She passed through all hardships that Guru ji underwent and she always remained with Guru ji as a source of Inspiration. She infused such a high spirit into guru ji and his sons that even the enemies were surprised to see their fearlessness.

**Mata Jito ji**- She was the wife of Guru Gobind singh ji. She used to tell her sons about the great sacrifices of their Grand father. Right from the beginning she used to tell her sons about their duties as a Sikh. During the Baptism ceremony of the Khalsa in 1699, Guru Gobind singh ji asked Mata Jito ji to Participate in the First Baptism by

adding sugar cakes[patatas] to water which was stirred with the Khanda[double edged sword] and administered to the Khalsa as Amrit. She commissioned Bhai Mani singh to collect the writings of Guru ji. It was she who got the writing of the Guruji collected and compiled as Dasam Granth.

**Mata Sundari**- She was the widow of Guru Gobind singh ji. She is popularly known among the Sikhs as the Great Mother of Khalsa. She was a devoted wife, a Spiritual Mother and a confident and far sighted guide of the masses. He helped provide leadership for the Sikhs in a very difficult time aafter the death of Guru ji. She helped maintain the sanctity of the SGGS as the only successor of Guru Gobind singh ji and dealt strictly with the pretenders of Guru ship. She was the First Khalsa woman. It was she who got the writings of the Guru ji collected and compiled as Dasam Granth.

**Mata Sahib kaur**- She was One of the wives of Guru Gobind ji whom he had made the symbolic Mother of Khalsa. She was the spiritual wife of guruji as she took vow of celibacy. His marriage to her was taken place under peculiar circumstances. She participated along with her husband in the creation of the Khalsa. She took Amrit and she was proclaimed as the mother of Khalsa. She always helped Mata Sundari with social and religious affairs, and issued about nine hukamnamas.

**-Bibi Harsarn kaur ji**- In the battle of Chamkaur Sahib ,two elder sons of Guruji were martyred. Guruji was obliged to leave



the place under the cover of darkness. After leaving Chamkaur Sahib, he reached the village of Harsarn kaur. Guru Gobind Singh Ji's two elder sons together with many other Sikhs were martyred while fighting with the enemies at the battle of Chamkaur Sahib. When she came to know about the martyrdom of Sahibzaade, she hurried to Chamkaur Sahib and reached the battle scene. She did the last ritual ceremony of the elder two sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and other Sikhs. She was thrown into that pyre by the Mughal soldiers. Thus, she also obtained martyrdom on 23 Dec, 1704. She is also called final Shaheed of the battle of Chamkaur.

**-Bibi Deep Kaur-** She was a devoted Sikh lady. She was once on her way to Anandpur to see the Guruji, a band of Mughal soldiers attacked her. She gave them a terrible fight and saved her honour by killing them. Guruji was very much impressed with the bravery of Bibi Deep Kaur that he called her the true daughter of the Khalsa.

**Conclusion :** In conclusion, we can say that Guruji visualised a society in which there is no gender discrimination. All the steps taken by Guruji completely revolutionized the lives of women in the Northern India. In the present times, we are in dire need to review our past culture to incorporate the moral values in our lives and to adjust ourselves in the changing scenario. The Sikh History point clearly to the higher status of

women assigned at the social and historical level. However, the evils of female foeticide, dowry, domestic violence etc. are still prevalent in our society. The political authority and religious authority is still in the hands of the male. We have still to provide her a place of equality even in the religious duties. The need is to look into present maladies, besides taking pride in past glories.

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