

Bibi Balbir Kaur

Daughters of the Khalsa

translated by Baldev Singh from "Adarshak Singhnia" by Karam Singh

The Akali movement had rejuvenated a new life among GurSikhs. Since the Sikh Raj period, this was the first time GurSikhs had asserted their religious independence and initiated non-violent efforts to seek control of their Gurdwaras. The bloody incident of Nankana Sahib and Guru-Kae-Bagh added fuel to the fire and served to strengthen the movement. As a result, the Sikhs raised slogans of India's freedom along with slogans for the independence of their Gurdwaras. Unfortunately, the level of commitment and self-sacrifice of Sikhs deeply disturbed the British. They sensed a potential threat to their control from this small community of lions. Expectedly, the British directed their terror machinery against the Sikhs. Along with Akalis, their sympathizers also troubled the British Psyche. As a result, the British forces arrested and confined all Akali sympathizers in the jails.

The Maharaja of Nabha, Ripudaman Singh, was an independent minded ruler. He never considered himself disjoint from his community. When Guru Khalsa Panth observed the eve of Nankana Sahib martyrdom, he too conducted Akhand Path of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Nabha and wore black turban to participate in this Panthic observance. Subsequently, he visited Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar and consulted with Akali leaders who were outside the jails. Maharaja's activities deeply troubled the British. They could not tolerate such activities as they smelled some sort of a rebellion through such participation. The British action was swift. They initiated legal steps to seize control of Nabha rule and expelled Maharaja Ripudaman Singh.

The news of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh's expulsion spread through Guru Khalsa Panth like a lightening rod. It shook the very core of Sikh psyche. Such excesses by the British became unbearable for the Sikhs and the whole Sikh nation galvanized to fight against this injustice. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC), working in collaboration with the Shiromani Akali Dal, conducted Akhand Paths at various places to openly express their outrage at this injustice and demanded the reinstatement of Maharaja. Sikhs initiated a Akhand Paath of Sri Guru Granth Sahib at the Jaito Gurdwara as well to express their outrage against this injustice. Unfortunately, it was not allowed to be completed. The agents of British empire, operating under British instructions, dragged and arrested the Granth Sahib who was reciting the Paath. As a result, the

Akhand Paath was forcibly interrupted.

This incident was equivalent of pouring salt over open Sikh wounds. The expulsion of Maharaja was a political affair that the Panth was still struggling to grapple with. It hadn't yet resolved on how to best deal with this issue when the forced interruption of Akhand Paath served a deep blow from the rulers to the Sikhs religious sentiments. This was an open challenge to Guru Khalsa Panth's freedom and honor. Akali leaders decided to accept this challenge. They immediately announced a non-violent morcha for the resumption and completion of the interrupted Akhand Paath. Thousands of GurSikh Singh, Singhnia, children, and elders started flocking in Amritsar ready to shed their lives for this religious battle. They were all eager to reach Jaito. However, the Akali committee decided to send a Jatha of 500 GurSikhs. The remaining GurSikhs were asked to await the schedule for the next Jatha. Everyone was eager to proceed to Jaito, yet they had to accept their Jathedar's decision.

Under the echoes of Jaekara, "Jo Bolay So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal," this Jatha left Amritsar after having sought the Hukam from Sri Akal Takhat and pledged to remain non-violent. Thousands of supporters were present on this occasion. Singhnia's were not allowed to proceed on this Jatha. But how could they remain behind and not participate in such a holy endeavor? They successfully sought permission to accompany the Jatha for organizing langar along the way.

The non-violent march of this Jatha was a unique event for the whole world. Organized in rows of four, these Saint-Soldiers proceeded bare-foot from Amritsar while reciting "Satnaam VaahGuru." Soon they reached their first rest-stop. The dedication and volunteer sewa of the local Sikhs testified to the whole world that the Sikh nation not only understood non-violence and how to die but how to honor its martyrs.

It became evident from the first rest-stop that the services of Singhnia, who had accompanied the Jatha for organizing langar, were not needed. Jathedar asked with them to return. Many did. However, several wanted to continue with their brave brothers and they did not return. Our Balbir Kaur was among this group. When Jathedar asked her to return, her eyes were filled with tears. She said, "Veer! Do not stop me from serving the living martyrs of Guru Gobind Singh. Sewa is the only essence of this life. Beside we never know when death will come upon us. I plead for permission to continue for Guru's sake. Let me proceed." Jathedar could not break her heart. He reluctantly gave permission, especially when faced with the utter display of self-sacrifice.

Balbir Kaur was 22 years old, full of youth and utterly beautiful. Guru's faith and feelings of selfless service for humanity had generated such a

glow on her face that she seemed like a goddess of purity or an angel. She was not alone. She was accompanied by an year old beautiful son.

The playful happy face of this child was not only Balbir Kaur's joy but the source of amusement for the whole Jatha. He played with everyone in the Jatha along the way.

The journey was nearing completion. Jatha prepared to depart from its final rest-stop. Jathedar stood on a high spot and pleaded for the return of the accompanying congregation. British forces had dug-in with machine gun. This information had previously reached the Jatha. Jathedar did not hide this information from anyone. He said, "With Guru's blessing, a martyr's maela is being organized. However, only those GurSikhs, who have Sri Akal Takhat's Hukam, should proceed further. Others should return and await their turn."

The congregation stopped and let the Jatha proceed. However, not everyone obeyed the Jathedar's instructions. Several GurSikhs, eager to seek the martyrdom, found hidden routes parallel to the Jatha's established route. They advance in hiding, with the view that when the whole program of martyrdom is unveiled they too will participate to seek martyrdom. However, Bibi Balbir Kaur did not seek any hidden routes. She continued marching with her brothers while her son enjoyed the sight, simply watching people on either side.

When Jathedar learned of Balbir Kaur's continued march with the Jatha, he left his leading position and caught up with her. "Bibi, there is potential of firing ahead. You should not continue any further." Jathedar pleaded. "My Veer! Do not stop me. My quest for sewa has not been quenched yet. Allow me to enjoy this sewa. You tell me of the dangers from the potential firing ahead? Five hundred Veers are with me. Since they are continuing for sure death why shouldn't they be accompanied by a Bahan (sister). I too have partaken Gurus Amrit. I shall consider myself blessed if I too could accept martyrdom along with my brothers and reach Guru Gobind Singh's court. Here my quest has not been quenched by serving my Veers." Balbir Kaur again pleaded with tears in her eyes.

"But .." Jathedar was about to say something when he was interrupted by Balbir Kaur saying, "My child, this is what you wanted to point out. He too is Guru's blessing. If he too serve the Panth, what greater deeds could be beyond this." Saying this, Balbir Kaur again hugged her child who burst out laughing.

Jathedar pressured Balbir Kaur to return. Others pressured her too, but she did not budge from her decision to continue her march to death with her brothers. She insisted that the "non-inclusion of a Bahan along with 500 Veers in the pending martyrdom is an insult to the brave daughters of

Tenth Guru. How could the Guru, whose amrit turned women into Singhnia, who bestowed equality to women, tolerate that not even a single daughter participate in his holy war? This is sacrilegious that Balbir Kaur simply could not allow."

The power of her persuasive arguments forced her brothers to accept her position. Even the Jathedar had to bow against her spirit of sacrifice and courage. Who so ever talked with her was perplexed and could not raise a convincing counter argument.

Jathedar having been forced to accept her decision, returned to his lead position in the march. Guru Khalsa's Kesri flag was freely fluttering in the winds. The Jatha exhibited a unique presence while the accompanying band's performance portrayed innocence. Under the guidance of their deeply held faith in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the command of their Jathedar, the brave force of Sant-Sipahis marched toward the Jaito Gurdwara. They were chanting "Satnaam VaahGuru." Every GurSikh in the Jatha was projecting calmness.

Hindu, Muslims, and Sikhs welcomed the Jatha all along of the way from Amritsar to Jaito, because of their participation in this religious task. They were served with abundant amounts milk, kheer (milk and rice pudding) and other things. Flowers were showered upon these living martyrs along the way. Thousands of rupees were donated.

Now it was turn for people serving the British to extend their welcome. They too welcomed these braves GurSikhs with rifle and gun fire. They showered them with rain of bullets. Gurus non-violent force was prepared for such a welcome. They accepted this welcome with "Satnaam Sri VaahGuru's" Hukam and continued the sweet walk towards their goal without any interruptions. Witnessing the scene it appeared that the Jatha was playing holli (festival of colors). After all martyr's holli is a holli of blood. If someone's face was colored with blood, someone else's head, chest, or thigh were colored. Blessed were the GurSikhs, for no one's back was visibly colored. Many Veers fell to the ground but would rise immediately to continue their march. The bullets would hit their chest only to fall again. With courage they would either rise again or accept death to reach the Kalgidhar father's lap.

Martyrdom was being openly served by now. It was the same serving that Balbir Kaur had insisted to reached and accept. Let us focus our attention on her condition. She continued her march while hugging to her child. She loved the rain of bullets that she had eagerly awaited. By now her face was glowing with some unique brightness.

Suddenly, She was hit by a bullet in her forehead. A blood spring burst open. Her whole face was covered with blood, eyes were covered with blood. However, this did not affect her march. She continued with the chanting of "Satnaam VaahGuru" while her child played with the flowing blood on her face. It was all a game for the child.

Suddenly another bullet hit Balbir Kaur's child. The bullet pierced the child through his ear and then hit Balbir Kaur's chest. The child died immediately and proceeded to the Guru's court. Balbir Kaur kissed his forehead and place his body on a nearby platform saying "VaahGuru look after your amanat (temporarily entrusted to me for safe custody)." However, she did not stop. Her face had turned yellow from the loss of blood. She had no strength left to continue. Her walk was wobbly by now, yet her heart's quest had not been quenched. Chanting the tune of "Satnaam VaahGuru," she kept her pace with others. On the other hand, the bullets had not stopped raining. They continued showering as if their thirst for blood had not yet mellowed.

Surprisingly, another bullet came hissing her way. It hit straight in Balbir Kaur's chest, pierced her body and left from the other side. This bullet was the message of death, the one Balbir Kaur had been eagerly awaiting. With this bullet, her beautiful body fell to the ground. But not her soul. Her soul left to join her child in Kalgidhar Father's protection. Her deepest quest was finally fulfilled. Her blood filled face still exhibited peace and dancing valor.

Bibi Harnaam Kaur

Late past mid-night, four men were sitting around a well outside a village in Ludhiana District. Considering the broad axes with long helms in their hands, it seems they are thieves gathered to execute a robbery plan. Their silence further suggested their wait for someone's arrival. They had waited only a few minutes when two men emerged out of the village. Seeing them the men immediately stood up.

"Who is there?" Shouted, one among them.

"Myself," one of the approaching man responded.

The first group of men sat down while the approaching men simply stood by after catching up with them.

"What news have you brought for me?" One of the sitting man inquired.

"They are asleep?" One of the approaching man responded.

"Explain clearly?" Question is raised again.

"Everything is fine, as I said. The old man has gone on a court date since yesterday and has not returned as yet. Harnaam Singh and Ram Singh, both left this morning for Taran Taaran to attend the Masia observance. The field is wide open." came the answer.

"Then who is at home?"

"The same girl, Harnaam Kaur, and his mother."

"You are telling me that the God has opened the flood gates. Is that right, Kalia! Only yesterday Harnaam Singh brought home four thousand rupees. That's ours now. Any additional stuff we find is just surplus." A man with thick mustache said.

"Why four thousand rupees only? There must be four thousand rupee worth of Harnaam Kaur's jewels?" One among the sitting man questioned.

"Really!"

"What other information have you brought Ustad?"

"Consider it a real catch." Everyone's face brightened with joy.

Hearing this conversation, it was self-evident that these men were thieves or gangsters, gathered to execute a planned robbery. Kala is a member of the area's famous gang, Sundar's gang. And this is Sundar's gang. Who is the unfortunate target of their evil plans? This was unclear. Yes they had mentioned the names of Harnaam Singh, Ram Singh, and Harnaam Kaur, but who are they? Suddenly, the group stood up and moved towards the village.

It was well past mid-night by now. It was pitch dark. So dark that one could not see their own hand. The thieves used a torch-light to find their way.

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"Mother!"

"Yes daughter, why aren't you asleep."

"Mother, I do not know why I am not sleepy today. Lets talk about something."

"No daughter, I am sleepy. Go to sleep."

Mother and daughter are conversing in the same house that we heard mentioned previously in the gang's conversation.

Between mother and daughter, for some reason Harnaam Kaur is having difficulty putting herself to sleep. After this conversation, the mother fell sleep, while Harnaam Kaur remained wide awake. She lighted a small oil lamp and started reciting Kirtan Sohila from a Gutka. She completed the Kirtan Sohila Paath but still did not feel sleepy. She put off the oil lamp and lied in bed covering herself with a comforter. It was peaceful all around. She had been in bed only for a short period when she heard some disturbance around the outer walls of the back room.

Her intuition suggested that the rats must be causing the disturbance. However it soon became clear that the disturbance could not be caused by the rats. Instead thieves were breaking in through the wall. She was deeply disturbed. There were thousands of rupees in cash. Plus, there was no one else beside her mother and her in the house.

During the winter night, she did not expect anyone to respond to her call for help. She was in deep thoughts by now while the thieves were breaking in. This is all but certain by now. Besides the noise of their tools, one could clearly hear their muffed conversation.

"Will the hard-earned income of my brother be looted this way?" Harnaam Kaur was questioning herself. Suddenly, "No" spewed out of her mouth with determination. "What if I am a woman. For sure I am a Sikh's daughter."

"Yes, VaahGuru, you are the only one to keep my honor." She collected herself and prayed to VaahGuru in AkalPurakh's court.

The thieves had broken in by now. Harnaam Kaur could clearly sense this from the nearing sound of disturbance. The thieves were moving the inner bricks by now.

There was no time left to think. She had determined her plan. All she had was a small, foot long, kirpan. Her brothers had taken the longer kirpans with them. She removed the battery light from under her pillow. Her brother, an army personal, had brought it along just yesterday. Using the dim light, she started moving towards the area where the thieves had broken in. She did not want to trip over something in the darkness and raise alarm to make thieves aware of her presence. Walking around in the dim light she saw the chaff-cutter. Now she replaced her kirpan in its sheath. Holding the chaff-cutter in her right hand and the battery light in her left hand, she advanced and moved next to the break-in location. The final bricks were being removed to ease the break-in. The thieves were conversing among themselves.

"Why? Is this the room with the money bag?"

"Yes."

"Well then four men should go inside and me and Kala will stand guard here." This was Sundar's voice.

One thief tried to move inside, with his head first, through the hole they had created in the wall. Before he could move in, Harnaam Kaur raised the chaff-cutter and forcibly hit it on the thief's head. Harnaam Kaur felt the eruption of blood fountain. But before she could see anything, the head disappeared. It had been pulled back. Harnaam Kaur was still standing confidently.

Sundar was a dangerous gangster. When he saw his wounded associate, he shouted that "Now we will not only steal the wealth of this house but the girl's honor as well."

He was sure that the person with such a vicious attack could not be anybody other than Harnaam Kaur. The house was constructed such that its outer portion faced the open area while its entrance door was towards the inner street. From this initial attack, it was clear to the thieves that they



will not be able to enter the house through the break-in hole they had so cleverly created in the wall. Leaving their wounded associate to guard the break-in, the rest of the men moved towards the inner street. The very first thing they did was to lock all neighbor's doors from the outside. This was to ensure that no one could reach out for any help. All this was done very cautiously. However, Harnaam Kaur had already determined that they were about to do something else. Her mother was still asleep. She did not feel the need to wake her up. For her fear could become an obstacle in her plans.

She dragged a huge trunk to block the break-in hole. Having secured the break-in hole she moved towards the outer area of the house.

The thieves had opened the front door and entered the courtyard by now. The very first thing Harnaam Kaur did was to remove the cash and jewels from the truck and dump it in corner of the bedroom where dirty laundry had been stored. Next she locked the room that had been broken into. In front of her was another room with a door and an open room. Near the door was a stone grinder. The door opened outward. Harnaam Kaur sat in the space between the stone grinder and the door.

The thieves entered the house from the front door. Using the torch for illumination they moved eagerly towards the room they had broken into. They were certain that Harnaam Kaur was still waiting for them in that room. Their walk seem to project their determination for revenge. No one could tell what they will do. They kept walking while Harnaam Kaur was prepared for her plan. She awaited their entry. As the men went past the door and entered the room, Harnaam Kaur moved swiftly to lock the doors and secure them with a solid lock. Four thieves were captive in the room now.

"Mother! Thieves." Saying she tried to wake her mother. Now the thieve's found themselves in a dangerous position. One of them was wounded who was unconscious outside while four were Harnaam Kaur's captives and Sundar was standing in the courtyard.

As the oil lamp was lighted, Sundar finally realized the true status of his position. But how could he run leaving his associates captive. Now he had also seen for himself that there was no one other than the girl and her mother.

Controlling the two wasn't a difficult task for him. For this he entered the room angrily. Harnaam Kaur was prepared for his challenge by now. He immediately attacked Harnaam Kaur with a heavy blow of his axe. Harnaam Kaur swiftly moved to hit his hand holding that axe with the chaff-cutter. Sundar's hand was wounded now. But he didn't care. He attacked Harnaam Kaur with full force for a second time. This time Harnaam

Kaur was hit on her forehead that started bleeding.

Just as a wounded animal retaliates, Harnaam Kaur viciously attacked Sundar, held his hands and started struggling with him. Sundar did not get another opportunity to attack her. In this struggle both lost their weapons.

A tender girl was facing a hardened criminal. What a match? Harnaam Kaur soon fell to the ground while Sundar was on top of her. Still Harnaam Kaur held onto Sundar's hands in such a way that neither could he attack her nor could he get up. Brave girl was fully aware as yet.

Witnessing this sight, mother came to her daughter's aid. She removed her Dupatta and put it around the Sundar's neck and started winding it to tighten her grip. Then she started pulling him away from her daughter. She squeezed his neck so hard that his eyes started to pop-out while his body became numb and his hands lost their grip. Observing this Harnaam Kaur too loosened her grip and stood up. Mother was still squeezing Sundar's neck when Harnaam Kaur moved quickly to remove Sundar's turban and use it to tie his hand and feet.

Having incapacitated Sundar, she asked her mother to go and seek help from the neighbors while she held the chaff-cutter over Sundar's head and guarded him. Mother went into the street, opened everyone's doors from the outside and awoke them. Soon 20 men had gathered. Harnaam Kaur's forehead was still bleeding. Her wound was pretty deep and her facial color had turned pale. Witnessing her in such a condition, the neighbors took charge of guarding the thieves and Harnaam Kaur was made to lie down in bed. She had managed to capture six gangsters. Four were captive inside, one was all tied up in the front room and the sixth was lying wounded outside. Neighbors quickly moved to take control of the gangsters.

Harnaam Kaur had lost so much blood that she was unconscious as she hit the bed. The neighbors tried to dress her wound and stop the bleeding.

Police arrived by sunrise. The police Captain, having heard of the brave Harnaam Kaur, came personally to witness the scene. The gangsters were sent to jail while Harnaam Kaur was moved to the Ludhiana civil hospital.

Soon Harnaam Kaur recovered within a few days. The Punjab Government awarded her Rs. 500 for her bravery. All national newspapers printed her photograph. Praising her deed they suggested that the whole female population need to learn a lesson from her. Although a number of years have elapsed since this event, Harnaam Kaur's deeds are still fresh as ever and serves an exemplary role for the female gender.

Bibi Prem Kaur

Intense battle ensued in the Thaeri Hills. Pathans held the high ground while a small force of brave Akali soldiers, under the command of and advancing against the enemy Singh Akali, was advancing uphill. Akalis were at the bottom of the hill while Pathans were on top. Every effort of Akalis seems to be unsuccessful against the enemy force. The enemy forces heavily outnumbered the Sikhs. Nevertheless, the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh did not lose faith. Working against all odds and facing the rain of enemy bullets, stones, and arrows, the brave Akalis persistently attempted to climb the hill.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was to participate in the battle along with the Sikhs, had not reach from Lahore so far. Meanwhile, the Pathans had distributed pamphlets, declaring Jihad (holy war against the Sikhs), and successfully turned the sentiments of the local population against the Sikhs. As a result, the locals sided with the Pathans in large numbers. On the other hand, the Sikhs bravely faced the enemy. Huge numbers among the enemy forces did not scare the small force of Sikhs. Whereas the Pathans understood this to be a battle for their life or death, it was not any less significant for the Sikhs. The fate of entire Sikh Raaj was in balance. Therefore the Sikhs, even in small numbers, were advancing against the enemy while clutching their lives in their palms. However, it seems that even fate had betrayed them today and would not side with them.

Brave Akali Phoola Singh is right in front leading and encouraging his Sikhs with jaekaras - 'Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal.' Such bold moves of their Jathedar are quite encouraging and constantly rejuvenating their spirits to face the enemy. Suddenly, the Sikhs advanced and the Pathans started running in all directions. It seems the Sikhs have captured the battlefield.

Unfortunately, it took only a flick of an eye lid to change the battle status. Pathans, hidden in the hill caves, were raining bullets and arrows on the advancing Sikhs. Suddenly, the enemy surrounded the Sikhs from all directions and they found themselves under seize. The enemy bullets and arrows were death messages destined for the Sikhs. All of a sudden, a bullet hit the Sikh Jathedar in his chest and the lion fell. Another bullet hit Cornell Karnail Singh Bania. He too fell wounded by the bullet.

The Sikhs, shocked by their leader's serious condition, started leaving the battlefield under frustration. The Pathans came out of the hill caves and chased the Sikhs down to the foothills.

About a mile from the battlefield, the Sikhs had organized a camp and a hospital for treating the wounded. A few young girls from Majha region

were busy nursing the wounded at the hospital. Next to the hospital was an ammunition and alcohol depot.

The sad news of battle reached the hospital — Pathans are chasing the running Sikhs, escaping the battlefield. The young girls looked at the hill. The enemy forces were fast advancing towards them. Such situations are not uncommon in battles. Some win and some loose. At some moment, one party has the upper hand, while at another moment the opposing party has the upper hand. Hence, all contingency plans must be in place before beginning the battle. As the potential of enemy advance toward the hospital became evident, the camp members gathered the wounded and started retreating to a safer location.

It seemed that the enemy had knowledge of the alcohol and ammunition depot. Their movements were self-evident of this. However, by now the depot security had run away, leaving it undefended. Such are the retreat of battles. Pathans were visibly proud of their potential victory. The large quantity of ammunition and alcohol in the now undefended depot was enough to ensure their victory. In comparison to the Sikhs, the enemy force had large numbers, but little ammunition. Now the depot could provide them with all the ammunition they need.

Pathans entered the Sikh camp with echoes of ‘Allah Hu Akbar,’ an Islamic religious slogan. They immediately focused towards the depot. The very sight of ammunition made them insane with happiness. Thousands of guns were there for their taking. The skies reverberated with the sounds of their happiness and war cries.

They quickly advanced to seize the ammunition but could not find the bullets. What use are guns without bullets? They frantically searched for and located the place of bullet's storage. There was so much ammunition that the Pathans now wanted to take control of the depot instead. Yet, they could not. The whole depot went up in flames right before their eyes. Suddenly there was a huge explosion that simultaneously shocks the earth and sky together. The enemy immediately lost their foothold as their bodies were flying in the sky like cardboard pieces. Not a single Pathan survived.

By now, the lion of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, crossed the Attock river and arrived with a heavy force. The Khalsa forces, under the command of Hari Singh Naluya, attack the Pathans. Their attack was so hard hitting that the Pathans no longer wanted to stay even a minute and ran for their lives leaving the battlefield to the Khalsa forces. The Khalsa forces were in complete control of the battlefield as the skies' echoes with the Jaekara "Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal."

Shere Punjab and Sardar Hari Singh Nalua accompanied by other sardars advanced to examine the blown-up depot. They had assumed and understood this blast to a divine help. Since had this ammunition fallen in the enemy hands, the victory for the Sikhs would certainly have been impossible. Dead bodies of Pathans littered the whole area.

Yes, Maharaja had his doubts though. He asked, "But this fire cannot be spontaneous?" Sardar Hari Singh Nalua nodded in agreement. With that the Maharaja started careful examination of the dead bodies. Suddenly, he saw the body of a fair, innocent, young girl hugging the ground. Her body was less than 50 feet from the depot. He walked briskly towards the body and carefully scrutinized it. She was the lead nurse, Prem Kaur, who was still clutching a torch in her hand. This suddenly clarified the whole situation. This brave Bibi had given up her life to save the Sikh forces from a humiliating defeat. No wonder, the blast had separated her body from the dead Pathans, as if to protect her innocence and honor her sacrifice.

This scene deeply moved Maharaja Ranjit Singh flooding his eyes with tears. Addressing her as his daughter, Maharaja picked her head and placed it in his lap. He used his handkerchief to carefully wash her face.

As the Sikhs soldiers witnessed these scenes, they were in tears as well. They immediately initiated preparations for her funeral. The Sikh army band played on and the canyon fired in continuous salute as Shere Punjab and other Sardars picked her body and carried her for a royal funeral. Every Sikh soldier was talking of Prem Kaur, her exemplary sacrifice and expressing their personal thanks. For she had single-handedly, had overturned a sure defeat of Sikh forces into their victory.

## Bibi Ranjeet Kaur - Khalsa Spy

Daughters of the Khalsa

from "Adarshak Singhania" by Karam Singh

translated by Baldev Singh, adapted and dramatised by Harjit Singh

The wild animals were howling in the nearby jungle, the wind was biting Ranjeet Kaur's face, she wrapped her midnight-blue shawl around a little tighter. Nothing to be afraid of, she quietly carried on repeating 'Vaahi-guroo, Vaahi-guroo' in time to her steps and Guru Gobind Singh jee's glove of spiritual love completely protected her. She looked through the trees at the magnificent setting sun, for a moment she forgot all about the war and was lost in the magic and mystery of the Creative Being - Karta Purakh. She felt as beautiful as a blossoming flower radiating love and life in all directions.

- "Vaahi-Guroo Jee Ka Khalsa, Vaahi-Guroo Jee Kee Fateh! Ranjeet Kaur Bhain Jee (sister)",

Ranjit Kaur quickly turned around and saw a young Khalsa warrior dressed in blue-battle dress, wearing a long curved sword down his left side, chain-mail armour across his chest and a three metal discus's around his blue pointed turban.

- "Vaahi-Guroo Jee Ka Khalsa, Vaahi-Guroo Jee Kee Fateh! GurMukh Singh Jee. Why are you out so late?",

- "Well I was about to ask you the same thing Bhain jee (sister), you know how dangerous it is for a woman to be out here alone while there are Turkish Soldiers patrolling the area. So Bhain Jee you better have a damn good excuse, otherwise you're going back with me."

- "Veer jee (brother), our Jathedar (leader) has asked me to fetch some important news from the SarPanch (village chief) and anyway you're only 11 so you better run back to the Khalsa camp."

- "Bhain jee, I can't believe he sent you alone. You know the War for our Independence is at its peak and there's trouble around every corner. Look, I've got an idea - it's safer for you to go back to the lake and rejoin the Khalsa Army and I will go in your place." - "Why do you think it's any safer for you to go, GurMukh Singh?" - "Bhain jee, it will be dark soon and I don't think it's right for a woman to go anywhere alone. I am a Khalsa Warrior, I carry 5 weapons and I am prepared to die fighting. I want people to tell stories about me and how brave Bhai GurMukh Singh was."

Just then a bat came flying out of the dark trees directly towards Bhai GurMukh Singh, he didn't know what was attacking him and screaming loudly he covered his face with his hands!

Ranjit Kaur burst out laughing and said "Veer jee, I too have been blessed with Guru's immortal "khande-batte-da-amrit" (amrit = nectar of immortality) . I too carry a long sword over my blue battle-dress and wear a warrior's turban. Guru Gobind Singh Jee is always with me. But you my younger brother have much to learn about ego and you are probably at more risk than me! Besides, the SarPanch (village headman) will not give anyone except me the strategic papers. Furthermore, the Jathedar stressed that I go. So my dear little brother, you better ran all the way home otherwise I'm going to grab you by the ear, drag you home and after the Khalsa has finished their evening prayers, I'm going to tell them the story of the great Bhai GurMukh Singh and the black bat!"

"Okay, you win , but be careful." Saying this Gurmukh Singh ran down the path towards the lake while Ranjit Kaur went on with her journey towards the village.

Gurmukh Singh's fears were not unfounded. Small bands of Turkish soldiers were wandering around the lake seeking information on Sikhs. Every Sikh was aware of this. However, it did not deter Ranjit Kaur. She fearlessly went on her way to the village. She had absolute faith in the strength of her Guru's amrit and blessed sword.

Ranjit Kaur reached the SarPanch's house. The women came out and hugged her, they hadn't seen her for some time. It was getting late and the women insisted that she spent the night with them. Remembering what GurMukh Singh had said she agreed, it would be safer to travel during the day and Jathedar had given her permission to spend the night. The SarPanch took her to a private room and handed over the Strategic Papers, what she read spelled disaster for the Khalsa. She got up at once and covering herself with her shawl she headed back to the Kahnuwaan lake, the women tried to make her stay saying save your self. But Ranjit Kaur's life was not worth anything without her Khalsa family.

A large number of Ahmed Shah Abdalee's troops were on their way from Lahore to seize Kahnuwaan and these strategic papers contained orders to SarPanch to help the troops. Thousands of Khalsa lives were at stake and getting the information back to her Jathedar was foremost on her mind.

By now it was midnight. The skies were clear and the moonlight lit up the earth. In this calm and still atmosphere, Ranjit Kaur reached the

outskirts of the quiet village and walked as fast as possible towards the lake. She had about 3 miles to cover, she increased her pace and marched with determination through the sounds of howling animals. She quietly carried on repeating 'Vaahi-guroo, Vaahi-guroo' in time to her footsteps as she always did and felt Guru Gobind Singh jee's spiritual glove encase her.

Two Turkish soldiers with swords in their waist-bands, rode past her left side. She fearlessly looked at the soldiers and underneath her shawl she grabbed the handle of her sword, just in case. The heavenly moonlight glowed from Ranjit Kaur's angelic face and intensified her beauty. The soldiers suddenly pulled their horses across her path and quickly dismounting they tried to grab her hands. She darted away with lightening speed and threateningly said "They'll be trouble if you touch me!", she continued aggressively, 'Who are you and what do you want?'

- "We are commanders of the royal forces" said the first soldier.

- "Then what business do you have with me?" said Ranjit Kaur.

Without answering, the second soldier loudly demanded "Who are you? And where are you wandering to at this time of night?"

- "Who ever I may be, you have no right to question me." Saying this Ranjit Kaur tried to walk past them at a fast pace.

The first soldier quickly moved to block her way once again and said, "we have orders to find out where the Sikhs are hiding. You look like a Sikh so until you explain what you are doing we aren't going to let you go anywhere."

- "That's right, I am a Sikh, what are you going to do about it?"

"Then consider yourself under arrest," said the first soldier, then he looked at the other one and said, "Khan Sahib, I think you better grab her and put her on your horse, because I don't know what I'll do if I get too close to her."

Both looked at Ranjit Kaur's face and then looked at each other and started laughing. Such overtures angered Ranjit Kaur. She started looking at them like a hunter at its' prey. Her eyes were red with anger.

There was a brief silence before Khan Sahib calmly said, "Beautiful lady, we have been sent to find the whereabouts of Sikhs. However, we are not animals. We are human. We too have pumping hearts in our chest. What kind of heart would it be that does not worship a beautiful angel like you."



Both men were intoxicated with Ranjit Kaur's beauty. A mere glimpse of her face had injected lustful insanity into them. Ranjit Kaur stared at their faces but remained silent. Upon completion of his sentence, the other soldier continued, "Beloved, what are you going to get from the wild Sikhs. Come with us. In Allah's oath we shall make you our Begum (wife). You can wear silk and eat whatever you like. You can even choose which one of us you want to marry!"

Ranjit Kaur still continued to silently stare at the soldiers. She had made her decision to continue or to die fighting. But her silence and non-responsiveness was misinterpreted by the men. Khan Sahib tried to grab her wrist, saying, "Come, sit on my horse. It is getting late my love."

Ranjit Kaur moved swiftly, taking two steps backward she drew her sword from under her shawl and reflecting the moonlight it flashed like lightning. She shouted "If you come any closer I won't be responsible for what happens!"

The soldiers burst out laughing. Khan Sahib said, "Angel drawing a sword! That's a first!"

The other soldier spoke "Isn't she beautiful when she's angry?"

This was the first time Khan Sahib had seen a woman protect her honour like a lioness, but she was still only a weak woman so he tried to grab her with his outstretched arms. A flashing sword dazzled him and he screamed in agony as his left hand dropped to the ground.

Having been bitten by the lioness the soldiers drew their swords and charged towards her. Ranjit Kaur wasn't sitting idle wearing bangles, she lunged forward at Khan Sahib again and cut off his sword hand. He retreated squirming in pain.

The other soldier was a skilled swordsman. His continuous attacks inflicted several wounds to Ranjit Kaur. Blood covered her whole face. Exhaustion was setting in by now. Suddenly, the strength of Guru's amrit injected so much courage into her, that she forgot all about her wounds and pains. Yelling the battle cry Jaekara, "JO BOLAY SO NIHAL, SAT SREE AKAL," her sword moved with such force that the soldier's head dropped to the ground and bounced like a ball. His body fell in a heap next to it.

Ranjit Kaur quickly looked around for Khan Sahib, but he had escaped without trace. Totally exhausted she still managed to search the heaped body and found several papers in the dead soldier's pockets. Seizing them, she mounted his horse and rode to the Kahnuwaan lake. As she

approached the camp she mustered up every last ounce of energy and yelled 'JATHEDAR JEE! JATHEDAR JEE!'. The Jathedar, several Khalsa Warriors and little GurMukh Singh came running out to meet her, seeing her blood red face and exhausted condition they carried her inside while little GurMukh Singh started crying. Her sisters wiped her face and cleaned her wounds while she searched around her clothing and handed the papers over to the Jathedar. He was amazed to find full details of the Turk's battle-plans. Ranjit Kaur was honoured greatly by the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh Jee's infinite and unparalleled grace had given her the courage to fight her attackers and save her Khalsa family from a bloody massacre.

News of Ranjit Kaur's courage spread through out the Khalsa Panth. She is known as the "Brave Daughter of the Guru".

Bibi Ranjit Kaur

Daughters of the Khalsa

translated by Baldev Singh from "Adarshak Singhnia" by Karam Singh

The war of Sikh independence was at its peak. It was the dusk time of a winter day when the sun was quietly setting hidden behind the trees. At this instance, we notice a young woman coming out of the Kahnuwaan lake and walking along the narrow footpath towards the neighboring village. She had very fair untouched complexion, bright eyes, sharp features and lengthy stature. Amazingly beautiful she was -- as if VaahGuru had expended all his skills in creating her. The rays of setting sun brightened her face like a blossoming flower.

She had traveled only a short distance when she met a Sikh from the village. Both folded their hands and greeted each other with "VaahGuru Jee Kaa Khalsa, VaahGuru Jee Kee Fateh." The Sikh asked, "Bhain (sister) Ranjit Kaur, where are you headed at this time?" She responded, "Veer (brother) Gurmukh Singh! Jathedar has asked me to fetch some important news from the village chief."

"Bhain, is it imperative for you to proceed at this time? If you like, I can proceed in your place while you return to the lake." Gurmukh Singh said.

"But why?" questioned Ranjit Kaur.

"Bhain, it will be dark soon and I have heard of Turk soldiers wandering in this region. As such, I do not think it is appropriate for you to proceed." Gurmukh Singh said.

Ranjit Kaur burst out laughing and said. "Veer, I too have partaken Guru's amrit. Besides, the village chief may not share the necessary information with you. Furthermore, the Jathedar had stressed that I go."

"Okay, as you wish, but be cautious." Saying this Gurmukh Singh continued towards the lake while Ranjit Kaur went on with her journey towards the village.

Gurmukh Singh's fears were not unfounded. Rightly so, Turk soldiers, divided in small bands, were wandering around the lake seeking information on Sikh whereabouts. Every Sikh was aware of this. However, it did not deter Ranjit Kaur. She fearlessly went on her way to the village. She had absolute faith in the strength of her Guru's amrit and blessed sword.

Ranjit Kaur reached the village, completed her tasks, and immediately turned around to return. She carried some urgent news for the Jathedar.

Initially, she thought of spending the night in the village. The village chief was a Sikh-sympathizer and Ranjit Kaur had developed friendship with women in chief's house. As such she had previously stayed with them on several occasions. She had Jathedar's permission to spend the night in the village. However, the news required immediate action. A large cantonment Ahmed Shah Abdali's force was on its way from Lahore to seize Kahnuwaan. Orders to help the cantonment had reached the village chief. Given the significance of this information to Sikhs, how could Ranjit Kaur waste any valuable time, like spending the night? Irrespective of the nightfall, she decided to return immediately. Neither the village chief nor any of the women in chief's house could dissuade her from her decision. Thousands of Sikh lives were at stake. Thus getting the information back to her Jathedar was of utmost importance.

She immediately proceeded on her way. The first segment of night had already elapsed. The skies were clear while moonlight brightened the earth. In this calm and still atmosphere, Ranjit Kaur left the village and proceeded towards the lake while reciting Kirtan Sohila. The distance to be covered was approximately 3 miles. She kept picking up her pace as she wanted to urgently convey the information.

She completed half of her journey without any incident. Animals hauled in the nearby jungle. Holding on to the strategic information, she kept picking her pace. Suddenly she shook up from the sound of horse steps. Two Turk soldiers, riding horses with swords in their waist-bands, were moving towards her left. She looked at the soldiers, placed her hand on her sword's handle, but did not stop. Silently she continued on her path.

The soldiers moved ahead and blocked her path. The moonlight glowed Ranjit Kaur's face and insinuating her beauty. She seemed like a fairy of some sort. Seeing her beauty, the soldiers lost all control of themselves. They quickly dismounted from their horses and moved towards Ranjit Kaur to grab her hand. However, she moved away from them with lightening speed and challengingly said -- "Beware, if you touch me! Speak with your tongue. Who are you and what do you want?"

"We are commanders of the royal forces." One of them responded.

"Then what business do you have with me?" Ranjit Kaur questioned.

"Who are you? And where are you wandering at this time?" One of the soldiers said in a commanding voice.

"Who ever I may be, you have no right to question me." Saying this Ranjit Kaur resumed her journey at a fast pace.

Both soldiers quickly moved to block her way once again and said, "we have been deputed to learn the whereabouts of Sikhs in this region. We are suspicious that you are either a Sikh or their agent. Until you explain your movements at this time of the night, we can not allow you to go anywhere."

"I am a Sikh, tell me what you have to say?" Ranjit Kaur jasserted.

"Then you cannot go. Consider yourself under arrest."

One soldier announced his decision. The other soldier interrupted the conversation saying, "Khan Sahib, consider her your captive. I am losing my control, just watching her."

Both looked at Ranjit Kaur's face and then looked at each other and started laughing. Such overtures angered Ranjit Kaur. She started looking at them like a hunter looks at her prey. Her eyes were red with anger.

There was a brief silence before the first soldier politely addressed Ranjit Kaur saying, "Beauty! We have been deputed to find the whereabouts of Sikhs. However, we are not animals. We are human. We too have pumping hearts in our chest. What kind of heart would it be that does not worship a beauty like you."

Ranjit Kaur stared at their faces but remained silent. Upon completion of first soldier's sentence, the second soldier continued, "Beloved, what are you going to get from the wild Sikhs. Come with us. In Allah's oath we shall make you our Begum (wife). You can wear silk and eat whatever you like. You may choose anyone among us to include in your marriage vows."

Clearly the soldiers were either drunk or insane from Ranjit Kaur's beauty. For simple sight of beauty can inject such insanity among erotic people.

Ranjit Kaur still continued to silently stare at the soldiers. She had made her decision. On the other hand, the anxious soldiers misinterpreted Ranjit Kaur's silence and non-responsiveness to their overtures. One soldier advanced and attempted to grab her wrist, saying, "Come, sit on my horse. It is getting late my love."

All it took was the soldier's advanced. Ranjit Kaur moved swiftly, took two steps backward, and drew her sword that was now lightening under the

moonlight. She challenged, the soldiers, saying, "Advance cautiously, for I shall not spare your well-being."

The soldiers burst out laughed. One of them said, "Angel drawing a sword! It must be a first."

The second soldier spoke "Enticing moves! Watch, how such tenderness and delicacy combined with such alluring behavior further insinuates her beauty."

Perhaps, this was the very first time the soldiers had seen a woman protect her honor like a lioness. They mistakenly interpreted it as enticing behavior.

After a short observation, one of the soldiers advanced again towards her. But before, he could reach her wrist, Ranjit Kaur's sword moved with lightening speed, chopped off, and dropped the advanced hand.

Such daring bites of the lionesses angered both soldiers. They drew their swords and moved towards Ranjit Kaur. Well Ranjit Kaur was not sitting idle wearing bangles. She gave a fitting response. With the very initial move, Ranjit Kaur attacked the first soldier and disabled him by cutting off his other hand. As a result, his sword fell to the ground and he retreated squirming in pain.

Now the second soldier was the sole challenger left for Ranjit Kaur. He was a skilled swordsman. His continuous attacks did cause several wounds to Ranjit Kaur. Blood covered her whole face. Exhaustion was setting in by now. Suddenly, the strength of Guru's amrit injected such courage in Ranjit Kaur that she forgot all about her wounds and pains. Yelling the Jaekara, "Jo Bolay So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal," her sword moved with such force that the soldier's head bounced like a ball and dropped to the ground. His body fell fluttering to the ground.

Ranjit Kaur was now free to face the other soldier. Where was he? He had escaped while Ranjit Kaur fought with the second soldier.

Now the battleground was clear. Ranjit Kaur took control of the other horse and rode towards the lake. Suddenly, she stopped after covering a short distance and returned to the battleground. She dismounted next to the dead soldier and searching his cloths. She found several papers from his pockets. Seizing these papers, she remounted her horse and rode towards the lake. Reaching the Kahnuwaan lake, she transferred the papers and conveyed all information to the Jathedar. To everyone's utter surprise, the seized papers contained the Turk's battle-plans. They came

into Sikh's possession because of Ranjit Kaur's courage and allowed the Sikhs to avert some grave destruction.

News of Ranjit Kaur's courage spread through out the Khalsa Panth. She became known as the "Brave Daughter of Guru" among all Sikh groups. Even today, Khalsa Panth is extremely proud of her work.

## Bibi Sahib Kaur

After the death of the Maharaja Alla Singh, the founder of Patiala rule, his grandson Maharaja Amar Singh became the ruler of Patiala. He too, like his grandfather, turned out to be intelligent and brave. He clobbered his opponents and extended his rule stretching up to the river Jamuna. His subjects trusted him and were willing to give their lives for his cause. And likewise the Maharaja was extremely considerate of his subjects. Because of this trust and closeness among the ruler and his subjects, this rule made increasing progress. It seemed certain that Maharaja Amar Singh's tactics and braveness would further extend the boundaries of his rule.

Unfortunately, we humans plan something while our Creator has something in store for us. At the moment when Patiala rule was at its peak, the young newly wed Maharaja passed away suddenly. All happiness was replaced by sadness, expectation by hopelessness, positiveness by negative attitudes. The future of Patiala seems to hang among major difficulties and facing numerous dangers.

Maharaja Amar Singh's death came unexpected in his youth. He left behind two princes and a princess. This princess is the heroine of our story, Rani Sahib Kaur. She was the eldest among her brothers. At the time of Maharaja's death, she was 15 years old. Younger than her was Maharaja Sahib Singh of 7 years and the youngest, Kanwar Budh Singh. The rule was passed on to Maharaja Sahib Singh. However, he was the ruler in name only. The real control was in the hands of Diwan Nanu Mal who was the most trusted advisor during Maharaja Amar Singh's period. Unfortunately, after the master's death, his trust quickly evaporated and was replaced by selfishness. He aligned with the Marhatas and initiated efforts for Patiala rule's destruction from its roots. Diwan's attitude also influenced the other servants of the empire. They too initiated pursuits for their selfish gains. As a result, corruption, looting, and injustice reigned in the empire. Justice and peace simply fled away like a bird. The empire was in immediate danger now. On one hand the inner situation was fast deteriorating while on the other hand, the external enemies were eager for its destruction. Child Maharaja Sahib Singh was terrified of the emerging situation.

By now Bibi Sahib Kaur had been married and was happily living with her in-law. No woman is willing to leave her home, yet Sahib Kaur took immediate action upon learning of the situation in her brother's empire. Her love for the younger brother drove her to set aside her own happily married life and immediately proceed to protect the Patiala rule.

A working machinery isn't difficult to operate. However, only a knowledgeable mechanic can operate a machine whose essential parts have



seriously deteriorated. That was the situation of Patiala. However, the daughter of Khalsa was undeterred. She cleverly fixed the broken machinery and attempted to operate it.

Slowly the situation started improving. The situation though improved significantly, hadn't completely recovered when a mob of Marhata soldiers advanced to conquer Patiala. The famous Lakshmi Rao was the commander of the Marhata forces. He was commanding a force of 100,000 men. The news of the impending attack also reached Rani Sahib Kaur. The rulers of Jind and Kaethal had already accepted the conditions of Marhata and paid a large sum for their safety. This made the situation even more grave for Patiala.

Marhata were fast advancing towards Patiala. Their success with Jind and Kaethal had given a huge boost to their confidence. On the other hand, Patiala's inner situation wasn't completely recovered. In everyone's estimations, Patiala forces were incapable of defending themselves against the Marhata. Bahadur Sahib Kaur was well aware of this assessment. But she neither twitched nor lost her confidence. In such a situation, even the bravest men could lose their courage. Yet this brave daughter of the Khalsa remained undeterred. Her composure was unchanged, as if she didn't know the concepts of failure. She wasn't discouraged. She had partaken Guru's amrit which can give life even to the dead. It can instill a courageous spirit in birds to defeat hawks. Then why should she be afraid? Fear couldn't even approach her. She ordered the sounding of the battle drums, Nagara, while preparing to face the invading forces. During the darkness of the night, she summoned and gathered Bhai Bangha Singh Thanaesar, Jodh Singh Kalsia, Deep Singh and Bir Singh Bhadodhia, Tara Singh Ghaeba and other Chiefs of the neighboring states and made all necessary preparations. Even before sunrise, the skies echoed with sounds of Khalsa's Jaikara "Jo Bohlae So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal" while the Sikhs advanced to welcome the invading forces with the tips of their swords. Before reaching Kuch, she addressed a small group of select associates. She said in a sweet yet firm voice

"Brothers, the enemy thinking of you as few and weak, is advancing to snatch your freedom. Our freedom is a blessed reward of our Guru Sahibans. Our Tenth Pathshah addressed this rule as 'your home is same as my home.' This is Guru's rule and that of his GurSikhs. This is your freedom as well as your honor. Could you tolerate Marhata feet reaching here to crush your freedom and honor? ..."

Every soldier collectively responded "Never, Never!"

Continuing with her speech, she said, "My brothers, this is what I expected from you. You are Sikhs of the Guru and I am confident that you will

not allow the enemy to advance any further. The remaining issue is that of numbers. But remember, our Tenth Guru engaged 150,000 against each Sikh. You are Sikhs of the same Guru. Thus don't worry about the huge numbers of the enemy force. We are within our rights and following the truth. We are raising our swords in defense of our freedom. Guru is with us. Recognize your duty and responsibilities. The victory is yours. Take oath with me that we shall die but not allow the enemy to advance even a foot."

The whole force collective took their oath. Subsequently, Bibi Sahib Kaur did her ardas following which the skies echoed with the sounds of Jaikaras, "Jo Bohlae So nihal, Sat Sri Akal," and the battle drums. Now the brave soldiers of Patiala advanced in defence of their honor.

While these few brave soldiers of Patiala left their capital, Ghanta Rao and Lakshami Rao left Ambala with their forces towards Patiala. Both sides clashed in the open fields of Mardaan Pur. Upon facing each other, it became evident that not only the Marhata force was large in numbers they had heavy artillery and cannons. In comparison Sikhs were few in numbers and did not possess any cannons. There was no match among both sides. It was clearly evident that Sikhs would simply disappear facing the Marhatas as salt when mixed with flour.

The Marhata Sardars sent their envoy to convey a message, "why are you bent upon getting your men killed for nothing, give up and surrender."

Bibi Sahib Kaur's face reddened with anger upon hearing this message. "Surrender," she repeated. Then addressing the Marhata envoy, she said, "Surrender! Guru's Sikhs know no surrender. Go tell your sardars that if they have any desire to live, they should return immediately. If not, Khalsa's sword awaits them. They may approach with their coffins."

Confident of their strength, the Marhata Sardars got aggravated hearing this response. Winning over a few Patiala soldiers was no challenge for them. They signaled the Marhata cannons to initiate shelling.

Competition between Swords and Cannons? This was a unique event in the history of battles. However, such competition was clearly visible in the fields of Mardaan Pur. On one side the cannons of Marhatas were blindly firing shells. While on other side, Guru's brave soldiers were advancing with their swords. Bibi Sahib Kaur, dressed in male attire and riding on horse back, was directing her soldiers with an unsheathed sword.

The Sikh soldiers fearlessly advanced into the enemy's fortified positions. Now the soldiers were directly facing each other and the cannons

became useless. The battle of swords ensued. Sikhs were renowned for their skills in using swords. For once the Marhatas got scared.

Witnessing the weakness of their soldiers, Lakshami Rao advanced with fresh horsemen and attacked the Sikhs. At this moment, the Sikhs too were in need of some fresh reinforcements. But where could they get it? All their resources were tied in the battle with none to spare.

Intense battle pursued all day. Sometimes the Sikhs had the upper hand while other times the Marhatas seemed to have the upper hand. The battle field was filled with dead bodies with flowing rivers of blood. The Sun God couldn't witness this bloody battle and hide behind a hill.

At this moment, the Sikh's position was grave. They were surrounded in the enemy's siege with no visible way to escape. Even at this moment, Sahib Kaur courage came handy. Seeing a weak segment in the enemy's siege, she shouted the Jaikara, "Jo Bohlae So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal," and forcefully attacked this segment. Her courage and the Jaikara instilled new courage among the Sikh soldiers. Using their swords, the Sikh soldiers successfully broke through the enemy's siege. Ghanta Rao and Lakshami Rao were astonished as their well planned scheme simply evaporated in front of their eyes.

By now it was nightfall, the soldiers couldn't see each other and thus both forces returned to their camps for rest. Celebration in Marhata camps and mourning in Sikh camps was evident. The reason being that the Sikhs took heavy casualties in today's battle. The Sikh Sardars and soldiers were discouraged. Despair and disappointment was prevalent among them. However, Bibi Sahib Kaur was neither disappointed nor in any despair. She appeared to be peaceful yet serious, as if engrossed in some deep thoughts.

Select few Sikh Sardars gathered in Bibi Sahib Kaur's tent to assess the day's battle. It was assessed that more than half of the Sikh force had been wiped out.

Sardar Jodh Singh said, "Bibi Ji! Tell us what to do now?"

"You tell me what to do brother?" Bibi ji answered in slow and soft voice, as if trying to probe the inner thoughts of the Sardars. After all the Sardars had collectively come to her with some apparent consensus. Jodh Singh did not respond. But Dalip Singh Bhadodhiaie said, "Bibi Ji! The status of the battle is clear. There is no hope for any type of victory. The time to give our lives is upon us. Although, Guru's Sikhs aren't afraid of this but ..."

He couldn't complete his sentence when he was interrupted by Bibi Ji's question, "But what?"

Silence prevailed. For a long time no one responded. Seeing no answer, she repeated her question “Brothers! Tell me what we should do now?”

“Bibi Ji! What can we do. We will fight bravely. We shall fight in the face of sure death. We shall happily accept our death. It is true that we have no hope of victory. But a Sikh’s duty is to fight. We shall fight, for we can not witness any encroachment of Patiala’s freedom or honor while living. However, we have a serious request of you, that you should return to Patiala. The battle field isn’t in our control and we can not sustain your capture by the enemy forces,” Bhai Bangha Singh Thanaesar hesitatingly uttered this response.

Hearing this Bibi’s face got reddened with anger as if her honor had been challenged. However, this quickly disappeared and was replaced with peace and seriousness. She said, “Your courage is commendable that you can not witness any encroachment of Patiala’s freedom or honor. Prior to such encroachment you would like to give up your lives. But how could you assume that Maharaja Amar Singh’s daughter could tolerate and witness the encroachment of Patiala’s freedom and honor. How could you assume that her personal life is more important to her than these things. Brothers! No one can live for ever in this world. One day we all have to die for sure. And if this live is expended preserving freedom and honor what better honor can there be than this. Sahib Kaur is prepared for this. Granted, I am a women and for sure weak. But brothers! I too have partaken the amrit of same Guru that you have partaken. Then why would I hesitate facing death? Don’t even think about it. If I leave here I shall leave in victory or I shall not leave at all.” Saying this, tears dropped her cheeks. Apparently, the mere suggestion for her return to Patiala, inflicted some deep pain in her.

Sahib Kaur’s words created silence in the meeting while everyone got deeply engrossed in thoughts. After a while Sahib Kaur continued “You say we have no hope of victory. I cannot accept this. We are fighting the battle of truth and righteousness. VaahGuru is with us. I am confident of our victory. Don’t get discouraged.”

Saying this, she stood up and started pacing around the tent as if she was about to take a major decision. Soon her face lightened up with happiness as if she got convinced of her victory. Addressing her Sardars she said, “Guru Sahib has shown me the way to our victory. What we need now is your courage.”

Everyone’s attention was now focused on Bibi’s face. They replied in unison, “we are prepared to follow your orders.”

Bibi said, “Look! Strength itself isn’t enough for For winning a battle. In fact the understanding and deployment of strategy is more beneficial. We too can defeat the Marhata forces with strategy.”

“Tell us what to do” everyone responded collectively.

“At this moment the enemy forces are celebrating their victory. As such they are careless in their egoistic happiness. If we were to suddenly attack them now, our victory is assured and the freedom and honor of Patiala can be preserved.”

All Sardars were astonished. They didn’t know that Sahib Kaur was equally sharp in battle strategy. This decision was taken around 10:30pm. Until midnight all battle preparations were carried out quietly. This decision invigorated new courage among the Sikh forces. Soldiers started coming out of their tents after preparing themselves for the battle. Bibi Sahib Kaur now dressed in male attire, riding horseback with unsheathed sword, face her soldiers and gave a short speech, “Brothers! Time has come for either victory or death in this battle for preserving the freedom and honor of Patiala. Advance keeping faith in Guru. Victory shall be yours. Your swords shall be the death message for the egoistic Marhatas. Prove the strength of our Tenth Guru’s Amrit.”

Subsequently, the sky echoed with the sounds of Jaikaras, “Jo Bohlae So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal.” The Sikh forces advanced and gave a surprise attack to the enemy forces. Even before the enemy became aware of what happened their soldiers were killed by the Sikh swords. In minutes the field was filled with dead bodies. The suddenness of the attack as well as the darkness made it difficult to distinguish among their own and Sikh soldiers. As a result, many enemy soldiers died fighting among themselves. Bibi Sahib Kaur was moving around encouraging her soldiers with Jaikaras. Her sword too killed many enemy soldiers.

This surprise attack by the Sikhs completely changes the status of the battle. Their defeat turned into a victory while Marhata’s victory changed into a defeat. When Ghanta Rao and Lakshami Rao saw the shining sword of Bibi Sahib Kaur upon them, they found escape as the best way out. They quickly collected their remaining companions and ran towards Hisar. Now the battle field was in total control of the Khalsa.

The true status of the battle became evident with sunrise. Uncountable enemy soldiers lay dead. Apart from the dead bodies, the enemy cannons, ammunition, ration, and treasury were left behind.

Bibi Sahib Kaur awarded all this wealth and distributed it among the Sikh soldiers. She capture the cannons and the ammunition and took them

to Patiala. Upon reaching Patiala, she was welcomed with huge celebration. celebrations unparalleled in Patiala history. Why not? After all her courage and battle strategy had not only saved the freedom and honor of Patiala but instilled such terror among the Marhathas that they never thought of advancing towards Punjab again.

Bibi Sahib Kaur's name is engraved in the fine pages of Sikh history. What are the daughter's of Khalsa capable of can be assessed from the above accounts. Who can say that GurSikh women are weak compared to their male counterparts. Sahib Kaur's sword became an object of terror for the Marhathas.

Daughters of the Khalsa

Singh

translated by Baldev Singh from "Adarshak Singhnia" by Karam

GurSikh Women Martyrs  
of the Anandpur Battle

Enclosing Anandpur in a Fort, Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj initiated the battle for freedom and sovereignty. The biting sound of his “Ranjit Nagara,” a large kettle drum, shook up and instilled fear among the neighboring Hill Rajas. They had started considering Kalgidhar Patshah as their arch enemy and deployed several strategies to get him to leave Anandpur. The Rajas of the 22 mountain ridges (BaiDhar) consolidated themselves against Guru Maharaj, blew the trumpets of war and initiated regular attacks against Anandpur Sahib. However, the courageous GurSikhs warriors, under the command of our Tenth Guru, displayed such martial skills in the battlefield that the enemy was forced to retreat with sustained heavy losses and severe damages in every attack. Irritated by the almost daily defeats with heavy losses, the Hill Rajas approached Delhi and sought Aurangzeb’s help. The rationale provided by the Hill Rajas against Guru Maharaj was that “if the rising tide of Sikh movement isn’t suppressed at this stage, it will destroy the Mughal empire.” Aurangzeb’s contempt for Sikhs was well known. He was independently searching for an opportune moment to destroy the Sikhs. And now the pleas of Hill Rajas provided him an excellent opportunity. Thus Aurangzeb eagerly issued orders for the Royal forces to attack Anandpur.

At this moment, Guru Gobind Singh Ji was accompanied by ten thousand brave GurSikh men and some 100 GurSikh women inside the Anandpur Fort. The royal forces arrived suddenly and seized Anandpur. The invading forces not only comprised of the Royal forces from Delhi, but were joined by the forces of Wajir Khan, Suba Sirhind, and Jabardast Khan, Lahore, along the way. Upon their arrival in Anandpur, even the hill rats had come out of their hiding places to help the invading forces. Altogether, the little fort of Anandpur Sahib was facing a force of 10 lakh (a million) strong. The enemy immediately seized the surrounding area and were now ruthlessly advancing in attempts to capture the fort.

On the other side, GurSikhs warriors prepared themselves at the sound of “Ranjit Nagara” and came out to defend and arrest the invading forces from reaching the fort. A fierce battle ensued and the GurSikhs fought courageously to check the enemy advanced. Many gave their lives in the fort’s defense and thereby enrolled among the ranks of martyrs in defence of righteousness. While our GurSikh brothers were fighting the fierce battle, GurSikh sisters were engrossed in nursing the wounded, managing the supply lines, and organizing the Langar.

At the time of the attack the invading forces were extremely confident of their strength. They were certain that the thousand odd GurSikhs wouldn't last beyond a day, especially in face of 10 lakh (a million) strong forces with canyons and heavy armors. However, the enemy sensed the error of their judgement, during the first day of the battle. And quickly realized that capturing Anandpur fort wouldn't be as easy as they had thought. Having suffered heavy casualties, the invading forces retreated and imposed curfew on the surrounding area. Their seizure of the area was so tight that nothing could move in or out of Anandpur. All supply lines to the fort were cut off. Now they adopted a strategy to simply wait for the GurSikhs to deplete their supplies and come out. This situation went on for nine months without any movement on either side.

By now, the situation was grim on both sides. Ration and water had virtually depleted inside the Anandpur fort. Nothing could be brought in from outside as all supply line had been severed. On the opposing side, the invading forces had become targets of various diseases because of the ensuing floods. Their soldiers were dying in large numbers, causing major havoc and desertions among the ranks. The enemy had lost all hope of ever capturing the Anandpur fort. Yet, their own strategy and the situation demanded them to stay engaged. While they wanted to abandon the seizure of Anandpur, their pride wouldn't allow them to do so. Comparatively, the situation among invading forces was deteriorating more rapidly than among GurSikhs.

Finally, all military tactics of the invading forces proved ineffective against the defence of GurSikhs inside Anandpur fort. The invading forces had been totally humiliated and defeated. Now diplomatic strategies were explored to turn their defeat into a victory. Under this strategy, the Hill Rajas and Mughal forces, took sacred oath of Cow and Koran respectively, and asked Guru Sahib to leave Anandpur. They wanted Guru Maharaj to leave the Anandpur fort just once and then return anytime at will. The rationale being that this would allow the invading forces to save face. However, Tenth Patshah was well aware of their hidden agenda and thus declined the offer. Subsequently, the request was resubmitted accompanied by an official letter of assurances signed by Aurangzeb himself. By now the situation inside the fort had further deteriorated. GurSikhs of Majha had already given their "Baedhawa," petition of disassociation with Guru Maharaj, and left the fort. The remaining GurSikhs were increasingly exhausted and wearied because of hunger. At this critical moment, under advice of Matta Gujari and some prominent GurSikhs, decision to leave the Anandpur fort was announced. Guru Maharaj, along with 500 GurSikhs and family members left the Anandpur fort during the bitter December-January winter of sunmat 1761. Since the seizure of Anandpur fort was to be shortly lifted, as per the agreement, a



hundred GurSikhs women and about 10 GurSikh men stayed behind.

As soon Kalgidhar Patshah left the fort, the combined forces of mughal and Hill Rajas quickly abandoned their sacred oaths. And contrary to the agreement, they pursued Guru Sahib's party. Finally, they caught up with and attacked Guru Sahib on the banks of Sirsa river. In this battle many GurSikhs were killed and Guru Sahib's family scattered. Younger Sahibjadas (sons) and Matta Gujari left with the deceitful Gangu to his village. While Bhai Mani Singh along with Guru Sahib's wife left for Delhi. Guru Sahib left for Chamkaur with the remaining 40 GurSikhs and elder Sahibjadas. At Chamkaur, once again Guru Sahib had to face the enemy forces in large numbers. All 40 GurSikhs, along with the elder Sahibjadas, accepted martyrdom in this battle. And Guru Sahib left for Mashiwadha while challenging the enemy forces. Readers must be familiar with the subsequent events; especially, the martyrdom of younger Sahibjadas and Matta Gujari. I shall skip these details for brevity.

Instead, lets return to the Anandpur fort where the invading forces were awaiting Guru Sahib's departure to start looting and destroying the fort. As soon as Guru Sahib left the fort, the greedy soldiers of the invading forces broke their ranks and proceeded towards the fort, burning and looting everything in their way. Now they seized the fort with Guru's GurSikhs inside.

What a power of Guru's amrit? The fort is seized by the enemy forces with no force inside to defend it. All there were a hundred women. Women, the fairer sex, popularly understood as weak and powerless by the world. However, these women neither considered themselves to be weak nor powerless. They echoed, "we too have partaken the amrit from our Kalgidhar father and the moment to prove it has come upon us." These daughters of lions picked up the guns, took up positions on the fort's pillars, and started firing on the enemy soldiers.

The enemy soldiers had presumed the fort to be was empty. As such they were taken aback by this sudden rain of bullets. Soon piles of stacked dead enemy soldiers were visible outside the fort. Seeing this, the enemy soldiers left their position and ran for their lives. Now, no living enemy could be seen anymore, as everyone fled for their lives. The brave daughter of Guru made the enemy chew iron grams, their bullets. Witnessing the disastrous situation of his forces, the mughal commander got irritated and issued orders for canyon fire against the fort. Intense canyon fire succeeded in breaking through a wall of the fort. Now, once again, the enemy foot soldiers moved towards the fort. They were again showered with bullets by the Guru's daughters. Hundreds of enemy soldiers again shut their eyes for ever. Unfortunately, by now the ammunition had depleted inside the fort. The enemy forces were rapidly advancing but there was no more firing coming from inside, in response. Fort's capture

was almost certain.

History reminds us the bravery of Rajput women folks. It is said that whenever any of the Rajput fort was about to be captured, all women would commit themselves to sati (submit to fire), in order to protect their honor. Although, GurSikh women faced a similar situation, they did not choose sati as a way out. Why not? They had partaken Guru's amrit. They were daughters of Kalgidhar patshah. They were lionesses. Why would they submit to sati? Why wouldn't they challenge the enemy and die fighting in the battlefield? The remaining GurSikh men asked them, "sisters the delicate time is upon us. What should we do? We aren't worried of our death? What we are worried about is your honor. The deceitful enemy could dishonor you all after our death."

Dalaer Kaur, Jathedar of GurSikh women, responded "Brothers, the amrit of Kalgidhar Patshah that you all have partaken is the same amrit that we have partaken. No force of this world can dishonor us. We shall accept martyrdom fighting the enemy before you all."

By now, the enemy was advancing so rapidly that there was no time for further debate. Upon Jathedar Dalaer Kaur's signal, all GurSikh women drew their swords and moved behind the damaged wall. This was the only way for the enemy to enter the fort. Here they patiently awaited the enemy's entrance.

Tears came to the GurSikh men, who still were worried about the fate of their sisters at the hands of the enemy. Jathedar Dalaer kaur noticed the predicament of her brothers and said "brothers do not worry about us. The enemy cannot enter the fort while we are alive."

At this moment the enemy had reached the fort and as expected, attempted to enter the fort through the damaged wall. Inside were 10 hungry GurSikh men and a hundred GurSikh women facing thousands of well bred Mughals and Pathans. In normal situation this was no match. But this was no ordinary situation. Guru's amrit that could awakens the weakest, filled the GurSikhs with such power and spirit that the enemy couldn't put a foot inside the fort. The enemy advance having reached the damaged wall was forcibly restrained just outside the fort.

Witnessing the events from a distance, the mughal commander yelled, "cowards, you are afraid of the princesses inside the fort. They are gifts for you and excellent hunts. Advance inside the fort, loot all the wealth and capture them as well." These words were so loud that they could be heard inside the fort. Jathedar Dalaer Kaur yelled back a fitting response, "Hunt or hunter? Cowards come and find out for yourself."

Dalaer Kaur's challenging response simply cut off the commander's challenge. The enemy soldiers had no will left to advance. Seeing this the commander was extremely aggravated. He gathered some of the best horsemen from his group, picked up all the courage he could muster, and advanced inside the fort. As soon as he entered the fort with his men, GurSikh sisters attacked them from every corner. Very quickly the enemy became target of GurSikh women's swords and fell to the ground. The commander of the mughal forces was killed in this attack. While some GurSikh brothers and sisters also lost their lives. How many? It was difficult to determine.

The cries of the wounded echoed in the fort. Soon the enemy forces outside figured out what had transpired with their companions inside the fort. Now no one had the courage to advance towards the fort. The previous information that the enemy had, about only a few women inside the fort, seemed inaccurate at best. The enemy was increasingly frightened by now.

Now the deputy commander of the mughal forces gave orders to retreat. Simultaneously, he asking for intense canyon fire. The enemy canyons opened fire and continuously pounded on the fort. Already a wall had been damaged and weakened by previous pounding and with this recent canyon pounding it fell inside. Through the fallen wall, the inner compound was clearly visible. No living humans could be seen inside. The enemy by now was convinced that no one was left on this side of the fort. They advanced in huge numbers and reached inside the fort. Afraid for their lives they cautiously proceeding to look around. But there was nothing to be afraid of. They searched every inch of the fort but did not find anyone. Where did the remaining GurSikhs disappeared? Where were they? No one knew. The enemy couldn't understand. The soldiers were still afraid, expecting sudden attacks at any moment from any direction.

After intense search, when no one could be found inside the fort, the enemy concluded that the remaining GurSikhs must have escaped through some secret passage. Orders were given for abandon the search and initiate looting. The very soldiers who were afraid for their lives until now, anxiously started searching for wealth inside the fort. In the process they moved the fallen wall of the fort. What they found was no wealth but the bodies of our martyrs. The faces of Kalgidhar's daughter were still radiant yet peaceful as they slept in their permanent sleep. It seemed as if they were resting after having successfully fulfilled their obligations. Rightly so, they had stood by their Jathedar and taken the stance that while living they shall not allow the enemy to enter the fort. They had fulfilled their promise. Guru's amrit was successful while they joined the ranks of GurSikh martyrs. Then why wouldn't their faces be radiant and peaceful? Along side them were the bodies of their martyr GurSikh brothers. Their

faces were peaceful too. It seemed that they were convinced, prior to their death, that their GurSikh sisters would not be mistreated. And yes, they knew that no power of this world could dishonor them.

The invading forces were shocked to witness this scene - such small numbers could face the immense mughal force and engaged them in such a fierce battle? They were astonished beyond belief. Spontaneously these words came out of a mughal governor's mouth "where such a fighting spirit is instilled among women, no force of this world could ever succeed challenging that tribe.

Sardarni Dharam Kaur

Rulers have to engage in various deceitful activities to strengthen their power base. To avoid embarrassment, such activities are commonly referred to as politics. Politics is simply a convenient acronym for deceitful activities. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh took control of the Lahore, he too used of such tactics. He initiated schemes to bring all neighboring rulers, big and small, under his control. He used every conceivable means available for successful accomplishment of this vision. Then, the Bhangi and Ramgariha Sardars were his strongest opposition. Ranjit Singh wanted to badly crush them and soon. The opposition leader, Sahib Singh Bhangi, was ruling Gujarat at the time.

Sardar Dal Singh was the ruler of Akalgadh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's father, Sardar Maha Singh, had conquered Akalgadh and established Sardar Dal Singh as its ruler. However, now Sardar Dal Singh was making overtures of self-independence. He even participated in opposition against Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The validity and correctness of his stance can not be justified, but it served as a reason enough for Maharaja Ranjit Singh's decision to establish control over the region.

However, Maharaja Ranjit Singh could not pick up enough courage to attack Sardar Dal Singh. He was afraid that Sardar Dal Singh would seek assistance from the opposition leaders, thus making his task even more difficult. Therefore, he sought the diplomatic route and initiated a web of deceit and deception. Sardar Dal Singh was sent an invitation, stating, "Dear friend, please come to Lahore. I need to discuss some important issues with you." Sardar Dal Singh reached Lahore based on this invitation, but Maharaja Ranjit Singh had something else in mind for him. Sardar Dal Singh was detained in Lahore fort while Maharaja himself left with a heavy force to conquer Akalgadh.

With Sardar Dal Singh neutralized, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was now sure that no one will oppose him and that he will be able to move into the city with open doors. He was very happy with his deceitful tactic and confident of his success. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh left Lahore for Akalgadh, he thought that the citizens of Akalgadh would come out in large numbers to welcome him. Indeed, he was welcomed but not with flowers and garlands but with canyon fire. This welcome spoiled his whole scheme and caused him serious anguish.

When Sardar Dal Singh's young spouse, Sardarni Dharam Kaur, learned of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's t face="Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif" size="-1">Hearing the commotion, Maharaja came out of his tent along with his Sardars. At the same moment Sardarni Dharam Kaur reached

there with lightening speed. She challenged announcing: “I want to have a few words with Ranjit Singh.”

What Maharaja saw was a young woman with sword in her hand riding a horse was challenging Ranjit Singh. Maharaja sneaked a peek at her and lowered his eyes. She said, “Maharaja, you deceitfully arrested my husband, thinking no one else would challenge you. You made a grave mistake. I have partaken the amrit of the same Guru that you have. Just as independence and honor are dear to you, they are also dear to us as well. Now excesses have taken place here. So it in your best interest to abandon the seize and leave by tomorrow, else it will not be safe for you.”

After this encounter, she quickly joined her soldiers and escaped the royal forces. Every effort of royal Sardars to arrest her remained unsuccessful. She easily escaped through the royal forces as hair moves through butter. Maharaja himself was left wondering with fingers in his mouth. He slowly uttered these words, “there is no hope of capturing the fort that is protected by such a brave woman.”

Next day, Maharaja received yet another disturbing news. Sardarni Dharam Kaur was not only fighting bravely but also engaging in diplomatic maneuvers. She had successfully sought agreement with Sahib Singh Bhangi and Jodh Singh Vajirabad for assistance. They were moving towards Akalgadh with their forces.

Maharaja had never dreamt that a woman could do all this. Now, Sardarni Dharam Kaur’s threat of last night had some significant weight attached. Maharaja gave orders for immediate abandonment of the seize and quickly left for Lahore. He immediately released Sardar Dal Singh, upon reaching Lahore, saying, “friend, no worldly power can subjugate a man whose wife is so brave, intelligent, and diplomat.”

Today, there is no rule of Akalgadh. But neither is Sikh rule. They came and disappeared like a dream. However, Sardarni Dharam Kaur’s bravery, courage, and intelligence remain exemplary among our history pages. It is boldly announcing to the world that the brave daughters of Sri Guru Gobind Singh too are capable.

## The Martial Heritage of Khalsa Women

By Shanti Kaur Khalsa

Late one afternoon I dropped by the house of my old friend, Satwant Singh Khalsa, to return the handgun I had borrowed from him to teach a shooting course at a local martial-arts school. The shiny metal weapon had been cleaned and oiled, and was now carefully wrapped in a cloth and tucked under my arm as I knocked on his door. His smiling face appeared and he greeted me as I walked into his home. I handed him the gun with a profusion of thanks, and turned to leave when his young daughter of six, Amrit Kaur, came up and grabbed her father by the leg.

"Papa, can I see that?" she asked. "Of course", Satwant Singh replied, and he began to unwrap the gun with great reverence. Her eyes grew as big as blue moons reflecting the glint of the handgun as her father explained to her what it was. She looked at the gun then looked at me, a Khalsa woman in a turban, and her face clouded with confusion. Again she looked at the gun and then up at me and began to smile shyly. Finally she said with expectant wonder in her voice, "Papa, can girls shoot guns too?"

Actually, Khalsa women have been shooting ever since guns were first introduced to India. Many of the old stories have been lost, and those that remain are scant in detail and description. But the fact is that the Tenth Master, Siri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj, encouraged and promoted women in martial training in the army of the Khalsa. The Khalsa has no gender, neither male nor female, so those women who were inclined to study the martial tradition found their places in the ranks of the Khalsa Fauj (Army). Mai Bhago (Mata Bhaag Kaur) is an outstanding example of a woman warrior in the Sikh tradition.

In 1705 the Mughal forces under the direction of the emperor Aurangzeb laid a deadly seige on the fort of Anandpur Sahib in a desperate effort to destroy Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Khalsa. As food and water were exhausted, the conditions became unbearable and many Sikhs deserted the Guru. The Sikhs from the Majha area of Punjab, belonged to a tradition of gallant warriors, but they also chose to abandon the Guru and return to their villages. Before he left the fort, Guru Gobind Singh Ji asked them to put their denouncement on paper : they wrote that they were no longer Sikhs of the Guru.

When the women of the viallage heard that their men were returning home, traitors to the Guru's cause, they were incensed. Bhago, a lady from Jhabal, spoke to the women and together they resolved to reverse the situation. As the men returned, hungry, tired and depressed from their

experience at AnandPur Sahib, the women would not let them enter their homes. They said to their husbands and sons, "Either go back and make amends for your cowardly behaviour, or exchange your dress with ours, stay at home act as housewives in our place. Dressed in your clothes we will go and fight for the Guru, lay down our lives for him, and wash away with our blood the shame which you have brought on us all, nay the whole of Majha itself."

Shamed by the courageous response of their womenfolk, a band of forty Sikhs started back towards the Guru under the leadership of Bhai Mahan Singh and Mai Bhago. Dressed in soldier's battle-gear, Mai Bhago struck a fearsome pose and was respected by the Sikh soldiers for her spiritual clarity and her courageous nature. As they made their way toward the Guru, groups of Sikhs from various villages along the way joined them in support of the great Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

By that time, Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Khalsa army had left the fort of Anandpur Sahib with the promise of safe passage from Emperor Aurangzeb. But his promise proved to be a cruel deception and the Khalsa suffered devastating battles in which the two elder sons of the Guru were killed. Now they were being pursued by Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind with over 5000 Mughal soldiers. Having already captured and bricked alive the two young sons of the Guru, Wazir Khan was eager to kill the Guru himself and gain favour with the Emperor in Delhi.

The Sikhs from Majha met with the Guru-Master between Ramiana and Khidrana. With Bhai Mahan Singh as their spokesman, the forty Sikhs begged the Guru to forgive their desertion and to bless them with his grace. Together they rode with the Guru to Khidrana where there was a large water tank to slake the thirst of the guru's army. But at this time of May, the plains of Punjab were already scorched by the summer heat, and when they arrived they found the tank nearly dry. Guru Gobind Singh Ji signalled for his army to continue on in search of water. Bhai Mahan Singh proposed that his group stay behind and engage the enemy there, allowing the Guru time to reach a place of safety. Guru Gobind Singh Ji agreed to the strategy, and rode about two miles forward with the bulk of the Khalsa army.

Big white sheets of Khaddar, the coarse woven cloth, were spread out on the shrubs so that the Mughal army would think that the full army of Sikhs were camped there in great numbers. Fearlessly, the small band of Sikhs waited in ambush for the huge army of Wazir Khan to approach the tank in search of water.

The battle of Mukhtsar began on the 8th of May, 1705. Under the leadership of Mai Bhago and Bhai Mahan Singh, the Sikhs from Majha fell upon



the advancing Mughal forces with a fury free of petty revenge. Mai Bhago was seen fighting in the first rank, firing her long-barrel musket with the skill and precision of a true soldier. The Mughal army rushed forward several times in an attempt to dislodge the Sikhs and capture the tank, but had to withdraw each time under the fierce volley of bullets and arrows. When at last the Khalsa's ammunition was all used up, they advanced forward in small groups to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. When her time came, Mai Bhago charged into the enemy ranks with a long spear, creating havoc and killing many Mughal soldiers.

They were not fighting for victory that day, as the Mughal army outnumbered the Khalsa by about 500 to one. They had no thought of saving their lives. They only wished to win time, to stall the Mughal forces long enough so that Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the rest of the Khalsa might advance to a better field of battle. By day's end, all the Khalsa lay dead in the battlefield.

Nearly 300 of the Turks lay with them in the same bloody bed. The battle had taken its toll and now the Mughal Army cried desperately for water. When Wazir Khan advanced forward to take possession of the water tank, he was shocked to find that it was bone dry. Morale had shrivelled in the blistering heat of the Punjabi heat and discipline in the ranks was quickly dissolving. Abandoning the dead and wounded where they lay, Wazir Khan and his army beat a hasty retreat in search of water for his despairing men.

As evening fell, Guru Gobind Singh Ji rode back to the battlefield of Khidrana. He got down from his horse and surveyed the bloody carnage that stretched before him. With a deep affection that he felt for his Khalsa, he knelt by each fallen soldier and blessed him. Coming to Bhai Mahan Singh, the Guru saw that he was not yet dead. He lifted his head gently and wiped the blood from his face. Mahan Singh opened his eyes and saw the beautiful face of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The Guru asked him if he had any last wishes, and Mahan Singh begged him to tear up the document that he had signed renouncing the Guru. The Guru said, "You have done a great deed. You have saved the root of Sikhism in Majha. You are the Muktas, the liberated ones, delivered from the round of birth and death forever." Saying this, he reached in his belt and pulled out the paper they had signed in Anandpur and tore it up into little pieces that floated away on the wind.

Continuing on, the Guru came to where Mai Bhago lay in the blood-soaked grass. Dozens of Mughals lay dead around her where they had fallen in mortal combat. He was surprised to find a woman here on the battlefield. When he knelt to lift her head he saw that she too was barely alive, and he washed her face with cool water. She opened her eyes and saw the Guru's face in all his radiance. Such a beautiful sight, after such a brutal day, lifted her soul into spiritual ecstasy.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji had her removed from the battlefield and her wounds were tended to by his physicians. When Mai Bhago recovered from her injuries, the Guru gave her amrit from his own hands and she became Mai Bhag Kaur. Having dedicated her life to the Khalsa, she stayed with Guru Gobind Singh Ji and served him as one of his personal guards. Dressed in male attire, she was one of only 10 Sikhs who were permitted to guard the Guru when he slept. She lived to be an old woman and died in Hazoor Sahib (Nanded, India) where she remained after the Guru's death.

The legacy of Mai Bhago Kaur lives in all of us. She showed the way for feminine strength to be courageous, powerful and dynamic. Her actions turned the course of history, and her courage under fire won her the love and respect of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Mahahraj.

The wives and daughters of today's Khalsa should be given encouragement and support to pursue martial arts training. It is not always easy for women, as it goes against the social programming and expectations of our culture. It requires building physical strength that women often lack in childhood, and which is often difficult to acquire later on. Yet it is not only possible for women to become proficient in the martial arts, when given the chance we often excel. More importantly, it builds discipline, confidence and a strength of character that serves a woman her entire life.

"Papa", said little Amrit Kaur shyly, "Do girls shoot guns too?" Satwant Singh was surprised at his daughter's question and he looked to me for a reply.

"Of course", I said with a smile, "Girls shoot the best! When you get older I will teach you myself." On hearing this she put her hand to her mouth and giggled with great excitement and expectation.