

Bhai Gurdas, poet of early Sikhism and authoritative interpreter of Sikh doctrine, pays high tribute to womankind.

“A woman,” he says (Varan, V.16), “is the favourite in her parental home loved dearly by her father and mother. In the home of her in-laws, she is the pillar of the family, the guarantee of its good fortune. . . Sharing in spiritual wisdom and enlightenment and with noble qualities endowed, a woman, the other half of man, escorts him to the door of liberation.”



To ensure equal status for women, the Gurus made no distinction between the sexes in matters of initiation, instruction or participation in sangat, holy fellowship, and pangat, commensality. Guru Amar Das, the third Guru of the Sikhs disfavoured the use of veil by women. He assigned women to the responsibility of supervising the communities of disciples in certain sectors, and preached against the custom of sati.

Such being the respect for womanhood among the Sikhs, monogamy has been the rule for them, and polygamy a rare exception. Female infanticide is prohibited.

Sikh history records the names of several ladies such as Mai Bhago, Mata Sundari, Rani Sahib Kaur, Rani Sada Kaur and Maharani Jind Kaur who played a leading role in the events of their time and left their imprint on them. In the tumultuous decades of the eighteenth century when Sikhs went through fierce persecution, the women displayed exemplary steadfastness. Their deeds of heroism and sacrifice are to this day recounted morning and evening by the Sikhs in their ardas (supplication).

“Our mothers and sisters,” they repeat every time in their prayer, “who plied handmills in the jails of Mannu [the Mughal governor of Lahore (1748-53)], grinding daily a maund-and-a-quarter of corn each, who saw their children being hacked to pieces in front of their eyes, but who uttered not a moan from their lips and remained steadfast in their Sikh faith—recall their spirit of fortitude and sacrifice, and say, Waheguru, Glory be to God!”



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Women in Sikhism



*“As a person of God (Gurmukh),
listen to the Name of the Lord, my
sisters.”*

Guru Amardas Ji, 3rd Guru of Sikhs

KAUR, THE PRINCESS

“Of woman are we born, of woman conceived; to woman engaged, to woman married. Women are befriended, by woman is the civilization continued. When woman dies, woman is sought for. It is by woman that the entire social order is maintained. Then why call her evil of whom are great men born?”

These are words that were uttered by the founder of Sikhism, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in about 1499. So for Sikhs from that period, there has been compulsion to treat women as equals and gender discrimination is not allowed.



and secular activities.

Consequently, Sikh women have played a glorious part in Sikh History and have proven themselves as equal in service, devotion, sacrifice and bravery. Examples of their moral dignity, service and self sacrifice are and will remain a source of inspiration.

The first woman to be remembered in Sikhism is Mata Tripta Ji, the mother of



the first, and founder Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji. She meditated while carrying the child Nanak in her womb, and brought him up with love and tender care.

Before the Gurus arrived on the scene, the state of Indian women was absolutely deplorable. They were considered low caste, declared to be intrinsically impure and unfit, hence ineligible, even for listening to the recital of sacred texts and receiving religious instruction or initiation.

With the Muslims came **pardah**, the veil, and zananah, confinement of womenfolk to the interior apartments. The state of a widow was the most pitiable. Polygamy was permissible for man, but a woman could not remarry even after the death of her husband.

With the advent of Sikhism appeared a liberating force in Indian society. Affirmation of the dignity of the human being, male as well as female, was central to GuruNanak's



Mata Khivi Ji, wife of Guru Angar Dev Ji, 2nd guru of Sikhs, serving langar in Guru's kitchen

teaching. Guru Nanak said that all creatures were equal before God and that to make distinctions among them on the grounds of birth or sex was sinful.



For women especially, he made many bold and sympathetic words to say. Guru Nanak rejects the prevalent superstition of sutak, according to which a woman giving birth to a child remains in pollution for a given number of days, depending upon the caste to which she belongs. Pollution is not in childbirth, says Guru Nanak

“Greed is the pollution of the mind; lying the pollution of the tongue; looking with covetousness upon another's wealth, upon another's wife, upon the beauty of another's wife the pollution of the eye; listening to slander the pollution of the ears. The pollution in which they commonly believe is all superstition. Birth and death are by Divine Will; by Divine Will men come and go”

As against celibacy and renunciation, Guru Nanak recommended **grihasth** - the life of a householder, in which husband and wife were equal partners. Fidelity was enjoined upon both.