

was inspired to take Ammrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ) and became Karam Singh (ਕਰਮ ਸਿੰਘ).

Dīp Kaur's family wanted to break off her engagement with Karam Singh after he became Ammritdhārī, but Dīp Kaur insisted that she would not marry anyone else. On her way back from a trip to Kartārpur with her friend, Dīp Kaur was kidnapped by a Paṭhān (ਪਠਾਨ), but a company of Singh's helped her escape and return to her village, Diālpur. Her family were so impressed by the bravery of the Singh's that they changed their mind about her engagement to Karam Singh and allowed her to marry him.

Karam Singh went on to become the *Jathedār* (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ) of the Doābā Sikh Lahir (ਦੁਆਬਾ ਸਿਖ ਲਹਿਰ) and his house became a meeting place for Sikhs who were served Laṅgar and accommodated by Dīp Kaur. In her marital family, Dīp Kaur began to reform attitudes toward women. She thought that women could not only contribute to society by performing household chores, they could also do many of the things that men could do, and so she began to work towards greater freedom for women.

Dīp Kaur began to venture out of the inner house or *andarī havelī* (ਅੰਦਰਲੀ ਹਵੇਲੀ) and into the outer house or *bāharī havelī* (ਬਾਹਰਲੀ ਹਵੇਲੀ) with the permission of her husband and his family. She would consult with other Sikh *Jathās* (ਜਥਾ) and help her husband with his administrative duties. She felt that women should be allowed to fight in battle just as men did, so she developed a *Jathā* of women in Kartārpur and taught them Shastar Vidiā (ਸ਼ਸਤਰ ਵਿਦਿਆ) so that they could help defend their village and help the men in times of need. Women, who had never thought of fighting, began to pick up sticks, spears and swords and learned to use them with skill. At first, this movement was looked down upon by the older generation, but Dīp Kaur won acceptance and even praise through her patient and humble perseverance.

Under the persecution of the Mughal government in the early 1700s, Karam Singh and his family were instrumental in terms of combating the Mughal army and providing relief for injured and displaced Sikh men and women. Dīp Kaur went to Anandpur Sāhib and began to help the Sikh families driven from their homes by the Mughal government. She stayed here for about four or five years and looked after the injured and displaced Sikhs who had come to seek refuge.

Dīp Kaur's husband died defending Ammritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ) from an attack by the Mughals, but instead of mourning his death, she celebrated his martyrdom and was proud of him for defending his faith. She raised her son, Phatah Singh (ਫਤਹ ਸਿੰਘ) to follow the Saint-Soldier lifestyle that both his parents lived by, so that he could take on the responsibilities of leading the *Jathā* at Kartārpur. She spent her final days in Kartārpur.

Adapted from: Singh, Harbans, The Encyclopedia of Sikhism and <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/Sikh-History/Khalsa-Women.html>

Sikh (ਸਿੱਖ) Women in State Affairs

In Indian history, we find only a few women actively participating in government affairs. In the early medieval Muslim period, Razīā (ਰਜ਼ੀਆ) was one of the few women who conducted the affairs of government, though for a short time only. During the Mughal period, the inmates of the Emperor's harem lived in seclusion excepting Nūr Jahān (ਨੂਰ ਜਹਾਂ). And in later times, the Rānī of Jhāmsī (ਝਾਂਸੀ ਦੀ ਰਾਣੀ) flashed into prominence for a while, during the uprising of 1857. But, strangely enough, the short span of Sikh history is replete with the remarkable role of Sikh women of princely families. Gurū Nānak Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ) had preached equality and respect for womenfolk and the Gurū's observations in favour of women went a long way in getting them an honourable status and share in the various fields of life.

The Sikh *rānīs* (queens) actively participated in state affairs when the occasion arose. They occasionally took charge of state administration and their contribution to the Sikh polity as rulers, regents, administrators, and advisers has been creditable indeed. In the words of William Francklin, "Instances indeed, have not infrequently occurred, in which they (women) have actually taken up arms to defend their habitations, from the desultory attacks of the enemy, and throughout the contest, behaved themselves with an intrepidity of spirit, highly praiseworthy." To quote Griffin, the Sikh women "have on occasions shown themselves the equals of men in wisdom and administrative ability" And as General Gordon observed, "The Sikh ladies ruled with vigour and diplomacy."

The *rānīs* did commendable works. Rānī Sadā Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਸਦਾ ਕੌਰ), widow of Sardār Gurbakhsh Singh Ghanaīā (ਸਰਦਾਰ ਗੁਰਬਖਸ਼ ਸਿੰਘ ਘਨਈਆ) and mother-in-law of Sardār Ranjīt Singh (ਸਰਦਾਰ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ), was well versed in the affairs of the state and commanded her soldiers in the battle-field with a thorough grasp of statecraft.

Māi Desām (ਮਾਈ ਦੇਸਾਂ), the widow of Caṛat Singh Shukarcakīā (ਚੜਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸ਼ੁਕਰਚਕੀਆ), was a great administrator, as well as an experienced and wise diplomat, who conducted the civil and military affairs dexterously. Ratan Kaur (ਰਤਨ ਕੌਰ), the widow of Tārā Singh Ghaibā (ਤਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਘੈਬਾ), was a brave and able lady who kept the Lāhaur Darbār (ਲਾਹੌਰ ਦਰਬਾਰ) forces at bay till the gate-keepers were bribed by the Lāhaur army. Māi Sukhām (ਮਾਈ ਸੁਖਾਂ), the widow of Gulāb Singh Bhaṅgī (ਗੁਲਾਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਭੰਗੀ), strongly defended the town of Ammritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ) against Ranjīt Singh for some time. Dharam Kaur (ਧਰਮ ਸਿੰਘ), wife of Dal Singh (ਦਲ ਸਿੰਘ) of Akālgaṛ (ਅਕਾਲਗੜ), after her husband's imprisonment by Ranjīt Singh, mounted guns on the walls of her fort and fought against the Darbār (ਦਰਬਾਰ) forces. She was a brave and wise lady who was able to foil the designs of the Lāhaur ruler on her territory.

After Sardār Baghel Singh's (ਸਰਦਾਰ ਬਘੇਲ ਸਿੰਘ) death in 1802, his two widows, Rām Kaur (ਰਾਮ ਕੌਰ) and Ratan Kaur, looked after their territories very well. Rām Kaur, the elder, maintained her control over the district of Hoshiārpur (ਹੋਸ਼ਿਆਰਪੁਰ) which provided her a revenue of two lakh rupees, and Sardārni (ਸਰਦਾਰਨੀ) Ratan Kaur kept Calāumdī (ਚਲੌਂਦੀ) in her possession, fetching her an annual revenue of three lakh rupees. She administered her territory efficiently. Similarly, Rānī Cand Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਚੰਦ ਕੌਰ), widow of Rājā Kharak Singh (ਰਾਜਾ ਖੜਕ ਸਿੰਘ), and Rānī Jindām (ਰਾਣੀ ਜਿੰਦਾਂ), widow of Ranjīt Singh, played important roles in the Lāhaur Darbār polity.

From the Paṭiālā (ਪਟਿਆਲਾ) house, there are great examples of Rānī Phato (ਰਾਣੀ ਫਤੋ), wife of

Siṅgh (ਬਾਬਾ ਆਲਾ ਸਿੰਘ), Rāṇī Rajindar Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਰਜਿੰਦਰ ਕੌਰ), Rāṇī Aus Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਔਸ ਕੌਰ) and Rāṇī Sāhib Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੌਰ).

In the words of Lepel Griffin, “Rāṇī Rajindar Kaur was one of the most remarkable women of her age. She possessed all the virtues which men pretend are their own—courage, perseverance and rationality—without mixture of weakness which men attribute to women.”

Sāhib Kaur was proclaimed as Prime Minister of Paṭiālā at the age of 18. She managed the affairs, both in office and in the battle-field, wonderfully well. Later, when her husband, Jaimal Siṅgh Ghanaīā (ਜੈਮਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਘਨਈਆ), was imprisoned by his cousin, Phatah Siṅgh (ਫਤਹ ਸਿੰਘ), she hastened to Fatahgar (ਫਤਹਗੜ) at the head of a strong force and got her husband released. In 1794, when the commander of the Marāṭhā (ਮਰਾਠਾ) forces, coming northwards, sent a message to Sāhib Kaur, of Paṭiālā's house, for submission, she preferred to settle the issue in the field of battle. Hurriedly, she formed a league of the neighbouring chiefs, Bhāg Siṅgh of Jīnd (ਭਾਗ ਸਿੰਘ, ਜੀਂਦ), Bhaṅgā Siṅgh (ਭੰਗਾ ਸਿੰਘ) and Mahtāb Siṅgh (ਮਹਤਾਬ ਸਿੰਘ) of Thānesar (ਥਾਨੇਸਰ), and rushed forth to check the advance of the Marāṭhās. The two armies came to blows near Ambālā (ਅੰਬਾਲਾ). Sāhib Kaur infused new spirit in her disheartened soldiers when she led a surprise night attack on the Marāṭhās. In the words of John J. Pool, “With mingled feelings of fear and respect they (Marāṭhās) turned their forces homeward and gave up the expedition. Thus, Paṭiālā was saved by the skill and daring of Rāṇī Sāhib Kaur.”

Thus, Sikh stateswomen have competently and skilfully managed governments and nations in the past. They were well known for their administrative sharpness, grasp of political situations, and dexterity in handling arms and organising defence. They are an inspiration for young Sikh women who are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of their courageous ancestors and contribute to the glory of the Sikh panth.

Adapted from: Bhagat Siṅgh “A History of Sikh Misals”

Daughters of the Khālṣā

Sāhib Kaur (1771 - 1801)

Sāhib Kaur (ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੌਰ) was a woman of remarkable leadership and diplomacy. She belonged to the royal family of the Paṭiālā state, ruled by Amar Siṅgh (ਅਮਰ ਸਿੰਘ) and his wife Rāj Kaur (ਰਾਜ ਕੌਰ) in 1773. Sāhib Kaur was extraordinarily intelligent and brilliant. She could read and write Pañjābī and she knew horse riding and the use of arms. She was initiated in 1779 and became a Kaur. In those days, the custom of early marriage was prevalent so she was married to Jaimal Siṅgh, son of Hakīkat Siṅgh (ਹਕੀਕਤ ਸਿੰਘ) of Ghanaīā Misal, in 1780.

Her younger brother, Sāhib Siṅgh (ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ), became the ruler of the state after the death of their father in 1781; he was only six years old at the time. According to historians, he was a cowardly, lazy and not very intelligent person. During his minority, the state was saved from disintegration by his grandmother, Rāṇī Hukmām (ਰਾਣੀ ਹੁਕਮਾਂ) and his clever prime minister, Nānū Mal (ਨਾਨੂ ਮਲ). After the death of Rāṇī Hukmām the state received such a terrible shock that the government nearly fell apart. Subordinate chiefs of Paṭiālā began to declare independence. Sāhib Siṅgh dismissed Nānū Mal and took the administration of the state into his own hands, but failed to control the palace intrigues.

In 1791 Sāhib Siṅgh invited his sister Sāhib Kaur, who was living with her husband in Gurdāspur (ਗੁਰਦਾਸਪੁਰ), and appointed her as his prime minister. She accepted the appointment on the condition

that none would interfere in her affairs and she would be at liberty to select her own assistants. As the subsequent events will prove, she was a good administrator, a brave general and an intelligent diplomat. She successfully managed her affairs in office just as well as in the battlefield and she possessed many leadership qualities such as bravery, perseverance and sagacity. She appointed Tārā Singh (ਤਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ) as her deputy and dismissed corrupt officials. She subordinated the chiefs who did not pay their tribute, and collected the due taxes. She also constructed two new forts and toured the state to keep in touch with the people. When she came to know that her husband's cousin had imprisoned him, she hurried with a strong force to free him. After a sudden and forceful attack, she not only liberated her husband, but also restored to him the property under dispute before returning to Paṭiālā.

In Paṭiālā, Marāṭhās were advancing from west India as the Mughal kingdom at Dillī was crumbling. Nāno Rāo (ਨਾਨੋ ਰਾਓ), a Marāṭhā chief, wanted to subjugate the Paṭiālā state, so he sent his agents to demand tribute. Sāhib Kaur won over his agents, who went back and reported that the Sikh chiefs were very powerful and that he should not challenge them. Nāno Rāo did not listen to his agents and decided to come up with a plan to attack. Sāhib Kaur also called a meeting of the Sikh rulers of Jind (ਜਿੰਦ), Nābhā (ਨਾਭਾ), and Kalsīām (ਕਲਸੀਅਮ) states for consultation. They were not in favor of a fight, but Sāhib Kaur reminded them of the consequences of subordination and exhorted them to fight. They agreed to face the Marāṭhās as a united group. Sāhib Kaur sent a strong reply to Nāno Rāo and warned the Marāṭhās that if they advanced, she would face them in the battlefield. She, with an army of seven thousand, left Paṭiālā, to face the enemy. Before starting, she addressed her chiefs and soldiers, and said, “I have taken a pledge that I will not return without defeating the enemy. Would you tolerate a young lady be killed while fighting while you leave the battlefield in disgrace?” She stood with a naked sword and continued to prepare her chiefs and soldiers mentally. Her speech and display of heroism touched the hearts and pride of her soldiers and chiefs.

The Marāṭhā chief, at the head of twelve thousand men, met the Sikh forces under Sāhib Kaur in the battlefield of Mardānpur (ਮਰਦਾਨਪੁਰ). In the fierce battle, the Sikhs lost one-third of their army while the enemy lost half of his. Sāhib Kaur personally took part in the battle and killed Ranjīt Rāo, a brave Marāṭhā chief, in a one-on-one fight. The fight continued till evening, when the soldiers retired to their camps. Sāhib Kaur and her chiefs met at night and planned for the next day. They were afraid that the Marāṭhā army would get reinforcements soon. They decided to attack them at midnight. The Marāṭhā were taken by surprise; they left the battlefield and ran back.

In 1796, at the time of the great Kumbh (ਕੁੰਭ) fair at Haridvār (ਹਰਿਦਵਾਰ), a famous pilgrim station, a dispute arose between two groups of saints—the Gusaiṃs (ਗੁਸੈਣ) and the Udāsīs (ਉਦਾਸੀ). Sāhib Singh, who with his followers was camping nearby, took the side of the Udāsīs. Sāhib Kaur was away in the state but when she came to know of it, she rushed with reinforcements and saved the situation.

The ruler of Nāhan (ਨਾਹਨ), a hilly state, had friendly relations with the Paṭiālā state. The ruler could not control internal disturbances in the Nāhan state so he sought the help of the Paṭiālā rulers in 1796. Sāhib Kaur, with a force of one thousand, rushed to Nāhan, about eighty miles from Paṭiālā, and restored peace. The ruler of Nāhan, in gratitude, presented her with a tall and strong elephant that she kept for her personal use.

George Thomas, an Irish adventurer, had carved out for himself an independent state at Hāmsī (ਹਾਂਸੀ), now in Haryāṇā (ਹਿਰਯਾਨਾ) state. Keen to expand his territory, he attacked Bhāg Singh, ruler of Jind state, and laid siege to Jind. Bhāg Singh asked the other Sikh rulers and chiefs for help. Sāhib Singh hesitated but Sāhib Kaur, a woman of brave spirit, put pressure on him to intercede. He flatly refused