

**Grade: 7**

**Course: Virṣā (ਵਿਰਸਾ)**

**Lesson Number: 5**

**Unit Name: The Tradition of Martyrdom**

**Title: Sikh (ਸਿੱਖ) Stateswomen of the Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **Standards**

#### **Standard 1: The Tradition of Martyrdom**

- Students describe the history and times of the great Sikh martyrs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Students learn the importance of and lessons learned from the two 18<sup>th</sup> Century Ghalūghārās (ਘਲੂਘਾਰਾ). In addition, students will be introduced to a host of other martyrs, including Hakīkat Rāī (ਹਕੀਕਤ ਰਾਇ), Botā Singh (ਬੋਤਾ ਸਿੰਘ), Garjā Singh (ਗਰਜਾ ਸਿੰਘ), Bhāī Tārū Singh (ਭਾਈ ਤਾਰੂ ਸਿੰਘ), the Khālsā (ਖਾਲਸਾ) Women, amongst others. Emphasis should be placed on the specific importance of their contribution.

### **Objectives**

1. In this lesson, students will be introduced to the important Sikh women of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century who made important political contributions to the Sikh Rāj (ਸਿੱਖ ਰਾਜ).
2. Using a case-study format, students will be introduced to Rāṇī Sāhib Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੌਰ), one of the most politically astute and courageous military leaders of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Prerequisites**

- Students should have some knowledge of the *Misal* (ਮਿਸਲ) period and of Raṇjīt Singh's (ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) reign.

### **Materials**

- The book entitled “Ithāsik Sikh Nārīām” (ਇਤਹਾਸਿਕ ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਰੀਆਂ) (see teacher resources for bibliographic information)
- Articles on “Sikh Women and State Affairs” and “Daughters of the Khālsā” (included in teacher resources)
- Blackboard or chart paper, and writing material
- Highlighters

### **Advanced Preparation**

- The teacher should gain knowledge about the women of the *Misal* period by reading the relevant chapter from “Ithāsik Sikh Nārīām”.

### **Engagement (15-20 minutes)**

- Greet students and give them a couple of minutes to settle down and take out their notebooks.
- When they have settled down, ask students:
  - How many presidents of the United States have been women?
  - Have there been any female Prime Ministers in Canada (One: Kim Campbell)?
  - How many prominent political women can students think of (ask them to give names)?
- The teacher should emphasize the fact that despite claiming to be an egalitarian society, the Western world has only seen a handful of prominent political women, but in the short history of Sikh supremacy in the Pañjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ) during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women actively participated in the administrative duties of the Sikh *Misals* and helped to consolidate and protect the

- territories of these confederacies.
- In this part of the lesson, the teacher should mention some prominent Sikh stateswomen such as Rāṇī Sadā Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਸਦਾ ਕੌਰ) of the Ghanaīā (ਘਨਈਆ) Misal who helped Ranjīt Singh consolidate his territory in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The teacher should also mention Ratan Kaur (ਰਤਨ ਕੌਰ), Māi Sukhām (ਮਾਈ ਸੁਖਾਂ) and Dharam Kaur (ਧਰਮ ਕੌਰ) who held out against the forces of Ranjīt Singh and used their military and political strategies to protect their *Misals*.
  - The teacher should then give students a brief background of Sāhib Kaur's (ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੌਰ) family and mention Rāṇī Phato (ਰਾਣੀ ਫਤੋ) [wife of the renowned Bābā Ālā Singh (ਬਾਬਾ ਆਲਾ ਸਿੰਘ)], Rāṇī Rajindar Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਰਜਿੰਦਰ ਕੌਰ) and Rāṇī Āus Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਔਸ ਕੌਰ), precursors of Sāhib Kaur, who fought in battles and were politically active in the Phulkīāṁ (ਫੁਲਕੀਆਂ) Misal in Paṭiālā (ਪਟਿਆਲਾ).
  - This part of the lesson is meant to give students an overview of the most prominent female stateswomen of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and serve as an introduction to the life and contributions of Sāhib Kaur (see Teacher Resources for general information that should be mentioned to students in this section).

### **Exploration (35 minutes)**

- Get students to read the article “Daughters of the *Khālsā*”. The teacher should decide whether the students should read the article independently or as a class.
- Either way, students should take a highlighter and underline the sections in the article that deal with Sāhib Kaur's bravery or political astuteness.
- In a large group, ask students to give examples from the article which demonstrate that Sāhib Kaur was an accepted and capable military and political leader.
- Write these examples on a blackboard or chart paper as students reply. The teacher can prompt students with questions such as:
  - What qualities does a person need to have in order to be a good leader?
  - Did Sāhib Kaur have any of these qualities?
  - Which of her actions demonstrate these qualities?
  - Get students to write these notes in their notebooks.

### **Explanation/ Extension (5-10 minutes)**

- In order to get students to think about the role of women in Sikh society today, ask students if they see any discrepancies between the teachings of *Gurmat* (ਗੁਰਮਤ) and the treatment and status of women in Pañjābī culture today.
- Ask students to think about all the historical Sikh women that they have learned about so far.
  - What do they teach us about what it means to be a Sikh woman?
  - What kinds of roles have they played in society and in their families?
  - What kinds of duties and responsibilities did they take on?
  - Are modern Sikh women encouraged to be like these women and take on the types of tasks that these historical women accomplished? Why/why not?

### **Evaluation (On-going)**

- Get students to prepare a written report about the life and contribution of Sāhib Kaur.
- In their report, students should answer the question:
  - How does Sāhib Kaur display the qualities of a good leader?
- Get them to use the notes they took in class, and the examples from the article, in their report.

### **Teacher Resources**

- Dr. Singh, Bhajan & Kaur, Prītam. Bhāg Dūjā: Vishesh Bīr Nārīām te Rāṇīām, Ithāsik Sikh Nārīām. Dillī: National Book Shop, 2003. p 177-219
- Sītāl, Sohan Singh. The Ghanaīā Misal. The Sikh Misals and the Pañjāb. Ludhiāṇā: Lāhaur Book Shop, 1981. p 40-46
- Sītāl, Sohan Singh. The Phulkīām Misal: The State of Paṭiālā. The Sikh Misals and the Pañjāb. Ludhiāṇā: Lāhaur Book Shop, 1981. p 89-111

### **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 Rāṇī 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 *rāṇīs* (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 *rāṇīs* did commendable works. Rāṇī 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

Sardārṇī (ਸਰਦਾਰਨੀ) Ratan Kaur kept Calaurindī (ਚਲੌਂਦੀ) in her possession, fetching her an annual revenue of three lakh rupees. She administered her territory efficiently. Similarly, Rāṇī Cand Kaur (ਰਾਣੀ ਚੰਦ ਕੌਰ), widow of Rājā Kharak Singh (ਰਾਜਾ ਖੜਕ ਸਿੰਘ), and Rāṇī Jindārī (ਰਾਣੀ ਜਿੰਦਾਂ), widow of Raṇjīt Singh, played important roles in the Lāhaur Darbār polity.

From the Paṭiālā (ਪਟਿਆਲਾ) house, there are great examples of Rāṇī Phato (ਰਾਣੀ ਫਤੋ), wife of Bābā Ālā Singh (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 Singh Ghanaīā (ਜੈਮਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਘਨਈਆ), was imprisoned by his cousin, Phatah Singh (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 Singh of Jind (ਭਾਗ ਸਿੰਘ, ਜੀਂਦ), Bhaṅgā Singh (ਭੰਗਾ ਸਿੰਘ) and Mahtāb Singh (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 Singh “A History of Sikh Misals”*

### Daughters of the Khālsā

#### **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 Singh (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 Singh, son of Hakikat Singh (ਹਕੀਕਤ ਸਿੰਘ) of Ghanaīā Misal, in 1780.

Her younger brother, Sāhib Singh (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 Hukmārī (ਰਾਣੀ ਹੁਕਮਾਂ) and his clever prime minister, Nānū Mal (ਨਾਨੂ ਮਲ). After the

death of Rānī Hukmārī the state received such a terrible shock that the government nearly fell apart. Subordinate chiefs of Paṭiālā began to declare independence. Sāhib Singh dismissed Nānū Mal and took the administration of the state into his own hands, but failed to control the palace intrigues.

In 1791 Sāhib Singh 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 Kalsiān (ਕਲਸੀਆਂ) 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 Gusaiṇs (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 (ਹਿਰਖੜੜ) state. Keen to expand his territory, he attacked Bhāg Singh, ruler of Jīnd state, and laid siege to Jīnd. 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 and forbade her to go for help. She replied that if Jīnd was captured, nobody could save Paṭiālā for long. She collected troops and left Paṭiālā without the approval of her brother. On the way, many other Sikh chiefs joined her to stand against the Irish invader.

On the battlefield, Thomas opposed them with heavy artillery fire and the Sikhs had to retreat. In the beginning of 1799, Sāhib Kaur collected nine thousand Sikh troops under her command, attacked Thomas' strongholds and cut his supply lines. Her bravery inspired others and the number of her forces increased. After a blockade of one hundred days, Thomas retreated from Jīnd. The Sikh forces pursued him but they too had to retreat when Thomas attacked them while they were sleeping. When the forces returned to Jīnd, they were scolded and taunted by Sāhib Kaur for their cowardice. She said that she would take the field personally to show them how to fight. They felt humiliated and resolved to conquer or to perish.

The Sikhs again attacked Thomas, who offered peace on the condition that that each party should remain in possession of the territories they held before the siege of Jīnd. Every Sikh chief, except Sāhib Singh, was in favor of accepting the terms. Like a wise politician, Sāhib Kaur tried her best to persuade her brother to agree to the peace terms, but he, being a stubborn man, did not agree and Sāhib Kaur signed the treaty on behalf of the Paṭiālā state. This enraged Sāhib Singh, who instigated by his wife, arrested Sāhib Kaur and imprisoned her at Paṭiālā. She appealed to Thomas for aid, who marched to Paṭiālā to help her. He had to fight Paṭiālā forces on his way and consequently, both sides suffered heavily. When Thomas reached near Paṭiālā, the weak-minded Sāhib Singh yielded, accepted the peace terms, and released his sister.

Sāhib Singh was extremely vindictive and possessed of a cruel nature. He again imprisoned Sāhib Kaur in the fort of Paṭiālā. She managed to escape and went to the fort at Saṅgrūr (ਸੰਗਰੂਰ). She was again caught and imprisoned, and seemingly murdered in the prime of her life, during her imprisonment in 1779. Thus ended the life of a brave Sikh heroine.

A noble and brave stateswoman, Sāhib Kaur's courageous deeds will be remembered throughout the generations. In independent India, she would have proved an excellent Prime Minister. Bhāi Kānh Singh (ਭਾਈ ਕਾਨ੍ਹ ਸਿੰਘ), author of Mahān Kosh (ਮਹਾਨ ਕੋਸ਼), writes that she made unique efforts to save and expand her brother's state. Muhammad Latīf (ਮੁਹੰਮਦ ਲਤੀਫ), a famous Muslim historian, writes that the Marāṭhās defeat was due to the fact that Sāhib Kaur herself took part in the battlefield and thus inspired her army. There is no doubt that Sāhib Singh would not have survived as the ruler of Paṭiālā, but for the help of his brave and self-sacrificing sister.

Adapted from: Daughters of the Khālsā, translated by Baldev Singh (ਬਲਦੇਵ ਸਿੰਘ), from Ādarshak Siṅghṇām (ਆਦਰਸ਼ਕ ਸਿੰਘਣੀਆਂ), by Karam Singh (ਕਰਮ ਸਿੰਘ).

*Adapted From: Singh, Harbans, The Encyclopedia of Sikhism and*  
[http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/women/bibi\\_sahib\\_kaur.htm](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/women/bibi_sahib_kaur.htm)

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