

Mātā Kishan Kaur Kaomke (ਮਾਤਾ ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਕੌਰ ਕੌਂਕੇ)

This is the sākhī (ਸਾਖੀ) of a brave woman who lived in the last century and whose life was devoted to the Sikh Panth. She was born in 1856 and was the daughter of Sardār Subā Singh of Village Lohgarh (ਲੋਹਗੜ੍ਹ) in Ludhiānā (ਲੁਧਿਆਣਾ) district. While living in her village, she learned Gurbānī (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ) and Sikh history from the granthī (ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ) of the Gurduārā there. She was married to Sardār Harnām Singh of Village Kaomke. He later on joined the army and died in 1902 while serving in Burma. Her two sons had also died when they were still young. She was thus left a widow and without any children. Rather than bearing the curses of Hindu society of being a widow or feeling lonely, she decided to spend the rest of her life in the service of the Khālsā Panth.

In 1903, Mātā Kishan Kaur went to Gurduārā Sackhand, Nanded in the south of India. The Gurduārā was built in the memory of Gurū Gobind Singh who left for his heavenly abode from there. She stayed at Nanded for some time, took Amrit to become a saint-soldier of the Gurū Khālsā Panth, and started tying a turban on her head. She devoted herself to organizing people to preach and practice the equality of men and women and the so-called low castes and high castes of Hindu society.

After the death of her husband, his brother did not allow her to maintain possession of her share of the land. When other methods failed, she went to the fields and personally told the brother of her husband to leave the fields for her. Finding her alone and helpless in the fields, he made some vulgar jokes and did not leave the fields. She was courageous and a brave person. She raised her strong arm and fixed a hard slap on his face. The man, feeling guilty of his misbehavior and being hit hard by an upright woman ran away to avoid a second slap from her. Mātā Kaomke took over the land which belonged to her. She was respected by the whole village as a great lady of good behavior, with great courage.

When the Gurū Khālsā Panth started the Gurduārā Freedom Movement in the beginning of the 20th century, she joined the movement as an active worker. In 1920, the Mahants refused offerings of some Sikhs who were recent converts from the so-called low-castes. She was with the Sikhs who went to the Golden Temple to protest against this anti-Sikh behavior of the Mahants. She was there to physically set the Mahants straight if they did not listen to their arguments. Observing the mood of the Sikhs, the Mahants fled from the Gurduara leaving it vacant for the Sikhs to occupy and take over its control.

In September 1922, during Gurū Kā Bāgh Morchā, Sikhs were beaten by police and even run over by the mounted police, crushing the bones of Sikhs under the hooves of horses. Mātā Jī and her associates undertook the sevā of caring for the injured Sikhs, taking them to the hospitals, and nursing them there. Every day she would go with the jathā to the Gurū Kā Bāgh. The policemen would beat the Sikhs with lāṭhīs to stop them from going to the Bāgh. The police would let the attending Sikhs carry away the injured members of the protesting jathā. It is then that Mātā Kishan Kaur took over the duty of administering first aid to them and taking them to the hospital.

One day, a very large number of Sikhs suffered very severe injuries. The police chief taunted her by telling her that there was much seva for her to do. Mātā Jī was already feeling very hurt to see the Sikhs being tortured and beaten. After hearing the taunting words of the police chief, she could no longer restrain herself. In response to his comments, she took a few firm daring steps towards the police chief, and looking at him with ferocious eyes, she raised her arm and like a lightning bolt, hit him in the face. The strong unexpected slap shook the police chief and turned his face over his shoulder. Without giving the brave woman a second look, he ran towards his tent to save his face from the second slap. This was a great insult not only for all of the police force, but for the whole British government.

Hearing of the tortures committed against the innocent Sikhs and the bearing of these atrocities against them, Father C.F. Andrews, a Christian missionary, decided to come to Gurū Kā Bāgh. After seeing the inhuman behavior of the British police officers, he cried, "I see hundreds of Christs being crucified every day by the Christians themselves." This changed the direction of the Morchā and finally the government yielded to permit the Sikhs their legal rights by owning the Gurū Kā Bāgh lands.

Mātā Kaomke again performed a daring deed during Jaito Morchā. Sikhs wanted to continue the Akhand Pāth disrupted by the police by arresting all the Sikhs there. A jathā of 500 Sikhs marched from the Akāl Takht in Amritsar to Gurduārā Jaito. People knew the jathā would be handled brutally by the police. To know the truth and details of the brutalities Mātā Kaomke dressed herself as a Jain woman and moved into the police camp. The government forces rained bullets on the jathā. The police secretly disposed of the dead bodies and removed the injured to the hospitals. They issued totally misleading reports and did not give correct information about the Sikhs killed and injured. Mātā Kaomke had seen all the actions with her own eyes and she made the facts public. When the details revealed by her were found to be true, the government was very much embarrassed, and was also very much surprised. After some time the secret police traced her and charged her with espionage. She was sentenced to four years in jail.

In 1925, the government accepted their defeat in the struggle against the Sikhs. They agreed to the formation of a Sikh body which would take over the management of the Gurduārās from the Mahants who were under the control of the government. With this agreement, all the persons arrested in connection with the Gurduārās movement were released. Mātā Kaomke, however, had to remain in jail until 1928 to undergo her full sentence.

When released from jail, she went straight to the Akāl Takht to express her thanks to the Guru for giving her a chance to serve the Khalsa Panth. She suffered for the cause of the Sikhs and the freedom of the Gurduārās from government control. The Panth honored her at the Akāl Takht and gave her the title of Mātā. Since then she became popular as Mātā Kishan Kaur. During the rest of her life, she stayed at her village, built a Gurduārā there and preached the Sikh faith to the people in the region. She died at the age of 96 in 1952.