

*Influential
women
of the
Sikh world
and beyond*



Contents

<u>Mata Tripta</u>	5	<u>Mata Jito</u>	26
<u>Bebe Nanaki</u>	7	<u>Mata Sahib Kaur (Devan)</u>	28
<u>Mata Sulakhni</u>	9	<u>Bibi Basant Lata</u>	30
<u>Mata Khivi</u>	11	<u>Bibi Susheel Kaur</u>	32
<u>Bebe Amro</u>	13	<u>Bibi Anoop Kaur</u>	34
<u>Bibi Dalair Kaur</u>	15	<u>Harsharn Kaur</u>	37
<u>Bibi Bhani</u>	16	<u>Rani Rajinder Kaur</u>	39
<u>Mata Ganga</u>	18	<u>Mai Desan</u>	41
<u>Mata Gujri</u>	20	<u>Sardarni Sada Kaur</u>	43
<u>Mata Sundri</u>	22	<u>Bibi Shamsheer Kaur</u>	45
<u>Mai Bhago</u>	24		

<u>Bibi Sahib Kaur</u>	46	<u>Dr. Dalip Kaur</u>	73
<u>Maharani Data Kaur</u>	48	<u>Tiwan</u>	
<u>Chand Kaur</u>	49	<u>Dr. Inderjit Kaur</u>	74
<u>Maharani Jind Kaur</u>	52	<u>Dr. Kalpana Chawla</u>	76
<u>(Jindan)</u>		<u>Inderjit Kaur</u>	78
<u>Mata Kishan</u>	54	<u>Sandhu</u>	
<u>Kaur Kaonke</u>		<u>Surinder Kaur</u>	79
<u>Princess Sophia</u>	57	<u>Dr. Surjit Kaur</u>	80
<u>Duleep Singh</u>		<u>Amerdeep Kaur</u>	83
<u>Bibi Harnam Kaur</u>	60	<u>Somal</u>	
<u>Gulab Kaur</u>	63	<u>Bhupinder Kaur</u>	85
<u>Dr. Parkash Kaur</u>	65	<u>Atwal</u>	
<u>Agya Kaur</u>	67	<u>Gurpreet</u>	88
<u>Amrita Pritam</u>	69	<u>Grewal-Santini</u>	
<u>Kailash Puri</u>	71	<u>Harita Kaur Deol</u>	90



<u>Harpreet Kaur</u>	92	<u>Dr. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar MBE</u>	116
<u>Capt. Harpreet Kaur Chandi</u>	94	<u>Palbinder Kaur Shergill</u>	118
<u>Dr. Harshinder Kaur</u>	96	<u>Parminder Nagra</u>	119
<u>Harvi Khatkar</u>	98	<u>Ravneet Kaur</u>	121
<u>Jashmer Kaur Grewal</u>	101	<u>Sukhy Basra</u>	123
<u>Jasmit Kaur Phull</u>	103	<u>Surinder Kaur Sandhu</u>	124
<u>Jasvinder Sanghera</u>	106	<u>Baroness Verma</u>	127
<u>Kiran Kaur Ghuman</u>	109	<u>Glossary</u>	128
<u>Chief Supt. Manjit Atwal</u>	111	<u>Disclaimer</u>	130
<u>Manpreet Monica Singh</u>	113	<u>Bibliography</u>	131
<u>Nimrat Kaur</u>	114	<u>Images</u>	133
		<u>Acknowledgements</u>	134



Mata Tripta

d. 1522



Mata Tripta, a deeply spiritual woman, the mother of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, is the first Sikh woman to be remembered in Sikhism.

Tales about Mata Tripta's ethereal beauty have come down the ages when she was expecting Nanak. It is said she was happy, peaceful and meditated throughout her pregnancy. She knew they had been blessed with Nanak, who was a Divine guide from God.

Seeing different facets of Nanak's personality develop fascinated and worried and filled her with joy. She showed a deep understanding of her son as he searched for answers and of his detachment from worldly matters.

She had always welcomed weary saints and holy men to rest in her home which gave Nanak the opportunity to talk freely, about his concerns about spiritual matters.

Nanak married Sulakhni, who gave birth to two sons. Tripta looked after her, guided her, gave her comfort, solace and helped raise her grandsons, while Nanak went on his missionary journeys.

In 1522, Guru Nanak came back. She implored him to stay. He performed her last rites and told everyone to meditate on God's name.

Great honour of being the mother of the saviour Guru Nanak Dev was bestowed upon her.

It is said that souls choose their parents before taking birth and the great souls have to wait, for appropriately exalted parents, to come into this world.

S. Basra



BACK TO
CONTENTS



Bebe Nanaki

1464 - 1518



Nanaki, sister of Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh religion, holds a special place in Sikh history because she was the first to see the light of Divinity in her brother and encouraged him on his spiritual journey. She removed all hindrances which might prevent him from fulfilling his mission in life. She loved his poetry, acknowledged to this day, to be most beautiful.

Born in 1464, she was showered with love by her family. Her father was village Patwari (keeper of land records), a man of means, and they all lived a good life.

At 11, she was married to Jai Ram, with much pomp and show, a revenue officer under the Nawab in Sultanpur. They lived happily, had no children of their own, so she spoiled her two nephews.

She was Nanak's first disciple and a most loving sister. They had a very strong bond. He returned just days before she died and performed her funeral rites according to his new beliefs and teachings.

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Mata Sulakhni

1473 - 1545



A girl named Sulakhni, was born in the village Pakhoke, district Gurdaspur, Punjab. Her father was the Patwari (keeper of the land records and crop revenue). As per custom of the day, she was trained in cooking, sewing, embroidery and housekeeping.

Sulakhni married Guru Nanak in 1487; marriage party and celebrations were a grand and impressive event attended by the rich and influential people of their community. Theirs was a marriage based on love and respect. She was a strong and devoted wife, who stood by his side throughout his travels, embodying his teachings and growing spiritually, she nurtured his followers. She denounced any injustice or discrimination based on caste.

When Guru Nanak came back from his final journey, he established the town of Kartarpur where they settled down. His followers multiplied and came in their thousands, to listen to him preach. He died in 1539; she remained in Kartarpur, contributing to the Sikh traditions and values of Guru Nanak.

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Mata Khivi

1506 - 1582



Mata Khivi was born in 1506 in village Sanghar in district Amritsar. She married Bhai Lehna in 1519, who went on to become Guru Angad Dev. She had generosity and congeniality of spirit. When her husband left to follow the Guru, she raised their children herself.

She upheld all Sikh values and looked after pilgrims and visitors with the utmost attention, managing langar at Khadur Sahib, serving to all with equal respect, without distinction of class, caste or creed. She broke purdah tradition and freed women from confinement of the house, while spreading the Guru's message.

She is credited with establishing the institution of langar, everlasting, which has become an integral part of Sikhism to this day. She died in 1582 and Guru Arjan himself, attended her cremation.

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Bebe Amro

Born in the 1520's



Born in village Khadur near Amritsar to Guru Angad Dev and Mata Khivi. She was taught to read and write in Gurmukhi script by her father, who also taught her sacred hymns, which she learned by heart and sang in her sweet melodious voice.

She was married to Bhai Jasoo of the village Basarke, about eight miles from Amritsar.

It has been written that when Amar Das became the 3rd Guru, he formed 22 "Manjis" (seats of spiritual authority) due to the high demand to see him, a position given to those

empowered to preach in his name. Three of them were women, Amro being one amongst them. She became a revered Sikh preacher at Basarke and the surrounding villages. She was a true meritorious devotee.

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Bibi Dalair Kaur

Born in the 1600s



Bibi Dalair Kaur was a seventeenth-century Sikh woman who fought against the Mughals. She rallied 100 Sikh women against them. She was killed and is considered to be a martyr among Sikhs.



Bibi Bhani

1535 - 1598



Born to Guru Amar Das and Mata Mansa Devi, on 19th January 1535. She was cheerful, calm and spent a lot of time meditating, even as a child. She was lovingly called “Mohani” – one who wins over hearts.

Guru Amar Das had blessed her; her progeny will inherit the Guru Gaddi (seat) after him.

She chose Bhai Jetha for her husband, who later went on to become Guru Ram Das.

When he chose his youngest son, Arjan, to be the next Guru, it was Bhani who helped the other two sons understand that their father had chosen the son who merited the position.

She was the embodiment of Truth, Service and Endurance and was cherished for her wisdom and grace. She is venerated by all Sikhs as the matriarch of all the Gurus that followed.

She stood by Guru Arjan throughout his Guru-ship and died on 9th April 1598 at Goindval.

Guru Arjan Dev writes about her blessings and advice in his hymn given at page 496 of the Guru Granth Sahib.

“O son! This is your mother’s hope and prayer that you may never forget the Lord, even for an instant! May you ever remember the Lord of the Universe! May the True guru be kind to you and may you love the society of the Saints!”

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Mata Ganga

d. 14 May 1621



Mata Ganga was the daughter of Bhai Sangat Rao. She was married to Guru Arjan Sahib, at Lahore, on June 19, 1589. In 1590, she gave birth to (Guru) Hargobind Sahib. She took her last breath, at Baba Bakala in 1621. Mata Ganga was not cremated, and her body was immersed in the river Beas to fulfil her wish that her body too (like her husband's) should be immersed in a river. A Gurdwara at Baba Bakala preserves the memory of Mata Ganga.

Guru Arjan Sahib was first married to Bibi Ram Dei, daughter of Bhai Kishan Chand, of the village Mau Sahib (near Phillaur, Jalandhar) in 1579. Soon after her marriage, she fell ill.

She remained confined to bed for several years. She requested the Guru to have another wife, but the Guru refused. Despite the Guru's refusal, she and Baba Buddha continued pursuing the Guru to do so, and they finally succeeded in getting the Guru's consent to have another wife. It is how he got married to Mata Ganga.

After the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Sahib, Mata Ganga played a very supportive role to get Guru Hargobind Sahib in Gurgaddi (religious command) succession as the 6th guru, as Guru Arjan Sahib's elder brother was trying to snatch Gurgaddi from Guru Hargobind Sahib. He even tried to poison the young Guru. So, under such circumstances, Mata Ganga played a very significant role in fighting off all such adversaries through social and religious efforts.



Mata Gujri

1624 - 1705



Mata Gujri married Guru Tegh Bahadur. They developed a strong bond of love between them. After 33 years of marriage, she gave birth to Gobind Rai. In November, 1675, the Guru was forced by Mughals to convert to Islam, but he refused. He was then arrested and beheaded in Delhi.

Mata Gujri demonstrated maternal devotion to her 9 year old son. Her sacrifice and unwavering faith in nurturing Guru Gobind, inspire courage and commitment to righteousness. She took over the affairs of the Sikh community until he came of age.

He created the Khalsa in 1699 to protect the Sikhs from the Mughal atrocities. Mata Gujri and her two young grandsons were separated from the main party when they were attacked, during the evacuation at Anandpur. Further betrayed by her cook, they were arrested and confined to the cold tower. Knowing what was to come, she told the 7 and 9 year old Sahibzadas, under no circumstances to give up their faith nor bow to the governor. The Sahibzadas were bricked alive in a wall but the masonry crumbled, so they were beheaded the next day.

While waiting to hear the outcome Mata Gujri fell into deep meditation. After hearing the gruesome story from Todar Mal, she collapsed in grief never to recover and died.

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Mata Sundri

1667 - 1747



She was a kind-hearted woman who married Guru Gobind in 1684 at Anandpur and gave birth to his eldest son, Ajit Singh. She was a devoted wife and ideal mother.

In December 1705, the whole family evacuated the fort at Anandpur, but the treacherous Mughal forces attacked them, after issuing a written safe passage. She went with Sahib Kaur Devan to Delhi and only heard the tragic news of the deaths of the whole family, in 1706.

Guru Gobind prepared a fresh recension of Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib with the celebrated scholar Bhai Mani Singh, before he was assassinated in 1708.

The Sikh community looked to Mata Sundri for leadership, she proved to be a far-sighted guide. She requested Bhai Mani Singh to assume charge of the Sikh shrines in Amritsar. She acted as Guru Gobind's emissary, counselling the Khalsa army; with her authority and stamp, issued many Hukum-Namas (Letters of Command). Later these were discovered and found to have been issued between 12 October 1717 – 10 August 1730.

Mata Sundri died in Delhi, in 1747. There is a memorial in her memory at Gurdwara Bala Sahib in New Delhi, where she was cremated. She is still held in high regard by the Sikhs.

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Mai Bhago

1670 – 1720



Born in village Jhabal near Amritsar, she was called Bhag Bhari (fortunate one) but her family affectionately called her Bhago, the name she is known by in Sikh history. She grew up hearing about the atrocities and harassment of Sikhs by the Mughal armies. A well-built, tall woman, she was faithful, true and fearless. Her father trained her in warfare; use of spear, sword and to ride horses. She wore a shield and a small turban and carried small arms in her belt as well.

Max Arthur Macauliffe has written regarding the Sikhs, this paragraph is particularly about Mai Bhago:

“They were joined by a heroine named Bhago who through zeal for the Sikh cause, had donned men’s attire and vowed to suffer death, if necessary, on the blood-stained field of danger on behalf of the Guru. The woman Bhago fought heroically in their ranks, disposed of several of her Mohammadan opponents and transmitted her name as an Indian heroine for the admiration of future generations...”.

The site of this battle was named Muktsar. She earned Guru Gobind’s admiration and became the only woman member of his personal security. Contemporary poets wrote poems about her.

A Gurdwara was built for her near the Gurdwara Sachkhand. Her spear is still preserved there along with Guru Gobind’s weapons.

S. Basra



Mata Jito

21 June 1673 – 5 December 1700



While the Gurus were leading the people on the right path, their wives were helping in achieving this goal by creating a congenial atmosphere. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru, founder of the Khalsa Panth, the Mughal Empire was very powerful. Politically it was an age of turmoil and confusion.

Jito was born in a well-to-do family and brought up in affluence in the bustling city of Lahore. She was the second wife of Guru Gobind and their marriage celebration took place with much grandeur and splendour. Thereafter, they lived in Anandpur.

Together they had three sons, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. This period in their lives was regarded to be golden. Mata Jito held Guru Gobind in great affection and had immense love for him. Every morning when he went to hold Darbar (court), she would put a garland of flowers around his neck. She meditated and sang kirtan (devotional songs) daily. Regarded as a pious woman, she served the devotees of the Guru with love and affection.

She died on 5th December 1700.

S. Basra



Mata Sahib Kaur (Devan)

1 November 1681 - 1747



Her father was a devout Nanak Nam Leva Sikh due to which there was a spiritual atmosphere in their home. She was a devout and pious woman who was present at the formation of the Khalsa Panth, by Guru Gobind. Her father offered her as a bride to the Guru, who refused initially but later agreed, making it clear that it would be a spiritual marriage only.

She was then bestowed with the honour of Eternal Motherhood of the Khalsa Panth. She is their spiritual mother and Guru Gobind their spiritual father.

Guru sent her to Delhi, entrusting her with five arms (weapons) belonging to Guru Hargobind Sahib, to be preserved and displayed with honour. To this day they are at Gurdwara Rakab-Ganj in Delhi and are considered sacred. During her life as Mother of the Khalsa Panth, Mata Sahib Kaur issued many Hukam-Namas (Letters of Command) to the congregation, in the supervision of community affairs.

She devoted the rest of her life to meditating on the Waheguru Naam (True Name). She died in 1747. At Bala Sahib in New Delhi there is a memorial commemorating her, which stands next to the shrine for Guru Har-Krishan.

S. Basra



Bibi Basant Lata

d. 1705



Basant Lata a baptised Sikh had no living relative and she came in the service of Mata Sundri, who treated her like a sister.

On the night of 5 - 6 December 1705, the fort at Anandpur had to be evacuated. Guru Gobind was given safe passage to evacuate. He left with his contingent, his whole family, including his wife Sundri, mother and four sons. Basant Lata was walking along the side of palanquins and Mata Gujri invited her to sit with her but out of respect she declined.

They were attacked by the Mughal army. Guru Gobind lost all his men and two of his elder sons. In utter darkness, Basant Lata stumbled and fell and found herself alone with Mughal soldiers, who arrested her and brought her to their chief as a gift.

She told the chief she was the maidservant of Mata Sundri, and so should let her go. He offered her jewels and proposed of marriage. When she refused, she was imprisoned, kept hungry and made to grind grain by working heavy stone mills.

She was then brought in front of the chief. She grabbed the dagger from his belt and struck it in her chest and died. A letter written to Mata Sundri was found in her pocket, telling her that she had sacrificed her life for her faith and honour, that she would meet her in the next world.

S. Basra



Bibi Susheel Kaur



Banda Singh Bahadur was first married to Sahib Kaur in June 1710. In 1711, when Banda Singh attacked Chamba State, the Raja of the State surrendered. The Raja requested Banda Singh marry his daughter, Princess Susheel (later known as Susheel Kaur). At first, Banda Singh refused, but when the Raja became emotional, Banda Singh had to agree to marry her. After their marriage, Susheel Kaur remained with Banda Singh. She gave birth to a son and named him Ajay Singh.

In April 1715, when Banda Singh came under siege in the fortress of Gurdas Nangal, she and her four-year-old son were with him.

They were arrested and taken to Delhi, where Banda Singh was martyred on 9 June 1716. Before killing Banda Singh, their son Ajay Singh was hacked to death. After this, the executioner pulled out the heart of the baby and tried to thrust it into the mouth of Banda Singh. Even after the gruesome murder of their child, Banda Singh and Susheel Kaur remained calm. After Banda Singh's martyrdom Susheel Kaur was sent into the custody of the local police chief. Though nothing is known about her fate, but, as Rajput ladies are known for ending their lives after the death of their husbands, it is likely that she must have ended her life by some means, or the Mughals might have killed her.



Bibi Anoop Kaur



The Sikh Gurus not only preached for the equal status of women but also revolutionised their social life. History is full of examples of women who did not step out of the house without covering their faces and performed wonderful, daring deeds in life. After being baptised, they faced the enemy courageously and preferred death to an immoral, comfortable life. The life story of martyr Bibi Anoop Kaur is a golden example worth narrating. She was born in 1690 in the village Jalopur Khere, near Amritsar. Her father's name was Lachchman Das Sodhi.

When her parents migrated to Anandpur Sahib, Anoop Kaur was only five years old. She used to play with Sahibzadas (Guru Gobind Singh's sons) and was liked by Mata Sundri. She grew up learning Gurbani and battlefield activities. After being baptised as a young girl, Anoop Kaur, with her group, took part in a battle against the hill chiefs. Victory in this battle boosted self-confidence among the young girls.

She continued to take part in every battle, and even after leaving Anandpur Sahib with Guru Gobind Singh ji, she fought battles at the river Sirsa before parting with Guru's army. After the martyrdom of the younger sahibzadas, she marched towards Sirhind with her troops.

On their way, they faced a patrolling party of the Mughal soldiers. In the fight with them, two Sikh soldiers were killed, and Anoop Kaur was injured, but the Mughal soldiers took to their heels.



They were on their way to Sirhind, when the chief of Malerkotla state with two hundred soldiers surrounded them. Anoop Kaur's companions died fighting, and she was injured. Consequently, she was arrested and taken to Malerkotla. The chief of Malerkotla wanted to marry her, but she was not going to let it happen. The chief sent for Kazi (Muslim cleric) to forcibly convert her to Islam and marry her. But when they opened the door of her cell, they found only her dead body, as she had thrust a dagger into her chest and had taken her own life.



Harsharn Kaur



After all his men and two elder sons died in the battle of Chamkaur, Guru Gobind was urged by the five beloved ones to leave at night, under cover of darkness.

A woman who had been wet-nurse to the Sahibzadas, recognized the Guru and asked about the family, especially the Sahibzadas. He told her they were killed as well as 35 of his men. Upon hearing this she made up her mind to give a proper cremation to them all, considering this to be her moral duty.

She risked her life to enter the battlefield of Chamkaur, armed and dressed as a Muslim woman, to retrieve and cremate the bodies of Guru Gobind's sons and his fallen soldiers. With tears in her eyes, she prayed for them all.

The light from the fire woke the soldiers who saw a woman standing. They asked her who she was, but she did not speak, even under threat. At seeing her holding a sword they fired on her wounding her severely. Two soldiers then lifted her and threw her body on the fire, along with her sword.

S. Basra



Rani Rajinder Kaur

1738 - 1791



Griffin, Sir Lepel writer of *The Rajas (kings) of Punjab*, writes:

“Rani Rajinder Kaur was one of the most remarkable of her age. She possessed all the virtues which men pretend their own; courage, perseverance and sagacity, without any mixture of the weaknesses which men attribute to women.” Married at age 13, her husband died in the prime of his life and she took over the management of his family estate of 200 villages, while still a teenager.

She was the granddaughter of famous Baba Ala Singh. In 1778, her cousin Amar Singh was defeated by Hari Singh, the chief of Saiba.

Together with her 3000 men, she defeated him, who now had to pay a large tribute to her cousin and return the lost territory. When a large intimidating Maratha army came demanding Rs 800,000 in tribute, she went to Mathura and negotiated a lower amount.

Upon her return from Mathura after 4 months, Nannu Mal, the Prime Minister was dismissed from his post and she fell from her status due to conspiracies and intrigues of the palace. She asked to see her nephew Sahib Singh, who declined to meet her. All her privileges were withdrawn, and she lost all respect.

The ingratitude of her most selfless service to the state broke her heart. Disgraced she fell ill at Patiala and after a brief illness, died in despair.

S. Basra



Mai Desan

1740 - 1794



Bibi Desan Kaur Waraich was born to Sardar Amir Singh Waraich, a very old Sikh Chieftain of Gujranwala. She had two elder brothers Dal Singh and Gurbaksh Singh, and a sister.

In 1756 she married Sardar Charat Singh of the Sukerchakia Misl. The couple had four children two sons, Mahan Singh also known as Maha Singh, and Sahej Singh followed by two daughters, Bibi Raj Kaur (not to be confused with the wife of Mahan Singh) and Saheer Kaur.

Sardarni Desan Kaur administered the Sukerchakia Misl since her husband was mostly away to battle.

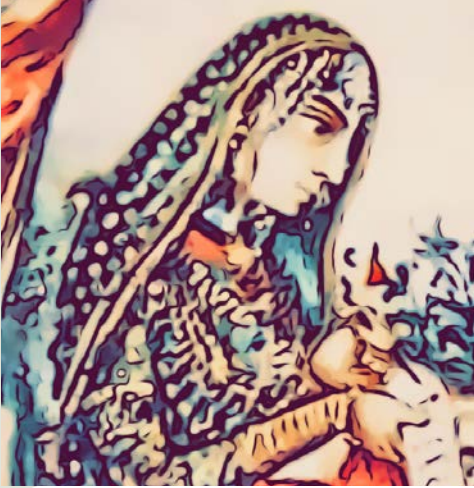
In 1770, her spouse died and was succeeded by her son, who was a minor. Mai Desan Kaur assumed the leadership of the Sukerchakia Misl as Mahan Singh was too young to run his affairs.

Desan Kaur was an able administrator, her people prospered and were happy under her rule. She was courageous and had tact and ability. One of the first tasks she undertook was the rebuilding of the fort at Gujranwala which had been destroyed by Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1751–1752. She renamed the new fort Mahan Singh ki Garhi.



Sardarni Sada Kaur

1762 - 1832



Better known as mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, she was politically astute, intelligent, ambitious, diplomatic and a military leader. She ruled the area under the Kanhaiya Misl, after her husband was killed, from 1789 – 1821 and had the loyalty of 8000 men.

Ranjit Singh assumed control of the Sukarchakia Misl and married Mehtab Kaur, daughter of Sada Kaur at age 15, and came under her influence.

She directed Ranjit Singh's unbounded energy towards unifying Punjab, telling him whoever controls Lahore controls Punjab. Leading citizens of Lahore secretly invited him to come and take the city.

She placed a large contingent of her men at his disposal. Together they encircled the fort in the night and the siege began the next morning. After the first breach was made in the wall, massive gates of the city were thrown open and the 18 year old conqueror, entered the citadel with Sada Kaur, to the boom of guns firing a royal salute, on 7th July 1799.

Relations became increasingly strained because Mehtab Kaur had failed to produce an heir-apparent and her inability to get on with her husband had created a rift between Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh. He also distrusted her ambition. In 1821 he ordered sequestration of her estates, giving Batala as Jagir(estate) to her grandson, (his son) Prince Sher Singh. She was apprehended trying to cross over to the British territory. Thereafter, she was kept in protective custody until her death in 1832.

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Bibi Shamsher Kaur



Bibi Shamsher Kaur Ji was a Hindu; later, she became a Gursikh Warrior.

Shamsher Kaur Ji fought the battle of Batala (1785). She was bestowed five villages to protect and preach Sikhi. Bibi Shamsher Kaur was a fearless Sikh warrior who led a 1,000-strong army and rescued captured women from tyrants.



Bibi Sahib Kaur

1773 - 1799



She was a woman of remarkable leadership and diplomacy. Extraordinarily intelligent, beautiful and brilliant. She could read and write Punjabi and was taught the arts of using arms and horse riding in her childhood. She was married in 1780, with great pomp and ceremony. It is said that the wedding party consisted of 20,000 members.

Her younger brother was Sahib Singh who became the ruler in 1781 at the age of six. According to the historians, he was cowardly, lazy and stupid. In 1791, Sahib Singh invited his sister Sahib Kaur to be his Prime Minister and gave her complete freedom to administer his state.

She defeated the Maratha, Nana Rao, with an army of 7000 men, to their army of 12000. She helped many other hilly state chiefs and had battles with the Irish adventurer George Thomas, who came to her rescue when her brother imprisoned her, for signing peace terms with him.

Sahib Singh again imprisoned Sahib Kaur and it is believed she was killed there.

She was a noble and brave woman, excellent at statesmanship. She occupies an important place in Sikh history. Thomas called her a man in her character. She made unique efforts to save and expand her brother's territory, but for his brave and sacrificing sister, Sahib Singh would not have survived.

S. Basra



Maharani Data Kaur

c. 1784 – 20 June 1838



Born Bibi Raj Kaur Nakai; she was the queen consort of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Empire and the mother of his successor, Maharaja Kharak Singh.

The Maharani took charge of the Sheikhupura Fort. She was formally granted it as her jagir (landed property) by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

She took an active interest in the affairs of the State and accompanied her son, Kharak Singh, as a fellow commander during the expedition to Multan in 1818.

Chand Kaur

1802 - 1842



Chand Kaur was married to Kharak Singh, the heir apparent of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in 1812 and they had one son named Nau Nihal Singh. He became the second Maharaja of Punjab, on 27th June 1839, at the death of his father.

Kharak Singh encountered the envy of his powerful and ambitious Chief Minister Dhian Singh Dogra, who started rumours, that he was planning on handing over Punjab to the British, give them money from the state revenues and disband the Khalsa army.

On 8 October 1839, Kharak Singh was dethroned, imprisoned and poisoned with white lead and mercury in his food, and died in 11 months, on 5 November 1840. During this period, Nau Nihal Singh, a capable youth, had taken over the administration of the government. On his way back from cremating his father, he was wounded when a brick archway fell on his head. He died and was cremated on the same site as his father, within hours.

Chand Kaur's shock at the death of her husband and son, didn't last long. She staked her claim to the crown. With the support of her powerful Sandhawalia relations, she was proclaimed Maharani of the Punjab, on 2nd December 1840, while Sandhawalias took full control of the administration. She proved to be totally inept in the art of diplomacy, vain, ill-tempered and used rough language. She came to be known as Mai (mother).



Sher Singh, son of Mehtab Kaur, laid siege to Lahore fort and forced his way into the city, with 26,000 men in infantry, 8000 horses and 45 guns, causing death and destruction everywhere. Mai was left with only 5000 men, a few guns and limited quantity of gunpowder.

On 7th January 1841, Mai was persuaded to accept a handsome Jagir (estate) and relinquish her pretensions to the throne. She was killed by her maids on 11th June 1842, while dressing her hair, they crushed her skull with a stone.

S. Basra



Maharani Jind Kaur (Jindan)

1817 – 1863



A first-hand account describes, Jindan: “had more wit and daring than any man of her nation... She was skilful in the use of her pen...”.

She was the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and mother of his seventh son Duleep Singh who inherited the throne at age 5.

At age seven he was proclaimed Maharaja and his mother, the youthful and comely Jindan assumed the role of queen Mother, from 1843- 46.

After the last Anglo-Sikh war, she favoured retaining British troops for protection but soon realized her mistake.

The British appointed a Resident at Lahore, who became the absolute and sole ruler of the Punjab. Maharaja Duleep Singh handed over the Koh-I-Noor diamond and stepped down from his illustrious father's throne, never to sit on it again. He was exiled to England age 10 and she was imprisoned and then banished from her country.

She finally met Duleep Singh again in 1860, in Calcutta and returned with him to England, where she told him about his Sikh heritage and Kingdom, which once had been his to rule.

She died on 1st August 1863 at the age of 46, in Kensington, London.

S. Basra



Mata Kishan Kaur Kaonke

Born c.1856



Born in 1856 in village Lohgarh, she learnt Gurmukhi script, Gurbani and Sikh history from the Bhai of her Gurdwara. She married Harnam Singh from the village Kaonke, they had two sons and a daughter. Widowed and childless she decided to serve her community by devoting herself to spreading the teachings of the Gurus.

She fought for her own rights and the rights of others, for example, she took back possession of her land which her brother-in-law had seized. She protested when the head of Har Mandir Sahib discriminated against the lower caste Sikhs, which was against the Sikh teachings, of equality for all.

In 1922, she protested with her fellow Sikhs, when the British mounted police refused them access to the Gurdwara, Guru Ka Bagh, by riding over them. She helped nurse the injured and brought them to hospital. The protesters continued, on their non-violent march.

Hearing of this Father C. F. Andrews, a Christian missionary came to verify the facts and was horrified at seeing the inhumane behaviour. His statement forced the State government to yield and allow the Sikhs to take control of their Gurdwara.

Another time, the British tried to prevent the Sikhs from protesting the forced abdication of the ruler of the state of Nabha, by non-stop reading of their holy scripture. They arrested all Sikhs present, who remained non-violent. Mata Kaonke joined volunteers to collect rations to feed them.



Police opened fire at another group of Sikhs. The authorities tried to minimise the numbers of dead and injured but having seen everything Mata Kaonke made the facts public, which embarrassed the government. The police charged her with espionage. She was prosecuted and sentenced to four years in prison.

When released from prison in June, 1928, an honour was bestowed upon her from the Akal Takht (Eternal Throne) to the title of “Mata” (mother).

S. Basra



Princess Sophia Duleep Singh

1876 – 1948



Sophia Jindan Alexdrovna Duleep Singh, was born on 8th August 1876, she was the daughter of the last Maharaja of Lahore.

She was a long-term supporter of Women's Suffrage movement and leading campaigner of women's rights in Britain. She used her fame, position and tenacity in the fight for gender equality.

Her tireless activities ranged from participating in landmark historical events, such as "Black Friday", on 18th November 1910, when she marched on Parliament with 300 Suffragettes demanding to see the Prime Minister, who refused to meet them.

When the violence erupted, she rescued a fellow suffragette from a policeman. 100 protesters were arrested that day.

She refused to fill in the Census in 1911, stating, “No Vote, No Census, and refused to pay tax, “No Vote, No Tax.” The Princess protested that taxation without representation was tyranny. “When the women of England are enfranchised and the state acknowledges me as a citizen, I shall, of course pay my share willingly towards it’s upkeep”. During the First World war, the women’s movements temporarily ceased activity to support the war effort.

She and her sister Princess Bamba travelled to India twice, in 1907 and 1924. The people were overjoyed at seeing the granddaughters of Ranjit Singh, resplendent in saris and traditional jewels. They shouted “We’re with you. We will give you the world”.



She died in her sleep on 22nd August 1948.
On her instructions a full band played Wagner's
Funeral March at her cremation and the ashes
were taken to India for burial.

S. Basra



Bibi Harnam Kaur

1882 - 1906



Jiuni (baptized name Harnam Kaur) was a selfless pioneer in the field of female education. She learnt to read Punjabi from her father and by age 6 she had already read many religious books.

In 1894 she married Bhai Takht Singh, a selfless worker in the field of education for boys. When he decided to open a school exclusively for girls, he approached Jiuni's parents to let her help him to run the school. They agreed and in November 1892 the school opened. Takhat Singh was manager and Jiuni the only teacher. She earned Rs6 per month.

Later they opened the Sikh Chief Girls School (Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalā) where they began offering boarding facilities for girls who lived too far to be able to attend.

No tuition-fees were charged, the whole venture ran on donations from the well to do Sikh families. Harnam Kaur worked as the Superintendent of the Boarding House.

The girls were taught all virtues of a good Sikh woman, in addition to reading and writing they were taught singing with musical instruments, embroidery and English as well.

In 1915, there were 312 students of which 210 were boarders. The school was preparing students for entry to Punjab University, had a competent staff of both sexes numbering 45.



She was an ordinary woman whose only ambition in life was to raise the status of women. Bibi Harnam Kaur did not live a full life dying in her prime in 1907 but she left behind a towering monument to herself in the shape of Chief Girls School (Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalā) in Ferozepur.

S. Basra



Gulab Kaur

Born c. 1890 – 1931



Born in the village Bakshiwala in the District of Sangrur in around 1890 in a farming family. She was married to Maan Singh and went to live in Manila in the Philippines, on their way to America. While waiting there, she started attending Ghadr party meetings and became so convinced of the cause that she set off on a return journey to India, to fight for its independence from the British.

Due to her activities fighting for freedom, she was imprisoned and tortured for three years in Lahore jail, without any legal proceedings. Upon release she continued fighting for freedom to her last breath. All Ghadrists called her their sister.

While attending a Ghadr Party meeting in Sangowal they received a warning from a sympathiser, that the police were on their way. Everybody got away. Gulab Kaur dressed herself in a long kurta, a deep veil to cover her face and a sheet to cover herself completely. She set a clay pot on her head, as if a village woman going for water and walked out of the village right under the noses of the police.

She died just a few days after the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. They had all been hanged in Lahore on 23rd March 1931.

S. Basra



Dr. Prarkash Kaur

1914 - 1994



Born in the village Khara in 1914, she defied societal norms to pursue her passion in medicine and became a surgeon. She married Dr Upkar Singh and together they opened a hospital.

She was chosen to take charge of meeting the needs of Sikh and Hindu refugees in Punjab camps during partition. She went on daring sorties with a colleague, to Pakistan, to rescue Sikh and Hindu girls. She continued to work endlessly for the welfare of women and children, to rehabilitate refugees and to operate Red Cross camps. Later she set up health centres in villages.

She was invited to take part in politics and was successful in securing Punjabi script and spoken, as the language of Punjab and appointed first woman Minister with a portfolio of Social Welfare and Health.

She is indeed an inspiration even to the women of today. She died on 29th May 1994.

S. Basra



Agya Kaur

d. 1918



Agya Kaur was the second wife of Bhai Takhat Singh, the founder of the Sikh Girls Boarding School (Mahavidyala) in Firozpur with Harnam Kaur, his first wife who died in 1906.

They were married in 1910 at Sultanpur. In February 1911, they went on a fund-raising tour of the South Asian countries, where she made fervent appeals for donations. Her commitment to raise funds demonstrates her dedication to uplifting of the girls. They returned to Punjab on 3rd March 1912, and she resumed her duties at the school as a teacher and matron of the hostel.

In 1917–18 many Indian and English soldiers returned to Punjab, survivors of the deadliest war the world had ever known. But the influenza travelled with them from the battlefields of Europe. That fall the flu was the deadliest it had ever been, ravaging the earth, one fifth of the world's population became infected. Known as the "Spanish flue", the pandemic of 1918–19 killed between 25–40 million people.

Her untimely death during the influenza epidemic is a reminder of the toll taken by this global catastrophe. She died on 27 October 1918.

S. Basra



Amrita Pritam

31 August 1919 - 31 October 2005



Born in Gujranwala, Punjab in British India, her mother died when she was only 11. She and her father moved to Lahore where she lived until the partition of India in 1947.

She started writing poems at a young age, publishing her first book of poetry at age 16, the year she married Pritam Singh. Initially she wrote romantic poetry but as she grew up, she saw the pain of people (Lok Peed) openly criticized the war-torn economy that caused the famine in Bengal in 1943, seeing the horrors of partition in 1947, she became involved in social work to help the needy.

She left Lahore and moved to Delhi where she wrote her most famous poem called “ajj aakhan Waris Shah nu”, I ask Waris Shah today. This poem immortalized her in writing, about the horrors of partition. Thereafter, many of her works were translated into English, Japanese, French, Danish, Mandarin and many other languages.

Amrita’s Magnum Opus, is a very long poem called Sunehade (golden), won her the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956, India’s highest literary award. She received countless awards, particularly the ultimate Sahitya Akedemi Fellowship awarded to the “Immortals of Literature” for lifetime achievement.

Many of her novels were made into films. Later her works became more spiritual, she wrote two autobiographies, in which she wrote about her un-requited love for poet Sahir Ludhianvi. She died in her sleep, age 86, after a long illness.

S. Basra



Kailash Puri

1925 – 2017



Kailash Puri was Punjab's first 'agony aunt' and sexologist.

Kailash inspired a generation of women who found in her the confidante who would answer the questions they could ask no one else. A woman talking about romance and lovemaking openly wasn't something that Punjabi society could have easily accepted. But she did, beginning by answering queries about women's problems in the 1950s in a magazine called Subhagwati (Versatile Woman).

When readers sent their problems into the magazine, Kailash began responding to them. “To my great amazement, the magazine was an overnight success,” she said. “People were so repressed in those days. Women were not allowed to share their grievances or their hardships. They just suffered. I was the one to whom they could talk in confidence.”



Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwan

4 May 1935 – 31 January 2020



She was one of the foremost novelists and short-story writers of contemporary Punjabi literature. She won awards, both regional and national and was a widely translated author. She retired as a Professor of Punjabi and Dean of Punjabi University, Patiala. She is widely credited as a tour-de-force in the creation of contemporary literature in the Punjabi language.



Dr. Inderjit Kaur

25 January 1942



She received her M.B.B.S. degree from Government Medical College in Patiala in 1967. She was very influenced by Bhagat Puran Singh, who was a writer, environmentalist and philanthropist, dedicated to humanitarian work. He established "Pingalwara", a home for the abandoned, orphaned, sick, mentally retarded and disabled of Amritsar.

After the death of Dr Inderjit's father, he took her in, as his daughter. In 1986 he designated her, his successor. Under her leadership Pingalwara took on the new problems of AIDS and drug addiction. Her concern for this segment of society motivated her to open special needs schools to accommodate her patients.

Under her guidance Pingalwara has rushed relief to many parts of India affected by floods, earthquake, tsunami and various other natural calamities. She is an environmentalist. Among her concerns are deforestation, natural farming, preservation of natural resources and pollution control.

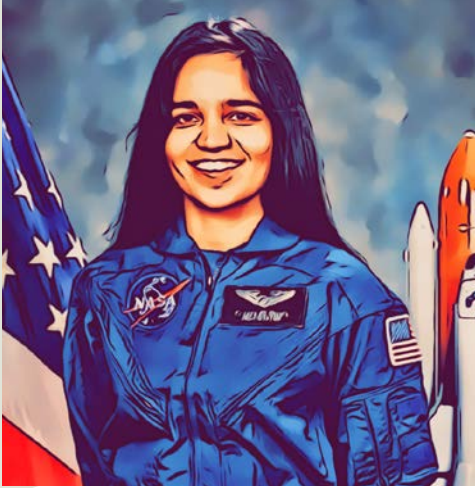
Dr Inderjit Kaur has received many honours for her tireless charitable works and social causes. A most unique woman, who has led a selfless life of service to the most vulnerable of the society.

S. Basra



Dr. Kalpana Chawla

17 March 1962 - 1 February 2003



Born in India, in a conservative Punjabi Hindu family. She broke many traditions to become the first Indian born female astronaut. After graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Aeronautical Engineering from Punjab Engineering College, she moved to the USA in 1982, where she graduated with two Masters degrees and a PhD by 1988.

After becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen, she applied and joined the NASA Astronaut Corps, in March 1995 and was selected for her first flight in 1997, on board the Space Shuttle Columbia. While travelling 6.5 million miles in the weightlessness of space she wrote “you are just your intelligence”.

Her second Space mission on 16th January 2003, was aboard Space Shuttle Columbia, which had been postponed many times due to technical problems. This time a piece of foam broke off from the Shuttle external tank and struck the port wing of the orbiter. Upon entry into the Earth's atmosphere, the damage caused the Shuttle to break apart.

Kalpana died on 1st February 2003 in the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, along with six other crew members, over Texas. Her remains were identified, cremated and scattered at Zion National Park in Utah, in accordance with her wishes.

S. Basra



Inderjit Kaur Sandhu

1 September 1923 - 27 January 2022



As a young school girl, she collected money, clothing and things to give to the refugees arriving from Pakistan. She was the first Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University Patiala from 1975-77. Yet again, she broke the glass ceiling as Chairperson of the Staff Selection Commission, New Delhi. First and until now the only woman to hold this office.

S. Basra

Surinder Kaur

25 November 1929 – 14 June 2006



Trained in Indian classical music, famous all over India, singer-songwriter, came to be known as “Punjab di koyal” (nightingale of Punjab). In her career, she recorded over 2,000 songs, mostly folk songs. Amongst them were poems written by Amrita Pritam and Shiv Kumar Batalvi—two giants in the world of Indian poetry.



Dr. Surjit Kaur

1934 - 18 March 2021



Dr. Surjit Kaur was the first Indian Sikh female General Practitioner in Leicester. She devoted her life to helping people and working in the medical profession for 40 years.

Dr. Kaur graduated from Lady Harding Medical College in Delhi in 1965. She overcame many obstacles to enter the medical profession, especially as a female. After moving to the UK, she worked as a general practitioner.

Dr. Kaur opened her own practice in Thurmaston in 1974. She was the only Asian female doctor in the area, and many people would come to see her, especially Asian women. She was not only a doctor but also a friend to many of her patients.

Dr. Kaur's patients sometimes needed help with forms or post that they did not understand. She always helped them and was respected by her peers and patients despite working in a male-dominated field.

After retiring in 2003, Dr. Kaur continued to volunteer at the Royal Infirmary A & E for several years. She was also very involved in her community. She held English lessons and organised sewing courses for local women as the president of the Ladies Committee (istri Sabha) at Sikh Gurdwara on Meynell Road.

Dr. Kaur donated money and time to several causes, including stationery and book donations for schools. She also sent medical supplies, X-ray mammogram machines, and hospital beds for cancer patients to India.



Dr. Kaur was the president of The Sikh Welfare & Cultural Society in Leicester since 1995.

Her charity efforts as part of the society earned her an invitation to one of the Queen's garden parties at Buckingham Palace. She met both the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Dr. Kaur passed away on 18 March 2021 at the age of 87. Her funeral took place on 30 March 2021. Unfortunately, Dr. Kaur could not see her children and grandchildren in the year leading up to her death due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Dr. Kaur was an inspiration to her children and many others. She supported charities such as the British Heart Foundation, Great Ormond Street Hospital, and Asthma UK.



Amerdeep Kaur Somal



Amerdeep Somal is the incoming Chair of the board at the Law Society of England and Wales. She is the UK Complaints Commissioner to the financial regulators (Bank of England, Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority) and Chief Commissioner and Chair at the Data and Marketing Commission. She sits on the board of the Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman. She is a Judge of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal.

She was the Independent Assessor to the Financial Ombudsman Service and a board member of the General Medical Council and Nursing and Midwifery Council. She was a former founding Commissioner at the Independent Police Complaints Commission and has held a number of board roles. She practiced as a defence and prosecution lawyer.



Bhupinder Kaur Atwal



Bhupindar was born in Simla, India, where her father served as an Officer in the Indian Army. During Partition, when many Sikhs and Hindus were forced to leave their homes, Bhupindar's family also had to move from their ancestral village, Alomahar, in the District of Sialkot to settle in Dehradun. After training as a primary school teacher, Bhupindar worked in the Mapping Department at The Survey of India, where she drew out geographical maps for India as part of a team.

In 1964, Bhupindar moved to England and married her husband on the same day she arrived. They settled in Leicester, where they had three daughters. Bhupindar kept working while her husband worked the night shift. She presented the Milan show, which was broadcast on Radio Leicester for six years, from 1975 to 1981. The program provided news, cultural items, and popular Hindi music for the growing Indian community in the UK. Bhupindar presented the show with Kartar Singh Sandhu and Youseff Choudary, interviewing Stars from India, including the late Lata Mangeshkar, the late Mohammed Rafi, Dharmendra, and Amitabh Bachchan. She also compèred shows for the Indian Community in the Midlands and interviewed dignitaries for the Milan program.



Bhupindar was also involved in many community groups that promoted different Asian minorities and fostered a joined-up community with various people and locals. She performed in a local Asian play at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester, which was a forerunner to the Tara Arts theatre group. In 1981, Bhupindar moved to the newly launched Centre Radio and presented the Sabras program, which featured her interviewing local business people who brought new ideas and products to the community. Bhupindar provided interpreter skills and translated several papers and pamphlets for various organizations throughout Leicester.

From 1986 to 2004, Bhupindar worked as a Civil Servant for HM Customs & Excise before retiring. Throughout her life, Bhupindar's resilience and dedication to her work and community have always defined her.



Gurpreet Grewal-Santini



A Journey of Resilience and Cultural Legacy

Gurpreet Grewal-Santini, the eldest in a Sikh family, discovered strength and cultural richness in the embrace of her grandparents following her father's loss. Raised in a serene village in Punjab, she was inspired by her grandmother's wisdom, fostering a passion for crafts, embroidery, and doll-making.

Motivated by her grandfather's teachings, Gurpreet embarked on a transformative journey to England with her mother and sister. The challenges of integrating into Western culture became stepping stones for personal growth; she had the privilege of starting the first Punjabi language radio programme in East Midlands in 1992.

Gurpreet's professional path spanned the public sector, voluntary organisations, and community engagement. A versatile contributor, she actively participated in charitable events, showcasing her commitment to community development. Beyond her professional life, Gurpreet is an avid learner, tackling challenges from learning new languages/skills to climbing three peaks. Her interests encompass sewing, embroidery, creative artwork, gardening, travel, and artistic expression through singing and dancing.

In the midst of her diverse pursuits, she remains a devoted carer for her mother, embodying unwavering strength in family bonds. A dedicated wife and mother of two sons, her life is a testament to resilience, cultural preservation, and the harmonious integration of tradition with the demands of a dynamic world. Gurpreet's journey reflects a deep commitment to family, heritage, and the pursuit of a diverse and fulfilling life.



Harita Kaur Deol

10 November 1971 - 24 December 1996



Flight Lieutenant Harita Kaur Deol was born in Chandigarh, Punjab. Her mother Kamaljit Kaur was her role model to whom she was very close and her father an army officer, Colonel Ranbir Singh Deol. She was a pilot and first female in the Indian Air Force, to fly solo on 2nd September 1994.

Air Commodore P. R. Kumar wrote, "She was confident and in full control of the aircraft. Her take-off and landing were excellent. The standard she demonstrated was much more than my expectation".

In 1993, she became one of the first seven women cadets inducted into the Air Force for Short Service Commission Officers, chosen from 20,000 applicants.

She died tragically at the young age of only 25 on 24th December 1996, one of 24 Air Force personnel to die that day, when the Avro aircraft in which they were travelling crashed.

Harita Kaur was a brave young woman who had always dreamed of being an Air Force pilot, which she achieved in 1992. She left a legacy of true inspiration for generations of women to come.

S. Basra



Harpreet Kaur



Harpreet Kaur is a four-time Emmy Award-winning producer and is the founder of Sach Productions. For over a decade, Harpreet has directed award winning documentaries shedding light on social issues.

Through advocacy and storytelling, Harpreet has impacted the lives of the individuals in her films and has inspired her audiences to become proactive. Her debut feature documentary, 'The Widow Colony' was the first Sikh film to be shown at the Canadian and UK Parliament, followed by a screening at the United States Congress.

Her documentary, 'A Little Revolution' takes viewers into the homes of children of farmers in Punjab, India, who have committed suicide. Harpreet strives to educate, entertain, and enlighten viewers with her ability to share compelling stories.



Cpt. Harpreet Kaur Chandi

Born c. 1989



Born in Derby in a Sikh family, she is sometimes known as “Polar Preet”. She joined the territorial Army in 2008 and the British Army at age 27.

Captain Chandi launched her expedition challenge at The Shard on 21st October 2021. The Defence-Minister praised her “physical and mental resilience”. She set out on her solo expedition on 7th November 2021 from Antarctica’s Hercules Inlet. A journey to the South Pole of 700 miles. She completed her journey in 40 days, 7 hours and 3 minutes, making her the third fastest woman to reach the South Pole un-assisted.

In November 2022 she set off on her second solo expedition from Hercules Inlet with the aim of becoming the first woman to cross Antarctica solo and unsupported, hoping to reach Reedy Glacier within 75 days. She was “pretty gutted” to have missed on the crossing record. On 20th January 2023, it was announced that she had broken the world record for the longest solo expedition, having travelled 868 miles up to that point.

On 26th November 2023, she decided to ski solo and on 28th December 2023, she reached the South Pole, to become the fastest solo woman skier to complete this route.

She was appointed a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2022 birthday honours; the Queen’s last. She has also been given an honorary degree by the University of Derby.

S. Basra



Dr. Harshinder Kaur

Born 6 September 1962



Dr. Harshindar Kaur has dedicated her life to fighting the curse of female feticide and infanticide.

For close to three decades now, she has worked tirelessly traversing the villages and rural areas of Punjab to fight the spread of female feticide as well as educating the masses on the disastrous consequences of this inhumane practice.

An outspoken crusader for women's rights, she has undertaken many initiatives for women's upliftment and empowerment.

Dr. Kaur is the founder of Dr. Harsh Charitable Trust, which pays for the education of orphaned children. Starting with just one girl child, the trust now pays for more than 400 orphaned children.

Her efforts have been recognized the world over. She is the recipient of numerous national and international awards and honours for her tireless work spanning decades.



Harvi Khatkar



Harvi Khatkar is a trailblazer in the realm of law enforcement. She is the first Sikh and Black or Ethnic Minority (BME) woman to attain the rank of Superintendent in the West Midlands Police. Harvi has a 28-year career of dedication, resilience, and a commitment to positive change within the force. She has served in diverse roles such as neighbourhood policing, response, operations, intelligence, integrated offender management, partnerships, and criminal justice. Her proficiency and leadership qualities propelled her to the rank of Superintendent in 2017 and Chief Superintendent in 2020.

In addition to her professional duties, Harvi actively contributes to breaking down barriers and fostering diversity within the police force. As Vice President of the Police Superintendents' Association (PSA), she assumed a pivotal role representing superintendents and chief superintendents across 49 police forces. Elected in 2021 as the lead for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic members, she further ascended to the position of Vice President in March 2022.

Harvi champions representation for under-represented colleagues, emphasizing the importance of lived experience in shaping inclusive policies. Her dedication to diversity is reflected in initiatives like the Future Supers programme, which supports under-represented groups in securing senior roles within the police force. She emphasizes the need for police forces to work better with diverse communities, acknowledging both successes and areas for improvement.



To aspiring individuals, particularly women and those from under-represented groups, Harvi offers advice rooted in her own experiences. Her story serves as an inspiration, illustrating that with resilience, determination, and a robust support network, success in policing is attainable. As she navigates the challenges and successes that lie ahead, Harvi Khatkar remains a beacon of leadership, resilience, and positive transformation in the world of law enforcement.



Jashmer Kaur Grewal



Jashmer was born in Tanzania in 1936, and grew up in East Africa. After completing her education, she had a desire to study and work in healthcare, but family pressures led to an arranged marriage in India. After her husband's death, Jashmer moved to Rampur in Punjab, where she started a poultry business and later learned about natural remedies. She taught knitting and sewing to local women, bred Jersey cows, and became a primary school teacher. Jashmer and her daughters immigrated to the UK in 1980, where she worked as a hairdresser before her parents arrived to help support them.

Jashmer was an active member of the community throughout her life, participating in organizations such as Girl Guides and Red Cross. She also spent time with her maternal uncles, who were spiritual healers and herbal doctors and learned about keeping good health and mental well-being. Her interest in natural remedies was further developed when she started reading about them and began massaging babies in her village.

Jashmer was a resilient and entrepreneurial woman who adapted to changing circumstances throughout her life. She bought a knitting machine and trained local women to knit, and later started a dairy business selling milk and butter. She also taught typing and offered additional tuition to some of her students. Jashmer's life is a testament to the power of perseverance and the ability to adapt to new situations.



Jasmit Kaur Phull



I was born in Mumbai, India, and I completed my education at St. Anthony's High School, where I excelled academically. Soon after, I completed a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology, which allowed me to set up my own pathology laboratory in Mumbai.

When it came to marriage, my parents were not in a rush and prioritized finding a good match for me. I married Jaswant, a medical doctor in Guyana, whom my father's friend recommended. After having two sons, we moved to the United Kingdom, where we've travelled extensively and have been blessed by the love and respect we've received.

Although I faced challenges in Guyana, I found kindness in others. I chose to stay home to raise my children while my husband focused on his job and exams. I later did voluntary work in their school and took up a job.

I served as a Magistrate for 18 years, and it was an eye-opening experience. I loved the justice system and enjoyed being part of it. Radio and TV shows invited me to share my story, including a conversation with my husband about our arranged marriage, which was recorded by the BBC and will remain in the British Library. I also had the privilege of attending the Queen's Garden Party twice. I have held various positions in different organizations, including being National President of the British Federation of Women Graduates and currently serving as High Constable of Lincoln.



Looking back, I'm proud of the sacrifices my parents made to give me and my siblings the best education. I'm grateful for the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji on equality, which my parents instilled in us. And I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had to see the world and meet wonderful people along the way.



Jasvinder Sanghera



Jasvinder Sanghera is a prominent British activist and author known for her work advocating for the rights of women, particularly those from South Asian communities, who are affected by forced marriage and honour-based abuse. Born into a Sikh Family in Derby, England, in 1965, Jasvinder has dedicated her life to raising awareness about these issues and providing support for those facing such challenges.

She grew up in a traditional South Asian household, and her family adhered to cultural norms that sometimes conflicted with her aspirations for independence and personal choice.

At the age of 14, she experienced first-hand the impact of forced marriage within her family when she was taken out of school and forced into a marriage with a man she had never met. This experience propelled her into a journey of self-discovery and resilience.

Determined to break free from the constraints of a forced marriage, she ran away from home. She faced societal stigma and ostracisation from her community but pursued education and eventually became an advocate for those facing similar circumstances.

In 1993, Jasvinder founded the charity organisation Karma Nirvana to support individuals affected by forced marriage and honour-based abuse. The organisation provides helpline services, advocacy, and education to raise awareness about these issues.



She is also an accomplished author, and her books shed light on her personal experiences and the broader issues of forced marriage and honour-based violence. Some of her notable works include “Shame” and “Daughters of Shame.” Her tireless efforts in advocating for women’s rights have earned her recognition and accolades. She has received various awards, including the Pride of Britain Award and the Woman of the Year Award.

Jasvinder is a sought-after public speaker who shares her story and expertise on the global stage. She collaborates with government agencies, NGOs, and educational institutions to address the challenges posed by forced marriage and honour-based violence.



Kiran Kaur Ghuman



Kiran Kaur Ghuman was raised in Punjab, India, born into a Sikh family, and she practices the Sikh Faith. As she was growing up, she studied fashion, music, dance, arts and sciences. She did nursing and worked in a hospital before moving to Britain. She studied further in England, and now she is a nutritionist and a massage therapist; she is extremely passionate about living a Healthy lifestyle and wellbeing.

Since a young age, she enjoyed singing and dancing, and she appreciates the Punjabi language, culture and Sikh history. She helps to organise events which present her culture and educate the next generation.

She does a lot of charitable activities. As a Sikh, she has been taught to give back to the society as much as she can. Since health is the greatest asset, she utilises her work to provide the elderly with free massages and support them to lead healthier lives. This is how she fulfils her Seva (selfless service). She is hoping to continue to do so in many other ways. She says she is enjoying working with the 'Bosworth Sikh Women Project' group.



Chief Supt. Manjit Atwal



Chief Superintendent Manjit Atwal, a Leicestershire Police 'role model' has been awarded the Queen's Police Medal (QPM). She received the medal in recognition of her dedication to policing and the support she has shown to others throughout her career spanning over 27 years. Manjit has been nominated as a 'truly inspiring officer in policing'. She joined the force in 1996 at that time a mother of two small children, driven by a desire to do something for herself and serve the community.

Throughout her time in service, Manjit has worked in 18 different areas of policing, including local policing, including neighbourhood policing, youth offending, operational planning, intelligence gathering, counter terrorism and a violent complex crime unit. She is nationally trained as a hostage and crisis negotiator. Her current role has taken her to a national level, as the Violence Against Women and Girls programme (VAWG) and Operation Soteria lead, seconded to the College of Policing and working with the national VAWG lead DCC Maggie Blyth and the national joint unit for Op Soteria (transforming the investigation of rape).



Manpreet Monica Singh



Judge Manpreet "Monica" Singh was born, raised, and educated in Houston. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her Juris Doctor from South Texas College of Law. She was a practising attorney for 21 years before making history as Texas' first Sikh Judge.

Nimrat Kaur

Born 13 March 1982



Nimrat Kaur was born on 13th March 1982. In 1994 her father, Major B. Singh SC, was abducted and killed by Kashmiri terrorist group Hizb-Ul-Mujahideen, for not conceding to their demands. Thereafter, her family moved to Delhi where she went to school and obtained an honours degree in commerce.

She became a print model and later appeared in plays, a two-part musical video and advertising on television.

Nimrat Kaur made her debut in an English film "One Night with the King" in 2006. Her Hindi film debut came in Peddlers in 2012 which was screened at Cannes Film Festival to good reviews.

“The Lunch Box”, was her second film to be screened at Cannes, in 2013. She was admired for her disarmingly natural performance, a talent to watch out for, radiant presence full of dignity and grace.

She went on to appear in the American series, “Homeland” in 2014 and 2020, and “Wayward Pines”, in 2016, she starred in the Bollywood drama “Airlift”, based on the civil operation of evacuation of Indians living in Kuwait during the Iraq-Kuwait war. In 2020, she starred in the Netflix film “Dasvi”, playing Chief Minister of Haryana.

Nimrat Kaur has established herself as a versatile actor in India and America. When asked how she feels, she responded “I am living my dream”.

S. Basra



Dr. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar MBE



Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar MBE is Associate Professor of Sikh Studies and Director of the multi-award-winning Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, UK. This is the first and only academic centre of its kind in the UK which gives an academic platform to working with the Sikh and wider Panjabi communities. In January 2022, she was elected as President of 'Theology and Religious Studies UK' (TRS-UK) as its first-ever President of colour. Opinderjit was awarded the MBE in 2018 for her services to Higher Education and to the Wolverhampton community.

More recently, she was honoured as one of 75 women of Indian heritage to have a global impact of her work through a project by the Deputy British High Commissioner to India to mark 75 years of Indian Independence. Opinderjit's projects include raising awareness of healthy lifestyles and organ donation in faith communities.



Palbinder Kaur Shergill



An immigrant child of humble financial means, Palbinder grew up in a small town in Canada in the 1970s with parents who valued education, gender equality, and community service. Her path was a natural extension of the Canadian dream.

She was drawn to the law because she believed it was the most effective tool for change. After 26 years of a highly rewarding career as a litigator, she felt that it was time for a new challenge. She was drawn to the bench because she believed it would afford her an opportunity to grow and allow her to contribute to the law in a different manner.

Parminder Nagra

Born 5 October 1975



Parminder Nagra is a British actress of Indian-Punjabi Sikh heritage. She is known for portraying Jess Bhamra in the film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002).

Born in Leicester, England to Sukha and Nashuter Nagra, Sikh factory workers who emigrated from the Punjab region of India in the 1960s. She is the eldest of four children with two brothers and one sister. Nagra attended the Northfield House Primary School in Leicester. At her comprehensive school, Soar Valley College, she played the viola in the youth orchestra and also appeared in her first theatrical productions.

A few months after sitting her A-levels and leaving school, Parminder was approached by her former drama instructor, about becoming part of the Leicester-based theatre company Haithizi Productions. She accepted and was cast as a chorus member in the 1994 musical Nimai presented at the Haymarket Theatre. Only a week into rehearsals, she was switched from the chorus to replace the lead actress. She had star quality that raised her above other actresses.



Ravneet Kaur



I am a dance artist with expertise in Indian Classical, Bhangra, Giddha, Bollywood, and Indian Folk dance styles. I have a Master of Arts degree in Dance and have performed in prestigious venues in India and the UK. I have also featured in music videos and won several awards, including the 2018 and 2019 LAGAS Leicester Asian Glitz Awards for Best Female Solo Dancer.

I believe that dance is an excellent medium for conveying stories and emotions, and I want to help people through it. Bhangra and Bollywood dances are known for their therapeutic effects, and I think dance exercise can be a feasible solution to many health issues. It releases positive endorphins, reduces stress and anxiety,

keeps you fit and healthy, and leaves you feeling energized, happy, and healthy.

I manage Dhamak Punjabna Di (DPD), an all-girls traditional gidha/bhangra team in Leicester that promotes Indian culture. We have performed at many events across the UK, including annual festivals and live TV shows. We also take Indian dance classes for all ages.

I love working with people from different backgrounds and cultures and want to make a significant difference so that people can achieve and maintain an active, happy, and healthy lifestyle. I have worked as an adult tutor in schools and at other charity and community functions and events, which has given me great satisfaction and joy.

Alongside dancing, acting has become my passion too. I have recently worked on two films based in the UK, and I hope to explore more opportunities in this field.



Sukhy Basra



“Photographer, Writer, Translator, Project Sales Manager, President of Board of Directors. Studied at King Richard III school – Deputy Head Girl, “A” Levels at Alderman Newton’s and Photography City and Guilds of London Institute. First full-time job at Leicester University, making holograms, a brand-new technology, in 1976.

Took part with community leaders and youth to foster better relations between all residents of Leicester. Adopted a grandmother for our Beaver colony, leading to a Christmas dinner for 25 seniors, each paired with one Beaver for the evening, creating much joy, laughter and singing. Gave interviews, published articles and implemented programmes across the country.

I have loved working on this project, gaining greater insight into these inspiring women”.



Surinder Kaur Sandhu



Surinder was born in India to Sikh parents. Her father, being in the army, was regularly posted to different places all over India. This made her very resilient, making it easy to make friends. She has friends from many countries, religions, and cultures. She came to Britain with her parents. Dinner time conversations were always lively and entertaining when the whole family got together, at the end of the day. Her career was in accounting, and she also worked part-time for 20 years on BBC Radio Leicester. Now, she registers civil marriage ceremonies at the Gurdwara.

Her most passionate work is to share information with the teachers and their students and many others who don't know anything about her culture and religion. Sometimes the schools come to the Gurdwaras and other times she goes to their school.

She was raised to give back to society, and since retiring, she has spent a great deal of her time doing charitable work. She has been doing meals for the homeless and raising funds for charities as she was a member of the "Women in Philanthropy" for cancer, farmers, water aid, and planting trees. She is a member of the Women's Interfaith Group and Christian Aware. She was also involved in Scouting for many years.



She is an active member of the Sikh Welfare and Cultural Society. She helps organise events and holds an Annual Lecture on Guru Nanak's birthday, to which distinguished guests are invited, from all walks of life to speak, as well as the Annual Multifaith Remembrance Day Service.

She had the honour of meeting our late Queen Elizabeth II on a few occasions, particularly when she came to the Gurdwara in Leicester for her Golden Jubilee in 2002 and had lunch with her again when she celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

She is enjoying working with the Bosworth Sikh Women Project Group.



Baroness Verma



Baroness Verma is a highly influential leader. She has held several key ministerial appointments in government and opposition and is adept at leading teams and driving transformational change. Baroness Verma is a strong advocate of diversity and inclusion, particularly in gender and race discrimination. She has received numerous accolades for her work in politics and business. Baroness Verma is also involved in several initiatives to promote inclusion and equality and serves as Chair and Director in multiple organisations.

Glossary

The 5 K's

Five external symbols must be worn by all Amritdhari Sikhs, each beginning with "K".

Amritdhari

A Sikh who has been initiated into the Khalsa (initiated Sikh).

Amrit

The nectar of immortality.

Caste

Dividing society into a social class. Sikhs believe in the equality of all.

Ek Onkar

There is only ONE GOD.

Emissary

Representative sent in the name of
or a person who acts as a representative.

Ghadr Movement

An international movement for the freedom of India from the British imperial Rule.

Golden Temple

Located in the city of Amritsar, Punjab, India. The upper part of the Gurdwara is gilded (adorned with gold foil). Sikhs refer to it as "Harmandar Sahib" (House of God).

Gurdwara

Sikh place of worship.

Guru

Spiritual Teacher.

Guru Granth Sahib

Sikh scripture considered to be the word of God and "Eternal Guru" by Sikhs.

Kar-Sewa

Work done without pay in the services to the religious cause.

Khadur Sahib

Name of the village in Punjab, India.

Khanda

Sikh symbol.

Langar

Shared vegetarian communal meals served in the Gurdwara.

Manji

Authorised seats of religious discourse.

Maratha Invasion

Marathas had a powerful empire in Maharashtra and they were defeated by Rani Rajinder Kaur of Patiala in 1789 and Bibi Sahib Kaur in 1794.

Matriarch

A woman head of the family.

Misl

A sovereign state of Sikh confederacy.

Punjab

Name of the state in the north-west of India.

Purdah

A custom in which women, veil themselves in the presence of strange men.

Sahib

Sir. It is used to imply great respect to people and places of religious significance.



Disclaimer

In writing stories of the Sikh women during the Middle Ages, it has been very difficult to find concrete information except in rare cases. For example, everyone has heard of Mai Bhago, the heroine of the battle at Khidrana.

Sometimes the names of the parents and where they lived was known but even the name of the woman was not known.

This is not the condition of only Sikh women; it is the same in the case of English women of that period.

I have tried my best to give you a sense of the real story, passed down by word of mouth, of the women from that distant past, which may include some imagination wrapped around the original truth.

S. Basra



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Images

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Image in colour of a woman meeting Guru Gobind on Vaisakhi day, on a book by Dorothy Field called *The Religion of the Sikhs* on Google.

Picture of a Sikh Woman in pink velvet suit on the cover of *Great Sikh Women* by Gagan Aneja.

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Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to the individuals and organisations that have worked in partnership to bring about this project.

Surinder Kaur Sandhu • Gurpreet Grewal–Santini

Sukhy Basra • Kiran Kaur Ghuman

Jashmer Grewal • Charanjit Kaur Hoonjan

Claire Jackson • Indu Grewal • R K Rani

Rachel Duffield • Eleanor Nesbitt • Manjit Atwal

