

Issues of Gender among the Sikhs: Eighteenth-Century Literature

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While analysing the whole range of contemporary evidence in Gurmukhi, Persian, and English on the issues of gender among the Sikhs, this paper determines the relevance of different categories of sources for reconstructing the relative position of the Sikh women in the family, the household, the community life, and politics during the eighteenth century. While differing in content, approach and points of emphasis, the Sikh sources as a whole provide the insider's view of the processes by which the new gender norms were being formulated and roles constructed, along with the gradual crystallization of the distinctly Sikh rites and rituals. In the community life visualized in these sources, faith and custom appear to be intertwined with the outlines of a new social order. Tension between the norm and practice too appears to be built into the rapidly changing socio-political situation in the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century opened in the backdrop of the institution of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, which is regarded as a turning point in Sikh history in socio-religious as much as political terms. The political struggle of the Khalsa during the eighteenth century, the establishment of their rule, and their polity before the ascendancy of Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), have received a good deal of attention from historians. Recently, the bearing of this situation on the social and religious life of the Sikhs during the eighteenth century has been studied.¹ There have been some studies also of aspects of gender relations or the relative position of men and women in this changing socio-political context.² However, the conflicting claims of the Sikh ideals and customs, and the selective use of the sources have resulted in the conflicting interpretations of the issues of gender among the eighteenth-century Sikhs, which necessitate a fresh look at the subject. While taking note of the available sources in Persian and English, this paper analyses the normative and empirical evidence in the Gurmukhi sources, which understandably constitute the most important category of contemporary evidence for this period.

Significantly, a form of Sikh literature known as the *rahitnama* (manual on the Sikh way of life) emerged soon after the institution of the Khalsa, showing concern for the relative position of women. *Rahitnamas* continued to be compiled in the middle decades and around the end of the eighteenth century, providing, among other things, the norms recommended for gender relations. Some other forms of Sikh literature of the period like the *var* (generally, heroic poetry), the *gurbilas* (poetical work in praise of the Guru/s), the *sakhis* (episodes in the life of a Guru) and the *ustat* (poetical composition

in praise) provide bits and pieces of empirical evidence on the subject. However, in view of the occasional divergence and even contradictions in the normative and empirical evidence, there has been a serious questioning of the veracity and relevance of some of these Gurmukhi works as sources for studying social history of the eighteenth-century Sikhs. The *rahitnamas* in particular have been dismissed as ‘merely prescriptive texts’, or as works by unknown authors, or as belonging to the later period. The paper proceeds on the premise that in a moral system passing through significant socio-political change, the prescriptive texts enunciating the norms about the social relations envisaged for the emergent and growing community, also yield insights into the ground realities, to be supplemented and complemented by direct, indirect and unintended empirical evidence in other sources.

It may be interesting to note that on the issues of gender in particular the Gurmukhi sources have been interpreted from almost opposite standpoints. The differences in approach, especially between the Sikh scholars and academic historians, and then among the latter, become more marked as they shift their focus from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Therefore, as a progressive and accumulative endeavour, historical reconstruction proceeds by taking note of the existing scholarly understanding of the subject.

Conflicting Interpretations

Teja Singh and Kapur Singh can be taken as the representative Sikh scholars to have reflected on the position of women in Sikhism. Citing the evidence of the *Asa di Var*, Teja Singh asserts that Guru Nanak restored to women the fullest rights in the society; in every way they were equal to men in the sight of God. Religious congregations were thrown open to women, and no social custom was to hinder them from doing so. Guru Amar Das forbade *sati*. Examples were known of the Sikh women in the later period that not only fought in battles but also ruled over states. They assisted men in spheres of social and political activity. Teja Singh comes to the conclusion that all invidious distinctions between men and women were abolished.³ Kapur Singh reinforces the idea of women’s equality with men in the Sikh social order even more forcefully. In his view, the Hindu evaluation of woman was based on the Law of Karma (Retribution). Although she was treated with great tenderness and reverence in Hindu texts, yet her social position throughout the ages had been inferior and subordinate to man. ‘As a girl, she was under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband and as a widow, of her sons’. Sikhism repudiated the nexus between *karma* and the social status of woman, declaring her to be ‘the very essence of social coherence’. This ‘ideological position’ is said to have been a source of vitality and strength for the democratic traditions and polity of the Sikhs.⁴

One may turn to the professional scholars for a more nuanced understanding of the issues of gender. In his *Guru Nanak in History*, J.S. Grewal underlines that Guru Nanak was prepared to defend woman against those who insisted on relegating her to an inferior position merely on the basis

of her sex. For liberation, 'she was certainly placed at par with man, just as the Shudra was placed at par with a Brahman'. However, a large number of metaphors relating to women in the compositions of Guru Nanak come from the conjugal relationship. The image of the ideal wife that emerges from these metaphors shows that the woman's place is in the home.⁵ In a later analysis of nearly all of Guru Nanak's verses with a bearing on gender, Grewal underlines that the female voice used by Guru Nanak in these verses appears to bring the woman within the orbit of emancipatory venture. However, the ideal wife is squarely placed in the patriarchal structure. Guru Nanak appears to create a larger space for women than what is found in Kabir or in much of the literature springing from devotional theism. Total equality of woman with man in the spiritual realm was a radical idea in Indian history, especially because it embraced all women. Guru Nanak's symbolic attack on discrimination against women due to physiological differences carried the idea of equality a long step forward. Grewal emphasizes that even though much of the space Guru Nanak creates for women is within the patriarchal framework, he does not explicitly support inequality of any kind.⁶

Joining the debate, W.H. McLeod points out that the often quoted *shalok* of Guru Nanak in the *Asa di Var* would seem to maintain complete equality of women with men, not just for the Sikhs but for everyone. The other Gurus supported the stand taken by Guru Nanak, and opposed such practices as dowry, seclusion and female infanticide. 'The views of the Sikh Gurus were vastly ahead of those of their contemporary society'. However, McLeod emphasizes that there were some other facts of Sikh history which did not indicate equality between Sikh men and women. Even the contemporary Sikh institutions are male dominated. The point is elaborated by McLeod in some detail. This situation raises for him the issue of the gap between the ideal of equality in *Gurbani* and the empirical realities of the Sikh Panth in its history of five hundred years. The position of the Sikh Panth in this respect is said to be no different from that of the other societies because no society in the world even today is free from gender inequalities.⁷ Though valid, in itself, this generalization ignores the relative position of the Sikh Panth in this respect in medieval India during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, let alone the eighteenth century which bridged the early and modern periods of Sikh history.

Recently, there has been scholarly focus on aspects of gender in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and then through the eighteenth-century, notably by Nikki Guninder Kaur Singh, Doris R. Jakobsh, and J.S. Grewal.

According to Nikki Singh, Guru Gobind Singh's treatment (not invocation) of Durga is suggestive of woman's power in society. Durga 'as a figure of myth' could provide inspiration for revitalizing the society. She is independent and powerful. By affirming the female power Guru Gobind Singh is said to have projected a positive attitude towards women. All women are exalted through the mythical Durga. The recalling of Durga as Bhagauti imparts feminine identity to the sword which, in Nikki Singh's view, is a metaphor leading towards a recognition of the female principle. The prayer at

the end of the *Chandi Charitra*, which is believed to be a composition of Guru Gobind Singh, is to stand for the right cause and to die fighting till the end. Moreover, the Sikh prayer (*ardas*) till today starts with the opening verse of the *Chandi di Var*.⁸

Jakobsh, on the other hand, does not talk about any relevance of Durga mythology for gender relations. She chooses to concentrate on the evidence of the *Pakhyan Charitra* in the *Dasam Granth* in support of her hypothesis that a novel construct of gender difference was developing in Sikhism: a masculine ethos was transformed into 'hyper-masculine' ethos. The occasion for the collection of these 404 tales is provided by a wily woman and the majority of tales relate to sexual intrigue and violence in which women are generally the seducers. In fact, an explicit statement is made that there is no end to their intrigues. Jakobsh accepts the view put forth by a few scholars (most notably, W.H. McLeod) that the *Dasam Granth* was held at par with the *Adi Granth* during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is then taken to mean that the *Pakhyan Charitra* was respectable among Sikh men, and its tales integral to the construction of the relative position of women which was the reverse of the male construct initiated by Guru Gobind Singh through the Khalsa order. Thus, to Jakobsh, the women represented an anti-thesis of the warrior-saint.⁹

Proceeding further on her hypothesis, Jakobsh quotes selectively from the *rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh to show that women were not included in the regular discipline outlined for the Khalsa; anyone who administered baptism of the double edged sword to a woman was a defaulter and liable to penance; and that the woman was forbidden to read the *Granth Sahib* in a general assembly of Sikhs. Notions of impurity too came to be associated with women, and men who took orders from their women were regarded as sinful, licentious and stupid. A Gursikh should not trust a woman. Consequently, a polarization of sexes is supposed to have been brought about by the institution of the Khalsa, and woman became the opposite of the manliness of the warrior-saint. In short, the male was exalted and the female was depressed.¹⁰ However, this *rahitnama* was neither the earliest nor the representative prescriptive text.¹¹ Moreover, as discussed in this paper, the *rahitnama* literature of the eighteenth century does not support the 'theology of difference' postulated by Jakobsh.

J.S. Grewal looks at the eighteenth-century sources, especially the *rahitnamas*, in an altogether different light. The *B-40 Janamsakhi* composed in 1733 makes it absolutely clear that the path enunciated by Guru Nanak was open to women as well as men. Chaupa Singh's *rahitnama* contains injunctions for the Keshdhari Singhs, the Sahajdhari Sikhs, and the Sikhnis. They all belonged to the Sikh or Khalsa community. The baptism of the double edged sword was essential only for the category called Keshdhari, but other injunctions of the *rahitnama* were common for all the three categories. The essential message of this *rahitnama* for both men and women was not to waste the opportunity provided by human birth for liberation. Above all, as Grewal points out, the author of the *Prem Sumarag* postulates almost a total equality

between Sikh men and Sikh women, both of whom are to be administered baptism of the double edged sword. On the issues of *sati*, the treatment of widows, and polygamy, this *rahitnama* moves far away from the position generally upheld in the medieval Indian society.¹² What makes it even more important is that by now historians of Sikh literature are inclined to place this work in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh.¹³

Evidently, there is a marked divergence in the scholarly understanding about the issues of gender among the eighteenth-century Sikhs. A nuanced rather than literal reading of the available literature of the period might yield a more rounded picture of the Sikh social order, particularly the everyday life of the householders who subscribed to the Khalsa ideology.

Evidence of the *Prem Sumarag*

The *Prem Sumarag* has ten chapters all of which contain references to gender relations, some incidental but mostly deliberate. In the first chapter, it is stated at one place that a person who follows the prescribed *rahit* would attain liberation, whether a man or a woman. Mutual fidelity on the part of married men and women is underlined. At the end of the second chapter it is stated that they who follow the *rahit* prescribed in the first two chapters would taste its fruit in this life, whether men or women. These two chapters relate to religious beliefs and practices, ethical life and baptism of the double edged sword (*khande ki pahul*). In other words, the religious and ethical values are common for men and women. It is important, therefore, to note that a woman could exercise the option of joining the path of *sikkhi* as enjoined in the institution of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru. The author goes on to lay down the procedure by which a married woman was to be initiated through baptism of the double-edged sword. Whereas a Sikh was to be initiated by five Singhs, a Sikhni was to be initiated by one Gurmukh (devout) Sikh. She should acquire Gurmukhi learning and love *shabad-bani* (compositions of the Gurus in the *Granth Sahib*), and read it. The Sikhnis should associate with one another to reflect on the *shabad*. Every Sikhni should serve her husband and obey him so that she may receive the gift of true Sikh faith. A widow could be initiated through baptism of the double edged sword with a slight variation in the procedure.¹

In a few chapters of the *Prem Sumarag*, the references to gender relations are rather incidental. For example, in chapter five, which relates to the preparation and partaking of food, the Khalsa Sikh who eats the consecrated food alone is compared to a woman who eats from the hand of her husband or eats the food tasted by him. In chapter six, which relates to bodily care and hygiene, it is stipulated that a woman should bathe three days after menstruation and have sexual intercourse with her husband, and not during the days of menstruation. In the last chapter there is an injunction to treat the married and unmarried woman alike. The remaining five chapters relate to the ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, rulership and justice. In all these chapters there are multiple or elaborate references to women.¹⁵

About the ceremony of birth, it is stated first of all that the woman who has conceived should be administered *khande ki pahul* and she should keep the unsheathed *khande* and the bow and arrow and the sword in her sight. At the time of delivery she should pray to the Akal Purkh that she has taken refuge in him. It is explicitly stated that the procedure detailed for the birth of a son is to be followed on the birth of a girl, with appropriate variations. Among other things, the baby girl is to be given *khande ki pahul* and the epithet 'Devi' added to her name; *karha prasad* is to be distributed and *ardas* performed in the same manner as for the boy.¹

The fourth chapter, on marriage (*sanjog*), starts with the recommendation that the girl should be married at a suitable age, the young age being more appropriate for the Kaliyuga. However, in the ninth section of the chapter it is stated that the girl and the boy should be married at the age of seventeen when both of them are grown up (*javaan*). The parents of the girl should give their daughter in marriage to a Khalsa Sikh who may be poor but earnest in his occupation. In the procedural detail reference is made to betrothal and other customary ceremonies and exchange of gifts, requiring the parents on both sides not to spend more than one-fourth of the cash in their possession. Five days before the marriage the girl should start eating the food specified for her. On the day of marriage she should be given *karha prasad* to eat at mid-day. An important feature of the detail is the wearing of arms by the bridegroom when he rides the mare; and the marriage party should sing or hear *shabad-bani* and the *Anand* composed by the third Guru Amar Das. Then there is detail about the actual rite of marriage.¹

It is underlined that the customs of both the families may be followed, and an *ardas* should be performed, seeking peace for the couple and mutual love between them. The bride should serve the groom as her lord and should always be faithful to him; the groom in turn should regard her as the other half of his body (*ardh-sariri*) and be kind to her; he should share with her whatever he earns; they should remain faithful to each other; the wife should look towards her husband for everything and towards no one else. Not to take anything from the bride's parents has a merit equal to millions of Gurburabs (celebrations associated with the Gurus). In the *ardas* to be performed on the first night of the union (*suhaag raat*), the items gifted by the bride's parents are mentioned and the groom is advised to accept them with pleasure. The whole description suggests that the primary purpose of marriage is procreation (and not sensual pleasure). The parents on both sides should regard themselves as equal and none should try to demonstrate superiority in any way. The union takes place in the bride's home and the marriage party departs on the day following. When the parents of the bride visit the place of her in-laws, they should eat and drink without any hesitation as it is done between two Khalsa families.¹⁸ This carries the implication that the relationship of faith is primary and the social tie is secondary.

The term used for widow remarriage is *par-sanjog*. Expressing the traditional view that a woman has far greater sexual urge than a man, it is argued that if a man could not live without a woman, how could a woman be

expected to live without a man? This is the main argument for widow remarriage. However, a number of qualifications are mentioned. The first preference of a widow should be to try to lead a life of contentment and self-control without getting married. If she has a son or a daughter, she should not get remarried. She could marry if she has no children or her children have not survived. The first circle of men whom she could marry was the collaterals of her deceased husband. If that were not possible for any reason she could marry a man who belongs to a good family and is a good person irrespective of his caste (*jati* or *baran*).¹⁹ With appropriate variations, the basic procedure of widow re-marriage is the same or very much similar to that followed in the case of the first marriage. The same ceremony was to be performed in case of re-marriage to a man outside the circle of collaterals. The woman was to be administered baptism of the double edged sword in this case, as in the other.²⁰

Apart from widow re-marriage, the marriage of a slave girl is also visualized. She too was to be given baptism of the double edged sword and, with appropriate variations; the procedure of marriage was similar to the procedure described earlier. This applied to an un-married slave girl as well as to the widow. The daughter of a Muslim could also be married to a Khalsa Sikh in a similar manner. It is interesting to note that she is to be given pork to eat for fifty-one days before she is married. Baptism of the double edged sword in her case too is obligatory. A Muslim widow could also be re-married to a Khalsa Sikh in this manner. Significantly, the treatment of the children born from remarriage was to be exactly the same as that of the children born from an earlier marriage. An infringement of this injunction made a person liable to excommunication.²¹

On the death of a Khalsa, no traditional mourning was to be observed. Instead, the compositions in the *Granth Sahib* called the *Alahanian* were to be recited. The women should also read and sing *bani* instead of beating their breasts. The ceremony to be performed on the death of males is given in detail. It is then stated that similar ceremony should be performed at the death of females. The ceremony to be performed on the death of a girl was to be almost the same as for the boy. Only slight variations are mentioned for the ceremonies to be performed on the death of the married and un-married women, and the widows. The death of a childless widow should be followed by *kirtan* instead of lamentation.²²

Women figure in the chapter on *raj* in several situations. The ruler of the ideal Sikh state should ensure that education was imparted to Sikh girls as to Sikh boys. He should patronize not only artists and the performers of *kirtan* but also the *patars* (dancing girls) who are as attractive as the dancers at the court of Indra. They were to sing *kirtan* and also to perform dance. Interestingly, they were also to tempt *jogis*, *sanyasis*, *bairagis*, Udasis, Jain monks and *pirs*, and whoever donned a religious garb. Those who were tempted were to be obliged by the ruler to adopt the life of a householder.²³

There are some suggestions regarding the woman's life outside the home. The Sikh ruler should organize a general festival on every full moon day (*Puran-mashi*) in which all men and women, and all boys and girls, were to

dress well to join the celebration. Both men and women should sing the praises of Sri Akal Purkh. A restriction is also suggested for women. With the exception of prostitutes, they should not be allowed to go out of the home unveiled. If a man indulged in illicit sexual intercourse with a woman, both of them were to be seated on a donkey, with their faces blackened; and they were to be ordered to get married. Their social status was to be determined by the caste that was lower. It is not clear that this case refers to the Sikhs alone. The quarters of the prostitutes should be clearly demarcated and separated from the rest of the people. It is interesting to note that, though any relationship with a prostitute is undesirable, it is more acceptable than adultery.

Furthermore, the ruler of the Sikh state should provide assistance to all kinds of needy persons, including the parent or parents who do not have sufficient means to marry off their daughters. It should be obligatory for every young man and young woman to get married. The 'Maharaja' should have only one wife. However, if she did not bear any children he could marry another woman. Normally, he should have no intercourse with a slave girl. But when the wife is not present and sexual urge gets hold of him he may have intercourse with a slave girl. It is bad, but it is better than turning to another woman. All women employed in the palace of the Maharaja and in the female quarters should be married women. The mount for women should preferably be the elephant, which is the royal mount, a camel, a horse, a mule, or a palanquin. Here, the author is thinking of the woman belonging to the royal and affluent households.²⁴

The chapter on justice is more interesting from the view point of women's right in family earnings and property. Whatever a man earns, he should divide it for different purposes. He should first of all take out the share of the Guru. He should offer one rupee to his mother and father, and one rupee to his wife. He should save one rupee. If he has incurred any debt, he should use half his earnings to repay it. If a man dies without children, the debt incurred by him should be paid first out of his property and the rest only should be taken over by the ruler (as escheat). However, if the deceased person had a daughter who has given birth to a son, the property of the deceased, after the payment of the debt, should go to his daughter's son. If he has only a daughter and she has no son, then the property should go to her. If he gives any movable or immovable property to his daughter during his lifetime and the daughter dies, this property should go to her husband. But if the father had given no property to his daughter in his life-time and she dies, her husband has no claim over the property of the deceased. However, if the daughter who has died leaves a daughter behind, the property should go to her. In short, the daughter's son and daughter (*dohtra* and the *dohtri*) are equally entitled in certain circumstances to inherit the property of their grandfather. If the deceased had no son or grandson and no daughter who has a son or a daughter, the property should go to his real brother or to his son or to his daughter or to his grandson and granddaughter or to his *dohtra* and *dohtri*, in that order. So long as any of these inheritors was alive, the ruler should not escheat the property of the deceased.

About the shares in property of the deceased, it is stated that *dohtras* and *dohtris* should have an equal share. Similarly, among brothers and sisters the property should be divided 'equally'. The wife's share in the property is one-fourth; in the case of two wives, this share is to be equally divided among them. The detail given for other shares clearly mentions the equal share of daughters. An absolute right in property is recognized. If a man is annoyed with a son till the time of his death to the extent of disinheriting him, then no share in property should be given to this son after the father's death. However, if during his life time, the father forgives the son, he becomes entitled to an equal share. It is explicitly stated that if a daughter or a sister is the only legal claimant to the property, it should go to her, that is to the daughter first and if she is not there then to the deceased's sister. If a man has two wives, he should treat them equally well in all respects. If a person has no sons but only daughters and their mother is alive, then his property should go to the wife. When the property is to go to the daughters, the one who is unmarried should get the equivalent of expenditure on marriage in addition to her equal share in the rest of the property. If one of the daughters is a widow, she should get the double share. No distinction was to be made between a real mother and a step mother, a real brother and a step brother, or a real sister and a step sister. If a woman leaves her husband for any reason and gives birth to a son or a daughter she has no claim over him or her; they belong to the husband. Finally, there are strict injunctions against extra-marital relations of any kind in the chapter on justice.²⁵

The Other *Rahitnamas*

Of the remaining *rahitnamas* placed in the eighteenth century, the one associated with Chaupa Singh is the most detailed, followed distantly by the texts attributed to Bhai Nandlal, Bhai Desa Singh and Bhai Daya Singh.

The prescriptive (*rahit*) part of the *rahitnama* of Chaupa Singh, a Chhibber Brahman, was compiled most probably in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh; the two narratives and the admonitory (*tankha*) part were added later, possibly in the 1740s.²⁶ In addition to some statements which carry implications for the position of women in the Sikh social order, the specific injunctions for women relate to their initiation, religious life and domestic duties.

It is categorically stated in the *tankha* part of the *rahitnama* that a Sikh of the Guru who administers baptism of the double edged sword (*khande ki pahul*) to a Sikhni is a defaulter (*tankhaiya*) and liable to penance. A Sikh of the Guru should not give his daughter in marriage to a person who cuts his hair (*mona*). However, the daughter of a *mona* could be married to a Sikh boy after she has been administered *charan-pahul*. As the phrase suggests, it is baptism of the foot. Since there was no personal Guru, the *manji* (lactern) of the *Granth Sahib* served as the substitute. As in the case of baptism of the double edged sword, so in this case balls of sugar (*patashas*) were added to the water in which the foot of the *manji* was washed. While the baptismal water (*pahul*)

was being prepared, five *paunis* of Guru Nanak's *Japuji* and the five *paunis* of the *Anand* were to be recited.²⁷

The prescriptive part of this *rahitnama* extols married life as the ideal for a woman. She is appreciated all the more if she comes from a good family. As she is expected to be loyal to her husband, he also should not covet another woman. As a matter of detail it is recommended that, like the Sikh of the Guru, the Sikhni should wash her hands before serving food or kneading dough. She should not allow her nails to grow long and she should not talk (while preparing food). She should have proper respect for food (*prasad*).²⁸

The authority of Mata Gujri, the mother of the tenth Guru, is recognized by the Masands (deputies of the Guru) and the Sikhs: together, they request her that the *raj-tilak* of the *sahibzada* (Guru Gobind Singh) should be performed. The *rahitnama* categorically states that a Gursikh should never kill his infant daughter. The manual also instructs the Sikhs not to curse a respectable woman. The *rahitnama* also says that whether a Sikh of the Guru or a Sikhni, it was commendable for them to remain steadfast and detached even in *raj*. Regarding it the *raj* of Vaheguru, they should retain purity amidst *maya*. They should remain humble.²⁹

It is important to note that over a dozen instructions meant for a Sikhni of the Guru are given at one place in the admonitory (*tankha*) part of the *rahitnama*. Most of the injunctions are negative, that is what women should not do. However, the positive injunctions included are equally important, or probably more. There are some mixed injunctions too. A Gursikhni should go to the *dharamsal* twice a day; sitting in a *sangat* she should keep her head covered to pay homage (to *Granth Sahib*) and concentrate on the *shabad bani* of the Guru. She should take something in kind as an offering, like a ball of cotton thread, a sheet or a small piece of cloth according to her means. She should also save a part of the raw food in the name of the Guru and take it to the *dharamsal* or give it to a needy Sikh. She should offer better food to a needy Sikh than to a member of her own family. She should regard her husband as *karta* (literally, doer) and look upon other men as a father, a brother or a son. At the same time, she should give instructions to her husband in the Sikh faith because men in the Kaliyuga listen to women more than to fellow men; the instructions given by the Sikhni would be very effective.³⁰

In fact, a Gursikhni is visualized as the corner stone of the correct religious and social practice. She should read and understand the *Granth Sahib* without paying heed to worldly concerns. Before reading Gurbani she should bathe or at least wash her face, hands and feet. She should not go to a grave or a *marhi*. She should take refuge with the Guru. She should not believe in anything except the Guru, her husband, and the *sat-sangat*. She should remain faithful to her husband and observe *dharam*, adopting all the good qualities of a person mentioned in the *Granth Sahib*. She should discard the singing of popular songs, verses making fun of others, and vulgar songs; she should sing only the hymns called *Suhaag* and *Ghorian*, both composed by the fourth Guru. She should never associate with a man other than her husband and she should not sit alone to talk with a woman of ill-repute. She should not curse a

man, nor quarrel with him. She should not take her bath naked nor should she stand naked in water or before the sun. She should regard the water and the sun like her father. She should keep herself physically clean and, if dirty, she should not cook or serve food. While kneading dough or cooking food in the kitchen she should not talk because her spittle would fall into the food. If she cleanses her nose or scratches her body she should wash her hands immediately. A small boy or a girl should not be allowed to enter the kitchen while cooking is being done. The fundamental instruction is common for both men and women: they should strive not to miss the opportunity of human birth for liberation. In the rest of the *rahitnama* there are a number of injunctions with regard to the attitude of the Sikhs towards women in general or towards Sikh women but there are only a few injunctions for a Sikh woman.³¹

The remaining three *rahitnamas* do not say much on gender relations. A recent study has placed the *Nasihatanama* (also called the *Tankhahnama*) attributed to Bhai Nandlal, to the first decade of the eighteenth century, before the death of Guru Gobind Singh.³² Essentially spelling out the Sikh way of life in religious, ethical, social and political terms, this *rahitnama* emphasizes that a Sikh should 'observe strict fidelity to his wife'; he should neither visit a prostitute nor develop sexual relations with another woman.³³ The *Sakhi Rahit* placed in the early eighteenth century³⁴ exhorts that a Sikh should consider a woman older than his age as a mother and a woman of his age as a sister. A Sikh should never look with lust on another man's daughter and sister. Elsewhere, however, the author says that a Sikh should never trust a woman nor should he allow her to probe into his thoughts.³⁵ In the *rahitnama* of Bhai Prahlad Singh, the *kurimar* is noted as one of the reprobate groups and a Sikh is instructed not to have any relation with the Sikh who kills his daughter.³⁶ The *rahitnama* of Bhai Desa Singh placed in the late eighteenth century, also exhorts a Sikh to have no relation with the Sikh who kills his daughter. A Sikh is instructed to keep himself away from prostitutes and not to have any sexual relations with a woman other than his own wife. A woman without clothes is compared with a man without *kes*. A woman without restraint is compared to a Brahman who does not know the *Vedas*. When *deg* (sacred food) is distributed no distinction is to be made between men and women. A Sikh is instructed to give his daughter only to a *pahulia* (baptized Sikh).³⁷ In the *rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, written probably in the last quarter of the century, a Sikh is instructed to have no relation with a *kurimar*. The marriage of a Sikh with the daughter of a Sikh is like mingling *amrit* (nectar) with *amrit*. To give the daughter of a Sikh in marriage to a non-Sikh is like entrusting a goat to a butcher. A Sikh is instructed to never look with lust nor fasten his affections on a prostitute or another man's wife.³⁸

The Gurbilas Literature

In the literature narrating the lives of the Gurus produced during the eighteenth century, concern for gender relations is not pronounced, yet the literary works

in this genre have a significance of their own, because the glimpses afforded by them into the issues of gender are incidental in nature.

In Sainapat's *Sri Gur Sobha*, composed probably during the first decade of the eighteenth century, there is a reference to mythical times in which Goddess Chandi was sent by the Supreme Being (Akal Purkh) to destroy the demons. In connection with the injunction against tonsure (*bhaddan*), the mother is made as much responsible as the father. The lure of beautiful women for the lustful man figures as providing the reason for compiling the *Charitro Pakhyan* (later incorporated in the *Dasam Granth*).³⁹

In his *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* composed in 1751, Koer Singh invokes Ad Purkh Kartar at the opening of his work but at the end of the same verse he invokes Ad Shakti Mata too who made the Panth powerful. Koer Singh devotes nearly a score of pages to the worship of the Goddess by Guru Gobind Singh before the institution of the Khalsa. Later, when the Guru announced that he was going to depart from this world, it was reported to him that his wife, Mata Sahib Devi, would not be able to live without him (and that she would like to burn herself on his funeral pyre). Guru Gobind Singh makes it absolutely clear that this was forbidden.⁴⁰

In the *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka* composed in 1769, Kesar Singh, a Chhibber Brahman, gives great importance to the worship of Mata Kali and the boons she gives for the institution of the Khalsa, and even for some features of the Khalsa *rahit* and Khalsa rule. The day on which Guru Gobind Singh declared that only the *Adi Granth* was the Guru and his own compositions were not to be included in the *Granth*, he also performed *Chandi Path*. In another episode, preference for male child is explicit and the Guru has no hesitation in giving the boon of male children to all the seven wives of a ruler.⁴¹

Chhibber takes particular notice of Mata Gujri, Mata Sundari, Mata Jito and Mata Sahib Devi, the first as the mother of Guru Gobind Singh, and the other three as his wives. When Mata Sundari misses her martyr son Ajit Singh and is not prepared to leave Nander for Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh entrusts a young Sikh named Ajit Singh to Mata Sundari as her son. Mata Sundari left Nander with her adopted son. At Delhi, the *sangat* was entrusted to Ajit Singh as the *sahibzada*. When he began to disobey Mata Sundari, he was persuaded by 'uncle' Kirpal to return to obedience.⁴² Later, Chhibber gives a separate chapter to Mata Sahib Devi who is said to have succeeded Mata Sundari as the leader of the *sangat* after her death. The Sikhs used to come to her presence from all sides, especially at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali. Thinking of their insecurity in Delhi, Mata Sahib Devi thought of stopping the gatherings of Sikhs on these festivals. Eminent Sikhs, including 'Bebe Gulabo', discussed the whole matter with Mata Sahib Devi, and they all adopted the resolution (*gurmata*) that the general gatherings of Sikhs on these two occasions should be organized at Amritsar. In 1727, 'uncle' Kirpal, with seven other Sikhs nominated by Mata Sahib Devi, went to Amritsar, and made appropriate arrangements for the bi-annual gatherings and the revival of traditions associated with the Harmandar Sahib. Kesar Singh gives the detail of these

arrangements. He goes on to add that after the death of Mata Sahib Devi, 'Bebe Gulabo' looked after the establishment (*dera*) in Delhi for sometime till her death.⁴³

In his chapter on Banda Singh, Chhibber takes notice of a Sikh *Sardar* who was made *faujdar* with thirty-four villages under Banda Singh's jurisdiction. The Sikh *sardar* did a shameful deed. He killed one man and forced his wife to marry him. She kept the head of her husband concealed, and started living in the *faujdar's* house. With her husband's head covered with a piece of cloth, she hurried to the presence of Banda Singh and placed her husband's head before him, and told him how her husband had been killed and she was forced to remarry. 'I have taken refuge with you for justice', she said, 'I shall hold you responsible in the divine court'. Banda Singh sent his men to bring the *faujdar* and to confront that woman. They were interrogated and the interrogation made it clear that the Sikh was a liar. Banda Singh ordered that he should be blown with cannon. Some *sardars* took him away for execution. But they allowed him to escape and a wooden effigy was blown by the cannon in her presence. That woman came to Banda Singh again that she had not received justice; the *faujdar* was kept alive in hiding. Then Banda Singh exercised his powers of imagination. The *faujdar* was called and blown by the cannon.⁴⁴

In *Sakhi* 17 of his *Mahima Prakash* composed in 1776, Sarup Das Bhalla refers to the assistance of Chandi Mata after the performance of fire sacrifice (*hom-jagg*). He also refers to a costly bangle (*chura*) sent by a devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh for Mata ji (Mata Gujri) through a Masand who however gave it to his own wife. This misappropriation was exposed later and the Masand was reprimanded. According to Sarup Das Bhalla, it was Mata Gujri who persuaded Guru Gobind Singh to evacuate Anandpur, giving him the assurance that the hill Rajas would honour their oath and would not attack the Sikhs. There is a reference also to the memorials (*dehuras*) of the mother and wives of the tenth Guru erected at different places by the Khalsa.⁴⁵

Bhalla takes particular notice of a (devout) Sikh woman who served Guru Gobind Singh well. On his way from Damdama toward the South, the Tenth Guru went to the house of this woman who said that the Sahibzadas were killed by the enemies but the Guru had not taken any revenge, adding further that, 'We people are simple Jats but if anyone kills one of our men we are never at peace until we have taken revenge, even in the second or third generation (if there was no earlier chance). But you have done nothing to your enemies. We being your devoted Sikhs cannot be easy in mind'. Guru Gobind Singh replied, 'If I shake the sleeve of my garment (*asteen*) many Sahibzadas would be produced'. Then he asked the old lady to draw a line on the ground. She did as she was told. The Guru asked her to undo what she had done. She did as she was told. The Guru asked her, 'did you feel any pain?' She said, 'How could I feel any pain about the lines drawn on the ground?' 'In the same way', said the Guru, 'I feel no pain on account of the *sahibzadas*. How can I accept your suggestion? A *banda* of mine would go and take revenge'.⁴⁶ This *sakhi* represents the direct relation of a woman disciple with the Guru.

In three consecutive chapters of his *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* written in 1797, Sukha Singh dwells on the worship of Goddess Kalka, her appearance, and the boons she gives to Guru Gobind Singh. He refers to women becoming Sikhnis of the Guru and he brackets men and women as the Guru's followers; he refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur's mother as 'Jagg Mata Nanaki'. Like Koer Singh, Sukha Singh refers to the preference being given to the male child in the society and Guru Gobind Singh giving the boon of a son to a Rani.⁴⁷

It might be in order to include in this section a prose work called the *Mahima Prakash Vartak*. Although purportedly written in 1824, it is based entirely on the two eighteenth century works: *Parchian* by Seva Das and *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla. In a recent analysis of this work, J.S. Grewal notices three categories of women: non-Sikh women, Sikh women, and the women of the families of the Gurus. Analysing each *sakhi* related to the women of these categories, Grewal notes that a large space appears to have been created for women in the Sikh social order. Sikh women are presented as respectable autonomous individuals who could attain to liberation. However, more space is created for them within the framework of the patriarchal family which remains the key institution of the Sikh social order. Significantly, no conflict is postulated between the demands of the faith and the demands of the family. Equilibrium is thus sought to be created between the principle of equality and the inegalitarian social reality.⁴⁸

The Other Sikh Sources

The empirical evidence about the Sikh women, particularly those associated with the tenth Guru, though meager, does leave the impression that in certain situations they exercised initiative and also wielded considerable influence. In a short poem by a poet named Mangal addressed to Mata Jito, she is seen as the overseer of the community, with the normal routine to ensure every family's welfare. The poem begins with a prayer that her glory may be like that of the sun and the moon, that her sons Jujhar and Zorawar may live long, and that her husband Guru Gobind Singh, 'the ruler of the three worlds', may have eternal life. Mata Jito herself is called Jagat Mata who grants wishes of all who come to her. The poet requests for financial support to enable him to perform the marriage of his daughter in Pasrur (near Sialkot). He hopes to return to Anandpur in order to serve Mata Jito without any anxiety on his mind. Apparently, his prayer was granted. This poem is recorded on the opening folio of the *Anandpur Bir* (recension) which, in Gurinder Singh Mann's view, was compiled in the 1690s at the court of Guru Gobind Singh. The place of Mata Jito's cremation at Anandpur was marked with a Gurdwara.⁴⁹

The *Amarnama*, composed at Nander in October 1708 as a *var* in Persian verse, contains an episode narrated by Guru Gobind Singh in which the wife receives great consideration from her husband in all decisions on matters important to the family.⁵⁰

In a compilation of episodes related to the Gurus, known as the *Parchian* of Sewa Das, written at Nander soon after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, there is an episode (*sakhi*) that underlines that service of the poor and the needy was undertaken by Mata ji who was persuaded that the ideal of service (*sewa*) was meant as much for women as for men.⁵¹

In this context, it is not surprising that after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, and as evident from the *hukamnamas* (orders) of Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi, they assumed leadership of the Sikh community on their own. The published *hukamnamas* of Mata Sundari, nine in all, are addressed to the *sangats* of Patna and Ghazipur, and to the family (*kabila*) of Bhai Rama (son of Phul), from 1717 to 1730. The published nine *hukamnamas* of Mata Sahib Devi, from 1726 to 1734, are addressed to the *sangats* of Patna, Benares, Pattan Shaikh Farid and Naushehra Pannuan; to Alam Singh Jama'atdar; and to the family of Bhai Rama of Phul. In both sets of *hukamnamas* the Sikhs are called 'sons' (*putt, farzand*) and are asked to send the stipulated amount of money through a bill of exchange (*hundi*) handed over to the authorized messenger. This amount is meant for the open kitchen (*langar*) in Delhi which was maintained in two separate establishments by Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi.⁵²

The authority of Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi is acceptable to the Sikhs because of their status as the wives of Guru Gobind Singh and due to their personalities. A few of the *hukamnamas* are interesting in this connection. The *hukamnama* of Mata Sundari, dated 13 September 1726, and addressed to some leading Sikhs simply acknowledges the receipt of Rs. 21 sent by them with an authorized messenger as was customary. However, the *hukamnama* of Mata Sahib Devi of probably the same year and addressed largely to the same set of people, states that they had never sent anything for her, and that they should make no distinction between her and Mata Sundari, both of whom belonged to the same house. All the persons addressed in these *hukamnamas* were important individuals, especially Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala state, who had established his control over Barnala and a number of villages by the 1720s.⁵³ Nevertheless, they are addressed like other Sikhs as 'the sons' of Mata Sundari or Mata Sahib Devi who appear to exercise their authority essentially on moral grounds.

This does not mean that they were not interested in the mundane affairs of the Sikhs. The *hukamnama* of Mata Sundari, dated 18 October 1723 and addressed to five respectable Sikhs by name, asks them to do impartial justice to two contending parties (on behalf of the entire Khalsa of Vaheguru), and that their decision must be based on moral justice (*dharam-nian*). Significantly, instead of going to a *panchayat* or a court, the disputants went to Mata Sundari to seek justice, and she appointed arbitrators on behalf of the Khalsa!⁵⁴ In a *hukamnama* of Mata Sahib Devi, dated 30 December 1734, there is the order (*hukam*) to construct a well in Pattan Shaikh Farid for the use of the Sikhs. Expenditure on the construction of the well through Bhai Binta was to be debited to Mata Sahib Devi.⁵⁵

Thus, there is hardly any doubt that both Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi were maintaining regular establishments in Delhi with the help of Sikhs employed for various purposes, including secretarial work. The institution of *langar* was maintained as a part of each establishment. The evidence of the *hukamnamas* indicates that in secular matters too the wives of the Guru took initiatives, and that their authority was recognized by the Sikh *sangats* within and outside the Punjab. Incidentally, the *hukamnamas* also show that Mata Sahib Devi had begun to exercise authority during the life-time of Mata Sundari.

Non-Sikh Sources

As it may be expected *a priori*, the Persian and early European sources of the eighteenth century showed little interest in the position of women among the Sikhs.

The silence of the Persian writers is far from surprising. They were interested primarily, almost exclusively, in the political activity of the Sikhs. Consequently, they would take notice of men and women directly involved in politics. Nevertheless, Rai Chaturman Saksena in his *Chahar Gulshan* mentions that in the reign of Farrukh Siyar, Mata Sundari established a separate spiritual seat and some Sikhs deserted her adopted son Ajit Singh in order to join her camp. When she died, people turned to Mata Sahib Devi as her successor. She too died a year later.⁵⁶ The resourcefulness of an ordinary Sikh woman is reflected in an incident recounted by Khafi Khan. Her son had been made captive along with Banda Singh Bahadur and his companions who were being executed in Delhi in 1716. She managed to find the means and a patron to enable her to make a representation to the emperor and the *wazir*, contending that her son had actually been captured by the Sikhs, and since he did not join them voluntarily he was innocent of any crime against the state. The emperor sent a mace-bearer with the order to secure the release of her son who, however, refused to be freed.⁵⁷

Among the Europeans, the first to take notice of the Sikh women or the attitude of Sikh men towards Sikh women was the Irish adventurer, George Thomas, who was active in the south-eastern Punjab around Hansi (present Haryana). He observed that the women attended to their domestic concerns with diligence, and that they were held in little esteem among the Sikhs. They were ill-treated by their husbands and prohibited from accompanying them in their wars. However, there were 'not infrequent' instances in which Sikh women had taken up arms to defend their habitations from desultory attacks and conducted themselves throughout the contest with a highly praiseworthy spirit of intrepidity. This statement refers broadly to the last two decades of the eighteenth century when the Sikh rule had been established over much of the area between the Indus and the Yamuna.⁵⁸

At the turn of the century, two British officers left some impressions about the relative position of the ordinary as well as upper class Sikh women. In 1808, Captain Matthews, an officer of the Bengal Army, travelled through the

Sikh territories and observed that both Sikhs and Singhs married one wife. In the event of her death, they could marry again. But if the husband died, the widow did not re-marry, except in the case of Jats who allowed widows to marry a second or a third husband. Sikh widows rarely became *satis* in the Punjab, though the practice was common in Jammu.⁵⁹ Writing his *Sketch of the Sikhs* about the same time, though published in 1812, John Malcolm contrasts the conduct of the contemporary Sikhs towards their women from that of their ancestors, apparently in the eighteenth century, who lived under severe restrictions; the fear of excommunication obliged them to cover their 'sins' with the veil of decency. In his day, however, there was hardly any infamy of which they were not accused with justification. They conducted themselves 'in the most open and shameful manner' in their sexual relations with women. In this context, Malcolm refers to the Sikhs as a 'debauched and dissolute race', whose women apparently were at the receiving end.⁶⁰

This is too sweeping a generalization to be taken literally. Malcolm probably had in mind the examples of a few members of the Sikh ruling class in relation to their conduct with prostitutes and professional dancing girls who were generally Muslim. It may be added that the early European writers, including Malcolm, based their observations on limited evidence, and quite often relying on hearsay. Gender relations formed an unimportant aspect of any social order in their time. They remained distant and cursory observers of issues of gender among the Sikhs.⁶¹

The British, however, became interested in the ground realities immediately before and after the annexation of the State of Ranjit Singh in 1849. Their summary settlements and land surveys unearthed several landed estates held by the Sikh women and numerous charitable grants (*dharmarth*) made by them roughly during the last quarter of the eighteenth century when a large number of autonomous principalities and pockets had been created by the Sikhs. The women exercised authority or held estates and landed property generally as the wives, widows and regents of the emergent rulers and *pattidars* (co-sharers in a joint conquest).⁶² It may be added that the early British records refer to the (*dharmarth*) grants, made among others, by Rani Sada Kaur, the widow of Gurbakhsh Singh Kanhaiya, for a *pakka* temple in 1798,⁶³ a year before she helped Ranjit Singh in the occupation of Lahore. On 26 February 1798, Sada Kaur confirmed the old Mughal grant of revenue free land in Kahnuwan held by the *mahants* of Pindori.⁶⁴ In 1800, she confirmed the old grants of four revenue-free villages held by the *mahants* of Pindori. In 1803, she gave a fifth village in grant to the *mahants* of Pindori. In 1808, again, Sada Kaur confirmed two more grants of revenue-free land upon the *mahants*.⁶⁵ That she was not an exception is evident from other sources. Ram Sukh Rao, for example, refers to the politico-administrative activities of Ram Kaur and Ratan Kaur, widows of Baghel Singh Karorasinghia.⁶⁶ The British records also contain several instances of the Sikh women inheriting landed property, or receiving land and well in dowry.⁶⁷ In his well known *Rajas of the Punjab*, Lepel Griffin refers to several intrepid, capable and resourceful Sikh women associated with the administration and politics of different ruling

families, like Rani Rajinder Kaur, Rani Sahib Kaur and Rani Aus Kaur of Patiala, Rani Daya Kaur of Ambala, Mai Deso of Nabha, and Mai Bhagbari of Kaithal.⁶⁸

In Retrospect

This analysis of the eighteenth century sources – the *rahitnamas*, *gurbilases*, *hukamnamas*, *sakhis*, and *vars* as well as the works of Persian and European writers – along with the early British records, yields a fairly rounded picture of the relative position of the Sikh women in the family, the household, the community life, and politics. These sources differ in content, approach and points of emphasis which apparently was as much due to the existential situation of the writer, his background, attitudes and concerns, as the period of writing.

The most comprehensive statement about the relative position of the ordinary Sikh women is found in the *Prem Sumarag* which more than balances out the negative injunctions of the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* inspired by the writer's Bramanical prejudice. Both ideologically and historically, the *Prem Sumarag* is closer to the spirit of the institution of the Khalsa. Monogamy and mutual fidelity were the corner stone of the social life of the Sikhs. The religious life was as much open to women as to men, though for initiation a few differences of detail are mentioned. For the ceremonies at birth, marriage and death also the differences between the men and women were of degree and not of kind. *Sati* was clearly disapproved of and widow re-marriage was allowed in certain situations. Within the general social and patriarchal framework, thus, a large degree of equality is visualized. The most radical feature was the right of women to hold property in certain situations. The *rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh is silent about rituals, widow re-marriage, and matters of property, but in all other respects it visualizes a large space for women. Thus, when seen in totality, its conservative stance gets mitigated. The remaining *rahitnamas* say very little about women and nothing new.

The other Sikh literature also does not yield much about gender relations, though several writers refer to the episode of the Goddess, prohibition of *sati* and preference for the male child. Men and women are bracketed for religious life, and women of the Guru's household play a considerable role in Sikh affairs, and memorials are built to them. Their role in public affairs is emphasized by the empirical evidence in the *gurbilas* literature and the *hukamnamas*. Significantly, all women noticed in public life did not belong to the Guru's house. In the second half of the eighteenth century, more women are mentioned as taking part in politics and administration, holding property and giving charitable grants. Despite their relative indifference to the Sikh women, even the non-Sikh sources of the later period point to their initiative and active role both within and outside the family.

In short, the sources taken up in this paper view the Sikh social order from the perspectives of the insiders and the outsiders. The Sikh sources as a whole

provide the insider's view of the processes by which the new gender norms were being formulated and roles constructed, along with the gradual crystallization of the distinctly Sikh rites and rituals which, incidentally, became the basis of the Singh Sabha program of reform a century later. In the community life visualized in these sources, faith and custom appear to be intertwined with the outlines of a new social order. Tension between the norm and practice too appears to be built into the rapidly changing socio-political situation in the eighteenth century.

Notes

1. See Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Social and Cultural Life of the Sikhs in the Punjab during the Eighteenth Century', Ph.D. thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2010.
2. J.S. Grewal, 'Precolonial Sikh Social Order: The Issues of Caste and Gender' in *Essays in Memory of Professor R.S. Sharma* ed. D.N. Jha (New Delhi: Manohar, forthcoming). For a discussion of gender relations in the larger context of medieval India, see Indu Banga, 'Gender Relations in Medieval India', *The State and Society in Medieval India*, vol. VII, Part 1, in *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, ed. J.S. Grewal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 443-74.
3. Teja Singh, 'Woman in Sikhism', *Essays in Sikhism* (New Delhi: Siddharth Publications, 1990 [1944]), pp. 44-49.
4. Kapur Singh, *Parasaraprasna: An Enquiry into the Genesis and Unique Character of the Order of the Khalsa with an Exposition of the Sikh Tenets*, ed. Piar Singh and Madanjit Kaur (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1989), p. 252.
5. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1998 [1969]), pp. 192-94.
6. Idem., *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993), pp. 1-21, 23-47.
7. W.H. McLeod, 'Gender and the Sikh Panth', *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 191-96.
8. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 118-26. It must, however, be pointed out that the *Chandi di Var* gives no indication that Guru Gobind Singh believed in Durga or Chandi. Like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, Durga is God's creation for Guru Gobind Singh. Like Rama and

Krishan, God created Durga and caused the demons to be destroyed. For detail see J.S. Grewal, *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 161-76.

9. Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 126-49.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-49.

11. In a recent article, Purnima Dhavan also relies on the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* and its prohibitions against women in support of the idea of 'hyper-masculine men' characterizing the 'Khalsa culture'. The women's roles in society are said to have become 'increasingly circumscribed'. Moreover, Dhavan sees the *rahitnama* genre 'as reflecting diverse views within the Khalsa community, rather than describing an actual historical reality'. Empirically, her focus remains on the practices related to the women from the emergent Sikh ruling families of the last quarter of the eighteenth century who 'could use their social status and kinship ties to claim a limited authority in society as "honourary men"'. See Purnima Dhavan, 'Tracing Gender in the Texts and Practices of the Early Khalsa', in *Sikhism and Women: History, Texts, and Experience*, ed. Doris R. Jakobsh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 76.

12. J.S. Grewal, 'Sikhism and Gender', in *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 206-25.

13. There has been intense scholarly debate regarding the date of this work which ranges from the first decade of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. In the present state of our knowledge the *Prem Sumarag* may be considered as an early-eighteenth century work. S.S. Kohli states that a manuscript of 1718 AD is in existence. *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas* (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, 1955), p. 216. Basing entirely on internal evidence Bhai Randhir Singh gives an elaborate argument in support of this view. See *Prem Sumarag Granth arthat Khalsai Jivan-Jach* (Punjabi), ed. Randhir Singh (Jalandhar: New Book Company, 1965 [2nd edn.]), Introduction; Dr Mohan Singh too places this work in the early-eighteenth century. See *An Introduction to Punjabi Literature* (Amritsar: n.p. 1951), pp. 111-42. This view is endorsed by J.S. Grewal in 'The Prem Sumarag: A Theory of Sikh Social Order', *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1965), pp. 100-11.

In a recent, and a more detailed analysis of this work, Grewal reiterates that the *Prem Sumarag* is an early eighteenth century work. He supports the date with a rigorous analysis of the text which makes his argument convincing. Grewal, *History, Literature and Identity*, pp. 208-11.

Cf. Surjit Hans, 'Prem Sumarag: A Modern Forgery', in *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1982), pp. 180-88;

W.H. McLeod, 'Reflections on *Prem Sumarag*', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 14, no.1 (2007), p. 124.

14. For the text see, *Prem Sumarag Granth*, pp. 8, 20-21.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 74-75, 147.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-38. For a discussion of the Sikh rites of passage, see Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Contemporary Evidence on Sikh Rites and Rituals in the Eighteenth Century', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2009, pp. 179-97.

18. *Prem Sumarag*, pp. 38-42.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 46-48.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-56.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-91.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 103,105-6.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 105-6, 108-10, 119, 121, 122-23.

25. *Ibid.*, pp.125-31, 133-34, 137-39, 142.

26. *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* (tr. and ed.), W.H. McLeod (Dunedin/New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1987). The date of this *rahitnama* also is important for our purpose. McLeod places this work between 1745 and 1764. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28. Recently, G.S. Mann has placed its *rahit* part (dealing with desirable conduct) in the early eighteenth century. See, 'Sources on the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall 2008), pp. 249-50. On the basis of his analysis of the text Grewal places the *rahit* part *before* the death of Guru Gobind Singh. See, J.S. Grewal, 'The Singh Way of Life: The Rahitnamas', in *History, Literature, and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), pp. 206-26.

27. For a discussion of the evolution of Sikh rites and rituals, see Malhotra, 'Contemporary Evidence on Sikh Rites and Rituals in the Eighteenth Century', p. 182.

28. *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, pp. 59, 66-67, 69, 77, 82, 102, 104, 127.

29. Ibid., pp. 59, 81, 103, 108, 114, 123.
30. Ibid., pp. 115-16.
31. Ibid., pp. 114-16.
32. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'The Earliest Manual on the Sikh way of Life', in *Five Centuries of Sikh Tradition: Ideology, Society, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), pp. 65-66.
33. Ibid., p. 69.
34. Grewal has argued that the *Sakhi Rahit* was originally written in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. See Grewal, 'The Singh Way of Life: the *Rahitnamas*', in *History, Literature and Identity*, p. 207.
35. *Sakhi Rahit Patshahi 10* appended to *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, p. 137. See also, *Sakhi Rahit in Rahitname* (Punjabi), ed. Piara Singh Padam (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1995 [6th impression]), p. 63.
36. *Bhai Prahlad Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
37. *Bhai Desa Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 133-34.
38. *Bhai Daya Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 69, 70, 72, 73, 74.
39. Sainapat, *Shri Guru Sobha* (Punjabi), ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1967), pp. 12, 32, 44.
40. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Punjabi), ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968), pp. 18, 103-23, 133, 153, 272, 286-87. Also see Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'The Goddess in the Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature', *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. IXL, part II (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2010), pp. 6-14.
41. Kesar Singh Chhibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (Punjabi), ed. Rattan Singh Jaggi (*Parkh*, vol. II) (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972), pp. 99, 102-15, 126, 136, 191, 235.
42. Ibid., pp. 99, 113, 125, 157-58, 178-79.
43. Ibid., pp. 182-86.
44. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Banda Singh in Chhibber's *Bansavalinama*: Image, Idea and Reality' in *Panjab Journal of Sikh Studies*, vol. II (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 2012), pp. 119-20.

45. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash* (Punjabi), 2 vols., ed. Gobind Singh Lamba and Khazan Singh (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1971), vol. II, pp. 801, 820-40, 876, 882.
46. 'Sakhian Patshahi 10', in *ibid.*, *sakhi* 23, pp. 881-82.
47. Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Punjabi) ed. Gursharan Kaur Jaggi (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1989), pp. 6, 8-9, 34, 37, 42, 126-57, 208-9.
48. J.S. Grewal, 'Gender Relations in the *Mahima Prakash (Vartak)*', Forty-Fourth Session, *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2013), pp. 124-34.
49. Mann, 'Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times', pp. 246, 257-58.
50. Nathmal, *Amarnama* (Persian), tr. and ed. Ganda Singh (Amritsar: Sikh History Society, 1953), pp. 28, 36.
51. *Parchian Sewa Das* (Punjabi), tr. and ed. Kharak Singh and Gurtej Singh (Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 1995), *Sakhi* 33, p. 148.
52. For Mata Sundari see document nos. 68-73, 79, 80; and for Mata Sahib Devi document nos. 74, 75, 77, 78, 81-85, in *Hukamname: Guru Sahiban, Mata Sahiban, Banda Singh ate Khalsa Ji De* (Punjabi), ed. Ganda Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 196-211, 214-231.
53. Document nos. 76 and 74, in *Hukamname*, pp. 209, 292-93. For a biography of Ala Singh see, Kirpal Singh; *Baba Ala Singh: Founder of Patiala Kingdom* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2005 [2nd edn]).
54. Document no. 73, in *Hukamname*, pp. 206-7.
55. Document no. 85, in *Hukamname*, pp. 230-31.
56. Rai Chaturman Saksena, *Chahar Gulshan*, in *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts*, ed. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), pp. 166-67.
57. The executioner was ready to strike when the order was handed over to him, but the son refused to be released. 'My mother lies', he declared, 'I am, heart and soul, a life-sacrificing believer and devotee of my Guide (*murshid*). Send me soon to join my companions already killed'. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhabu'l Lubab*, in *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 158-59.

58. 'Memoirs of an Irish Maharaja, 1803', in "Siques, Tigers, or Thieves": *Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606-1809)*, ed. Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 202.

59. [Captain Matthews], 'A Tour to Lahore in 1808', reprinted in *The Panjab Past and Present*, ed. Ganda Singh, vol.I, part 1-2 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 112-13.

60. John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services 1986 [1812]), pp. 139-40.

61. For a critical analysis, see J.S. Grewal, 'John Malcolm: A Sketch of the Sikhs', in *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011): Western Enterprise and Indian Response* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), pp. 40-59.

62. For example, Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth-Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 131n58, 135n68.

63. For example, National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI), *Foreign Political Proceedings*, 13 February 1857, No. 294.

64. This document bears a date later than that of Gurbakhsh Singh's death. The seal was apparently used by his widow, Sada Kaur, who administered her husband's territories after his death in his name.

65. B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal (ed. and tr.), *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori: A Historical Interpretation of 52 Persian Documents* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), pp. 247-71 (document nos. XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV).

66. Ram Sukh Rao, *Sri Bhag Singh Chadaruday* (Gurmukhi), MS/573, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, ff. 166-67, 169.

67. NAI, *Foreign Political Proceedings*, 21-28, February 1851, No. 218 A. See also Banga, *Agrarian System*, p. 136n71.

68. Lepel H. Griffin, *Rajas of the Punjab* (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 [1871]), pp. 49n64, 61, 70-71 and passim.