

EXPLORING THE FEMININE EXPERIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY IN SIKH NARRATIVES OF BHAJI JOGA SINGH

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Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru *Jot* of Sikhs, also known as *Sant* Soldier. His unique personality is not only difficult but impossible to put into words. While Guru Sahib's life is full of examples of his contribution to social progress and reforms, there are also examples of Guru Sahib's spiritual and philosophical insights. Guru Sahib tried to create the society anew from various aspects, for which Guru Sahib brought changes in the human mentality by giving practical form to the principles of the first Guru Sahib. This research paper is based on the essay '*Bhasam*' written by Dr. Balbir Singh which is recorded in *Shudh Sarup* book, it presents the new identity given to women by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. This article is 45 pages of text that presents the testimony of Bhai Joga Singh and Kaur.

At the global level, efforts have been made in various ways for women's rights, especially equality with men and women's existence. As the world has been modernized, this struggle has taken different forms. Of course, initially, these struggles were limited to legal rights, but now these efforts have taken such a form that the women's liberation movement has gone beyond legal equality or job sharing to establish the separateness of women's existence. Which has impacted the life of a man and his existence also. An alternative form of this struggle has emerged. Of course, in the early period, feminist thinkers took very commendable steps for female identity, but with time, they have also neglected the male existence to elevate the female existence. Some feminist thinkers have hypothesized that it is confusing what form the struggle should take to assert women's rights or equality. It is in these ideas that French feminist thinkers have tried to understand the mystical aspects of women's writing, women's bodies, and women's nature. (For more information see: Pardeep Kaur: 2019; 12-14)

If we understand the serious aspect of this existence or identity from the context of Sikhism, then a different form emerges. Theoretically, in *Gurbani*, importance has been given to human existence or human life, regardless of their gender, all are equal. Both men and women have been described as the creation of the same five elements and considered the presence of God in both of them. In *Gurbani*, God is addressed as Purakh, and all humanity is addressed as women *Jiva Nari*. *There is one Husband Lord, and all are His brides*. (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 933) The ideal man is described in *Gurbani* through the metaphor of a wife's love. How a man can please God as a husband and achieve the real purpose of life only through the qualities of a woman? For such a *Gurmukh*, symbols have been used in *Gurbani* like *Suchaji*, *Sulakhni*, *Gunwanti* which become *Suhagan* only because of their qualities. *Gurmukh*, i.e. one who follows the virtues of a woman, attains the grace of God. *Manmukh*, sitting with face turned away from God (husband), remains the most deprived. According to *Gurbani*, if there is a difference between human beings, it is only because of their good or bad deeds. Examples of the practical form of these principles of *Gurbani* can be found in the life of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and his teachings.

Guru Gobind Singh ji gave a new direction to human life. Many incidents in this connection have become part of Sikh memory (*Simriti*). There is an example of Bhai Joga Singh in such memory. Of course, from the life of Bhai Joga Singh and Kaur, which is the basis of this paper. The contemporary situation of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the political, social, spiritual and many other aspects of the issues resolved in his court is clear, but the main focus of this paper is to consider the contemporary female

conditions of Guru Sahib, the new identity given to women by Guru Sahib, the importance of female qualities in the path of spirituality, etc. This *Sakhi* Joga Singh, who wrote the Guru Sahib's literature and Kaur, who was the king of Kathgarh's assistant (actually a woman kept by the king in the guise of a man), who was later known as Bibi Sharan Kaur. The special aspect of the lives of these two is how the importance of female qualities in the path of spirituality is seen from the common life of both of them, which is a great example of Guru Sahib bringing the theoretical aspect of Gurbani into practice.

In this text the questions and answers of the bhai Joga Singh has revealed a different form of woman's existence. As Joga Singh recites the lines *Nij naaree ke Saatha neh tum nit Baddaiyahu Par Naaree Ke Seja Bhool Supane Hoo (n) na jaiyahu..* (Sri Dasam Granth Sahib; 837) With this he becomes nervous and whenever a female form comes to his mind, he considers it a sin. His thoughts attract him to women. In these thoughts, he asks those women who are you? They answer "We are not other women, nor are we our own women." We are the bodies of women, the essence of women, their essence, their extracted extract, their soul, the soul of the soul, with the fragrance of which the sky of the human heart is full of dreams." (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 38) To find answers to his questions, bhai Joga Singh discussed with Bhai Chaupa Singh and Bhai Daya Singh, but even they were clear that it is not in Sikhism that aliens It is immoral for a Sikh to think for a woman. In search of this answer, another question arises in Joga Singh's mind if the dream of the other woman is a sin, then is it right for a woman to dream of a man? *In a dream, I was lifted up why didn't I grasp the hem of His Robe. Gazing upon the Beautiful Lord relaxing there, my mind was charmed and fascinated.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 1362) One day, when Joga Singh, surrounded by these questions, sat in the court of Guru Sahib with Haridas, and wanted to clear his doubts, Haridas said at the gesture of Guru Sahib that *In this world, there is one Husband Lord; all other beings are His brides.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 591) "These are Guru's words, we are all women, the man is the same, he is the same, only he is the only man, all the others are daughters, girls. He is the only one, all others are idiots. He is the bridegroom; all the others are brides. He is a male, the rest of all creation is female." (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 46)

Here it becomes clear that in this world there all are women and there is only one man, that is God. Here the doubts of bhai Joga Singh's mind are removed as well as the honour of being a man and the desire to be attracted to women are ended. He realizes that the purpose of human life is to live his life in surrender to the Supreme Being as a feminine soul. Those human souls who have concentrated their minds or who have devoted themselves to God as a Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such souls, according to *Gurbani*, are *suhagan*, who attain the status of bliss only in their surrender. This female soul can be anyone, male or female. A feminine soul means a soul which has the qualities of a good woman which is the embodiment of patience, contentment, humility, dedication and love. Bhai Joga Singh comes to know that the purpose of human life is to spend his life in surrender to the Supreme Being as a feminine soul.

In this *sakhi*, in the regarding of Kaur's state of mind, Guru Sahib cleared and presented about the female soul and the identity that has given to a woman. Kaur, who was the special man of the king of *Kathgarh*, arrives at the Guru Sahib's court to find a solution to his woes, as he was suffering with depression, but this is at a time when Joga Singh is deliberating on his predicament *There is one Husband Lord, and all are His brides..* (Sri Guru Ganth Sahib; 591) also fell into Kaur's ears. Haridas was saying, "The rest of creation is female." (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 46) These words and the meaning of the verse of *Gurbani* made Kaur's mood more confused that she is a man or a woman, that is, what is her body identifying her? "We are describing the metaphors of poetry," Guru Sahib tells Kaur. (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 47) Along with this, Guru Sahib says that we are giving the name of Kaur to women. "Many have told us that Kaur is a man's name, but we said: Yes, we are making a play, we are naming it according to what we have to do." (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 47) Guru Sahib also said that "*Samarth Purkh* takes incarnation and trades souls in the world, they are spiritual traders. Their behavior is their

play, their drama, they have to dress up like that.” (Balbir Singh, Dr.: 2008; 49) Hearing all this, different thoughts come to Kaur's mind. Kaur's state of mind at this time is very well mentioned. Here, Kaur feels that I wish Guru Sahib would change her body, and give her the name of women's soul. Women's souls are not common, but this is the soul in which a person has to be dedicated to a man, that is, God. Kaur's wish was not that she should be clothed in worldly women, but she wanted such soul that have all the qualities to surrender in front of God. Kaur's desire is a feminist perspective of Sikhism which can be understood with a spiritual vision distinct from Western feminist theories. This desire is not for the transformation of the body or the identity of the body, but here the identity is erased.

Guru Sahib names Kaur as Sharan Kaur in the next meeting and gives Sharan Kaur to Asa Singh as his daughter/son in his trust. Sharan Kaur is above the gender distinction of sons and daughters, it is Guru's grace (*Bakhshish*) in which there is harmony, not discrimination. Sharan Kaur later achieved the status of a brave woman in Sikh history. She not even cremated the bodies of the great Sahibzades and other martyrs, but also Bibi Sharan Kaur was martyred alive in that pyre by the enemies.

Many aspects of women's experience and spirituality emerge from this life story. such as:

1. Women also have to become feminine souls by following the spiritual path, this discussion does not mean that all women (in various forms/shapes of the soul) are good souls, not only those women who possess the qualities of perfection, are capable of becoming *Suhagan*. These metaphors are used in *Gurbani*. Guru Sahib also makes it clear to Kaur that we were referring to the metaphors of the poem. That is, the metaphor of a woman has been used because a woman usually has more qualities of humility, patience, and love than a man because a man has some hardness, a woman is very kind-hearted, but metaphor or the meaning of this *sakhi* is that she is to become a woman, she is to become a *Kaur* which is *Suchaji* in Guru Nanak *Bani*. From all this dialogue or *sakhi* we come to know about the path from evil to goodness or from *Manmukh* to becoming *Gurmukh*. So, the importance of the common qualities of a woman can be seen which are helpful in the path of spirituality and essential for a seeker.
2. In this *Sakhi*, Guru Sahib talks about the state of mind of good and bad people that the play of good people is to become a female soul from within, they direct their soul towards purity for the union of God. It means that in this world a person is in any body whether male or female. But the great is the one who has the female form inside, who has assumed the beautiful qualities of the female and the male is only God. Even if he is living in the world with whatever body he wants. It is a kind of drama that the body can be seen but the soul is that of a beautiful woman. All this is an internal phenomenon, which cannot be described in general terms.
3. A medium person who changes his form for worldly activities i.e. takes advantage through his body, has been compared by Guru Sahib to *Vaishya* bad *Karmas*. As Kaur disguised as a man was working for the king's personal affairs, her life was in turmoil. Just like the problem of being a lesbian or gay in the world today is immoral. It is a kind of flesh trade that has set the world on an immoral path. This immorality is meant to be selfish because it makes the body rascal. Who has been called *Kuchaji* in the *Bani* of Guru Nanak Sahib, who remains only *Duhagan* due to his actions. So, from this *Sakhi*, the teachings given by Guru Sahib are coming out that of course, all humanity has been guided to the right path through the metaphor of a woman, but it is not a matter of becoming a woman from a body, but every human being has to make his soul a woman's soul.
4. The importance of the Guru is also seen here that if there is the grace of the Guru, then the path of the human soul to the union with God is easy. Again and again, it is mentioned in *Gurbani* that only the grace of the Guru can make a person wise. It is only through Guru that man comes out of darkness meaning ignorance. *Taking me by the arm, you lifted me up, out of the deep darkpit of household and Maya.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 1218-1219)
5. From this *sakhi* like Kaur, it is clear that it is a sin to mistake being a man or a woman as a body.

Living as a man, when I was around other women, I assumed I was a man. Which was her big mistake. In today's time, women are carrying the tree of feminism movement in different context men are also in the ego for the existence of their leadership, this is all a mistake or a kind of physical mistake. Because the real purpose of the soul, every person present here is to meet God, who is the only man, and everyone has to endow their souls with the qualities of a woman.

6. Here she also talks about taking her test before Guru Sahib. Usually, a man talks about proving the chastity of a woman. As we hear or read about the fire test given by Mata Sita in *Ramayana*, Guru Sahib talks about form tests instead of these tests. A sacrifice that is not to prove anything or to test anything. Such a sacrifice “has its partner its own self, its own soul. It is not for pretense, it is not for presenting evidence, it is not a testimony to establish a truth, it is the internal call of the self which is the true nature of the soul.” (Balbir Singh, Dr.:2008; 82) Similarly, the Kaur who became Sharan Kaur did not sacrifice herself to prove anything, but it is the light of her soul for herself. The pyre in which she was martyred was the pyre of character test for her. It is not only limited to martyrdom or bravery but this incident was the expansion of the soul of Bibi Sharan Kaur who was on the last step where her test was not by any human or man but she had no form here, here she was that part of Nirankar.

The state of mind of Bibi Sharan Kaur was such that the body does not matter to a person. Neither the body nor any distinct sense of pleasure and pain remains. To attain this state of mind is the real purpose of human life. Bani of Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib *One who knows that pain and pleasure are both the same, and honour and dishonour as well, Who remains detached from joy and sorrow, realizes the true essence in the world.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 218) describes through words. Bibi Sharan Kaur's life seems to be the life of a seeker. How did she first give sanctity to her work or actions, i.e. took the path of *Gurmukh* from the path of *Manmukh*. She kept herself under the shelter of the Guru. Her state of mind, which is that of a seeker, was merged with the Supreme Truth by the grace of the Guru. The qualities and stages that are seen in the life of Bibi Sharan Kaur, information about them is available in the book of William James and also the examples of the lives of seekers regarding these qualities and stages are found. The mental state of the seeker has been described through four aspects. The first is asceticism, where the ascetic takes pleasure in austerity by devoting himself/herself to it. Second, is the strength of the soul, where all fear is gone and no desire remains. There is no difference between heaven and hell. It means that the distinction between pleasure and pain is lost. Purity, where the seeker becomes a form of a calm mind and pure soul away from the entanglements of the world. Charity, is where the whole world becomes equal in the eyes of the seeker. Enemies are also loved and even beggars are treated as brothers and are helped by them. It means that the mind of a seeker is full of love for everyone beyond himself/herself. (William James: 1985; 273-274) How day by day a person becomes a scholar of this path and finally reaches a state where a person has no attachment to his body, even if he/she gets a warning from it for some good deed, he/she does not hesitate. Man becomes aware in such a situation that the soul is eternal, death has nothing to do with it, only the human or worldly body ends. The purpose of human life is to eliminate the evils within. A scholar or seeker of this path becomes free from all fear or dread. Only a person with such a state of mind can give martyrdom. Being selfless and fearless can create courage in a person. This is an example of real devotion and power which is reflected in the life of Bibi Sharan Kaur. Controlling your emotions is the greatest power and that is real freedom. Its practical form is reflected in the life of Bibi Sharan Kaur.

7. The importance of women in the eyes of the *Jogis* at that time also emerges from this witness, like the wife of bhai Joga Singh (when he had three *Laavan* (ritual of Sikh Marriage), but one *Laav* was left). reaches the hut, where women are not usually kept. But because she came to seek help, the Siddhas first disguised her as a boy and then sent her away after giving her the Guru Mantra and preaching. But the spiritual condition of this woman has been described that she did not find any solution in the camp of Siddhas but it was considered necessary to change her physical disguise (which means that

somewhere in the body of a man is associated with salvation.) But when if she goes to Guru Sahib's court, both her spiritual and worldly problems are solved there. By calling bhai Joga Singh according to the Sikh code of conduct (*Rahit Maryada*), their remaining *Laav* is completed and Guru Sahib sends this couple for preaching purposes.

8. The practical form of the spiritual stages of the *Bani Lavan* recorded in the *Guru Granth Sahib* can be seen from this conversation or this *Sakhi* and the role of this hero-heroine. That is, how a human soul strives to reach the ultimate stage of spirituality and how it makes every effort to reach that stage. By associating *lavan* with spirituality and giving honour to the couple by having their Sikh complete the fourth lava himself, Guru Sahib makes known the domestic importance of the household. Guru Sahib tells Joga Singh and his wife to earn *Sahaj yog*, for which he asks them to correct their mind as well as focus on his steadfastness. That is, only a steady mind can produce *Gurmukhta*. *He wakes in peace, and he sleeps in peace. The Gurmukh praises the Lord night and day.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib; 646) Here, Guru Sahib gave the same order for both men and women, but on the path of becoming a *Gurmukh*, where both of them themselves had to acquire the soul of a woman and at the same time ordered them to teach others too.

In summary, it can be said that where the Gurus praise the virtues of women through their verses and tell the whole of humanity the way to attain God's union through those virtues. In the same way, the practical aspect of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's life or his court can be seen. How Guru Sahib has given a new meaning to women. For which, also said to women have need to recognize their qualities. As in today's time there is a discussion of feminism or women's rights and feminist principles are also being developed, but those efforts are also having such results which are dividing human beings based on gender. This division is a matter of concern for all. If the *Gurbani* and Guru Gobind Singh Ji's message will be developed, then we may be able to protect ourselves from these troubles. The meaning of being free has become different in this modern time, but the meaning of being free is not to make others low and try to be high, otherwise to be free is to eliminate all the differences between yourself and others. As long as there are attempts to be free from others, then man cannot be free, but he will sink into such swampy thinking, where there is no way out. So, man/woman must be freed from the differences in his/her thinking so that instead of falling into differences, man/woman can go towards the real purpose of life. If every man tries to understand each other's soul rather than the physical aspect of a woman, then perhaps the gap between men and women in this world can be reduced.

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