

# ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Dear Brothers & Sisters of this infinitely beautiful Sikh Nation, this essay about the image and attitude of women in contemporary Sikhi (ਸਿੱਖੀ) is a dedication to you. It is my hope that this work will be well received by you; my Guru Ji's sangat (ਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸੰਗਤ). It is inevitable that some of the views expressed in this essay will definitely upset some members of our panth (ਪੰਥ). However my intention in writing this essay to give voice to an opinion that I think has never been heard by our panth's ears, and one that I think desperately needs to be heard.

Before beginning, I would like to say that all praise is due to the wonderful and all powerful Creator (ਕਰਤਾਰ); the inspirer of all thought and action.

**ਤੇਰੇ ਕਵਨ ਕਵਨ ਗੁਣ ਕਹਿ ਕਹਿ ਗਾਵਾ; ਤੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਧਾਨਾ ॥**

*Which, which of Your Great Virtues should I sing and repeat, Vaaheguroo Jee you are my Master; the treasure of virtues.*

**ਤੁਮਰੀ ਮਹਿਮਾ ਬਰਨਿ ਨ ਸਾਕਉ; ਤੂੰ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਉਚ ਭਗਵਾਨਾ ॥੧॥ ਅੰਗ ੭੩੫**

*Oh Vaaheguroo Jee! I cannot express Your Greatness. You are the highest of high|| Ang 735*

Furthermore I hope that Guru Sahib will deliver the work of this servant (ਸੇਵਕ) successfully and acceptingly into the hands and hearts of His Gurmukhs (ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ). I am neither a scholar nor a learned individual; I can only hope to become a better Sikh with Guru Sahib Ji's blessing through Sangat (ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ + ਸੰਗਤ).

**ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਰਮੁ ਨ ਜਾਨਾ; ਨਾਹਿਨ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰਣੀ ॥**

*I do not know anything about spiritual wisdom, meditation or karma, and my way of life is not clean and pure.*

**ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਕੈ ਅੰਚਲਿ ਲਾਵਹੁ; ਬਿਖਮ ਨਦੀ ਜਾਇ ਤਰਣੀ ॥ ਅੰਗ ੭੦੨**

*Please attach me to the hem of the robe of Guru Ji's Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy; so that I may swim across this terrible river of attachment greed ego lust and anger|| Ang 702*

*What does **girl power** mean to you?*

We live in a world that is still gripped with gender inequality, so in a male-dominant society a woman still feels the need to prove her worth in the work force, in social circles and most unfortunately in our Sikh panth as well. The latter arena is the most concerning, since Guru Sahib created his Sikhs equally and prescribed ways for us to live that would ensure that equality.

Please allow me to further explore the above mentioned issues by posing a question. Have you ever heard the saying:

*“The eye does not see what the mind does not know.”*

For example, pretend that you are taking a stroll in a garden that has thousands of different types of flowers. At the end of your stroll your friend asks you “what flowers did you see in the garden?” you could only tell them about the flowers that you already know about. So you might say “I saw roses, lilies, lilacs etc” but you wouldn’t say “I saw a plumeria, a hibiscus, or a lantana.” So even though those flowers were in the garden you didn’t know what they looked like, so your eyes just glanced over them without mentally processing them. You would have to learn about those flowers, then re-visit that garden and only then will your eye recognize them.

There is a similar trend in global-society, and even within contemporary Sikhi that I was totally oblivious too until it was pointed out to me. If you ever examine this matter, then you will also realize the truth in it. In Sikhi when you think of *girl-power*, who comes to mind? Naturally the first image that comes to mind is Mata Bhag Kaur Ji (**ਮਾਤਾ ਭਾਗ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ** aka Mai Bhago **ਮਾਈ ਭਾਗੋ ਜੀ**), Mata Sada Kaur Ji (**ਮਾਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ**) or other female-warriors. Rarely will anyone tell you that they initially pictured Mata Sahib Kaur Ji (**ਜਗਤ ਮਾਤਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ**; Mother of the Khalsa) or Mata Khivi Ji (**ਜਗਤ ਮਾਤਾ ਖੀਵੀ ਜੀ** Guru Angad dev sahib ji’s wife & a sevadar **ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰ** of the highest eminence).

Sangat Ji, this is just a way of demonstrating that young Sikhs and Sikh girls especially associate the notion of *girl-power* with female soldiers, warriors, and group leaders etc. In short, they associate *girl-power* with roles that were traditionally given to men. As females we think that in order to be considered equals in a male-dominant society, we need to show competence in the same fields as men: i.e. demonstrate the ability to fight in battle, being group leaders, and being the alpha-dog etc. Many girls in western society believe that fulfilling traditional female roles are demeaning: i.e. Rearing children, providing guidance for family members, cooking for the family, and completing house-hold chores etc.

I would like to ask:

*Are the women who stayed home and raised their children less heroic than those that went to battle & fought alongside the Singhs?*

It’s my humble belief that a Sikh woman’s ultimate seva (**ਸੇਵਾ**) to the panth is raising her children to be complete Gurmukhs and provide support and guidance to members of her home. Although I firmly believe that if they were ever called upon the daughters of the panth would lead for Sikhi and bleed for Sikhi, we must realize that Sikh mothers have a role in protecting our traditions that no other member of our nation has.

**ਜਨਨੀ ਜਣੈ ਤੋ ਭਗਤ ਜਨ; ਕੈ ਦਾਤਾ, ਕੈ ਸੂਰ।**

*Oh child-bearing woman, if you are going to give birth to a child then give birth to a devotee, to a philanthropist or to a righteous warrior.*

**ਨਹੀ ਤੋ ਜਨਨੀ ਬਾਂਝ ਰਹੈ; ਕਾਹੇ ਗਵਾਵੈ ਨੂਰ। \*\***

*Otherwise oh woman, do not bear children at all. Why squander your beauty and the beauty of life?*

In this context a Giver/philanthropist is one who can even give selflessly when there is nothing to give. A warrior is one who fights the physical battles on earth's battlefields with weapons of steel as well as fighting the mental war waging inside the mind with the weapons of good virtue, good character & Bani.

<http://www.sikhithemax.com/page.asp?ShabadID=2590>

These lines \*\* (from this essay not the url) have been cited many times in our history to instruct expecting mothers about their duty to prepare their children to be guruwale (ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲੇ).

Devoting time to teaching their children about Sikhi is a seva which is taken very lightly by modern Sikh women. The progression of a pure Sikh tradition without the compromise of our rehat (ਰਹਿਤ) is being challenged by the forces of western culture, media, fashion and thought. While the latter influences are shaping our generation on a daily basis in our schools, work places, and television, we are struggling to instill a sense of pride and confidence in our youth. We could meet this challenge by properly educating our youngsters in our very own homes, through our children's first educator: our mothers. Along with nourishing her child's body with food, a mother can nourish her child's mind through the narration of stories from our marvelous Sikh history, teaching them to read gurmukhi (ਗੁਰਮੁਖੀ), to learn santhiya (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸੰਥਿਆ), to become proficient in understanding bani (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਅਰਥ), and doing simran (ਸਿਮਰਨ).

The lack of knowledge and regard that Punjabi youth have toward the Sikh way of life may be substantially reduced if Sikh mothers would educate their children and raise them on the ideals of Sikhi. This is not to say that all problems owing to generations of "Sikhi-less-ness" falls on the shoulders of Sikh mothers, but this is surely one of the greatest fields pertaining to the chardi kala (ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ) of the future of our panth.

This leads into another issue in Sikh society which was briefly touched upon earlier in this paper: Gender inequality. As the Chinese proverb states

*"A gardener who does not guard his flowers from looming weeds, will one day find his garden being choked of its livelihood."*

Many of the problems within the Sikh nation are stemming from our inability to deal with our own problems as they come up. For some time now sentiments of feeling unappreciated, feeling inferior, and not feeling respected have been settling into the hearts of Sikh women, owing to an inability of Sikh men to realize a woman's worth. Keeping this in mind, young women are trying to earn their respect through acquiring an attitude and an image consistent with the notion of "*girl-power*." Women are subconsciously placing less importance on familial duties and more importance on taking on "male-roles" in order to achieve equal status & stature. This trend can be illustrated by observing the appearance of aspiring female leaders in the corporate world. Female presidents, and CEOs as well as women who are trying to reach such posts often have short hair (boy-cuts) and wear blazers & dress pants; the image of a man in the corporate world. By comparison female employees or secretaries often have long hair and wear dress skirts.

My aim is not to critique this ideology of "*girl-power*" in Sikhi, but to show what this attitude has caused. It's been my experience that Amritdhari (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਧਾਰੀ) people, but especially amritdhari girls tend to alienate non-amritdhari Punjabis. My parents are amritdhari, but growing up they never enforced or encouraged my sisters and I to keep a complete Sikhi saroop (ਸਿੱਖੀ ਸਰੂਪ). We learned to read bani (ਬਾਣੀ ਪੜਨੀ), speak Punjabi, and to guard our honor as women (ਲਾਜ ਰੱਖਣੀ). Like many Punjabi parents, my parents didn't want their girls to feel left out of American society. So although we were "Sikhs on the inside" (even though such a thing cannot truly exist), we were not Sikhs on the outside. I believe that the outer appearance of a Sikh is as important as the inner aspect, but I have met **MANY**, people who adorn the Sikhi saroop, but are void of Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) on the inside.

Sangat Ji, I regret to admit that there have been many times when I felt discriminated against by my amritdhari sisters for trimming my eyebrows or wearing skirts. Although I admire amritdhari people for keeping a Sikhi saroop & lifestyle, many of them tend to be intimidating and selective, which is why I never had meaningful friendships with them. And although my parents were amritdhari and I was aware of Rehat and Amrit, I never completely felt that I would commit to a life of an amritdhari Sikh until I had a wonderful experience with the sangat at my last university. One Singh's mannerism in particular had a lasting impression on me and many others at my school. I was not surprised at all to learn that the reason he was such a great Sikh was largely due to the way his mother raised him. His elderly Ustad (ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗ ਉਸਤਾਦ) in Toronto and his sangat also had a large role in the shaping of his Faith, but he explains that his foundation and strength in Sikhi was unquestionably from his mother's teachings. I have seen other examples of Gurmukhs who are a shining reminder of what a Sikh should be, and those Singhs and Kaurs are also products of fantastic child rearing.

Through Guru sahib's grace (ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ) I have stopped cutting my hair (ਕੇਸਾਂ ਦੀ ਬੇਅਦਬੀ) and I plan on walking the path of the Gurmat very soon(ਖੰਡੇ ਬਾਟੇ ਦਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਛਕਣਾ).  
*Gurprasaadhé.*

I realize that this is not enough though, even once becoming a certified Kaur (ਕੌਰ), my duty to Sikhi will not be complete. In the future when I become a mother I realize that a large part of my commitment to Sikhi entails that I must devote myself to teaching my children about Sikhi, Bani and Maryada (ਮਰਯਾਦਾ).

Dear readers, as a young panth we have come a long way, but we still have a great deal more to cover. We have the tools with which we can remedy many of our own problems. It's the aim of many panthic well-wishers to reshape the way we treat each other. The threats that Sikhi faces demand us to be more sincere and dear to each other. We need to feel that each man, woman and child in our panth is precious. I think this realization only starts to take effect if each Sikh considers the next person to be more valuable than his/her self.

In closing I must express that it was not my intention to hurt anyone's feelings or to make accusations at any individual or group of people. I would never intentionally say anything malicious about my fellow brothers and especially sisters, as I place you on the highest pedestals.

As the 10<sup>th</sup> Nanak once said:

**ਸਾਧ ਅਸਾਧ ਜਾਨੋ ਨਹੀ ਬਾਦ ਸੁਬਾਦ ਬਿਬਾਦਿ; (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਅੰਗ ੨੫੪)**

*I don't know who is righteous or evil, nor am I cleverly arguing for against anyone to make conflict. (Sri Dasm Granth, Ang 254)*

I didn't write this paper to simply "give my two-cents," because I believe my opinion isn't of any importance. I wrote this article because I thought it was of interest to my fellow Gursikhs. I'm bound to offend some readers and make errors in trying to express my views. For that I apologize and hope that I did not hurt anyone's feelings. It took me a long time to decide how I was going to express my opinion simply because I was very cautious of upsetting any Gurmukhs. Even though I was careful in the selection of my words I know that I cannot control how the sangat will react, as those are matters that I will leave in God's hands.

**ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭਿ ਸਰਣਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ; ਸਰਬ ਚਿੰਤ ਤੁਧੁ ਪਾਸੇ ॥**

*All beings and creatures are in your Sanctuary; all of our cares and worries rest with You*

**ਜੋ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੋਈ ਚੰਗਾ; ਇਕ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੀ ਅਰਦਾਸੇ ॥੪॥ ਅੰਗ ੭੯੫**

*Oh Vaheguroo Jee! Whatever pleases you is acceptable, good, this alone is my prayer||*  
*Ang 795*

Humbly & Respectfully,  
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January 2, 2008  
ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਸਮਪੂਰਨੰ ।  
ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ॥  
ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹਿ॥