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Bibi Basant Lata: Unsung Heroine Of The Sikh Resistance During Guru Gobind Singh's Era

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Abstract: This paper sheds light on the courageous life of Bibi Basant Lata, a devoted Sikh woman who played a crucial role in the Sikh resistance against the Mughal Empire during Guru Gobind Singh's era (1666-1708 CE). Through a critical examination of historical sources, this research reveals Bibi Basant Lata's bravery, strategic thinking, and devotion to the Sikh cause. Her contributions, including providing shelter and support to Sikh warriors, demonstrate the significant role women played in the Sikh struggle for freedom and survival. This study aims to recover Bibi Basant Lata's story, highlighting her unsung heroism and the importance of women's participation in shaping Sikh history.

Keywords: Bibi Basant Lata, Guru Gobind Singh, Sikh resistance, Mughal Empire, women's history, Sikhism.

Primary sources by Kesar Singh Chibbar, Santokh Singh, Giani Gian Singh, Saroop Das Bhalla, and Koer Singh do not provide any information regarding Bibi Basant Kaur. Not even the Encyclopedias of Harbans Singh and Kahan Singh Nabha. Therefore, the information written in the secondary sources has been received, in which there is also no mention of the sources of this information. Sawan Singh writes that a short biography of Bibi Basant Lata will prove that women can successfully face all kinds of critical and risky situations. They can undergo the worst torture, shun attractive temptations, and sacrifice their lives to save their faith, honour, and human rights. Sikh women, like Sikh men, are equally good saint-soldiers.[1]

Gurcharn Singh Aulakh writes that Mata Basant Kaur's previous name was Sito Bai. She was the daughter of Lakhi Shah. This was the same Lakhi Shah who cremated the body of Guru Tegh Bahadur by setting his house on fire. He settled in Delhi for business, although his village was Khairpur Sadat in Mujafargarh district (now in Pakistan). It can be said that she got bravery and devotion from her father. Bibi Basant Kaur got married at the age of twelve to Bhai Mai Das, who was son of Bhai Mani Singh's son. Bhai Mani Singh was also a

resident of Alipur, which was in the northern district of Majufargarh (Pakistan). Bhai Mani Singh's family was a family of martyrs. About sixty-two members of Bhai Mani Singh's family were martyred. Including these, the eight sons of Bibi Basant Kaur were also martyred, whose names were respectively Chit Singh, Bachitar Singh, Gurbaksh Singh, Anik Singh, Ajaib Singh, Ajab Singh, Uday Singh, and Bhagwan Singh. Bibi Sito (Basant Kaur) had settled with Bhai Mani Singh at Anandpur on Vaisakh 1691, where Guru Gobind Singh had appointed Bhai Mani Singh as his Diwan (finance minister). When Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa Panth on March 30, 1699 A.D., Bhai Mani Singh, his five sons, and Mata Sito also took Amrit and became Basant Kaur from Sito Bai and also wrote that from Basant Lata, which is her famous name in Sikh history. Like Bhai Mani Singh, Mata Basant Kaur also endured the atrocities of the Mughals.[2]

Sawan Singh, in 'Noble and Brave Sikh Women' writes that in Anandpur she spent her time in the service of Mata Sunder Kaur and her family. Her life's only mission was to serve. She treated every member of the family like her own dear and near one. She was happily living under the shelter of Mata Sunder Kaur, who treated Basant Lata like her sister and loved her from the core of her heart. After leaving the fort of Anandpur on December 20-22, 1704, A.D. Mata Gujri and Mata Sunder Kaur sat in a palanquin with the younger Sahibzadas (Princes). Basant Kaur was walking along. Mata Sunder Kaur asked Basant Kaur many times to sit in the palanquins. But she refused out of respect and kept on walking in the dark.[3] In the darkness, she fell down; her companions had gone far away. She found herself surrounded by a few Mughal soldiers. She fought with them but was arrested, and they presented her as a gift to their chief. The chief offered her a comfortable and respectful life as his senior queen, but she did not agree and refused his offers. She snatched a dagger from the belt of the chief and quickly thrust it into her chest. She died in no time. The chief did not want people to know about it. So he asked his Hindu servant to cremate her secretly. The servant's wife found a written note in her pocket. In this letter, she requested Mata Sunder Kaur to forgive her mistakes, if any, committed by her in her service. After her cremation, the couple met Mata Sunder Kaur at Damdama Sahib (Bathinda). Guru Gobind Singh said that she has become immortal and will be remembered forever. [4] Bhai Vir Singh states in 'Sri Kalghidar Chamatkar' that she was an Amritdhari woman whose parents, husband, and son were all dead. The author writes that she was in the service of Mata Sahib Kaur. After the war of Anandpur, when Guru Gobind Singh left the fort of Anandpur along with his family, he was with Mata Sahib Kaur's palanquin. But stumbling on the way due to darkness, she was left alone, captured by the Mughal soldiers, and brought before their chief. She was given a lot of temptations, but she still did not obey, so she was tortured a lot. But Bibi Basant did not give up before them. Basant Kaur was also forced to leave her religion, but she still refused and remained firm in her religion. The author further writes that she snatched the dagger from the tyrant and stabbed herself in the stomach, but did not surrender to the enemy. Thus, she set an example of being a brave Sikh woman. The Mughals secretly planned to cremate Bibi Basant Kaur, and this task was entrusted to a Hindu soldier who performed Basant Kaur's rites with the help of his wife. At this time, that soldier received a letter from Bibi Basant Kaur addressed to Mata Sahib Kaur. In which she apologised for any mistake made while serving Mata Sahib Kaur and also wrote that she did not waver from her religion and faith even while in the prison of the

Mughals. That person delivered that letter to Mata Sahib Kaur after performing her last rites. Guru Gobind Singh also praised Bibi Basant Kaur for her bravery. [5]

The biography of Bibi Basant Lata proves that a Sikh woman can successfully face all kinds of critical and risky situations. They can suffer the worst tortures, avoid alluring temptations, and sacrifice their lives to protect their faith, honour and rights.

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