

# MARITIME SIKHS



*A Special Magazine edition on*

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

# MARITIME SIKHS

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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## A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH

### A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH: THE WOMEN OF THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY



LONG BEFORE GENDER PARITY BECAME A GLOBAL TALKING POINT, THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY (MSS) WAS QUIETLY REWRITING THE NARRATIVE OF SIKH INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP. IN THE VAST LANDSCAPE OF THE SIKH DIASPORA, WHERE GURDWARA GOVERNANCE HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN A MALE-DOMINATED SPHERE, THIS COMMUNITY IN NOVA SCOTIA EMERGED AS A RADICAL OUTLIER—A BEACON OF THE TRUE EGALITARIAN SPIRIT OF GURU NANAK, THE FOUNDER OF SIKH FAITH.

THE TRENDSETTING ACT OF ELECTING ALL-WOMEN EXECUTIVES WAS NOT MERELY A LOCAL MILESTONE; IT SENT RIPPLES ACROSS THE OCEANS. IT CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND WAS HAILED BY INDIAN LUMINARIES, INCLUDING FORMER CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER DR. M.S. GILL SAID, "AS A HUMBLE SIKH, I SALUTE THE BIBIS OF HALIFAX FOR TAKING THE LEAD AND SETTING A PRECEDENT FOR OTHERS TO EMULATE. I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE SGPC AND THE MANAGING COMMITTEES OF GURDWARAS WILL DEFINITELY BE A PROGRESSIVE STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. WITH WOMEN AROUND, IT WOULD ALSO ENSURE IMPROVED WORKING OF THE SIKH RELIGIOUS BODIES," HE ADDED.

IN THIS SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ISSUE OF MARITIME SIKHS, WE HONOR SIX EXTRAORDINARY PAST PRESIDENTS. THESE WOMEN DID NOT JUST HOLD TITLES; THEY NAVIGATED FINANCIAL CRISES, SPEARHEADED MASSIVE BUILDING EXPANSIONS, AND BRIDGED THE GAP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL FAITH AND THE CANADIAN MULTICULTURAL MOSAIC.

FROM THE FOUNDATIONAL HOSPITALITY OF THE 1960S TO THE MODERN ADVOCACY OF THE 21ST CENTURY, THEIR LEADERSHIP PROVES THAT WHEN WOMEN LEAD, THE COMMUNITY THRIVES WITH COMPASSION, FISCAL PRUDENCE, AND SPIRITUAL DEPTH.

AS YOU READ THE FOLLOWING BIOGRAPHIES, YOU ARE NOT JUST READING PERSONAL HISTORIES —YOU ARE WITNESSING THE LEGACY OF A REVOLUTION THAT BEGAN IN THE MARITIMES AND CONTINUES TO INSPIRE THE SIKH WORLD TODAY.

## A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH



### A LEGACY OF GRACE: CELEBRATING GURDIP KAUR TOOR (PRESIDENT MSS: 1992 - 1993)

THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, WE HONOR A WOMAN WHO DIDN'T JUST BREAK GLASS CEILINGS, SHE BUILT THE FOUNDATION THEY STAND UPON. GURDIP KAUR TOOR WAS MORE THAN A FOUNDING MEMBER OF MSS; SHE WAS ITS HEARTBEAT.

AN ELEMENTARY TEACHER BY TRADE, GURDIP BROUGHT THE PATIENCE OF THE CLASSROOM TO THE FOREFRONT OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP. IN 1992, SHE MADE HISTORY AS THE "FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT" OF MSS, LEADING AN ALL-FEMALE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WITH A QUIET, IMMOVABLE STRENGTH. SHE DIDN'T LEAD BY COMMAND, BUT THROUGH SEVA, LISTENING, GUIDING, AND ENSURING EVERY VOICE CARRIED WEIGHT.

HER IMPACT STRETCHED ACROSS THE FABRIC OF NOVA SCOTIA. SHE TAUGHT PUNJABI AND PERFORMED KIRTAN, ENSURING OUR HERITAGE FLOURISHED IN A NEW LAND. IN 1987, WHEN 174 REFUGEES ARRIVED IN HALIFAX, GURDIP MOBILIZED THE COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE LANGAR AND SPIRITUAL SOLACE, EMBODYING THE TRUE SIKH SPIRIT OF COMPASSION. HER CIVIC DEDICATION LATER EARNED HER THE YWCA VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR IN 1993 AND LED MSS TO TOP HONORS AT THE PROVINCIAL MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL.

GURDIP FACED THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A PIONEER WITH UNWAVERING INTEGRITY. WHETHER SHE WAS TENDING HER GARDEN OR LEADING A BOARDROOM, SHE MOVED WITH A GRACE ROOTED IN GURBANI.

TODAY, WE CELEBRATE GURDIP KAUR TOOR NOT JUST FOR THE TITLES SHE HELD, BUT FOR THE BARRIERS SHE DISSOLVED. SHE TAUGHT US THAT LEADERSHIP IS NOT ABOUT AUTHORITY. IT IS ABOUT SERVICE. HER LIFE REMAINS A LUMINOUS ROADMAP FOR EVERY WOMAN STRIVING TO LEAD WITH HEART AND PURPOSE.

## SURJIT KAUR SIDHU: A MATRIARCH OF FAITH AND FOUNDATION (PRESIDENT MSS: 1993 - 1994)



TO UNDERSTAND THE ROOTS OF THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY (MSS), ONE MUST LOOK TO THE JOURNEY OF SURJIT KAUR SIDHU. HER STORY IS ONE OF QUIET STRENGTH AND ENDURING DEVOTION, BEGINNING AT THE VERY INCEPTION OF OUR COMMUNITY WHEN SHE AND HER FAMILY HOSTED THE HISTORIC FIRST BAISAKHI CELEBRATION IN THEIR HOME IN APRIL 1968.

SURJIT'S LEADERSHIP REACHED A PINNACLE DURING HER 1993-94 PRESIDENCY. BRINGING DECADES OF EXPERIENCE AS A RETIRED TEACHER FROM THE HALIFAX PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, SHE APPROACHED THE ROLE WITH A MASTER EDUCATOR'S TOUCH. HER PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND, BALANCING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS, PREPARED HER PERFECTLY TO NAVIGATE THE DIVERSE EXPECTATIONS OF OUR SANGAT. SHE DIDN'T LEAD IN ISOLATION; SHE CHAMPIONED A COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT, WORKING SEAMLESSLY WITH A DEDICATED TEAM INCLUDING SATPAL SODHI, KULDIP CHEHIL, MOHAN BHOGAL, AND GURDIP TOOR TO ENSURE A PRODUCTIVE AND HARMONIOUS YEAR.

UNDER HER STEADY HAND, THE MSS FLOURISHED THROUGH EFFICIENT, COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT. HER TENURE WAS MARKED BY A DEEP COMMITMENT TO THE ANNUAL MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL, A MASSIVE UNDERTAKING THAT SHOWCASED SIKH HERITAGE TO THE WIDER HALIFAX COMMUNITY. TRUE TO HER CALLING AS A TEACHER, SHE PLACED A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUTH, ENSURING THE NEXT GENERATION HAD THE SPACE AND GUIDANCE TO FLOURISH IN THEIR FAITH.

BEYOND HER PRESIDENCY, SURJIT'S 58 YEARS OF SEVA HAVE BEEN DEFINED BY CONSISTENCY. WHETHER TEACHING SUNDAY SCHOOL, PREPARING LANGAR, OR SERVING AS PAST PRESIDENT, SHE LED BY EXAMPLE—A LEGACY NOW CARRIED ON BY HER CHILDREN WHO CONTINUE TO VOLUNTEER IN THE GURDWARA.

TODAY, AT 93 YEARS OF AGE, SURJIT REMAINS A VITAL PRESENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY. EVERY SUNDAY, SHE RETURNS TO THE SPIRITUAL HOME SHE HELPED BUILD, REUNITING WITH FRIENDS WHO HAVE BECOME FAMILY OVER SIX DECADES. SURROUNDED BY THE LOVE OF HER FIVE CHILDREN AND SIX GRANDCHILDREN, SHE STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO THE SECURITY AND COMFORT FOUND WITHIN THE MSS. HER LIFE IS A BEAUTIFUL REMINDER THAT TRUE LEADERSHIP IS ROOTED IN A LIFETIME OF SERVICE, FAMILY, AND AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO THE WELL-BEING OF ALL.

### A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH



## BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING BRIDGES: THE TRAILBLAZING JOURNEY OF GURINDER KAUR DHILLON (PRESIDENT MSS: 1997 - 1998)



IN THE VIBRANT HISTORY OF THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY (MSS), FEW STORIES ARE AS COMPELLING AS THAT OF GURINDER KAUR DHILLON. HER JOURNEY IS A MASTERCLASS IN RESILIENT LEADERSHIP, PROVING THAT "BEING THE CHANGE" IS NOT JUST A SLOGAN, BUT A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY AND JUSTICE.

GURINDER'S IMPACT PEAKED DURING HER 1997-98 PRESIDENCY, LEADING THE SOCIETY'S THIRD ALL-WOMEN EXECUTIVE. STEPPING INTO LEADERSHIP FOLLOWING A MASSIVE BUILDING EXPANSION THAT LEFT THE ORGANIZATION WITH A DAUNTING \$125,000 DEBT, SHE FACED A TRIAL BY FIRE. WITH A SCARCITY OF FUNDS BUT AN ABUNDANCE OF FAITH, SHE AND HER TEAM LAUNCHED CREATIVE FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES, INCLUDING A LEGENDARY COMMUNITY WALK-A-THON. THROUGH PRUDENT FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND THE UNWAVERING SUPPORT OF THE SANGAT, THEY CLEARED THE DEBT WITHIN A SINGLE YEAR—A FEAT THAT SECURED THE SOCIETY'S FUTURE.

BUT GURINDER'S VISION EXTENDED FAR BEYOND THE BALANCE SHEET. AS A THREE-TIME SECRETARY, SHE REVOLUTIONIZED THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF MSS, MOVING VAISAKHI CELEBRATIONS BEYOND THE GURDWARA WALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME AS A PUBLIC "MELA." THIS PROGRESSIVE SPIRIT DEFINED HER TENURE, HOSTING WORLD-RENOWNED THEOLOGIANs LIKE PROF. DARSHAN SINGH JI AND ENSURING THE MSS REMAINED A BEACON OF GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SIKH WORLD.

HER PROFESSIONAL PATH IS EQUALLY INSPIRING. AFTER CONFRONTING BLATANT RACISM IN THE RETAIL SECTOR, GURINDER PIVOTED TOWARD MORE HOLISTIC AND IMPACTFUL WORK. SHE BECAME A PIONEER IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH INTERPRETING, CO-FOUNDING THE NON-PROFIT CHIS IN 2000 TO BRIDGE LINGUISTIC GAPS IN NOVA SCOTIA'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM. FOR 26 YEARS, SHE HAS BEEN A VITAL VOICE FOR NEWCOMERS, SERVING ON THE TASK FORCE FOR NEWCOMER'S ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND THE BOARD OF THE CLAYTON PARK WEST LIBERAL ASSOCIATION.

FROM TRANSLATING MI'KMAW POETRY TO FACILITATING ENGLISH CONVERSATION AT THE KESHAN GOODMAN LIBRARY, GURINDER HAS SPENT DECADES ADVOCATING FOR MULTICULTURALISM AND IMMIGRANT RIGHTS. TODAY, AS SHE BALANCES HER INTERPRETER WORK WITH GLOBAL TRAVEL AND FAMILY, HER LEGACY STANDS AS A SHINING EXAMPLE FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: A LEADER WHO MET EVERY CHALLENGE WITH GRACE, COMPETENCE, AND A HEART FOR SEVA.

### A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH



## KANWAL KAUR SIDHU: A LEGACY OF SERVICE AND LIFETIME OF DEVOTION TO THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY (PRESIDENT: 2010 - 2011)

KANWAL KAUR SIDHU'S STORY IS NOT JUST ONE OF INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT, BUT A TESTAMENT TO A FAMILY LEGACY OF RADICAL SELFLESSNESS. HER FATHER, GURCHARAN SIDHU, WAS A FOUNDING PILLAR OF THE MSS, SERVING ON THE EXECUTIVE FROM 1968 TO 1976. ALONG WITH DR. KIRTAN SINGH, HE PURCHASED THE LAND ON WHICH OUR GURDWARA SAHIB STANDS TODAY. WITH HER MOTHER, SURJIT SIDHU, ALSO LATER SERVING AS PRESIDENT, SEVA (SELFLESS SERVICE) WAS NEVER A MERE HOUSEHOLD TOPIC—IT WAS THE VERY AIR THEY BREATHED.

GUIDED BY THE GURBANI PRINCIPLE:

ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਤ ਹੋਇ ਨਿਹਕਾਮੀ “SERVING SELFLESSLY WITHOUT DESIRE,”

SHE HAS SPENT DECADES STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY. AFTER SERVING AS VICE PRESIDENT, TREASURER, AND SECRETARY, SHE REACHED A HISTORIC MILESTONE IN 2010 BY BECOMING PRESIDENT. IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED LANDSCAPE, HER TENURE REALIZED THE GURU'S TEACHING THAT WOMEN LEAD WITH EQUAL FAITH AND COMPETENCE.

A BEACON FOR  
THE GLOBAL  
PANTH



## A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH

A CAREER EDUCATOR, SHE TRANSLATED CLASSROOM VALUES OF PATIENCE AND MENTORSHIP INTO COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE. UNDER HER PRESIDENCY, THE MSS FLOURISHED, INITIATING THE DAILY PARKASH OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB JI AND A WEEKLY SUKHMANI SAHIB PATH. ALONGSIDE A DEDICATED EXECUTIVE—KRISHNA GREWAL (VP), MANVINDER DHILLON (SECRETARY), AND SUSHMA PAUL (TREASURER)—SHE MODERNIZED THE SOCIETY VIA SOCIAL MEDIA AND LCD GURBANI TRANSLATIONS. FROM HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES TO VITAL RENOVATIONS, SHE ENSURED A SAFE SANCTUARY WHILE PLANNING FOR FUTURE NEEDS LIKE EXPANDED LANGAR SPACE AND SENIOR ACCESSIBILITY.

THROUGH OPEN COMMUNICATION, SHE PROVED THAT COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING STRENGTHENS COMMUNITY BONDS. HER COMMITMENT TO SEVA EXTENDS BEYOND OUR WALLS, SPEARHEADING HUMANITARIAN OUTREACH AND TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION THAT SERVICE IS AN ACTIVE VERB. TODAY, SHE CONTINUES ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, GUIDED BY THE ULTIMATE PRAYER:

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ, ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

“NANAK, THROUGH THE REALIZATION OF DIVINE WILL MAY OUR SPIRITS REMAIN EVER ASCENDING, AND BY THY WILL, MAY THE WELFARE OF ALL EXISTENCE BE REALISED.”

## SHARAN KAUR LITT: A JOURNEY OF SEWA, FAITH, AND LEADERSHIP (PRESIDENT MSS: 2016 - 2017)

FOR SHARAN KAUR LITT, THE SIKH PRINCIPLE OF SEWA—SELFLESS SERVICE—IS NOT JUST A CONCEPT; IT IS THE HEARTBEAT OF HER LIFE'S WORK. HER LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE MARITIME SIKH SOCIETY (MSS) REPRESENTS A TRANSFORMATIVE ERA OF COMMUNITY UPLIFTMENT AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN ATLANTIC CANADA, FUELED BY A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO FAITH AND ACTION.

SHARAN'S IMPACT ON THE MSS HAS BEEN BOTH FOUNDATIONAL AND VISIONARY. HAVING SERVED AS SECRETARY IN 2015 AND PRESIDENT IN 2016, SHE OVERSAW THE COMPLEX DAILY OPERATIONS OF OUR SPIRITUAL HOME WITH GRACE AND PRECISION. DURING HER PRESIDENCY, SHE DIDN'T JUST MANAGE THE PRESENT; SHE BUILT THE FUTURE. SHARAN INITIATED THE CRITICAL GROUNDWORK FOR THE NEW GURDWARA SAHIB, LEADING THE BUILDING COMMITTEES AND SPEARHEADING THE FUNDRAISING EFFORTS THAT DRAFTED THE BLUEPRINT FOR OUR PERMANENT SPIRITUAL SANCTUARY.

BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE GURDWARA, SHARAN HAS BEEN A TIRELESS ADVOCATE FOR NEWCOMERS. SHE HAS SPENT YEARS HELPING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES FROM INDIA NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES OF SETTLEMENT—FROM FINDING SHELTER TO SECURING EMPLOYMENT. HER DEDICATION TO CULTURAL VISIBILITY IS EQUALLY IMPRESSIVE; SHE HAS REPRESENTED THE MSS IN MULTICULTURAL PARADES AND CONTINUES TO ORGANIZE VIBRANT WOMEN'S CULTURAL EVENTS THAT ATTRACT UP TO 500 PARTICIPANTS, ENSURING OUR HERITAGE REMAINS ALIVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

**A BEACON FOR  
THE GLOBAL  
PANTH**





## A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH

BREAKING BARRIERS IS A HALLMARK OF SHARAN'S JOURNEY. AS A WOMAN PRESIDENT IN AN ARENA WHERE LEADERSHIP HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN MALE-DOMINATED, SHE LED WITH A LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM THAT NORMALIZED INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE. HER SUCCESS PAVED THE WAY FOR WOMEN TO SEE THEMSELVES AS DECISION-MAKERS WITHIN THE FAITH COMMUNITY.

THIS SAME FOUNDATION OF SIKH VALUES—HONESTY, HUMILITY, AND FAIRNESS—FUELS SHARAN'S PROFESSIONAL LIFE. SINCE 2021, SHE HAS BECOME A MULTI-AWARD-WINNING REALTOR, KNOWN FOR HER TRANSPARENT GUIDANCE AND ETHICAL MENTORSHIP OF OTHER WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY. WHETHER HELPING A FAMILY PURCHASE THEIR FIRST HOME OR MENTORING A PEER, SHE TREATS EVERY INTERACTION AS AN EXTENSION OF HER SERVICE.

BALANCED BY THE SUPPORT OF HER HUSBAND AND TWO TEENAGE SONS, SHARAN CONTINUES TO SERVE AS A MEMBER-AT-LARGE, PROVING THAT WITH ENERGY AND DEDICATION, ONE CAN SUCCESSFULLY WEAVE TOGETHER THE THREADS OF CAREER, FAMILY, AND A PROFOUND COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD.

## THE QUIET STRENGTH OF A COMMUNITY BUILDER: DR. SIMARDEEP KAUR HUNDAL

### A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH



IN THE LANDSCAPE OF NOVA SCOTIA HEALTHCARE AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP, DR. SIMARDEEP KAUR HUNDAL STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED WHEN PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE MEETS A HEART FOR SERVICE. A PRACTICING GENERAL DENTIST AND THE CLINICAL FORCE BEHIND MULTIPLE DENTAL PRACTICES, DR. HUNDAL'S INFLUENCE STRETCHES FAR BEYOND THE CHAIR SIDE; SHE IS A BUILDER OF BOTH SMILES AND SANCTUARIES.

IN 2020, DR. HUNDAL STEPPED INTO THE PRESIDENCY OF GURDWARA MSS DURING A SEASON OF PROFOUND UNCERTAINTY. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GURDWARA SAHIB—A VITAL SPIRITUAL HOME FOR THE CONGREGATION—HAD REACHED A STANDSTILL, FACING BOTH FINANCIAL HURDLES THAT SEEMED INSURMOUNTABLE AND COVID.

RATHER THAN SEEING A DEAD END, DR. HUNDAL SAW A DUTY. DRAWING UPON HER YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND THE TRUST SHE HAD CULTIVATED IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, SHE BECAME THE BRIDGE THE COMMUNITY NEEDED. HER JOURNEY TOOK HER TO EVERY CORNER OF THE COUNTRY, RALLYING SUPPORT AND GATHERING THE RESOURCES NECESSARY TO BREATHE LIFE BACK INTO THE PROJECT. TODAY, THE COMPLETED GURDWARA STANDS NOT JUST AS A BUILDING, BUT AS A MONUMENT TO HER RELENTLESS RESOLVE AND HER BELIEF THAT NO VISION IS "IMPOSSIBLE" WHEN BACKED BY COLLECTIVE FAITH.



## A BEACON FOR THE GLOBAL PANTH

FOR DR. HUNDAL, SUCCESS IS NOT A DESTINATION TO BE MANAGED, BUT A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE LIVED. HER PHILOSOPHY IS ELEGANTLY SIMPLE: DO THE WORK TO THE BEST OF ONE'S ABILITY AND LET SIKH PRINCIPLES BE THE COMPASS. THIS GROUNDED APPROACH ALLOWS HER TO BALANCE THE COMPLEXITIES OF A MULTI-CLINIC BUSINESS WITH A DEEP COMMITMENT TO PHILANTHROPY, SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS LIKE NORTHWOOD AND THE ANGAD HUNDAL SOCIETY.

WHEN THE CLINICAL COATS ARE PUT AWAY, DR. HUNDAL FINDS HER "PEACE OF MIND" IN THE FINE STROKES OF OIL PAINTING, THE REFLECTIVE WORLD OF WRITING, AND THE WARMTH OF HER FAMILY IN INDIA.

"COMPLETING THE GURDWARA SAHIB WHEN IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE GIVES ME TRUE PEACE OF MIND," SHE SHARES WITH CHARACTERISTIC HUMILITY.

THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, WE CELEBRATE DR. SIMARDEEP KAUR HUNDAL—A LEADER WHO PROVES THAT THE MOST POWERFUL WAY TO RISE IS BY LIFTING AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY WITH YOU.

## CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR SIKH WOMEN IN ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

FOR GENERATIONS, THE IMAGE OF A SAILOR IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY (RCN) WAS DEFINED BY RIGID ADHERENCE TO WESTERN GROOMING STANDARDS. WHILE SIKH MEN HAD CARVED A PATH TO WEAR TURBANS IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES (CAF) DECADES PRIOR, SIKH WOMEN FACED A SILENT, SYSTEMIC BARRIER. ENTER HARKIRAN KAUR, WHOSE RESOLVE TO INTEGRATE HER FAITH WITH HER NAVAL SERVICE DIDN'T JUST CHANGE A WARDROBE—IT FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERED THE FABRIC OF CANADIAN MILITARY INCLUSIVITY.

HARKIRAN'S JOURNEY BEGAN IN 2014 WITH A DEEP-SEATED NEED FOR SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS. AS A CONVERT TO THE SIKH FAITH, WEARING THE DASTAR (TURBAN) AFTER TAKING AMRIT WAS A CORE TENET OF HER BELIEF, SYMBOLIZING EQUALITY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND A COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE. HOWEVER, WHEN SHE FIRST SOUGHT TO HONOR THIS COMMITMENT WHILE IN UNIFORM, SHE HIT A WALL OF INSTITUTIONAL RESISTANCE.

THE MILITARY INITIALLY DENIED HER REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATION, CITING THAT EXISTING DRESS REGULATIONS PROVIDED NO FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN TO WEAR TURBANS. WHILE HER MALE COUNTERPARTS WERE ACCOMMODATED, SHE WAS EXPECTED TO ADHERE TO STANDARD FEMALE HAIR REGULATIONS, FORCING A PAINFUL CHOICE BETWEEN HER RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND HER PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS.

REFUSING TO ACCEPT A POLICY THAT DISCRIMINATED BASED ON GENDER, HARKIRAN ENLISTED THE HELP OF BALPREET SINGH, A RENOWNED ADVOCATE WHO BECAME A PIVOTAL ALLY. TOGETHER, THEY CHALLENGED THE CAF IN OTTAWA TO ALIGN ITS INTERNAL POLICIES WITH THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS.

### SIKH WOMEN IN ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY



## THE IRON ARCHITECT: HOW ONE WOMAN BUILT A REVOLUTION

THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, FORGET THE CLICHÉS OF PASSIVE HISTORY. MEET MATA GUJRI, THE 17TH-CENTURY VISIONARY WHO DIDN'T JUST WITNESS A REVOLUTION—SHE ENGINEERED ITS SOUL. IN AN ERA OF BRUTAL MUGHAL TYRANNY, SHE EMERGED AS THE "SILENT ARCHITECT" OF SIKH RESISTANCE, PROVING THAT THE MOST LETHAL WEAPON AGAINST OPPRESSION ISN'T A SWORD, BUT AN UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT.

### THE STRATEGIST BEHIND THE MARTYR

MATA GUJRI'S LIFE WAS A MASTERCLASS IN RADICAL RESILIENCE. WHEN HER HUSBAND, THE NINTH SIKH GURU, STOOD AGAINST FORCED CONVERSIONS TO PROTECT ANOTHER FAITH'S RIGHT TO EXIST, HE DID SO WITH HER TACTICAL BLESSING. KNOWING HIS DEATH WAS CERTAIN, SHE DIDN'T COLLAPSE IN GRIEF. WHEN HIS SEVERED HEAD WAS RETURNED TO HER, SHE CHOSE PURPOSE OVER PAIN. SHE PIVOTED INSTANTLY FROM A GRIEVING WIDOW TO THE GUARDIAN OF A MOVEMENT, RECOGNIZING THAT THE CROWN OF LEADERSHIP NOW RESTED ON HER YOUNG SON'S SHOULDERS.

### GROOMING THE GREATNESS

SHE DIDN'T JUST RAISE A CHILD; SHE SCULPTED A LEGEND. AS HER SON, GURU GOBIND SINGH, CAME OF AGE, MATA GUJRI WAS THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE. SHE NAVIGATED TREACHEROUS POLITICAL LANDSCAPES AND MANAGED THE ADMINISTRATIVE HEARTBEAT OF A GROWING COMMUNITY. HER GENIUS LAY IN HER ABILITY TO ENSURE THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE WAS FUELED BY UNWAVERING COMPASSION, NEVER THE POISON OF VENGEANCE. SHE WAS THE BRIDGE THAT KEPT THE REVOLUTION STEADY WHEN IT WAS MOST VULNERABLE.

MATA  
GUJRI JI



## MATA GUJRI JI

### **THE COLD TOWER OF INTEGRITY**

HER ULTIMATE TEST CAME AT AGE 81. SEPARATED FROM HER ARMY AND IMPRISONED IN A FREEZING OPEN-AIR TOWER WITH HER TWO YOUNGEST GRANDSONS (AGED 7 AND 9), SHE FACED A PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR. IN THE DEAD OF WINTER, WITHOUT WARMTH OR FOOD, SHE DIDN'T TEACH THEM TO FEAR; SHE TAUGHT THEM TO TRANSCEND. WHEN THOSE BOYS CHOSE TO BE BRICKED ALIVE RATHER THAN BETRAY THEIR CONSCIENCE, IT WAS HER VOICE THEY HEARD IN THEIR HEARTS. THEIR POISE WAS HER GREATEST MASTERPIECE.

### **A LEGACY WRITTEN IN STONE**

MATA GUJRI WAS EXECUTED IN THAT SAME PRISON SHORTLY AFTER HER GRANDSONS, COMPLETING A LIFE OF TOTAL SACRIFICE. SHE SAW HER HUSBAND, HER SON, AND HER GRANDCHILDREN ALL DIE FOR THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS—YET SHE NEVER LET THE FLAME OF HOPE FLICKER. TODAY, WE CELEBRATE HER NOT AS A FOOTNOTE, BUT AS THE IRON LADY WHO ENSURED THAT EVEN WHEN THE BODY IS BROKEN, THE SPIRIT REMAINS UNCONQUERED.

## MAI BHAGO: A LEGACY OF COURAGE AND CONVICTION

BY HARKIRAN KAUR



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SERVES AS A GLOBAL MOMENT TO CELEBRATE THE PIONEERS WHO SHATTERED CEILINGS AND REDEFINED THE LIMITS OF POSSIBILITY. WHILE WE OFTEN LOOK TO MODERN ICONS, HISTORY OFFERS US THE FORMIDABLE FIGURE OF MAI BHAGO—AN 18TH-CENTURY SIKH WARRIOR WHOSE LIFE REMAINS A MASTERCLASS IN LEADERSHIP, RESILIENCE, AND THE REFUSAL TO ACCEPT A “LESSER” STATUS BASED ON GENDER.

FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS TODAY, MAI BHAGO IS MORE THAN A HISTORICAL FIGURE; SHE IS THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE IDEA THAT COURAGE IS NOT A GENDERED TRAIT.

IN 1705, DURING THE SIEGE OF ANANDPUR, FORTY SOLDIERS FROM HER VILLAGE SIGNED A DISCLAIMER AND DESERTED GURU GOBIND SINGH JI. MAI BHAGO CONFRONTED THEM WITH A FIERCE ULTIMATUM, SHAMING THEIR COWARDICE AND FAMOUSLY TELLING THEM THAT IF THEY WOULD NOT FIGHT, THEY SHOULD STAY HOME WHILE THE WOMEN TOOK UP ARMS. SHE DIDN'T WAIT FOR PERMISSION TO LEAD; HER MORAL CLARITY RALLIED THE MEN BACK TO THEIR DUTY, PROVING THAT LEADERSHIP REQUIRES THE COURAGE TO SPEAK UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS.

DONNING A SOLDIER'S DRESS AND MASTERING THE HORSE AND SPEAR, SHE FOUGHT ON THE FRONT LINES AT THE BATTLE OF MUKTSAR. LEADING THOSE FORTY MEN, NOW THE CHALI MUKTE AGAINST AN ARMY OF THOUSANDS, SHE SHATTERED THE DICHOTOMY THAT ONE MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL DEVOTION AND PHYSICAL STRENGTH. SHE PROVED A WOMAN COULD BE A STRATEGIC THINKER, A PROTECTOR OF HER COMMUNITY, AND AN EQUAL.

THOUGH THE BATTLE'S SOLE SURVIVOR, HER INJURIES WERE SEVERE. GURU GOBIND SINGH JI PERSONALLY NURSED HER BACK TO HEALTH, RECOGNIZING HER AS A SOUL OF IMMENSE SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL CALIBER. IT WAS DURING THIS PERIOD THAT HER TRANSITION INTO THE KHALSA WAS FORMALIZED. RECEIVING AMRIT FROM THE GURU HIMSELF, SHE TOOK THE NAME MAI KAUR AND BECAME A “SAINT-SOLDIER,” A SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL DEDICATED TO A HIGHER CAUSE.

## MAI BHAGO JI





## A MESSAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

TO THE GIRLS OF TODAY WHO ARE TOLD THEY ARE “TOO LOUD,” “TOO AMBITIOUS,” OR “NOT SUITED” FOR CERTAIN SPACES, MAI BHAGO’S LEGACY OFFERS A DEFIANT REBUTTAL. SHE REMINDS US THAT OUR WORTH IS NOT DETERMINED BY SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS, BUT BY OUR INTERNAL STRENGTH (SHAKTI).

HER STORY IS A CALL TO ACTION. IT URGES EVERY WOMAN TO FIND HER OWN “MUKTSAR” THAT PLACE WHERE SHE STANDS HER GROUND, DEFENDS HER VALUES, AND LEADS OTHERS TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE. MAI BHAGO DIDN’T JUST FIGHT A BATTLE; SHE FOUGHT A MINDSET, PROVING THAT WHEN A WOMAN REALIZES HER OWN POWER, SHE BECOMES AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE FOR CHANGE.

**MAI BHAGO JI**

## EQUALITY AS A DIVINE MANDATE: THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIKHISM

**THE SIKH FAITH, FROM ITS VERY INCEPTION IN 15TH-CENTURY PUNJAB (INDIA), DIDN'T JUST SUGGEST GENDER EQUALITY—IT MANDATED IT. IN AN ERA WHERE WOMEN WERE OFTEN TREATED AS PROPERTY, THE SIKH GURUS CODIFIED A SYSTEM OF ABSOLUTE GENDER EQUALITY. GURU NANAK FAMOUSLY CHALLENGED THE STATUS QUO:**

**"FROM HER, KINGS ARE BORN... WITHOUT WOMAN, THERE WOULD BE NO ONE AT ALL... SO WHY CALL HER BAD?"**

### **THE THEOLOGICAL MANDATE**

IN 1699, WHEN GURU GOBIND SINGH JI INITIATED THE KHALSA, MEN WERE GIVEN THE TITLE 'SINGH' (LION), AND WOMEN WERE GIVEN THE TITLE "KAUR" (PRINCE). THIS WAS A REVOLUTIONARY ACT OF SOVEREIGNTY. IT MEANT A WOMAN'S IDENTITY WAS NO LONGER DEFINED BY HER FATHER OR HER HUSBAND; SHE WAS A SOVEREIGN ENTITY IN HER OWN RIGHT, DIRECTLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE DIVINE.

### **IN SIKHISM, WOMEN HAVE THE ABSOLUTE RIGHT TO:**

- \* LEAD CONGREGATIONS: WOMEN CAN LEAD PRAYERS, PERFORM KIRTAN (MUSICAL WORSHIP), AND READ THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB PUBLICLY.
- \* PARTICIPATE IN PANJ PYARE: WOMEN AS PER REHAT MARYADA, THE SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT ARE ELIGIBLE TO BE AMONG THE "FIVE BELOVED ONES" WHO ADMINISTER THE AMRIT CEREMONY.
- \* GOVERNANCE: WOMEN HOLD LEADERSHIP ROLES IN GURDWARA MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING.

**HISTORICALLY, THIS WAS REALITY. MAI BHAGO, A LEGENDARY WARRIOR, LED 40 SOLDIERS INTO BATTLE, THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF MATA GUJRI IS RECORDED IN HISTORY AND MATA KHIVI'S LEADERSHIP IN THE LANGAR (COMMUNITY KITCHEN), IS IMMORTALIZED IN THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB.**

**EQUALITY AS  
A DIVINE  
MANDATE**

## THE PATH FORWARD

### THE PATH FORWARD: RECLAIMING THE GURU'S VISION

**THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIKHISM IS CURRENTLY A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN DIVINE THEOLOGY AND CULTURAL INHERITANCE. TO TRULY HONOR THE GURUS, THE COMMUNITY MUST:**

- \* REFORM INSTITUTIONS: ACTIVELY RECRUIT MORE AND MORE WOMEN FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP ROLE.
- \* EDUCATE: TEACH YOUTH THAT GENDER RESTRICTIONS ARE CULTURAL "ADD-ONS," NOT RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENTS.
- \* LEAD COURAGEOUSLY: GURDWARAS MUST ALIGN WITH THE UNIVERSAL REHAT MARYADA OVER LOCALIZED TRADITIONS.

**EQUALITY IS NOT A "MODERN" UPDATE TO SIKHISM; IT IS ITS VERY HEART. RECLAIMING IT IS NOT AN ACT OF REVOLUTION, BUT AN ACT OF RETURN.**

## THE CONTEMPORARY JOURNEY

### THE CONTEMPORARY JOURNEY: SARBAT DA BHALLA

TODAY, THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE SIKH DIASPORA FROM THE DENTAL CLINICS AND SCHOOLS OF NOVA SCOTIA TO THE NAVAL DECKS OF THE CANADIAN FORCES REFLECTS A CONTINUED EVOLUTION. HOWEVER, THE JOURNEY IS NOT OVER. WHILE THE THEOLOGY IS PERFECT, HUMAN PRACTICE OFTEN LAGS.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SERVES AS A REMINDER TO THE GLOBAL SANGAT TO RETURN TO THE GURUS' ORIGINAL VISION: A WORLD WHERE THE "QUIET STRENGTH" OF WOMEN IS NOT JUST ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT IS THE VERY FOUNDATION UPON WHICH THE COMMUNITY STANDS.



**MARITIME  
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**INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
DAY**

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- **EDITOR:** BALBIR SINGH
- **COPY EDITORS:** KANWAL SIDHU, HARKIRAN KAUR, SATNAM SINGH RANDHAWA
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- **CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:** DR. ANUROOP KAUR, DR. S. S. SODHI, HARKIRAN KAUR, SATNAM SINGH RANDHAWA

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902-477-0008

[Info@maritimesikhsociety.ca](mailto:Info@maritimesikhsociety.ca)

[www.maritimesikhsociety.ca](http://www.maritimesikhsociety.ca)

### **WE VALUE YOUR INPUT;**

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW WE CAN IMPROVE OUR NEWS MAGAZINE? PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS WITH US SO THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH THE MOST RELEVANT AND ENGAGING CONTENT.

WE EXTEND OUR PROFOUND GRATITUDE FOR THE INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAGPAL SINGH TIWANA'S ARCHIVES, ALONGSIDE A MYRIAD OF OTHER DISTINGUISHED SOURCES, WHICH HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY ENRICHED THE CONTENT PRESENTED IN THIS EDITION OF MARITIME SIKHS.