

Chali Mukhtay.

The Forty Liberated ones.

In 1704 the city of Anandpur Sahib, the residence of Guru Gobind Singh Ji was under extended siege by the combined forces of the Mughal army and Hill chiefs. The siege took its toll and the meager provisions were completely exhausted, with the Sikhs having to live on leaves and bark from the trees.

Within the Sikh ranks there was a group of Jats of the Majha region, they had had enough and they made up their mind that they wanted to escape and leave Anandpur Sahib. After much deliberation they made their way to the Guru, and their leader Maha Singh told him of their desire to leave. Guru Gobind Singh Ji understood their situation but asked them to stay and fight, but all his persuasive arguments fell on deaf ears, they were resolute, they wanted to leave.

With no alternative Guru Gobind Singh Ji with a heavy heart asked them that if they truly wished to leave then they must write a disclaimer and have it signed by all the deserters claiming that they no longer belonged to the Guru, and the Guru no longer belonged to them.

Obviously we can never understand the hardship the Sikhs had to endure and the desperate situation the Sikhs were in but even so, when we think of the great sacrifices made by Sikhs like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bundha Singh to name but a few it is hard to understand what possessed the Majha Sikhs to put pen to paper and write a disclaimer that "Guru Gobind Singh Ji, we are no longer your Sikhs and you are no longer our Guru," it must go down as a most shameful episode in Sikh history.

The names of the forty deserters were :

Bhai Maha Singh	Bhag Singh	Dilbagh Singh	Maan Singh	Nidhan Singh
Kushaal Singh	Gharbara Singh	Dayal Singh	Darbara Singh	Nihal Singh
Ganda Singh	Sumer Singh	Bhala Singh	Suhel Singh	Chamba Singh
Ganga Singh	Shameer Singh	Sultan Singh	Maya Singh	Majja Singh
Sadhu Singh	Sarja Singh	Gulab Singh	Harsa Singh	Hari Singh
Dhana Singh	Karan Singh	Kirat Singh	Lachhman Singh	Sangat Singh
Budha Singh	Jadho Singh	Shoba Singh	Joga Singh	Bhanga Singh
Janga Singh	Dharam Singh	Karam Singh	Kala Singh	Jado Singh

The deserters were from the Majha region and one of the villages in this area was called Jhabal, and in the village lived a woman named **Mai Bhago**. She was known for her faith and courage and when she saw the 40 Sikhs approaching in the distance she went out to meet them. She asked news about Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and when she heard their sorry tale her blood boiled. She could not contain herself, she charged them with cowardice and a lack of faith in their Guru. She felt, as did the other women folk of the area that they had brought shame on their region. Mai Bhago was determined to wipe this stain of infamy of the Majha sikhs. She told all the women folk not to be hospitable to the Sikhs, she shamed and censured the Singh's for their cowardice.

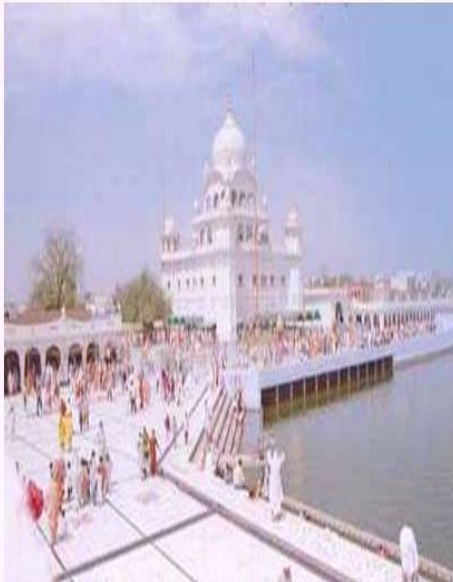
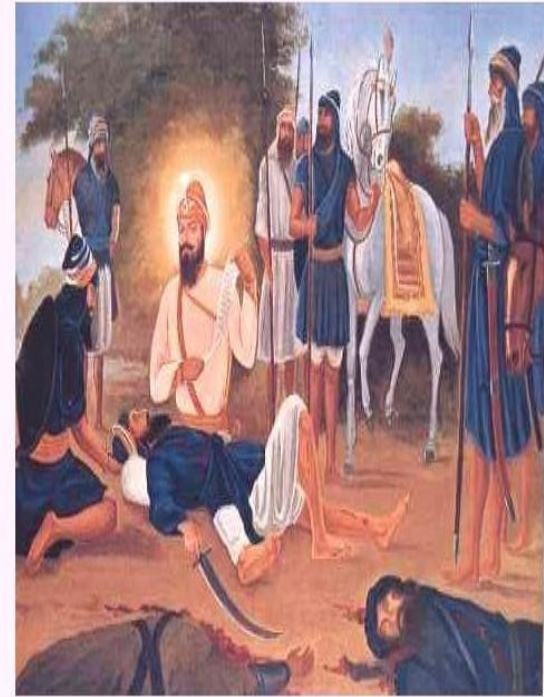
Mai Bhago donned on men's clothing and told them that either they stay behind and look after the children or they try to make amends and return with her to the Guru. Ashamed by their act of desertion they vowed to put things right and mounted their horses and set off towards Frozepur.

Knowing that the enemy Wazir Khan was advancing to attack the Guru, Mai Bhago's group took up positions near a place called Khidrana. As the enemy forces came close the Sikhs pounced on them, a fierce battle ensued; although heavily outnumbered the Sikhs attacked with ferocity and many were killed on both sides. The dust raised by the battle alerted Guru Sahib Ji who by this time had vacated Anandpur Sahib, he joined his Sikhs on a sandy hill (*tibbi*) and shot arrows on the enemy. As the battle raged Guru Sahib Ji mounted his horse and led his contingent from the west. The enemy could not stand a sudden attack on its left flank and after sustaining heavy loses withdrew leaving the dead and dying on the battlefield.



Guru Gobind Singh Ji dismounted from his horse and surveyed the scene. He saw one of his Sikhs lying wounded and recognised him as Maha Singh, the leader of the 40 deserters. Guru Ji sat beside him and put his head on his lap and wiped away the blood and tears from his eyes, just as a father would a son. Guru Ji was greatly impressed and pleased by his Sikhs. "Ask whatever you will, the house of Guru Nanak is open to you" spoke Guru Ji but Maha Singh only had one thing on his mind, the letter of desertion. "O Lord of all the heavens, if you are in mercy then please forgive me and my companions for our betrayal, and all that I pray for now is that you tear up the letter we handed to you." The all knowing Guru had kept the letter on his person knowing full well that it would be needed, Guru Ji took it out and tore it in front of Maha Singh.

"You have redeemed yourself here and in the hereafter." The forty deserters who lay dead in the battlefield were blessed by Guru Sahib Ji as the **chali mukhtay –the forty liberated ones**. A grand gurdwara now stands at the site of the battle, known as Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib, Mukhtsar.



Mai Bhago in the meantime was also laying in the battlefield wounded. Guru Ji blessed her for her courage and fortitude in leading the Sikhs into battle and regaining their honour. In time Mai Bhago recovered from her wounds and remained in the Guru's presence after the battle. Mai Bhago followed Guru Sahib Ji to Nanded. In 1708 when Guru Ji ascended the heavens Mata Ji settled at Bidhar about 200 km from Nanded where she lived to a ripe old age. Mata Bhago Ji is held in the utmost high regard by Sikhs and considered a saint. Her spear and musket that she used in the battle at Mukhtsar is still preserved at Takhat Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded.

Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib is associated with the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. This place is situated in high sandy mound (tibbi means a small hillock). Guru Sahib chose this place to stay on reaching Muktsar as it provided a very good view of the area. When the battle between the Forty Muktas and the Mughals was in progress, Guru Ji helped his sikhs by shooting arrows at the Mughals from this place. The birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Guru Gobind Singh Ji and shahidi purab of Guru Arjun Dev Ji are celebrated with great fervour here. Besides, the Magh Mela is organized on the 12th and 13th of January to commemorate the sacrifice of the Forty Muktas. Diwali and Baisakhi are also celebrated with enthusiasm.