

Mughal confrontation

In attempt to capture the Guru the large Mughal army led by Wazir Khan (of Sirhind) under the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb proceeded to Anandpur Sahib alongside the Mughal Armies of Lahore and Kashmir.



Disbandment of the Chali Mukte (40 "liberated" Sikhs)

On around 1704 the Mughal hill chiefs had surrounded Anandpur Sahib and were demanding it be evacuated stopping provisions for food and the siege lasting a few months. They announced that any Sikh who would say that "he/she is not anymore a Sikh of Guru Gobind" would be left untouched while others would be "done to death". A group of 40 Sikhs (*Chali Mukte*), led by Mahan Singh Rataul, told Guru Gobind Singh that they were not his Sikhs anymore. The Guru told them that they would have to write a document that said "We are not your Sikhs anymore" and sign it. All forty Sikhs (except one: 'Bedava') wrote their names on this document, and left Guru Gobind Singh.

Mai Bhago's retaliation

Mai Bhago was distressed to hear that some of the Sikhs of her neighbourhood, who had gone to Anandpur to fight for Guru Gobind Singh, had deserted him under adverse conditions. She criticised them openly; hearing her taunts, these Sikhs were ashamed of their betrayal. Mai Bhago rallied the deserters, and persuaded them to meet with the Guru and apologize to him. She set off with them (and some other Sikhs) to seek out the Guru, who were traveling across the Malwa.

Unfolding events at Anandpur Sahib

The Guru leaving Anandpur fort

A messenger arrived with an oath signed by Aurangzeb on a copy of the Quran, assuring the Guru that if he came out of the fort, permanent peace would be negotiated on honourable terms. The oath of the Emperor was further supported by an oath signed by all the Generals of the Mughal army and the Hill Chiefs. Guru Gobind Singh did not trust these assurances, but to show the real face of the Mughals, the Guru nevertheless decided to leave the fort.

Separation of the Guru's family

Meanwhile, Guru Gobind Singh evacuated the fort of Anandpur. His children had already been separated in the retreat by the betraying Mughal army and the Hill Chiefs. The two youngest ones, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh, had gone along with their grandmother Mata Gujari Kaur (mother of Guru Gobind Singh Ji) while the elder two, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jhujhar Singh, had gone with their father. At the battle of Chamkaur, the Guru's elder sons were killed and attained martyrdom. The Guru left Chamkaur on the order of the Panj Pyare. Guru Gobind Singh's forces travelled day and night through the jungles of the Malwa region with the imperial Mughal forces of Aurangzeb in constant pursuit.

Battle of Muktsar at Khidrana

The Guru had reached the village of Khidrana, when Mai Bhago and the men reached Khidrana. She led stopped near the *dhab*, or pool, of Khidrana, the only source of water in the area which was overtaken by the Mughal imperial army pursuing the Guru.



Mai Bhago and her men attacked the pursuing Mughals' army of 10,000 soldiers. Mai Bhago & the 40 liberated ones eventually forced the imperial Mughal army to retreat. While the Guru's forces showered arrows onto the Mughals from nearby high ground. When Guru Gobind Singh visited the battlefield, he found all dead except Mai Bhago and the previous leader of the deserters, Mahan Singh. Mahan Singh, who had been seriously wounded, died as the Guru took him into his lap. All forty of the Sikhs who came to redeem themselves died as well as Mai Bhago's brothers and husband and attained martyrdom in this pitched battle. Some sources say Mai Bhago's children were martyred there too.

Guru Gobind Singh blessed those forty dead as the *Chali Mukte*, Forty Liberated Ones. He took into his care Mai Bhago, who had suffered serious injury in the battle.

Mai Bhago Kaur residing with the Guru

Mai Bhago stayed with Guru Gobind Singh at Talwandi Sabo. She may have adopted the garb of a Nihang. When the Guru went to Hazur Sahib she became one of ten other bodyguards of the Guru arming herself with a large lance (weighing about 102 pounds) and musket and did so in male attire.

Mai Bhag Kaur at Janwada

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh Ji at Nanded in 1708, Mai Bhag Kaur retired further south. She settled down at Janwada, 11 km from Bidar in Karnataka, setting up her *dera* where she immersed in meditation and taught *Gurmat* (The Guru's way) living a long life. Her hut in Janwada has now been converted into a place of worship and learning, Gurdwara Tap Asthan Mai Bhago. At Nanded, too, a hall within the compound of Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib marking the site of her former residence is known as Bunga Mai Bhago.