



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Lioness of Punjab

By Anita Jari Kharbanda

Young Adult Novel | 14+ Years | Grades  
9-12

### Key Themes:

Sikh History, Feminist Role Models, Warrior  
Women, Sikh Women, Punjab History, War  
& Military

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978-1-949528-69-5 (eBook)

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Solutions, OverDrive, EBSCO & more

It is the winter of 1705, and the tenth Guru of the Sikhs is under attack by the armies of the mighty Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. Under siege and isolated, Guru Gobind Singh Ji's men are exhausted beyond measure, and forty soldiers decide to head home. Back in the villages of Punjab, these forty men are met by a fiery Sikh woman—a warrior who has been preparing all her life for this very moment—who leads the deserters back to the Guru. This is the story of that warrior, the fierce Mai Bhago, who chose the sword to symbolize her unwavering loyalty and devotion to her people and her faith.

This energetic coming-of-age young adult novel brings us closer to Mai Bhago—a woman revered in the Sikh community and beyond—to imagine her growing to embrace her many roles in a way that was entirely her own and, in the process, becoming a shining inspiration for young women everywhere.



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## 2023 Notable Social Studies Trade Book

“. . . Bhag Bhari’s strong Sikh faith and courage shine throughout . . . An illuminating look at Sikh history.” — Kirkus Reviews

“. . . a riveting historical tale . . . the narrative’s careful focus on Bhag’s development of her vocation; her relationship with her husband; and her community’s willingness to grow and change with her that proves thought-provoking and inspiring.” — Publishers Weekly

### Resources for the classroom

Discussion Guide

Author’s Note

Bibliography

Slideshow on Sikh History

Book Trailer (Video)



**Anita Jari Kharbanda** is an Indian-American engineer by trade and a storyteller by heart. She lives in North Texas with her husband and two sons. An avid lifelong reader of all kinds of fiction, she revels in seeing her children do the same. The healing power of letters filled with family history inspired Anita to start writing. She now writes the kinds of stories she’s devoured through the years, with one difference. She promised herself she’d write stories about the characters she dreamed of seeing in books growing up, and lift the voices of those who go unheard. Connect with her at [anitakharbanda.com](http://anitakharbanda.com).

#### **Cover Artist:**

**Anantjeet Kaur** is an independent illustrator and graphic designer from India. A varied life experience, love of life and her country, as well as her Sikh roots propel her imagination in a unique way. See her work at [anantjeetkaur.com](http://anantjeetkaur.com)



## Questions for book club or group discussion:

1. In the book's prologue, Mai Bhago says she was not the dhi of a king, but rather the dhi of Waheguru, and that you can decide which title is more prestigious. Given the reference to stately power versus spiritual power, how does this theme transgress throughout the novel? How do you view the intention behind this statement?
2. The novel is based on one of the first female Sikh warriors from the early eighteenth century in India. How do you view Mai Bhago's role as a pilgrim in the feminist movement? How do you view your own role in shattering glass ceilings?
3. When wounded, and after having lost her husband and veer in the Battle of Muktsar, Mai Bhago experiences the divinity of all of mankind. Have you ever experienced something similar, be it Waheguru or any other spiritual being?
4. In the epilogue, Mai Bhago encounters a life-altering meditative prophecy about the future and her place in it. Were there predictions made about you or your future? If so, how did they affect the choices you made growing up?
5. Share a favorite quote from the book. Why did this quote stand out?
6. If you were making a movie of this book, who would you cast?
7. Martyrdom is a theme throughout the novel, and a defining principle of the Sikh religion. What are your views on martyrdom in the time and place of this book? Have you ever felt like a martyr for, say, having to give up a part of yourself that meant so much to you?
8. The book depicts a main character who deeply loved her family. Do you believe Mai Bhago's family was a large contributor to her strength and bravery? If not, where do you think she derived her bravery from? Was it an innate part of her nature? Where do you derive your strength and bravery from?
9. Are there lessons in *Lioness of Punjab* that could enlighten world leaders about violent conflicts around the globe?
10. What songs does this book make you think of? Were they in English, Punjabi or Hindi, or some other language? Create a book playlist together.





11. What do you think of the book's cover? How well does it convey what the book is about?
12. What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was she trying to get across?
13. *Lioness of Punjab* was told only from Mai Bhago's point of view. If you could hear this story from another person's point of view, who would you choose?

**Questions prepared by Anita Jari Kharbanda  
for *Lioness of Punjab*.**

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