Chapter - 5
WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

The roots of women’s participation in public life can be traced back to the nineteenth century reform movement. This movement emerged as a result of conflict between the Indian bourgeoisies, trying to wrest control from the British. This class made attempts to reform itself, mainly by campaigning against caste, idolatry, purdah, child marriage, sati, female infanticide, perceived as elements of primitive identity. Raja Ram Mohan Roy focussed on two issues, namely women's education and abolition of Sati. In the early 1850s, a campaign on widow remarriage was launched resulting in the passage of a Bill in 1856, which allowed widow remarriage. Several eminent women reformers participated in this movement as well as in the religious reform movement of this period. Pandita Ramabai, Manorama Majumdar, Sarla Devi Goshal (later known as Sarla Devi Chaudhrani as she married Ram Bhuj Dutt Chaudhari of Punjab) who started 'Bharata Stree Mahmandal' in 1910 for the education of women with headquarters at Lahore (Punjab); Swarna Kumari Devi who started the women’s organisation 'Sakhi Samiti' in 1886 for widows are few examples. These activities gave momentum to women’s participation in public spaces, which later paved the way for their entry into the nationalist movement for independence.¹

The reform movement started by the early reformers and expansion of education opened the doors for women to participate in public sphere which led them to play an important role in bringing about political, economic and social transformation in India.

Thus, the early twentieth century which saw the demand for women's education gaining emphasis, finally led to the movement for women of all communities to join together and enter the arena of social reform. This awareness led to the formation of various organisations and associations either by men or women for the emancipation of womenfolk. These bodies further gave women a platform to come up with their own innovative ideas to share with the other members of the society for their upliftment. Hence, women entered public life and became members of the regional and national level organisations in India.

This chapter discusses the women participation in the public life of Punjab. In the early 1900s various organisations were formed in the different parts of Punjab (as discussed in the fourth chapter), so, either, women with the help of their husbands, fathers and brothers or individually started participating in the activities of these organisations.

This chapter looks into the women involvement in Sikh Educational Conferences (1908-47), Sikh Women Conferences, All India Women Conferences (1927-47), Indian National Congress (1901-2

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Punjab Legislative Council and Assembly before independence and in other regional, national and international conferences held in the various parts of India. It may be specified here that by women of Punjab we mean either women born in Punjab or residents of Punjab. Women actively participated in all the sessions of these conferences and organisations and even proposed resolutions for the development of their fellow sisters.

Sikh Educational Conference (1908-47)

The Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar established their educational committee in 1908 of thirteen members which organised all the sessions of the Sikh Educational Conference in different parts of the colonial Punjab. The function of the conference was to advise and suggest the Educational Committee of Diwan the different kind of methods to impart education and improve education amongst the people. Members (members of the Educational Committee), Fellows (enrolled in the Registers of Committee and who paid rupees eight per month), Delegates (persons elected by any Diwan, Singh Sabha, educational institute or a public body to attend the Conference) and Visitors (who attends the conference but was not a Fellow, Member or Delegate) were the persons who attended the sessions of the conference.

The Educational Committee was established by the males who organised the conferences. But from the first session of 1908 upto the freedom of India in 1947, there was a notable participation of the women in all the sessions of the Conferences. The women initially started participating in these conferences as mere visitors and then began to present their papers and finally even started to initiate resolutions for women emancipation in the conferences. From 1908-1947, there were thirty three sessions of the conference and in these thirty nine years the women became aware about their rights, duties, needs and importance in the society.

The first session of 1908 at Gujranwala didn't show any women participation. But the President Sardar Baghel Singh of Lahore\(^5\), Shivdev Singh Oberoi of Sialkote\(^6\) and Jodh Singh of Amritsar\(^7\) delivered their lectures regarding female education. The Sixth resolution pertained to the printing of the names of the railway stations and names on tickets in Punjabi for the convenience of females and this was passed unanimously.\(^8\) Several gold ornaments given away by some ladies of Mardan (district Peshawar) in aid of building Dharamshala in London, proposed by Bhai Teja Singh, M.A., were presented and the audience praised the ladies.\(^9\)

\(^6\) Ibid, p. 28.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 113.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 23.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 28.
In the first decade of the Sikh Educational Conference sessions from 1908 to 1917, women participated as ‘visitors’ from the second session of 1909 at Lahore on 9-10-11 April. Many women donated money for the female education like Bibi Chet Kaur, Bibi Radha Sarsa and wife of Sunder Singh donated rupees ten, twenty five and two respectively.\textsuperscript{10} The next session of 1910 at Amritsar witnessed women as ‘fellows’ who paid rupees eight per month and were enrolled in the registers of the committee like Bibi Satwant Kaur, Lachman Kaur, Har Kaur, Balwant Kaur and others.\textsuperscript{11} In the fourth Session of 1911, students of local girl schools and of Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, Ferozepur welcomed the President and sung Shabads and presented gifts to the President. Girl students of Ferozepur school were also given scholarships by the committee. Bibi Bhagwan Kaur was given scholarship of rupees four per month for her education.\textsuperscript{12}

After 1911 session, the singing of Shabads by girls after the inauguration of session, during discussion of every resolution and in the end of the session, became a regular trend. Girl students of Ferozepur school and other local girl schools usually performed that duty. After 1912, female participants started delivering their lectures on female issues. Bibi Mataab Kaur of Bhujangan Ashram, Kairon (Amritsar) spoke on ‘the need of girl schools’. This is illustrated below:

\textsuperscript{10} The Report of Proceedings of Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan, April, 1909 to Feb. 1910, Amritsar, Gurmat Press, 1910, pp. 42 to 44.
\textsuperscript{11} Educational Committee Chief Khalsa Diwan Di Report, March, 1910 to December., 1910, Amritsar, Wazir Hind Press, 1911, pp. 22 to 26.
\textsuperscript{12} Educational Committee Chief Khalsa Diwan Di Report, January, 1911 to December, 1911, Amritsar, Wazir Hind Press, 1912, p. 16.
Brothers! The most important work is our education, open more and more girl schools at different places and donate money. If we will forget the education of girls then the children will not be educated.

Bibi Agya Kaur, wife of Bhai Takhat Singh also spoke on ‘Istri Vidya’ in the conference. Bibi Harnam Kaur of Amritsar presented a gift to the President ‘Joginder Singh (Wazir of Patiala State) on which it was written - “To educate a boy is to educate an individual but to educate a girl is to educate a family.”

The sixth Sikh Educational Conference of Ambala on 21-22-23 March, 1913 witnessed the participation of a young girl of eight years. Bibi Chatar Kaur came to the pandal (hall) with her small black donation box in which she collected the money from the other participants. The amount collected was rupees two hundred and sixty three and her father Ram Singh Kabli doubled it to Rupees five hundred and twenty six and they both donated that to the

15 Ibid., p. 6.
committee. Then Chatar Kaur read her poem on female education. Few lines of that poem are as follows:

माजी धिमिली लीवें, बुझ रे दुलिकिर।
माजी ही उल फूल बोलता दिलिकिर।
मामी उने थड़े लिए माँगीया लालीया।
बुझ रा मातृ आमी घमँड फिसकटीया।
हिमिना ते जील घल घगँ फिसकटीया।
तिहा है मंदबारी तरी सोये िलग बुझी है।
तिही उने मेघ तिह तिही सिंही माजी है।

In the seventh session of the Conference of 1914 at Jalandhar, Bibi Savitri Devi stood on the same dice where her male counterparts used to speak. She read her paper in English on ‘The Sikh Education’ in which she discussed the traditions and customs prevalent in Sikh society since the period of the Gurus. She laid stress on the importance of girl education as advocated by Gurus as well as its relevance in modern times. Shrimati Hemant Kumari Chaudhari of Victoria Girls School, Patiala also donated her book "आदर्श माता" (Aadarsh Mata) to the library of the Educational Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan.

18 The Sikh Education - a paper written by Bibi Savitri Devi for the 7th Sikh Educational Conference, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Coronation Press, 1914, pp. 2 to 5.
Discussing the importance of female education for domestic household works like cleaning the houses, cooking, taking care of children and first aid, Bibi Agya Kaur delivered her lecture at the eighth session of the conference at Ferozepur in 1915.20 Bibi Gyan of Rawalpindi became the winner of the art exhibition launched by the conference in 1915.21

The tenth session of the conference was held at Lahore on 6-7-8 April, 1917 with Harbans Singh Raees Attari as the President. This session was of great importance as many Rajas, Maharajas, Muslim and Hindu deputation attended this conference alongwith the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael Francis O'Dwyer.22 The members of the Muslim deputation – Khan Bahadur Mian Shahdeen (Chief Judge of Chief Court, Punjab), Mian Mohammad Shafi, Mian Fazal Hussain and Chaudhari Shahabudeen praised ‘women participation’ and congratulated the female participants as is illustrated below:

“महिलाओं, बेटीओं, बेटियों का मुहावरा है विर अपने ही इंग्लिश मुस्लिम हो जाये।”23

In this session, the women also donated large sums of money to the committee like Bhagat Kaur and Pratap Devi donated rupees fifty thousand to Lahore Khalsa High School and rupees forty two thousand respectively.24

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20 Shrimati Bibi Agya Kaur Ji Da Vikhyan, n.d.
21 Golden Jubilee Book, p. 22
22 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
23 Ibid., p. 32.
24 Ibid., p. 43.
The next ten sessions of the conference from 1918 to 1929 witnessed further improvement in the women participation. Bibi Chatar Kaur regularly came to attend the conference with her father carrying a small black box and read poems for female emancipation. The poem

“राल राल पंडे ड़ुमी फल्में मैं मंशुंवजी ने,
रंग ता मंज़ेरे पाणे पंडे तो टप्पे टुटा,
इंते मंशुंवजी मैं ते धटी रंग जा लटी।

(She requested people to donate the maximum so that the amount could be used for females).

Bibi Gurdit Kaur daughter of Bhai Dewan Singh of Amritsar donated utensils for the eleventh session of the conference. Bishan Kaur of Sindh was honoured and given thousands of rupees by the Educational Committee for her contribution in spreading and preaching Sikhism in Sindh at the twelfth session of the Sikh Educational Conference of 1920 at Dinga on 2-3-4 April. In 1921, at the conference at Hoshiarpur, Rajinder Kaur participated in ‘Kavi Darbar’ and secured fourth position in the competition.

In 1922 at the fourteenth session at Delhi, Mrs. Rai of Madras sang shabad which proved that women of provinces outside the Punjab also participated. Pritam Kaur daughter of Takhat Singh

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Ferozepur was awarded ‘Gold Medal’ for her first position in the tenth class exam.\textsuperscript{29} In the Conference of 1925, Pritam Kaur was given scholarship of Rupees fifty per month for studying B.T. degree course.\textsuperscript{30} At the sixteenth Educational Conference of 1926, Ranjeet Kaur, Harnam Kaur and Satwant Kaur of Ferozepur School were awarded ‘Mai Sada Kaur Medal’ of gold for their first position in the entrance exams. Amar Kaur, and Mohan Kaur got ‘Bhai Bishan Dass’ silver medal for their first position in Gurmat education exam.\textsuperscript{31}

The nineteenth session of the conference at Montgomery on 6-7-8 of April, 1928 saw an important change in women participation. On 8th April, 1928, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. there was a Sabha of women where approximately fifteen hundred women participants gathered and discussed the issues of female education and health issues.\textsuperscript{32} Dr. Raminder Kaur presided the Sabha and in her presidential address stressed the need for more female schools. Then Wazir Kaur, B.A.B.T., spoke on the need of female teachers and inspectresses. Pritam Kaur, B.A. B.T., pleaded for opening more and more educational institutions for the girls.\textsuperscript{33} Tej Kaur won ‘Mai Sada Kaur Gold Medal’ by standing first in the M.S.L.C. candidates of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepur.\textsuperscript{34}

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\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 7.\
\textsuperscript{30} Educational Committee Di Sataarvi Salana Report 1925, Amritsar, Wazir Hind Press, 1926, p. 69.\
\textsuperscript{31} Solvi Sikh Educational Conference Di Report, 1926, Amritsar, Panthak Press, 1926, pp. 26-27.\
\textsuperscript{32} Univi Sikh Educational Conference Di Report, Montgomery, 1928, Amritsar, Panthak Press, 1928, pp. 20-21.\
\textsuperscript{33} Educational Committee Di Vihvi Salana Report, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, Wazir Hind Press, 1928, pp. 57-58.\
\textsuperscript{34} Brief Report of the Educational Committee of Chief Khalsa Diwan of the Year 1928, Amritsar, Panthak Press, 1929, p. 14.
\end{flushright}
In the twentieth session of the Sikh Educational Conference in 1929 at Sargodha, women called a meeting in the conference under Dr. Raminder Kaur. Here, after the speeches of Kuldeep Kaur (B.Sc.) and Bishan Kaur of Karachi, it was decided that there was an urgent need of ‘Sikh Women Association’ in the Punjab.\textsuperscript{35}

Hence in the ten sessions of the conference from 1918 to 1929 women started preparation to organise their own independent associations.

From 1930 to 1947, more educated women started participating and raised the issue about their rights. From 1930 to 1947, there were further thirteen sessions of the conference. After the twentieth session of the conference of 1929, the next twenty first session of the conference was held in 1931 at Amritsar on 3-4-5th of April. ‘Here Ghaniya Singh recited the poem of Harnam Kaur, a popular poetess of that time.’\textsuperscript{36} It indicates that women in the 1930s became good poetesses and their poems were read at those grand events. The twenty second conference of 25-26-27 March, 1932 at Lahore was very vital as here a separate ‘Sikh Istri Conference’ was organised under the Presidentship of Sardarni Shivdevi of Sialkot on 26 March, 1932 at 5:00 p.m. in Lahore University hall.\textsuperscript{37} This women conference witnessed more than fifteen hundred participants of Hindu, Muslim

\textsuperscript{35} Golden Jubilee Book, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{36} Golden Jubilee Book, p. 93.
and Sikh religion. Even European ladies attended the conference. Amrit Kaur, wife of Pratap Singh Advocate, Khadija Begum M.A. (a Muslim lady), Harnam Kaur Nabha, Ragbir Kaur and many others read their informative addresses. All the ladies were asked to work in their respective regions for their sisters and the need of 'Istri league' was felt.38

The Reception Committee of this Lahore Conference also formed a ‘Ladies Sub-Committee’ with Amrit Kaur as Convenor and the other members were - Bibi Shivdevi, Bibi Bawa Udham Singh, Bibi Teja Singh Raees Lahore, Dr. Raminder Kaur, Bibi Tej Kaur, Sardarni Nihal Kaur, Sardarni Harcharan Kaur Punjab University and Sardarni Jagjeet Kaur.39 One of the members of that sub committee Dr. Raminder along with Harnam Kaur and wife of Sardar Sampooran Singh Chawla proposed the twenty fifth resolution pertaining to the free education of the girls in the schools.40

In the mid of 1930s, members of the Sikh Educational Conference started passing resolutions for the employment of women in Punjab Education Services (P.E.S). The thirteenth41 and twenty fourth42 resolution were proposed in the conference to appeal to the head of the Education Department, Punjab for employing women in

38 Ibid., p. 5.
39 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
40 Ibid., p. 41.
42 Educational Committee Di Baivi Salana Report, Amritsar, Wazir Hind Press, 1931, p. 43.
the Women branch of PES. The scope of the scholarships given by the Educational Committee was extended in the 1930s as girls were given stipends not only for studying but also for completing their Teacher Training Courses. In 1931, Bibi Ram Kaur and Bibi Dito were given monthly stipends of rupees ten and twelve respectively. Bibi Bhagwan Kaur scholarship was also started for this purpose.43

In the twenty third session of 1933 at Peshawar, Bibi Jaswant Kaur participated in ‘Kavi Darbar’ and got a medal for her excellent performance. Akali Kaur proposed the resolution for spreading Sikhism and female education in Kashmir.44 By 1934, the issue of female education was changed into co-education. Dr. Davinder Kaur pleaded against co-education and requested opening of different schools for different sexes.45 In 1935 at the occasion of Silver Jubilee celebrations of the conference, Mrs. Bedi and Mrs. Keshab (both European ladies), read their papers on ‘female education’ and ‘need of reforms for females’ respectively.46 Bibi Balbir Kaur ‘Bal”s poem ‘Kalam’ was praised by the audience in the twenty sixth session in 1936.47 Kumari Jawant Kaur of Amritsar won the first prize in ‘Kavi Darbar’ at Amritsar at the twenty seventh session of the conference in 1938.48 Bibi Amrit Kaur ‘Amrit’ also recited her poem.49 Bibi Prakash

47 Ibid., p. 123.
Kaur, Bibi Daljeet Kaur and Bibi Amar Kaur got gold medal for first position in tenth class examination, silver medal for the first position in middle examination and silver medal for the first position in Gurmat Education respectively.\textsuperscript{50}

In 1939, Bibi Jaswant got the first prize of rupees twenty one in ‘Kirtan Darbar’ at Sialkot.\textsuperscript{51} In 1941 at the twenty nineth session, girls again participated in ‘kirtan darbar’ and acquired the first and second positions.\textsuperscript{52} At the thirtieth session at Faridkot in 1943, Bibi Joginder Kaur Radio Artist got the third prize in kirtan darbar.\textsuperscript{53} At the thirty first session at Sargodha in 1944, Mrs. Kartar Nirman Giani Sargodha recited her poem and the audience praised it a lot.\textsuperscript{54} The year 1945 again saw the women participating kirtan and kavi darbar. The thirty third session of the Sikh Educational Conference was held at Karachi in 1946 and here the same trend in the women participation was seen.\textsuperscript{55}

Hence, in the Sikh Educational Conference from 1908 to 1947 women participation was remarkable. Initially they came to the conference as mere visitors, then they started reading papers and participated in various exhibitions and competitions like kirtan and kavi darbar. Eventually under the patronage of the committee they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 36.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Golden Jubilee Book, p. 113.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 135-142.
\end{itemize}
formed their own ‘Sabhas’ within the conference and started representing the women of Punjab and proposed resolutions for the female emancipation.

In the late 1930s, women even got a special sitting arrangement in the pandals (halls) of the conference. Female delegates were made to sit on the right side of the stage (in the complimentary blocks and galleries) and the female students of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala and of other local girl schools were made to sit.56

Thus, the Sikh Educational Conference provided a platform for the women of Punjab to represent their sisters. They got a chance to participate and this participation motivated the male members of the Conference to speak for them. They helped the women to get better education through the scholarships and eventually encouraged them to work in the Punjab Education Services. Hence, women got a golden opportunity in the sessions to get good education and after education they opted for new careers. Women also started forming associations for themselves.

These sessions were so relevant that even women of other provinces like Madras also came to Punjab to participate in them. Thus the women of Punjab were coming into the contact of women of other provinces and this generated more awareness in them.

Sikh Women Conferences

The Bhujangan Ashram of Kairon, Amritsar was the pioneer in organising the Sikh Women Conferences in the undivided Punjab. These conferences witnessed the participation of many active women from and outside the Punjab. The main objective of the conferences was the female emancipation. It laid stress on female education and tried to make women aware of all sort of useless superstitions, black magic, fasts and other old customs and tradition which the ladies were following. They wanted to educate women about child care and healthy life. They provided a platform for the women of Punjab to come forward and discuss all the hot issues of society at that time. All the social evils like child marriage, widowhood, custom of sati, purdah system and others were discussed regularly in the sessions of the conferences.

The Conference was open to all the men and women irrespective of their caste, religion or creed. Admission fees for the male and female members was fixed at the rate of rupees five and three respectively. An Executive Committee and the Reception Committee were formed to assist the main organising committee. All the poems and papers which were to be read at the conference were sent fifteen days before the session to the Reception Committee. Women were

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58 Bhujangan Pattar, Kairon, 1 September 1917, p. 17.
also asked to submit their papers and any resolution (which they wanted to propose in the conference) to the Reception Committee.\textsuperscript{59} The tickets of the Conference were issued from the head office at Amritsar and were given to the participants on their arrival at the venue. The fees for the tickets was deposited beforehand by the participants. Free tickets were also issued as ‘Complimentary tickets’ to the ‘Updeshaks’ or preachers of Sikh Girls schools and other important reformists in the society. To get the complimentary tickets, the managers of the girls’ schools were asked to send their application fifteen days before the conference.\textsuperscript{60} The stay of the participants was also organised by the members of the Reception Committee.

The conference was usually held for three days. On the first day of the conference, the Reception committee welcomed the President of the Conference and she was brought to the hall in a great procession. The second day witnessed the lectures of various females and males from every corner of the region. Poems were also read by the popular poets and poetesses. On the third and last day of the conference resolutions were passed and ‘Religious Diwans’ and ‘Baal Prikhaya’ (Competition for the healthy baby) were held. Children of age three and below participated in this competition and to judge the contestants, a qualified lady doctor was invited and the winners were

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.} 1 October, 1917, p. 16.
given gold and silver medals.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, by this the women were encouraged to take good care of their children so the they could win that competition and they were also given knowledge regarding the health of babies.

Bibi Livleen Kaur\textsuperscript{62} and Bibi Milap Kaur\textsuperscript{63} were the main activists in organising these conferences. Shrimati Bhagwanti Ram Kaur was the President of the Sikh Women Conference held on 26, 27, 28 October, 1917.\textsuperscript{64} She was the wife of Sardar Mataab Singh, Barrister of Ferozepur and was working for female emancipation in her home town.\textsuperscript{65} In her presidential address she tried to make clear the difference between the motives of the Sikh Educational Conferences and the Sikh Women Conferences. According to her the main objective of the former was emancipation of women through the spread of female education, while the latter focussed on female emancipation with female education as well as eradication of all social evils in the society like female infanticide, child marriage, dowry, purdah, sati system and others. She suggested for organising an association based on the pattern of ‘Sisters of Mercy’ working in England and suggested the name ‘Daya bir or Daya punj Bhaina’ for helping ill people. She was against the same type of education for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., pp. 16-17.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Editor of Bhujangan Pattar, Kairon.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Important worker of Bhujangan Ashram, Kairon.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Bhujangan Pattar, 1 November, 1917, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 1 October, 1917, p. 43.
\end{itemize}
girls and boys and wanted girls to be taught more about the household activities. She propagated against wearing jewellery and stressed on simple living for the women.66

Shrimati Amrit Kaur, President, Reception committee of 1917 Sikh Women Conference at Amritsar delivered her lecture on the importance of the conference. She was pro-British and thanked the government for their peaceful administration during the time of the first world war (1914-18). She focussed on the need of establishing female colleges as there was only Khalsa College for boys for higher studies.67

Bibi Milap Kaur, active worker of the Bhujangan Ashram also participated in the proceedings of the Conference.68 Bibi Gyan Kaur wife of Shri Master Chanda Singh (editor of Panth Sewak) read her paper on the duties of an ideal wife in the house and wanted only that education for a girl which could make her an ideal wife, ideal mother and ideal daughter in the society.69 Bibi Jaswant Kaur spoke on the efficient domestic expenditure by the lady of the house. If the husband earns then it is the duty of the wife to spend that money in a proper and efficient manner.70 Bibi Shiv Devi, wife of Sardar Bhanga Singh (Inspector of Police) made a comparative study of the safety of women

68 Bhujangan Pattar, 1 Nov., 1917, p. 5.
69 Ibid., p. 6.
70 Ibid, p. 7.
during ancient and modern times. She debated on the need of awareness among women about their security in the society. Sardar Narain Singh's (Barrister of Lahore) wife Bibi Gyan Kaur read her paper on the need of suitable female education for making her a perfect homemaker. Bibi Mohinder Kaur recited her poem on the same theme in the Conference.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 6-7.}

Thus, the Sikh Women Conference of 1917 witnessed the participation of women from almost every part of the Punjab as mentioned above from Amritsar, Sialkote, Lahore, Ferozepur and other places. Even Maharani Nabha was supposed to attend that session but due to her ill health, she was not able to attend that important conference of women.

Bibi Hardayal Kaur (wife of Sardar Bahadur Singh Rasaldar Major and A.D.C. Viceroy India) was the President of the 1918 conference. But due to her ill health, Bibi Amrit Kaur, wife of Doctor Balwant Singh, Amritsar, presided the session.\footnote{Ibid., 1 Nov., 1918, p. 3.} In her presidential address, she spoke on the existing condition of the women facing various restrictions. She stressed that women were not free to marry the boys of their choice, they also preferred not to have professional education and limited themselves to get domestic education. She praised the reformers who were working for female education and
pleaded with them to introduce education based more on professional and vocational training. The audience also praised the poem of Bibi RatanKaur Dheerka at the Conference. She focussed mainly on the importance of the conference which is illustrated below:

'Nek Bibiyan' was the paper read by Bibi Har Kaur Saihansara, at the Sikh Women Conference of 1921. She elaborated different ways by which any nation could progress. (1) The firm faith of the citizens could make the nation prosperous. (2) Only educated citizens whether males or females could climb the ladder of progress. (3) Unity, universal brotherhood, and revolution could help the nation to progress. (4) The society free from all evil customs could make people progress. She opined that females were very important pillars of the society to make a nation prosperous. Thus, women at that time were not only thinking about their province but also wanted complete development of their nation - India.

74 Bhujangan Pattar, 1 Dec., 1918, p. 7.
Bibi Patwant Kaur of Kairon, Amritsar compared 'Sun' with the 'education' in her lecture at the conference. She said that as when sun rises then there is light everywhere and people like to work in the light of day. Similarly if there is light of education then everyone would like to work in that light and the society will progress. Hence she gave importance to female education for the well-being of the society.\(^76\)

Bibi Tejwant Kaur of Mianwind propagated for female reforms and asked more women to join 'Bhujangan Council' at Kairon (Amritsar). She pleaded for donation to the council so that it could do more and more reformatory work for females like opening new girls' schools, helping the widows to remarry and creating awareness amongst the people about the ill effects of purdah and dowry system.\(^77\)

Hence, the Sikh Women Conferences of the Punjab were attended by many women from the different parts of Punjab. The conference discussed the issues ranging from social evils prevalent to the methods for eradicating these evils. The stress was laid on the female education with the subjects mainly dealing with the household affairs. Lady doctors were called upon for conducting the competition of healthy babies and the objective behind it was to educate women about the correct ways of child care.

\(^76\) Ibid, pp. 13-19.
These women conferences mainly worked for the overall development of the women. The participants of the conference worked for the concept of Ideal homemaker. They worked for removing all kinds of social evil customs of the society whereas the main objective of the participants of Sikh Educational Conference was the propagation of education for females. They looked to education as the only tool for improving the condition of women. Professional education for girls was the need of the hour for them. They wanted girls to come out of their houses and adopt new occupations and form associations.

Thus both the conferences were working for the emancipation of women either making them perfect homemakers performing household activities.

All India Women's Conferences (1927-47)

Early in 1926, Mr. E.F. Oaten, director of Public Instruction, Bengal, at a prize-giving ceremony in Bethune College, Calcutta, urged women to put forward their views and demands regarding the kind of education they wanted. And he called on Indian Women to “tell us with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it.” Mr. A.L. Huidekoper, an ex-Principal of Bethune College, made use of this appeal as the basis of two articles which were published in Stri Dharma, the monthly magazine of the Women's Indian Association (WIA). Then Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, in the autumn of 1926, as

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Secretary of the WIA, Adyar, Madras, addressed an appeal in a form of a circular letter to women all over the country to form local communities and hold constituent conference in each of the provinces and in certain other clearly defined districts and Indian states, for the purpose of declaring their views on the problems of education.79

There was a tremendous response to this appeal - women’s associations all over India held meetings and sent in their proposals and schemes. The first All India Women Conference (AIWC) meeting was preceded by twenty-one constituent conferences. About seven thousand women of all castes and communities attended these constituent conferences to express their views on education and elect delegates to the AIWC meetings.80

Thus, the First All-India Women's Conference was organized to take place at Poona, where it was duly held from January fifth to eighth, 1927 under the distinguished Presidentship of Her Highness the Maharani Chimnabai Saheb Gaekwad of Baroda - Mrs. Cousins being the first Honorary Organising Secretary.81 Delegates to the conference included a large number of professional educationalist as well as social reformers, women associated with the nationalist movement and the wealthy and titled. The general resolutions outlined the best type of education for females included basic assumptions about women’s place in society.82

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80 Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, Women's Struggle, p. 22.
81 The Indian Annual Register, Jan.-June, 1935, p. 377.
The participation of women of Punjab in all the sessions of AIWC is studied in this section.

From 1901-47, twenty sessions of AIWC were held in all the different parts of India. The first session was held in 1927 at Poona and twentieth session was held at Madras in 1947. Out of these twenty sessions, only one session was held in Punjab in 1931 at Lahore under the Presidentship of Muthulakshmi Reddi and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala acted as the Chairperson. Three sessions were held near the neighbouring provinces of Punjab, that is, 1928 and 1938 session at Delhi and 1934 session at Karachi. Many women of Punjab also presided these AIWC Sessions. The eighth session of Calcutta in 1933 was presided by Lady Abdul Qadir of Lahore. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala was the President and Chairperson of the twelfth session at Nagpur in December 1937. And Amrit Kaur acted as a chairperson of thirteenth session of Delhi in 1938. Rameshwari Nehru also presided and acted the Chairperson of Bangalore session of December, 1941. 83

At the first meeting of the Conference in 1927 there were eighty-seven members from the local reception committee, fifty eight delegates from local conferences and over two thousand observers (men and women). Maharani Chimnabai Saheb Gaekwad of Baroda

was the first President of AIWC. Mrs. Sarla Devi Chaudharani represented Punjab and participated in this first Session. Begum Shah Nawaz was enlisted as one of the delegate but she was not able to attend the session due to some reasons. The first session of AIWC concluded on the 8 January, beginning on 5 January, 1927 and adopted several resolutions urging addition of fine arts, advanced domestic science, journalism, social service and architecture as optional subjects to the college curricula and that scholarships be offered to women students to attract them to take up law, medicine, social science and fine arts.

The Second conference was held in Delhi under the Presidentship of Begum of Bhopal in February 1928. In January 1929, Patna was the venue of the third conference under Rani of Mandi as President. The fourth conference was held in Bombay with Sarojini Naidu as the President. In all these sessions Sarla Devi Chaudharani and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur represented Punjab.

The fifth session of AIWC was held at the capital of Punjab, Lahore, Muthulakshmi Reddi presided the session and Lady Abdul Qadir of Lahore was President of the Reception committee. Abdul Qadir delivered her lecture regarding the female education and also

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84 Geraldine Forbes, *Women In Modern India*, p. 79.
spoke on ill effects of the purdah system. As the session was in Punjab, many women from Punjab participated in this session. Many resolutions were also proposed by these Punjabi women. “Mrs. Kamla Kaul moved the resolution regarding the appointment of at least one women magistrate in courts where the cases of the minor were to be decided. Another Punjabi lady Sardarni Pritam Kaur proposed the resolution to pressurize the government by all the reform sabhas and Samajhs regarding the cleaning of villages, towns and cities in different parts of the country. Begum Mamdot of Ferozepur condemned the purdah system and gave her example of leaving purdah against her family traditions and proposed a resolution against purdah which was passed unanimously. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala proposed the resolution regarding the Pachmari scheme of opening Central Home Science Institute at Delhi. And this resolution was also passed unanimously and about rupees one lakh were collected for that cause. Hence, the Lahore session of AIWC witnessed various Punjabi women participation and these women proposed various resolutions on important issues.

The sixth session of Madras commenced from 28 December, 1931 to 1 January, 1932. Mrs. P.K. Roy presided the session and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur acted as the Chairperson. Miss Khadija Begum

88 Punjabi Bhain, Ferozepur, Jan. 1931, pp. 3-4.
89 Ibid., p. 7.
90 Ibid., p. 8.
91 Ibid., pp.8-9
92 Ibid., p. 9.
Ferozuddin of Lahore, Mrs. Miles Irwin and Begum Shah Nawaz of Lahore represented the women of Punjab during the session. Begum Ferozuddin supporting the resolution of physical training in girls' schools said that it was a crying need of the day and if one wants the progress of nation then physical training was a must in the schools. Mrs. Miles Irwin and Begum Ferozuddin also supported the resolution proposed by Srimati Chellammal of Madras regarding the appointment of women teachers in all private and public bodies dealing with education.

During the seventh session of 1933 at Lucknow under Lady Vidyagaur Nilkanth as the President, it was decided to send Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur on the behalf of AIWC to speak to the government of India for the Indian women's demand for right to vote.

The eight session of AIWC of December, 1933 at Calcutta witnessed a Punjabi lady as the President. Lady Abdul Qadir, apart from having done signal service in the cause of the education of Muslim girls in the Punjab, she founded an Industrial School for women in Lahore and gave her time and energy to all movements of a beneficial and cosmopolitan nature without distinction of caste, creed or colour. Mrs. Brijlal Nehru of Lahore and Sardarni Pritam Kaur of...
Ambala also attended the session. Miss Sushila Sethi, Mrs. S.K. Datta, Miss Shakuntala Bhandari, Miss P. Thaper, Miss K. Sehgal, Miss D. Sehgal, Mrs. Chopra and Mrs. Hiralal were the delegates from the Central part of Punjab. Miss Hassan and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur represented the eastern part of Punjab in this session of 1934. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur proposed the following resolution in the second day session of conference on 28 December.

“Believing that the welfare of nations and classes depends on the building of a new order.” She said the new order was based on unity, patriotism and love of humanity. This resolution was unanimously passed. The Resolution proposed by Mrs. N.C. Sen about the appeal to all Indian men and women to eradicate the evil of untouchability from Society was supported by Miss Sushila Sethi with other delegates of the conference. She said that ‘it is genually seen that ladies are more particular about caste and creed than men. So the women should try to enter the lives of untouchables as one of them and should invite them to our houses now and again. And all of us resolve to give our active help to the removal of untouchability which is a great blot on the fair name of our Motherland. Thus, in each session of AIWC women from different parts of Punjab were actively participating and used to discuss all the burning issues regarding women as well as other social evils of the society.

100 Ibid., p. 9.
101 Ibid., pp. 59-60.
102 Ibid., p. 129.
103 Ibid., pp. 134-135.
The ninth session of the conference was opened on the 29 December, 1934 at the Khali Kdina Hall, Karachi. The session was presided by Hilla Rustamji Fardoonji. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur represented Punjab and Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali came from Delhi. Begum Shah Nawaz of Lahore and Mrs. Brijlal Nehru also attended the session. Amrit Kaur read her paper on the report of the Liaison Officer. She discussed how she tried to establish contact with women’s organisation abroad and how she tried to secure their support and interest in Indian affairs. And due to her efforts two British ladies came to India and participated in this session - Dr. Maude Royden and Mrs. Corbett Ashby. The resolution introduced by Mrs. Janaki Charry of Truancore claiming co-education as the only way to improve the slow progress of Indian women was rejected by Mrs. Kalandarali Khan of Punjab (Central) and Dr. (Miss) Ferozuddin of Lahore. They both favoured separate schools for both the sexes. But Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur supported this resolution. However, this resolution due to lack of supporting votes was not passed in the session. This indicated that women of Punjab were becoming aware day by day and were able to discuss the pros and cons of the issues discussed in the sessions of conference.

105 Ibid., pp. 353-354.
106 Ibid., p. 356.
107 Ibid., pp. 359-360.
All India Women’s Conference’s tenth session was held in Trivandrum from 28 December, 1935 to 2 January, 1936. In this session, the President Her Highness Maharani Sethu Parbathi Bai of Travancore stressed that the fundamental problem of women was not political and social but economic. Amrit Kaur and Shah Nawaz agreed with the President and laid stress on economic independence of women and appealed to girl students to opt more for professional and vocational courses, so that they could earn their livelihood. In this session, Amrit Kaur was also elected as the Vice-President of AIWC for 1936.

Amrit Kaur was the active member of the later sessions of Ahmedabad (1936), Nagpur (1937), and Delhi (1938). She presided the Nagpur session and was chairperson of the Delhi Session. Begum Shah Nawaz, Manmohini Zutshi of Lahore, Rameshwari Nehru and Sarla Devi Chaudharani were other representatives of Punjab in these session.

In the fourteenth session in the Senate Hall of the Allahabad University on 27 January, 1940 under the presidency of Begum Hamid Ali, Brij Lal Nehru, Shah Nawaz and Amrit Kaur discussed

109 Ibid., p. 364.
110 Ibid., p. 365.
111 Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, Women’s Struggle, p. 214.
113 The Indian Annual Register, Jan-June, 1940, Vol. I, p. 347.
the issue of fixing a national minimum wage for all labour women in India.\textsuperscript{114} Sardarni Sewa Singh Gill of Punjab propagated in favour of the swadeshi clothes and as far as possible urged to exclude all the foreign goods from the country.\textsuperscript{115} Manmohini Zutshi was acting General Secretary of the Conference and gave a thanks giving speech in the session.\textsuperscript{116} Hence Punjabi women were trying their level best to make the conference a success.

The fifteenth session of the All India Women's Conference commenced at Bangalore on the December 27, 1940 and continued for the next three days under the presidency of Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru.\textsuperscript{117} She spoke against the social evil custom of untouchability and pointed out that it was the duty of all conference members and branches to redouble their efforts for the removal of untouchability. Mrs. B.K. Singh representing Punjab agreed with her.\textsuperscript{118} Mrs. Vidya Puri (Punjab) and Amrit Kaur showed their affirmation with the resolution of faith in Non-violence moved by Mrs. Ammu Swaminathan of Madras.\textsuperscript{119} Now the concern of women of Punjab changed from social evils to the freedom struggle and they discussed the methods to attain independence.

\begin{enumerate}
\item[] 114 Ibid, p. 349.
\item[] 115 Ibid., p. 353.
\item[] 116 Ibid., p. 356.
\item[] 117 The Indian Annual Register, July-Dec., 1940, Vol. II, p. 334.
\item[] 118 Ibid., pp. 339-340.
\item[] 119 Ibid, p. 337.
\end{enumerate}
After the session of 1941, the women of Punjab started working more enthusiastically with AIWC. Amrit Kaur was the most active member of the Conference in the later sessions of Delhi (1942), Bombay (1944), Hyderabad (1945), Akola (1946) and Madras (1947).\(^{120}\) Amrit Kaur an eminent social worker in Punjab and joined AIWC in 1929 and became its secretary, president and chairperson. She was elected to the Lok Sabha from Punjab and was the first Health Minister of independent India’s.\(^{121}\)

Thus, the women of Punjab who were either born here or settled in Punjab, actively participated in all the sessions of AIWC from 1927-47. They moved from Punjab and reached the venues of the session either in the north of India or in the Southern part of India. This conference mobilized women of the province of Punjab and gave them opportunity to interact with other women of different parts of India. In the beginning the Conference had only the educational aim which was further changed to the forum-speaking against all the social evil customs prevalent in the society and eventually led members of AIWC to participate in the struggle for independence of the nation.

When the women of Punjab first started participating in the sessions of AIWC, they demanded all sort of educational reforms for the girls like change in curriculum, opening of new girl schools, physical training for girls and others. But with the passage of time, as

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\(^{121}\) Ibid, p. 218.
the movement for freedom struggle was initiated the women members of AIWC, started encouraging women to participate in the nationalist struggle. They urged their sisters to adopt the constructive programme of Gandhi as to use Swadeshi products and others. AIWC made women politically active in the society. They started as educationalists but eventually became political leaders and activists participating in the struggle for freedom (this issue is discussed in detail in the chapter sixth).

AIWC held their annual sessions at the different parts of India and women delegates of almost all the provinces attended these sessions. The conference also asked the provinces to organize their annual regional sessions in their respective provinces. For this purpose the Punjab province was divided into two parts - Punjab Central and Punjab east. Both of these divisions arranged the provincial conferences every year and the resolutions passed here were discussed in the AIWC Sessions by the delegates of Punjab.

The Annual meeting of the Central Punjab Women's Educational Conference was held on 3 November, 1934 in the Y.W.C.A. Hall Lahore. There was a large gathering of ladies of all communities with Mrs. A. Latifi, wife of the Financial Commissioner, Punjab in the Chair. In her lecture she said “My ideal for the Punjab is not merely a mass of primary passed or even secondary passed women,
but an army of trained housewives and mothers with well trained captains who will drill and lead the rank and file. Every woman then would be a unit in the hierarchy for the service of the country.\textsuperscript{123}

In the following year in 1935, Punjab again observed the meeting of the Central Punjab branch of AIWC at Lahore on 9 November, 1935 under the presidency of Lady Shafi.\textsuperscript{124} Mrs. Kohli and Begum Shah Nawaz attended the session and discussed the issue of curriculum for girl students in Schools and Colleges. They suggested to make the subject of home science as mandatory for the girls.\textsuperscript{125}

The Punjab Branch of the AIWC arranged their annual session on 21 June, 1943 at Fateh Chand College, Lahore. This session witnessed the participation of large number of women from each and every corner of the Punjab. Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru was the President of the Conference. Other delegates present were Mrs. Ram Saran Das, Mrs. Anand Kumar, Mrs. Rai, Mrs. Buch, Mrs. Maharaj Krishan Kapur, Mrs. B.L. Rallia Ram, Mrs. Situ Suri, Mrs. Nazir, Mrs. Bhim Sain Sachar, Mrs. Chatrath, Mrs. Sabberwal, Mrs. Mukand Lal Puri, Mrs. Chopra, Mrs. Godbole and Mrs. Perin Romesh Chandra, besides members of the staff of Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Sir Ganga Ram School and the Fateh Chand College.\textsuperscript{126} All these women members

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 472.
\textsuperscript{124} The Indian Annual Register, July-December, 1935, Vol. II, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 377.
\textsuperscript{126} The Indian Annual Register, Jan.-June, 1943, Vol. I, pp. 301-302.
discussed the issues relating to food situation in the country, Hindu succession Bill, condition of orphan children and dearness allowance for the women teachers that is all the burning issues of that time in the society.\textsuperscript{127} Premvati Thapar, Secretary of the Punjab branch presented the report of the work of the branch and said that their activities were all round and of a varied nature. The branch’s main motive was to raise the status of women and children and prepare them to be better citizens.\textsuperscript{128}

Therefore, these provincial gathering made women aware of the rights and they started demanding higher offices of the government for them. They were able to interact with the women of different parts of Punjab and joined their hands for demanding more and more provisions for the women section.

\textbf{Indian National Congress (1901-47)}

Indian National Congress (also known as the Congress and abbreviated INC) is a major political party in India. It is the largest and oldest democratic political party in the world.\textsuperscript{129} Founded in 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, Womesh Chandra Banerjee, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Manmohan Ghose, Mahadev Govind Ranade\textsuperscript{130} and William Wedderburn, the INC

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, pp. 302-303.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{129} P.N. Rastogi, The nature and dynamics of factional conflict, New Delhi, Macmillan Company, 1975, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{130} Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi and Barun De, Freedom Struggle, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1972, pp. 52-55.
became the leader of Indian independence movement, with over fifteen million members and over seventy million participants in its struggle against British rule in India.¹³¹

Various national leaders and political activists from almost every part of India were either directly or indirectly linked with the INC. ‘Lala Lajpat Rai’ as the representative of Punjab province also presided one of the sessions of INC in 1920 at Calcutta. In all the sessions only one woman Mrs. Sarojini Naidu presided the INC Session of 1925 at Cawnpur.¹³² From 1885 to 1947 there were fifty four sessions of the INC. But as the present work is limited from 1901 to 1947, so the number of sessions during this period were thirty eight. And in Punjab out of these thirty eight sessions, only three sessions were held in Punjab at Lahore (1909), Amritsar (1919) and again at Lahore (1929) under the presidency of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru respectively.¹³³ From the first session of INC, there was participation of male members of Punjab but women started participating only from the thirty third session of 1918 at Delhi under Hasan Imam as the President.

The women from Punjab went to the nearby province of Delhi in 1918 and attended the session of INC. Sarla Devi Chaudhurani (wife of Pandit Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry of Lahore) accompanied her

¹³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_National_Congress#cite_note_O.
¹³³ Ganda Singh Collection, File no. 467 (Material collected from the National Archives of India, New Delhi), p. 1.
husband to Delhi. She not only visited there but also initiated a resolution which is as follows:

“That this Congress urges that women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme, shall not be disqualified on account of their sex.”

The above resolution was supported by another Punjabi lady present at the Session - Shrimati Lakshmi Devi who stated that all the brothers and sisters assembled in the session should have faith in God and try to remove all difficulties in the way of progress of the women. She urged that right to vote should be given to women. And if the men were advancing then their wives who were called as their better halves should also be entitled to go ahead with the men.

Thus, the Punjabi women were becoming aware day by day with the help of their husbands or other male allies about their political rights and were proposing resolutions in the sessions of national political parties like INC.

The next session of INC was held at Amritsar under Pandit Motilal Nehru. Rai Sahib Lala Ruchi Ram Sahni, R.B. Raizada Bhagat Ram, Maulvi Ghulam Mohyyud Din, Dr. Saif-ud-din Kitchlew, Lala Harkishan Lal, Dr. Maqbool Mahmood, Mr. Bhagat Ram Puri, Rambhuj Dutt Chandhari and others attended and participated in the

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135 Ibid., pp. 218-219.
136 Proceedings of INC Amritsar, 1919, ibid, p. 221.
proceedings of the session.\textsuperscript{137} One woman Begum Hasrat Mohini also supported the resolutions discussed in the session. She delivered her speech discussing the work of the Britishers and negated their policy and pleaded for Hindu-Muslim unity in India.\textsuperscript{138}

Hence, INC also witnessed the participation of women of Punjab. It was not on a large scale but they used to propose and support the resolutions which made their existence felt in INC’s proceedings. They spoke on issues relating from their own region like Jallianwala Bagh Massacre to the national issues of Hindu Muslim unity. They proposed resolutions regarding the emancipation of women by either removing social evils or by propagating female education amongst their fellow delegates.

In the sessions of INC, the women of Punjab also came into the contact of women of other progressive women. They invited them to Punjab and requested them to create awareness amongst their other Punjabi sisters in Punjab. Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Muthulakshmi Reddi and others came to Punjab and pleaded women to rise and work for women emancipation.

Other National and International Conferences

The All India Aryan Women’s Conference was held at Ajmer on 19-20 October, 1933. This conference was presided by one of the Punjabi woman Shrimati Shano Devi, Principal Kanya Mahavidyala,

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 247-257.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 258-259.
Jalandhar. The conference was attended by a large number of ladies from far and near, including the girl students of Gurukuls of Dehradun and Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Jalandhar (Punjab) and Baroda. This conference was organized on the occasion of the semi-centenary celebrations of a reformer Swami Dayanand who worked a lot for the emancipation of women. In the presidential address, Shano Devi condemned the system of acceptance of dowry for marriages and untouchability, and spoke on the non-preaching of the vedic dharma. She advised the merging of all women's institutions into one All-India Association and control of all these women institutions by women. She even condemned the evil customs of child marriage, purdah, untouchability, caste restrictions and idol worship.

Thus, in the third decade of the twentieth century there was mobility of women from Punjab to other provinces of India. They represented Punjab and expressed their views regarding all the evil customs and even presided the conferences at all India level. The women of Punjab were becoming aware and were trying to emancipate their fellow sisters.

The women of Punjab also participated in the conferences at the international level. Sarla Devi Chaudharani, resident of Lahore and Begum Shah Nawaz of Lahore went to attend the International
Women’s Conference of Calcutta from 30 January, 1936 to 4 February, 1936.¹⁴² Women delegates from Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Romania, Switzerland, France, Denmark, Greece, Holland, Australia, New Zealand and China attended this Conference.¹⁴³ Few women of Punjab mentioned above also got the chance to interact with these foreign delegates. The Maharani of Baroda presided over the session and the Indian delegates came from the provinces of Bombay, Delhi, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa, Burma and Bengal. On the first day of the session Begum Shah Nawaz of Punjab proposed the vote of thanks with Mrs. Kamala Devi Chattopadhya.¹⁴⁴

The Resolution pertaining to the value and necessity of rural work in this country was emphasized at the morning session of the conference on 31 January, 1936. Begum Shah Nawaz suggested village societies and women teachers to work for the villagers in every village and stressed on the great need for the revival of village industries. She urged for the whole hearted support and co-operation of the educated and aware village women in these activities.¹⁴⁵ On the motion favouring this issue by Begum, the Conference adopted the resolution to appoint a special sub-committee to examine and promote rural welfare.

¹⁴² The Indian Annual Register, Jan-June 1936, Vol. I., p. 336.
The Begum also participated in the discussion of various issues dealing with the necessity of including domestic sciences in the curriculum for girls schools, spoke on child welfare and also remarked on the issue of women trafficking in the province of Punjab.\textsuperscript{146}

Another conference of all India nature witnessed the involvement of a women residing in Punjab. ‘Srijukta Sarla Devi Chaudharani presided the All India Social Conference held on Thursday, the 31 December, 1925 in the Albert Institute Hall, Calcutta.\textsuperscript{147} In her presidential address, she called upon her countrymen and countrywomen to rally under the flag of social reform. Unless the society was set in order, the country-men could not step out, claim or bear the burden of political rights in their nation and outside the world. Concluding her address, she focussed more on removing the social evils like purdah, untouchability, early marriage, widowhood and others than political participation of the people.\textsuperscript{148}

Hence, from 1901-47, women participation was not only confined to regional and provincial conferences but they participated in the conferences at the national and international level as well. Here they discussed the social evils and the new development programmes for women as well. It can be seen that during this time women got so

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, pp. 373-374.
\textsuperscript{147} The Indian Quarterly Register, July-Dec, 1925, Vol. II, p. 397.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, pp. 397-398.
aware that they talked of different methods to empower women. They wanted revival of cottage industries and laid stress on the economic dependence of their sisters.

Punjab Legislative Council and Government

The history of the Punjab Legislative Assembly can be traced back to 1861, when for the first time, under the Councils Act of 1861, efforts were made to establish some representative institution in the form of an Executive Council. But it was only under the Government of India Act 1919 that a Legislative Council was set up in Punjab. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Punjab Legislative Assembly was constituted with one hundred seventy five members. It was summoned for the first time on 1 April, 1937.¹⁴⁹

As there was a political platform for the people of Punjab, so it was obvious that reformist, leaders, educationalist and others went to these political bodies. So the women also did not lag behind and they either joined the Punjab legislative council or showed their presence in the government of Punjab in the third decade of the twentieth century.

On 19 February, 1934, Shrimati Lekhawati Jain took her swearing in oath as the first elected lady member of the Punjab Legislative Council.¹⁵⁰ In the budget session of the council presided by Chaudhri Sir Sahabuddin, Lekhawati debated on the resolution of

women in Local Bodies. She stated that sex disqualification for registration on electoral rolls of Municipalities and District Boards should be removed in respect of women generally and that they should be allowed to stand as candidates for membership of those bodies.\textsuperscript{151} But this motion was opposed by almost all the members of the council and even the only other woman member of the House Dr. (Mrs.) Shave who preferred women being nominated to local bodies as they would be then gradually prepared to face the mudslinging that elections involved.\textsuperscript{152}

Hence in 1934, women were fighting for their rights to vote and to contest election as their male counterparts were enjoying these rights.

In the fourth decade of the twentieth century women were also appointed as the Parliamentary Secretaries in the Government of Punjab under the Governor Sir Henry Dufffield Craik. Out of nine parliamentary secretaries only Mrs. Jahanara Shah Nawaz was a women member.\textsuperscript{153} In 1940, the Punjab Legislative Assembly had four women elected members – Mrs. Duni Chand, Mrs. Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, Shrimati Raghibir Kaur and Begum Rashida Latif Baji.\textsuperscript{154} In the Budget Session of Lahore on 9 January, 1940. Begum Rashida

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 209.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, pp. 209-210.
\textsuperscript{153} The Indian Annual Register, Jan-June 1940, Vol. I, p.3.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, pp. 181-182.
Latif, veiled Muslim woman member of the unionist party, supported the resolution of primary education bill for both the sexes. She said that primary education should be made compulsory for girls with domestic science subject as the compulsory subject.\textsuperscript{155} Bibi Raghbir Kaur and Begum Shah Nawaz also gave their consent to Rashida Latif.

These women members always fought for the women rights of education, enfranchisement, equality of sexes and against social evils till they remained the member of these political bodies. These women had a great impact on their fellow sisters and always tried to create awareness among them about the events happening in Punjab and outside the Punjab. These ladies prepared a platform for the ladies of the future who in the twenty first century Punjab are contesting elections and becoming ministers and chief ministers.

To sum up, it may be said that the reform movement of the early nineteenth century tried to remove the social evils of the society and demand for the female education made women of Punjab capable either to participate or to form their own organisations. The annual conferences at both the regional and national level like Sikh Educational Conferences, Punjab Women’s Conferences and All India Women’s Conferences attracted various women participants from the Punjab and from other parts of India. And these participants started reciting poems, reading papers and even proposing the resolutions on

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Ibid}, p. 183.
all the hot issues pertaining to the women of Punjab and India. This public participation had a great impact on their roles and with the passage of time they also moved hand in hand with their male counterparts in the governance of the province. They were appointed as Parliamentary Secretaries and were elected to the Punjab Legislative council. These women started debating on the important issues with other male members in the sessions of these political bodies. And the most important consequence of this public participation was that it cleared the way for the women of Punjab to participate in the nationalist movement of freedom struggle. They courted arrests, did picketing, went on hartals and showed their existence in the society and tried to become the better halves of their husband in the real sense. And after the independence of India they were also given credit for their work and were appointed in the cabinet of the Independent India. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala was the fine example of this as she was appointed as First Health Minister of free India.