One of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellencies and realise its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it. A.S. Altekar expresses that “The degree of freedom given to move about in society and to take part in its public life gives a good idea of the nature of its administration and enables us to know how far it had realised the difficult truth that women too have a contribution of their own to make in its development and progress.”

Indian texts essentialized women as devoted and self sacrificed, yet occasionally rebellious and dangerous. Texts on religion, law, politics and education carried different pronouncements for men depending on caste, class, age and religious sect. In contrast, women's differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate, supportive roles they were destined to play. Historians were equally essentialist in their portrayal of Indian women. Occasionally Indian text and historical narratives singled out one woman for special attention but usually this was because her accomplishments were significant by male standards. Topics that were interwoven with women's lives - household and agriculture technology; religious rituals and sentiments;

---

fertility and family size; furnishings, jewellery and clothing; inheritance and property rights; and marriage and divorce - were largely overlooked, remarks Geraldine Forbes.²

With regard to the history written from women's point of view, Virginia Woolf's remarks appropriately the ironical paradox of woman's life. "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She prevades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history."³

Women have contributed significantly since the beginning of civilization. The moral values and dedication towards humanity from ancient times till the present era can be seen in examples of Sita, Anusuiya, Ahilya, Laxmibai, Mirabai, Razia Sultan, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi, Medha Patkar, Maharani Praneet Kaur, Harsimrat Kaur Badal and others. In Indian culture women have been represented as and raised to the level of goddesses, but unfortunately the patriarchal family system and other socio-historical factors resulted in the subordination of women. The position varies from religion to religion, society, environment and culture of specific region. There is no denying the fact that much progress has been made towards improving women's place in the society.

Women in India have not been given their due place, though they are given a great deal of respect and status as mother, daughter and sister. Under the influence of democratic liberal ideas of the nineteenth century, many social reform movements were launched in India. Many journals for women dealing with backwardness of women and pleading for change in their status in society through education were published. As a consequence a few brave women came forward and the early years of the twentieth century saw a Muslim woman barrister practising in the Punjab High Court. Zarina Bhattty in her article, “Women’s Movement and Women’s Studies in India : A Historical Perspective”\(^4\) writes that in 1936, Hijab Imtiaz Ali, a Muslim poet and writer also had the honour of being the first woman pilot in India. Despite such bold ventures by some women, the primary aim of girl’s education was to prepare them as good mothers, as motherhood remained the cherished goal for women. Society did not question the existing division of labour.

History, has ignored and submerged the contribution of women, their work has been underestimated as concerned with the limited world of experience, that is, the domestic sphere to which they are forced to remain confined by societal norms. Women have long been pushed to the seams of history.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times, through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In Modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister and speaker of the Lok Sabha and others. Similar pattern of change can be discerned in the status and position of women in the colonial Punjab.

 Annexation of Punjab

Punjab, etymologically the land of five rivers, was generally believed to be the tract situated between the rivers Indus and the Jamuna and bounded by the Himalayan mountains towards the North and North-East. The Province derives its name from its rivers (Punjab, meaning five rivers), namely Sutlej, Beas, Chenab, Ravi and Jhelum; which transverse its length from north east to south-west and join up with the Indus at Mithan Kot (in the Dera Ghazi Khan District) and thus along with it pour their waters into the Arabian Sea near Karachi. The undivided Punjab consisted of – The Punjab, Native states dependent on Punjab Government, Kashmir, North-West Frontier Province and Tribal territory under the political control of


North-West Frontier Province.\textsuperscript{7} The United Province of Punjab was divided into four natural divisions – Indo Gangetic Plain West, the Himalayan, the Sub-Himalayan and the North-West Dry area. All these four divisions mainly referred to the physical and climatic features of the Punjab.\textsuperscript{8} After the advent of Britishers, the undivided Province was partitioned in 1901 and again in 1911 due to administrative and other reasons. In 1901, it was partitioned and a new province, namely North Western Frontier Province was carved out of it. Another slice was taken off in 1912, when the capital of the British Indian Empire was shifted to Delhi, and the city of Delhi and a part of the surrounding territory were constituted into a distinct province.\textsuperscript{9}

On 29 March, 1849, Britishers proclaimed the annexation of Punjab and all the terms were settled with Maharaja Duleep Singh.\textsuperscript{10} Sir Henry Elliot, the Foreign Secretary, held a Darbar at Lahore for making known the decision of the Government of India about the annexation.\textsuperscript{11} The motives for the annexation had their economic as well as political aspects. Cotton of the Panjab was one of the chief attractions to the British, while Amritsar offered the prospect of an

\textsuperscript{8} Census of India, 1931, Vol. XVII, Punjab, Part I, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{9} Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress, Lahore, 1920, p. 3.
enterport for the Panjab and the hill territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Multan and Peshawar promised to become advanced depots for the British trade in Afghanistan and in the region beyond the Oxus. The Punjab also offered vast opportunities of employment for a large number of British civilians and officials with handsome salaries, allowances, furloughs and pensions.\(^\text{12}\)

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, for the proper administration of the province a Board of Administration was set up under Sir Henry Lawrence as President, Mr. John Lawrence and Mr. Charles Mansel as the heads of Revenue and Financial, and Judicial Department respectively.\(^\text{13}\) During the four working years of the Board of Administration, it did commendable job in the field of education and eradicating female infanticide particularly. Female Infanticide was brought within the pale of law.\(^\text{14}\) Many places in the Punjab where the crime of female infanticide was most suspected, had been declared under the Female Infanticide Act (VIII of 1870) in 1884.\(^\text{15}\) The expenses involved in the marriage of a girl was one of the causes of this evil custom.\(^\text{16}\) So, the Britishers ordered that expenses be reduced by inviting only few guests to the wedding party. In the

\(^{12}\) Ibid, pp. 26,27.


\(^{14}\) Ibid, p. 369.


field of education, an enquiry was also made and the best scheme recommended was to improve the indigenous schools for girls and boys. After the dissolution of the Board in 1853, the Punjab came under John Lawrence (1853-59). He divided Punjab into seven divisions which were further divided into small districts and then into tehsils. This was done for the proper administration of Punjab. Sir Robert Montgomery was appointed as the Lieutenant Governor on 26 February, 1859 to 1865. Then came Sir Donald McLeod (1865-1870), Sir Henry Marion Durand (1870-71), Sir Robert Henry Davies (1871-77), Sir Robert Eyles Egerton (1877-1882), Sir Charles Atichison (1882-1887), Sir James Broadwood Lyall (1887-1892), Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick (1892-1897) and Sir William Macworth Young (1897-1902).

From 1849-1900, these Lieutenant Governors of the Punjab were either busy in political upheavals in the province or were trying to clean the society and eradicating the social evils present.

Social Customs

To study the status and position of women in Punjab province, there is an imperative need to analyse the social conditions first. Many social evils were prevalent which restricted the overall development of the women. To remove these evils the British government passed various laws from time to time. A regulation for

---

declaring the practice of Sati, or of burning or burying alive the
widows of Hindus, illegal, and punishable by the criminal courts was
passed on 4 December, 1829 known as Regulation Act of XVII of
1829.\textsuperscript{18} The Government of India also legalized the remarriage of
widows (especially of Hindus) by passing an Act known as Act XV of
1856.\textsuperscript{19} To curb the evil custom of female infanticide, the Female
Infanticide Act VIII was passed in 1870.\textsuperscript{20} On 25 June 1928, the
government of India also appointed a committee to examine the state
of the law relating to the Age of Consent as contained in Section 375
and 376 of the Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Act 1925 (XXIX of
1925).\textsuperscript{21} Some socio-religious reform movements also came forward in
the nineteenth century to help the government in removing these evils
and tried to implement these laws in their respective regions.

Female infanticide was quite common in the province 'The birth
of a boy is an occasion for a great rejoicing; a girl causes less
enthusiasm'.\textsuperscript{22} The birth of female child was regarded as an
inauspicious event while that of a male child was given a blatantly
preferential treatment within the family. The female child was killed
immediately after her birth. The strict caste limitation in choice of a

\textsuperscript{18} Radha Kumar, \textit{The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid}, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{20} G.S. Chhabra, \textit{Social and Economic History of the Punjab 1849-1901}, p.82.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Report of the Age of Consent Committee 1928-1929}, Calcutta, Government of India Central
Publication Branch, 1929, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Punjab District Gazetteer, Vol. XXX-A: Lahore District} with maps, 1916, Punjab
Government, p. 38.
wife and puberty consummation – both these turned the birth of daughters into a veritable calamity in all but the most well-to-do families.\textsuperscript{23} Even the marriage expenses, particularly dowry were also the reason for selectively killing infant daughters.\textsuperscript{24} This practice was widely prevalent in the United Province, the Punjab and Rajputana, and amongst various sections of the population, especially Khatris, Rajputs, Jats and all classes of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{25}

The subject of female infanticide was one of the first matters that attracted John Lawrence’s attention after he became the Commissioner. He promulgated three new commandments:

‘Bewa Mat Jalao;
Beti Mat Maro;
Korhi Mat dabao.

(Thou shall not burn thy widow;
Thou shall not kill thy daughter;
Thou shall not bury alive thy lepor.)\textsuperscript{26}

The Bedis were generally known as Kurimar (daughter-slayer) and they were well known for committing female infanticide.\textsuperscript{27} Almost in every district - Nabha, Multan, Gujranwala, Jhelum, Ferozepur this evil custom was practiced by every caste.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid}, p. 243.
Various methods were adopted to kill the new born baby girl. Firstly, the baby was throttled by pressing the thumb gently against her throat continuously for several minutes; secondly, a little juice of akk (calatropis procera) was administered internally; thirdly, an overdose of opium was mixed in the first potion (ghutti); fourthly, the device of pouring icy-cold water on the baby used to be a familiar device in the chilly winter nights. But the most favourite method was the fifth one of "Starvation" – not feeding the baby at all or giving her totally insufficient nourishment, which reduced her to death in few days.\(^{28}\) Sometimes the poor new born girls were put to death by putting them into a ghara (an earthen pot) and buried alive in the ground. Another way was to take her to a jungle where she was put in a sitting position under a tree, gur (brown sugar) was put into her mouth and a batti (corded roll of cotton) was placed between her fingers and then, the mother used to sing in Punjabi.\(^{29}\)

‘Gur Khayee; puni katteen

Ap na aayee, bira nu ghateen’.

(Eat gur; Spin the cotton, do not come back yourself but send a brother)

This evil practice of female infanticide affected the sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) and there was an increasing

---

disparity between number of females and males between 1901 to 1947. This can be seen from the following table:

**Table - 1**

**Sex Ratio in Punjab (1901-1941)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Sex Ratio (females per 1000 males)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The girls who escaped infanticide were married at a very early age. Early marriage was the only vocation left for them due to absence of female education. ‘The custom of early or infant marriage arose due to caste restrictions and elaborate customs regarding marriage which made the parents anxious to marry their daughters at the earliest opportunity.’ Among the people, girls were generally married between the ages of seven and twelve years – the shastras laying great stress upon the necessity to marry a girl before or immediately upon attaining puberty, after which, it is, of course a great disgrace for her to remain in her father's house.

---

30 www.punjabgovtnic.in/Economy/HumanResources.htm.
Girls were married at that age when they even did not know the meaning of the marriage. They were unaware of all the burdens of marriage. Girls were married at that delicate and tender age when they used to play with their dolls and other toys. This can be seen from the illustration number I in which the wife is playing with her dolls while her husband is looking at her.

Later her poor immature body was generally subjected to the burden of pregnancy before it had the strength to carry it to a successful end. Several miscarriages and still births before the birth of the first living child were usual. And finally, the result was an abnormally high mortality rate of mothers and infants in child birth, the prevalence of female disorders and children’s diseases.

Child marriages affected the health of ladies as well as the children born of these marriages. Immature mothers were not able to bear, nurse or rear to physical perfection to the new generation, and large sections of the society showed the signs of ever increasing devitalization and physical deterioration.

Further examples of mismatched marriages may be cited. For instance, the wedding ceremony of a young girl and an old man and vice-a-versa or wedding of an illiterate girl and an educated boy and vice-a-versa, in all the four cases, the condition of the woman was deplorable and used to suffer either at the hands of her husband or

33 S. Das, Purdah : The Status of Indian Women, p. 82.
34 Ibid, p. 83.
husband's family members. The condition of women can be easily seen from the illustrations. Illustration II shows a young woman married to an old husband. Both are sitting on a cot and the old husband is pulling her dupatta (a cloth used to cover the head by women) and she is saying “सा लघु ती; मैं तू क्यों होती” (Oh! father don’t trouble me). It can be seen that there is such a age difference between both that a woman is not able to accept her marriage and is not happy.

In the illustration I an example of child marriage is given. A young girl of age ten to twelve is married to a thirty to thirty five year old man. The young wife is busy in playing with her dolls and husband is calling her. She replies “मैं तुम बच्ची नहीं पलटें हँस रही” (Let me play with my dolls). It can be seen that the girl is unaware of her all marriage duties due to her young age.

Illustration III with the caption “बिहारिना देशिया बिहारिनवी” (Married male student) depicts the difficult situation of the husband who is a student first. He is not able to bear the burden of his marriage along with his studies. It is shown that his wife along with his books is sitting on his back which depicts miserable condition of the husband.

When either of the partner was not educated, the result again was a mismatched marriage. In the illustration IV with the caption “राष्ट्रवादें आपिते पत्नी” (Husband coming from the Office) an educated
husband comes from the office and his wife is least bothered about him and is busy in eating. The husband is shouting at her and again the consequence is an unsuccessful marriage.

In the illustration V with the caption ‘पढ़ी लिखी धुली’ (an educated wife) an example of a well educated woman is given. The wife is sitting on a table and reading some paper where as her illiterate husband is doing household activities. These type of mismatched marriages were very common in the province. These marriages were based on the compromises by either of the partner. There was a difference of age and intellectual level between the couple.

An important negative effect of these marriages was widowhood. Whenever the old husband died, then his wife became a widow. And compulsory widowhood was enforced on either young or child wives.

According to shastras and the old customs a widow duly observing the vows of widowhood was to be respected even by elders, was usually given the management of the household and every effort was made to mitigate her unfortunate position.35 But in the early nineteenth century, a widow was looked upon as an unproductive encumbrance and even a scourge to the family. ‘It was also believed that if widow remarries then she loses her chastity and the gravity of the sins affects the following generations of the family.’36 A young

---

widow was seen as ‘bad luck’ bride who had caused her husband’s death.\textsuperscript{37} Due to these reasons, the widow’s pretty jewels and clothes were forcibly taken back by her husband’s relatives. She was often made the drudge of the household. This was considered to be the just and deserved punishment for some unknown sin committed by her supposedly in an earlier incarnation. She was regarded by the society as an unfortunate, unauspicious and a condemned women. As the relation between husband and wife was considered sacred and indissoluble, even after the death of the husband, the wife was supposed to live a life of asceticism, self denial, unflinching devotion to her husband’s memory, self sacrifice and self effacement.\textsuperscript{38} She was not allowed to wear nose-ring and coloured clothes of any kind. She was not allowed to join a singing party at marriages. She was given a soiled chadar (sheet) to wear. She was not given rich food to eat, rather she was to observe fast from two to six days in a month on different sacred days. She was warned to observe all these customs strictly. In case of any violation her image was lowered.\textsuperscript{39} The custom of compulsory widowhood made the condition of women worse.

Besides enforced widowhood, the custom of widow remarriage was also prevalent in some classes of the society. Remarriage of widows was common among some castes and was recognised among

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 16.
all the villages. On the death of a husband his widow was bound to marry one of her deceased husband’s collaterals who would succeed to the property on her death. Such a marriage was made by the simple form of chadar dali or sheet throwing. If for any reason there was no brother of her deceased husband, then she was allowed to marry any other person in the brotherhood. This was called as Karewa or Chandar Andezi. But she was to abandon her claim on her deceased husband’s property and live far away from his relations. Karewa, as a rule, was primarily a levirate marriage in which the widow was accepted a wife by one of the younger brothers of the deceased husband. Although the widow was not compelled to remarry but she was not free to marry without the consent of her late husband’s family.

This type of remarriage led to irregular and ill organised matches. In case of chadar dalna or chadar urhana, sometimes a widow of a higher age was married to a boy of much lower age. Sometimes, the poor unfortunate young widow was married to an old man. All these are examples of unequal marriages which often led to unhappiness and moral degradation of the woman in the society.

Polygamy was another custom prevalent in the Punjab among the classes which allowed remarriages. In the levirate form of marriage, sometimes a married man who was the brother of the deceased was asked to marry the widow. This usually caused polygamy - meaning a man having more than one wife. Further, if the wife did not bear an issue, especially male within a few years of her marriage, the husband was forced by his relations to remarry. In such cases both the wives used to live together in the same house and the wife bearing children was given preferential treatment, while the issueless wife was totally ignored.

The custom of sati was also prevalent in some classes of the society of the Punjab. When a woman's husband died, then she was asked to ascend the funeral pyre of her dead husband to burn herself. ‘This was done for two main motives - spiritual glamour and material gain. On its spiritual side, the woman reached in immolation the highest peak of the old Sita-Rama glamour - matehood faithful through life and after death. Secondly, there was a lot of material gain to the family after becoming a sati. So she was asked to sacrifice her life for the sake of the welfare of the family.’

Purdah or ghunghat or veil was known in the region. Married women used to observe it in the presence of their husband's kin as well as before their husbands in the presence of others. They also

---

extended purdah to all classificatory and ‘courtesy’ affines - to most of the senior men of the village as well as towards certain female affines, notably the mother-in-law or classificatory mother-in-law.\textsuperscript{44}

It was observed as a mark of respectability and mannerism by all communities in the whole of Northern India and Punjab was no exception.\textsuperscript{45}

In Punjab, it was said:

“अंतर के घर खेट पी,नागर गाटी घर पी।”\textsuperscript{46}

(The one who stays indoor is worth lakhs but she, who wanders out, is worth a straw).

The custom was a great hindrance in the progress of women. The seclusion of women prevented the development of social life. They were cut off from other members of the society and developed much more marked separate ideological groups. Sometimes the women also suffered from health problems like weakness of eyesight, asthma and others due to purdah.

These were some of the social evil customs and practices prevalent in the society of Punjab and acted as hindrances in the development of women. When the Britishers came to Punjab, they tried to eradicate these evils beginning with female infanticide. Later

\textsuperscript{44} Prem Chowdhry, \textit{The Veiled Women : Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana 1880-1990}, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Punjab District Gazetteer, Vol. XIX-A, Multan District, 1901-02}, p. 98.
the enlightened leaders of the society also launched their reform movements to help the government. Reformers were working at the India level as a whole as well as at the regional level, including Punjab, who also launched their own social reform movements.

Social Reform Movements

When the strong hand of the British had settled itself upon the country the only possible outlet was the organisation of peaceful movements aiming at the social and cultural development of the people. Many movements were thus organised, some of which originated in the province itself while others traveled into it from other parts of India. Generally speaking, these movements had a programme of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres.47

Among the various movements which originated and traveled into the province, the first was the Brahmo Samaj. The phrase “Brahmo Samaj” literally means the society of the worshippers of the one True God. This movement was started on the 20 August 1828, by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal.48 The Samaj introduced itself into the Punjab after the Mutiny of 1857. A branch of the Samaj was established at Lahore in 1864, and by 1872 it had its own temple in Anarkali.49

---

The cardinal principles of the Samaj were belief in one God, the universal brotherhood, the equal rights of both sexes, the disregard of all social restrictions in the matter of interdinning and intermarriage, the cultivation of a high standard of morality and respect for sacred books and holy men as aids to spiritual development. It also denounced widow burning, polygamy and pleaded for a return to earlier practice in the matter of the rights of women according to the Hindu law of inheritance. It also struggled to put down child marriage.

The movement, however, could not find much success in the Punjab. It was mainly confined to the educated classes of the headquarter towns of some districts. Lahore, Shimla, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Mianwali, Bhera, Amritsar and Delhi had a few number of followers of this sect.

Arya Samaj came to the rescue of women and became the reservoir of reformist channels against the prevailing social evils during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was the founder of the movement on 10 April 1875 and established the first Arya Samaj at Bombay. On 1 January 1877, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in a magnificent durbar held by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton at Delhi. Dayanand went there and on the invitation of some hindus of Lahore, he visited the
city of Lahore. And later in 1877, he founded the Arya Samaj at Lahore and it became the headquarters of the movement.\(^{54}\)

There were also other branches of Arya Samaj at different districts of the Punjab like Sialkot, Multan, Delhi, Gurdaspur, Gujranwala, Hissar, Karnal and Amritsar.\(^ {55}\) All these branches were working for the spread of education and the introduction of social reforms. They believed towards the fusion of sub-castes on the principle of reverting to the four varnas and towards encouraging widow remarriage and discouraging child marriage.\(^ {56}\) The Arya Samaj even fixed the marriageable age for girls and boys as sixteen and twenty five respectively. It laid stress on a strategy to diffuse knowledge and dispel ignorance.\(^ {57}\)

To remodel and transform the society, Arya Samaj paid ample attention to the education of girls. It organised a network of schools and colleges for them, where education was imparted in the mother tongue. At Lahore in 1886, “The Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College” was founded in the sacred memory of its founder.\(^ {58}\) Later, Lala Dev Raj with the help Mai Bhagwati of Haryana started “The Kanya Maha Vidyalaya” at Jalandhar in 1886. This institute was instrumental in removing the social evil of purdah and raised the marriageable standard of the girls.\(^ {59}\)

\(^{54}\) J.N. Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India, p. 110.
\(^{56}\) Ibid, pp. 134-135.
\(^{58}\) J.N. Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India, pp. 126-127.
\(^{59}\) The Tribune, Lahore, March 25, 1923, p. 8.
The Arya Samaj also criticised enforced widowhood and laid emphasis on widow-remarriage. It is reported that one of the earliest widow remarriages sponsored by the Samaj was in 1894 in Lahore. Societies were set up all over the Punjab to promote widow-remarriages. It was a great achievement of the Samaj. Rai Bahadur Ganga started a Widow Marriage Association in the Punjab in December 1914 and got the widow remarriage legalised for those who wished to remarry. The Amritsar branch led in this drive for the acceptance of widow remarriages. They performed widow remarriages on a grand public scale giving maximum publicity to each event. It encouraged the widow remarriage even amongst higher castes like Arora, Brahmins and others as well.

Thus, this movement started in 1877 in Punjab worked in the twentieth century for the women emancipation. It encouraged people to leave old customs and traditions and appealed them to educate their daughters, encouraged widow remarriages, discouraged child marriage and purdah system.

The Nirankari Movement was founded by Baba Dayal Singh (1783-1855). Sometimes during the decade of the 1840s, he called for the return of Sikhism to its origin and emphasized the worship of God.

---

as Nirankar (formless). He condemned idol worship and making obeisance to “holy men”, he disapproved of going on pilgrimages and performing brahmanical rituals.

This movement advocated that the women must not be treated as unclean at childbirth; disciples were not to use astrology or horoscopes in setting the time for ceremonies; dowry was not to be displayed at marriages; neither lighted lamps nor blessed sweets, prasad, was to be placed in rivers; and no one was to give brahmans any payments for conducting rituals. Thus, this movement believed in one formless God and wanted women to leave all the superstitious activities and ceremonies which they used to follow to please their deities.

The Namdhari Sect or Kuka Movement was founded by Balak Singh of Village Hazaro in the north west frontier region. The disciples of the sect chanted hymns and, like dancing dervishes, worked themselves into a state of frenzy and emitted loud shricks (Kuks); they came therefore to be named Kukas.

The Kukas were against child marriage. They condemned infanticide and dowry system. They gave equal status to women and believed in inter-caste marriage between hindus and untouchables.

---

67 Ibid, pp. 129-129.
They even allowed women to be initiated through baptism.\textsuperscript{68} This movement was important as it’s disciples participated in the national movement for freedom in the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1858 an American Presbyterian Mission was established at Ludhiana. Immediately after the annexation of Punjab, it had spread its activities from Malwa to Majha area of Punjab.\textsuperscript{69} The Church Missionary Society opened centres around Amritsar and Lahore and in the hill districts. The society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Salvation Army, the Methodists, Episcopolians, Moravians and Roman Catholic order vied with each other in gaining converts.\textsuperscript{70} Even the English government was supporting the activities of Christian missionaries. It can be judged from the following Table:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Number of Conversions \\
\hline
1881 & 3,796 \\
1891 & 19,547 \\
1901 & 37,980 \\
1911 & 1,63,994 \\
1921 & 3,15,931 \\
1931 & 4,14,788 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Number of Converts into Christianity}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{68} Kenneth, W. Jones, \textit{Socio-Religious Movements in British India} p. 91.
Thus, the number of converts to Christianity increased at rapid rate from 1881 to 1931. After 1901 the increase became evident and the reformers in Punjab were worried about these conversions.

In 1853, Maharaja Dalip Singh adopted Christianity. And after twenty years in 1873 four Sikh students of the Amritsar Mission School offered themselves for conversion into Christianity. Even Dayanand’s Arya Samaj was also spreading its message at a fast pace. So all these reasons stirred a small group of prominent Sikhs to form the Singh Sabha of Amritsar, which held its first meeting on 1 October, 1873. Among those who helped to establish the Sabha were Sir Khem Singh Bedi, Thakur Singh Sandhawalia, Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala and Giani Gian Singh. Sandhawalia became its President and Giani Gian Singh its Secretary.

To restore Sikhism to its past purity, to publish historical religious books, magazines and journals, to propagate knowledge using Punjabi, to return apostates to their original faith and to involve highly placed Englishmen in the educational programme of the Sikhs were the lofty aims of the Sabha.

Singh Sabha of Amritsar, then of Lahore, and Chief Khalsa Diwan all worked for emancipation of women. They regarded female education (based on domestic art) as the only way by which they could

---

73 *Ibid*, p. 29.
emancipate their girls and opened various schools for them. The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Ferozepur was the fine example of this.

Thus, the emancipation of women became the central concern of the social reformers. Several societies sprang up for the amelioration of women’s lot and status. These socio-religious reform movements led a crusade against the social evil customs persisting in the society of the province.

Theoretical Engagements

The subject of the present thesis is a debated issue in academic circles especially amongst historians and scholars. The varied methodological and theoretical approaches and perspectives to understand the women in modern India may be categorised in three ways. First, the nationalist approach which traces the history of the freedom movement from 1885 to the partition of India in 1947.

The Nationalist school developed the idea that nationalism was a unified and collective opposition of the Indian nation against the common enemy represented by British colonial rule. Nationalist discourse, according to Partha Chatterjee, resolved the “women question” by the end of the nineteenth century. The indigenous elite leaders led the people especially women from subjugation to freedom.

---

Like Mahatma Gandhi who brought the women into public life and motivated them to solve their own problems.

Similarly, various reformers and educationists in Punjab encouraged their women to come out of their houses and participate in the activities important for their development. Elite leaders of Punjab like Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Surinder Singh Majithia, Lajpat Rai, Bhai Takhat Singh, Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhary and others opened various institutions and paved the way for the women to form their own organisations and associations.

The second approach is of the historians of the ‘Cambridge School’. This school views the development in India and the provinces primarily in terms of the British and colonial elites. This school regards the colonial rule as a boon to the India. Colonial historians narrate the civilizing mission of the British as rescuing Indian women from their own culture and society. This school reduces the over-emphasis on and glorification of elite leaders, instead projected them as ‘middle men’. These middle men took the help of Britishers in cleaning their society from all sort of social evils and tried to emancipate their ladies.

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a new body of historical knowledge which referred to itself as ‘Subaltern Studies’. The subalterns dismissed previous historical writings as elitist,

---

materialistic or over-materialistic and instead focused on ‘marginal’ and non-elite groups and their ‘autonomous’ resistance at various stages in the development of Indians.\textsuperscript{77} The subaltern approach discusses the ‘history of below’ and re-reads history from their perspective. They take into account all the magazines, journals, newspapers, books and others edited or written by the women themselves. The history by the women is discussed thoroughly.

Review of Literature

The period of the research work is vast, moreover in this period from 1901 to 1947 the political and socio-economic conditions of whole of India had undergone changes. Colonial Punjab under the Britishers from 1901-47 saw various changes in every section of the society, especially women. Though much literature and source material is available on this subject, but we find very little work on Punjabi women and therefore it needs more probing.

\textit{The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement 1857-1947}\textsuperscript{78} by Manmohan Kaur has touched various social evils customs prevalent in the Punjab and other provinces of India. This book elaborates various phases of the freedom struggle and the role of women in that. It mentions many Punjabi women leaders but not in a comprehensive way. Gail Minault’s \textit{The Extended Family}\textsuperscript{79} is the collection of eleven

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textsuperscript{77} & \textit{Ibid}, p. 42. \\
\textsuperscript{78} & Manmohan Kaur, \textit{The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement 1857-1947}, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1968. \\
\textsuperscript{79} & Gail Minault, \textit{The Extended Family : Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan}, Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1981. \\
\end{tabular}
articles examining the participation of women in Indian politics in the historical perspective. Beginning with the social reform movements of the nineteenth century, continuing during the freedom movement and into contemporary India and Pakistan, the book makes a major contribution to the history of the Indian women's movement. There is one article 'Kinship, Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab' which gives account of the women of the colonial Punjab. But this is mainly limited to the Muslim women and not the women in general. *The History of Doing* by Radha Kumar is an illustrated account of movements for women rights and feminism in India from 1800-1990. It gives a brief interpretative history of women's organisations and associations in the different parts of India. Many Punjabi women like Lado Rani Zutshi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sarla Devi Chaudharani and others are mentioned. It depicts the participation of the women of Punjab in national organisations and movements but the regional and local association of women in the Punjab are not referred. Geraldine Forbes's work *Women in Modern India* gives a sympathetic and comprehensive study of Indian women. The author begins with reform movements for women and their impact. How women were attaining education is elaborated. The women participation for legal rights and in the nationalist movement in the north and southern parts of India is also mentioned. Various women of North India mainly of Punjab

---

have been named but it is not a complete study of women in colonial Punjab. The book tries to clear the concepts relating to the gender studies and gives a picture of women of India in general and is not confined to any specific region.

The above mentioned books are those which were published in the last two or three decades of 1900s. These mainly dealt with the social reform movements and the national struggle for independence. Women of the different regions of India were mentioned and their participation in detail was not discussed. The books which were published in the first decade of 2000, looked into the history of India from women's point of view. New avenues for women were seen and their participation was discussed in almost all the public affairs like in theatre, films, social work, politics, literature and others.

*Women’s Studies in India*\(^{82}\) by Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar focuses on aspects of female experience that conventional learning has either ignored or deliberately relegated to silence. It wants to study the women history by co-relating it with other disciplines like political science, sociology, psychology and literature. It gives a new approach, but is not based on any specific region. *Relocating Gender in Sikh History*\(^{83}\) by Doris R. Jakobsh is a penetrating volume first to chart the history of gender construction in

---

Sikhism right from the time of Sikh Gurus. It discusses the Singh Sabha reformers, armed with western education and the Victorian ideals of the high colonial era, sought to reinterpret tradition according to their own needs and visions. The book is very informative, even mentions the formation of regional organisations like Bhujangan Council, Sikh Educational Conferences and others in Punjab. But Jacobsh's work is limited primarily to the Singh Sabha Movement which tried to improve the condition of women during the colonial rule. *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Punjab*\(^8^4\) by Manju Verma discusses all the important phases of the nationalist movement in which the women of Punjab also participated. This book is a very good source of information on the women of Punjab, but it covers only one part of the concerned research work. Geraldine Forbes's *Women in colonial India*\(^8^5\) is a collection of essays on politics, medicine and historiography explaining women as participants in the nationalist politics and colonial schemes to provide western medicine for women and as subjects of women's history. Again this work is of all India level and not related to any particular region. *Women in the Indian National Movement*\(^8^6\) by Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert is a pioneering work relating to the women in India. It deals with the old concept of the national movement and participation of the women. But

---


women of the middle section of the society are taken into account along with the elite class women. The book is not related to Punjab but still it gives the idea to discuss the local women of the region and their contribution. The book also discusses the Hindi vernacular print media and the role played by women in it. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar in *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*\(^\text{87}\) argues the need to understand the history of social reforms from a much wider array of perspectives: for example, the connections between specific social abuses on the one hand, and, on the other, systems of traditions of gender practices across times, classes, castes and regions. Again it is not a full fledged study of women in the colonial Punjab. Only one aspect of social reforms is elaborated. Kamlesh Mohan’s *Towards Gender History*\(^\text{88}\) is an important source of information with special reference to the Punjab. It has the collection of six essays discussing different aspects of the women. The status and position of the women from Gurus period to the colonial rule has been discussed. Then it also mentions the importance of vernacular journal ‘Stree Darpan’ in fashioning the minds and images of the women. Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy is discussed in detail as a catalyst for creating women’s consciousness in Punjab. The book discusses some of the areas of concern of the research work but it is not a complete study of the women in colonial Punjab (1901-47).


Chapterisation

This study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is 'Introduction' which discusses the historical background of the topic. The aims and objectives of the study are critically analysed as well as the social evil customs and social reform movements pertaining to the women are thoroughly discussed in the chapter. Some of the theoretical interpretations are also taken into account. The chapter even elaborates the review of existing literature on the women in colonial Punjab.

The second chapter 'Women Awareness Through the Vernacular Press' discusses the impact of media which was initially started by the Britishers. The print media was used by the male reformers who sometimes even involved their wives and other female allies to give the clear picture of the society. The impact of the vernacular journals, magazines and newspapers on the womenfolk has been critically analysed.

In the third chapter 'Women : From Education to Occupation', the initiatives taken by the Britishers in the field of education have been discussed. This chapter also analyses how women after receiving education some of them started opting for new profession and occupation and contributed to the society as doctors, teachers, lawyers, skilled workers and others. They joined hands with their male counterparts and opened various schools for the girls and even participated in the public life of Punjab during the colonial period.
The fourth chapter ‘The Emergence of Organisations and Associations for Women’ discusses the contribution of both Britishers and male reformers of Punjab who formed new organisations. A.O. Hume, retired British Civil Servant encouraged male leaders to form Indian National Congress in India. Similarly, the early male leaders of the Singh Sabha were pro-British and they formed various associations with the patronage of Britishers. Then these organisations took up the gender issues and even encouraged some women to form their own associations like Istri Sabha, Bhujangan Council, Punjab Istri Conference and many more. These associations regularly organized conferences, meetings and discussed gender issues. These associations motivated women to participate in public life.

The fifth chapter deals with ‘Women Participation in Public Life’. This chapter analyses how the educated women of Punjab began participating in all the regional, national and international activities. Women started representing their sisters and tried to take their demands to the Government of Punjab and India.

In the sixth chapter 'Women in the Nationalist Movement', participation of women in the freedom movement is mentioned. All the political happenings in other provinces affected the women of Punjab and they started participating in the struggle for freedom. And after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 the women of Punjab directly jumped into the national struggle for independence.
The seventh chapter is 'Conclusion' which summarises the findings and interpretations of the thesis. The importance of the vernacular print media, education, organisations and associations for female emancipation is highlighted. The enlightened women then entered public sphere and political arena of the Punjab.