CHAPTER-V

WOMEN ISSUES IN POPULAR SIKH LITERATURE
AND JOURNALISM (1890-1920)

Historical writings of the Sikhs have time and again stressed greatly on the origin and
development of the Sikh religion, thereby un-intentionally ignoring the plight of its
women members in general. Perhaps the root cause behind the neglect in duly referring to
the contributions of Sikh women lies in the traditions that continued from the medieval
Indian society of which Punjab was an integral part. Reform initiated would have
definitely incurred the wrath of its population and perhaps this became the primary
reason behind the slow introduction of the much needed reform process as concerns the
status and role of Sikh women. Historical accounts however do not entirely ignore their
contributions to the growth of the Sikh community which was fighting its own battles of
survival. One has to scan all types of literature available on the Sikhs in order to analyze
objectively the role played by the female members of this brave community, proving an
equal match to their male counterparts in facing all kinds of challenges.

Sikh women have been emancipated over the centuries just as their counterparts
in the rest of India, the only difference being that there are very few references to the
exact manner in which their liberation was brought about. The reasons could be many.
Many Sikh historians, both at the national as well as on an international scenario contend
that details concerning the participation of Sikh women have been largely ignored but in
reality on browsing through the various sources available at hand, we can gather bits and
pieces and effectively construct the role played by the female members of the Sikh
community in its development and sustainence. Popular Sikh literature and journalism in
Punjab came with the coming of the Press in India, during the British rule. Although the
Press became an effective medium of transporting the patriotic feelings of the people to
the British government, this very Press also played a constructive role in exposing the
socio-religious and economic evils of the time, thereby creating an awareness amongst
the population and enabling them to ‘think’, most importantly, resulting in an increase in
their ability to question and reason, something that they had forgotten to make effective
use of over the years.
This awakening had its influence first on the Punjab and the Sikhs, who were by this time fairly settled, living a stable life with their own rulers and their own government, until the British occupation of Punjab in 1849. Meanwhile the Press continued its role of stirring the people’s minds and hearts thus initiating the much needed reforms in society, religion, politics and education. By the early 19th century, political leaders realized how powerful an instrument the periodicals were for spreading ideas. Many of them began to produce their own papers to propagate their ideas and influence people. A new force was detected in society, namely, the force of public opinion. Consequently, the journalism of the period was largely political in nature and thus the impression, justifiable to a great extent, was created that journalism was an adjunct of politics.

Emperor Asoka’s pillar inscriptions and rock edicts in different parts of the Mauryan Empire during 3rd century B.C. are considered examples of imperial political communication to the informed and literate section of the population. Ashoka used the Prakrit language in his communication on ethics and morals as evidence by his inscriptions. The learning languages were confined to high casts, the aristocracy, priests, army personnel and landowners. Another feature of communication in ancient India was the emphasis placed on oral and aural systems. Writing was done on palm leaves using a style, but the written documents were considered too scared to be touched or used by the lower classes. The ruling class used certain methods for coding, transmitting and decoding messages secretly through the network of spies to information about neighboring enemies. According to historians of journalism, news was collected in a well-organized manner under Akbar the Great. In 1574, Akbar established a recording office that helped later medieval historians to gather materials for chronicles. The first printing press arrived in India on 6th September 1556 and was installed at the college of St.Paul in Goa. First printed newspaper of India was in English edited and published by James Augustus Hicky, an employee of East India Company. It was named Bengal Gazette which came out on 29th January 1780. Soon many other weeklies and monthlies such as Indian Gazette, Calcutta Journal, Bengal Harakaru, and John Bull in the East came out during the 17th and 18th century. Digdarshan was the first Indian language newspaper.

The famous Raja Ram Mohan Roy also brought out periodicals in English, Bengali and Persian. Some of Roy’s papers were Sambad Kaumadi a Brahmical Magazine, Mirat-ul-Akhbar, Bangadoota and Bengal Herald. Although Maharaja Ranjit
Singh encouraged the development of Punjabi journalism, the earliest newspaper in Punjabi was a missionary newspaper. The first printing press in Punjab was established in Ludhiana in 1809.¹

The publication of tracts and newspapers by Sikhs in alignment with revolutionaries from Europe and North America created a significant political crisis for the British government in India. Even Sikh politicians in exile continued fuelling the freedom movement via their writings. So much so that such fiery journalism forced the British to ban such vernacular material. Organizations and public meetings in London stimulated some of the earliest Sikh nationalist publications. Many such meetings were also religiously attended by Sikh students. Pamphlets came to be distributed among Sikh troops and farmers urging them to join in the struggle against the Britishers. This movement slowly started creating an impact even among the Sikh diaspora, particularly in North America.²

California became an important centre of Sikh associations and literary activity. In the early 1900’s, Punjabis in San Fransisco acquired a Printing Press and renamed it Yugantar Ashram. The movement produced revolutionary cells throughout East Asia and India. It also resulted in the publication of a controversial newspaper, the Ghadr, meaning Mutiny or Rebellion, (which was initially started in Urdu, and later also in Punjabi and Hindi). The first issue of Ghadr was published in 1913, its articles confined to the British rule. The Ghadr mainly preached a message of revolution.³

The works emanating from Sikh centres emphasized the economic and social conditions of the people of India, hoping to generate sympathy and foreign help from the powerful nations.⁴ Oppressive British policies were exposed alongwith the British policy of divide and rule.⁵ Although theoretically addressed to the Indians, much of this literature pertained to the Punjab and the Sikhs. Apart from discussing specific problems affecting the Sikhs, articles attempted to stir Sikh spirits by repeatedly emphasizing their

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³ Ibid, p. 100.
⁵ Ibid, p. 102.
symbols and self-image. The British government in retaliation to such public outburst adopted a variety of tactics to meet threats from hostile writers. Ordinances were passed between 1908 and 1911, by the British Government of India to halt the flow of revolutionary propaganda.⁶ Particular interest was paid to the Sikh publications on account of the major role played by the Sikh army within the Indian army.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Government of Punjab, possessed several laws affecting its control of literature judged as inflammatory or seditious.⁸

According to N.G. Barrier, printed books and newspapers constitute a major set of unused material. Although Punjabi and Sikh literature generally declined after 1849, there is indication that the Sikhs were writing on virtually every subject. By 1910, there were over twenty Sikh newspapers and journals, supplemented by the work of scholars and publicists such as Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Babu Teja Singh Overseer and Bhai Vir Singh. Sikh intellectuals organized the Khalsa Tract Society and the Panjabi Prachar Sabhas, which in turn institutionalized the spread of Sikh literature in the Gurmukhi script.⁹

Out of these many newspapers, periodicals and journals published during the Victorian era, some did take up the task of drawing the attention of the common man towards the social issues particularly towards the general plight of women. Indian women and all aspects of their life came to be compared with that of the European and the Western women, especially the British women. Tremendous comparisons arose and it was found that these women were living two extreme lives, the Indian woman still trapped in age-old shackles of myth and superstition, while women from the developed countries of the world had no doubt a life of equal rights. What arose as a mere observation eventually assumed the form of the growth of the feminist movement in India, with social reformist organizations like the Brahmo Samaj, Prathana Samaj, and

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the Arya Samaj having spread their branches all over the country. The Singh Sabha effectively carried out this multifarious role of liberating the women of Punjab, by focusing on their education. It was strongly felt that in order to emancipate the Sikh women, education was to play a key role. The Press was used an effective medium of communicating their ideas and rationale behind the reforms being brought about, thus reaching a vast majority in a short time. Results were encouraging. Amritsar became the main centre from where the vernacular Punjabi newspapers, journals and periodicals came to be published, some of which were printed daily, some others became weekly publications, fortnightly and so on. These had a deep impact in moulding the thought process of the people of Punjab and making them abreast of the changes happening around them. Along with articles relating to the freedom movement, writers also highlighted the conditions that prevailed in the society in the form of poems and satire. Large number of Punjabi poets wrote on various issues during this period, adopting numerous themes and writing in various genres. They provide a meaningful evidence on the society and culture of the period.\footnote{Daljinder Johal Singh, \textit{Society and Culture as Reflected in Punjabi Literature (1750-1850 A.D.)}, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1985, p. i.}

Punjabi literature produced between 1750-1850, has not yet been explored for reconstructing the socio-cultural history of the Punjab.\footnote{Ibid, p. ii; See also, Jatinder Sandhu, \textit{Attitude of Arya Samaj Towards Other Communities in Punjab}, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1997.} Punjabi literature produced during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is remarkable in the history of the Punjab. A bulk of this literature is in verse and some of the best poets of Punjab belonged to this period.\footnote{Ibid, p. 22.} The story of \textit{Puran Bhagat} had to be proverbially instructive to generalize social truths. For example, in this story, a son is the crown of the family, a wife–of the home, a king–of his subjects and clouds of the earth. Again a son, is regarded as a must to perpetuate the family, a banker, one who upholds family honour and a spiritual guide to secure redemption. Subscribing to Hindu beliefs and practices, Salvahan’s marriage with Luna has to be justified. When Luna, hesitates to marry Salvahan on account of her low caste, a danger to his Khatri caste, the latter tells us that there is no harm in seizing gold, knowledge and a low caste woman. In \textit{Raja Rasalu}, to
clean a sword is take blood, a house fed extensively on pulses brings defeat in the field and a woman kept indulgently is a source of distress.\textsuperscript{13}

During Ranjit Singh’s reign, Jat Sikhs, comprising a bulk of the Khalsa army, had the advantage of reverting to their traditional occupation at any time. There are indications of the existence of social hierarchy among the Jats at the village level. The Jats attached great importance to property in land. The size of landholding was the basis of one’s social status. It figured prominently during matrimonial alliances among those who were financially well-off. A Jat with a large holding also had more power and prestige as he had more labourers and menials attached to his family. These developments therefore led to the attachment of great significance to the number of male members in a family among the peasant proprietors as they were a source of strength for the family in farming as well as in the feuds fought. Sons also brought dowry, due to which a family’s social and financial status was further enhanced. In contrast, birth of a girl-child was viewed as a liability, especially among the poor classes. As a result, female infanticide came into vogue.\textsuperscript{14}

Economic conditions of Jat farmers had serious implications on their marriage arrangements and customs as well. Though there may be exceptions, there is indication that the chances of marrying their boys were rendered hopeless on account of small land holdings. They readily paid bride money to the parents of the girl, thus encouraging selling of daughters, resulting in wide age-differences between the marriage partners. The custom of widow re-marriage called Karewa also prevailed among them. There was also a marked difference between the Jats and Khatris, in so far as their social standing and values were concerned.\textsuperscript{15} A Khatri sahukar (money-lender) being economically well-off could spend enough on the dowry of his daughter. Infanticide was rare among them. Unlike Jat farmers, their profession did not require numerous male members for the purpose of collective labour in a family. They did not favour the idea of widow re-marriage and viewed such a custom with contempt.\textsuperscript{16} Meanwhile female infanticide was carried out by the village dai’s, by administering poison with the first feed to the newly born girl.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}, p. 224.
Certain kinds of social etiquettes and rules came to be determined by the traditions of the family and also by the interfamilial relationships. Adherence to certain norms of affinal ties was so imperative that the girl’s parents were forced to be humble. A daughter’s right in her parents home was constantly validated through the gifts she received on her occasional visits after marriage. Adjustment of a bride in her in-laws house depended much on the dowry she brought along. The primary concern of the mother’s therefore became to train their daughters to adjust to their life after marriage. For the young wife the dictates of the mother-in-law and the sister-in-law became a constant source of pain and grief.\(^\text{18}\)

A woman’s life came to be confined within the four walls of the house with all kinds of relatives regulating her behaviour and making decisions for her. She had practically no say in her own house-hold matters and moreover she came to be judged on the basis of her efficiency in pleasing the members of her family. A good wife was considered as one who could cook, sew clothes and spin. It was only on the basis of her adjustment with her husband’s family that the prestige of her parental home could be ensured. Adultery was considered as one of the greatest sins. According to Qadir Yar, a writer, it was regarded as unpardonable even after one’s death.\(^\text{19}\)

Warris Shah, another poet, considers a husband’s longevity as the ideal blessing for a wife. According to him, shoe-beating was the only proper punishment for a gadding wife.\(^\text{20}\) Many of these poets do express the significance of marriage as a social regulator. Family integrity and chastity of women was the primary concern. Marriage was being governed by kinship rules. A liaison earned a social odium. A grown-up married girl became a source of constant pain to her parents, leading to the practice of child-marriage. More than verything else, marriage was sacramentally indissoluble. According to Nijabat, divorce was viewed with great contempt. Infidelity became a matter of social dishonour among people of respectable classes. People largely did not favour re-marriage of widows. Divorce was not feasible even among the agrarian classes. Amongst all this, dowry existed pre-dominantly.\(^\text{21}\)


\(^\text{19}\) *Ibid*, p. 272.


Birth of sons called for great rejoicing and feasting whereas a daughter’s birth generally passed off unnoticed. Celebration of a son’s birth on one hand led to mourning of a daughter’s birth on the other. Regarding the custom of ‘Sati’, there is only one known reference by Jaffar Beg about the queens of Ranjit Singh becoming Satis, after his death. Apart from this there are no reported cases of Satis in Punjab, esp. among the Sikhs. All this and much other information regarding the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political life of the people of Punjab in general and also the Sikhs in particular can be re-constructed by an analysis of the records available to us in the form of newspaper articles, periodicals, journals and pamphlets duly preserved at the Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar. Although most of them are now in a torn condition, they nevertheless transport a researcher into the era in which they were published. These contemporary records stressed largely on the freedom movement and the issues addressed by the freedom fighters, contemporary movements that began in Europe, Russian influences on Indian politics, etc.

One such article published in the Jungi Azadi, mentions the participation of the women of district Amritsar, village Ladewal and Havelian, who belonged to the Aap Rakheya League. These women came together and made effective use of a trait they had acquired during their school days to provide monetary assistance to the drought affected people of Bengal. The women of these villages sowed some rice and donated the proceeds of this sale towards the noble cause. This self-less gesture of social service created an excitement among the rest of the Bengalis, who came forward in large numbers to make more such donations towards the Bengal Relief Fund and thus play their part in lessening the woes of the drought victims.

The Civil Military Akhbar, published from Quetta, was a weekly newspaper. An article published in this newspaper, in the year 1907, refers to the social work undertaken by a women’s organization, Istari Sudhar Sabha, based in the province of Jammu, was had been actively functioning since the past one year. This Sabha was started by Shrimati Pandita Jivan Mukta Ji. A Jod-Mela was successfully organized for a week. Around


thirty-five women had given monthly donations to the Sabha. Pradhan of this Sabha was Sardar Kishen Singh Maktu. It was due to the efforts and initiative of his wife that the Sabha had flourished. Due to her efforts, that monthly donations were collected. Donation collected amounted to rupees eighty-four, out of which rupees fourteen were spent on religious expenses and the remaining seventy rupees were deposited in the Sabha fund. Apart from this the Sabha collected some more donations which were spent on various tasks like celebration of Diwali, Puranamshi and the Gurpurab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Avtaar Dharan, Baisakhi celebrations and on conducting the marriages of orphaned girls. The Sabha was organized every Wednesday in the premises of Gurmat Kanya Pathshala, during which discourses were held on the topic of betterment of women’s conditions in society. One such lecture was given by Shriamtii Gyan Kaur, wife of Sardar Chanda Singh, who had been invited as the Chief-Guest on the occasion. A yearly Report of the Sabha was presented by Shrimati Pandita Jivan Mukta. After the presentation of the yearly Report, students of the Gurmat Kanya Patshala are said to have presented a programme of Shabd recitation, which inspired thirty more women to join the Sabha as members. Following this, seventy two girls from the Gurmat Kanya Patshala, who had passed their yearly examinations, were awarded prizes and monetary incentives. Prizes were also awarded to widows who had been receiving their education on the basis of donations received from this Sabha. Women teachers of the Sabha also received prizes from Sardar Sadhu Singh, a Forest Officer of Baluchistan.24

Another article published in the same newspaper’s September issue urged the women to imitate the foreign women. The article’s writer clarifies that he does not want the Indian women to blindly copy the Western women in matters of dress, external appearance or smoking and drinking or dance and party like them but to follow them in matters of education and inculcating a spirit of forward thinking and questioning attitude. He wants them to sift good from bad giving the example of a swan and a crow.25

On 8, January, 1910, a poem published in the Civil Military Akhbar, describes in detail the values and parting advice being given by a father to his daughter on the eve of her wedding. Being a lengthy poem it addresses each and every aspect of a woman’s

24 Civil Military Akhbar, ṇfšqţ.Ɩ|Xko Čgɨw2], Quetta, June 8, 1907.
25 Civil Military Akhbar, Quetta, ṇfřzv rʃonK dh oh; ὐ, September 16, 1909, p. 2.
duty after marriage and reflects the idealism that is thrust upon the bride-to-be. On the eve of her marriage, the girl is reminded of the superior expectations that her in-laws family would have from her and how she must fulfill their expectations failing which her life would go astray. newspapers of the later era stress more on the need to educate women and the importance of equipping them with all types of education.

The Khalsa Samachar, published from Amritsar, following the Russo-Japanese war, tells of how the Japanese Government worried over their short height were advised to marry taller women by their elders as a solution. The article links this Japanese dilemma to the Indian context, by proclaiming that on the one hand the Japanese are seeking solutions for increasing their height and on the other hand, we have pushed our women to the darkest corners of ignorance. The writer stresses on the need to increase our mental development. This darkness and ignorance of the womenfolk could be dispelled only by education. Our women were to be encouraged to realize the worth of education. Educating Sikh women meant educating the Sikhs.

Another Punjabi weekly organ of the Sikhs, Punjabi Darpan, in one of its news clipping lays stress on the need to educate the women of Hindustan in the science of medicine (Hakimi). Information is provided to those interested in seeking admissions to this profession by listing Lord Hardinge Women’s Hakimi College in Delhi, as the institute providing this course exclusively for women. However, the main drawback here is that as the medium of instruction followed by the Lord Hardinge Women’s Hakimi College is English, many women are not able to benefit from its services. Another article from the same newspaper, Punjab Darpan, refers to a Report submitted by the Vidayak Committee and Prabandhaks of the Pathshalas. One of the observations made by a scholar in the Report is quoted here. The scholar notes that on seeing the condition of women, one can infer the level of development reached by

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26 Civil Military Akhbar, Quetta, Xh Be{ jo xo sO B th fyo x f;f, January 8, 1910, p. 4.
27 Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar, fjsqhfjyk, 17th June, 1908.
the community (of the Sikhs) as a whole. The Sikh Vidayak Committee also feels a dire need to review the state of female education in general.29

With Russian influence in particular and western influence in general looming over the Indian scenario in the early 1900’s, social reformists were concerned about their implications on the Indian women. Even the Sikhs viewed these changes with a lot of apprehension. Happiness was expressed over the event of the women of village Kairon, having come to Amritsar to spread the wave of improving the conditions of women. Serious objections were raised over the wearing of western clothes by women of this area, especially wearing of Russian style clothes. It was held that blind imitation of western culture spoiled communal harmony and such behaviour on the part of women was not sanctioned by the Sikh religion.30

Another social evil considered as an integral part of the traditional Indian society comes into focus in the contemporary Punjab of the early twentieth century, the practice of buying and selling women. Although there is an indirect reference to this practice by way of a play advertisement in the same issue of the Punjabi Darpan, it does highlight the existence of one of the most heinous social crimes against women, despite a ban on this practice by the government. The advertisement states that the play is being staged to help in creating an awareness amongst people, by enacting the lawful action that should be taken against those who indulge in the buying and selling of women, an evil commonly practiced in the hilly areas of Punjab.31 Though one could successfully construct many unknown facets of Sikh women’s history, these immemorial marvels in print are mostly found in a torn condition.

The Khalsa Advocate, dated 15th July, 1904, adopts a tough stand against the practice of dowry and lavish expenditure incurred at the time of marriages.32 Similarly The Khalsa Advocate, dated 29th April, 1905, states that the Singh Sabha prohibited the use of purdah.33

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29 Punjabi Darpan, Amritsar, Wednesday, February 21, 1917, p. 3.
30 Punjabi Darpan, Amritsar, Wednesday, June 6, 1917, p. 3.
31 Punjabi Darpan, Amritsar, Wednesday, June 6th, 1917.
32 The Khalsa Advocate, Lahore, July 15th, 1904, p. 6.
33 The Khalsa Advocate, Lahore, April 29th, 1905.
**Istri satsang**, (issues available–April 8, 1904 to March 25, 1909), is a newspaper dedicated to the cause of women. Passing references are made to the problems faced by women and their status. Excerpts from the *Gurbani* are given in detail and there is reference to the performance of prayer by women. Elsewhere hymns from the *Gurbani* are taught. Development of female education and the condition of widowed women is also mentioned by way of yearly Reports and articles. Major stress of this newspaper is on the Sikh religion, its values, rules and regulations. Another newspaper *Nayak*, (issues available–December 8 1920 to January, 1922), traces the independence movement in India and the participation of its people in it. References to the organization of some conferences of the time are also found. *Panth Premi*, (Available issues – June 18, 1928 to May 25, 1929), provides a gist of the times. It mentions the conditions of the Gurdwaras and the related laws passed for Gurdwara reformation. It also carries news related to the independence movement, highlights the role of Sikh martyrs and the contributions of the philosophers of the Khalsa Panth. There are brief notes also on the Simon Commission. The Sikh Educational Conference of Sargodha is stated coupled with some advertisements. *Sacha Dhandora*, (available issues – August 31, 1909 to November 2, 1935), refers to the new developments within the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhk Committee and the issue of Gurdwara Sheesh Ganj Sahib.

It also describes the Punjab State Conference and the Shimla Resolution, gives information about Gandhi’s Round Table Conference and the british. The Satyagraha movement is also discussed. In addition one finds some illustrations and advertisements in the newspaper. The *Khalsa Samachar* (Available issues – May 27, 1908 – September 14, 1950), discusses various aspects of the religion of the Sikhs, its problems and development. Along with the bani of the *Guru Grant Sahib*, it also gives religious and moral discourses to the Sikhs. It also refers to the Gurdwaras and their importance in the life of the Sikhs. Reports of the Sikh educational conferences are also published. There is also a list of books on the Sikh religion and history. Political, social and other information is also found alongwith advertisements.

Various issues of the *Khalsa Akhbar* (Published from Lahore) highlight the importance of female education, and the urgent need to involve them in the mainstream affairs of both society and religion. The *Khalsa Akhbar* dated 6th November, 1886 states that education of women is extremely neccessary both for the development of the Sikh
community as well as for the growth and advancement of the Sikh religion.\textsuperscript{34} The same newspaper in its issue dated 4th August, 1888 underlines once again the need of female education.\textsuperscript{35} In order to explain the importance of female education, male members of the society are addressed through the article.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover another article considers man as a complete without the company and support of a woman and thus the male members of the society cannot fulfill their worldly obligations by not giving the women their due.\textsuperscript{37}

The\textit{ Khalsa Akhbar} dated 23rd February, 1900, stresses on the need of rising above caste and such other considerations at the time of solemnising marriages.\textsuperscript{38} The\textit{ Khalsa Akhbar} recurrently emphasizes the importance of female education in Punjab as being indispensable for the betterment of the Sikh community.\textsuperscript{39}

The\textit{ Punjab Darpan} (Issues available - August 30, 1916 to September 14, 1950), published recurrent news clippings on the Europe and the World War and its effects. It also reflected upon the impact of the World War on the Indian political and social scene. Reports and proceedings of the Sikh Educational Conferences were published by the\textit{ Punjab Darpan}. Development of the Arya Samaj movement in Punjab is accompanied by some editorials and advertisements. Another newspaper, titled\textit{ Beer}, (Available issues--May 16, 1911 to December 7, 1924), was published in Punjabi from Amritsar, carrying many articles relating to the political scenario of the time, developments within the Khalsa Panth, advertisements, etc. A Punjabi newspaper titled

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Khalsa Akhbar}, Lahore, #dHlaig dl.Ddbj sg ;IPia$@ 6th November, 1886, p. 5 :

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Khalsa Akhbar}, Lahore, #dHlaig dl.Ddbj sg vC$@ 4th August, 1888, p. 4 :

duaVj jlj s[lg Fij b,a wv vCdbj sg fChjHg af :i s[Gs[ hV Rpl Vjv'G l'J dl.hj Fg dhla+g dlhj r,v dZijV VhkJ s[Gs[ lJ dlhM bj' dw dhla+g dlhj sg wpN ;IPa Vhk lqNs[ m

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Khalsa Akhbar}, Lahore, 6th November, 1886, p. 3 :

dul f+wji dhW b,s[ h'S Sa[ qVp<tg wjSj hp.sj ] ba[ dhW Wjh h'S[ a[ vp.rj hp.sj ] @ dhHg f+wj dhla+g bV% h'S[ Vjv bjsqg Vgq rdLg bioja b.Zj qPit dddSjJ ujs ] m

Bharat, (Issues available- March 25, 1917 to April 8, 1917), was published weekly, carrying religious, political and educational information, focusing on the Sikh Women Educational Conferences, and celebration of various festivals.\(^{40}\)

Education in the Punjab on the advent of the British rule cannot be said to be in a flourishing condition. The Sikh form of education (Vernacular Education in Gurmukhi), may be said to have been in its infancy, but Gurmukhi was of yet to be develop.\(^{41}\) The Educational Despatch of 1854 placed the subject of female education under the care of the Supreme Government and the matter received due attention at the hands of the local government all over India.\(^{42}\) The educational experiment of the British Government in India was carried on by the Education Department under the Provincial Government and in doing so, many problems of various kinds were encountered in the Punjab.\(^{43}\) Regarding the type of education imparted to the women, it was almost entirely of a religious or semi-religious character.\(^{44}\) By the turn of twentieth century, the Sikh reformers realised that only educated women could play an important role in the propagation of Sikhism; transmitting its ethical and moral values to the Sikh children and youth. To achieve this objective, they debated the pattern of curriculum for women education through their newspapers and periodicals. Prominent among them were the Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar (1899); the Khalsa Advocate, Lahore (1901); Istri Satsang, Amritsar (1904); Istri Samachar, Quetta (1908); Punjabi Bhain, Ferozepure (1907); Istri Sudhar, Amritsar (1924); Phulwari, Amritsar and Lahore, (1924); Akali, Lahore (1920); Pritam, Montgomery and Lahore (1922); and Fateh, Lahore (1927).\(^{45}\)

Majority of these newspapers are found in the Punjabi language which had a wide reach, being vernacular in nature. Another feather in their cap was the printing of these newspapers from Amritsar, Punjab. Therefore they had a wider audience and


\(^{42}\) Ibid, p. 71.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, p. 11.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, p. 18.

scholarly contributors. On reading these newspapers one is awestruck at the manner in which these newspapers performed their duty of making the people abreast of facts and just not information. One finds them following the principle of fearless journalism both in theory and in practice. Alongwith political, social, economic and other current events, women’s issues have also been tackled by them. A large scale movement for the empowerment of Sikh women began from Punjab with full support of these newspapers. Organisations of the Singh Sabha became the foremost in leading the cause of the emancipation of Sikh women using the medium of education. It becomes quite interesting to note how women stepped full-flegedly into a life and society beyond the four walls of the home starting first by entering schools. Singh Sabha reformers had a tough time convincing their families to allow them to attend school.

The Sikh Educational Conference promoted the ‘cause’ of the Punjabi language and female education. These became the main concerns of the Sikh Educational Conference, inaugurated in 1908 in Gujranwala.46 Thus began a movement of educational renaissance in Punjab. The Conference soon became a great source of inspiration for the Sikhs. Schools were opened in quick succession throughout Punjab. In addition to these schools, over two dozen Punjabi libraries and literary associations also came to up.47

Apart from promoting communal harmony, the Sikh Educational Conference worked not only for the education of boys but also for girls, for whom a large number of schools and colleges were established. The much needed incentive, in this case, was provided by two of the greatest advocates of women’s education and promoters of the Conference; Bhai Takht Singh of Ferozepur and Baba Nihal Singh of Kairon. The impetus given by these veterans helped in furthering the noble cause of women’s emancipation in Punjab. The conference also played an important role in the advancement of physical education and also triggered a revolutionary awakening among the masses.48 Papers presented at the various sessions of Sikh Educational Conferences

46 Doris R. Jakobsh, Relocating Gender in Sikh History; Transformation, Meaning and Identity, New Delhi, 2003, p. 150.
made due reference to the glorious legacy of female education among the Sikhs.  

Besides laying emphasis on women’s reform amongst the Sikhs, promotion of the study of Punjabi language and literature was equally important on the agenda of these conferences. Karamjit Singh's study highlights in general the status and role of women in the history of Punjab, especially during the nineteenth century. The period of study is divided into three different phases, 1800-1839, 1839 to 1849 and 1849 to 1900, in order to understand not only the changes that took place in their position and status from time to time, but also to highlight the significance of their role in the polity and society of the nineteenth century. The impact of social evils on the position of women in the medieval period is discussed along with the efforts made by the socio-religious reform movements supported by British legislation and liberalisation towards the emancipation of Sikh women.

The writer is of the view that various socio-religious evils like the caste system, purdah, female infanticide, early marriage in turn leading to early widowhood, treatment of widows, polygamy etc. lowered status of women in society.

Other sources of popular Sikh literature in the form of pamphlets, periodicals and journals of the study period were not available for research as they have been destroyed during the Operation Blue Star from the Sikh Research Itihaas Board, Golden Temple premises, Amritsar. Female education began in Punjab from Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepur. However, a visit to the Bhai Takht Singh Library situated within the school’s premises, revealed that much of the valuable literature had perished in a flood. The remaining documents which were saved from the flood were then deposited with the Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, which has now become the only source of reviewing contemporary literature.

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