PREFACE

Women’s issues have always created a deep urge in me to prod deeper into their problems and the manner in which these problems are faced by them. Women since ages are addressed as the weaker sex and it becomes ironical that apart from a section of the male population, majority of the women themselves support this view. In building gender attitudes of people religions play a major role. The scope of the Sikh religion covers almost every aspect of an individual’s life. Hence, a dire need was felt to delve into the literature of the Sikhs and dig out information that may even remotely be related in any manner whatsoever to the gender ideology of the Sikhs. Though this study went through its initial teething problems, eventually questions regarding the nature of this research work acquired clarity. The research work is based primarily on the fundamental question arising in our minds, “What is the Status of Sikh Women within the Sikh religion?” A host of subsequent questions arose and resulted in the birth of this study. Thus began the process of reconstructing the gender history of the Sikhs for the period, 1500 to 1920 CE. For this purpose, all available literature on the Sikhs has been analysed both objectively and critically.

For the purpose of reducing ambiguity and providing meaning and utilitarian value to the study, all possible and related aspects of Sikh literature have been reviewed, analysed and inferences have been drawn taking into account the historical value of the literary sources assessed. Chapter I as an introductory chapter traces the origins of the Sikh religion, its historical developments and the projection of gender in Sikh historiography. Chapter II portrays the gender notions of the Sikhs as reflected in the Guru Granth Sahib, Varan Bhai Gurdas, the Janamsakhis, Dasam Granth and the Gurbilas literature which constitute the early Sikh literature. Chapter III discusses the gender issues and concerns arising from the Hukamnamas and Rahitnamas, while the next Chapter charts the formation of gender identity from Sikh historical literature (1750-1920). Women issues in popular Sikh literature and journalism for the period 1890-1920 are taken up in Chapter V. Gender ideas and insights in Sikh Rahit Maryada are sought in Chapter VI. Since the entire work revolves around the role, status and identity of the Sikh women, Chapter VII is devoted wholly to the role played by the prominent Sikh women
in Sikh history and tradition. Towards the completion of Chapter seven, the picture was clearer than before. Sikh women definitely have a history, which is reflected through the writings of the Sikhs, both sacred and secular. This is not a tall statement being made but a fact that has been unearthed after painstaking investigation and study of literary and scholarly works.

Chapter VIII summarises the study undertaken and draws valid conclusions emerging as a result of analyzing the available primary and secondary sources. The need for undertaking the study also arose from an inherent dearth of scholarly and historical writings on the Sikhs in general and on the role and status of Sikh women in particular, information on which was hitherto scattered in bits and pieces. A need to present a wholistic perspective on the gender relations of the Sikhs was the reason behind the proposed research work.

In the completion of this work, many individuals and institutions have provided me with their expertise, guidance and support. I have been extremely fortunate to be able to create for myself a group of well-wishers, who became my greatest source of inspiration and encouragement and who also had tremendous faith in my abilities as a researcher. For all this and much more which I may be unable to express in words, I thank my Supervisor, Dr. Sulakhan Singh, who considered me apt enough to undertake this scholarly work and constantly strived to make me work to the best of my abilities and capabilities. I am also grateful to the Librarian and Staff of Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, as well as the Librarian and other Staff of the Library of the Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, the Sikh History Research Department situated in the premises of Khalsa College, Amritsar; the New Book Company, Jalandhar; Capital Book Depot, Chandigarh; the English Book Shop, Chandigarh; and the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh for providing me with a calm, serene and peaceful environment alongwith their library facilities. I thank the Librarian and other Staff of Dr. Balbir Singh Sadan, Dehradun, as well as of Trimurti Bhawan, New Delhi and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid Section, Punjabi University, Patiala for providing me with their valuable resources. I also thank K.G. Graphics, Amritsar for their whole hearted co-operation during the process of type-setting of this thesis. I am equally indebted to Prof. Balwant Singh Dhillon, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru
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