CHAPTER IV
ISSUES AND DEBATES

In 1902, the Chief Khalsa Diwan was founded which replaced the earlier parallel bodies of the Lahore and Amritsar Khalsa Diwans. The unification of leadership under the new organization gave a new impetus to the promotion of education among the Sikhs. It was a major plank of the Singh Sabha programme. Chief Khalsa Diwan adopted this programme with much more vigour and enthusiasm. The Diwan leaders felt that education was the only key to achieve success in their religious mission. The leaders were conscious of the lack of the education among Sikhs. Majority of them were illiterate and hence incapable to differentiate the unsikhs from the Sikh elements in the Sikh social and religious order. They felt difficulty in adapting themselves to the circumstances accompanying the British rule and they fell behind in education and official employment.¹ On the other hand the government and Christian missionaries had popularized the new mode of education. The other communities of the province had taken it open heartedly to get all kinds of material benefits of the British raj. Sikhs could not ignore these benefits any longer if they wanted to promote their religious as well as material interests.

Arya Samajists, Dev Samajists, Sanatan Dharmis and Brahma Samajists among the Hindus, Ahmadiyas among the Muslims were already active on the educational front. The Sikhs too had not been ignorant of what was happening around them. They had made a promising start by establishing schools in different parts of the Punjab. To set up Khalsa College at Amritsar for higher education towards the end of 19th century was the product of their ambitious scheme.² But still the pace of progress was very slow. Till 1907, there were only seven Khalsa schools and pathshalas in the province. To promote the Gurmukhi script or Punjabi language and education of their community, the Chief Khalsa Diwan set

up Sikh Educational Conference in 1908 in Gujranwala. The impetus for the conference came from a similar endeavour among the Muslims of Punjab. By 1905, the Muhammadan Educational Conference had received a good deal of publicity through various Sikh means. In the intervening years the Khalsa Advocate had started calling a similar venture among the Sikhs.³ It was Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, a leading personality of Chief Khalsa Diwan, who envisaged the scheme of setting up the Sikh Educational Conference. He organized an all Indian Sikh Conference at Khalsa College Amritsar on April 12, 1904. The proposal for the founding of Sikh Educational Conference was mooted in the annual report of Khalsa College by Sardar Naranjan Singh for the first time, who was officiating Principal of Khalsa College, Amritsar in 1905. In this report he suggested to launch 'a movement under the name of Sikh Educational Conference and to hold its sessions on the occasion of Diwali and Baisakhi festivals'. Later on a Sikh missionary group led by Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia visited Sindh and attended the session of the Muhammadan Educational Conference at Karachi in December 1907.⁴ They were deeply influenced by proceeding of the Muhammadan Educational Conference and returned home with the determination to have the same kind of organization for their own community.

On the day of January 9, 1908, Sardar Sunder Singh invited few leading Sikhs at his residence, with Sardar Tarlochan Singh as Chairman and Bhai Jodh Singh as Secretary. After some discussion, it was decided to start a Sikh Educational Conference on the pattern of the Muhammadan Educational Conference. Ten days later, a meeting was convened at Majithia house and plans were formulated for the establishment of Sikh Educational Conference. Those who attended meeting included Sardar Umrao Singh, father of the painter Amrita Shergill, Sardar Khazan Singh, Bar-at-law and Sardar Inder Singh, who later became Prime Minister of the Faridkot state.⁵ To draft a constitution for the

³ Doris R. Jakobsh, Relocating Gender in Sikh History, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, 150.
⁵ Ibid., 13-14.
proposed conference a committee of five members that included Sardar Gurcharn Singh, Sardar Kharak Singh and Bhai Dan Singh from Lahore, Professor Jodh Singh of Amritsar and Bhai Gulab Singh of Gujranwala was appointed. The proposals of the committee with some minor changes were later approved by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the sponsoring body. It’s real enthusiasm and guidance came from Bhai Vir Singh of Amritsar who subsequently became the driving force behind this venture.

When the constitution was finally adopted, it was decided that the conference would meet once every year. The dates of each annual session were to be determined before hand by an Educational Committee to be set up as the executive council of the conference. If no dates were announced three months before the session, it was understood that the conference would meet during the Easter holidays.

The membership of the conference was open to the following categories of persons on payment of certain fees on yearly or permanent basis:

- The members of the Educational Committee, delegates, fellows and members of the Reception Committee.

Besides these, the following people had right to attend the conference session:

- Special visitors, visitors, *sahaiks* (helpers) of the Reception Committee, press representatives allowed by the Reception Committee and the Educational Committee, volunteers enrolled by the Reception Committee and the Educational Committee, Ex-Presidents of the conference and any other gentlemen invited by Educational committee.

The Sikh Educational Committee was an autonomous committee of Chief Khalsa Diwan. It was composed of 13 members. They were elected in the following way:

- 7 members were to be nominated by the Chief Khalsa Diwan

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7 Gurbachan Singh Talib and Attar Singh (ed.), *Bhai Vir Singh, Life, Times and Works*, Publication Bureau, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 1973, 34.

8 Teja Singh and Nanak Singh (ed.), *Silver Jubilee Book*, Sardar Shivdev Singh, Honorary Secretary, Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, April 1935, 49.

1 member to be elected by the various Diwans and Singh Sabhas
2 members were to be elected by the various educational institutions
2 members were to be elected by registered Sikh graduates
1 member to be elected by the Reception Committee of the place inviting
the next conference.¹⁰

The names of the members of Educational Committee were announced at
the conference. The Educational Committee had no President but functioned under
the guidance of a Secretary who was elected every year and was to hold the
meeting of the committee.

The main concerns and objectives of the Sikh Educational Conference were
to spread western sciences and literature among the Sikhs; to promote the study of
Sikh literature; to support and improve the existing Sikh educational institutions;
to encourage the opening of new Sikh educational institutions; to found
scholarships for the poor and deserving Sikh students; to further the cause of
women education among the Sikhs; to promote technical and agriculture education
and the work of original research among the Sikhs; to advance education among
the Sikhs by publishing and distributing educational books, journals, pamphlets
and other publications in addition to the reading of papers on scientific and literary
subjects; to hold yearly conferences at different places and inspire the Sikh sangat
to open schools and colleges and to render them requisite help; to make efforts for
securing assistance and aid applicable to private schools from educational
department of Punjab Government; to disseminate improved methods of
agriculture among the Sikhs; to spread religious education with secular education
and to encourage the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script and to help the Sikhs
for getting jobs in government and public sector.¹¹

The conference had following functions to perform: to consider and decide
educational matters that might had been approved by Subject Committee; to have

¹⁰ Chief Khalsa Diwan Di Karvai, April 5, 1908, 215, see also Brief Report of Educational Committee
¹¹ Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) Di Salana Report 1946-47, Sardar Surjit Singh
Majithia Honorary Secretary, Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Aroar Bans Press,
Amritsar, 25-27, see also Inder Singh(ed.), Golden Jubilee Book 1908-1958, Chief Khalsa Diwan,
Amritsar, 1958, 11-12 and Gurdev Singh Deol, Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, Life, Work and Mission,
educational papers read that might had been approved by the Educational Committee; if so advised by the Educational Committee, to appeal for funds in accordance with these rules and to consider and decide other matters, if any that might be put before it by the Educational Committee.  

The main function of the Educational Conference was to promote education and free people from the evils of illiteracy. With the above mentioned aims and objectives, Sikh started to hold annual sessions of the conference regularly. The annual session was held for three days. The location of the session was rotated annually. The date and place of the next session was to be decided during the process of each conference. The Golden Jubilee Book of Chief Khalsa Diwan meticulously described the detail of the three day procedure of an Educational Conference. It is stated that the prominent people of the area who wished to hold the session for the next year at their place sent a written invitation to the Educational Committee. On acceptance of the invitation by Educational Committee, the prominent members of that area organized themselves and formed a Reception Committee. 

The Reception Committee elected its President, Secretary and Joint Secretary. The Reception Committee made many sub-committees to perform various functions. These sub-committees were fund collection committee, langar committee, religious diwan committee, kirtan darbar committee, market committee, volunteer servants committee, lodging committee, exhibition committee, pandal committee, arrangement of procession committee, kavi darbar committee, enquiry committee and arrangement of cleanliness committee. It is the task of fund collection committee to collect funds from the fees payable by the different categories of participants and from voluntary donations in response to general appeals made at the session. Langar committee was to provide community meals to the gatherings. Lodging committee provided the places to visitors in tents and houses. Religious diwan committee was responsible to hold morning and evening religious congregations. Kirtan darbar committee was to

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13 See also, Fauja Singh, “Sikh Educational Conference”, 375.
invite the various kirtani jathas and allow them time to perform on the stage. Exhibition committee provided venue for the display handicrafts made by students of various schools and tools of agriculture. Market arrangement committee arranged shops and book stalls. Pandal committee looked after the management of conference pandal and the seating arrangements. Procession committee arranged the whole process of President’s procession of first day of the session and decided the route to be followed and made the arrangements accordingly. Besides these, there were committees of volunteer servants, of kavi darbar, enquiry committee and of the arrangements of cleanliness.

The first day of the conference started with the procession of the President who was to ride on an elephant or to move in a car. The students of local schools joined the procession. The music of the school bands or drums filled the zeal in the atmosphere. After procession, the President inaugurated the exhibition which was a way to promote education regarding different skills. Various schools displayed the handicraft things made by their students. Agriculture Department displayed agriculture tools and provided information about new modes of agriculture. Sometimes valuable items related to Sikh history like Kharadde (manuscripts), Hukamnamas and pictures were on the display in the exhibition. Exhibition was held for the whole duration of the conference.

Subject Committee was another important committee of the conference. Resolutins related to educational matters were sent to Subject Committee. Subject Committee passed the resolutions after discussion on them. Kirtan darbar and religious diwans were the main attractions of the day. Kirtan darbar was held to motivate kirtani jathas and to propagate education of ragas. There was a competition among kirtani jathas and awards were given to the three best performers. Expositions of kirtan and katha were held in the morning and evening religious diwans.

The second day began with the religious diwan followed by langar. The President of the conference was welcomed in a well decorated pandal. Then girls of the local schools or Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala sang a shabad or hymn. Arambik (opening) ardas was held. The President of Reception Committee delivered his speech. Then the students of various institutions read welcome addresses in the
honour of President of the conference. Speakers read articles and delivered speeches. After that appeals were made for ‘national fund’ which was meant for educational purposes. The Educational Committee was vested with full control over the management of all funds collected on behalf of the conference. Educational Committee provided financial aids to the schools. Passed resolutions by Subject Committee presented in the *pandal*. Resolutions were read by a person one by one. *Sangat* passed them with ovations of *Sat Sri Akal, Kavi darbar* was an important programme of the day. It was held after the evening religious *diwan*. Hindu and Muslim poets also participated in it. Poems were read on the issue of education.

On the third day religious *diwan* was held in the morning. Passed resolutions again presented and approved by the *sangat*. Prizes were distributed to the winners of *kirtan* and *kavi darbar*. Before the end of the conference the venue for holding the conference in the next year was decided. The enthusiasm of the conference resulted in the emergence of a new school or college at the conference place or in its surroundings.14

The conference has its own significance. It gave an opportunity to the people to gather at a place and to discuss their social, religious issues openly. Religious *diwans, kavi darbar*, exhibition and *langar* were main attractions for the people. Large sums were contributed for special programmes. It enriched the ‘national fund’.15 From this platform the Sikh intellectuals had raised a number of issues and debated about the contents of education to be imparted to the Sikhs in general and women in particular. The cause of women education, however, became the main concern of the Sikh Educational Conference.

The first session of the Sikh Educational Conference was held at Khalsa School, Gujranwala on April 17-19 under the Presidentship of Sardar Baghel Singh, *Rais* of Kulla (Lahore). The key speakers of the conference were Bhai Jodh Singh and Sardar Shivdev Singh Oberoi. They painted out the plight of education among the Sikhs or the overriding state of illiteracy among the Sikhs which was a

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14 *Golden Jubilee Book*, 18-21 see also Fauja Singh, “Sikh Educational Conference”, 373-375
15 N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature*, XXX.
major cause of the degrading condition of Sikhs and their community with in the
country as well as outside the country. They advised to open own educational
institutions to secure the Khalsa tradition.\textsuperscript{16} To open these, fund was a major issue.
To solve the financial problem a resolution was proposed by Sardar Sunder Singh
Majithia and under this it was appealed to members of the community to donate 4\textsuperscript{th}
part of their \textit{daswandh} (1/10 of the total income) for the educational betterment of
the community. That money was kept to spend on education of Sikhs.\textsuperscript{17} Such
appeals for raising fund was made in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Sikh Educational Conference, this
time the proposal for raising fund was made from Bhai Takhat Singh, an
emancipator of women.\textsuperscript{18}

The Educational Committee started to help in running the Sikh educational
institutions from the collected fund. In 1908 it spent 626 rupees as a financial aid
to these institutions.\textsuperscript{19} For the progress of education more money was required.
The Sikh Educational Committee tried number of ways to collect finance. In 1913
the proposal of ‘national fund’ was made by Bhai Jodh Singh. The committee
approved the proposal after discussion.\textsuperscript{20} Sardar Harnam Singh made the draft of
the scheme of ‘national fund’. It was accepted with majority in March 1914.\textsuperscript{21} At
the 4\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Educational Conference a permanent ‘national fund’ was raised under
the scheme. It was decided to provide aid to Khalsa schools from the interest of
the ‘national fund’. On the very first day, the response of the Sikh masses towards
the ‘national fund’ was admirable. On the appeal of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia,
an amount of 8000 rupees collected at the \textit{pandal} and promises were made for
more amount.\textsuperscript{22}

University, Patiala, 1973, 76.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Golden Jubilee Book}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{18} Khalsa \textit{Samachar}, April 7, 1910, 4.
\textsuperscript{19} Sardar Nahar Singh, M.A, “Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia and his Achievements”, \textit{Khalsa Advocate},
Amritsar, October 9, 1943, 3.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Karvai Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan De Samagam Di}, March 2, 1913, at office of
Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Karvai Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan De Samagam Di}, March 22, 1914, at office of
Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, n.p.
\textsuperscript{22} Khalsa \textit{Samachar}, February 29, 1912, 2, see also \textit{Golden Jubilee Book}, 8.
At next conference session, an overwhelming scene was emerged when a little girl Bibi Chattar Kaur, daughter of Sardar Mohan Singh Vaid of Tarn Taran appeared with her piggy bank to collect money for the educational cause. That money was made doubled under promise by Sardar Ram Singh Ji Kabli, whom she addressed as *dharam*-pita. At the 6th session of Sikh Educational Conference, held at Ambala in 1913 she collected 263 rupees from the conference *pandal* and in the same manner, it was made doubled with same amount by Ram Singh. That tradition was kept alive by Educational Committee for many years. To encourage the tradition committee started to give rewards who collected upto 500 rupees. At the 11th Sikh Educational Conference at Gujranwala one gold coin was given to Bibi Chattar Kaur and one to Tarlok Singh son of Sardar Attar Singh of Karachi, as rewards. Many a times, Bibi Chattar Kaur read poems in front of people to collect donation. She recited one such poem at the stage of the 11th Sikh Educational Conference. The poem aimed at motivating the Sikhs to donate liberally for the cause of education.

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हिंदु हिंदु छूट नहीं डिंठी आमाजन छूटे,
रखी आते ले लैं बापी कला लाए।

कॅप बुंदेल छूट दी दाती नहे टिकाएं हिंदु,
वे टिके यहाँ मैं मानत मटान गढ़ा गायी।

हिंदु हिंदु गंध जुमी धारे मैं मंदिरदेवी में,
पैंह लाईं ये ती मादाविस नहे आ जायी।

ईंट लाईं मंगले धारे गंध दे कुपरे गुड़,
ढंटे मंदिरदेवी में मैं भक्ती देख तां लड़ी।
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23 Sardar Ram Singh Ji was a contractor of Delhi. He lived for some years in Kabul. From that time onwards, people used to call him Ram Singh Ji Kabliwala or Kabli.
26 *Khalsa Samachar*, April 11, 1918, 2.
27 *Golden Jubilee Book*, 43.
For the promotion of education, special resolutions also presented and passed in which appeals were made to Sikh masses to open schools and libraries attached with village Gurdwaras and *dharmsalas*. One such resolution was passed at the 3rd Sikh Educational Conference at Amritsar.\(^{28}\) As a result many Khalsa schools were opened up in villages along with the cities. These Khalsa schools were not confined to central Punjab and princely states which had a predominantly Sikh population. They were also established in Muslim majority areas of Rawalpindi, Multan and out of Punjab like Agra, Hyderabad (Deccan), Ara (Bengal) and Burma. Within 10 years the number of schools reached up to 276.\(^{29}\)

At every Sikh Educational Conference emphasis was made on the importance of education. Many speeches were delivered and poems were recited for the purpose. For example Santokh Singh recited a poem at the 5th Sikh Educational Conference of Sialkot, which was published as a tract. The poet said that education was panacea to all evils in the society. It helps in doing away with our false sorrows as we begin to think in a rational manner. It is, therefore, road to the happiness and prosperity of the community.

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dispa te saba maha , maha sadh dharmi

dispa te saba, tara pharchhi

dispa te saba, suti jada baddi

dispa te saba, kaya baddi thad hai

dispa saba bhumi , maha badd sahbi

dispa um mithi , maha mit walhri

dispa hukumwad, maha hukumwad

dispa kithum, kithum kithum

dispa hukumwad, kithum kithum kithum\(^{30}\)
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\(^{28}\) *Report of the Educational Committee*, Chief Khalsa Diwan, 1934, 89 (Gurmukhi), see also *Golden Jubilee Book*, 6.

\(^{29}\) *Khalsa Samachar*, June 14, 1917, 3, see also Ganda Singh, "The Educational Conference", 77.

\(^{30}\) *Golden Jubilee Book*, 11.
Along with education of boys the conference attached great importance to education of Sikh women. However, the Sikh women were not elected as delegates at the first Educational Conference though some of them were putting their efforts in women education by teaching in Sikh schools. Nonetheless, the well wishers of the conference criticized the omission of women delegates. For ‘If we are to progress we must not leave our womenfolk behind.’ By the second Educational Conference held in Lahore in 1909, the Reception Committee resolved to admit women to the proceedings. It is noted fact that women as well as men were welcomed to the common langar (meal). At the second conference, special seating arrangements were made for women, a separate ‘Ladies Diwan’ was also planned for the conference. The special seating arrangement referred by the Khalsa Advocate was a curtained area behind which women sat at the conference. The one of the aims of Sikh Education Committee was to bring women at par with men both educationally and socially. At every conference session education of women remained major issue.

The conference gave Sikhs an opportunity to give their views on education of women and related topics. The thought provoking presidential addresses and speeches of Sikh intellectuals with main emphasis on women education were delivered from the stage of the conference. The Sikh newspapers Khalsa Akhbar, Lahore and Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar side by side published those speeches and occasionally quoted those in support of religious and homely education for their women. The steps in this case were also taken by Bhai Takhat Singh of Ferozepur, Bibi Agaya Kaur wife of Bhai Takhat Singh and Bhai Nihal Singh of Karion, father of the later Chief Minister of Punjab, Sardar Partap Singh Karion. Bhai Takhat Singh remained member of Sikh Education Committee from 1909 to till his death and used this platform for the progress and emancipation of women to a great extent.

32 Ibid., 151.
They all realized that education of women would be useful not only to the individual recipients but also to the community as a whole. The logic was simple that if the mothers were educated they would rear their children in such a manner that they would prove great assets to the community. Such kind of feeling was expressed by Sir Joginder Singh, wazir of Patiala state in his Presidential address at the fifth conference, at Sialkot in 1912. He said on behalf of Maharaja Patiala that our real and basic education starts at homes... Our mothers are the main sources of our conduct and character. They made us and our thoughts.

“भारती महों असे सल्ली विद्या दियाए दिख जी आज्ञात्र टूटी है
...........असी विद्याली दे मुखबर समी नं। विद्यार रखें माने भार पढ़ जाइ तल से समेत आज्ञात्र दुः घटनीहुईमां घट।”

The importance was given to women as the central figure of family and social life. It was believed that the progress of community and religion vested in the hands of women. The issue of women education became so popular that many poems, articles were started to recite and read on the conference stage. It is an important fact that these were listened by the visitors more interestingly and carefully. At the 6th conference Bibi Chattar Kaur recited a poem to shake the conscious of the people for girls’ education. She appealed the brothers (male members) of community to make some efforts for girls' education who had been ignored and thus remained illiterate and unintelligent. The Bibi Chattar Kaur appealed to the Sikh brethrens to not to ignore women in their own pursuit of education.

कुस्ता ता मायें भानी, घड़ू विधवाहरीन।
विद्यार उ तीन घठ खशुन विज्ञानीहर।
.............................................
भाभी हघवाली हीनें, कुसु मे रखतिकह।
भाभी ही तीन उजा, बलश विद्वानिकह।
भानी उं में बेंके छुटें साहीहर लटीहर।

33 Golden Jubliee Book, 9-10.
The President of the conference Leela Ram Singh from Sindh\textsuperscript{35} stated in his presidential address that women contribute significantly towards making men serve the society better. They could inspire them to do service by rising above self. It is much more important to educate women for the progress of the Sikhs and Sikh religion.

"भल कुष धरितु आजमा ई घर सलजी बसाइ करी बीमां बद्गूँ बन घर सलजी सभी तथा.... भूत्व जिम गात दा धीमी पवीत्र तै बि माडी को अने घात दा लंग सलजी सभी तथा ध्यान दे देखिए धौ। जिम लगी बसी तथा दा पुकार भीड़ियां दे घुल दर्द वस्ती वै..."

From the same stage Bibi Agaya Kaur wife of Bhai Takhat Singh read an article on women education. She depicted the poor condition of women. Men folk considered women as foolish and she said that men consider it a disgrace to seek advice from their wives. The arrangement of education only would make them intelligent and intellectuals.

"भल धीमती मं ई घेला दी सुजी दा दीघांगल धीमा तै हिंदु घर से मृदव मारुदे तथा बि धीमी दिम गात दा धिंतान दी तै बनदे, देवी तल धीमी मारुदे दी तै दे दिम दात दुः विचारें दी तै मारुदे, फांडी धीमी धुध बजा हिंदा। ............... धीमती बनदे ई घर धीमा तै। निम उम्मुं धमां दी विचार दा पुरूष दे से दिम उम्मुं धीमती मं दुसी दी देघे उम धीमा ही धीमा अते आजमा दिमाल मारुदियां घर सभी।"\textsuperscript{37}

She spoke about the patriarchal values that dominated the minds of men in her speech. She said that woman is no doubt physically weaker than men, but she

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Leela Ram Singh was an eminent person of the Sindh. His early name was Leela Ram. He worked as a judge. He had knowledge of Sikh religion and philosophy. In 1911 at the age of 55 he baptized to Sikhism.
\textsuperscript{36} Golden Jubilee Book, 13.
\textsuperscript{37} Khalsa Samachar, March 27, 1913, 3.
has the capacity to withstand challenges. The movement to educate women was already started by her husband Bhai Takhat Singh at Ferozepur many years ago. He was the only protagonist of girls' education when even the idea of educating women was yet to become acceptable.

Education of women remained central issue during every session of Sikh Educational Conference. Intellectuals and educationists declared that with education of a boy produce one educated person but with the education of a girl the whole family would be benefited. The thoughts of mother made reflection on the child when he or she was in the womb.

Different issues emerged in the meetings of Sikh Educational Conference. On the basis of these issues, it can be studied by dividing its development into three phases. In the first phase (1908-1918) they emphasized on the need of educating women. They debated over the special study schemes for girls. In the second phase (1918-1928) efforts were made for starting a separate Women Educational Conference. In third phase (1928-1938) Sikh Women Educational Conference began to the held with Sikh Educational Conference. It gave a platform to women for debating the issues concerning them.

During the first phase Sikh reformers tried to make community conscious with the fact that no community can make progress if their women would be uneducated.

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38 Khalsa Samachar, April 16, 1914, 9; see also, Joginder Singh, The Sikh Resurgence, 70-71.
At the very first session at Gujranwala they emphasized on “education of Sikh women”. In the second Sikh Educational Conference of Lahore they raised the issue of syllabus for them. They passed a resolution and demanded from the Education Department to introduce a special study scheme for girls in middle and high schools. They demanded that classes of cooking, nursing and child care in Punjabi vernacular should begin for women.  

Several educational institutions for women came up in different parts of the province. According to the scheme specials subjects introduced to be taught. The subjects like needle work, cooking, stitching were introduced as a part of curriculum for girls which could meet the future requirements of the girls when they grow. By the year 1915, as many as 8 Kanya Middle Schools, 36 Kanya Primary Schools, 5 boarding houses and 1 widow ashram were established which were affiliated to Chief Khalsa Diwan. With increasing number of girls schools, the requirement of women teachers was felt. The parents of the girls wished that only female teachers should be appointed to teach them. There was strong resistance to the idea of appointment of male teachers in girl schools. The leaders of the conference made arrangements for the training of female teachers at various places to meet the requirement of the schools. First of all Junior Vernacular (J.V.) and Senior Vernacular (S.V.) classes were started in the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala, Ferozepur and became world famous boarding school, producing ideal women teachers for community services.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan started a widow ashram to give them shelter and to protect them from life long stigma of widowhood at Amritsar. In 1912 fifty-four widows were admitted in this ashram. Besides giving them general education, these women were trained in needle work and cooking. The most important feature of ashram was the opening of training classes for the widows. Sardar

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41 Khalsa Samachar, October 9, 1913, 6.
Balwant Singh of Gujranwala was first to propose a scheme for the education of widows in the 7th Sikh Educational Conference. Under the scheme he appealed the community members to provide scholarships to widows to carry on their studies, so that their services can be used as teachers, doctors and nurses for the country.43 He also opened Sardar Balwant Singh Istri Sahaik Vidyala from his own fund.

The 7th Sikh Educational Conference was special for women. It gave opportunity to Bibi Savitri Devi, Bibi Agaya Kaur and Bibi Ripudaman Kaur to speak in the conference. Bibi Savitri Devi spoke on 'Sikh education system.'44 She was the only speaker who spoke in English and listened with attention by each member. Her words penetrated every heart and the beautiful rise and fall of her voice kept them spell bound. On the 2nd day of the conference Bibi Agaya Kaur of Ferozepur delivered her speech. She prefaced her lecture with a devotional hymn sung in accompaniment of a harmonium and five pupils of her own school. She spoke on women education about an hour without consulting a single note. This showed her complete mastery on the subject and kept the whole audience spell bound. After her Bibi Ripudaman Kaur, wife of Sardar Puran Singh of Dehradun delivered her paper on pantheism and mysticism. The strife between the soul and the flesh was vividly described, no wonder that such description brought tears in the eyes of many.45

At the occasion of 8th Sikh Educational Conference in 1915 Sikh reformers declared that their aim to educate women was to make them 'a gurmat kanya, gurmat bhain, gurmat istri and gurmat mata.46 For the overall development of their women they emphasised on education of physical exercises for the development of mind and intellect. At the very next conference they declared that the future of the community lay in the hands of learned and talented women.47 The conference gave special attention to the promotion of women education and preferred different courses for them. Bibi Agaya Kaur proposed a resolution at the

43 Khalsa Samachar, April 16, 1914, 9-10.
44 Diamond Jubilee Book, 23.
46 Golden Jubilee, 22.
47 Diamond Jubilee, 30.
9th Sikh Educational Conference, asking the Panjab University Lahore to prepare separate and easier course of entrance for girls than the boys. She insisted that the whole education of girls should be different from those of boys from the very beginning. The subjects of stitching, cooking would be more helpful for girls than Alzebra and Geometry in their practical life.

The issue of separate course took the concrete shape when a resolution was passed in the name of 'final examination scheme'. Under this scheme separate courses were suggested for those girls who wanted to continue their higher studies than those who just aimed at to pass metric examination. During initial 10 years the conference focused on the issue of women education. The leaders used every mean to make the Sikh people aware about the condition of women. The issues related to syllabus and ideal Sikh women teachers for *panthic* schools were raised more empathetically in years to come. At the 11th Sikh Educational Conference at Gujranwala they appealed to the management body of girls' schools to impart more education of home management and religious values. The need to produce more capable women teachers for girls' schools was also felt. They also made a

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50 Khalsa Samachar, April 18, 1918, 4.
sub-committee under Chief Khalsa Diwan to continuously monitor and revise the schemes of courses for girl schools.\textsuperscript{51}

The first phase showed great concern towards women. The number of women participants increased. The free mingling of both the sexes was main feature of the conference. The effective participation of women was noted by other community visitors. For instance, on the 10\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Educational Conference the speaker of Muslim deputation Nawab Julaafkar Ali Khan noted the progress of education among the Sikhs and congratulated the women for their participation in the works of community welfare.

In the second phase of the progress of Sikh Education Conference a very important issue of Sikh Women Educational Conference was raised. This idea was proposed by Babu Tek Singh, a master of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur in 1916 to hold Sikh Women Educational Conference along with Sikh Educational Conference so that the participation of women could be increased.\textsuperscript{55} But the proposal was refused by the Educational Committee of Chief Khalsa Diwan.\textsuperscript{54} To change the traditional attitude towards women was not so easy. The issue of Women Conference was again raised by Bhai Nihal Singh of Kairon in 1920.\textsuperscript{55} But due to the lack of mutual consent Educational Committee could not finalize its decision. Ultimately in 1928 they got success when a resolution was passed on

\textsuperscript{51} Karvai Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) De Samagam Di, February 8, 1920, Amritsar, n.p.
\textsuperscript{52} Golden Jubilee, 32.
\textsuperscript{53} Karvai Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) De Samagam Di, October 1, 1916 at office of Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{54} Karvai Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) de Samagam Di, November 19, 1916 Lahore, 25.
\textsuperscript{55} Karvai Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) de Samagam Di, February 29, 1920 Amritsar, n.p.
March 17, 1928 by the Education Committee and permission was granted to hold Women Conference along with Sikh Educational Conference.\textsuperscript{56}

By this time the educated women had realized that women's cause could not be left to the male activists. The students of girls' schools also raised demands to improve their conditions during these years. At the 18\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Educational Conference of Rawalpindi in 1927, the students of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur and Sikh Kanya Pathshala of Rawalpindi in letters of respect to President pointed out the deficiencies in education system like lack of good books and lack of facilities for physical exercise for them in their schools.

\begin{quote}

मदीना मिलियन भुवनेश्वर भजाना दाते। मझे कही वेला धामेब दृष्यी
भाषकारीं, मधील वेळा अलेक्जांडर रजा वेली विभाग दृष्यी हिंदा मांगे,
मधील विषयी दे माल्ल लहरी मझे महुदां विच वेली धूमध्य तामी?\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

The students of Ferozepur Mahavidyala also requested to found a Sikh girls college for the advancement of their education.\textsuperscript{58} There emerged a group of women intellectuals including doctors, teachers and inspectors of Education Department which was ready to play an active part in their development. Bibi Raminder Kaur, Bibi Kuldeep Kaur and Bibi Pritam Kaur (D/o Bhai Takhat Singh) were prominent activists of the group. On the demand of Raminder Kaur, Educational Committee provided time and venue to hold the Sikh women session during the 19\textsuperscript{th} Educational Conference at Montgomery.\textsuperscript{59} They were also allocated time to discuss specifically women related issues on fixed hours. Hence, on the occasion of Montgomery conference around 900 women assembled under the Presidentship of Bibi Raminder Kaur. Bibi Kuldeep Kaur (B.Sc.), Bibi Wazir Kaur and Bibi Pritam Kaur were eminent speakers of the session. They pointed out the deficiencies in women education. They raised the issues of less number of girls' schools in comparison to boys. There were 109 recognized senior secondary

\textsuperscript{56} Diamond Jubilee, 79.
\textsuperscript{57} Khalsa Samachar, April 21, 1927, 8.
\textsuperscript{58} Khalsa Samachar, May 5, 1927, 4.
\textsuperscript{59} Karvai Educational Committee (Cheif Khalsa Diwan) De Samagam Di, March 18, 1928, Amritsar, n.p.
schools in Punjab. Out of which 20 were high schools and 89 middle schools. Among these there was only one high school and ten middle schools for Sikh girls. They insisted on the need of capable women teachers and head mistresses for these schools. They also demanded a girls' boarding house at Lahore for those who came here for higher studies. Moreover one of the remarkable achievements of their efforts was the establishment of Sikh Women’s Association.\footnote{Educational Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) Di Vihvi Varshik Report 1928 (Gurmukhi), Wazir-i-Hind Press, Amritsar, March 1929, 57 -58.}

The leaders of Sikh Educational Conference also came forward to meet their demands. The President of the conference, Sardar Mohan Singh suggested to open libraries for women along with Singh Sabhas and Gurdwaras for their educational development.\footnote{Golden Jubilee Book, 86.} Later on, in the Brief Report of the Educational Committee of the year 1928, a separate chapter was devoted to women education. It was regretted in the report that there were no suitable arrangements of physical exercise for women in schools and the present system of their education required complete overhauling. The paucity of trained teachers was also felt.\footnote{Brief Report of the Educational Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan of the year 1928, Published by Educational Committee, Amritsar, March 1929, 6.} During this phase the Sikh Educational Conference also showed its regret on closing some girls' schools. In 1926 the conference recorded its strong protest against the policy of the local bodies and district inspecting staff of Attock, Rawalpindi, Jhelum in closing some of the Gurmukhi Girls’ schools known as Bedi Khem Singh's Girls schools with a view to stop the teaching of Punjabi among the Hindu and Sikh girls of these districts and thus practically stopping the advantage of education to women of these areas.\footnote{Brief Report of the Educational Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan of the year 1926, 16.}

In third phase a new beginning was made. In 1929 with the foundation of Sikh Women Educational Conference, women started to play more active role in educational matters. On the demand of Sikh Women Educational Association (earlier Sikh Women Association) the Education Committee gave permission to
organize separate Women Conference on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} day of Sikh Educational Conference. Some rules were made for Women Conference by Educational Committee as:

- the conference would be held under the supervision of Educational Committee,
- there would be no separate ticket of the conference and no separate appeal for grant would be made,
- initial permission of Educational Committee was required for any agenda of the conference.
- permission of Educational Committee was must for the members of conference and
- it was made necessary to present passed resolutions of the conference at the Sikh Educational Conference.\textsuperscript{64}

According to the proposed plan first Women Conference was held by Sikh Women Association on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} day of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Educational Conference at Sargodha. The conference expressed its concern over the poor conditions of women at homes and lack of primary education among them. The papers on child care and present conditions of homes were read by Bibi Pritam Kaur (B.A.B.T.), Inspectress of Schools, Kapurthala criticized the less number of Sikh girls' schools in her article, 'Our position in Sikh community'. She also raised the issue of ideal Sikh girl schools with the aims of producing 'ideal Sikh women'.

\textsuperscript{64} Karvai Education Committee (Chief Khalsa Diwan) De Samagam Di, March 17, 1929, Amritsar, n.p, see also Golden Jubilee Book, 90.
In another paper on 'women education' the speaker raised many issues. She spoke about the backwardness of the community in women education. She observed that the promotion of education is the only key of success for an ideal family life. She emphasized on the need of more primary schools for the progress of the Sikhs and religious education for Sikh children. She also emphasised that those girls who went for studies to Lahore in different schools and colleges were not taught the Sikh morals. They were exposed only to western education. They thus remained away from the teachings and training of Sikh tenets. The purpose of separate boarding house of Sikh women would be to train the inmates in the recitation of the *granth*, playing musical instruments like the sitar, harmonium. This was considered necessary to perpetrate the principles of ideal living.

The President of 20th Sikh Educational Conference Sardar Bahadur Sardar Bishan Singh strongly criticized the apathy shown by government and local bodies towards their education. He emphasized that the inspecting agency was responsible mainly composed of European or Anglo-Indian ladies for whom travel from village to village was uncomfortable. Moreover they were not motivated enough for their job. He suggested that government should take responsibility of maintaining primary schools of girls.\textsuperscript{66} Hence the Sargodha conference devoted all its attention towards the question of women education in villages. This conference passed a resolution and made authorities responsible for not creating adequate facilities for women education in the Punjab. It urged the government to take


\textsuperscript{67} The Khalsa, April 7, 1929, 8.
immediate steps for women education.\textsuperscript{68} By another resolution they put the demand of opening boarding house at Lahore.

The women intellectuals continued their efforts for the development of their education. At the 21st Sikh Educational Conference, Amritsar they reaffirmed the issues of the last conference. The resolutions were passed by the conference against the unsympathetic attitude of some local bodies towards education of women. Bibi Pritam Kaur and Bibi Kuldeep Kaur regretted the indifferent and unsympathetic attitude of the government and semi-government local bodies. They also noted that for many years not a single payment of grant-in-aid was made to Guru Nanak Girls Schools of Fatehjang, Nankana Sahib and Sahiwal by their respective bodies, despite of the fact that Education Department had sanctioned grants-in-aid and requests had also been made to the local bodies to pay it.\textsuperscript{69} At the women session of the conference Bibi Amrit Kaur and Bibi Pritam Kaur again passed the resolution of Sargodha conference pointed out the failure of authorities to provide adequate facilities for women education in the Punjab and urged the government to take immediate steps in this direction.\textsuperscript{70}

Women reformers realized the need of increasing number of women in the Education Department to raise the issues concerned with women more forcefully. The tried their best to bring awareness among women so that they could participate in a great number in the Sikh Educational Conferences. As a consequence, on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Sikh Educational Conference Lahore, they held women session on 2\textsuperscript{nd} day under the Presidentship of Shrimati Shiv Devi. The total attendance of women participants was 1,500. Besides Sikh women, there were Hindu, Muslim and European ladies. After singing hymns by girls of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur, Bibi Shiv Devi delivered her Presidential address. She raised the issue of absence of high schools for girls even in big towns like Lahore and Amritsar. She demanded from the government to provide at least one Sikh girls college in the province. She observed that in the absence of Sikh educational institutions, the girls would become ignorant about their own religious values and

\textsuperscript{68} Brief Report of 20th Sikh Educational Conference, Amritsar 1930, 35.
\textsuperscript{69} Educational Committee Chief Khalsa Diwan di Bevin Varshik Report, Amritsar, 1931, 40-42.
\textsuperscript{70} Khalsa Samachar, April 16, 1931, 5.
ethics. They easily would become targets of others religions. She emphasized on opening of more and more educational institutions to secure Sikh religion. At schools and homes religious education should be given to the children. She further noted that unemployment was the main problem of the day. It was difficult to meet both ends of the life with single hand income. She suggested that by learning the art of handicraft, stitching, knitting, cooking and home management the women could support their families financially.

The conference passed resolution and appealed Education Minister of the province to appoint Sikh women in women branch of Punjab Educational Service Department. In another resolution the women leaders of the conference considered the fact that the women education in the province was already very poor, the order for imposing fees on girls in schools was highly unjust and

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71 Khalsa Samachar, April 7, 1932, 4, see also Golden Jubilee Book, 100.
detrimental to the cause of their education. They requested the authorities not to take fees from them. Moreover they encouraged Sikh ladies to organize themselves and found Sikh Women League.

The President Sardar Wasakha Singh of Lahore Educational Conference also noted less educational institutions for women than men. In his Presidential address he noted that there were total 3 colleges for boys, 70 high schools and 200 middle schools form men. On the other hand there was no college, only one high school in the name of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala and 20 middle schools for women. Only 2% girls were educated. We should pay attention towards women education. The Chairman of Reception Committee Sardar Kartar Singh also pointed out the slow progress in women education. He noted that paucity of fund and lack of trained woman teachers were the hindrances in their educational growth. He also raised the question of mismanagement of funds. He showed figure of expenditure on education of the province and noted that in the year 1930-31 total 2,26,90,630 rupees spent on men education whereas only 28,35,324 rupees on women education. He suggested raising more funds for education so that more women teachers could be produced for their institutions.

The issue of different education for girls remained a leading concern of the women session of 24th Sikh Educational Conference at Rawalpindi in 1934. Dr. Davinder Kaur (M.A., Ph.D.) cited the psychological aspect and emphasised that 'a girl's personality is different from that of a boy and its development has to be on different lines which ultimately affects vocations in life. The schools being separate it is only reasonable that their curricula should be suited for their mental make up and being so it is bound to be related to their professions in life.'

The concept of an 'ideal Sikh woman' was so high on the minds of the Sikh thinkers that from the beginning the issues of different syllabi, different type of

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73 Karvai Educational Committee, Chief Khalsa Diwan Di, 26 March, 1932, Lahore, see also the Report of 22nd Sikh Educational Conference, 1932, 40-41.
75 Ibid., 99.
76 Khalsa Samachar, April 14, 1932, 7-8.
77 Davinder Kaur daughter of Sardar Bhai Bishan Singh, was the first Sikh woman having M.A. and went England on state scholarship for higher education, Punjabi Bhain, April 1931.
78 Khalsa Samachar, April 26, 1934, 6-8.
education for girls almost remained integral part of speeches of the conferences. The President of the 24th Sikh Educational Conference Rawalpindi, by following the same tradition announced the aim of women education in five words ‘simple living and high thinking’ (सामय जीवन और अच्छा ध्यान). He also propagated the fact that women are the main inspiring spirit of our nation builders.

During the 1934 and 1935 conference sessions the demand of Women College for Sikh girls remained momentous issue. Sikh leaders wanted to upgrade Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur upto a college. They fixed it as a target in 1935. The President of the Sikh Educational Conference of Rawalpindi Sardar Raja Singh Sahib suggested upgrading the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur into college level. He expressed his concern over the absence of Sikh Girls College. By sending Sikh girls to non-Sikh colleges would mean that they would forget the real Sikh tenets. They would fail to transmit moral and religious values to the children. But unfortunately the efforts could not be materialized in to reality. Some new issues emerged at the Silver Jubilee session of the conference in 1935. Mrs. Bedi and Mrs. Kasheb read their papers at women session of the conference. Mrs. Bedi accepted women education and women reform a necessary condition for the development of community. She raised the issue of increasing death rate among children in the country due to the carelessness of the mothers. So she emphasised on the learning of child care and principles of hygiene along with stitching, knitting and cooking.

With the progress of education of women, the Sikhs were becoming aware about the result also. In 1935 they pointed out the dangers of the western type of education for their girls which could make them agile, lazy and impetuous. They insisted traditional education for their women and wanted to make them simple, hardworking and of gentle nature. The real asset of a women is to make home a

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79 Karvai 24th Sikh Education Conference, Rawalpindi Di, 30, 31 March and April 1, 1934, 15.
81 Karvai 24th Sikh Educational Conference, Rawalpindi Di, 15-16.
83 Khalsa Samachar, April 25, 1935, 21.
heaven. So they emphasised on homely and religious education for them. They wanted to make them more fit in their family life than in professional life. In brief, they assumed that men and women were two entities meant to perform different roles. Therefore, educational curriculum should be different for women education.

During 1940s the issues related to women education remained same in the conference sessions with more and less changes. Sikhs got success in the field of women education and became forward in the province by expansion of their institutions. Fully conversant with the fact that no community can make progress if their women are uneducated, the conference paid special attention towards women education. Many a times, women's conferences were also held during the session of the Sikh Educational Conferences. By reading papers on women education, launching special schemes and raising funds the Sikh Educational Conference did a commendable service to the cause of the women education.

In retrospect the Sikh Educational Conferences of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was convened every year to make the progress of literacy among the Sikhs. Women education was one of the important issues in the Educational Conferences. The discussions and debates started on the syllabus of their study. On the basis of issues taken, the conferences have been divided into three phases. During the first phase, Sikh reformers tried to make community conscious about the relationship between education among women and the progress. It was the formative phase in which they set their target to make women a ‘gurmat kanya, gurmat bhain, gurmat istri and gurmat mata’. They introduced subjects like cooking, needle work and stitching for women under special study scheme. During second phase, they put their efforts to organise Sikh Women Educational Conference. They achieved success in 1928 when Educational Committee gave permission to hold Women Educational Conference along with Sikh Educational Conference. The third phase made the new beginning. Women started to play more active role in educational matters by holding Women Educational Conferences regularly. The women activists Kuldeep Kaur, Bibi Pritam Kaur, Bibi Amrit Kaur pointed out the poor

condition of women at homes, less number of girls' school, apathy of government and local bodies towards their education. They also demanded an increase participation of women in the services of Educational Department.

Hard labour of Sikh reformers for the education of the community resulted expansion of institutions for boys and exclusively for girls. Mr. Alfred Mervyn Davis of Bishop's Stortford College London praised these efforts through a message on Silver Jubilee celebration.

"An assertion, the truth of which is established by the fact that the education system of the Sikhs is the most fully developed and the most broad minded of any in the whole of India... Special attention is paid to female education and in the attention which they give to the education of women and girls the Sikh rank highest among the people of India."\(^85\)

\(^85\) Golden Jubilee Book, 5.